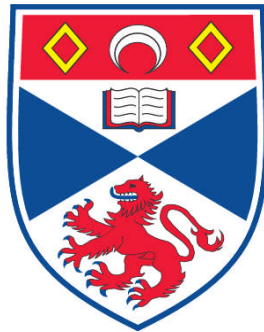


***ROOTED IN ALL ITS STORY, MORE IS MEANT THAN MEETS THE EAR:
A STUDY OF THE RELATIONAL AND REVELATIONAL NATURE OF
GEORGE MACDONALD'S MYTHOPOEIC ART***

Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



2011

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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

Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Divinity
In Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

St Mary's College
St Andrews, Scotland
September 2010

Abstract

Scholars and storytellers alike have deemed George MacDonald a great mythopoeic writer, an exemplar of the art. Examination of this accolade by those who first applied it to him proves it profoundly theological: for them a mythopoeic tale was a relational medium through which transformation might occur, transcending boundaries of time and space. The implications challenge much contemporary critical study of MacDonald, for they demand that his literary life and his theological life cannot be divorced if either is to be adequately assessed. Yet they prove consistent with the critical methodology MacDonald himself models and promotes. Utilizing MacDonald's relational methodology evinces his intentional facilitating of Mythopoesis. It also reveals how oversights have impeded critical readings both of MacDonald's writing and of his character. It evokes a redressing of MacDonald's relationship with his Scottish cultural, theological, and familial environment – of how his writing is a response that rises out of these, rather than, as has so often been asserted, a mere reaction against them. Consequently it becomes evident that key relationships, both literary and personal, have been neglected in MacDonald scholarship – relationships that confirm MacDonald's convictions and inform his writing, and the examination of which restores his identity as a literature scholar. Of particular relational import in this reassessment is A.J. Scott, a Scottish visionary intentionally chosen by MacDonald to mentor him in a holistic *Weltanschauung*. Little has been written on Scott, yet not only was he MacDonald's prime influence in adulthood, but he forged the literary vocation that became MacDonald's own. Previously unexamined personal and textual engagement with John Ruskin enables entirely new readings of standard MacDonald texts, as does the textual engagement with Matthew Arnold and F.D. Maurice. These close readings, informed by the established context, demonstrate MacDonald's emergence, practice, and intent as a mythopoeic writer.

Declarations

I, Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 115,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in January, 2002, and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D in October, 2004; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2002 and 2010.

Date

Signature of Candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions for the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for this degree.

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Signature of Supervisor

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Acknowledgements

Any work arises from the contributions of many people, and this particular work is truly a relational effort. More have shaped and carried me along this journey than I could possibly name. With each name I do mention is encompassed a whole community: spouses, children, siblings, friends – in Scotland, England, France, Canada, the United States, and beyond.

Active research for this thesis began not long after the new millennium, drawn out by health, circumstance, and the general state of being human. But its roots go much further back. They are familial and environmental: my mother's faithful reading at bedtime, my father's encouragement of the love of literature, my step-mother introducing me to a princess and some goblins, my step-father helping enable my education and also being eager to learn more about it, my siblings keenly sharing a love of good Story and particularly that quirky genre, Fantasy; also, long ago, a school-bus driver who took my eight year old interest in Tolkien seriously, and discussed symbolism and literary intent when my school teachers thought I was faking my reading list; rural neighbours who proved to me that education and wisdom stretched far beyond the realms of the classroom, as did a love and grasp of literature and Story; the incalculable gift of being able to read, play, and labour in the great and unrestricted out-of-doors once inhabited by my predecessors.

Despite recurrent self-doubt, I was encouraged forward by fellow lovers of Story, of critical and rebellious thinking, and of the praxis of faith: those such as Katherine Woodman, Loren & Mary Ruth Wilkinson, Maxine Hancock, Christopher Mitchell, Robert Trexler. Kerry Dearborn directed my first intentional study of MacDonald, and was the first to encourage me to publish in the field – her lived example as a professor continues to be a beacon. Michael Ward enabled my first MacDonald lecture, at which Jerry Root gave words of affirmation that I have never forgotten (nor his ability to mouth along every quotation). Colin Manlove spurred me on with his comment that "it'd be a great thing to do, if you could do it," and with his warning to not let certain challenges "get to me." I am particularly grateful for his model as a humble academic – willing and wanting to keep learning. Bruce Hindmarsh was another model of scholarly engagement, freely sharing abundant material with a stranger. I thank Stephen Prickett for his contagious enthusiasm and shared love of integrative learning, and the rest of the George MacDonald Society for their years of encouragement and support – most especially Rodger Bardet, John Docherty, Richard Lines, and Mike Partridge. I also appreciate the efforts of two women outside of the academy who have spent many years quietly urging a more thorough understanding of MacDonald: Barbara Amell and Marilylle Soveran.

Very practically, far too many to name have generously carved out workspaces for me over the years. Just as many have helped in taking notes, transporting books, photocopying, typing, and editing when health impeded my abilities. Some of these learned far more about MacDonald than they ever intended, and sharpened my own thinking and writing in the process: Janice Deary, Kathryn Gatewood, Julie Guthrie, Amy Kettwig Jeffrey, Julie Khovacs, Karen Murphy, Gina Prokopchuk, and David Wilhite. Special thanks is proffered to my colleagues in MacDonald studies, Thomas Gerold, Rachel Johnson, Gisela Kreglinger, Caroline Kelly, Jennifer Koopman, Jeff McInnis, Ferdinand Soto, and Jennifer Trafton, all of whom have encouraged, challenged, and taught me, and have proven Chesterton right in that the time for MacDonald was yet to come. Gisela and Jeff both cared for me far beyond the realm of colleague-dom, and the recordings of MacDonald's short stories that Jeff made during a season when I was unable to read should really reside in an archive. Jennifer T. gave me confidence in the world of publication, and raised the bar of good editing almost unattainably high. With a humble gratitude to and admiration for the scholars upon whose work all we build, with whom we converse, and through whom we seek to better understand the works and the person of George MacDonald: Long may the conversation continue. At ITIA and St. Andrews University many others who delighted in truth and learning carried me in body, spirit, and soul. Keen to engage intellectually, and even willing to bear with yet another reference to MacDonald, many helped in very practical ways when poor health was impeding. This thesis would not exist were it not for that community – most especially the contributions of Cindy Burris, Julie Canlis, Keith Hyde, Sharon Jebb, Matt Jensen, Kristen Deedee Johnson, Ivan Khovacs, Duffy Lott, Jennifer Hess Mouat, Marilee Newell, Stephen Prokopchuk, Chelle Stearns, Alan Torrance. Nor would it exist without the practical, emotional, and spiritual care of the women's 'Prayer Group' of which I was a part. Even in Canadian exile Kathleen Patchell and David Robinson continued that model of communal theological learning.

Thanks are also due to the Russell Trust for a generous research grant, and for scholarships from University of St. Andrews. The Disability Team of Student Services went above and beyond the call of duty, with their determination to make my progress possible. Kind and helpful archivists also furthered the endeavour, at: Beinecke Library Yale, Brander Library Huntly, Bodleian Library Oxford, John Rylands

Library Manchester, Kings College Aberdeen, Kings College London, Marion E. Wade Center Wheaton, University of St. Andrews Archives, St. Deiniol's Library Wales.

Thanks are also due to Sven Soderlund, for first making me believe I really could do a PhD; James Houston for telling me I must do a PhD – one on MacDonald at that; and Thēna Ayres and Kelly Monroe Kullberg; for always believing in me. Perhaps the greatest thesis-thanks are to my supervisor, Trevor A. Hart – for believing in my ability to think and write, and for not giving up on the extensive intrusiveness of this student's health – and to my husband Greg – for so much more than could ever be listed here, extending from bearing with the long tediousness of academia to rummaging through pub dumpsters in a foreign city, when a bag with three years of handwritten research was stolen. Ever my shining knight.

And so this work is dedicated to my dear family, in all its multifaceted dimensions; to the communities in five different countries that have helped raise, guide, and care for me; to my friends who teach me what it is to be known; and to my husband, whose choice to walk beside me through the many highs and lows has carried me further than he could ever imagine.

This thesis endeavours to raise more questions than it answers. For, as MacDonald writes: “repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future.” My humble hope is that readers will be encouraged to re-read MacDonald, and, in listening to him, ‘think things for themselves’: enter and revel in the conversation.

*I would rather assume the office of master of the hearing,
For my aim shall be
to cause the song to be truly heard;
to set forth worthy points in form, in matter, and in relation;
to say with regard to the singer himself
his time, its modes, its beliefs,
such things as may help to set the song in its true light —
its relation, namely,
to the source whence it sprung,
which alone can secure its right reception by the heart of the hearer.
(England's Antiphon)*

Rooted Deep in all its Story, More is Meant than Meets the Ear:
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Prologue

In 1924 a committee was formed in London for the first “Centenary Celebration” of Scottish author George MacDonald. The unpublished attendance list is fascinating and colourful, in itself indicative of the man being honoured. Its president was the Prime Minister of Great Britain, a man who had named his son after one of MacDonald’s protagonists. The Chairman was the prolific critic and Catholic author G.K. Chesterton, a man who considered MacDonald’s writing to have transformed his vision of the world. The Vice-Chairman was celebrated actor and producer Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, the man lauded as the greatest Victorian ‘Hamlet,’ and author of the introduction to MacDonald’s critical study of Shakespeare’s tragedy. The committee members included social activists and philosophers. Some were church leaders, others actors and playwrights. One was Britain’s first literary agent, another one of Britain’s first female politicians. A bishop, a Radical MP, and a Noble Prize winner were in the number; musicians, historians, authors, and artists; Scots, English, Irish, and Welsh, representing a variety of denominations. Distinguished literary figures in attendance included A.S. Peake (of *Peake’s Commentary*), Ernest Rhys (founder of Everyman’s Library), John Galsworthy, James Barrie, and W.B. Yeats. I know of no publication of this list, and yet it stands as a stunning testament to the breadth of MacDonald’s influence a century after his birth – and as an indication of the expanse of his ongoing influence. Such a gathering calls forth MacDonald’s own words:

we must not forget that, although the individual song springs from the heart of the individual, the song of a country is not merely cumulative: it is vital in its growth, and therefore composed of historically dependent members. No man could sing as he has sung, had not others sung before him. Deep answereth unto deep, face to face, praise to praise. To the sound of the trumpet the harp returns its own vibrating response – alike, but how different! The religious song of the country, I say again, is a growth, rooted deep in all its story. (*Antiphon 3*)

The committee was gathered to ensure remembrance.

In full, the list is as follows:

President: The Prime Minister, Rt. Hon J Ramsay MacDonald LLD (first Labour Prime Minister, then serving his first term; born in Lossiemouth – named his son after MacDonald’s Lossiemouth protagonist Malcolm).

Vice Presidents: J.M. Bulloch, LLD (literary and theatre critic, and a historian noted for work on the Gordons of Strathbogie); Prebendary Wilson Carlisle DD (founder of the Church of England’s socially-concerned ‘Church Army’); Hon. Stephen Coleridge (author, lawyer, and co-founder of NSPCC); Mary Davies (renowned singer, founding president of the Welsh Folk Song Society, and wife of MacDonald’s secretary W.C. Davies); A. Ruth Fry (writer and Quaker peace activist); John Galsworthy (Nobel Prize novelist and playwright); Robert F. Horton (theologian, historian, and literary critic); L. P. Jacks (philosophy and theology professor); John Kelman, O.B.E. (minister, literary critic, theologian); Coulson Kernahan (novelist, poet); A.S. Peake (biblical scholar); W.E. Orchard (theologian, Presbyterian minister turned Catholic priest); Ernest Rhys (novelist, essayist, playwright, founder of Everyman’s Library); George Russell (Irish critic, painter, poet); Clement Shorter (journalist, editor of *London Illustrated News*, founder of *Sketch and Tattler*); Bishop Edward S. Talbot (historian, bishop of Southwark, Winchester, Rochester); Katherine Tynan (Irish novelist and poet); W.B. Yeats (poet).

Chairman: G.K. Chesterton (author, literary critic).

Vice-Chairman: Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson (actor, artist, theatre-producer).

Additional committee members: Sir James M. Barrie (author of *Peter Pan*); A. Violet Cavendish Bentinck (philanthropist, patron of the arts, aunt of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother);¹ Joseph King (writer, Member of Parliament); Rev. E. P. Powell (author); Sir Leonard Powell (Justice of the Peace); Jane Cobden Unwin (one of London's first elected female politicians, activist, wife of publisher Thomas Fisher whose company, after merging with Ruskin's, published *Lord of the Rings*).

Honourable Secretaries: Greville MacDonald (doctor, author, MacDonald's eldest son); A.S. Watt, CBE (literary agent, son of A.P. Watt, Britain's first literary agent.)²

This committee list is but a small representation of those who 'sang as they had sung' in part because of the song of MacDonald; it is a list of those who have themselves contributed to the songs of others. It serves as a reminder that *each* voice is antiphonal – "heart after heart responding across the ages" (*Antiphon* 12) – and it harkens the clarion call of that particular voice that the committee had gathered to celebrate: "a growth, rooted deep in all its story."

¹ In 1896, Violet, her mother, and her sister Hyacinth gave MacDonald a valuable opal ring, presumably inspired by that in *The Princess and the Goblin*. (Beinecke 1/31/1)

² Archival records, dated November 25 1924; document titled "George MacDonald Centenary Celebration, December 10th" Wade Centre archives.

INTRODUCTION

George MacDonald is a Storyteller for storytellers. Many of the authors who revere him consider his work not only enjoyable, but life-transforming. G.K. Chesterton asserts:

I for one can really testify to a book that has made a difference to my whole existence, which helped me to see things in a certain way from the start; a vision of things which even so real a revolution as a change of religious allegiance has substantially only crowned and confirmed. Of all the stories I have read, including even all the novels of the same novelist, it remains the most real, the most realistic, in the exact sense of the phrase the most like life. It is called *The Princess and the Goblin*. (“Introduction” 9)

In the same vein, C.S. Lewis called MacDonald “the greatest genius of [mythmaking] whom I know,” and designated him his “spiritual master.” (*Anthology* xviii) Madeleine L’Engle credited him with not only shaping but also saving her understanding of God and her ability to be an artist. (L’Engle 145-156) W.H. Auden wrote: “George MacDonald is pre-eminently a mythopoeic writer,” and that able to “project his inner life into images, beings, landscapes which are valid for all, he is one of the most remarkable writers of the nineteenth century.” (478) As such authors discuss the nature of MacDonald’s writing they use variations of an unusual word: *Mythopoesis*. It is this gift of “Mythopoesis” for which they most revere MacDonald, regarding him a master of the art. But the word is difficult and problematic because it is elusive. Completely unfamiliar to many, it is also often misconstrued by those who do use it. That it was so intentionally applied to MacDonald by men who revered the concept – “it may even be one of the greatest arts,” says Lewis (*Anthology* xviii) – compels careful examination of what these writers meant, and why MacDonald in particular evoked such distinction. From its inception such examination reveals that to understand this Storyteller for storytellers it must be recognized that he is a storyteller *of* storytellers: essentially and intentionally MacDonald is not a solitary voice.

The endeavour to understand the concept of Mythopoesis as used by those who first coupled it with MacDonald (Chapter One), and the contemplation of how he comes to be a mythopoeic writer, evokes new considerations and reconsiderations of MacDonald himself. A careful reading of the discussions out of which came Tolkien and Lewis’ use of the word *mythopoeic* not only redresses superficial definitions – and misapplications – but also presents a methodological challenge to established study and interpretation. Contrary to such methodologies as employed by New Critics, exploration of the concept demands that the significance of relationships be taken into account – not just the relationships that occur within a given text, but, according to MacDonald, the relationships out of which that text has grown: both literary and biographical.

MacDonald scholarship has rarely not engaged with MacDonald's biography, yet the amount of primary research conducted upon that biography has been limited – and as a result, some of the various biographic points that have informed critical readings deserve more extensive or even renewed examination.³ It is pertinent to acknowledge that MacDonald's own academic mentors had some strong opinions about the benefits that can arise from the interdisciplinary engagement of biography with literary study. That a text did not stand independent of the human from whose lived experience that text was issued was an integral aspect of their own literary critique, and thus of how they taught. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, these men were atypically interdisciplinary in their approach. The potential of conversation between author and reader was central to their understanding of how to critique a text, and became paramount in understanding MacDonald's own apprehension and practice of literature, and essentially, of Mythopoesis. Their emphases resonate with an assertion by philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, that art is "inextricably embedded in the fabric of human intention." (3)

MacDonald's mentors A.J. Scott and F.D. Maurice suggest that preferential status should not be given to a work in and of itself, even if that is where the would-be critic may begin. They are interested in a piece of writing as a piece of – to use Tolkien's term – *sub-creation*. As such they believe that both its conception and inception should also be taken into account. For them this is a theological perspective: to know something of the author, and of how a piece of work came about, is to understand that piece of work better – just as for them to know something of God, and of the creation of the world, is to understand Creation better, and, vice-versa. While they did not believe that pursuing critical study in this manner could lead to full revelation (as indicated even in their delight at the ever-unfolding geological and evolutionary discoveries of their day), they did firmly believe that the effort was worthwhile and likely to be enlightening. While the methodology of these men is quite different from that practiced throughout the century that followed, it is of some interest that it was with these convictions that they founded the very discipline of English Literature (as detailed in Chapter Three). For that alone their methodology merits some consideration.

³The greatest strand of critical work on MacDonald since the 1960's has been psychoanalytic. Much of that psychoanalysis has incorporated the available biographical information. One of the benefits of pursuing a biographical criticism is that clarifications can be made or alternatives suggested to the previously available biographical material that has informed those psychoanalytic readings.

It is admittedly a methodology that fell out of fashion, and yet in the wake of newer and various methods of reading text, it is a methodology certain aspects of which are beginning to be reconsidered as viable. Despite its apparent contradictions with certain tenets of New Criticism, the practice of “biographical criticism” has never completely disappeared from literary study – in particular pockets, such as those of Dickens and Whitman studies, it has maintained acceptability. In Jackson J. Benson’s “Steinbeck: A Defense of Biographical Criticism” (1989) he describes the form as a “recognition of ‘otherness’ – that there is an author who is different in personality and background from the reader [...] a discovery that puts a burden on us to reach out to recognize that uniqueness before we can fully comprehend an author’s writings.” (108) In *The New Biographical Criticism* (2004) George Hoffman concurs, arguing that it might “be time to reconsider the biographical dimension” – as distinct from psychoanalytic criticism. (1) While recognizing that pitfalls do exist, Hoffman calls for a “renewal” of the methodology: “We have heard much, as students and literary scholars over the last half-century, on the abuses of biography; all too little has been said on the subject of its uses.” (2) Hoffman, a Renaissance scholar and an executive committee member of the MLA, discusses the critical risks of sidestepping an author’s life, and the benefits of “casting a wider net over the general conditions of life in the author’s time.” (3)

Such an approach does not disavow the value of “close readings” as advocated by New Criticism in regards to the recognition and discussion of such devices as theme, pattern, rhetoric, symbolism, irony, imagery – as already indicated, close attention to such internal characteristics of a text was even encouraged by MacDonald’s literary mentors Scott and Maurice. But contrary to the later New Critics, these men taught that although this aspect of “close reading” was a primary action, its value did not outweigh that of the above mentioned “biographical criticism,” nor of familiarity with other works by the author. They did consider a text a unified whole, but one that, like a human, could be even better understood for knowing its external relationships; they did not view any work as self-contained: both the words on the page as well as the contexts that produced and surrounded them were important. Thus their response to what the New Critics would call “intentional fallacy” did differ: while they did not believe that one could infallibly declare the intent of an author, they did think it of considerable importance to attempt to understand the intentions of an author. For them, engaging with a text meant engaging with a communication by another human, and they believed it worthwhile to endeavour to understand that other human as best as possible – while ever aware that misconceptions were always possible. In light of this perception of a text as communication,

they also believed the affective capability of a text to be worth consideration; a communication necessarily invited a response. This was tightly tied to their theological understanding of Revelation and the invitation of reception. Yet they did not believe that one “correct” reading of a text was possible, for the humans engaging with a text, attempting to critique it, necessarily brought different sets of tools and experiences to the page. For MacDonald and his mentors the engagement of each reader with the writing of the author could enable new truths to come forth – as such a text would always mean more than an author intended, but that did not therefore render the declaration of intent by the author invaluable.

Thus the question posed by Wolterstorff, “What then is art for?” is of some pertinence when considering the mythopoeic art of MacDonald, because for MacDonald art is very intentionally a mode of communication – and not only in simple expression of author to reader. MacDonald firmly believed that art itself arises as a response, and is an effort on the part of one person to communicate that response to another person or persons. Wolterstorff claims there is no one single purpose for Art; “the purposes of art are the purposes of life.” (4) Yet he does assert that “works of art equip us for action.” As MacDonald phrases it, they make us “think things for ourselves.” In his introduction to the translation of Karl Emil Frazos’ *Ein Kampf ums Recht* (*For the Right*), MacDonald writes:

The cry of “Art for art’s sake,” as a protest against the pursuit of art for the sake of money or fame, one can recognize in its half-wisdom, knowing the right cry to be, “Art for truth’s sake!” But when certain writers tell us that the true aim of the author of fiction is to give the people what they want, namely, a reflection, as in a mirror, of themselves – a mirror not such as will show them to themselves as they are, but as they seem to each other, some of us feel that we stand on the verge of an abyss of falsehood. (v-vi)

MacDonald explains elsewhere that with his own art he hopes not to show readers what they already know, nor indeed what they want to know, but instead to “wake them up.” His work is endlessly explicitly pointing his readers to the other artists who have shaped his own work, and to whom he is responding. For MacDonald this is not an issue of “genetic fallacy,” but rather an invitation to his reader to enter the conversation that he is having in response to certain artists with whom he himself has engaged. In this sense, he almost renders it impossible to conduct the type of exclusive “close reading” that only considers one of his works within itself, for he continuously drives the reader *out* with his frequent quotations and naming of other artists – even in his fantasy. As Mr. Raven croaks in exasperation to Mr. Vane, who eventually learns to stop considering only *his* interpretation of events, and begins to engage with the voices of others: “A book is a door in, and therefore a door out.” (*Lilith* 25) MacDonald

explains that a book draws the reader into a world envisioned by another so that the reader may be better prepared, for having related with the communications of that author, to venture out into yet other worlds. MacDonald repeatedly attempts to show that no book can exist (or come into existence) in isolation from others. And to be able to explore adequately the mythopoeic art that so many writers attribute to MacDonald, writers who claim that their own literary output – their artistic action – has been affected by that mythopoeic art, this thesis likewise chooses venture “out.”

Thus in an effort to better understand MacDonald, and in acknowledgement of those current leanings in critical methodology that resonate with that propounded by three pioneers of the discipline of English Literature, this thesis follows a methodological path akin to that those scholars encouraged. By following such a method this thesis suggests that the place for such an approach exists, and can contribute in meaningful ways to the on-going discussions and explorations of MacDonald scholarship.

In the process, this thesis takes a direction antithetical to the recently published (2000) critique of Cambridge author and critic David Holbrook. Holbrook’s *A Study of George MacDonald and the Image of Woman* proposes that MacDonald’s writing evolved from his private inner world. Considering the corpus largely “morbid,” Holbrook explains that the manner in which MacDonald “deal[s] with universal questions” arises from a life-long effort to resolve identity issues induced by premature weaning and his mother’s early death. (2, 4, 6, ff) Holbrook’s work follows a methodological tradition in MacDonald scholarship commenced by Robert Lee Wolff in the 1970s. Wolff’s popular critical study *The Golden Key* reads MacDonald through a Freudian lens, resulting in such conclusions as: “MacDonald, unable to resolve his Oedipal wishes, nurtured a life-long fantasy of sleeping with his mother.” (47) Wolff’s was the prime critical text for some years, and ensuing studies built upon and responded to it. Richard Reis’ more extensive *George MacDonald*, published in 1972, was highly complementary of Wolff. Reis’ later edition (1989) retracts some of his initial enthusiasm, and focuses on Jungian readings. This then remained the dominant approach in MacDonald studies for a considerable period of time. MacDonald garnered the interest of Jungian and generally psychoanalytic critics in particular because of his intriguing use of symbols and his attention to the feminine and to dreams; however the biblical parallels to those symbols, feminine aspects, and dreams were not addressed. Like Wolff, Reis and others did not interact with most of MacDonald’s non-fiction – his sermons, his poetry, his own literary studies – and thus did not interact with explicit discussions

of theological and biblical imagery (which need not have eschewed other readings, yet did invite integrative consideration). In some circles MacDonald became an anti-church, even anti-Christian icon. In 1987 William Raeper incurred new discussion with an important biography that considered MacDonald's faith a significant aspect of his life and work, although Raeper remained prominently Jungian in his theological assessment and literary criticism.⁴ The same year David Robb, while arguing that MacDonald's Scottish context must be better understood, proclaimed that MacDonald: "had that sturdy Calvinist belief in the distance between God and man – and between God and man's imagination." (*GMD* 99) Despite subsequent (and quite varied) efforts to address this standard inattention to or misunderstanding of the expression of MacDonald's faith in his work, perhaps most notably by Rolland Hein and Stephen Prickett, it has remained far too easy for the literary critic to ignore how central that faith is to every genre of MacDonald's writing. Yet when a methodology akin to that encouraged by MacDonald and his mentors is employed that centrality becomes unavoidable. During the writing of this thesis a book marking a new turning point in MacDonald criticism was published: Kerry Dearborn's thorough study of MacDonald's theology, *Baptized Imagination*. Her book demands that any further publication on MacDonald at least reconsider the standard assumptions about his theology. This thesis aspires to similarly invoke a reconsideration of some standard assumptions in the literary criticism of MacDonald scholarship. It is hoped that the introduction of new material to the dialogue will both enable re-evaluations and synergistically evoke new ones.⁵

Through the study of this new material, this thesis concludes that the word *mythopoeic* is in fact applicable not only to MacDonald's work but also to his intent. Persistently MacDonald argues that writing is born out of the relationships from which the author has grown; that identity is forged in the community of one's upbringing, whether that be in reaction, response, or both. He is consistently insistent that if one desires to delve more deeply into a work of literature, turning to the author him or herself will better enable a cohesive reading; it will more fully reveal his or her intent. MacDonald's own declared aim as a literary critic is to better facilitate the relationship "betwixt my readers and the writers from whom I have quoted." (*Antiphon* 12) He spent the greater portion of his adult life giving lectures of literary criticism, and while newspaper reports

⁴ For an excellent overview of twentieth century MacDonald scholarship see "George MacDonald: Merging Myth and Method" by Robert Trexler, *Bulletin of the New York C.S. Lewis Society*, 2003.

⁵ Although some critics have declared the need for contextualization of MacDonald – Prickett, as a Victorian; Robb, as a Scott; and Manlove, as a Scottish and Christian fantasist – most critical study has not complied. Manlove and Docherty have flagged MacDonald's intertextual engagement with a contemporary, and the papers from the Baylor 2005 conference indicate renewed interest in contextual methodology (cf. Trexler [Fletcher Phineas], Koopman [Shelley], Kreglinger [Novalis]). Another text published during the writing of this thesis is Jeff McInnis' *Shadows and Chivalry: Pain, Suffering, Evil and Goodness in the Works of George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis* (2007). Tracing the overall effect of MacDonald's works on Lewis's thought, faith, and imagination, McInnis also specifically addresses and contends the most common Jungian interpretations of MacDonald.

are all that remain of these lectures, there are rich critical essays and novels full of both explicit and implicit critique. In considering him as he demands that others be considered, MacDonald's emergence – and practice – as a mythopoeic writer is revealed. Two inextricable threads become apparent in such critique: 1) for MacDonald identity is formed through relationship, and 2) transformation occurs as a result of relationship. Thus the pursuit of MacDonald's identity as a mythopoeic writer demands a more careful consideration of his proclaimed identity as a Celt and as a Scot than previously endeavoured – posing a challenge to Robb's declaration that: "the advocacy and discipleship of Christian Romantics like Lewis and Tolkien, has hindered the reassessment of MacDonald's Scottish writing." (*GMD* 131) It demands a reevaluation of MacDonald's relationship with his family and his church – of how his writing is a response that rises out of these, rather than, as has so often been asserted, a reaction against them. So too must be considered more closely certain literary and personal relationships, relationships that consolidate the character and passions of MacDonald and restore his identity as a literature professor rather than the current prevailing image of a failed-minister-turned-writer. As this is done it will become clear how new information can inform critical readings both of this highly relational storyteller and of the "mythopoeic" stories he told.

In exploring MacDonald's identity as a mythopoeic writer, this thesis is divided into three parts: the first addresses the mythopoeic concept, the second explores personal relationships that shaped and confirmed MacDonald's relational and storied worldview, and the third examines two of MacDonald's more widely recognized texts in which are clearly evidenced his mythopoeic practice and intent. Not only is entirely new material considered throughout, leading to conclusions quite contrary to some standard positions in MacDonald scholarship, but vistas are opened up for further study to ensue. It is suggested that taking MacDonald's Christian worldview into account can lend considerable insight into MacDonald's work. Previous critical opinion has held that in academic study MacDonald's spiritual life can (even should) be separated from his literary life. Roderick McGillis articulates this as a division into material for the academic and material for "the nonacademic reader (or for the academic reader who craves new and intriguing information about MacDonald the spiritual figure)." ("What's Missing" 286) This thesis argues that to attempt such division can hinder accurate scholarship. Consideration of the definition, development, and expression of Mythopoesis in the writing of MacDonald, supports MacDonald's declaration that his prime intent in writing is to "wake up" his readers to the proffered revelation of the Divine Imagination. MacDonald believes that an understanding of the intrinsically relational God cannot be grasped outside of a relational hermeneutic; that a list of dry

propositions would never be able to convey what the fullness of poesis could.⁶ As his storytelling is specifically discussed, it is revealed how remarkably – and intentionally – *dependent* it is. For MacDonald story *necessarily* begets story. The rejection by the Futurists of “everything consecrated by time” but a few years after his death would have been anathema to him.⁷ MacDonald does not promote stagnation in tradition but rather an intentional relationship, a conversation, with it; his writing invites a continually renewed perception informed by the past. In acknowledging the formative importance of relationships both literary and personal, MacDonald seeks to demonstrate that the engagement of particularities can reveal the transformative possibilities of universal truths.

As the stories, the relationships, of George MacDonald are pieced together not only is the author himself more fully revealed, but so too may be the intent of his publications and the desire he had for their transformative potential – as modelled repeatedly in the biblical narrative in which he fully immersed himself.

Methodological Explanations

Thesis Limitations

This thesis will not engage with many of the traditionally recognized influences on MacDonald, such as the German Romantics, the English Romantics, and the Christian mystics. I have written summarily on these elsewhere.⁸ Prickett’s *Religion and Romanticism* is a key text. For extensive considerations of Novalis as well as Romanticism generally, see Dearborn’s *The Baptized Imagination*, and for Novalis in relation to *Lilith*, G. Kreglinger’s PhD thesis, *Shock Re-invested* (St. Andrews University, 2008). Dearborn challenges an all too common simplification and thus examination of Romanticism, and explains how “the more predominant emphasis on escapism and anti-rationalism which devolved into a subjectivism that exalted feeling above all was not

⁶ MacDonald does not consider the terms *poetry* and *story* mutually exclusive, as articulated clearly in *Antiphon* in his discourse on the ballad. He uses the word *poetry* in the same manner as a literary mentor, Philip Sidney, for whom Aesop’s Fables and the Biblical story of David and Nathan are proof of the educational power of ‘poetry.’ (*Defense* 61) MacDonald’s Sidney anthology clarifies further: “verse being but an ornament, and no cause to poetry; since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified. [...] It is not riming and versing that maketh a poet [but] that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching...” (*Gems* 149) By such definition much of MacDonald’s fiction is ‘poetry.’ For clarity’s sake, the word *poesis* is used.

⁷ The Futurist Movement stressed the possibilities of creation *ex nihilo*, proposing a total rejection of tradition and claiming to not be inspired by or to engage with any predecessors. Their spokesman Marinetti explained in 1909 that the movement’s desire was “to mock everything consecrated by time.” (White 362)

⁸ Cf. *North Wind* 16, 1997.

appealing to MacDonald.” (28) J. Koopman’s recent dissertation, *Redeeming Romanticism* (McGill University, 2007), looks specifically at MacDonald’s relationship with Shelley, and Fernando Soto and John Docherty have frequently addressed connections with Blake at MacDonald Society gatherings, and in Docherty’s “An Ambivalent Marriage,” in *Literary Heritage and Heirs*, Zossima Press, 2008. There remain many significant areas of literary influence yet to be addressed in any depth in MacDonald scholarship, such as: Plato, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Sidney, Milton, and Herbert. Dearborn gives an introduction to many of these. Acknowledgement should also be made to Barbara Amell, Robert Trexler, and Rachel Johnson for their pioneering forays into these areas. This thesis does not discuss the significant engagements with MacDonald’s contemporaries Charles Kingsley and Lewis Carroll published by, respectively, Colin Manlove and John Docherty.

Clarifications

The first time a nineteenth-century text is mentioned, I shall include its publishing date – if pertinent to the discussion at a later point, the date may be included again. Some of MacDonald’s novels were serialized before being bound, and the date may reflect this.

As a number of MacDonald’s relatives are referred to frequently within this work – most notably his father, his brother, and his literary sons Greville and Ronald – these persons shall be known by their first names.

For the sake of consistency and clarity I shall follow the example set by Tolkien and Lewis in capitalizing the word ‘Story’ when it is used as a concept, distinguishing it from the common noun. In like manner concepts such as ‘Primary World’ (as utilized by Tolkien), ‘Imagination’ and ‘Nature’ (as modelled by MacDonald), and ‘Mythopoesis’ will also be capitalized.

It is necessary in Part Three, for the purpose of clarity, to italicize the word *Isaiah* when differentiating the book from the person. All other books of the Bible will likewise be italicized.

Victorian spellings and grammar shall be maintained in quotations, such as *Shakespeare* and “Mr Arnold.”

Terminology

Weltanschauung: For the purposes of this study the use of the phrase “MacDonald’s theology” could be misleading, especially in consideration of the occasionally divisive debate on the place of ‘theology’ within MacDonald’s work. Robb, for example, understandably argues that “too exclusive a concentration on MacDonald’s engagement with eternal verities can obscure the extent to which he cared for the issues of his own day.” (*Scottish Town* 8) Robb draws deserved attention to MacDonald’s contemporary concerns, however his comment could be construed to imply that MacDonald’s concern for current issues was actually separable from his “engagement with eternal verities.” McGillis, in fact, indicates that it should be so. (“What’s Missing” 286) MacDonald’s son Ronald is unequivocal: for his father there could be no division between things ‘religious,’ literary, historical, or even political. For MacDonald these elements of life are inherently interrelated. An examination of his “engagement with eternal verities” should necessitate an examination of his contemporary concerns – and vice-versa. His ‘theology’ *is* his holistic worldview – his *Weltanschauung* – incorporating culture, language, environment, ethos, and community, all in relation to God. As Ronald phrases it, MacDonald “breathed one air” – he “could no more divide the religious from the secular than a fish separate swimming from water [...] George MacDonald’s life *was* religion.” (Ronald 78) The term that will then be most often used – despite its limitations – in describing MacDonald’s general understanding and perspective is *worldview*. As this thesis intends to make evident, MacDonald’s worldview was profoundly theological and profoundly holistic. To disregard the current issues of his day, to ignore his rich cultural and literary heritage, to not seek to better utilize his imagination in understanding the interrelation of these things, would be, for MacDonald, theological failure; it would be inconsistent with his own understanding of the ways of God and man – with his *Weltanschauung*.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

- AC* – *Adela Cathcart*
- Annals* – *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*
- BNW* – *At the Back of the North Wind*
- Curdie* – *The Princess and Curdie*
- Diary* – *A Book of Strife, in the form of the Diary of an Old Soul*
- EL* – *The Elect Lady*
- Elginbrod* – *David Elginbrod*
- Essays* – *Essays on some of the Forms of Literature (a book review in Orts)*
- Ethics* – *The Ethics of Dust*
- Faber* – *Paul Faber, Surgeon*
- “*Fantastic*” – “*The Fantastic Imagination*”
- Forbes* – *Alec Forbes of Howglen*

Fors – *Fors Clavigera*
GPW – *Gutta Percha Willie: the Working Genius*
He&S – *Heather and Snow*
Hamlet – *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark A Study with the Text of the Folio of 1623*
Hope – *The Hope of the Gospel*
“Imagination” – *“The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture”*
Lossie – *The Marquis of Lossie*
MM – *Mary Marston*
Miracles – *The Miracles of Our Lord*
Modern Painters – *MP*
Orts – *A Dish of Orts Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespere [sic]*
Phantastes – *Phantastes: a Faerie Romance for Men and Women*
Poetical – *The Poetical Works of George MacDonald*
Portent – *The Portent: a story of the Inner Vision of the Highlanders commonly called the Second Sight.*
Queen – *Queen of the Air*
RS – *A Rough Shaking, A Tale*
Falconer – *Robert Falconer*
SBP – *The Seaboard Parish*
“St. George” – *St. George’s Day, 1564*
Stones – *The Stones of Venice*
SG&SM – *St. George and St. Michael*
SWF – *Salted With Fire: A Story of A Minister*
T&B – *There and Back*
US – *Unspoken Sermons*
The Vicar’s Daughter – *Vicar’s*
Cumbermede – *Wilfrid Cumbermede*
WMM – *What’s Mine’s Mine*
W&W – *Within and Without*
Wise Woman – *The Lost Princess: A Double Story (or, The Wise Woman)*

Part One

AN EXAMINATION OF MYTHOPOESIS

*“Thinkest thou,” says Carlyle in “Past and Present,”
 “there were no poets till Dan Chaucer?
 No heart burning with a thought which it could not hold, and had no word for;
 and needed to shape and coin a word for –
 what thou callest a metaphor, trope, or the like?
 For every word we have there was such a man and poet.
 The coldest word was once a glowing new metaphor and bold questionable originality.”*

[...]

*But while the imagination of man
 has thus the divine function of putting thought into form,
 it has a duty altogether human,
 which is paramount to that function –
 the duty, namely, which springs from his immediate relation to the Father,
 that of following and finding out
 the divine imagination in whose image it was made.
 To do this,
 the man must watch its signs, its manifestations.
 He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call
 the works of His hands.*

“The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture”

(published in 1867, 1882, 1893; delivered as a lecture repeatedly)

CHAPTER ONE

Mythopoesis:
A Relational Means of Revelation

*Section I: Mythopoesis**Section II: The Imagination and Its Practice**Section III: The Crucial Element**Section IV: Inherited Participation**Introduction*

In 1946 C.S. Lewis officially added his voice to the long stream of literary artists who give accolade to the work of George MacDonald. Lewis Carroll, John Ruskin, H.G. Wells, Frances Hodgson Burnett, James Barrie, W.B. Yeats, and G.K. Chesterton preceded him – T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Madeleine L'Engle, Ursula Le Guin, Maurice Sendak, Frederick Buechner, Sally Vickers, and Jeffrey Overstreet number among those who would – and continue to – follow. Although general consciousness of the works of MacDonald may have waxed and waned (and waxes yet again) according to the tastes of the reading public, his *influence* upon a tradition of literature has not: many who have not nor ever will read MacDonald, voraciously read books intrinsically shaped by his vision. In the introduction to his homage *Anthology* Lewis tried to explain to his readers just why it is that MacDonald excelled – in Lewis' opinion, was “the greatest genius” – in what “may even be one of the greatest arts”: Mythopoesis. (*Anthology* xviii) Lewis was expanding on what he had learned from Owen Barfield and J.R.R. Tolkien, informed by years of academic and enthusiastic conversation on the topic.

The written and verbal discussions Tolkien and Lewis held about this ‘great art’ reintroduced it to the public consciousness – and in the process they identified MacDonald as a prime practitioner. Yet despite the significance of the concept to these scholars and creators of Story, they inked the term *mythopoeic* sparingly for they considered few works deserving of its application. Close consideration of what exactly they intend when honouring MacDonald with the term illuminates the work of MacDonald itself. It also results in a critique that directly challenges many long-held assumptions in MacDonald scholarship. Establishing the signification of Mythopoesis for writers and literary critics such as Tolkien and Lewis also has wider implications as use of the term increases in the general field of literature. In some circles

Mythopoesis is now considered an independent genre – and while the writers discussed in this chapter are often recognized as progenitors of that genre it is rarely with awareness that for them the term was essentially theological. What conspired to make MacDonald a so-called “mythopoeic writer”? Did he intentionally seek to write this way? If so, why? In proffering a response to these queries, this thesis intends to enable a more thorough understanding of MacDonald’s development as an author, and of his arguably mythopoeic intent. This will enable greater insight into new critical study of his work, as well as render some previous critical conclusions highly implausible.

Section I: Mythopoesis: Clarifying the Intent of the Term, its Import for Tolkien and Lewis, and why they attribute it to MacDonald

*The truer its art,
the more things it will mean [...]
when such forms are new embodiments of Old Truths, we call them products of the Imagination.
 (“Fantastic Imagination”)*

The most frequent definition given for the adjective *mythopoeic* is ‘myth making.’¹ As a noun *Mythopoesis* – or *Mythopoeia* – is often defined as ‘literary myth.’ These definitions are repeated in various discussions of MacDonald’s ‘gift of the mythopoeic,’ yet with little in the way of exegesis and thus all too easily exposed to misconstruction. These brief definitions are not only inadequate, but as such do not allow for a correct understanding of what is intended when used by scholars such as Tolkien, Lewis, and their student Auden – particularly in application to MacDonald. Rolland Hein, while concurring with the definition of “myth making,” has taken the application of the term *mythopoeic* perhaps the most seriously of all MacDonald critics. (*Mythmakers* 217) In *Christian Mythmakers* he states: “We are concerned in this study not with ancient mythologies as such, but with what is better identified as Mythopoeia: stories that are composed in time, but which suggest (however dimly) something covert but eternally momentous.” (5-6) Yet while Hein’s definition approaches those of Tolkien and Lewis, his study does not pursue their definitions in his book, despite chapters on both these and other ‘mythopoeic’ authors. Nor does Hein independently explore in any depth what the term itself might mean.² Yet the esteem those such as Tolkien and Lewis give to the concept demands that their understanding of the concept be granted careful consideration; if it can be rated as Lewis proposes, “one of the greatest arts,” then an investigation into their intended meaning is

¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth OED) defines *mythopoeic* as: “Myth-making; productive of myths; pertaining to the creation of myths.”

² In fairness, the book should not be judged as an academic text for that is not its intent.

requisite – especially when MacDonald is touted as an exemplar of that art. (*Anthology* xviii) For an accurate understanding of their use of the term one must not only delve into Tolkien and Lewis’ own discussions and writings, but into those of Owen Barfield. Barfield’s work is foundational, a significant influence on their comprehension of myth, language, and the *mythopoeic*. I have treated this with considerable detail in a chapter of Hart and Khovacs’ *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology* (Baylor Press, 2007), and thus in this thesis give only an overview of the discussion. The overview will serve as lens through which may be viewed a specific and developed focus on the pre-eminent Mythopoesis of the predecessor of these Oxford critics and Story-crafters: George MacDonald.

Owen Barfield was, like Lewis and Tolkien, one of the ‘Inklings’: a group of scholarly friends who gathered in mid-twentieth century Oxford for discussion and debate, as well as to read and tell stories. In two of Barfield’s books: *History in English Words* (1926) and *Poetic Diction* (1928), he argues that myth is “closely associated with the very origin of all speech and literature.” (qtd *Inklings* 41) Not incidentally some of Barfield’s prime influences are also literary mentors of MacDonald – Philip Sidney and Joseph Addison are notably so in their discussions of poesis. Put very simply, Barfield argues that initially for man there had been no distinction between ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical.’ For example, when translating the Latin *spiritus* one has to choose – using the context for guidance – between ‘spirit,’ ‘breath,’ or ‘wind.’ But early users of the language would not have felt the need to make such distinctions. The blowing wind was not ‘like’ someone breathing – it *was* the breath of a god.³ Mythological stories were the same thing in narrative form. Nothing was ‘abstract’ or ‘literal’; it was all one and the same. Barfield believes that “words originally embodied an ancient, unified perception,” but that this unity of consciousness became fragmented as conceptual thinking developed. (qtd *Inklings* 42) He writes with anticipation that some day humans will once again be better able to reconcile the literal and the abstract, with a renewed perception *informed* by the past, rather than a mere reversion to it.

³ While German philosopher Ernst Cassirer put forth an argument similar to Barfield’s, it appears that the two men developed their theories independently, if contemporaneously. (*Inklings* 42) Barfield acknowledged the similarities. (*Rediscovery* 16) Cassirer’s treatment of mythopoeic thought as a legitimate form of knowledge (translated into English in the 1950s) was significant for the direction of philosophical understanding of knowledge acquisition, and it influenced the work of scholars such as the Frankforts and Slochower. Slochower, author of *Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics* is often quoted as defining Mythopoesis as ‘a kind of literary myth making.’ However, his actual definition is congruent with the understanding of Barfield and his friends: “a mode of transformational experience that illuminates traditional thinking.” (15) Levy-Bruhl is another important scholar in the field. However the purposes at hand are to explore what was intended by applying the term to MacDonald and so the work of these other scholars shall not be pursued.

Barfield points out that previously “the general relation between language and myth” was “almost unfathomable,” as is made clear by the very definition of the Greek *muthos* – also translated as ‘word.’ (83) He elucidates by explaining that the word ‘poetry’ is from the Greek ‘to make.’ He repeats Sidney’s sixteenth-century exposition of a poet as “a maker.” Rather than being someone who “merely follows nature,” the poet brings forth new forms “such as never were in Nature,” borrowing from nothing in physical existence, but ranging “into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.” (189) It is *because* the poet has contemplated the “Ideas” behind Nature that he thus “delivers forth, as he hath imagined them” – a concept resonant in Tolkien’s defining poem, “Mythopoeia”: “We make still by the laws in which we’re made.” (190; 85) During the seventeenth-century that ranging “into the divine consideration” came to be understood as ‘invention.’ From the Latin *invenire*, “to find,” it was a word “implying that something had been found in Nature which had not *yet* been imitated by man.” At the same time another word appeared: ‘creating’ – “if poets could indeed spin their poetry entirely out of themselves, they were as ‘*creating* gods.’”⁴ (190) With this development Barfield reminds his readers of Joseph Addison’s words: “This Talent of affecting the Imagination ... has something in it like Creation: it bestows a kind of Existence, and draws up to the reader’s view several objects which are not to be found in Being. It makes additions to Nature, and gives greater variety to God’s works.” (190) Tolkien would later call the application of such a word to human activities “sub-creating,” a response to the invitation to assist “in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation.” (“On Fairy Stories” 73) Barfield claims that up until the seventeenth-century the word ‘inspiration’ implied the understanding that “poets and prophets” were “direct mouthpieces of superior beings – beings such as the Muses.” (190) For Tolkien this concept maintained potency even in the twentieth-century: engaging with the Muse was engaging with Divine Inspiration. For him the distinction between the ‘inspiration’ and the modern conception of ‘invention’ (as opposed to the initial understanding, explained by Barfield) was immediately relevant to his own greatest work, for though he knew he was writing fiction, he says that he “had a sense of recording what was already ‘there’ ... not of ‘inventing.’” (*Tolkien Letters* 131) Interestingly, MacDonald maintains much the same in his experience of writing his epic, *Lilith*.

These discussions by Barfield convinced both Tolkien and Lewis that myth has a central place in language, literature, and the history of thought. For Lewis, it was such a significant shift in worldview that it led to his becoming a theist – and further conversation with Tolkien proved

⁴ Barfield is referencing Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589.

metaphor and myth so inextricable from theological understanding that Lewis felt compelled to accept Christianity. Tolkien had argued with Lewis that “not only the abstract thoughts of men but also his imaginative inventions must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of original truth.” (qtd *Inklings* 43) This meant that sub-creating was actually a fulfilment of God’s purpose, because, wrote Tolkien, humans “make still by the laws in which we’re made.” (“Mythopoeia” 97) Pagan myths must therefore have “something of the truth in them.” (qtd *Inklings* 43) It was agreed that a myth is “a story out of which ever varying meanings will grow for different [recipients] in different ages” – a declaration which indicates a multi-dimensional understanding of truth. (*CSL Letters* 271) Tolkien explained to Lewis that the uniqueness of the *Christian* myth is that God as Author had used images that were precise in location, in history, and in consequence: the old myth of a dying god had become fact. But, as Lewis came eventually to argue himself, “by becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.” (“Myth Become Fact” 44) This momentous conversation inspired Tolkien’s poem “Mythopoeia,” a poem subtitled “from Philomythus to Misomythus” – from lover of myths to hater of myths; it presents Tolkien’s perspective on the pre-Christian Lewis, if Lewis remained unwilling to accept that myths contain a sense of truth. If one applies Barfield’s definition of *mythos*, Tolkien’s barb goes deeper: ‘lover of words’ to ‘hater of words,’ even ‘lover of meaning’ and ‘hater of meaning.’ (85) Tolkien argues in his poem that a relationship with language allows humanity to grasp better the world that it inhabits. Lewis described the conversation a few days later to an old MacDonald-loving friend:

What Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn’t mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself... I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) similarly moved me provided I met it anywhere except in the Gospels... Now [they have convinced me that] the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*. (*CSL Letters* 7)

Tolkien had challenged Lewis that if he was able to enjoy and receive from ancient Norse and Greek myths in a manner he could not with abstract arguments, would he not allow the same for a story they claimed to be true? “Could he not treat [the Christian story] as a story, be fully aware that he could draw nourishment from it which he could never find in a list of abstract truths?” (qtd *Inklings* 44) Lewis, upon consideration, found that he could.

Then Tolkien put forth another challenge: “If God chooses to be mythopoeic... shall we refuse to be mythopathic”? (45) Shall we refuse to enter and thus be transformed? Tolkien

reminded his medievalist friend what he should know well: that the authors Lewis loved and taught viewed Nature itself as God's story, God's poem. Tolkien went so far as to suggest that it is the moral duty of man to "assert the existence of the good and the true, to seek truth through myth, to exercise his God-given function of sub-creation." (qtd *Inklings* 45) In "On Fairy Tales" he remarks on MacDonald's "The Golden Key" as an example of such. Lewis was convinced by Tolkien to approach anew his ability to write, as an *intentional* sub-creator, seeking to convey the Mythopoeic; he was fully converted to a "Philomythus."

