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Dedicated to the memory of Colin Manlove, 1942–2020



Introduction: George MacDonald's Scotland

Rebecca Langworthy and Derek F. Stewart

Although revered globally for his fantasy writing and awe-inspiring religious vision, the Scottish texts of George MacDonald (1824-1905) are amongst the North-East of Scotland's best kept secrets. Pulling into Huntly, Aberdeenshire – the rural town of MacDonald's birth – there is little to indicate the connection to the region's celebrated son: visitors making a pilgrimage to Duke Street to see the building where MacDonald was born are welcomed by signs outside the town displaying the expression 'Room to Roam', taken from MacDonald's seminal work *Phantastes*. Even at the University of Aberdeen's King's College, where MacDonald was educated in the first-half of the 1840s, there is little trace of him around the ancient campus. Whilst the cobbled streets themselves are evocative of scenes from his early Scottish novels, the only visible indication that he spent his formative years at the institution is portrait of the author, bearded and with a dignified gaze, hanging towards the rear of Elphinstone Hall.

Writing to Helen MacKay Powell in 1883 from Bordighera, Italy MacDonald highlights the significance of place in fiction before complaining of a sense of disconnection from his native land. He states: 'I am often terribly hampered in my stories by sheer ignorance. I have seen so little of Scotland or any other place. Aberdeen, Banff, Cullen & Huntly are the *only* places I knew when I left at twenty'.¹ MacDonald spent a relatively short period of his life in Scotland, relocating to the intellectual hub of London to study for the ministry at Highbury College. MacDonald went on to settle briefly in Manchester and Hastings before returning to London, and visited much of Europe during holidays. With his wife Louisa, MacDonald embarked on a lecture tour of America in 1872–1873. MacDonald eventually moved to the warmer climes of Italy in 1880, where he remained for more than twenty years.

Herein lies an incongruity: despite all of MacDonald's travels, depictions of Scottish rural and urban life, Scots dialect, tradition, and myth are abundant

¹ Glenn Edward Sadler, *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI., 1994), 309.

in his writing. A vivid sense of place can, as David Robb has reminded us, be found throughout MacDonald's early Scottish novels. For Robb, '[e]ven readers unfamiliar with Aberdeenshire can sense how precisely MacDonald locates his characters in landscapes and townscapes which are part remembered, part imagined in accordance with the needs of each book.'² Novels such as *David Elginbrood*, *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, and *Robert Falconer*, each written long after MacDonald had left Scotland behind, revolve entirely around their Scottish settings. Although his Scottish work is often overlooked, it is no exaggeration to state, as MacDonald's son Greville argued in his biography of his father, that '[h]is novels, not only those which, conceived in his native country, inaugurated a new school of Scottish Literature'.³ Scotland as a place is a fundamental element of MacDonald's aesthetic, which he drew upon time and again throughout his life and literary career.

The articles that comprise this special issue of the *Journal of Scottish Thought* originated from a three-day conference held at the University of Aberdeen in 2017. Drawing delegates from all over the world, scholars at this event explored MacDonald's Scottish heritage – a relatively overlooked theme in the field of MacDonald studies – and illuminated some fascinating connections that go beyond merely the setting of MacDonald's work.

Within this collection, the idea of a Scottish identity is explored in several papers. David Robb's discussion of MacDonald's representations of the Scottish landscape and language places him alongside the likes of Robert Burns, James Hogg, Sir Walter Scott, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Sharin Schroder examines MacDonald's representation of his Scottish identity as expressed while living out-with Scotland, and compares this depiction of Scotland to those of Margaret Oliphant, MacDonald's contemporary and mentor. John Pazdziora discusses the formative nature of the Scottish literary landscape and the use of landscape in MacDonald's writings to allow for the contemplation of nature. The importance of the landscape surrounding Huntly, as the burial place of MacDonald's ancestors and close family, is highlighted by Joshua Rawleigh in his reading of the concept of home in *Lilith*.

MacDonald's engagement with the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of Scotland forms a separate grouping of papers. Jennifer Koopman looks at MacDonald's use of the Doric dialect and poetic expression in relation to the debates surrounding literary representation of dialects. The influence of the Celtic tradition is discussed by Adam Walker in relation to MacDonald's use of

² David Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1987), 35.

³ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924), 1.

otherworlds and Per Klingberg examines the influence of the Scottish fairy tale tradition on MacDonald's short story 'The Carasoy'. Colin Manlove traces how MacDonald's understanding of scientific concept of electromagnetism and the growing awareness of the quantum universe are represented in 'The Golden Key' and *Lilith*.

Some of the contributions expand our understanding of George MacDonald's Scotland beyond national boundaries. In his paper, for example, Maxim Medovarov explores MacDonald's theology in relation to Eriugena's response to *apokatastasis* and universal salvation. Franziska Kohlt looks closely at the shared literary visions of MacDonald and William Morris, using the little-known fact that they both, at separate times, lived at the same address in Hammersmith as a lynchpin to her argument. Moreover, Elena Pasquini analyses of the significance of the angel creatures of *Phantastes*, while Oliver Langworthy provides a fascinating insight into the author's knowledge of the language and literature of Ancient Greek in his examination of the protagonist's name Anodos. Timothy Baker also examines MacDonald's knowledge of other cultures, discussing the extent of MacDonald's engagement with German Romanticism. As the articles in this issue demonstrate, an understanding of the polymorphic nature of George MacDonald's Scotland necessitates a totally interdisciplinary approach that is free from preconceptions about what it is exactly that constitutes 'Scottishness'.

Aberdeen, Scotland

MacDonald's Northern Voice

David Robb

Although of different generations and very different writers, George MacDonald and Robert Louis Stevenson were not only aware of each other's writings but held each other in high esteem.¹ Stevenson's most interesting reference to MacDonald comes in the Preface to his 1887 collection of poetry, *Underwoods*. Referring to the poems in Scots in the volume, Stevenson apologises for their lack of dialect purity: he is simply writing Scots speech as it comes to him, he says, without any attempt at reproducing the distinctive speech of any one of Scotland's districts. As he writes:

I note again, that among our new dialecticians, the local habitat of every dialect is given to the square mile. I could not emulate this nicety if I desired; for I simply wrote my Scots as well as I was able, not caring if it hailed from Lauderdale or Angus, from the Mearns or Galloway [...] And if [my speech] be not pure, alas! what matters it? The day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten; and Burns' Ayrshire, and Dr Macdonald's Aberdeen-awa', and Scott's brave, metropolitan utterance will be all equally the ghosts of speech.²

There may now be some surprise in finding the largely forgotten MacDonald coupled with Burns and Scott. MacDonald, of course, was still a contemporary of Stevenson's in 1887, and there is real respect in that 'Dr Macdonald', apparently one of the last in a line of prominent, locally-nourished Scottish writers. Stevenson was sensing how the distinctiveness of Scotland and Scottishness was fading as the United Kingdom grew ever more unified.

¹ William Gray, "Amiable Infidelity," "Grim-Faced Dummies," and Rondels: Robert Louis Stevenson on George MacDonald', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 23 (2004), 21–26. I am grateful to Professor Sharin Faith Schroeder for this reference. As regards MacDonald's awareness of Stevenson, see my article 'George MacDonald's Scottish Novels: Three Notes', *Notes and Queries*, new series, vol. 33, no. 2 (June 1986), 174–77.

² R. L. Stevenson, *Underwoods* (London, 1895), xi–xii.

Stevenson's own writing, one could argue, illustrates this loss: it is hard to feel that, as a whole, it is quite as rooted in a Scottish world as those of the writers he mentions. Stevenson, of course, produced great literary treatments of Scotland. Yet one feels that he turned periodically to Scotland in much the same way as he turned, prompted by other inspirations, to the South Seas, or the streets of London, or rural France, or to an island of pirate treasure. Compare this with Scott, whose Scottish Waverley Novels emerge from an emotional and intellectual life focused on Scotland to a far greater extent than Stevenson could claim. Compare it too with Burns, and with James Hogg: their most distinctive work is totally at one with the rural peasant worlds which created them. And compare it with MacDonald, whose best Scottish work not only draws upon and evokes the distinctive regional environment in which he was brought up, but makes of his own Scotland a literary experience from which special imaginative, spiritual and religious truths emerge. MacDonald's Scotland, as I have long argued, is a region with links to fairyland.³

The phrase 'Aberdeen-awa' refers both to the characteristic speech of the North-East but also to the region itself. Stevenson is contemplating the way in which older generations of Scottish writers drew upon and reflected a Scotland which had been made up of a marked variety of regions, the diversity of which had made Scotland seem larger than its population or land-mass would suggest. So when we think of 'MacDonald and Scotland', we are essentially thinking of two Scotlands. One is Scotland as a whole. The other is the distinctive MacDonald world of 'Aberdeen-awa', the large corner of north-east Scotland from which he hailed, and which formed the basis of his Scottish novels with both their geographical particularity and their otherworldly, fairy-tale leanings. Each contributes to the range of effects and meanings we find in his work and different audiences respond in their own ways to what he offers. Stevenson and many other Scots will have been conscious of the distinctive Buchan north-east when they read him. To non-Scottish readers, however, these works must simply depict, in the main, 'Scotland'. That said, there was clearly a realisation among non-Scottish readers that MacDonald's regional distinctiveness was having at least one effect, namely an encounter with a flavour of Scots dialogue which differed from, for example, Walter Scott's and which they saw as more provincial, more alien and simply less comfortable to read than they liked. Judging from

³ David Robb, 'George MacDonald's Aberdeenshire Fairytale' in H.W. Drescher and J. Schwend (eds), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century* (Frankfurt, 1985), 205–15.

early reviews, it was for many of them a speech which came from simply too far north.⁴

So it seems appropriate to consider MacDonald's writings both with respect to the idea of Scotland as a whole, and also to think about his northern, Aberdeenshire origins and their reflection in his novels. His first novel-length Scottish statement was *David Elginbrod* in 1863. Its strange design, with its tale of the inexperienced student who draws enough support from his encounter with the pious Elginbrod family in their northern rural backwater to enable him to survive the improbably gothic perils of life in England, reveals much about MacDonald's instincts regarding what he felt he should be writing about. In his fiction he utilises his Scottish origins to colour and add weight to his religious vision. As I have argued before, he knew that his English contemporaries regarded Scotland as a land of peculiar piety — a land which took its Christianity with especial seriousness, at times impressive, at times ridiculous and always stubborn in its beliefs and behaviour.⁵ The traditional impression of Scottish religious life, from the eighteenth century onwards in particular, had seen it as peculiarly austere — dominating and colouring the national life and character. MacDonald's own sardonic summing up of this comes with reference to the character of David Elginbrod: 'few suspected him of being religious beyond the degree which is commonly supposed to be the general inheritance of Scotchmen, possibly in virtue of their being brought up upon oatmeal porridge and the Shorter Catechism'.⁶ The Ten Year Conflict with its challenge to British parliamentary sovereignty and its spectacular outcome in the splitting of the Church of Scotland in 1843 had left its mark on the English consciousness, a process which attained a climax of sorts in 1861 with the publication of Henry Thomas Buckle's *On Scotland and the Scotch Intellect*. This famous attack on Scotland's religious history and its influence on Scottish life appeared just a couple of years before *David Elginbrod*, and when MacDonald seized upon the Martin Elginbrodde quatrain at a dinner at his publisher's, he clearly saw it as a Scottish expression of charity in theological thinking with which the nation was not being widely credited.⁷

⁴ Emma Letley, *From Galt to Douglas Brown: Nineteenth Century Fiction and Scots Language* (Edinburgh, 1988), 88–92. Hereafter 'Letley'.

⁵ David Robb, 'George MacDonald and the Grave Livers of Scotland' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Context and Contemporaries* (Glasgow, 2013), 273–89.

⁶ George MacDonald, *David Elginbrod* (London: Hurst & Blackett, n.d.), 39. Hereafter 'DE'.

⁷ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924), 320–21. Hereafter 'GMDW'.

David Elginbrod, doubly disappearing from the book both as a result of the geographical direction taken by the plot and also by dying, is nevertheless seen as a spiritual force capable of overcoming distance and death, thanks to the soundness (in MacDonald's view) of his religious instincts. He embodies a distinctively Scottish religious strength and beneficial force within Victorian Britain, as does Robert Falconer — to a lesser extent in his minor appearance in this novel but to a very marked extent in the later novel named after him. Although Greville MacDonald believed that David's character was based on MacDonald's own father, it must also be seen as an embodiment of a national type: Scots speech has a substantial role in creating the character, and the deep and instinctive piety of the Elginbrod family fits the broad national stereotype, though with a far less forbidding twist than Buckle offered.⁸ This is a national piety emerging from the grass-roots, rather than being imposed by the priestly caste which so repelled the English historian. Strong and humane religious instincts like David's are portrayed as the essence of Scottish life.

The possibility of a single figure embodying an essential Scottish stereotype was in the air, in any case. The historian Tom Devine points out that, in mid-century Scotland, 'the cult of national heroes [...] remained an important link between the new Scotland and its national past' and that 'in the period after about 1840, Burns became a Scottish cultural icon and was celebrated as never before.'⁹ And as Christopher Whatley has recently explained, the astonishing national and international celebration of the centenary of Burns's birth in 1859 cemented the world's identification of the poet as an embodiment of Scotland.¹⁰ In communities across Scotland and the globe, events marking the birthday at the end of January proliferated, with a degree of popular public enthusiasm for the poet greater than had ever been seen before, and perhaps since. There were 676 publicly organised events in Scotland and even 76 in England. Others took place abroad, especially in the United States. The events of 1859 embodied a Scottish essence in one figure just a very few years before MacDonald wrote *David Elginbrod*. Admittedly, Hastings (where MacDonald was living at the time) does not seem to have marked the occasion, but Huntly certainly did, with a half-day holiday and an elaborate and prestigious ball in the evening.¹¹ Although the event is mentioned in neither of our two

⁸ GMDW, 323.

⁹ T. M. Devine, *Independence or Union: Scotland's Past and Scotland's Present* (London, 2017), 88–9.

¹⁰ Christopher A. Whatley, *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People* (Edinburgh, 2016), 76–92.

¹¹ James Ballantine, *Chronicle of the hundredth birthday of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh &

substantial biographies (Greville MacDonald's and William Raeper's), it seems inconceivable that MacDonald was unaware of the extent of the celebration of a poet he held in high regard, as the effectiveness of his lectures on Burns in America in 1872 and 1873 indicates. Other Scotsmen of the past and present were also seen as embodiments of Scotland, or at least of distinctive and important Scottish characteristics: Scott, of course, and Carlyle, and Thomas Chalmers immediately spring to mind. Yet the universality of the enthusiasm for Burns in 1859 — an appeal which crossed nations and social classes — was in a league of its own.

Burns was not necessarily seen by MacDonald as the ideal embodiment of Scottish life, and veneration of the poet was not universal. Facts and rumours about Burns's moral failings were widespread, and there was a particular tendency among clergymen and people of an evangelical persuasion to reject the prevailing enthusiasm. In particular, Burns's apparent love of the bottle was seen as a flaw fatal to any claim that he could be a Scottish role model. MacDonald's stance on all this is summed up briefly by Greville in his account of his father's American lectures. It was typical of the age that MacDonald's emphasis was not so much on Burns's works themselves — close literary criticism would belong to a later period — but on the personage of the poet. MacDonald used the poems primarily as illustrations for a biographical account:

Without notes or help other than a little volume of Burns's works, he set the man before them, the lover, the romantic ploughman, the poet, in true portraiture, while his sins and shortcomings were fully accredited to him. (GMDW, 424)

Louisa MacDonald, in a letter home from Chicago, was succinct in her account of 'the fortieth lecture I have heard on that poor but talented genius! The long and short of which is that "he did as well as he could, but he might have done better" — like the French master's verdict on his scholars leaving school'.¹² William Raeper's summary of the first lecture suggests that MacDonald balanced honesty with an endearing idealism as he explained Burns's drouthiness: 'He was a natural man of the soil, and though he drank (it was true), he did so only for the company and not for the drink.'¹³

London, 1859), 277–8.

¹² GMDW, 454.

¹³ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, 1987), 290.

The fact that Burns was the topic MacDonald found himself lecturing upon most frequently in America was due, to a considerable extent, to the popularity of the poet in that country at that time, a popularity which would result, in the 1870s, in the commission of a statue of Burns for New York's Central Park. This was installed in 1880, the same year as a copy of the same statue was unveiled in Dundee, and it was one of the first statues of Burns to be erected anywhere outside Scotland. That Burns was the topic most in demand from MacDonald suggests, however, that not only was Burns greatly liked by the Americans but also that he was being seen as the most desirable topic for a Scottish lecturer: MacDonald seemed to be lecturing little, if at all, on the other apparently obvious Scottish literary topic, Walter Scott.

All of which, arguably, throws light on MacDonald's move into writing Scottish fiction, in which the creation of the character after whom the first novel is named seems to have been crucial. David Elginbrod is no practising poet, but his nature is so completely in accord with MacDonald's conception of the ideal man that poetry has a natural appeal for him. He enjoys and understands poetry quite instinctively. Hugh Sutherland introduces him and his family to important new poetic experiences in the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Previous to this, David had encountered Milton whose works had only a mixed appeal, and Burns whom he already knows and reveres as a natural part of his Scottish existence.

David can be seen in two ways. He is the first of several characters, in MacDonald's novels, to embody what Scotland, at its best, can offer the world. We might see him as MacDonald's answer to the installation of Burns, during the centenary a few years earlier, as the quintessence of Scotland. After all, Burns apparently did as well as he could, but he might have done better — and David Elginbrod is a version of that possible superior Scottish distinctiveness. The challenge to Burns is not too close — David Elginbrod is no mere parody of the poet. But he is, like Burns, a man of unusual capacity emerging from an obscure part of the Scottish rural scene, and he is associated with the plough by the quotation from Chaucer which MacDonald added to the title-page of the novel's first book, 'Turriepuffit'. (Burns, of course, was universally seen as the ploughman poet.)

At the same time, however, this is the first of a series of novels in which MacDonald variously projects himself, in a sequence of guises. The autobiographical echoes in Hugh Sutherland, Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer is always clear and does not depend solely upon the fact that, in their stories, they emerge from MacDonald's own part of Scotland. Their progress through

life's challenges, after their early years in the world in which MacDonald himself was formed, shadows, however distantly, the shape of his own life story. But *David Elginbrod* is a first novel, and like many another first novel is likely to be particularly autobiographical. Is it going too far to see *both* David and Hugh as embodiments of facets of MacDonald's own being, so that the older character, as well as the young student, reflects the author? If Hugh Sutherland is the scholar and aesthete who swiftly leaves behind the Scottish world which bore him, to encounter like MacDonald love and adventures in England, David Elginbrod can be considered as the embodiment of the powerful and natural religious instincts which MacDonald felt within himself and saw as partly derived from his family and community. David's being is a counterpart to MacDonald's own. If David in his northern roughness is an alternative Scottish ideal to the Burns so lauded in 1859, so then is MacDonald himself, with his mission to communicate an important religious message. However much of the gentle and strong personality of David Elginbrod was derived from MacDonald Senior, David's eloquent, personal and freshly unorthodox religious ideas, focused on the essential concept of God as a loving father, is derived from MacDonald himself: the author's father, for all his goodness, is never credited with such revolutionary views.

The pattern established in this first novel, of special Scottish strength and insight intervening from afar in the complexities and dangers of Victorian Britain, recurs in several later works. In *Robert Falconer* (1868) the move from Scotland to London is prompted by the hero's need to find and save his father but, in the process, he becomes a major force for good in the slums of the capital. Rescue, too, is the motivation for Malcolm McPhail, the Marquis of Lossie, venturing south to save the headstrong Florimel from herself in the 1877 novel of that name. *The Marquis of Lossie* also contains another example of the benefits to London of some Scottish expatriate missionary work in the form of Malcolm's old school-teacher, ejected from his living in the north, preaching to the downtrodden in a mid-week prayer meeting in an obscure dissenting chapel. In cases like these, Scotland is seen as having something valuable to give to the world of the majority of MacDonald's readers.

MacDonald's Scotland, however, is also MacDonald's Aberdeenshire: his English readers may or may not have been familiar with the phrase, but the world of 'Aberdeen-awa' makes its own distinctive contribution. MacDonald's North-East does not emerge properly until his second novel, *Alec Forbes of Honglen* (1865). The Scottish world of *David Elginbrod* lacks the geographical fullness and precision of the novels of the later 1860s and 1870s. Nevertheless,

it is made up of a small handful of elements which together gesture towards Scotland's north-eastern corner, but which do not emerge as a precise regional world as we read.

These fragments from the far North-East are varied enough, admittedly. For example, the trees of the fir-wood, beloved of Margaret Elginbrod, are Douglas firs, introduced from North America in 1827 by a Scotsman and a rapidly established feature of the northern Scottish landscape. Their shape, of course, is conical: they point heavenward like cathedral spires, seeking the light – hence, perhaps, their appeal to Margaret and her author? The name 'Turriepuffit' appears on no map: perhaps it hints at a root in 'Turriff', but given a further twist to make it seem more 'Scotch' to southern readers. Hugh Sutherland is a student at, specifically, 'one of the Aberdeen Universities' (*DE*, p. 8) and clearly MacDonald is consciously writing about the Aberdeen he knew as a student in the 1840s: King's College and Marischal College were merged to form the University of Aberdeen in 1860, a year or so before the novel was written. David's position on the estate of Turriepuffit is that of a grieve, translated for English readers as 'bailiff': MacDonald is envisaging a farming arrangement of a type he was familiar with from his Huntly days. Turriepuffit is open to winter weather of a northern severity which could be life-threatening, hence the heroic rescue of Margaret by Hugh. And there is always the issue of the 'northern' dialect speech which so disconcerted early readers and reviewers — not that it seems particularly opaque by the standards of *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*, let alone as lyrically developed as the speech of *Sunset Song*. Yet there is a fair bit of Aberdeen-awa in *David Elginbrod*.

But it was with *Alec Forbes of Honglen* (1865) that MacDonald first sketched the North-East world of his youth with anything like fullness, and it was as if a creative watershed had been crossed. His confidence and pleasure in creating something like a realist novel is clear in the book, hence the extensiveness and thoroughness with which he recreates the Huntly world of his memory. Compared with the isolated Turriepuffit of *David Elginbrod*, the landscape of *Alec Forbes* feels extensive, peopled and complete. Indeed, one can use it and its successor *Robert Falconer* as a primitive guide book to Huntly and its surroundings to this day.

We can feel MacDonald's confidence as he finds that the realist novel could be used as a medium for much that he wanted to say: poetry and dream-fantasy were not the only modes which could accommodate his vision. It is surely no coincidence that his best non-fantasy fictions — in my opinion, *Alec Forbes of Honglen*, *Robert Falconer* and *Malcolm* (1875) — are the ones most

securely and extensively located in areas thoroughly familiar to him (Huntly and its surroundings, and Cullen on the coast to the north). The first two are set in the scenes in which he was brought up, while the third benefited, as Greville tells us, from a special trip to the Moray Firth coast in autumn 1873 with the specific goal of setting the novel there and refreshing his memory.¹⁴ These locations make a substantial contribution to the appeal of these books, not solely because the solidity of their landscapes brings them close to our expectations of a proper, realist novel. These, surely, along with *Sir Gibbie*, offer MacDonald the best chance of a lasting place in the nineteenth-century novel of Scottish life, and are the ones based most securely on the Scottish actuality with which he was most familiar. Truth, it would seem, could still emerge from the Scottish North-East.

Sir Gibbie (1879), however, is a slightly different case. It has a degree of unreality which the three other novels lack, despite its being vividly grounded in the slums of Victorian Aberdeen. The novel's 'Widdiehill' is the Gallowgate, a street MacDonald would have known well as he journeyed from his student lodgings in Old Aberdeen to the city centre, the harbour and other locations. He certainly got as far as Ferryhill and Torry, as he makes Gibbie flee to 'the lofty chain-bridge over the river Daur' – this is obviously the still-standing Wellington Suspension Bridge, opened in 1830. The novel also makes it clear that he was familiar with Rubislaw Quarry and the harbour. And he will have been as familiar with the city's squalor as he was with its landmarks – the Burns scholar Thomas Crawford, of Aberdeen University, once said to me that *Sir Gibbie* offered the best fictional account he knew of a Victorian Scottish city. But as Gibbie flees westwards '*up Daurside*', the locations become more vague, although MacDonald clearly knew that the River Dee emerges from a thoroughly mountainous region. Is 'Glashgar' modelled, in name at least, on Lochnagar? There is little else in the novel which might make us think of anywhere specific in the valley of the Dee.

Sir Gibbie remained one of the most fondly remembered, and most consistently read, of MacDonald's Scottish novels, well into the twentieth century, at least among an older generation of readers. It was a novel which combined various unexpected elements: the vividness of the slums of Aberdeen, its unpredictable relocation to a part of Scotland which MacDonald had not evoked before, and above all the strangeness of its central figure, the dumb but Christ-like Gibbie. It has a hidden strength, too, in that it would

¹⁴ GMDW, 466.

appear to be based on one of the stories of James Hogg, his constant source of literary pleasure and inspiration. The influence of Hogg on MacDonald is a subject in itself, and we can be in no doubt of the special place the earlier poet and tale-teller had in MacDonald's personal pantheon: the famous evocation of Hogg's poem 'Kilmeny' in *At the Back of the North Wind* is its clearest illustration, but throughout his fiction references to the Ettrick Shepherd's tales are liable to be found whenever a young character's worthwhile reading material is listed. In Hogg's *Winter Evening Tales* (1820) we find the story entitled 'Duncan Campbell'.¹⁵ It tells of a six-year-old Highland lad, separated from his widowed father when he is sent to Edinburgh to live with an elderly aunt and to be educated, who is so shocked by the sudden sight of his aunt's corpse on its deathbed that he flees, panic-stricken, to the far outskirts of the city. Separated from all caring adults, he wanders the countryside for several years until he is taken in by a loving farming family. Eventually, by the accidental arrival of two highland women trading domestic goods for lowland wool, Duncan's true origins and family are revealed, and he returns to the northern house of his father and regains his rightful place in society — which enables him to aid in turn the loving friends who had sustained him, rescuing them from poverty and marrying their daughter. The general identity of outline between this story and MacDonald's 1879 novel is clear. What strikes one is both the closeness and the distance between the two stories: the shape and essence of Hogg's tale had clearly embedded itself in MacDonald's mind, but he was able to thoroughly refashion it with a completeness which hints to us, once again, how his literary imagination was drawn to story shapes (from ballads, from German literature, or wherever) so as to recreate them for the sake of the essential truth which he perceived within them.

With *Sir Gibbie*, MacDonald seems to be turning to the more generalised rendering of the Aberdeenshire scene which would mark most of the Scottish novels of the 1880s and 1890s. A partial exception is *Heather and Snow* (1893), to which I shall return. That apart, Scotland's north-east corner became for many readers, one suspects, simply George MacDonald's Scotland, established in the public consciousness by the novels of the 1860s and 1870s. One can still feel their Aberdeenshire quality, if one knows the region — the prominence of castles in these novels, for one thing, chimes with a regular feature of Aberdeenshire tourist advertising. But the fascinating actuality of the earlier novels has gone, and one feels that MacDonald is now content to rely on

¹⁵ James Hogg, 'Duncan Campbell' in *Winter Evening Tales*, in Ian Duncan (ed.), (Edinburgh, 2004), 80–97.

the impressions left in an old man's memory. His literary 'Scotland' has transformed into something more like fairyland, or the landscapes of the *märchen* which always made up part of his consciousness.

But in any case, something else is going on in his Scottish novels. Their worlds contain at least one further layer of meaning. Consider again those first reactions to the Scots speech in his earliest novels. The speech of his Scots characters was instantly recognised as 'peasant', 'regional', and 'northern', even in comparison with the Scots of Walter Scott, or Hogg, or Galt. Victorian readers had made their peace with the dialects of these southern Scottish writers but often found MacDonald's a continuing hurdle. Even a particularly sympathetic reader, Margaret Oliphant, was still complaining in 1875:

Why will Mr MacDonald make all his characters, almost without exception, talk such painfully broad Scotch? Scotch to the finger-tips, and loving dearly our vernacular, we yet feel necessary to protest against the Aberdeen-awa' (is it not Aberdeen?) which bewilders even ourselves now and then, and must be almost impossible to an Englishman.¹⁶

Yet MacDonald persisted and by the 1880s reviewers were apparently becoming more tolerant of his 'northern dialect of Scottish', and of 'his mastery of the peasant tongue of that region'.¹⁷ Even when his novels became less geographically precise and lost the topographical specificity of his best work, his dialect retained qualities of north-east speech which continued to colour it for southern readers. For many Victorian readers, it would appear that, by and large, MacDonald's 'northern' twist on literary Scots dialect was one of the less welcome aspects of his regional particularism.

In *The Idea of North*, his stimulating and wide-ranging study, Peter Davidson explores how the concept of a region to the north of one's own known world has had powerful resonances from the earliest times to the present.¹⁸ Meanings and associations ascribed to the idea of the north have varied widely across time and individual perceptions but have always been part of the framework within which we locate ourselves in the world. Davidson alludes to various traditions in thinking about northern-ness, picking out, on the first page of his first chapter, one of the earliest and most powerful strands of thought as one in which the north is 'a place of austere felicity where virtuous peoples

¹⁶ Quoted in Letley, 90.

¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹⁸ Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London, 2005). Hereafter 'Davidson'.

live behind the north wind and are happy'. He talks of 'the idea of north as a place of purification, an escape from the limitations of civilization', and of 'the cleansing properties of the northern wind'.¹⁹

I have referred to ways in which southern readers seem to have regarded Victorian Scotland, especially in a religious connection, a conception which may explain the apparent confidence MacDonald had in offering his southern characters and settings spiritual help and salvation from his saintly Scottish characters. But I suggest that MacDonald was not simply taking advantage of an established pattern of thought regarding Scotland: the idea of the north seems to have been of particular significance to him. His most obvious expression of his vision of the importance of the north, of course, is the famous book apparently foreshadowed by Davidson's ancient Greek writers. *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) is a children's novel – a work of fantasy – which memorably tells of the experiences of a little London boy, the son of a cab-driver, who is visited at night by the beautiful female North Wind and taken by her on aerial journeys across the globe. On one, she even carries young Diamond so far north that he eventually reaches the land at the back of the north wind. This is not Heaven – MacDonald never tries to envisage Heaven, but always sees the regions or states to which he believes we travel after death as simply further stages on that unimaginable journey. But it is at least part of the way there.

And it involves death. As North Wind journeys to the Arctic with Diamond, she becomes progressively weaker until she is reduced to a corpse-like state in which she can go no further. Famously, too, North Wind is portrayed as dealing death, and in a storm she sinks a ship with all hands. At another level, Diamond's journeys with North Wind, we come to realise, are bouts of his progressive weakness and illness brought on by the poverty-stricken living conditions he endures with so many others of his class and time: North Wind, in prosaic reality, is the cold draught over his bed at night, from which his poor family home cannot protect him. Victorian attic bedrooms must often have been draughty places. The novel is the tale of a dying child, and the region at the back of the north wind is where he (and we?) go after death. The awfulness and terror of death is acknowledged in the book: insistently present, central — but not dwelt upon. Death is being placed in a much larger context, namely that of MacDonald's vision of Christian reality, not blithely optimistic but curiously hopeful and reassuring, and the paradoxical juxtaposition is the

¹⁹ Davidson, 21.

spark to his strikingly imaginative creativity. North Wind, and the land behind her back, is incomprehensibly various, loving and deadly at the same time. The far north is equally wonderful and deadly, as befits a region (or a direction) which brings a Victorian believer closer to God.

Scotland, and particularly MacDonald's Aberdeenshire version of it, partakes of some of this mix of associations. As Davidson states, '[f]rom the south, Scotland is inevitably hyperborean' (Davidson, p.233). And even readers brought up in the south of Scotland and its central belt felt confronted by the particularity of MacDonald's Aberdeenshire in its various guises. For Davidson, the 'Jacobite and dissident north-east of Scotland, seen from the Lowlands, was far away and austere, less foreign in language than the Western Highlands, but still an outward-facing outpost of the kingdom of winter' (Davidson, p.234). He elaborates the point: '[w]ithin Scotland, the north-eastern counties of Aberdeenshire and Moray are perceived as lost, grim, especially at the mercy of the weather. For all the unstable prosperity caused by the oil in the North Sea, Aberdeenshire is seen from the Lowlands as impossibly northern, impossibly distant and provincial' (Davidson, p.245). Natives of the North-East, aware of the beauties and richness of the region (beauties and richness which Davidson acknowledges), may feel a little surprised and hurt by this description, but it surely contains some truth even today. Even now, this is a part of Scotland which seems to have comparatively little appeal to visitors, and so (in the great scheme of things) it is still somewhat little known. What proportion of MacDonald's first readers, one wonders, had ever set foot in Aberdeen, or Huntly, or Cullen? Or wanted to?

The distance and unfamiliarity of his northern settings, their qualities of quaintness, otherness, and extra closeness to the natural world in all its only partly-tamed strength and danger, was a central part of his message. Just as Diamond found himself in regions closer to God's reality while North Wind carried him northwards, so MacDonald's readers are invited to travel north, imaginatively, to a surprisingly alien and distinct region. The nearest parallel to Diamond's experience we find in the Scottish novels is towards the end of *Alec Forbes of Honglen* when Alec, shipping as a doctor on an Aberdeen whaler, finds himself abandoned and desperate in the Arctic wastes after a disaster which may perhaps be drawing on the fate of the John Franklin expedition, a mystery with which the Victorians were obsessed for decades after its disappearance in 1845. On the other hand, who knows what tales of Arctic danger the undergraduate MacDonald had picked up from sailors and whalers at Aberdeen harbour? In either case, it is while isolated in the polar

regions that Alec finally comes to maturity – indeed, he finds there both God and his true love Annie Anderson.

And MacDonald knew that the landscapes of the North-East could be places of danger and death, a fact not always fully appreciated by outsiders. In one of the earliest modern studies of MacDonald's work, published in 1972, Richard Reis was struck, like many readers, by the frequency and vigour with which MacDonald includes natural disasters, especially floods and blizzards, in his Scottish novels.²⁰ Reis enjoyed them, and thought them well done, but was clearly puzzled a little by their frequency. To him, the possible explanations seemed to be either a need to acknowledge the mystery of the cruelties God occasionally inflicts upon humanity (cf the Lisbon earthquake of 1755) or else simply a desire to liven up the stories with some exciting episodes. Perhaps with Diamond and Alec in mind, another explanation is possible. Both of their journeys involve strain, pain and danger: the bleakness and danger of the north seems to have been an element in MacDonald's conception of closeness to God, and of the revelation of His truth and being. Peter Davidson, we saw, talks of the tradition of the north as a place 'of austere felicity where virtuous peoples live behind the north wind and are happy', and as 'a place of purification, an escape from the limitations of civilization'. The blizzards (as in *David Elginbrod* and *Heather and Snow*) and the floods in *Alec Forbes*, and *Sir Gibbie* and *What's Mine's Mine*, are all, in their various ways, episodes of challenge and purification – elemental experiences which bring out the heroism latent in rescuers, and passages of purifying danger for the rescued. Perhaps the neatest illustration of this line of thought is to be found in *Alec Forbes of Honglen*, when young Annie Anderson falls asleep in the igloo built by Alec and is found by him there: she has to be rescued from this perilous, freezing tomb, but wakes to find herself in the nearest thing to heaven – Alec's home – that her miserable young life has offered her so far. Near-death experiences like this seem to be good for MacDonald's characters because they approach God through them, just as death itself will do, as MacDonald conceives it. This novel of 1865 is startlingly prescient of *At the Back of the North Wind* at moments like Annie's rescue from the igloo and Alec's Arctic survival, just as it is a clear parallel to that other fairy-tale account of the perils, hardships and pain of the journey ever onwards to God, this time to the land where the shadows come from: 'The Golden Key'.

One cannot claim, of course, that MacDonald regarded Scotland solely

²⁰ Richard H. Reis, *George MacDonald* (New York, 1972), 60.

as an austere haven of unalloyed spiritual strength and goodness. There are too many criticisms of the country and its people – often, harsh and deeply felt – for that. One need only think of his various rejections of Scottish religious practices and beliefs, his portrayal of the grasping mean-mindedness of Alec Forbes's foe Robert Bruce (with his name suggesting its own national stereotype), or the slum conditions he depicts in Aberdeen, to realise that he saw the country to the north of most of his readers as very far from perfect. Yet the implication of an underlying nearness to God remains.

If we need further confirmation of the strength of the association, in MacDonald's mind, of northern-ness (with all its associated bleakness and danger) and the reality of God, then we perhaps find it in the second-last of the series of Scottish novels: *Heather and Snow* (1893). This appeared not long before *Lilith* (1895), an utterance which has long been regarded as a particularly urgent vision by MacDonald. Greville's account tells of his father's special conviction, as the book was emerging in its different versions in the 1890s, that it was the result of a mandate direct from God.²¹ The sense of a special urgency in *Lilith* itself is clear enough, but I sense it, too, in the otherwise little-regarded *Heather and Snow*. One understands how easy it is to overlook this late novel: its characters and situations can too easily seem to be a re-hash of episodes and motifs long familiar to readers of MacDonald's fiction. Thus we find once more the mentally-impaired holy fool, the aristocratic bounder who has to be given a holy whipping, the demonic mother-figure whose malevolence almost destroys her offspring, the destructive preoccupation of the worst characters with their class-superiority, the motifs of the proper riding of a horse and of punishment for any stupid cruelty towards the animal. Once again, a young hero awakes (like Alec) to find himself left behind and isolated in a situation of extreme danger: this time, the episode occurs during the Indian Mutiny. Once again, MacDonald imagines the surprise discovery of a nearly dead intruder unconscious in a tomb-like burrow, from which a resurrection can follow. Yet again, a flawed young hero must learn God's ways before he can be married to the infallibly right-thinking heroine. All in all, it can seem to be a mere re-opening of MacDonald's box of favourite tricks, an indication of the author's limitations rather than a fresh inspiration.

Yet against the odds, a sense of freshness and vigour emanates from the book. The enthusiasm with which MacDonald retells yet again a story made from elements which have haunted his writings for so long is itself testament

²¹ GMDW, 548.

to the urgent truth he clearly believed inhered in them. If he is telling the same story yet again, it is because, for him, there is only one story to tell about the relationship between human beings and their maker. But what marks the novel despite the hackneyed nature (to put it cruelly) of its narrative is the importance of its setting. It is the most committedly and avowedly northern, and Scottish, of his later fictional landscapes. The title is apposite: the Scotland that MacDonald requires to convey the essential reality of God's dealings with his creatures is reduced to two principal elements of bare northern moorland. And MacDonald's refreshed commitment to his conception is particularly clear, for the book marks a retreat from the generalised vagueness of the Scottish landscapes of *Castle Warlock* and *What's Mine's Mine*. Anyone familiar with the landscapes of the Scottish north-east is likely to realise that the bleak, high-lying basin surrounded by low hills and dominated by one peak in particular — MacDonald labels it the Horn — is a rendering of the moorland plateau to the west of Huntly called the Cabrach, with its prominent peak the Tap o' Noth. The firmness with which MacDonald utilises this setting resides not simply in his faithfulness to the bleak natural elements of this northern location but is also found in his prominent use of the idiosyncratic archaeology of the region with its 'weems' or souterrains which were a known feature of the area by Victorian times. The solid specificity of the book carries its own guarantee, but at one point we even find MacDonald confirming that this is a place he has actually tramped: he describes a little hollow near the top of 'the Horn' 'which, the one time I saw it, reminded me strongly of Dante's *grembo* in the purgatorial hill'.²² He is returning to part of his childhood northern landscape with a renewed urgency. And this, in turn, brings home to us just how important a part landscape had always played in all the Scottish novels earlier in his career. Containing as it does the most ferocious of all the great snowstorms of his fiction, *Heather and Snow* is perhaps the last of his explicit attempts to drag his readers northwards to God.

And for MacDonald, it was the completion of a circle. His student commitment to Universalism, which landed him in trouble with his Aberdeen minister, was based on the controversy sparked by James Morison who, as independent minister of the Cabrach parish from 1839, sparked a local evangelical revival centred round the belief that Christ died for all, a view and movement which rapidly achieved national notoriety. The roots of MacDonald's clearest and deepest religious ideas appear to have sprung from

²² George MacDonald, *Heather and Snow* (London, 1893), 95.

the Cabrach's lonely northern landscape, or at least were given form and force by Morison's example. *Heather and Snow* was, perhaps, his return to the earliest impulses of his life's work.

University of Dundee

Margaret Oliphant and George MacDonald as Scottish Writers for a British Audience

Sharin Schroeder

In his chapter on Victorian fiction in the *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, Colin Milton claims that discussing authors such as George MacDonald, Margaret Oliphant, Andrew Lang, and Arthur Conan Doyle ‘in relation to the history of Scottish literature raises an obvious question. How can writers who spent most of their lives, and all of their *writing* lives, outside Scotland be considered part of the Scottish tradition?’ Milton’s question is rhetorical; he goes on to say that ‘the case is easily made for MacDonald and Oliphant: some of their best works are set wholly or partly in Scotland; their characters are often products of its distinctive history and traditions; each makes extensive use of Lowland Scots.’¹

But questions of national identity were and are raised in relation to these two writers. *The Sheffield Evening Telegraph and Star* addresses some of these questions in a 4 October 1888 response to Glasgow’s *Scottish Art Review*, which it says, ‘raises a wail over the decline of Scotch literature’:

Where, it asks, are the Scotch men of letters now? Where are the Northern celebrities in the sense in which Scott, Hogg, Christopher North, and the brilliant galaxy in the early years of this century were celebrities? They don’t live in Scotland now. They all go to London. In the world of fiction, Mrs. Oliphant, Mr. George MacDonald, Mr. William Black, and Mr. R. Louis Stevenson, are all Scotch by birth – but where is the Scotchness in their writings? They all write for a wider and more general audience than is to be found in their native country, and they have all left it. Dear old Scotland is stripped of the honour which should rightfully be hers; and her children are kidnapped and adopted by the English Metropolis. London, in short, drains Scotland now as much as she drains the provinces. By attracting to herself the Northern

¹ Colin Milton, “‘Half a trade and half an art’: Adult and Juvenile Fiction in the Victorian Period”, in Brown, Clancy, Manning and Pittock (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 2007), II, 286–300, (287).

geniuses she sucks all the local atmosphere out of them, and while adorning English literature, she decidedly robs Scotch.²

While many of Scotland's authors were, in fact, leaving their native land and attempting to appeal to a broader audience, the portrayal of Oliphant and MacDonald as authors who 'adorn[ed] English literature' but 'rob[bed] Scotch' sets up a false dichotomy between Oliphant and MacDonald's Scottish and British identities. Both authors maintained a loyalty to their Scottish heritage and relied to a great extent on Scottish literary and publishing networks. As the *Scottish Art Review* seems to recognise and lament, however, they were typical of their time in writing for a British audience that welcomed reading material not exclusively Scottish.

The *Scottish Art Review* clearly wanted a purer Scottish tradition. But, as Colin Kidd notes, 'there was nothing unnatural, awkward, or contrived about the idea of "British Literature"' in nineteenth-century Scotland, at least in the minds of most Scottish critics, for whom a 'pan-British compass was the norm'.³ Kidd's assessment of this pan-British critical approach certainly represents MacDonald and Oliphant's work. Both authors were proud of their Scottish roots: Oliphant would draw on her Scottish identity when she wanted to explain the Scottish temperament to the English reader, as in the early pages of her *Life of Edward Irving*,⁴ or when she wanted to identify herself with the most loyal of Scots, as in some of her writing for *Blackwood's Magazine* (including her review of George MacDonald's *Malcolm*).⁵ However, when writing on non-Scottish subjects, other aspects of her identity came to the fore, including her gender, her religious views, or her status as an expert critic on literature, history, or life writing. MacDonald also took up his Scottish identity as needed to suit his artistry. He was committed to writing in extremely accurate Scots in his novels on Scottish themes, and Greville MacDonald insists in his biography on the importance of understanding the Celt as a

² *Sheffield Evening Telegraph and Star*, 4 October 1888, 2, in *The British Newspaper Archive* <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>> [Accessed 3 July 2017]. Nineteenth-century periodical sources in this paper were accessed using either *The British Newspaper Archive* or *British Periodicals* (ProQuest).

³ Colin Kidd, 'British Literature: The Career of a Concept,' *Scottish Literary Review*, 8.1 (2016), 1-16, (11, 10). See also Douglas Gifford, 'Introduction,' in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Cairns Craig, 4 vols (Aberdeen, 1988), Volume 3, ed. Douglas Gifford, 1-12 (8-9).

⁴ Margaret Oliphant, *Life of Edward Irving*, 2 vols (London, 1862), I, 1-9.

⁵ Margaret Oliphant, 'New Books', *Blackwood's*, 117 (May 1875), 616-37, (634-37). (634-37).

means of understanding MacDonald's character.⁶ Indeed, both novelists' Scottish heritage can be traced even in many of their works in English settings. Nonetheless, MacDonald, like Oliphant, wrote on many other themes than Scotland, and reviews of the two authors discuss them as Scottish and English novelists interchangeably.

Critics who take a nationalist approach to nineteenth-century Scottish literature can certainly find primary sources to support their views. On the other hand, those who maintain, like Kidd, that a broader British approach more accurately represents the way many nineteenth-century Scottish writers saw themselves, will also find ample evidence. Working from Kidd's point that 'constricting binary alternatives of England/Scotland' are not particularly helpful,⁷ I will investigate the interplay between MacDonald and Oliphant's Scottish and British identities. Firstly, I will examine the importance of their Scottish networks when outside of Scotland; secondly, I will give a partial account of the English and Scottish reception of their fiction; and finally, I will explore how Oliphant's experiences with expatriate Scots, including MacDonald, influenced some of her non-Scottish fiction.

Scottish Networks in England

A closer look at Oliphant and MacDonald's friendship demonstrates the importance of expatriate Scottish networks in England for both writers. When MacDonald and Oliphant wrote, most publishers were in London. None of MacDonald's novels, though many of them are about Scottish subjects and make use of Scots, were published in book form in Scotland.⁸ MacDonald made an unsuccessful attempt to publish *David Elginbrod* with Blackwood, one of the few prestigious publishers still in Scotland, writing in February of 1861, 'I would rather have you to publish it than any other firm'.⁹ Oliphant published one fifth of her one hundred novels with Blackwood, the firm to whom she felt the strongest loyalty. Nonetheless, she published the other eighty with London publishers, including Hurst and Blackett (twenty-nine) and Macmillan (twenty-two).¹⁰

⁶ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (New York, 1924), 44–45.

⁷ Kidd, 3.

⁸ *Malcolm, The Marquis of Lossie, Sir Gibbie, Mary Marston, Castle Warlock, Heather and Snow*, and *Salted with Fire* were serialised in Scotland. See Table 1.

⁹ Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Blackwood Papers, MS 4162, fols. 117–18 (4 Feb. 1861).

¹⁰ For a full list of the publishers of Oliphant's and MacDonald's novels, see Troy J. Bassett, *At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837–1901*, in

However, although the publishers were in London, they were not always English. Many of Oliphant's publishers, including Alexander Macmillan, W. & R. Chambers, David Bogue, and Smith, Elder were Scottish. The publisher of five of MacDonald's novels, Alexander Strahan, had started his business in Edinburgh before moving to London. William Isbister, publisher of *The Wise Woman*, and Blackie, publisher of *A Rough Shaking*, were also Scottish transplants. William Raeper notes that MacDonald's journey south followed the traditional route for a "lad o' pairs" hailing from a poor background: the bursary to a Scottish university followed by a move to an England filled with other Scottish writers and a 'publishing business [...] dominated by Scots'.¹¹ Attention to these networks demonstrates that there were particularly Scottish approaches to making one's way in the capital and highlights Oliphant's motivation to help MacDonald, a fellow Scot.

Many scholars have shown interest in the literary networks that contributed to Victorian publishing success, including scholars such as Joanne Shattock, Andrew Nash, and Nathan Hensley, who have written on particular Victorian Scots.¹² Shattock, writing on the differences between male and female Victorian literary networks, makes the well-known points that male writers had greater access to clubs and coffee rooms and publishers' dinners, that they sometimes had university or civil service positions, and that they were more likely to attend and certainly more likely to give lectures than women. However, the evidence in and out of Shattock's article also demonstrates that there was some fluidity in this networking: some of George MacDonald's early literary networks in London depended on what Shattock calls a feminine form of networking, the literary party.¹³ As Rolland Hein notes, '[f]requent visits to [Lady Byron's] home opened to MacDonald an entrance into the literary and intellectual world of London'; it was through Lady Byron that MacDonald met Margaret Oliphant.¹⁴

Victorian Research Web. <<http://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl> [accessed 1 July 2017]. Bassett lists Oliphant as publishing one hundred novels and MacDonald as publishing thirty-eight. Disagreements may arise as to what constitutes a novel.

¹¹ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, Herts, 1987), 191.

¹² Joanne Shattock, 'Professional Networking, Masculine and Feminine', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44.2 (2011), 128–40; Andrew Nash, 'William Robertson Nicoll, The Kailyard Novel and the Question of Popular Culture', *Scottish Studies Review*, 5.1 (2004), 57–73, (69); Nathan Hensley, 'What is a Network? (And Who is Andrew Lang?)' *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 64 (Oct. 2013) <10.7202/1025668ar>; Nathan Hensley, 'Network: Andrew Lang And The Distributed Agencies Of Literary Production', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 48.3 (2015), 359–82.

¹³ Shattock, 134.

¹⁴ Rolland Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker* (Nashville, TN, 1993), 150.

Shattock's article also implicitly demonstrates that nationality as well as gender had a large impact on literary network access. Oliphant's own network-forming followed what Joanne Shattock sees as the traditional route for male Scots new to the capital, 'the obligatory call on Carlyle'.¹⁵ Shattock notes that David Masson, the first editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* (and MacDonald's successful rival for the Chair of Rhetoric and *Belles Lettres* at Edinburgh), met 'George Nickisson, the proprietor of *Fraser's Magazine*,' T. K. Hervey, editor of the *Athenaeum*, and George Henry Lewes at Carlyle's house, where he also made numerous other important London connections.¹⁶

As a Scottish *woman* of letters, Oliphant's call on Carlyle was perhaps less expected; when working on the biography of the Scottish preacher Edward Irving, whom Carlyle had known, she visited his house, 'shy as I always was, yet with the courage that comes to one when one is about one's lawful work, and not seeking an acquaintance or social favour'.¹⁷ Regardless of Oliphant's motive, as Elisabeth Jay notes, the research for the Irving biography, including the visits with Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, led to 'new contacts and friendships and launched her into a world where she was regarded as a successful breadwinner'.¹⁸ Oliphant's connections in London and in literary networks were extensive both for a Scot and for a woman, and as early as the 1860s, when she was still in her thirties, she was able to use them on others' behalf, including George MacDonald's.

In fact, Oliphant played an important role in helping at least two Victorian novelists reach success. In the first case, that of Dinah Mulock, Oliphant was a reluctant mediator, at least in retrospect. Oliphant describes how it was she who helped Mulock, a rival novelist, eclipse herself in financial success by introducing her to the London publisher Henry Blackett of Hurst and Blackett.

I had introduced Mr Blackett by his desire to Miss [Dinah] Mulock

¹⁵ Shattock, 132.

¹⁶ Ibid., 131.

¹⁷ Margaret Oliphant, *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant*, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill (Edinburgh, Blackwood and Sons, 1899), in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 25 vols (London, 2011–2016), VI, ed. Linda Peterson (2012), 62; *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Peterborough, Ontario, 2002), 142. I cite both twenty-first century editions of Oliphant's autobiography when possible; Peterson's contains the original published text, including the letters, and critical notes on the changes made to the text; Jay's edition is Oliphant's unexpurgated autobiography, given in its original order.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself'* (Oxford, 1995), 17.

[sic] in London,—he, apparently with some business gift or instinct imperceptible to me, having made out that there were elements of special success in her. [. . .] He had at once made an arrangement with her, of which ‘John Halifax’ [1856] was the result, the most popular of all her books, and one which raised her at once to a high position, I will not say in literature, but among the novel-writers of one species. She made a spring thus quite over my head with the helping hand of my particular friend, leaving me a little rueful,—I did not at all understand the means nor think very highly of the work, which is a thing that has happened several times, I fear, in my experience.¹⁹

Oliphant’s reluctance and regret in Mulock’s case, where Oliphant’s networking was casual, can be contrasted with her tireless mediating efforts a few years later with the same publisher, Hurst and Blackett, on behalf of George MacDonald and his first popular novel, *David Elginbrod*.

After MacDonald’s early patron, Annabella Milbanke, Lady Byron, introduced MacDonald to Oliphant, Oliphant became interested in helping him publish *David Elginbrod* and gave him suggestions on the manuscript.²⁰ MacDonald had applied to Blackwood to publish the novel in January and February of 1861. John Blackwood, however, responded that he had ‘read the greater portion of your novel’ and found it unsuitable for serial publication in *Blackwood’s* or for separate publication: ‘[m]y main objection,’ Blackwood wrote, ‘is that the characters are (to my eyes at least) so unlike anything in real life[,] but there is truth[,] excitement + interest about the story[,] and I think it may very probably succeed’.²¹

Oliphant would later refer to the many rejections *David Elginbrod* received as ‘one of the instances of publishers’ blunders’,²² but MacDonald’s original two letters to Blackwood about the manuscript do not come off as particularly professional. His first asks the firm to consider his novel without telling them anything about it; however, he notes twice his hope ‘for a speedy answer, which is of some consequence to my plans’.²³ His second informs them that he has ‘not been able to give it the polish I intended before submitting it to your inspection’ but that ‘those who happen to know anything of my prose

¹⁹ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 66; *Autobiography*, ed. Elisabeth Jay, 147.

²⁰ Hein, 150.

²¹ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 30360, p. 33a (13 February 1861).

²² Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 214.

²³ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4162, fols 115–16 (23 January 1861).

compositions would be satisfied to trust me with the finish'.²⁴

When the manuscript reached Oliphant, it was very visible that MacDonald had had trouble placing it: Annie Coghill writes before the 1884 letters in Oliphant's autobiography that the manuscript 'came enveloped in wrappings that showed how many refusals it had already suffered'.²⁵

After receiving the novel, Oliphant first lobbied with Hurst and Blackett to publish it and then persistently attempted to convince John Blackwood to let her review it in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Perhaps the most interesting letter in this negotiation, datable only to somewhere in March or April of 1863, is published at the end of her autobiography:

I am very glad you like 'David Elginbrod,' and my anxiety to get the article admission I may explain by telling you that it was at my urgent recommendation (having read the MS. and made such humble suggestions toward its improvement as my knowledge of the literary susceptibility made possible) that Mr Blackett published it; and that the author is not only a man of genius but a man burdened with ever so many children, and, what is perhaps worse, a troublesome conscientiousness; so please, if you are persuadable, let me have my way this time, and I will assault or congratulate, haul down or set up, anybody your honour pleases hereafter.²⁶

Blackwood, however, was not persuadable. Between January and April,²⁷ Oliphant wrote Blackwood at least six letters regarding the review; in the first two she simply proposed an article on 'Thoughtful Books', listing several that she might review but saying that her real motive was 'to say a good word for a curious novel written by a poet whom I know, and called "David Elginbrod"'. The most extraordinary and absurd of *stories* but full of the most beautiful thoughts and scraps of divine philosophy. Let me do this please—'.²⁸

²⁴ NLS, MS 4162, fols 117–18 (4 February 1861)

²⁵ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 214.

²⁶ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 132. Greville MacDonald claims a different origin of *David Elginbrod's* acceptance, stating that Jessie Ballantyne showed the manuscript to Dinah Moluck, who 'took it to her own publishers, Hurst and Blackett, and told them they were fools to refuse it. "Are we?" they asked. "Then of course we will print it without delay"' (322). William Raeper correctly attributes the intervention to Oliphant (180).

²⁷ Oliphant's letters are often unfortunately undated; archivists have penciled in the first January date. Blackwood's extant responses (some replies are missing) do have dates.

²⁸ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 38 [19 January 1863]

Oliphant's next letter, which I put second but which is undated, states '[t]he paper I thought of was upon *Thoughtful* books [. . .] specially a book called *David Elginbrod* which pretends to be a novel'.²⁹ Blackwood initially agreed both to this paper and another paper by Oliphant on liturgies; the articles were supposed to go into the May number of the magazine, but, after reading them, he objected to them both, apparently mainly on theological grounds. He found Oliphant's description of MacDonald's novel too heterodox and, regarding the second paper on liturgies, which Oliphant commented that she 'trust[ed] you'll think orthodox enough for anything', believed the article likely to cause offense to members of both the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, with the result of embarrassment to the magazine and perhaps to its author, should her authorship become known.³⁰

Oliphant's advocacy of *David Elginbrod* went quite far, however, and she did not give up easily. She promised to 'cut out all the objectionable matter from the paper about David Elginbrod if you will return me the proof—Perhaps to delete what you don't like [and add another review] would be the best way'.³¹ She evidently wrote two separate revisions making 'amendments in the point of orthodoxy' and seems to have hoped, after her liturgies article was refused, that the paper on thoughtful books would still appear, especially since Blackwood was particularly worried about whether he would have enough material for a strong number in May.³² On April 20, however, Blackwood responded that he did not think her review would do:

I fear the patched David Elginbrod on Thoughtful Books is rather an unsatisfactory paper a very eccentric sound indeed – I incline not to use it.

As I assented to the subjects of both this paper + the Liturgys when

²⁹ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 62.

³⁰ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 78; MS 30360, pp. 374–5 (15 April 1863)

³¹ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 80.

³² NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 58. See also fol. 94, where Oliphant notes that she hopes Blackwood will like the David Elginbrod paper 'in its amended form'. Both of these are difficult to date. On the one hand, in fol. 94 she says she has not yet finished the liturgies article, so that letter must have been written before April 15, when Blackwood refused it. Folio 58 discusses Blackwood having sent Oliphant proof of the Elginbrod article, which, Oliphant says 'conveys a certain faint hope that you might be induced to use it—as that I send it back with some amendments in the point of orthodoxy'. This letter then immediately goes into the section quoted in the letters of her autobiography and above (Peterson, 132). But it is unclear whether this letter was sent before Blackwood's letter refusing Oliphant's articles on liturgy.

I felt very doubtful as to how they would suit you I will not allow you to lose your labour altogether + inclose [*sic*] a cheque £20 – which we shall consider as worked off in the next no– of the Magazine altho it may contain nothing from your pen.³³

Oliphant was not pleased with this response, refused the cheque as payment for the articles, though she accepted it as an advance, and defended herself on the counts of heterodoxy:

I daresay you will not expect human complacency to go so far as that I should be quite contented with this second rejection—two in our week is rather hard measure—Of course I have only to submit—but I confess I can't very well understand it. I have touted *David Elginbrod* simply as a book containing certain interesting though heterodox opinions which I have described historically, neither as a champion nor assailant. I don't for my own part agree with MacDonald in the very least—and what I have said is simply a narrative of his opinion, not by any means an expression of my own—the most orthodox may surely without impugning their own belief give a fair description of the sentiments of any book under discussion—and this is all I have done—however of course it is your business to accept or reject—and I can have nothing further to say in the matter, though I don't pretend not to feel it—My cheque I neither can nor will accept for work which is of no use to you—were I to return it it might look like ill-temper, but it must stand against the next paper I send you—³⁴

I go into such detail about Oliphant's proposed *David Elginbrod* review, in part, because only the published letter has been previously discussed, and one complaint that has historically been made about MacDonald scholarship is that we lack a strong understanding of MacDonald's interactions with many of his contemporaries. Roderick McGillis, in his 1995 response to the publication of the Rolland Hein biography and the Glenn Edward Sadler edition of MacDonald's letters, shows frustration in the number of 'lacunae [that] remain in our understanding of George MacDonald's life. Truly, we do not have all we need for a complete portrait of MacDonald the man, and further, we can

³³ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 30360, 376 (20 April 1863).

³⁴ NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fols 74–5.

never have all we need'.³⁵

More broadly, Oliphant's letters to John Blackwood regarding *David Elginbrod* provide fascinating insights into her place in British literary and publishing networks. Her importance in this role is clearly complicated, alternatively underrated and overrated by her peers. Yes, she helped MacDonald to publish his novel, but her influence was limited. Blackwood could and did veto her work if it did not match his own views and was not even persuaded when she promised that if he accepted this piece, she would 'assault or congratulate, haul down or set up, anybody your honour pleases hereafter'.³⁶

When Oliphant's influence was recognised, it was sometimes viewed negatively; Henry James and Thomas Hardy both came to resent it. Hardy made use of Oliphant's influence early in his career when Oliphant requested his work for the newly founded *Longman's Magazine* in 1882, but he was offended by Oliphant's review of *Jude the Obscure* and wrote more than one critical account of Oliphant.³⁷ Henry James, writing about Oliphant's influence, infamously claimed, '[s]he wrought in "Blackwood" for years, anonymously and profusely; no writer of the day found a *porte-voix* nearer to hand or used it with an easier personal latitude and comfort. I should almost suppose in fact that no woman had ever, for half a century, had her personal "say" so publicly and irresponsibly'.³⁸ As is clear from the letters above, however, Oliphant's say was often not *personal*, but rather subject to the Blackwood brand and the whims of its editors, and her anonymity, far from being a means of gaining power over an unwitting public, actually gave her less authority and less ability to say what she wished.³⁹

Oliphant herself gives perhaps a too underrated account of her influence in her autobiography. She repeatedly underscores her failures at London

³⁵ Roderick McGillis, 'What's Missing: Lacunae in the Life and Letters of George MacDonald', [Rev. of Rolland Hein's *Victorian Mythmaker* and Glenn Edward Sadler's *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald*], *The Lion and Unicorn*, 19.2 (1995), 282–87, (284).

³⁶ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 132.

³⁷ J. S. Clarke, "'The Rival Novelist'—Hardy and Mrs. Oliphant', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 5.3 (1981), 51–61, (51, 56–8).

³⁸ Henry James, 'London Notes August 1897', in *Notes on Novelists with Some Other Notes* (London, 1916), 353–60, 358.

³⁹ On the *Blackwood's* brand, and on Margaret Oliphant's role as writer for *Blackwood's*, see David Finkelstein, *The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* (University Park, PA., 2002), (112, 113–28). I also discuss the limits of Oliphant's authority in *Blackwood's* in 'Lasting Ephemera: Margaret Oliphant and Andrew Lang on Lives and Letters', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 50.2 (2017), 336–65.

networking—how she stood in corners at parties, ‘rather wistfully wishing to know people, but not venturing to make any approach’ and ‘exasperat[ing] my aspiring hostess, who had picked me up as a new novelist, and meant me to help her amuse her guests, which I had not the least idea how to do’.⁴⁰

In matters of temperament, Oliphant and MacDonald seem well matched. Hein describes MacDonald as ‘not generally socially gregarious’ and claims that he ‘despised the masks people tended to assume in public gatherings’.⁴¹ Oliphant, in her autobiography, describes a similar reticence to make much of herself and her work, calling it ‘Scotch shyness [. . .] and the strong Scotch sense of the absurdity of a chorus of praise’.⁴²

She also believed herself, as a woman, to be at a disadvantage in questions of influence, protesting against the ‘the fictitious reputation got up’ by men such as Augustus Hare and Matthew Arnold, ‘who happen to be “remembered at the Universities”, and who have many connections among literary men’.⁴³

In considering Oliphant’s position as a Scottish and British author, it may be worthwhile to note that the universities she refers to are English, and, if she sometimes resented their control over reputations, she also rated their value highly enough to send her own sons to Eton and Oxford. It is also worthy of comment that some who criticised her seemed to marginalise her both because she was a woman and because she was a Scot. After her death, Henry James wrote that her ‘instrument was essentially a Scotch one [...] What was good enough for Sir Walter was good enough for her’.⁴⁴ When W. E. Henley admonished James that he could have no ‘pretensions to interest in literature’ without having read Oliphant’s novel with a Scottish heroine, *Kirsteen* (1890), James ‘laboured through the book’, with the conclusion ‘that the poor soul had a simply *feminine* idea of literature’ and could not be considered an artist.⁴⁵

Although Oliphant discusses multiple themes in all her writings, in contemporary responses to her autobiography, her role as a woman writer and her loyalty as a Scot frequently come to the fore. Reviewers highlight members of Oliphant’s Scottish networks, George MacDonald, the Carlyles, and James

⁴⁰ *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 35; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 76.

⁴¹ Hein, 150.

⁴² *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 16; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 49.

⁴³ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 166. The quotation above is solely in reference to Hare. On Arnold, see Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 78.

⁴⁴ James, ‘London Notes’, 359.

⁴⁵ A. C. Benson, ‘A Visit to Lamb House’ (January 1900), in *The Diary of Arthur Christopher Benson*, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1926), 46–48; repr. in *Henry James: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Norman Page (New York, 1984), 87–8.

Barrie, as examples of figures to whom Oliphant offered untinctured praise. Oliphant's anecdotes about Tennyson, Dickens, Mulock, and George Eliot, also discussed in the reviews, have a sharper edge.

Oliphant's intervention in the publication of *David Elginbrod* gave many reviewers pleasure. At least three comment with interest and even surprise that it was she who helped him reach his first success as a novel writer and contrast her treatment of MacDonald with her treatment of others. *The Bookman* editor and advocate of Kailyard writers, W. Robertson Nicoll, in his review of Oliphant's *Autobiography* notes that Oliphant 'did not, as a rule, put a high estimate on the work of her competitors, but it is pleasant to find that she helped George MacDonald to get "David Elginbrod" published, and that she regarded him in many ways a noble writer'.⁴⁶ The *Times* writer maintains that '[t]he autobiography is frank to an extreme. [. . .] She confesses to mortification when Miss Muloch [sic], the author of "John Halifax," whom she herself introduced to Mr. Blackett, "took a leap over her head." By the way, we learn that it was Mrs. Oliphant who launched George MacDonald'.⁴⁷ William Canton, in *Good Words*, also contrasted Oliphant's advocacy of George MacDonald with her supposed failures of judgment in regard to Dickens's *Great Expectations*: '[o]n the other hand, she furthered the publication of "David Elginbrod"—who among Scottish readers that remembers the books of the sixties but remembers that novel with pleasure?'.⁴⁸

The English and Scottish Reception of Oliphant's and MacDonald's Fiction

Because Oliphant and MacDonald wrote so prolifically, a thorough account of their Scottish and English reception histories would require a much longer study. The Scottish reception history, especially, has long been hindered by access difficulties. In 1925, John Malcolm Bulloch wrote that he was unable to give a complete history of George MacDonald's serialisations, 'particularly—strange to say—in the matter of Scots papers in which he serialised some

⁴⁶ W. Robertson Nicoll, 'Mrs. Oliphant's Autobiography', *Bookman*, 16. 93 (June 1899), 67–68, 67. Nicoll, who was in great part behind the popularity of Kailyard writers, also notes that when Oliphant was given 'a proposal that she should show up the Kailyard School, Mrs. Oliphant expressed her admiration for Mr. Barrie' (67). See Nash, 'William Robertson Nicoll,' with attention to page 57 for Oliphant's response to the Kailyard school.

⁴⁷ 'Mrs. Oliphant's Autobiography', *The Times*, 27 April 1999, 8.

⁴⁸ William Canton, 'From an Idler's Day-Book', *Good Words*, 40 (Dec 1899), 429–32, (430).

of the Scots stories'.⁴⁹ I uncovered new information on some of these serialisations, listed in Figure 1, by searching for advertisements in the *British Newspaper Archive*.⁵⁰ However, at the time of this writing, *The Glasgow Weekly Herald*, which serialised *Malcolm*, and *The Glasgow Weekly Mail*, where *The Marquis of Lossie*, *Sir Gibbie*, *Castle Warlock*, *Heather and Snow*, and *Salted with Fire* appeared, remain undigitised.⁵¹ As Paul Fyfe notes, digitised and microfilm newspaper collections have significant gaps, particularly among Scottish and provincial newspapers.⁵² While we can look forward to a better understanding of MacDonald's reception history as digitisation projects go forward, some newspapers, never having been preserved, are beyond recall.

What is clear from extant information is that there was no uniformly English or uniformly Scottish response to the novelists' work. Some Scottish newspapers seemed thrilled merely to publish news of MacDonald's success; more than one local Scottish newspaper reprinted a column describing how an 'old Aberdeen student has achieved, during the last few days, his first success as a novelist [*David Elginbrod*]'.⁵³ However, Scotland also provided some of Oliphant's and MacDonald's harshest critics, such as the writer for the *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, who complained of the novels each author published in Glasgow newspapers. The critic panned Oliphant's *Squire Arden* but called it 'a masterpiece compared with the miserable collection of melodramatic impossibilities and wire-drawn sentimentalities which Mr George MacDonald has heaped together under the title of "*Malcolm*"'.⁵⁴

The English reception also varied – and is complicated by the fact that some anonymous writers for English newspapers may, in fact, be Scottish. From isolated reviews, we can see that writers in English periodicals usually, but not

⁴⁹ John Malcolm Bulloch, *A Centennial Bibliography of George MacDonald* (Aberdeen, 1925), 5.

⁵⁰ I would also like to thank Troy J. Bassett, who continuously updates *At the Circulating Library* and answered several of my questions about information on the MacDonald serialisations listed there.

⁵¹ Readers may also have noticed that opinions given in my first long quotation, purportedly those of a writer in the *Scottish Art Review*, are mediated through an English paper, the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph and Star*. The *Scottish Art Review* is not yet digitised.

⁵² 'An Archaeology of Victorian Newspapers,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49.4 (Winter 2016), 546–77, 554.

⁵³ *Dundee Advertiser*, 20 January 1863, 3; *Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser*, 20 January 1863, p. 5; *Elgin Courier*, 23 January 1863, 6.

⁵⁴ *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, 11 September 1874, 2.

always, preferred the Scottish sections of *David Elginbrod* to the English, the *Athenaeum* reviewer being a notable exception,⁵⁵ and that they often, but not always, would comment on MacDonald's use of Scots in his novels.

English reviewers' opinions on the value of Scots varied, however. The *Athenaeum* review of *Robert Falconer* claimed that mastering the 'quaint Scotch dialect' was 'well worth the small effort'.⁵⁶ Edwin Paxton Hood of the dissenting *Eclectic Review* noted of *Alec Forbes* that 'while some readers will possibly find it difficult to follow the pages through their long Scotticisms,' he personally could not think of a novel 'in which the humour—for [...] there is a most delightful humour in Scotch discourse—of the Scottish character has been so happily rendered'.⁵⁷ The *London Review* critic, on the other hand, writing of *Robert Falconer*, was less enthusiastic about MacDonald's 'profuse indulgence in the Scotch language,' as the reviewer was 'frequently obliged to guess at his meaning'.⁵⁸

For Scottish critics, it seems the arguments were somewhat different, but no more uniform in their conclusions. Margaret Oliphant is often quoted for her response to *Malcolm* in *Blackwood's Magazine*: '[w]hy will Mr. MacDonald make all his characters [...] talk such painfully broad Scotch? Scotch to the fingertips, and loving dearly our vernacular, we yet feel it necessary to protest against the Aberdeen-awa' dialect [...] which bewilders even ourselves now and then, and which must be almost impossible to an Englishman'.⁵⁹ She contrasts MacDonald's Scots negatively with that used by Sir Walter Scott and believes that it is 'poor art, and not truth at all, to insist upon this desperate accuracy'. MacDonald's insistence on the 'exact words, or rather breakings up and riddlings of words', Oliphant protests, has a tendency to obscure the

⁵⁵ 'David Elginbrod,' *Athenaeum*, 17 January 1863, 79–80, 79. The *Athenaeum* reviewer did admire Elginbrod's character, writing, 'Those who are not deterred by the Scotch dialect from reading this portion of the story, cannot fail to be struck by the simple and original remarks of the old Scotchman.' The reviewer, however, unlike most, who preferred David Elginbrod, found the 'most interesting part of the book [...] is Hugh's residence at Armstead' (79–80). This is quite a contrast to the *Globe* (London), whose critic admired 'the first part of the book, in which David Elginbrod, and his wife and daughter, are described with their environment (a very fit setting for such a gem)' but found 'all that follows concerning other people, all more or less diseased in mind [...] not so good to read.' 'Literature: David Elginbrod,' *Globe*, 22 January 1863, 1.

⁵⁶ 'Robert Falconer,' *Athenaeum*, 4 July 1868, 12–13, 13.

⁵⁷ [Edwin Paxton Hood], 'Alec Forbes of Howglen,' *Eclectic review*, 122 (September 1865), 222–34, 222.

⁵⁸ 'Robert Falconer,' *London Review*, 4 July 1868, 19–20, 19.

⁵⁹ Oliphant, 'New Books', 634.

‘poetry and wisdom’ behind ‘the veil’.⁶⁰

Sir Edward Troup, an Aberdonian, had quite the opposite complaint: he wondered why MacDonald was not more careful to ‘adopt the peculiarities of the Aberdeenshire dialect’.⁶¹ In a 1925 talk given to the Vernacular Circle, Burns Club of London, Troup notes that he had asked MacDonald this very question. MacDonald’s response was similar to Oliphant’s. MacDonald claimed that he ‘wrote for a much wider audience than Aberdeenshire, and if he used the Aberdeenshire dialect people outside the North Eastern counties could not or would not read it, whereas if he used the classic Scots tongue he could appeal to Scotsmen all over the world and to the many Englishmen and Americans who read Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns’.⁶² For Oliphant, MacDonald’s Scots was too local, for Troup it was not quite local enough, but for MacDonald it was in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott and Burns.⁶³

How much (and what varieties of) Scots an educated Briton should be expected to know was a matter of debate on both sides of the border. Andrew Lang, another Scottish critic, who lived part of each year in St Andrews and part in London, maintained against the *Athenaeum* reviewer of Stevenson’s *Weir of Hermiston* (1896) that well educated English citizens can and do read Scots: ‘the two hundred Scotch words used by Mr. Stevenson—are of constant occurrence in Burns, Scott, and the Ballads. If this reviewer really does not understand them, he cannot read, without a glossary, books with which every educated man is supposed to be familiar’.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Lang claims these Scots words as part of a shared British heritage: ‘[t]he words themselves, as a rule, are old English surviving north of the Tweed’.⁶⁵

In August, Lang addressed the literary use of Scots more pointedly and addressed how the language affected Scottish literature’s perceived value and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 635.

⁶¹ Sir Edward Troup, ‘George MacDonald’s Use of the Scots Tongue,’ repr. in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 2 (1983), 24–32, (24).

⁶² Ibid., 24.

⁶³ The disagreement can be traced to the question of what, precisely, makes for an accurate representation of a dialect. Oliphant seems to be referring mainly to questions of vocabulary, while Troup is more focused on whether the spelling represents the pronunciation. Troup notes, ‘If you are an Aberdonian and know your own dialect, you can read his Scottish stories with the Aberdonian pronunciation as easily as if he had used the Aberdeenshire spelling. If you are not an Aberdonian, you are not puzzled and repelled by the Aberdeenshire peculiarities’ (24).

⁶⁴ Andrew Lang, ‘At the Sign of the Ship’ *Longman’s Magazine*, 28 (July 1896), 313–22, (321).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 321.

its popularity. He objected to the *Academy* reviewer of Stevenson, who claimed that Scots were always partial to their own, and gave numerous examples to counter this claim. While Lang claimed that there was, in fact, no ‘arrogance in claiming that persons ignorant of a language are not the best judges of the literature of that language’,⁶⁶ he also believed that Scottish critics were often more critical of Scottish writers than the English:

In fact, no man is a prophet in his country, a Scot least of all [. . .] it was a Scot who trampled so noisily on what he called ‘The Kailyard School’. [. . .] The English, it appears to me, and not the Scotch, have commonly given to Scotch writers the warmest welcome.⁶⁷

Oliphant may have agreed. In her autobiography, she tries to account for the success of her first novel, *Passages in the Life of Margaret Maitland* (1849), which was reviewed in the *Athenaeum*. As she was later embarrassed by its ‘foolish little polemics’, she could only conclude that there was ‘some breath of youth and sincerity in it which touched people, and there had been no Scotch stories for a long time’.⁶⁸ While twentieth- and twenty-first century critics have pointed to English interest in Scottish stories both in the time of Scott and Hogg and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Oliphant’s account is interesting as a temporal outlier, or perhaps a reminder that, despite critical accounts of particular moments of English interest in Scottish stories, such stories were never out of favour.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Andrew Lang, ‘At the Sign of the Ship’. *Longman’s Magazine*, 28, (August 1896), 416–24, (418).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 416–17.

⁶⁸ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 27; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 65.

⁶⁹ Critics have shown interest in giving dates to this reception history. See James Moffatt, who linked MacDonald’s 1860s novels with Dr. Alexander’s later Johnnie Gibb of Gusheneuk (1871) and a ‘movement to exploit the Scottish character in the far North, to use the humour and the dialect of Aberdeenshire and the adjoining shires’ (219). Margery Palmer McCulloch points to the desire in the 1880s of the ‘capital’s periodical press for [Barrie’s] small-town Scottish stories’ (90). Andrew Nash, on the other hand, notes that ‘the statistical tables of best-sellers from 1891–1901 [. . .] indicated no discernable difference between Scotland and England in the consumption of the works of Barrie, Crockett, and Maclaren’ (61). Moffatt, ‘George MacDonald’s Scottish Tales’, *Bookman*, 72.430 (July 1927), 219–20; McCulloch, “‘Frae Anither Window in Thrums’”: Hugh MacDiarmid and J. M. Barrie’, in *Gateway to the Modern: Resituating J. M. Barrie*, ed. Valentina Bold and Andrew Nash (Glasgow, 2014), 88–102; Nash, ‘William Robertson Nicoll’.

Scottish Influences on Oliphant's Non-Scottish Novels

In order to demonstrate the impact of Oliphant's Scottish identity on her non-Scottish work, I wish to discuss briefly two of Oliphant's works that are set outside of Scotland, *Salem Chapel* and *A Beleaguered City*. I choose these two novels above others, not only because Victorian critics often judge them to be among Oliphant's critical successes,⁷⁰ but also because *Salem Chapel*, on the one hand, was written at the time of Oliphant's networking on George MacDonald's behalf in 1862, and because *A Beleaguered City*, perhaps Oliphant's highest work of art, contains many affinities with MacDonald's.

Salem Chapel, serialised in *Blackwood's* from February of 1862 to January of 1863, though not at all about Scotland, relies on the Scottish expatriate experience. Oliphant based parts of it on her experience, not in a Chapel, but in a Free Church of Scotland in Liverpool:

As a matter of fact, I knew nothing about chapels, but took the sentiment and a few details from our old church in Liverpool, which was Free Church of Scotland, and where there were a few grocers and other such good folk whose ways with the minister were wonderful to behold. The saving grace of their Scotchness being withdrawn, they became still more wonderful as Dissenting deacons, and the truth of the picture was applauded to all the echoes. I don't know that I cared for it much myself, though Tozer [the deacon, cheese-maker, and grocer who very nearly runs the congregation] and the rest amused me well enough.⁷¹

Although Oliphant claims that the 'truth of the picture was applauded to all the echoes', in fact, the reception history of *Salem Chapel* was somewhat bifurcated. Just as *Margaret Maitland* had been praised for the freshness of its Scottish theme, *Salem Chapel's* originality appealed to people. Outsiders, unfamiliar with dissent, believed in her portrayal. The *Westminster Review* critic wrote, '[t]ales of pastoral experience and scenes from clerical life we have had in plenty, but the secret things of the conventicle, the relative position of pastor and flock in a Nonconforming "connexion" were but guessed at

⁷⁰ The *Saturday Review*, in a harsh assessment of Oliphant's writing after the publication of her autobiography, singled out these two works as those with life still in them: "'Salem Chapel," which belongs to 1863, and "The Beleaguered City," of 1880, are still alive, although they are crushed and stifled by the mass of the deceased fiction around them.' *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant*, *Saturday Review*, 20 May 1899, 627–28, (628).

⁷¹ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 66; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 147–48.

by the world outside, and terrible is the revelation'.⁷² *The Dublin University Magazine* writer found Oliphant's portrayal of dissenters more interesting than Trollope's 'unrivaled' portrayal of churchmen for the same reason: 'to the literary public dissenting ministers are comparatively unknown, while at the same time they are possessed of immense influence over large classes of the community. So we eagerly follow Mrs. Oliphant into the *terra incognita* of congregationalism'.⁷³

Dissenting periodicals, on the other hand, did not see their own likeness in Oliphant's work: Edwin Paxton Hood, in *The Eclectic Review*, accurately perceived that although the 'author has been where she has obtained some considerable acquaintance with the ways and means of our Nonconformist churches,' her experience was not first hand: 'we should suppose that she has studied us rather through the spectacles of another denomination, or through hearsay; and we could very well point to her attention many errors of character and of detail'.⁷⁴

Whether Oliphant's representation of a dissenting chapel relied not only on her experience in the Free Church of Scotland, but also on the experiences of her friend, Scottish expatriate George MacDonald, in Arundel, cannot be determined. However, there are intriguing similarities between the experiences of Oliphant's dissenting minister, Arthur Vincent, and those of MacDonald.

MacDonald, as a Congregationalist minister in Arundel, was clearly a much better clergyman and person than Arthur Vincent, whose education, combined

⁷² 'Belles Lettres', *Westminster Review*, 79 (April 1863), 322–32, (327). American edition.

⁷³ 'Modern Novel and Romance', *Dublin University Magazine*, 61.364 (April 1863), 436–42, (437).

⁷⁴ Edwin Paxton Hood, 'Chronicles of Carlingford—My Lord Deacon', *Eclectic Review*, 4 (March 1863), 222–241, (237). Hood's reception of Oliphant and MacDonald is worthy of further study. Editor and predominant author of the Congregationalist *Eclectic Review* (many issues are solely from his pen), he devoted six full articles to reviews of Oliphant's and MacDonald's work, including Oliphant's *Life of Irving* (June 1862), *Salem Chapel* (March 1863), and the *Perpetual Curate* (December 1864) and MacDonald's *David Elginbrod* (February 1863), *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (September 1865), and *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood* (January 1867). His initial reaction to *Salem Chapel* was disbelief that the work was from Oliphant's pen; he would have been happier to attribute them to the 'stronger, but more unhealthy and indeed eminently morbid pen of the author of "Adam Bede"' (222). In response to *Alec Forbes*, he asked MacDonald to 'leave the creeds and the sects behind him, leave Mrs. Oliphant to deal with Carlingford and Salem Chapel, and, for himself, if he determine on being a Scottish painter, walk rather in the step and the manner of John Galt' (234). For other dissenting objections to Oliphant's writing, see 'Chronicles of Carlingford', *London Quarterly Review*, 20.40 (July 1863), 434–54 and 'The Chronicles of Carlingford', *British Quarterly Review*, 41.81 (January 1865), 254–5.

with his pretensions to the higher society of Grange Lane, and more especially, the favor of the glamorous Lady Western, led him to feel superior to his flock of 'greengrocers, dealers in cheese and bacon, milkmen, [...] dressmakers of inferior pretensions, and teachers of day-schools of similarly humble character'.⁷⁵ However, the two ministers came from similar Congregational backgrounds and faced similar challenges. Vincent went to Homerton, MacDonald's original first choice for a seminary, though MacDonald later went to Highbury.⁷⁶ Both men gave stirring sermons that not everyone understood, and both were subject to congregational meetings in their absence in which their fate was discussed.⁷⁷ As William Raeper writes in his biography, MacDonald 'chafed against being at the mercy of a group of tradesmen "in which they regard you more as *their* servant than as Christ's"''.⁷⁸ While such a complaint by pastors against congregants is hardly unique, the complaint is precisely Arthur Vincent's in *Salem Chapel*: 'I am either your servant, responsible to you, or God's servant, responsible to Him—which is it? I cannot tell; but no man can serve two masters, as you know' (vol. 2, 306, Chapter 22).

Moreover, both men leave the ministry to 'go into literature'. Vincent was not a good Christian example, too enamored by those of a higher social class, but Vincent's ending position is more promising than his start, and Oliphant seems to approve of his visionary idealism. Nonetheless, Vincent's literary endeavours, apparently confined to periodicals, are a result of his frustration that his ideal remains unrealised, rather than, as with MacDonald, an attempt to bring the kingdom of heaven nearer:

A Church of the Future—an ideal corporation, grand and primitive, not yet realised, but surely *real*, to come at one day—shone before his eyes, as it shines before so many; but, in the mean time, the Nonconformist went into literature, as was natural, and was, it is believed in Carlingford, the founder of the 'Philosophical Review', that new organ of public opinion. He had his battle to fight, and fought it out in silence, saying little to any one. (vol. 2, 313)

Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* did have some detractors; the sensational element of the story, involving attempted murder and brain fever, did not please

⁷⁵ Margaret Oliphant, *Salem Chapel*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1863; repr. Leipzig, 1870), I, 6.

⁷⁶ Hein, 43.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁸ Raeper, 92.

reviewers. Dissenters, as noted, objected that Oliphant did not understand them and wondered at her goal. The Methodist *London Quarterly Review* writer noted that her very terms were incorrect (448), claimed that no dissenting minister would be enamored, as Mr. Vincent was, by a lady clearly outside of his class (447), and complained that it was impossible to tell what Oliphant's purpose was in writing such a story: '[i]t could hardly have been the writer's purpose to show the injustice to which Dissenting ministers are exposed from their congregations, or she would have either found a minister in whom there was more to admire, or a people in whom there was more to condemn'.⁷⁹ Nor could it be a sectarian purpose, since her established church clergy was no better than her dissenter (452–3). But is there nothing more in the tale than a gentle satire on all its characters, most of whom, though original 'are characters for whom it would be hard to cherish a feeling of sympathy' (450)? Is the purpose of the novel only to mock?

And it does seem that *Salem Chapel's* purpose generally is to hold up the flaws of its characters, particularly Arthur Vincent's, but also those of his congregation. There are perhaps two exceptions, Mr. Vincent's capable mother, who though not always wise, nor entirely genuine in her statements, has been a pastor's wife and knows how to manage a congregation, and the mysterious Mrs. Hilyard, whose ability to fascinate Vincent makes her remarkable; she is perhaps the only member of the congregation to whom he makes an effort to act as a pastor should, though his efforts clearly stem more from the impoverished woman's being 'so strangely superior to her surroundings' than from his sense of duty (vol. 1, 35, ch. 2).

In contrast, MacDonald's characters are never subjected to satire for satire's sake; when their flaws are portrayed, MacDonald's purpose is clear. Robert Falconer's grandmother could very well have been subjected to keen satire, but instead MacDonald makes her one of his strongest and even most sympathetic characters, imprisoned by her doctrines but nonetheless loving fiercely.⁸⁰ Even with *David Elginbrod's* Euphrasia, who has in her much to criticise, MacDonald asks us to understand her rather than to mock her.⁸¹ Oliphant's lack of sympathy for some of her protagonists, on the other hand, was noticed early, and not only in regards to *Salem Chapel*. John Blackwood wrote Oliphant on

⁷⁹ 'Chronicles of Carlingford'. *London Quarterly Review*, 20.40 (July 1863), 434–54, (448–9).

⁸⁰ *Robert Falconer* (London, 1868; repr. Eureka, CA., 1990). See particularly chapter 8, 'The Angel Unawares' and chapter 12, 'Robert's Plan of Salvation.'

⁸¹ *David Elginbrod* (London, 1862; repr. Eureka, CA., 1999). See particularly chapters 38, 39, and 60, 'The Wager,' 'The Lady Euphrasia,' and 'The Lady's Maid'.

March 5, 1865 about *Miss Marjoribanks* that a *Saturday Review* critic was correct that ‘the author has not the remotest sympathy with her heroine + it may be worth your consideration to get in a feminine character with whom the author does sympathise. Do not however let this suggestion of mine mislead you’.⁸²

I do not claim that sympathy is better than satire; they both have their place. Oliphant’s gentle satire of Lucilla Marjoribanks, which sympathizes, at least, with Lucilla’s desire to influence, rightly remains critically acclaimed today. However, in Oliphant’s 1860s fiction, the narrator’s critical remarks regarding her characters are often made, apparently, with the sole goal of illuminating their absurdities, in contrast to MacDonald’s approach.

I do think that Oliphant’s *A Beleaguered City* (1879), where satire and sympathy are both present, stands above *Salem Chapel* in artistry. The plot of *A Beleaguered City* is as follows: when the citizens, particularly the men of the town of Semur, cease to believe in ‘*le bon Dieu*, whom our grandmothers used to talk about’, and instead place their faith in the power of money (with Jacques Richard going so far as to call a one hundred sous piece his God), the more conventionally pious women of the town respond in horror, saying ‘[i]t is enough to make the dead rise out of their graves!’⁸³ The dead do, in fact, rise from their graves, turning the July weather cold like winter and the day dark like night. The dead then force the inhabitants from the town, although they are visible to only a few of the living.

The elements of satire in Oliphant’s story are still present, particularly in the character of the mayor, who claims he is ‘a man of my century, and proud of being so; very little disposed to yield to the domination of the clerical party, though desirous of showing all just tolerance for conscientious faith, and every respect for the prejudices of the ladies of my family’ (*A Beleaguered City*, 10). Satire can also be clearly seen in the character of the mayor’s mother, who writes near the beginning of her narrative,

I have long felt that the times were ripe for some exhibition of the power of God. [...] Not only have the powers of darkness triumphed over our holy church [...] which might have been expected to bring down fire from Heaven upon our heads, but the corruption of popular manners (as might also have been expected) has been daily arising to a pitch unprecedented. (*A Beleaguered City*, 89)

⁸² NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 30361, 296 (5 March 1865)

⁸³ Margaret Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City and Other Stories*, ed. Merryn Williams (Oxford, 1988), 7, 5.

Nonetheless as the story continues we meet Agnès, the mayor's wife, whose religion is true and genuine, a character with whom Oliphant could genuinely sympathise as both the fictional and the actual woman had lost their ten-year-old daughters, making the return of the dead to the town very personal to Agnès. Agnès's vision of her dead daughter is similar to Oliphant's speculations in her autobiography about the doings of her own children after their deaths.⁸⁴ The story also moves away from satire in its discussion of the priest, who, though religious, cannot see the dead and is forced out of the town like everyone else. And at times, the mayor too has moments that engage readers' sympathies. The mayor could not see the dead, but as he looked toward the town he could see empty boats moving on the river, including his wife's boat the *Marie*. 'They came near to me who were my own,' the mayor narrates, 'and it was borne in upon my spirit that my good father was with the child; but because they had died I was afraid' (*A Beleaguered City*, 40). Though the mayor could not see them, he did look upon the river and the town, saying,

'Oh God,' I cried, 'whom I know not, am not I to Thee as my little Jean is to me, a child and less than a child? Do not abandon me in this darkness. Would I abandon him were he ever so disobedient? And God, if thou art God, Thou art a better father than I.' It seemed to me that I had spoken to some one who knew all of us, whether we were dead or whether we were living. That is a wonderful thing to think of, when it appears to one not as a thing to believe, but as something that is real. (*A Beleaguered City*, 43)

MacDonald's ideas, as expressed in his writings and his conversations, had a clear appeal to Oliphant, an appeal rooted in her life experiences, including her mingled faith and doubt in the face of the death of her children. The two writers shared a Scottish heritage; a similar religious temperament; and abiding interests in Scottish and English literature, the fantastic, and speculative theology. They were also similarly prolific, and the volume of their writing continues to provide a significant challenge to researchers who would compare their work or put it in the larger context of Scottish or British literature, Victorian print culture, or the history of ideas. Thus, while this article contributes to a better understanding of MacDonald and Oliphant's mutual

⁸⁴ *Autobiography*, ed. Elisabeth Jay. See particularly pages 39–41, on Oliphant's daughter, but Oliphant discusses all of her children in turn. All six of Oliphant's children and her husband predeceased her.

help and influence. Though *A Beleaguered City* is not a Scottish novel, in scenes like this one, where Oliphant deals with relationships with God as familial, she comes closest to the writing of George MacDonald, some of whose ideas had clearly interested her. Scottish novelists though they both were, their writing overlaps most in its speculative theology.⁸⁵ Thus, Oliphant, in her review of *Malcolm*, wished to get past MacDonald's use of Scots and the unreality of some of his characters in order to focus on the 'beautiful bits, without too much to do with the story—pure crystals, reflecting a hundred delicate prismatic gleams of poetry and thought'⁸⁶ such as the mad laird's 'yearning wistfulness of nature, looking in perpetual longing hope yet despondency for the God who will not show Himself'.⁸⁷

Oliphant's final message to MacDonald, sent four months before her death through her friend Anne Thackeray Ritchie, conveys that, though nationality united the two writers, still more did their deeper spiritual concerns. After asking Ritchie to visit George MacDonald at Bordighera, Oliphant writes, 'Tell him I am not so patient as he is, but longing very much for the new chapter of life, where I hope we shall meet and talk all things over with better light upon them than here'.⁸⁸ offers a glimpse of the importance of Scottish expatriate networks in London, and introduces the ways in which MacDonald and Oliphant's writings were received on both sides of the Scottish border, it also opens many avenues for future research. Many relevant physical archives remain unvisited, and many key sources remain undigitised. As the number of titles digitally available increases and methodologies become more sophisticated, fuller accounts of Oliphant's and MacDonald's reception histories will be possible, and further connections between them will be uncovered.

⁸⁵ Other critics have pointed to the similarities of Oliphant's and MacDonald's fantasies rather than their realistic Scottish novels. Douglass Gifford distinguishes between the traditional supernatural of Burns, Hogg, and Barrie, and the 'related, rich, but less traditional fantasy and supernatural work of Victorian Scottish writers such as MacDonald, Oliphant and Munro' (79). Marshall Walker links the two authors' "amateur theology of the supernatural" (167). Gifford, 'Barrie's Farewells: The Final Story,' in *Gateway to the Modern*, 68–87 (79); Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707*, (London, 1996).

⁸⁶ Oliphant, 'New Books', 636.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 637.

⁸⁸ *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 290.

Table 1

George MacDonald Novels First Serialised in Scotland	Periodical	Dates
<i>Malcolm</i> London: Henry S. King, 1874	<i>Glasgow Weekly Herald</i>	Begun 10 January 1874 (BNA)
<i>The Marquis of Lossie</i> London: Hurst and Blackett, 1877	<i>Glasgow Weekly Mail</i> <i>Lippincott's</i> (Philadelphia)	Begun 7 October 1876 in the Glasgow Weekly Mail (BNA) The Lippincott's serialisation appeared from Nov. 1876– Sep. 1877 (Bulloch, p. 29).
<i>Sir Gibbie</i> London: Hurst and Blackett, 1879	<i>Glasgow Weekly Mail</i> <i>Manchester Weekly Times</i>	12 October 1878–March 1879, simultaneous publication in both periodicals (BNA). Bassett (ATCL) gives different March end dates.
<i>Mary Marston</i> London: Sampson Low, 1881	<i>Aberdeen Weekly Journal</i> <i>Manchester Weekly Times</i> Later in the <i>Daily Gazette for</i> <i>Middlesbrough</i>	Begun 2 October 1880 in both weekly papers (BNA). Bassett lists the Aberdeen paper as ending June 4 and the Manchester paper as ending April 16; the Middlesbrough serial ran daily from July 3 to Sep. 15, 1883 (Bassett, ATCL).
<i>Castle Warlock</i> London: Sampson Low, 1882 (Published in 1881 as <i>Warlock o' Glen Warlock</i> by Lothrop in Boston)	<i>Glasgow Weekly Mail</i> <i>Wide Awake</i> (Boston)	Begun 29 January 1881 (BNA). I am unaware of the dates for <i>Wide Awake</i> . (See Shaberman 66.)
<i>Heather and Snow</i> London: Chatto and Windus, 1893	<i>Glasgow Weekly Mail</i>	Begun 14 January? 1893 (BNA) 9 January–1 May 1897 (Bulloch 42). Start date verified in BNA.
<i>Salted with Fire</i> London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897	<i>Glasgow Weekly Mail</i>	9 January –1 May 1897 (Bulloch 42. Start date verified in BNA)

Newspaper advertisements verifying the serialisation start dates above were found in the British
Newspaper Archive:

Malcolm: The Glasgow Weekly Herald start date is based on the language the “second Saturday of
the New Year” which appears in multiple regional newspaper advertisements from early 1874.
(*Londonderry Journal*, *Belfast Weekly News*, *Preston Herald*).

The Marquis of Lossie: ‘New Scottish Story’ [*The Marquis of Lossie*], *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5
October 1876, 4.

Sir Gibbie: 'From the *Athenaeum*', *Cornish and Devon Post*, 5 October 1878, 3. *Mary Marston*: *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland* is digitised in British Newspaper Archive (under the title *Aberdeen Press and Journal*).

Mary Marston's start date in the eight-page literary supplement of the *Manchester Weekly Times* is advertised in *The Manchester Weekly Times*, 25 September 1880, 4.

Castle Warlock: *Dundee People's Journal*, 22 January 1881, 8. For more on the American publication, see Raphael B. Shaberman, *George MacDonald: A Bibliographical Study* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), 66.

Heather and Snow: The John O'Groat Journal appears to have accidentally run the first chapter too early (27 December 1892), 2. However, the majority of the *Heather and Snow* advertisements point to a 14 January 1893 start date: Advertisement, *John O' Groat Journal*, 10 January 1893, 1; Advertisement, *Glasgow Evening News*, 11 January 1893, 3; Opening chapter. *Aberdeen People's Journal*, 14 January 1893, 8; Opening chapter. *Inverness Courier*, 10 January 1893, 3.

Salted with Fire: Bulloch's start date is confirmed in the *Saint Andrews Citizen*, 2 January 1897, 1.

Taipei Tech

‘A Faint Mass and a Clear Edge’: The Nature of Landscape in George MacDonald’s Fiction

J. Patrick Pazdziora

In his short story ‘The Snow Fight’ (1872), George MacDonald performs a skillful sleight-of-hand with the Scottish landscape. The story begins simply: ‘In a certain village in the north of Scotland there were two schools.’¹ The formula is familiar enough: in a certain place there was such-and-such a thing—a cowardly tailor, a man who had three daughters, Tam o’ Shanter’s mare. This is the once-upon-a-time beginning of a fairy tale. And yet the narrator takes pains to situate the story not simply long ago and far away, ‘[i]n a certain village’, but specifically ‘in the north of Scotland.’ The story does not, ostensibly, require a Scottish setting; however, MacDonald gives it not just a country but a specific, even mimetic locality:

It was a curious little street. Low gables of stone-built cottages, several of them broken into corbel-steps, and most of them pierced with only one or two little windows, leaving a large space of unfeatured wall, a mere defence against the weather; now and then the front of a more pretentious house of two stories and four or five windows; here a little shop with peg-tops, called *pears* in that part, but pronounced *peers*, and ginger-bread nuts, called *gibbery*, mingled in the harmonious confusion of human necessities; then the staring new-built residence of the chief tradesmen of the place, next to a little chapel—such were the principal features of the street, unessential to my story, I confess—only you cannot help thinking a little of what your frame shall be when you want to hang up your new-bought picture. (10)

The narrator makes the astonishing claim that place, space, and landscape are unimportant. They are ‘unessential to my story’, relegated to ‘frame’ the real drama: the class-based struggle and moral education of Masters Ferguson and Fraser. The *essence* of the story, as it were, is the lesson the two boys learn about

¹ ‘The Snow Fight’, *Good Words for the Young* (1872), 9. Further citation given in text.

being young gentlemen – and is, incidentally, told entirely in English.

But what about that frame? The narrator protests its unimportance, but the readers should remember the persistent, thick-skulled unreliability of MacDonald's narrators, and the sly wit of the author that mocks their self-defeating lugubriousness. The description of the village street in fact roots the whole story. On the one end stand almost windowless stone cottages, while on the other end sit the chapel and the flashy new homes of the well-to-do, between are the 'pretentious' multilevel houses of, presumably, the middle-class. The street ranges from simple shelter to political and cultural power, with aspiration balanced in the middle. Each end of the street has an attendant school—parish and private (9). And as the defining centre of the street we see the toy-store and the sweetshop—twin paradises of childhood. These, in turn, are localised by the story's only use of Scots; both *peer* for a wooden top² and *gibbery* meaning 'gingerbread' are words specific to Aberdeenshire.³ Thus the 'frame' clarifies the moral conflict of the story: Fraser and Ferguson, from the well-to-do end of the street, are growing towards stunted or stalwart adulthood, respectively, based on their treatment of wee Johnny Webster from the poor end of the street. A compassion born from recognition of shared humanity triumphs over the pretensions of class and political power; the lesson is learned through the games and hijinks of an Aberdeenshire childhood. The particularly Scottish setting in the children confront the realities both of their own social situation and their moral character provides a proving ground for their later character in adulthood.

The Scottish landscape in MacDonald's fiction exerts a real, formative influence on his characters; it nurtures the children who play in it and the adults who work on it. The nature of the place forms the nature of the people who live there. While the narrator of 'The Snow Fight' may be cheerily dismissive of the importance of landscape in his own tale, certainly landscape plays a vital, sometimes crucial, role in many if not most of MacDonald's works. This paper, then, attempts to consider this 'frame' of landscape that surrounds MacDonald's narratives.

MacDonald's fiction, I suggest, contains three basic types of landscape. He of course employs the ancient distinction between town and country, but for his own aesthetic purposes. The *country* in MacDonald often represents the

² "Peer n.1". *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. 2004. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/peer_n1> [Accessed 21 Nov 2017].

³ "Gibbery n.1". *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. 2004. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/gibbery_n1> [Accessed 21 Nov 2017].

security and shelter of home, family, native language, and so on. The countryside serves as the home environment from which MacDonald's protagonists set forth, and to which they may eventually return. This is apparent in works such as *Robert Falconer* (1868), and *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1870). The *city* by contrast serves as an alien space which provides the embodiment of the inner disturbances of the protagonist—think of *Alec Forbes* (1865) or *David Elginbrod* (1863), or even *Lilith* (1895). In this sense MacDonald anticipates the psychologised cities of the late-Victorians, notably James Thomson and Robert Louis Stevenson. To this dichotomy, he adds a third space, which I will call the *wild*—the natural world, behaving according to its own laws of nature, older and stronger than human habitation. The wild functions partly as a greenwood space that MacDonald's characters journey into; it is also active, wearing away at the boundaries of civilisation and occasionally overstepping and attacking civilised space. Water belongs to the wild, for instance in MacDonald's not infrequent use of floods, as do storms; fairyland is also the greenwood and the wild. Between each of these three landscapes, there is the possibility of a liminal space, in which the characters are caught betwixt and between, and need to decide whether to go forward or back; an exemplary scene might be wee Sir Gibbie, standing gazing at 'the dark river' on the bridge from city to country, dazed with the loss of home and safety, and not knowing what lies ahead.⁴

These three landscapes recur throughout MacDonald's fiction. A full analysis of all three types in MacDonald's novels, to say nothing of his fairy tales, short stories, and poetry, is matter for a much longer study. This essay will restrict itself to considering the way in which MacDonald himself understood the role of landscape in his fiction, the Scottish landscape in particular. To do this, I will look first at his own use of the Romantic landscape of the Swiss Alps, and then address, second, the intrusion of the wild onto the other landscapes, town and country, of Aberdeenshire.

'It was a gorgeous evening'

The human geographer Denis Cosgrove has suggested that '[l]andscape is a way of seeing the world.'⁵ Specifically, he identifies this way of seeing with the historical development of landscape painting in the Early Modern period, whereby the painter could impose a particular, individual way of seeing onto a material space. 'Observed in this painterly way, landscapes could be beautiful,

⁴ *Sir Gibbie* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1879), I, 113–14.

⁵ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, 1998), 13.

sublime, tame, monotonous, despoiled. They engaged in a subjective response in those who observed or experienced them. Landscape was therefore invested from outside with human meaning.⁶ So the way of seeing is specifically 'the view of the outsider, a term of order and control, whether that term is technical, political, or intellectual.'⁷ While it is not necessary to interpret MacDonald through Cosgrove's theories about the interrelation of landscape and cultural production, it is helpful, to retain this notion of a painterly, spatially etic perspective on the literary presentation of landscape. Put another way, if landscape is a way of seeing, it can also be a way of reading; if a landscape can be painted, it can also be written.

This, at least, seems akin to MacDonald's own contention. In a striking passage near the end of *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), Annie Anderson, after suffering a sexual assault from by the grocer's son, leaves the village of Glamerton to walk to her aunt's home across the river.

It was a gorgeous evening. The sun was going down in purple and crimson, divided by such bars of gold as never grew in the mines of Ophir. A faint rosy mist hung its veil over the hills about the sunset; and a torrent of red light streamed down the westward road by which she went. The air was soft, and the light sobered with a sense of the coming twilight. It was such an evening as we have, done into English, in the ninth Evening Voluntary of Wordsworth. And Annie felt it such.⁸

While the bluntness of the literary allusion is perhaps a bit jarring, the assertion that the visual and emotional impression of a sunset can be rendered 'into English' seems a distinct artistic claim. So, too, is the choice of poem. Wordsworth's ninth *Evening Voluntary*, from 1818, is given the heading 'Composed on an Evening of Extraordinary Beauty and Splendour'; it describes how a sunset produces 'a multiplication of mountain ridges' by slanting through 'watery vapours, or sunny haze' so that it appear as, Wordsworth explains, 'a kind of Jacob's Ladder'.⁹ MacDonald would have been aware of Dante's use of Jacob's Ladder in the *Paradiso* as a symbol of religious discipline and spiritual perfection, so Wordsworth's description of the ladder's appearance in the natural world would have had no little appeal

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸ *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (London, 1865), III, 190. Further citations given in the text.

⁹ *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (London, 1857), IV, 135.

to him.¹⁰ Furthermore, Wordsworth addresses the poem, at least in part, to those ‘whom broken ties | Afflict, or injuries assail’ (III.1-2) as an invitation to climb ‘On those bright steps that heavenward raise | Their practicable way’ (III.11-12). Annie Anderson, distraught after the assault, is thus receiving spiritual substance from the vista of nature; assailed by injury, her gaze is turned heavenward, and the possibility of attaining union with God, through a vision of the sunset over the Scottish landscape.

It seems hardly accidental that MacDonald also read portions the ninth Evening Voluntary for his lecture ‘Wordsworth’s Poetry’, describing it as ‘one of Wordsworth’s finest poems’.¹¹ The poem is fairly lengthy, but the opening, read in the lecture by MacDonald, is worth quoting in full:

Had this effulgence disappeared
With flying haste, I might have sent,
Among the speechless clouds, a look
Of blank astonishment;
But ’tis endued with the power to stay,
And sanctify one closing day,
That frail Mortality may see—
What is?—ah no, but what *can* be! (I.1–8)

MacDonald introduces this passage with a discussion of what he says is ‘perhaps the best thing that can be done for us, the best at least that nature can do’, that is, to engender ‘that mood or condition in which thoughts come of themselves’ (254). He refers specifically to thoughts ‘of love, and truth, and purity’, in other words spontaneous, non-discursive prayer. He continues:

If the world proceeded from the imagination of God, and man proceeded from the love of God, it is easy to believe that that which proceeded from the imagination of God should rouse the best thoughts in the mind of a being who proceeded from the love of God. This I think is the relation between man and the world. (254)

The result of such an experience, MacDonald says, is remembering ‘the

¹⁰ *Paradiso*, XXII. 61–75. Dante specifically associates the image with the Rule of St Benedict.

¹¹ George MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakspeare*, Second Edition (London, 1893), 254. Further citations to this essay given in the text.

simplicity of childhood' and a 'vow [...] to press on towards the things that are unseen, but which are manifested through the things that are seen' (256). Here, as elsewhere, MacDonald recasts the Romantic idyll of nature into Christian mysticism. Evelyn Underhill, whose classic text on the subject has yet to be surpassed, argues that mysticism is

[...] the abolition of individuality; of that hard separateness, that "I, Me, Mine" which makes of man a finite isolated thing. It is essentially a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality; for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love.¹²

For MacDonald, Nature serves as a catalyst of that 'instinct of love' which propels the individual to surrender their 'hard separateness' for union with the Real, which MacDonald, as a devout Christian, understood to be God in Christ. Nature could prompt this effect of love because, like humanity themselves, it proceeded from the generative power of God, expressing something of the divine character. Thus the imagination of God – that is, nature – connects with the love of God – that is, humankind – to engender a new conception of reality; Nature manifests not simply the seen, or material world, as it already is, but offers the hope of the unseen: 'what can be!'¹³

MacDonald's language here is explicitly Trinitarian, evoking not only the creed ('who proceedeth from the Father and the Son' etc. – itself using the wording of St John's Gospel)¹⁴ but an entire mystical theology of how humankind and the natural world relate to the Trinity. The basic concept – that creation proceeds from the mind of God – is ancient, originating with the *Enneads* of Plotinus and was recast by St Augustine, Origen, and many others as a means of articulating the Trinity.¹⁵ MacDonald's wording here is peculiar, even idiosyncratic; he appears to be triangulating several different

¹² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 3rd edn. (New York, 1912), 85.

¹³ Wordsworth and MacDonald both are likely referencing the First Epistle of St John (3.2): 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.' MacDonald also references Hosea 6. 3, 'let us press on to know the Lord', II Corinthians 4. 18 and, likely, Hebrews 11. 1.

¹⁴ St John 15. 26

¹⁵ Cf. Underhill, 127ff.

mystical sources in order to develop his own idea.

The most likely influence is Jakob Böhme; MacDonald certainly had read Böhme as early as 1863, when he quotes William Law's translation in *David Elginbrod*.¹⁶ Böhme, in his best-known book *Aurora* (1612), specifically connects a study of the natural world with the outworking of the Trinity:

If thou wilt be a Philosopher and *Naturalist*, and search into *God's Being in Nature*, and discern how all is come to pass, then pray to God for the Holy Spirit, to enlighten thee with it. [...] In the Holy Ghost alone, who is in God, and also in the whole Nature, out of which all Things were made, in him alone thou canst search into the whole Body or Corporeity of God, which is *Nature*, as also into the Holy Trinity itself. For the Holy Ghost goes forth from the Holy Trinity, and reigns and rules in the *whole Body or Corpus* of God; that is, in the whole Nature.¹⁷

Similarly, William Law, in his general introduction to Jakob Böhme's thought, explains that '[h]is Writings begin where the Spirit of God begun [*sic*] in the first Rise of Nature and Creature'. Law claims that the writings are 'showing how all Things came from a *working Will* of the Holy Triune Incomprehensible God, manifesting himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' and how the life of the children of God began 'in and from this divine Fire, which is the *Father of Light*, generating a *Birth of Light* in their Souls, from both which *proceeds* the *Holy Spirit*, or *Breath* of Divine Love in the Triune Creature, as it does in the Triune Creator'.¹⁸

Aurora is a deliberately opaque text, intertwining a surfeit of alchemical symbolism with an already difficult theology. Given Böhme's fondness for puns, it is not immediately clear which definition of *nature* he intends – whether the natural will or personality. It would require a separate study to assess whether MacDonald's understanding of *Aurora* was entirely correct, but it does seem likely that, reading *Aurora* back through the Romantics, MacDonald would formulate the concept he puts forward in 'Wordsworth's Poetry', conflating the 'Nature' of Jakob Böhme with the 'Nature' of Wordsworth. Indeed, the ninth chapter of *David Elginbrod* is entitled, simply, 'Nature'; it bears as an

¹⁶ *David Elginbrod* (London, 1863), I, 100.

¹⁷ Jakob Böhme and William Law, *The Works of Jacob Behmen: the Teutonic Philosopher* (London, 1764), I, 28, II.15, 17-19. Emphasis in original. Law's translation is cited throughout as the text which MacDonald knew.

¹⁸ William Law, "A Dialogue between Zelotes, Alphabeticus, Rusticus, and Theophilus" in *The Works of Jacob Behmen*, I, vi. Emphasis in original.

epigraph a quotation about the Holy Spirit from *Aurora*,¹⁹ and begins with Margaret Elginbrod reading Wordsworth. Margaret's reading 'introduced her to nature in many altogether new aspects,'²⁰ with the result that she recognises the possibility for mystical enlightenment in her own, distinctly Scottish landscape: '[n]ot only was the pine wood now dearer to her than before, but its mystery seemed more sacred, and, at the same time, more likely to be one day solved. She felt far more assuredly the presence of a spirit in nature [...]'²¹ Compare that with Jakob Böhme's assertion that the Holy Spirit is 'in the whole Nature'; reading Wordsworth has awoken Margaret to a dim conception of what Jakob Böhme shouts from the housetops.

So, according to MacDonald, Wordsworth's ninth *Evening Voluntary* suggests this: the Holy Spirit, the 'Breath of Divine Love', reigns over the whole of Nature; the man or woman contemplating the natural world, themselves offspring of the Love of God, responds to the Holy Spirit in Nature with spontaneous contemplative prayer. The Holy Spirit, immanent in the natural world, draws the individual soul to be attentive of the godhead; the study of Nature and the adoration of the Trinity are thus essentially the same act. The mind and the love of God meet when humankind is attentive to Nature: the creature and the Triune Creator are harmonised through the Breath of Divine Love animating all things.

Now, it seems rather probable that this is *not* what Wordsworth had in mind. MacDonald is playing a sort of philosophical shell game with Romanticism; ostensibly explaining an English Romantic text, he neatly replaces it with a Christian conception of mystical union with the divine, and says, in effect, ah yes, Nature must mean this because Wordsworth said so. In fact, MacDonald is propounding his own mystical understanding of Nature, self, and poetry, under Wordsworth's imprimatur. Either this represents a profound work of eisegesis on MacDonald's part – of which he was certainly capable – or else he calculated that his hearers would be more likely to accept philosophical and theological ideas from outside the main current of Christian thought if they seemed to come from Wordsworth. Whatever the cause, by apparently invoking Wordsworth, MacDonald is rather invoking his own complex, mystically-

¹⁹ Jakob Böhme and William Law, 1, 21. The passage immediately before MacDonald's quotation declares that the soul 'searches into the *Deity*; and also into *Nature*'. The use of Böhme in this context seems more significant given the care MacDonald took selecting the epigraphs for *David Elginbrod*, literally pasting them on to the top of the manuscript pages.

²⁰ MacDonald, *David Elginbrod*, III, 101.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

inclined framework of Christian theology, rather than the comparatively more conventional trappings of English Romanticism.

Given this complex, mystical understanding of the landscape, it is worth considering what effect the Scottish landscape has on the characters in *Alec Forbes*, before turning to consider more deeply why it has that effect. The hypothesis stated give earlier posits that there are three kinds of landscape in MacDonald's fiction: the country, or home landscape; the city, or the psychological landscape; and the wild, a greenwood space in which the characters undergo maturation. The Alps are, for MacDonald, what could be typified as a *wild* landscape. He would also use the Alps as a surrogate for the divine vision in *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872); we can think, too, of the mountain in *The Princess and the Goblin* or the meditation on mountains that opens *The Princess and Curdie*, among others.²² While the threefold division of landscape types can be found throughout much of MacDonald's work, for considerations of space, this essay will turn to consider the conflict between the wild landscape and the home landscape in MacDonald's literary portrayal of Aberdeenshire.

'A terrible country'

The wilds in MacDonald are not infrequently associated with water. To choose a few examples at random, consider the 'stream of clear water' that goes 'running over the carpet' and lures Anodos into Fairy Land in *Phantastes* (1858); the burn that Colin reroutes through his cottage in 'The Fairy Fleet' (1866), bringing said fairy flotilla floating up to his bed; or Sir Gibbie's wandering 'up Daurside'; the entire, brooding presence of the sea over *Malcolm* (1875); or even the Land of Waters in *Lilith* (1895).²³ Such instances could be multiplied. Glamerton, the fictionalised Huntly of *Alec Forbes*, stands just above the juncture of two rivers: the *Glamour* and the *Wan*. MacDonald describes Glamerton from 'one of the highest hills surrounding the valley', as seen by the protagonist, Alec Forbes, who is walking with his ill-starred sweetheart, Kate:

The country lay outstretched beneath in the glow of the June day, while around them flitted the cool airs of heaven. [...] Through the green

²² *The Princess and the Goblin* (Whitehorn, CA., 1997), 9ff; *The Princess and Curdie* (Whitehorn, CA., 1997), 9ff.

²³ George MacDonald, *Phantastes* (London, 1858), 9; 'The Fairy Fleet', *The Argosy* (1866), 417–32 (418ff); *Malcolm* (London, 1875), I, 14–21; *Lilith* (Whitehorn, CA., 1994; repr. 1998), 118.

grass and the green corn below crept two silvery threads, meeting far away and flowing into one—the two rivers which watered the valley of Strathglamour. Between the rivers lay the gray stone town, with its roofs of thatch and slate. One of its main streets stopped suddenly at the bridge with the three arches above Tibbie's cottage; and at the other end of the bridge lay the green fields. (II, 143–4)

This is quite a faithful description of the Deveron and Bogie rivers meeting beyond Huntly; the sharp contrast between the dense, grey slate and granite city centre and the lumping, wooded hills beyond is an arresting feature of the village landscape.²⁴ How MacDonald fictionalises this landscape, however, reveals what he wants to do with it. The significance of the river name *glamour* should be self-evident, recalling as it does the *glamourie* of the fairy world, the enchantment and entrapment of mortals as recalled in Scottish folklore – think of the river of blood over which the Fairy Queen bears Thomas Rhymer.²⁵ This, as David Robb has suggested,²⁶ is likely the source of the name *Glamerton*; similarly, *Strathglamour* can be translated as 'Valley of Enchantment'.²⁷ And this gives, I think, a clear indication of the way in which MacDonald is employing realistic details of Scottish landscape within the novel. *Glamerton* would be a perfectly predictable name for a Scottish town in the valley *Strathglamour*, both named after the river *Glamour*; such formulas are, to the best of my knowledge, characteristic of many Scottish place names. But it also suggests that the town and its inhabitants are within reach of the *glamour* of the wild spaces beyond.

Notice, too, that the bridge provides a sharp demarcation between the grey Aberdonian houses and the green fields, and that the rivers creep through the green corn. Green, as MacDonald well knew, is the colour of fairy;²⁸ across the

²⁴ A recent report on Huntly as a conservation area notes that '[t]he dense urban form within Huntly contrasts sharply with the openness of the Bogie and Deveron river valley and the hill country beyond.' *Huntly: Conservation Area Review 2013* (Aberdeen, 2013), 12 <<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/6352/huntlyconservationareareview.pdf>> [accessed 16 May 2018]. This helpfully detailed and illustrated booklet may be a helpful companion to any critic or reader studying MacDonald's landscapes and unable to easily visit Huntly themselves.