Lewis proceeded to use the word *mythopoeic* more often than Tolkien. But – perhaps surprisingly for some critics today, and useful when considering the work of MacDonald – Lewis is clear that the word is not limited to the genre of Fantasy. This is made evident in Lewis' most extensive examination of the term *mythopoeic*, found in his anthology of MacDonald quotations, where he states his belief that MacDonald achieved Mythopoeisis "better than any man." (xviii) Lewis argues that MacDonald's fantasy is mythopoeic in *nature*. He is careful to make clear that this quality is something above and beyond the manner in which words are strung together; he is not always a great fan of MacDonald's grammatical ability and style.⁵ Because of this, he ponders whether this art of "myth-making" can even be considered a "literary" art, for it seems that the form is only a medium. In considerable contrast to his initial insistence that all things that are real must therefore be rationally explainable, Lewis writes, "The imagined events are the body and something inexpressible is the soul." (x) In Lewis' understanding of the *mythopoeic* "the plot, the pattern of events" are crucial – the manner of conveyance is not. This is why Lewis, Tolkien, and Barfield considered a story like the ancient Norse tale of Balder a great myth: it was not a particular telling of the tale that was vital to their love of it, it was the story itself that they loved. "Any means of communication whatever which succeeds in lodging those events in our imagination has," says Lewis, "done the trick." Of course he considers it desirable that the medium through which Story is conveyed is worthy – but even when it is not, the story will remain when the medium fades away.⁶ (xxvii)

⁵ Misinterpreting this distinction, many Lewis scholars and devotees have underestimated how thoroughly Lewis is shaped by his "spiritual mentor." Lewis' statement that MacDonald is not an author of the first order is *not* a condemnation although, unfortunately, it has incurred condemnation. (U.C. Knoepfelmacher addresses this in *George MacDonald: The Complete Fairy Tales*, 1999.) For Lewis, the 'first order' writers were such as Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare; a category which excludes many very gifted writers. While Lewis did not grant MacDonald such laurelled status, he nonetheless rates MacDonald's influence upon his own life as higher than any of these. His writings teem with references to MacDonald's work, and *Phantastes* is placed as the very first on his list of books that "most shaped his philosophy of life." ("Booklists" 719)

⁶ Levy-Bruhl explores this when he suggests that, while a poem is untranslatable, a mythical narrative can be translated into any language. (172 ff)

Lewis realizes retrospectively that reading MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858) as an eighteen year old had actually begun an awakening within him that enabled comprehension and acceptance of the arguments of Barfield and Tolkien years later. *Phantastes* had 'woke something up' in Lewis: precisely the result MacDonald desired of his writing.⁷ Lewis makes clear that even if he had been told the effect *Phantastes* was having upon him at the time he would have rejected the idea – yet nonetheless the effect was there, working away at him, slowly changing and transforming him. It is not incidental that Lewis continued to read and reread – to devour – the writings of MacDonald, discussing them with his dearest friends, giving them as gifts, infusing his own writings with both their images and their concepts. Nor is it incidental that he writes of how *Phantastes* steered him away from a Romantic philosophy into something 'other.' "I had already been waist deep in Romanticism; and likely enough, at any moment, to flounder into its darker and more evil forms." (*Anthology* xxi) After *Phantastes*, claims Lewis, his reception of what he read was filtered through a love of "goodness." (xxi) With his recognition of the import of this intangible "meaning-making," Lewis the literature scholar laments: "It is astonishing how little attention critics have paid to Story considered in itself." (*Of this and Other Worlds* 25)

Out of an argument shaped by the discussions of Barfield had evolved a mutual understanding of what Tolkien calls "Mythopoeia": the experience of *receiving* a "story out of which ever varying meanings will grow." (85) Within his essay "On Fairy Tales" Tolkien seeks what he calls "a less debatable word," and chooses *Enchantment*. "Enchantment," he says, "produces a Secondary World." (43) It is a place in which transformation can occur – a transformation that does not fade upon re-entry into the Primary World, but, significantly, casts new light upon the Primary World. Thus, he indicates, it is a medium of revelation. Both Tolkien and Lewis direct their readers to the Gospel as the greatest example of Mythopoeisis – a directive with which MacDonald would have readily concurred.⁸

⁷ "The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is – not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself." ("Fantastic" 196)

⁸ Thus for these writers the term *Gospel* refers to the general story, not to any of the four distinctive gospel texts.

Section II: The Imagination and Its Practice: MacDonald's contribution to understanding both

"O Lord God," I said, almost involuntarily, "thou art very rich.
Thou art the one poet, the one maker."
(Seaboard Parish)

The explorations by these men of the power of Story, such as Tolkien's iconic "On Fairy Tales" and Lewis' *Of This and Other Worlds*,⁹ have been observed to hold similarities with Chesterton's oft-reprinted chapter in *Orthodoxy*, "Ethics in Elfland."¹⁰ Yet a textual comparison quickly reveals that many of the concepts expressed by all three men – and possibly even by Barfield – are re-articulations of MacDonald's seminal essays "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture" (1867) and "The Fantastic Imagination" (1893). Indeed, the more familiar a reader is with these two essays by MacDonald, the more striking the similarities. These essays are a clear articulation of much of what occurs within all of MacDonald's writing, and make evident the theological foundation of his understanding of the Imagination. They also make evident how his understanding of Theology requires the Imagination. They stand in sharp contrast to the declaration by Robb that MacDonald held a "belief in the distance [...] between God and man's imagination." (*GMD* 99) It is worth noting that, as Tolkien with "On Fairy Tales," MacDonald considered his own essay "The Imagination" of notable significance: "one of the best things, I think, that I have ever done."¹¹ (Peel 9) It is the only known lecture – of hundreds, over decades – that MacDonald ever gave from a written text.¹² Almost a century before Barfield, it explores the theory that words originally embodied an ancient unified perception. It suggests that it may be an unwelcome thought for some readers that "the imagination has had nearly as much to do with the making of our language as with 'Macbeth' or the 'Paradise Lost,'" and that "half of our language is the work of the imagination." (6) MacDonald urges his audience to view the concept practically:

For how shall two agree together what name they shall give to a thought or a feeling? How shall the one show the other that which is invisible? [...] the man cannot look around him long without perceiving some form, aspect, or movement of nature, some relation between its forms, or between such and himself which resembles the state or motion within him. This

⁹ Most notably the chapters "On Stories" and "On Three Ways of Writing for Children."

¹⁰ For a recent example, see Alison Milbank's discussion of the influence of "Ethics in Elfland" upon "On Fairy Tales" in *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians* (T&T Clark, 2009).

¹¹ It is difficult today to comprehend just how unusual was MacDonald's defence and theological perspective of the Imagination. Nineteenth-century perceptions were coloured by its negative representation in two key reference texts of that period: the King James Bible (i.e. Luke 1:51), and Samuel Johnson's dictionary. Johnson describes *imagination* as a foolish, even harmful faculty, equating it with words like *caprice* and *scheme*. (116; 131)

¹² Letters reveal that he frequently offered it as an option. It is the first essay in the collection of *Orts*. He even published a part of it anonymously in 1867 – it appeared in at least three journals: *The British Quarterly Review*, *Scott's Monthly Magazine*, and New York's *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*.

he seizes as the symbol, as the garment or body of his invisible thought, presents it to his friend, and his friend understands him. Every word so employed with a new meaning is henceforth, in its new character, born of the spirit and not of the flesh, born of the imagination and not of the understanding, and is henceforth submitted to new laws of growth and modification. ("Imagination" 6)

His argument resonates with Sidney's explorations of the machinations of a poet, as quoted by Barfield. MacDonald includes the same passages utilized by Barfield in his Sidney anthology *A Cabinet of Gems* (1892). (147-151) They are again reflected when MacDonald maintains:

To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination [...] We must begin with a definition of the word *imagination*, or rather some description of the faculty to which we give the name.

The word itself means an *imaging* or a making of likenesses. The imagination is that faculty which gives form to thought – not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in sound, or in any mode upon which the senses can lay hold. It is, therefore, that faculty in man which is likeliest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has, therefore, been called the *creative* faculty, and its exercise *creation*. *Poet* means *maker*.¹³

("Imagination" 3)

As MacDonald goes on to assert that "the *Trowere*, the *Finder*" might be a more accurate term than *Poet* or *Maker*, he adds:

Certainly it would be a poor description of the Imagination which omitted the one element especially present to the mind that invented the word *Poet*. – It can present us with new thought-forms – new, that is, as revelations of thought. It has created none of the material that goes to make these forms. Nor does it work upon raw material. But it takes forms already existing, and gathers them about a thought so much higher than they, that it can group and subordinate and harmonize them into a whole which shall represent, unveil that thought. (14)

This he develops further in the now familiar argument that a relationship with language allows man to better grasp the world that he inhabits – and better relate with it. (Precursors of Tolkien and Lewis' discussion of a star's full identity abound.) MacDonald – a lover of science – feared that new Victorian obsessions with science would lead to such a focus on deconstruction that an ability to see unity in things would be impeded. Emphatic that Science and Poetry are aspects of the same Holy Truth, he writes:

that science may pull the snowdrop to shreds, but cannot find out the idea of suffering hope and pale confident submission, for the sake of which that darling of the spring looks out of heaven, namely, God's heart, upon us his wiser and more sinful children; for if there be any truth in this region of things acknowledged at all, it

¹³ MacDonald considered Sidney "one of the noblest of whom he had read or known," and quoted and referenced him in most of his books. ("Lecture on Sir Philip" 18)

will be at the same time acknowledged that that region belongs to the imagination.

(“Imagination” 8)

To apprehend that unified reality – to have a unified perception – imagination must be employed; the more God’s intent behind that reality is sought, the more full and fruitful the apprehension.

The seemingly subtle but theologically important difference between creating and sub-creating that Tolkien and Lewis sought to disentangle is also one that MacDonald dwells upon: “We must not forget, however, that between creator and poet lies the one unpassable gulf which distinguishes – far be it from us to say *divides* – all that is God’s from all that is man’s; a gulf teeming with infinite revelations.” He prefers to keep the word *creation* specifically for an act of God – “except it be as an occasional symbolic expression, whose daring is fully recognized, of the likeness of man’s work to the work of his maker” – and instead to employ the word *imagination*. (2-3) The imagination of man he says is:

made in the image of the imagination of God. Everything of man must have been of God first; and it will help much towards our understanding of the imagination and its functions in man if we first succeed in regarding aright the imagination of God, in which the imagination of man lives and moves and has its being. (3)

For MacDonald as well as the Inklings he influenced, it was a declaration of some significance that the employment of one’s imagination could also be a participation in, and thus an apprehension of, God’s inspired revelation.

Further examination of how Tolkien and Lewis discussed and applied both the personal tutelage of Barfield and the printed tutelage of MacDonald highlights key aspects of the mythopoeic art. In their academic writings and in their lectures and tutorials, they sought to draw people back to the initial story in the texts they were studying. But they also sought to “make by the law in which they were made,” and create Mythopoeisis themselves. As modelled by MacDonald, within their attempts at mythopoeic stories the role of Story itself is explicitly important. Tolkien asserts that *The Lord of the Rings* is the “practical demonstration of the view that [he had] expressed” in his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” and that the epic work is a passionate argument for the import of Story. (*Tolkien Letters* 309) Significantly, throughout the *Rings* Story is explicitly inextricable from relationships; although Lewis had argued that “the plot’s the thing,” in Tolkien’s tale the “pattern of events” is subservient to the relationships that incur those events. Long passages are devoted to the relationships between the various characters –

those historical as well as those contemporaneous. It is clear that a lover of Story will aid the ‘Battle for Good’ and that a hoarder of Story will hinder it – so too will a scorner of Story. As relationships develop, stories are shared and the plot moves forward; when stories are not valued, entire nations decay. In the midst of this Tolkien puts one of his strongest passions into the mouth of a spiritually, mentally, and emotionally awakened king named Théoden. Théoden is chided for not recognising the arboreal creatures called Ents: “Is it so long since you listened to tales by the fireside? There are children in your land who [would know them even from] twisted threads of stories.” Théoden replies:

Out of the shadows of legend I begin to understand the marvel of the trees I think ...
We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land. Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom.
(*Rings II* 191)

In rediscovering Story, the king has his understanding of even Nature illuminated and transformed. His perception of reality, of its relationality, is becoming unified.

Tolkien laments in “On Fairy Tales” as he had through King Théoden, that that which is essential sustenance and fortification for humanity, that which once warriors demanded to hear, has been “banished” to “the nursery.” (85) Yet there is hope because: “the old that is strong does not wither/Deep roots are not reached by the frost.” (*Rings I* 257) *The Lord of the Rings* ends with a commission to a humble hobbit to perpetuate the stories of his people, to “keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more. And that will keep you as busy and as happy as anyone can be, as long as your part of the Story goes on.” (*Rings III* 309) It is a commission that recognizes humanity’s continued participation in the True Myth, echoing an old text that Tolkien knew as well as MacDonald:

Watch yourself closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them [...] teach [my words] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.¹⁴

Tolkien’s hobbit is given a commission about which MacDonald is passionate: to share with his people Stories of the Ages – stories that will transform as they are experienced by their listeners, and which will *continue* to transform; stories with “ever varying meanings, which will grow” as the listeners travel a “road that goes ever on.” (*Book I* 61)

¹⁴ *Deut.* 4:9; 11:19 (Revised Version is used unless otherwise stated).

Section III: The Crucial Element: Better understanding the Crux of the concept by recognizing Lewis' Error

the plot is never the principal thing.
(MacDonald's Shakespeare lecture)

Tolkien's emphasis upon the development of relationships and how that is inextricable from the experience and transmittance of stories marks a key focus shared with MacDonald – and yet it is one distinctly absent from Lewis' early observations. So much of what these men said and wrote on the topic seems express paraphrasing of MacDonald – with this notable exception. Recognition of this incongruity is integral to understanding MacDonald's expression of Mythopoesis. Lewis writes in his anthology of MacDonald that "the plot, the pattern of events" is the crucial element of Mythopoesis. It must be granted that he is arguing specifically that the plot is more important than the medium – but his emphasis is marked: "Any means of communication whatever which succeeds in lodging *those events* in our imagination has done the trick." (15; italics mine) Although increasingly comfortable with honouring the 'inexpressible,' Lewis still anchors himself in the concrete. This conflicts with MacDonald's emphasis. MacDonald explains clearly, in a lecture on Shakespeare's story-telling genius: "the plot is *never* the principal thing. Humanity is the stage on which the great dramatist plays, and the plot is merely subservient to this." (W22 26; italics mine) For MacDonald, as was clearly understood and portrayed by Tolkien, the plot is nothing without the relationships of the characters – whether to Nature, God, or fellow creatures; it is those *relationships* that carry and propel the plot.

Reflection upon the Balder myth that so riveted Lewis indicates that perhaps he had not yet fully processed what it was about the story that so affected him. The "pattern of events" is quite perfunctory once removed from the relational elements of the tale: a supposedly invulnerable god dies when struck by a poisoned arrow, but is expected eventually to come to life again. However, when one hears of a caring and innocent young Balder – the best-loved by men and gods alike, so loved by his mother that she engages almost all of nature in his protection – and of the jealous Loki's unprovoked contrivance to have Balder's blind twin brother accidentally kill him; when one knows of the grief and despair felt by all of Ragnarok, even its creatures, and of the traitorous Loki's deceit so that Balder cannot be released from death; and when one is made aware of the ubiquitous and continued longing for the day when Balder will be reborn – then it seems clear that "the idea of the dying and reviving god" could not have so moved Lewis without the crucial relational elements. The relational elements, both

those beautiful and those evil, are what ‘lodge those events.’ Lewis’s declaration that “the plot, the pattern of events” is the crucial element was made in 1946. A decade later, after he had embarked on his relationship with Joy Davidman, he published arguably his finest work – a story defined by relationship: *Till We Have Faces*. It is possible that by then he consciously considered the relationships within a mythopoeic story more important to its ‘body and soul’ than the “pattern of events.” Certainly he would have agreed that without that relational element even the pattern of events of the Gospel story would lack a mythopoeic element; without the vastness of the love of the Father, the emptying out in sacrifice of the Son, the despairing grief of the disciples, the unbelievable joy and incomprehensible resurrection mystery that reaches beyond the restrictions of time, it would not be ‘the Gospel.’ Without relationship, the Gospel cannot transform. And thus it must be emphasized: for all that Tolkien and Lewis express about what mythopoeic writing *is*, for MacDonald it is *not* the plot that must be lodged in the reader’s or listener’s imagination, for, again:

the plot is *never* the principal thing. Humanity is the stage on which the great dramatist plays, and the plot is merely subservient to this. (26)

Patterned after the communication of God to humanity, it is the relational element that MacDonald regards as the true medium of transformative revelation. For MacDonald’s practice of what Lewis calls *Mythopoesis*, this is the crux.

MacDonald believes that relationship intrinsically serves as a medium for eternal truths. The truths that are eternally conveyed in myth, the truths that somehow are able to speak to the needs of each new generation, require – so MacDonald believes – relationality; and not only is a relational element within a story required so that the truth be transmitted, but the story must itself be able to relate that relational truth. As Tolkien had written, there must be produced “a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside.” (43) If all elements of the story are entirely foreign, it cannot have a mythopoeic effect upon the reader. The reader must be able to enter the story, to be ‘inside’ it, before there is a possibility of returning to their Primary World somehow transformed. The concept is one MacDonald explicitly explores in a number of different ways, both in his fantasy and in his realistic novels. In the very first novel that he writes, this concept is a clear element of intent in the story’s over-all structure, as the initially pathless Anodos (his name in Greek can mean ‘without a way’) leaves his Primary World and enters a mythic secondary one full of transforming adventures that result, as he returns at the story’s end, in his fulfilling the second of his name’s meanings: ‘a way up.’ The critic Prickett overlooks this central point, deciding:

“Anodos at the end of his experience, instead of being better fitted for accommodation with the real world, is actually left wondering how far he is un-fitted for it.” (“Fictions” 120) Yet clearly even Anodos’ sisters “observe some change” in him, and as head of the home he begins “the duties of my new position, somewhat instructed, I hoped, by the adventures that had befallen me in Fairy Land.” (213) Within the story itself Anodos pontificates on the vicarious educational experiences he has while reading some tales in the palace library:

New lands, fresh experiences, novel customs, rose around me. I walked, I discovered, I fought, I suffered, I rejoiced in my success. Was it a history? I was the chief actor therein. I suffered my own blame; I was glad in my own praise. With a fiction it was the same. Mine was the whole story. For I took the place of the character who was most like myself, and his story was mine; until, grown weary with the life of years condensed in an hour, or arrived at my deathbed, or the end of the volume, I would awake, with a sudden bewilderment, to the consciousness of my present life, recognising the walls and roof around me, and finding I joyed or sorrowed only in a book. [...] From many a sultry noon till twilight, did I sit in that grand hall, buried and risen again in these old books. And I trust I have carried away in my soul some of the exhalations of their undying leaves. In after hours of deserved or needful sorrow, portions of what I read there have often come to me again, with an unexpected comforting. (76)

The reader who accompanies Anodos into *his* secondary worlds is thus expressly encouraged to observe the transformations that they are working upon him, their fellow traveller – transformations that defy the restriction of boundaries such as ‘Primary’ and ‘Secondary.’

The novel *Adela Cathcart* (1864) is MacDonald’s most explicit exploration of the transformative nature of stories. Here the entire novel is shaped around the effort of a small community to bring healing to a young woman dangerously stricken by *ennui*; she is so disabled in her apathy that the doctors believe her life is in jeopardy. The innovative and desperate resolution is to tell stories to her, over several consecutive nights, with the hope that in the space of these stories her interest in life and living will be ‘quickened’ – in the very creedal sense of that word. Throughout this novel of what the narrator calls “simple stories, simply told,” the community of storytellers discuss what they understand stories, parables, and fairy-tales to be. (32) He points out to them that it is after all Christmas time, “just the time for story-telling.” The ‘wicked aunt’ is the novel’s foil and readers know she is an unhappy woman, for she does not like stories. She asks:

So you approve of fairy-tales for children, Mr. Smith?”

“Oh, not for children alone, madam; for everybody that can relish them.”

“But not at a sacred time like this?”

And again she smiled an insinuating smile.

“If I thought God did not approve of fairy-tales, I would never read, not to say write one, Sunday or Saturday. Would you, madam?”

“I never do.”

“I feared not.” (63)

At this point the narrator Mr. Smith commences his story, which is “The Light Princess,” a tale MacDonald himself had not been able to publish up to that point, yet is today one of his best known. It is but one of many short stories of a variety of genres that appear in the novel, including fantasy, realistic fiction, factual (not only from the story’s perspective, but of an actual event in MacDonald’s life), alongside some powerful poetry. No style is elevated over another, and the novel discusses prejudices against different genres. The format holds remarkable resonance with Sidney’s *Defense of Poetry*. MacDonald deliberately sets the scene in the period of Christmas, thus reminding his audience that their Christian faith is inextricably bound within Story. Arguably, what the concerned community is doing for Adela, God has done for humanity. Early in the novel before what is called the ‘story-club’ commences, the narrator shares a poem he has translated from Martin Luther. It begins:

From heaven above I come to you,
To bring a story good and new:
Of goodly news so much I bring –
I cannot help it, I must sing. (44)

MacDonald is not being subtle. He, like Tolkien and Lewis, wishes to make very clear that this consideration of the import of Story is hardly novel. Indeed, rather than merely having scriptural precedence, it *is* scriptural precedence. And it is a precedence that has called forth modelling for centuries. In addition to Luther, the narrator quotes John Milton:

Great bards beside
In sage and solemn times have sung
Of turneys and of trophies hung;
Of forests and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear. (64)

The narrator then explains: “what distinguishes the *true* bard in such work is, that more is meant than meets the ear; and although I am no bard, I should scorn to write anything that only spoke to the ear, which signifies the surface understanding.”¹⁵ At the novel’s end it is agreed that the “wonderful prescription of story-telling,” is indeed partly responsible for

¹⁵ MacDonald not only reiterates this concept later in the book (88) but throughout his work.

Adela's return to full health.¹⁶ (409) She has repeatedly been caught up in the tales, forgotten about herself, and then begun to think about herself and the world in a new fashion. It is clear: not only do others claim that MacDonald's stories are transformative, MacDonald himself is certain that Story can invoke transformation.

Lewis writes of Mythopoesis:

It goes beyond the expression of things we have already felt. It arouses in us sensations we have never had before, never anticipated having, as though we had broken out of our normal mode of consciousness and 'possessed joys not promised to our birth.' It gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives. (*Anthology* 21)

This resonates with Chesterton's description of how he saw his world with new eyes after he had been within MacDonald's *The Princess & The Goblin*; he understood better what his own world really was and how he was to live within it: "Of all the stories I have read it remains the most real, the most realistic, in the exact sense of the phrase, the most like life."

("Introduction" 9) As authors both Chesterton and Lewis were cognizant of, and even sought out, the influence of MacDonald upon their writing. They, and Tolkien as well, recognized that MacDonald was part of a lineage in which they wished to participate.¹⁷

Section IV: Inherited Participation: The Assertion that Mythopoeic Writing must evolve from Relational Engagement

*When we read rejoicingly the true song-speech of one of our singing brethren,
we hold song-worship with him
and with all who have thus at any time shared in his feelings,
even if he has passed centuries ago
into the "high countries" of song.
(England's Antiphon)*

This recognition of a literary lineage underscores another relational element that must be considered in order to understand Mythopoesis. In Barfield's concept of the "ancient semantic unity" of myth and language, in the concept that unity of consciousness fragmented as

¹⁶ MacDonald is quick to emphasize that stories are not the only healing element: "Did you ever know anything whatever resulting from the operation of one separable cause?" (*AC* 49)

¹⁷ Chesterton discussed MacDonald in a number of essays and wrote the introduction to Greville's biography. Lewis crowns MacDonald as his guide in *The Great Divorce*, intentionally paralleling Dante's choice of Virgil. For an introduction to Tolkien's complicated relationship with MacDonald's writing, see: "Reluctantly Inspired," by Jason Fisher, *Northwind* 25, 2007.

conceptual thinking developed, lies implicit the fact that stories that are able to move their readers or listeners back towards such unity cannot do so without hearkening to what has come before. If writers are to seek intentional “reconciliation of the literal and the abstract,” with “a renewed perception *informed* by the past, rather than reverting to it,” they cannot do so without themselves engaging with the past. Writers must be transformed by engagement with others, they must contemplate the ways of God, nature, and man, before they can give voice to something new – something that is, in and of itself, a response to that which has gone before: an “effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation.” (“On Fairy-Stories” 73) This requires not only an engagement with one’s antecedents, but a recognition that one is responding to and building upon their work. MacDonald wrote: “No man is capable of seeing for himself the whole of any truth: he needs it echoed back to him from every soul in the universe; and still its centre is hid in the Father of Lights.” (“Imagination” 16) To stand in a tradition of Story is both to receive and to be part of ‘passing on’ that which is infused with the truths of myths that have gone before. Tolkien drew upon northern European myths, such as Beowulf and the Icelandic sagas. Lewis’ work is not only rampant with Lucius Apuleius, Dante, Milton, Spenser, etc., but also with near-contemporaries such as Mauriac, Haggard, Chesterton, and MacDonald. The clearly evident influences upon MacDonald’s works number in the hundreds – and he is careful to draw explicit attention to many of them. In his first ‘realistic novel’ *David Elginbrod* (1863) he references over ninety other writers.¹⁸ Many of these, while implicitly shaping the story, are discussed in detail by the novel’s characters, or by the narrator. A close reading of any of MacDonald’s writings will indicate that he is intentionally placing himself in a tradition of apprehension, engagement, and transmission. While some might hesitate to consider such engagement a ‘relationship,’ it lends considerable insight to MacDonald’s work and intent to realize that there is no hesitation on his part:

May not a man well long after personal communication with this or that one of the greatest who have lived before him? I grant that in respect of some it can do nothing; but in respect of others, instead of mocking you with an airy semblance of their bodily forms, and the murmur of a few doubtful words from their lips, it places in your hands a key to their inmost thoughts. Some would say this is not personal communication; but it is far more personal than the other. A man's personality does not consist in the clothes he wears; it only appears in them; no more does it consist in his body, but in him who wears it. (*Donal Grant* [1883] 227)

The writers whom MacDonald references most frequently are those who also intentionally place themselves in that tradition of storied conversation, writers such as Dante, Chaucer,

¹⁸ This number only includes obvious references – not the myriad of allusions or unmarked quotations that also exist.

Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare. If Story is a relational medium, it is also part of a relational tradition – one that recognizes that its participants cannot stand alone. For many their identity is anchored in this Christian literary tradition – a tradition that has sought to follow the mandate framed by MacDonald in one of his earliest pieces of literary criticism: “The life, thoughts, deeds, aims, beliefs of Jesus have to be fresh expounded every age, for all the depth of eternity lies in them, and they have to be seen into more profoundly every new era of the world’s spiritual history.” (*Browning’s Christmas Eve* [1853] 119) Tolkien and Lewis name MacDonald a master of the art of Mythopoeisis, an art they present as a transformational medium “out of which ever varying meanings will grow for different [recipients] in different ages.” (*Letters of CSL* 271) For MacDonald such a transformation cannot occur without that element made so evidently crucial by the Truest Myth: a life lived, a story forged, in relationship.



MacDonald – like those he influences – argues that *creatio ex nihilo* is in the domain of the Divine Maker only. Creative humans are, he writes, the *trouweres* – the finders. Through engagement with inspiration they respond to what they have found in God’s creation. Thus it is that stories not only require an act of relationship to fulfil their purpose of being told – the engagement of a reader or listener – they also require relationship to enable their existence. Stories evolve from the response of the writer/teller to external forces (humans, animals, nature); a story is an expression of relationship that seeks to relate. When Lewis writes that the *mythopoeic* “goes beyond the expression of things we have already felt [...] shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives,” he is reiterating MacDonald: “The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is – not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself.” (*Anthology* 29; “Fantastic” 196) MacDonald not only seeks to rouse this alertness; in many of his tales he explores and endeavours to show how it can happen. To do this he uses a medium that exists as a result of relating, for the purpose of relating. Admirers of MacDonald indicate that certain special stories transcend the mere glory of relational communication and offer the possibility of personal transformation to the receptive reader/listener. The expectation that relationships can transform is profoundly theological: from inception humans are told, “It is not good for man to be alone.” This is the mystery of Mythopoesis.

To understand how MacDonald came to pursue Mythopoesis, to explore the adequacy of this term for what he strives to achieve, one must – just as with etymology – explore his roots. To understand from whence came his apparently unique perspectives, and perhaps more importantly his mythopoeic practice – the result of which still transforms writers and readers today – attention must turn back to the soil in which his son claims “he was planted early.” (Ronald 52) Thus may be sought a ‘unified perception’ of the author and his mythopoeic practice.

Part Two

DETERMINED SCOT?

Relationships that Shape and Confirm MacDonald's Mythopoeic Expression

*First, however,
let us look at some of the more powerful of the influences
into the midst of which [he] was born.
For a child is born into the womb of the time,
which indeed enclosed and fed him before he was born.
Not the least subtle and potent of those influences which tend
to the education of the child (in the true sense of the word education)
are those which are brought to bear upon him through
the mind, heart, judgment of his parents.
We mean that those powers which have operated strongly upon them,
have a certain concentrated operation, both antenatal and psychological,
as well as educational and spiritual, upon the child.*

“St. George’s Day”

CHAPTER TWO

'Out of the Shadows of Legend':
Redressing the Portrayal of Influences in MacDonald's Upbringing

Section I: The Mythopoeic Celt of MacDonald's Heritage

Section II: 'Into the Womb of Time': Aberdeenshire Born and Raised

Section III: Scottish Pastors & Preachers Who Shaped Macdonald & His Mentors

Introduction

*But I do say
 that all my hope, all my joy, all my strength are in [God];
 that all my theories of life and growth
 are rooted in him.
 (Letters)*

In 1987 David Robb made a signal contribution to MacDonald criticism simply in the act of publishing a study on MacDonald in the "Scottish Writers Series"; the book is a significant acknowledgement of the centrality of Scottishness to MacDonald's work. It is an excellent beginning, yet as Raeper observes, it is only "a beginning in examining MacDonald's heritage, and achievement as a Scottish writer." ("Diamond" 144) Compelling as Robb's lead was, few have followed with notable intent.¹⁹ This may in part be due to the perspective articulated in the conclusion of Robb's book that although the rediscovery of MacDonald "has been welcomed by twentieth-century Christians [...] it still seems necessary to try to assess him in the Scottish context. [...] Were that to happen, our sense of the complexity of Scottish fiction would be enriched." (*GMD* 132) This comment represents a critical stance that has seriously debilitated MacDonald scholarship: that MacDonald as a Scottish author can (and should) be considered apart from his Christianity. Robb, like most critics, does not ignore MacDonald's Christian background, and he is less blinkered than many in his assessment. But his exploration of how a Scottish upbringing shapes MacDonald's theological worldview rests largely within the context of the Missionar church of MacDonald's youth, and although much more accurate than a critic like Reis, Robb's representation is still sufficiently curtailed as to leave entrenched assumptions unchallenged.²⁰ In a later essay Robb does vitally make note of MacDonald's "profound openness to religious truths and imagery," remarking that "the details of his own

¹⁹ Dearborn does acknowledge the Celtic heritage and she heralds MacDonald's Scottish theological mentors, although how Scottishness manifests itself is not her intended focus.

²⁰ The works of Huntly historian P.W. Scott help explain the cultural integration of faith and community.

life-story provided him with a vocabulary to express his deepest beliefs.” (“Realism” 280) Yet MacDonald is more than merely “open”: Robb, like others, remains hindered by a desire to dichotomize. (*GMD* 132) His claim that it was during MacDonald’s “undergraduate days in Aberdeen that his rejection of traditional Calvinist doctrines began in earnest” (13) is echoed by other critics and reveals the usual assumption – challenged but largely unexplored by Bruce Hindmarsh – that in the environs of MacDonald’s childhood there was no contention with Federal Calvinism.²¹ Of even greater significance, it feeds into the assumption that MacDonald *can* be considered as a Scottish author apart from his Christian faith. This chapter challenges such assumptions. Robb may allege that the “advocacy” of Christians like “Lewis and Tolkien, has hindered the reassessment of MacDonald’s Scottish writing,” but this thesis alleges that that very advocacy, with its assessment of MacDonald’s mythopoeic gift, is what compels a far more accurate understanding of MacDonald’s Scottishness than has yet been attained. Although curtailed by restrictions of length, this chapter endeavours to give sufficient account to prove the point.

MacDonald was born into a Highland family, and grew up in and around a small town and rural parish of North East Scotland in the early nineteenth century. To keep in mind both the period as well as the culture in which MacDonald experienced his early years is to understand much about the shaping of the man, and the outworking of his subsequent worldview. It is also to understand why the oft-repeated sweeping claim that MacDonald grew up in “Calvinist Scotland” is not merely insufficient, but has led to misconceptions and oversights compounded by a persisting depiction of a dour ‘fire-and-brimstone’ tyranny. Although Hindmarsh is amongst those who query the relativity of MacDonald’s Highland roots (he believes them more distant than they are, and also fails to consider MacDonald’s maternal side), he nonetheless points out the “short shrift” of such critics as Reis in describing MacDonald’s Scottish religious heritage as merely “Calvinist hellfire,” and notes that Prickett has followed Reis’ descriptions closely. But Hindmarsh’s observation that such labelling “easily substitutes for careful scrutiny of the spiritual tradition in which MacDonald grew up,” and that unbiased scrutiny reveals “MacDonald’s childhood religion was not entirely discontinuous with his later spirituality; neither was its contribution all negative,” has been ignored.²² (56) In 1987 Raeper gave the most thorough exploration to date of MacDonald’s Christian upbringing. His sketch of life in Huntly is of great worth, not the least because of his personal ties with the place and people, yet his focus on an oppressing ‘Calvinism’ dominates. In 1992 he wrote an important essay on

²¹ Robb’s detailing of MacDonald’s time in Aberdeen is very helpful in explaining relevant politics – church and otherwise.

²² Dearborn’s recent book thoroughly redresses the theological inaccuracies of this blanket representation.

MacDonald's "Scottish consciousness," arguing: "this aspect of MacDonald's shaping as a writer has often been passed over." (136) With acuity he observes that the trend in critical study of MacDonald is to veer into discussions of German or English Romanticism, overlooking the "distinctive Scottish flavour": "an uncomfortable blind spot when assessments are made of him as a writer." (*Diamond* 136) Yet even so, Raeper's essay does not go much beyond his valuable articulation of this oversight, albeit pointing out MacDonald's rural childhood "steeped in ballads and folktales" and his keen consciousness "of ancestral voices."²³ (136) Like Hindmarsh, neither Robb nor Raeper actually explore the *effect* of those voices of MacDonald's Highland pedigree (although Raeper does trace the legendary paternal lineage from Glencoe). Had they done so, they would have been forced to grapple with a cultural identity inseparable from Christian faith. They would have also gained critical insight into MacDonald's acute sense of Scottish identity. Manlove makes a crucial contribution by placing MacDonald within the context of being a particularly Scottish fantasist, including him both in his anthology of Scottish fantasy (1996) as well as in his study of that particular body (1994), and he explores to some degree the Celtic nature indicated, yet not in great depth or breadth.²⁴ In fact both Manlove and Raeper, while making note that previous critics have given credit to Romantic influence that was actually due to Scottish, nonetheless end up themselves giving more attention to the former. Considering their academic experience, this is a loss. For to broaden Hindmarsh's earlier comment, MacDonald's Scottish childhood *worldview*, not only his childhood religion, "was not entirely discontinuous with his later spirituality." (56) Adequate attention cannot but prove this so.

Throughout MacDonald's literature many of the constant themes – themes that appear in his earliest stories, themes that may mature, yet remain essentially the same even in his last books – can be seen to have their roots in the same cultural soil as MacDonald himself.²⁵ Commenting on the abiding nature of these themes, his son Ronald remarks how *Phantastes* and *Lilith* serve almost as bookends holding together a body of consistent work, one a more mature and experienced version of the other: "the same man – the same great thought – the same wide hope, and the same rare poet."²⁶ (27) He adds:

²³ Raeper's essay hints that this is an area he would have explored further. Sadly this was Raeper's last MacDonald publication due to his tragic early death.

²⁴ This is limited by the scope of his valuable work, for Manlove is addressing a wide variety of authors.

²⁵ Although some critics have argued that MacDonald's focus changed considerably, Manlove has shown clearly the consistencies. However he views them more as stagnancies than as persistent convictions. (*Circle* 403)

²⁶ Greville concurs, comparing a passage in *Alec Forbes to Lilith*, asserting that the reader: "will see how little the quality and substance of the poet's outlook changed, although he gained so much in extent of vision." (403)

The permanence of his tastes, even of his mere likings and dislikings, gives quaint support to my statement that he had early chosen his course, and spent his time here in following it; and not, as so many even of the great have done, in digging up his roots to find fresh soil and new nourishment for them. If he could read this he would say, smiling, that he was planted early where the ground was richest. (Ronald 52)

Deeper consideration of this “Scottish consciousness” in which MacDonald was planted – without eviscerating the faith intrinsic to it – is overdue; to discover how the word *mythopoeic* is applicable both to MacDonald’s work and to his intent, it is required.

Section I: The Mythopoeic Celt of MacDonald’s Heritage

*Such a one will see the customs of his ancestors glorified in the mists of the past;
what is noble in them will appeal to all that is best in his nature,
spurring the most generous of his impulses,
and stirring up the conscience that would be void of offence.*
(What’s Mine’s Mine)

- i) Perceived Identity
- ii) Celtic Community
- iii) Liminal Existence
- iv) Liminal Landscapes
- v) Recognized Lineage: the Legacy of Mackintosh MacKay

i) Perceived Identity

*In George MacDonald’s blood the Gael at least preponderated very largely;
and I cannot doubt that the tradition which existed in his family
[gave] him a heart equally open to the Highland and the Lowland appeal.*
(MacDonald’s son, Ronald)

It has been claimed that Greville MacDonald’s biography makes too much of his father’s Celtic roots and Highland blood, for he states that that MacDonald’s “racial inheritance – one of romance, devotion and piety, of unlettered literature and song, of poverty and freedom – is of first importance in understanding his character and work.”²⁷ (45) And yet MacDonald was clearly passionate about his Scottish inheritance, claiming in 1897: “I myself am a pure Highlander on both sides, though I have no Gaelic.” (“Interview” 95) His statement is more than nostalgic expression: as Greville indicates, it is actually a key to the early shaping of his entire *Weltanschauung*. As he matured MacDonald became more aware of the interrelated

²⁷ For example: “There is no proof that George MacDonald had, or claimed, the Highland ancestry elaborated by Greville in his opening chapters.” (Hutton 74) Hutton does an admirable job of highlighting Greville’s prejudices and occasional alterations of text in letters – however his assertion of Highland ancestry stands up admirably.

perspectives that he had imbibed unintentionally when growing up in rural Scotland: on relationship and community, Nature and land, the supernatural/divine, language and communication, education and revelation. Various mentors throughout his life would reinforce the importance of these interrelations. Some of this rural Scottish inheritance did not always rest easily alongside *some* of the popular expressions of the Calvinism in MacDonald's childhood community. Unfortunately for the purpose of critical study, Dearborn is all too unique when she differentiates the narrower and more restricting practice of Calvinism by labelling it Federal Calvinism, and it is important to note that MacDonald himself separated that practice from the teachings of Calvin.²⁸ Such contrasts as MacDonald did see in his heritage quite likely sharpened his perception and enhanced his apprehension. The manner in which he responded to this Aberdeenshire upbringing resulted in a worldview quite unique from many of the London literati amongst whom he later found himself living and writing, teaching and pastoring. His corpus of writing includes and is apprised by personal, familial, and cultural histories – thus keeping alive the heritage that informs his own identity. MacDonald offered particularities of his personal Scottish story to carry meaning not only to his Scottish audience, but to those English and beyond. As a 1923 reviewer observantly writes: “Stories like [his] cannot be written in this hurrying age. They require a soil of their own, and that soil was MacDonald's by inheritance and possession.” (Moffat 21)

The perception of MacDonald as a Celt was not merely familial: his fellow countrymen – perhaps most importantly, Huntly folk themselves – considered MacDonald an “Aberdeenshire Celt.” (Huntly np) Eighteenth-century documents prove that his paternal grandfather grew up in a Gaelic-speaking Catholic family. (Saintsbury 1; Greville 25) That progenitor, like MacDonald's maternal grandparents, hailed from the Highlands and the coast. MacDonald's maternal uncle was a native Gaelic-speaker who fought hard to keep the language active in the Highlands, so it is likely that his mother had also grown up with that tongue. Thus when MacDonald was a child his family, already prominent by virtue of church and economic leadership, bore the additional stigma of originating elsewhere. His brother Charles explains in a memoir that Highland history was a substantial element of their valued family lore. (1, 2 Charles²⁹) Greville does emphasize that part of the role of Celtic bards (the Makars – makers) was to teach clan history, and he recognizes that this is a role his father covertly fulfilled within

²⁸ For example, *Malcolm* describes the local Calvinists with: “they are yet not worthy to unloose [the] shoe latchet” of Calvin. In *Elginbrood*: “They take up what their leader, urged by the necessity of the time, spoke loudest, never heeding what he loved most; and then work the former out to a logical perdition of everything belonging to the latter.” (93) Dearborn further clarifies misconceptions regarding MacDonald's relationship with Calvin.

²⁹ The source of this information is a document in King's College Archives, titled *C. F. MacDonald*. It is a collection of memories written by George MacDonald's elder brother, in June 1885.

the weave of his novels.³⁰ His enthusiasm for this history is caught and repeated in most subsequent biographies, yet none note the consequences for MacDonald of his own experience of growing up in a displaced Highland family at a time in which – as a consequence of exile – every surname spoke a history, and could evoke unwanted stigma.³¹

During MacDonald's lifetime the question for literary critics was not whether his Highland blood was evident in his writings, but rather whether its evidence was desirable. The opinion of Scottish critics (whether writing for Scottish or English publications) tended to concur that "there is in the genius of MacDonald a strong affinity for the marvellous." (*Works* 32)

In Dr. MacDonald the inexpressible Celtic infuses all – that which is the dream in nature and the wistfulness in the human heart, but never a dimness of sight nor a shrinking when a blow has to be struck; which is at once mystical and realistic, rude in touch, dreamy and darkling in thought. Whoever does not 'see the hang' of this cannot see the Celt or those born of him; it runs through them all. Dr. George MacDonald is a very 'wall-ee' (Wellhead or spring) of it. (Huntly np)

However there were certainly English critics who did not find, as one labelled it, such "apparent Celtic-weakness" palatable (cf. "Portent of Prejudice," *W*42). Interestingly the current Scottish novelist Margaret Elphinstone has proposed that that it is a particularly Scottish trait that 'Fantasy,'

as a reflection both of the individual subconscious and a collective past tradition, is central to how *this* world operates. That's frightening because it cannot be consciously apprehended or controlled. Reading good Scottish fantasy is a sinister, disorientating experience because it overthrows the comfortable post-Enlightenment rationale which allows us to make a difference between the dream and the reality, and to think that we escape from the dream and become rational beings again when we wake up, or stop reading. (Elphinstone, "Fantasising Texts")

Elphinstone's insight sheds light on the quandary that continues to puzzle MacDonald critics in their efforts to categorize certain of MacDonald's novels: Fantasy? Realism? Something in-between? Manlove's critical study *Scottish Fantasy Literature* offers a broad definition of Scottish Fantasy that offers an answer: "a fiction involving the supernatural." (1) By such definition there is scant in MacDonald's fiction that falls outside the category. The present-day fantasist Elphinstone continues: "So [with such Scottish writing] we're not looking away from the real world, we're looking very hard into it. And as we watch, every ordinary thing turns into

³⁰ Incidents of that MacDonald family history shape some of the most memorable elements of his novels – moreso than has been recognized. But MacDonald drew upon the history of the wider community as well.

³¹ Surnames were so readily identified with place, politics, and religious affiliation, that exiled Highlanders would sometimes change them. Although fugitives, MacDonald's progenitors did not.

something else, or, paradoxically, reveals more of its true nature.” (“Fantasising Texts”)

MacDonald’s determination to create a story that offers revelation to the willingly observant reader is then, according to his contemporaries and to Elphinstone, an intent indicative of his Celtic nature: “a very ‘wall-ee’ of it.” (Huntly np)

This Celticity is perhaps most explicitly seen in the novels *The Portent* (1860) and *What’s Mine’s Mine* (1886) though it threads its way through all of MacDonald’s work. Attention to this detail confirms that awareness and pride in his Celtic blood was a very conscious matter; a consciousness that enabled him to write, “I find my Scotch clannishness a most elastic material [...I] think of it as only a rudimental form of love to all men.” (*Letters* 156) This claim is especially helpful in explaining that while the particularity of his own Scottish history was crucial in shaping MacDonald’s worldview, he was able to understand those valued elements as transcending cultural constraints, even to the extent of finding their resonance and explanation within Scripture – itself a text of all peoples, originating as a text of one ‘tribe.’ This perspective was a key element in MacDonald’s worldview, and it underscores the advantage in considering how his own history shaped him.

ii) Celtic Community

The exploration of ‘clannishness,’ and even particularities of story-detail that shape MacDonald’s novel *What’s Mine’s Mine* hold very specific parallels with MacDonald’s maternal family records, those of the MacKay clan. With Celtic principle, this novel is influenced both by the heritage of persons and by that of the land; the actual ‘MacKay country’ finds its fictional parallel in the novel both in physical description and in the people’s relationship with the place before and during the Highland Clearances. MacDonald narrates how for a Celt the concept of *community* is a matter of society, soil, and soul: a holistic worldview. In *What’s Mine’s Mine* this distinct understanding of community is so explicit as to thus make it recognizable through the rest of MacDonald’s corpus: a portrait of relationally-oriented faith counterbalancing the one that has become iconic in MacDonald scholarship, that of the dour and restrictive (albeit loving) Grandmother Isabella MacDonald (and her caricature in *Robert Falconer*). This ‘Celtic’ expression of faith closely portrays what MacDonald himself sought to live and write. It also sheds more light on MacDonald’s understanding of relationship as something to be experienced not only with human beings of all kinds, but with all of Creation.

Alastair McIntosh explores some of the intrinsic elements of this Highland concept of community in his study of Celtic identity, *Soil and Soul*, and his clarifications uphold the validity of a claim made by Raeper: that what critics have often attributed to “the Romantics” read by MacDonald (both German and English) is actually owed to a profound rooting in his own heritage. Yet Raeper still does not sufficiently differentiate MacDonald from the Romantic tradition – in either his Scottishness, or his understanding of Christianity. Raeper talks of MacDonald ‘marrying’ “his folk tradition to Romantic theory.” (*Diamond* 136) While indicating the earlier roots of the Scottish folk tradition, another sacramental term used by Lewis when talking of the effect of MacDonald upon his own imagination is more apt: that in his writings the Scottish MacDonald ‘baptized’ the Romantic. The Celtic qualities explored by McIntosh help to indicate where MacDonald distinctly diverges from those Romantics whose writings he did unquestionably admire. This is especially obvious in *What’s Mine’s Mine* – the novel Lewis claimed to be the best, yet one that is virtually overlooked in criticism. (Durie 165) Even Robb in his focus on the ‘Scottish novels,’ gives it but four sentences, even mislocating the setting.³² (*GMD* 32) In *What’s Mine’s Mine* MacDonald explicitly seeks to clarify the distinction between Romantic and Celtic ethos by portraying Romanticism in conversation with Celticity, using a pair of young southern urban sisters as the romantic/Romantic foils. The *double-entendre* is intentional. Christina and Mercy are initially attracted to the country because it is ‘wild’ and ‘untamed.’ They idealize the local ‘uncivilized’ people, and are attracted to the men because they are “semi-savages.” (76) The women are intelligent and articulate but sentimental, and Christina struggles with melancholy; they fulfill many Romantic clichés. Yet at almost every philosophical turn these Romantic sisters are challenged by the novel’s Celtic brothers. An early Scottish poet, historian, and minister’s wife – and friend of MacDonald’s maternal family – Anne Grant of Laggan, marks a key contradistinction in the novel with her explanation of a fundamental Celtic concept:

No Highlander ever thought of himself as an individual. Amongst these people, even the meanest mind was in a manner enlarged by association, by anticipation and by retrospect. In the most minute, as well as the most serious concerns, he felt himself one of the many connected together by ties the most lasting and endearing. He considered himself merely with reference to those who had gone before, and those who were to come after him; to these immortals who lived in deathless song and heroic narrative; and to these distinguished

³² Robb situates it “vaguely, on the west coast,” instead of Sutherlandshire, in the Northern Highlands. (32)

beings who were born to be heirs of their fame, and to whom their honours, and, perhaps, their virtues, were to be transmitted. (qtd MacIntosh 14)³³

This sense of a nourishing community that transcends time and even text is crucial to MacDonald's understanding of relationship and Revelation, of the transformational nature of story. It is an element of Celtic ethos rather than of general Romanticism that pervades his non-fiction and fiction alike, and reaches a culmination in *Lilith*.

It is necessary to stress that the Celtic perception of being part of a community involved in a greater Story included relationship with the land as well as with its inhabitants. While the southern sisters of *What's Mine's Mine* have a romantic fascination with the beauty and wildness of the land, they are also scared of it: it is *other*. Conversely the Highland brothers do not merely love the land, they are defined by it – and are almost as passionate about their responsibility to steward it as they are about their responsibility to steward the clan they lead. Robb comments that MacDonald's "religious background" gave him a "sense of the ideal Christian community" as in "the patriarchal, clan groupings of the Portlossie novels [amongst which Robb mistakenly includes *WMM*]." (*Realism* 280) His claim in and of itself is broadly correct; he is again more open than some of his progenitors, in observing that MacDonald's "religious background" models much that is positive and is not merely "hell-fire theology" – yet the background of which Robb speaks is restricted to that of the North East Missionar church and does not include other models, let alone that Celticity which so explicitly informs *community* as seen in *What's Mine's Mine*. In *Robert Falconer* MacDonald writes: "The ancient clan-feeling is good in this, that it opens a channel whose very existence is a justification for the flow of simply human feelings along all possible levels of social position. And I would there were more of it. Only something better is coming instead of it – recognition of the infinite brotherhood in Christ." (563) Kinship with creation, that which man is called to steward, consistently serves this framework. What McIntosh defines as a Celtic understanding of community is MacDonald's worldview, a religious background broader than the Missionar Kirk. It is a worldview which MacDonald considered part of both his familial and his biblical lineage.

This all-inclusive kinship and responsibility to clan helped develop one of the most striking community differences between early nineteenth century Scotland and England. It is a disparity of which MacDonald's writings reveal an acute awareness, and through which they challenge

³³ Grant (1755-1883) regularly corresponded with MacDonald's Celtic scholar and minister uncle, Mackintosh MacKay. (46) Her husband was MacKay's predecessor in Laggan parish.

conventional understandings of education, intelligence, worth – and, of revelation. It was a deeply communal issue, manifesting how the relational sensibilities of a clan mentality assumed a respect for the voice of *every* person. Historically, every member of a clan was a valuable part of the laird’s family – not only regardless of economic or social standing, but also regardless of physical or mental disparities. This underlying ethos affected how persons of mental or physical limitations or differences were integrated into the community. Here again what may seem a small matter of Scottish culture actually contributed significantly to MacDonald’s theology and writing. For many years after the clan system had deteriorated the tradition yet continued: “individuals, passive and not violent or destructive, remained in their native communities and were tolerated and supported by friends and neighbours.”³⁴ (Checkland 164) This did not mean poor treatment was non-existent, but there was a lingering Celtic belief – of which MacDonald reminds his readers in numerous novels – that these people were particularly special to God and worthy of respect. David Wright’s study *Mental Disability in Victorian England* explores the contrasting and consequential impact of a loss of community care and inclusion more common in England, suggesting that asylums erected ostensibly to enable “greater integration” actually lowered “the tolerance of families and communities to care for their dependent kin and neighbours, thus leading to a century of segregation and physical isolation.”³⁵ (Wright 202) It is a fact unexplored in critical studies of MacDonald that almost every one of his novels, as well as some of his poetry and non-fiction writing, engages with the issues of those persons typically withdrawn or hidden from community in nineteenth-century England and urban Scotland.

When integrating this issue into his writing, MacDonald marries his cultural tradition with his literary one. Much in the manner of his beloved Shakespeare, MacDonald’s ‘holy fools’ are typically the source of important wisdom, insight, or truths.³⁶ But this is no mere literary tool. The acts of grace, mercy, and love administered by these unique characters are another way of MacDonald proclaiming that true education – apprehension of wisdom and understanding – does not only occur through the acquisition of knowledge, academic or otherwise. Persons with varying degrees of mental challenges – both permanent as well as temporary – persons of emotional fragility, persons with severe physical handicaps, persons who are suicidal (sometimes persons carrying the weight of more than one of these burdens) are never stock characters; each

³⁴ While the first Asylum for the “mentally unstable” was erected in Edinburgh in 1813 and in Glasgow in 1814, these urban communities functioned in a substantially different manner than the majority of the Scottish population. (Checkland 165)

³⁵ The inmates of these institutions were of shocking diversity: from severe mental illnesses violent in nature and severe physical deformities requiring intensive maintenance, to deafness, dumbness, or a lack of some fingers.