²⁵ Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Linton, 2001), 74–5.

²⁶ David S. Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1987), 35.

²⁷ This is perhaps an allusion to the Enchanted Ground in the Ninth Stage of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), especially given the languid sensuality of the young people's summer afternoon together; intertextuality between MacDonald and the Puritans is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

²⁸ Henderson and Cowan, 57–9.

Glamour, then, is the wild landscape of 'fair elfland.' Alec and Kate, looking down at the small, secure space of the rural, home landscape, are positioned as liminal viewers. They are of the town, but looking beyond it into the enchanted landscape beyond; as young people, indeed, they are at no small risk of being lured away by the pied-piper call of the wide world, and, through their time at Aberdeen, they are already exchanging grown-up life in the city for their rural childhoods. Put another way, they are being stolen away by the fairies; for those they leave behind, such as Alec's mother or Thomas Crann, there's little difference between the social reality and the fairy tale.

The name *Wan* is rather more curious. The river is first given its full name of Wan Water when Alec Forbes goes for 'a ramble through the snow' after being 'confined to the house' after a dog bite; he is, the narrator assures us, 'rejoicing in his freedom' on his 'solitary walk' (I, 169). So the Wan Water appears in the novel at a moment of liberation and vitality in a young man's life. In his essay 'Imagination, Its Functions and Culture' (1867), written a few years after *Alec Forbes*, MacDonald includes a brief discussion of Tennyson's 'Morte D'Arthur' (1833) as an example of the 'poetic facility' of 'choosing, gathering, and combining the material of a new revelation' contrasting it with Thomas Malory's original.²⁹ The passage from Malory MacDonald chooses for the analysis is Sir Bedivere's answer to Arthur: 'Sir, I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan.'³⁰ MacDonald appends a paragraph-long

²⁹ MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts*, 22.

³⁰ MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts*, 23. This quotation suggests that MacDonald was consulting, and probably owned, the three-volume 1816 R. Wilks edition of Malory, edited by Joseph Haslewood. The widespread 1817 Longman's edition, with notes by Robert Southey, enjoyed popularity with MacDonald's friends among the pre-Raphaelites; it was, however, a reproduction of Caxton's 1485 text, so the passage under consideration is of course different: 'Syr he sayd I saw no thyng but the waters wappe and wawes wan' (II, 441). It could, of course, be posited that MacDonald merely offers his own gloss of the Middle English, but this explanation fails to satisfy for a number of reasons. MacDonald is persistent in referring to Malory's work as 'The History of Prince Arthur'; see for instance *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (London, 1872), I, 193. This title is used by the rival 1816 editions. Of the two, Alexander Chalmers' edition, from Walker and Edwards, was more affordable, and apparently consulted by Tennyson; Chalmers, however, renders the passage in a fairly straight gloss from Caxton: 'I saw nothing but the water, wap, and waves waun' (II, 473); the punctuation suggests that 'wap' is being glossed as a noun. This reading is clearly at variance with the text MacDonald quotes here. Significantly Haslewood's text not only glosses 'wap' as a verb, as MacDonald's note asserts, but also adds a definite article to accentuate the parallelism: 'I saw nothing but the water wap and the waves wan' (III, 359). This is identical to the text as MacDonald quotes it. Additionally, the running header on each page spread of Haslewood's edition reads 'THE HISTORY

footnote to this quotation, discussing the possible etymological derivations of the word *wan*, which he defines as 'dark, gloomy, turbid,' and says is 'a common adjective to a river in an the old Scotch ballad.'³¹ This, then, would appear to be his reason for choosing the name Wan Water, again connecting his story with the ballad traditions; yet the length and detail of the note suggests that the word and its greater significance in the ballads had no little interest for him. This, too, could be another reason: the older word gives his town and its inhabitants rootedness in an only imperfectly remembered past.

There is a third possible reason for the name: in *Phantastes*, the story of Cosmo ends as he dies in the princess's arms, before they are both found by her maidservant. The final line of the fairy tale reads: '[w]hen Lisa came up, she found her mistress kneeling above a wan, dead face, which smiled on the spectral moonbeams.'³² So already in MacDonald's work, the adjective *wan* has clear textual connection between Scottish ballads and death. This, too, relates to the corollary river of the *Glamour*, the land of the fairies was the land of the dead, and to be *glamoured* by the fairies was effectively to mistake the grim underworld for a place of beauty, riches, and pleasure.³³ It seems all the more significant then, when MacDonald describes the Wan Water as Alec walks beside it:

[...] wan enough it was now with its snow-sheet over it! As he stood looking at its still, dead face, and lamenting that the snow lay too deep over the ice to admit of skating, by a sudden reaction, a summer-vision of the live water arose before him. (1,169-70)

The water itself is described as dead, in fact *wan* with a 'dead face' like Cosmo. Alec, alone and wandering solitary, gazes on the Wan Water and confronts both the reality of winter and the idea of death. And yet, almost immediately, he seizes on 'a summer-vision' and 'the live water arose'; in

OF PRINCE ARTHUR' (as opposed to 'KING ARTHUR, AND HIS KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE' in Chalmers); this seems a probable derivation for MacDonald's use of this title to refer to the Matter of Britain. A discussion of the print history of Malory's text can be found at Kara L. McShane, 'Malory's Morte d'Arthur: Exhibition Guide', in *The Camelot Project* <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/mcshane-malorys-morte-d-arthur-exhibition-guide>> [accessed 17 May 2018]

³¹ MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts*, 23 n7.

³² *Phantastes*, 182.

³³ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, Herts, 1987), 148; cf. Henderson and Cowan, 19–20, 60–1.

other words, he apprehends in essence both death and the resurrection from the dead. He does not, however, articulate this to himself in spiritual terms, but senses it in the seasonal cycle of the land. It is from the occluded, 'snow-sheeted' landscape that he has his first understanding of spring and summer as rebirth. He responds by building a boat: a way in which he can immerse himself into this landscape without – significantly – needing to actually cross the river.

So the landscape of Glamerton, then, is bounded by the waters of fairy on the one side, the waters of death on the other, flowing into each other and both, arguably the same place. This connects literarily to the Scottish ballad tradition, and to the mythological death of Arthur. Crossing out of the home-space of Glamerton, even just looking across it, the protagonists face a wild space, uncanny and otherworldly:

A terrible country they came from—those two ocean-bound rivers—up among the hill-tops. There on the desolate peat-mosses, spongy, black, and cold, the rain was pouring into the awful holes whence generations had dug their fuel, and into the natural chasms of the earth, soaking the soil, and sending torrents, like the flaxen hair of a Titanic Naiad, rolling into the bosom of the rising river-god below. The mist hung there, darkening everything with its whiteness, ever sinking in slow fall upon the slippery peat and the heather and the gray old stones. (II, 263)

The source of the two rivers is described as wild and desolate; as David Robb notes in his essay in this issue, the 'landscapes of the northeast could be places of danger and death.'³⁴ Here as elsewhere, MacDonald's description shifts from the literal – 'peat-mosses, spongy, black, and cold' – into the mythological: a 'Titanic Naiad' having some sort of liaison with the 'river-god below'. The realistic landscape, a north Scotland peat-bog like many one could actually see, becomes identified with an otherworldly being. This sense of the landscape being haunted, of the wilds being inhabited or at least pervaded with the suggestion of inhabitancy, of being unco if you will, seems pervasive in MacDonald's fiction. So, in his short story 'A Journey Rejourneyed' (1865), the narrator James Bayley remarks that after seeing the mountains 'I think I understand what gave rise to the grand old fable of the Giants' explaining how '[i]n once mountain especially, in the west of Scotland, I see the shoulders of

³⁴ See p. 17.

a giant heaving away from his neck and down-bend head the weary weight of centuries'.³⁵ Folklore and fairy tradition, then, emerge as a way of seeing particular landscape, and particularly the wild landscapes. Folklore, as well, is tied with a historical sense, 'the weight of centuries' or the 'generations' that dug for peat. Out of this haunted landscape flows the water that both shapes the Scottish village and lures away its children.

Fear of water, indeed, is a recurrent theme throughout *Alec Forbes*. Kate is obsessed with death by water to the point of madness, and indeed drowns herself. Annie Anderson, as a child, is overwhelmed by fear when the school room floods after heavy rain: '[s]he could not tell what might be sweeping about in that filthy whirlpool'; she stands crying by the flood until Alec Forbes carries her out of the schoolroom to safety (I, 69). Later, in the Glamerton flood, as Annie sits in the rising waters in blind Tibbie Dyster's cottage, trying vainly to save the old woman from drowning, she ascribes the river water with almost personal agency. As she sits 'half-covered' in flood water, '[s]omething struck her gently on the arm, and kept bobbing against her. [...] It was round and soft. She said to herself, "It's only somebody's heid that the water's torn aff"' (II, 292, 293). That she later finds it to be 'a drowned hen' (II, 293) seems incidental: the flood water is personal, vicious, and powerful, a monster that can tear off people's heads as well as drown them; it can kill in an animal or, indeed, a human way.

As well as Kate and Annie, Alec Forbes suffers fear of water. When he realises that Annie is trapped in the flood, he is seized not with unthinking heroism, but with fear of drowning: 'That was a terrible water to look at. And the boat was small' (II, 284). The narrator explains that '[t]he terrors of the night had returned upon Alec'; his fear of water becomes a nightmare of damnation (II, 284). The water itself appears to him not simply a natural force but a gateway to hell. The boat he builds to control his environment, to encounter the river but not to cross it, is poor protection against the actual reality of death. Alec, of course, does risk the flood and saves Annie – a sequence clearly foreshadowed when he saves her from the small flood in the school house. But his fear of water persists, as does his fascination with death by drowning. This fear, emerging from his fascination with the wild landscape beyond the Glamour, carries itself with him to Aberdeen, where he was an undergraduate. The fear manifests itself – or shapes his way of seeing – on the Links. Unsuccessful in his courtship of Kate, Alec begins to

³⁵ MacDonald, 'A Journey Rejourneyed', *The Argosy* (1865), 58. Further citation given in the text.

take long heartbroken rambles around the Links, trying to take comfort in the turmoil of the sea.³⁶

It was a desolate shore along which he walked. Two miles of sand lay by the lip of the sea on his right. On his left rose irregular and changeful mounds of dry sand, upon which grew coarse grass and a few unpleasant-looking plants. From the level of the tops of these mounds stretched a way a broad expanse of flat, uncultivated ground, covered with thin grass. (III, 2–3)

Alec wanders by the midwinter sea alone as he wandered by the midsummer river with Kate. As with the peat-bog, the description emphasises both the strictly realistic and the sharply symbolic. The ‘irregular and changeful’ nature of the dunes suggest the turmoil in Alec’s heart – not only because of his jilted love-affair, but because he is a young man standing on the cusp of adulthood. The familiar landscapes of home and university have become no longer a safe harbour for him, but rather as unstable and shifting as the sea itself; he inhabits a liminal landscape, solid earth that moves like waves, the way he inhabits a liminal age and shape of mind. The water in this landscape moves towards him with the same inexorable force that time and his adulthood are moving towards him; as he lies on the shore, indulging his melancholy on this border between settled and unsettled landscapes, the tame and the wild, he find himself at the mercy of the tide:

Suddenly something cold seemed to grasp him by the feet. He started and rose. Like a wild beast in the night, the tide had crept up upon him. A horror seized him, as if the ocean were indeed a slimy monster that sought to devour him where he lay alone and wretched. He sprang up the sand before him and, sliding back at every step, gained the top with difficulty, and ran across the *links* towards the city. (III, 3–4)

The sea too is transformed into a mythical creature; the turn of time and tide is transmuted into a ferocious, predatory *thing*, falling upon a vulnerable wanderer. Alec’s misery is made physical by this unstable, liminal landscape; he finds himself surrounded and pulled in by the threat of the unknown—in this case, of maturation, of accepting the reality both of his adulthood and of

³⁶ Whether this detail is autobiographical is anyone’s guess.

bereavement. He will outgrow his boyish crush on Kate, true, but Kate will die tragically young, throwing herself into the sea (III, 144–5).

All three of the central young people in *Alec Forbes* – Annie, Alec, and Kate – share this fascination with death by water; all three, in their own way, need to cross water out of their safe home landscapes and into the wild in order to reach adulthood. Kate, of course, does not make a good crossing; Annie almost drowns, but keeps herself alive until rescue (II, 103–104). Alec himself becomes a ship's doctor, and sets out to sea, voyaging into the wild landscape of the Arctic:

The [ship] lay a frozen mass, changed by the might of the winds and the snow and the frost into the grotesque ice phantom of a ship, through which, the winter long, the winds would go whistling and raving, crowding up it the snow and the crystal icicles, all in the wild waste of the desert north, with no ear to ear the sadness, and no eye to behold the deathly beauty. (III, 265)

The transformation of the ship, and of Alec's ordeal surviving the snowbound wastes of the north, is the culmination of his journey towards adulthood; his bereavement at Kate's death, his loneliness, and, ultimately, his loss of the former security of the home landscape of Glamerton, are given harsh physical reality. When he returns home from the wreck of the ship, after Annie has already given him up for lost, he appears abruptly and unexpectedly on a night when 'an odd-looking figure' amid '[l]ow swells of peat ground, the burial places of old forests', on a night when '[t]he moon was high and full' (III, 277). He returns from the sea into a wild landscape akin to the source of the Glamour, like a man who'd escaped the home of the fairies. By crossing liminal spaces into the wild, and returning, Alec steps into his full adulthood; he and Annie are able to return, 'wise and sadder', to the security of the home they had lost.

'Do take me up an Alp'

If, as suggested earlier, landscape is a way of reading, then it is worth considering what effect, if any, George MacDonald hoped that stories about characters shaped by landscape would have on his readers. Nor, to prove this, do we need to delve simply into his critical writings. MacDonald's little-known travel narrative 'A Journey Rejourneyed', directly contemporaneous to *Alec Forbes*, recounts the experiences of several young women who cannot afford to travel, but who are able to get out into an exotic, transformative landscape

by listening to their friends' stories. The landscape they experience is portrayed as literary in nature, being that most stereotypical Romantic landscape, the Swiss Alps. Wordsworth famously used his crossing of the Alps – or missed crossing, rather – as a meditation on the nature of the imagination, in Book VI of *The Prelude* (1805, 1850); Percy Shelley, in 'Mont Blanc' (1817) wrote something similar about his own travels, according to his own lights. In 1865, MacDonald himself went on a walking tour of the Swiss Alps, funded by the gift of a friend.³⁷ Upon his return, he wrote a striking if obscure short story, 'A Journey Rejourneyed', published in *Argosy* as two parts in December 1865 and January 1866. The landscape of the Alps, then, for MacDonald, was first encountered literarily, through the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, and others; then kinaesthetically, as a landscape in which he is physically present; and then transmuted once again into literature, this time his own work. So it is a landscape he encounters through reading, seeing, and writing alike. As such, it provides a striking text to examine the way in which MacDonald took his idiosyncratically mystical ideas about Nature on to a characteristically Romantic landscape, so – especially since it is widely neglected unfamiliar – it will be considered it in some depth.

'A Journey Rejourneyed' is, most simply, a lightly fictionalised account of MacDonald's walking tour of the Alps, with the role of MacDonald filled by the character James Bayley. Portions of the story, indeed, are copied from his own records of his journey. For instance, when James Bayley declares: 'I hate the photographs. They convey no idea but of extreme outline. The tints, and the lines, and the vapours, and the mingling, and the infinitude, and the loftiness, and the glaciers, and the slow-crawling avalanches cannot be represented' (350), the phrasing is almost identical to a letter MacDonald sent to Louisa from Switzerland.³⁸ Certainly there is a sensible literary thriftiness to this; returning with a mass of letters about the Alps, it makes sense that MacDonald would revise and reorder them into a publishable travel narrative. And in what seems like a knowing in-joke for MacDonald's family, after James

³⁷ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924), 347ff.

³⁸ For which see Glenn Edward Sadler, ed., *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, 1994), 149:

'I hate the photographs, they convey *no* idea. The tints and the lines and the mass and the streams and the vapours, and the mingling, and the infinitude, and the loftiness, the glaciers and the slow crawling avalanches—they cannot be described.' It seems possible that further comparison of the story to MacDonald's letters and notebooks would reveal that much if not most of it was written as a personal account of his own travels while in Switzerland.

Bayley utters this passage, one of the sisters remarks, 'Isn't it like a book, to hear him talk?' (55)

The story, however, is told not by James Bayley, but by Jane, an early-adolescent girl; the conceit of the story is that she is writing letter to the editor recounting a story that James Bayley told her and her sisters. It is a cast of characters which George MacDonald evidently enjoyed, and which he used again as the frame for 'The Fairy Fleet', published in *Argosy* in 1866, and later adapted as 'The Carasoy'. Jane is among the most delightful characters in MacDonald's fiction: intelligent, articulate, and inquisitive, but occasionally gloomy and self-contradictory, she assumes a brusque professionalism that rapidly deteriorates into her own inquisitive chatter. She is an effervescent character, at times both lyrical and petty, and clearly patterned off of MacDonald's own oldest daughters, who were about Jane's age at the time. She introduces herself thus:

My name is Jane. At least that is what I choose to call myself. I want to tell anybody who will listen, what a friend of our family, James Bayley—that is what I choose to call him—told us. I think people will care for it, because it made my sister Lizzie sleep all night with a smile on the face which constant pain makes so white. (53)

Jane's father is dead, so she and her sister Maria work as tutors to help their mother provide for Lizzie, who is dying from a lingering illness. Jane's life, then, is centred around her sister's health and her family's poverty. She explains, 'Even in these days of running to and fro, we cannot manage to leave home, at least not often, and never to a greater distance than Hastings. Brighton none of us like' (53). She is restless but attempting to put a bold face on an anxious, confining situation. She explains:

When I am tramping through the wet in a day like this, with goloshes and an umbrella, thinking of the dreary two hours I shall have to spend with the Miss Drontheims—not dreary because I have to teach, but dreary because I have to teach *them*—I say to myself, "This is one of my dreams, in which I go tramping and teaching; but I shall wake in my own home with the teak-kettle singing on the hob, and the firelight playing on the curtains of Lizzie's bed. Think of that, Jane," I say to myself, "and do your work as well as ever you can, that you may wake with a good conscience." (53)

Even in this flight of cathartic fancy, Jane does not reimagine her home any differently than they are now, or even imagine her sister well again; she holds the fragile situation of her present state as an ideal of home. The reference to dreaming helps destabilise both the continuity and the reliability of the narrative; as she is choosing to call herself Jane and choosing to call her family friend James Bayley—note that the emphasis on choice undermines factuality—so she chooses to believe her suffering is only temporary. Jane is generally upbeat and optimistic, but it takes very little imagination for the reader to recognise both the hardship of her life, and her fear for her sister's well-being. It is a not insignificant detail that in her dream of waking to a secure home, her sister is still alive.

Lizzie also relies on dreaming to escape the confines of her bed, remarking, '[d]o you know, I think I have dreams given to me at night just because I cannot go out and see things' (58). Similarly, when James Bayley comes to visit, she demands, '[d]o take me up an Alp [...] I am so tired of lying here all day. I climb Alps sometimes at night; but I want to go up one awake, with a hold of you, James.' So in order to create a waking dream – an illusion of health and activity for a terminally ill child – James Bayley tells her a story.

This is the frame in which MacDonald offers a travel narrative about his own visit to the Alps. And, as he has subsumed Wordsworth's 'Evening Voluntary' into spiritual awakening of an adolescent girl, so here, too, he subsumes the Romantic landscape of the Alps into catharsis for a family of sisters. There is perhaps a biographical reason for this: 'A Journey Rejourneyed' may well be derived from MacDonald's own experience of talking about his travel with his daughters. But there is also a distinct aesthetic reason, derived from the mystical understanding that MacDonald had of landscape and poetry. MacDonald's emphasis in describing the Alps is not on factual, mimetic representation of the Alps, nor on Romantic musings on individual inspiration, but on the spiritual insight the act of reading about a landscape will provide for his readers.

To this end, MacDonald creates yet another layer of destabilisation in the narrative. Jane insists that she must faithfully record everything James said, but the reader is allowed to doubt that she heard correctly: notably, she recalls that 'when [James Bayley] got his holiday, he went to Switzerland, and thanked God on top of the Sneezer—I think that is what he called it' (54). The physical landscape of the Alps as James Bayley actually saw it distorted through its double-transformation into narrative: the account that he told is changed as Jane hears it, and she then recounts her own variant as circumscribed by

her limited knowledge of the world. It is not clear how much, if any, of the remaining narrative is faithful to James Bayley's own words, or faithful instead to Jane's possibly confused memory of them. This landscape, Jane herself begins the narrative with a lament at her inability to remember James Bayley's stories with any accuracy:

Some ancestor of his must have been a magician or a necromancer or something of that sort; for with a few words, flung out anyhow, he can make you see such things! Oh! I can never tell them so that you will see them as I saw them; yet I must try. [...] What a pity it is that his words must be withered and shrunk like fallen leaves, by being blown and tossed about in my mind! (53)

Paradoxically, even as Jane laments her faulty memory, MacDonald elevates her to the equal of Dante. There is a clear allusion in this passage to the final canto of the *Paradiso*, at the precise moment when Dante finally receives the beatific vision. Comparing himself to '*colui che sognando vede, | che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa | rimane*,³⁹ Dante declares:

*Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio
che 'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,
e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio. [...]*

*Così la neve al sol si disigilla;
così al vento ne le foglie levi
si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla.*⁴⁰

James Bayley becomes analogous with the Sybil, his stories with divinely inspired utterances, and Jane with the Dantean poet-pilgrim on the cusp of

³⁹ *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 58-60: 'the dreamer, after he awakens, | still stirred by feelings that the dream evoked' (Hollander's translation).

⁴⁰ *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 55-57, 64-66:

From that time on my power of sight exceeded
that of speech, which fails at such a vision,
as memory fails at such abundance. [...]
Thus the sun unseals an imprint on the snow:
Thus the Sibyl's oracles, on weightless leaves,
lifted by the wind, were swept away
(Hollander's translation)

apprehending ‘*somma luce che tanto ti levi | da’ concetti mortali*’.⁴¹ If this seems rather a grandiose ambition for travel writing, recall Jakob Böhme’s assertion that the Holy Spirit ‘is in God, and also in the whole Nature’ which is ‘the *whole Body* or *Corpus* of God’.⁴² In other words, the Holy Spirit shows the nature of God in Nature. When James Bayley is describing the Alps, he is quite literally describing God; when Jane sees the Alps through his narrative, she is seeing ‘the Light inexpressible’ as clearly as Dante did. For MacDonald, then, because landscape is a way of seeing the world, rightly construed it is a way of seeing God, because the world, ruled by the Holy Spirit, comes from and returns to God. The description of a specific landscape, then, should be such that it evokes in the readers that attentiveness needed so they can see the Trinity in nature for themselves. In this sense, MacDonald seems to hope that his descriptions of landscape will be like St Bernard guiding Dante’s gaze to the Divine Light:

*Bernardo m’accennava, e sorridea,
perch’ io guardassi suso; ma io era
già per me stesso tal qual ei volea,*⁴³

The literary landscape creates this response in the reader: of their own initiative and impulse, they are able to receive the whole Nature of God in the whole of Nature.

This is evident at the climax of ‘A Journey Rejourneyed’, when James Bayley describes his first sight of the Wetterhorn. The passage is both striking and little-known, so it is worth quoting at length:

“A steep green slope, which we first scrambled up and then rode along; the first of a shower; big cattle, each with its big bell on a broad belt round its neck, glooming through the rain; faster and faster descent of rain-drops; the water running into my boots; steeper and steeper descents; fog, through which nothing but the nearest objects can be seen; a more level spot of grass, with rock sticking through it in

⁴¹ *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 67–8: ‘[...] Light exalted above mortal thought’ (Hollander’s translation).

⁴² Jakob Böhme and William Law, II, 28, II.15, 17–19

⁴³ *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 49–51

With his smile, Bernard signalled
that I look upward, but of my own accord
I was already doing what he wished
(Hollander’s translation).

every direction, and haggard old fir-trees standing half dead about a stream running over the rockiest of channels and down the steepest of descents not to be a succession of waterfalls, banked everywhere by this green grass—the whole making up one of the two places I saw where I would build a house;—singing women; a glass of brandy at a roadside inn; the Eiger hanging over us through the fog, fearfully high and fearfully overhanging, like nothing I can think of but Mount Sinai in the *Pilgrim's Progress*; a scrambling down of rocky stairs; and then, through the mist, that for which I have brought you all this way in the pouring rain—the sharp-edged, all but perpendicular outline of the Wetterhorn, close in front of our faces—nothing but a faint mass and a clear edge—the most frightful appearance by far we have yet seen. I would not for a month's sunshine have lost that sight. If I could draw at all, nothing would be easier than to let you see it, as it rushed from the earth through the mist into the sky. A single line, varying in direction, yet the effect is nearly perpendicular, seen through a grey mist—that is all. And all I can say is, *It was terrible*; and there is little good in saying anything, except your saying is your friend's seeing.”

“I see it,” each of us cried. (128–9)

This description is genuinely remarkable. Most of it consists of a fragmented single sentence, conveying a series of distinct images rather than a connected narrative. The reference to *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), too, gives these images spiritual significance: the walkers pass under Law in the form of the grim Mount Sinai, to receive grace in a glimpse of the mountain of paradise. And here, again, is the correlation between describing landscape and painting landscape. There is the lament for drawing ability, of course, but the actual description of the Alp itself is drawn largely from John Ruskin's analysis of J. M. W. Turner. In the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843), Ruskin offers this assessment of Turner's studies of Arona:

It is totally impossible here to say which way the light falls on the distant hills, except by the slightly increased decision of their edges turned towards it, but the greatest attention is paid to get these edges decisive, yet full of gradation, and perfectly true in character of form. All the rest of the mountain is then undistinguishable haze [...]⁴⁴

⁴⁴ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters Volume I Containing Parts I and II of General Principles and of Truth* (London, 1903), 441.

This corresponds exactly to MacDonald's description of the Wetterhorn as 'nothing but a faint mass and a clear edge'. Ruskin, indeed, goes on to 'particularly insist upon this sharpness of edge, because it is not a casual or changeful habit of nature; it is the unfailing characteristic of all very great distances.'⁴⁵ Turner's use of edge, then, creates 'the impression [...] of mountains too far off to be ever distinctly seen, rendered clear by brilliancy of light and purity of atmosphere; and the effect, consequently, [is] vastness of space with intensity of light and crystalline transparency of air.'⁴⁶ Now this is a text that MacDonald certainly knew, being personal friends with Ruskin, who gave him a copy of *Modern Painters* in 1864.⁴⁷ And it is easy to see how Ruskin's ostensibly visual argument would seize on MacDonald's mystically-inclined imagination, the 'intensity of light' connecting with '*somma luce che tanto ti levi | da' concetti mortal?*'⁴⁸ To present this connection, then, MacDonald translates his own physical experience of walking the Alps into a literary experience, based on the Alpine landscape of English Romanticism but employing Ruskin's painterly theory about how the Alps should be portrayed. This combination of physical, poetic, and painterly landscape is then mediated through the narration of an adolescent girl, to relate a spiritual awakening she and her sisters have, the story about the Alps becoming, in essence, a vision of the divine.

'I give it up'

If landscape is a way of seeing the world, MacDonald specifically presents it as a way of seeing the Divine. Scotland appears both as a beloved home and a haunted wilderness; venturing outside of the home landscape into the wild becomes emblematic of maturation. George MacDonald's Scotland, with its Aberdeenshire landscapes of straths, peat-bogs, links, and shore, reflects the inner life of his characters; these peculiarly Scottish spaces shape whoever they become, individually and spiritually.

In a curious aside in *Robert Falconer*, the narrator suggests that 'If the writer has any higher purpose than the amusement of other boys, he will find the life of a country boy richer for his ends than that of a town boy.'⁴⁹ This is largely

⁴⁵ Ibid., 442.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 441–2.

⁴⁷ Greville Macdonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 328ff. Another way into this topic is, indeed, through Ruskin, whose importance to the Victorian novel as an art form is perhaps too frequently overlooked.

⁴⁸ *Paradiso* xxxiii. 67–8: '[...] Light exalted above mortal thought' (Hollander's translation).

⁴⁹ George MacDonald, *Robert Falconer* (London, 1868), I, 216.

because, the narrator says, country boys are more susceptible to the revelatory influences of nature; they go outdoors and experience their maturation, developing 'a tenderer feeling of [Nature's] femininity' – they fall in love with the landscape, as it were. Town boys, by contrast, get their education largely from reading, and even read too much: 'Town boys have too many books and pictures. They see nature in mirrors, – invaluable privilege *after they know herself, not before*. They have greater opportunity of observing human nature; but here also *the books* are too many and various.'⁵⁰

But precisely when the eager critic looks to identify real aesthetic motherlode for MacDonald's fiction, the narrator undercuts it: '[b]ut I must stop, for I am getting up to the neck in a bog of discrimination. As if I did not know the nobility of some towns-people, compared with the worldliness of some country folk! I give it up.'⁵¹ Here, yet again, is a clueless narrator, fumbling to philosophise as the author slyly suggests the fact of the matter: the book in the reader's hands is one such potentially distorting mirror of Nature, and the reader is most likely a bookish town-dweller rather than an active country lad. The literary landscape and the adventures of the characters thus reflect to the attentive reader what is actually physically possible, whether for outdoor games to be played or the awakening of the spirit through contemplation of the Nature. In this sense, the book invites the reader to set it down and step outside.

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 216–17. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹ Ibid., 217.

‘The Hand of Age Upon Me’: George MacDonald and the Restoration of Home in *Lilith*

Joshua T. Rawleigh

Lilith (1895), the last major work of George MacDonald (1824–1905), is often regarded as his magnum opus. In his biography of MacDonald, William Raeper describes *Lilith* as MacDonald’s “‘Dark night of the soul’”, exposing the terrible struggle between light and shade that had battled in his conscience since his earliest days.’¹ The novel has often been regarded as the culmination of MacDonald’s lifelong attempt to articulate a theology of death. In *Lilith*, he approaches death from a more personal angle than in his other novels, a perspective that emerged from personal tragedy and his ongoing struggle against age. *Lilith*’s solution to death is “home”, characterised by the restoration of a corrupted world and corrupted relationships. Home is where the family is intact and where the individual’s teleological desires are met. The reconciliation of the first family and Mr. Vane’s journey throughout the novel as well as its treatment of death and the afterlife reveal MacDonald’s anticipation of his own death as a spiritual homecoming.

MacDonald’s narratives often come from his own past, particularly the places he has visited, so that, as Timothy Youngs argues, these ‘multiple shapes are intrinsic to the telling’ of his tales.² MacDonald weaves these “shapes” from a complex mixture of his upbringing in Aberdeenshire, his life in England, his travels to America and North Africa, and his final years in Italy. Added to this is his confounding insistence on orthodox theology, while holding heterodox positions. The key to unraveling these paradoxical foundations to MacDonald’s works is the life of the man himself. MacDonald drew from his own life with an uncommon poignancy, so that places visited by the author would appear in his novels decades later in striking detail. *Robert Falconer*, for example, tells how the eponymous character sneaks out of his grandmother’s house to practice his fiddle at the old, family thread factory. The path described is identical to

¹ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Herts, 1987), 364.

² Timothy Youngs, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the fin de siècle* (Liverpool, 2013), 142.

the route from MacDonald's grandmother's home in Huntly on the corner of Church St. and Duke St. to the old MacDonald family factory.³ Indeed Falconer's Rothieden is a stand-in for Huntly. The Boar's Head in Rothieden is the Gordon Arms of Huntly (named because the Gordon clan's sigil is a boar's head), while the school Robert Falconer and Shargar attend corresponds to the nonconformist school attended by MacDonald. Through an awareness of the autobiographical elements of novels such as *Robert Falconer*, one can functionally create a short self-guided tour of the author's hometown.

In 1891, when MacDonald was just beginning work on *Lilith*, he returned to Huntly. His letters from this trip illustrate his renewed fascination with his ancestral home. He writes with wonder at the sight of the Scottish countryside after visiting his familial cemetery, saying 'I see the country more beautiful than I used to see it. The air is delicious, and full of sweet odours, mostly white clover, and there is over it much sky'.⁴ The feeling he conveys is of delight in returning to his boyhood home. MacDonald goes on in the letter to say that this delight in the Scottish countryside fills him with the 'hope of the glory of God', and the final renewed creation.⁵ Nostalgia for his Scottish home drives MacDonald to hope in God rather than to wistfulness. The settings of his novels, particularly his fantasies, often direct the reader to a renewed image of a landscape that closely resembles his childhood view of Scotland.

Writing from Bordighera, MacDonald fondly inscribes *Lilith* with images of the Scottish landscape renewed. Initially, however, the other world of *Lilith* is barren to varying degrees. Vane's first entry point into the Region of the Seven Dimensions is the countryside, with Adam's and Eve's solitary cottage, reminiscent of 'The Farm', MacDonald's boyhood home. The plant life around the cottage includes heather and thistles, quintessential Scottish botany, even though at this point the landscape is relatively desolate. As Vane moves away from the cottage, he enters completely barren lands: '[a]s I walked, my feet lost the heather, and trod a bare spongy soil, something like dry, powdery peat'.⁶ The reason for this barrenness is a lack of water. Mara explains to Vane how Lilith gathered the waters of the land, though she could 'not hold more than half of it, and the instant she was gone, what she had not yet taken fled away underground, leaving the country as dry and dusty as her own heart' (*Lilith*,

³ George MacDonald, *Robert Falconer* (Whitethorn, CA., 1998), 87.

⁴ Glenn Edward Sadler (ed.), *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI., 1994), 344.

⁵ Ibid., 344.

⁶ George MacDonald, *Lilith* (Grand Rapids, MI., 2000), 48. Further citation given in text.

75). Before Lilith steals the water, the land is a verdant, Eden-like paradise, known as ‘the Land of Waters’ (*Lilith*, 75). Lilith’s theft is akin to Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. Both actions corrupt not only humanity, but creation as well. The desolate industrialised Bulika is the culmination of this broken creation, with its miserable, selfish people and exhausted land. It is reminiscent of Gwyntystorm from *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), where the people, full of greed, continued to mine for gold, until at last, ‘[o]ne day at noon, when life was at its highest, the whole city fell with a roaring crash. The cries of men and the shrieks of women went up with its dust, and then there was a great silence’.⁷ Unlike with Gwyntystorm, Bulika and its surrounding country retain redemptive hope because of the water that waits beneath the earth. In the end, this water bursts, turning the desert into thriving hills of vegetation with a clear blue lake and rivers, just like in *The Princess and the Goblin*, when the subterranean waters wash the goblins and misshapen creatures out of the tunnels, cleansing the kingdom of their corruption.⁸ When Vane first ‘wakes’ from the House of the Dead, he sees:

The whole expanse where, with hot, aching feet, I had crossed and recrossed the deep-scorched channels and ravines of the dry river-bed, was alive with streams, with torrents, with pools—“a river deep and wide!” [...] I stood a moment gazing, and my heart began to exult: my life was not all a failure! (*Lilith*, 232–3)

Vane’s jubilation echoes something of MacDonald’s catharsis in seeing the country around Huntly as an old man. For both, viewing the landscape as it ought to be led to a moment of ontological completion, or wholeness of spiritual being. As Raeper reminds us, the reader of *Lilith* ought to remember that though MacDonald, as ‘the Sage of Bordighera’ in the Italian countryside, may seem distant from young Scottish boy gallivanting around Huntly, he still draws inspiration from his childhood landscape.⁹ MacDonald keeps the image of Scotland in his mind, using it as a sign of restoration and wholeness.

⁷ George MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* (Project Gutenberg) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/709/709-h/709-h.htm>> [accessed 1 October 2017].

⁸ George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (Philadelphia, 1907), 297–300.

⁹ William Raeper, ‘Diamond and Kilmeny: MacDonald, Hogg, and the Scottish Folk Tradition’, in *For the Childlike*, ed. Roderick McGillis (London, 1992), 133–45, (143).

For MacDonald, returning to Scotland was returning home, as it naturally evoked his boyhood memories, but also because it meant returning to the land of his family. MacDonald describes the Drumblade churchyard in Huntly as ‘where the bodies of all my people are laid’.¹⁰ MacDonald attaches himself to these dead family members, creating a sense of communion that suggests he and they will one day reunite. Their bodies, now residing in the hills and fens of Scotland, are tied to its landscape and bring MacDonald with them because of a natural communion. He finds solace and redemption in the promise of a restored landscape where his family lies sleeping. Like Vane lying down to join his family in the crypt beneath the sprawling heather fields, MacDonald anticipates joining his family amassed around Huntly, as his sleep with them will lead to restoration of their familial ties. They shall all be perfectly united in death. As he says in the same letter, ‘I get little bits of dreamy pleasure sometimes, but none without the future to set things right. “What is it all for?” I should constantly be saying with Tolstoi, but for the hope of the glory of God’.¹¹ The scene as he sees it, though idyllic, awaits a future completion, ‘the hope of the glory of God’, that will see the restoration home. His final visit to Huntly spurred his contemplation of death, restoration, family, and landscape all together. The spectre of Scotland as his home and the home of his ancestors haunts the pages of *Lilith*.

What ties MacDonald’s family to the landscape of Scotland is death. MacDonald believes that death will reunite him with all who have died, particularly those whom he loves. In his essay ‘Defining Death as “More Life”’: Unpublished Letters by George MacDonald’, Sadler writes that, ‘[i]n MacDonald’s case, however, the topic of death cannot be avoided; it is both of literary and biographical importance in understanding his life and works’.¹² In terms of the literary, both MacDonald’s fantasy and romances deal with the author’s view of death, though for the purposes of this paper, the fantasy best illuminates the author’s attitudes on mortality. Sadler notes that ‘MacDonald is at his best when he is seeing death through the eyes of a child’.¹³ Child death or death seen by children is the most common way MacDonald uses death in his fantasy. He applies the childlikeness that MacDonald championed in his essay ‘The Fantastic Imagination’ to death in order to give death the severity and

¹⁰ Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 344.

¹¹ Ibid., 344.

¹² Glenn Edward Sadler, ‘Defining Death as “More Life”’: Unpublished Letters by George MacDonald’, *North Wind* 3 (1984), 4–18, (6).

¹³ Ibid., 4.

hopefulness he believes it deserve.¹⁴ In his ‘Unspoken Sermons’, MacDonald argues that when Christ says, ‘[e]xcept ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven’, he refers to essential quality of God that is most commonly reflected in children.¹⁵ This quality is the innate simplicity and hopefulness one finds in children.¹⁶ By linking death to children who exhibit this quality, MacDonald shows death at its most severe, removing something good from the world, and its most redemptive, because it unites the child to God from whom its childlikeness comes.¹⁷ Death, though painful, only leads to more life for the childlike.

Childlikeness is a quality that, while most naturally found in children, can be found in adults as well. When heroic adults die in MacDonald’s fantasies, they are those that exhibit childlikeness. The childlike adult who dies enters into more life, just like Vane at the end of *Lilith*. MacDonald poignantly phrases this in *The Golden Key* (1867), where Mossy, who, at the end of his long journey, is an aged and dying, though he retains his childlike heart, converses about death with the Old Man of the Sea. The Old Man of the Sea asks him if death is good: “‘It is good,” said Mossy. “It is better than life.” “No,” said the Old Man: “it is only more life.””¹⁸ Though published thirty years prior to *Lilith*, *The Golden Key* articulates the same perspective on death. Death is only more life for the childlike Mossy, just as it is for Vane at the end of his journey.

MacDonald’s treatment of death was uncommon for Victorian authors, who preferred to sentimentalise child death. The most famous example of this treatment of child death is that of little Nell in Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840). Dickens paints the scene with infamously sentimental imagery:

She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death.¹⁹

Nell, until the point where she drifts into a pre-death sleep, encourages those

¹⁴ George MacDonald, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, in *The Light Princess and Other Stories* (London, 1891), 3.

¹⁵ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* (Memphis, TN, 2012), 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ George MacDonald, ‘The Golden Key’, in *The Golden Key and Other Stories* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), 32.

¹⁹ Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841; repr. London, 2000), 538.

around her to live good lives. It is a long scene, where the family grieves, but comes to terms with her death. Such was common in the Victorian cult of the child, a nineteenth-century movement that viewed children as models of purity and innocence that were to be guarded, protected, and admired, but not treated seriously.²⁰ Nell's death is an idealised death, sanitised of reality. Nell's family can gather around her, shed a few tears, and then go forward to heed her final words that spur them on to live morally.

Contrast this to the way MacDonald treats child death. His most complete treatment is in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), which tells the story of a boy named Diamond, whose adventures with the mysterious lady, North Wind, precipitate his death. MacDonald's depiction of Diamond's death is abrupt, despite it being foreshadowed throughout the novel. Diamond's tutor, who is also the narrator, comes to Mr. Raymond's house for his usual lesson with Diamond, only to discover the house in mourning. Mrs. Raymond tells him that they discovered Diamond's body on the floor of the attic room that morning. The tutor goes up alone to the tower and finds '[a] lovely figure, as white and almost as clear as alabaster'.²¹ The family has no consolation and no final words with the child. He is simply, and terribly, dead. Nevertheless, MacDonald ends the novel hopefully: 'I saw at once how it was. They thought he was dead. I knew that he had gone to the back of the north wind'.²² This statement contains the essential thrust of MacDonald's novel: death begets life. With Little Nell, Dickens dwells on the painful, yet beautiful act of death for the child. For MacDonald, the death itself matters little, because it is merely a passage into more life. The preceding novel prepares you for this life through death, creating a more hopeful, though more horrific, scene.

Both *The Golden Key* and *At the Back of the North Wind* demonstrate the way that MacDonald, even from earlier in his career, dealt with death in his works. In broaching death from the perspective of a child, MacDonald attempts to capture the divine perspective on mortality. Thus, while both Mossy and Diamond are children, they demonstrate adult maturity. Mossy has the appearance of an old man, while Diamond often takes on a parental role to his younger siblings, as well as other children like the drunken cabman's

²⁰ Kimberly Reynolds, 'Perceptions of Childhood', *The British Library*, 2014 <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/perceptions-of-childhood>; Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford and New York, 2009).

²¹ George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind*, (New York, 2001), 346.

²² *Ibid.*, 346.

baby.²³ In *Lilith*, Lona exemplifies this same balance of childlikeness and adult characteristics. Lona is the eldest of the Little Ones, who acts as a mother to the other children, yet she maintains the innocence and simplicity that defines the childlike.

In nurturing the Little Ones and leading them to Bulika, Lona exemplifies the union of maturity and childlikeness MacDonald treasures. Because of this ability to perfectly exemplify this union, her sudden death at her mother's hands is tragic on multiple levels. First, the reader sees her death as the death of a child. As she embraces Lilith she cries 'Mother! Mother', which she then repeats as she lays dying (*Lilith*, 184–5). Vane cradles her body, forgetting his rage at Lilith and saying, 'love of the child was stronger than hate of the mother' (*Lilith*, 184). MacDonald then shows the Little Ones grieving her as their mother when Vane brings them her body. Vane notes that their grief is different than his own, though no less tragic:

[T]he tender hopelessness of the smile with which they received it [Lona's body], made my heart swell with pity in the midst of its own desolation. In vain were their sobs over their mother-queen, in vain they sought to entice from her some recognition of their love. (*Lilith*, 186)

MacDonald uses the Lona's double role as child-mother to deepen the grief over her death. However, the narrative is always moving beyond death toward restoration. In *Lilith*, the children soon become distracted when they see Lilith herself and the narrative focus moves to her and her journey to redemption (*Lilith*, 187). Lona's death becomes a secondary point by which MacDonald brings about Lilith's spiritual healing. In her attempt to convict and change Lilith, Mara mentions Lona's murder, but otherwise the focus is on Lilith (*Lilith*, 199). As with Diamond's death, MacDonald does not dwell on the tragedy of death, but emphasises it as part of a redemptive narrative.

Nevertheless, there is a difference in the way MacDonald approaches death in his earlier works, and the way in which he approaches death in *Lilith*. He pays death considerably more attention in *Lilith* than he does in his other works. Rather than death being an important but non-dominant theme, death characterises the central points of *Lilith*. More importantly, however, MacDonald struggles with death in *Lilith* in a way he does not in his other fantasies. In *At the Back of the North Wind*, death is seen through

²³ Ibid., 146–147, 169–171.

the eyes of three characters: Diamond, who joyfully embraces it as it leads him to the country at the back of the north wind, North Wind herself, who understands it as a part of the 'far-off song' that she must obey, and the tutor, who accepts Diamond's death immediately.²⁴ The tutor, as narrator, shapes the reader's approach to death, relating Diamond's adventures rather than struggling with his death, which he leaves 'for each philosophical reader to do after his own fashion'.²⁵ Diamond has told him of all his journeys, including his journey to the Elysium shadow of the country at the back of the north wind. Therefore, when the tutor notes that Diamond has gone to the actual country at the back of the north wind, he is assenting to death as an ultimate, though bittersweet, good.

Contrast this acceptance to Vane in *Lilith*, who is also the narrator, but battles against accepting death. Vane tells the reader, rather robotically, that 'My father died when I was yet a child, my mother followed him within a year' (*Lilith*, 5). Vane's indifference at the death of his parents may be excused as perspective on a past tragedy, from which he has healed, yet it reveals his apathy regarding death. When he enters the Region of the Seven Dimensions, he immediately argues with the sexton, Adam. What begins as a mere intellectual exercise for Vane, discussing the ability of objects to occupy the same space, soon dissolves into anger when Adam counters all of Vane's points. The crux of their debate, both here and throughout the novel, is Vane's question '[b]ut how was life to be lived in a world of which I had all the laws to learn?' (*Lilith*, 23). When Vane arrives at Adam and Eve's cottage, the coffin door, along with the gaunt yet lifelike features of his hosts disturb him. They invite him to "sleep", but tell him that in so doing he will not be able to wake himself. Upon debating this point and seeing the House of the Dead beyond the coffin door, his soul grows 'silent with dread' (*Lilith*, 32). He understands that the sleep offered by his host is death, and though they insist this death will bring him into greater life, he flees. As he says, 'I began to conclude that the self-styled sexton was in truth an insane parson: the whole thing was too mad!' (*Lilith*, 35). The underlying theme of the ensuing narrative is Vane's struggle to accept the sexton's thesis: 'you will be dead as long as you refuse to die' (*Lilith*, 157).

Vane, unlike most of MacDonald's protagonists, struggles to accept the goodness of death. When reflecting on a poem George MacDonald wrote to a bereaved friend, his son Greville MacDonald notes that:

²⁴ MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind*, 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 317.

If anyone interested as well in my father's character as in his work——
and few men, it will be allowed, have closer agreement with theirs than
his—will turn from this, one of his very early utterances on death, to *Lilith*,
almost his latest, he will see how little the quality and substance of the
poet's outlook changed, although he gained so much in extent of vision.²⁶

Nevertheless, Greville later says that a 'note of present sadness echoes throughout [*Lilith*]' not present in his other fantasies, 'a note, however, in no way out of harmony with the far-calling chimes of an unfathomable faith'.²⁷ This sadness manifests itself in Vane's inability to immediately accept death as an ultimate good.

If we accept Greville's analysis of his father's work as having a such a close arrangement with his life, we must look for the source of this 'present sadness'. The first place to look are his major publications in the decade prior to *Lilith: The Tragedie of Hamlet - with a study of the text of the Folio of 1623* (1885) and *A Year's Diary of an Old Soul* (1880). Five years prior to writing the first draft of *Lilith*, MacDonald annotated the First Folio edition of *Hamlet*. What first appears an insignificant work as far as influencing *Lilith*, has bearing on the theme of death in *Lilith*. It is no accident that Greville compares the two as the highest examples of his father's critical and fantastic works.²⁸ An example of the influence is in 'The Cemetery' where Vane comments on how 'all were alike in the brotherhood of death' (*Lilith*, 33), echoing Hamlet's contemplation of the commonality of death for all humanity '[d]ost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th' earth?'.²⁹ Certainly, Vane contains something of Hamlet's foolishness and misery, and in *Hamlet*, one see the tragedy of a man wrestling to accept the reality of death, just like in the character of Vane.

A Year's Diary of an Old Soul, written a full decade before *Lilith*'s first draft, makes more substantial thematic contributions to *Lilith*. The first lines of the September 22nd entry: '[d]eath haunts our souls with dissolution's strife; | Soaks them with unrest; makes our every breath | A throe, not action', demonstrates the recognition of death's pain often lacking in MacDonald's works. From there, though, the poem quickly turns to describe '[l]ife everywhere, perfect,

²⁶ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, The Complete and Original Works of George MacDonald, 51 (Whitethorn, CA., 1998), 403.

²⁷ Ibid., 549.

²⁸ Ibid., 547.

²⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark* (New York, 1896), 150.

and always life, | Is sole redemption from this haunting death'.³⁰ September 23 begins with 'God, thou from death dost lift me. As I rise, | Its Lethe from my garment drips and flows', demonstrating the hopeful process of death to life that characterises MacDonald's eschatology.³¹ It ends with the speaker submitting to God and finding total restoration in Him: 'Where thou art God in every wind that blows, | And self alone, and ever, softly dies, | There shall my being blossom, and I know it fair'.³² These entries for September 22nd and 23rd could be used as thematic summaries for *Lilith*, as they transform death from something fearful into something comforting.

Yet these references in MacDonald's other works only reveal the wider literary framework in which he wrote *Lilith*. They do not tell why MacDonald's final fantasy contains a 'present sadness' in dealing with death. Greville dwells more on *Lilith* in his biography than almost any other work (both *Alec Forbes* and *Robert Falconer* are comparable). He explains his reasoning for this by saying:

I lay all this stress upon the importance of *Lilith* because I am writing my father's life: for it was not only the majestic thought of his old age, but portion also of the suffering that, mercifully near the end, led him up to his long and last vigil.³³

These two prongs of old age and increased sorrow most impacted the thematic thrust of *Lilith*, differentiating it from MacDonald's earlier works.

That MacDonald struggled with various health complications, which grew in aggravation in his old age is well known. For example, the MacDonald family's exile into Italy occurred largely because of their patriarch's declining health in the much colder London weather. According to Greville, his father struggled with chronic eczema, bronchitis, and asthma, all of which plagued him even after the family retreated to Bordighera.³⁴ Old age exasperated MacDonald's conditions, and led to the development of new ones. In his letters from the period around *Lilith*'s publication, he described the increased weariness and loss of memory that had begun to plague him. In a letter to J.S. Blackie, he

³⁰ George MacDonald, *A Book of Strife in the Form of the Diary of an Old Soul* (Bibliotheca Virtual Universal, 2008) <<http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/167438.pdf>> [accessed 3 October 2017].

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 555.

³⁴ Rolland Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker*. (Nashville, TN., 1994), 230.

describes it as ‘the hand of age upon me’, saying, ‘I can work only four hours a day, cannot, only I never could, walk much, and feel tired’.³⁵ A year prior to this, he writes A. P. Watts, saying ‘My memory plays me sad tricks now. It comes of the frosty invasion of old age – preparing me to go home, thank God. Till then I must work, and that is good’.³⁶ The ever-increasing scars of age were a present reminder to MacDonald of his impending death. Greville tells of a fervency that pressed upon his father as he wrote *Lilith*. He says that the first draft, written in 1890, was:

Unlike anything else he ever did. It runs from page to page, with few breaks into new paragraphs, with little punctuation, with scarcely a word altered, and in a handwriting freer perhaps than most of his, though with the same beautiful legibility.³⁷

Both MacDonald and Greville interpreted this fervency as ‘a mandate direct from God’, something MacDonald had never felt before in his writing.³⁸ As MacDonald’s last major work *Lilith* contains its author’s final attempt at conveying many of the themes he cultivated in his literary career, reinterpreted with the perspective of old age and an increased sense of mortality.

In the five years over which he wrote *Lilith*, MacDonald found himself increasingly compelled to confront the reality of death.³⁹ In almost every letter he wrote between 1890 and 1895, MacDonald discusses his longing for death. The intensity of these morbid thoughts increased substantially after the death of his daughter Lilia in 1891. By all accounts, Lilia was the child upon whom MacDonald relied upon the most, and was perhaps his favorite daughter. In a letter to his cousin Helen MacKay Powell, MacDonald says: ‘I think we feel — Louisa and I at least — as if we are getting ready to go. The world is very different since Lily went, and we shall be glad when our time comes to go after our children’.⁴⁰

While we cannot be sure the extent to which Lilia MacDonald impacted *Lilith*, her death clearly tempered the otherwise exuberant MacDonald. The general mellowing reflected in MacDonald’s letter to his cousin accounts for the “present sadness” in *Lilith*. One can see Lilia appearing in the character

³⁵ Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 363.

³⁶ Ibid., 355.

³⁷ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 548.

³⁸ Ibid., 548.

³⁹ Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 64.

⁴⁰ Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 350.

Lona in *Lilith*. MacDonald often brought his children into his works, such as Irene, his fourth daughter, who appears as the titular princess in *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie*. Greville MacDonald gives us little detail of Irene; therefore, it is difficult to know how much of the character is based on the child. Lilia and Lona, however, bear a remarkable resemblance. In a letter to his wife, Louisa, MacDonald, who was with his children, tells her '[t]he children are very little trouble [...] Lily is just a little mother to them all – seeming to think of everyone before herself'.⁴¹ Greville comments on the letter saying, '[h]ere let me add that this eldest sister was always the same; mothering parents, brothers and sister, guests hearty or dying, and refectory adoptions'.⁴² This child-mother role is the inspiration behind Lona, who is still a child along with the other Little Ones, but also functions as their mother. Just like Lona, who loses her life for the sake of those in her care, Lilia contracted tuberculosis after trying, though ultimately failing, to nurse a friend back to health. In her illness, Greville describes her joy, and eventually how she died in her father's arms in 1891.⁴³

According to Greville, at Lily's funeral:

The tremulous subdued voices showed how deeply everyone was mourning the loss of a cherished friend, that woman who, from her very childhood, had been a mother to old and young. Her father could hardly leave the grave [...] the day was terribly wet: all nature was lamenting.⁴⁴

The picture matches MacDonald's description of Vane clutching Lona's corpse moments after she has died. Just like at Lilia's funeral, rain accompanies Vane and the Little Ones, who form a funeral party to take Lona back to Adam. The rain in *Lilith*, however, has a positive connotation, as water is linked to the healthy maturation of the Little Ones, who marvel at the 'rivers of the sky' (*Lilith*, 208). Nevertheless, the water does not reach the desert, thus their redemption is incomplete. Oddly, Adam hardly acknowledges the death of his daughter. When Vane, Mara, and the Little Ones arrive at his cottage, Adam focuses on Lilith's redemption rather than dwell on his murdered daughter. This underpins MacDonald's argument that death is simply more life. Vane demonstrates the natural human response to death, so akin to MacDonald's

⁴¹ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 326.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 526.

own response to the death of Lilia. Adam, as the fully redeemed, prefigure of Christ, sees that Lilith, because she still grasps hold of her sin, is truly dead, while the selfless Lona is truly alive. He therefore turns his attention to helping Lilith. Adam fulfils his duty as sexton by tending the dead, leading them to life. When Lona wakes from death, however, Adam ‘embraced Lona his child’ (*Lilith*, 238). In speaking to Lona and Vane, his gaze fixates on Lona, finding joy in her resurrection. The death of Lilia was the deepest sorrow of MacDonald’s old age, leaving both him and his wife longing for death. MacDonald’s earthly reaction to this sorrow, incarnated in Vane, is contrasted to the everlasting hope of a heavenly father, in the character of Adam.

MacDonald saw death as a vehicle for returning to the family he had lost, not only children, but the rest of those he loves. He notes in a letter to a friend that, ‘[w]e shall get home to our father & elder brother before very long — at least we shall somehow get a little nearer to them’.⁴⁵ MacDonald describes death as a homecoming, resulting in his reunion with family and friends. Accompanying the view of death as returning home in MacDonald’s letters is a renewed sense of the fatherhood of God. His use of familial language for God increases drastically beginning in 1894. In a letter to J.S. Blake, MacDonald combines a familial understanding of God with this imagery of going home: ‘[m]ay the loving Father be near you and may you know it and be perfectly at peace all the way into the home country, and to the palace home of the living one — the life of our life’.⁴⁶

Lilith echoes MacDonald’s desire for familial restoration as a sign of the world’s complete redemption. In *Lilith*, the family of Adam is broken. Lilith, the first wife of Adam, is alienated from the family by her false sense of autonomy. MacDonald incorporates elements of the Lilith of Jewish mythology, who refused to submit to Adam and was therefore banished from paradise.⁴⁷ Similarly, MacDonald’s Lilith refuses to submit to Adam, demonstrating her rejection of family for the sake of individuality. To be a wife is to become one with a husband, and therefore to sacrifice part of one’s self. As Adam says, Lilith ‘counted it slavery to be one with me’ (*Lilith*, 147). Her pride takes her further, viewing herself as God-like for giving birth and demanding that Adam worship and submit to her. Adam refuses, saying, ‘I would but love and honor, never obey and worship her’ (*Lilith*, 147-148). She

⁴⁵ Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 360.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 362.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey M. Hoffeld, ‘Adam’s Two Wives’, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 26.10 (June 1968), 430–40, (344).

delights in her own freedom above all else: 'I defy that Power to unmake me from a free woman [...] You shall not compel me to anything against my will' (*Lilith*, 200). Besides rejecting the accepted norm of a submissive wife, Lilith also scorns motherhood by abandoning her child and then living in fear of her. This fear leads her to slaughter the children of Bulika, echoing the original vampiric Lilith who feasts on the flesh of children.⁴⁸ Lilith's rejection of motherhood culminates in the murder of her daughter Lona. By killing Lona, Lilith not only refuses to participate in the primordial family, but violates it.

MacDonald continues Lilith's story directing her from what seems the most despondent path toward redemption and eventual reacceptance into the family of Adam. Mara is the first to accept Lilith into the family, pushing her toward redemption even though it is a costly process that demands total surrender. Lilith and Mara battle over the nature of free will and servitude until Mara finally strips Lilith of her view of power and individualism, saying, '[t]here is no slave but the creature that wills against its creator [...] She alone is free who would make free; she loves not freedom who would enslave: she is herself a slave' (*Lilith*, 200). She then forces Lilith to see 'the good she is not, the evil she is', so that '[s]he knows that she is herself the fire in which she is burning' (*Lilith*, 202). When Lilith finally admits defeat, but cannot open her hand, Mara brings her to Adam, because '[y]ou [Lilith] have harmed him worst of the created, therefore he best of created can help you' (*Lilith*, 207). Lilith requires forgiveness and help from Adam before she is able to release her own guilt and reenter the first family.

When Lilith, Mara, Vane, and the Little Ones reach the House of Death, Adam and Eve have been expecting them. Adam has prepared a bed for Lilith to sleep on, but Eve is hesitant to trust her. Eve calls Lilith '[t]he mortal foe of my children' and warns Mara to '[t]rust her not hastily [...] She has deceived a multitude' (*Lilith*, 213). On a simple level, Lilith is Eve's rival for the affections of Adam and therefore her natural enemy. The deeper conflict, however, is that Eve is the paradigm for motherhood. She is the mother of all humanity, whereas Lilith is the enemy of humanity, but particularly children. The war between the two women makes Eve hesitate to forgive Lilith's repeated infanticide. Nevertheless, Lilith's repentance is changing her, so that Lilith's first thought when the Shadow comes to the house is to protect the Little Ones, asking if they are in the house where they cannot be hurt. Lilith's mothering instinct is returning, a portent of her final redemption and restoration into the divine

⁴⁸ W.M.S. Russell and Katharine M. Briggs, 'The Legends of Lilith and of the Wandering Jew in Nineteenth-Century Literature', *Folklore*, 92.2 (1981), 132–3.

family. Eve recognises this, so that the moment Lilith enquires about the safety of the children, ‘the heart of Eve began to love her’ (*Lilith*, 215). Eve forgives the evil Lilith does against the children, telling Lilith that all the harm she has caused does nothing except to speed them on to God. Even in slaying Lona, Lilith has ‘but sent [her] into the loveliest sleep’ (*Lilith*, 215). Eve promises that death will reconcile Lona and Lilith, a promise fulfilled when Lona ‘wakes’ and sees her mother lying next to where she lay. Lona kisses Lilith, which Adam promises ‘will draw her homeward’ (*Lilith*, 240). This moment is the fulfilment of Lona’s attempt at Bulika to love her mother, a moment interrupted by murder. Lona, though, has already forgiven her mother and the final kiss is the sign of the restoration of the mother-daughter relationship.

The final member of the first family to be reconciled with Lilith is Adam. While Eve expresses hostility toward Lilith when Vane and Mara bring her to the House of Death, Adam is enthusiastic for the ‘long waited’ reconciliation, much like MacDonald himself (*Lilith*, 213). He insists that she humble herself before God by releasing her hand. In the end, Lilith is unable to open her hand, despite trying with her utmost effort. She beseeches Adam to bring a sword to ‘divide whatever was not one and divisible’ (*Lilith*, 218). Adam brings the sword and cuts off Lilith’s hand, immediately causing her to sleep. In her last act, Lilith submits herself to Adam, recognising her inability to redeem herself. By allowing Adam to sever her last tumor of sin, Lilith willfully puts herself under Adam’s headship restoring the relationship and undoing her original sin of defying Adam.

It is important to note here, that while there is certainly a gendered power struggle between Adam and Lilith, the wider family dynamic, not just the gendered ones, requires submission. Vane’s submission to Adam and Lilith’s to Eve demonstrate that the familial life is one of submission. Yet even in this familial act of submitting to Adam, Lilith is truly submitting to God. Adam is merely an intermediary figure between the two. The vehicle for Lilith’s humility before God. This is the same sort of submission that Vane must perform in choosing to lie in the Hall of the Dead. The restoration is that of a reciprocated helper, not an oppressed slave. Throughout his works, much of MacDonald’s theology, relies on submission; Lilith’s submission to Adam is a further demonstration of the concept that submission, or deference to others, is generally good, found in biblical passages such as I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 that assert the need for all Christians to submit to one another. In MacDonald’s wider work, the act of submission is always championed as the highest expression of Christian devotion. For example, in *The Princess and*

Curdie, Curdie submits to the will of the old Princess Irene, leaving his family to go to Gwyntystorm. In *At the Back of the North Wind*, North Wind regularly rebukes Diamond, and he accepts her rebukes with humility. Individualism for the sake of individualism is never a quality praised in MacDonald's works, but humility expressed in submission always is. By Lilith's finally accepting life through death, the family at the center of the novel is reconciled creating a sense of domestic restoration.

Throughout *Lilith*, MacDonald introduces the symbolism of domestic elements to reiterate his emphasis on home and its restoration. The initial setting of the novel is Vane's ancestral house, though Vane has little emotional connection to it. Vane only describes the library and a few odd corridors. This detachment is indicative of Vane's disconnect from his family. From his first entrance to Adam and Eve's home, however, Vane feels a connection to it. He has an element of dread, but because of the warmth that oddly resonates from the chilling, yet beautiful, figure of Eve, he is comforted (*Lilith*, 28). When Vane visits Mara's home, it is dark and foreboding, yet provides a shelter from the creatures that roam the wood at night (*Lilith*, 73). Still, the shelter of home can be abused, as shown when Vane visits Lilith's palace in Bulika. The palace is more enthralling than the other shelters he visits, but there is danger in it. Vane comes to the palace after wandering the wilderness searching for Lilith, with whom he has grown enchanted. Rather than bring him the rest he expected, the palace brings him anxiety, for he knows its mistress' evil. What ought to have been comforting, brings him dread.

Another homely symbol is food. In the cottage, Adam and Eve offer him food and drink, specifically bread and wine. This relates to both the simple meals shared by families as well as the Eucharist. The first aspect of this, the simple meal shared by families, is found at pivotal points throughout the novel, particularly when Vane meets new characters. The Little Ones are impressed when Vane eats their good fruit as opposed to the Giants' coarse apples. The Little Ones reward him by feeding him for the duration of his internment (*Lilith*, 56). When Vane meets Mara, she feeds him with dry bread and water, which Vane describes as a feast, though he recognises its simplicity (*Lilith*, 78). These examples of rustic, homey meals contrast with the seductive feast Lilith offers Vane, but which 'may not have been quite innocent' (*Lilith*, 132). Indeed, the food and drink are drugged, allowing Lilith to drink Vane's blood while he sleeps. This act contrasts the "true blood" found in the Eucharist and the life given by those who offer it to Vane. The emphasis on Eucharistic meals reveals that this is not merely an earthly family, but the heavenly family

of the Church. Adam offers this meal to all who enter his home, but the meal is only a preparation for sleep.

The most common image MacDonald uses for death is sleep. This comparison has its origin in the New Testament, where both Christ and St. Paul refer to death as sleep to convey that death is not a finality.⁴⁹ Vane initially confuses death and sleep when Adam invites him to spend the night in his cottage and is horrified to learn that Adam and Eve expect him to die. In MacDonald's understanding of mortality, death, like sleep renews wearied bodies, imparting them with new life. MacDonald pushes this relationship further by relating sleep/death to the domestic life of the family of God, the most consistent conceit in *Lilith*. Restful sleep in *Lilith* comes when the sleeper is in a place of safety, under the care of the sleeper's spiritual family. Even when sleep and death are not synonymous in *Lilith*, it begets life. When Vane visits Mara, he sleeps and awakes refreshed. In his sleep, he dreams that he sleeps next to his mother and father in the chamber of death, showing that this sleep is a precursor of the death to come (*Lilith*, 78). This restful sleep contrasts with the sleep Vane receives in the palace of Bulika. When he sleeps from Lilith's drug imbued wine, he does not rest. Though her bed is much softer than the hard slabs he was offered by Adam, and the sheets are thicker than the thin blanket Mara gives him, he awakes more exhausted than when he lay down. Lilith's mimicry of these domestic elements demonstrates the extent of her corruption. She twists the signs of the heavenly family to abuse Vane.

In offering these domestic elements of shelter, food, and sleep to Vane, the primordial family demonstrates an outward reaching element, which culminates in their adoption of Vane. Vane begins the narrative as a lonely individual, an orphan from childhood who has just come into his inheritance, reminiscent of Anodos from *Phantastes* (1858).⁵⁰ Vane returns to his familial home, a place that is strange and distant from him, in order to begin his post-university life. He has no friends or family so he is as he says, 'as much alone in the world as a man might find himself' (*Lilith*, 5). Vane describes himself as being 'given to study', later clarifying that 'I had loved my Arab mare and my books more, I fear, than live man or woman' (*Lilith*, 5, 55). During his adventures, however, Vane becomes conscious of this loneliness so that he recognises:

⁴⁹ John 11.11–14 and I Thessalonians 4.15–17.

⁵⁰ *Phantastes and Lilith* bookend MacDonald's career and are often linked together due to their shared dream-like style, protagonist-narrator, and thematic parallels.

What a hell of horror [...] To wander alone, a bare existence never going out of itself, never widening its life in another life, but, bound with the cords of its poor peculiarities, lying an eternal prisoner in the dungeon of its own being! I began to learn that it was impossible to live for oneself even, save in the presence of others. (*Lilith*, 83)

Vane's quest becomes bent on curing his loneliness. When he nurses Lilith back to health, he does so because he is lonely. His thought is simply, '[p]rove what she may [...] I shall at least be lonely no more' (*Lilith*, 99). Likewise, his desire to help the Little Ones derives from the familial love that they show him. He goes to find them water because he believes it will help them grow. In their company, Vane experiences his first glimpse at familial life. Though his path to help them is characterised by error, the intention is always the well-being of those he perceives as his new family. When he returns to them, this is even clearer. He becomes a father to them, just as Lona is a mother. Through Lona, he finds a companion who is equal parts sister and his 'heart's wife' (*Lilith*, 173). Together, they lead the children into battle against Lilith and the people of Bulika in order to restore the families from which the children have been stolen.

The result of this campaign is apparently disastrous, resulting from Vane starting 'the wrong way' (*Lilith*, 140). The mothers and fathers of Bulika fear Lilith more than they care about their children, and while Lilith is taken captive, the Little Ones lose Lona, their mother and leader. The selfishness Vane suggests as his motive betrays the family of the Little One's just as much as Lilith betrayed Adam. Had Vane fulfilled his promise to Adam and sought the company of the sleepers before the company of the Little Ones, rather than pursuing glory in leading the Little Ones to Bulika, he may not have brought them ruin. In the end, however, Vane humbles himself. When he returns to the House of the Dead with the repentant Lilith, he too seeks forgiveness from Adam. Adam willingly gives it before sending Vane on his mission to restore the land by burying Lilith's hand. The restoration of the land represents the restoration of the family that Vane destroyed. The Little Ones, who, like the land, were unable to grow, are now free to flourish with Vane's submission to Adam's will.

Adam said in one of his and Vane's first meetings that, 'you and I use the same words with different meaning. We are often unable to tell people what they need to know' (*Lilith*, 45). On his return to the cottage, Vane meets an old man asking for death. The man is puzzled that one as young as Vane would

also seek death. Vane adopts the language of Adam, Eve, and Mara, saying, 'I may not be old enough to desire to die but I am young enough to desire to live indeed [...] For no one can die who does not long to live' (*Lilith*, 225). The man accuses him of speaking in riddles, echoing Vane's accusation to Adam of, 'Enigma treading on enigma [...] I did not come here to be asked riddles' (*Lilith*, 45). Vane has adopted the 'dialect' of the first family, representing his adoption into that family. He encourages the man to eat and drink from Eve's table, though the man wanders away weeping. Vane knows that Mara will find him and he will come to the answers himself. By taking on the language of the first family, Vane shows that he is no longer a wayward observer to their saintliness, but a participant in their work. He may now live with his foster family and spread their message to others, though others may not listen. Adam tells him at the beginning of his adventure that 'you came, and found the riddles waiting for you! Indeed you are yourself the only riddle [...] And you must answer the riddles!' (*Lilith*, 45). In adopting the language of Adam, Eve, and Mara, Vane demonstrates that he is of the same kind as them and can understand their world.

When Vane returns to the cottage, he is ready to be fully adopted into his new family. Though, he initially feels loneliness once more creep over him, it is vanquished by the memory of 'father Adam, mother Eve, sister Mara', who would soon usher him into life through death. He begins to see himself within the domestic roles of the first family, who then feed him and sooth him into the sleep of death (*Lilith*, 226). He lies next to Lona, 'blessed as never was man on the eve of his wedding', insinuating his marital as well as spiritual acceptance into the family (*Lilith*, 227). When he first 'wakes', the familial bonds are cemented. Eve says to him, '[w]e are mother and son', likewise Mara calls him 'brother', while Adam reclaims his role as father to both Lona and Vane (*Lilith*, 239). Vane's adoption into the first family also restores his relationship with his own family. Both his mother and father, who he did not know in 'life', sleep in the Hall of Death. When he awakes, they have already gone on before him, so that his journey to the New Jerusalem brings him closer to the restoration of his earthly family as well as the completion of his new spiritual family.

Vane's journey through the other world is a journey to find home, both the place and the people in it. In their first meeting, Adam, as the Raven, says to Vane: '[y]ou have, I fear, got into this region too soon, but none the less you must get to be at home in it' (*Lilith*, 15). The ensuing novel is a testament to that journey. The familial bonds that Vane gains characterise this home as

a place where relationships are restored. The journey home for both Vane and MacDonald, however, requires death. Both Lilith and Vane must learn this lesson, and when they do, it leads them to bliss. MacDonald expresses the same sentiments in his latter letters, and in many of his works. He notes that 'the shadows of the evening that precedes a lovelier morning are drawing around us both. But our God is in the shadow as in the shine and all is and will be well'.⁵¹ 'The hand of age' crept upon MacDonald as he wrote *Lilith*: his memory grew faint, he was prone to dejection, and he incessantly feared madness.⁵² Yet he held hope. 'I am happier and more hopeful, though I think I always had a large gift for hope', he wrote to his secretary, W. Carey Davies.⁵³ *Lilith* is the culmination of his renewed vision of Scotland, his hope in his family restored, and the belief in a greater spiritual family that awaited him upon waking from death, welcoming him home.

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⁵¹ Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 362.

⁵² Ibid., 363; Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 388.

⁵³ MacDonald, *An Expression of Character*, 354.

Donal's Doric Skirmish and the Rise of the Critic Hero

Jennifer Koopman

Literary Battle

The plot of George MacDonald's 1879 novel *Sir Gibbie* hinges on a strange and understudied episode of critical aggression in Chapter Fifty, in which Donal Grant attacks his college rival Fergus Duff on matters of poetic representation. Hostilities erupt when Fergus shares the metaphor he is developing for his Sunday sermon, in which he plans to chastise the congregation on 'the emptiness of their ambitions'.¹ As he overlooks the sea, anticipating his flock's indifference to his preaching, he devises 'a certain sentence about the idle waves dashing themselves to ruin on the rocks they would destroy' (*SG*, 371). As he explains the metaphor to Donal, the ocean waves

seem to be such a picture of the vanity of human endeavour [...]. Just as little as those waves would mind me, if I told them they were wasting their labor on these rocks, will men mind me when I tell them to-morrow on the emptiness of their ambitions. (*SG*, 368)

To note: Fergus is speaking the Queen's English. Donal, by contrast, replies in indignant Doric, the dialect of MacDonald's native North East Scotland, as he rejects Fergus's reading of the waves as a redundant force:

'Hoots, Fergus!' said Donal again, in broadest speech, as if with its bray he would rebuke not the madness, but the silliness of the prophet, 'ye dinna mean to tell me yon jaws [*billows*] disna ken their business better nor imagine they hae to caw doon the rock?' (*SG*, 368)

Fergus parries Donal's objection by pointing out that he 'spoke poetically' (*SG*, 369), and reproaches Donal for his ignorance – 'I should have thought by this time you would have known a little more about the nature of poetry' (*SG*, 369)

¹ George MacDonald, *Sir Gibbie* (1879; repr. Whitethorn, California, 2000), 368; hereafter cited in the text as *SG*.

— as he reminds him that '[p]ersonification is a figure of speech in constant use by all poets' (*SG* 369). Donal swings back by dismissing Fergus's babbling 'aboot poetic license, an' that kin' o' hen-scaich' (*SG* 369), and insists on a distinction between true poetry and false poetry: '[f]or the verra essence o' poetry is trowth, an' as sune's a word's no true, it's no poetry, though it may haw on the cast claes o' it' (*SG*, 369). In other words, truth is a necessary condition for poetry: without a core of truth, no utterance can be categorised as poetry. This definition places a burden on the poet to interpret natural signs correctly: everything in nature, Donal claims, has a 'rale design' (*SG*, 370), a true purpose, the godly meaning of which must be read like symbols in a book. That MacDonald operates in an essentially textual world has been noted previously by Roderick McGillis, who observes that '[w]hat the book and nature have in common is textuality'.² The image of the world as a great book also recalls the natural supernaturalism of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, which 'speak[s] of the Volume of Nature: and truly a Volume it is,—whose Author and Writer is God. [...] It is a Volume written in celestial hieroglyphs, in the true Sacred-writing; of which even Prophets are happy that they can read here a line and there a line'.³ From Donal's point of view, Fergus misreads nature's symbols in his depiction of the waves' action as useless, repetitive toil. In the teleological, God-centered universe that Donal inhabits, everything must have a purpose. Repetitive though the waves may be, theirs is not static, unproductive repetition. Nor are they warring with the rocks. Quite the opposite, it is productive, progressive work, as the waves perform their duty of keeping the world clean:

'Fergus! the jaws is fechtin' wi' nae rocks. They're jist at their pairt in a gran' cleansin' hermony. They're at their hoosemaid's wark, day an nicht, to haud the warl' clea, an' gran' an' bonnie they sing at it. Gien I was you, I wadna tell fowk any sic nonsense as yon; I wad tell them 'at ilka ane 'at disna dee his wark i' the warl', an' dee 't the richt gait, 's no the worth o' a minnin, no to say a whaul, for ilk ane o' thae wee craturs dis the wull o' Him 'at made 'im wi' ilka whisk o' his bit tailie, fa'i in in wi' a' the jabble o' the jaws again' the rocks, for it's a' ae thing — an' a' to haud the muckle sea clean.' (*SG*, 370)

² Roderick McGillis, Preface to *The Story, the Teller and the Audience in George MacDonald's Fiction*, by Rebecca Thomas Ankeny, *Studies in British Literature* 44 (London, 2000), vii.

³ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (1834; Oxford, 1987), 195.

Translation: waves, far from being at war with the rocks, are actually nature's housemaids, part of the world's grand cleansing harmony as they wash the world clean, and singing as they go. Fergus ought to be informing churchgoers that anyone who fails to do their godly work ranks lower than a minnow, who, along with the whale and other seas creatures, all contribute to the 'gran' cleansin' hermony' of purifying the ocean. Donal's tongue-lashing implies that writers unable to see such basic truths about the world fail in their basic function, as they 'blether' (SG, 370) and 'haiver' (SG, 369) 'nonsense' (SG, 370) – writers in whose company he would seat the unfortunate Fergus Duff.

As their disagreement escalates from Fergus's misguided metaphor to false poetry in general, Donal leaps to the opportunity to denounce – perhaps not entirely unexpectedly – the work of Byron. Byron, we learn earlier, is one of Fergus's favorite poets, whose work he strives to imitate in verse that 'went halting after Byron' (SG, 150). He is not one of Donal's preferred writers, however, as Donal proceeds to attack the passage in Canto Three of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in which Byron personifies (wrongly, according to Donal) mountains rejoicing over the elemental birth of an earthquake:

And now again 'tis black — and now, the glee
Of the loud hills shakes with mountain mirth,
As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth.⁴

Donal aligns Byron's prosopopoeia with the 'nonsense' (SG, 369) of Fergus's 'seemles' (SG, 370):

'Ow ay! bu there's true and there's fause personification; an it's no ilka poetry 'at kens the differ. Ow I ken! ye'll be doon upo' me wi' Byron. [...] But even a poet canna mak less poetry. An' a man 'at in ane o' his gran'est verses cud haiver aboot the birth o' a yoong airthquack! — losh! to think o' 't growin' an auld airthquack — haith, to me it's no up till a deuk-quack! — sic a poet micht weel, I grant ye, be he ever sic a guid poet when he tuik heed to what he siad, he micht weel, I say, blether nonsense aboot the sea warrin' again' the rocks, an' sic stuff' (SG, 369–70)

Fergus attempts to recover by protesting he cannot understand Donal's 'vulgar

⁴ Byron, George Gordon, Lord, 'Child Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt,' *The Poems and Dramas of Lord Byron* (Chicago: Belford-Clarke, 1891), 168–234, 3.93.7–9.

Scotch' (SG, 369), which he disparages as 'the prosaic stupidity of poverty-stricken logomachy' (SG, 368). He appeals to Donal's companions Ginevra Galbraith and Mrs. Sclater for support, hoping the ladies' 'wits are not quite swept away in this flood of Doric' (SG, 371); however, this tactic also fails, as they claim to understand Donal '[p]erfectly' (SG, 371). The ocean itself, as if to punctuate Donal's triumph and Fergus's defeat (not to mention Byron's), sends forth 'a thunderous wave with a great *bonff* into the hollow at the end of the gully on whose edge they stood' (SG, 371), which Ginevra laughingly identifies: '[t]here's your housemaid's broom, Donal!' (SG, 371). The final score: Donal: one; Nature: one; Fergus: zero. Donal exits the altercation feeling sorry for Fergus. He sees poetry and priesthood as linked vocations, and Fergus fails on both counts: 'when I think of him as a preacher, I [...] see an Egyptian priest standing of the threshold of the great door [...] blowing with all his might to keep out the Libyan desert' (SG, 372) while 'four great stone gods, sitting behind the altar ... [are] laughing at him' (SG, 372). Again, Donal's understanding of the writer's role recalls Carlyle, notably his concept of the poet as hierophant: '[i]ntrinsically it is the same function which the old generations named a man Prophet, Priest, Divinity for doing'.⁵

This critical assault stands out for the way it combines two major hallmarks of MacDonald's fiction: his featuring of the Doric language, and his incorporation of earnest literary discussion as part of the plot. Scholarly neglect of this chapter is perhaps not surprising, as Fergus is not the only one to struggle with the language: for a non-Scottish reader, Doric presents a challenge. Even MacDonald's contemporaries noted difficulties with the language, with such formidable readers as Henry Crabb Robinson remarking on his inability to understand the heavily inflected speech of *David Elginbrod* (1863), the first Scottish novel.⁶ The 1900 A. L. Burt edition of *Sir Gibbie*, reproduced by photolithography in the 2000 Johannesen reprint cited here, provides translation of two words, 'jaws [*billows*]' (SG, 386), and 'cwite [*coat*]' (SG, 369), but these are drops in the proverbial bucket, as the Doric onslaught proceeds almost incessantly for four pages. Indeed, some readers may never encounter the episode at all. Michael Phillips's popular 1983 abridgement of

⁵ Thomas Carlyle, 'The Hero as a Man of Letters', *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History Six Lectures Reported, with Emendation and Additions* (London, 1888), 128.

⁶ See Robinson's letter to MacDonald, in which he declares of the eponymous David Elginbrod that 'Sometimes I regret that my want of familiarity with his dialect render his not so perfectly clear to me' (Letter to George MacDonald, 3 Feb. 1863. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.3.124 Beinecke Lib., New Haven).

Sir Gibbie, published as *The Baronet's Song* by Bethany House, understandably translates Doric into standard English throughout the text; less forgivable, however, is the omission of nine-tenths of this scene, which he reduces to one sentence: 'A good deal of discussion followed, most of it to Fergus's discomfort'.⁷ It would be a shame to overlook this episode, however, as the intersection of literary critique and Doric reveals MacDonald's ideas about language, spirituality, and social class. Moreover, it stands as a turning point in the development of his main character, Donal.

Hierarchy of Language

The altercation with Fergus illustrates MacDonald's beliefs about language and spiritual authenticity, which he develops through *Sir Gibbie* (1879) and its sequel, *Donal Grant* (1884). A hierarchy of language emerges, in which linguistic primitivism (or at least perceived linguistic primitivism) correlates to spiritual exaltedness. In short, the more humble and (seemingly) simple the speech, the greater its proximity to the divine. Languages rank as follows:

1. Heaven/Wordless Divine Communion
2. Ancient Languages (e.g. Gaelic)
3. Local Patois (e.g. Doric)
4. Queen's English

Underpinning this system lies the idea that language is a symptom of the post-lapsarian condition, a result of the break from original unity with God. Heaven exists as a transverbal realm beyond language, since communion with God eradicates the need for words. MacDonald's idea of heaven as a supralinguistic realm has Augustinian origins: in 12.13 of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes heaven as 'the intellectual heaven, where the intellect is privileged to know all at once, not in part only, not as if it were looking at a confused reflection in a mirror, but as a whole, clearly, face to face'. He describes divine wisdom, moreover, as a fleeting moment of communion moving beyond all speech.⁸

⁷ Michael Phillips, *The Baronet's Song*, in *The Poet and the Pauper* (Bloomington, Minnesota, 1983), 145.

⁸ Augustine chronicles such an experience in his depiction of ephemeral translinguistic communion with his mother:

the flame of love burned stronger in us and raised us higher toward the eternal God, [...] And while we spoke of the eternal Wisdom, longing for it and straining for it with all the strength of our hearts, for one fleeting instant we reached out and touched it. Then with a sigh, leaving *our spiritual harvest* bound to it, we returned to the sound of our own speech, in which each word has a beginning and an ending

Mute Sir Gibbie embodies this state. His golden halo of hair, eyes of celestial blue, and cruciform scar on his back all mark him as a Christ figure: yet his muteness offers the primary sign of his godliness, as he moves silently through the world in 'the holy carelessness of the eternal now' (SG, 7). Supralinguistic communion appears also in MacDonald's earlier works, notably *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), in which Diamond struggles to convey his experiences upon returning from the immortal land 'at the back of the north wind': 'when he came back, [...] what he did remember was very hard to tell. [...] The people there do not speak the same language for one thing. Indeed, Diamond insisted that they do not speak at all'.⁹ Even the river running through the land of eternity, Diamond discovers, 'did not sing tunes in people's ears, it sung tunes in their heads' (ABNW, 124), implying how divine communication requires no words, but speaks directly to one's intellect. The connection between wordlessness, divinity, and wind aligns Gibbie with Diamond and the North Wind. Indeed, Gibbie is one step closer to the divine: Diamond may be a privileged passenger/guest of the North Wind, but Gibbie is an outright descendant. As his surname *Galbraith* implies, he is the gale-breath of inspiration embodied in an angelic street urchin. Whereas Diamond can only hear the wordless immortal river song, Gibbie can understand and impart it. In the novel's final chapter, Gibbie and his wife Ginevra witness the rebirth of an ancient river. The newly-reemerged burn, like the river that runs through the land at the back of the North Wind, sings a sacred song, which Gibbie understands: "'Gien I was a birnie, wadna I rin!'" sang Gibbie, and Ginevra heard the words, though Gibbie could utter only the air he had found for them so long ago' (SG, 447). Diamond struggled and ultimately failed to translate the river's sacred song without words, yet Gibbie transmits it effortlessly. He is in this sense a divine *in fans*, a child-like being who lacks human speech, yet lacks nothing, because he exists in unbroken communion with God.

Ginevra, for her part, shares her husband's freedom from language. Also born a *Galbraith* or Gale-Breath (despite her father's petulant insistence that their line has no connection to good-for-nothing Gibbie's family), Ginevra escapes the bonds of mortal language when she marries Gibbie. As their marriage waxes, their need for language wanes, until 'their communication was now more

— far, far different from your Word, our Lord, who abides in himself for ever, yet never grows old and gives new life to all things. (Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. (London, 1961) 9.10; 197–8.)

⁹ George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind*, ed. Roderick McGillis and John Pennington (London, 1871; repr. Peterborough, Ontario, 2011), 122. Hereafter cited in the text as *ABNW*.

like that between two spirits: even signs had become almost unnecessary' (*SG*, 446–7). By the end of the book, she can hear Gibbie's divine, wordless song of the burn, inaudible though it would be to ordinary listeners. A comparable marriage of minds exists in the sequel *Donal Grant*, in the elderly pair Andrew and Doory Comin. A pious 'pair of originals' living 'close to the simplicities of existence',¹⁰ the Comins have blurred their boundaries of selfhood to the point that they no longer require verbal exchange: 'as they sat it seemed in the silence as if they were the same person thinking in two shapes and two places' (*DG*, 22–3). Communicating without words, the Galbraiths and the Comins offer examples of marital union in its most idealised state.¹¹ This transverbal communion stands out as one of MacDonald's more salient Romantic traits: as Roderick McGillis observes, 'MacDonald's notion of language and literature as 'things' active and immediate derives from Romanticism's eager desire for a language that can repair the separation of subject and object' (Preface, ix). M. H. Abrams further identifies such translinguistic communion as the 'experience of eternity in a moment' that is 'of common report among the philosophers and poets of the Romantic generation'.¹²

Wordless communion may be an attractive goal, yet for ordinary mortals, language remains necessary, especially for would-be poets such as Donal. That said, certain forms of language approach this state of spiritual unity better than others. Ancient tongues and dialects retain vestiges of original communion. *Donal Grant*'s mystical shoemaker Andrew Comin asserts that a return to the roots of the evolutionary tree would reveal a language so pure and direct that it would cease to resemble a conventional verbal exchange. As he explains it,

gien we could work oor w'y back to the auldest grit-gran-mither-tongue o' a', I'm thinkin' it wad come a kin o' sae easy til 's, a't wi' the impruvt faculties o' oor h'avenly condition, we micht be able to in a feow days to haud communication wi' ane anither i' that same, ohn stammert or hummt an' hawt. (*DG*, 27–8)

Ironically, Andrew Comin's thick Doric makes him one of the most difficult

¹⁰ George MacDonald, *Donal Grant* (1883; repr. Whitethorn, California, 1998), 25. Hereafter cited in the text as *DG*.

¹¹ A similar transverbal union appears in the brotherly bond of Edmund and Edward Whichcote in MacDonald's *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891, Repr. Whitethorn, California, 1994).

¹² M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971), 385, 386.

characters of all to understand. Yet the point remains: ancient tongues rank higher than the Queen's English, as MacDonald idealises (perceived) linguistic primitivism as more authentic, spiritual, and true.

This celebration of primitivism aligns MacDonald with his much-admired predecessors Wordsworth and Coleridge, whose *Lyrical Ballads* renounce the artifice of Augustan poetry, and lionise what Wordsworth calls the 'plainer and more emphatic language' of rustic people.¹³ Plainer and more emphatic language, for MacDonald, includes both Gaelic and Doric. Gaelic *Sir Gibbie's* narrator portrays as an ancient, primitive, inherently noble, but rapidly disappearing tongue connected to nature: 'that language, soft as the speech of streams from rugged mountains, and wild as that of the wind in the tops of fir trees, the language at once of bards and fighting men' (SG, 152).¹⁴ After Gaelic, in which neither MacDonald nor Donal Grant were fluent, Scottish dialect offers the next best thing: for Donal, 'the lowland Scotch, an ancient branch of English, dry and gnarled, but still flourishing in its old age, had become instead his mother tongue' (SG, 152). As the narrator explains,

the man who loves the antique speech, or even the mere patois, of his childhood, and knows how to use it, possesses therein a certain kind of power over the hearts of men, which the most refined and perfect of languages cannot give, inasmuch as it had traveled further from the original sources of laughter and tears. (SG, 152)

The equation is clear: the more modern, refined and (seemingly) artificial a language is, the greater its distance from its authentic divine source. Thus, Donal finds 'better meat for a strong spirit' in his book of Robert Burns 'than

¹³ William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads", *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (Fort Worth, 1994), 424.

¹⁴ A problem remains, which MacDonald overlooks: literature featuring so-called 'simple' language of rural folk is not necessarily less artificial or more authentic than the ornate Augustan poetry eschewed by Wordsworth, MacDonald et al. Laura Mandell makes a similar point about Scottish poetry in her observation that '[f]ailing to notice that simple language is an artifice (in the positive sense of 'made') has led both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics, paradoxically, to devalue its opposite, poetry filled with poeticisms. [...] It is simply artificial in a different way' (Laura Mandell, 'Nineteenth-Century Scottish Poetry', *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Enlightenment, Britain, and Empire (1707–1918)*, eds. Susan Manning, Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Murray Pittock, *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 2007), 303).

[in] the poetry of Byron' with its artifice, 'or even [Walter] Scott' (*JG*, 152).¹⁵

Similarly, MacDonald represents children's speech as more natural than adult speech, as it, too, contains vestiges of prelapsarian union with God. Andrew Comin's explanation that the 'auldest grit-gran'mither-tongue' (*DG*, 27) of humanity 'wad be mair like a bairn's tongue nor a mither's' (*DG*, 28), together with his suggestion that in heaven 'we might be able [...] to had communicaton wi' ane another [...] ohne stammer or hummt or hawt' (*DG*, 28), envisions a condition in which the boundaries of the self are unfixed, much like an infant that does not discern the difference between itself and its mother.¹⁶ Certainly, Gibbie's muteness and illiteracy indicate a childlike lack of self-consciousness. Young Gibbie does not exist, in his mind, as a separate entity with independent thought until the day Donal reads aloud to him from a book of ballads:

When, by slow filmy veilings, life grew clearer to Gibbie and he not only knew, but knew that he knew, his thoughts always went back to that day in the meadow with Donal Grant as the beginning of his knowledge of beautiful things in the world of man. Then first he saw nature reflected, Narcissus-like, in the mirror of her humanity, her highest self. (*JG*, 97)

MacDonald's upholding of children's speech as authentic and spiritually elevated again chimes with his Romantic predecessors, particularly Wordsworth and

¹⁵ MacDonald's belief in the purity of regional dialect may help explain his fascination with Dante, who also wrote in the vernacular and frequently works his way into MacDonald's works (such as *At the Back of the North Wind*). As Barbara Amell has shown, Dante occupied a prominent place in MacDonald's lectures ('George MacDonald on Dante: Reprinted from the Glasgow Evening News, Sept. 18, 1889', ed. Barbara Amell, *Wingfold: Celebrating the Works of George MacDonald*, 89 (Winter 2015), 31–8. Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson further reveals how MacDonald's mentor A.J.Scott helped to shape MacDonald's appreciation for Dante's language: 'Scott repeatedly drew attention to the medium Dante utilised: the vernacular. In this Dante was a pioneer: choosing to write such an epic work in a language that could be understood by readers other than the educated elite' (Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, 'Rooted in All its Story, More Is Meant than Meets the Ear: A Study of the Relational and Revelational Nature of George MacDonald's Mythopoeic Art' (doctoral thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2011, 104).

¹⁶ While no one has yet offered a psychoanalytic reading of Andrew Comin's comments, his idea of heaven as a return to a pre-verbal, pre-symbolic, infantile dissolution of self certainly invites this sort of interpretation, particularly given MacDonald's tendency to treat time as cyclical, with death bringing a return to the womb.

Coleridge in their *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as Blake with his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Sir Gibbie, with his angelic countenance and congenital muteness, incarnates the Romantic ideal of the child as an uncorrupted, pre-linguistic innocent. Even grown up, he remains, linguistically, an infant, to the extent that *infant* is derived from the Latin *infans*, or 'not speaking'. His animal-like appearance further suggests the primitive nature of his innocence, as the text variously identifies him as a horse (SG, 6), a bird (SG, 63–4), a 'beast-boy' (SG, 200), a brownie (SG, 102), a pan (SG, 174), and a savage in skins (SG, 170–4).

At the bottom of the linguistic hierarchy stand modern forms of speech, which *Sir Gibbie* depicts as pale, degraded shadows of sturdier Scottish tongues. As the narrator laments,

the old Scottish is, alas! rapidly vanishing before a poor, shabby imitation of modern English—itself a weaker language in sound, however enriched in words, since the days of Shakespeare, when it was far more like Scotch in its utterance than it is now. (SG, 152)

The narrator's regret that modern English should have degenerated from its earlier resemblance to Scottish hints at a basic principle that permeates MacDonald's work: proximity to Scotland is an important marker of spiritual worth. This implication fits with David Robb's observations about the nationalist preoccupations of MacDonald's novels, in which 'the pattern of conflict between right and wrong involves, as often as not, a contrast of British nationalities'.¹⁷ Robb, in his discussion of 'Victorian perception[s] of Scottish religious piety',¹⁸ argues that the frequency with which characters of obscure Scottish origins (Hugh Sutherland, Robert Falconer, David Elginbrod) rescue other characters (often English aristocrats) from depravity reinforces a 'connection between Scottish origins and improvement of life in England', a pattern so strong that 'Readers could be forgiven for thinking, "Where would the English be without the Scots?"'.¹⁹ This template extends to *Sir Gibbie*: MacDonald casts Janet and Robert Grant from the same mold as David Elginbrod, their humble origins connoting spiritual exaltedness. Living in their far-flung 'high-humble' (SG, 76) mountain cottage, dwelling amid '[l]

¹⁷ David Robb, 'George MacDonald and the Grave Livers of Scotland', *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, eds. Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow, 2013), 274.

¹⁸ Robb, 275.

¹⁹ Robb, 273.

oneliness and silence, and constant homely familiarity with the vast simplicities of nature' (*SG*, 77), the Grant family belong to 'a class now [...] extinct, but once [...] the glory and strength of Scotland' (*SG*, 76). Their choice of language further reinforces their natural piety: by insisting on praying only in Doric, at a time when 'most Scotch people of that date tried to say their prayers in English' (*SG*, 352), the Grants display a desire for spiritual authenticity that all MacDonald's good Scottish characters share. The elevation of unfashionable rural simplicity explains also why Andrew Comin discusses heaven in Doric, and why Donal deliberately uses his native tongue to defend the purity of English poetry.

The Problem of Byron

Donal's unprovoked dressing down of Byron, which seems to come out of nowhere, makes sense in light of the pattern that Robb identifies, in which 'humble Scottish heroes and heroines overcome the sins and mistakes of upper-class, even aristocratic, semi-villains, who, even if Scottish by birth, are anglicised in speech and outlook'.²⁰ The aristocratic Byron stands as a kind of anti-David Elginbrod, one who failed on every count to absorb the special spiritual opportunities of Scottish rural life. Raised in Aberdeen and attending the Aberdeen Grammar School before graduating to public celebrity in England, and thence to notorious exile abroad, Byron, with his life of scandal and misadventure, is emphatically the wrong kind of Scotsman, by MacDonald's pastoral standards of holiness. To make matters worse, Byron is, of all the English Romantic poets, the most Augustan in spirit, reveling in the kind of showiness, extravagance, and artifice that MacDonald deplored: in *England's Antiphon*, MacDonald disparages the Augustan period as a fallen age in which 'the poets of England [...] ceased almost for a time to deal with the truths of humanity'.²¹ This bias continues in *Sir Gibbie*, where the ill effects of impoverished poetry manifest themselves in the stunted intellectual and emotional development of Ginevra's governess, Miss Machar: thanks to a diet limited to lesser romantic verse – 'she had never got beyond the "Night Thoughts: and the "Course of Time"' (*SG*, 195) – the middle-aged spinster 'had withered instead of ripening' (*SG*, 195). Luckily, Ginevra pays little heed to Miss Machar's lessons, and has Donal Grant to help set her straight on matters of poetry.

²⁰ Robb, 274.

²¹ George MacDonald, *England's Antiphon* (1864; Repr. Whitethorn, California, 1996), 267–8.

MacDonald's disapproval of Byron may stem from his friendship with Byron's widow, who befriended the MacDonalds during the 1850s, and left them a £300 legacy upon her death in 1860.²² While it is impossible to say precisely what it was about the MacDonalds that appealed to Lady Byron, William Raeper suggests that MacDonald took the place of the preacher F. W. Robertson, whose friendship Annabella Byron had made in Brighton and whom she missed greatly after he died.²³ Certainly, the MacDonalds' scrupulous Christian morality would have appealed to her, and their indignation at her plight would have bolstered her carefully maintained persona of 'all-forgiving angel', as David Crane describes her.²⁴ Both MacDonald and Lady Byron were sympathetic to the possibility of universal salvation, a position that even her biographer Harriet Beecher Stowe had difficulty sharing. During their brief but intense friendship, she recounted in detail to MacDonald and Louisa the sordid history of her married life, which for years had earned her public censure. MacDonald clearly took her side: to the end, his novels vilify Byron relentlessly. In *Guild Court: A London Story* (1868), Byron provides the model for the undeserving seducer Tom Worboise, who 'flatter[s] himself with being in close sympathy with Lord Byron', a volume of whose poetry he carries in his pocket.²⁵ In *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872), Lady Bernard — a superlatively flattering homage to Lady Byron — laments the failure of her dissipated grandson, 'who was leading a strange, wild, life', and who, for all her hopes that he might 'turn out a Harry the Fifth', dies unrepentant and unredeemed.²⁶

The most scathing indictment of Byron occurs in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), in which the narrator likens Byronmania to an adolescent illness: '[t]he Byron-fever is in fact a disease belonging to youth, as the hooping-cough [sic] to childhood, — working some occult good no doubt in the end'.²⁷ Appealing to base passions rather than morality or intelligence, Byron 'makes no demand either on the intellect or the conscience, but confines himself to

²² Greville MacDonald offers a fuller discussion of the MacDonalds' involvement with Lady Byron in Chapter Five of his biography of his father, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (1924; Repr. Whitethorn, California, 1998), 300–13.

²³ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, 1987), 132.

²⁴ David Crane, *The Kindness of Sisters: Annabella Milbanke and the Destruction of the Byrons* (London, 2003), 268.

²⁵ George MacDonald, *Guild Court: A London Story* (1868, Repr. Whitethorn, California, 1999), 6.

²⁶ George MacDonald, *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872; Repr. Whitethorn, California, 1998), 164.

²⁷ George MacDonald, *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865, Repr. Whitethorn, California, 1995), 207; hereafter cited in the text as *AF*.

friendly intercourse with those passions whose birth long precedes that of choice in their objects — whence a wealth of emotion is squandered' (*AF*, 207). Certainly, Alec, Kate, and Miss Warner squander emotions aplenty while flirting over their copies of Byron. Its power is temporary, however. Like opium, the intoxicating effects of which wane with regular use, Byron's effects do not last: '[m]ost of those who make the attempt are surprised — some of them troubled — at the discovery that the shrine can work miracles no more' (*AF*, 207). Love of Byron indicates Alec, Kate, and Miss Warner's immaturity, and implies romantic disappointment and sexual failure:

I will not weary my readers with the talk of the three young people enamoured of Byron. Of course the feelings the girls had about him differed materially from those of Alec; so that a great many of the replies and utterances met like unskillful tilters, whose staves passed wide. (*AF*, 208)

MacDonald's depiction of unsuccessful conversation as the suggestively phallic sport of *tilting* underscores Alec's double failure, in both literary taste and sexual pursuit. Kate rejects Alec and eventually succumbs to the charms of 'the cunning Celt' Patrick Beauchamp, a ne'er-do-well aristocrat who upstages Alec by reading Kate the works of Percy Shelley, 'which quite overcrowded Byron' (*AF*, 307). MacDonald further deflates Byron by adding that it is somehow unEnglish to like him too much. Brimming with anti-French prejudice, the narrator suggests that the public's misplaced admiration for Byron damages their national image abroad: it is love of Byron 'in virtue of which the French persist in regarding Byron as our greatest poet, and in supposing that we agree with him' (*AF*, 208). That the lucky suitor Patrick Beauchamp is a Scotsman with a French name further hints at the foreign taint associated with Byron and his admirers. The failure of Alec, Kate, and Miss Warner to 'tilt' skillfully or successfully in their discussions of Byron implies the difficulty of being a good English knight in the face of foreign depravity. MacDonald wants a hero, yet it is not until Donal Grant that he finds one fit to defend English poetry against Byronic corruption.

(Mac)Donal(d) as Red Cross Knight

MacDonald's condemnation of Byron accords with contemporary treatments of the poet, whose wild life troubled the decorous sensibilities of Victorian audiences and critics alike. His novels imply that Byron stands beyond

contempt, and possibly beyond salvation. His unforgiving assessment contrasts with that of his fellow critic Matthew Arnold, with whom MacDonald, on other issues, generally tended to agree. Arnold declared in his 1881 essay on Byron that the world was on the verge of awakening to the greatness of Byron's poetry, and paired him with Wordsworth as 'first and preeminent [...] among the English poets of this century'.²⁸ Like Arnold, however, MacDonald sets up Byron in opposition to the other *enfant terrible* of Romantic poetry, Percy Shelley, with Byron playing the fallen demon to Shelley's beautiful angel. In *Sir Gibbie* this opposition plays out in the rivalry between Fergus and Donal. Whereas Fergus seeks to imitate Byron in his poetry, Donal produces verse 'with a slight flavor of [Percy] Shelley' (SG, 410), a writer with whom MacDonald was more sympathetic,²⁹ and keener to identify.³⁰ As *Sir Gibbie* chronicles Donal's rise from obscurity to heroism, we find a protagonist with a decided resemblance to MacDonald. Through much of the novel he suffers social embarrassment as a country boy transplanted to the university town. Rural clothing sets him apart: even through the sympathetic eyes of Ginevra, 'he looked undeniably odd' (SG, 336) in his coarse-woven shirt, 'buff-colored fustian' trousers, 'olive-green waistcoat', 'blue tail-coat with lappet', 'well-polished' hob-nailed boots and 'beaver hat' (SG, 333). Country living suited him better, she reflects: 'he was a more harmonious object [...] when dressed in his corduroys and blue bonnet, walking the green fields, with cattle about him' (SG, 336) than consorting with polite urban society, which judges his appearance to be 'very queer' (SG, 336) indeed. His awkwardness may originate in MacDonald's own youthful experiences: as Colin Manlove observes, '[i]t seems clear enough from the biographical facts we have that MacDonald suffered from his own uncouthness in society'.³¹ Like Donal, MacDonald in his college years was plagued with poverty, and he frequently required financial assistance. As he

²⁸ Matthew Arnold, 'Byron', 1881, *Essays in Criticism* (New York, n.d.), 384.

²⁹ See especially MacDonald's 1860 essay 'Shelley', written for the 8th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Vol. 20, 1860), 100–4.

³⁰ Elsewhere I discuss Donal's development as a specifically Shelleyan protagonist; see 'Gothic Degeneration and Romantic Rebirth in *Donal Grant*', *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, eds. Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow, 2013), 198–215. For further discussion of MacDonald's Shelleyan protagonists, see also '“The Cruel Painter” as a Re-Writing of the Shelley-Godwin Triangle', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies* 26 (2007), 48–76.

³¹ Colin Manlove, 'George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Campbell (New York, 1979), 82.

wrote to his father in 1847, 'I do not expect to save anything in my present situation. You have no idea what it is to live in London. I have paid £7 for boots & shoes since I came, and not a pair but you would say is worn to the last'.³²

Linguistic differences exacerbate Donal's discomfiture, as Doric becomes a social liability in the university town where none of Ginevra's young lady friends can 'understand such broad Scotch' (*SG*, 340). The girls dismiss Donal as 'a clodhopper' and 'a treasure of poverty-stricken amusement' (*SG*, 336), tittering uncontrollably whenever he opens his mouth, and openly preferring his mute friend Gibbie, 'because he could not speak, which was much less objectionable than speaking like Donal! — and funny, too, though not so funny as Donal's clothes' (*SG*, 340). By contrast, Fergus Duff scorns his rural origins and native dialect in the interests of social advancement. Fergus's protest that he, a 'magistrand [...] about to take his degree of Master of Arts' cannot understand Donal's 'vulgar Scotch' is disingenuous, a cover for the fact that he feels threatened by the 'upstart' herd-boy, now that Donal has made it to university and is no longer the 'cleaner-out of his father's byres' (*SG*, 369). Donal's inability to make any headway with Ginevra and her friends works its way into a nightmare rife with Spenserian overtones: he dreams he is an enchanted serpent, a 'laithly worm' (*SG*, 338) gripping a book in his coils, who wants desperately to speak to a lady clad in Juniper (which translates as the French word *ginèvre*, from which Ginevra is derived). Unfortunately, he can emit nothing but an inarticulate hiss (*SG*, 339).

The clash with Fergus marks his transformation, when the serpent scales fall away and he stands revealed in his true identity as chivalric defender of literature. His appearance changes too: 'town-made clothes' replace shepherd garb, and he greets Ginevra 'with an air of homely grace' like that of 'the Red Cross Knight [putting] on the armour of a Christian man [...] From a clownish fellow he straightway appeared the goodliest knight in the company' (*SG*, 366). Release from inarticulate enchantment to heroic eloquence brings with it a new ability to communicate: following the showdown with Fergus, he goes on to have 'a good deal of talk about the true and false in poetry' (*SG*, 372) with Ginevra, (though she still rejects him and marries Gibbie in the end). Fergus, meanwhile, emerges worse for wear, revealed by Donal to be 'a poor

³² George MacDonald to George MacDonald Sr., 12 Jan 1847 (George MacDonald Collection 103.1.3.147. Beinecke Library, New Haven); see also Raeper, *George MacDonald* 43, 44; Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 68.

shallow creature' (SG, 381) given to showiness and pretention.

The image of Donal as the Red Cross Knight, defender of truth in literature, has further biographical resonances. MacDonald's friends seem to have considered him as a kind of literary Saint George: a drawing by his friend and illustrator Arthur Hughes portrays MacDonald (along with his daughter Mary, dressed as Carroll's Alice) at his writing desk, in the position of Saint George, lounging atop the prostrate body of the defeated dragon (see Fig. 1).

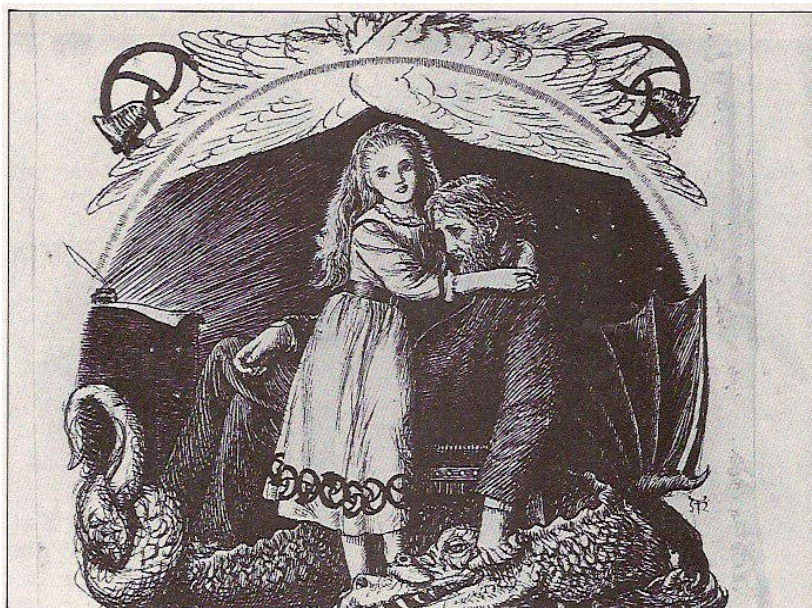


Fig. 1. Undated drawing by Arthur Hughes, portraying George MacDonald as Saint George, and his daughter Mary MacDonald as Lewis Carroll's Alice. (From William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, 1987)).

Years later, his son Greville would called his visionary romance *Lilith* 'the Revelation of St. George', a byname that pleased MacDonald and his wife both.³³ Donal's encounter with Fergus emphasises the heroic significance that MacDonald attached to literary endeavours, illustrating his 'equation,' as William Raeper describes it, that 'true knights are also true poets'.³⁴

That he saves the heroic glitter for a critical debate about literary representation suggests a new kind of heroism, however. MacDonald

³³ *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 548.

³⁴ Raeper, 211.

straddles the ages, one foot planted in the camp of his radical visionary Romantic predecessors, and the other on the side of his contemporaries, the eminent (and eminently long-bearded) Victorians. *Sir Gibbie* reveals this duality and mythologises a historic shift at work. The Romantic celebration of poet-hero (such as we find, for example, with Anodos in MacDonald's *Phantastes*) is giving way to a new champion, the Victorian critic-hero, an unaffected, reform-minded man capable of discerning literary wheat from chaff with intellectual rigor and sober judgement. *Sir Gibbie* provides an opportunity for self-mythologising, too, as Donal's display of critical prowess fits with MacDonald's real-life role as lecturer and critic. Overall, we might position the episode as a response to Matthew Arnold's call for literary criticism in 'The Function of Criticism in the Present Time' (1865), in which he disparages the earlier Romantic movement as a 'premature' 'burst of creative activity' that needed an intellectual, critical foundation to uphold it. MacDonald knew Arnold's work and shared Arnold's view of poetry as a high and sacred pursuit. Whether Donal's outburst constitutes a deliberate response to Arnold's call for criticism, or whether MacDonald's ideas were simply running along a parallel course, remains a question. Certainly, however, the parallels are suggestive. Donal's censure of Fergus (not to mention Byron) implies that literature wants a new hero, not a larger-than-life Romantic poet-adventurer, but a humble and unpretentious Victorian critic-hero to defend its sacred integrity. In *Sir Gibbie*, that hero is Donal Grant. In real life, it is MacDonald himself. *Sir Gibbie* reveals this duality and mythologises a historic shift at work. The Romantic celebration of poet-hero (such as we find, for example, with Anodos in MacDonald's *Phantastes*) is giving way to a new champion, the Victorian critic-hero, an unaffected, reform-minded man capable of discerning literary wheat from chaff with intellectual rigor and sober judgement. *Sir Gibbie* provides an opportunity for self-mythologising, too, as Donal's display of critical prowess fits with MacDonald's real-life role as lecturer and critic. Overall, we might position the episode as a response to Matthew Arnold's call for literary criticism in 'The Function of Criticism in the Present Time' (1865), in which he disparages the earlier Romantic movement as a 'premature' 'burst of creative activity' that needed an intellectual, critical foundation to uphold it. MacDonald knew Arnold's work and shared Arnold's view of poetry as a high and sacred pursuit. Whether Donal's outburst constitutes a deliberate response to Arnold's call for criticism, or whether MacDonald's ideas were simply running along a parallel course, remains a question. Certainly, however, the

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The Literary and Theological Otherworlds in MacDonald's Fairy Tales

Adam Walker

The otherworlds of George MacDonald's fairy tales are described as magical, overlay landscapes, which exist parallel to our own world and provide a pervasive and interactive space that outwardly reflects the characters' inward journeys. These "otherworlds," as described by medievalist such as Howard Rolland Patch, and most recently by Aisling Byrne, may be broadly defined as spaces within medieval literature that are governed by supernatural laws or beings and interact within the natural spaces of the landscape. In medieval literature, this may include 'the next world, the world of fairies, an imaginary fantastical realm, or, less frequently, far-flung corners of the globe, such as the wondrous East or Antipodes.'¹ Within many of MacDonald's works, the entry into otherworlds marks the beginning of discovery, self-awareness, and greater communion with the divine. In stories such as *Phantastes*, *The Golden Key*, *Cross Purposes*, and *Lilith*, the otherworlds overlap with our own world and lie accessible through living portals, borderlands, or by manipulation of geometric planes of light, and those who journey through them undergo what Rolland Hein has rightly described as a purgative experience, through which the trials and refining fires make holy the characters, who come to a deeper faith in divine presence.² MacDonald's otherworlds, in this regard, have been considered in light of his reading of Dante's *Commedia*, and MacDonald's

¹ Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford, 2016), 5. See also Howard Patch's *The Other World, According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1950). In John Carey's analysis of Otherworlds in Irish literature, the space is defined as 'a minimal designation for any place inhabited by supernatural beings and itself exhibiting supernatural characteristics'. See John Carey, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 7 (1980), 1-27, (1).

² See Rolland Hein, *Christian Mythmakers: C. S. Lewis, Madeline L'Engle, J. R. R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, Charles Williams, Dante Alighieri, John Bunyan, Walter Wangerin, Robert Siegel, and Hannah Hurnard* (Eugene, OR., 2014) and Chad Schrock's 'From Child to Childlike: The Cycle of Education in Novalis and George MacDonald', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 25 (2016).

own sermons, such as a 'The Consuming Fire' and 'Justice.' Many studies of MacDonald's indebtedness to the German Romantic Movement, particularly Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), have also shed light on the way in which MacDonald's fairy tales reflect his understanding of life as a sacred journey.³ However, there remains much to be said about MacDonald's indebtedness to otherworlds found in English medieval literature and Celtic literature and theology.

This article will begin by examining the cultural significance of otherworlds within the Scottish fairy faith. Firstly, by examining the ways in which natural topography is associated with the supernatural otherworld, I hope to place MacDonald's use of landscape in context with the rules of Scottish fairy faith. Secondly, I will examine the role of the otherworld within English and Celtic literature to locate MacDonald's otherworlds within a larger literary framework and rooted in the mythology of early medieval and "Celtic" literature.⁴ Thirdly, I will examine the theological significance of Celtic otherworlds and how they operate according to the rules of MacDonald's Christian imagination.

The influence of Celtic literature on MacDonald from an early age was certainly great, as MacDonald's family was remarkably versed in the Celtic literary tradition and the belief in otherworlds.⁵ Within Scotland's cultural context, the otherworld has always been connected with the sense of natural place, particularly with specific geographic locations such as hills, forests, mounds, and wells. This belief permeates throughout Celtic literature and is best exemplified within the Scottish fairy faith itself, which can be traced as far back as the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Scotland.⁶ MacDonald's fairy tales

³ See, for example, Roderick McGillis, *George MacDonald: Literary Heritage and Heirs: Essays on the Background and Legacy of His Writing* (Zossima Press, 2008); Gisela H. Kreglinger and Eugene H. Peterson, *Storied Revelations: Parables, Imagination and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction* (Cambridge, 2014).

⁴ I use the term "Celtic" liberally to refer to those cultures associated with the Gaelic language, which was established in Scotland by Irish colonists (natives of the older Scotia) around 500 AD.

⁵ See Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, 'Rooted Deep: Discovering the Literary Identity of Mythopoeic Fantasist George MacDonald', *Linguaculture*, 2 (2014), 25–44. Johnson describes the literary family in which MacDonald grew up. One uncle was a Celtic scholar, a collector of Celtic fairy tales, and the author of the *Gaelic Highland Dictionary*. His grandfather was a patron for the controversial Ossian. A cousin was a Celtic academic, a step-uncle was a scholar of Shakespeare, and MacDonald's own mother was educated in classical literature and fluent in many languages.

⁶ The Anglo-Saxons, for instance, carried with them medicine books on remedies for fairy curses known as the *Leechbook* and *Lacnunga*. See Lizanne Henderson and Edward Cowen, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A Brief History*. (Dundurn, 2001), 47. Henderson

operate within an interactive cosmology reflected in the Scottish fairy faith, in which the natural world is overlaid with spiritual energies and significance.

Compared otherworlds in Greek and Roman mythology, J. A. MacCulloch describes the otherworlds of Celtic literature as highly individualised. He writes, '[m]any races have imagined a happy Other-World, but no other race has so filled it with magic beauty, or so persistently recurred to it as the Celts.'⁷ The Celtic otherworld as it appears within mythology and folklore exists in other dimensions or realms, underground, or in the west. 'Fairy land,' observes Evans-Wentz, 'actually exists as an invisible world within which the visible world is immersed like an island in an unexplored ocean, and it is peopled by more species of living beings in their world, because incomparable more vast and varied in its possibilities.'⁸ In his recent analysis of Irish narratives, John Carey defines otherworlds as 'a minimal designation for any place inhabited by supernatural beings and itself exhibiting supernatural characteristics.'⁹ Preferring not to approach otherworlds through shared textual characteristics exclusively, Aisling Byrne focuses on the archipelagic geography shared by the Celts and argues that the characteristics of the Celtic otherworlds should also be examined in context with the geography of the region. The otherworld, for the Celts, has always existed on the earth and was accessible through certain features of the landscape.