³⁶ The exception is *Bannerman*. Significantly the handicapped man in this story does not belong to a community but is a wanderer. Gray, in his history of the Huntly of MacDonald’s youth, notes that it was only such “visitors” who caused communal concern. (57)

is unique. MacDonald's holy fools vary widely in what makes them 'foolish' in the eyes of their world: Janet of *Sir Gibbie* and Old Rogers in *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* are considered fools by many in their community, simply because they openly – though quietly – seek to live a biblically and prayerfully shaped life, with no thoughts as to social advancement. That Gibbie cannot speak makes him a fool to some; that Isy (*Salted with Fire* [1897]) once had a bout of mental illness makes her permanently a fool to others. The Canon's son in *Thomas Wingfold* (1876) declares that the Polworths "have no right to existence" as they are physical dwarfs, and they should certainly not procreate.³⁷ (48) Yet these characters are MacDonald's prophetic teachers, and lovers – playing their part in defining and cohering the community. In *What's Mine's Mine*, "Rob of the Angels" knows "better than any other man in the highlands" the "ways and habits" of the wild animals. (196) But even more important is the declaration of his Celtic laird's son that:

I am convinced that nowhere so much as in the highest knowledge of all – what the people above count knowledge – will the fulfilment of the saying of our Lord, "Many first shall be last, and the last first," cause astonishment; that a man who has been leader of the age's opinion, may be immeasurably behind another whom he would have shut up in a mad-house. Depend upon it, things go on in the soul of that Rob of the Angels which the angels, whether they come to talk with him or not, would gladly look into. Of such as he the angels may one day be the pupils.

(149)

It is also a point of some significance that MacDonald's 'holy fools' not only teach, but that they themselves grow, change, and learn; they are not static. They are holy, but they are also human. Sometimes they are gentle, sometimes they are raging. But each and every one is fully human, made in the image of God. MacDonald's 'holy fools' are mediums of Revelation: a radical declaration to his much of his readership, and undoubtedly for many a rather unsettling one – but integral to his Celtic Christian worldview.

iii) Liminal Existence

Some scholars argue that the reason Celtic society embraced Christianity so readily was the profound resonance that already existed between the mythopoeic worldviews. Both cultures transmitted this identity through *poesis*: story, poetry, song. For MacDonald as for the Christian Celts, many of these pre-Christian *poeses* were portents of the truth. An eighteenth century writer notes that: "The Shorter Catechism and the fairy stories were mixed up together to form the innermost faith of the Highlander, a much gayer and less metaphysical character than his

³⁷ Extreme though these prejudices may seem, they accurately represent nineteenth-century societal opinions. For examples see the numerous popular articles and books by eugenicist Francis Galton, who proposed 'state-regulated breeding' as early as 1865. His many awards led to knighthood in 1909.

Saxon-tainted countryman.”³⁸ (McIntosh 43) J. Philip Newell also emphasizes: “There was no desire to change everything or to sweep away all that had gone before it; instead, the Gospel was permitted to work its mystery of transformation in the life and culture of the people. The Gospel was seen as fulfilling rather than destroying the old Celtic mythologies.” (27) This resonates with a poem MacDonald wrote for his sister-in-law: “Old fables are not all a lie” (recalling Tolkien’s conversation with Lewis); mythopoeic tales may be harbingers of, rather than competitors with, Scriptural truth. (*Violin Songs* 23) Elsewhere MacDonald elaborates: “The Lord of the promise is the Lord of all true parables and all good fairy tales.” (*The Elect Lady* 66)

This Celtic tradition of unified perceptions saw both Scripture *and* Creation as mediums of God’s Word – a concept understood as supported by Scripture, and one expressed throughout Church History as the ‘Book of Scripture’ and the ‘Book of Nature.’ Both mediums warranted love and respect; both invited engagement. Newell explains that such a spirituality “unite(d) a distinction between God and creation with a great reverence for creation’s element,” and held together “the revelation of God in creation and the revelation of God in the Bible [thus reflecting] the practice of listening for the living Word of God in nature as well as in the Scriptures.” (*Listening* 44; 34) Thus the traditional Celtic prayers celebrate God working within his creation, yet they do not confuse the creator God with his creation. Rather than being pantheistic, Celtic prayers clearly “distinguish creation from the Creator, between the Source of life and living things.”³⁹ (*Listening* 43) Recorded Highland prayers reveal a people who saw a relational Triune God involved in everything from the weather to their laundry to their husbandry. This conviction of an all-encompassing, all-relating God who loves bodies *and* souls, the world *and* humanity’s positive interaction within it, is woven throughout MacDonald’s work – and evidenced most clearly in his characters who pray: be they child like Gibbie, clergy like Walton, “innocent” like Steenie, forlorn soul like Donal, or ancient saint like Janet. This Celtic affinity with Nature is generally recognized, however the related affinity with Scripture is less readily so. Historian James MacLeod writes that it is difficult to conceive just how highly Scripture was venerated in the Highlands. (81) Even through the nineteenth century Scripture recitation accompanied by Celtic prayers was part of the daily pattern of a Highland community. Whether people were literate or not was irrelevant to their love of both words and the Word. Memories were libraries, and – as reflected in MacDonald’s work – some

³⁸ This thesis will not address distinctions between Gaelic Catholic and Gaelic Protestant cultures, other than to remark that the proliferation of Protestant bards attests to the division not being as distinct as sometimes assumed, as evidenced in the Jacobite Presbyterian elder and poet Robb Donn, whose work MacDonald’s uncle records. (M. MacKay xxxv)

³⁹ MacDonald addresses this charge directly in *WMM*. (230)

of those who could not read or write nonetheless had vast portions of the Bible within their recitative cognition. (MacLeod 81)

This general sense of a ‘thin veil’ is exhibited throughout MacDonald’s writings – not surprising as members of his family, including his father, were said to have ‘the second sight.’⁴⁰ While at seminary MacDonald apparently caused eyebrows to rise when he introduced a debate on the existence of ghosts. Newell writes of how in the early nineteenth century the generally “heightened spiritual awareness” of the Highland’s bardic ethos found new “prophetic expression” through travelling preachers (68) – men such as MacDonald’s uncle, Mackintosh MacKay, whose influence will be considered more closely later in this chapter. Celtic scholar Ragnall MacilleDhuibh explains, “Poetry and prophecy went hand in hand.... The highest and most important function of poetry was prophecy.... Both poetry and prophecy required a heightened spiritual awareness.” (qtd *Listening* 68) MacDonald proposes that true poets are more attune to Creation than the majority of humankind. A poet is an active recipient *because* he is one who sees, and thus a *trouwere*:

the imagination of man has [...] the duty, namely, which springs from his immediate relation to the Father, that of following and finding out the divine imagination in whose image it was made. To do this [he] must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the works of his hands. (“Imagination” 8)

Newell concludes in his study of Celtic spirituality that “the connecting principle between druid, bard, and evangelical preacher alike was sensitivity to poetics,” and that partaking of the eternal “provides a deeper perspective on reality than the temporal world of normality [for] normality proceeds from the mythopoeic rather than the other way round.” (*Listening* 68; 72) The Celtic faith, much as Elphinstone describes its fantasy, has: “not so much a binary opposition: real/fantastic, as a demolishing of the *boundary* that divides the real from the supernatural. [...] In this re-location the borderlands become central, the liminal place where action takes place, and, in the text, where the plot can start to happen.” (“Scottish Fantasy Today”) To begin understand this is to begin to understand MacDonald’s *Weltanschauung*, and to see fitness in the nomenclature he received so often both in Britain and abroad: “Poet, Prophet, Seer.”

⁴⁰ Dearborn quotes a London *Times* article (1924) that attributes MacDonald’s father with “the second sight traditionally associated in the highlands with these men who, in a sense, seem to have been considered successors of the prophets of old.”
⁽³⁴⁾ The Celtic *taishbitaraugh*, or gift of second-sight, enables one to perceive realities not evident to others, often matters distant in either time or space.

iv) Liminal Landscapes

By the mid-nineteenth century many Celts had become exiles, and many more were in the process of becoming so. While MacDonald explores aspects of this with ancestry parallels in the *Malcolm* books (1875, 1877),⁴¹ the later novel *What's Mine's Mine* (1886) speaks very directly to MacDonald's English readership as well as his to Scottish readership, both resident and exiled. Within the novel's fabric is an acute awareness of the tragedy of cultural and ecological degeneration being caused by the Clearances, both historical and sociological in its observation. Occasionally it is wrongly suggested that: "MacDonald took little interest in politics." (Sadler 277) In reality MacDonald is pro-active on many political subjects, but the manner of his response reveals his belief in the power of Story to transform: he subtly weaves his counter-arguments and sociological challenges into the fabric of his tales.⁴² In *What's Mine's Mine* however, the commentary is hardly subtle: an entire text is dedicated to the communal and cultural assault in which entire communities were being banished overseas, so that the soil of their inheritance might feed sheep. MacDonald's novel repeats the Old Testament mantra that the health and story of the land is tied to the health and story of the people: "Such was the present treatment of the land, causing human life to ebb from it, and working directly counter to the creative God." (36) Prophetic in its warnings, the book anticipates the eradication of specific animal species that modern Scotland is actually now seeking to reintroduce (cf. 33, 339).

McIntosh's explanation that for a Celt *community* is a matter of society, soil, and soul, continues to provide a helpful hermeneutic for MacDonald's wider emphasis on these elements. To remove a people from their land is to strike at their very identity. MacDonald frequently emphasizes that Nature is part of the creative expression of humanity's Maker, the Divine Poet – a means through which humans can come to understand him better. The sanctity of Nature was not a novel concept MacDonald first discovered in Wordsworth and then embraced, but rather a theme he found within Wordsworth that resonated with the culture from which he came: 'liminal landscape' is inseparable from the people and their story. Still in geography around Huntly today, names denote family histories, historical events, and the presence of the fantastic; cultural tales can be bound to very specific geographic locations. Manlove observes this "peculiarly Scottish feature" in which: "the location of the fantastic in the real world is often tied in with a precise

⁴¹ Greville remarks on these parallels with MacDonald family history. *Malcolm* proves MacDonald's awareness that the Celtic history is not always admirable: his ancestors played their part in fraternal warfare, and the book evidences the power of both true stories and false stories.

⁴² MacDonald's literature actually reveals a broad political interest, covering topics as diverse as eugenics, education for poor and for women, vivisection, and urban housing regulations.

topography of the Scottish landscape.”⁴³ (qtd “Scottish Fantasy Today”) It is a feature of a number of what are called MacDonald’s ‘realistic novels,’ and serves to compound the perspective that ‘there are more things in heaven and earth’ than many philosophies are prepared to dream. It contributes to the multi-dimensional understanding of landscape found throughout MacDonald’s work, and explains to English readers of *What’s Mine’s Mine* the concept of being in relationship with the land. Paralleled by the Biblical theme of the prophets in which the health of the land is intimately tied to the spiritual health of the people, the ancient concept pervades even the fantasies, such as *Curdie*, which is bound beginning to end by landscape. Throughout MacDonald’s work there is recognition of the relationship of humanity with creation and how inseparable it is – or should be – from the relationships of human beings with each other and with God. Yet he faced the reality of the multifaceted disaster of land evictions with the conviction that community itself is greater than the land, even though the land is a shaping element of that community. Without community the stories, language, and traditions will not persevere – nor the identity that together they forge.

v) Recognized Lineage: Legacy of Mackintosh MacKay

the Gael,
his devotion to the soil, his love of liberty, his intolerance of injustice,
his eloquence and love of learning [...]
George MacDonald inherited all the characteristic virtues.
 (his son, Greville)

Greville makes much of the local sentiment that “the poet [MacDonald] came from a good and gifted race,” yet still gives little attention to his father’s maternal lineage. (Huntly np)

Biographical accounts that allot time and space to family history rarely even mention the existence of MacDonald’s maternal family, the highlander MacKays.⁴⁴ Sadler’s *Letters* includes a family-tree chart that dates back to the early seventeenth century – and yet only follows the paternal line. (xviii-xix) Raeper certainly deserves due credit for acknowledging MacDonald’s maternal grandfather by name, and for mentioning his maternal uncle’s publication, friendship with Walter Scott, and role as Moderator – but he does it with brevity, basically reiterating

⁴³ Early reviewers of MacDonald’s novels discussed this role of landscape – British, Continental, and Faërie. Cf. “Reviews” in *Queries* March 1886 and Filmer’s “Neither Here Nor There.”

⁴⁴ Attention is often allotted to MacDonald’s cousin Helen Mackintosh MacKay, but this is a relationship explored for its impact on Louisa with postulations that Helen might have spurned a young MacDonald’s love, rather than for any interest in family heritage.

Greville, and without due exploration of the effects upon MacDonald.⁴⁵ Yet archived family letters indicate an on-going closeness with, and awareness of, this extended MacKay family; they chronicle a family strong in Celtic pride, and with a profoundly conscious and practiced faith. Professional ministers proliferated in the family, including not only MacDonald's maternal uncle, but also his great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather. (Greville 48)

Repeated critical attention has been given to the grandmother in *Robert Falconer*, with explanations that she is a portrait of MacDonald's own paternal grandmother Isabella, and of how she represents the repressive Christianity MacDonald wished to challenge. Yet however warranted, this attention has eclipsed the more positive role of MacDonald's maternal family, a family that often represents the type of Christianity MacDonald sought to emulate; whilst Grandmother Isabella MacDonald – truly a noteworthy character – has become legendary in MacDonald scholarship, she is not MacDonald's only relative, nor his only religious influence (nor does she deserve all of the the judgements placed upon her). Critical attention needs to consider the MacKays of MacDonald's mother's side, and this chapter provides an introductory account. These MacKays reveal a very different expression of Scottish Calvinist faith than was Grandmother Isabella's legacy – although, importantly, they did share her willingness to dissent from standard ecclesial identity.

Greville does not completely overlook Mackintosh MacKay (1793-1873) – “because of his intimacy” with MacDonald – but the detail he gives is insufficient for a character so important to Highland history, let alone to MacDonald studies.⁴⁶ (47) A farmer's son turned academic and minister, MacKay was celebrated for his passionate care of Highland culture and for his active opposition to the Clearances and forced emigration. Like characters in his nephew's novels, MacKay's love of the people and the land, of language and story, and of God, are inextricably entwined. MacKay was a highly respected Gaelic scholar, most admired in that capacity for his work as the prime editor of *The Highland Dictionary* (1828)⁴⁷ and for collecting and publishing in 1829 the poems of Rob Donn (who is today recognized as an important Gaelic bard.)⁴⁸ Donn was not the only such MacKay knew – he was intimate with a number of Celtic Seanachies,

⁴⁵Again, considering the comments in his later essay, it seems likely this was territory into which Raeper had planned to venture further.

⁴⁶ For greater detail of this iconic man's biography, see the Appendix.

⁴⁷ Greville names this Gaelic dictionary MacKay's “claim to distinction.” (47) I would suggest it was but an important element of a much broader contribution to – and stewardship of – Highland history. It was unquestionably important: comprised of Gaelic vocabulary, signification and various meanings in English and Latin, and translation from Latin and English into Gaelic, it also included an introduction explaining the objects and sources of the work, and a compendium of Gaelic grammar.

Apparently MacKay did four-fifths of the work but was unrecognized as chief editor. (47)

⁴⁸ Although Macallum also included some of Donn's (1714-1777) work in his collection printed in Montrose in 1816, MacKay's work seems to be recognized as the first proper publication. It is known both as *Songs and Poems in the Gaelic Language by Robert MacKay* and *Orain le Rob Donn*. Donn had been raised by MacKay's grandfather, and worked for him as a cattle-herd.

from whom he garnered Highland histories, and whose work he promoted. (Greville 43; Henderson 12) Sir Walter Scott sought out MacKay for translation help and to learn Highland histories – stories that later appeared in Scott’s novels, sometimes with acknowledgement to MacKay: a man for whom Scott had great respect. (Lending some irony to Reis’ comment: “MacDonald did not know much about the Highlands, but Scott certainly did.” [70]) MacKay’s publications include a work on Scotland’s Church history and a translation of the Olney Hymns (poetry by Cowper and Newton) into Gaelic. (H. Scott 24) That as an adult MacDonald remained conscious of his uncle’s scholarship is evident, for in the 1870s, with the aid of Matthew Arnold, he worked to garner support for a Civil Pension annuity for MacKay – though MacKay died before the effort came to fruition. (Greville 412) As late as 1893 MacDonald was still working to have his uncle’s achievements adequately honoured. (Kings 1/1/74)

MacKay’s life’s work as a minister, as much as his publications, reveals how this lover of the Gaelic language and literature celebrated its marriage with Scripture. While collation of the *Carmina Gadelica* bore witness that too many Protestant clergy were contributing to the dissolution of the Gaelic language and poetry, MacDonald’s uncle was striving to do exactly the opposite.⁴⁹ He was passionate about his people being able to continue worshipping God in their own poetic, communal language. Arguably he did more for the language and culture in this capacity than through his academic scholarship, as he actively worked to keep the endangered language alive in Highland churches both in Scotland and abroad.⁵⁰ In his collection of Donn’s songs, in his contribution to the Dictionary, he was trying to preserve a largely oral culture that, as communities were being dissolved, was facing erasure. His gift of telling Celtic fairytales was such that it drew the attention of Icelandic folklorist, Þorleifur Repp. (Wawn 114) He took action by teaching Gaelic and by urging education commissions that Gaelic-speaking children should first be taught to read in their own language, rather than only in the foreign tongue of English. (Durkacz 164) In his role as a minister, MacKay continued the same endeavours – travelling all over the Highlands preaching in Gaelic, keeping

⁴⁹ A.W. MacColl recently published *Land, Faith, and the Crofting Community* (2007) a carefully researched challenge to the fallacious assumption that few Scottish ministers were interested in preserving the Highland culture. MacColl addresses the largely ignored response of Scotland’s evangelical church to the land problems of the nineteenth century, its action due in no small part to Biblical and cultural notions of identity and economic justice, and which “drew more and more upon the communitarian notion of the people’s right to possess their ancestral land.” (5)

⁵⁰ Knowledge of MacKay’s endeavours gives insight to MacDonald’s regret to a former teacher: “I can never forget the lessons I had from you in Gaelic. I wish I had continued the study of the language. I might have been the minister of a parish in the Highlands of Scotland.” (Raeper 35)

alive the people's spiritual language, and attempting to train up more Gaelic ministers.⁵¹ At the late age of sixty he chose to go to Australia for a decade, so that he might minister to the remote Gaelic communities there.⁵² This was a Celt who did not take words, identity, or community lightly.

MacKay, clearly one of the prototypes for the elder brother in *What's Mine's Mine*, inspired MacDonald on a broader scale than characterization.⁵³ His life's work is an important prism through which to understand MacDonald's heritage and worldview. This uncle and MacDonald corresponded for years, and MacKay also visited MacDonald's young family when in proximity. Even while struggling to feed himself in his first years in London, MacDonald sent money to MacKay's relief work during the Highland Potato Famine.⁵⁴ (Greville 107) Following the practice of his uncle, MacDonald worked some 'translation,' paraphrasing Christ's parables into Doric poems. While Greville makes note that this uncle remained a Calvinist who was proud of MacDonald's genius but was disturbed by his "heresies" (47), the tenor of these differences was obviously insufficient to impede a close relationship and the sharing of many faith-inspired passions. It was also apparently insufficient to have impeded MacKay's encouragement of MacDonald's writing, for MacKay left his nephew's family "quantities of paper" – a far more valuable gift in the mid nineteenth-century than might be immediately recognized. (Beinecke, Box 29, miscellaneous) MacKay had a Christian worldview that demanded he fight for a continued Highland existence. He recognized that, as Newell writes, "for the people affected [the Clearances] meant the destruction of their culture, their way of life and the context of their spirituality." (54) As a linguist and gatherer of tales, MacKay knew that being physically separated from the landmarks to which identity was married meant that both historical and fantastical stories would be lost.⁵⁵ Yet MacKay fought not just against the Clearances, but also for those communities already cleared, aware that once they had been divorced from their established relationship with the land, maintaining community would be difficult. He did not want them to lose their identity; he wanted these exiles to somehow find a deeper sense of Home. MacDonald's uncle was a pastor, a story-keeper, and a leader who was seeking to preserve the community, the language, and the lore, in defiance of time and space.

⁵¹ More than once MacDonald has characters, such as Malcolm's 'grandfather,' articulate their inability to pray in any language other than Gaelic. Donal Grant first realizes he loves Arctura when deep emotion breaks forth in Gaelic expression.

⁵² This is similar to Ian MacRuadh's foray to Canada in *WMM*, to ensure that the clansfolk there are well. MacDonald continued to correspond with MacKay across this great distance.

⁵³ For the many parallels, see in particular Kennedy's descriptions and photo in *Disruption Worthies of the Northern Highlands* and MacKay's own article in Hugh Miller's *The Witness* (17 June, 1848).

⁵⁴ MacKay worked "strenuously to alleviate" the suffering in the Highlands caused by the potato famine from 1846 -1848. (Greville 215)

⁵⁵ I.e. "Your uncle was the only man to have ever climbed that cliff – do you know the story?" "Let me tell you why this is called the 'Fairie's Vale.'"

Clearly Grandmother Isabella's 'Calvinistic' fiddle burning was not the only family legacy that shaped George MacDonald.



As MacDonald writes about the Clearances in *What's Mine's Mine*, he is exploring both the particular and the general – truths of his family, truth for the Scots, but also truths far greater and wider than for a single nation. He is writing about a way of life that has shaped him: community as society, soil, *and* soul; identity and daily existence inextricable from the Divine; a poesis that both receives and relates this revelation. His uncle Mackintosh MacKay stood as a living link – as well as a worthy model – to a family that treasured the integration of its spiritual and cultural heritage. Continued self-exposure to his Celtic heritage, whether in the reading of Ossian⁵⁶ or of the Old Testament prophets fortified MacDonald's ability to steer through the harsher Calvinism of early nineteenth century Scotland, as well as the theological angst arising in Victorian England. His understanding of Truth had early exposure to an ethos that allowed for – even depended upon – the marvellous. When MacDonald later met teachers whose Biblical faith reflected this type of spirituality – some to whom this thesis gives special attention – he was quick to draw alongside their mentorship. An awareness of how easily a culture could be lost, coupled with an infusion of Biblical story throughout his own childhood – story constantly drawing on story – contributed to the overarching theme of storied tradition from the beginning to the end of MacDonald's career. In the decade to come he would meet a teacher, A.J. Scott, who would convince him more than ever of the spiritual urgency in reclaiming these identity-shaping stories. For MacDonald books (as containers of stories) became “a kind of sacrament – an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; as, indeed, what on God's earth is not?”⁵⁷ (*Portent* 82) The ‘Celticity’ that he continued to contemplate throughout his life thus shaped his understanding of God's varying mediums of Revelation and Relation. His inheritance of this holistic participation in communal story is integral to his worldview; attempts to critique him as a Scottish author apart from this can only fall short.

⁵⁶ Manlove writes: “The world of MacPherson's *Ossian* is that of the wild Highland unconscious,” adding that “Romanticism itself owes a huge debt” to *Ossian*. (11)

⁵⁷ MacDonald is here drawing on the traditional wording of Augustine's definition of sacrament.

Section II: 'Into the Womb of Time': Aberdeenshire Born and Raised

*When the operative force of such regards has been fostered
by the teaching of a revered parent;
when the influences he has left behind
are nourished and tended, with thorough belief and devoted care,
by her who shared his authority in life, and now bears alone the family sceptre,
there can be no bound set to their possible potency in a mind of high spiritual order.
(What's Mine's Mine)*

- i) Family Education
- ii) Vocal Education
- iii) Communal Education

Introduction

The early nineteenth century was a time of great economic, political, religious and social change in Britain. Industrialization and urbanization were altering work and social relationships irrevocably. Continental ideas of equity and the 'Rights of Man' were unsettling the ruling classes in a way that the remote clan system had not. The general populace was becoming more literate, yet less connected to the stories of their heritage. All of these factors contributed to increasing dissent within the Church. As a cumulative result of warfare, religious schism, the Clearances, and industrialization, MacDonald's families on both sides had been displaced. And so this too became an integral part of who George MacDonald was, his personal story: living in a locally successful, yet still financially struggling family in the middle of an era of social and historical upheaval; an 'outsider' family both culturally and educationally, and yet one that was intimately involved in the thread of the place, knowing its people and influencing its ways. His was a family for whom the Christian faith was central – a faith that cannot be simply labelled 'Calvinist.' As already stated, the tendency to so label MacDonald's upbringing has perpetuated common misconceptions; not only do vastly different manifestations of Calvinism exist, but even many different manifestations of Scottish Knoxian Federal Calvinism. These were certainly diverse within MacDonald's own community and family, and the diversity was a contributing factor not only to MacDonald's general understanding of God, but to his understanding of how God relates – of how God reveals himself – to his people. MacDonald's upbringing firmly planted him in the soil of his inheritance, and he did not reject it – though some critics would have him do so. Instead he acknowledged that it helped to shape his worldview and proffered resources upon which he would draw for the remainder of his life.

MacDonald lived with his immediate family and his paternal uncle's family in the "Gordon country" of Huntly and surrounds. As a youth he spent hours both on foot and on horseback coming to know – and developing a relationship with – the land in which he lived. Each time he returned as an adult, his desire to know it better became more cognizant and his awareness of the particular place that had shaped him that much more acute. As early as 1855 he made quite clear that the literal *place* of his home was already calling forth Story.⁵⁸ (*Letters* 92) In his frequent lectures on Robert Burns, MacDonald talked of how the environment in which a poet is raised shapes him. He explained how Milton would not have been Milton but for his physical context, nor Burns be Burns but for his; that each is so distinctive from the other precisely because of growing up in entirely different environments. The world of Burns was in many ways not so different from that of the young MacDonald, as parallels in poems such as "The Hidden Life" (1864) indicate.⁵⁹ MacDonald would always emphasize, as throughout the novel *What's Mine's Mine*, that "it was a far-off way of loving God, to love the place where God had set them." ("Robert Burns" np) Like Burns, MacDonald's love of the people and of the land were inextricable; like his forbearers, *that* was inextricable from his understanding and love of God. It is the community of his childhood through which MacDonald finds expression of his worldview; in reflecting upon it he realizes more clearly from whence his *Weltanschauung* has grown. In his father especially he saw and lived under the auspices of a faith that was not limited to church or family devotions, but which permeated his entire environment. It affected the manner in which he engaged with all persons, regardless of status, religiosity, or limitation. It thus affected the way in which he engaged with knowledge and education. Like Milton and Burns, MacDonald would not have been MacDonald but for the physical context of his upbringing. His was a context that fostered a mythopoeic pen.

⁵⁸ It is often forgotten that MacDonald's first publication – the poem 'David' – appeared in 1846, long before he even attended seminary. *Within and Without* was composed in 1850-51, and his translation of *Spiritual Songs* for Christmas 1851.

⁵⁹ The familiar image of Burns as the ploughboy, alert to the beauteous daisies he is overturning, is directly mirrored in MacDonald's actions and observations of the young ploughman in this poem.

i) Family Education

*For it is impossible,
let me repeat,
to give any whole idea of the son without
picturing the father and brothers, the mother and the little sisters,
who were so literally, though miles might keep their bodies far separate,
part and parcel of his welfare.
(Greville)*

MacDonald's father, George Sr., was well loved and well respected in the streets, in the churches, and in his home. Despite continuous obstacles – business failures, a leg lost to tubercular disease, and then tragedy of his young wife's death from tuberculosis – he remained positive, humorous, and community-oriented. He and his brother James worked together, prayed together, and their families lived together as well. They were deacons in the church and attended prayer meetings during the week. (Nicholl np) The religious atmosphere of their shared house was all pervading: morning and evening worship gathered children, farm hands, and servants together, as was usual in Scottish homes at the time.⁶⁰ (*Letters* 33) This does not, however, indicate a dour home; Greville writes of the great fun had amongst children and adults alike. The all-pervasive religious commitment was a mode of being for the young MacDonald, and not oppressive as might be assumed by critics not familiar with such a life-style. (Huntly np) MacDonald and his brothers also taught Sabbath School out at Drumblade, four and a half miles away. ("The MacDonalds" 41) He, his brothers, and cousins also took turns visiting their grandmother on Sundays to read Scripture and to pray.⁶¹ It must be emphasized that Grandmother Isabella was an influence that they *visited*: George Sr., Uncle James, and their wives were the primary Christian influences of MacDonald's childhood, not Grandmother Isabella (an assumption easily made by the prominence given her in MacDonald scholarship). Indeed, that Isabella had her own home in the town, away from "The Farm" (to which the brothers moved when MacDonald was but two) meant that her words and actions could be more easily discussed – such as when she burnt her dead husband's fiddle after finding her sons (young men at the time) beginning to play upon it.⁶² The prime influence on MacDonald's theological formation was not this woman but his father, the man who wrote him the following:

so far as I am able to see, the views of both of us are very much alike ... Like you, I cannot by any means give in to the extreme points either of Calvinism or Arminianism, nor can I

⁶⁰ Cf. "The Bible and Change in the Nineteenth Century" (Cheyne 92); George Sr. to his son, 24 May 1850, Huntly.

⁶¹ Cf. Mary Gray's "A Brief Sketch of the Life of George MacDonald," *The Bookman*, November 1905, and Charles' memoir. (9)

⁶² The source of the famous scene in *Robert Falconer*. Cf. Charles' memoir.

bear to see that which is evidently gospel mystery torn to pieces by those who believe there is no mystery in the Scriptures and therefore attempt to explain away what it is evidently for the honour of God to conceal. I see so much of mystery in nature, and so much of it in myself, that it would be a proof to my mind that the Scriptures were not from God were there nothing in them beyond the grasp of my own mind. As to the responsibility of man and his power or choice, I think there can be no doubt. (*Letters* 34)

MacDonald names the author of *this* letter to be his greatest familial influence: a father who thought deeply about his faith despite living in a culture in which Christian practice was the social norm. He is unsurprisingly akin to the father in the poem MacDonald dedicated to him, “A Hidden Life”: “For the old man clung not to the old alone, / Nor leaned the young man only to the new; / They would the best, they sought, and followed it.”⁶³ (223) The men in the poem are shown even to critique the theology they have just heard preached in their church. This desire to sift and discern was one of the greatest gifts George Sr. gave to his young son: no person or book, no category or group was intrinsically error-free; perceptive insight and good intent easily co-mingle with their opposites. George Sr. taught his son to neither whitewash nor blacklist. It was a liberating wisdom that would shape MacDonald’s discernment of literature, people, and philosophies for the rest of his life – and out of it would be born some of his most memorable characters, and some of his greatest insights. MacDonald’s father was a man who articulated his desire for God over denomination, who was willing to discuss varying doctrines, and openly voice his desire to continue to change and grow. With *his* father a Catholic-born, fiddle-playing, Presbyterian elder, his mother an Independent church rebel, his first wife a sister to the Gaelic-speaking radical who became Moderator of the disrupting free church, and his second wife the daughter of an Episcopalian minister – merely using the tag “Calvinist” for his son’s theological background is both simplistic and misleading.

⁶³ Greville confirms the poem’s close parallel, and uses it for illustration throughout his biography.

ii) Communal Education

"In the north, you know,"
continued Christina, thinking with pride that her brother was at Oxford,
"nothing is easier than to get an education,
such as it is!
It costs in fact next to nothing.
Ploughmen send their sons to St. Andrew's and Aberdeen to make gentlemen of them! Fancy!"
 (WMM)

MacDonald states clearly the impact of his father's literary influence when he writes: "I am so pleased you like my writing (in the CS). Much of my taste for literature has come from you." (*Letters* 81) That MacDonald's parents were not academics or authors by trade did not mean they were without love and learning of great literature; the novels and poetry of their son articulate repeatedly that it is not only those *en route* to an academic life-style who read and value good literature. Yet it has been indicated that the number of books available to MacDonald in his rural childhood was limited. While that would have been true of most of his neighbours, evidence exists that the MacDonald household provided access to more books than was normal for the time and place. This is not surprising when one considers that MacDonald's mother had a classical education, and had sisters who were teachers and a brother who was a literature scholar. MacDonald's well-loved stepmother also came from an academic family, her father an Episcopalian minister and her brother a Shakespeare scholar.⁶⁴ (Greville 365) Not least should be considered the lively letters from George Sr. to his son, in which he references literary, scientific, and theological books, as well as newly published poetry. (Greville 31; *Beinecke* 1/5/195; *Letters* 14, 90; etc.) There is an oft quoted obituary that claims that in MacDonald's family, "A strict censorship was exercised over books, but the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* were permitted" – leaving the impression that little else was allowed. (Nicholl np) Raeper supposes that Macdonald's access was limited to largely "heavy religion" and "gloomy verse" (the adjectives speak a textual judgement that the young MacDonald might not have shared.) (33) Yet MacDonald delighted in reading *Paradise Lost* while flung across his horse. (Greville 54) He speaks of reading *Arabian Nights* endlessly; of loving, if not understanding, his father's copy of "Rime of The Ancient Mariner"; and of initiating his love affair with Shakespeare. (Amell 103) It is likely MacDonald was much like the boy in "A Hidden Life" who:

read old tales / Of Scotland's warriors, till his blood ran swift / As charging knights upon
 their death-career. / He chanted ancient tunes, till the wild blood / Was charmed back into

⁶⁴ In 1849 MacDonald writes of his stepmother: "Father, I've hardly seen her match for a lady of God's making yet." (Greville 129) After George Sr.'s death, MacDonald wrote to her as regularly as he had his father. (295) He claimed to so love both mothers, he did not know which he would kiss first upon arriving in heaven. (J.Johnson 6)

its fountain-well, / And tears arose instead. That poet's songs, / Whose music evermore
recalls his name, / His name of waters babbling as they run..." (4)

As Robb wrote, "who having read *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* can doubt that listening to oral folk-tales and legends was one of the formative aspects of MacDonald's childhood in Huntly?"⁶⁵ (*Realism* 281) Some of those old tales were in the copy of *Ossian* that his paternal grandfather had subscribed.⁶⁶ Burns – he with a name "of waters babbling" – was evidently familiar. Uncle MacKay's edition of Robb Donn would have added to the Highland poetry. And MacDonald's schoolmaster Alexander Millar recollected his young student regaling classmates with legends of Huntly's castle. (Huntly np) This was not a child deprived of Story; MacDonald's upbringing was rich in a family-sanctioned Western literary tradition.

Yet even had MacDonald been raised in a 'normal' rural Scottish home, he would have had far broader literary access and education than many critics realize – almost immeasurably more than his English counterparts. Scottish education and literacy needs to be considered as part of the environment in which MacDonald was raised, for it is responsible for much that made him unique in thought and practice from his English colleagues and readership, and it contributed to the sense of mission shaping both his and his mentors' careers. In 1855 – the earliest such records are available – Scotland's literacy rate was 89% for men and 77% for women, compared with a respective 70% and 59% for England and Wales. In the majority of the Lowland counties, *outside* of the industrializing areas, male literacy was over 90%. (Anderson 1) This staggering difference between neighbouring nations is largely due to the fact that while public education had been available in Scotland since the mid-sixteenth century, England did not have free primary education until the establishment of the National Board of Education in 1899 – three and a half centuries later. Secondary education was not publicly available there until 1902. In England education was for the economically privileged. Scotland's long ingrained ethos of national education, regardless of social standing, traced back to the Reformation and certain theological convictions of John Knox. It shaped cultural assumptions about intellectual ability and sources of knowledge, as well as societal integration. It was a tradition that nineteenth-century Scots considered "a point of superiority over England."⁶⁷(1)

⁶⁵ If the home of Mackintosh MacKay is any indication of his sister's, such stories abounded, of "warriors clay-mores ghosts and second-sights," of dwarfs, giants, fairies, and shifting mountains. (Wawn 114)

⁶⁶ George Sr.'s father contributed to the publication costs of *McCallum's Ossian* (1816) (McCallum np) MacDonald later loaned his own copy, once owned by Mackintosh MacKay, to Tennyson. (Tennyson 99)

⁶⁷ Scottish historian Anderson explains: "The belief that Scottish education was peculiarly 'democratic,' and that it helped to sustain certain correspondingly democratic features of Scottish life, formed a powerful historical myth, using that word to indicate not something false, but an idealization and distillation of a complex reality." (1)

In Scotland's non-compulsory school system it was a fundamental ethos that poverty be no barrier to talent, and that anyone might be able to progress educationally. (Anderson 2) Perhaps "the most distinctive feature of Scottish education" was the direct relationship between the parish schools and the universities, which established 'university subjects' for the children. This meant that even the 'lowliest' cowherd was taught Latin and Mathematics, and sometimes even Greek. (3) Scottish universities even arranged term times so that students could still return to farms when they were most needed. As a result, while it might appear – even to the Victorian English reader let alone the reader of today – a little romantic that MacDonald's Scottish farmhands are found out in the field reading Plato and Euclid alongside Burns and Scott (not to mention Dante, Milton, and Klopstock) this is *not* the stuff of fiction: it actually happened. In 1864 the English journal *Cornhill* reported its astonishment at the fact in "The Scottish Farm Labourer." (613-616) Considering MacDonald's vast English audience, and the long-lasting Parliament debate over public funding for education throughout nineteenth-century England, his continuous emphasis on well-educated labourers in his novels carried a subtle political twist.

It is important to reiterate that in MacDonald's novels an education and a love of literature need not necessitate a change in 'station' for his young protagonists. Some do become scholars, teachers, or clergy, but not all. Education is of deeper worth, seen to be primarily an instrument of internal change – and relational dialogue. Thus the more literature the title character of *David Elginbrod* reads (a character based on MacDonald's father), the better a father, spouse, and worker he becomes. *This* is why he pursues such knowledge. Such practice was not unusual in the Scotland of MacDonald's youth, in which schoolmasters and ministers sometimes gave private help to older men desirous of further education. (Anderson 7) In an age in which women were still not permitted to study at university, MacDonald's protagonists share their institutional education with their female friends and family – and often are surpassed by them, even in the traditionally male-dominated subjects of Maths and Latin. Typically, MacDonald put his convictions about female education not only into his text, but also into practice by teaching at one of the first women's colleges in England, Bedford.⁶⁸ For similar reasons, he taught at English institutions that made university level education available to the 'working class,' he supported literary magazines and newspapers financially accessible to the masses, and with his family he gave performances and readings to the impoverished. (*Letters* 285) MacDonald practiced the political challenges his writings addressed, faithful to one of his recurrent themes: the need of transformative thought to incur transformative deed. But when in a poem he

⁶⁸ MacDonald also independently gave academic lectures to small groups of women.

pondered “Love filling up the thinking place,” MacDonald – a writer impassioned about the gifts handed down through good literature and grasped through geometry and physics – wanted to make sure his readers understood that, as the scholar in *Lilith* slowly learns: “To understand is not more wonderful than to love.”⁶⁹ (*Poetical* 512; *Lilith* 57) MacDonald is passionate about academic education being available to all persons, regardless of gender, class, or capability. His writing delights in the richness that such knowledge can bring to the farm-labourer as to the professor; that scholarship can be “a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future.” (“Imagination” 11) He invests a large portion of his career into enabling students in such a pursuit. However it is central to MacDonald’s understanding of revelation that his writing show that even those who cannot read at all may be wise educators – one of his wisest characters, Janet Grant, is also one of his least educated. As Vane comes to realize, the most important education is not received through books – theological or otherwise; academic education means little, can even putrefy, unless this relational truth is apprehended.

iii) Vocal Education

*The Muse of the North was silent, or spoke in ineffectual accents.
After a long interregnum came
George MacDonald,
unconsciously paving the way
for the mob of northern gentlemen who now write with ease.
He brought to his task an unusual fervour, a more than common scholarship,
a more than common richness, purity, and flexibility in style,
a truly poetic endowment of imagination,
and a truly human endowment of sympathy, intuition and insight.
D.C. Murray, 1897⁷⁰*

Another gift MacDonald received from his father was a love of his country’s language. Memoirs in local papers recall George Sr. sitting contentedly on a three-legged stool in the market square: waiting to do business as a corn dealer, with any farmer who should come along. He had more fun and humour than his brother, James, and was less carefully English in speech. It is to be noted, however, that neither of them was so Scotch in accent as the poet, in his English and foreign exile, preserved in delicious purity, his broad, north country tone, wedded to noble speech; and when visiting his Aberdeenshire home would sometimes delight in speaking Doric at its broadest. (*Huntly Express* np)

⁶⁹ MacDonald felt strongly: “This worship of intellect I scorn as much as I do the worship of wealth.” (“Burns” 22)

⁷⁰ From “My Contemporaries in Fiction.” (26)

This description of a community leader casually set in the centre of his community and comfortably speaking the common language is not a frivolous anecdote, but an observation of great importance. It is indicative of the high regard for culture and for persons that was an outworking of George Sr.'s faith, and of a perspective that would influence his son's eventual understanding of language, of translation, and of revelation of Scriptural truth.

Like many an exile, MacDonald clung to his native tongue and accent and sounded more strongly of his childhood home than those who had never left. For this he was both loved and scorned. Newspaper reviews of his lecturing evidence the pervading prejudices: his manner of speech found favour with North Americans and Scots, but was scorned by many English. That MacDonald loved to keep his Scots alive and broad caused delight whenever he returned to Scotland. One Aberdeen report celebrates that MacDonald's "purest, richest Aberdonian" used distinctive regional words: "The great preacher was declaring in the tongue wherein he was born the wonderful works of God!" (Clear 32) MacDonald was intentional: "I talk Scotch to all the people, and one old school-fellow tells me that will get me over the effect of my beard and moustache!" (*Letters* 91) His desire to celebrate his cultural identity was as counter-nationalistic as possible: MacDonald believed that every human should better come to know and give thanks for the soil into which they were 'planted,' and that an honest knowledge and acceptance of one's own identity would better enable appreciation and love of other cultures – and a recognition of shared humanity.

MacDonald was quite clear that he considered Scots distinct from English, and but one of the Scottish languages.⁷¹ That he chose to have the Aberdonian characters in his novels speak Doric raised yet stronger emotions than his accented lectures – and continues to cost him readers even today. Yet despite the claims of some modern critics that the "persistence of his impenetrable Scots vernacular aroused near-universal bafflement and frustration" (*God's Fiction* 129), there appears to be a greater proliferation of nineteenth century criticism declaring that to struggle through the vernacular was well worth the effort. For example, the *Athenaeum* review of *Forbes* suggests:

The dialect of broad Scotch in which the story is chiefly written may be a hindrance to indolent readers; but the racy, idiomatic flavour of the style would, we imagine, be inducement sufficient to overcome this difficulty. There is a picturesque force in the Scotch

⁷¹ In this thesis the term 'Doric' is used to refer solely to the distinctive tongue of Scots in the North East, as differentiated from 'Lowland Scots.' The term 'Scots' will be used generally to differentiate from English.

phraseology which takes away all vulgarity from its most homely speech. ("Forbes Review" 45)

For MacDonald the public use of this language was more profound than the fact that he was expressing himself in the manner in which his instinctive thought flowed most freely. It was a conscious matter of preservation – "In the present era of human utterance, the common speech of every succeeding generation is falling away from the pith and pathos of the preceding" (*Warlock* 65) – and perhaps most importantly it was a matter of particularity. His choice acknowledged the integral role of language and of words themselves in the shaping of his stories, in the making of their meaning.

Within the novel *Malcolm*, MacDonald is actually explicit in explaining some Scottish words – such as *partan* – to his readers. He shows how such words can take on multiple meanings within the context of a particular community – a concept he would also apply to his understanding of the depth of Scripture. What some reviewers saw as "local vulgarism," using "such painfully broad Scotch," MacDonald understood to be a valuable identity of a worthy people – his people. ("New Books" 25) Language encapsulates an entire cultural identity and interaction with the world; the fact that not only was poetry and wisdom found in a dirt-floored cottage, but could also be shaped within the medium of a very specific "provincial dialect" was for MacDonald a fact weighted with numerous theological truths, truths about which both his fiction and his non-fiction is quite explicit.⁷² This was fuelled by the belief that particularity gloriously relates universal Truth, and he sought to reveal this by faithfully portraying a living community.

This import of cultural voice for MacDonald must be strongly emphasized for it contributed to and shaped his understanding of language and translation in general, by indicating how such a 'unified perception' relates to people and their story in particular – essential in the earlier established understanding of Mythopoesis. Such a high valuation of language meant that MacDonald was acutely aware of the challenge ambiguity of language brought even to Scripture. He discovered in his own struggles with translation – especially in Scots, German, Greek, and Hebrew in particular – that it is impossible to carry all context of one word over into a world of a whole other language, for each function within a particular context. Translating a language necessarily alters it. Yet MacDonald refused to see this aspect of particularity as a weakness. Rather, with language an intrinsic aspect of Scripture, he saw a gift of richness proffered in truths

⁷² MacDonald also pays attention to cultural language in some of his 'English' works: *If I Had a Father* is full of Cockney accent, and in *Seaboard* the vicar hears and searches out the meanings of local Devonshire terms.

designed to meet ever-changing contexts.⁷³ He spent over twenty years struggling to make his personal translation of Novalis more adequately representative of the text: “so severe are my notions of what a translation ought to be.” (*Letters* 295) Aware that the limitations of translation issued from the very richness of each individual language, MacDonald had realized that language was the voice of community, imbued with its story and belief – even its landscape. The more he studied Scripture, and pondered the concept of Revelation, the more he became aware of how bound up this was with the language and communication of the people – something he had learned, and loved learning, from his own people. As much as he encouraged understanding of one’s own culture and language, he encouraged seeking to understand others in theirs; thus MacDonald’s Scottish novels introduced his English-speaking (and even German) readership to a particular people different from themselves. In so doing was made evident the universal truths they shared.



The letters between the two Georges show attributes of the father later admired in the son. They contain humour, pain, admonition, guidance sought and proffered, debate, a love of place, and a deep familial love. They reveal the poetic relationship George Sr. had with his environment, as he scribes such thoughts as: “nature, long detained from its summer garb, is now getting into lovely verdure.” (*Letters* 33) The value George Sr. held for all persons is manifest in his discussions of both servants and neighbours. His ‘clannish care’ is shown as he keeps his son generally up to date on the community into which he was born, expressing concern for farmers who lose their land due to bankruptcy and for others who struggle with drink. The value placed upon the speech of his people is relayed in his own colourful use of Doric terminology. Within this soil, society, and soul of Strathbogie – and modelled profoundly by his father – was demonstrated a holistic existence that shaped MacDonald’s understanding of both God and humanity. Before exposure to continental Romanticism, Mysticism, or criticism, MacDonald’s worldview had begun its formulation within the linguistic and mythic – the relational – community of his childhood.

⁷³ Cf. introductory comments of *Rampolli*.

Section III: The Scottish Pastors & Preachers Who Shaped MacDonald & his Mentors

*The permanence of his tastes,
even of his mere likings and dislikings,
gives quaint support to my statement that he had early chosen his course,
and spent his time here in following it;
and not,
as so many even of the great have done,
in digging up his roots to find fresh soil and new nourishment for them.*
(his son, Ronald)

- i) MacDonald's Missionar Kirk
- ii) Scotch Divines

Introduction

Being aware of the Celtic Christian ethos in MacDonald's upbringing, and understanding the Christian ethos of the home in which he was raised corrects numerous assumptions about MacDonald's Christian foundation, giving better insight into his work – yet it is perhaps the church of MacDonald's youth that receives the harshest criticism. While some critique may be warranted, to not consider the positive influences – especially when MacDonald himself states gratefulness for them – is to perpetuate certain misconceptions. Only a brief overview can be justified here, but it stands in challenge to entrenched stereotypes that have served as critical impediments. MacDonald grew up in a town that had been host to religious controversy for centuries, and his family was affected more than most. It was an environment that shaped his theology – and thus, his literature – in a more profound manner than would have resulted from simple exposure to a specific Scottish Calvinism. For MacDonald “the great Sabbath-breaker *Schism*” – a destroyer of community and communication – was a fundamental foe he would proactively combat in both writing and practice throughout his life. (*Antiphon iv*) Ronald explains: “Bred in a land of religious division, his whole fight was against schism.” This son of MacDonald is starkly clear about what his father did – and did not – write:

He made no war upon the Church as he knew it – whether Independent, Presbyterian, or Anglican; his war was upon the faithlessness of the officially faithful, and, incidentally, only upon one or two Calvinistic and Augustinian dogmas exaggerated out of all proportion to their service. (52; 53-54)

This statement so completely contradicts much MacDonald literary criticism that it is tempting to repeat; it is a bold contrast to the frequent sweeping aspersions cast on MacDonald's

‘Calvinistic background.’ A close look at MacDonald’s church background accentuates Ronald’s claim, painting a far more complicated picture than usually portrayed. An apt parallel is drawn from MacDonald’s description of how the well-intentioned yet inadequately informed character Miss St. John interprets the woman modelled on Grandmother Isabella MacDonald: “Knowing nothing of Mrs. Falconer’s character, Miss St. John set her down as a cruel and heartless as well as tyrannical and bigoted old woman, and took the mental position of enmity towards her.” (*Falconer* 174) In recognition that misinterpretation of both MacDonald’s grandmother and the character of the church environment in which MacDonald was raised have been guiding forces in critical scholarship, this chapter gives a cursory reconsideration of the ecclesial environment of his youth, and of the theological mentors towards whom his father directed him. MacDonald’s shaping as a mythopoeic author has firm roots in this soil, shared by his continuum of theological mentors, confirming a highly communal – and Christian – “Scottish consciousness.”

i) *MacDonald’s Missionar Kirk*

As a child MacDonald was not merely exposed to a regional and familial inheritance of Catholic and Protestant conflict, but also to the fragmentation happening throughout the Scottish Protestant church. Both his maternal grandmother and his stepmother were daughters of ministers – one Episcopalian, one Established. His maternal uncle, Mackintosh MacKay, was actively supporting Gaelic-speaking congregations at a time when many in ecclesial authority wished the language phased out – and soon he would become one of the first post-Disruption Moderators of the Free Church. MacDonald’s one paternal aunt married a Congregational minister. His paternal grandmother, Isabella, left the Parish church at which her husband remained an elder and took herself and her three youngest sons to the ‘Missionar Kirk’. That George Sr.’s parents were thus divided along church lines cannot have been without effect, nor the variety of denominations represented by both the MacDonald and the MacKay families.

This independent “Missionar Kirk” of MacDonald’s childhood was a product of dissent long before even the 1846 Disruption of the Presbyterian Church – yet it had arisen out of dissent *against* denominational schism. Such intra-denominational dissent was rife in Strathbogie in the years before the Disruption. MacDonald was a young teen during this period, and Elizabeth Saintsbury claims in her biography that he was “too young to have been personally concerned.” (26) However, as the son of a multi-denominational family (with one uncle soon to be

Moderator of the forthcoming split), and as a youth already reading the sermons of Thomas Chalmers and teaching Sunday School, it is hard to imagine how the alert and theologically-minded teen could have possibly been unaffected. The church was known locally as ‘Cowie’s church,’ named for its founder. Rev. George Cowie receives short shrift in MacDonald criticism, another icon of the supposedly dour Calvinism of MacDonald’s youth. Careful reading of contemporary accounts reveals a more complicated picture – including the fact that Cowie began to dwell much more on the “love and grace and work of the divine Saviour” in his later years. (Troup 8) But what must be most carefully emphasized, as Cowie’s name often appears in dissections of MacDonald’s church-youth, is that the man died almost *two decades* before MacDonald was born (in 1806) – when even George Sr. was yet young. While Cowie may have had a legacy in founding the Missionar Kirk, he was long gone by the time MacDonald began worshipping there – and not only was he a different man theologically by the time of his death, the church itself continued to change, becoming increasingly relaxed and upbeat. MacDonald is not the only remarkable youth to have been shaped in those years at the Missionar Church of Huntly: among his friends and cousins were numbered pioneering missionaries, renowned ministers, and various scholars and doctorates – one of whom became the first scholar of Chinese Language and Literature at Oxford. Such progeny from MacDonald’s church in and of itself evidences the need for reassessing that environment. While there is merit in – accurately – reporting on the foundations of the church in which MacDonald spent his youth, it should no more be stereotyped by its inception than a butterfly by its larvae.

John Hill, the man who actually was the minister of MacDonald, and under whom George Sr. and James served as deacons, seems to have been a hero to the community at large – regardless of denomination. (*A.M. Address*; *Strathbogie* 138) He was clearly respected by the younger population of the region, and when he gave his annual talk to the “youth of Strathbogie” the large Missionar Kirk was crowded. (“The MacDonalds” 41) Hill’s Sabbath School, at which MacDonald and his brothers taught, was attended by over a thousand children – from multiple congregations in the community. (*Strathbogie* 138) Hill receives little attention in existing MacDonald biographies, yet as a mature and established author MacDonald claims that Hill’s influence on him had been significant:

I like to hear a boy loving his minister’s preaching. What little I have succeeded in doing in the world, I largely owe to the stimulus given me in boyhood days by my minister, the Rev. John Hill. He was a man of God. (Smeaton 38-39)

MacDonald's frequent references to Hill in letters to his father denote love and respect, and that this attitude was shared by George Sr. is made evident in the naming of MacDonald's youngest brother: "John Hill MacDonald." (*Letters* 8, 11, 13) While MacDonald's love and respect for his father is commonly acknowledged, few have tried to reconcile this with the fact that George Sr. was a leader in the same church so often deemed to be a representation of MacDonald's theological objections, and a friend and prayer partner with its pastor. (J. Johnson 5) Troup describes Hill as "possessing delicacy of feeling, gentleness, meekness and modesty of demeanour united with firmness of principle and who always exerted unerring prudence in action. His preaching gave almost universal satisfaction." (*Strathbogie* 138) In a country in which Baptists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans – let alone Catholics – even today sometimes struggle to meet on common ground, this pastor had friendships and sought learning outside of his denomination. (138) He was one more character in the multi-denominational parish in whom MacDonald saw the goodness of God, even if they differed in some theological opinions: an essential element of MacDonald's long battle against Schism. In *Huntly Two Centuries Ago*, Troup (by this time the minister of the Missionar Kirk) discusses Huntly's progress to unity-in-diversity. He writes of how it is good that no single church prevailed in uniformity, pointing out the presence of six. (19) Drawing attention to the merits of such diversity, this late nineteenth century minister of the Missionar Kirk asks: "Was it not well therefore that there were some who held other views [from our own] and took another course?" Thus an accurate description of the church in which MacDonald was raised must acknowledge that – during a national era of denominational discrimination – his church demonstrated how 'dissent' need not necessitate divisiveness; that relationship was a theological priority.

ii) Scotch Divines

There are two "Scotch Divines" whose influence should also be incorporated into an understanding of MacDonald's *Weltanschauung*, and who well represent the continuum of positive Christian environment during MacDonald's childhood through to that of his emergence into authorship. The first, Thomas Chalmers, was a friend of Uncle Mackintosh MacKay's, and regardless of whether MacDonald or his parents met Chalmers, there is no question that the family held him in very high regard and read his work closely. Chalmers was also a friend of MacDonald's great mentor, A.J. Scott. He is best known today as the first Moderator of the Free Church. The second, Thomas Erskine, MacDonald met as a young adult. Erskine was an intellectual colleague of Chalmers, and shared with Chalmers (dialogically as well

as personally) many friends – most importantly he was one of the closest comrades of A.J. Scott. The shaping influence of both Chalmers and Erskine has been overlooked, yet both men directly and indirectly reinforced MacDonald's holistic theology, and contributed to his mythopoeic art.⁷⁴

Long before the Disruption occurred, MacDonald's family was well aware of Chalmers, Scotland's most famous preacher. Greville has made familiar the scene of MacDonald as a child, standing on a table, pretending to be Chalmers as he preached to the farmhands. As young as thirteen MacDonald was reading Chalmers' sermons (even on holiday) and later he read about Chalmers' work in reintroducing traditional concepts of parish to Scotland's swelling cities. (Beinecke 1/3/145; Dodds 74) This revered teacher and preacher was a friend and colleague of MacDonald's Uncle MacKay – whose appointment as Convener of the Highland work was under Chalmers, and who later became Chalmers' successor as Moderator. When MacDonald sought his first pastorate, George Sr. wrote to his son about his developing style and understanding of preaching, turning to Chalmers for precedence and quoting Chalmers' memoirs quite closely. (Kings 1/1/24; Chalmers 254-256) For Chalmers all truth was God's truth (Roxborough 174) – a theme repeatedly reiterated by all of MacDonald's mentors – and he loved the pursuits of Science and believed its practice could be an act of worship. (Dodds 97; Chalmers 18) He discussed the revelatory aspects of Nature, and even wrote about the possibility of "higher beings, that fill every corner of the universe" – a concept redolent with the multi-dimensional understandings described by Elphinstone: the Celtic and scriptural perspective that 'there are more things in heaven and earth' than many are prepared to dream. (Chalmers 18; qtd Dodds 104) It was also an important part of Chalmers' identity that his accent and vocabulary remained true to his upbringing, and he publicly avowed the import of his rural Scots heritage. (88; 57) In 1870 James Dodds wrote that while the 1846 Disruption was to Chalmers "a sad and dire necessity," the ideals of his life were "the full realization of the parochial [parish] system; the inherent self-governing power of the Church; the extinction of pauperism, combined with the general elevation of the working class." (73) While trying to re-establish a rural Scottish example of education within the groaning urban tenements, Chalmers also felt that although the Bible should be taught in school, no child should be forced to attend the class or be excluded from other classes if they did not take it. He even asked his theology students not to preach predestination. (Roxborough 175) This issue of theological freedom was to become foundational to the English educational institutions that MacDonald's mentors A.J.

⁷⁴ While Dearborn does not mention Chalmers, she does uniquely mention Erskine's theology, but that is in brief, as her prime attention is given to Maurice.

Scott and F.D. Maurice would help found and run; these men would adamantly concur – for theological reasons – with Chalmers’ then radical claim that: “religion, most precious as it is, must not stand in the way of common national education.” (Dodds 367, 369) Oxbridge did not accept that position until 1871. In the realization of his ideals, Chalmers directly shaped and inspired the praxis of MacDonald’s personal mentors – each of whom could have written, as did Chalmers: “Deliver me from the narrowing influence of human lessons, and more especially of human systems of theology. Teach me directly out of the fullness and freeness of Thine own word.” (Dodds 182)

Over those non-systematic influences that shaped MacDonald arches the influence of one man whose acting out of the commandment, “Practice Hospitality” (Rom.12:13) modeled a ministry that for the MacDonald family would culminate in their life and practice at Bordighera.⁷⁵ This man was Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. He and Chalmers were “firm friends and correspondents, and it was in dialogue with Chalmers that Erskine cut his mature theological teeth, and ventured his ideas in a developed form on paper...” (Hart 10) It could be said that it was in turn with Erskine that MacDonald’s greatest personal mentors (other than his father) – A.J. Scott and F.D. Maurice – would cut some of *their* theological teeth. (F. Maurice 121) Erskine became the connecting point for many people in MacDonald’s life, the living link from Chalmers to Scott and Maurice in particular, precisely because of how he sought to live his theology.⁷⁶ The delight of these dissenting Scottish divines in their own heritage increased, rather than inhibited, their delight in the cultures of others (as evidenced in their many Continental relationships – literary and personal). Perhaps most importantly, they modelled for MacDonald the concept of intentionally making one’s home and one’s conversation places of communion; a hospitality – a practiced theology – in which not only was discussion and exploration of ‘the ways of God to man’ invited and encouraged without condition, but in which sustenance was offered to the weary. MacDonald became a type of practising heir to this convention. He met Erskine sometime in the 1850s, likely through their mutual friendship with Scott. Erskine was appreciative of MacDonald’s first full publication, *Within and Without* (1855), declaring: “I like it better than any poetry and most prose that I have read for many years.”⁷⁷ (Greville 194, 292) In August 1865 MacDonald visited Erskine while in Edinburgh to candidate for the Edinburgh University Chair,

⁷⁵ For over twenty years in the ex-pat community of Bordighera the MacDonalds hosted friends, neighbours, and strangers for engagements with art and theology, and offered to many a haven for retreat.

⁷⁶ Maurice, himself a student of these so-called Scotch divines (Chalmers, Erskine, Scott), also falls loosely into their category despite his citizenship. For more on this relationship see *The Life of F.D. Maurice*, ed. F. Maurice. Other shared friends included Carlyle, the Russell Gurneys, and the Mount-Temples.

⁷⁷ Erskine and Scott had met while attending lectures in Edinburgh in 1826. (Dearborn 71)

and fellow guests included Thomas and Alexander Carlyle, and Dr. John Brown (author of *Rab and His Friends*). (354) A letter from Louisa reveals that Erskine's Linlathen had previously been a place of restoration for MacDonald – and she is determined that it will be so again, reiterating at the end of the long letter, in postscript: “*Do go to Linlathen.*”

A brief overview of Erskine's theology will make evident the profound resonances in MacDonald's work. Above all it was passionately relational. Shaped by what Erskine scholar Don Horrocks calls his “overwhelming Johannine insistence on the ‘holy love of God,’” (30) this man who chose to spend more intentional time at home with friends than engage in the public sphere has been named by Church historians Drummond and Bulloch: “the most significant figure in Scottish theological thought in the quarter of a century preceding the Disruption – and perhaps in the nineteenth century.” (194) This “significant figure” reinforced and broadened the key influences of MacDonald's Huntly upbringing, influences of that Celtic worldview with which he was so continually interested, and also of some of the emphases of Chalmers. Erskine helped better interpret the inconsistencies MacDonald had seen between the God of dour Calvinists such as his Grandmother, and the holistic God of Scripture and Creation, as variously embraced by other members of his family. (*Encyclopædia* 756; Drummond 19; Hart *foreword* xiiv 5) He was emphatic that dogma should never impede relationship with an infinitely loving God. The framework of his theology was his understanding that the intrinsically relational Creator-God is revealed in relationship. This insistence was “informed by the pride of place which [Erskine] gives to the catholic doctrines of incarnation, trinity and atonement.” (Hart 19) Thus understanding of the historical – storied – life and death of God's own son is essential. (19) Christ's act of loving obedience stands in stark contrast to that act which led to man's separation from God, and models what his sacrifice makes possible again: the choice to set aside one's own will – one's attempt to exist independent of God – and instead accept the eternally waiting proffer of becoming more fully oneself, through and with him. Faith must be a relational engagement; it could never be merely an intellectual acknowledgement. One's entire life was to be a process of spiritual education, spiritual evolution, a response to God's prevailing passion to reveal himself. Uncomfortably for many, Erskine argued that notwithstanding the unique role of Scripture, God's desire to engage with all of humanity in the place of conscience meant that this could occur via other mediums as well – and be experienced not only by Christians. (Horrocks 212, 225) The Gospel was special revelation, yet Erskine believed God to also generally reveal something of himself ‘naturally’ as well. Inspiration, intuition, and discovery were apprehensions of revelation; consciousness the

realm of *poesis*. (255) These theological understandings, further explained by MacDonald's mentor A.J. Scott, pervade MacDonald's writing and give shape to the method of his practice.

Both Erskine and Scott shared their love of Romantic writing with MacDonald, and Erskine was a living link to some of the great Romantic writers – but both men approached Romanticism with very Scottish lenses, and, intentionally Christian ones. Erskine wrote:

The doctrines of revelation are the manifestations of that ever-present Almighty God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. They are lights to guide us back to God, our long-lost heavenly Father, and if they serve not this purpose, they serve no purpose. They are channels through which his Holy Spirit, which is our life, may be received into the heart; and if they bring not his Spirit, they do nothing. (qtd Hart 138)

Horrocks delineates: "Although Erskine reflected the contemporary importance of the individual, it was the individual as defined by relationship: vertically with God, where the importance of the divine Fatherhood and sonship was prominent: horizontally, in mutual fraternal relationships." (42) He explains that Erskine's vision was for "a Church which mirrored the interdependence and unity which subsists in God, actualised by the Spirit." (42) The distinction is similar as that viewed in the discussion of Celtic perspectives: "I feel the sin and misery of Individuality," wrote Erskine. (42) He felt that humanity needed what he called "a law of gravitation" to "awaken" emotions, and keep them in "healthy exercise." (63) Readers familiar with MacDonald cannot ignore how full even his 'fairy tale frolics' are of this required reciprocity: the physical levity in "The Light Princess" works to underscore the process the princess makes through the relational 'law of gravitation' as she learns how to engage with people. The story "hid(es) pearls for the wise even within the jeweled play of the variegated bubbles of fancy." ("St. George's Day" 66)

Erskine was not a Romantic reacting against the intellect; he was rather a Christian Scot reacting against a dominantly intellectual theology that did not incorporate relationality. One hundred years later Horrocks concurs with numerous colleagues that Erskine "can lay claim to playing a significant role in restoring classical belief in the universal loving Fatherhood of God and corresponding sonship to a prime position in Christian Trinitarian thought." (43) Under the intensive mentorship of A.J. Scott – who Erskine apparently saw as the gifted intellect who could clearly articulate this "radically new" theology towards which they had all been "independently moving" – MacDonald was encouraged as reader, writer, pastor, and teacher. (228) It is no marvel that MacDonald's own theological expressions were to change little in essence throughout his life, considering the depth of dialogue that would have entailed their shaping, under such kindred mentors.

Yet before MacDonald was to meet the radical Alexander John Scott, let alone Erskine or Maurice, he was to spend several years in an electric Aberdeen. He was sixteen when he began his October to Easter terms at Aberdeen, and Erskine, Scott, and Chalmers were all subjects of conversation in the university town, as events escalated up to the Disruption in 1846. MacDonald's focus in studies, akin to Chalmers, was mathematics and chemistry. The interdisciplinary nature of the Aberdeen program encouraged the young scholar – as had Chalmers – to continue to see the interrelation of science with other subjects. Hindmarsh has made note of the importance of the “Common Sense Realism” philosophy then dominant at the university – again, herein was the emphasis that comprehension of the world was not an exclusive of the academically educated, and that Nature reflects eternal truths. (Ducheyne 264) During this period began friendships and acquaintances that would last MacDonald's lifetime, men who shared his admiration of Chalmers (some of whom would go on to work with Chalmers) and of Erskine. Even once MacDonald moved to England, his Scottish formation was upheld and promoted through these continued relationships with Christian Scots such as Robert Troup, William Geddes, John Stuart Blackie, and Norman MacLeod.⁷⁸



Contrary to common critical consensus, MacDonald had a youth rich in theological teachers whom he cherished – and whose teaching prepared the foundations of his mythopoeic art. His uncle Mackintosh MacKay modeled an integrated understanding of holistic community and practiced faith – the interrelation of society, soil, and soul. The wisdom and grace of his father guided him in the education of honouring and respecting a person even when not in full agreement – even when in strong disagreement. Long after MacDonald left his well-storied home, this father's regular and welcome letters continued to portray loving engagement with his environment. MacDonald loved the church minister of his youth, and while he may not have agreed with all of John Hill's theological convictions, decades later he remained appreciative of his influence. The Huntly of MacDonald's youth, previously riddled with schism, proved that dissent *could* be held without division, unity found despite diversity. Teachers such as Chalmers and Erskine repeatedly, and in a multiplicity of manners, reinforced the belief that relationship

⁷⁸ Geddes became the Principal of Aberdeen University, Blackie and McLeod became important literary editors whose establishments promoted the work of MacDonald throughout Britain.

was not only a theological key, but that good theology demanded good relational practice. In doing so they also affirmed the importance and responsibility of cultural identity. Robb's study of MacDonald as a "Scottish writer," in correction to stereotyping critics before him, does helpfully stress that the denomination of MacDonald's youth evinced a "lively spirit of fellowship, a strong sense of the duty of members to watch over and help each other" (7) – the same traits so strongly revered by the Highland tradition.⁷⁹ Yet, perhaps influenced by his concern that the "advocacy and discipleship" of Christians such as Lewis and Tolkien has impeded assessment of MacDonald's "Scottish context," Robb ends his several page description of "MacDonald's immediate religious inheritance" with old Revd Cowie – not describing the church or its leadership during MacDonald's actual lifetime in Huntly. (131; 3-8) To have done so would have more effectively challenged stereotypes, and the prevalent "mental position of enmity." (*Falconer* 174) MacDonald's experience of exile (to England, for reasons of health and employment) evoked greater awareness on his own part – perhaps even greater love and understanding – of the rich culture of his racial and familial heritage, his childhood locale, and his immediate family. His writing and his lectures make evident that from early on he was acutely aware of how the unique environment in which a poet is raised shapes and educates him; his work reveals an awareness that his own environment was greatly enriched by particular models that influenced his *Weltanschauung* with the conviction that "to understand is not more wonderful than to love" – and that in the loving is found new understanding. (*Lilith* 57) "A Hidden Life" and *Alec Forbes* both model clearly MacDonald's belief that love of literature, of learning, and of God is not the remit of academia, for in these works his academically gifted and theologically astute protagonists make farming their – approved – careers of choice. *What's Mine's Mine* makes clear that MacDonald's is a consciously Celtic valuation: a Scottishness that, despite Robb's good intent, simply cannot be understood apart from MacDonald's faith.

Once in London MacDonald would meet the teacher whom he looked up to "more than to any man except my own father," A.J. Scott. (qtd "The Heart" 14) This new Scottish relationship, developed in England, would powerfully co-inhere the sense of storied community and identity that had shaped MacDonald's youth. Strikingly, as a result of Scott's conviction that a deeper theological grounding is to be found in self-knowledge, he models for MacDonald how to utilize the best of his Scottishness to assist his host country in coming to

⁷⁹ Robb also observes "positive things such as [MacDonald's] fervent outreach to all men, the evangelistic spirit in which he wrote" and a sense of "ideal Christian community" hailing from "the early days of Christianity, as in the circle which grows around Robert Falconer." (7) Yet that "circle" around the adult Robert in London was not a mere manifestation of first century idealism; it was the type of community that MacDonald saw occurring in his own century – most especially through men such as Chalmers, Erskine, Scott, and Maurice.

better know and understand *its* cultural identity. Integrating literary passions with a practice of the relational theologies of Chalmers and Erskine, Scott confirms MacDonald on the course that will mark him as an intentionally ‘mythopoeic writer’ – fully aware of his Scottish identity, fully impassioned to engage with humankind, and fully convinced that to do so through Story could awaken his readers to transformation and God.

CHAPTER THREE

**MENTOR OF A STORIED LIFE:
The 'Unified Perception' of A.J. Scott**

(A Study of how MacDonald's Chosen Mentor prepared the way for MacDonald's Mythopoesis)

TO A. J. SCOTT

*When, long ago, the daring of my youth
Drew nigh thy greatness with a little thing,
Thou didst receive me; and thy sky of truth*

*Has domed me since, a heaven of sheltering,
Made homely by the tenderness and grace
Which round thy absolute friendship ever fling*

*A radiant atmosphere. Turn not thy face
From that small part of earnest thanks, I pray,
Which, spoken, leaves much more in speechless case.*

*I see thee far before me on thy way
Up the great peaks, and striding stronger still;
Thy intellect unrivalled in its sway,*

*Upheld and ordered by a regnant will;
Thy wisdom, seer and priest of holy fate,
Searching all truths its prophecy to fill;*

*But this my joy: throned in thy heart so great,
High Love is queen, and sits without a mate.*

May, 1857.

CHAPTER THREE

**MENTOR OF A STORIED LIFE:
The ‘Unified Perception’ of A.J. Scott**

The name of one friend is better than all the muses.
(The Portent)

Section I: Better than all the Muses

Section II: A Living Vocation

Section III: Not Merely Cumulative

Introduction

According to MacDonald, literary criticism should take into consideration those who had a “certain concentrated operation, both antenatal and psychological, as well as educational and spiritual” upon the author, and a closer look at A.J. Scott makes it strikingly clear that this particular man warrants careful attention when assessing the genesis and nature of MacDonald as mythopoeic Makar. (*St. George* 78) Because of the accolade openly and repeatedly given to Scott by MacDonald (and by Greville), MacDonald scholars must be at least familiar with the name of the man he placed next only to his father – yet there remains a dearth of critical engagement. Despite the biographical chapter charted by Joseph Johnson in 1906, Dearborn and Hindmarsh are the only MacDonald critics since to give him considered study, and by virtue of their theses their focus is limited to doctrinal correlations.⁸⁰ This is somewhat surprising as throughout MacDonald’s twenties and thirties, far removed from the Aberdeenshire of his youth, Scott – according to MacDonald – became a second father. He was a man who understood intimately the framework that had shaped MacDonald. To Scott the interrelation of society, soil, and soul was paramount: much of his work in England, as a Scotsman, sought to heal what he perceived as ruptures between these elements in urban English identity. This section of the thesis thus follows MacDonald’s premise that to understand an author and his works, one must consider – in addition to the environment in which he is raised – the company he keeps, the influences he chooses. “The name of one friend,” MacDonald declares, “is better than all the muses.” (*Portent* iii) For MacDonald, Scott is this friend – an influence quite intentionally chosen. Though unacquainted with MacDonald’s parents, Scott was of MacDonald’s homeland. He shared

⁸⁰Remarkably, the work of J. Philip Newell has been overlooked: his unpublished dissertation is the most comprehensive work on Scott extant (*A.J. Scott and His Circle*, University of Edinburgh, 1981); an article considers Scott’s influence on Christian Socialism (1984); he presents Scott as a practitioner of particularly Celtic theology in his book, *Listening to the Heartbeat of God* (1997).

connections with MacDonald's Uncle MacKay, and was a friend and student of Chalmers. He became, amongst other things, a relational fulcrum for MacDonald, introducing him not only to Erskine but to the community of MacDonald's future – including fellow mentor F.D. Maurice and intimate friend John Ruskin. MacDonald desired that Scott shape his work intellectually, spiritually, and relationally – and so he did. In the first section of this chapter brief consideration is given of Scott's lifework, as that trajectory yet unpresented in MacDonald studies gave direction to MacDonald's own course, the works he wrote, and how he chose to write them. It is information that should have considerable impact on how MacDonald is critically read, not the least in Scott's development as a scholar of Dante. The next section shows how out of Scott's explorations of the relational nature of revelation arose an impassioned advocacy for rediscovering and engaging with the transformative nature of literature. Scott appears mostly in footnotes even in the studies of theology and church history, let alone of education history. Yet his influence on the development of education in England is rather significant, and his endeavours in this regard, alongside those of Maurice, evolved very intentionally out of his relational theology. The last section of this chapter shows just how deliberately MacDonald progressed his own career from the teachings of his "Master," how Scott's *Weltanschauung* is intrinsic to the consolidation of MacDonald's own.

Section I: Better than all the Muses: Why A.J. Scott is a necessary component in MacDonald Scholarship

- i) An Introduction to A.J. Scott
- ii) Scott through the pen of Carlyle
- iii) A Serious Study of Dante
- iv) Connecting with Ruskin through *Modern Painters*

*For the power of the truth lies of course in its revelation to the mind,
and while for this there are a thousand means,
none are so mighty as its embodiment
in human beings and human life.
There it is itself alive and active.
(Seaboard)*

Introduction

Victorian London was the largest, richest, and most powerful city in the world: guaranteed shock for a rural graduate of Aberdeen. It is hardly surprising that the nineteen year-old tutor George MacDonald sought out fellow Scots, not only for friendship but that, “in the daring of [his] youth” (as the introductory poem explains) he might also “draw nigh” to someone for mentorship. His cousin Helen introduced him to her in-laws, and soon MacDonald seemed to have two chief London pleasures: visiting these Powells (an artistic and philanthropic Welsh Congregational family with six lively sisters) and attending “the lectures of Professor A.J. Scott.”⁸¹ There was much for the inquisitive to discuss at this time, with colleagues and friends alike: Wordsworth was poet laureate; Carlyle had just published *Past and Present*; Macaulay his *Critical and Historical Essays*; and Ruskin his *Modern Painters I*. In 1845 Newman had joined the Catholic Church, Engels published his *Conditions of the Working Class of England*, and Disraeli published *Sibyl, or The Two Nations*. MacDonald was reading Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle* that year, and the famine had struck Ireland. The following year George Eliot published her translation of *Das Leben Jesu*, the Brownings eloped to Italy, and MacDonald (age 22) anonymously published his first poem, “David.” In 1847 the Bronte sisters were publishing *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, and potato blight was devastating not only Ireland but also the Scottish Highlands (it was said that three quarters of Highland food supplies were lost) – resulting in the emigration of hundreds of thousands of crofters to Canada and Australia. (Salaman 377) In 1848, revolution swept Western Europe, the Chartist movement came to a crisis, F.D. Maurice founded Queen’s College for Women, Marx and Engels published their *Communist Manifesto* in London, Mrs. Gaskell shocked proper society with *Mary Barton*, and her long-term friend Alexander John Scott was appointed chair of English Language and Literature in University College, London. And, a

⁸¹ Suggested specifically by both M. Gray and J. Johnson. (np; 20)

homesick George MacDonald returned to Huntly for a summer of parental guidance – before initiating life as a seminary student and as a fiancé to Louisa Powell. (Greville 111) If Aberdeen had been radical, London in the mid-1840s was no letdown.

The pleasures of the Powell family and A.J. Scott appear to have sustained MacDonald when, in September 1848, he commenced studies at Highbury Theological College. (Hutton 74) His love of teaching prospered even here, as he offered Chemistry classes to his colleagues in addition to some theological tutoring. (Greville 115) And here, as in Aberdeen, he found many friends with broad views – broader than those of the College’s Council. (114) Raeper writes that despite the disapproval of Highbury professor John Godwin, MacDonald and his comrade Greville Matheson had fallen “heavily under the influence of A.J. Scott whose lectures they attended at the Marylebone Institute in London,” and Greville suggests that MacDonald persuaded various other students to join him. (67; 130) Louisa also attended some of the Scott lectures. (Greville 69) They addressed such topics as Dante Alighieri, the “Academical Study of a Vernacular Literature,” and “European Literature from 1450 to 1603.” Deceptively normal as these titles may sound in the twenty-first century, even the fact that Scott was giving them, let alone addressing such content, was radical – as this chapter shall discuss. Both their content and the theological motivation compelling their delivery would shape the course of MacDonald’s life and his literary output.

While the exact date of the first personal meeting between Scott and MacDonald is unknown, by spring of 1849 Scott is mentioned familiarly in letters between Louisa and MacDonald.⁸² (Greville 121) While MacDonald considered Scott the greatest intellect he had known, it was not for intellect alone he revered him. (192) In Scott, MacDonald found a spiritual mentor whose holistic worldview not simply complemented his, but deepened, strengthened, and widened it. MacDonald addressed him in letters as “My Master,” and wrote to Scott’s daughter: “I looked up to your father more than to any man except my own father, who did not know half so much, but who was worthy of knowing whatever God taught him.” (“The Heart” 14; Raeper 228) Upon Scott’s death MacDonald wrote to Scott’s wife Ann –

My Very Dear Friend,

... He who has left us was the best and greatest of our time. Those who know him best will

⁸² That Summer Louisa expresses gladness that in Scott MacDonald has found someone who could both “preach and give the message from God direct” and hopes he will “miss no opportunity of hearing him.” (Greville 122) J. Johnson writes: “The acquaintance began with MacDonald’s enthusiastic appreciation of Scott’s lectures, and receiving from Mrs. Scott an invitation to go to their house, which he was obliged to refuse, but said in his reply, ‘Believe me, very few things taking place between man and man, could give me so much pleasure as Mr. Scott’s approbation.’” (192)

say so most heartily. [...] He was – he is – my friend. He understood me, and gave me to understand him; and I think I did understand him to the measure of my inferior capacity. *All my prosperity in literary life besides has come chiefly through him and you....* (Greville 359; italics mine)

To another MacDonald would write simply that Scott was “the greatest man I have ever known if – I may use a form which implies a power of judging which I do not possess.” (Hunter 391)

i) An Introduction to A.J. Scott: How Scott’s background prepared him to be MacDonald’s Mentor

- a) The Education of an Educator
- b) Scott’s New Direction

*If it be the unpardonable sin, as Carlyle tells us it is,
not to know a great man when he appears,
then the generation to which Alexander John Scott belonged was guilty.*

[...]

It may be asked, why Scott was not better known in his time and is still so little known.

In the first place he was without worldly ambition. He had no care for popularity.

He was emphatically a speaker and not a writer.

As a public teacher,

he was before his time.

(John Hunter, D.D.)⁸³

a) The Education of an Educator

Alexander John Scott was born in 1805 in Greenock, western Scotland. His father, Dr. John Scott D.D., is described as a man “deeply loved by Thomas Chalmers,” and an intimate of some of the most distinguished leaders of the National Kirk. (AJS 16) He placed a strong theological emphasis on the Holy Spirit, which Newell remarks as being unusual for that time and place, and of certain influence on his son’s choice to do likewise. (20) Already widely conversant in literature and theology, Dr. Scott made a special effort to participate in his son’s general literary pursuits – and this included acquiring sufficient Italian to “read some of the best works in that language with perception and enjoyment of their merits.” (AJS 15, quoting Scott) This unique attention to Italian literature in a West Coast minister’s family would eventually lead to the adulation of its son as “one of the foremost students of Dante” of his day,⁸⁴ resulting in but one of the many riches – though one of distinct significance – that that son would later share with George MacDonald.

⁸³ From a lecture to the ‘London Society for the Study of Religion,’ 1921. (387)

⁸⁴ AJS 15, quoting *The Scotsman*, 19th January, 1866.

Between 1819 and 1827 A.J. Scott studied the customary seven years for students of Divinity at the University of Glasgow. This was the period of Thomas Chalmers' intentional community building in a Glasgow parish: offering education and enabling the impoverished. It is not known if Scott participated in this endeavour, but certainly Chalmers' passion for holistic social and spiritual care as enacted in the slums of Glasgow was reflected in Scott's own work in London, and later in Manchester.⁸⁵ (In years to come, Chalmers and Scott would both converse and correspond, Chalmers even thanking *Scott* for insights in his published sermons.⁸⁶) Meanwhile Scott was struggling with aspects of the Westminster Confession and not entirely convinced that the pulpit was his calling, so he took some time out tutoring in Edinburgh and attending medical classes at the University – contemplating the medical profession. It was apparently a “season of darkness and doubt.” (*AJS* 43) Significantly, the family for whom he tutored was intimate with Thomas Erskine and soon the twenty-one year old Scott had met one of his closest life-companions: Erskine of Linlathen, then just short of forty. The mutual respect and love between the men was a relationship from which many would benefit. When at the age of thirty-three Scott published *Lectures expository and practical, on the Epistle to the Romans* (1838), Erskine wrote of him: “Scott is in point of intellect one of the first, if not the first man I have known.” (*DNB* 951) Considering the international collection of intellects with which Erskine engaged, his commendation is singular. Not without an element of humour Erskine also granted the accolade: “So rare a gift it is to be at once in the highest sense original and uneccentric.” (*AJS* 330) Erskine was struck by Scott's emphasis on the love of God, as enacted both through and by Christ, for every single human being. (49) “I often wondered,” he later mused, “at the number and variety of matters in which [Scott] took interest, and which he had made himself master of; and yet I always felt that *he never lost delight of the relation of each department to the great whole*, the place which it held in the hierarchy of things.” (Preface of *Two Discourses* xvii; italics mine)

Upon graduating from Glasgow, Scott was licensed to preach by the presbytery of Paisley. A friendship struck with Edward Irving led to an invitation to move south. Scott was struck “by the wretchedness and ignorance of the poorer population” of busy London, and spent the winter months “in preaching and teaching among the poor of Westminster.” (*DNB* 950) Unfortunately more attention in Church History is given to what occurred in Scott's second year of working with Irving than in the revolutionary work that Scott *incurred* in the following decades. At the end of 1829 Scott gave some sermons about spiritual gifts for McLeod Campbell at Row and also

⁸⁵ Edward Irving, who Scott would briefly assist in London, did assist Chalmers here.

⁸⁶ One such was Scott's discussion of how the church had shaped and reshaped practice in response to changing culture and period since the time of Moses. Chalmers responded: “Yours is no every-day pamphlet; I have read it with the most entire and cordial satisfaction.... How the adoption of your principal ought to speed the cause of Christian union!” (569)

at Port Glasgow, which occasioned “an extraordinary exhibition of ‘speaking with tongues’ and ‘prophesying in the church.’” The *DNB* conclusion upon this event and the events which followed is significant: “The movement and the so-called manifestations accompanying it had great influence on Irving, much more than on Scott himself, who never felt the ‘utterances’ to be convincing proofs of any genuine inspiration. The intimate connection between the two divines was shortly afterwards severed, though their friendship continued to the end.” (950) The experience of these events however, and ponderance upon the charismatic expressions they incurred, laid some crucial groundwork for Scott in his careful assessment of both the manifestation and the purpose of Revelation.

This same year Scott wrote an article titled: “Answer to the Question, What was the Reformation?” It addresses the relation of Martin Luther’s intensely personal and vibrant faith – his struggles with doubt and a “living encounter of God’s grace” – to the Reformation that ensued. Scott writes,

One living man with the Spirit dwelling in him and speaking by him, who exercises faith and prayer for his fellow-men, is more to a country than a thousand Bibles. I do not mean Bibles left shut, but thousands of Bibles pored on and ransacked for proofs of doctrine, are less than one living man, with the Spirit of wisdom and love, of faith and prayer. (637)

Newell observes the echo of Coleridge as Scott adds: “Christianity is not a Theory, or a Speculation, but a *Life*. Not a *Philosophy* of Life, but a Life and a living Process.” (64) A relational *Weltanschauung*. Within this context Scott also emphasizes the need for spiritual unity within the Church universal, and points out where the Reformation, despite Luther’s intentions otherwise, had failed. Excessive attention to and elevation of the Individual had led to a sense of “independent completeness in self, which shuts out all that is beyond the range of one’s own sense and intellect.” (*Reformation* 637) Such relational “Schism” – on small or grand scale – was a foe Scott actively fought, and lectured and preached against, throughout his life.

b) A New Direction

In January 1830 Scott received an invitation to pastor his own church at Woolwich, but his integrity made him unable to subscribe to the whole Westminster Confession of Faith. He explained his objections in a letter to the moderator of the London presbytery, detailing his “inability to assent to the doctrine that ‘none are redeemed by Christ but the elect only,’” and questioning the presbytery’s powers in ordination. (*AJS* 80) The result was that on May 27, 1831 Scott was charged by the Paisley presbytery with heresy, and deprived of his licence to preach – a

sentence confirmed by the General Assembly. He became the first of a number of ministers to be removed due to their expressed understanding of “limited atonement” in the Westminster Confession. Erskine recalls long walks and talks with Scott during that interim period, the summer of 1830, and writes of how Scott taught him,

what an immense change would be made in the conscious personal religion of men, as well as in their theology, by understanding that they were made to be educated, not to be tried; and therefore that trial is in order to education, not education in order to trial. (344)

Scott had also stressed to Erskine how the good that is found in man is of God, and how, in our efforts to obey God’s laws, we can come to know and understand God better. (qtd *AJS* 89, 90) This passion for the declaration of John 7:17 (“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself”) was life-long, and is inscribed on Scott’s tombstone. Both Erskine and Campbell independently commented on the then distinctively Christocentric nature of Scott’s theology: “the humanity of Christ,” wrote Scott, is:

that which translates the ineffable language of the Most High into man’s native tongue. But it is much more; for ‘he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father’; not as another, but as one with Him. The light of Godhead is reflected from him; but that is also the light of Godhead which is refracted through him.” (*Two Discourses* 15-16)

Each of these aspects in Scott’s theology which struck Erskine as distinctive, later became tenets central to MacDonald’s texts.

Despite ejection from the presbytery, Scott chose to remain in the community of Woolwich. The majority of his former elders followed him to a new chapel, where he ministered for another fifteen years. (*AJS* 177) During this time Scott quietly started to change the face of London. It began with evening classes for the dockyard labourers and public lectures. He introduced discussions in theology, philosophy, politics, history, and literature, asserting: “I know that the greater any subject of human thought is, and the more intimately it concerns the well-being of men, *the more* religion has to do with it.” (*Other Christian* 281) For Scott none of these subjects could be extricated from his concern for such social issues as regarded class, gender, working and living conditions – and especially education. Like Chalmers, he firmly believed that education should be made free and appealing to all – but forced on none. (237) He played his part both in enabling that education in England, and in promoting it, drawing MacDonald alongside in the process.

Scott continued to develop his studies in languages, theology, modern history, English Literature, and general science, and he began to become an important personal influence on men and

women involved in theological and social reform. Irving had made some important introductions for Scott – perhaps the most striking of these was to Coleridge – but Erskine was especially intentional in paving Scott’s way to the foreign city, connecting Scott with his own large sphere of London literati.⁸⁷ (*AJS* 60-61) As a result Scott himself soon became the “personal link between some of the leading theological reformers of Scotland and England.” (Newell 268) In December of 1830 he had married Ann Ker, an apt and active partner in his ministry and hospitality, who shared his lively mind and his interests in theology and literature. Friends remarked on how as a team they put their passions into practice.⁸⁸ (F. Maurice 251) They hosted Linlathen-like evenings, gathering together such diverse friends as the Wedgwood family, Erasmus Darwin, the Rev. James Dunn, John Sterling, F. D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Francis Newman (Cardinal Newman’s brother), Thackeray, Archdeacon Julius Hare, Karl Gützlaff (the missionary Guō Shí), Anthony Norris Groves (brother-in-law and mentor of George Müller), and William and Elizabeth Gaskell: dynamic congregations.⁸⁹ Scott’s passion for the arts led to intimate friendships with numerous artists as well, such as Fanny Kemble, Frédéric Chopin, and, perhaps most notably – especially in regards to the shared relationship with MacDonald – John Ruskin. It is not surprising – and it is very appropriate to this study – that what *is* today known of Scott is largely revealed through his relationship with others. People from all walks of life were drawn to Scott – notably, people of widely varied political and theological perspectives.

One of the most colourful of Scott’s new friends was the major Victorian figure, essayist, and historian Thomas Carlyle. Noted for his public rejection of the Church, his satiric thorniness, and his vociferous – and at times contradictory – opinions, Carlyle proves an engaging and informative lens through which to view Scott. Although Scott would, like MacDonald, also have a close relationship with John Ruskin, it is this relationship with Carlyle that seems most closely to parallel that of MacDonald and Ruskin.⁹⁰ The archived letters of Carlyle give a rare depth of insight into the character of the man who so influenced MacDonald, in addition to showing how profoundly Scott was an exemplar for both MacDonald’s career and relational conduct. That in turn gives particular insight into MacDonald’s writing. There are three areas of observation upon Scott in these letters that are of special interest to MacDonald studies: first, Carlyle’s sheer amazement at the love, acceptance, and work-related aid and encouragement that he was freely

⁸⁷ In addition to being a London tour-guide Erskine, after a week of escorting Chalmers in France, took Scott on a tour of the Bernese Alps. (Hanna 196)

⁸⁸ MacDonald and Ruskin attest both to Ann’s partnership in her husband’s work and to their independent respect of her. Significantly, Ann was quite critical of the charismatic manifestations during Scott’s time with Irving – as was Chalmers. (*AJS* 94; Greville 359; Carlyle’s letters, etc.)

⁸⁹ Cf. *CLO* 10:31, 34-36; *AJS* 266, 353-4, etc.

⁹⁰ Cf. Manlove’s *Scottish Fantasy* for Carlyle’s influence on MacDonald.

proffered by Scott and Erskine, regardless of openly vocalized theological doubts and suspicions; second, the details Carlyle provides about Scott's dedicated lecturing to all strata of society; and third, both Carlyle's insight into and his assessment of Scott's scholarly work on Dante.

ii) Scott through the pen of Carlyle: A Sketch of Scott's practiced *Weltanschauung*

As a Scotsman very sceptical of his theological upbringing, the fractious and contradictory Thomas Carlyle is a wonderful prism through which to view not only Scott, but also Erskine and Maurice. Considering the celebrated voice Carlyle remains today, his assessment of these men – Scott in particular – is invaluable. Carlyle was first introduced to Scott in 1831, when Irving dragged him to a lecture: it was an inauspicious beginning to a long and stimulating friendship. (CLO 5:348-359) His initial impression of this fellow Scotsman was that of: “a thin black-complexioned, vehement man; earnest, clear, and narrow as a tailor's listing.” He describes how “for a stricken hour did he sit expounding in the most superannuated dialect (of *Chroist* and so forth) yet with great heartiness” the meaning of one word. (5:348-359) Carlyle was not immediately enamored with this passionate pastor who had retained such a strong Scots accent. Yet, as a displaced countryman, Carlyle shared with Scott a strong concern for the moral and ethical nature of England's politics, a love of mathematics, of the German language, and of literature; he was a fellow polymath with social convictions.⁹¹ Before long the men were intimate friends.

Carlyle's letters are redolent not only with admiration for both Scott and Erskine, but also with repeated surprise that they genuinely cared for him and enjoyed his company, despite deep theological and philosophical differences. His letters indicate that Scott and Erskine both were more interested in emphasizing and exploring the mutualities. In one letter to his mother Carlyle declares:

The best class of all whom I have seen this year are the class of religious people; certain of whom very strangely have taken a kind of affection for me, in spite of my contradictions towards them! It teaches me again that the best of this class is the best one will find in any class whatsoever. The radical members, and ambitious vain political people, and literary people, and fashionable people are to be avoided in comparison. (10:52-57)

Carlyle marvelled that Scott and Erskine included him in their circles, invited him to join them on

⁹¹ Working knowledge of German language and literature was rare at this point in Britain: Scott and Carlyle were in a select company, one that included Coleridge, Erskine, Sterling, Julius Hare, and Thirwell. (AJS 197)

their European trips, and gave much time to helping him with his manuscripts.⁹² It was not long before he became a regular figure at Linlathen (where he met MacDonald), and his letters have numerous expressions of pining for Scott when they have been too long apart. (21:128) He wrote enchantingly of Erskine: “I have seen him several times lately, and like him as one would do a draught of sweet rustic *mead* served in cut glasses and silver tray. One of the gentlest, kindest, best-bred men. He talks greatly about ‘Symbols’ and other *Teufelsdröckhiana*;⁹³ seems not disinclined to *let* the Christian religion pass for a kind of Mythus, provided men can retain the spirit of it well.” (10:16-22) While it is difficult to ascertain what exactly Carlyle means at this point by “Mythus,” let alone what Erskine actually had to say about the concept (apart from Carlyle’s interpretation thereof), it is worth recording their engagement. A decade later Carlyle would write a testimonial for Scott evidencing how great his admiration had grown:

Mr. Scott has long been intimately known to me as a man of great, solid, and original powers of mind, – of eager, persevering industry, – of a pure, high, and earnest character; whose rare merits the whole world, if at length the fit arena were conceded to him, might yet well come to recognize. A man of strong judgment, – of deep inquiring spirit, full of delicacy, and of energy, and of veracity; whose pilgrimage through the confusions, intellectual and other, of our time, has been that of a valiant, resolute, and modest man; a struggle (as I suppose) full of toil and painful effort and endurance, but rich also in noble victories, and of lasting result to him. (qtd Newell 195)

MacDonald was clearly not alone in his adulation of “Woolwich Scott.”

In February 1840, Carlyle writes that Scott had been lecturing in the Paisley region to “an audience of 1,000 operatives; admittance three-pence each”: a vindication of some sort, being the region from which Scott had lost his clerical qualifications. (12:47-50) That same month Scott gave a twice-weekly course of lectures in Glasgow on the mutual relations of religion and philosophy, asserting “the essential harmony of scientific and religious truth.” (12:47-50) He gave similar lectures back in Woolwich that summer, drawing huge crowds. (*AJS* 244-5) Newell notes that this general topic was one on which Scott continued to lecture widely, in both England and Scotland. In September 1842 Erskine writes that he had been in London in the spring and summer “primarily to hear Scott’s lectures on his old subject, the mutual relations of religion and philosophy,” having an ever growing “value for [Scott’s] views on the subject [...] I felt increasing admiration for his talents as a lecturer. I afterwards heard him deliver two lectures on

⁹² *French Revolution* (1837) established Carlyle’s reputation. Scott helped him with it, and amazed Carlyle by reading it four times over “every word of it!” (10:16-22)

⁹³ Diogenes Teufelsdröckh is the protagonist of *Sartor Resartus*.

‘schism.’”⁹⁴ (J. Thompson 175) Maurice also attended these lectures, similarly convinced Scott’s emphasis on a perceived unity was of great theological import.⁹⁵ (322)

Scott’s lectures contended that the God of spiritual truths is revealed in the truths of the natural world; with Celtic perspective he complained that too often religious persons did not see the relation between God’s spiritual and physical modes of utterance. Any new discovery of a physical law was another discovery of God’s creativity; it was a fuller exegesis of the Book of Nature. Understanding *unity*, an awareness of the cohesive, holistic – relational – nature of all elements within the realm of God’s reality, was essential not only within each discipline, but in recognizing the relationship of all disciplines. (246) Here again is the “unified perception”; Scott endorsed “a living spirituality connecting soil, soul, and society” (as explored in earlier chapters) – the relational *Weltanschauung* that would also drive MacDonald. When such perception is attained, Scott explained, “physical science itself, becomes to us as a Jacob’s ladder, whose foot indeed rests upon the earth, but the angels of God are ascending and descending upon it, and the Lord God stands at its summit.”⁹⁶ (*Two Discourses* xv) He is adamant that both seeking and exploring all variety of relationships would lead one into deeper and fuller theological truths.

In a letter to his brother, Carlyle introduces a subject quite significant for the student of MacDonald: Scott is “working a little at a Translation of one Balbo’s *Life of Dante*, which he thinks of printing with Notes.”⁹⁷ (18: 188-189) This Italian study of Dante was less than a decade old, and the following paragraph articulates precisely why Scott thought it worth his efforts. The words resonate with Scott’s own relational theology, and represent a perspective that he would impress firmly upon MacDonald. They would reflect the nature of Scott’s own impassioned work for the remainder of his life:

So far we have watched Dante growing up amidst the rising civilization of Florence.

The *deeds performed*, the *language spoken*, and the *pursuits favoured* by those around us, form the most important part of our education; it is these which give us a stimulus (if we have the capabilities within us) to virtuous deeds, and make us fit to bear good fruits in after life.

Providence has given us faculties, by which we can benefit by the labours of others; we are

⁹⁴ Scott published three of his lectures this year as *Three Discourses*. The explicit emphases on unity, relationship and revelation resonate throughout.

⁹⁵ Characteristically these men modeled a unified fellowship – and humility – not endangered by theological differences. (188)

⁹⁶ This ladder image conjures the final scene in *The Golden Key*, the “beautiful beings of all ages,” climbing up to the “country whence the shadows fall.” I am indebted to Kerry Dearborn for suggesting the grandmother as a Nature-figure. Read through this lens, the story deftly illustrates much that both Scott and MacDonald have to say about different means of Revelation – ‘scientific,’ ‘literary,’ and ‘spiritual’ (and in the meeting of all three). MacDonald’s definition of ‘Wisdom’ illumines it further – especially in mind of the essay “St. George’s Day” and its reference to the rainbow and golden key.

⁹⁷ Carlyle’s brother John was simultaneously working on a prose translation of the *Inferno* (1849), and shared materials with Scott, as did the political exile Mazzini. (19:11-13)

thus able to start from the goal at which our predecessors stopped, and help our successors onwards on the path of which none of us can see or know the furthest point, but on which Nature urges us forward. Lasting, widely spread renown, and an influence on future ages can only belong to him who accumulates information from the past as well as from the present. None did this better than Dante. This is seen through his works, above all in the *Commedia*, *and is seen not less in the actions of his life*. (Balbo 80; italics mine)

This need to recognize and understand one's own identity-forming history, to glean intentionally from the stories that have shaped one's community and oneself, combined with the realization that humanity is called to carry forward the meta-narrative by its response to these communications, became recurrent themes in Scott's lectures and sermons and were inextricably bound up with his understanding of the relational unity compelled by Divine Love. Most of the public lectures in the last years of Scott's life focused on literature and the history of philosophy. (AJS 383) That Scott spent so much time devoted to this particular reading of Dante gives considerable insight into MacDonald's own passion for, and reading and teaching of, the Exiled Poet.

iii) A Serious Study of Dante: Considering the precursor of MacDonald's own obsession with Dante

Scott's translation, if completed, never was published – although he quoted the opening lines in his inaugural lecture at University College, London, 1848. The incompleteness must have disappointed Carlyle, for he had been a dedicated champion of the endeavour, believing Scott's work important “for yourself and for all of us.” (20:72-4) Nonetheless Dante remained a primary topic for Scott and his Dante lectures were considered amongst his best. An obituary in *The Scotsman* declared: “Those who should know best say that with him died more knowledge of the deep things of Dante than any one survivor could replace.” (199) It took years before Scott's protégé MacDonald felt that he had acquired sufficient understanding to have the right to lecture on Dante: with the precedent set by Scott, Dante was clearly not a subject to take lightly.

Although neither Scott's full lecture notes on Dante nor his translation of Balbo been found, enough transcription and reports of lectures exist to give a sense of his emphases. He considered Dante “the compend of the history of the middle age: how wonderfully, in that one small volume, is concentrated the past life of that period!” (Notes 71) Yet Scott also saw Dante as the transition to the new modern age – someone who drew upon the past so that he might speak into the present, preparing for the future. As such, he believed that Dante's epic work continued to offer transformative insight. He made it his task to draw attention to that wealth of storied

wisdom. Scott believed that the most overlooked aspect of Dante was the extent to which the Italian exile had been acquainted with classical literature; the reverence Dante held for those works and “the sort of inner revelations which he receives from them.” (71) Dante had been transformed by stories – and that fact now shaped his own story of the *Commedia*, in its crafting, its characters and events, its language, its landscape, its ‘storyness.’