The literary record of Scottish fairy-lore began at the end of the fifteenth century with the tales of Thomas Rhymer. The legend, which tells of a boy abducted by the Queen of Elfland and returning with the gift of poetry and prophecy, was retold and popularised by Sir Walter Scott in the eighteenth century. Thomas Rhymer's tale, and others such as the Ballad of Tam Lin or James Hogg's 'Kilmeny' (in which the otherworld is described as 'A land of love, and a land of light,/Wihtouten sun, or mon, or night.../The land of vision it would seem,/A still, an everlasting dream') compare beautifully with the overlay otherworlds that appear in MacDonald's fairy tale novels.

Apart from the works of literature, our knowledge of the fairy faith in Scotland is informed by the records kept by monasteries, church councils, and town assemblies. The number of these records increased during the seventeenth century when the fairy faith had become a serious concern for

and Cowen speculate that fairy faith may have been introduced to Scotland by the immigrants from Scandinavia and that this is why the nature of fairies in Scotland differ from the nature of fairies in Ireland.

⁷ J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts* (Edinburgh, 1911).

⁸ Walter Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (London, 1911).

⁹ Carey, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', 1.

the Calvinist church. By nearly all accounts, encounters with the otherworld were closely related to geography and certain places within the landscape. In October 1675, in the town of Aberdeen, the fairy faith had become so serious a concern for the church that the local bishop and synod met to acknowledge and deal with ‘divers complaints’ among the locals who claimed, according to the Presbytery Records of Aberdeen, ‘under pretense of trances and familiaritie with spirits’ to have encountered and traveled ‘with these spirits commonly called the fairies.’¹⁰ Persecution followed throughout the Reformation as the fairies were increasingly being associated with the demonic. Calvinist officials sought to warn people of the fairy faith and to establish a safeguard against the so-called ‘seducers’ and ‘consulters’ of fairy-folk. Lizanne Henderson and Edward Cowan’s study observes that the sightings of the dead were also reported alongside interactions with fairies in certain geographical locations. Their book, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History*, provides the trial of a native Donald McIlmichall who was tried in 1677 on suspicion of conspiring with spirits. In his testimony, he stated that ‘on the night in the moenth of November 1676 he travelling...when at ane hill he saw a light not knowing quhair he was.’ There at the place called Dalnasheen, meaning literally in Gaelic ‘the field of the fairy hill,’ he encountered several fairies and met with them among various other places, such as Lismore and the Shian of Barcaldine.¹¹ Similarly, in the trial of Margaret Alexander, Alexander claimed that her father was carried back and forth over the place of St. Mungo’s Well. Fairy sightings and encounters proved dangerous as, in some places, people were put to death for encountering them. The conflict between Calvinism and the fairy faith was still residual during MacDonald’s time. MacDonald scholar Kerry Dearborn conjectures that it was this tension between the Calvinist church and the native Celtic beliefs that created a ‘faith crisis through which MacDonald’s theology was born.’¹² Over time, the otherworlds grew ever more distant.¹³

¹⁰ Henderson and Cowan, 61.

¹¹ Ibid., 43.

¹² Kerry Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald* (Aldershot, 2006), 9–10.

¹³ Geoffrey Chaucer, in the thirteenth century, blames the monks for driving out the fairies from the land. Other fantasists such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien related the separation to people’s physical relation to the land and their sense of home. In a letter to Arthur Greeves, 1930, Lewis recalls a conversation with Tolkien about the nature of people’s relationship to landscape and the belief in the supernatural beings that inhabited it. He writes:

Tolkien once remarked to me that the feeling of home must have been quite different in the days when a family fed on the produce of the same few hundred

In the seventeenth century, some Christians resisted the prevailing demonisation of fairies and sought, instead, to incorporate fairies into the established Calvinist theology. The most well-known example of this is the case of Robert Kirk, a seventeenth-century Presbyterian minister whose tract on otherworlds entitled *The Secret Commonwealth* is considered today as one of the most important works on the fairy faith in Scotland. Kirk's tract countered both the atheism that had arisen in Scotland and the Calvinist church. He argues that atheism begins with the denial of otherworlds and their inhabitants. He recognised a need to place fairy faith under the theology of the church and, throughout the tract, Kirk uses scripture from the Old and New Testaments with local testimonies of fairy encounters and ancient belief.¹⁴ Kirk observes how the descriptions of fairy encounters are marked

miles of country for six generations, and that perhaps this was why they saw nymphs in the fountains and dryads in the wood – they were not mistaken, for there was in a sense a real (not metaphorical) connection between them and the countryside. What had been earth and air & later corn and later still bread, really was in them. We of course who live on a standardised international diet (you may have had Canadian flour, English meat, Scotch oatmeal, African oranges & Australian wine today) are really artificial beings and have no connection (save in sentiment) with any place on earth. We are synthetic men, uprooted. The strength of the hills is not ours.

Tolkien's speculation and Lewis's adumbration inquire about the way in which fairy faith emerged in relation to land and how people's interaction and relationships with nature shape, inform, and fashion supernatural beliefs associated with place.

¹⁴ R.J. Stewart summarises the main tenants of Kirk's tract. According to Stewart's summary:

1. There is another world or dimension that mirrors our own: it is located underground. The cycle of energies and events in that place is a polarised image of our own, thus they have summer when we have winter, day when we have night, and so forth.
2. The inhabitants of this world are real beings in their own right and have certain substantial supernatural powers.
3. Certain people, mainly male seers, are gifted with the ability to see such beings from the mirror-or underworld, and to receive communications from them.
4. The subterranean people are able through signs and mimicry or dramatic actions to show seers what will come to pass in the human world. It is up to the seer to develop means of interpretation.
5. Humans can and do physically transfer to the fairy-or underworld.
6. The subterranean people are linked to the land, each region having its counterpart in the underworld. Thus they are, in one respect, the *genii loci* of the ancient world.
7. The spirits of the dead and of ancestors are also found in this underworld, though they are often distinct from the Fairy Race themselves.
8. Both the subterranean people and the seers who perceive them retain fragments of ancient religious and philosophical tradition, often at variance with the religious and scientific viewpoints of the day.
9. There are spiritual and psychic healers in the human world who work through

with the use of place-names and physical indicators within the landscape, such as mounds, fields, forests, glens, or wells. These topographic places mentioned among the trial testimonies and by writers such as Kirk provide, as Sean Kane describes, an 'oral map of a landscape touched everywhere by footprints of the supernatural.'¹⁵ The fairies are always on the borders of the geographic definitions in the landscape. The legend surrounding Kirk's death, which occurred shortly after the publication of his tract, is also linked to place. According to legend, he was abducted on a fairy hill for betraying the secrets of the inhabitants of the otherworlds. The Scottish Folklorist Stewart Sanderson records that Kirk 'was in the habit of taking a turn in his nightgown on summer evenings on the fairy hill beside the manse, in order to get breath of fresh air before retiring to bed: and one evening in 1692—14 May—his body was found lying. Apparently dead, on the hill.'¹⁶

On the role of geographic delineation, Kane speculates that the insistence on boundaries may have increased as a way in which to cope with the supernatural. Psychologically, the boundaries and places in the fairy faith serve as practical advantages by separating the normal world from the supernatural. Kane argues that this disconnection 'segregates the world of mystery from the world human beings have control over. Without the boundary, the world of mystery does not stand apart from the world of human making.'¹⁷ This multilayered and interactive cosmology of the Scottish fairy faith is represented in MacDonald's fairy tales, in which the natural world is overlaid with spiritual energies and significance.

The blending of these worlds in MacDonald's fairy tales occurs on the fringes, in the twilight, or with characters who share lineage with the fairies. In *The Golden Key*, MacDonald describes how the stories of Mossy's aunt would have been 'nonsense, had it not been that their little house stood on the borders of Fairyland.'¹⁸ The tale begins at twilight, the temporal threshold between night and day, the time when, according to the fairy faith, the veil between otherworlds grows thin. 'No mortal,' writes MacDonald in *Cross*

the methods laid down by tradition, often using corrupted prayers and incantations to accompany their healing ceremonies. These are of a different category to the seers, and do not seem to receive aid from the subterranean or underworld fairies.

See R.J. Stewart, *Robert Kirk: Walker Between Worlds: A New Edition of The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*. (Dorset, 1990), 12–13.

¹⁵ Sean Kane, *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*. (Ontario, 1998), 75.

¹⁶ Stewart Sanderson, 'A Prospect of Fairyland', *Folklore*, 75.1 (1964), 1–18.

¹⁷ Kane, 85.

¹⁸ George MacDonald, *The Complete Fairy Tales* (New York, 1999), 120.

Purposes, ‘or fairy either, can tell where Fairyland begins and where it ends.’ The spatial merging becomes a threshold and the initial stage in the journey of self-discovery and otherworld encounters. This liminality can be seen in *Phantastes* with Anodos’s first encounter with the woman whose cottage stands on the borders of Fairyland.

The sense of place was principal in the Celtic imagination and understanding of the world. According to Philip Sheldrake, the cosmology of the Celts influenced the way in which Celtic Christianity was carried forwards throughout the Christian period. Their forbearers ‘felt themselves to be surrounded by gods who were close at hand rather than distant and disengaged.’ The gods ruled and protected people and the earth from forces of evil. ‘Both places and people,’ Sheldrake writes, ‘effectively preserved this inheritance in a new version of the old sacred universe now framed within Christian community cultures.’¹⁹ In this sense, the landscape at one point was an extension of identity, as topographic locations served as portals, signs, and signifiers. Medievalist Alfred K. Siewers observes that the Celtic spiritual realm in the early Celtic story *Tochmarc Etaine* is accessed through mounds, islands, and springs within the landscape itself. ‘This “Otherworld”’, he writes, ‘is a framework for a number of early Christian Irish and Welsh texts, is always present but not visible to mortals because of Adam’s sin, according to the story.’²⁰ Thus, as monasticism grew in the Celtic countries of Ireland and Scotland, the sea and islands provided a place of ascetic solitude. Many historians, such as E.G. Bowen, conjecture that the early Celtic forms of asceticism were closely related to the eastern desert traditions.²¹ Sheldrake notes that, in the Hebrew scriptures, there are strong associations between the sea, the desert, and the otherworld.²² Like the desert of Eastern monasticism and the prophets of the Old Testament, the forests, sea, and islands provided a place of prayer and contemplation for the Celtic saints.

The Celtic monastic understanding of sea and islands occupy a dominant presence within MacDonald’s fairytales as well. In *Phantastes*, when Anodos, wearily seeking the path out of Fairyland, encounters the sea ‘bare, and waste, and gray’, he is overcome by its desolation. In the darkening twilight, he then attempts to escape through death by casting himself onto the waves, which

¹⁹ Philip Sheldrake, *Living Between Worlds* (Boston, Mass., 1995), 21.

²⁰ Alfred Siewers, ‘Orthodoxy and Ecopoetics: The Green World in the Desert Sea’, *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. John Chryssavgis, Bruce V. Foltz (New York, 2013), 243–62.

²¹ See E. G. Bowen, *Saints, Seaways, and Settlements* (Cardiff, 1977), 210–11.

²² Sheldrake, 23.

embrace him and keep him afloat. The waves sustain him until he is brought to a boat. Anodos's boat is driven onward by a mysterious power. The scenario may allude to Novalis's 'engen Kahn' [narrow boat] which carries the dying lover swiftly to the shores of heaven.²³ But, perhaps even more appropriate is its appearance in the Anglo-Norman chronicler, Nicholas Tivet's *Les chronicles*. His hagiographic legend of a saint being carried upon the sea by divine will was later made popular in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Chaucer's 'The Man of Law Tale'. Celtic saints, such as Columba of Iona and Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, often settled in places of liminality, upon borders of the wilderness, beside the sea or upon islands.²⁴

When Anodos awakes, he finds himself floating beside the shore of an island, which 'lay open to the sky and the sea.'²⁵ In the centre of the island stands a simple cottage that blends with the earth and rises out of the turf itself and seems to function as an otherworld apart from Fairyland.²⁶ The nurturing old woman who lives in the cottage demonstrates influence over Anodos's fate and holds power over the door into otherworlds. When, against the discretion of the old woman, Anodos enters the door of the Timeless, the waters around the cottage begin to rise, and he is urged to flee. He discovers that the island is really a peninsula and escapes over the isthmus and returns to Fairyland. For Celtic ascetics, there was an appeal to liminal places such as islands and shorelines as a place of access and a sense of closeness with the otherworld. 'To an extent,' as Sheldrake reminds us, 'all places were points of access, or doorways to the sacred.'²⁷ The natural world and the otherworld are signified through special topography and historical or spiritual significance.

Through these topographic locations in the fairy faith, as Sean Kane puts it, 'each world contaminates the other'.²⁸ MacDonald's fantasies draw on this otherworldly 'contamination', which has primarily been attributed to the German Romantic influence, particularly Novalis's model of the fairy tale or *Märchen*. Novalis's *Märchen*, a story 'without rational cohesion and yet filled with

²³ See Novalis's *Hymnen an die Nacht*, Hymn 6.

²⁴ Peter Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland* (London, 1991), 208.

²⁵ George MacDonald, *Phantastes* (Johannessen Press, 1994), 226.

²⁶ For the island motif in Celtic literature, see the *Voyage of Maelduin* and the island with the flaming rampart, which is also a doorway and vantage point. The *Voyage of Snedgus* is also notable with its account of an island where Enoch and Elijah dwell with a hundred doorways of burning altars at their thresholds. See Howard R. Patch, *The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), 32–3.

²⁷ Sheldrake, 32.

²⁸ Kane, 102.

associations, like dreams', with 'the whole of Nature...wonderously blended with the whole world of Spirit', embodies a reality already present within the cultural and literary fabric of Scotland. While Novalis undoubtedly influenced MacDonald, we cannot look to his *Märchen* as the source of MacDonald's otherworld-building. The way in which the subjects of MacDonald's fantasies interact with the worlds of spirit by undergoing a spiritual experience to attain a higher understanding and spiritual maturity is just as Celtic – if not more so – as it is German Romantic.

Locating MacDonald's Fairy Tales within the 'Celtic' Imagination

In his article 'The Argument of Comedy', Northrop Frye traces the genre of what he calls the 'green world' comedy throughout English Renaissance literature. The function of this 'green world' is employed most notably in the forests of Shakespeare's works, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale*. 'The action of the comedy', explains Frye, 'begins in the world represented as the normal world, moves into the green world, and goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comedic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.'²⁹ The plot progression operates under the Christian notion of *commedia*, and the drama of the green world employs the theme of 'the triumph of life over the wasteland, the death and revival of the year impersonated by figures still human and once divine as well.'³⁰ This triumph can be seen in John Milton's *Comus*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the works of medieval authors such as Peele, Lyly, Greene, and the Arthurian romances.

In MacDonald's most exemplary fantasies, *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, the two protagonists, Anodos and Mr. Vane, enter otherworlds and undergo a conversion before returning to the ordinary world they previously inhabited, a pattern already noted by Frye as present in medieval 'green world' literature. No one could contest the use of Celtic fairy-faith in *Phantastes*, but the inspiration for the nature of the landscape in *Lilith* is less apparent. The hidden world of *Phantastes* is explicitly "Faeire," and its permeation into the world of people occurs organically. The interaction with the overlay land in *Lilith* is further demarcated through MacDonald's dichotomies of awareness and sleep, waking and dream-life. *Lilith* underwent at least five drafts from 1890 to its publication in 1895. The otherworld in the first draft of *Lilith*,

²⁹ Northrop Frye, 'Argument of Comedy' (1948); repr. in *English Institute Essays*, ed. D.A. Robertson, Jr. (New York, 1949), 182.

³⁰ Ibid.

the manuscript referred to as *Lilith A*, is markedly different from the final version published in 1895. In *Lilith A*, the protagonist, a young Henry Fane, returns from Oxford to his estate and undergoes a spiritual journey to find his father who has gone missing in another world, much like the legend of Robert Kirk's disappearance. In the subsequent draft known as *Lilith B*, we find that 'the other world', as MacDonald refers to it in *Lilith A*, is replaced with 'the region of seven dimensions'. Deirdre Hayward attributes this region to the German mystic Jakob Boehme's 'seven eternally-generating qualities', which compromise God's trinitarian nature.³¹ While Hayward's ascription is certainly plausible, MacDonald's dimensions do not directly correspond to Boehme's 'qualities', and it is more likely, as speculated by Hein, that MacDonald drew from Dante's realm of three earthly dimensions with an addition of four heavenly dimensions. Hein also conjectures that MacDonald's replacement of 'the other world' with its more metaphysical substitute was meant to appeal to the 'rational types' at the end of the century: perhaps MacDonald feared that contemporary readers would not take fairy land seriously enough. Regardless of the difference, the nature of spiritual overlay landscapes in MacDonald's fantasies consistently reflects and informs the characters within his novels as well as his readers.

Alfred K. Siewers traces the roots of the 'green world' tradition even further to Celtic otherworld literature such as *Immram Brain* and the mythological cycle *Tochmarc Etaine*, which 'focuses on a network' of geographically-specific 'portals to the Otherworld'.³² The Celtic mythologies concerning the Tuatha Dé Danaan, the clanspeople devoted to the Earth goddess Dana, provide a spoken map of stories, place-names, and associations overlaid with spiritual signification. The settings and characters of such tales are associated with topography such as graves, elfmounds, fairy hills, and rises; the lands and their inhabitants 'link hill to hill', as Kane describes.³³ The crossing water, or undergoing a symbolic baptism before entering into the 'green world' (such as the stream that flows over the carpet before Anodos's path into Fairyland) is 'a common requirement for many travelers to the Otherworld, found time and time again in myths, legends, sagas, poetry and medieval romances'.³⁴

The Celtic Christians of Scotland and Ireland derived their emphasis on

³¹ Deirdre Hayward, 'George MacDonald and Jacob Boehme: Lilith and the Seven-fold Pattern of Existence', *An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 16 (1999) 55–72, (59).

³² Alfred Siewers, 'Orthodoxy and Ecopoetics: The Green World in the Desert Sea' *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration*, (New York, 2013), 243–62, (243).

³³ Kane, 72.

³⁴ Henderson, 36.

nature from their forbearers. Sheldrake observes that the traditional Celtic mythology 'had been fundamentally positive in its understanding of the world.'³⁵ The Celtic approach is significantly different from the Anglo-Saxon understanding, as the medievalist Jennifer Neville argues. Neville observes that, as opposed to the Anglo-Saxons' poetry, the Celtic mythologies offer 'the representation of the natural world' in the context of the 'wonder and joy that surrounds the seeking of God.' Within Anglo-Saxon poetry, however, the representation of nature and landscape tends to create a 'context of helplessness and alienation of that natural world that motivates seeking God.'³⁶ The Celtic understanding of humanity and the world was through participation with the cosmos, rather than transcendence or dominance over.

It is important to note this difference in early English literature when locating MacDonald's representations of both an immanent and a transcendent God. The struggle to find a synthesis between the two is exemplified in the philosophy of the two Romantic poets who most influenced MacDonald: Novalis and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Novalis was reacting against the egotistical idealism of J.G. Fichte and his insistence on the transcendence of the "I" towards the "Absolute," God. This transcendence, according to Fichte, requires a rejection of nature in order to access the spiritual realm. Novalis sought to incorporate a pantheistic, Spinozian understanding of the natural world through which humankind could access God. The synthesis of Fichte's idealism and cosmological integration is represented in his *Blütenstaub* fragments and his idea of the *Märchen*.

For Coleridge, the problem was represented in his axiomatic understanding of all philosophy as either "I AM" or "IT IS" – a philosophy based on either the subject or object. In describing these two philosophies, Coleridge scholar Thomas McFarland categorises the IT IS philosophies as the reality of things. This distinction would include Aristotle's philosophy, the associations of Locke and Hartley, behavioristic psychology, Communist theory, Bertrand Russell's philosophy, etc.³⁷ Platonic philosophy, the theology of the early church, Berkeley's idealism, and German idealism, would fall under the I AM category, which locates the mind as the centre-point of reality. In the ontological study of IT IS, knowledge of God comes through the study of things. In his early years, Coleridge's proclivities were toward pantheism, though later in life

³⁵ Sheldrake, 70.

³⁶ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999), 37.

³⁷ Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford, 1969), 56.

he reconciled the two approaches through his concept of the imagination. MacDonald's understanding of the imagination (found most notably in 'The Fantastic Imagination' and 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Cultures') provides a similar reconciliation between the conflicting philosophies, but in a different way, as we shall see.

I return briefly to the Celtic imagination and its understanding of God's immanence in context with the Anglo-Saxon's idea of a transcendent God to enquire what significance the Celtic imagination has on the theology it produced. Acknowledging the usefulness of Neville's argument, Siewers observes that the 'so-called Celtic Otherworld of stories such as *Tochmarc Etaine* and *Immram Brain*' had 'morphed' into the 'green world' tradition of medieval and Renaissance literature.³⁸ Siewers also observes that the Celtic otherworlds theologically influenced and were entertained by the Irish theologian of the ninth century Johannes Scotus Eriugena. Of Eriugena's philosophy of nature, Siewers writes that 'physical Creation is a continuum from primordial causes that he describes as divine to theophanies and their physical effects.' 'The result,' Siewers adds, 'is a physical world sparkling with divine energies or meaning, in which dialectic and metonym and hermeneutics iconographically become incarnational processes.'³⁹ The Celtic understanding of nature as a living and interactive component of the cosmos and existing within a larger spiritual nature is the very fabric that makes up MacDonald's fairy tale landscapes. For example, in *Phantastes*, MacDonald writes:

As through the hard rock go the branching silver veins; as into the solid land run the creeks and gulfs from the un-resting sea; as the lights and influences of the upper worlds sink silently through the earth's atmosphere; so doth Faerie invade the world of men, and sometimes startle the common eye with association as of cause and effect, when between the two no connecting links can be traced.⁴⁰

The world of Faerie interacts with the 'world of men' through subtle permeation analogous to the natural influences of light and airs of the atmosphere. Anodos's considerations on the overlay spiritual landscape reflect

³⁸ Alfred Siewers, 'The Green Otherworlds of Early Medieval Literature', *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. Louise Westling (Cambridge, 2014), 31–44, (36).

³⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁰ *Phantastes*, 30.

the Celtic understanding of nature as theophany and Eriugena's understanding of nature being alive with the energies of God.⁴¹

Eriugena's divisions of nature involve a cyclical motion that entails a creation springing from God and apophatically returning to God. His philosophy implies both divine immanence and transcendence over nature itself. In Book I of *De divisione naturae*, Eriugena describes nature as having four divisions: the first is the species of 'what creates and is not created'; the second is 'what is created and creates'; the third is 'what is created and does not create'; and the fourth is 'what neither creates nor is created'.⁴² The nature of the world is defined as the second and third, the nature of first causes or ideas, and the phenomenal world of material and sensible things. God is attributed to the first and fourth divisions of nature, in which nature has its beginning and in which all things have their end. Eriugena posits nature as a manifestation or overflow of God. In Book IV, Chapter 7, Eriugena describes the mind as existing and acting eternally within the divine: '[f]or I understand the substance of the entire man to be no other than his idea in the mind of the artificer who knew all things in himself before they were made; and that very knowledge is the true and only substance of those things which are known, since they subsist formed most perfectly in it eternally and immutably.' This understanding is built upon Eriugena's definition of a human as 'a certain intellectual idea eternally made in the Divine Mind.'⁴³

MacDonald seems to echo Eriugena's theophanic cycle of nature when describing the imagination. In 'Individual Development', during the soul's first comprehension of death, the soul is 'filled with horror' with the knowledge that 'all things are on the steep-sloping path to final evanishment, uncreation, non-existence.'⁴⁴ The wisdom of the soul, aided by the imagination, urges the question, 'Is not vitality, revealed in growth, itself an unending resurrection?' Similarly, in his essay, 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture', MacDonald defines the purpose of the imagination as 'to inquire into what God has made.'⁴⁵ He describes the imagination as a creative faculty that provides a context under which the scientific and intellectual laws may be understood. Imagination is 'that faculty which gives form to thought—not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in

⁴¹ Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Divisions of Nature* (Indianapolis, IN, 1976), 30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴⁴ George MacDonald, *Dish of Orts* (Whitehorn, CA., 2009), 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

sound, or in any mode upon which the senses can lay hold.' In this way, MacDonald's definition of the imagination bears resemblance to the famous passage in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, in which Coleridge attributes the imagination under two categories.⁴⁶

MacDonald, however, modifies the imaginative process to be imitative of God rather than entirely creative. The imagination is to 'give the name of man's faculty to that power after which and by which it was fashioned.'⁴⁷ For MacDonald, the imagination of the person is 'made in the imagination of God.' The poet's imagination, for MacDonald, appears here as a passive participant. He writes, '[i]ndeed a man is rather being thought than thinking, when a new thought arises in his mind.' Whereas Coleridge posits the human imagination as an active participant in God's creative process, MacDonald qualifies it as a representative of God's creation. MacDonald's imagination, in this sense, is more sympathetic towards a Celtic understanding of nature and the mind. Coleridge, who admired the writings of Eriugena and the theophanic cosmology within it, was nevertheless more suspicious of its pantheistic implications.

Agency, intellectual and moral, was a characteristic safeguard against pantheism for Coleridge's imagination. However, MacDonald's understanding of the human mind as a microcosm of God's mind provides an agency to surrender to the harmony of the divine *Logos*, the fulfillment of which is that the person 'shall be a pure microcosm, faithfully reflecting, after his manner, the mighty microcosm.'⁴⁸ This passage harkens to St. Maximus the Confessor's understanding of humanity as *Imago Dei*, a microcosm of the energies of God. The energetic 'divine function' of the imagination, for MacDonald, is to incarnate of the idea into form. Imagination 'has a duty altogether human, which is paramount to that function—the duty, namely, which springs from

⁴⁶ Coleridge writes:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. XIII.

⁴⁷ MacDonald, *Dish of Orts*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

his immediate relation to the Father, that of following and finding out the divine imagination in whose image it was made'. To do this, one must 'watch its signs, its manifestations. He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the work of His hands'.⁴⁹ This contemplation is largely dependent on the harmony of which the fully-developed human imagination is a product.

Semiosis and the Imagination

In his essay 'Individual Development', MacDonald describes the process through which a child develops their ego apart from their mother by relying on their senses and perceiving the external world. 'By degrees', he writes, '[the child] has learned that the world is around, and not within him—that he is apart, and that is apart.' At this point, the world around him, 'is not his mother, and, actively at least, neither loves him nor ministers to him, reveal themselves certain relations, initiated by fancies, desires, preferences, that arise within himself'.⁵⁰ In a similar argument put forth in his essay 'The Fantastic Imagination', MacDonald describes a law or harmony that may be intuited through the semiotic process of making meaning through understanding the external world.

In cosmological semiosis, Eriugena introduced a unique ontology in which being denotes 'a sign of superessential non-being'.⁵¹ By positing being itself as a manifestation, Giraud argues that Eriugena's theophany is dependent upon the infusing of manifestation with signification. Theophany, he writes, 'must therefore be read as implementing a radical move which results in an assimilation of phenomenality in general to the mode of commonly attributed to the sign'.⁵² Being is, therefore, 'both the manifestation of God and the sign of God'.⁵³ While beings are 'signifying manifestations' of the divine, God himself is regarded as transcendent and beyond the second and third divisions of nature. Throughout his fairy tales such as 'The Light Princess' and *The Princess and the Goblin*, MacDonald's characters learn to see immanence of God within nature and to respond accordingly to the extensions of God's revelation through nature.

The understanding of the external in relation to the self comes from the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Vincent Giraud, 'Being as Sign: Note on the Eriugenian Ontology', in Willemien Otten and Michael I. Allen (eds), *Eriugena and Creation: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on Eriugenian Studies* (Turnhout, 2014), 224.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 225.

third universal motion of the soul, as described by Eriugena in Book II of *De divisionae naturae*. The three motions include the mind, reason, and sense. He writes:

The third motion is composite, (and is that) by which the soul comes into contact with that which is outside her as though by certain signs and re-forms within herself the reasons of visible things...For first (the soul) receives the phantasies of the things themselves through the exterior sense, (which is) fivefold because of the number of the corporeal instruments in which and through which it operates, and by gathering them into itself (and) sorting them out as it sets them in order; then, getting through them to the reasons of the things of which they are the phantasies, she moulds them [I mean the reasons] and shapes the into conformity with herself.⁵⁴

Similarly, in 'The Imagination', MacDonald states that 'the world...is the human being turned inside out. All that moves in the mind is symbolized in nature.' It is easy, here, to recognise the similarities between MacDonald and the German Idealists' mind-world reflexivity and the subjective and objective reciprocities of nature. However, both the Idealists' duality and MacDonald's use of landscape, self-reflection, and imagination are closely related to the philosophy of Eriugena and even older Celtic literature. According to Eriugena scholar Dermot Moran, the philosophical idealists themselves are indebted to the Celtic world-view. Moran argues that the German models of Idealism were inheritors of Eriugena's thought. He writes:

Idealism based on a developed concept of subjectivity and a thinking through of the implications of divine immateriality was not only possible in the Middle Ages but found actual and sophisticated expression in Johannes Scottus Eriugena.⁵⁵

Eriugena's understanding of the relationship between the mind and nature bears idealist 'colourings' by bearing witness 'to a conviction, which later reappears in German absolute idealism (Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Feuerbach), but which derives from the theology of the Word (verbum) in the prologue to

⁵⁴ Eriugena, 177.

⁵⁵ Dermot Moran and Stephen Gersh, 'Spiritualis Incrassatio', in *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition*. (Notre Dame, IN., 2006), 125.

the Gospel of John, that the process of divine creation may be thought of also as a process of the divine self-knowledge.' Like the place-names associated with fairy faith and the relationship between the mind and world in German idealism, the landscapes in MacDonald's fantasies embody mentalities and convey toponymic information.⁵⁶ Nature becomes a character that mirrors both the author's psychological and spiritual journey and operates as an extension of divine will. In moments of reflection, the divine theophany of nature reveals itself unbidden and unsought for.⁵⁷

The use of otherworlds and its significance within MacDonald's fairy stories reflect a unique theological understanding of the natural world in relation to the mind. Thus, the role of MacDonald's otherworlds and its use in earlier medieval and Celtic traditions can provide a new vantage point in examining MacDonald's cultural, literary, and theological inheritance behind his understanding of nature, the imagination, and God's presence in creation. Richard Reis observes antecedents for MacDonald's understanding of God's self-expression in nature within Emanuel Swedenborg, Jakob Boehme, and William Law. Hein extends his list to include the English Romantic visionary William Blake, and goes so far as to say that MacDonald's thoughts were 'most directly shaped by the German Romantics.'⁵⁸ Hein describes MacDonald's sacramental understanding of nature – that the supernatural and divine communicate and dwell through symbols – as emanating from the 'unconscious portion of nature' within 'man's innermost being.' These images and thoughts

⁵⁶ See Henderson, 42.

⁵⁷ See *Phantastes*, 320. In the closing of *Phantastes*, Anodos describes a glimpse into an overlay reality. He writes:

I will end my story with the relation of an incident which befell me a few days ago. I had been with my reapers, and, when they ceased their work at noon, I had lain down under the shadow of a great, ancient beech-tree, that stood on the edge of the field. As I lay, with my eyes closed, I began to listen to the sound of the leaves over-head. At first, they made sweet inarticulate music alone; but, by-and-by, the sound seemed to begin to take shape, and to be gradually molding itself into words; till, at last, I seemed able to distinguish these, half-dissolved in a little ocean of circumfluent tones: 'A great good is coming—is coming—is coming to thee, Anodos'; and so over and over again. I fancied that the sound reminded me of the voice of the ancient woman, in the cottage that was four-square. I opened my eyes, and, for a moment, almost believed that I saw her face, with its many wrinkled and its young eyes, looking at me from between two hoary branched of the beech over-head. But when I looked more keenly, I saw only twigs and leaves, and the infinite sky, in tiny spots gazing through between.

⁵⁸ Rolland, Hein, *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald* (Eugene, OR., 2013), 68.

arise from a nature that moves and has its being in God and are ordered according to laws that the imagination often intuitively long before they are ascertained as laws.⁵⁹ The unity of substance within MacDonald's landscapes and their features reflect, by virtue of God's immanence in all things and, corresponding to Eriugena, strong associations between underlying realities and the landscapes his characters inhabit. In this way, the role of MacDonald's otherworlds and its use in earlier medieval and Celtic traditions can provide a new vantage point in examining MacDonald's cultural, literary, and theological inheritance behind his understanding of nature, the imagination, and God's presence in creation. Re-reading MacDonald's fairy tales in context with the otherworld traditions and considering how his theories of the imagination are rooted in his incarnational and sacramental understanding of nature, reveal how MacDonald's stories share in the Celtic imagination embodied in Scotland's literary and theological perspectives.

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⁵⁹ In his essay 'The Imagination', MacDonald includes in a footnote an anecdote on the role of the imagination in ascertaining nature's laws. He writes:

This paper was already written when, happening to mention the present subject to a mathematical friend, a lecturer at one of the universities, he gave us a corroborative instance. He has lately guessed that a certain algebraic process could be shortened exceedingly if the method which his imagination suggested should prove to be a true one—that is, an algebraic law. He put it to the test of experiment—committed the verification, that is, into the hands of his intellect—and found the method true.

MacDonald's son and biographer, Greville, records a similar conversation with his father on the laws of mathematics and their relation to nature:

Once, forty years ago, I held conversation with my father on the laws of symbolism. He would allow that the algebraic symbol, which concerns only the three-dimensioned, has no substantial relation to the unknown quality; nor the 'tree where it falleth' to the man unredeemed, the comparison being false. But the rose, when it gives some glimmer of freedom for which a man hungers, does so because of its substantial unity with the man, each in degree being a signature of God's immanence

See Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (Whitehorn, CA., 1998), 482.

Trickster Turned Sadist: Tradition and the Breakdown of Tradition in 'The Carasoyne'

Per Klingberg

George MacDonald published his fairy tale 'The Fairy Fleet – an English Märchen' in the April issue of the periodical *The Argosy* during 1866. Four years later, the story was included in the author's ten-volume work *Works of Fancy and Imagination* (1871). As the story migrated from periodical to book, however, it was also subject to some drastic changes. Not only did MacDonald rename the story 'The Carasoyne', but it was also substantially expanded through the addition of a second part, making it almost twice as long as the original text. While the first part of the story depicted a young Scottish boy named Colin's struggle to rescue a human girl who had been taken by mischievous fairies, the revised version of the story was given a continuation that stretches well into the protagonist's adulthood. Now a married man and a father of three, Colin is once again visited by the vindictive fairies who abduct his son, forcing him to undergo a series of trials similar to those he faced as a young boy. This second part of the story makes for a reading experience that is at the same time weirdly familiar and unsettlingly strange. Although the plot structure is an almost exact reproduction of the first part, the tone of the story is now decidedly darker, especially in the portrayal of the fairies: originally portrayed as mischievous tricksters, prone to pinch their human captives for fun, they have now turned into truly malevolent creatures, threatening to maim Colin's son. Paradoxically, MacDonald increasingly emphasises the *Scottish* nature of the tale in this second part while changing the setting of the story from Scotland to Devon, drawing more clearly on a folkloric tradition.

Scholars discussing 'The Carasoyne' have tended to view this second part as either an entirely superfluous addition, adding nothing to our understanding of the story, or at worst an unfortunate revision that spoils a perfectly good text. While Robert Lee Wolff, for instance, *does* pay attention to the second part, he does so primarily in order to criticise, stating that whereas the original version was 'by far MacDonald's most successful fairy-tale since *Phantastes*', the second part was 'a major lapse in taste' and an expression of 'savagery' on MacDonald's behalf. In Wolff's view, the stylistic and thematic change

undermines the qualities of the first part, leading him to conclude that '[t]he story has been spoiled' by these revisions.¹ Richard Reis, on the other hand, seems to have only the first part of the story in mind when he describes it as 'a delightful trip through a world of toy ships and brownies into which a child is suddenly projected'.² In his article 'Maturation and Education in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales', Dieter Petzold explicitly dismisses the importance of this second part of the story, stating that he will forego discussion of it entirely, since 'the maturation theme is merely reduplicated and blurred in the second part'.³ It is not necessary to share Wolff's negative assessment of the second version of the story in order to agree with him that the continuation is to be understood as something more than a pointless repetition. Here, everything seems to have taken a sudden turn for the nasty. As Wolff puts it, '[t]he fairies and goblins have always been mischievous; but they are now sadistic. Colin has always been dreamy, but he is now passive and incompetent. The old woman has always been blind, but she is now terrifying'.⁴

The aim of this article, however, is not so much to evaluate the changes that MacDonald made to his story as to examine and discuss them as compositionally motivated, suggesting that they serve an artistic purpose. What is the significance of the repetitive element of the second part and why is it so much darker than the first part? This essay will trace how MacDonald's revisions serve to create a text that more emphatically highlights the Scottish theme and more explicitly draws on an older folkloric tradition in its portrayal of the fairies, rather than the playful figures of contemporary children's fiction. This increased reliance on folkloric figures and motifs is, in many ways, congenial to the significantly darker tone of this second part. As Carole Silver has pointed out in her seminal study of Victorian fairy faith, *Strange and Secret Peoples* (1999), works of folklore had a degree of freedom unknown to other literary works produced in the Victorian era:

Unlike the revised or composed fairy tales Victorians read in such profusion, the folklore they gathered was filled with sex and violence. Less expurgated than much Victorian fiction, permitted to be 'crude'

¹ Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key* (New Haven, 1961), 132–3.

² Richard H. Reis, *George MacDonald* (New York, 1972), 80.

³ Dieter Petzold, 'Maturation and Education in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales', in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 12 (1993), 10–24, (21).

⁴ Wolff, 134.

because authentic, Victorian folklore collections provide a set of insights into the ways in which a culture sought to externalize evil.⁵

For an author intent on using the fairy tale as a vehicle for a serious discussion of moral questions and the problem of evil, the use of folkloric motifs could serve as a means by which to achieve greater artistic license and intellectual freedom. Emphasising the *Scottish* nature of the fairies serves a similar purpose. As Silver points out, there was a broad consensus among fairy-versed Victorians that Celtic fairies were particularly dangerous:

Anglo-Saxon and Celt alike agreed that the slaugh (the host), the sidhe (mainly perceived as female), and many of the other fairies of Ireland and Scotland were neither harmless nor playful - unlike some of the elfin peoples found in other parts of England.⁶

It bears pointing out, however, that ‘The Carasoy’ is not a merely passive reflection of a tradition: although MacDonald is an author with a profound understanding of the traditions of the genres that he works in, he is not subservient to them. On the contrary, he is rather prone to employ the conventions of genre in unconventional ways, thus achieving unexpected and unsettling effects. As John Patrick Pazdziora aptly describes it, MacDonald ‘re-appropriated [traditional fairy-tales] to his own ends; with his deep understanding of not just literary fairy tales but the folklore behind them, he seems to have seen himself in a living, ongoing storytelling tradition’.⁷

While ‘The Carasoy’ makes more extensive use of folk traditions than its predecessor, it is *also* a decidedly less traditional text. In the second part of the story, MacDonald subtly undermines a series of fairy tale conventions, and traditional tropes are used to portray the fragility of the societal order that they depend on, at times seemingly at the verge of falling apart, confronted with exile, moral degeneracy and modernity. In other words, highlighting and discussing how and when the text departs from and breaks with convention is just as important a task as to identify the conventions that the text draws upon.

The premise of the story, in ‘The Fairy Fleet’ – as well as in ‘The Carasoy’ –

⁵ Carole Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples* (New York, 1999), 149.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷ John Patrick Pazdziora, ‘How the Fairies were not Invited to Court’ in Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora & Ginger Stelle (eds), *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, Occasional Papers 17 (Glasgow, 2013), 254–73, (256).

is fairly simple: as a boy, Colin lives a rather lonely life with his shepherd father in the Scottish countryside. Having decided to alter the course of a brook, so that it will run through their cottage, Colin is at first delighted to discover that a fairy fleet now sails through their house at nighttime until he learns that the fairies have kidnapped a human girl. The fairy queen agrees to set the human girl free if Colin is able to bring her a magic concoction known as the Carasoy. Initially, Colin is at a loss as how to achieve this, but suddenly recalls how he, at a very early age, lost his way on the Scottish moors, and suddenly found himself standing outside a cottage, in which a mysterious wise woman resided – a figure that, of course, ought to be very familiar to any reader of MacDonald. She helped him find his way home then and, surely, she will be able to assist him in his task. Any conscious attempt to find the wise woman is in vain, however: only when Colin has lost his way on the moor does he find himself outside of the cottage once again. The woman explains to Colin that he will face three trials over the forthcoming nights: only if he is able to dream three days without sleeping, work three days without dreaming and finally both work and dream for three days, will he be able to find a bottle of Carasoy. Through the assistance of the woman, who tells him wonderful stories for three days, and a goblin blacksmith, who sets him to work for three days, Colin is able to achieve all three feats and to bring the mysterious concoction to the fairy queen.

However, the potion that the queen so desires do the wicked fairies no good, causing them instantly to age rapidly. They depart from Colin's cottage, lamenting bitterly. But more importantly, for Colin, the girl is released from her captivity. The family takes her in, and having grown up and earned himself college degree, Colin marries her, and they move to a little cottage in Devon, to 'get away from the neighbourhood of a queen who was not to be depended upon'.⁸ This is where 'The Fairy Fleet', an upbeat and all-in-all rather conventional fairy tale, ends. In short, the text reads as a straightforward depiction of a boy's coming of age, in which he overcomes hardships and temptations in order to gain true love in the end.

In the second part of the story, MacDonald reveals what took place after the pair left Scotland. As it turns out, the wickedness of the fairies has forced them into exile from their Scottish habitat, and they *too* have taken up residence in the south of Devon. Discovering that Colin's family are moving into the region, they decide to seek vengeance, snatching away the youngest of Colin's

⁸ George MacDonald, *The Complete Fairy Tales* (New York, 1999), 208. Further citation given in text.

children. Once again, Colin, now an adult and father of three, must seek the assistance of the wise woman in the cottage, and once again he must undergo nine nights of trials before he is able to face the fairy queen. On the ninth night he receives some wax and an awl from a helper known as the Goblin Cobbler – using the wax he is able to seal the fairies into the basin, known as the Kelpie's Pool, in which they are fond of swimming. Boring a hole in the rock with the awl, he threatens to empty the basin entirely of water, causing the captured fairies to panic. The fairy queen reluctantly returns Colin's son and swears never to hurt his family again.

Petzold, who has discussed the fairy tale in the monograph *Das englische Kunstmärchen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (1981) as well as in his article, has stressed how the theme of maturation is central to the story. If MacDonald in this tale lies closer to the rustic folk tradition than the more moralistic and rationalistic *conte de fées*-school, it is, Petzold argues, congenial with the author's aim, since the folk tale is commonly understood as a depiction of the individual's inner maturation rather than insight gained from outward education.⁹ There is no reason to question Petzold's reading of 'The Fairy Fleet', rather than 'The Carasoy'n', as a depiction of inner maturation, with the quest being a symbolic representation of a boy's initiation into adulthood. It is, in fact, quite easy to find passages in the text that lend support to such a reading. The changeling girl tells Colin that she longs to grow into a woman, something that is impossible among the fairies that, as Petzold puts it, act as 'personifications of childishness and immaturity, mental states to be overcome by growing up'.¹⁰ The fact that the fairies refer to humans as 'the big people' is surely not only a reference to their physical size – nor is it a coincidence that Colin notes that the fairy queen cries 'like a spoilt child, not like a sorrowful woman' (192, 195).

The static world of Faërie, perpetually caught on the threshold between childhood and adulthood, is precisely what must be rejected in order to achieve maturity. The fact that the girl, once saved, takes over the domestic chores in the cottage, as Colin assumes his father's position as a shepherd is a clear indication that this has happened by the end of the story – Colin and Fairy, as they have taken to calling the girl, have been integrated into the Victorian ideal of the nuclear family. In much the same vein, the potion of the Carasoy'n seems to function as a representation of aging and maturation: the

⁹ Dieter Petzold, *Das englische Kunstmärchen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Buchreihe der Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie 20 (Tübingen, 1981), 201.

¹⁰ Petzold, 'Maturation...', 16.

fairy queen explains that she wants the potion, since she longs for ‘something that I neither like nor please – that I don’t know anything about’ (195). As it happens, this turns out to be the fairies’ introduction to the concept of aging.¹¹ In ‘The Fairy Fleet’, then, MacDonald emphatically highlights the importance of growing up as well as the dangers of resisting adulthood in a way that distinguishes him from other male fairy tale writers of the time, whose works are marked by a strong tendency to regression.¹²

The inclination to identify fairies with the childish, however, is something very typical of the Victorian period. Diane Purkiss has convincingly shown how the Victorians came to project the romantic notion of the innocent child on the fairy figure, something that turned them into more asexual figures than they were previously perceived.¹³ Nicola Bown makes a similar observation in *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (2001) and discusses it as a possible reason why the Victorian fairy mania was primarily a male phenomenon – as women were struggling to be perceived as adults in the first place, the fairy figure could function as a way for men to escape the pressure of adulthood.¹⁴ Silver, in turn, shows how the golden age of children’s literature increasingly relegated the fairies to the nursery. The fairies lost their moral ambiguity, something that Silver states as a possible reason for the declining interest in fairies at the end of the nineteenth century:

As the elfin peoples became staples of children’s literature, the perception grew that they themselves were childish and that interest and belief in them fitted children only. Some of the tales promoted a false set of conventions, one that made the fairies tiny and harmless – moral guides for children or charming little pets – and a tradition of sentimentalization and idealization developed. In this literature, fairies were conflated with angels or further miniaturized into toys. In addition, fairies and witches were increasingly polarized: fairies grew purely good and sprouted wings, losing their demonic energy and power.¹⁵

¹¹ Unsurprisingly, Wolff opts for the most Freudian reading possible, insisting that the Carasoy symbolises ‘defloration, which always leads to trouble and grief’, 133.

¹² Cf. U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago, 1998).

¹³ Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London, 2000), 220.

¹⁴ Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-century Art and Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-century Literature and Culture, vol. 33 (Cambridge, 2001), 4.

¹⁵ Silver, 187

When the fairies are introduced in ‘The Fairy Fleet’, they come across very much as children of their time. Although the fact that they are dressed in green is a homage to folk tradition,¹⁶ MacDonald’s detailed description of the bobbing fairy fleet and the activities of the playful fairies reads more like an ekphrasis (i.e. a literary description of a work of art) of the work of a contemporary fairy painter such as sir Joseph Noel Paton:

The sailors were as busy as sailors could be, mooring along the banks, or running their boats high and dry on the shore. Some had little sails which glimmered white in the moonshine-half-lowered, or blowing out in the light breeze that crept down the course of the stream. Some were pulling about through the rest, oars flashing, tiny voices calling, tiny feet running, tiny hands hauling at ropes that ran through blocks of shining ivory. On the shore stood groups of fairy ladies in all colours of the rainbow, green predominating, waited upon by gentlemen all in green, but with red and yellow feathers in their caps. The queen had landed on the side next to Colin, and in a few minutes more twenty dances were going at once along the shores of the fairy river. (192)

Repeatedly, the text calls attention to the diminutive features of the fairies: not only are they sailing with ‘little sails’, they are also described as ‘tiny’ trice. In comparison, the fascinated Colin is described as a ‘glowering ogre’ in relation to the fairies. The miniature-sized fairies are a motif that stems from a literary tradition, rather than folk tradition, implying a distanced attitude in which fairies are viewed as entertaining mischief makers rather than a possible threat.¹⁷ ‘The Fairy Fleet’, then, is mostly written in line with a *literary* fairy-tale tradition, where the childish and diminutive traits of the fairies are stressed, something that will change in ‘The Carasoyne’. The difference between the two versions should not be exaggerated, however – as Silver has pointed out, MacDonald belonged to a minority of Victorian fairy tale-writers who ‘created characters and situations that were both freshly original and consonant with

¹⁶ In his article ‘The Making of the Early Modern British Fairy Tradition’, historian Ronald Hutton lists the colour green as one of the “motifs which were to be enduring components of fairy lore”, citing texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ronald Hutton, ‘The Making of the Early Modern British Fairy Tradition’, *The Historical Journal*, 57.4 (2014), 1135–56, (1138).

¹⁷ Silver, 188; Purkiss, 174.

the broader folklore tradition'.¹⁸ MacDonald's knowledge of folk traditions is on display in 'The Fairy Fleet' as well.

The most striking example of how MacDonald draws on these sources is given at the ending of the first part: in order to save the human girl, Colin must hold her in his embrace, even as she shifts into numerous animal shapes. The motif is, of course, derived from the Scottish ballad of *Tam Lin*, where the female protagonist saves the namesake of the ballad in much the same way. There are two important differences, however: here, it is a boy, rather than a young woman, who is the acting part and the rather explicit sexual themes of *Tam Lin* are played down in MacDonald's fairy tale. Several versions of *Tam Lin* portray both rape and attempted abortion and the female protagonist who wants to win a father to her baby must first see him turn into a series of threatening animals, such as a snake and a bear, and finally a rod of hot iron.¹⁹ Small wonder, that this imagery has been interpreted as a young woman's first meeting with a (possibly threatening) male sexuality. Colin's trial, however, is aimed at male protectiveness rather than the fear of a young woman: although the girl in MacDonald's story at first turns into 'a great writhing worm' in Colin's grasp, she then turns into a series of animals that evoke compassion rather than fear, such as a rabbit in pain and a frightened dove, begging to be set free (206).²⁰ And even if Colin, like the protagonist of *Tam Lin*, endures the trial and earns the hand of a woman, the immediate connection between trial and outcome has been weakened through the insertion of a nine-year long interlude in which Colin is educated – Petzold is surely right to view this as a rationalistic concession to Victorian conventions in dealing with a sexually charged motif.²¹ It also bears pointing out that the fairy queen of *Tam Lin* is a truly frightening creature, who in several versions of the ballad intends to sacrifice her former lover as a tithe to hell: there is no indication in MacDonald's story that leads us to assume that the changeling girl is in similar danger. The handling of a folklore motif in 'The Fairy Fleet', then, is still done in such a way as not to undermine the assumptions that a Victorian

¹⁸ Silver, 186.

¹⁹ The best-known version of the ballad is found in the first volume of James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898), indexed as 39A. It bears pointing out that the versions differ greatly as to whether the sexual encounter is a consensual one; version 39G depicts how 'Tam-a-line, as he is called in this version, 'got his wills of her/His wills as he had taen', in Francis James Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols (Boston, 1898), I, 349.

²⁰ Petzold makes a similar observation. See Petzold, 200.

²¹ Petzold, 201–2.

reader would bring to a contemporary literary fairy tale: it is still a benign and, ultimately, a fundamentally safe text in this respect.

As the story moves to Devon, however, the fairies now become more distinctly Scottish than the generic pan-British figures of 'The Fairy Fleet'. The difference is not an unimportant one. Without exaggerating the regional differences or claiming the existence of any absolute dividing lines, it is possible to state that there is a broad consensus that Scottish fairies have been perceived as decidedly more dangerous than their English counterparts. For instance, Katherine Briggs writes in *The Anatomy of Puck* (1959):

On the whole the fairy picture is gloomier in the Highlands than in the south. We have many familiar features, the changelings, the fairy ointment, the aristocratic state, the fairy hills, the theft of corn, the power of invisibility, the dislike of being watched, the brownie labours, the boggarts; but we have little of the fairy mirth, the dancing or the gifts to favourites. [...] The Highland fairies are fiercer, more independent, more dangerous than the Southerners, but even here Prospero could have found his fairy familiar, though it would have needed all his power to coerce it to serve good ends. It is no surprise to find that the Scottish fairies held intercourse with the witches.²²

In a discussion on Elizabethan fairy faith, Purkiss contrasts English and Scottish attitudes in a similar fashion:

The result is that most, though not all, English encounters with fairies are tonally different from Scottish accounts. To meet a fairy in Scotland is at best an equivocal experience, and can be downright disastrous. In England, fairies are still risky, but the sense of risk is defrayed by an even clearer and more optimistic sense of the possible benefits.²³

Purkis notes that whereas many of the Scottish fairy stories of the time are found in the protocols of witch trials, and relates of menacing figures, English fairies are more prone to appear as the helpers of the story, for example leading poor men to find hidden treasures. Silver also notes that Scotland was 'famous for its witch trials and for the particularly grotesque and horrific nature of its supernaturals' – and, unlike their English counterparts, Scottish

²² Katharine M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck* (London, 1959), 32.

²³ Purkiss, 124.

fairies tended to be more clearly linked to witchcraft and dark magic.²⁴ It bears pointing out that when the fairies are reintroduced to the reader in the second part of the story, they are portrayed in line with such a darker tradition – they are no longer to be read as manifestations of childishness and irresponsibility. The contrast with the first part is striking: rather than dwelling on the diminutiveness of the playful figures, the text now repeatedly underlines the frightening and wild nature of the fairies. Colin sees ‘a few grotesque figures’, dancing ‘furiously’ and ‘more wildly than ever’, egged on by a violin wailing ‘just like the cry of a child’, a simile that is used two times in a short passage of text: whereas Colin in the first part observed the fairies with wide-eyed fascination he now views them ‘filled with horror’, listening to a song in which the fairy Peterkin describes how they have maimed his son bit by bit (213–14). This cruelty is further accented near the end of the story, when the fairies mock Colin’s demand that they return his son, by showing him ‘a dreadful object’, ‘like a baby with his face half eaten away by the fishes, only that he had a huge nose, like the big toe of a lobster’ (222). Although this is not the child, as they claim, the reader is offered no reassuring answer as to who or what it was that the fairies showed Colin. The fairies now come across as malevolent and possibly dangerous, rather than as childish pranksters.

In this second part of the story, MacDonald is also increasingly referencing both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic folklore. Discussing ‘The Fairy Fleet’, Wolff praises MacDonald for having kept ‘to a minimum folklore themes such as the changeling and her repeated transformations into animals at the end’. While Wolff suggests that MacDonald ‘has skillfully worked them into the framework of a basically original tale’, he implicitly criticises the author for not doing the same in the second part of the story.²⁵ One does not have to share Wolff’s conviction that a sparing use of folklore themes makes for an evident criterion of literary quality to see that the observation itself is true – one need only to refer to the cobbler’s song, a flashy display of erudition, where MacDonald not only references generic fairy tale-creatures such as mermaids, ogres and fairies, but also more specifically Celtic creatures such as the kelpie, the pookie and the brownie. The mention in the last verse of the mysterious Boneless seems to be a reference to a passage from Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), where Scot mentions ‘old Boneless’ as one

²⁴ Silver, 174.

²⁵ Wolff, 132.

of the creatures he was frightened with as a child.²⁶ This is a rather obscure reference, well beyond the usual *par de course* for the casual reader of fairy tales. More examples could be given, but perhaps it suffices to say that ‘The Carasoy’n is written by an author who is very much aware of the tradition that precedes him.

However, the fairies of the second part are not only more Scottish in the sense that they are portrayed in a darker fashion. It is now also made clear that they are explicitly connected with the Scottish landscape. While it is true that the fairies, like Colin, now reside in Devon, they have not chosen to do so freely – as the story increasingly references folk traditions, it is also made clear that this tradition is in decline. Cruel as the fairies of folk tradition may be, they are bound by a certain set of rules and, importantly, they are obliged to keep their word when dealing with mortals. However, we now learn that this is no longer the case: the fairies that Colin encounters are in grave moral decline and have started to disregard the rules that govern the interactions between mortals and fairies. MacDonald tells us that these fairies

had played many ill-natured pranks upon the human mortals; had stolen children upon whom they had no claim; had refused to deliver them up when they were demanded of them; had even terrified infants in their cradles; and, final proof of moral declension in fairies, had attempted to get rid of the obligations of their word, by all kinds of trickery and false logic. (209)

Consequently, they have been dealt one of the worst punishments imaginable for a fairy – they have been banished from ‘that part of the country where they and their ancestors have lived for more years than they can count’ (209), driven by an involuntary wanderlust and unable to feel at home wherever they attempt to settle down. The motif of the departing fairies is a well-established one in literature: the reason given for the departure has varied over the centuries however, from the christening of the British Isles to the negative impact that the factories had on the beauty of the landscape.²⁷ Here, the reason given is a moral degeneracy in the fairies themselves, something that, as far as this author has been able to gather, lacks a clear precedent in tradition,

²⁶ Qtd. in Purkiss, 159–60.

²⁷ An early example of this motif, mentioned by both Purkiss and Silver, is Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), where the Wife of Bath laments that the friars have replaced the fairies of old. Purkiss, 73; Silver, 185; Bown, 39.

but corresponds well to an increasingly pessimistic tendency in MacDonald's later writing. And yet, this departure is not only to be understood as a morally justified punishment, but also as a very tangible and irreversible loss for the Scots and the Scottish landscape itself. In the first section of the second part, MacDonald describes this disenchanted landscape at some length:

Now that which happens to the aspect of a country when the fairies leave it, is that a kind of deadness falls over the landscape. The traveller feels the wind as before, but it does not seem to refresh him. The child sighs over his daisy chain, and cannot find a red-tipped one amongst all that he has gathered. The cowslips have not half the honey in them. The wasps outnumber the bees. The horses come from the plough more tired at night, hanging their heads to their very hoofs as they plod homewards. The youth and the maiden, though perfectly happy when they meet, find the road to and from the trysting-place unaccountably long and dreary. The hawthorn-blossom is neither so white nor so red as it used to be and the dark rough bark looks through and makes it ragged. The day is neither so warm nor the night so friendly as before. In a word, that something which no one can describe or be content to go without is missing. Everything is common-place. Everything falls short of one's expectations. (210–11.)

The banishment of the fairies, then, *also* means that existence has lost a higher dimension and feeling of inherent meaning, a state that the first part of the story was moving towards. But one can also note that the distinctiveness of the Scottish landscape is suddenly made clear in a way that lacks a counterpart in the first part of the story. 'In the splendour of their Devon banishment' with its exuberant beauty, the beauty of "their bare Scotland", with 'the rocks and stones and rowan and birch-trees of the solitary burns' is made all the more clear for the homesick fairies. 'The country they had left might be an ill-favoured thing, but it was their own' (210). The fairies that the reader encounters are truly *Scottish* and the loss of values and the experience of exile are inseparable from each other. The wicked fairies are not whole without Scotland, but neither will Scotland ever be the same without its fairies – the paragraph reads more like a tragedy than a conventional morality.

One could argue that, as both the fairies and the story depart from Scotland, we also leave the enchanted world of fairytales behind: the conventions of the genre suddenly seem to be cast in doubt. There is a logic to this. As David

Robb has pointed out in a discussion of MacDonald's novels, Scotland, to the typical Victorian reader, was 'still a country known through books, reputation and myth rather than through direct knowledge, and was already being thought of as the domain of untold eccentricities [...], a region where wonder and strangeness were domesticated'.²⁸ In the first part of the story, a mindset in which the miraculous belongs to real life is still valid, as made clear by the fact that Colin's father immediately accepts his son's explanation as to why he has been missing for nine days, 'as at that time marvels were much easier to believe than they are now' (204). This elegiac aside makes clear that such an attitude to the realities of the miraculous belongs to the past – and the second part of the story seems to have abandoned such a naïve acceptance, rather taking place in our disenchanted modernity.

To make the difference between the two versions as clear as possible, one may well linger at the depiction of the three nights that Colin spends at Stonestarvit Moss towards the end of 'The Fairy Fleet'. In sowing and harvesting the grapes that will turn into the Carasoy, Colin experiences something akin to an epiphany:

Those three days were the happiest he had ever known. For he understood everything he did himself, and all that everything was doing round about him. He saw what the rushes were, and why the blossom came out at the side, and why it was russet-coloured, and why the pitch was white, and the skin green. And he said to himself, "If I were a rush now, that's just how I should make a point of growing." And he knew how the heather felt with its cold roots, and its head of purple bells; and the wise-looking cottongrass, which the old woman called her sheep, and the white beard of which she spun into thread. (203–4)

The movement of 'The Fairy Fleet' is directed towards a pinnacle of higher understanding, in which everything is revealed, and every part of the landscape holds a deep significance. As we have already seen, the second part of the story immediately begins with a departure from this state, providing us no indication that this state can be recovered. And although the first and the second part of the story are deceptively similar as far as plot structure goes, the imagery of the second part, as we have seen, is decidedly darker and more troubling in nature. Furthermore, the conventions of the fairy tale are undermined in the

²⁸ David Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1987), 34.

second part of the story, a technique that is made clear in comparison with the first part. Despite remaining a simple story in terms of its plot, the text moves from transparency to opaqueness in the second part, resisting an easy translation into a moral schema.

No reader ought to remain in doubt as to the significance of the first part of the story: it reads as a perfectly straightforward portrayal of a boy's coming of age, in which he overcomes hardships and temptations to gain true love in the end. In rescuing the girl, Colin faces three different trials, each one lasting for three nights and each one clearly linked to a certain set of virtues: in dreaming three full nights without sleeping Colin shows that he is capable of spiritual growth and imagination while he displays work ethic in working for three full nights, finally achieving a synthesis of both virtues in the last trial, harvesting the grapes of the Carasoy. But there is also a logical progression to the trials that creates a coherency to the tale. As Colin works three nights in the smithy, the goblin helps lift Cumberbone Crag, a feat for which they require the manufacturing of tools – something that Colin and the blacksmith provide through industrious labor. As Colin arrives at Stonestarvit Moss to plant the grapes, he realises that the lifting of Cumberbone Crag served to direct favorable winds over the moss, turning the soil fertile. The place where the work is to be commenced has been marked by an egg from the hen Jenny, whom he met in the first part of the story. In other words, at every point of the story a clear connection between action and outcome is established as well as an internal consistency – elements of the first two trials are present in the third trial.

Furthermore, this first part of the story is characterised by an extremely strict observance of one of the classic conventions of fairy tales: the importance of the number three. The most obvious example of this would be the fact that Colin's trial is given in the forms of three threes – but MacDonald uses this convention with strict consequence and a painstaking attention to detail. Jenny the hen lays three eggs after the first trial, Colin 'worked like three' in the smithy and processes 'a bar of iron three inches thick or so, cut off three yards' (201). Once Colin has managed to return the girl Fairy to the world of mortals, her recovery is given to us in a long number of threes: she sleeps for three days and then waits an additional three days before she starts to talk. After three weeks she is finally ready to eat human food again and within three months she can assume the domestic duties of the house. Having spent three times three years in school, Colin is finally ready to marry her.

This meticulous attention to detail has no real equivalent in the second

part of the story. Colin and Fairy have three children and the abducted son is three years old – but otherwise, three is not a recurring number on the micro-level of the story. And although Colin once again spends nine nights trying to retrieve a loved one from the fairies, it is no longer presented as a series of trials, lasting three nights each. Rather, Colin spends seven nights listening to the stories of the wise woman, one night to retrieve the cobbler's wax and awl which he is given promptly and, finally, one night to retrieve his son. Not only is this disposition strangely asymmetrical for a reader accustomed to the conventions of the fairy tale, it is also hard to ascribe any particular moral significance to Colin's experiences during the first eight nights where he remains a rather passive and hapless figure. There is no longer a clear connection between the three trials and no clear connection between action and outcome on Colin's behalf.

In fact, the repetitive element itself creates an unsettling effect: while the narrative structure is largely identical to the previous version it is now placed in a different framework. The maturation theme that is so important to the first part of the story is subverted by the fact that the protagonist is no longer a valiant boy but a respectable husband and father with a college degree. In fact, the repetitive character of the text carries a pessimistic implication for our understanding of the text as a coming of age-story: if a trial happily overcome can recur at any point later in life, it loses its character of painful but necessary initiatory experience, transforming the archetypical hero's journey into a futile endeavor. Whereas the first part of the story emphatically points out the importance of growing up and maturing, the other part of the story seems preoccupied with the depiction of a world in decline, a theme that is certainly not limited to the moral corruption of the fairies. Where the young Colin lived up to the criteria of a true hero, the adult protagonist has turned into that rare thing, a fairy tale hero with a penchant for procrastination, entirely at a loss as how to retrieve his son from the fairies. Only when the fairies themselves point out that only nine nights remain until the boy has been taken for seven years, meaning the next attempt at rescuing him will have to wait for an additional seven years, does Colin, rather reluctantly, begin to act. This ought to be contrasted with how the first part of the story stresses the young Colin's readiness to action: in the very first paragraph of the story, we learn that this Colin was 'never at a loss when anything had to be done. Somehow, he always blundered into the straight road to his end, while another would be putting on his shoes to look for it' (189). The fact that Colin at the outset of the story has no idea what the Carasoyñ *is* or how one is supposed

to find it does not keep him from looking: “[p]eople in fairy stories,” he said, “always find what they want. Why should not I find this Carasoy? It does not seem likely. But the world doesn’t go round by *likely*. So *I* will try” (italics in original, 196).

Although it is true that Colin must lose his way on the moor in order to actually enlist the aid of the wise woman, it is a disorientation that is the result of a heroic and determined search. In much the same way, the young Colin’s readiness to action is intimately linked with his capacity to dream. It is striking how differently Colin approaches the problem, or rather avoids approaching the problem, as an adult. Even after the fairies have taunted him and threatened to maim his son, Colin’s attitude is primarily that of resignation. Although he realises that he is in need of the help of the wise woman, he believes himself to know the moors of his childhood too well to lose himself there once again and seems to be content to leave it at that. This time, it is pecuniary problems rather than any attempt to emulate the behavior of the heroes of fairy tales that set him on the right track: after attempting to borrow some money from his friend, Colin happens to lose his way in Dartmoor and suddenly finds himself outside of the wise woman’s cottage. What emerges in this second part of the story, then, is an alarmingly incompetent hero, crestfallen, resigned and at times prone to inexplicably foolish behavior. For instance, he does not heed the instructions of the wise woman to follow Jenny, who is to show him the way to the Goblin Cobbler, but rather lingers at her cottage to peep through her windows. As a result, he almost loses his way and consequently, almost loses his son. The fairies may not be what they once were, but the same seems to be the case with the fairy tale heroes of yore.

Unsettlingly enough, this holds true for the helpers of the story as well. When Colin seeks the aid of the goblin cobblers their first thought is not to assist him but to cut him into pieces, so that they can use his head for a ‘good paste-bowl’ and his sinews for ‘good thread’ (218). Only when the frightened Colin shouts that he is sent by the wise woman in the cottage are they able to rein in their violent impulses and agree to help him. It is true that there is an analogous scene in the first part, where Colin almost ends up in a fight with the goblins in the smithy, before mentioning the name of the wise woman – but now it is no longer a question of a squabble, but rather a mutilation of the human body, where the parts are to be used in industrial production. Rather than having being driven out by the ongoing industrialisation, then, these fairy tale-figures seems to have embraced the conditions of disenchanted modernity.

The moral order of the smithy was guaranteed by the Goblin Blacksmith,

an adult authority figure, handing out rewards and punishments to the younger goblins and Colin as he saw fit. The counterpart in the second part coincides with the three hundred thirteen cobblers who want to mutilate Colin – puzzlingly enough, the cobblers seem to simultaneously constitute a crowd and one individual. Colin notes that the movements of the cobblers are all made simultaneously ‘as if they had been a piece of machinery’ and when one of them approaches Colin to talk to him, the other disappear as if they were a mirage (218).

As Wolff has stated, even the wise woman comes across as terrifying in this second part. Although she remains a helping and comforting figure there is a certain ominous quality to her appearance this time around – that the woman is blind is made clear in the first part of the story, but now it is emphasised that ‘there was nothing but wrinkles’ where one would expect to see eyes (216). As Colin defies her instructions and peeps in through the window he can see that there is a fire burning in her eyes and he falls unconscious to the ground. Any symbolic significance of this particular scene aside, we may state that there is a frightening dimension to the woman that is missing in ‘The Fairy Fleet’. It is also noteworthy that she has been given a new epithet: whereas Colin should state that he was sent by ‘the woman with the spindle’ to enlist the help of the Goblin Blacksmith, the same name falls on deaf ears when presented to the cobblers. Only when he evokes the name of the woman with the staff do they agree to help him. The woman may be the same, but it is another aspect of the woman that is important in this part of the story.

What at first sight could seem almost frustratingly familiar, then, is in reality quite different this time around. Throughout the second part MacDonald reuses motifs and figures, similar to those in the first part, but gives them new and disturbing meanings. If it at first glance may seem like a mirroring of the first part, it is given to us through a glass darkly, resulting in a more pessimistic and morally ambiguous story than the original. It is noteworthy that readers and interpreters seem to have had a hard time accepting ‘The Carasoy’n’ as the authoritative version, preferring the more conventional version of 1866. Apparently, something about this later version strikes the readers as off. As this paper has shown, MacDonald has introduced a series of subtle changes in the second part of ‘The Carasoy’n’, resulting in a story that is decidedly more different from the first part than the similar plot structure would have the reader believe. In much the same way that we are left baffled by the grim ending of *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), challenging our conceptions about proper fairy-tale endings, there is an unsettling quality to the second part of

‘The Carasoy’n’, precisely because it does not add up. In a genre where we expect to meet enchantment, we are thrown into a disenchanted world; where we expect to meet valiant young heroes we are confronted with disoriented and disillusioned adults and instead of happy-ever-after, we are given an arduous repetition of yesterday’s trials. ‘The Carasoy’n’ does not necessarily make for a truly satisfying reading experience, in the sense that genre conventions are heeded, but it is a striking example of how MacDonald undermines literary conventions in order to craft confrontational and unsettling narratives, keeping the form of the fairytale relevant as a vehicle for serious discussions of existential questions and the ever-relevant topics of good and evil.

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The Electromagnetic World of George MacDonald's Visionary Romances

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This paper will argue that MacDonald's visionary romances *Phantastes* (1858), 'The Golden Key' (1867), and *Lilith* (1895) form a group that used analogies drawn from the electro-magnetic universe that was being steadily discovered throughout the nineteenth century, and in the new quantum universe of the twentieth. That these romances belong together is also clear in other terms: first, they uniquely concern matters of God and heaven throughout; second, they are the only pilgrimage fantasies, that is, stories centrally involving a journey, throughout MacDonald's work. Together they form an extraordinary blend of mysticism and science.

MacDonald was trained as a scientist at Aberdeen; and after his first degree would have gone on to study under the chemist and 'electro-biologist' Justus von Liebig at the University of Giessen in Germany but for the lack of family funds to support him. Thereafter he often lectured on science, despite no less often denigrating it for romantic and theological reasons. The topic of science in MacDonald's thought and life has been portrayed by F. Hal Broome; and Fernando Soto has written on an electrical element in *Phantastes*: these two are pioneers in this area.¹

To begin with *Phantastes*. A feature of this work that always troubled me was its insistence on not touching things. Why is there so much stress on not touching people? The fairy Anodos first meets tells him that 'if you could touch me, I should hurt you.'² Anodos does wrong in laying hands on the little girl's magic ball, which flashes and finally bursts. The people of a strange planet never touch one another, never have sexual relations, and are horrified when they learn of the way babies are made on earth. Cosmo von Wersthal

¹ F. Hal Broome, 'The Scientific Basis of MacDonald's Dream-Frame,' in William Raeper, ed., *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1990), 87–108; Fernando Soto, 'Mirrors in MacDonald's *Phantastes*: A Reflexive Structure,' *North Wind, A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 23 (2004), 34–8, 42–44.

² George MacDonald, *Phantastes and Lilith* (London, 1962), 17. Page references for both works are to this edition.

gets closer and closer to his lady, but when she finally embraces him, it is only for him to die. A ballad about a knight called Sir Aglovaile tells how when one night, despite warnings, he touched the ghost of his former wife, he lost her finally. We can explain touch here as part of the desire to possess things that is so criticised in *Phantastes* – but really, there is nothing wrong with touch in itself. After all, plenty of the inhabitants of Fairy Land touch Anodos without censure. Why should Anodos not want to touch what he loves? Why is the command “TOUCH NOT” wherever we look? So what to do with this? It is possible that seizing something is like breaking an electrical circuit. When Anodos releases the lady from the alabaster in the cave, he does it by singing to her. His song brings her to life and gives her the energy to break free of her prison and glide away towards the woods. If we conceive of the song as working like an induction coil, then he has induced in her a current of life or energy without touching her. He does the same in bringing her into visibility in the fairy palace: but then, in seizing her, he breaks the musical connection between them that is giving her life. She then literally runs away to earth, just like a current earthing itself; and he too, following, has to go down into the earth. Moreover, in future she will no longer be the mystic white lady, but will shrink to the earthly wife of the knight of rusty armour.

A not dissimilar process of earthing is seen at the end of the story, when Anodos is floating in bliss on a cloud after his death in Fairy Land, and he is suddenly cast back to earth – ‘a pang and a terrible shudder went through me; a writhing as of death convulsed me; and I became once again conscious of a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life’ (180). He has lost Fairy Land save for his memories, and wonders whether now he ‘must live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men’ (181). Again, when earlier he puts his head to the ground in the shadow of the Ash-tree in order to see it substantially, he is reduced to a state of terror (36); and later, at a moment when he is feeling that ‘Earth drew me to her bosom; I felt as if I could fall down and kiss her’ (50), he is about to fall victim to the Maid of the Alder and have his power removed.

In a paper of 1834 Michael Faraday called the point where current enters an electrolyte the ‘anode’ after the Greek for ‘up and ‘way.’ He conceived of the anode as the ‘easterly’ side of an electrolytic plate so oriented in an ionic solution as to produce an electric current by charging the cathode, which was in the westerly position. The analogy was with the sun’s movement from east

to west.³ But in truth the electrical current is from the electron-rich cathode to the anode, that is, from west to east. In *Phantastes* we have a hero called 'Anodos' who travels from west to east, and continually draws our attention to his eastwards direction (27, 37, 55, 59, 164). Going eastwards is for Christians going towards Christ: compare John Donne's 'Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward,' in which the poet berates himself for turning his back on Christ on the day of His crucifixion.

Of course, the anode does not itself travel in an electrical circuit; but on the other hand it can occur at any point in a circuit. And Anodos is growing into his true self throughout his travels, not achieving this until the end of his journey to the east and the sunrise. Again, while Anodos moves in what looks like a linear direction from west to east in the story, he is also going in a circle out of his home and back again. In other words, his journey forms a circuit. Further, Anodos's journey not only forms a circle but a spiral, in that the Anodos who returns home at the end is a considerably developed form of the man who first left it. MacDonald said that 'The movements of a man's life are in spirals: we go back whence we came, ever returning to our former traces, only upon a higher level, to the next upward coil of the spiral, so that it is a going back and a going forward ever and both at once.'⁴

Such spirals in electricity are called coils, the coils of an electric motor that when a current is passed round them generate a magnetic field sufficient to turn the rotor. Electric motors were in existence by 1832, but were only made commercially useful by the 1870s.⁵ MacDonald would doubtless have heard of these developments and seen illustrations of their products. Electric motors of a limited kind were on show at the Great Exhibition of 1851,⁶ which MacDonald visited from Arundel.⁷

But why should MacDonald do this? Why should he liken the progress of Anodos to an electrical circuit? Is that not to degrade a spiritual process with a merely material one? *Phantastes* is written only twelve years after MacDonald gave up a scientific career. Moreover, MacDonald's literary and spiritual mentor

³ Michael Faraday, 'Experimental Researches in Electricity – Seventh Series,' in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* (1776–1886), 124 (January 1834), 77–9.

⁴ MacDonald, England's *Antiphon* (London, 1868), 256.

⁵ Edward Tatnall Canby, *A History of Electricity, New Illustrated Library of Science and Invention*, Vol. 6, 3rd edn (London, 1966).

⁶ K. G. Beauchamp, *Exhibiting Electricity* (London, 1997), 85–7.

⁷ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, Herts, 1987), 86.

was the German mining engineer, poet and fabulist Friedrich von Hardenberg, or Novalis, who throughout his writings, particularly his manuscript later-entitled *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* ('Notes for a Universal Encyclopedia') insists on the doctrine of correspondences whereby scientific and material processes could be seen as interlinked in a vast analogical and spiritual system.⁸ Indeed MacDonald describes such a correspondence in *Phantastes*, when Anodos is about to recount the tale of a strange planet that might seem to have no relation to us: 'No shining belt or gleaming moon, no red and green glory in a self-encircling twin-star, but has a relation with the hidden things of a man's soul, and, it may be, with the secret history of his body as well' (83).⁹

This electrical imagery may thus help us to understand or guess at some of the oddities of *Phantastes* that seem so often to frustrate us. For instance, the long tress of her hair with which the Beech-tree girdles Anodos to protect him is something like an electric coil of wires: when the Alder-tree removes it from him and tears it in pieces he is rendered a helpless victim for the Ash-tree, as though discharged of his electric field. Again, the chamber of the imagination in the fairy palace, circled by twelve halls of statues that dance, may recall some of the makeup of an electric motor – for example the twelve-coil armature of the celebrated 'electro-moteur' of Paul Gustave Froment invented in 1845.¹⁰ Electricity can also throw light on Anodos's spiritual development during the story. For the anode is always the site of charging by new electrons, whereas the cathode is the place of discharge. By the end of his time in Fairy Land the spiritually depleted Anodos of the start of the story has been charged with new vitality and energy.

As for the shadow Anodos meets, which reduces the wonder of everything he sees in Fairy Land to the banal, and which he longs to remove from himself, what is that? – 'It began to coruscate, and shoot out on all sides a radiation of

⁸ Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg), *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia* (*Das Allgemeine Brouillon*), trans., ed. and introd. by David W. Wood (Albany, NY, 2007), 116, sect. 637: 'Every thing is a general formula of something else' (see also 136, sect. 737 and 196–7, sect. 24); and for examples, 36, sect. 245; 162, sect. 909; 176, sect. 1026.

⁹ Compare MacDonald, cited in Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924), 216: 'He [MacDonald] knew enough of Swedenborg's teaching to feel the truth of *correspondences*, and would find innumerable instances of physical law tallying with metaphysical, of chemical affinities with spiritual affections; of crystallisation with the formation of purpose; of solution with patient waiting till the time for action was come; and so forth.'

¹⁰ Canby, 53, has a picture of this.

dim shadow. These rays of gloom issued from the central shadow as from a black sun, lengthening and shortening with continual change. But wherever a ray struck, that part of the earth, or sea, or sky, became void, and desert, and sad to my heart' (66). This shadow turns a haloed child and his wonderful toys to the merely banal when it covers him, and even blasts the sun. It is possible to see this shadow, which saps the life out of things, as operating on Anodos like a resistor in the circuit of his travels.

If in part *Phantastes* may be said to be based on electricity, 'The Golden Key' has magnetism for its scientific root. For much of the story the protagonists Mossy and Tangle are drawn by desire towards their goal, first to find the door whose lock the golden key will fit, and then that door becomes the means to reach a further end, the country 'from whence the shadows fall.' There are no antagonists such as Anodos's shadow in *Phantastes* or the evil princess in *Lilith* to obstruct their progress – though Tangle does go by a more roundabout route. The journey of the two is westwards, towards sunset and death before resurrection: it is opposite to that of Anodos in *Phantastes*, moving electrically towards a state of discharge. The story is driven by the characters' desire to close the distance between themselves and their object, and we feel its pressure on them throughout their journey, as they push past mountain ranges and plains, and then as Mossy walks across the sea to the cliff he must enter, and Tangle goes by way of the three Old Men of the Sea, the Earth and the Fire to enter the mountain from beneath. And at every stage too the reader is drawn onwards by the pressure to see how they will reach their goal. The laws of magnetism as of electricity take part in a universal web of analogy, whereby magnetic attraction and spiritual longing are but different modes of movement towards God.

'The Golden Key' has one other pervasive magnetic image, that of the rainbow, which overarches the story like a huge line of force, if from east to west. In most stories of rainbows' ends there is only one terminus to the rainbow, where treasure or one's heart's desire is to be found: but in MacDonald's story there are two, forming opposite poles with an attractive force between them. Long before MacDonald's day it was known that the earth was a huge magnet (though the fact that this came from its iron core was not known till 1940).¹¹ Tangle descends to the centre of the earth, in whose fiery core lies the centre of its physical and spiritual magnetism both, in the form of a baby. This baby gives Tangle her direction to the country whence

¹¹ William Gilbert, *De Magnete, Magneticisque Corporibus, et de Magno Magnete Tellure* (London, 1600)

the shadows fall in the shape of a little snake that she must follow; and as she does so, 'The serpent went straight on, turning neither to the right nor left.' This serpent, quite apart from any other symbolic meanings it has, can be seen as an image of a compass needle in a magnetic field.

The magnetic attraction that governs 'The Golden Key' would appear to be reversed in *Lilith*. Here everything seems mutually repellent, at least to the hero Vane. Where Anodos happily walks off from his Victorian bedroom into Fairy Land, Vane's immediate impulse is to leave the strange world in which he has found himself, and return home: he only travels in the region of seven dimensions when he learns that, because he has just chosen to return to it, there is now no way out of it. Vane is repelled by the riddles of Mr Raven; flees from the coldness of the dormitory of the dead; is pursued by the hideous creatures of the Bad Burrow; is terrified at the fighting skeletons in the Evil Wood; and disgusted by the fleshly decay of the dancers in the woodland hall. When he meets the children of the forest, the Little Ones, he is drawn to them; but no sooner has this happened than he is captured and enslaved by the gross giants who are their other side. Vane next falls in love with a dying woman he finds and nurses back to health; but *she* rejects *him*.¹² This woman, Lilith, is absolutely opposed to every principle of good, and most specifically to her daughter Lona and her step-daughter Mara.

The people Vane meets on his travels are also most of them isolated from one another: effectively, through his journeys among them, he connects them up like points on a circuit board, until by the end of the story there is a measure of commerce among them. But if 'magnetic resistance' is thus finally overcome, mutual repugnance is the primary idiom of the story. In effect, Vane finds his way to the dormitory of the dead only by fleeing from it – and not just once but twice, for, when he returns with Lilith from Bulika and Adam asks him to stay the night, he again refuses and sets off on another circuit of the country.

A scientific element in *Lilith* was first noted by H. G. Wells, who was excited by MacDonald's idea of passing from this world to another through the device of polarised light striking a mirror.¹³ For Wells Vane was going into a genuine

¹² In his 'Frustrated Interpretation in *Lilith*' (Harriman, ed., *Lilith in a New Light*, 96–7) John Pennington has remarked, 'The desires of Vane and Lilith are complementary but also diametrically opposed, giving the novel a sustained tension as when two opposing magnets force each other away.'

¹³ Wells wrote to MacDonald on 24 September 1895: 'I have been reading your *Lilith* with exceptional interest. Curiously enough I have been at work on a book based on essentially the same idea, namely that, assuming more than three dimensions, it

other world, to enter which some form of apparatus was necessary: what Wells did not see was that Vane was also going into an inner landscape, a picture of the state of his own spirit and also into a supernatural world, the purgatory that awaits all souls. The idea of passing into a world of higher dimensions was present in the scientific speculation of MacDonald's day – in Bernhard Riemann's concept of *n*-dimensional geometry (1857) and its numerous followers, and in such later speculations as those in E. R. Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), in the essays of the mathematician C. R. Hinton, and indeed in the first chapter of Wells's own *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, the same year as *Lilith*.¹⁴ Vane's journey in *Lilith* is in part one of assimilating the reality of the world of higher dimensions with which he is faced – that is, of moving from a three- to a seven-dimensional understanding. But this adaptation is not simply a matter of mental adjustment, but of a transformation of the spirit.

As soon as Vane has arrived in the strange land through the mirror, he is presented with a teacher of its fundamental laws. No such authority appears to Anodos in *Phantastes*, who is left to reflect that 'it is no use trying to account for things in Fairy Land; and one who travels there soon learns to forget the very idea of doing so' (33). First Mr Raven attacks Vane's certainty about where his real home is, and then questions his very identity, in order to undermine him. Vane thinks he came through a mirror, but Mr Raven tells him it was a door, and not a door *in*, as in Vane's world, but one *out*. For Vane this is absurd, since it is perfectly possible to go in or out through a door in his world; but Mr Raven is talking not about a physical door, but a spiritual one, through which one can only go out, out of the self. And the more one goes through such doors, 'the farther you get in!' (194).

Vane, who (like MacDonald himself once) is a student of the physical sciences, has also been attracted to making analogies between physical and metaphysical facts and 'between physical hypotheses and suggestions glimmering out of the metaphysical dreams into which I was in the habit of falling' (187), is actually like E. A. Abbott or C. H. Hinton in his notion

follows that there must be wonderful worlds nearer to us than breathing and closer than hands and feet. I have wanted to get into such kindred worlds for the purposes of romance for several years, but I've been bothered by the way. Your polarisation and mirror business struck me as neat in the extreme' (Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (London, 1932), 323–4).

¹⁴ On MacDonald's probable debt to Abbott, see Jeffrey Bilbro, "'Yet more spacious Space': Higher-Dimensional Imagination from *Flatland* to *Lilith*", *North Wind* 28 (2009), 1–12.

of metaphysics as an extension of physics rather than a realm of the spirit requiring a wholly new understanding of the basis of life. This is the approach to metaphysics of the science fiction writer as opposed to the writer of supernatural fantasy. This is why, despite his own speculative mind, Vane is wholly unable to comprehend the world as presented to him by Mr Raven. Nevertheless we *will* find analogy between the region of the seven dimensions and science – but Einsteinian science, of which the Victorian Vane has no knowledge.

The region of the seven dimensions is not a world such as H. G. Wells's Mars or Frank Herbert's Dune, where the nature and customs may be different, but the fundamental physical laws remain the same. This region is a place that works by laws founded on what to us is paradox and seeming impossibility. To Vane's 'Two objects ... cannot exist in the same place at the same time,' Mr Raven replies, 'Can they not? ... No man of the universe, only a man of the world could have said so' (204). In this region, 'nobody is himself, and himself is nobody,' a pigeon can come out of a heart, and 'you will be dead, so long as you refuse to die' (196, 206, 331). These are the laws of the spirit presented as laws of a higher science which Vane the physical scientist has yet to learn. When he has done so, they will cease to seem riddles and make perfect sense (226).

Some of these paradoxes, such as that two objects can be at the same time in the same place, or that there need be no such thing as distance or separated times, are in fact now part of scientific thinking in a quantum universe that can be folded upon itself and contain an infinity of coexisting worlds. Of course, this is not predicated on a world of the spirit, but it does involve the paradoxical vision that has hitherto been exclusively the province of religion.

Throughout *Lilith* there is frequent mention of what may be called the science of the soul, the laws by which events occur in the region of the seven dimensions. What is being portrayed, after all, in a purgatory, is a purification and refinement of souls analogous to that carried out on mine ores to extract metals or elements. Adam tells Vane 'To go back you must go through yourself, and that way no man can show another' (204); Lilith declares, 'Your perfection is a poor thing, comes soon, and lasts but a little while; ours is a ceaseless ripening' (305); and Mara, while Lilith is writhing in the torment of spiritual change, explains,

She is far away from us, afar in the hell of her self-consciousness. The central fire of the universe is radiating into her the knowledge of good

and evil, the knowledge of what she is. She sees at last the good she is not, the evil she is. She knows that she is herself the fire in which she is burning, but she does not know that the Light of Life is the heart of that fire. Her torment is that she is what she is. Do not fear for her; she is not forsaken. No gentler way to help her was left. (373)

This is not unlike a spiritual engineer commenting on the present status of a high temperature fusion process. For all its mysterious nature, *Lilith* is full of such exposition. There is nothing like this in *Phantastes* where there is hardly ever any explanation of what is going on, and Anodos is for much of the time on his own and in a state of bafflement.

We have said how *Lilith* is founded on paradox – nobody is himself and himself is nobody, home is ever so far away in the palm of your hand, a door out is a door in, one can only grow by going backwards. All of this vision is based on upending our knowledge of this world; physics inverted into meta-physics. Or in other terms, into something analogous to modern quantum physics. What I want to suggest here is that *Lilith* is structured rather like a quantum computer of the spirit. Remember that the world of *Lilith* as a purgatory relates not simply to one idiosyncratic man but to all conditions of humanity past and present, and therefore requires something like a controlling programme for the universal optimisation of souls.

One spiritual law of *Lilith* is that everything occurs in several versions – nothing, in this purgatorial world, is yet in its true form, and therefore requires several identities through which to be expressed. In itself *Lilith* is another version of *Phantastes*, the two making up one di-polar fantasy, *Phantastes* dealing with what may be called the first things, and *Lilith* with the last. Within *Lilith*, Vane makes three versions of a journey into the region of the seven dimensions. Lilith appears first as a nearly dead woman, then as a beautiful one, then as Princess of Bulika, then as a spotted leopardess, then as a cat, before being described as Lilith by Mr Raven. Mr Raven himself is seen first, dimly, as a possible ghost or a former librarian, then as a bird-man called MrRaven, then as a man with a wife who has a house on the heath, and finally as Adam, and his wife as Eve: yet even in their naming these two are little like the Adam and Eve we are familiar with from the bible. The Little Ones can change into stupid giants and Mara into a white leopardess. Mara herself – the name comes from Anglo-Saxon ‘mære’ meaning ‘night-mare’ – is as a leopardess a version of Lilith at the same time as being her opposite. In the Evil Wood the trees turn to warring armies of people.

Metamorphosis is in the idiom of this strange world: Mr Raven tells Vane that 'Everyone ... has a beast-self – and a bird-self and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent self too ... In truth he has also a tree-self and a crystal-self, and I don't know how many selves more – all to get into harmony' (211). Most people do not yet have their true identities or names. The first question Vane is asked is, 'Who are you, pray?' and Mara tells him that 'Your real name is written in your forehead, but at present it whirls about so irregularly that nobody can read it' (253).

The region of the seven dimensions itself can also be variously seen. Mr Raven at times makes it appear as another, science-fictional planet with its own peculiar ecology and creatures – and the pseudo-science of 'polarised light' at the mirror-portal furthers this. Then again, this other world is also a spiritual place, the purgatory for all people who have ever lived. But then we can also see the strange and desolate landscape that Vane sees through the mirror as a reflection of himself, of his own mind, his inner landscape; and much of what he meets on his travels seems part of himself – the innocence of the Little Ones, the stupidity of the giants, the arrogance of Lilith. All these different and mutually inconsistent views of the strange world are simultaneously true.

Vane is described as travelling across a landscape: but in a sense he also does not travel at all. His journey exists in yet another version – within his soul. In a similar way Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* portrays a long walk across difficult countryside from the City of Destruction to Celestial City; but in the 'real' world, its hero Christian makes no physical journey, only one within his spirit. So in *Lilith* Vane is shown leaving Mr Raven and travelling through the region of the seven dimensions past the Bad Burrow, the Evil Wood, the fruit trees of the Little Ones, Mara's cottage, the hall of dancing skeletons, the river where Lilith lies and the city of Bulika; but at the same time he has not physically moved a step. Mr Raven says, 'you have not left your house, neither has your house left you' (202). He tells Vane that the strange region where they stand is coincident with the breakfast-room of his house in the Victorian world, where his housekeeper's niece is presently playing the piano (203–4). We thus have two versions of Vane's journey: in one it appears solid and material, and in the other it is spiritual and interior. In the case of Bunyan's story, as with all good allegory, we translate the continued metaphor of the journey into movements of the spirit. But with *Lilith* it is slightly different, in that Vane himself is a materialist and is not aware of any spiritual journey he is making. Without his being labelled as Mr Materialist, as he would be in

Bunyan, it is harder here to see through to the deeper level; and harder too to see the landscape only as a metaphor and not as existing in its own right. When in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* the Redcrosse knight thinks he sees his lady Una in the arms of another, and is later overthrown by a knight called Sansfoy ("Without faith"), we read through the fiction to the spiritual fact that Redcrosse has lost sight of truth and faith. But in *Lilith* such dismissal of the surface story is less possible.

We think that Vane may be either dreaming his vision at home, or else in a real other world called the region of the seven dimensions: but he is also in both at once. Mr Vane tells Vane that 'you have not yet left your house, nor has your house left you' (202). This is put over through the bi-localism of the story, whereby the 'other' world is made exactly coterminous with this one. Thus an either / or situation is also an and/and one just as with the 'qubit' of a quantum computer. In the same way, at the end of the story, when Vane is sleeping in the dormitory of the dead and thinks that he wakes and wanders into the land outside the cottage, Mr Raven tells him that he is dreaming: and the sense of not knowing whether he is dreaming or waking persists when Vane finds himself at home and apparently cut off from the dormitory. But in fact he is also both dreaming and waking at once, and we feel this as we read.

In *Lilith* any one phenomenon, any one character, place or action, exists in multiple modes. Vane both does and does not make a journey, the region of the seven dimensions is a series of multiple and mutually exclusive locations, Lilith is a leopardess and a woman. This comes out particularly in the matter of Vane's development. At the beginning of his journey he understands none of Mr Raven's riddles; by the end he does. Yet at the literal level no spiritual change in him has happened between. On his journey he fails to look after the Little Ones and falls in love with the evil, child-slaying Princess of Bulika. His second circuit of the country starts with his refusal to heed Mr Raven, and is followed by the collapse of his horse, an attack by wolves and then cats, and capture by the stupid giants. Saved by the Little Ones, who have in Vane's absence developed a far more sophisticated society, Vane resolves to attack Bulika and install their queen Lona on the throne with himself as consort; he even thinks to open 'a commerce in gems between the two worlds' (346). No sign of spiritual development in him at the story level, then. With Bulika stormed, Vane's now beloved Lona killed by Lilith, and Lilith herself captured, the city seems so ungovernable that they resolve to leave it. Vane now wants only to get rid of Lilith, and the company travel to Mara's house to find directions on how to cross some rough country. Again, all Vane's

considerations have been about his own material gain and comfort. Mara has other plans than mere direction-giving. She is determined to make Lilith repent of her evil, and that night is devoted to attempting this. We hear nothing for the time of Vane, until suddenly, in the middle of the process, he for the first time begins to speak theology: he declares, 'A horrible Nothingness, a Negation positive infolded her [Lilith]' (375). This is the first time Vane has shown any knowledge of the world beyond sense. He continues to interject in these terms until the company set out to go to Adam for Lilith's final cure. There again, gathered with others in the dormitory of the dead, Vane says nothing during the entire process. But then, suddenly, with Lilith now asleep on one of the beds, he calls out, 'I give me up. I am sick of myself, and would fain sleep the sleep' (391).

Nothing at the *literal* level of the story has prepared us for this: on this level it comes as a shock. Yet if we consider the whole story as a projection of Vane's soul, his inner landscape, it begins to make sense. For instance, each item he encounters on his journey exists in isolation from the others: by visiting them all he can be seen as connecting them up: that is, he creates a measure of community among the formerly islanded parts of his spirit; and this is furthered during his second journey. However when Vane meets Lilith he meets his own evil in its worst form. She represents at its extreme the refusal to yield the self that made him twice reject the dormitory of the dead, the proud isolation that once made him happy to be alone, the blindness to truth that has left him unaware of any other category than the material, the refusal to bow to others. When Vane nurses her to health and falls in love with her, he is demonstrating his commitment to her evil. Later therefore, when Lilith is brought to repent, we may see this as a symbol of what is happening in Vane himself, so that when she is ready to lie down with the sleepers, so is he.

We therefore have two readings: at the literal level of the story Vane does not change at all, while at the allegorical level he does. And the story is so framed that both versions are valid. In Bunyan and Spenser we can put aside the story for the inner truth, but not here. In effect we are asked to entertain a contradiction: Vane is a hopeless materialist throughout, and Vane is spiritually developing from the start. And this is the paradoxical vision of *Lilith*, in which opposed versions of events lie side by side.

In the same way, for instance, the seven-dimensional, paradox-filled vision of reality that Mr Raven tries to inculcate into Vane cannot wholly dismiss Vane's three-dimensional way of seeing, because that is the fundamental idiom

in which he is created. In the region of the seven dimensions the realities of the spirit, or in other terms the other four dimensions, are always breaking through, whether in the armies of the Evil Wood, the changes in the dancers in the woodland hall, or in the awe-full nature of Mara. Mr Raven's continual critiques of Vane are both justified and unjustified. Vane's materialism is the product of living in a three-dimensional world: Mr Raven's intolerant metaphysics arises out of too great a habituation to a world of a further four in which the laws of the spirit are dominant.

The idea of 'bi-localism' in the story supposes that two worlds can be in the same place at the same time, and can even influence one another, as some long-headed hyacinths in the other world are entwined in the strings of a piano that the niece of Vane's housekeeper is playing back in his Victorian house 'and give that peculiar sweetness to her playing!' (204). In the same way the region of the seven dimensions can be different places to different people. To Vane it is a bleak and largely desert landscape. To Mr Raven it has in it a ruined church still inhabited by its former congregation, whose prayers arise from it like birds; for him the world is one of living thoughts, as it was when created (206). To a squabbling married couple Vane meets it is hell (271). And when Vane is resurrected from his sleep to go to heaven, the world about him has changed to a paradise. The world that Vane sees so solidly throughout his journey is actually many worlds, that change with changing thought.

A similar dual situation is found with Lilith, particularly in her transformation by Mara to good. Several recent readers have found that her character is too vivid and various to be easily judged, and have objected to the moral censure placed on her effectively feminist rebellion. John Pennington has noted that Lilith's very nature forbids her capitulation: she is a permanent fact of the spiritual landscape, and to have her conclude, and stop being Lilith, is a contradiction.¹⁵ The more common suggestion is that she got out of MacDonald's control and he could only suppress her forcibly. But there is also a view of her opposite to this. The admiring view of her is Vane's, and he is her fool; she is continually seen critically as a megalomaniac and a destroyer. Further she is overcome not just by the force of Mara and Adam, but by her own choices: her evil, in the shape of a dark spot, is steadily devouring her, and she is being weakened by her very energies. Nevertheless these points can be answered in their turn also; and really we are left in the end in a quandary in

¹⁵ Pennington, 97.

regard to Lilith's treatment. Here again both views sit irreconcilably together. Lilith is finally beyond censure, and Lilith is judged evil; she is brought to repentance naturally, and she is forced to yield.

The same goes for the inconsistencies that multiply towards the end of the book. We are told that the final resurrection is now, and then that it is yet to come. Vane reaches God; Vane is turned away by God. Heaven is all good; heaven contains evil. Vane is sent back to this world and Vane is still at the end dreaming in the region of the seven dimensions. But there is reason for this. We have approached the point in the story where all the contradictions that run through it are brought to an extreme because only beyond them lies an atonement, at-one-ment,' past our conceiving. The nearer we get to it the farther off we are. Vane's meeting with God simply cannot be written. We are left with contradiction: he reaches God, and he is turned away. Only in his own true death will he be able to enter on the divine mysteries and reconciliations.

This of course is paradox: but paradox is now not necessarily the sole property of the Christian vision. *Lilith* was published in 1895, ten years before MacDonald's death and another event of 1905, the publication of the 'annus mirabilis' papers of Albert Einstein, discoverer of the quantum universe.¹⁶ In such a universe opposites can both be true. Most recently this is demonstrated in the quantum computer, where in place of the old binary idea of the 'bit' as 1 or 0 there is the 'qubit' of 1 or 0 and 1+0 – that is particle OR wave together with particle AND wave simultaneously – that is, a contradiction in action. In other words, on to the old system of 0 either/or is added that of and/and.¹⁷ This is just the 'system' of *Lilith*: for there we have a universe of alternatives which is also one of additions. There we have numerous opposed accounts of the nature of the fantastic universe all of which are both true and not true.¹⁸

¹⁶ These are: 'Concerning an Heuristic Point of View Toward the Emission and Transformation of Light', *Annalen der Physik* 17 (1905), 132–148; 'On the Movement of Small Particles Suspended in Stationary Liquids Required by the Molecular-Kinetic Theory of Heat', *Annalen der Physik* 17 (1905), 549–60; 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies', *Annalen der Physik* 17 (1905), 891–921; and 'Does the Inertia of a Body Depend upon its Energy Content?', *Annalen der Physik* 18 (1905), 639–41.

¹⁷ Andrew Anthony, 'The Rage to build the Most Powerful Computer in History,' *The Observer, New Review, Science and Tech*, 22 May, 2016, 19–21.

¹⁸ The analogy here is with the Austrian Erwin Schrödinger's demonstration, in his November 1935 paper, 'Die gegenwärtige Situation in der Quantenmechanik,' of the supposed absurdity of quantum theory: Schrödinger postulated a cat, placed in a sealed box alongside a phial of poison gas and an atom which may or may not emit a radioactive particle which would close a circuit, break the phial and kill the cat. The question is, 'Without opening the box, is the cat dead or alive?' The straight answer is that it is either dead or alive; the quantum answer is that until the box is opened

There we are asked to see Vane simultaneously developing and not doing so; Lilith as rightly tamed and not, heaven as both reached and not yet found. The moral universe asks us, like the current binary computer, to choose between Lilith and Adam; the metaphysical one demands acceptance of both at once. The divisive and the synthetic vision exist together. Of course, MacDonald does not intend any of this: his vision is still the divine science of the human spirit. But it is interesting to reflect on how so sensitive a mind, still part-scientific, could catch these wisps of the future in the changing scientific thought of his own time – could in effect make a work that is in many ways an image of a machine that is only now being developed. This says much on the depth of his knowledge of reality.

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the cat is simultaneously dead *and* alive – which for Schrödinger was a nonsense. But in fact Schrodinger's proof only served the better to demonstrate quantum theory in action. See esp. section 5 of John D. Trimmer, trans., Erwin Schrödinger, 'The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics: A Translation of Schrodinger's Cat Paradox Paper' in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124 (1961), 323–38.

George Macdonald and the Heritage of John Scotus Eriugena: Between Celtic and Eastern Christian Traditions

Maksim V. Medovarov

George MacDonald didn't routinely use direct notes and references when he quoted anybody. For example, a problem with Origen is well known: it must be strongly supposed that MacDonald was familiar with him but no direct evidence has been preserved showing that the author of *Unspoken Sermons* had ever read Origen or discussed him with F. D. Maurice who was one of MacDonald's closest friends in 1860s. For instance, MacDonald just once in his life mentioned Origen directly. It should also be pointed that MacDonald's library was dispersed after his death – it does not exist as a whole collection of books nowadays and it is often impossible to define what books he actually read. Thus, his special interest in Origen or Alexandrian theology as a whole cannot be definitely proven exactly. Though, in his lectures on Dante's purgatory there are clearly recognisable traces of the Alexandrian school.

The same can be said about MacDonald's relation to the Celtic philosopher and theologian – John Scotus Eriugena. No references to the first and most prominent Celtic philosopher of medieval Europe are found in MacDonald's works. While, there is no direct evidence as to whether George MacDonald had ever read Eriugena's works but there are some indirect arguments in favor of this hypothesis that will be discussed below.

First of all, it should be mentioned that Eriugena's main treatise, *De divisione Naturae*, was published in three consequent editions in Latin in 1838, 1853 and in 1865 (we should add an earlier Oxford edition in 1681) and since that time was easily available for anyone who could read Latin (the first English translations date from 1976 and 1987). Nevertheless the other important treatise, *De Divina Praedestinatione*, was first published in Migne's Patrology in 1845 (and only translated into English in 1998).¹ On that basis it can be supposed that MacDonald would have discussed new editions of Eriugena's writings with F. D. Maurice (who was an outstanding expert on the Church Fathers). In 1873 Maurice published his own study of the roots

¹ Raul Corazzon, *The Works of Eriugena: Editions and Translations* <<https://www.ontology.co/pdf/eriugena-editions.pdf>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

of Eriugena's philosophy connecting it to the Church Fathers.² Moreover, MacDonald who was a great admirer of German Romantics knew very well their special appreciation of Eriugena, for example, in Friedrich Schlegel's *Philosophy of History*.³

The two Celtic authors were distanced one from another by one thousand years. However, their theological paradigms seem to be quite similar. MacDonald contrasted the Celtic 'mode' of the theology and philosophy with the 'Germanic' one, and he did it more consequentially than, for example, Thomas Carlyle.⁴ Eriugena may be considered as the founder of this 'Celtic mode' of thought in Medieval and Modern Christian philosophy and theology. According to Grigory V. Bondarenko, it is better to speak not about 'Celtic Christianity' but about a Goidelic or Gaelic Christian spiritual tradition that embraces Ireland and Scotland and includes Eriugena as well as MacDonald.⁵

To our point of view, MacDonald's polemics against Calvinism was based on the hidden opposition between 'God of love' and 'God of power'. It was not a dualistic opposition and it certainly did not mean that every Scottish thinker belonged to the 'Celtic' spiritual tradition: for example, Radical Calvinists certainly did not, and even Thomas Carlyle was still quite far from George MacDonald's 'theology of Love' due to his strong accent on the ethics of hard work and his pessimistic view on God of retribution while MacDonald tried to discard this kind of theology and return to the old 'Celtic' line of Eriugena and St Francis of Aberdeen. G. K. Chesterton emphasised it already in 1924:

It is a measure of the very real power and even popularity of Puritanism in Scotland that Carlyle never lost the Puritan mood even when he lost the whole of the Puritan theology. If an escape from the bias of environment be the test of originality, Carlyle never completely escaped, and George MacDonald did. He evolved out of his own mystical

² Frederick D. Maurice, *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (London, 1873), I, 467–501.

³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte* (Wien, 1829), pp. 128, 159; cf. Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 84.

⁴ Chesterton, Gilbert K., 'George MacDonald', in Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924) <<http://www.chesterton.org/george-macdonald/>> [accessed 1 May 2018]

⁵ Grigoriy V. Bondarenko, *Mify i obshchestvo Drevney Irlandii* (Moscow, 2015), 369–70; id., *Studies in Irish Mythology* (Berlin, 2014), 287.

meditations a complete alternative theology leading to a completely contrary mood.⁶

It was John Scotus Eriugena who was the prominent link in the “golden chain” of this theological tradition in Scotland that began as early as in the fifth century AD, the link between Eastern Orthodox, Greek theology and the Goidelic world. The comparison of some theological concepts of Eriugena and George MacDonald may help us to prove that the Scottish author of *Unspoken Sermons* can be considered as the one of the last links of the same chain side by side with Northern Irishman Clive Staples Lewis.

Among the main features of this tradition connecting Eriugena and MacDonald there is an inclination to panentheism, in some aspects even to emanationism (though viewed with references to the Bible and especially to St Paul’s epistles) that may be interpreted in terms of *apokatastasis*. It does not necessarily mean the total denying the concept of eternal punishment because there was another notion of the eternity itself. In Romano-German, European scholastic tradition eternity was considered as indefinitely long period while the Greek notion of *aion* was rather described as something ‘perpendicular’ to the linear time. For Eriugena, the Greek sources were the main pattern, and in some degree this can be said of MacDonald, too.

The public debate between Eriugena and Pardulus of Laon was organised in 849 AD by archbishop Hinkmar of Reims and was connected with Eriugena’s treatise *De Divina Praedestinatione* where he argued that the freedom of will means the free choice of the good and the final *apokatastasis*.⁷ It is especially important that Eriugena’s opponent Gottschalk of Orbais was the Saxon predecessor of Calvin’s teaching of predestination. As Carlos Steel said, ‘Eriugena launched a direct attack on Augustine’s doctrine’.⁸ Dermot Moran considers that according to John Scotus Eriugena, God does not predestine anyone to death, since God is life and the source of life in all living things.⁹

It may hardly be striking that nineteenth century Western European philosophers and theologians did not usually mention John Scotus Eriugena

⁶ Chesterton, *ibid.*

⁷ Vladimir V. Sokolov, *Srednevekovaya filosofiya* (Moscow, 1979), 111.

⁸ Carlos Steel, ‘The Return of the Body into the Soul: Philosophical Musings on the Resurrection’, in *History and Eschatology in John Scotus Eriugena and His Time: Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies*, ed. Michael Dunne, James McEvoy (Leuven, 2002), 584.

⁹ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 27–34; cf. Sokolov, 120–1.

at all. But there also existed an Eastern Christian tradition. Vladimir Solovyov mentions Eriugena occasionally but Professor Alexander Sokolov devotes two special studies to him in 1898 and 1899. Alexander Brilliantov gives a special footnote to F. D. Maurice, and convincingly demonstrates that on the early stage of *De Praedestinatione* John Scotus Eriugena was influenced by St Augustine and St Gregory of Nyssa while in the later stage of *De Divisione Naturae* the influences of Dionysios the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor dominated, though Eriugena's thought was undoubtedly original in its main features.¹⁰ But Brilliantov analysed only the second period of John Scotus and paid little attention his teaching about the sins, eternal punishment and *apokatasistis*.¹¹

Nevertheless, Eriugena was not well known among Russian Theologians even at the very beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, the only reference to Eriugena in the fundamental work of the twentieth century Russian Orthodox theology and philosophy can be found only in Pavel Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914). But it is a significant reference.¹² In the fourth letter titled 'The Light of Truth', Florensky argues that the singular God cannot be Love; only the relations between Father God, Son God and the Holy Spirit make the Holy Trinity themselves the Love. Side by side with St Augustine and the texts of Orthodox liturgy the philosopher quotes Eriugena in Latin (from Migne's Patrology):

Amor est connexio aut vinculum quo omnium rerum universitas ineffabili amicitia insolubilique unitate copulatur. [...] Amor est naturalis motus omnium rerum, quae in motu sunt, finis quietaque statio, ultra quam nullus creaturae progreditur motus ('The Love is connection or the fetters, with them all the things are combined in unspeakable friendship and indissoluble unity. [...] Love is the natural movement of all things that are in motion, the end and quiet station beyond which no motion of any creature goes ahead').¹³

¹⁰ Alexander I. Brilliantov, *K voprosu o filosofii Erigeny*, 2nd edn (Saint-Petersburg, 2006), 51–6; Id., *Vliyaniye vostochnogo bogosloviya na zapadnoye v proizvedeniyakh Ioanna Skota Erigeny*, 2nd edn (Moscow, 1998), 40.

¹¹ Brilliantov, *Vliyaniye vostochnogo bogosloviya*, 384–98.

¹² Pavel Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdeniye istiny: opyt pravoslavnoy teoditsei* (Moscow, 2005), 99, 501.

¹³ *Patrologiae cursus completus, Seria Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol 122 (Paris, 1865), col. 519b. English translation by Maksim Medovarov.

This quote expresses the view of MacDonald no less than of Florensky. There is a key common feature between them and Eriugena: God is Love – and it does not mean pink sentimentality but the Love as the Consuming Fire.

More can be said about the problem of hell and *apokatastasis* in MacDonald's writings. He knew very well that all churches and their branches strictly repudiate Origen's idea of *apokatastasis* as leaving all human life and virtues without any sense and reward. Nevertheless, MacDonald definitely rejected the idea of the eternal punishment in hell and found it awful.¹⁴ It was certainly the common feature of some Liberal variants of nineteenth century theology. One should remember that the most prominent Russian philosopher of the century, Vladimir Solovyov came to the same conclusion when in 1875 in London he made the acquaintance of Thomas Carlyle, James Anthony Froude and other British intellectuals of that age; later, in 1893, Solovyov briefly visited Scotland. But already in 1875 he strongly supported the idea of *apokatastasis* and rejected the eternal punishment. It's highly unlikely that Solovyov could have known MacDonald's first series of *Unspoken Sermons* (1867) but both of them independently come to the same conclusion, probably under the influence of Alexandrian theology and of John Scotus as well (because Solovyov quoted Eriugena in his dissertation in 1877 and named him the first medieval philosopher).¹⁵

Thus the problem was marked: what is the fate of great sinners after death? In Russian Orthodox thought this question was not solved for some years after Solovyov's death. It was eventually solved by Florensky in his *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. It is striking that his solution based on Alexandrian tradition and Eriugena coincides in its main features, sometimes even at the level of special terms and phrases, with George MacDonald's solution. One should remember that MacDonald insisted that God does not punish except to amend and that he uses hell-fire if necessary to heal the hardened sinner. MacDonald declared:

I believe that no hell will be lacking which would help the just mercy of God to redeem his children. When we say that God is Love, do we teach men that their fear of Him is groundless? No. As much as they fear will come upon them, possibly far more [...] The wrath will

¹⁴ Onesimus, *Four Views on Hell, Part One: The Case for Eternal Conscious Torment* (2017) <<http://www.worksofmacdonald.com/the-hell-you-say/2016/3/26/four-views-on-hell-part-one-the-case-for-eternal-conscious-torment>> [accessed on 1 May 2018]

¹⁵ Vladimir Solovyov, *Sochineniya*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1988), II, 8.

consume what they *call* themselves; so that the selves God made shall appear.¹⁶

The view expressed here is indeed the weak form of *apokatastasis*: MacDonald recognises that some sinners refuse to be transfigured by what he perceived to be the fiery operation of God's love. This interpretation however seemed to be unlikely by MacDonald himself (though a similar opinion was later expressed in C. S. Lewis' fiction such as *The Great Divorce*).

The exact parallel to this idea of 'fiery operation of God's love' one can find in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* where Eriugena's doctrine of love becomes the key to the whole structure of Florensky's theology. His book consists of twelve 'letters'. The third, fourth and fifth letters are devoted to the Holy Trinity and the mystery of Love inside God and between God and human. The eighth letter 'Sin' and the ninth letter 'Gehenna' are devoted to the problem of hell and the punishment of sins.

Florensky insists that the both statements – '*apokatastasis* is possible' and '*apokatastasis* is impossible' – are true simultaneously. It is a paradox, antinomy – but there is no mercy without retribution and there is no retribution without forgiveness: the two sides of God are inseparable. Some people can freely choose to reject God, and He cannot make them be good by force. The solution of this contradiction is that hell is closed from inside only, not from outside. The hardened evil sinners hate God and their hatred is finally turned against themselves. Their 'self' becomes closed in itself, its reality becomes unreality because only the Light of God is the true source of reality and objectivity. Florensky emphasises: 'no sacrament can make the sin not to be sin: God does not justify the injustice'.¹⁷ But it makes the sin close in on itself, turns it into the 'ring' and makes it safe for the soul. Thus the hell-fire is indeed the Light of God. The just men simply perceive it as a Light of Love and warmth while the deadly sinners perceive it as torturous hell-fire of Gehenna. Florensky says, 'This is Gehenna – the *only* reality in their own conscience, and *nothing* – in the conscience of God and just men'.¹⁸

Florensky shows that the liturgical texts of Eastern Orthodox Church define the Body of Christ and Light of God as the day for saints and the night for sinners, as the purifying fire for the first and the deadly fire for the last of them. Interpreting St Paul thoroughly, Florensky argues that the very essence

¹⁶ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* (Hazleton, PA, 2012), 23.

¹⁷ Florensky, 191.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

of every man will be rescued in any case, and *apokatastasis* is inevitable in this sense only; but all the attributes of sinners' souls will be tortured forever in the Light that becomes the eternal hell for them.¹⁹ It is exactly the same fiery operation of Godly Love that MacDonald writes about in *Unspoken Sermons*, as will be demonstrated below. The reason of this situation is that God himself is a consuming fire, he is fear for some people and love for others – anyone can choose what he wants. *Ommes igne salietur*, 'Everybody will be salted by fire' (Mark 9:49) – this phrase is the epigraph to the chapter 'Gehenna' in Florensky's book, and it seems to be quite similar to MacDonald's doctrine. It is worth mentioning that at the end of this chapter Florensky accuses the Alexandrian school, including Origen, and St Clement, and the Cappadocian Fathers, including St Gregory of Nyssa and St Gregory of Nazianzus, of having a view of *apokatastasis* which is 'too optimistic' and 'pink'. It is unacceptable as well as the contrary 'pessimistic' view of all-damnation. Florensky concluded: 'If you ask me, would the perpetual torment be, I'll say "Yes". But if you ask me more, would the common recovery in beatitude be, I'll answer "Yes" again'.²⁰ Florensky calls it an antinomy, that is the situation when the both statements are true at the same time.

This idea seemed to be new in the early twentieth century but indeed Florensky just repeats Eriugena's arguments. His *De Praedestinatione* is not so widely known as *De divisione Naturae* but it is the first treatise that devoted to the perpetual torment and sin.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of *De Praedestinatione* John Scotus Eriugena argues that God does not inflict any punishment but sinners are tormented by their own iniquity. The same divine fire includes the just who find beatitude in it, and the wicked, who find punishment there. God, who has created neither sin nor death, is not the author of any punishment. The punishment is rather caused by sin itself. God has indeed created the substantial nature of sinners and righteous people alike, and he never abandons it, whereas he rejects the sin, of which he is not the creator. According to Eriugena, side by side with Origen and St Gregory of Nyssa – and Florensky, too – the substantial nature of sinners will never be annihilated; this is why God has established the limit of growing of evilness in every sinner, and he did it to avoid that this may increase grow *ad infinitum*. Eriugena insisted that God does not predestine anyone to damnation and, what is more, does not allow even the impious to perish. No substantial nature can perish or even 'be

¹⁹ Ibid., 207–14.

²⁰ Ibid., 216.

punished and be in misery'.²¹ Punishment will afflict the evil will (according to Florensky – not will but sin itself) but all natures will enjoy 'a wonderful joy'.²² Dermot Moran says:

No nature, for Eriugena, has the power to punish another nature. Punishment is simply the essence of beatitude, and the sinful soul remains trapped after death in the region of fire, the fourth element of material world. The good soul also dwells in this realm but it does not feel the fire as painful because to the healthy eye the sun is cheerful whereas to the unhealthy eye it is dazzling and painful.²³

Thus, for Eriugena, God did not create hell or evilness but human sinfulness is responsible for creating its own hell and being subjected to its own torment.

Eriugena called the torment by evil itself *occultissima operatio*, that is the most mysterious operation of God's providence, since due to it the final *reditus* of sinners to God will take place. In the universal *apokatastasis* sinners will not be deprived either of their ontological subsistence or of happiness that they preserve in their own nature or memory: only their evil will shall suffer and be destroyed. They will remember the good and will want to reach it. While the substance of sinners created by God will live eternally, the evilness derived from their perverted will shall perish in the other world and not remain eternally. Thus the sinners' evilness, according to Eriugena, will be annihilated (while according to Florensky, it will be closed in itself); only their substance restored into God will finally remain of them.²⁴

Eriugena and archbishop Hinkmar of Reims won the debate in the ninth century. But later their tradition was oppressed in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and was revived by George MacDonald who in his later years said almost the same that Eriugena in his doctrine of hell and punishment. In his sermon *Consuming Fire* (1867) he describes the fiery inexorable Love that

²¹ Robert Crouse, 'Predestination, Human Freedom and the Augustinian Theology of History in Eriugena's *De Divine Praedestinatione*', in *History and Eschatology*, 303–11.