Scott did not profess Dante to be without error: as in his friendships, Scott modeled the ability to differ candidly on some points while referring to others as being of such profundity as to be labeled “inner revelations.” (71) In general, Dante’s *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* appealed more to him than the *Inferno*. Yet for Scott the *Commedia* in its entirety was “a world-poem [...] a book for all mankind.” (qtd *AJS* 390) In addition to Dante’s unique manner of drawing upon both Christian and non-Christian texts to craft his own poesis – an aspect Scott considered crucial to the text – Scott repeatedly drew attention to the medium Dante utilized: 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. This very intentional decision – Dante even wrote a treatise to defend his choice – was taken so that his poem could be accessed by the greatest number of persons, without distinction of class or sex (c.f. Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Convivio*). It was a decision that changed the course of Western Literature in its subsequent use and evaluation of vernacular language. Scott explored this in his introductory lectures on medieval history, explaining how troubadours – the storytellers of Provençal France – had inspired Dante. He described their earlier effort to use vernacular language so that it reached all classes and sexes, painting a picture of the uniquely multifaceted audiences the troubadours would gather, in intentionally non-exclusive settings. He explained why these audiences were culturally mixed, and how that meant that “they were *compelled* to think of differences of faith – they were compelled to acknowledge good in those who differed extremely from themselves.” (*Notes* 47) He showed how this diversity unified by the sharing of stories had been in the process of developing a deep cultural richness – when it was suddenly cut short by the ravages of war. Scott then explained to his listeners how Dante made evident his adulation of these French Makars by not only filling his story with storytellers, but by placing an actual troubadour in prominence in each of the *Commedia*’s divisions. (47) Scott draws specific attention to the fact that the troubadour found in Hell has been condemned to “eternally hold in his hands his head separated from his body, because of the schism he had promoted – the schism, namely, between Henry the Second of England and his sons;” because this troubadour had betrayed his craft (the very essence of which was derived from a unification of materials) by using that craft to cause division, Dante

condemns him to bodily and spiritual schism. (41) Scott tells his audience how the traitorous schism had brought an end historically to the trade of the troubadours, but that Dante himself then deliberately took hold of the thread and began reweaving it. Dante's passion for such interweaving of historical, literary, and relational unity parallels Scott's, and became for Scott a touchstone. Scott explained to his audiences that to understand the depth of Dante's work one had to study these "vital impulses, spiritual, political, and intellectual" that were Dante's heritage, and those which shaped the era into which he was born. From all accounts Scott poured much effort into such study, utilizing his remarkable ability with ancient and modern languages.⁹⁸ (71; Erskine 571) While all of his lectures garnered admiration, Scott's impassioned study of Dante meant he was "considered by some experts to be the profoundest modern student of Dante." (AJS 388) The lessons he was drawing from Dante held multiple resonances with those that shaped MacDonald's own storied and diverse history. They also presented considerable challenges to the English establishment with which Scott was beginning to engage, those to whom he was lecturing.

iv) Connecting with Ruskin through *Modern Painters*:

Scott's initiation of a long-term literary relationship for MacDonald

As Scott's passion for social challenge and change compelled him to bring more and more literature and history to the attention of his English audiences, it is no surprise that he was drawn to an unusual and eclectic book published anonymously by "A Graduate of Oxford." This *Modern Painters*, volumes 1 and 2, pursued connections between imagination, truth, humanity, art, literature, myth, landscape, nature, Scripture, and divine revelation; it was as polymathic as Scott.⁹⁹ Its author was John Ruskin. In February 1847 Scott co-contributed to a review of the two volumes, published in *The North British Review*. (AJS 270) His collaborator was Edinburgh's John Brown (who MacDonald met at Linlathen). It is not entirely clear which specific words in the review are by Scott and which are by Brown, but presumably the opinions throughout are mutual.¹⁰⁰ The review is biographically and scholastically important as only a few short months after it was published, MacDonald – by then completely enamoured with Scott – bought *Modern*

⁹⁸ Scott occasionally quotes from supporting medieval texts, and refers to his reading of original thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscripts, written in "entirely different dialects." (*Middle Ages* 22, 28)

⁹⁹ Hilton describes *Modern Painters* thus: "It is philosophy and aesthetics, and much more than that. It is poetry. It is prose. It is a treatise. It is a great pamphlet. It is a defence, or rather a vindication. It is a sermon. It is art criticism, art history, a commentary on recent exhibitions, or an introduction to certain collections. It is a meditation on landscape, or an exercise in how the eye may examine nature." (76)

¹⁰⁰ Although Hilton mentions the review, he attributes it solely to Brown – even commenting on Brown's subsequent relationship with Ruskin. He does not mention Scott. (102)

Painters as *the* engagement present for his wife-to-be. (Leon 84) Ruskin himself would not only become a friend of the Scott family, but also of the MacDonalds; of all the personal relationships Scott and MacDonald shared, that which would have the most profound long-term effect was with Ruskin – and while Scott became a mentor of sorts for Ruskin, MacDonald became Ruskin’s colleague and confident.¹⁰¹ Although some academic attention has been paid to MacDonald’s aid and friendship through Ruskin’s painful love affair in the 1860s and 1870s, very little has been paid to MacDonald’s literary engagement with Ruskin – an oversight not without consequences. Because *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1870-1871) is dedicated to Ruskin that is the work which has received the most attention, yet completely overlooked is the quiet response to Ruskinian thought that permeates some MacDonald novels in a rather significant manner – as will be discussed in a later chapter. *Modern Painters* is specifically recognized by title several times in MacDonald’s work, and it plays a central role in one of the more biographical of his novels. Its adulation from Scott is thus far from incidental.

Newell’s thesis makes a helpful attempt to tease out which passages in the review of *Modern Painters* are most likely to be Scott’s. These discuss how Ruskin enables readers to “open their eyes upon a new world – walk under an ampler heaven, and breathe a diviner air” (271) – a description strikingly similar to what Chesterton claims MacDonald’s *faëry* achieved. The review claims that Ruskin’s book leaves “the earth and every common sight transformed before him, – what is base, and personal, and evanescent, yielding to what is eternal, spiritual, divine, – and leaves him there more than delighted, instructed, strengthened, ennobled under the sense of having not only beheld a new scene, but of *having held communion with a new mind.*” (271; italics mine) (The reviewer’s vocabulary is very similar to that used by Anodos in the library, as described in Chapter One.) Scott notes the high regard for Turner, and then hails Ruskin’s holistic perspective – that unified worldview already so important to himself, and undoubtedly an aspect of their mutual admiration. (272) Ruskin’s ability – his tendency – to locate the particular within the general, to make his reader see “minute” details of the specific image or scene he is describing so that the reader might better apprehend the greater argument, the greater truth, was obviously a methodology which resonated with Scott. That Ruskin’s art criticism was done with intent “to show how painting may show forth His glory” was exactly what Scott endeavoured after in his literary criticism – criticism that, according to Carlyle, persevered “instinctively towards the kernel and spiritual essence of the matter.” (23:115-116)

¹⁰¹ Rivalled only by the relationship they shared with Maurice. When Scott died, Ruskin wrote to MacDonald of the “tranquillity” of Scott’s faith, ranking himself “among his lovers.” (Greville 192)

The year of Scott's *Modern Painters* review – 1847 – was the year MacDonald gave Ruskin's book to Louisa, and began dragging his seminary friends along to Scott's public lectures: lectures on Dante, on European Literature, on the concept of Revelation, the importance of a vernacular language, the need to know one's cultural history and literature, and the interrelation of Science and Religion.¹⁰² In addition to MacDonald and his friends, Scott had been attracting such listeners as Thackeray, the publisher Macmillan, John Kemble, Maurice, Carlyle, the Gaskells, Francis Newman, and Henry Crabb Robinson. (*AJS* 274) This last wrote of Scott's "eloquent eulogies of such poets as Homer, Dante and Shakespeare" and of his "beautiful reading of Wordsworth." (354) Scott was also still giving lectures specifically to working classes in Woolwich – as well as in urban Scotland – and in these too he lectured on literature, and on theological and literary history.¹⁰³ These courses were essentially an introduction to and exploration of the audience's historical identity, through an integrative lens similar to that found in *Modern Painters*. In an 1846 London lecture series to which "all teachers in the British system were cordially invited," for lectures on subjects "bearing more or less directly on the duties and engagements of the teacher" (and which he repeated to audiences of multiple class and educational backgrounds) Scott continued to explain a concept of which he had become even more convinced in his study of Dante, and even of *Modern Painters*: how important it is to know the cultural, relational and spiritual environment of an author to have a full appreciation and fair interpretation of his writing. (*Committee on Education* 452) It became one of his most insistent emphases.

¹⁰² MacDonald would have had access even to missed lectures, via the many newspaper reports.

¹⁰³ This included lectures such as "The General Literature during the first half of the Nineteenth Century." (Newell 318)

Section II: A Living Vocation: Understanding Scott's role in the development of the Discipline of English Literature, and how that relates to his *Weltanschauung*

*For what makes the thing a book?
Is it not that it has a soul – the mind in it of him who wrote the book?
Therefore only can the book be possessed, for life alone can be the possession of life.
The dead possess their dead only to bury them.*

*Does not he then, who loves and understands his book,
possess it with such possession as is impossible to the other?
Just so may the world itself be possessed –
either as a volume unread, or as the wine of a soul,
'the precious life-blood of a master-spirit,
embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.'
It may be possessed as a book filled with words from the mouth of God,
or but as the golden-clasped covers of that book;
as an embodiment or incarnation of God himself;
or but as a house built to sell.
The Lord loved the world and the things of the world,
not as the men of the world love them,
but finding his father in everything that came from his father's heart.*

(Hope of the Gospel)

- i) Nobility of Thought *and* Deed
- ii) The Forgotten Birth of a Discipline (and why a Scot taught England her Literature)
- iii) The Professor's Proposal
- iv) A Brief Look at the Impact of Scott at Owens, Manchester

Introduction

During this intense period of lecturing, Scott was also nurturing the friendship between himself, Maurice, and Erskine. That shared friendship would have important ramifications, for their shared theological perspectives demanded social practice – and that included, perhaps surprisingly, practice relevant to the world of English Literature. As if in preparation for the coming period of intense public action, Scott took a trip through the north of England and then up to Linlathen with Maurice, for Maurice's first visit there. Newell writes that in Maurice's friendship with Scott he had found "a representative of that little Scottish band of reformers, whom he hailed as 'marking a new era in spiritual and intellectual progress.'" (185) Scott was essentially an ambassador introducing Maurice in person to more of these reforming 'Scotch divines.' The newcomer described the hosting Erskine as:

delightful here as everywhere, with the same fresh sympathy and deep intuitions, from which one has derived so much help and teaching. . . . I have had very pleasant intercourse with him on subjects of deepest interest. (F. Maurice 444)

Fortified by their time with Erskine, Scott and Maurice returned from Linlathen to London to embark on a series of events that would indelibly mark the city and the nation.

Newell names April 10, 1848 – the night of a meeting called in response to the Chartist petition and the increasing ravages of industrialism upon the working class – the birth of Christian Socialism. Scott and Maurice are rarely mentioned without reference to the movement, and Newell’s thesis carefully charts the contributions and history of “Scott and his Circle.” F.D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, and John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow were prime movers – and A.J. Scott was present at founding meetings, and continued for the rest of his life to give inspiration to the leadership. (OCS 278) But alongside these meetings – intimately bound up with the matters of their concern and strikingly important for MacDonald – Scott and Maurice were also busy academically. Very busy. They were on the frontlines of enabling what had been considered a basic human right in Scotland: education for persons regardless of class or creed. Their specific focus was higher education. Scott of course had been giving lectures to all variety of persons for years, but now they were concerned with bringing to these audiences the benefits of institutional education. Following the praxis of Chalmers, in a logical outworking of Scotland’s education and community traditions, these ‘Christian Socialists’ were theologically convinced that an academic education that gave exposure to rich culture as well as enabled opportunities for employment should be made available to all persons – not only regardless of creed, but also of class and of gender. “Neither Greek, nor Jew, man nor woman, free nor slave,” should be without. Not only in the realm of socialism, but also in the realm of education in England, Scott and Maurice were about to commence a quiet yet profoundly effective revolution. An integral part of that revolution was the initiation of an entirely new discipline – a discipline to which MacDonald would fully commit.

i) Nobility of Thought *and* Deed: The Educational Initiatives

Scott and Maurice were involved in so many different and related educational ventures over the next two decades that it is perhaps helpful to give a brief outline of their positions during that time, before discussing one of their least acknowledged – but for the development of MacDonald one of their most pertinent – contributions. From 1839-1841 Maurice was the editor of a newly

founded *Educational Magazine*. In 1840 he was appointed to the chair of English History and Literature at King's College, London, and in 1846 also to the chair of Divinity. After the return from Linlathen in 1848, Scott began teaching at University College as Chair of English Literature. Erskine had recommended him for the position, and wrote to the college that not only would such an appointment be "a good service to your country," but that the position would be a "living vocation" to a "noble character." (J. Thompson 185) In 1848 Maurice founded Queen's College for Women. Because Queen's was still dominated by exclusive Church of England advocates however, and did not have women on the board, Elizabeth Jesser Reid founded Bedford College for women in 1849, with A.J. and Ann Scott contributing to the endeavour. Ann was active in the life of the college and its administration, and Scott was appointed Professor of English Literature and Professor of Moral Philosophy. (*Reid Papers* PP40/5/4/12; PP40/5/4/16; Greville 121) In 1850 Scott was appointed Principal of the new Owens College in Manchester – also Professor of Logic, Mental Philosophy, English Language and Literature, and Hebrew. He continued to give many public lectures, especially in Manchester, London, and Edinburgh, and to teach evening classes for labourers. (J. Thompson 188) In the early 1850s Scott was involved in the establishment of a Public Library (still then a new concept) in Manchester and to help advertise the facility he organized free lectures, his own entitled: "Literature of Society and Fiction." (Credland 12) In 1853 Maurice published *Theological Essays*, which challenged the doctrine of eternal punishment, and was consequently forced to resign from King's.¹⁰⁴ In 1854 Maurice helped found the Working Men's College, and remained its Principal for the rest of his life. MacDonald, who had come to admire Maurice during his Highbury education, attended the inaugural lecture. (Dearborn 51) Ruskin – now friends with Scott – joined Maurice's effort at the College, teaching art there for the first four years and an acting member of the College Council; it was there that Ruskin's reputation as an art critic began to grow, and there, suggests Hilton, that he gained the knowledge of working-class conditions that enabled him to write his greatest works.¹⁰⁵ (99) (Ruskin was succeeded by Ford Madox Brown – whose painting "Work" features Maurice and Carlyle.¹⁰⁶) In 1857 the increasingly ill Scott resigned as Principal to Owens, but continued as Professor until his death in 1866. In 1858 Scott opened the Manchester Working Men's College, assisted by the Gaskells – it later merged with the evening classes at Owens.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Dearborn for a careful elucidation of Maurice's stance, including his adamant denial of being universalist. (58)

¹⁰⁵ All references to Hilton will be from his second Ruskin volume, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰⁶ Other Art teachers included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burnes-Jones, Arthur Hughes, and Alexander Munro. MacDonald became acquainted with them all, and intimate with some.

¹⁰⁷ In the inaugural address Scott spoke of the intent that: "the working and laborious teachers" and the "working men" would mingle together, "not on a footing of condescension on the one hand, and of an expected servility on the other, but on both sides as a brother man with brother man. If this were all good must come." (*Working Man's* 69) Scott explained that institutions such as Owens would benefit its working class students in the manner David Livingston and Hugh Miller had benefited from the "peculiar educational arrangements" of Scotland. The growth in "cultivated working men" would incur changes in England's

That same year Maurice returned to Kings as professor of English Literature and Modern History. In 1860 Maurice was appointed rector to the Chapel of St. Peters, Vere Street – a position he retained until 1869, and in 1866 Maurice was appointed Knightsbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, Cambridge. Considering the variety of these educational ventures in which Scott and Maurice were involved – more than have even been listed – over some very busy years, it is surprising that they are not more widely recognized as the education pioneers they clearly were. But it is their particular involvement in the birth of the era's new discipline that is perhaps the greatest oversight, and is, it must be repeated, of particular importance to MacDonald and his mythopoeic perspective.

ii) The Forgotten Birth of a Discipline (and why a Scot taught England her Literature)

- a) The Emergence of a Literary Discipline
- b) Intrinsic Value of Story, According to Scott
- c) Necessarily Interdisciplinary
- d) Relational Reading
- e) Comprehending Communication
- f) A Position of Reception

The historians D.J. Palmer and Franklin E. Court have looked closely at the development of English Literature as an academic discipline. Their discoveries prove pertinent to understanding the development of MacDonald's conviction of the transformational – and necessarily relational – nature of Story, as well as MacDonald's development as a professional author and teacher. For Palmer and Court – decades apart (1965 and 1992) – both conclude that the two primary movers in this discipline development were A.J. Scott and F.D. Maurice. (Palmer 29) This assertion will startle many who only know of these men as theologians or preachers concerned with social justice. It may also unsettle those who consider Religion to be the bane of Literature.¹⁰⁸ Yet Court calls these principal mentors of MacDonald avatars of the new discipline: a historical role that has been overlooked not only in MacDonald studies, but also in Theology. Court adroitly argues that while Matthew Arnold deserves due recognition for his leadership in the development of Literary Criticism,¹⁰⁹ focus on Arnold has historically overshadowed the accolade due the first person ever

“social condition,” and thus “the relations of the country as a whole” – affecting even the voting spectrum. (70, 72) The “great public object” was to prevent differences from “hindering us from understanding one another [...] to overcome the prejudices which lie both in the intellect toward the practical, and vice-versa.” (71, 72)

¹⁰⁸ As will the mutual conclusion that “the promotion of English studies” was the result of “a complex interaction between the spirits of Utilitarianism and Evangelicalism.” (Palmer 29)

¹⁰⁹ Ironically, Arnold himself never supported efforts to make English Literature an academic discipline. (108) Court seeks to clarify the common misconception. (117) While possibly the most influential *critic* in England after the 1860s, Arnold was only

to commit himself to the actual full-time career of teaching English Literature: Alexander John Scott.

a) The Emergence of a Literary Discipline

Court's study, *Institutionalizing English Literature*, traces the development of the discipline.¹¹⁰ He marks the humanist Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) as "one of the earliest to maintain that the primary goal of a literary education should be the promotion of the common good and the preparation of students to become useful citizens." (10) Vives' *De tradendis disciplinis* (*On the Transmission of Studies*) "argued for both the need to teach vernacular languages and the formal study of books printed in the vernacular." (10) However it was the efforts of Adam Smith in Edinburgh to teach and lecture upon 'British Literature' as a body of work worthy of academic attention that Court sees as most instrumental in the discipline's eventual development. (13) In an appropriate foreshadowing of Scott and Maurice, Smith saw such literary study as a means with which to meet the challenges and changes resulting from industrialism. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) he discusses the natural human propensity to be interested in another's life story, considering it foundational to "Moral Sense." (23) His emphasis on the relational awareness incurred by reading should be noted for its resonance with a now familiar theme: "A student's sense of self-identity and difference from others would give way to a sense of identity with others, realized as yet another stage of self-identity. Texts provided an obvious arena for the functioning of this essentially social process." (23, 24)

Although almost a century passed before a university considered official courses in English literary study, it was again Scotsmen who incurred the discussion. University College London opened in 1828 as an alternative to Oxford and Cambridge, and the Scots Thomas Campbell and Lord Henry Brougham were primary forces in its establishment. (Court 40-43) The College was modelled after both Scottish and German non-collegial Universities, and was intended to be affordable to those who could have never considered Oxbridge, as well as open to those who would never be allowed to graduate there – those unable to adhere to traditional Church of England doctrine: Jews, Atheists, Roman Catholics, Dissenters.¹¹¹ (40) Brougham was firmly of the mind that the unprecedented inclusion of a course on "English Language and Literature" would "widen the reading audience and sensitize the educable masses to the power of the written

fourteen when Maurice held his first chair. Scott's conception of the place of criticism in the study of culture anticipated Arnold's. Some of the complications for Arnold will be addressed in a later chapter.

¹¹⁰ What Court actually intends by "*English Literature*" vacillates between English Literature, British Literature, and European Literature (and later, Anglo and non-Anglo Literature). The distinctions would perhaps have aided his own understanding of Scott and Maurice's intent.

¹¹¹ This inclusiveness earned it the disdain of a large portion of the British establishment. (Bellot 315)

word.”¹¹² (44) Such expectation indicates Brougham’s own high estimation of the power of literature. The first man to take up the position was Thomas Dale, but Court explains how Dale did not actually meet the expectations of the council in his approach to the task, dividing his responsibilities into independent courses and working from the perspective that the primary use of the study of literature was to “discipline the mind.” (58, 64) Dale was not successful in the post, and did not remain long. His successors continued to be distracted by other foci and passions, treating literature as a means to an end: taste and refinement for the fashionable; a vehicle for inculcating good conduct; the platform for linguistics; even demoting it back to being merely an act of approved leisure. But then in 1848 Scott was hired. The committee report declared that, “in contrast to his immediate predecessors, for whom literature was more an avocation than a profession” Scott “has made ‘literature the business of his life.’” (102) Thus it was A.J. Scott who earned the distinction of being the first to devote an entire academic career to teaching ‘English Literature.’¹¹³

Court gives the best part of a chapter to explaining how highly influential both Scott and Maurice were in the shaping of English Literature as a discipline. In creating the template they returned to the principal pedagogical objectives laid out by Smith in his Edinburgh English lectures a hundred years before. Despite Court’s emphasis on taking cultural and historical context into account, unfortunately his own focus on political forces and intent seems to impede his ability to grasp the theological motivations that propelled and informed Scott and Maurice. Also, his suggestion that Maurice’s teaching moulded Scott’s seems based primarily on the fact that Maurice had held a university position before Scott did. Close study of that relationship however indicates that Maurice was more a student of Scott (and Erskine) – though undoubtedly many of their shared perspectives and methods were born out of mutual conversation and exploration. Certainly it was Maurice who publicly acknowledged Scott as his teacher: in an address delivered at Owens College’s award-evening, Maurice explained that “his chief claim to be present was that of being a fellow-student, inasmuch as he had learned more from the first principal of Owens College than the students whom he addressed”¹¹⁴ (J. Thompson 192); in Maurice’s dedication of *Medieval Philosophy*, addressed to Scott, he again acknowledges Scott’s influence and tutelage. But Court’s purpose is to mark their contribution to, and their place within, the discipline – and this he does admirably.

¹¹² Cambridge’s first programme of English Literature only began in 1878. (Court 38)

¹¹³ Although Scott eventually left this position to become the principal of Owens, he did indeed commit himself to teaching literature – at Owens as well as in public lectures – for the remainder of his life. Court thoroughly and adequately defends the title for Scott, rather than for Henry Morely at University College in 1865, or for Dale, as Hilton makes claim.

¹¹⁴ As this speech occurred well after Scott’s death, one can discount it being any form of polite public flattery.

b) The Intrinsic Value of Story, According to Scott

In Scott's inaugural lecture of November 25, 1848 at University College, as the new Professor of English Language and Literature, he began with the pronouncement that although it was finally no longer doubted that "the language of our own country is a fit subject for academical study," there was still clearly a lack of "recognition in the public mind of the propriety of making the literature of England enter into the academic course." (*Academical* 3) This objection is difficult for the modern mind to process, but the facts stand: as recently as 1848 Scott was having to argue before the educated elite of England that *Beowulf*, Chaucer, and Shakespeare should be included in academic study; that such texts were not too modern nor too frivolous for the purpose. A few months later at Bedford College Scott reiterated: "the literature of our own language is one of the most striking examples of a vast educational power left, till recently, altogether uncontrolled." (*English Literature* 5) He added that the appointment of "Professors of this subject at University and at King's College, and now at Queen's College and at this Institution" was an example of the endeavour to address this error. (5) While Scott was advocating a study of *English Literature*, he was also arguing generally for the study of *vernacular* literature (as opposed to merely classical Greek and Latin) because he also wished his audience to consider the question "independent of the attributes which distinguish the literature of our country from that of others." (*Academical* 4) Unsurprisingly Scott argued that much good that lay, for instance, in the study of Dante and Goethe – and in addition to that independent good, observing how the authors of England engaged with such great voices as Dante and Goethe would lead to a better understanding of England herself. Although this latter point was not Scott's prime argument, it was still an important aspect: the academical study of the literature of one's nation could not but bring a better understanding both of that nation and one's place within it – and thus of the direction in which both oneself and one's nation might proceed in engagement with others.¹¹⁵ As a Scotsman – the appointment of whom Erskine told a committee member would be "a good service to *your* country" – Scott stood before his literate London audience and argued that for their personal enrichment, as well as for that of their nation, they needed to recognize their own rich national literature as more than mere leisure material. (Hannah 66; italics mine)

In the Bedford lecture Scott pointed out that the mediums through which humanity is educated

¹¹⁵ In *Rampolli*, MacDonald reiterates this argument. (11) Interestingly Court suggests that current literary study (1993) is opening "to horizons that finally might link all, as Maurice and Scott originally had hoped, in a universal world community. The days of cultural insularity, esotericism, ethnocentric parochialism, and theories about aesthetic totality, the motive forces for literary study of most late nineteenth-century clerics and many influential early twentieth-century modernists, seem to be passing." (165) Court calls Scott and Maurice, the prime education mentors of MacDonald, the "academic precursors of modern literary studies." (122)

are manifold from the moment of birth – often the traditional ‘intentioned’ forms of education have the least impact upon intellectual and moral development, while the powerful educational influence of a child’s community is overlooked. In an argument MacDonald would echo closely in his essay on Shakespeare, Scott explained to his educated audience: “We forget to enter on the list of those who have educated us, along with fathers, preachers, and professors, the fascinating companion, the stubborn rival, the honest friend, our equals in age.” (4) At the same time, observed Scott, there is far too frequently “an irreconcilable variance” between the intent of methodic instruction and the actual environment surrounding a child: for example, the religion the father desires his child to learn is “choked by [the father’s] own daily life,” and laws of coherent thinking are “shattered in the use and hearing of incoherent talk.” (8) Sometimes, says Scott, the ‘inculcated’ lessons are in the right, and sometimes the ‘lived’ lessons – but either way, the latter are the most enduring. Scott believed that education through Literature and History is – or should be – more akin to a ‘lived’ lesson than an ‘inculcated’ one, for literature and history can proffer engagement and relationship in a manner unique to other subjects found in the academy.¹¹⁶ As a “border-land between abstraction and actual life” such education provides companions to observe and with whom to explore; it can enable “living contact of spirit with spirit” – within “its very substance” the battle between good and evil can be communicated, allowing the “inward experiences” that are “the very matter of all moral teaching.” (8; 21) Scott does not deny that Literature may be poorly taught. While arguing the enduring educational impact of reading good literature (and the need to be equipped to read it wisely, and to be able to identify that which is not good), he also quite vociferously presents the possibility (far too frequently realized since the discipline’s inception) of a teacher ‘killing’ all possible enjoyment to be found in such texts as *Robinson Crusoe*, *David Copperfield*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, or *The Tempest* through sermonizing – much as the classics had already been “embittered to our souls, as if for the purpose of effectually weaning us from their attractions.” (17)

From such awful prospects may we be delivered! If such be the business of a Professor of English Literature, far be it from me. Compared with being influential in the extinction of all those voyages of literary discovery in childhood and youth, of all those stolen joys, those subjects of many of men’s sweetest remembrances, I am not sure but the murder of a single boy or girl ought to sit lightly on a man’s conscience. (18)

Scott is confident that a good teacher, however, will readily engage his or her students in the “vast educational power” of English Literature.

¹¹⁶ While he does “assuredly” believe that there are “moral exercises of great importance” involved in, say, mathematical and grammatical study, “biography, history, poetry, from Lear to the last fashionable novel” are of “far more carious and penetrating influences.” (*English Literature* 8)

As Scott addressed the lack of public awareness of the importance of and need for English literary study, he further explained that literature reveals, and has the potential to shape, both identity and ethics. Just as Barfield had convinced Lewis that Myth has a central place in language, literature, and the history of thought, Scott declared that the integrative study of a nation's literature, its history, and the evolution of its language (both internally and cross-culturally) provided a better understanding of one's sense of that nation, of oneself as part of that nation, and of the common humanity of which that nation was a part.¹¹⁷ This was a perspective of some novelty in the xenophobic atmosphere of nineteenth-century imperial England. Yet Scott insisted that literature provided "commerce with past ages and remote peoples, whose imports are so essential to all the uses of life," evidencing "a nation truly a member of the great community of mankind."¹¹⁸ (*Academical* 15) Court remarks that this argument for particularity was similar to that made some years before by Maurice, although Scott makes it "without the self-conscious religious overtones."¹¹⁹ (104) Such overtones would not have been appropriate for the Bedford inauguration lecture, but that did not negate the fact that Scott's perspective stemmed from the same theological convictions, the same holistic *Weltanschauung*. Scott believed that to study great literature was to engage with the story of mankind, of God's creation. In resonance with the preceding chapters of this study, Scott was proposing that literature be considered more broadly than for its ethnographic and linguistic value; it could be a medium of relationship with the wider human community, with the natural world, and, as his writings elsewhere make explicit, with God. Acknowledging the power of the particular within this broader scope was an essential element of his theology.

c) Necessarily Interdisciplinary

Part of the reason Scott had been chosen for the University College position of English Literature Professor was that in addition to Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, he was highly proficient in

¹¹⁷ Although recognizing the attention Scott and Maurice give to international literature, Court nonetheless misconstrues their emphasis on the literature of England as being driven by 'nationalism,' rather than by a desire to show that to attain self-knowledge a people must understand the community and culture out of which it has come. (Notwithstanding, Court continues to highlight Scott and Maurice's emphasis on a sense of "unity" with all humans, regardless of boundaries.) For Scott this is a constant reiteration: for instance, he considered the greatness of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Jonson to lie in their ability to "make men understand that catholic humanity, which could manifest itself under such various systems, in other nations and ages." (qtd Newell 390) Court also interprets the continued emphasis on a community-oriented perspective as "self-effacement," overlooking their conviction that careful reading of good literature will evoke a healthy self-understanding that necessitates concern for others – an emotional maturation significantly different from self-effacement. (84)

¹¹⁸ When Coleridge envisaged his National Church, "at the fountainhead of the humanities, to preserve the stores and to guard the treasures of past civilization, and thus to bind the present with the past", he formulated an idea which was to give impetus and shaping spirit to English studies, both as part of a general education, and as an academic discipline on its own merits." (Palmer 40)

¹¹⁹ The accuracy of Court's assessment aside (in a different environ 'religious overtones' would have been evident), the observation that they are not as overt here is indicative of something Scott and MacDonald both evidenced in their friendships. Their conviction that all truth was God's truth meant for them that they were eager to discuss with and learn from all who were in pursuit of truth – even if the other did not attribute the truth as God's. The result of this was that both Scott and MacDonald had many friends, like Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold, who struggled with the Christian faith or did not believe in it at all, and yet who valued dearly their relationships with these men who did – and often confided in them intimately.

Italian, French, and German, and had studied Anglo-Saxon and old German. This, combined with his “extensive preparation in modern literature,” swayed the committee to choose Scott over poet A.H. Clough. (Court 101) The report read: “He has made it his business to study the literature of modern Europe, and more especially the whole course of English Literature, and appears to be thoroughly versed in it.” (101) Court adds that the committee was impressed with Scott’s talent as a public lecturer, most especially with the course of lectures that Scott had given for schoolmasters at the British and Foreign School Society on Anselm, Bernard, and Dante – his standard exploration of how these authors expressed the intellectual and literary genealogy of their respective centuries. This interdisciplinary approach made Scott especially attractive to the committee and, as has been noted, was a key aspect of his own holistic – and Celtic – *Weltanschauung*. Scott was adamant that not only can the literature of a people not be understood without considering the people, but that a people could not be understood without considering its literature: “Let him, in all his reading, observe the date of the works he reads, and the relation they bear to the spirit of their age, and to its measure of knowledge. Even such monuments of the past, as we all have access to, may be considered with reference to the mind of their respective ages.” (qtd *AJS* 240)

This is Homer to Greece, Dante to Italy, Chaucer, and again Shakespeare, and in a new development, Milton to England. It is Europe re-organising that speaks in Goethe. Old Europe does not withdraw without a farewell utterance through Walter Scott. By his matter, the historian belongs to *the literature* of the country whose works he records: so indispensable and so vitally adherent are his facts to those works whose special character is the utterance of the national mind. (*Academical* 9-10)

Scott’s integrative, interdisciplinary method clearly resonates with the early Scottish understanding that story and language could not and should not be disentangled from cultural identity – or indeed from the injunction to social responsibility. For both Scott and Maurice the study of literature was necessarily interdisciplinary – and if pursued with integrity, necessarily evocative of response. The echo of the Dante scholar Balbo rings in their challenge: they too urge intentional gleaning from the stories that have shaped one’s community and oneself, benefiting “by the labours of others” that the readers might be “thus able to start from the goal at which our predecessors stopped, and help our successors onwards on the path of which none of us can see or know the furthest point.” (Balbo 80)

Scott explains that in reading,

thoughts and feelings have come to me from the earliest inhabitants of this world. The recondite philosophy of one age is the common sense of the succeeding one. The discovery with which Bacon or Newton may have startled himself, is in our day a thing taken for

granted by children and diffused in the general atmosphere of thought. Other men have laboured, and we have entered into their labours. Of what we take for the most natural conditions and inevitable impressions of our own minds, how little would have been there, had there been no spiritual and intellectual inheritance for mankind. (qtd *AJS* 239)

Indeed says Scott, he would have no right to be giving such lectures if he did not hope that some listeners would grasp the “capacity for guidance of the present” that lay in the literature of the past: “If I have in any measure succeeded in communicating this, my labour has had its best reward.” (*Middle Ages* 103; 104) For Scott, teaching – and reading – literature was clearly “a living vocation.” (Erskine 65)

When Maurice became the second person to hold the Chair of English Literature at King’s College, London (1840-1846), he also had initiated a dramatic shift. His predecessor had kept separate the lectures on history, literature, and composition. (Court 88) Intending to enhance “critical faculty and encourage self-expression,” Maurice combined History and Literature, “using a number of different disciplinary approaches to examine the ancient world, instead of concentrating solely on one language.” (88) He was also acting under the compunction that great literature discouraged self-focus and “preoccupation with individual salvation in favour of social commitment (‘doing the duty that lies nearest’) and the salvation of the race.” (89) In Maurice’s first class on “The Growth of the English Nation and its Literature,” he addressed Caesar’s *Commentaries*, druids, and Celtic culture: “The result I arrived at was that the feeling of religious awe and mystery was that which belonged to the Celts, as the moral feeling, reverence for relationship, marriage, &c., especially characterized the Gothic race.” [sic.] (*F. Maurice* 293) When he discussed his 1840 class on Chaucer with Archdeacon Julius Hare, Maurice wrote that not only will Chaucer force them to give “strict observation” to word usage, but that the *Prologue* especially will “throw more light than any book I can think of upon the life of the time.” (292) These letters show that Maurice was not just passing off packages of information to his students: he was also learning, and enjoying doing so, as he prepared for his classes. Both he and Scott believed that this was an integral aspect of teaching. Scott gives a vivid image: “He who learns from one occupied in learning, drinks of a running stream. He who learns from one who has learned all he is to teach, drinks ‘from the green mantle of the stagnant pool.’ To catch information is something; to catch the life and spirit of the pursuit an contemplation of truth, is infinitely more.”¹²⁰ (*University Education* 22) But there were also challenges: Maurice groans that he is expected to *teach* Composition – “How to manage this I do not know, except by teaching them

¹²⁰ The quotation Scott uses is from *King Lear*. MacDonald repeats the image and concept in, “Death of the Old Year.” (*Poems* 339)

to think, by reading good books, and studying the force of words.” (291) Scott articulated the same perspective when commenting on the teaching at Owens a few years later, adding that: “every paper at the College, when in the English language, is treated as a lesson in English composition; none more so than those for the Greek and Latin class.” He was confident that this resulted in “young men who know more of their own language than most men of liberal education, not excluding some writers for the cheap press and some university reformers.”¹²¹

d) Relational Reading

Court calls attention to Maurice’s unusual conviction that “authors and readers exist together within an organic culture” – but it was a central tenet for Scott as well. (90) This belief was crucial to both men’s understanding of literature and of faith; it shaped their comprehension of revelation. For both Scott and Maurice, a close reading not only engaged with the text, but with the mind of the person who wrote that text. When Scott presents the “higher steps in the study of a literature” he names first “the consideration of the relation between an entire work and the entire subject which it endeavours to represent, composition in its nobler sense” and then, as “the highest literary point of view,” he names “the relation between the work and the living author.” (*English Literature* 29) That a text did not stand independent of the human from whose lived experience that text was issued was an integral aspect of their own literary critique, and thus of how they taught. Court credits Maurice with what he calls a culturally remarkable discovery: that the practice of good literary criticism was necessary to successfully institutionalize formal literary study. Maurice’s printed lecture “On Critics” declares that the best kind of literary criticism “delights to draw forth the sense and beauty of a book, and is able to do so because the heart of the critic is in sympathy with the heart of the writer.”¹²² (qtd Palmer 37) This sense of an intentional *conversation* between author and reader – of “making contact with the great imaginations of the past” (39) – is paramount in understanding MacDonald’s own apprehension and practice of literature, and essentially, of Mythopoesis. Here the critic is the bardic *trouwer*: exhibiting and invoking awareness, opening up consciousness to that which is already present. It is a perspective not only akin to the Celtic tradition, but also to the Hebraic and early Christian. Court fails however to record an additional comment Maurice made in regards to literary criticism: in 1839 he wrote to Julius Hare, in the midst of a discussion on literary criticism and certain discoveries within a text, that there was:

¹²¹ From a letter by Scott “to the Editor of the Manchester Guardian,” dated July 20, 1858. Palmer explains how the public institutes at which Scott lectured also made a much broader cultural impact than has been recognized, for in their inclusion of the study of literature and the provision of lending libraries, many were able to read English Literature for the first time – and share it with their families. (32)

¹²² MacDonald’s *Home Again* shows the struggles of a young literary critic who has yet to understand this goal.

a principle which I wish should always be taken for granted, that all we do which is good and permanent is done in us or through us, consciously or unconsciously, by a divine Spirit, with whom, if we work cheerfully and obediently, the work thrives, if proudly and resistingly, it is marred. (F. Maurice 275)

For Maurice (and Scott) literary criticism itself was something that was most successful, most insightful, if done under the guiding inspiration of the Holy Spirit; conversation between author and reader could be mediated by and through God's Spirit. Thus with the acquisition of knowledge, there could also be illumination. (Palmer 36) Believing like Smith that studying literature "encouraged introspection and also provided the raw materials which supported generalizations about human behaviour," (Court 90) Maurice and Scott also believed that such engagement with other minds would increase the possibility of common understanding and unity. For both men this was a key theological pursuit.

When Scott taught his courses he was keen on establishing a firm foundation of early Anglo-Saxon literature, one that included not only fluent instruction in such histories as *Beowulf* and Bede, but also a basic grasp of the language.¹²³ (Charton 172; Court 100) "Great value was placed on tracing the histories and converging lines of development of words in order to construct a 'philosophy' of language that would reveal the specificity of a culture as it was expressed through comparative connections among the meaning of the language, its literature, and the [cultural] consciousness that gave rise to both."¹²⁴ (97) In his classes and lectures Scott delighted in the "secondary elements" of literary study: the close observation of an author's form, such as the use of words and turns of phrase, the rhetoric employed. In further concord with Smith, he believed that the style itself revealed something of the author, his culture, and the text. "We cannot," he says,

...speak of the acquisition of details without referring to the laws which connect them with the subject-matter itself; the work to be understood. These are the laws, at the lowest, of the relation of word to thought: higher, of thought itself to reality; of thought to thought, forming the essential unity of a work; of the work produced to the individual mind from which it emanated; of that to the general mind of the age and nation. Here, surely, is ample range for the exhibition of principle, kept *continually vital* by the concrete character and living interest of that which it is adduced to illustrate. (qtd Court 105; italics mine)

¹²³ "For five Englishmen who are interested in the *Nibelungen*, I find there is scarcely one who cares, perhaps even knows of, the edition of *Beowulf* by Kemble. Englishmen care more for the comparatively recent foreign epic than for their own Saxon poem. The prevalent English tone is that of disdain for their own ancient literature; they like to disparage the remote past of their own country – to cut themselves off from all association with the times before the Reformation. I will not stay to ask whether this is the spirit of the Reformation." (*Middle Ages* 14)

¹²⁴ Court uses the word 'racial' here, rather than 'cultural' – but I believe that that latter commutes Scott's intent, while the former may be misconstrued.

Scott was determined that his listeners understood that literature is, in its very conception let alone in its transmittance and apprehension, a communication borne of relationship and a communication which invites participation – on numerous levels. After Scott's death Maurice would lecture on how Scott had repeatedly taught that the words uttered by authors:

were the expression of the living thoughts of living men, and those were worth more than all things, because man was more than all things together – (hear, hear); – and though he would have them to study things, and study them with all possible diligence, and though he did not think that any sort of wisdom that they might discover in the study of things could ever be wasted to them, yet he repeated they were not wasting time by a study of words [...] wherever they were studying, whatever they were doing, to whatever classes they might belong. (“FDM at Owens” np)

Palmer's *Rise of English Studies* emphasizes that this was the first time that a “historical approach to literature, as distinct from the rhetorical approach or from facts about literary history” was considered the proper method for study. (26) According to Scott, language was “the fruit that preserves the seeds of the life of past ages, for a new growth in the future.” (qtd *AJS* 384) The emphasis on the relationship – the necessary interplay – between language and literature resonates with Barfield's discussion of the “unity of consciousness” required to understand the breadth and depth that *spiritus* lends to spirit/breath/wind. Informed by the integrative mythopoeic worldview of his Scottish background, his biblical study, and that which he found pervasive in British and European literature, Scott was redressing – a century before Barfield – the fragmentation that had developed within conceptual thinking. He, like Barfield, was hoping for a renewed perception informed by the past, a renewed perception that would thus inform steps forward into the future. The past was not ‘finished’ for Scott: it was full of the ‘living thoughts of living authors’ whose voices were calling for engagement.

e) Comprehending Communication

Because Scott understood that Literature “whatever it may be more” is at its least “Expression by Words,” he believed it necessary to understand that “whatever gratification or benefit this may communicate, is reserved for those by whom the words are understood.” (*English Literature* 26)

The language in which the literature was conveyed paramount. Scott believed that

the knowledge of language which will serve us in the appreciation of a literature, must be copious; must consist, not of mere dictionary meanings, but of all the fine distinctive shades in association, in tone, in the feel, so to speak, of a word, which lead a poet to cull one from among a score of seeming synonyms; must be ripened into an unconscious habit, or else the word will still be an obstructive medium between us and the light of the thought. (26)

While this reality was an argument to apprehend what languages one could on the part of the reader in order to access the wealth of literature (be it Anglo-Saxon, Italian, or Hebrew), it was also an intimation of the vast wealth of communications available to one reading in one's mother-tongue – and of that which would always evade a non-native speaker of that language. This underscored the importance of being able to convey the literature of a people in the language of that people; it was the reason McIntosh MacKay fought so hard to keep Gaelic alive. Champions of the vernacular received frequent attention in Scott's lectures, and he repeatedly charted its rise in Britain and on the Continent. Chaucer who "like Dante, imbibed eagerly and with aptitude whatever the previous literature could give him. [...] having received, and in some measure transmitted the lights of the previous literature" was frequently coupled with Dante: "they are both men of true genius – men receiving fully and richly the influence of the time to which they belonged, and also full of that germinative life which presses forward from the present into wonderful anticipations of the future." (*Notes* 73; 69) Alfred the Great also received significant adulation from Scott for his efforts to unify and thus fortify his kingdom against the Danes specifically by having the history, the stories, of his people translated out of Latin into the vernacular: "simple and evident to common sense when found out, but so uncommon till he suggested it – *that a nation must have a vernacular language.*" (20) Scott explained to his audience how "the genius of Alfred" was manifested when he set precedence by translating Bede's history himself, and by even recording narratives of common sailors. (24, 21) Ever drawing out socially relevant implications for the nineteenth century, Scott noted that Alfred also sought to ensure that not only the elite of his nation became literate, but that those outside of the privileged classes also had the opportunity. (This point especially, considering the Education Bill right then in hot debate, would not have been well received by the entirety of Scott's audience.)¹²⁵ Scott added that concurrent with Alfred's endeavours – and perhaps incurred by him – the cleric Aelfric "wrote a homily to familiarise the people with the history of their own country; another to awaken their interest in the Scriptures."¹²⁶ (20) Such champions of the vernacular throughout European history are honoured repeatedly in Scott's lectures: Milton also made a choice to step outside the norm and write his epic in English, and even more dramatically, Wycliffe and Luther laid their lives on the line for putting the Scriptures into the vernacular.¹²⁷ Expressly, as the listening public noted, "in dealing with the early development of vernacular literature in Europe, Scott returned again

¹²⁵ Regardless of a persisting fear that educating the working class was dangerous, Maurice argued that "literary study was a natural vehicle for both entertaining and educating the masses by appealing to the innate powers of sympathy that guided their conduct and formed their imagination. [...] Christians, particularly, needed to be made aware of their social responsibility and of the bond they shared with all humanity. Literature in the service of altruism could accomplish that." (Court 91)

¹²⁶ Scott clarifies: "although I have called the literature founded in the days of Alfred, and very mainly by his means, by the name of a *vernacular* literature – a literature in the language of the country – it could hardly as yet be called a *popular* literature." (25)

¹²⁷ Luther not only translated the Bible, so that the people could themselves access the Word of God, but he also wrote hymns in the vernacular, so that they could praise God in their own tongue.

and again to Dante, whom he regarded as ‘one of the greatest, purest, loftiest, justest spirits that ever breathed.’ (“The History” 388) With the importance of communicating in the vernacular being a concept so pervasive throughout Scott’s teaching career, it is hardly surprising that his student MacDonald felt justified in scribing the language of his own people, nor that he was a sort of pioneer in the venture. His education demanded it of him. But so, he was learning from Scott, did his faith: for Scott declared that the highest example had been set in the act of Incarnation: “the humanity of Christ is that which translates the ineffable language of the Most High into man’s native tongue.” It is thus “the light of Godhead is reflected from him; but that is also the light of Godhead which is refracted through him.” (*Two Discourses* 15-16)

f) A Position of Reception

Court claims that Scott’s emphasis upon the worldview brought by an author to the text – each with personal experiences and relationships as well as culture permeating the very turns of phrase – was unique. (105) It is a perspective surprisingly modern for a man living in the world’s most rapidly colonizing empire. But it is also the perspective of one made daily aware of the uniqueness of voice through the very lilt of his own. Yet despite the changes and developments from Homer to Milton, Scott identified a continuum of common threads, common signs, and common truths. And these commonalities demanded attention: in tracing these threads from Chaucer and young England, through the War of the Roses, to Wycliffe, and on to Shakespeare, one was tracing “a history of the mind of England, the links are the individual authors. I say the authors, not their works.” (*Two Discourses* 227) Scott explained that the England seen was through the eyes of the author, and thus the reader must needs be aware of that author, not merely the work, to understand what he or she was reading: it is “the writer himself we study, and his subjects as reflected in him.”¹²⁸ (228) Context was an aspect of the revelation, and was part of what made the commonalities so striking. Common truths demanded attention:

Ally yourselves, I would say, with all truth. Be assured, there is harmony in all truth.... There is, I repeat, a harmony in all truth – a mutual dependence. All its lines converge. There is a point in which meeting, they lean one upon the other; and he who will try to do without any of them will find the rest give way. (228)

Recognizing that the common threads converged in unifying “symbolic interpretations” was as crucial for Maurice as it was for Scott.¹²⁹ Although Court indicates that Scott and Maurice’s

¹²⁸ Maurice concurs, writing that it must not be forgotten that Thales, Pythagoras, Plato were real humans, not mere “bundles of opinions.” (269)

¹²⁹ That “symbolic interpretations of reality” could have an influence upon behaviour was a concept that gained support and interest mid-century from “the new science of psychology.” (Court 90) Palmer sees the attitude typified in John Stuart Mill’s tribute, after his early mental crisis, to the healing powers of Wordsworth’s poetry. (39) As already indicated, MacDonald is among the authors exploring the phenomena through fiction; such potential for behavioural change becomes for him a central theme –

methodology was new in the classroom, it was certainly not new in the realm of literature – of Story – itself. Certainly it was a crucial element in religion and myth. And Scott and Maurice hoped to equip their students to be able to recognize that, in the very stories that had shaped their cultural identity. In words resonant with Elphinstone’s observation that in Scottish fantasy “the borderlands become central, the liminal place where action takes place, and, in the text, where the plot can start to happen,” Scott explains literature as “the borderland between abstraction and reality:”

and thus its function, in an academical course, is to maintain the connection between the world of thought and the actual world. Such a character must belong most of all to our native literature. To this it owes its importance, and also its fascination. Here are exhibited, in feeling and action, men emphatically of like passions with ourselves; such as we are, or such as we meet with, or differing from those in measure rather than in kind. A speech, not dead nor foreign, but instinct with home tones, meanings, and associations, presents its objects with a vivid directness and transparency to our imagination; and thus teaches us, as nothing else could, what we are to look for in all other literature: how the ancient or the alien speech and its treasures are not ours, until we are brought into some degree of like contact with the inward and the outward life of those who used it. Because of the importance of this part of knowledge, we must not exclude it; because of its fascination, we cannot. (“Scottish Fantasy Today”; *English Literature* 10,11)

For Scott the *reader’s* ‘plot’ – adventure – can start to happen in the borderland relationship with the text and author. Both he and Maurice believed that reading in a manner that enabled one to recognize shared truths, repeated patterns, common symbols could open the reader to “the sort of inner revelations” of which Dante spoke. (*Middle Ages* 71) Just as Dante had been transformed by stories – stories that then shaped his own – so too there existed for every reader the potential of being transformed by the revelatory nature of Story.

iii) The Professor’s Proposal: Scott’s presentation of Story as a medium of Revelation In Scott’s discourse “On Revelation,” there is an obvious resonance with the perspectives of Erskine discussed in Chapter Two.¹³⁰ Had Court read this discourse he would have found in them the very conscious “religious overtones” of which he had appreciated the absence in Scott’s inaugural lecture. Here Scott’s text distinctly articulates his understanding of Story as a means of

from Anodos reading in the library, to Adela listening on her couch, to Mossy who has the Golden Key because his father had told him the stories of Fairy Land.

¹³⁰ “On Revelation” was given as a lecture early as 1837. (J. Thompson 652)

Revelation, and as he discusses different manners in which Inspiration can be apprehended, he explains that:

To reveal God is the end for which the Scriptures are given. Relatively to each individual mind among us, this is the aim of the universe. Thereby God utters His Being to us, as an author makes known his existence and form of mind by his book; and as a friend by his letter expresses the state of his heart towards us, and seeks communion with ours. The Scriptures form but one element in this, God's manifold utterance of Himself.¹³¹ (*Two Discourses* 35)

Scott's illustrative use of author and text is not incidental.

To fully establish how this primary mentor of MacDonald understands literature to be a possible medium of Revelation, a consideration of his broader interpretation of the concept is required. In doing so it becomes evident that Scott believes that reception of Revelation through other mediums can actually better enable one's apprehension of revelation in Scripture; Scott suggests that one's right reception of what the Scriptures are meant to convey will be assisted if one considers the other "principal classes of means which [God] has used with the same intent." He is clear that he is not saying that each means is "distinct and self-complete," but rather that there is *necessarily* a "mutual dependence of all; and the harmonious, combined result is the manifestation of God." (*Two Discourses* 35) With echoes of Chalmers, Scott first shows how the Book of Nature astounds David with the "astronomical 'work of His fingers'" and how thus directed we ourselves then learn "by looking on that ampler page on which he looked, and reading, as there inscribed, what is the greatness, and how it makes marvelous the loving-kindness, of Him." Just as Scott explained that the explorations of humanity in good literature could help the reader understand the workings of the persons with which he or she engaged in live flesh, so here he explained that the *Psalms* can help the reader to better see Creation. Yet again there is resonance with Tolkien's comment that in re-exploring the tales and songs of one's heritage, one "begin(s) to understand the marvel of the trees." (*Book II* 191) Likewise, Scott says, when Christ demands consideration of the "lilies of the field,"

it is not the Bible He is directing our eyes to, but the creation; and the deeper pure sense of the exquisiteness of beauty there exhibited, the clearer and stronger are the characters in which the lesson of Christ is written for us. The spirit in which David, and Isaiah, and the Lord Jesus spoke those things will make the heart in which it dwells hold manifold communion with a mind uttering itself in all surrounding nature. (*Two Discourses* 37)

¹³¹ He continues: "You are familiar with a very strong assertion, in the Epistle to the Romans, of a light of God transmitted through the created world," a light that, as is explained in Romans, has made invisible things of God visible. For Scott, Maurice, Erskine and MacDonald alike the strong link between concepts of Inspiration, Revelation, and Light deliberately plays throughout their writing.