²² Paul A. Dietrich and Donald D. Duclo, 'Hell and Damnation in Eriugena', *ibid.*, 347–66; Avital Wohlman, *L'homme, le monde sensible et le péché dans la philosophie de Jean Scot Érigène* (Paris, 1987), 112; Gian Luca Potestà, 'Ordine ed eresia nella controversia sulla predestinazione', in *Giovanni Scotto nel suo tempo. L'organizzazione del sapere in età carolingia*, Atti del XXIV Convegno internazionale (Todi, 11–14 ottobre 1987) (Spoleto, 1989), 383–411.

²³ Moran, 32.

²⁴ Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden, 2013), 784–85; Moran, 27–34.

revealed to Moses and to the Apostles in terror, fire and fear. The saint sees farther into the meaning of fire than the trembling sinner, and he knows better what it will do to him. God loves sinners so He will burn them clean. 'Can the cleansing of the fire appear to them anything beyond what it must always, more or less, be – a process of torture?', MacDonald asked.²⁵

They do not want to be clean, and they cannot bear to be tortured [...] For that which cannot be shaken shall remain. That which is immortal in God shall remain in man. The death that is in them shall be consumed. [...] All that is destructible shall be destroyed.²⁶

It must be burned out of the immortal essence before it can partake of eternal life. Here MacDonald returns to the theory of purifying fire echoing the doctrines of both Eriugena and Florensky. Then MacDonald explains what happens after the stage of this fire:

When that is all burnt away and gone, then it has eternal life. Or rather, when the fire of the eternal life has possessed a man, then the destructible has gone utterly and he is pure. Many a man's work must be burned, that by the very burning he may be saved – so as by fire.²⁷

The God is against sinners only in that degree in which their sin and themselves are the one: they just must be salted by fire. So the fear of God is not opposed to his love – it is the same light. Here one of the most important parts of MacDonald's theology starts – that is his doctrine of consuming fire as a necessary and inevitable tool of correcting the human nature corrupted by sin.

The man who loves God, and is not yet pure, courts the burning of God. Nor is it always torture. The fire shows itself sometimes only as light – still it will be fire of purifying. The consuming fire is just the original, the active form of Purity, – that which makes pure, that which is indeed Love, the creative energy of God. [...] That which is not pure is corruptible, and corruption cannot inherit incorruption. The man whose deeds are evil, fears the burning. But the burning will not come the less that he fears it or denies it. Escape is hopeless. For Love

²⁵ MacDonald, 21.

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ Ibid., 24.

is inexorable. Our God is a consuming fire. He shall not come out till he has paid the uttermost farthing. If the man resists the burning of God, the consuming fire of Love, a terrible doom awaits him, and its day will come. He shall be cast into the outer darkness who hates the fire of God.²⁸

This quote from MacDonald's sermon 'Consuming Fire' may be a sufficient though indirect proof that he continued the great Goidelic tradition of Eriugena.

Moreover, MacDonald returned to this problem again in his sermon 'Justice' in 1889:

For sin there could be no mercy. [...] God does punish sin, but there is no opposition between punishment and forgiveness. The one may be essential to the possibility of the other. [...] If sin demands punishment, and the righteous punishment is given, then the man is free. [...] Punishment, deserved suffering, is no equipoise to sin.²⁹

It is important to draw attention to his conclusion there:

God is not bound to *punish* sin; he is bound to *destroy* sin... God does destroy sin; he is always destroying sin. In him I trust that he is destroying sin in me. He is always saving the sinner from his sins, and that is destroying sin. But vengeance on the sinner, the law of a tooth for a tooth, is not in the heart of God, neither in his hand. If the sinner and the sin in him, are the concrete object of the divine wrath, then indeed there can be no mercy.³⁰

It is the key point of MacDonald's anthropology, that there is the fundamental difference between the human person or 'self' and its corruption by sin. The notions of suffering, punishment, torment and even hell apply to the sin only. Otherwise one would not have find any place for the notions of forgiveness, mercy and even redemption. It would certainly be so if the divine wrath should persecute the sinner himself. But it is not really so. MacDonald clarifies:

²⁸ Ibid., 24.

²⁹ Ibid., 317.

³⁰ Ibid.

The only vengeance worth having on sin is to make the sinner himself its executioner. Sin and punishment are in no antagonism to each other in man, any more than pardon and punishment are in God; they can perfectly co-exist. The one naturally follows the other, punishment being born of sin, because evil exists only by the life of good, and has no life of its own, being in itself death. Sin and suffering are not natural opposites; the opposite of evil is good, not suffering; the opposite of sin is not suffering, but righteousness.³¹

So in the quoted sermon MacDonald comes to the conclusion about the *theosis* (deification) as the goal of atonement – ‘not satisfaction but an obedient return to the Father’.³² The connection between the purifying fire and the doctrine of *theosis* is direct in MacDonald’s writings: deification of man is the immediate logical result of the procedure of self-purification and self-torment of the former sinner.

In the next sermon, ‘Light’, MacDonald continues:

To fear the light is to be untrue, or at least it comes of untruth. No being, for himself or for another, needs fear the light of God. Nothing can be in light inimical to our nature, which is of God, or to anything in us that is worthy... It may sound paradoxical, but no man is condemned for anything he has done; he is condemned for continuing to do wrong. He is condemned for not coming out of the darkness, for not coming to the light.³³

Thus, MacDonald repeated Florensky’s idea that there is a full and true antinomy (though he actually does not use this Kantian term). Eriugena thought the same when he argued that all sins and punishment are just projections of human inability and reluctance to turn their own conscience to the Mercy of God.³⁴

Now there can be made an attempt to briefly summarise the common teaching about the hell, sin and divine fire in treatises of John Scotus Eriugena (*De Praedestinatione* and *De divisione Naturae*), George MacDonald (*Unspoken Sermons*) and Pavel Florensky (*The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*). According

³¹ Ibid., 318–19; cf. also 162 (*Man’s Difficulty Concerning Prayer*).

³² Ibid., 327.

³³ Ibid., 342.

³⁴ *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 426–30.

to Eriugena, the substantial nature of sinners will never be annihilated, can perish or even 'be punished and be in misery'; while the substance of sinners created by God will live eternally, the evilness derived from their perverted will shall perish in the other world and not remain eternally.³⁵ The souls corrupted by sin do feel the region of Godly fire as painful hell and torment while the righteous souls feel it as a light of God; the sin finally will be destroyed not punished by God – though punished by sinners themselves; this punishment will afflict the evil will but not the human nature. The final goal, for Eriugena, is *reditus* (return and reconciliation) of all men to and with God – the doctrine of *theosis* (deification of man). MacDonald also indicates the final reconciliation and *theosis* as a goal of human life. In his opinion, everyone will be cleansed by fire because God is consuming fire; this fire will consume the death and sin in men but their immortal nature will be saved 'so as from fire' (1 Cor. 3:15). The Light of God is felt as a torment and fire by sinners and as inexorable love by righteous people and saints. They are the sinners who punish themselves by not coming to the Light, it is not the 'guilt' of God. Florensky shared with Eriugena and MacDonald the same final goal of human life as *theosis*, the deification of man. He also explained in detail that the 'self' of sinners will never be annihilated.³⁶ However their attributes including sins shall perish. God cannot forgive those who reject forgiveness, so that everyone will be salted by fire (Mark 9:49); the souls of sinners feel God as fire of Gehenna, as painful hell and torment while the righteous and saint souls feel it as a warm and lovely light of God. In this way punishment will afflict the sin but not the human nature; as a result the sin after confession becomes closed in itself and it cannot do harm anymore. At the same time the substance or 'self' of the sinners will be restored in God, and finally this substance only will remain of them.

So many coincidences cannot be explained by common sources (including the Bible, Church Fathers, etc.) used by the three theologians, nor by similarity of their mode of thinking. The same structure of argumentation and the sequence of considerations in *Unspoken Sermons* and *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* closely resemble the logical chain of the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of *De Praedestinatione* and the fifth book of *De Divisione Naturae* (already analysed by Maurice and Brilliantov). The similar pattern of thought just might have helped MacDonald and (independently) Florensky to add some new accents in their argumentation on the topic of anthropology and

³⁵ Ibid., col. 418–9, 436.

³⁶ Florensky, 200–7.

their concepts of sin and hell. It is especially worth mentioning that from Florensky's point of view Eriugena was more correct speaking about the topic of *apokatastasis* than some of the Church Fathers who according to Florensky sometimes had vague ideas of it. This tradition continued in Scotland and Ireland till the times of St Francis of Aberdeen, Reformation and English conquest in the seventeenth century. The problem of its representatives in the age of Jacobite wars is still under discussion. Even if this chain of 'Goidelic' Christian theology was really interrupted it seems to be clear that George MacDonald and later C. S. Lewis may be considered as its successors. From our point of view, it became possible due to the growing interest to Eriugena in the nineteenth century and the edition of his full collected writings in 1865. However, the parallel tradition existed in the Slavic and Baltic world being represented by Florensky and some other theologians mentioned below.

The Baltic theological tradition is little known now even among specialists so it seems to be useful to draw more attention to it in comparison with the theology of Eriugena and MacDonald. Represented by Lithuanian religious thought in the twentieth century, it was quite near to the Slavic and Celtic thought though it was often underestimated and almost forgotten. Lithuanian theology is not widely known up to the present day, however it is especially interesting due to the combination of its Roman Catholic background and influences of modern German philosophy with the openness to the Eastern Orthodox tradition (from the Fathers of Church to modern Russian religious thought). We do not pretend here to solve the problem of full comparison of Lithuanian theology with MacDonald or Eriugena but to put his question and to outline contours for its further investigation. Two persons can be named here, both representing amazing parallels to George MacDonald's approach: Antanas Maceina and Algis Uždavinys. The former was the prominent representative of Lithuanian Catholicism who nevertheless supported the special Eastern Orthodox attention to the unity of the Holy Trinity in love in his *Sheep of God* (1966),³⁷ while Algis Uždavinys worked for years in England and became known mostly for his investigations in the spirituality of Ancient Egypt, Late Antiquity, Neo-Platonism and the Alexandrian school as well. Uždavinys was not himself a Christian – in the end, he was converted to Islam by Martin Lings, one of the most outstanding Oxford students of C. S. Lewis and later a Sufi sheikh. But Uždavinys cannot be imagined without a huge Christian theological background behind his intellectual position. It is

³⁷ Antanas Maceina, 'Dievo Avinėlis', in *Raštai*, in 14 vols (Vilnius, 1994), IV, 495–569; id., *Agnėis Božij* (Saint-Petersburg, 2002), 312.

sufficiently to look at the numerous references to the Fathers of Church in his main writings for coming to this conclusion.

There is a common feature that Uždavinys shares with MacDonald: the process of *theosis*, or deification, was considered by both of them as the way of return of the son to the Father, ‘the inexpressible miracle is to turn into God’, as Eriugena said.³⁸ The same idea of that return was dialectically described by him though it has been presented in Christianity implicitly since its very beginning, especially by the Cappadocian Fathers or in Areopagitics or St Maximus the Confessor.³⁹ But this return for any human being must be the way through death to rebirth. It was the main intuition of MacDonald from his youth to the striking pages of *Lilith*. The difference between the simple physical death and the true spiritual death that can open the way to the resurrection in the eternal life is deeply rooted in the Alexandrian school as Uždavinys shows in his most prominent book *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth*, in the chapter ‘Philosophy and the Power of Faith: Towards the Final Union’. The famous words of St Clement of Alexandria, ‘The Word of God speaks, having become man, in order that you may learn from man how man can become god’ (Protrepticus 8:4) – lie in the long row of Plato’s, Plotinus’, and Porphyry’s teachings, as Uždavinys argues, though the Christian theology highlighted here some other aspects than Neo-Platonists did.⁴⁰ Uždavinys said, ‘The philosophical life is also the life of loving, according to Proclus’.⁴¹ But the full sense of that life of loving may be revealed in Christianity, first of all in the teaching about the Holy Trinity, and especially in the mystery of love between the Father and the Son, as Eriugena and MacDonald, Florensky and Maccena have shown. Finally one can add that Eriugena’s statement that

³⁸ See: *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 876b. In Latin: Mutatio itaque humanae naturae in Deum non substantiae interitus aestimanda est, sed in pristinum statum, quem praevaricando perdiderat, mirabilis atque ineffabilis reversio. Cf. the interpretation of that phrase in: Giovanni Reale, Dario Antiseri, *História da Filosofia. Antiguidade e Idade Média* (São Paulo, 1990), 491.

³⁹ For St Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus see St Maximus’s *Scholia in Gregorium Theologum* that was published as an appendix in the first edition of Eriugena’s writings (Oxford, 1681) and quoted by S.T. Coleridge in 1809: ‘Deus omnia sit et omnia Deus sint’ See Samuel T. Coleridge, ‘The Friend’, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton, 1969), vol 4, part 2, 80. For St Dionysios the Areopagite see Eriugena’s commentaries to him in *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 126–282, 1023–1192, and for St Maximus the Confessor himself see col. 1193–1220.

⁴⁰ Algis Uždavinys, *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth: From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* (Dilton Marsh, 2008), 74.

⁴¹ Uždavinys, 79.

true philosophy is true religion and vice versa was fully accepted by Uždavins throughout his life.⁴² Anybody can ascend to Heaven through philosophy alone, Eriugena said,⁴³ and is it not in exactly this fashion that MacDonald had been building his own Christian theology?

Thus, comparing MacDonald's theology with some examples of Russian and Lithuanian theology of the nineteenth–twentieth centuries influenced by the Greek tradition (and by John Scotus himself), we can conclude that the spiritual evolution of MacDonald developed side by side, in parallel courses with that of the Eastern Christian tradition. The coincidence between Eriugena, MacDonald and Florensky in the sequence of argumentation on the problem of sin, eternal torment, hell and divine fire seems astounding and can be explained only by attentive reading of *De Praedestinatione* by the two latter authors. Indeed, it should not be so striking because the 'Celtic Christianity', from its very origins, adopted many theological ideas of Early Eastern Christianity, even though coloured in a specific hue by Irish or Scottish national character.

Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

⁴² *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 357d; see also: Sokolov, 112.

⁴³ Hilary Ann-Marie Mooney, *Theophany: The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Johannes Scotus Eriugena* (Tübingen, 2009), 181.

From Scotland to Utopia (via Hammersmith): William Morris, George MacDonald and the Science and Aesthetic of Utopia

Franziska Kohlt

*„Die Himmel erzählen die Ehren Gottes,
Und seiner Hände Werk zeigt an das Firmament“*
Psalm 19:1

In 1879 an unassuming and ‘conventional’, and yet ‘handsome’ brick building, 26 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, changed hands.¹ Known as ‘The Retreat’, it had been the house of George MacDonald, who moved there in September 1867 to experience some of the happiest, most challenging but also most productive times of his career. Renamed ‘Kelmscott’, it became the London showroom of William Morris, artist and socialist, until his death in 1896. Although rarely mentioned in the same breath, Morris and MacDonald shared as many philosophies as they shared friends and role models. Their fiction and utopian visions, their scientific knowledge, and the way in which it was expressed in their social concerns but especially also their art seemed, at times, so uncanny, so that even critics, such as Colin Manlove have been led to wonder whether ‘Morris’s early prose romances’ may be the ‘stimulus’ or even the ‘source’ for such works as *Phantastes* (1856).² Investigating the social circles that gathered at the Hammersmith house and the circles both men frequented reveals even more complex intellectual cross-currents and intersections between their fiction, and the connections of the latter to wider discourses of psychology, social science and the history of the decorative arts.

The Retreat

George MacDonald moved to a large though austere-looking house in Hammersmith to accommodate a family that had increased to eleven children. Although unassuming from the outside, the house was, as Greville MacDonald remembered, ‘a great success’: it had a ‘garden of nearly an acre’, ‘a great

¹ Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London, 1994), 391.

² Colin Manlove, ‘Did William Morris Start MacDonald Writing Fantasy?’, *North-Wind*, 24 (2005), 60.

walnut tree', 'a tulip tree, said to be the biggest but one in England' and was 'quiet' and 'undisturbed'.³ As unremarkable as the outside of the Georgian house may have been, it was all the more remarkable on the inside. The interior was designed by MacDonald's friend Daniel Cottier, a Glasgow Arts and Crafts artist who became a major influence on Charles Rennie Mackintosh and William Comfort Tiffany. As Greville noted, he 'attained much the same position in New York as William Morris in London, so far as influence in the decorative arts was concerned'.⁴ The most remarkable feature of the house was its study, designed in 'barbaric splendour' after MacDonald's 'own heart':

Crimson-flock wallpaper with black fleur-de-lis stencilled over, a dark blue ceiling with scattered stars in silver and gold, and a silver crescent moon; and specially designed brass ball wall-brackets and chandeliers for the gas.⁵

Common in church architecture, starry blue ceilings that imitated the solar system (according to its contemporary theoretical perceptions), with depictions of the moon and sun often as central lanterns reminded worshippers of God's creation of the heavens and the earth, under whose artificial recreation they were humbled. Even modern scientific discoveries elicited reactions that crystallised in divine art, so that Haydn wrote *The Creation* (1798) after observing the stars and planets using William Herschel's telescope, praising what he had seen in the words of the Psalms: '[t]he heavens are telling the glory of God | The wonder of his work displays the firmament'.⁶ It was in this room, Greville recalled, MacDonald had a vision of a 'stage for acting upon', which 'looked to me like the human heart waiting to be filled with the scenes of its own story', scenes 'that the heart itself will determine'.⁷

The scenes wrote themselves as the house was always filled with visitors who were 'a colourful mixture', as William Raeper notes, of 'East End accents and pre-Raphaelite poise'.⁸ Although MacDonald did not move in the most illustrious circles, and was in fact often sickened by them, eminent guests joined them nearly every week, all year round. 'Literature was well represented', as

³ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife* (London, 1924), 379.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁶ Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London, 2008), 68; Psalm 19:1.

⁷ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 386.

⁸ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, 1988), 214.

Greville remembered.⁹ Even the Poet Laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson once invited himself to their famous annual parties for the Oxford and Cambridge boat race – the house was situated on the course. Tennyson examined MacDonald's library with which he was delighted; he even borrowed a copy of Ossian's poetry, whose authenticity he had doubted.¹⁰ A regular visitor was 'Uncle Dodgson', better known under his pseudonym Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

But the MacDonald family equally received the less illustrious: the presence of the poor, who were abundant in Hammersmith, was a more pressing matter to MacDonald than famous acquaintances. The fate of the poor moved MacDonald deeply, as he confessed in a letter to his wife Louisa:

I have been anxious – for the first time in my life about the future of our country, and the kind of days on which our children will fall [...] it is only for moral considerations. I feel I must do something for it and them for my poor part.¹¹

It was at Hammersmith MacDonald's social concerns were translated into action. He became involved in the efforts of Octavia Hill, a social reformer and founder of the National Trust, in whose housing schemes many of the Hammersmith poor were accommodated. Hill became a family friend of the MacDonalds, who, as Greville recalls, 'ministered to Octavia Hill's energies'; her houses, as Jeffrey Smith notes, became 'a significant outlet for MacDonald's ministry,' and thus his and his family's art.¹² The MacDonald children put on musical entertainments, Greville would play the violin and 'Grace would play Beethoven', Schumann and Chopin on the piano; their 'speciality' were Carols at Christmas time, for which MacDonald read specially composed nativity verses.¹³ The MacDonald ministry was almost always a family endeavour. They brought to the poor also their performances of the *Pilgrim's Progress* as their theatrical performance at the housing estates, but also organised plays

⁹ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 380.

¹⁰ Letter to Helen McKay Powell, 24 March 1875; repr. in Glen Sadler, *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), 41.

¹¹ Letter from George MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald, 21 October 1868; repr. in Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 266.

¹² Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 382; Jeffrey W. Smith, 'Victorian Social Reform in *The Vicar's Daughter*', in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and contemporaries* (Glasgow, 2013), 71.

¹³ Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (London, 1932), 34.

and meals at The Retreat, in which their eminent friends were also involved.¹⁴ While the poor were the central audience, friends such as Ruskin, the Burne-Jones family, and Arthur Hughes came along too; Hughes's nephew even assisted in painting the stage sets.¹⁵ Louisa and George MacDonald's priorities are reflected in their cordial letters to such Victorian giants as John Ruskin (who in part funded Hill's efforts) in which they confessed that in their 'anxiety to entertain the poor people' at the first of these dinners, they may have 'neglected to make provision' for Ruskin, who Louisa feared must have gone 'home half dead with unfed fatigue.'¹⁶ The MacDonalds' participation in social efforts was significant: Greville understood his father 'in the first rank of thought-reformers' and Hill echoes this sentiment in a letter to Greville in 1905 in which she writes his parents and her will remain 'united' in history in their common 'lasting work.'¹⁷

The stories that MacDonald's heart wrote upon the stage of his mind were drawn to a significant degree from their Hammersmith surroundings, whose concerns preoccupied him greatly. Smith believes that Hill's social concerns and efforts were 'directly mirrored in *The Vicar's Daughter*', but it was also the house in which he wrote *At The Back of The North Wind* (1868), the story of a cab worker and a crossing sweeper, child workers who succumb to illness inflicted by poverty, ill-regulated work environments and dismal housing conditions, and *Princess and the Goblin* (1872).¹⁸ MacDonald's work became part of a movement of London's social writers, of whose work he was aware. As a reader of Carlyle, and soon-to-become editor of the working-class prophet Charles Kingsley, MacDonald was all too aware of social tensions among the working poor which they had addressed in such work as Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1834) and Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) or *The Water-Babies* (1862–3). MacDonald, like Kingsley, was a sympathiser of Christian Socialism – one of the focal points of his Hammersmith life was Vere Street chapel, where Frederick Denison Maurice preached, who was an immense influence on his fellow fantasists Kingsley and Lewis Carroll – an admirer of Maurice and close friend of the MacDonalds.¹⁹

¹⁴ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 383.

¹⁵ Ibid., 381.

¹⁶ Letter to John Ruskin, 24 June 1868; repr. in Sadler, *Expression*, 162.

¹⁷ Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences*, 87, 95.

¹⁸ Smith, 'Social Reform', 71.

¹⁹ Christian Socialism, a term coined by Maurice, centred around such figures as Maurice, Kingsley or John Malcolm Ludlow who were outspoken working-class advocates, and critics of utilitarianism and *laissez-fair* capitalism. Their activism was founded

It was the joint influence of MacDonald's direct engagement with the social problems around him, as well as the philosophical and moral concerns underlying them, that shaped his writing, as well as the mere physical environment. Behind such poetical imagery as the starry blue ceiling of the tower room of the Princess Irene's castle in *The Princess and the Goblin* is MacDonald's own study's ceiling, but MacDonald also layers into his physical detail more profound philosophy. As the room in which Irene's fairy-godmother appears to her, who, being her great-great-great-grandmother knows everything that is past, but also endows her with a golden thread to lead the Princess through the future, it reflects likewise MacDonald's concern about the present state of society, and what kind of philosophy could guide him out of it. And all this is encapsulated in literary imagery, such as the attic room, which, drawn from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, already embodied the imagination in MacDonald's first faerie-romance, *Phantastes*.²⁰ MacDonald's houses and castles acted almost always as allegories for the body; the body's organisation, or malfunction, by analogy, was also indicative of the organisation of society. While the imagination, closest to the heaven that, as the psalms proclaimed, 'showed His handiwork', the caverns of the castle's basement as clearly indicated the lower desires of society, which very clearly revealed what MacDonald thought was the cause of the plight of Hammersmith's suffering poor, brought on by selfish, and capitalist desires.

In these caverns dwelled 'a strange race of beings': goblins, which were once 'very like other people', but, because 'the king had laid what they thought too severe taxes upon them', and 'had required observances of them they did not like', they retired below ground.²¹ There, instead of any king, heavenly or otherwise, they worshipped only their material possessions, valued in gem stones, and, accordingly 'greatly altered in the course of generations'; 'no wonder', the scientifically-trained MacDonald interjects, 'seeing they lived away from the sun, in cold and wet and dark places.'²² They grew 'not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous, or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form', but also 'grew in cunning' and 'mischief'.²³ The mythological goblins were a parable for a society that turned its back upon the laws a good king had set

primarily in scripture and manifested in action for instance in the Chartist uprisings, in which their ideas were spread in pamphlets and speeches; Raeper, *MacDonald*, 219.

²⁰ *Phantastes* drew its name from the room in Spenser's House of Alma that was an allegorical embodiment of the creative imagination.

²¹ George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (London, 1911), 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25.

out for them, and who instead founded a society upon capitalist, selfish, and immoral principles which could not fail to make them morally degenerate. It is the moral evil that is expressed in their physical degeneration, as MacDonald clearly indicates their immoral ideology is inhumane, and therefore not for humans but for beasts which they have accordingly become.

MacDonald feeds scientific theory and practical concerns about the state of mid- and late-Victorian society into a literary image that had already gained currency in Victorian literature. Goblins as an image of immorality, embodiments of modernity's temptations and wayward desires had been used by Christina Rossetti, who was part of MacDonald's wider artistic circle, in her 'Goblin Market' (1862). As the ultimate threat to the innocence of her two girl-protagonists, but also in a wider sense as a danger to children and thus to the future of mankind. It is noteworthy that the danger they exert is conveyed through commerce. They also appear in Dickens's 'The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton' from the *Pickwick Papers* (1836), a Christmas tale in which a miser is converted where Dickens rehearses the ideas underlying his most famous tale of capitalist criticism embedded in a dream-fairy-tale: *A Christmas Carol* (1843). MacDonald's Hammersmith novels aim to overcome the fictional division between the imagination and real-world society and its problems, as they expanded upon the imagery of his literary predecessors with a focus on application.

Through the fiction MacDonald wrote at The Retreat he attempted to shape minds that could better direct society through the real synthesis of arts and science which had long been an ideal of his; the scientific basis for this had been laid a long time before. Unlike most of his London circles, MacDonald was a trained scientist, and, what is more, not at the mid-Victorian English universities, but the King's College of what was in 1860 to become the University of Aberdeen. Aberdeen taught the Natural Sciences alongside Philosophy, with a focus on the practical application for the improvement of industry and society in mind.²⁴ It is telling that it was MacDonald's desire to continue his work in Giessen, in Germany, under the tutelage of Justus von Liebig, who was famous for his work in chemistry for the improvement of agriculture and population health.²⁵ MacDonald's training was accompanied

²⁴ The curriculum of the Artium Magister of King's College is explained in detail in P.J. Anderson, *The Arts – Curriculum* (Aberdeen, 1892), 17; Colin A. McLaren, *Aberdeen Students, 1600–1860* (Aberdeen, 2005), 99, 108.

²⁵ The works of Justus von Liebig, which included *Analysis of Organic Bodies* (1839) and *Organic Chemistry in its Applications to Physiology and Pathology* (1842), were translated by MacDonald's tutor William Gregory, with whom he discusses his future career in a

by extensive reading in German philosophy, such as Hegel and Schelling and German Romanticism, especially of the scientifically-trained authors Novalis and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whom he translated.²⁶ The significance of this reading alongside his scientific training was, primarily, that these writers treated differently the relationship between science, as the godmother to industry and industrialism, on the one hand, and nature, art and poetry, on the other: a difference that had a lasting impact on MacDonald's mind and philosophy.

MacDonald was distinctly unopposed to science. This is contrary to the 'general belief among critics' that MacDonald 'turned away from his early studies in physics and chemistry *absolutely*, allowing science *no place* in the discovery of worthwhile knowledge', as Manlove believes, supported by assertions such as Hal Broome's that he 'rejected science altogether.'²⁷ While rarely discussed in the context of MacDonald's non-fiction nor fiction, it is there MacDonald instead conveys a subtly different philosophy. In such psychological essays as 'A Sketch of Individual Development' or 'The Imagination', MacDonald established that there were two modes of enquiry into nature's truths – Science and Poetry – and that it is their synthesis, rather than one superseding the other, that constitutes the ideal philosophy. Only by combining the 'twain wings' of science *and* poetry, could the mind to 'rise up' to the dimension of knowledge it pursues; 'when one of the two [wings] is paralysed or broken', the mind could not rise to the heights to which it has been created to aspire.²⁸ In a lecture on Wordsworth's poetry, in which he described poetry as the literary form truest to nature, he re-emphasises this fundamental difference between science and the poetry, as well as the ideal of their synthetic relationship:

letter exchange.

²⁶ Discussions of MacDonald's education and complementary reading can be found in Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 68–70 and William Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 42–4, 48–9. Records of his science lectures are kept in the University of Aberdeen's Special Collections; MacDonald published a translation of Novalis's *Hymnen an die Nacht* soon after graduating, and republishes towards the end of career alongside other earlier and more recent translations in Novalis, 'Hymns to the Night', in George MacDonald, *Rampolli: Growths from a Long-Planted Root, Being Translations, New and Old, Chiefly From the German* (Longman, 1897).

²⁷ Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge, 1975), 58; F. Hal Broome, 'The Scientific Basis of MacDonald's Dream-Frame', *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1991), 88 [my emphasis].

²⁸ George MacDonald, 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture', in *Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination and Shakespeare* (London, 1882), 6.

The poet may be man of science, and the man of science may be a poet; but poetry includes science, and the man who will advance science most, is the man who, other qualifications being equal, has most of the poetic faculty in him.²⁹

MacDonald's portrayal of the goblins, as an embodiment of an unnatural, man-made desire, that is corrupting society and endangering the future of mankind, echoes these convictions, and frames them within contemporary evolutionary theory, which endorsed the idea of a normative morality implicit in natural law. MacDonald's goblins mirror in particular the framework of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary psychology, which was, more directly concerned with the organisation of society than Darwin's more prominently cited *Origin of Species*, and the place of science, and arts, including imaginative disciplines, within it. As Spencer explains, for instance, in *Social Statics*, this conception of evolution is based on the idea of man's dual identity, the individual being shaped via its psychological faculties by, firstly, its inherited nature, and, secondly, its social environment, and that, in its ideal state, the organisation of man mirrored the organisation of nature, which, thus, in turn, was the model for society. Nature, as it were, provided the 'true social philosophy', 'the moral law of society', which he referred to as 'the Moral Sense', and thus 'warns us against adopting any fundamental doctrine' such as 'the greatest happiness to the greatest number' – the chief principle of Utilitarianist philosophies which left entire classes behind, criticised by MacDonald in such works as *At the Back of the North-Wind*, and ultimately the goblins who look after the wealth of their own.³⁰ If society were, in an 'unnatural' state, it would exert an unnatural influence upon the individual, which would in the long term lead to moral and then physical degeneration, and, in accordance with Darwin's evolution by natural selection, to extinction – as the species was thus maladapted to natural law.

'Progress', as it should occur, was therefore defined as the state in which mankind was, as Spencer put it, 'all of a piece' with nature, its development as natural as 'the unfolding of a flower.'³¹ MacDonald uses the same image in *Lillib*, where 'living' souls dreams 'live thoughts' that unfold as flowers in

²⁹ George MacDonald, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', in *Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination and Shakespeare* (London, 1882), 256–7.

³⁰ Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: or, The Conditions essential to Happiness specified, and the First of them Developed* (London, 1851), 17.

³¹ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 65.

the dimension of the imagination.³² Once this mental state was achieved, Spencer stated, the development of the species, when in harmony with the 'law underlying the whole organic creation' must 'end in completeness' and 'so surely man must become perfect.'³³ Spencer believed it was primarily through the study of science, and secondarily through the pursuit of the arts this quasi-Utopian state could be reached, whereas MacDonald's priorities were inverted. Both believed, however, in their union, a doctrine that must be conveyed through education.³⁴ While Spencer derived his theory from observation of society and spread them through scientific prose, MacDonald's fiction, likewise drawn from the observation of society, drew on science, but appealed to the imagination, which he sought to stimulate through his fantastic fiction, the second of the 'twain wings', which could bring the 'two levels of experience', science, and imagination, 'together as a coherent whole.'³⁵

'Art for truth's sake': Morris's Kelmscott

In this context of social science and the embodiment of its findings in imaginative art, on the intersections of fantasy, decorative arts and nature, it is intriguing that it was the Arts and Crafts pioneer and socialist William Morris who was to buy the house from the MacDonald family. Mrs Cobden-Sanderson remembered that life at The Retreat was 'full of excitement and interest' and 'Christian Socialism', and 'with the MacDonalds' departure [...] the days of Christian Socialism came to an end at Hammersmith.'³⁶ It was certainly a time of breaks, but also of continuities, although the Morris's were rather less enchanted by the house. William Morris called it a 'convenient shelter from the weather' and his daughter May remembered that her father never felt at home in it. His dislike of the house began with its name, which 'made it sound like an asylum.'³⁷ Morris feared that were he to invite guests,

³² MacDonald, *Lilith: A Romance* (New York, 1895), 30.

³³ Spencer, *Social Statics*, 65.

³⁴ Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (New York, 1861), 73, 33.

³⁵ MacDonald, 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture', in *Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination and Shakespeare* (London, 1882), 8.

³⁶ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 387–8.

³⁷ The Quaker-run 'Retreat' of the Tuke family near York was one of the most prominent and progressive, and most well-known asylums of the country. Its non-restraint methods included communal tea-parties for the inmates and visitors, which spread throughout Victorian psychiatric practice and were parodied in Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland*, cf. Franziska Kohlt, 'The Stupidest Tea-Party in All My Life': Lewis Carroll and Victorian Psychiatric Practice', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2016), 147–67, (155).

‘people would think something was amiss with me.’³⁸ The rest of the house did not fare much better in his evaluation. He came to see it with William de Morgan, a Pre-Raphaelite affiliate, painter and potter, who was ‘distinctly unimpressed by the decoration of the principal rooms’ and noted, with horror, ‘their blood-red flock papers and long book cases, painted black’ as well as the ‘ceiling of azure blue, dotted with gilt stars, considerably tarnished.’³⁹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote ‘vitriolic’ letters against it, and Morris, equally appalled, wrote to Jane Morris that the garden was ‘a complete swamp’ and the staircase was ‘a sort of ladder with no light at all, which would assail the ear whenever a meal was going on.’⁴⁰ He saw in most of the smaller, damp rooms evidence of the ‘dourness of so many Scots interiors’; ‘The Macs’, he concluded, ‘had done their best to make it look dismal.’⁴¹

A remarkable transformation, however, occurred: Morris started working, first, upon the basis of MacDonald’s and Cottier’s designs, and, breaking loose from them, transformed the house into a palimpsest, one layer covering another to create new, and yet common form. Upon MacDonald’s blue carpet, evocative of rivers and the ocean, were ‘strewn floral eastern rugs’; the red wallpaper became covered in ‘piercingly blue flower-heads’; and the room became warm and colourful.⁴² Morris’s houses served as showrooms for his designs: the dining room became Morris’s ‘Damascus room’, and the garden with its walnut, its chestnuts and its ‘very fine tulip tree’ was tidied up under Jane’s instruction.⁴³ The garden was a crucial feature of any house Morris lived in; at Kelmscott Manor and the Red House the gardens had inspired his designs. Just as the fritillaries on the banks of the Cherwell in Oxford during his student days grew in his mind into the fritillary patterns of his fabrics, Jane enhanced Louisa’s strawberry patches in the Hammersmith garden, and Morris designed the ‘Strawberry Thief’ in the house in which he was to set up a silk loom and Kelmscott Press.⁴⁴ Even those visitors who knew Morris marvelled at Kelmscott House: it was a ‘remarkable’ and ‘queer place’; George Bernard Shaw wrote there was an ‘extraordinary discrimination at work in this magical

³⁸ MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 391.

³⁹ Ibid., 392.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 392.

⁴¹ Ibid., 396.

⁴² Ibid., 395–6.

⁴³ Ibid., 397.

⁴⁴ Tony Pinkney, *William Morris in Oxford: The Campaigning Years, 1879-1895* (Grosmont, 2007), 98.

house.⁴⁵ The house and the imaginations of its inhabitants who transformed it were at play, and intermingled. Morris continued the MacDonald tradition of the boat-race parties, and Morris's no less illustrious friends and their families began to populate the house: the Burne-Joneses and their children, and the young Rudyard Kipling were among its visitors. Finally, Morris renamed the house 'Kelmscott', after his paradisiacal Cotswold manor which he had no desire to leave. The houses were connected by the Thames, a thought that dwelled on his mind, until it, too, was turned into fiction.

One of the rooms whose layout remained unchanged was the 'stage' room, and, as with MacDonald, the house and its environs played with his imagination. It was meant to be a 'happy refuge from the world' for him to pursue his artistic endeavours, where he 'tried to live like an artist unconcerned with other matters', but the contrast it constituted to the 'other' Kelmscott plagued him.⁴⁶ 'The view from his study window', Fiona MacCarthy notes, 'came to haunt him.'⁴⁷ Though already steeped in Victorian social criticism, Morris was warned of the densely crowded slums, in which his name was known – he was often stopped by the poor in the street. And not even the splendour of his own house isolated him: he notes in his diary how a suicidal man was dragged out of the Thames just outside Kelmscott house, which had a 'terrible allure' for the poor, and died shortly thereafter – Morris was summoned as a witness by the coroner.⁴⁸ Suicides, a third of them committed by drowning, 'quintupled' during the industrialisation of Victorian Britain and were, as a medical paper reported, 'the poor man's remedy': an expression of his 'appetite for calm' an idea of 'improving his condition' it was the one 'of the forms of the pursuit of happiness' which some in society as it was, could achieve by no other means.⁴⁹ Natural beauty and 'nerve-racked' despair, imagined utopia and dismal reality, took hold of his mind in equal intensity.⁵⁰

Morris 'imagined a long line of hungry desperate poor [...] pressing close to his window' and the thoughts about what lay outside the house begin to dominate his Hammersmith writings.⁵¹ In imagery strikingly resembling MacDonald's *North-Wind*, and Ruskin's 'South-West-Wind, Esquire' from *The King of the Golden River* (1851), in Morris's 'Message of the March-Wind' (1885)

⁴⁵ Shaw in McCarthy, *William Morris*, 397.

⁴⁶ Arthur Clutton-Brock, *William Morris* (Hoo, 2007), 60.

⁴⁷ MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 400.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁴⁹ [Anon], 'Suicide', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 127 (1880), 719–20.

⁵⁰ Morris in McCarthy, *William Morris*, 400.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

the truth of the ills of London's slums is revealed, as it is to Diamond, by the voice of nature carried by the wind. Blowing from London, it 'tellet of gold, and of hope and unrest | Of power that helps not, of wisdom that knoweth | but teacheth not', 'of a people' and 'of the life they live there, so haggard and grim.'⁵² The wind reflects Morris's fear of the contagious, corrupting and degenerating situation of the poor, and of the immoral influence of immoral environment that usurps individual free will, which he lectures on in socialist meetings. These concerns echo in the poem: '[a]s I hear the yells and shrieks and all the degradation', the same degeneration MacDonald references in his *Goblins*, 'as I see the brutal reckless faces and figures go past me, it rouses recklessness and brutality in me also, and fierce wrath takes possession of me.'⁵³ Morris's active engagement and perception of nature, and its juxtaposition with the current state of society, gives rise to such insight that presses him to act. Accordingly, Morris's house became centre of his efforts for the Socialist League, a prominent though not uncontroversial discussion forum, which was to attract a broad variety of thinkers inclined towards socialist thought, including MacDonald's admirer H. G. Wells.

The March Wind spread the message of socialism through very similar dialectics of light and dark as that encountered in MacDonald's writing, asking '[f]or what and whom hath the world's book been gilded | When all', that there is for the poor, is the 'blackness of the night' – the 'hope that none seeketh' it hints, 'is coming to light.'⁵⁴ The solution for healing the wounds of nineteenth-century urban suffering lies in nature, Morris writes from Hammersmith: '[i]t seems to be nobody's business, to try to do better things – isn't mine, you see, in spite of all my grumbling – but look, suppose people lived in little communities among gardens and green fields, so that they could be in the country in five minutes' walk, and had few wants [...] then I think we might hope civilisation had really begun.'⁵⁵ 'To-morrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet', the March Wind whispers, and 'against the background of the filth and degradation of industrialization' Morris founded the Socialist League and its paper *The Commonweal* in 1885, and the Arts and Crafts movement, by this

⁵² William Morris, 'The Message of the March Wind', *The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by His Daughter May Morris, Volume 9: Love is Enough; Poems By the Way* (Cambridge, 2012), 121.

⁵³ Morris in MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 400.

⁵⁴ Morris, 'March Wind', 121.

⁵⁵ Morris in Clutton-Brock, *William Morris*, 60.

name, in 1887, which gave rise to Morris & Co, that translated his socialist philosophy of nature back into society.⁵⁶

The Arts and Crafts movement was thus a direct reaction against *laissez-faire* capitalism and those who aimed to shift the blame for its effects onto the poor themselves. Thus, a contemporary article in *The Economist* justified the suffering of the disadvantaged, with an opposing interpretation of nature, stating that ‘suffering and evil were nature admonitions, they cannot be got rid of, and the impatient attempts of benevolence to banish them from the world by legislation have always been more productive of evil than good.’⁵⁷ Rosalind Blakesley emphasises the importance of to the movement of such predecessors as Morris’s master Ruskin, and ‘Ruskin’s Master Thomas Carlyle.’⁵⁸ Carlyle had upheld that the ‘British industrial experience seems fast becoming one huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence physical and moral; a hideous living Golgatha of souls buried alive.’⁵⁹ In this economy, he proclaimed, ‘men are grown mechanical in head and heart [...] they have lost faith in individual endeavour and in natural force of any kind’; ‘man’s mental and spiritual growth was being sacrificed in the name of technical progress.’⁶⁰ Visions of men with mechanistic minds, and men of science who had lost the post-Darwinian perspective of social improvement for preservation of the species primary end of science, practically effecting its opposite, haunted the apocalyptic visions of human degeneration and extinction of *fin-de-siècle* literature. Mind and Imagination, the body and its urban surroundings the last of which were perceived to be in stark opposition to the beauties of nature, stood in tense interrelation, a struggle both MacDonald and Morris felt deeply and personally. Both MacDonald and Morris turned their impressions into art of the imagination, into practical thought, which sprang from their urge to ‘do something’, as MacDonald wrote to Louisa, guided by beauty and truth: their art became the synthetic voice of their philosophy.⁶¹

The applied philosophy of MacDonald’s and Morris was an act of materialising an ideal, while maintaining the influencing potential of the latter. For that, they drew on a maxim of the Pre-Raphaelites, with whom both Morris’s

⁵⁶ Morris, ‘March Wind’, 121; Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London, 2006), 7.

⁵⁷ Blakesley, *Arts and Crafts*, 13.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphelets* (London, 1850), 22.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶¹ George MacDonald in Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 266.

and MacDonald's circles intersected.⁶² The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and especially their later affiliates had ventured into the decorative arts and architecture, still guided by their prime principle of 'mimesis' of nature and conveying of pure and good emotion through art. They not only worked in painting and sculpture, but their affiliates, many closer to Ruskin than to the brotherhood, such as William De Morgan, especially also forayed into the decorative arts. De Morgan, who was closer to MacDonald's circles than the Brotherhood, had designed the fireplaces not only of Morris's Kelmscott, but also those of Lewis Carroll's study in Christ Church, his Oxford college: these included ruby lustre motifs of such creatures as a gryphon and a dodo. He was the son of the mathematician Augustus De Morgan, who had been a tutor and mentor to the mathematician Charles Dodgson, and the character of De Morgan's mathematically structured tiles appealed to the principles of Geometry and Astronomy, the measuring of the Earth and the heavens, at that time still the two main professorial chairs in Mathematics at the University of Oxford.⁶³ Their designs for the people conveyed the awe-inspiring perfection of Nature and the divine creation. De Morgan and his whole family were deeply invested in moral and social matters; his mother was invested in the promotion of Bedford College for Women at which MacDonald later taught. This was as representative as it was typical of their shared social environment and of the individuals drawn towards Morris's efforts at Kelmscott House, and of those loosely affiliated with Morris, but acting as part of a common influence upon a common course in a common location and intellectual discourse.

It is crucial to dwell on the ideals of this movement and some of their creations. The Oxford Natural History Museum and its structures, for instance, were created as a temple to science. Its columns were adorned with leaves and flowers carved from life specimens provided by the University's Botanic Gardens, and its glass ceiling revealed the same starry blue sky as MacDonald's study. Despite being a temple to science, it was built to awe its beholder, so adhering to older ideals of sacred architecture, and scientific ideals more akin to Natural Theology than perhaps to Darwin's natural selection – the topic debated at its opening evening, in what became known as the 'Great Debate'.⁶⁴

⁶² MacDonald was close friends with Pre-Raphaelite sculptor Alexander Munro and Arthur Hughes, who also illustrated many of his books, as well as *Good Words for The Young*, which was for a time edited by MacDonald.

⁶³ John Catleugh, *William de Morgan Tiles* (Shepton Beauchamp, 1983), 37.

⁶⁴ The 'Great Debate' was the name given to the much-discussed altercation between Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and T.H. Huxley on the 30 June 1860 at Oxford's Natural

The museum was a philosophy and a discourse set in stone. This illustrates the manifold ways in which the ideals of the imagination in MacDonald's and Morris's circles were embodied in art and imaginative writing, under the influence of the same social and scientific discourses, which offer a richer and more complex response to the question Manlove poses, '[d]id William Morris Start MacDonald Writing Fantasy?'⁶⁵

Although the work of Arts and Crafts artists also consisted of churches and public buildings, the focus of the movement was on the domestic sphere, and focused in particular on the production of furnishings and household goods, as Rosalind Blakesley highlights.⁶⁶ This was all part of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* which society should become: 'every element had to be designed as part of a single, organic whole', which in turn was to stand in harmony with nature itself.⁶⁷ Morris embodied the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his housing experiments, in which every individually designed part reflected the same overall philosophy which aspired to harmony with nature – as was the case with his own houses, such as Kelmscott. Morris had a clear and comprehensive idea of how his ideal society and its constituent parts should be run, which he presented in a lecture entitled 'How We Live and How We Might Live' (1884). Morris pleaded for a revolution to return the technological discoveries of his day, which he believed were misused to the misery of the greater part of the population, to reasonable application. For instance, the 'victory over nature', 'the steam-engine' was 'used for the base work of producing a sort of plaster of china clay and shoddy' – shoddy being the material gained from shredded and reformed

History Museum during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In a discussion of the then recently-published *Origin of Species* (1859), Wilberforce humorously enquired whether it was 'through his grandfather or his grandmother that he claimed his descent from a monkey' and Huxley replied he was not ashamed to have a monkey for his ancestor; but he would be ashamed to be connected with a man who [...] obscured the truth' (Isabella Sidgwick, 'A Grandmother's Tales', *Macmillan's Magazine*, Oct 1898, 433-4). Huxley thus suggested an absolute truth of natural evidence, even if it contradicted institutional doctrine, such as the immutability and fixity of creation which stood against evolutionary theories, or fixity of evolutionary processes, and in particular natural selection which complicated the idea of a God with the power of interfering agency. A theory of fixity of evolutionary processes was suggested by William Paley in his *Natural Theology* (1802), which MacDonald had rejected as a theory of a 'mechanistic God' ('Wordsworth's Poetry', in *Orts* (London, 1882), 250).

⁶⁵ Manlove, 'Did William Morris Start MacDonald Writing Fantasy?', 61.

⁶⁶ Blakesley, *Arts and Crafts*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

textiles – while machines could be used to afford workers more leisure time.⁶⁸ Now that ‘the conquest of Nature is complete’, ‘our business’, he proclaimed, was ‘the organization of man, who wields the forces of Nature’, into a society, not build on competition, but co-operation.⁶⁹ This was a necessity, as the current system was ‘a hideous nightmare’ which deprived its citizens of the arts, of ‘animal and intellectual pleasure, by starving and overworking them, making them ‘unable to read a book, or look at a picture, or have pleasant fields to walk in.’⁷⁰ Morris demanded provisions for health, and education, but on the final and main point of an ideal society, Morris was adamant: its ‘material surroundings [...] should be pleasant, generous, and beautiful’: if this could not be achieved, and such an environment could not be provided ‘for all its members, I do not want the world to go on; it is a mere misery that man has ever existed.’⁷¹ Housing should follow the model of nature, and ‘every child should be able to play in a garden close to the place his parents live’, and these dwellings should, in turn, be ornaments to Nature, not disfigurements of it.⁷² It was this doctrine which Morris captures in his own botanical ornamental patterns, which were meant to ‘lead the mind outdoors’:

the successful pattern (a surface ‘thicket wall’ of planes which create the effect of an open field beyond) may invite us to dwell on the busy surface, or it may lure us to delve beyond the surface to the blank space beyond [...] inspiring us to envision our dream.⁷³

Morris and MacDonald shared the belief in a rebalanced, nature-orientated society to encourage the thriving of ‘morality’, in Spencer’s sense, the way in which natural laws intended mankind and society to function. While MacDonald, like Octavia Hill, agreed they should ‘bring beauty to the communities of the poor’, Morris’s idea of man’s having ‘conquered nature’ struck a different note from MacDonald’s striving for a harmony with nature, which he held

⁶⁸ William Morris, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, *The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by His Daughter May Morris, Volume 23: Signs of Changes; Lectures on Socialism* (Cambridge, 2012), 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷³ Morris in Inge Bryden, review of David Latham (ed.), *Haunted Texts: Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism* (Toronto, 2003), *The Journal of William Morris Studies* (Winter 2004), 80–3, (82).

in awe.⁷⁴ Morris believed man should wield the power of industry to amplify the voice of nature; MacDonald suggested, science should be utilised by the imagination, the element of unfettered nature in man. Art, the product of the imagination, was an expression of beauty, and 'beauty', MacDonald alleged, 'is the only stuff in which Truth', being nature, God's creation, 'can be clothed.'⁷⁵ In Nature, and the imagination, truth and 'the moral world' resided; its law was equal to 'natural law', and, as 'the mind is the product of this live law.'⁷⁶ Thus, in order to create true art, man 'must invent nothing', as was demonstrated in the fluidity of natural imagination and art in the opening scene of *Phantastes*, which will be discussed below.⁷⁷ This held true for fiction likewise, where 'in physical things', MacDonald is clear that the author 'may invent; in moral things he must obey.'⁷⁸ True and beautiful art would thus not 'convey meaning' but 'wake meaning', it would stimulate the soul 'as the wind assails an aeolian harp', and thus 'rouse [man's] conscience', 'wake things up in him' as nature itself is 'mood-engendering.'⁷⁹ But, conversely, if a man was not exposed through his environment (in Spencer's sense) to such influences of beauty, but only greed, as the goblins, the embodiments of man-made philosophies that corrupted mind and thus society, he 'cannot help himself' and must become a 'little man.'⁸⁰ 'The Fantastic Imagination' and 'How We Might Live' convey the differing foci of MacDonald's and Morris's philosophies at the heart of their artistic representations of nature, with its associated ideals. MacDonald's art focused on stimulating the right frame of mind, while Morris provided the detailed measures to be taken in waking realities once this was achieved; yet, their minds, however, strove towards a common aim, rooted in a common context of nineteenth-century science, psychology and social criticism.

'How we might live': Utopia and the journey's end

While self-reflective, Morris's and MacDonald's literary dream-visions are also forward-looking, towards a future of goodness: they are utopian visions. The image of Utopia came from Thomas More's eponymous work, and denoted 'no place', as well as, in its homonym 'eu-topia', 'good place.'⁸¹ Emelyne Godfrey

⁷⁴ Smith, 'Social Reform', 71.

⁷⁵ George MacDonald, 'Fantastic Imagination', in *Orts*, 315.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁸¹ As defined in the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 'utopia', 'from

summarises the common purpose of Morris and MacDonald when she defines 'Utopian thinking' as a 'holistic thinking about the connections between economic, social, existential and ecological processes in an integrated way'.⁸² As such, it was 'concerned with aesthetics [...] because the ultimate criterion of our social arrangements is how far they can deliver the satisfaction of human lodging'.⁸³ The Utopian mode of thinking that structures MacDonald's and Morris's writing was inherently linked to moral ideals through aesthetics, as its eventual manifestation was meant to propagate and maintain them as a balanced system.

While the utopian element recurs as a prominent general theme throughout their work, in Morris's 'Earthly Paradise' (1868-70), or the orchard society of the Little Ones in *Lilith* (1895), it is in this wider, not strictly literary framework, the commonalities of MacDonald's and Morris literary work can be more easily identified. Literary themes act as framing devices to convey aesthetic, moral and social ideas, as in their common use of medievalism, which Manlove has identified this in MacDonald's 'quasi-medieval Fairy Land' in *Phantastes* (1858), or Morris's medieval tropes and settings in *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) and *News From Nowhere* (1890).⁸⁴ To Morris, the appeal of medievalism lay primarily in an idealised perception of the role of the craftsman, and the creative mind, as an ambassador between nature and society. Clive Wilmer elaborates, to Morris, the artisan delighted in nature and 'took in the physical world' in such a way that it was in turn 'expressed in his own workmanship' which 'returned his delight to the world'.⁸⁵ Morris orientated his medievalism according to the ideals of Ruskin who believed that 'greed was the natural enemy' of this idealism, and this medieval culture came to an end with mercantilism and its 'pursuit of medieval gain' which 'superseded the love of God and the beauty of his handiwork'.⁸⁶ Morris's utopia is a secular expression of the same idea. Accordingly, in *News From Nowhere*, in the future utopian society the 'extravagant love of ornament' had given way 'to the feeling that the house itself and its associations was the

Greek *ou* "not" + *topos* "place" [...] a pun on eutopia "place (where all is) well" (London, 1992; 1016).

⁸² Emelyne Godfrey, 'Tomatoes and Cucumbers', in *Utopia and Dystopias in the Fiction of H. G. Wells and William Morris* (London, 2016), 2.

⁸³ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁴ Manlove, 'Did William Morris Start MacDonald Writing Fantasy?', 60.

⁸⁵ Clive Wilmer, 'Introduction', in *News From Nowhere and Other Writings* (London, 2004), xxiv.

⁸⁶ Ruskin in Wilmer, 'Introduction', xxiv.

ornament of the country life amidst which it had stranded in old times, that to re-ornament it would but take away its use as a piece of natural beauty.⁸⁷ Nature itself is the model for society, and all efforts in constructing society must be modelled upon and complementary to it, as Morris had described in his lecture, a state he believed had been achieved in the past.

Secondly, Manlove highlights their common use of the dream narrative: a traditional narrative form to achieve catharsis by revisiting the past and retrieving from it lessons for the future, as literary dreams from *The Pilgrim's Progress* to the *Christmas Carol* demonstrate. They functioned along the katabatic archetype, which, through its associated patterns of descent, confrontation and ascent provided ample metaphoric imagery based on nature, which fulfilled an effectively psychological function.⁸⁸ Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly from Morris and MacDonald's discussion of social and political ideals, nature acts as the guiding force, and, simultaneously as the metaphoric embodiment of psychological processes that lead to projected insights. It was not only the wind, but especially also rivers which with their steady, constant, and one-directional flow conveyed a pre-determined natural course of both thought and insight, an indicator of a normative natural law upon which society was best modelled. It appears thus in both MacDonald's first fantastic novel *Phantastes* (1858), leading Anodos through Fairy Land, and in Morris's *News From Nowhere*. As noted initially, Kelmscott House in Hammersmith was connected to Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire by the Thames, which offered itself as such a metaphor in Morris's novel. Its protagonist William Guest falls asleep after a socialist meeting like the one at which Morris had presented his lecture 'How We Might Live' in November 1884, and has a dream of a future world.⁸⁹ As the 'Nowhere' in the title indicates, the dreams guide him through a utopia, and its governance, in juxtaposition with memories of his Guest's own environment. As in MacDonald, the river connects waking

⁸⁷ William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 221.

⁸⁸ The mythological katabasis is the hero's journey into the underworld in which allegorical embodiment of world sin are encountered; as it is a journey through the underworld, the realm of the brothers Hypnos and Thanatos, sleep and death, it facilitates psychological insight into the individual and social structure; cf. John Docherty, 'Anodos and Kathodos in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*', *The Carrollian: The Lewis Carroll Journal*, 9 (2002), 46; Fernando Soto, 'Chthonic Aspects of *Phantastes*: From the Rising of the Goddess to the Anodos of Anodos', *North-Wind*, 2000, 20; Kiera Vaclavik, *Uncharted Depths: Descent Narratives in English and French Children's Literature* (Oxford, 2010).

⁸⁹ The Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist Democratic Foundation met regularly at Kelmscott House.

reality, dreamed ideas. From Hammersmith Kelmscott's, via the ideas gained in the utopian dream, Guest find his Journey's End, his peace, in the setting of Kelmscott Manor: Morris's Cotswolds cottage. From there, Guest will rise up into deeds, as indeed Morris himself did in manufacturing the domestic designs of Morris & Co at his Manor.

In *Phantastes* the river functions in an identical fashion. MacDonald's protagonist, like Guest, falls asleep after pondering a philosophical question, namely that of the truth found in Fairy Land. Anodos awakes into his dream, a vision that alternates, in the manner of Goethe's *Faust*, between natural spaces of creative and reverent thought which reveal the truth inherent in the natural state of the world and mind, and the dark. In such spaces as Faust's 'Studierzimmer', and 'Wald und Höhle', or *Phantastes's* Church of Darkness, whose chapter epigraph references *Faust*, and the natural Fairy Land, man-made spaces of selfish and narrow applications of scientific thinking, are juxtaposed to an opposite natural state, mirroring the binaries of MacDonald's psychological essays in literary imagery.

At the hypnagogic onset of Anodos's dream, however, the dimensions of waking reality and dream are not yet separate, and their increasing separation traces their connection, the incident of an that ideal state of their synthesis. Still in his room, Anodos is 'looking out of bed' and suddenly sees that a 'stream of clear water was running over the carpet', and, 'stranger still', the 'carpet, which I had myself designed to imitate a field of grass and daises' had been brought to life by the vision associated with his particular state of consciousness, so that 'the grass-blades and daises seemed to wave in a tiny breeze that followed the water's flow.'⁹⁰ The 'branches and leaves designed upon the curtains of my bed were slightly in motion', and, likewise, the 'elaborately carved foliage' of the dressing table, 'of which ivy formed the chief part' had undergone a 'singular change.' First, they began to look 'curious' until they *were* 'unmistakeably ivy', and just beyond it, the design seemed to continue itself where the designer had stopped, so that 'a tendril of clematis twisted itself about the gilt handle of one of the drawers.'⁹¹

Creation and the created, material and the immaterial, are one in the imagination of the creative artist, and that this perfect union of nature is manifested in a decorative object, pieces of furniture, seemingly to pre-empt the ideals of Arts and Crafts artists is no coincidence. William Raeper notes

⁹⁰ George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*, ed. by Nick Page (London, 2008), 47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

how the similarities in thought manifested in visually similar ways. The stage sets and theatre curtains that were designed and hand-painted by the MacDonald daughters with the help of Arthur Hughes' brother Edward for the family-devised performance of the *Pilgrim's Progress* had a 'Morrissy' appearance.⁹² Anodos's aesthetic vision echoes not only MacDonald's own geometric floral and botanical patterns that adorned his poetry manuscripts, and that of his children in the MacDonald family sketchbooks – the MacDonald family's ministry through their very own *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which enacted on and off the stage while in Hammersmith. It was the same spirit that was reflected in the design ideals of Morris and likeminded figures of the arts and crafts movement.⁹³ As Morris and MacDonald encode their ideals of nature, and mind and society's relationship with it, into pattern, this dream-vision that enacts these ideals, accordingly teaches Anodos the right kind of thinking, guides him to where his own decorative art, which made his own life more beautiful, has come from, a mindset diametrically opposed to the scientific materialism, 'like [that of] a geologist', which he displays at the beginning of the novel.⁹⁴ The dream facilitates the psychological conversion with which Anodos is dispatched back into waking reality, where he now approaches 'the duties of [his] new position', of managing the estate he inherited, 'somewhat instructed [...] by the adventures that had befallen me in Fairy Land.'⁹⁵ Wondering whether he could 'translate the experience of [his] travels there, into common life', he feels like 'a ghost, sent into the world to minister to my fellow men', as MacDonald ministered at Hill's houses for the poor, preaching and practising the utopian imagination.⁹⁶ When unsure about his progress, Anodos seeks counsel in nature, and in the final vision of the novel, he hears the fairy voice of his dreams say 'a great good is coming [...] to thee Anodos', indicating he has averted the path of the unnatural philosophy that has misshapen both the London MacDonald experienced in Hammersmith, and the goblins that embodied its faults.⁹⁷

The position of both Anodos and Guest's journeys ends are thus noteworthy. In *News From Nowhere*, having travelled from Kelmscott House to Kelmscott Manor in a dream, it is the river that connects the two houses:

⁹² Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 338.