Scott thus explains that it is on the authority of Scripture itself that man ought, “by the right use of creation,” to come to better know, thank, and honour God, and that, importantly, “the man with the Bible in his hand is not discharged from the study of God in that other volume.” He is saying that closer attention to that Book of Nature will better enable one’s comprehension of the Book of Scripture: on the authority of Scripture itself. There is an intrinsic relationship between the two – a concept not unrelated perhaps to his insistence on attention paid to the author, rather than isolating the texts. This cohering knowledge according to Scott is “distinct from doctrines and propositions; though, when obeyed, conducting to a right condition of the intellect concerning God.” (*Two Discourses* 37) He adds, “But God’s end in the creation, as in all means of revealing Himself, is not merely to make us infer from His work what He is, but to bring us to Himself.” (44) God’s end in creation as in all means of revealing himself is to incur relationship. The echoes here of the Celtic and Medieval understanding of the Book of Nature, and Scott’s clear establishment of a Biblical precedent, reveal a conviction clearly rooted in something deeper, older, than Romanticism.¹³²

At this point Scott’s discourse presents in Erskinian terms the capacity and role of conscience in the apprehension of truths, in the reception of Revelation.

There are workings of God in the mutable, and man has faculties for the perception of these. There is also an immutable Being of God, and with this man is called to unite himself, by a voice spoken within, presenting a character which it commands him *to be*: – to be, not because of certain circumstances and events, but because it is, absolutely and irrespectively, good to be that which is commanded, and therefore evil to be otherwise. The capacity for receiving this eternal voice is what men call conscience. (46)

Again Scott is articulating the importance of something being good in and of itself. Yet he underscores – importantly for MacDonald – that love and truth thus received compel further good, for it will:

set the judgment and the active energies to work, to find and effectuate a due development of love and truth in act. But this development in act is the province of those subordinate faculties, not of conscience itself. Its sole injunction is, Be thou. Being what it requires, we do. Having become conformed to it in inward condition, we cannot but bring forth the corresponding act. (46)

This becomes a central theme in MacDonald’s first novel, a culturally atypical book that Scott

¹³² Dearborn explains that Hindmarsh applied the label ‘Romantic’ to Maurice and Scott pejoratively, as that which tempted MacDonald toward ‘escaping into Idealism,’ and into a deference for the aesthetic over the moral and for content over form. (63) Yet this is a misinterpretation, she points out, for study of the impact of these men on MacDonald reveals “a strong priority of realism and obedience in which attitudes toward the aesthetic and the ideal were informed and shaped by a desire to bring all into conformity with the will and revelation of God.” (64)

admired and for which Maurice found a publisher: *Phantastes*. Here the protagonist must learn, both in his engagement with people and in the stories he reads, that nobility of thought is nothing without nobility of deed. The theme is reiterated in MacDonald's last fantastical work, *Lilith*, which culminates in the realization that for Lilith to 'un-do' herself would be great evil – if it were possible. But only the Maker can make or unmake; she must choose to *be*.

Scott had asserted that literature can be a good thing simply in and of itself – that it need not be utilitarian to be good – and it is clear that he also desires his listeners (and readers) to understand that their own existence as creations of the Creator is, in and of itself, a Good Thing: "We repeat, the voice heard by conscience says simply 'Be thou.' The reason is *in* the command, and the authority also. The goodness of what it presents is the intrinsic and essential blessedness of God's Being. This voice is always a call to participate with Him, and thus to unite with Him." (48) In this participatory act of *being* in existence, "The spirit it is IN MAN, and the inspiration (or in-breathing) of the Almighty giveth them understanding:"¹³³ God's communication to conscience, and through conscience to the mind of man, is called "inspiration."¹³⁴ MacDonald would echo this in almost creedal language: "I believe in the inspiration of the Almighty. I believe in fresh inspired thought. It is because of that that there are fresh impulses, starts to conscience." (Burns np) But Scott is clear that a participatory apprehension is an act of obedience, and that "the mere presence of the demand does not necessarily imply such obedience," for "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." (49) MacDonald repeatedly relates this concept of the participatory role in apprehension throughout his work; it is absolutely central to *Lilith*.

Scott then elaborates on another suggestion of Erskine, and one similarly important for this study: that it is precisely because of this *in-breathing* through which God invites man to participate and thus apprehend, that literature other than Scripture can be a medium for Revelation:

There is another contact of God with man's mental being, presenting facts, anticipations, propositions, even words to the mind, which is more commonly called inspiration. In its highest form, at least, this includes the former, and the man's obedience to it. Thus God informs and illuminates the intellectual part of a man, in adaptation to the spiritual wants, the needs and requirements of the conscience of himself and others. For this can be communicated to others, and thus inspiration performs a new and special function in the

¹³³ (Job 32:8); Scott clarifies that this is "something is affirmed to be in man, not 'created' like the heavens and the earth, nor 'made' like the beasts and like his own body, but breathed forth from the Being of God. And of this in-breathing, or spirit that is in man, it is elsewhere said, "that it is the candle of the Lord, searching the hidden parts of the belly." *Proverbs* 20:27 (48)

¹³⁴ Remember that up until the seventeenth century, according to Barfield, the word 'inspiration' implied the understanding that "poets and prophets" were "direct mouthpieces of superior beings – beings such as the Muses." (207)

revelation of God. (49)

Scott explains that this was the case for Job: “God met him directly, and left his history also for our instruction. What occurred in this instance, peculiar probably in degree, was surely not in kind unexampled.” (50) Again, he writes, through David is shown not “a creed, an injunction to believe in a particular way, but a true history of a pure working of a human soul in fellowship with the Spirit of God.” Thus the narrative is a twofold prophecy of God’s manifestations: “first, as a narrative of the inspired man’s inward experience, and then, as an anticipated narrative, with a running commentary sometimes added, of the future dealings of God with men.” (53) Scott shows how both aspects are necessary elements of Scripture:

No knowledge of mathematics will make the original of Euclid or Archimedes intelligible to one who is ignorant of the Greek language: on the other hand, one thoroughly versed in that vocabulary will find the book sealed to him if he is wanting in geometrical insight. This mutual dependence, in the understanding, of the symbol and the import, of letter and spirit, holds in all learning from God; emphatically in the study of the Bible. (54)¹³⁵

Once again, Scott is emphasizing the necessity of an interdisciplinary, relating lens; it is the same argument he has made for the study of English Literature. And then he makes a huge leap in ethos for his nineteenth-century English audience: with Erskine he claims that while the Bible has an exclusive character of its own, it is not the exclusive means of either revelation or of inspiration. Revelation “recounts and expounds the divine manifestations in creation, in providence, in miracles, in human conscience, and inspired thoughts, word, and works” – and if this is true of Job, then it must thus also be true for Socrates, for the author of the Bhagavad Gītā, for a modern-day Muslim of whom Scott has read. The Truths these men have declared must have been granted by divine inspiration – for truth, if indeed it is truth, can *only* be of God. Scott sees in these men that of which Lewis and Tolkien spoke in Balder’s myth – but here Scott is asserting the logic that one cannot allow for only pre-resurrection persons to be bearers of truth while not yet themselves understanding the Cross.¹³⁶ There is no question of Scott’s utter conviction: the Incarnation is *the* “central and crowning revelation of God” and of this Scripture is both “a history and an exposition.” (52) And just as MacDonald did after him, Scott believed it important to articulate that the Incarnation itself is far greater than the Scripture that tells of it: “What we have said of all revelation, we say of Scripture, – its end is to bring us to God Himself.” (52) Yet Scott unquestionably understands Revelation to be by no means limited to the

¹³⁵ He adds that to neglect “literal, or historical, understanding of Scripture ... is to despise the wisdom of the Spirit in selecting the matter for the record,” as well as the “spiritual element, for which the other is merely a vehicle; and to meet which is, for the spirit of the man to meet the Spirit of God [...] We lose the lesson of great part of the Bible if we regard it merely as an inspired and authoritative announcement to us now; not historically, as recording, for our example, the condition of human spirits under the power of divine inspiration of old.” (52)

¹³⁶ One student of Scott recalled how he could, when teaching about religions, reference examples from the Koran, the Vedas, the Zenda Avesta (Zoroastrian scripture), “without notes to hand.” (*AJS* 345)

literature of Scripture. And it is the perpetrator of this culturally aberrant perspective, of these repeatedly proffered positions, that MacDonald not only chooses to be near so that he may continue to learn from him, but with whom MacDonald (and his young family) intermittingly lives over the course of the next few years. Those instrumental years in Scott's constant presence immediately precede MacDonald's emergence as a novelist. They are years in which MacDonald is already becoming established as a teacher of literature and a writer of stories. And Scott's mark on his output, his person, is striking.

Scott, Maurice, and their mentee MacDonald understood literature to be a medium through which the culture, history, and language (the identity) of the human race could be better understood – and thus, the Divine Being who communicated in each of these. For them it was not only a means to see where mankind had been, what ideas had been delved into and conversed with, but something with which humans are to engage actively so that insight might be provided for the present and future. Essentially, Scott believed that a healthy community is a mythopathic one: one that engages with Story, with intent to know and learn from and be transformed by it – and one that seeks to continue in the same vein. And while Scott believed that the Christian community *must* be mythopathic, he found his vocation in calling the wider community of God's children to participation in their communal story: as the first person to commit himself to a career of teaching 'English Literature.' Convinced that all truth is God's truth, Scott believed that response to his invitation must enable revelation of that which is of God.¹³⁷ If he could help people to better understand who they were, and engage them in conversations of the centuries about the truths of humanity, that would bring them closer to understanding God's ultimate revelation, the Incarnation: the ultimate manifestation of Storied relationship. When Scott moved to Manchester, where he taught until his death, hundreds of students from all sectors of society would consider his invitation.

¹³⁷ Scott encouraged his students to "go on increasing their knowledge of truth, not only by a direct knowledge of God, but by a knowledge of all these subordinate truths, each of which is a witness for God, and all of which in itself is the chorus of the universe to his Praise." (*Popular Education* np)

iv) A Brief Look at the Impact of Scott at Manchester

*It was in Owens College I listened to Mr Scott
expounding deep truths with an eloquence so real,
being inspired by the truth, that my heart burned within me.
I never brought a difficulty to him, metaphysical or practical, but I found the help I needed.*
(Letter from MacDonald to Dr. Hunter)

In 1850 Scott was appointed Principal of the new Owens College and professor of English Language and Literature, and of Philosophy, in Manchester. There are several reasons why Scott's presence at Owens is important to the study of MacDonald. Not only was it the somewhat notorious workplace of his mentor, it was a place of MacDonald's own further education as he attended both Scott's public lectures and at least one course. (Johnson 35; Horder 359) The unique ethos of the school's foundation was clearly important. The progenitor of what is today Manchester University, it was founded "in the midst of a manufacturing and mercantile population" and like Bedford it did not require religious instruction nor any specific statement of faith from students, graduates, or professors. (J. Thompson 188) This resulted, wrote a local newspaper, in "frank, free intercourse between men of the most various antecedents & opinions." ("Owens" np) The range of class and educational background did not decrease rigor: despite resistance Scott insisted on keeping a high standard of education, even if at risk of dissuading students. (J. Thompson 188) A general course of non-sectarian "religious instruction" was made optional and free of charge, and included New Testament Greek, Old Testament Hebrew (taught by Scott), and a series of lectures by Scott on *The Influence of Religion in relation to the Life of the Scholar*. (160) For over ten years Scott also delivered this series as a weekly evening course for the public. The course was an exegesis of his claim that "Christianity is not a Theory, or a Speculation, but a *Life*. Not a *Philosophy* of Life, but a Life and a living Process." (*Reformation* 637) A *Weltanschauung*.

Recognition of this optional course gives further insight into the worldview that MacDonald's key mentor was proactively endorsing. Unique in its approach, the course demonstrates how passionate Scott was about communicating the holistic nature of a faith-infused *Weltanschauung* to as wide a community as possible. The syllabus for the series was broken into three sections: 1) *On the connection of the laws of thought with the religious life* (it is indicative that the final lecture of this section was: "Harmony of the intellectual, spiritual, and practical life"); 2) *Relations of religion to the life of the scholar* (with lectures on Augustine, Caedmon, Bede, Alfred, and Anselm); and 3) addressing *Philosophical aspects and responsibilities of being Human*, ending with the lectures: "Moral

and spiritual conditions of social progress” and “Application to our age.”¹³⁸ In the lectures Scott warned against viewing knowledge as a mere utilitarian matter: “the man of science, of literature, of philosophy, stands not upon the usefulness of his pursuit, but upon its intrinsic worth and nobleness. His main business is with the good that is in it, not with the good that it is for.”

(*University Education* 19) Scott emphasized, as he had in inaugural lectures, that true education – as opposed to the inculcation of information – is primarily designed to awaken and cultivate the soul and mind for their own sake, for the sheer delight in developing the faculties which God has given mankind. “The relish of food, the smell of a rose, the sweetness of music, the contemplation of truth, aye, the peace of a man’s conscience; these are instances, higher or lower, of that which is good, apart altogether from its being useful.” (17) The role of the professor was “to nurture a delight in the imagination...but in order to do so, he must himself love learning.” (qtd *AJS* 350) A love of learning Scott undeniably had: “I want to give myself a chance of complete development,” he wrote, “I want an education that will make me more whole and entire, and exercise more harmoniously the faculties which God has bestowed upon me.” (qtd *AJS* 403)

Scott was evidently desirous that his students as well as any interested ‘general public’ (men and women of mixed classes) were being challenged to think through not only what they believed, but how it shaped their worldview – their *Weltanschauung* – and its practical outworking. Reports record that the lectures were very well attended, members of the public including “ministers of various denominations.” (Thompson 160) In fact the reputation of these lectures was such that despite neither Scott nor the College being affiliated with the established Church, the Bishop of Manchester requested a link with the Episcopalian training college, so that ordinands might attend. Large numbers of seminary students from Lancashire Independent College in Manchester also attended the public lectures, and that institution also requested an affiliation. (UA/101) One listener described how Scott traced down through the centuries the life of religion, “how it existed and was fed and grew and developed, ever and again breaking out and bursting through all forms – the strength, power, and endurance that it gave to men, and how, under the least healthy conditions, it rejected what was false and assimilated what was true. How its influence had blest the world. How unseen and in secret it wrought, changing the outer form.” (qtd *AJS* 342) (Familiarity with Scott’s own unhappy history with his nation’s established church is an asset, lest it seem he was glorifying an imperfect establishment. He was all too aware of the imperfections: the ‘religion’ of which he spoke was the Christian faith, not the organization

¹³⁸ Scott’s course holds very strong parallels with the culturally distinctive course developed in the 1990s at Regent College, International Graduate School of Christian Studies, by Loren Wilkinson and Ian Provan.

dogged – like any long-term establishment – with abuses of power and damaging decisions; the imperfections were clearly not his focus.) With this course Scott was putting explicit effort into introducing Christians to their heritage, to the holistic nature of their storied faith.

It is not a stretch to see the lecturing Scott as a type of modern British Ezra, for just as Ezra with the de-storied Israelites in *Nehemiah*, Scott was attempting to return a people to their Story. He explained that their particular heritage was not only to be found between the covers of a Bible, but included the stories of those who followed in its wake, those who continued to engage with both God’s written Book and with his Book of Nature. Just as the exiled Israelites needed to know the stories which defined them as a people, so the English needed to know the stories which defined *them* as a people – the stories, the history, the language through which their own unique identity had been shaped. These stories progressively revealed who they, as a people, were. In knowing who they were, they would thus better be able to relate amongst themselves (class regardless), relate with others (an honest history could not turn them inward), and, Scott believed, relate with God. To his Christian audience Scott explained that while the Gospel is a particularly special form of God’s revelation, through which God did transform readers and hearers, the more recent stories of their inheritance could also be mediums of transformation. An understanding of their own particular histories would equip them to better understand the stories of others. Not everyone reacted favourably to these lectures: while most adults were very appreciative (the audience that attended by choice!), student response was mixed – for some the lectures were transformational; others, reflecting back, thought they had been too young. (*AJS* 343) But Professor Greenwood, Scott’s successor as Principal, considered the lectures to be of a calibre that worked on a person long after they were first heard, as a “great source of mental, and, I think I must add, of spiritual growth.” (343) Certainly Scott continued to receive gratitude from students long after they had left, sometimes from halfway across the globe. (J. Thompson 187) MacDonald numbered amongst those for whom Scott’s teaching continued to nurture, for the remainder of his life. Two decades after Scott’s death MacDonald told Scott’s daughter: “I need not say to you that I owe your father & your mother more than I can say.” (*Letters* 335) In 1894, as he was completing *Lilith*, he wrote to her: “I have been a good deal with your father lately in reading some of the precious teachings he has left, and have been learning from him afresh. [...] The blessed influences of your family have never left me or my wife.” (360)



This then was the man MacDonald called Master. They may not have had very intimate relations in London, but MacDonald must have known Scott through more than just lectures and sermons for not only does he name Scott as the person he would like most to officiate his wedding, but he immediately is in contact with Scott when he begins looking for work in Manchester. (Greville 148) As early as 1850 MacDonald had sent his mentor the poem “Light” (as well as the verses given at the beginning of this chapter), which tells of walking wearily through the night streets of London and at dawn finding himself at the side-gate of a temple: “Thy voice, Truth’s herald, walking the untuned roar,/ Calm and distinct, powerful and sweet and fine:/ I loved and listened, listened and loved more.” (*Poetical* 272) This is high admiration indeed; Raeper’s comment that Scott “became something of a friend and mentor to MacDonald during his London days” is something of an understatement. (68) In 1852 MacDonald even named his first-born after Scott, despite her gender: Lilia Scott MacDonald. Greville claims that it was Scott’s presence that drew MacDonald to Manchester, and that is hardly surprising.¹³⁹ The lectures Scott was delivering at this time were proffering an integrative *Weltanschauung* that would ground MacDonald’s own life’s work, and an approach that he himself would soon thereafter use in hundreds of his own lectures on the literature of England and of Dante.

There are two very interesting and rather significant family connections in relation to the Manchester move that are important to record, not only for what they indicate about MacDonald’s relationship with Scott, but also for their dissuasion from any urge to label MacDonald as a person for whom the pulpit had always been intended or expected. The first is a concerned and caring letter written by MacDonald’s brother-in-law and former professor John Godwin, upon hearing of MacDonald’s intent to go to Manchester. He urges MacDonald – by now twenty-seven – not to give up so easily on the Congregational Church, assuring him that by no means were all congregations like the one he was leaving in Arundel. Godwin’s letter gives wise counsel as regards definitive judgements, and acknowledges “the narrowness of view & the consequent imperfections which are too common among [Congregationalists].” (Kings 1/1/19) But Godwin is also very concerned that close association with the censured Scott will ruin MacDonald’s own theological reputation, and thus his chances for further ecclesial work: “If you take an occupation in connexion [sic] with Mr Scott, it seems to me, that this is almost a [unmaking?] of the ministry. Are you prepared for this?”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Family letters also indicate that the presence of MacDonald’s brother Charles was a significant reason to move there.

¹⁴⁰ Although MacDonald left a paid position in the Congregational Church, that was not the end of his ministry in that community. Horder’s obituary for MacDonald observes: “And though he afterwards became a lay member of the Established Church, yet to the last he found the chief scope for his preaching in the Congregational Church of his early days, where, too, he had the largest number of his disciples.” (48)

Godwin's voice of caution is an interesting contrast to two very important letters from MacDonald's father. In the first, George Sr. expresses surprise that his son knows Alexander John Scott, and is curious as to how their acquaintance has come about – indicating his own familiarity with the name at least. In the second letter, dated March 1850, George Sr. is – in his typical paternal care – telling his son of an exciting new venture of which he has recently heard:

Did you notice in the last "Patriot" an account of a new College or Academy that is to be set on afoot at or near Manchester result of a legacy to the effect of £100,000 by a person of Manchester of the name of Owens. There are to be no tests of a religious kind & about £1,700 is to be applied as Salaries to Professors & other teachers ... (Kings 1/1/3)

George Sr.'s belief that his son would be a good lecturer – and his encouragement in that direction – is significant enough in and of itself. He has been a keen observer of his son's literary skills and loves for many years, and is very aware of the delight MacDonald finds in publishing. George Sr.'s emphasis on the lack of religious tests – an exception he would recognize as akin to Chalmers' practice – is also noteworthy. Religious testing was a prominent social issue, and central to the Owens project (only in 1871 did the Religious Test Act finally bar such testing nationally, although not for Theology students). But what George Sr. did not know for some time – nor yet his son, or MacDonald may have never accepted a pastorate in Arundel – was that the first Principal of that proposed College was to be one Alexander John Scott. Scott's decision to accept the position became public in April 1850 (although Owens did not open until March 1851). (*AJS* 329) By then MacDonald knew Scott well enough to write a congratulatory letter. (J. Johnson 192)

Despite his father's conviction that he should consider a future of lecturing, MacDonald apparently expressed doubt as to whether he had the right nature for being a teacher – a concern George Sr. flatly refutes:

I hope you will be directed to what will be most for the glory of God & your own comfort & the benefit of others. As to your remark in a former letter about the probability of your being too quiet for being an acceptable dissenting teacher & your aversion to "do violence to your nature" by a little of the Boanerges¹⁴¹ system as I understand you to mean. I have a few things to say tho' they may not be worth much, they may nevertheless go somewhat to show that I think you rather delicate or fastidious on such a point. "Do violence to your nature"! What if you had been born with duck feet like your maternal grandmother? Or had been

¹⁴¹ This word means "sons of Thunder" (referencing James and John of Zebedee) and was sometimes applied to a 'thundering' preacher. MacDonald uses the word himself in reference to the apostle John. (*TW* 257)

gifted with the Higgenbotham of a Dutchman, or had a little of a ‘geck neek’¹⁴² all of which might have been rectified by doing “a little violence to your nature.” Would you have rather toddled on through life with your toes more attached to each other than your heels, & because of the second natural impediment would you have preferred walking along like a bent old man that you might thereby keep up the balance, or when you came to stand still, to present an attitude somewhat akin to that of a costive dog!¹⁴³ & all forsooth that you might not do violence to your nature.¹⁴⁴ I know you would act otherwise had such been your infirmity. & why not suppose that your very quietness may be something of an infirmity as a public speaker & seeing that in this country a little animation tends to arrest the attention or prevent some from sleeping ____ [illegible due to photocopying & cross-writing] ____ in the estimation of many [?] a [?] to what may independently be excellent, why should not some violence be done to one’s nature on such a subject when one speaks for the benefit of others & those others generally prefer a degree of animation (I say not of not violent action) feeling that it tends to impress & warm the heart.

You can think of this if you like & tell me what you think of it you do not happen to be disgusted with some of my similes but you know I mean no affront. ‘Tho’ I would have your best foot always foremost for I know a little of the materials of your innerman. Stand forth then like a man & don’t let me fancy that you have been learning of some wizard merely to peep and mutter. (Kings 1/1/3)

George Sr. must be given due credit. Not only would his son become a renowned teacher and lecturer, packing halls sometimes numbering to the thousands, in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, America, and Italy, but – although the time was not yet right for him to be teaching at Owens – he would indeed teach at other institutions connected with its Principal – even stepping into Scott’s old position as Literature Professor at Bedford.¹⁴⁵ And long before MacDonald even believed he had such capabilities, when he still was pursuing a permanent position in a church, his father was telling him that as a teacher – as much as a minister – he could be working “for the glory of God & your own comfort & the benefit of others.” (Kings 1/1/3)

¹⁴² Doric for “twisted neck.”

¹⁴³ Synonym for “constipated.”

¹⁴⁴ Greville obviously had sensibilities and humours different than his progenitors, as his account of this letter, in entirety, is: “Among other and racier illustrations he points out that his maternal grandmother was born duck-footed. ‘Was the doctor,’ he asks, ‘doing violence to the nature God had given her when he set free the little toes from their bondage?’” (130) Greville does communicate his grandfather’s prime point – but in an unacknowledged abbreviation that hardly represents the man accurately.

¹⁴⁵ Though MacDonald continued to write in various mediums, most of his income was derived from his from employment as a professor, public teaching, and speaking. (Gillies 43) He preached regularly throughout his life, but never accepted payment. He also turned down numerous pulpit offers.

Section Three: Not Merely Cumulative: A Recognition of the extent to which Scott influenced MacDonald's career, and a call to reinstate MacDonald's identity as a Scholar of Literature

- i) MacDonald's response to Scott
- ii) Scott's Passion Manifested

*I know no such powerful influence for the preservation of faith and reverence in young men
till such time as these feelings shall rest on direct personal acquaintance with truth,
as the assurance that such a man as Alexander John Scott believed and worshipped....
These reminiscences may help you to realise what I thought and think of the man –
the greatest I have known,
if I may use a form which implies a power of judging which I do not possess.*
(Letter from MacDonald to Dr. Hunter)

i) MacDonald's response: Initial engagement with Scott and his teachings

Once he moved to Manchester, MacDonald found more in common with his mentor than ever. Now he too had left a pulpit under charges of heterodoxy. The situations were more different than brief accounts allow: while Scott was actually excommunicated, MacDonald chose to resign from Arundel.¹⁴⁶ But there were similar taxations, and they were compatriots in poor health. Like MacDonald, Scott had suffered for years from severe headaches and fatigue that overshadowed and impeded his work (and which eventually brought an early death). They both came from close families with fragile health, and many early deaths. Suffering and exile was too familiar to them both. It is no wonder Scott became "Macdonald's ideal and spiritual teacher." (*AJS* 360) After three years together in Manchester MacDonald writes a letter to Scott that indicates how fundamental this relationship had become to his own sense of self:

I speak from the position of a pupil, and that of one who, I flatter myself, is so in no ordinary degree of the relationship. I have listened to you expounding deep Truth with an eloquence so real, being informed by the Truth, that my heart burned within me. Indeed, of all men whom I have heard, you only impress me as eloquent with that high kind of utterance which alone is truly valuable. But whether on these occasions, or when favoured with your conversation at your own table, or rendered more responsible still by being admitted to your study, I do not know whether I have been more humbled by my ignorance at your side, or exalted by finding that you sympathised with my deepest thoughts and

¹⁴⁶ While the resignation occurred in response to considerable pressure, due to a discontent on the part of some powerful congregation members, it should be recognized that this malcontent was not unanimous, nor effected by the denomination. Raeper explains that ejections of ministers were fairly common in the Congregational church of this era, and easy to enforce – as had occurred to both of MacDonald's predecessors. MacDonald was distinct in being the first pastor in three *not* to be officially voted out. (80) Letters and poems indicate that the MacDonalds had warm relations with both the more impoverished and the younger members, and maintained relations with some for decades. (cf. Beinecke Archives.)

highest inspirations. I have never brought a difficulty to you, metaphysical or practical, but I found the help I needed; and I should have been perplexed to decide which to wonder at the more, the clearness of your vision for the perception of a simple Truth, or the acuteness and accuracy of the analysis by which you conveyed your perceptions to others, had not the remarkable union of the two absorbed the wonder in itself. You seem to me to construct bridges of metaphysical argument, bound and cemented by logic, across chasms to distant heights which are first perceived only by the eye of the poet, and first visited only by the faith of the prophet... (qtd *AJS* 361)

It should be remarked that MacDonald comments on how Scott is *confirming* MacDonald's "deepest thoughts and highest aspirations." As intimated in earlier chapters, Scott's teaching strengthened a foundation already laid through MacDonald's rich inheritance. MacDonald's admiration and Scott's influence lasted, and was widely acknowledged: an obituary for MacDonald in *The British Weekly* – forty years after Scott's death – considered it important to proclaim that MacDonald's high estimation of Scott was maintained "to the last day of his conscious life." (*AJS* 362)

But now that MacDonald was in Manchester with Scott, able to learn from Scott's side, he also had need of physical maintenance. He had no job but a growing young family. In Arundel while yet pastoring he had made some progression towards a literary career, having written the five-act dramatic poem *Within and Without*, some poems, and translated Novalis' *Spiritual Songs*. (The same month that his first piece of literary criticism – on Browning's "Christmas Eve" – was published, MacDonald resigned from the pulpit.) He intended to keep writing, but that would not support his family. Scott helped MacDonald to seek work opportunities, finding him some tutoring jobs, and introducing him to Manchester colleagues. He also provided financial assistance. (*Letters* 108ff) If the Scotts and MacDonalds had not been intimate as families before now, they certainly quickly became so. When MacDonald had further life-threatening haemorrhaging attacks – at the same time Louisa was in confinement for Greville's birth – it was the Scott home in which he was tended, holistically nurtured with food, rest, conversation, and good books.

Eventually in his pursuit of work MacDonald joined forces with some companions and began a small Ladies' College in their home on Camp Terrace – a forum that would evolve into Manchester Ladies' College – lecturing in literature, natural philosophy, and chemistry. (Greville 216; *AJS* 365) Greville's notes indicate that Sidney's *Arcadia* was one of the subjects covered, and Raeper lists *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and the 'Modern Poets.' (103) Scott and a number of his students from Owens College came regularly to hear MacDonald on Sunday evenings in a type of Home

Church situation. (367) In June 1854 sufficient funds were raised for him to have a preaching room in the city centre. The attendance was small, but loyal. MacDonald wrote to his father: “I do not at all expect to become minister of any existing Church, but I hope to gather a few around me soon – and the love I have from the few richly repays me for the abuse of some and the neglect of the many.” (366) From this year onward the *Christian Spectator* published MacDonald’s poems and articles on a regular basis, providing a little more income and increasing exposure, and both “The Broken Swords” and “The School Master’s Story” came out this year. (Gillies 42) In the summer MacDonald pondered moving to London to find work – but admitted that the “chief difficulty” for him in doing so would be in not living near Mr. Scott. (Greville 368) Scott and his family cared well for MacDonald, on many levels; much of their own limited time, energy, and resources were invested in the aspiring young author.

MacDonald’s poor health finally prompted his family to move to Hastings. Although no longer in the same city as Scott, MacDonald stayed in close contact: writing to him for advice and support, sending him copies of his published novels, and visiting when possible. Eventually he could write:

I send you today a copy of my new book (*Adela Cathcart*). The name of it is stupid, but that is my publisher’s fault, not mine. It is made up of almost all the short things I have written (some of which have been published before) imbedded in another tale. Although slight, I don’t think you will consider it careless, nor unworthy of filling gap between the last and the next book which is on the way. I have dedicated it to Dr. Russell. Some day I hope to write a book good enough in my own eyes to let me ask you to allow me to dedicate it to you. I have long had one in my mind, for which I have some material ready – a life of the Robert Falconer who is introduced into *David Elginbrod*. For that I hope to be able to make the request. (*Letters* 143)

It is unlikely that Scott would have found such a treatise on the healing and transformative nature of story, as represented in the plot of *Cathcart*, “careless” in the least. *Robert Falconer* (1868) was eventually written, but it was not published until after Scott’s death in January 1866 – though nonetheless dedicated to him.¹⁴⁷ But meanwhile in Hastings MacDonald entered new adventures and new relationships: it was there that the family friendship with Lewis Carroll began, and there that *Phantastes* was written. And *Phantastes* – that work which would set MacDonald apart, which would be considered by some to be the beginning of the modern fantasy genre, and which was redolent with themes that would persist throughout the corpus, “won the keen appreciation of

¹⁴⁷ Scott died in Switzerland. MacDonald had initially planned to be on this trip, but was convinced by Ruskin to take the Bernese Oberland tour Scott and Erskine had done years before. (Greville 347)

Scott.”¹⁴⁸ (*AJS* 368) In 1859 MacDonald left the south coast and stepped into Scott’s former chair at Bedford Ladies College, London, as professor of English Literature – his testimonials written by pioneers Scott and Maurice.¹⁴⁹ He would hold the position for eight years. In 1865 he also began lecturing in Literature at King’s College. Thus MacDonald too can be numbered amongst the first of those naming the teaching of English Literature as their profession. His father, who had died the year previous, would have been well pleased. George Sr. had been prophetic in his envisioning of his son as a public speaker and teacher.

While employment as a professor of English Literature was MacDonald’s longest held salaried position, he had been employed as a teacher of Literature for some time through the medium of lectures. In 1858 he gave a series of eight literature lectures in London that were very well received.¹⁵⁰ Thus MacDonald carried forth not only the message but also the practice of his mentor for decades. Equally convinced that Story was a prime medium of transformation, and that he was living amongst people in great need of being reminded of their own rich literary heritage, MacDonald was to give hundreds and hundreds of lectures, the contents of which repeatedly weave throughout his other medium of ministry, his writing – a format in which his audience yet continues.

¹⁴⁸ MacDonald wrote to Ann, “I hope Mr. Scott will like my fairy-tale. I don’t see what right the *Athenaeum* has to call it an allegory and judge or misjudge it accordingly – as if nothing but an allegory could have two meanings!” Scott did like the book, considering the style good and the language of “purity and delicate beauty.” (qtd Dearborn 4) Unfortunately the publication of MacDonald’s reference to the *Athenaeum* review singled it out for attention – leading to the misconception that the review was representative, as is frequently concluded in critical studies (cf. *Golden Thread* 6; *Anthology* 108; Triggs 73; Bloom 138). Gillies clarifies that in general the reviews of *Phantastes* “were actually quite positive.” (186) Any negative response seemed to come from reviewers who “were nonplussed by MacDonald’s fusion of fairy-tale form with religious or spiritual truths.” (43)

¹⁴⁹ MacDonald was now well equipped to follow Scott: “a great reader, of wide, and, in some subjects, profound erudition. His knowledge of English poetry from Chaucer to Browning surpassed that of any other man whose knowledge I have known. His familiarity with the thought and writings of William Law, Henry More, George Fox, Blake, Swedenborg, Behemen and Jean Paul Richter – and I know not what other mystics – implies an amount of study for which how he found the time is a wonder to me; he had both the scholar’s and the poet’s mastery of Milton, Shakespeare, and Dante; he read his Germans, his Frenchmen, and his Italians in their own words; he read the New Testament at least (with which he would always begin his attack upon a new language) in Dutch, modern Greek, and, I think, Spanish, and knew it best, I am sure, in its oldest tongue. To classical scholarship he has laid little claim; but I have heard him read Horace aloud so that the lines lived and swung with the poetry which had till then been more dead to me than their tongue or even their commentators. Russian novelists he always read through their French translators, and advised this medium to others.” (Ronald 54)

¹⁵⁰ His hosts Emelia and Russell Gurney, M.P., Q.C. were long-time members of Erskine’s ‘Linlathen circle’ and also friends of the Scotts and Lady Byron. (Three years previous Erskine had written to Emelia of his admiration of *Within and Without*.) Soon life-long friends, Emelia arranged many of MacDonald’s future lectures. (Greville 194, 292, 300)

ii) Scott's Passion Manifested: How MacDonald begins to practice and disseminate Scott's mythopathic *Weltanschauung*

- a) Master of the Hearing
- b) A Revelatory Inheritance

*I would rather assume the office of master of the bearing,
for my aim shall be to cause the song to be truly heard;
to set forth worthy points in form, in matter, and in relation;
to say with regard to the singer himself, his time, its modes, its beliefs,
such things as may help to set the song in its true light –
its relation, namely, to the source whence it sprung,
which alone can secure its right reception by the heart of the hearer.
(England's Antiphon 3)*

a) Master of the Hearing

Like his mentor, MacDonald lectured on English Literature to an English audience in a Scottish brogue. He also lectured on some Scottish Literature, and *in* Scotland and Ireland. But with the exception of Dante, what he taught his British audience was the literature of Britain's heritage. His writing – and his teaching through his own literature – was shaped by authors of varied cultural backgrounds, but in the literally hundreds of lectures MacDonald gave over more than four decades of lecturing (many of which were written-up by journalists, thus increasing the audience exponentially), his topics were on writers such as: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Sidney, Tennyson, Hood, Coleridge, Burns, Milton, Wordsworth, Walter Scott, and Tennyson.¹⁵¹ True to the teaching of Scott, these lectures never considered the literature without considering its author. MacDonald's lectures, essays, and even commentary in his novels reveal that he knew well the lives of the authors he admired – and that he desired to introduce them to others. At times he would repeat Scott almost verbatim. Like Scott he lectured extempore, with one single and important exception: delivery of his lecture on "The Imagination and Its Functions."¹⁵² It is a matter undiscussed that for years before MacDonald wrote any novel, he taught about literature; he immersed himself in the great tradition of literary conversation in the most profound manner possible – by teaching it to others. This literature was the fertile ground in which his creativity was intentionally rooted. Ronald writes that his father's "knowledge of English poetry from Chaucer to Browning surpassed that of any other man whose knowledge I have known." (54)

¹⁵¹ While MacDonald did discuss Coleridge and Wordsworth, the 'English Romantics' were but a small portion of his subject matter. There is no recording whatsoever of MacDonald lecturing on the German Romantics. In 1867 he responded to an inquiry: "As to subjects, I would recommend a play of Shakespeare; but I will lecture on Tennyson, or Chaucer, or Milton, or Shelley. If none of these will do, I can find you others, but my subjects are entirely in literature." (Beinecke 1/36/1) In 1879 he wrote to the critic Horder, "I could give you a lecture on Wordsworth, or Tennyson's Lyrics, but I much prefer lecturing on Hamlet or Macbeth." (Beinecke 1/2/2) Amell's journal *Wingfold* is a rich resource of 'transcriptions' and reviews of MacDonald's lectures. MacDonald lectured on the above listed topics, extensively, in North America – including literature lectures at Princeton.

¹⁵² In 1883 he writes again to Horder; "Would you like Hamlet & Julius Caesar or Tennyson & Sir Philip Sidney – or two upon Wordsworth – or a read lecture on the Imagination? Choose." (Beinecke 1/2/7)

After an 1880 lecture a reporter wrote: “It may be said of the author of ‘Robert Falconer’ that if he had not become one of the noblest of the Christian teachers of his age, he might have been its foremost literary critic.” (“Affectionate” 32) And yet current leading MacDonald critics have overlooked this life-long endeavour. The apparent lack is bemoaned:

First let me set out some of the mysteries evident to a student of MacDonald's life. Perhaps most frustrating to a reader interested in MacDonald's fiction is the lack of commentary in his letters on such things as the literature of his own day, his own writing, and subjects of a critical nature generally. [...] Finally, MacDonald rarely enters into an expository discussion of literature or art or criticism.¹⁵³ (“What’s Missing” 283)

Yet even without access to the abundant archives of correspondence and lecture reviews, MacDonald’s texts are crammed with criticism, both of classic and contemporary works. It appears in his ‘expository’ works, as well as – in an expository fashion – in much of his fiction. It will be argued in a following chapter that it appears very powerfully in his ‘non-expository’ responses. Also, while MacDonald’s area of expertise is literature, commentary on visual art and music is not absent. This general oversight in MacDonald scholarship is significant, and has obscured critical understanding of both MacDonald and his writing.¹⁵⁴ The final section of this thesis recounts but a few examples of MacDonald’s extensive engagement with “literature of his own day.”

An example of the consequences of such misunderstanding in MacDonald criticism can be seen in Mary Ann Gillies’ excellent study of A.P. Watt, Britain’s first literary agent – a man who began his career and the entire agent industry with George MacDonald’s work. Conditioned by existing critical study, Gillies is amazed, almost confused, that MacDonald’s London lectures “were on literary subjects, rather than on the spiritual or moral topics that he had preferred in the 1850s in Manchester, thus suggesting that he was not so otherworldly as to be unaware of the need to tailor his material for the popular audience.” (48) Gillies, left with the impression that MacDonald’s literary lectures must have been crowd pleasing deviations, expounds on how her own primary research has jarred with what she has read in MacDonald scholarship: “There is a lingering conception among his readership that MacDonald was otherworldly. David Robb notes, ‘not only did MacDonald tend to view the mundane world, which is what we are principally

¹⁵³ The above quotations come from McGillis’ review of Sadler’s letters and Hein’s biography. McGillis’ bewilderment at the lack of correspondence with contemporary authors and artists in either of the critiqued books is warranted. The archives from which the material is sourced is laden with such ‘lacunae.’ Occasionally Sadler even misquotes relevant names: such as transcribing “J.W. Kinglsey” instead of “Mr. Kingsley” – being the author Charles. (Beinecke 1/3/153) McGillis does rightly acknowledge the huge contribution of these works to MacDonald scholarship.

¹⁵⁴ Even in Bordighera MacDonald lectured on literature extensively, usually during regular public sessions within his own home (which could seat two hundred). One visitor, referencing *Pilgrim’s Progress*, wrote: “He was the ‘Interpreter,’ and to visit the Casa Coraggio was to visit the ‘House Beautiful’ or the ‘Delectable Mountains,’ from which one might even catch a glimpse of the ‘Heavenly City’ on a very clear day.” (“Personal Recollections” 26)

aware of, as insubstantial, transitory and dreamlike ... but he also regarded it as lifeless and dull.”

(48) Aside from the misinformation Gillies has garnered on an admittedly under-researched period in MacDonald’s life – one supposes the “spiritual or moral” topics referenced were actually sermons – and aside from Robb’s inaccurate representation of MacDonald’s worldview, what is most striking is that someone who is not a MacDonald scholar is attempting to clarify misconceptions in MacDonald scholarship by pointing out the significance of his overlooked literary lectures.

MacDonald’s most explicit published literary criticism is – as noted – mostly disregarded, although it still garners accolades when ‘rediscovered.’¹⁵⁵ For example, few readers today realize that in the same manner Lewis compiled an anthology of MacDonald’s writing, MacDonald compiled an anthology of Philip Sidney (*A Cabinet of Gems*). In that anthology MacDonald includes the description by Sidney of the poet as a “maker,” one who ranges “into the divine consideration of what may be and should be” – the concept that was so instrumental to Barfield’s argument. (147) He also records Sidney’s own conviction of the transformational power of poesis: “With a tale forsooth *the poet* commeth unto you: with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner [...] he intends ‘the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.’” (*Gems* 155) Sidney is another champion of writing in vernacular, and another artist whose work merges classical mythic images with Christian ones without any sense of blasphemy. In *Annals* the vicar’s discovery that no one in his parish knows the work of Sidney leads to a series of public lectures on poets – given in a local barn. The scene is a wonderful mixture of the *Weltanschauung* MacDonald shared with Scott, highlighting the coherence of literature and identity, and the conviction that these should be proclaimed as readily in a barn as in a ‘hallowed hall.’

The object of these lectures was to make the people acquainted with the true heroes of their own country – men great in themselves. [...] But I have not finished these lectures yet, for I never wished to confine them to the English heroes; I am going on still, old man as I am – not however without retracing passed ground sometimes, for a new generation has come up since I came here, and there is a new one behind coming up now which I may be honoured

¹⁵⁵ Herbert scholar C.A. Patrides calls MacDonald’s evaluation of Herbert’s “The Temple” in *Antiphon* “one of the most considerable essays in the history of Herbert criticism.” (1996) (27) G.R. Hudson addresses the significance of MacDonald’s Browning reviews in her *Robert Browning’s Literary Life* (1992). (286) A.J. Smith includes MacDonald’s work in his *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (1996). Though MacDonald’s *Hamlet* is almost entirely overlooked in MacDonald scholarship, it has not been ignored in Shakespeare scholarship: i.e. Bernice W. Kliman [1988]; David Farley-Hills [1996]; Ann Thompson [2000]; Hardin L. Aasand [2003]. The eminent Shakespearean Ann Thompson considers it “thoroughly scholarly,” adding: “In addition to crediting George MacDonald for this innovative edition on textual grounds, I would recommend his commentary on literary grounds: the encounter between MacDonald and Shakespeare is always thoughtful and modest, often entertaining and original. I would also urge editors and publishers to consider his and Longman’s elegant and reader-friendly layout as a possible model for modern editions of the two-text plays.” She concludes that MacDonald’s edition of *Hamlet* “deserves to be remembered.” (202, 205)

to present in its turn to some of this grand company – this cloud of witnesses to the truth in our own and other lands. (225)

MacDonald's biblical allusion to 'cloud of witnesses' is not incidental. Both as a Celt and a Christian it was easy for him to have firm faith in that witnessing cloud. A journal report of his 1867 lecture on Sidney states: "He hoped, before he had done, to help [the audience] to love Sydney [sic] somewhat as he did himself. They need not stop loving people because they were dead so many years ago. They were all brothers and sisters, and Sydney one of the noblest of whom he had read or known." ("Lecture on Sir Philip" 18) MacDonald wanted his audience to remember that "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" was also "the God of Sidney, of Hooker, of Herbert." (*Seaboard* 162) He believed it important that his audience know their heritage, and in knowing it, might learn from it by engaging with it. Although the writers of whom he spoke were dead, their conversation was still proffered: "Next to possessing a true, wise, and victorious friend seated by your fireside, it is blessed to have the spirit of such a friend embodied – for spirit can assume any embodiment – on your bookshelves." ("Essays" 229) Indeed MacDonald's perspective was an eternal one, expecting that someday our relationship with these witnesses will be fulfilled, for he continues:

But in the latter case the friendship is all on one side. For full friendship your friend must love you, and know that you love him. Surely these biographies are not merely spiritual links connecting us in the truest manner with past times and vanished minds, and thus producing strong half friendships. Are they not likewise links connecting us with a future, wherein these souls shall dawn upon ours, rising again from the death of the past into the life of our knowledge and love? Are not these biographies letters of introduction, forwarded, but not yet followed by him whom they introduce, for whose step we listen, and whose voice we long to hear; and whom we shall yet meet somewhere in the Infinite? ("Essays" 229)

Such a 'long-term' perspective heightened the demand not only for responsibility to the text, but also to the author upon whom one presumed to write or lecture.

MacDonald considered publishing a similar anthology with Milton and with Bacon. (Beinecke 1/1/3) Although he did not do so, he did publish a broader anthology, *England's Antiphon* (1868). This compilation, in which he "sought to trace the course of our religious poetry from an early period of our literary history," perhaps expresses best what – in the footsteps of Scott – he was trying to do. (v) The endeavour as well as the commentary it includes make clear his understanding of literature as antiphonal response, one writer/thinker to another, each building upon that which had been 'heard.' In the book's introduction he repeats a familiar message:

For we must not forget that, although the individual song springs from the heart of the individual, the song of a country is not merely cumulative: it is vital in its growth, and therefore composed of historically dependent members. No man could sing as he has sung, had not others sung before him. Deep answereth unto deep, face to face, praise to praise. To the sound of the trumpet the harp returns its own vibrating response – alike, but how different! The religious song of the country, I say again, is a growth, rooted deep in all its story. (3)

MacDonald makes clear from the outset that one of his goals with this collection is to better facilitate the relationship between the readers and the writers – writers who are intentionally interdenominational: “Heartily do I throw this my small pebble at the head of the great Sabbath-breaker Schism.”¹⁵⁶(vi) Adhering to the understanding of truth expressed by his mentors, MacDonald includes in this compendium those writers who have not resolved their struggle with the Church and/or with God: a ‘noble band of reverent doubters,’ which includes in its rank Matthew Arnold. (326) This inclusion also stresses the fact that a writer need not concur with voices in the tradition with which they consciously engage; as MacDonald had learned in Huntly, good conversation does not exclude dissent.

With similar educational intent MacDonald published separate essays on Shakespeare, Browning, Wordsworth, and Shelley. His children considered his edition of *Hamlet* – an endeavour of six years – to be possibly his greatest work. (Ronald 57; Greville 540) While *Exotics/Rampolli* (being the same collection, only the latter title includes *Diary of an Old Soul*) is the cultural exception – and thus an important one – it *is* an exception. Yet here too in the Italian and German poetry the concept of a literary heritage remains paramount, even in title. In the publishing contract the book is called: *Rampollo; Growths from an Old Root*. (Gillies 53) The published title is: *Rampolli: growths from a long-planted root*. Both forms indicate that MacDonald was thinking carefully about the concept conveyed.¹⁵⁷ Literary heritage cannot be separated from Literature, and neither from the identity of a people. The echo found in Tolkien is no mere coincidence: “The old that is strong does not wither/ Deep roots are not reached by the frost.” (*Rings* 257)

It should remain clear that the often-overlooked emphasis by MacDonald upon British literature was not indicative of a general preference; rather, as taught by Scott, MacDonald was addressing a lack in the culture around him. The people of his host country had lost their story,

¹⁵⁶ A reviewer in the *New York Times*, 1869, wrote: “His is a truly catholic mind, and no genuine manifestation of religious thought that comes within the scope of his subject, fails to receive full and appreciative justice at his hands.” (*W*37 31) In an 1867 book review MacDonald noted that “People of different opinions, like rough boys, are given to slamming doors in each other’s face; this little book is a kind of wedge to keep the door of heaven open.” (*W*66 31)

¹⁵⁷ That *Diary* is included among these ‘growths from deep roots’ indicates conscious participation in the tradition.

lost their sense of heritage, of community, of understanding who they were in relation to their forbearers – and thus of each other (themselves), and (in his eyes) of their Maker. MacDonald was returning this story to them – a story often shaped by engagement with those from other cultures. In doing so he was creating an audience who would be more ready to receive his own writing, though this was not his impetus. He, like Scott, was another Ezra. Like that prophet who stood before the Israelites reminding them of the stories that gave rise to their laws, their culture, their worship, their identity, their language – stories that they had forgotten – MacDonald was returning to a people its own stories. (Cf. *Nehemiah* 8) Being aware of how intentionally he did this in lectures makes all the more evident how strong a feature this is in his novels.¹⁵⁸ Through his novels he drew his readership into even more stories of national and international Makars – stories belonging to that readership, even if forgotten by most of them. Some were stories his readers would know, and thus resonate with, and some stories – more obscure – were ones that MacDonald believed would none the less shape and give depth to the surface tale. He was seeking to evoke renewed perceptions, informed by the past. It is little wonder that libraries are the setting for so many important relational engagements in the novels.¹⁵⁹ Frequently MacDonald proffers explicit literary criticism and ‘literary introductions’ through specific discussion of texts between his characters – in *St. George and St. Michael* (1875) he even turns one of his favourite poets, Herbert, into a character. The extent of his referencing of other texts within his fiction alone is astounding: in his first ‘realistic’ novel for example (*David Elginbrod*) he *explicitly* mentions over ninety works of literature – this number does not include unreferenced quotations and allusions.¹⁶⁰ But most pervasively MacDonald manifests Scott’s teaching in the very crafting of story after story infused with his own literary heritage, a necessary ingredient of Mythopoeia:

When we read rejoicingly the true song-speech of one of our singing brethren, we hold song-worship with him and with all who have thus at any time shared in his feelings, even if he have passed centuries ago into the “high countries” of song. My object is to erect, as it were, in this book, a little auricle, or spot of concentrated hearing, where the hearts of my readers may listen, and join in the song of their country's singing men and singing women. (*Antiphon* 2)

¹⁵⁸ The MacDonald family theatrical performances are another form of proffered Story. Most famed for the presentation of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim* books, their repertoire included numerous Shakespeare plays, fairy tales, a Dickens novel, and Zola’s *L’Assommoir*. Scripted by Louisa, all manner of friends and family were drawn into acting and set design. Audiences covered a wide societal spectrum, and very purposefully included the impoverished (and thus in England, the illiterate).

¹⁵⁹ A more plausible rationale in my regard than the usual presumption: that MacDonald once fell madly into unrequited love in an unidentified library, thus incurring an obsession with libraries in general. (Cf. Robb for the persistence of the romantic theory – and his acceptance thereof. (10-11)

¹⁶⁰ Numerous quotations and explicit allusions were not unusual within the body of a fictional text in MacDonald’s time – but MacDonald is unusually intentional, if not excessive. Even the fantasies contain many direct quotations (not always marked out by quotation marks), and often directly name other titles of literature.

But MacDonald's object of enabling the hearing of the voices of British writers has been more than overshadowed by almost obsessive focus on what might seem to some a salacious story: his 'rejection' from one church. A failure to adequately represent MacDonald's career-life – the typical focus being his twenty-nine months as a Congregational minister rather than his more than a decade as an English Literature professor, and his four decades as a lecturer in English Literature – has resulted in gross historical misrepresentation. Studies of Victorian history, even of Victorian Literature, *never* present MacDonald as a successful teacher of Literature – rather his identity is most often type-cast as that of an ousted minister, forced to write to feed his family.¹⁶¹ It is time the facts displace the fallacy.

By the time the young author George MacDonald returned to London for his second period of living there, his life had become considerably full. He was a husband and a father of six. He had twice nearly died. He had been placed in and encouraged out of his first and only 'denominationally-paid' pulpit. He had preached as a guest, as the pastor of a home-church, and been offered a pulpit in Bolton. He had lectured in people's homes in Literature and Science, but had also become engaged in the first efforts of teaching both women and working class men in England. Repeatedly medical doctors had forbidden him to preach, for months at a time. He had suffered the anxiety of not knowing how to provide financially for his young family, and had experienced the exhilaration of having his first works published. He had received literary attention for his output, and kind patronage as well. He had travelled through France to Algiers, and studied culture and religion exceedingly different from – and surprisingly similar to – his own. Two brothers, who were also two of his closest friends, had died. His young half-sister, to whom he was also very close, had died. In 1858, just as he published *Phantastes*, his father died. He had met his two great mentors – both dissident clergy concerned to act for the people, both lovers and teachers of literature – who confirmed for young MacDonald that he could, indeed, *Write*. Truly, that he should. Just before his intended ordination in Arundel, December 1850 (due to haemorrhage attack, it had to be postponed six months) MacDonald wrote to his brother Charles: "I don't think I am settled here for life... I hope either to leave this after six or more years, or to write a poem for the good of my generation. Perhaps both." (Raeper 80) Perhaps more.

¹⁶¹ Examples can be given, such as from Manlove's *Anthology* (108), A.N. Wilson's *The Victorians* (169), and Alison Milbank's *Dante and the Victorians* (176), yet to do so is not really fair, as the misrepresentation (in varying degrees) is almost ubiquitous. The compendious work of Tim Hilton on Ruskin is a strong example of how a prejudice against the assumed persona of such a 'failed-minister' colours not only Hilton's presentation of MacDonald, but his interpretation of Ruskin's engagements with him – resulting in errors in Hilton's Ruskin scholarship. The appendix includes a brief example.

b) A Revelatory Inheritance

Awareness of the profound passion for the revelatory power of literature as expressed throughout the life of A.J. Scott, and to a lesser degree of F.D. Maurice, lends considerable depth of insight not only to MacDonald's practice, but as to why their injunction to him to *write* was so very important. These teachers – practitioners – of literature saw in MacDonald the capacity and the desire to engage with the age-old conversations of Truth- and Light-seeking. Scott in particular invested his person, his time, and his community in MacDonald. His influence pervades MacDonald's own passionate love of, his engagement with, and his creation of, Literature. *Elginbrod*, *Falconer*, and *Miracles* are the works in which MacDonald publicly honours these mentors, but their stamp is ubiquitous. Like MacDonald's uncle Mackintosh Mackay, Scott and Maurice understood that a people's identity comes from their shared heritage, and that that heritage is conveyed in language and story. And like MacKay, they understood that that identity was inextricably bound up with a theological identity, and they saw this reiterated throughout not only English Literature, but in the literatures with which it interacted. In the increased understanding of self and other, through the relational power of story, these 'lore-masters' believed that revelation could occur, and lives and even societies be transformed. Because of their own theological understandings these teachers did not believe in forcing the acceptance of any doctrine upon anyone, but they did believe that they were called to reveal truths to everyone – and that all truths were God's truths. Counter-culturally they believed that the opportunity to learn more fully one's cultural and spiritual heritage should not be denied to anyone, regardless of status or creed. Such a position met with much resistance from both conservative and liberal camps, yet they believed that the acquisition of a nation's stories was a basic human right, and they were determined that the stories be told. And thus MacDonald's own development as a Mythopoeic writer became intimately linked with the development of English Literature as a discipline.

Two years after Scott's death, MacDonald dedicated what he considered to be his best novel to: "The memory of the man who stands highest in the oratory of my memory, Alexander John Scott." It should not be overlooked that this book is arguably the most autobiographical of the novels. It is, in many ways, a story of MacDonald's own identity as a Scot, as a boy from Aberdeenshire and Huntly, as the offspring of the MacDonalds and MacKays. It is a tale that reveals the limitations and errors of the Federal Calvinism of MacDonald's grandmother, but more importantly the love and care that persisted in her practice and in the practice of others in the community. It does not damn her as the literary critics do. It shows Robert's own growing

understanding of God's grace, and the consequentially increased understanding of his grandmother. It shows how aspects of God are revealed to Robert through nature, through music, through stories – through relationship. A book sufficiently controversial in the questions it asks that even the daring Norman MacLeod decided not to publish it in *Good Words, Falconer* shows its protagonist as an adult in London, going against the grain of society in his service of the poor and uneducated, and in his pursuit to live as God – rather than polite society – would have him. (*AJS* 370) As an exiled Scot, the adult Robert reflects on how his upbringing has shaped him: “All the old things, the old ways, the old glories of childhood – were they gone? No. Over them all, in them all, was God still. There is no past with him.” (360) As the novel concludes, the reader becomes aware that the narrator – the teller of the story – is someone who was himself a recipient of the story, having had it told to him by the protagonist. That protagonist – Robert Falconer – has been an intentional mentor to the narrator, modeling relationship, storytelling, and service.¹⁶² As he departs from the story's stage Robert commissions the narrator to do likewise, and mentor through relationship: “as I have done, get him to know your ways and ideas.”¹⁶³ (305) And in the very crafting of the book, the narrator has indeed done just this, manifold: a fitting homage by MacDonald to Scott.



Literature is informed and shaped by a people, a culture, a language, a place. The stories evoked in turn either inform or reverberate within new stories, new tellings of persistent truths. MacDonald and his predecessors – as well as his inheritors – believe that great mythopoeic tales are forged in communion and interrelation. None stand alone; each, in their particularity, is a part of a community. Great writers such as Dante are explicit about this, voicing that they do not, cannot, create out of a vacuum. This is exactly what both MacDonald and Tolkien propound in their exploration of the word *create: ex nihilo* is the reserve of the Creator. As a student of Scott, MacDonald very explicitly follows the lead of Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare: he enters the dialogue as but one of the participants, seeking the truths he recognizes and with which he resonates, and, following those threads, participates in the communion, the conversation, the argumentation – his very participation inviting his readers to do the same. In intentionally

¹⁶² The narrator writes of Robert: “He gave us this day story after story about the poor people he had known. I could see that his object was often to get some truth into his father's mind without exposing it to rejection by addressing it directly to himself [...] In the evening I sought to lead the conversation towards the gospel-story; and then Falconer talked as I never heard him talk before. No little circumstance in the narratives appeared to have escaped him. He had thought about everything, as it seemed to me. He had looked under the surface everywhere, and found truth—mines of it—under all the upper soil of the story. The deeper he dug the richer seemed the ore. This was combined with the most pictorial apprehension of every outward event, which he treated as if it had been described to him by the lips of an eye-witness. The whole thing lived in his words and thoughts.” (403)

¹⁶³ Robert's words echo the Deuteronomy text referenced in Chapter One.

entering the dialogue, this student of Scott seeks revelatory insight in unified perceptions. To the conversation he brings an understanding and awareness of his own identity. This awareness in and of itself helps him discern the truths with which he feels enabled to engage, and the voices which shape his own. He is profoundly aware that the right to engage in and learn from this conversation has little to do with his class, his gender, or his abilities – it has everything to do with his shared humanity: that he is a relational being. Just like the stories with which he engages, like those persons who have shaped his own person, he himself is a “story” of people, place, language, and experiences. The relationships that are part of who he is, and by virtue of which, in a sense, he relates with his Triune relational God, constitute that through which he relates to what he reads/hears/receives. As he himself is continually transformed, thus becoming (the opposite of an *un*man) more fully human, so is shaped what he relates to his audience – what he then writes/lives/breathes.¹⁶⁴ For MacDonald it is a deep reality that not only is it not good for man to be alone: it is impossible. And the more humans relationally give and receive from Creation, from God’s various mediums of revelation (Word, Nature, Man, Holy Spirit), the more fully human they become. For him humans are living stories through which, in their own transformation, transformation is incurred in others; to be fully human is to be mythopathic. Like Maurice and Scott, and under the influence of their teaching, MacDonald sees his prime responsibility – as a literary critic and also as an author (the latter never distinct from the first) – to be a facilitator of relationship: “For the power of the truth lies of course in its revelation to the mind, and while for this there are a thousand means, none are so mighty as its embodiment in human beings and human life. There it is itself alive and active.”¹⁶⁵ (*SBP* 208) As such Scott in particular confirmed MacDonald’s identity as a Scottish *trouwere* and modelled an approach to and reception of literature on which MacDonald patterned his own teaching and writing. The result was literature that people still claim is transformational. Scott invited MacDonald into his own established relationships with people, such as Maurice and Ruskin, and out of those new relationships yet new stories were born – stories such as those to be discussed in the last part of this thesis; stories still remarked upon today, by different recipients in a different age, for their mythopoeic power.

*But the singers will yet sing on to him that hath ears to hear.
When he returns to seek them, the shadowy door will open to his touch,
the long-drawn aisles receding will guide his eye to the carven choir,
and there they still stand, the sweet singers,
content to repeat ancient psalm and new song
to the prayer of the humblest whose heart would join
in England's Antiphon. (332)*

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Gibbie* for MacDonald’s introduction of the term “unman,” later a key term for Lewis. (131)

¹⁶⁵ This recalls Maurice’s declaration that the best kind of literary criticism “delights to draw forth the sense and beauty of a book” – able to do so “because the heart of the critic is in sympathy with the heart of the writer.” (Palmer 37)

CHAPTER FOUR

**‘More Fully Awake’:
Recognizing Ruskin’s Contribution to and reception of MacDonald’s Relational
Hermeneutic**

*The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is –
not to give him things to think about,
but to wake things up that are in him;
or say, to make him think things for himself.
 (“The Fantastic Imagination”)*

Section I: Contexture: Recognizing the status of Dante’s *Commedia* in Victorian Britain, and specifically the relationships MacDonald and Ruskin have with the text

Section II: Confraters: Establishing the close personal and literary relationship between MacDonald and Ruskin

Section III: A Lens with which to Consider: the MacDonald/Ruskin Relationship as Critical Aid

Introduction

The relationship MacDonald had with John Ruskin was not as formative as the one he had with Scott – no other relationship was – and yet it was a relationship which left an extensive imprint upon MacDonald’s writing, furthered his intentional crafting of mythopoeic tales, occupied much of his daily and family life, and can be claimed as one of the most important elements in understanding one of MacDonald’s most complicated and most famous novels. Yet very little has been written about this relationship, and even less upon the academic intercourse of these two men.¹⁶⁶ Considering Greville’s assertion that the British luminary Ruskin was among MacDonald’s four closest friends – the others being Scott, Maurice, and Greville Matheson – this is a notable oversight.¹⁶⁷ (192) In consequence there is a vast amount of exploration yet to be done of which the perimeters of this thesis only allow a passing acknowledgement. The present purpose is not to assess what MacDonald has to say in response to Ruskin, where he agrees and disagrees with Ruskin’s writing – that is another (and vast) project altogether. The intent here is to establish that there is indeed an engagement, and that it should no longer be ignored as it is an engagement that lends critical insight to MacDonald studies and to MacDonald’s mythopoeic expression. The current focus enables

¹⁶⁶ Any focus has been upon the “La Touche affair” and even that has not received sufficient attention, although Raeper devotes to it a few pages.

¹⁶⁷ To each of these men MacDonald dedicated a book. He also published some of Matheson’s poetry, together with some of his own and his brother John’s, after both men had died: *A Threefold Cord: Poems by Three Friends* (1883).

deeper comprehension of MacDonald's own understanding of Story and its transformative power, for his absolute insistence upon the essentially relational nature of Story is borne out in this relationship. The result is the crafting of a tale cited more than any other for its mythopoeic power, the essence of which will be explored in the final chapter. This current chapter presents some of MacDonald's early and Scott-directed engagement with Dante, and shows that passion as an important aspect of MacDonald's relationship with Ruskin. This provides the would-be critic with an interpretive key, the significance of which is here introduced, but which will be more fully displayed when examining how MacDonald both responds to and builds upon the literary vision proffered in the *Commedia* through the text of *Lilith*. It becomes evident in this chapter that a broader familiarity with MacDonald's corpus can give an indication of authorial intent, and also reveals MacDonald's persistent passion for certain relationally-oriented themes taught by his mentors and compounded by reflection on his youth – most notably, those of divine inspiration and the enduring possibility of transformation. Accountable to Scott's assertion that one needs to consider an author of a text – rather than a text in isolation – to adequately critique that text, this chapter gives attention to a pre-*Lilith* novel that is quite explicit in its engagement with Ruskin, and more self-expository than *Lilith*. Using *The Seaboard Parish* as a supporting text further explains MacDonald's relationship with Ruskin and in doing so further illuminates MacDonald's writing. The recurrent images and themes shared between *Seaboard* and *Lilith* present a challenge to some critical assessments of the latter – most notably whether *Lilith* is Christian in design and intent. Manlove points out how the critical trend has been to view *Lilith* through a Jungian reading (*Circles* 80), yet again this thesis asserts that to engage with psychoanalytic readings before considering MacDonald's work contextually, and before taking his own *Weltanschauung* into account, not only can occasion readings antithetical to his purported beliefs but may also belie the creative complexity of his texts. This chapter furthers the proposal of the thesis by displaying how a recognition of MacDonald's engagement with both the person and the texts of Ruskin will better equip critical study of MacDonald, and in doing so it further establishes MacDonald's passion for mythopoeic revelation through the medium of relational writing.

Section I: Contexture: Recognizing the status of Dante's *Commedia* in Victorian Britain, and specifically the relationships MacDonald and Ruskin have with the text

Cast the fancy free in the spiritual world and faithfully follow out such masters of that world as Dante and Spenser.

Modern Painters III, viii, sec 7

i) Cultural Context

In the early nineteenth century there was a surge in English readers of Dante, aided by a revival in Grand Tours and interest in things Italian. The arrival of Italian political exiles (some were intimates of Scott and MacDonald) increased the intrigue. (Brand 3) For reasons both of fashion and of health, many British literati visited Italy, and returned with a greater understanding of and interest in its art and literature: Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, Turner, Ruskin, etc.¹⁶⁸ (3) But critics suggest that elemental to the spreading of Dante's British fame was the discovery by Coleridge of the 1814 translation of the *Commedia*, by Revd. Henry Francis Cary. Victorian scholar Alison Milbank describes the translation as "one of the most culturally significant productions of nineteenth-century Britain," (29) and when Coleridge – determined to have Dante read in England – gave strong public endorsements in 1818, Cary's translation became widely popular.¹⁶⁹ (Brand 55; Kuhns 178) Shelley – claiming that the apotheosis of Beatrice was "the most glorious imagination of modern poetry" (Kuhns 180) – first studied the *Commedia* by aid of Cary's work, before engaging in his own translation; later, Keats and Ruskin carried Cary's version on their person, ready to hand. (Milbank 30) As a result, critical writing on Dante also began to increase. John Taaffe published the first English commentary on the *Commedia* in 1822, and when the Italian exile Foscolo published his *Discorso sul Testo della Commedia di Dante* (1825) (the same text that Scott borrowed from Mazzini), he further "raised the level of Dante criticism." (Brand 58) Dante – in name at least – was becoming ensconced in British criticism and consciousness.

Coleridge acknowledged that Dante could be difficult, but revealed his regard by persistently revisiting challenging passages annually, for over a decade – determined to comprehend. (Kuhns 178) Such esteem for Dante in one so admired by A.J. Scott should not pass without remark. Nor should Coleridge's specific citing of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* to support his theories of poetic diction: the concepts within Dante's argument for writing in the vernacular resonated greatly with

¹⁶⁸ Few learned the language and customs; interaction with locals or their Catholic Church was generally scorned. (Brand 12)

¹⁶⁹ Eric Brown regards Coleridge's 1818 Dante lecture as "one of the most significant landmarks in the popularizing of the Italian epic." (645-6) Milbank argues that Foscolo's article on Dante in the *Edinburgh Review* was of equal import. (17)

the perspectives and unusual practice of both Scott and MacDonald, for reasons already established. Coleridge's revisions of *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are, as MacDonald's revisions of *Lilith*, infused with the *Commedia*'s influence¹⁷⁰ – and MacDonald's later study of Coleridge's revisions (currently held in the Aberdeen University Archives) display his thorough knowledge of Coleridge's literary engagement with Dante's concepts and symbols.¹⁷¹

In *The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth Century England*, Brand writes that though Dante's reputation was now "firmly established" amongst scholars, the public interest facilitated through Coleridge and Cary's translation waned in the 1830s (Coleridge died in 1834) – interestingly, this is the period in which Scott begins giving the lectures that so frequently encourage attention to Dante. (71) Enmeshed with the tapering public interest was a trend over which MacDonald himself expressed frustration: while the intrigue of *Inferno* did compel some readers, not many continued beyond that, most "finding the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* tedious for their Catholic theologizing and in condemning [the] mixture of ancient history with modern, and of the sacred with the fabulous." (Brand 71) In *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin also comments that while few educated persons in England "do not profess to admire Dante," negligible numbers had actually read him. (Norton 97) Certain scenes or themes acquired "fashionable appeal" – perhaps the most famous being that of the damned lovers, Paolo and Francesca – but this only required cursory knowledge of Dante; for many the *Commedia* became little more than a tool for allusion, albeit a fashionable one. (69) Popular artists kept this intrigue as part of the national psyche for some time: a topic to which Alison Milbank has addressed an entire critical study. Scott persisted in lecturing on Dante through the 1840s and 1850s, convinced that the text in its entirety deserved to be lodged in the public consciousness; a truncated version betrayed the text – especially if leaving readers in the realm of the damned. Indeed for such as Scott and MacDonald it was that very "mixture of ancient history with modern, and of the sacred with the fabulous," apparently so tedious to the (un-storied) modern audience, that they believed so necessary to apprehend. At varying levels of depth, engagements with Dante were conducted by such as Leigh Hunt, Gosse, Leighton, Watts, Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and the Rossetti siblings.¹⁷² In 1866 – not long after Scott's death – Cary's translation again captured the public imagination, this time accompanied by Gustav Doré's illustrations. This version became incredibly popular and graced "many a Victorian parlour

¹⁷⁰ Brown elucidates these 'Dantean' revisions, and corrects Brand's oversights, noting specifically the emergence of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* during Coleridge's close study of the *Commedia*. (648-8)

¹⁷¹ As far as I know, these remain unexamined.

¹⁷² Dante Rossetti received both his name and his interest from his Italian scholar father, who taught at Maurice's University College London – his brother William translated *Inferno* in 1865.

table.”¹⁷³ (Milbank 227) Milbank explains that the combination came “to supplant even *Paradise Lost* as the epic by which the nineteenth century sought to understand itself.” (222) The following year Longfellow’s translation of the *Commedia* (admired by Ruskin) was available for comparative reading. (Hilton 140) By 1886, MacDonald’s favoured translation by Plumptre – Maurice’s brother-in-law – was but one of many. ‘Readings’ of Dante also became popular, such as that published at the end of the century by MacDonald’s life-long friend Emelia Russell, the disciple of Erskine and Scott, who facilitated MacDonald’s first London lectures.¹⁷⁴ The *Commedia* itself may not have been widely studied, but it became nonetheless an established cultural presence.

ii) Dante & MacDonald

Considering the respect in which A.J. Scott was held as a passionate Dante scholar and the general interest expressed in the poet by other artists and writers whom MacDonald admired – in addition to the Dantean themes personally relevant to MacDonald – it should come as no surprise that Dante, just as Isaiah, pervades the corpus of MacDonald’s work. Despite Joseph Johnson’s claim that MacDonald seldom lectured on Dante (a comment repeated in subsequent biographies¹⁷⁵), MacDonald actually gave many lectures on the Italian poet – not only in England, Scotland, and Ireland, but also in Italy. (98) Having lived much of the last nearly thirty years of his life in Italy, MacDonald was fluent in the language, and friendly with nationals. He appears to have first lectured on Dante once his family began wintering regularly in Italy in the late 1870s. (*Art* 97) By this time many of his friends and acquaintances had explored Dante in pen and on canvas, and he was well acquainted with the original Italian text. In an 1890 lecture on the nature of the great poets, after addressing Chaucer and Shakespeare, MacDonald stated that Dante “excelled them both in intensity.” (Amell 7) He considered the *Commedia* – “taking it altogether” – “the most marvellous of poems that he knew, except the book of Job.” (“Dante’s Divine” 11) Amell quotes a report of him explaining at a lecture:

The *Divinia Commedia* was the first great – the only great – Italian poem, and the man who wrote it was a man to be placed beside Shakespeare, only in a different way.... Dante would have written a great poem wherever he had been, and in whatever circumstances he was; but the special kind of poem was greatly influenced by the condition of his country at the time – a little republic, in the midst of other countries, frequently at war between themselves, and with it. (97)

¹⁷³ Ruskin did not like Doré’s work. (*Fors* 11)

¹⁷⁴ *Dante’s pilgrim’s progress* (1893).

¹⁷⁵ Possibly perpetuated by MacDonald’s statement in 1867 that “I never lectured upon Dante for the best and worst of reasons – that I am incapable of doing so.” (qtd Peel 9) This underscores the importance of biographical familiarity, as MacDonald eventually *did* feel able.

MacDonald's emphasis on how Dante's environment shaped his work reiterates a familiar emphasis, as does his clear re-articulation of Balbo's concept of responding to and building upon the work of those who have gone before. Also mirrored here is Balbo's conviction that such an intentional relationship with these stories of the past must produce ever more beautiful expressions of things divine: "If we have had 600 years more for the idea of Jesus Christ and His love to grow in us than Dante had, we ought surely to be able to build loftier ideas, grander notions of what the glory of God is to His children than Dante could." (99) MacDonald is assured that this is an engagement "out of which ever varying meanings will grow for different [recipients] in different ages." (*CSL Letters* 271) As mentioned previously, Dante was the only non-British poet upon whom MacDonald lectured – emphasizing just how important MacDonald (like Coleridge and Scott before him) thought it was that the British public become better acquainted with the *Commedia*.

MacDonald's lectures on Dante help elucidate some of what is in MacDonald's literature. Reports of his popular "Talk About Dante," given in Scotland and Ireland only two months after the date on the first *Lilith* manuscript, record MacDonald's stated intent to inspire his listeners to read the *Commedia* themselves. ("On Dante" 7) His preference was that they do so in the original, but if that was not possible he recommended Plumptre's translation. (8) Usually at lectures MacDonald would carry a text with the work of the author he was discussing, but when speaking on Dante it seems that quotations were given from memory: reports claim that he gave "an exhaustive descriptive analysis." (7) By 1890 he had spent many decades with the work. Amell writes that when giving a series of lectures on various poets, MacDonald would save Dante for the last, often proclaiming that he "liked to begin at the bottom of the stair, and ascend." (7) An apt allusion. While his lectures were usually between ninety minutes and two hours, the lecture on Dante seems to have typically spanned three evenings – yet with audiences no less attentive. (7) The Chairman at the end of a series at an Irish college in 1891 asserted that he "did not know another lecture which could have drawn on a Saturday night such a large audience as that, nor did he know any other lecturer who could have held such an audience spell-bound for almost two hours." (8) Aware of the tendency to read only the *Inferno* (if even that) MacDonald insisted that he would not give the lectures at all if only discussion of the *Inferno* was desired; he was not averse to discussing *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso* independently but, he said, "it was a most unpleasant thought that most people in this country who began to read Dante began – and most frequently ended – with the *Inferno*. They very often did not read through it; and that he did not so much mind, but he did mind that they did not go beyond it, for, powerful in the extreme as the *Inferno* was, one

did not know Dante from reading it only.” (8) He desired to address, not condone, an interest that was arrested in development – a matter of specific import when looking at the influence of the *Commedia* upon *Lilith*, for it appears that MacDonald begins his text exactly where much of his audience would have left off: on the doorstep of Purgatory.

Within MacDonald’s corpus of work, explicit references to and discussions of Dante abound – at least twenty-two of the published works explicitly refer to Dante by name.¹⁷⁶ His very first collection of poetry – published in 1857 – begins with a quotation from the *Commedia*’s introduction. Additionally, the references to Dante in MacDonald’s later spoken sermons are frequent: “I am speaking now of what one of the greatest men said six hundred years ago. ‘Do you not know,’ Dante says, ‘that you are worms that are meant to go forth as the angelic butterfly? Why are you content to be unborn in the cocoon?’” (11) As early as *Elginbrod* (1863), the greater part of a chapter is concerned with the protagonist translating passages from Dante. The chapter, entitled “Italian,” begins with an epigraph from Dante: *Per me si va nella città dolente* (“Through me thou goest into the city of grief”). As the protagonist struggles with mixed motivations and true delight in the discovery of Dante, the scenario shows the irony that his obsessive studies of this particularly relational text are isolating the young boy whom he loves, and whom he should be teaching.¹⁷⁷ Ensuing discussions of the challenges of adequately translating the *Commedia*’s terza rima indicate that MacDonald had faced the struggle himself. When in *Cumbermede* the characters discuss Dante, the interaction occurs most aptly in Chapter XXXIII.¹⁷⁸ While Dante is mentioned several times in *Annals*, perhaps the most important reference is in regard to Uncle Stoddart. MacDonald makes considerable effort to show how Stoddart is a scholar obsessed with books and acquisition of knowledge – but he cares little for people, let alone for applying what he has learned in his books to his relationship with people. He is almost a proto-type for *Lilith*’s Vane, who comes to realize: “To understand is not more wonderful than to love.” (57) Thus it is hardly incidental that Stoddart has been reading Dante when Walton calls him out of himself, to help others...nor that this is the beginning of a dramatic life-change (of learning to build relationships) for Scott. The sequel to this novel, *The Seaboard Parish*, is full of Dantean references – as well as, as will be explored further, references to Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*. The long discussion with a young painter named Percivale about his rendition of Dante’s Purgatory rock, and the inclusion of further translation from the Italian will also be

¹⁷⁶ *Poems* (1857), *Elginbrod* (1863), *Annals* (1865-66), *Falconer* (1866-67), *Seaboard* (1867-68), *Antiphon* (1868), *BNW* (1868-70), *WC* (1870-71), *GPW* (1872), *Malcolm* (1875), *MM* (1881), *Orts* (1882), *WMM* (1886), *Home Again* (1887), *EL* (1888), *US III* (1889), *RS* (1889-90), *T&B* (1889-90), *Hope* (1892), *Poetical* (1893), *H&S* (1893), *Lilith* (1895), *SWF* (1897).

¹⁷⁷ Hugh teaches himself the Latin with just a dictionary, a grammar, and a New Testament.

¹⁷⁸ Thirty-three being the number with which Dante repeatedly plays throughout the *Commedia*.

addressed. Perhaps one of MacDonald's most familiar passages referring to Dante is that found in *Back of the North Wind*, in which Dante is given an old version of his name: *Durante*, which, the narrator tells us: "means Lasting, for his books will last as long as there are enough men in the world worthy of having them."¹⁷⁹ The reader is explicitly encouraged to make comparisons and contrasts between young Diamond and his ancient 'dimension-crossing' predecessor. Considerably extensive referencing and discussion of the *Commedia* also appears in two collections of written sermons: *Unspoken Sermons III* (1889) and *Hope of the Gospel* (1892) – the proximity of these dates to the creation of *Lilith* (begun circa 1890, published 1895) is important, as are the lectures MacDonald was giving on Dante during this period.

Clearly MacDonald has been misleadingly quoted as feeling unable to lecture on Dante – while that may have been the case early in his career, he obviously reached a point at which he felt capable to follow the footsteps of Scott. Since the beginning of his writing career he had, at least implicitly, been exegeting the works of the great poet, and before long he was following Scott's lead in lectures as well, with the same intent and desire of drawing his listeners into the great company of readers.

iii) Dante & Ruskin (and the world into which they drew MacDonald)

Ruskin too was fascinated with Dante, calling him "the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest," and he references, discusses, and adulates Dante throughout his corpus. (Norton 3) The Dante scholar and Ruskin disciple Charles Norton declares: "No other great English writer has shown such familiarity with the Divine Comedy as Mr Ruskin," adding, "perhaps no book, with exception of the Bible, was his more constant companion." (340; 97) More than a century later, Ruskin scholar Tim Hilton concurs. (588) Milbank, calling Ruskin "Dante's champion," suggests that the poet's work was so crucial for Ruskin that he applied not only his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bible as a lens through which to read and understand other narratives and events, but that he used Dante's *Commedia* in like fashion, "as if it too were some sort of biblical commentary." (6; 29) This insight is important to remember when considering Ruskin's relation to MacDonald's use of Dante in *Lilith*. Milbank suggests that Dante provides an episteme for Ruskin: a way of first seeing and knowing, and then of imposing order and design upon experience. (30) Certainly Ruskin's writing continuously encourages attention to Dante,

¹⁷⁹ As the very first line of the ubiquitous Cary-Doré edition explained that Dante was an abbreviation of "Durante or Durando," Victorian readers would have recognized the allusion. (Cary vii)

particularly *Purgatorio*, and after 1845 all Ruskin's publications but one reference him. (*Comments* v) In 1855 Ruskin asked Rossetti to paint him a seven piece series on Dante's *Purgatorio*.¹⁸⁰ Ruskin also designed his garden at Brantwood to replicate Dante's 'Purgatorial mount,' detailing even the zigzagged path. (Illingworth 220) Repeatedly Dante is Ruskin's standard for a true artist and a provider of illustration and allusion – not only in his texts, but also in his personal life. In fact, in the difficult year of 1867 Ruskin called his life – in parody of Dante's *Vita Nuova* – “*Morte nuova*.” (248) This perspective is exacerbated after his beloved Rose passes Ruskin on the streets of London without acknowledging him, in 1869: from this point Ruskin views their relationship in terms of Dante and Beatrice. (Leon 478) Hilton notes that as Rose fades in illness, Ruskin turns yet even more to Dante, as clearly evidenced in *Fors Clavera*: “Ruskin's commentary is full of his deep reading of the Italian. It is also personal, for his remarks seem to be addressed to the girl in Ireland, wasted to thinness ‘like the reeds of the lake of Purgatory,’ whose expected death would soon gather her into the transcendental world that Dante revealed to Ruskin.”¹⁸¹ (248-249) Scott's lectures had highlighted the search in the *Commedia* after a spiritual peace that transcended outward circumstances – Ruskin sought the same.

This man so personally shaped by Dante was introduced to MacDonald by Scott – not at first in person but, as described earlier, through Scott's review of the “Oxford Graduate's” *Modern Painters*. MacDonald's immediate enthusiasm for the text was manifested in his choosing it for his engagement gift. Within weeks of formal introduction a few years later, Ruskin gifted MacDonald with the entire set of *Modern Painters*, in the original green morocco binding. (Greville 329) Clearly *Modern Painters* was foundational in their early acquaintance. In addition to Dante, the men shared a passion for Herbert – rare at the time, claims Hilton – and Euclid, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Walter Scott. (84; 195) They also shared a deep love of Scotland.¹⁸² Their mutual admiration for and love of A.J. Scott was a conclusive seal. Like MacDonald, Ruskin avidly read the reprints of Scott's lectures – even while traveling: “a mode of passing the day which makes the hours seem short.” (*Winnington* 110; 109) In 1855 Ruskin had lectured for Scott in Manchester, and letters indicate that he was attending – and enjoying “immensely” – numerous of Scott's lectures as well as dining in his home and meeting his friends. (*Winnington* 37; 347; 453; 530) On one occasion (in 1863) when both Ruskin and the Scotts were at Winnington Hall, Ruskin writes to his father: “Mr. Scott to whom nearly all our best divines owe – & confess – their deepest teaching – [is

¹⁸⁰ Reference: www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s74.raw.html; Rossetti only completed two. The Mount-Temples purchased a number of Rossetti's Dantean pieces, thus enabling MacDonald close acquaintance with the works. J. Johnson records MacDonald voicing “keen appreciation of Watts, Burne-Jones, and Rossetti,” and of Rossetti's picture, ‘Dante's Dream.’ (63)

¹⁸¹ Ruskin was almost always responding to some contemporary person within his writing.

¹⁸² Cf. *Ruskin's Scottish Heritage*, Viljoen. Ruskin declared to MacDonald: “you are never so eloquent as when you are talking about Scotland.” (Greville 355)

here] but he is very weak & ill – & comes here only to rest.” (418) Scott tells Ruskin on this visit about some of the Manchester cotton barons who are actually caring well for their employees during the ‘cotton famine’ – and Ruskin repeats to his father: “the men get to love them like clan-chiefs.” (419) During the crafting of the fifth and final volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin remarks in a letter that Scott’s concept of beauty has shaped his own; the text itself includes the acknowledgement that “in writing this volume [Ruskin] had received particular help from Scott’s writings.”¹⁸³ (*Winnington* 131) It is no wonder then that *Modern Painters*, first endorsed and then influenced by Scott, should assume a prominent role in the relationship of these devoted new friends.

As had Scott, Ruskin widely increased MacDonald’s circle of friendships with artists and authors in London.¹⁸⁴ The Pre-Raphaelite crowd and their associates became a part of London life for the MacDonalds. Arthur Hughes regularly illustrated MacDonald’s work – over two hundred pieces (McInnis 73) – and his nephew Edward Hughes was later engaged to MacDonald’s daughter Mary (herself a frequent model for paintings). Alexander Munro would use Greville for the ‘Boy and Dolphin’ statue that still stands in Kensington Park, and make a medallion of MacDonald’s profile (now in Huntly). Sculptor George A. Lawson would craft a bust of MacDonald in 1870, and the entire MacDonald family posed many times for Charles Dodgson’s portrait photography – in addition to encouraging him to publish his *Alice* manuscript.¹⁸⁵ Madox Brown would rent a house to them, and George du Maurier would move into 12 Earl’s Terrace as they moved out. William Morris bought their busily hospitable home ‘The Retreat’ when they moved more permanently to Bordighera, Italy – and there in Italy Jane Morris would leave money for the MacDonalds to distribute as they best saw fit. There too, others such as Georgiana Burne-Jones would flee for retreat with the MacDonalds, protected from the world’s cares.¹⁸⁶ Ellen Terry, Forbes-Robertson, and Miss Cushman were among the acting friends who gathered around the family and in their home. It is no wonder they were sometimes referred to as Bohemian. The fact that recognizing such relationships can impact critical reading of MacDonald is readily illustrated by the following:

MacDonald lived a life of almost total isolation from his intellectual and social milieu [...he] lived from the resources of his family and his own spirit rather than from any wider community. This partly explains how he could write works so obscure and severed in

¹⁸³ Ruskin originally included an extract from Scott, but the final edit required paring out most extracts. (Burd 251) He did send Scott a specially bound edition. (262) Presumably Scott’s engravings for *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* were also from Ruskin. (176)

¹⁸⁴ Not only in the short term: one of Ruskin’s art students and copyists married MacDonald’s son Ronald. (568 Viljoen)

¹⁸⁵ Letter August 17 1870, from “W.M”, Kings Archives.

¹⁸⁶ Beinecke series 1/ 2/109; Beinecke series 1/ 1/ 50

character from those of his contemporaries. It may also explain why his work does not do the Victorian “thing” and evolve, change in character or treat new ideas. Indeed the very fact that he ends his career with a work not dissimilar in basic form from one of his earliest underlies this; it also closes the circle of his literary life just as he himself lived in a sense in a circle of his own.”¹⁸⁷ (Circle 56)

That MacDonald lived in any sort of isolation can no longer be contended. As to the challenge of an isolated and stagnant corpus, it is hoped these chapters will also give adequate response. But what is of primary import in recognizing the breadth of MacDonald’s active and inclusive community is that he – indeed, his entire family – invited into friendship many who did not fit comfortably, or at all, into a traditional Victorian church context. The result was that many persons who were struggling with Christian faith, or who were downright antagonistic towards it, felt comfortable in discussing their state of mind with MacDonald (or indeed, felt comfortable not discussing it). Many others came to him, as well as to his writings, with the desire of deepening their faith; they believed that engagement with his *Weltanschauung* would assist this. Multiple accounts indicate that all were welcome.¹⁸⁸ MacDonald was following the practiced hospitality of his mentors: what Erskine and Scott were to Carlyle, Scott and MacDonald were to Ruskin – as well as to many others introduced to MacDonald through his friendship with Ruskin.

¹⁸⁷ Manlove was undoubtedly limited by the lack of primary material; access to archives has since increased exponentially. However the declaration continues to be imbibed. Conversely Amell, who has researched (and reproduced) the illustration of MacDonald’s work extensively, surmises that there is “no other author who collaborated with as many Victorian artists as George MacDonald.” (“John Pettie” 9)

¹⁸⁸ The archives at Beinecke, Kings, Wheaton and elsewhere are full of letters to and from such persons – celebrities and general public alike.

Section II: Confraters: Establishing the close personal and literary relationship between MacDonald and Ruskin

*There had been one point on which we especially agreed –
that a true knowledge of the present, in literature, as in everything else,
could only be founded upon a knowledge of what had gone before;
therefore, that any judgment, in regard to the literature of the present day,
was of no value which was not guided and influenced by a real acquaintance
with the best of what had gone before,
being liable to be dazzled and misled by novelty of form
and other qualities which,
whatever might be the real worth of the substance,
were, in themselves, purely ephemeral.*
(Seaboard)

- i) Conscious Care
- ii) Conscious Conversation

i) Conscious Care

Considering how seriously Greville stresses the relationship between Ruskin and MacDonald, considering that Ruskin gave critical editorial reviews of MacDonald's works-in-progress, and considering that MacDonald explicitly referenced Ruskin's work within his texts, it is almost startling that scholarship has given the relationship so little attention – for unlike Scott, information on Ruskin proliferates, and there is no shortage of his writings.¹⁸⁹ The biographical information available suggests that much closer textual attention is warranted (greatly evidenced at the King's London and Yale Beinecke archives). While Ruskin biographer Tim Hilton does give some time and attention to the relationship between his subject and MacDonald, it is clear that Hilton holds little respect for MacDonald, and his information is full of blatant factual errors and even self-contradictions.¹⁹⁰ As already indicated, mutual interests aside, the care Ruskin and MacDonald shared for Scott and the esteem in which they held him was itself a unifying matter. But an independent relationship was quickly established. Ruskin was exceedingly generous to the MacDonalds, as he had been to the Scotts¹⁹¹ – “you can not give me a greater privilege than you can by letting me help you” – and just as with the Scotts, the MacDonald family as a whole embraced the intense man.¹⁹² (*Winnington* 499; *Leon* 354-5) Both Ruskin and MacDonald scholars

¹⁸⁹ Beinecke archives credit Greville for providing much of the material that enabled Leon's classic text, *Ruskin: The Great Victorian* (1949). Greville is one of the three men to whom the book is dedicated.

¹⁹⁰ This does not dismiss the usefulness of Hilton's text – it does, however, necessitate frequent corroboration of information.

¹⁹¹ MacDonald writes to Scott: “Ruskin is very kind to me in every way – begs me to apply to him when I want help and has helped me already. He is coming a little out of his troubles I think.” (*Letters* 152) The following year Ruskin writes to MacDonald with a prescribed Switzerland itinerary: “I feel wonderfully like an old man of the world writing to his boy going out for his first happy holidays.” (*Kings* 1/1/32) Ruskin also helped finance Scott's final trip. (*Whitehouse* 69)

¹⁹² Greville's biography and archived letters include numerous supporting accounts. (i.e. *Kings* 1/2/3)

are aware of the reconciliatory role MacDonald and Louisa found themselves in as Ruskin and his longed-for Rose La Touche went through years of separation and anguish, ending only with Rose's death. The MacDonalds and their long-term friends the Mount-Temples (Ruskin himself had been friends with the Mount-Temples for many years¹⁹³) provided the two homes in which both of these tragic lovers felt at ease, and some of their most positive engagements occurred in the safety of these places.¹⁹⁴ Yet little attention has been paid to the many and moving letters written by Rose to "Mother-bird" MacDonald and her husband, let alone those written by Ruskin himself.¹⁹⁵ The MacDonald family letters contain many references to the care that even the MacDonald children had for Ruskin and his Rose. But these letters reach far beyond insight into the "La Touche affair": they corroborate Greville's claim of a very deep friendship between his father and Ruskin.¹⁹⁶ In the years after Ruskin's plunge into agnosticism (1858) he sent moving letters to MacDonald opining that if only he could believe that the God MacDonald speaks of truly existed, he would be content.¹⁹⁷ In one letter he apologizes for turning down the honour of being a godfather to MacDonald's son Maurice, claiming that he already has too many and feels that in his current faith struggle he should not accept the responsibility.¹⁹⁸ Early in their correspondences he apologizes to MacDonald that he can only use terms of endearment for one person (Rose), yet it is not long before his "MacDonald," turns into "My dear MacDonald," and his "Ruskin" into "Ever lovingly Yours." (Kings 1/1/30, ff) Even when Ruskin is feeling dejected and void of emotion, he is eager to receive MacDonald's care and understanding.¹⁹⁹ In 1870 he writes to Georgiana Mount-Temple: "If Mr. MacDonald is with you, give him my love. – I do love him, he has been very true to me." (Bradley 256)

¹⁹³ For a time Ruskin even had his own 'apartment' at their stately home. William was an executor of Ruskin's will, and a Trustee of the Guild of St George. (Hilton 469)

¹⁹⁴ In 1866 Ruskin proposed to Rose, and for the next decade their relationship was traumatic and unresolved – Rose was unsure and vastly troubled by Ruskin's loss of faith, and her parents continuously intervened, fuelled by slander from Ruskin's first wife. As early as February 16, 1865, Ruskin writes to MacDonald that Rose had told him: "you were the only person she thought, who could do me any good." (Kings 1/ 1/31) On March 7, he asks MacDonald to break off relations with Mrs. La Touche: "So that I do not think you can ~~and~~ well and rightly continue that woman's friend and mine. And mine you must be, whatever you think or do in this." (Kings 1/1/36)

¹⁹⁵ Ruskin adopts Rose's terms for Louisa, writing when in deep despair: "I forget everything, even what the mother-bird told me she had written in the little prayer-book. Will you please send me that accurately." (Kings 1/1/47)

¹⁹⁶ Greville writes of the deep mutual care evidenced in the vast correspondence – yet he was forbidden by Ruskin's "literary executor" to reference most of that resource, and it was afterwards destroyed. (*Reminiscences* 328; 97)

¹⁹⁷ Cf. 12 January 1866, which mentions Scott's death. Ruskin sounds remarkably depressed and quite resigned to his disbelief. Although Hilton claims Ruskin "never ceased to believe that the Christian God was his maker and that Jesus Christ was his saviour," some of Ruskin's letters to MacDonald indicate otherwise – not the least in calling himself a Pagan. While Ruskin is best described as frequently being in a state of struggle with Christian faith, it must be accepted that at times he did put himself outside of that faith altogether – not just traditional practices of it. This does not, however, detract from Hilton's assertion: "He loved the Bible, and a full study of his Biblical references would reveal [a remarkable] sensitivity." (170)

¹⁹⁸ Cf. April 13, 1864: "I am so glad you would like me for your little Maurice's [god] father – but – look here -: first, I'm a Pagan.... (Kings 1/1/28) The final appointment was to the boy's name-source.

¹⁹⁹ For example: "I understand you perfectly – and shall be very grateful for all the love – and expression of it you can give me – only I've no love, to speak of, to give in return – but some sympathy and I really think, entire understanding, so that you need never ~~think~~ shrink from saying you like me if you do, only you know I never believe anybody can possibly like me." (Kings 1/1/29)

Mention of Ruskin throughout both Greville's text and archived letters indicate that he was a regular in the MacDonald family activities for quite some time. The depiction of him dancing at one of their multi-class fêtes, with his disciple Octavia Hill, is a memorable one. (381) It also illustrates the fun and relaxation Ruskin enjoyed with the large family (so different from his own solitary childhood), as well as the multi-faceted interests shared. Ruskin's work with Hill was momentous in England's history of social action and historic preservation – natural developments of some of Scott's concerns to which Ruskin invested a portion of his inheritance (Kraus 5) (Hill's social work specifically echoed Chalmers' example and ethos, and the MacDonalds actively contributed to and helped facilitate that work, enveloping Hill as well into their family fun and care.) Ruskin further enabled the MacDonald family's engagement with his intellectual work by sending them tickets to his lectures (i.e. Beinecke letters, Feb 7, 1864), and Greville recalls family discussions of *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1884) as each issue came out. (329) On his visits Ruskin seems frequently to have borne gifts to the MacDonald family – the ones Greville mentions are hardly negligible: a grand piano for instance (a bust of Haydn was lost en route). The gifts themselves often indicated something of the nature of Ruskin and MacDonald's relationship: amongst the books (some specifically for the children) and in addition to the leather-bound *Modern Painters*, was a gold-embossed Virgil (that guide of Dante); amongst the art-work were some engravings by Turner.²⁰⁰ Most striking – and of critical interest – was a valuable antique ring of late Greek Art that bore the figure of Psyche: the mythological symbol of transformation to which MacDonald referred throughout his corpus, and which he traced, as will be discussed, from Grecian myth through to Paul, and on through Dante and Blake as well. The fascination was shared: Ruskin scholar Van Akin Burd notes that one of Ruskin's "favourite metaphors in viewing his life was that of a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis." (11) It is a metaphor, a symbol, that both men use repeatedly. No wonder Greville names this Psyche ring as one of MacDonald's most treasured possessions. (423) The gift, and the value MacDonald placed on it, is indicative of the passions the men shared and the depth of their friendship.

Although their relationship may have initially been shaped by MacDonald's admiration for Ruskin, Ruskin makes clear that the respect quickly became mutual. Just as in Scott, Ruskin found in MacDonald the supposed anomaly of someone passionate in his love of God, yet abhorrent of

²⁰⁰ The provenance of the Virgil is the Wade Center in Wheaton, Illinois. Inside the cover is inscribed: "George MacDonald/ with John Ruskin's love./ 1864" Below that is written: "Greville Matheson MacDonald/ from his Father./ Janry. 20, 1871." The Turners rather overwhelmed MacDonald: "My dear Ruskin, I do not know how to thank you for those beautiful books, – so valuable & useful if indeed that is not one and the same thing! And for the engravings from Turner – I do not deserve such exquisite things. But I am indeed delighted to possess them, I fancy so much better than any engravings of his I have seen before, simply from their perfectness – they are so new and fresh. We shall all enjoy them greatly, & thank you often and often." (Beinecke 1/1/30) MacDonald would discuss these engravings with his children, "so that as children we came to understand something of Turner's genius." (Greville 381)

many aspects of the restrictive and damning faith expressed by his mother – and which had finally repelled Ruskin. And as with Scott, Ruskin found in MacDonald openness to hard questions and an acceptance of uncertainty. He found a protestant Christian as well-versed in Biblical typology as his mother had ensured he was, and yet one who loved art and literature and even held regard for the myths that pre-dated Christ.²⁰¹ He found someone who had lived his entire life surrounded by the controversies of theological dissension and disruption, and who thus had no expectation that people would have their faith completely ‘sorted,’ let alone that they must share identical theological convictions with himself as proof of their authenticity or worth. He found also a man whose scholarship as well as art of writing he could respect. Ruskin described MacDonald’s *Diary of an Old Soul* (1880) as one of the three great religious poems of the past century – and, in one of his Oxford Lectures, called it “the best example of the survival of faith in this sceptical age.” (This latter comment, and the interest it aroused, appears to be responsible for the public printing of the poem, although MacDonald forbade its use in advertising.) (Greville 340, 497; Gillies 60) When writing a testimonial for MacDonald for the Chair of Rhetoric at Edinburgh, Ruskin wrote: “of all the literary men I know, I think you most love literature itself; the others love themselves and the expression of themselves; but you enjoy your own art, and the art of others, when it is fine.” (Beinecke 1/3/127) To this high commendation Ruskin added, “I am always glad to hear you lecture myself – and if I had a son, I would rather he took his lessons in literary taste under you than under any person I know, for you would make him more than a scholar, a living and thoughtful reader.”

No small praise that. The height of accolade for a devotee of Scott, and a striking acknowledgement of MacDonald’s extraordinary scholastic abilities – Ruskin, by the date of this letter, knew most of the literati of Britain, and many in Europe. Those he had not met, he had read. Such admiration was proffered regardless of the fact that Ruskin and MacDonald did not always agree: it was a relationship that challenged and sharpened, and shared.²⁰² Ruskin makes no

²⁰¹ According to Hilton Ruskin had begun his career believing it “his Christian duty to attack Greek culture.” But as he began to question his restrictive upbringing, and study more of the myths of the ancient world, this changed. Hints appear in works such as *MP III*, but Hilton claims that at this point: “more often they were kept to conversations with friends. Such friends were usually artists: they were not churchmen.” (*Vol. I* 274) Hilton’s comment is necessarily supposition – and indicates that he is not adequately familiar with the Scott-and-MacDonald-type of churchmen that Ruskin knew.

²⁰² For example: “**I also have to regret that I talked conceitedly to you.** But you will forgive me, **and I shall be cured of it in time.**” (Beinecke 1/1/30) Sadler omits the phrases in bold, the resulting implication that MacDonald was apologizing for not feeding Ruskin properly at a fête. Ruskin’s unpublished reply is: “My dear MacDonald when I drew back, when you spoke to me, it was in the sense of my own inferiority to you – of my incapability of giving you the comfort of fellow-feeling in your bright fancy & enjoyment, and of the sort of pity or wonder with which if we travelled together you would see my weariness and coldness – partly from having made what is beautiful to others my field of disappointing toil – and partly & chiefly because I have “la mort clair l’ame.” And yet – so far as I have feeling at all – it would be with you – and if you could just let me have the pleasure of seeing you enjoy yourself – and never mind though I was silent – not letting me chill you or sadden – so as not to require of me the effort to be other than I am. I think it would do – nay – would probably be the best thing that could be done for me.” The letter continues with a request that MacDonald and Lilia join Ruskin on his next trip to Italy. (Kings 1/1/39)

bones about expressing both what he likes and dislikes in MacDonald's novels. The following note is remarkable not only for hints in the content, but as evidence that Ruskin began reading (despite his contrary denial) MacDonald's novels as soon as the friends became acquainted:

David E. is full of noble things and with beautiful little sentences. I can't read it for it is sad to me – all novels are – but I should like Euphie if I were to read it, to be worried to death when she died. I don't care about Margaret a bit. Besides, I being [in] Hugh's pleasantest state of "awake in his coffin" – only care for observations on the clay which I can scratch through the chinks in the lid – and hate to hear of grass and flowers – except fossil. It's all nonsense about Everybody turning good. No one ever turns good who isn't.

June 30, 1863²⁰³ (Kings 1/1/26)

With this note begins a relationship in which Ruskin is invited to engage critically with some of MacDonald's texts before they are even published. (Leon 570) Greville makes specific note of Ruskin's uneasiness with the children's story "The Light Princess" – indicating that MacDonald's Celtic comfort with bodies and sexuality was too broad for the yet-conservative Ruskin. Ruskin did not think this story, with a prince and princess swimming alone together at night, appropriate for publication ("mixed bathing" was still not acceptable in 'proper' society).²⁰⁴ He writes to MacDonald:

You are too pure-minded yourself to feel this – but I assure you the swimming scenes and love scenes [ed. note: kisses on finger tips, and finally once on the lips, are the most 'explicit' scenes] would be to many children seriously harmful – Not that they would have to be cut out – but to be done in a simpler and less telling way. We will chat over this. Pardon my positive way of stating these things – it is my inferiority to you in many noble things which enables me to feel them and prevents you. July 22, 1863 (Kings 1/1/27)

The conversation obviously continued, as Ruskin indicates in a later, undated letter:

Only one word about that question of the passions. I wholly feel with you that the harm done by ignoring them has been fearful. But I think they ought to be approached in a graver and grander manner – than fairy tales – and everything calculated for readers under 14 or 15, should be wholly free of every sexual thought – that afterwards passion should be given in serious and glorious truth – as the great law and sanctification of all bodily life. (Kings 1/1/78)²⁰⁵

²⁰³ *Elginbrod* was published this year.