⁹³ cf. These sketchbooks, along numerous loose uncatalogued visual materials are held at Aberdeenshire Museums Archive, Mintlaw [MS ABHER 2007.011].

⁹⁴ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 42.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 42, 271.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 271.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 272.

one situated in the din of the metropolis, the other nestled in the countryside, closer to the source of the Thames. The hidden source of the rivulet that leads Anodos through the fairy forest into Fairy Land, and carries his boat to the edge of it and his resting consciousness, springs from his house and returns him to it. In the same uncanny doubling, the house on his departure and the house to which the changed Anodos returns, and then changes, are two very different places: one, the beginning of his journey, the other, the end. Rather than an end of restfulness as Guest's, it is in MacDonald's fashion a restlessness, reflective of their differing attitudes to nature, as a conqueror, in Morris's case, as outlined in 'How We Might Live', or, in MacDonald's case, as a minister in constant awe of creation, constantly acting according to its instructions.

The distance of a river from its source measures its distance from the ideal of nature which both authors strive for, and indicates the way towards it. As the Thames flows from the natural countryside near Kelmscott through London, where it is polluted and barely visible; the later fiction of MacDonald embodies cities built upon the un-ideals of the mind – minds which have, unlike Anodos's, not become reformed. In Mr Vane's vision in *Lilith* (1895), Bulika is a dystopian future reflection of a society based on purely capitalistic values, governed by Eugenics, as 'poverty was an offence' and '[D]eformity and sickness were taxed.'⁹⁸ The sound of waters is only faintly audible below ground; no waters are in sight. Like the wind, its sound indicates the direction of Utopia, and, accordingly, while subdued in Bulika, the river bursts forth in its counterpart, the vision of the Celestial City. Both Morris's and MacDonald's fantastic utopian visions function along temporal, and dialectical axes. As the medievalism that pointed to a more natural, idealised past, their dream-visions do not, however, advocate a return to the past. Through dialectical juxtapositions of such pasts original, the source, with their antithesis, their corruption, or potential corruption, their Utopias are not Romantic Edens – the orchard of the Little Ones remains an impossibility. MacDonald and Morris strive for synthetic post-Industrial visions: they are *New* Jerusalems, the redemption of mankind after its fall, which is granted by the already inherent laws of the world, and society's reconciliation with them, a continuing and renewed effort MacDonald had undertaken ever since his studies of applied science, and reading of poetry at King's College Aberdeen. And despite the differences in the aesthetic and literary visions of both Morris

⁹⁸ MacDonald, *Lilith*, 162.

and MacDonald, it was nature that was the source, providing the map and the practical instructions, as it is always where the voice of nature calls from, as in *At the Back of the North-Wind*, where the in this case, hyperborean, post-human paradise was located – an earthly paradise which both Morris and MacDonald hoped there could yet be built in their green and pleasant land.

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The Angel Creatures of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*

Elena Pasquini

One splendour, in particular, I remember – wings of deep carmine, with an inner down of warm gray, around a form of brilliant whiteness. She had been found as the sun went down through a low sea-fog, casting crimson along a broad sea-path into a little cave on the shore, where a bathing maiden saw her lying.¹

This image is one of the most beautiful in *Phantastes*, and it is one that always comes to mind when the novel is mentioned to me. It is an extract from Chapter XII, where the protagonist, Anodos, meets creatures from a faraway planet in which women have angel wings instead of arms, while the men look like human men. The chapter in question is probably one of my favourite parts because it brings to mind many other texts that speak about love, soulmates and enchanted places. However, when attempting to analyse *Phantastes*, it is noticeable that scholars seem to disagree on the beauty and the importance of this scene. The novel itself has been controversial over the years, dividing readers into two camps. For some, the text is a powerful and beautiful fantasy novel, full of different aspects of fantasy: statues that are people, knights, fairies, evil shadows and enchanted species. At the same time, for others, it is just a very confused collection of short, disconnected stories. This feeling of disconnection between the stories that create the novel has encouraged some to single out Chapter XII as an unnecessary passage in which the angel creatures and their story have no meaning. Adrian Gunther contests Robert Lee Wolff, for example, who sees this chapter, and also Chapter XIII, as useless to the overall needs of the novel, believing that MacDonald should not have published them.² Similarly, Clayton Jay Pierson, as Susan E. Howard shows, believes that the stories are not important for Anodos because he just

¹ George MacDonald, *Phantastes* (Whitethorn, CA, 1994), 139. Further citation given in text.

² Adrian Gunther, 'The Structure of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 12 (1993), 43–59, (43).

reads them and does not really participate in them.³

Even if, for Wolff and Pierson, both chapters are not worthy of much attention, Chapter XIII has frequently been considered to exist as an almost perfect parallel with Anodos' story. Cosmo's story in Chapter XIII finds another man infatuated with a cursed woman, this time in a mirror/painting. Cosmo manages to free the woman from her curse, losing his life in doing so. His story allows Anodos to see what he must also do: sacrifice himself for his beloved. Thanks to the clear connection between the stories of the two men, Chapter XIII has been afforded closer attention from critics and readers. Chapter XII tends to be more obscure, having a fragmented structure, with alternation between poetry and prose, and a very short story about the customs of the angel-like creatures. It is exactly this that makes Chapter XII important to the understanding of the overall text of *Phantastes* and allows it to complement Chapter XIII as learning moments for Anodos and the reader. This paper aims to extend the analysis of Chapter XII, arguing that it is an integral part of the whole story and an insight into MacDonald's poetics on art and religion. The analysis will concentrate on an explanation for the fragmented structure of the novel and Chapter XII, identifying Novalis as a possible influence for this stylistic choice. It will also look into the concept of the novel as Anodos' *Bildungsroman* and his journey towards understanding love as a gift to give and not a selfish demand. Chapter XII is analysed in connection with Chapter XIII, with both examples showing the use of literature as a tool for teaching. In this case, the overall lesson being that love is sacrificial for the good of other fellow human beings, highlighting MacDonald's belief of love and God's love in contrast with those of the Calvinist church.

Stephen Prickett has argued that *Phantastes* is a difficult text to categorise generically.⁴ This is due mostly to the great variety of different chapters and stories within the main story of Anodos. It is a fairy tale, with the length of a novel, which seems to combine different elements of classic fairy tales like the Ogress in the cottage, and the *chanson de geste* – as seen in the adventure of Sir Percival – and myths like the angel creatures in Chapter XII. The stories are so varied and different that they cannot be associated with a single genre. However, Prickett adds that, in general, scholars and readers have agreed in

³ Susan E. Howard, 'In Search of Spiritual Maturity – George MacDonald's *Phantastes*' *Extrapolation*, vol. 30, no. 3 (October 1989), 280–292, (280–281).

⁴ Stephen Prickett, 'Fictions and Metafictions: 'Phantastes', 'Wilhelm Meister', and the Idea of the 'Bildungsroman' in William Raeper (ed.), *The Gold Thread – Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1990), 109–125, (109).

calling the novel a *Bildungsroman*.⁵ The German term can be translated as a novel of growth or, as Prickett writes 'the novel of self-cultivation' in which the story is usually constructed around a single character who will learn throughout their adventures, and situations.⁶ Usually the novel has a character whose choices are dictated by selfish behaviours or inexperience, naivetés that will cause them some form of fall or unpleasant situation. Thanks to these experiences and the lessons learned while failing, the character should arrive at the end of their story having grown as a person and often are seen to become a member of the society. In *Phantastes*, Anodos is represented as an adult only in age, but he shows immediately within the first encounter with his fairy grandmother that he has no control over his impulses and is internally very immature. The lack of discipline and the egocentricity of his behaviours are the main reasons for his misfortunes. He also lacks a form of empathy and respect for other people, always putting himself first, and with no knowledge of what it means to feel true love, friendship and respect for other beings. One of the main characteristics of Anodos is his constant incapability to control his desires, especially sexually, which lead him to try and possess the women he likes without too much consideration of each woman's desires. Anodos must learn what love really is and the difference between sexual desire and love for another person that is selfless and pure.

In a *Bildungsroman* it is important that the growth of the character is well considered in each passage and there must be a series of ups and downs, growths and failures, to make the character realistically capable of improvement. Each chapter should be calculated to allow for this growth over the course of the text. At first, it seems that the fragmented structure of *Phantastes* slows down this linear action of the *Bildungsroman*. One of the biggest critiques of *Phantastes* is its composition as a series of disconnected stories, which have discouraged and confused more than one reader. In his essay 'The Structure of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*', Gunther explains how, even if there are many separated stories, they do have a structure of 'parallels and key transition points [...]' which makes the text a coherent journey in Anodos' growth.⁷

Gunther's analysis, for example, highlights the fact that Chapter XII and Chapter XIII are at the physical centre of the novel: the text is composed of twenty-five chapters in total and thus the two chapters share the centre of the book. Their content cannot be dismissed as unimportant, as their parallel nature

⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁷ Gunther, 43.

can be used to analyse the novel itself. In fact, Chapter XII mirrors, in a smaller way, the structure of the text and its meaning over all; while Chapter XIII uses Comso's story to directly illustrate Anodos' personal journey from selfish love to a sacrificial love. Thus, it makes Chapter XII and XIII both parallel and complement each other, as smaller versions of the novel as a whole. In his analysis, Gunther focuses more on Chapter XIII, where Anodos shares with the reader a story he has read in the fairy palace: Cosmo's story. This recalls clearly the story of the main protagonist Anodos. Both men are in love with a lady who has been cursed and who they then free. At the end of Chapter XIII, Cosmo dies to save his love, sacrificing himself for her life. This is a 'premonition' of what Anodos must do at the end of the novel to save a loved one. Anodos sacrifices his life not just for the Marble lady, but also for the Knight, her partner, and Anodos' dearest friend. This kind of sacrifice is possible because Anodos has internalised the lesson learned through not just his adventures and mistakes, but through the example set by two of the texts he reads in the library of the fairy palace which are told in Chapter XII and XIII.

While Chapter XIII represents Anodos' story itself, Chapter XII encapsulates the whole book both in its fragmentation and meaning. This is done through the dream-like atmosphere and fragmented structure which, in turn, is also the area of praise or critique for the novel as a whole. Chapter XII is, in fact, the story which Anodos reads in the fairy palace and it is about the angel creatures who live on a planet which is not Earth but something beyond. The story is told in a way that is as fragmented as the novel itself. Chapter XII, for example, starts with a poem about nature and time and how it 'et blow and roll the world about;/ Blow, Time – blow, winter's Wind!' (133). Nature and time are what makes the world keep moving, they are two of the main creators and creations of it. The chapter, however, contains another two poems, not directly connected with each other, alternating three poems to three moments of prose, again not directly connected. No other chapter presents as many changes of pace and focal points as this one. It is as though MacDonald continually pushes us forward and slows us down and then pulls us again, like the wind that blows and blows in the poem which opens the chapter. After the first poem about the wind, the chapter opens with a reflection not about nature in general but the nature of man:

All that man sees has to do with man. Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship. The community of the centre of all creation suggest an interradiating connection and dependence of the parts. (134)

This passage is important both for Anodos's journey and for the reader's experience. In fact, it suggests that all that people do and think about is related to humanity itself. Art, philosophy, science and even religion are all man's activities and fundamentally they speak about man itself. People as single individuals are little worlds that need to be in a relationship with others, and there is no possibility to really be alone; man is not made to be alone. At the same time, MacDonald may also refer to mankind as a world and nature and God as the other relationship humans must consider. Everything, no matter what scale, is based on relationships and mutual belonging, connection, and dependence. So is the novel itself. All the parts seem fragmented, but they are fundamentally all related, and important. Every single adventure or story that Anodos faces relates to love, as either negative possession or positive selfless love. It also addresses the love of people for their community and families both positive, like the two brothers, or negative like the worship of the fake idol at the end of the novel. Every fragment is a small example which a reader can either understand or not, but there is at least one chapter important for each reader, where the message about love that Anodos must learn is shared with the reader as well.

Chapter XII shows, in a smaller version, the fragmentation of the whole novel, as if MacDonald wanted to ensure the reader was paying attention; this could be linked to MacDonald's admiration of the philosopher Novalis. It is no accident that MacDonald borrows the notion of fragmentation and a dreamlike atmosphere from Novalis, whose words open the novel itself. As Prickett quotes in his essay, the fragment is Novalis' definition of fairy tales and poetry in which the German philosopher writes: '[a] fairy story is like a disjointed dream-vision, an ensemble of wonderful things and occurrences'.⁸ As in a dream, the reader can understand that there is a meaning and a vision, even if at the time the experience is not fully clear. As Kristin Gjesdal suggests, Novalis claims that the nature of reality is a fragmentation of thoughts and feelings; it is not a linear and strict event, but a series of events experienced in different ways.⁹ Throughout the text, and Chapter XII as its smaller example, the author wants to propose a story not for entertainment's sake, but as something which mimics the way in which reality can be interpreted and vocalised by humanity. MacDonald does this with literature throughout his life, and it is not a coincidence that he uses literature as the key means by which Anodos learns

⁸ Prickett, 109.

⁹ Kristin Gjesdal, 'Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis]' in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2009; substantive version 2014) < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/novalis/> >

his greatest life lessons; Anodos' reading of stories mimics and parallels the position of the reader who is reading the text as a whole. The structure of the text and the chapter is then a mirror on how humans, like Anodos, experience life; it is a series of experiences which make us who we are even if sometimes we do not understand why they happen. Overall, *Phantastes* is a *Bildungsroman*, a story about the growth and education of the main character, Anodos, but also of the readers themselves. The two chapters at the centre show him, in a very focused way, what he has to learn through the whole experience in Fairy Land: it is up to Anodos to understand what the stories are telling him, as it is up to us to understand what MacDonald is trying to tell us through the story of Anodos.

Chapter XII is not just important for its internal structure but also for the story of the angel creatures visited by the human man. The first part of the chapter seems concerned with establishing the importance of community and connection not just between people but between worlds. MacDonald writes: '[a]ll that man sees has to do with man. Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship' (133). Humans seem to obey a law of interconnections because they are social beings, interested both in understanding humanity and their surrounding world. The importance of community and individual self-reflection is not an accident in the work of a deeply religious author:

No shining belt or gleaming moon, no red and green glory in a self-encircling twin-star, but has a relation with the hidden things of a man's soul, and it may be, with the secret history of his body as well. (134)

The stars, the souls and the bodies are all connected; even if a scientific or poetic solution cannot be given at the time, MacDonald seems to suggest that faith can still do it. The creatures in Chapter XII arrived in their world in a mysterious way. They as individuals are a miraculous creation. They also embody the importance of community. The moment in which the baby is discovered is very important because it shapes the appearance and temperament of the future adult. While the males have a normal appearance, the females have wings instead of arms. At the moment of their founding, the male is influenced internally by the time and season of their discovery, the females' wings retain the colours of such moment:

Those that are born in summer have wings of a deep rose-colour, lined with pale gold. And those born in autumn have purple wings, with a

rich brown on the inside. (138–9)

The Angels' appearance, the colours and temperaments they have are characterised by the natural and temporal moment in which they are found by the maiden, not when they are born. It is not the moment in which they are created, but the moment in which they are discovered that counts. It is the moment in which they enter the community that shapes them. It is the experience with the world and the people around them, with nature and their kind, that shape those creatures and so the same can be said of humans. Peoples' behaviours are shaped by their experience and the conditions and circumstances in which they are born and accepted make them different from each other.

These interconnections and the power of shaping each other links to Novalis' poetics. Novalis wrote the concept of *Bildung* (education) as something fundamental both for the individual and for the community in which the individual lives. *Bildung* needs art, philosophy, and religion to be completed. Novalis claims, as Gjesdal explains, that philosophy is a form of conversation with oneself through the act of questioning.¹⁰ For Novalis, doing philosophy 'is a conversation with oneself', which 'takes place through the encounter with the other'. As Gjesdal puts it, then, to 'do philosophy is a challenge to the real self to reflect, to awaken and to be spirit'.¹¹ It is possible to consider philosophy as inclusive of art and religion if we consider that for MacDonald all three were components of the same message that he wanted to pass both to his readers, through novels and essays, and to his sermons audiences in church. If that is taken into consideration, then the meaning of Chapter XII is not just a linear story of his creatures, but a philosophical example of his understanding of the world and the human condition. People need other people to thrive, to grow and to learn what love is. None of those are achievable alone. Philosophy, art and love are all acts which are best when built on the connection achieved through community and shared, to allow everyone else to experience new things. Novalis clarifies that the act of growth is achievable when we look not just inside ourselves, but when we take into consideration the other's point of view. The encounter with the other is fundamental because the self can understand itself through confrontation with the other. Art is the perfect medium for the *Bildung* to happen because it allows humans to see themselves in stories and in questioning the art, they

¹⁰ Gjesdal, 'Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis]'.

¹¹ Ibid.

question themselves. Arising through the act of reading stories, Chapter XII and XIII are a way for Anodos, and the reader, to see himself as human through the angel creatures, and himself as an individual through Cosmo.

As Courtney Salvey writes in her essay, 'Riddled with Evil: Fantasy as Theodicy in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *Lilith*', Anodos acquires his dark, evil shadow in the cottage of the Ogress who is reading about evil and darkness.¹² Salvey suggests that what the Ogress reads is false, arguing that even if solemn and read in a book, her vision of the world as something dark and evil is not the vision of MacDonald himself. But Anodos still does not know this yet and, breaking another rule, he opens a door he should not have and gets cursed with the dark shadow. This shadow, however, does not have power in the fair palace, which is a positive space. A place where Anodos belongs and where he can learn something, this time not by listening to a false prophet, the Ogress, but by reading himself and gaining his own interpretations. He reads many books, but he only remembers and tells the reader the stories of the angel creatures and Cosmo. Anodos wants to learn and to know and through this he can slowly but steadily start to understand his journey.

Chapter XII and XIII each contain that part of the *Bildungsroman* which openly explores the idea of love as a form of giving instead of possessing – the lesson that Anodos must learn in order to achieve spiritual growth. Both Howard and Gunther agree on this reading. In her essay, Howard suggests that the lesson that Anodos must learn from the example of the two stories is 'love: not sexual love, but *caritas*, the self-sacrificing love [...] similar to the one of Christ.'¹³ While it is possible to see the sacrificial attitude of Cosmo, who dies to save his lover, the angels and men do not seem to die as a voluntary act. It is mostly an impulse, a desire for something so new and so powerful that they can only react by sacrificing themselves. When Howard uses the parallel with Christ, again, there is a difference between dying as an act done with agency, which the creatures do not really seem to have:

The sign or cause of coming death is an indescribable longing for something, they know not what, which seizes them, and drives them into solitude, consuming them within, till the body fails. (141)

¹² Courtney Salvey, 'Riddled with Evil: Fantasy as Theodicy in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *Lilith*' in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 27 (2008), 16–34, (22).

¹³ Howard, 282.

The creatures seem to die because they do not know what to do with the feeling which has taken possession of them. However, what they do is the exact opposite of Anodos' attitude towards love, even if they do not have a name for this kind of love. Anodos has so far acted in a possessive way towards the women he has some interest in. It happens with the Marble Lady, and also with the girl with the globe. After being seized by a desire to possess the girl's singing globe, Anodos ends up breaking the globe, deaf to the begging of the girl to not touch what belongs to her. The creatures of this planet are different: they prefer to die without hurting the object of their love. Their lesson is to feel love has something connected with giving not taking. They do it instinctively showing the pureness of their heart. However, Anodos can still learn and understand this lesson of love.

The angels and men of the planet are, according to Howard, a negative example of love. They are sterile because they are not connected with each other; their love produces death and not life.¹⁴ This idea of a sterile love between the angel creatures is unsatisfying given the message they have about the idea of love. The creatures do not need to make babies because someone creates them; they are found and loved regardless of their origin. They do not create them but 'do the maidens go looking for children, just as children look for flowers' (136). Those creatures are childlike in spirit, finding each other is like a game and the love they have is as pure as the one between a child and its parents. Howard claims that they are disconnected from each other; however, their appearance is modified according to how they are found, and how they are introduced to each other. Also, the moment of their finding is fundamental for understanding the future of the babies and their inclinations, and sometimes they are found in unfavourable circumstances. However, the maiden will take care of them: '[b]ut no sooner is a child found, that its claim for protection and nurture obliterates all feeling of choice in the matter' (136). They are still cared for, even if sexual love did not create them, they do evoke love in the hearts of the others who will protect them and love them. Howard condemns the creatures for their incapacity to create babies, life, but their act of caring for each other is as important as life itself.

Similarly, Gunther claims that those creatures are undeveloped because of their lack of understanding of both love and carnal love, arguing that their physical and emotional lack of sexuality characterises them as negative examples. In fact, Gunther even suggests that narrator/Anodos is the spiritual

¹⁴ Ibid., 282.

guide of the creatures; it is by Anodos's telling the angels how babies are made on Earth that allows the angels and men to understand what their act of dying leads to: a re-incarnation. Their 'indescribable longing' is the last thought they hold and the one that 'controls the form (and presumably the world) of their next incarnation.'¹⁵ Interestingly, he claims that after Anodos reveals how babies are born, two of them leave to die 'in order to hasten this next stage which they now understand to be their direction.'¹⁶ However, this is inaccurate. Only one maiden dies due to the story Anodos tells them. The death allows the narrator to explain the costume of those people surrounding the act of dying. When a maiden and a man look into each other's eyes and they fall in love, their feeling pushes them far away from each other, leading them to find a solitary place and die. The act is performed without knowing what the feeling is or why it happens. This next incarnation privileges a hope that love can be reciprocated between the two creatures who have fallen in love and re-born on our realm.

At the same time, the idea that the Angels die voluntarily, in the pursuit of sexual love destroys the meaning of these creatures. Rolland Hein is another critic that, like Gunther, believes some of the creatures 'long to die in order to be born into this world where they may know physical love.'¹⁷ However, he later argues that 'MacDonald's doctrine' suggests 'self-denial', in which a person should be able to restrain themselves from too much indulgence in pleasures which will destroy the real essence of the pleasure itself.¹⁸ It is not possible then to agree that the creatures die to fulfil their need for pleasure and still consider MacDonald's idea that death is a passage to a positive further existence. In the first case, the Angels are represented in a way similar to the myth of the Rider and the two Horses written by Plato in *Phaedrus*. One horse is a white horse who runs towards the divine or spiritual world, whereas the black horse drives towards the world of materiality and pleasure; the rider, who is the mind or soul, has to balance the two horses. When the black horse wins his battle against the other horse and the rider, the whole group fall to Earth and acquire a body in which the soul is now trapped until death. In suggesting that the angel creatures die to re-incarnate in our world and be able to enjoy the pleasure of physical love, associates them with the black horse in Plato's myth.

¹⁵ Gunther, 50.

¹⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷ Rolland Hein, *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald* (1982; Eureka, CA, 1989), 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 69.

However, MacDonald, as said before, does not believe in total abstinence and mortification of the body to achieve the divine. Even Hein suggests that 'MacDonald does not hesitate to champion the role of sex, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a higher form of love, and hence, spiritual well-being.'¹⁹ The creatures do not know why they die; they do because the desire they feel has no name but is a consuming force. Instead of acting on it, as Anodos usually does, the angel creatures die, in self-denial and so they are rewarded. What the passage suggests is that dying is not a final event, but a new beginning which for these creatures is rewarded by experiencing a new type of love.

Chapter XII is a chapter of hope looking towards a love created by giving instead of abandoning one's self to a violent passion. MacDonald manages to create a new poetic love in a religious, harmonious way. He does not perceive the solution of greedy and violent love to be the 'Christian asceticism' marked by 'repression' and denial, but rather he allows us to imagine a new one.²⁰ What Howard and Gunther perceive as sterile or undeveloped, is not a negative state, but a positive one, a stage of learning. Mike Partridge suggests that MacDonald believed men and women to be the children of God, creating them from his heart, which is what happens in the story described by Chapter XII.²¹ The state in which these beings are in is one of simple joy and love: they love each other as families without needing passion. Their connection with each other and the world around them is different, not inferior. As Hein suggests MacDonald wants the reader to enjoy and be transported by the images of the novel and to accept it as it is because 'some incidents will seem to convey moral and spiritual truths; others will remain incorrigibly enigmatic,' as in why the women creatures should have wings and the men do not.²² The creatures of this planet do not know who creates them, and they do not know why they die in the way in which they do; they are very childlike. It is in their being honest, childlike, and faithful to the work of nature that they are rewarded with salvation, with being reborn again. This idea of salvation made MacDonald unorthodox for many theologians and critics of his time.²³ Salvation is not something that God gives only to chosen people,

¹⁹ Ibid., 68.

²⁰ Ibid., 79.

²¹ Mike Partridge, 'George MacDonald's Theology' in *The Golden Key* (2013), <<http://www.george-macdonald.com/articles/theology.html>> [last accessed 17 November 2017].

²² Hein, 55.

²³ Martin Dubois, 'Sermon and Story in George MacDonald', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 43, no. 3 (September 2015), 577–87, (577).

as in Calvinism, or something that is achievable with repressing our nature and needs, as in Catholicism. It is an act of connection between the worlds based on the understanding of what love is. Salvation is an act of love that is extended by God to his creatures. These angelic creatures should not be judged to establish if they are superior or inferior to humans. They are there as a symbol of something else, something that is 'lying beyond consciousness' (134). They are an example of true love, fraternal love and family love; all types of love that can be found in real life and which Anodos can finally understand. It is important that Anodos sees that his way of perceiving love, and wanting love, is wrong. Love is not something that can be demanded or taken from someone else. Love is organic and has many forms: it is a gift to give, even if it means we have to sacrifice all we have, as is demonstrated by Cosmo and ultimately by Anodos.

This paper has proposed several reasons why Chapter XII of *Phantastes* requires closes analysis by its readers. The chapter's position at the centre of the novel makes it a strategic point for the rhythm of the story and encapsulates the meaning of the story itself. With Chapter XII and XIII, the reader is at the heart of the novel and can see its essence and message. The story invites its readers to enjoy the fragmentation and dreamlike atmosphere as it swings between poetry and prose, between nature and supernatural beings. Chapter XII and Chapter XIII are texts within the text that highlight the philosophy and thoughts of MacDonald who believed strongly in the importance of literature and art, as a way to teach people. *Phantastes* is a novel that focuses on the idea of love, what love should be and can be, as a communal good and a gift. It is also something that can be learned, and which shapes the lives of men and women alike. Love allows humans a second chance, something so far away from the straight and unforgivable Calvinist belief of grace and predestination to salvation or damnation. MacDonald gives a second chance to the angel creature to fulfil their love on Earth; and he gives a second chance to Anodos when he has finally understood what true love is. Love is a form of salvation for both individuals and communities. *Phantastes* is a text about the salvation and maturity of a young man, Anodos, who becomes the example of hope that MacDonald provides for his readers. It is an act of faith in the act of giving, in the act of loving and being loved, that is embodied by the angel creatures of Chapter XII.

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Anodos, Late Antiquity and Greek Translation in George MacDonald

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Introduction

In George MacDonald's 1858 novel *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*, the main character, Anodos, enters Fairy Land the day after his twenty-first birthday and embarks upon a journey through that land before returning home at the end of the novel. Scholarship on *Phantastes* contains a number of speculations about the name Anodos. Within this body of work there are therefore competing definitions of the word's philology, source, and its meaning within MacDonald's text. Moreover, these definitions often become the cornerstone for larger arguments regarding the sources MacDonald could have used in the text as a whole. This article aims to provide a closer examination of the name Anodos and the Greek *anodos* (ἀνοδος) with the aim of clarifying the discussion of the term within MacDonald scholarship. This will be undertaken in two related parts. First, I will discuss, with reference to recently disclosed primary source material, MacDonald's education in Greek at the University of Aberdeen and Highbury College so as to establish the probable boundaries of his capacity to translate Greek and to fix some possible source texts within, or closely related to, that probable range. Second, having established some sources on *anodos* in Greek literature to which he could have been exposed, I will discuss the issues of translation, principally of sense and meaning, that arise from the use of *anodos* in these sources.

Ultimately, the intent of this paper is not to argue for a unitary meaning, let alone a single meaning, of *anodos* within *Phantastes*. The lack of substantial works translated by MacDonald from Greek has relegated the subject even further back than his similarly unappreciated knowledge of and translations from German. Nevertheless, MacDonald's Scotland was steeped in a tradition of study of Classical Greek literature, and his later education and experiences in England would further expose him to works composed in Greek. This is an exercise in clarification in service to a broader and more significant aim: to put flesh on the bones of the current appreciation of George MacDonald as

a translator of Greek, coming out of a Scottish educational milieu had high regard for Greek language and literature.¹

MacDonald's Education in Greek

Works of Greek literature formed a cornerstone of education at the University of Aberdeen since the foundation of King's College by William Elphinstone in 1451, attested by a range of works retained in the libraries of King's and Marischal's Colleges. The earliest source for MacDonald's own interaction with this tradition in Scottish education is from May 2, 1838, at the MacDonald family estate of Bleachfield Cottage, when he was fourteen years old and would have been studying for his entrance exams for the University of Aberdeen.

This date, and his age, are fixed with reference to his earliest Greek textbook, a translation of the Latin edition of Moor's *Elements of the Greek Language* from 1836.² Casual vandalism of the volume appears to have been a family tradition, as annotations in several hands, in English and Greek, can be discerned on these pages. In addition to George MacDonald's inscription, there are four others, in three distinctive hands, from a John H. MacDonald and a John Hill MacDonald. Except for George MacDonald's, a date is attached to only one inscription, that of John Hill MacDonald at Bleachfield Cottage on April 27, 1846. Another from Bleachfield Cottage, and two from King's College can be seen, but damage to the pages has obscured the dates. While it is therefore impossible to attribute the other writing in these pages to a particular MacDonald, they are instructive examples of the level of proficiency the holders had when it came into their possession. In addition to the Greek alphabet, written in four distinctive hands, several lines of English written in Greek letters can be made out by one -νες Μαχδοναλδ, where he reproduces his current address: Ὑντλγ – Αβερδεενσιρε Σχοτλανδ Βριταν ὁ μεγας νου στειγγ ατ θε στρεετ του Βασιλεος. Four words of actual Greek are present here, all with incorrect diacritics. Transliterated back it reads 'Huntly – Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Great Britain now staying at the street of the King.' That this is the product of a neophyte is apparent. A very basic familiarity with declensions and some rudimentary grammar is telling in itself, but even

¹ See Neil Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries Vol. II, Abbotsford to Keele* (Oxford: 1977) and M. R. James, *A Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts in the University Library Aberdeen* (Cambridge: 1932) or the extensive digital catalogue provided by the University of Aberdeen.

² With particular thanks to Christopher MacDonald for making images of these documents available for study.

beyond this the act of writing out English in Greek letters to familiarise the student with the alphabet is still practised today. While these inscriptions do not appear to be in George MacDonald's hand (acknowledging the difficulty of discerning this), he wrote at least one of the alphabets found in these pages and was likely around this same level of proficiency when he received the book.

This level of proficiency is unlikely to have persisted as rigorous engagement with Greek would have continued at King's College, with MacDonald having studied it for at least three hours a day during his undergraduate degree.³ Unfortunately, there are no known materials directly attributable to MacDonald's study of Greek during this period. MacDonald's successful completion of his undergraduate degree suggests that he at least had a basic familiarity with the material tested in these exams. Upon entering Highbury in 1848 to train as a Congregationalist minister MacDonald's studies would have been 'comprise[d of] the Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, and Syriac languages, the belles lettres, intellectual and moral philosophy, the mathematics, history, biblical criticism, the composition of sermons, theology, Hebrew antiquities, &c.'⁴ While recourse is often made to F. D. Maurice, or more rarely to A. J. Scott, as influences on MacDonald while at Highbury, a notable interlocutor was Ebenezer Henderson. From 1830–1850, Henderson was the theological lecture and the professor of Oriental languages.

So, in sum, MacDonald had about twelve years of Greek while at Aberdeen and Highbury, which is more than sufficient to qualify him as a translator of the language. He had ready access to a range of texts, as attested in the review of the Highbury curriculum, and implied by the works of his immediate tutors. As we continue on to consider the uses and significance of *anodos* within Greek literature, we will return to the Highbury curriculum, and to Henderson's work, but this hopefully provides a sense of the scope of Greek to which MacDonald was exposed.

***Anodos* in MacDonald Research**

Within the main body of criticism on *Phantastes* there are several definitions of *anodos* supplied. These include 'without a path' or 'pathless' 'the way back', and 'the way up'.⁵ Jonathan Sotto provides an excellent overview, noting these

³ David Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1987), 9.

⁴ 'Isham – Iver', in *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, ed. Samuel Lewis (London, 1848), 6–628.

⁵ For 'without a path' see Yuri Cowan, 'Allegory and Aestheticism in the Fantasies of

definitions and highlighting the need for an academic exploration of this issue: if a large part of MacDonald's enigmatic story is to be understood, the Greek meanings of this word must be reviewed in their full historical settings and contexts. The uses of the word *anodos*, along with the Greek mythology and religion associated with this word, Sotto asserts, prove central to an understanding of the mysteries within *Phantastes*.⁶ These differing definitions *anodos* influence the interpretation of the text, and larger arguments are built upon the definition which the individual critic chooses to use. Other scholars make similar arguments for translations of *anodos*, which Sotto notes as Wolff, Hein, Manlove, Reis, Docherty, Gunther and Muirhead.⁷ Sotto goes on to argue principally around the mythical significations of *anodos*. Prior to considering these ourselves, it is profitable to consider *anodos* in more strictly philological terms.

Sense and Meaning

The 1855 edition of Liddell and Scott dates from a few years prior to the publication of *Phantastes*, and offers translations under two different entries ἄν-οδος: 'having no way/impassible' and ἄνοδος: 'way up/ascent'.⁸ While it is true that *anodos* can mean both of these things, this is only true in the sense that idea is the same in an ideal definition and a definite ideal. One is adjective, and one is a noun, just as *anodos* as an adjective means impassible, and *anodos* as a noun means way up. In fact, the difference is even more pronounced in the case of *anodos*: there are two different constructions leading to an identical word distinguished by context. On the one hand is ἄνοδος constructed from an alpha privative attached to -οδος and giving us 'impassible' or 'no way'. It is from this that MacDonald scholars derive their 'trackless' imagery. On the other is ἄνοδος, constructed from ἀνα- attached to -οδος which gives us 'way up' or 'ascent', or 'rising'. These different constructions produce, in effect, two different words. That is to say, when used in context it is relatively difficult to confuse them – one being a noun, and the other an adjective. With this in mind, it is possible to consider the meanings and their sense in context, which are more expansive than the limited entries in the 1855 edition of Liddell and Scott suggest.

George MacDonald', *North Wind*, 25 (2006), 42. For 'pathless' see Christ Brawley, 'The Ideal and the Shadow: George MacDonald's *Phantastes*', *North Wind*, 25 (2006), 97. For reference to 'the way back' and the 'way up' see Aren Roukema 'The Shadow of Anodos: Alchemical Symbolism in *Phantastes*', *North Wind*, 31 (2012), 62.

⁶ Fernando Sotto, 'Chthonic Aspects of MacDonald's *Phantastes*: From the Rising of the Goddess to the Anodos of Anodos' *North Wind*, 18 (2000), 20.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: 1855), 123.

Impassible

Anodos as an adjective expressing ‘impassable’ or ‘having no way’ has two well established examples. Euripides, c. 480 BCE, wrote of ‘trackless paths’ in *Iphigenia*. Similarly, Xenophon, c. 430 BCE, referred to mountains that were impassable or trackless in *Anabasis*. Such adjectival are not unusual but are equally far less common than its use as a noun. Despite this, the adjectival use has clearly captured the imaginations of numerous MacDonald scholars.⁹ MacDonald’s facility with Greek certainly allows for the possibility that he could have encountered the term in either context. However, the presence of Xenophon on both the Highbury and King’s College curriculums makes that option somewhat more plausible. However, neither can be definitely asserted on the basis of either arguments currently put forward in MacDonald scholarship or from external evidence from MacDonald’s own work.

Physical Rising in Mythology and Elsewhere

The use of *anodos* as referring to ascent, or way up, is rather more well attested than ‘impassable’. References range from the rising of stars in Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle to the rising of the Nile in Aelian.¹⁰ The association of these more straightforward, physical ascents with mythological figures are the uses that have most taken MacDonald scholars. This is problematic as the use of *anodos* to refer to ascent from an underworld is quite limited. For example, while there may be a ‘way up’ for Orpheus, if he ever takes an *anodos*, it will not have been in Virgil or Ovid, both Latin authors (though he does tread an *acclivis* (ascending path)).¹¹ In Persephone’s cyclical departure and return to captivity, as recounted in Homer’s *Hymn to Demeter*, she does not take an *anodos* but is instead told to ἀνέλμυ (go up) from the misted land of Hades. While these figures may be considered to have ascensions attributed to them the texts themselves cannot be considered valid sources for any consideration of where MacDonald derived the name of the protagonist of *Phantastes* on the simple basis that the word *anodos* does not appear in them.

Problematically for Sotto, and others who argue for a Greek mythological account of Anodos such as Battersby, there are no accounts verifiably contemporary with the religious festivals commemorating these events that contain the word *anodos*. Archaeological and classical works, notably Berard Claude’s *Anodoi. Essai sur L’imagerie des Passages Chthoniens* and Sottos’

⁹ See the prior discussion for examples to this effect.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 355.6 and Aelian, *De Natura Animalium* 11.0.

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.53.

principle source, Jane Harrison's *Themis* and her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, draw largely, though not exclusively, on illustrations on red clay jars and mythological sequences that they identify as *anodoi*, but which are not internally identified as such.¹² Their attribution of *anodoi* to these images are largely a construction of the author. However, the association of these mythical images, on jars and in literature, with Persephone or Kore returning from Hades is not without basis.

It is possible to associate *anodos* with Persephone's return by way of the festival of Thesmophoria, a Greek cultic festival. Sotto and Battersby, as mentioned earlier, argue strongly for a connection with Persophone. Although none of the primary sources use the term *anodos*, the scholia on Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazysae* does state that the first day of that festival is referred to as *anodos*, and one of the fictional letters of Alciphron relates that the *Anodos* happens on the first day of Thesmophoria.¹³ The term is eminently applicable in this form, but for Sotto and Battersby's argument to be sound it is necessary that MacDonald had access to and was aware of a particular scholia on Aristophanes that is the sole use listed in a number of editions of Greek lexicons published around 1830-50. While this seems far-fetched, the existence of such scholia within MacDonald's intellectual reach is mentioned directly in a quotation from Henderson, in his notes to Stuart's *Elements of Biblical Interpretation and Criticism*:

p. 72, from Henderson's notes, *Scholia* mean *short notes* upon any author either of an exegetical or grammatical nature. On all the distinguished Greek authors scholia have been written, in more recent times; many volumes of which are still extant, upon Homer, Thucydides, Sophocles, Aristophanes, &c. In like manner a multitude of scholia from the ancient Christian Fathers, especially of the Greek Church, have come down to us in their works. Originally they were brief remarks, occasionally made in their commentaries and other writings. Afterwards these were extracted and brought together, and they now form what is called *Catena*

¹² See Claude Berard, *Anodoi. Essai sur L'imagerie des Passages Chthoniens* (Rome, 1947); Jane Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1912); and Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1908).

¹³ For an example of the scholia contemporary with MacDonald, see *Aristophanis Comoediae: Accedunt Perditarum Fabularum Fragmenta*, ed. G. Dindorfii (Oxford, 1838), 323.

Patrum. Many scholia are also found on the margin of manuscripts or interlined, or placed at the end of a book.¹⁴

A less verifiable source – in a variety of ways – is letter 37 of Alciphron. The letter makes the same association as does the scholia, noting that '[t]he Anodos has indeed already taken place on the first day...'.¹⁵ This is less verifiable for a number of reasons related to the text itself and to its availability to MacDonald. The most demonstrable of these is that while it is referenced in later lexicons, it is not present in those contemporary with MacDonald. While there are early editions of Alciphron their dating is fraught, and there is no way to connect them to MacDonald as with the scholia. While it is not impossible that he encountered, for example, Seiler's German 1856 edition of the letters, this is far less likely than an encounter with the scholia itself which is referenced in contemporary lexical entries for *anodos*.

Metaphorical Rising in Plato and Neoplatonic Theology

While it is therefore not impossible for MacDonald to have directly interacted with that scholia on Aristophanes, the same source directs us to a rather broader range. Henderson makes particular reference to the existence of scholia in the works of Greek Patristic sources.¹⁶ An examination of Henderson's publications shows which sources he was using, and which were filtering through to his students. In *The Great Mystery of Godliness Incontrovertible*, Henderson uses the authority of patristic sources, to support his arguments.¹⁷ Henderson makes use of Berriman's somewhat obscure 1741 *Critical Dissertation on 1 Timothy*, making specific mention of Berriman's use of the Greek and Latin fathers.¹⁸ Henderson also refers to Burton's 1826 work *Testimonies of the Ante-Nicene Fathers to the Divinity of Christ*.¹⁹ This text was one of the first to bring patristic sources to the scholarly community and Henderson's engagement

¹⁴ Moses Stuart, trans. and ed., *Elements of Biblical Criticism*, repub. and comm. E. Henderson (London: 1837), 72.

¹⁵ Allen Benner, trans., *The Letters of Alciphron, Aelian, and Philostatus* (London, 1949), 143.

¹⁶ Patristic here refers to works of theology in Greek and Latin composed by Christian writers between roughly the second and sixth centuries AD. This period is also referred to as Late Antiquity.

¹⁷ E. Henderson *The Great Mystery of Godliness Incontrovertible or Sir Isaac Newton and the Socinians Foiled in the Attempt to Prove a Corruption in the Text 1 Tim III, 15*. (London, 1830).

¹⁸ Ibid, 93.

¹⁹ Ibid., 96.

with sources such as suggest his involvement within a growing academic engagement with the patristics. The other key text which Henderson would undoubtedly have used in his courses at Highbury is the 1827 text *Elements of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, annotated by Henderson and quoted above.²⁰

Of metaphorical uses of ascent, Plato's use of *anodon* in *Republic* 517b to refer to the ascent of the soul is the most commonly identified source. This is of course an extension of the physical ascent language implied in the scholia on Aristophanes or apparent in Socrates of Constantinople, but it also carries its own unique sense. Crucially, MacDonald cannot have gotten this from a non-Christian Neoplatonic source such as Plotinus, Iamblichus, or Porphyry: they do not depend on the language of *anodos*. A notable and curious exception that perhaps deserves better attention by MacDonald scholarship is the writing of the fourth century Emperor Julian – so-called the Apostate for his outlawing of Christianity. He does deploy the language and concept of *anodos*. The defining feature of his writing is his adaptation and representation of older myths with contemporary religious and philosophical elements, in an effort to render them meaningful and significant to his subjects. His ill-fated attempt to restore the pagan traditions of the Empire bears several interesting resemblances with themes from MacDonald's work, and could perhaps benefit from further examination in its own right. However, it is difficult to say if and where MacDonald would have encountered Julian. His work is obscure, but Greek editions were published in Paris in the seventeenth century, and these were extant in the United Kingdom. I have been unable to definitively identify references to his works in the curricula or libraries to which MacDonald had access, but this absence of evidence is not definitive.

However, this is not to say, however, that there is no other Neoplatonic adoption of *anodos*: third and fourth century Christians adopt it, most probably intending to imply a more significant connection to Plato than that enjoyed by their non-Christian contemporaries.²¹ Such a move, by the proponents of True Philosophy, would not be out of place. Abundant evidence exists in the works of late antique Christian writers of the appropriation and adaptation of concepts and personages of non-Christian philosophy and religion. I have selected two instructive quotations to illustrate this – notably, both figures are familiar with the works of Origen, with Nazianzus having produced (with

²⁰ Moses Stuart *Elements of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation* ed. E. Henderson (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1827)

²¹ The appropriation, rather than explicit condemnation, of classical culture by late antique Christians is quite common although hardly universal.

Basil of Caesarea) Origen's *Philokalia*. Eusebius is notable for his *Ecclesiastical History*, but also produced many works of theology and Biblical commentary.

Three selections, from Gregory of Nazianzus' *In praise of Hero the Philosopher*, and one each from Eusebius of Caesarea's commentary on the Isaiah, demonstrate the broad reception of *anodos* language in the Fathers.

Gregory of Nazianzus uses *anodos* in a way which is similar to that employed by Plato, albeit with a particularly Christian reception:

It does not become us, nor is it in keeping with a philosophical temper, to be impressed in this away with the nobility that issues from legends and tombs and an hauteur long decayed, nor that which is attached to family or conferred titles, a boon derived from the labors of night and the hands of princes who are perhaps not even of noble birth themselves, but dispense it like any other prize; but rather with the nobility that is characterized by piety and a moral life and the ascent (*anodos*) to the first good, the source of our being.²²

Gregory writes in honour of the Christian convert Maximus, who would later betray him and attempt to usurp his position as bishop of Constantinople in 379. Prior to this, Maximus was highly regarded and considered a zealous and erudite defender of the faith. In praising him, Gregory alludes to two noteworthy themes in his corpus: deification and the true philosophy. The true philosophy, as contrasted with secular philosophy, concerns itself with virtuous conduct, Trinitarian faith, and practical emulation of Christ's example. Through this, one grows in faith towards knowledge of God. Reminiscent of Plato's ascent of the soul, in this case it is the deification of the believer: their ascent towards the divine source of being and good, or as much of it as can be achieved this side of death.

Eusebius, in his commentary on Isaiah, wrote that:

And after Cyrus, Xerxes, the king of the Persians, sent away Ezra "the scribe of the law" with letters ordering all the rulers of the nations between the country of the Persians and that of the Jews to cooperate with Ezra. This then was the second group of those who returned (*ginetai anodos*) with Ezra. After these things, when Nehemiah was again going up (*aneimi*) to Jerusalem...²³

²² Oration 25, trans. M. Vinson, *Fathers of the Church* 107 (Washington, D.C., 2003), 159.

²³ Johnathan Armstrong, trans., *Ancient Christian Texts: Commentary on Isaiah* (Downers

This example, commenting on Isaiah 14:2, is especially interesting in that it demonstrates a contrast in context between *aneimi*, here going up, and *anodos*, a return. Eusebius was perfectly aware of the implications of ascent and restoration in *anodos*, and here connects it explicitly with the restoration of the exiles to Jerusalem. Elsewhere, in his commentaries on the Psalms, and on 67(68):33 in particular, Eusebius uses *kathodos*, *epanodos*, and *anodos* to discuss the rising and setting of the sun in tension with the restoration of Christ to Heaven.²⁴

In the case of Gregory and Eusebius *anodos* carries implications not just of upwards motion as in the ascent of Christ to heaven or of the soul to its source, but of a return to a proper place. As Christ was incarnate on Earth, so too he ascends to Heaven to take his place as advocate alongside the Father. As mankind fell into sin, so too does it purify itself and progress towards God, the origin of its being. As with Plato's use to describe the ascent of the soul, these Fathers of the Church embraced and iterated the concept of an *anodos* to embrace the particular contours of Christian theology.

Faraday and Electrochemistry

A final area that is one that has generated an increasing amount of recent interest: the 'scientific' adaptation of *anodos* and *kathodos* into anode and cathode by Faraday in his work on electroplating. A familiarity with the genesis of anode and cathode helps concretise that it is precisely MacDonald's familiarity with Greek sources more broadly that must guide such a reading.

William Whewell, master of Trinity College, was the one who proposed to Faraday that anode and cathode be adopted. As he says in the letter 713,

I have considered the two terms you want to substitute for *eisode* and *exode*, and upon the whole I am disposed to recommend instead of them *anode* and *cathode*. These words may signify *eastern* and *western way*, just as well as the longer compounds which you mention, which derive their meaning from words implying rising and setting, notions which anode and cathode imply more simply. But I will add that, as your object appears to me to be the indicate of opposition of direction without assuming any hypothesis which may hereafter turn out to be false, *up* and *down*, which must be arbitrary consequences of position on any

Grove, IL., 2013), 77.

²⁴ *Patrologia Graeca* 23.719.

hypothesis, seem to be free from inconvenience even in their simplest sense. I may mention too that *anodos* and *cathodos* are good genuine Greek words, and not compounds coined for the purpose. [...].²⁵

Whewell's explanation of anode and cathode as signifying eastern and western refers to their use in describing physical rising.²⁶ The rising of the sun in the east and its setting in the west are a principal point of reference in this regard. There is little to object to in his assessment here, and he continues in a similar vein in letter 716:

As to the objection to *anode*, I do not really think it is worth hesitating about. *Anodos* and *Cathodos* do really mean in Greek *a way up* and *a way down*; and *anodos* does not mean, and cannot mean, according to the analogy of the Greek language, *no way*.²⁷ [...]

And if it did mean this as well as *a way up*, it would not cease to mean the latter also; and when introduced in the company with *cathodos*, no body who has any tinge of Greek could fail to perceive the meaning at once. The notion of *anodos* meaning *no way* could only suggest itself to persons unfamiliar with Greek, and accidentally acquainted with some English words in which the negative particle is so employed...²⁸

Whewell goes on to refer to an objection mounted by Faraday that it might be misunderstood as 'no way', which is to say as a cognate of the trackless I put forward by some scholars of MacDonald. Whewell's objection is predicted principally on the fact that such a meaning is only possible adjectivally, and that used in the sense he suggests such a meaning would not appear plausible to one familiar with Greek. Although MacDonald was certainly this, what he meant by the sense of *Anodos* as a name cannot be understood definitively

²⁵ Frank James (ed.), *The Correspondence of Michael Faraday: 1832–1840*, vol. II (London, 1991), 179.

²⁶ Whewell's intellectual reach was expansive and so opens a range of speculative possible sources of knowledge, but one textual source for *anodos* that can be wholly confirmed is Plato's *Republic*. Whewell published a translation from Greek in 1861. The explanation here implies at least a passing familiarity with other sources. The works of Plato and Aristotle are a reasonable absolute minimum.

²⁷ Whewell goes on to discuss that *anodos* can only mean 'no way' when used as an adjective. The explanation is materially similar to the one laid out earlier in this paper, and so I omit it.

²⁸ *Correspondence*, 182.

from Whewell's argument. Further, while it is certainly not implausible that MacDonald should have become acquainted with *anodos* by way of anode these quotations do suggest that it be best understood in the sense of ascents and descents in any case. Whewell's argument is on the basis of the ubiquity and clarity provided by 'good genuine Greek words' whose meaning could be easily perceived by anyone 'with a tinge of Greek' and who was not simply making assumptions on the basis of a familiarity with superficially similar English words.

The Utility of Secondary Sources

A final note should be made concerning the utility of secondary sources proximate to MacDonald in rationalising one or another claim about his understanding of *anodos*. Proponents of the claim that *anodos* should be interpreted as 'on no way' or 'wanderer' might point to Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's use of the word that she adopted as a pseudonym in *Fancy's Following*, in a conscious acknowledgement of George MacDonald.²⁹ Even passing over the grammatical torsion necessary to produce such a translation, Coleridge's understanding of *anodos* is not decisive for MacDonald's. Indeed, in a contest of contemporary sources, the *Eclectic Review*'s 1863 assessment of *Phantastes* offers that the work is '[a] larger "Story without an End", the story of Anodos, a name answering pretty much to our well-known Excelsior.'³⁰ This paper has, as far as possible, sought to highlight the primary sources to which MacDonald's expertise in Greek gave him access in order to approach the question of MacDonald as a translator of Greek. Where it has strayed from this, as in Whewell's letters, it has been to highlight that Whewell

²⁹ While many studies of Mary Coleridge assert, without reference, that Anodos as used by Coleridge is to be glossed in line with the 'pathless' translations above, Battersby asserts, without reference, that Coleridge herself glossed it as 'wanderer' in Christine Battersby, "Mary Coleridge, Luce Irigaray, and the female self" in *Beyond Representation and Poetic Imagination*, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge, 1996), 254. I can find no indication of this and note that the foreword to the 1900 edition of *Fancy's Following* discusses it signifying 'ascent' and 'return'. See Mary Elizabeth Coleridge ps. Anodos, *Fancy's Following* (1900: Portland, OR., 1900), foreword. I am inclined to accept Battersby's assertion, however, though this remains irrelevant to MacDonald's own understanding. The inclination in scholarship on Coleridge to present 'on no road' likely relates to *Gathered Leaves*, which quotes Coleridge directly connecting her use of Anodos to her godfather George MacDonald's *Phantastes*. Edith Sichel, the editor of the volume offers 'on no road' as the implication of the name and speculates concerning it. Edith Sichel, ed, *Gathered Leaves from the Prose of Mary E. Coleridge* (New York: 1910), 23.

³⁰ *The Eclectic Review*, January–June 1863, 163.

himself understood an education in the Classics to be decisive in the correct interpretation of the terms he offered to Farraday. That is to say that, while Whewell is far from the only valid source of information in MacDonald's use of *anodos*, it is notable that the evidence of Whewell suggests one should consider not externalities, but the products of formal education in the Greek language in the nineteenth century.

It is this on this that I would depend. MacDonald's education and skill with the Greek language gave him access to a scope and scale of literary references that make attempts to proffer unitary definitions deeply problematic on two fronts. First, it ignores MacDonald's facility as a translator of Greek and in so doing limits not just his intellectual reach but ignores the intellectual traditions of his education in Scotland and the wider Victorian intellectual culture in which he participated. Second, it passes over the far more likely conclusion that, like Whewell responding to Farraday, MacDonald was not only able to recognise a difference between adjectival and nominal usage but that he was aware of the varying theological significance in Greek and Christian religion. Simply put, an argument about the ambiguous meaning of *Anodos* in *Phantastes* could be readily constructed only with reference to earlier or contemporary secondary literature. This would tell us nothing about the matter at hand: MacDonald's competency in Greek, the sources to which it gave him access, and the potential richness the range of those sources added to his thought.

Conclusion

In this consideration of MacDonald as a translator of Greek evidence has been adduced for nearly every common scholarly argument for the meaning of *anodos*. The presence of Xenophon on the Highbury curriculum gives strong reason to believe that MacDonald had read his other popular works, widely available at the time, and in doing so encountered the idea of *Anodos* as trackless. Henderson's allusion to the availability of scholia on Aristophanes certainly opens the possibility that MacDonald connected *anodos* to the festival of Thesmophoria. And finally, my own offering, that the so-called Platonic sense of *Anodos* may be derived from MacDonald's reading of the Greek Fathers. This is suggested by the syllabus, Henderson's work, and MacDonald's association with F.D. Maurice as well. To a certain extent, MacDonald's familiarity with Whewell and Farraday's electrochemical lexicon of anode and cathode, first introduced in 1834, is supported by MacDonald's undergraduate exposure to chemistry. However, Whewell himself proposed the terms on the basis of his knowledge of Greek literature. MacDonald's familiarity with the

latter could not but strongly inform even an intentional play on the former.

That there is evidence for all of these makes it unlikely that any one can be suggested as the definitive meaning intended by MacDonald. To suggest otherwise is not just difficult to support but overlooks the breadth and depth of MacDonald's erudition. The Scotland of MacDonald's youth and education was one inextricably connected to the Greek language, and to great works of Greek literature. The continuation of this study at Highbury College, with figures notable for their use and popularisation of the works of the Greek Fathers, points directly to his status as a reader and translator of Greek. To search for definitive meaning in a word that in its own construction refuses a unitary definition, in the midst of such a broad and encompassing education, is to diminish MacDonald not just as a translator, but as a dilettante and an author, to whom the multivalence of *anodos* would themselves have appealed.

Notes on Contributors

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Dr. Rebecca Langworthy recently completed her doctoral thesis examining the development of adult fantasy in the work of George MacDonald. She has published on a range of fantasy authors including J. K. Rowling, Michel Faber, George MacDonald, and C. S. Lewis. Her current research includes work on community engagement with Kailyard authors.

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Derek F. Stewart is an independent scholar whose research interests include the nineteenth-century novel, Victorian theatre and Scottish writers of the period. His PhD thesis examined the depiction of the city in writings by Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Augustus Mayhew and Shirley Brooks, arguing that each author's profound interest in drama and performance shaped their representations of the London metropolis.

David Robb

David Robb retired from Dundee University in 2012 where he had been a senior lecturer: he is currently a Research Fellow in English. As such, he continues to work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottish Literature. He has recently written on George MacDonald, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Sydney Goodsir Smith. He is President of Dundee Chamber Music and chairs the Tayside branch of Friends of Scottish Opera. He is a past secretary and president of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, and has served on the literature award committees of the Scottish Arts Council and the Saltire Society.

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Adam Walker

Adam Walker recently completed a M.A. degree in Literary Studies at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania. His thesis linked the work of the British Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge both to late-eighteenth-century science writing and to the philosophy of nature of the ninth-century Irish writer John Scottus Eriugena. He is currently a PhD student at Harvard University where he continues to explore the intersections of theology and literature in the nineteenth century.

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Sharin Schroeder is an associate professor of English at Taipei Tech in Taiwan. She has published various articles on the reception history of Victorian writers such as Margaret Oliphant, George MacDonald, Matthew Arnold, Francis Newman, and Andrew Lang. She has also published several essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's nineteenth-century influences.

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Per Klingberg is a Ph.D. Candidate in Comparative Literature at Örebro University in Sweden, currently finishing a dissertation on George MacDonald's fantasies, reading them as depictions of the intellectual, religious and existential tensions brought on by the Victorian Crisis of Faith. He also writes literary criticism for *Svenska Dagbladet*.

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Joshua Rawleigh's research interests tend to focus on theology and literature in the nineteenth century. Currently he is examining the connection between George MacDonald and Syriac Christianity, drawing from his background in Syriac and MacDonald studies. He began postgraduate studies at the University of Edinburgh in autumn 2019.

Colin Manlove

Dr Colin Manlove (to whose memory this issue of *The Journal of Scottish Thought* is dedicated) was a literary critic with a particular interest in fantasy literature. He is the author of over thirteen books on subjects ranging from Shakespeare to Harry Potter. Among his best known work is *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975), which was one of the first academic studies of fantasy literature.

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Dr Maksim Medovarov is a historian of social, theological and political thought, especially in the UK and in Russia (the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). He is author of about 150 publications in history and philosophy. He participated in three conferences devoted to George MacDonald (Oxford, 2014; Cambridge, 2016; Aberdeen, 2017).

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