²⁰⁴ For some time after the turn of the century public beaches retained separate sections for men and for women. (Ferrant 144)

²⁰⁵ MacDonald gives voice through the vicar in *Seaboard* – responding to a woman aptly named Mrs. Bowlder: "I am very ready to be annoyed, even to the loss of my temper, at the urgings of ignoble prudence." (84) Publishers were likewise not keen on what is now one of MacDonald's most frequently published – and illustrated – children's stories. Undaunted he embedded it in *Catheart*. MacDonald's stance is one his Celtic Uncle MacKay also held – MacKay knew that some of Donn's poems would be considered "bordering on impropriety," yet he justifies their publication, marking the difference between cultural impropriety and what is actually immoral – noting the "phraseological liberties" of Chaucer in defense of printing the former. (xlviii) Nonetheless some reviewers alleged "many of the poems are decidedly immoral." (Reid 71)

Later Ruskin realizes that MacDonald has satirized part of his response in *Adela Cathcart* (1864), into the mouth of the disapproving Mrs. Cathcart who believes that “God did not approve of fairy-tales.” (63) He writes in a postscript: “You did make me into Mrs. Cathcart – She says the very things I said about the fairy tale. It’s the only time she’s right in the book, you turned me into her, first and then invented all the wrongs to choke up my poor little right with. I never knew anything so Horrid.”²⁰⁶ (Kings 1/1/28) This recognition by Ruskin of his own words woven into MacDonald’s text – and the manner in which they further challenge Ruskin’s stance as well as his restrictive understanding of the Sacred – is an indication of the nature of their developing literary relationship.

That same year – 1864 – novelist Lucy B. Walford (1845-1915) attended a ‘house lecture’ given by MacDonald in the home of an artist, and she writes of her thrill of spotting “the great Ruskin” in attentive attendance. (48) First she overhears a lively discussion of Shakespeare between the men. Listening in again later she attends to their agreements on the role of imagination in architecture. After this she writes: “They then discussed landscape painting [on which Ruskin was a national authority], and on this head Mr. MacDonald had much to say. He contended that, as a rule, they represented only a particular portion of Nature, but that a true artist would insensibly weave into his picture something of the mood he himself was in while painting it, and that this mood would communicate itself to those looking upon the picture afterwards.” (48) This concept is one MacDonald expounds upon at some length in *Seaboard*, and one that underscores his on-going concern with relationship enabling revelation:

if he be an artist, by which I mean true painter, true poet, or true musician, as the case may be he so isolates and represents them, that we see them – not what nature shows to us, but what nature has shown, to him, determined by his nature and choice. With it is mingled therefore so much of his own individuality, manifested both in this choice and certain modifications determined by his way of working, that you have not only a representation of an aspect of nature, as far as that may be with limited powers and materials, but a revelation of the man's own mind and nature. [...] Every man is such a convex mirror [...] the human mirrors being all differently formed, vary infinitely in what they would thus represent of the same scene. I have been greatly interested in looking alternately over the shoulders of two artists, both sketching in colour the same, absolutely the same scene, both trying to represent it with all

²⁰⁶ Ruskin confesses that he is full of “awfully wicket [sic] humour.” This is also the letter in which he demurs being a godfather, though he admits that: “I wish with all my heart I had your Maurice instead of any of my four.”

the truth in their power. How different, notwithstanding, the two representations came out!
(196)²⁰⁷

Clearly the topics with which MacDonald engaged Ruskin in person he also carried on within more than one of his texts – and it appears that Ruskin was well aware of this. It is probable that the conversation went both ways.

ii) Conscious Conversation

By the early 1890s, during which time *Lilith* was crafted, Ruskin had gone through a dramatic crisis in health – physical, emotional, and mental – and had largely withdrawn to Brantwood, his home in the Lake District. Despite their early intimacy, he and MacDonald had not seen each other often since Rose’s death, and for a few years the letter writing became infrequent – Leon indicates that this tapering in correspondence had been a matter of “deep grief” to MacDonald.²⁰⁸ (570) MacDonald had walked with Ruskin through some of his darkest hours, and he continued both to love and be concerned for the man. One of Ruskin’s later letters, written on his birthday in 1884 or 1885, to MacDonald then far away in Italy, shows that the love remained reciprocal.²⁰⁹

It also explains the gap in correspondence:

You are the first person to whom I write today – I am so very happy to hear from you, having fancied you were partly estranged from me. I was rudely unkind to you once at Broadlands – also I thought you might feel there was sort of Shadow of Death upon me, since 1872 – 75, and did not like to enter into it – again.

Your last [___?___] lecture here came by this same post. I not only will read but am eager to read, and will instantly report on it.

I am so glad of all you tell us of yourself.

Ever your lovingest,

J. Ruskin. (Kings 1/1/59)

Ruskin’s mention of the lecture is important, as the only lecture MacDonald had ever written out was “The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture.” While it is possible that MacDonald might simply have sent Ruskin a newspaper report from one of his other lectures, Ruskin’s offer to “report on it” makes that unlikely. The lecture itself references Ruskin and is, as explained,

²⁰⁷ Such conversations continue through the book. (436) The final volume of *MP* asserts: “the soul of man is still a mirror, wherein may be seen, darkly, the image of the mind of God,” but Ruskin despairs that this was “all the book I have got to read about God in” – that no other ancient book, hieroglyph, or cuneiform, “nothing in the clouds above, nor in the earth beneath” would add to it. (199-200) The perspective did not persist, but *Seaboard* and *Lilith* nonetheless clearly refute it. The soul of man, thought MacDonald, was certainly a mirror – but the soul of man was never sufficient in and of itself: “For our imagination is, in small, / And with the making-difference that must be, / Mirror of God’s creating mirror.” (*Diary* August 27)

²⁰⁸ Greville and Leon indicate that after a quiet spell in the late 1870s the writing between MacDonald and Ruskin recommenced, although the two (by then feeblers) men never met again in person. (Leon 570)

²⁰⁹ The letter is dated 1884, the envelope 1885. (Kings) Ruskin may have errantly written the old date as it is early in the year.

fundamental to MacDonald's *Weltanschauung* – it is his most explicit expositional expression of the concept of the Imagination. Biographer Leon writes that with this letter and its offer, and until “the darkness closed in on him,” Ruskin was “once more criticising MacDonald’s work for him just as he had done twenty and more years before.” (570) The two men had shared intimacies over many years, incurred through the friendship and teaching of Scott, and they had developed a relationship that was particularly their own, shaped by their love of the same stories and their involvement in each other’s life-story. Expressions of this reciprocity appear in a number of MacDonald’s texts, but are woven most thoroughly into the fabric of *Lilith* – perhaps in hope that the mythopoeic threads therein could be instigators of healing transformation for a fellow lover of Story. If so, it is a bold expression of hope – and within its storied particularity MacDonald explores and responds to contemporaneous and continual issues of faith and doubt.²¹⁰

Wilfrid Cumbermede, written early in MacDonald’s writing career (1872 – after his Ruskin-directed trip to Switzerland) is the text most often linked to Ruskin, for Greville suggests it might be a response to the conduct of Mrs. La Touche during the trials of Ruskin’s relationship with her daughter Rose.²¹¹ The novel is indeed filled with descriptions of the transformative power of exposure to the Alps, with their meadows, glaciers, peaks and caves – majesties and terrors that, says the narrator, “it would take the soul of a Wordsworth or a Ruskin to comprehend or express.”²¹² Greville suggests that this remark, combined with “certain passages concerning the mystical influence of the Alps upon the soul, strengthens [his] assumption that Ruskin’s suffering, his lavish giving of himself, and his starvation of her alone who could give him peace, were the incentive to the book’s writing.”²¹³ (351) The introduction of this story which is written just after Ruskin’s first serious emotional breakdown, assures the reader:

The poorest, weakest drizzle upon the window-panes of a dreary roadside inn in a country of slate-quarries, possesses an interest to him who enters it by the door of a book, hardly less than the pouring rain which threatens to swell every brook to a torrent. How is this? I think it is because your troubles do not enter into the book and its troubles do not enter into you,

²¹⁰ Greville wondered if aspects of *Lilith* were comments on his own trials – if nothing else, a testament that he expected his father to be writing with particular persons in mind. (*Reminiscences* 322) Docherty suggests the book is inspired by MacDonald’s relationship with Charles Dodgson: “This is not to say that some slow mining for MacDonald’s many allusions will not help the reader in his or her comprehension of *Lilith*. But most of these buried allusions (the biblical allusions excepted) seem to have been intended for the ‘one reader’, Dodgson. MacDonald apparently hoped that his biblical allusions would be registered subliminally by practising Christians. For such readers, a traditional straight Christian path leads through the story.” (360)

²¹¹ There is also much similitude to the relationship of Ruskin and MacDonald. The narrator of this novel subtitled “An Autobiographical Story” certainly is similar to MacDonald, yet both main characters seem like potential Ruskins. Wilfrid is a Corpus Christi graduate like Ruskin, and like Ruskin treasures the “influence of external Oxford,” the architecture and general surroundings of which affect him more than anything other than “the Swiss mountains, pine-woods, and rivers.” (190)

²¹² The wonder of the boys, when they enter a cave, is no less than Ruskin’s “indescribable rapture when I was allowed to go into a cave.” (Hilton *Vol. I* 211) A similar nod is made in *Guild Court*, when it is noted that the Psalmist’s commentary on the heavens is limited because “the Jewish nation was not yet able to produce a Ruskin.” (117)

²¹³ Greville notices similarities of Alpine descriptions between *Praeterita* and *Cumbermede*. (351)

and therefore nature operates upon you unthwarted by the personal conditions which so often counteract her present influences. (3)

This is yet another confirmation of the vicarious experience offered by Story, and a welcoming invitation for any soul-weary reader. One of the main characters in the story, Charley, struggles both with belief and with mental health. The protagonist Wilfrid also feels compelled to be honest with the fact that although he clings to a Christian faith, it is with hope rather than conviction – this to the discomfort and/or horror of others in the tale who are socially defined by religion, but who show little evidence of an actual desire to grapple with the things of God. There is definitely much here that is relevant to the Ruskin MacDonald knew – for whom comment on his frail, failing, and at times absent faith seem rarely absent in his correspondence with MacDonald. In 1868 Ruskin responded to the first volume of *Unspoken Sermons* with:

Dear MacDonald,

Thank you exceedingly for the book. They are the best sermons – beyond all compare – I have ever heard or read – and if ever sermons did good, these will. Pages 23-34 are very beautiful – unspeakably beautiful. If they were but true! – (I know some one who will like them so much.)

But I feel so strongly that it is only the image of your own mind that you see in the sky! And you will say – “And who made the mind?” Well – the same hand that made the Adders [sic] ear – and the tigers [sic] heart – and shall they be satisfied when they awake – with their likeness?

It is a precious book though – God give you grace of it.

Ever affectionately yours

J. RUSKIN (Kings 1/1/41)

The pages Ruskin refers to are in the middle of the first sermon, “The Child in our Midst,” and they contain the relevant passage:

The God who is ever uttering himself in the changeful profusions of nature [...]; the God of music, of painting, of building, the Lord of Hosts, the God of mountains and oceans; whose laws go forth from one unseen point of wisdom, and thither return without an atom of loss; the God of history working in time unto Christianity; this God is the God of little children, and he alone can be perfectly, abandonedly simple and devoted. [...] Our longing desires can no more exhaust the fullness of the treasures of the Godhead, than our imagination can touch their measure.²¹⁴

Evidently this was the God Ruskin longed to exist.

²¹⁴ This quotation comes from a facsimile of the first edition, ensuring the accuracy Ruskin's references.

But while *Wilfrid Cumbermede* may have Ruskinian references, *The Seaboard Parish* is teeming with them. *Seaboard* was published in 1868, after a five-year period in which Ruskin had spent much time with the MacDonald family. In 1865 MacDonald had had to convalesce in Devon, recovering from one of his bad bouts of haemorrhaging: the location, adventures, and persons MacDonald engaged with on this visit shape the framework for *Seaboard*.²¹⁵ (Greville 262-3) During the convalescence Maurice came down to visit, and read to MacDonald “out of Ruskin ‘the scene on the shore of the Galilean lake’” (Raeper 135) – a section from *Modern Painters III*.²¹⁶ This particular event may have served as the book’s germination – for not only are Ruskin and his *Modern Painters* discussed within the text, but *Seaboard* itself is a vigorous engagement with much of *Modern Painters*. Near the beginning the vicar’s daughter responds eagerly to an offer of art lessons:

“...for I have had no one to help me since I left school, except a book called *Modern Painters*, which I think has the most beautiful things in it I ever read, but which I lay down every now and then with a kind of despair, as if I never could do anything worth doing. How long the next volume is in coming! Do you know the author, Mr. Percivale?”

“I wish I did. He has given me much help. I do not say I can agree with everything he writes; but when I do not, I have such a respect for him that I always feel as if he must be right whether he seems to me to be right or not. And if he is severe, it is with the severity of love that will speak only the truth.”²¹⁷ (254)

And so the Ruskin-guided lessons ensue.

This book *Modern Painters*, reviewed by Scott and chosen by MacDonald to mark the beginning of his married life, had been a startling new perspective on the world of Art. The mixture of prose, poetry, criticism, and memoir, argued for the superiority of modern landscape painters – and in particular J.M. Turner – over the “Old Masters” of the post-Renaissance period who failed in their attention to natural truth (with homage paid to exceptions, such as Titan and Dürer). Ruskin scorned the method of composing or inventing idealized landscapes in the studio rather than, like Turner, personally engaging with the “truths” of water, air, clouds, stones, and vegetation. *Modern Painters I* contains detailed observations – word pictures – of exactly how clouds move, how seas appear at different times of day, and how different trees grow. Ruskin describes particular scenes or objects, using them to explain what he argues to be universal truths. He then supports these with particular examples of error or truth from various

²¹⁵ Another summer at Bude also lends some colour. (“J. Gordon Thompson” 7)

²¹⁶ Ruskin scholar Paul L. Sawyer describes the scene as a “word painting”: “Like many of Ruskin’s crossing images, this one suggests a sudden experience of redeemed selfhood so profound that an individual emerges from it as from a baptism, the sight cleansed, the body made strong.” (137)

²¹⁷ Louisa, the recipient of the family’s first *Modern Painters*, painted throughout that Devon summer. (Greville 263)

artists. *Modern Painters II* is filled with allusions to Dante: he is described as the “central fiery heart” of the “Penetrative Imagination,” the action of which is sight as judgment. Milbank notes Ruskin’s stress that the pursuit of truth is a “‘centering activity’ which is a process of movement inwards, towards the centre, rather than outwards,” (34) not unlike Dante’s own upward and inward journey.²¹⁸ Ruskin writes that

every character that is so much as touched by men like Aeschylus, Homer, Dante, or Shakespeare, is by them held by the heart; and every circumstance or sentence of their being, speaking or seeming, is seized by process from within, and is referred to that inner secret spring of which the hold is never lost for an instant; so that every sentence, as it has been thought out from the heart, opens for us a way down to the heart, leads us to the centre, and then leads us to gather what more we may. (qtd Milbank 34)

Milbank suggests that Ruskin is confused by the location of the “centre,” first granting it to the heart of the reader, and then to the heart of the poetic imagination...but could it be that for Ruskin the centre is the meeting of, the relation between, the twain? Certainly this is what MacDonald would intend, what Scott and Maurice had taught. *Seaboard*, awash with *Modern Painters*, makes clear that the discussion Walford had overheard between Ruskin and MacDonald at the house-lecture was one that went far beyond the bounds of that room²¹⁹ – as the narrator of *Seaboard* says: “I was just thinking before you came [...] about the relation of Nature to our inner world. You know I am quite ignorant of your art, but I often think about the truths that lie at the root of it.” (480) And that thinking is what shapes the book. *Seaboard* is a unique text in its rather modern expression of self-awareness: it is a book that vacillates between story and sermon, narrative and narrator’s voice; from the onset it repeatedly draws attention to its own structural dichotomies.²²⁰ Whether or not this is successful in placating the reader who desires pure story, the method enables MacDonald to repeatedly discuss the role and nature of Story itself, then exhibit it, then discuss it again; not unlike Ruskin does with his pieces of art. Like *Adela Cathcart*, *Seaboard* is a story about the transformative relational power of Story, but it is also a story about that same power within Art and Nature – particularly as expressed by Ruskin.

²¹⁸ MacDonald more carefully stresses the upward movement as well as the inward: “Further in and further up...” (*Lilith* 329)

²¹⁹ The room is described very specifically – complete with steep “Jacob’s ladder” – not only by Walford, but in the sequel of *Seaboard: The Vicar’s Daughter*. (48; 46)

²²⁰ A mix of story and sermon for MacDonald is hardly new, but here sermons are more than occasional occurrences within the text. What *is* new is the pervasiveness of the narrator’s voice – and the reflection of the narrator upon both these aspects.

Section III: A Lens with which to Consider: Preparing for critical study of mythopoeic *Lilith* with a reading of *Seaboard*

*a holy ephod bound on me,
I am a gifted seer;
The unseen grows more clear;
Still their indwelling Deity
Speaks plainer in mine ear.
Oh holy high the mission is
Which thought to thinking brings!
Thy web, the nursing chrysalis
Round Psyche's folded wings,
To them transfers the loveliness
Of its invoven things.
("My Heart")*

- i) Reflecting Insights
- i) Revisioning Stories
- lii) Responsive Reception
- iv) Revealing Repetitions

As stated, the examination of some of the elements of *Seaboard* and how they relate to Ruskin helps lay the groundwork for a better understanding how MacDonald explores the transformational potential of Story, and particularly of how this is effected in *Lilith*.²²¹ Although one of the most discussed works by MacDonald, *Lilith* has not been discussed in relation to either *Seaboard* or to Ruskin. Yet the shared elements make blatant some of the themes in *Lilith* – not the least in the Dantean references and allusions that, if not as arresting, nonetheless pervade the text of *Seaboard*. The book's audience already knows that the narrator – a vicar away from his home parish – is a reader of Dante, for that was established when he was the protagonist of the prequel, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*.

i) Reflecting Insights

The most extensive discussion of Dante in this sequel occurs when the narrating vicar and the young landscape artist first converse. The discussion revolves around the manner in which a certain rock on the shore evokes Dante's Purgatory, and specifically, the place of Ulysses' demise. In the artist's painting of the rock the seven circles of Purgatory are clearly evident. (245) A translation of the referenced passage is given – presumably MacDonald's own. During the

²²¹ *Seaboard* and *Lilith* are not the only texts that share striking images. For example, the vicar's dream in *Seaboard* comes right out of *The Portent*, and in *Lilith* Vane also canters on a Düreresque horse that dissolves as he crosses a barrier. The end vision of *Cumbermede* appears to lead right into the book of *Lilith*, with Charley and Mary lying in a cold sleeping chamber (following an incident with the horse 'Lilith'). Also in *Seaboard* the vicar's boys have "a huge gilt ball" with "an eagle of brass with outspread wings on the top of it." (134) Nothing more is said of the eagle (familiar to members of European churches, in which it bears up the lectern that is to hold the Word of God), but it is in description very similar to the eagle which sits upon the mirror through which Vane enters the region of seven dimensions.

conversation it is established that not only both men but – unusually for the period – the vicar’s daughter as well, read Dante in the original.²²² The painter stresses that careful reading and knowledge of an artist, a Makar, allows one even further into the truths of his work: “if anybody only glanced at my little picture, he would take those for sea-birds; but if he looked into it, and began to suspect me, he would find out that they were Dante and Beatrice on their way to the sphere of the moon.” (245) It is not long before the daughter and the painter – both readers of *Modern Painters*, and both in personal conflict with the Christian faith – fall in love. As the young man – Charles Percivale – spends more time with the narrator’s family, the vicar-narrator – Henry Walton – has long conversations with him about theories of landscape painting. The narrator also spends much time reflecting to the reader both upon the surrounding vistas of dramatic land, sea, and sky (with particular attention to Ruskin’s favoured topic of clouds), as well as upon theories of their power to affect the human observer.²²³ (One of the vicar’s discussion partners is a Wordsworth-loving doctor by the name of none other than “Turner.”²²⁴) The ‘word-painting’ employed by the narrator throughout the novel is not unlike that used by Ruskin in his efforts to reproduce visual experiences in *Modern Painters*. In a manner that surely would have pleased Ruskin, the reader feels like he or she is not only beginning to visualize the scenes described, but is coming to better understand what the characters see. And as the vicar and the artist both converse over the paintings – in addition to landscapes, he paints Pre-Raphaelite style romances (one is specifically inspired, MacDonald adds in a footnote, by Arthur Hughes’ *Knight of the Sun*)²²⁵ – the explanations and interpretations, and their literary, mythological, philosophical, and moral elements are also redolent with Ruskin. Ruskin’s gift of the Turner engravings to MacDonald came the year *Seaboard* was published – perhaps the gift was in part a response to the book.

Modern Painters is noted for its emphasis on the visual and on seeing – and these are also persistent themes through *Seaboard*. The narrator explains that his own acuity of sight, despite an inborn short-sightedness, has developed “because I have trained myself to observe. The degree of power in the sight is of less consequence than the habit of seeing.” (196) For the reflecting vicar, this is further fodder for comprehending the means of revelation:

²²² Says the painter, probably alluding to Rossetti: “A friend of mine, a brother painter, an Italian, set me going with that, and once going with Dante, nobody could well stop. I never knew what intensity *per se* was till I began to read Dante.” (245)

²²³ The word ‘cloud,’ or variations upon it, appears over seventy times. Ruskin’s iconic “The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century” was first delivered as a lecture in 1884.

²²⁴ Ruskin used an extract of Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* for his epigraph to each edition of *MP*.

²²⁵ The piece is described in great detail and declared: “a grand picture, full of feeling – a picture and a parable.” (615) Other narrative paintings of more sombre character and of less skill are also discussed. *The Knight of the Sun* (c. 1859) was well-received, and Hughes inscribed upon the frame a stanza from MacDonald’s poem “Better Things” (1857). Hughes partnered other paintings with MacDonald quotations, such as *The Heavenly Stair* (c. 1888). (Roberts 204) Detailed information on the painting is found in Leonard Robert’s catalogue, *Arthur Hughes: His Life and Works*, which also gives extensive attention to various paintings either owned by the MacDonalds or for which the children modelled.

My eye could not be filled with seeing. I stood in speechless delight for a while, gazing at the “endless ending” which was “the humour of the game,” and thinking how in all God's works the laws of beauty are wrought out in evanishment, in birth and death. There, there is no hoarding, but an ever-fresh creating, an eternal flow of life from the heart of the All-beautiful. Hence even the heart of man cannot hoard words, not in meaning, for the words can bear no meaning but the one which reveals its own reality. (443)

For him the output of poets such as Wordsworth (whose “To the Daisy” discusses “the humour of the game,/ While I am gazing”), or of Philip Sidney (“endless ending” is how Sidney translates a phrase in Psalm LXV), are expressions of their apprehension and response – their relation – to God’s own poetry: “More and more nature becomes to me one of God's books of poetry – not his grandest – that is history – but his loveliest, perhaps.”²²⁶ (140) MacDonald is reminding his readers again that, like the Christian Fathers (and Mothers) before him, like the Celts of his heritage and his Scottish mentors, he understands both Nature and History to be mediums of poetic communication from God to his people: God is “the world's great Author.” (407) In the pervasive discussions of sight, MacDonald – like Ruskin – continues to refer to the necessary enabler: Light. Many discussions take place between the doubting young painter and the literary pastor that intertwine the concepts of sight, light, and faith. Percivale echoes Ruskin in his plaintive: “I wish I could believe as you do, Mr. Walton,” (445) and also in his confiding: “I know you are able to distinguish between a glad unbelief and a sorrowful doubt.”²²⁷ (443) The vicar – harkening Erskine’s discussions on Light and conscience, while playing with Ruskin’s concepts of light in landscape painting²²⁸ – explains:

The heart of man is not able, without more and more light, to understand that all vision is in the light of the Father. Because Jesus went to the Father, therefore the disciples saw him tenfold more. His body no longer in their eyes, his very being, his very self was in their hearts – not in their affections only – in their spirits, their heavenly consciousness. (459)

²²⁶ In *Antiphon* MacDonald discusses “endless ending” at length – the psalm ends with a phrase reminiscent of *Lilith*: “That buried seed through yielding grave doth grow.” Ruskin also revered Sidney’s Psalter, producing an edition called *Bibliotheca Pastorum*, included in his select library for the Guild of St George. (Hilton 535; Collingwood 396) “The ‘Endless Ending’” is itself a chapter title in *Lilith*. McGillis references the title in his discussion of “the importance of poetry as a way of knowing.” He references post-Macdonald Northrop Fry and Paul Ricoeur, concluding that this title means: “Poetry truly never ends. The idea of the endless story is strong in MacDonald.” (“Language” 155; 146) He seems unaware of the phrase’s pre-MacDonald source.

²²⁷ Elsewhere the vicar declares: “The very fact that he doubts, shows that he has some faith. When I find anyone hard upon doubters, I always doubt the quality of his faith.” (578)

²²⁸ For Erskine, Scott, and Maurice ‘Light’ is a key word and concept. This is clearly the case for MacDonald too. These men seek to “bear witness to the Light,” constantly drawing attention to the “Word become flesh.” (*John* 1:9; 14) The entire gospel of *John* was one that Ruskin almost knew by heart. His 1881 Epilogue to *MP III*, in addition to berating the ill-equipped viewer who dares approach classical painting without being familiar with iconography or knowing the Patristics, classical literature, and Scripture, adds that he has read *John* “some thousands of times, syllable by syllable.”

He further expounds on this by way of quoting a poem of Novalis – one of the Hymns of the Night – “for which I had and have an especial affection.” (459) It is the poem MacDonald had shared with Ruskin in the past, and one that he would share with Ruskin again.²²⁹

ii) Revisioning Stories

In a conversation directly relating to the passion MacDonald shared with Scott, Percivale the artist challenges the vicar that one “can hardly expect experience to be of use to any but those who have had it. It seems to me that its influences cannot be imparted.” (455) As MacDonald had through the format of *Catbcart* he now reiterates through his reflective narrator an argument for the vicarious educational nature of Story, of relating tradition and experience. And again, there is an echo of Balbo:

That depends on the amount of faith in those to whom its results are offered. Of course, as experience, it can have no weight with another; for it is no longer experience. One remove, and it ceases. But faith in the person who has experienced can draw over or derive – to use an old Italian word – some of its benefits to him who has the faith. Experience may thus, in a sense, be accumulated, and we may go on to fresh experience of our own. (456)

The narrating vicar – as he explained to his readers in the first chapter – is enabling exactly this: he is telling a story, his story, so that others can learn from it. Throughout his telling, he retells other retellings – stories of the neighbourhood, stories from the Bible, stories from mythology, stories from Shakespeare – and typical to any MacDonald novel, he references many many more. When he tells his daughter the story of her parents’ courtship (one the readers of *Annals* already know), it not only dispels fears and girds her sense of identity, but “it made her trust us more.” (622) When he retells Gospel stories, he weaves in images from the myths of “old painters and poets.” (578) When retelling of the infancy of Christ he encourages his children to “rest and brood” their thoughts upon

the fragments that are given us, and, believing that the imagination is one of the most powerful of all the faculties for aiding the growth of truth in the mind, I would ask them questions as to what they thought he might have said or done in ordinary family occurrences. (578)²³⁰

²²⁹ Cf.. May 30, 1875, written upon the occasion of Rose’s death. (Kings 1/1/48) Novalis’ poems were written while grieving his own betrothed.

²³⁰ This recalls a passage published the year before *Seaboard*: “Nowhere can the imagination be more healthily and rewardingly occupied than in endeavouring to construct the life of an individual out of the fragments which are all that can reach us of the history of even the noblest of our race. How this will apply to the reading of the gospel story we leave to the earnest thought of our readers.” (“Fantastic” 18)

Ruskin has encouraged a similar thing in *Modern Painters III*, when he declares that the reason humans have an imagination is, “above all, to call up the scenes and facts in which we are commanded to believe, and be present, as if in the body, at every recorded event of the history of the Redeemer.” (*MP III* 46) But the vicar pushes the imaginative engagement a little further, and he explains why: he hopes that his children, in participating in these stories, will learn to *choose* to be shaped by them: “If we do not thus employ our imagination on sacred things, his example can be of no use to us except in exactly corresponding circumstances – and when can such occur from one end to another of our lives?” (71) The vicar firmly believes that this practiced and imaginative engagement with stories will “help thereby in the actual training of their imaginations to truth and wisdom” (71) – and this holds whether it is the veritable stories of the gospels that inspire reflection, or fictive tales. The vicar also explains to Percivale that even when a person is not yet able to learn from their response to a work of art – visual, aural, or literary – it yet does them good just to recognize expressions of what might be “their own thoughts, or feelings, or something like them” that they had yet been unable to consider – thus enabling their “waking up.” (480) “Even when [the reader/viewer/listener] is not aware of it, [the art is] working upon him, – for good, if he has chosen what is good, which alone shall be our supposition.” (481) In a later essay, published during the crafting of *Lilith*, MacDonald would explain this to be the best thing humans can do for one another: “next to rousing his conscience, is – not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself.” (“Fantastic” 319)

The vicar adds an interesting element to his response to Percivale, one perhaps implicit in Balbo, and certainly congruent with Scott’s emphasis on the importance of knowing an author by his body of work: the element of trust. It is not an element brought up directly in the discussions of Mythopoesis put forth by Tolkien and Lewis, but a hint of it lies in Lewis’ comment on re-reading, for he says that it is in the re-reading – once he already is somewhat sure of the tale – that he finds wisdom and strength. Should the listener or reader have reason to distrust the teller of a tale, the opportunity for transformation (be that transformation for good or ill) through apprehension can be undermined. This emphasis thus underscores that MacDonald considers the transformative power of Story – Mythopoesis – to be necessarily relational. Should something exist to impede the story’s reception, then that story – one that may yet transform another person – will not transform the non-receptive listener/reader; clearly the extent to which the story may transform the listener depends on how receptive that reader is to it. A story may then be *mythopoeic*, but Mythopoesis will not necessarily occur. The *Seaboard* vicar explains: “Revelation is

not enough, the open trap-door is not enough, if the door of the heart is not open likewise.” (181) If the reader/listener *is* receptive, then they are able to accumulate the experience proffered through a tale that has itself been shaped by another’s accumulated experience – and thus, as MacDonald says, “may go on to fresh experiences of our own.”²³¹ (181) Constant is the reminder that a story and what it has to offer is not meant to stagnate: a relational medium, it is meant to produce a response – and must, if it is to prove the occurrence of Mythopoesis. ‘He *who has ears*, let him hear.’

iii) Responsive Reception

After discussing engagement with the Gospel, the vicar explains that “the one poet, the one maker,” has also enabled such a relationship with his Book of Nature: “For our comfort, education, training, he has put into form for us all the otherwise hidden thoughts and feelings of our heart. Even when he speaks of the hidden things of the Spirit of God, he uses the forms or pictures of Nature.” (362; 481) And this enables humanity’s own communication one to another. Without it: “Metaphysics could have no existence, not to speak of poetry, not to speak of the commonest language of affection.” For,

it affords but the material which the thinking, feeling soul can use, interpret, and apply for its own purposes of speech. It is, as it were, the forms of thought cast into a lovely chaos by the inferior laws of matter, thence to be withdrawn by what we call the creative genius that God has given to men, and moulded, and modelled, and arranged, and built up to its own shapes and its own purposes. (481)

And thus, says MacDonald, the argument that real art can never merely be a ‘copy’ finds support for it must be an interpretation of what the artist sees, or, as MacDonald – and Ruskin – would have it, a response.²³² “If to this they can add some teaching for humanity, then indeed they may claim to belong to the higher order of art, however imperfect they may be in their powers of representing – however lowly, therefore, their position may be in that order.” (407) In his essay on the Imagination MacDonald had already written:

But, as to this matter of *creation*, is there, after all, I ask yet, any genuine sense in which a man may be said to create his own thought-forms? Allowing that a new combination of forms already existing might be called creation, is the man, after all, the author of this new

²³¹ Ruskin was hardly adverse to this: “to use books rightly, was to go to them for help: to appeal to them, when our own knowledge and power of thought failed: to be led by them into wider sight – purer conception – than our own, *and receive from them* the united sentence of the judges and councils of all time, against our solitary and unstable opinion.” (*Sesame* 87; italics mine)

²³² Ruskin follow this argument throughout *MP*, writing in the second volume that this imaginative response is an “expression of the power and intelligence of a companionable human soul,” giving “penetrative sight” into the landscape. (139)

combination? Did he, with his will and his knowledge, proceed wittingly, consciously, to construct a form which should embody his thought? Or did this form arise within him without will or effort of his – vivid if not clear – certain if not outlined? Ruskin (and better authority we do not know) will assert the latter, and we think he is right: though perhaps he would insist more upon the absolute perfection of the vision than we are quite prepared to do. [...] But God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness, and sends forth from thence wonderful gifts into the light of that understanding which is His candle. Our hope lies in no most perfect mechanism even of the spirit, but in the wisdom wherein we live and move and have our being.²³³

MacDonald is drawing here upon the same source as Barfield and Tolkien: Sidney's description of humans ranging "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be," contemplating the Ideas behind Nature to thus "deliver forth, as he hath imagined them."²³⁴ (Barfield 188-190) The relational act of *sub-creating*.

iv) Revealing repetitions

This discussion of the interrelation of inspiration, language, nature, and myth is not the only resonance in *Seaboard* with the argument of Barfield. The elucidating example of *spiritus*, *wind*, and *breath* is also invoked, in a manner suggestively familiar. Near the *Seaboard's* beginning the vicar described the fresh new wind coming in his invalid daughter's window: "as if life from the Spirit of God were coming into my soul: I think of the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Wind and spirit are the same word in the Greek; and the Latin word *spirit* comes even nearer to what we are saying, for it is the wind as *breathed*." (117) Three years before, while visiting the 'seaboard parish,' Maurice had read to MacDonald from the section of *Sesame and Lilies* in which Ruskin had written:

Take up your Latin and Greek dictionaries, and find out the meaning of 'Spirit.' It is only a contraction of the Latin word 'breath,' and an indistinct translation of the Greek word for 'wind.' The same word is used in writing, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth;' and in writing, 'So is every one that is born of the Spirit;' born of the BREATH, that is; for it means the breath of God, in soul and body. We have the true sense of it in our words 'inspiration' and 'expire.'" (35)

²³³ In "Fairyland" Ruskin declares: "Long since I told you this great law of noble imagination. It does not create, it does not even adorn, it does but *reveal*, the treasures to be possessed by this spirit." (71)

²³⁴ MacDonald's earlier comment regarding Nature also comes straight from Sidney: "There is no art delivered unto mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth." (11)

Inspiration and *expire*: one the divine gift that enables creative life, and the other, death.²³⁵ The biblical context of these phrases to which Ruskin alludes, “the wind bloweth where it listeth” and “So is everyone born of the Spirit,” is John 3:8 – Christ’s conversation with Nicodemus about his need to be born again (John 3:1-21). Thus “the wind that bloweth where it listeth,” a phrase MacDonald reuses in more than a dozen works,²³⁶ is linked with the concept of rebirth and that favourite image of MacDonald and Ruskin – one which, they both claim, has been imbued with truth since the inception of Grecian myths: the rebirth, the transformation, of Psyche. (In *Queen of the Air* Ruskin – who had given MacDonald the Psyche ring – directly connects the words *psyche*, *pneuma*, and *spirit*. [72]) The image of the ‘reborn’ Psyche appears in at least sixteen of MacDonald’s novels, in addition to two of the sermon collections and a myriad of poems (both written by and translated by MacDonald). In at least nine of these, Psyche’s symbolism as a soul reborn is explicitly presented or discussed.²³⁷ It is in the middle of a sermon that the vicar of *Seaboard* explains her import:

Plainest of all, look at the story of the butterfly – so plain that the pagan Greeks called it and the soul by one name – Psyche. Psyche meant with them a butterfly or the soul, either. Look how the creeping thing, ugly to our eyes, so that we can hardly handle it without a shudder, finding itself growing sick with age, straightway falls a spinning and weaving at its own shroud, coffin, and grave, all in one – to prepare, in fact, for its resurrection; for it is for the sake of the resurrection that death exists. [...] No more creeping for the butterfly; wings of splendour now [...] is not this a resurrection? Its children too shall pass through the same process, to wing the air of a summer noon, and rejoice in the ethereal and the pure.²³⁸ (414)

For MacDonald, Psyche is a symbol of Life because she is a symbol of Death. Bound up with the light of true vision, “resurrection of the dead” is one of the novel’s key themes. (407) MacDonald reminds his readers through the vicar’s sermon that the world is “full of resurrections...”

Every night that folds us up in darkness is a death; [...] You die, as it were, every night. The death of darkness comes down over the earth; but a deeper death, the death of sleep,

²³⁵ In his 1873 lecture “The Nature and Authority of Miracle,” Ruskin discusses how “the uniformity of the laws of nature does not preclude their interruption by a Deity wishing either to convince or assist mankind.” He cites: “the wind bloweth where it listeth, and some of the energies granted to men born of the spirit may be manifested only on certain conditions and rare occasions.” (21 Burd) In 1869 he writes to Georgiana Mount-Temple, discussing again how the term *inspired* “is the right word for receiving breath” from Heaven. (Bradley 21)

²³⁶ For example: *Annals*, *Forbes*, *Seaboard*, *Falconer*, *W&W*, *Guild Court*, *SG&SM*, *Faber*, *Curdie*, and *US II & III*, and in some of the poetry.

²³⁷ *MM*, *WMM*, *Portent*, *H&S*, *Seaboard*, *Miracles*, *DOS*, “*My Heart*,” and the unpublished play which pre-dates 1859: *If I Had A Father*. In this last, a sculpture of Psyche is the centrepiece around which the play revolves: “all I ever longed for! – my father and my Psyche!” (266)

²³⁸ The language here is very similar to that in *Lilith*: “Most of [the Little Ones] would have nothing to do with a caterpillar, except watch it through its changes; but when at length it came from its retirement with wings, all would immediately address it as Sister Butterfly, congratulating it on its metamorphosis – for which they used a word that meant something like REPENTANCE – and evidently regarding it as something sacred.” (232)

descends on you. [...] But the God of the Resurrection is awake all the time, watching his sleeping men and women. (407)

The vicar argues that the many examples of death and resurrection around us – the sun each day, the flowers each season – call us “from helpless submission to willing obedience, – is not this a resurrection indeed?” (407) They prepare one for “the resurrection for the sake of which all the other resurrections exist – the resurrection unto Life.” (407) Even, he adds, the shift “from selfishness to love – is not this a rising from the dead?” (407) In Ruskin-fashion he shows how particular flowers are age-old symbols of death and resurrection – naming the flowers that pervade his own corpus with this hint: snowdrops, crocus, primroses, anemones, and bluebells – flowers that Ruskin also often draws upon, flowers that proliferate in poetry and myth.²³⁹ As he relates death and resurrection to light and vision he asserts: “That St. Paul saw it to be such may be shown from his using the two things with the same meaning when he says, ‘Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.’” (407) From that source of light, from the blowing breath of the Spirit, comes transformation and rebirth. But something or someone must die – or there cannot be new life.

It should be noted that MacDonald, familiar with spiritual, mental, and physical anguish – and having many friends such as Ruskin who also faced such trials – does not trivialize the choice to die to self and be transformed into new life. He writes,

This rising from the dead is often a long and a painful process. [...] As from painful tossing in disease, rise into the health of well-being. As from the awful embrace of thy own dead body, burst forth in thy spiritual body. Arise thou, responsive to the indwelling will of the Father, even as thy body will respond to thy indwelling soul. (*Seaboard* 422)

But he does consider this a necessary process of discovering one’s true self, and of then finding one’s True Home: “to pass through the valley of the shadow of death is the way home [...] I knew that as the thought of water to the thirsty soul, for it is the soul far more than the body that thirsts even for the material water, such is the thought of home to the wanderer in a strange country.” (605) In *Modern Painters III*, Ruskin describes Turner as having no True Home – yet critics have observed that it is Ruskin himself who seemed to struggle with his sense of place. (Milbank 37) Even the fairly ‘centred’ vicar of *Seaboard* once struggled to grasp what exactly “home” is, in its most true essence. He explains how he came to realize that humanity’s truest “home” is not defined even by the very crucial relationships with loved ones – those relationships contribute to making humans who they are, and they are a necessary part of self-

²³⁹ “Upon the man who can understand the human meaning of the snowdrop, of the primrose, or of the daisy, the life of the earth blossoming into the cosmical flower of a perfect moment will one day seize, possessing him with its prophetic hope, arousing his conscience with the vision of the ‘rest that remaineth,’ and stirring up the aspiration to enter into that rest.” (“Imagination” 13)

discovery, but they are not “Home.” Touching close to the pain of his friend Ruskin, MacDonald dares to write: “In the closest contact of human soul with human soul, when all the atmosphere of thought was *rosy with love*, again and yet again on the far horizon would the dun, lurid flame of unrest shoot for a moment through the enchanted air, and Psyche would know that not yet had she reached her home.” (605; italics mine) For,

there is but one home for us all. When we find – in proportion as each of us finds – that home, shall we be gardens of delight to each other – little chambers of rest – galleries of pictures – wells of water.

Again, what was this home? God himself. His thoughts, his will, his love, his judgment, are man's home. To think his thoughts, to choose his will, to love his loves, to judge his judgments, and thus to know that he is in us, with us, is to be at home. And to pass through the valley of the shadow of death is the way home. (605)

One is minded of earlier in the text when MacDonald gave his own translation (under guise of the vicar's hand) of the hymn by Novalis, the final stanza of which read: “Where I have but Him/ Is my Fatherland;/ And all gifts and graces come/ Heritage into my hand:/ Brothers long deplored/ I in his disciples find restored.” (461) It is one of the hymns MacDonald shared repeatedly with Ruskin;²⁴⁰ it resonates with the words of the laird in *WMM* as he comforts his exiled clan, with the message (discussed in next chapter) of *Curdie*, and with much of the text of *Lilith*. Reading MacDonald explains MacDonald.

When McGillis lists some of the “mysteries evident to a student of MacDonald's life,” he notes that “(h)is friendship with Ruskin was obviously intimate, yet again he has little to say about Ruskin as thinker, art historian, or economic theorist.” (“What's Missing” 283) Hopefully this chapter has gone some way in addressing that supposed lack, and has also intimated that primary research has much yet to reveal – not that, for instance, MacDonald has “nothing to say” about the Pre-Raphaelites. (283) This type of close reading also evidences the influence of Scott throughout, for it demands recognition that MacDonald referenced not only recent poets like Wordsworth or Novalis, or pivotal Christian poets (as they both regarded him) like Dante, but that he also reached back to pre-Christian myths that offer hints and shades of truth – doing so in order to better comprehend God's communications. By writing in this manner MacDonald (and Ruskin, usually – though he goes back on his word occasionally²⁴¹) was indicating that storied image is in and of itself capable of truth-communication, perhaps most especially when its engagement with the Book of Nature is also evident. There need not be post-resurrection

²⁴⁰ As indicated in his letter upon Rose's death. The influences of Novalis upon MacDonald is a familiar topic – *Lilith* is pervaded with allusions to *Hymns to the Night* in particular.

²⁴¹ Thus making MacDonald's insistence all the more notable.

baptizing to make it capable of communicating truth, or even any post-Torah benediction. MacDonald argues, as did Erskine and Scott, that since the inception of the world, since God first acted as Makar, the things he has created have been revealing who he is. And since its creation, humanity has been responding in what manners possible, and communicating those responses to one another. The more accurate the apprehension of what God's creation is revealing, the more open to inspiration the teller/shower, the greater the truth imbued. The apprehension of Torah, crowned by the ultimate and embodied Revelation of Christ – Inspiration and Resurrection – transformed all subsequent revelations, and enabled even deeper truths (truths that had always existed) to be understood more fully.²⁴² These men were convinced that such truth could be accessed even retrospectively – as Christ's explanation to Nicodemus, and then Paul's discussion of the explanation, endowed an even greater depth to the story of Psyche.

In the middle of the vicar's tale, his wife challenges him:

Sometimes after thinking about something for a long time, you come to a conclusion about it, and you think you have settled it plain and clear to yourself, for ever and a day. You hang it upon your wall, like a picture, and are satisfied for a fortnight. But some day, when you happen to cast a look at it, you find that instead of hanging flat on the wall, your picture has gone through it – opens out into some region you don't know where – shows you far-receding distances of air and sea – in short, where you thought one question was settled for ever, a hundred are opened up for the present hour.” (426)

MacDonald clearly hopes that *Seaboard* will be a storied experience, a revelation that opens out into new regions for the reader. The image is one that did not fade for him, for it is into that unknown region, that mirror-picture upon the wall, that MacDonald allows his protagonist in *Lilith* to step.²⁴³ But for now the narrating vicar bids farewell to his readers with: “*Friend, hope thou in God*” and “Now faith is the essence of hopes, the trying of things unseen” – his own rendering of the first verse of a chapter renown for its stark reminder to its readers that their rich heritage is defined by their inherited stories. (624²⁴⁴)

²⁴² Lewis calls this a ‘Deeper Magic.’

²⁴³ This image is used again in *Wise Woman*. It also shapes Lewis’ *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

²⁴⁴ Hebrews 11:1

Part Three

STORIED ENDEAVOURS TO AWAKEN RESPONSE:

Critical readings of MacDonald's mythopoeic art,
as informed by his own methodology

*Certainly it would be a poor description of the Imagination
which omitted
the one element especially present to the mind that invented the word Poet. –
It can present us with new thought-forms – new, that is, as revelations of thought.
It has created none of the material that goes to make these forms.
Nor does it work upon raw material.
But it takes forms already existing, and gathers them about a thought so much higher than they,
that it can group and subordinate and harmonize them
into a whole which shall represent, unveil that thought.
[...]
And every new embodiment of a known truth
must be a new and wider revelation.
No man is capable of seeing for himself the whole of any truth:
he needs it echoed back to him from every soul in the universe;
and still its centre is hid in the Father of Lights
("The Imagination")*

Storied Endeavours to Awaken Response

*When a man finds that every time he reads a book
not only does some obscurity melt away,
but deeper depths, which he had not before seen, dawn upon him,
he is not likely to think that the time for ceasing to write about the book has come.
[...] the depths are not to be revealed utterly; while every new generation needs a new aid
towards discovering itself and its own thoughts
in these forms of the past.
("St. George's Day")*

Introduction

This thesis began with a consideration of *mythopoesis* as discussed and defined by authors who believed MacDonald one of the greatest practitioners of one of the greatest arts. It then showed that the crucial element for MacDonald in that art is relationship: for the genesis of the story, for its subject matter, as well as for its reception and continuity. *Part Two* followed MacDonald's own injunction to consider the familial, spiritual, and educational influences that shape an author, re-presenting the inheritance and the environment in which MacDonald matured and learned to relate. From these foundations he developed the *Weltanschauung* that proved foundational to his mythopoeic art, one that was confirmed and refined in his relationship with A.J. Scott – a fellow Scotsman with a passion for unity, identity, and the relational orientation of God. This primary mentor taught, inspired, and encouraged MacDonald in his pursuit of literature and of communicating God's love – he confirmed MacDonald's identity as a Scottish *trouvere* and modelled an approach to and reception of literature on which MacDonald patterned his own teaching and writing. In their shared friend Ruskin, MacDonald found not only another lover of Dante, but someone keen to believe that the truths he found in Dante and even in ancient myth could somehow contribute to, rather than detract from, his relationship with Divine Truth. Awareness of the relational engagement between these men and within their works, especially as seen in *Seaboard*, gives greater understanding to MacDonald's own literary and Christian intent. *Part Three* now demonstrates the advantages of the methodology laid out by Scott and MacDonald by pursuing new readings of two standard MacDonald texts – texts that evolve not only from MacDonald's spiritual, historic, and literary inheritance, but also from particular relationships with people introduced to him by Scott. These chapters are introductions to some of the intent in MacDonald's crafting and ethos as a storyteller, and suggest that he is a worthy heir of Scott's teaching on Revelation and Relationship; a writer who did indeed seek to be *mythopoeic*. Close consideration of the writing evidences that MacDonald did not believe himself an independent creator – for him every single aspect of Story is relational. *Because* it is relational it has the potential to

transform, to be *mythopoeic*. Engagement with living persons and living issues is as inextricable from MacDonald's writing as is the literary heritage to which he subscribed; to best understand how this is so the texts must, in the manner modelled by Scott, be regarded in their historical context and with an awareness of the allusions and indebtedness to other stories of the readership's heritage that weave throughout.

Utilizing this approach is not only antithetical to much of the critical reading that has been published on these texts, but also engenders readings that are sometimes quite contrary to, and at other times quite pre-empt, standard assumptions. Two of MacDonald's most frequently critiqued texts, *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) and *Lilith: A Romance* (1895), are often named as examples of his mythopoeic power. These chapters examine what makes them so, considering how MacDonald the *trouvère* presents within these stories the truths that he believes to be transformational if apprehended – an apprehension of which he believed the manner of telling would aid. The first, *Curdie*, models the transformative nature of stories in relation to each other, while also addressing contemporarily relevant challenges to the revelatory nature of both Scripture and stories-in-general. Contrary to the typical psychoanalytic readings of this book, and the frequent assertion that it is a text attesting to MacDonald's loss of faith, this chapter shows how throughout the novel MacDonald carefully engages with the Biblical text of *Isaiah* and with certain readings of that Scripture – and in doing so, proves storied relevance to social and spiritual issues of his own Britain. Thus MacDonald asserts the revelatory import of his medium. The next and final chapter considers another text that has sometimes been stylized as an expression of rebellion against Christian religion and an assertion of the feminine self: *Lilith*. Again an alternative approach is modelled, guided by the context of MacDonald's life and mentorship and resulting in considerable challenges to standard assumptions. In recognizing MacDonald's engagement through *Lilith* with one of the greatest works of fiction in the Christian literary tradition, it is revealed that more than just the framework of the *Commedia* informs MacDonald: the relational aspects of the *Commedia* that compelled Scott are also clearly re-presented here, and understanding of mythic truth is essential to the telling. Yet *Lilith* stands not only as a beacon of literary relationship, but even more importantly as one of human relationship. Like the *Commedia*, *Lilith* engages with the author's (candidly liminal) present – knowing that some select readers will pick up the text and find within it startling personal particularities. The personal and literary relationship shared between MacDonald and Ruskin proves a fascinating and revelatory cipher, lending insight to the shape and theological meaning of a text that is perhaps greater than, but does not therefore “deny rational comprehension” –

despite such conclusion by E. Cuisick. (“Jung” 69) These close studies reveal the extent of MacDonald’s mythopoeic intent, his desire to be “thought-provoking,” to “wake things up,” to make his reader “think things for himself” – as “such ought the fairytale to be.” (“Fantastic” 196) In the crafting of *Lilith* and *Curdie* both, MacDonald asserts his belief in the transformational power of his medium.

CHAPTER FIVE

**‘The Divine Imagination in Whose Image’:
Intertextual Dialogue in *Curdie***

*If a writer's aim be logical conviction, he must spare no logical pains,
not merely to be understood, but to escape being misunderstood;
where his object is to move by suggestion, to cause to imagine, then
let him assail the soul of his reader as the wind assails an aeolian harp.
If there be music in my reader, I would gladly wake it.
Let fairytale of mine go for a firefly that now flashes, now is dark,
but may flash again.
Caught in a hand which does not love its kind,
it will turn to an insignificant, ugly thing, that can neither flash nor fly.
("The Fantastic Imagination")*

Section I: Contexture***Section II: Correlations******Section III: Conscious Conversation******Section IV: Challenging the Contemporary Critic******Introduction***

As indicated, a more accurate understanding of MacDonald's positive Christian experience and community, an integration of his broader corpus, and an awareness of his own convictions upon the concepts of revelation and relationship may lead the scholar into quite different critical conclusions than some of those currently assumed as standard. An awareness of how familiar MacDonald is with the biblical text, and – of no less import – how strong was his professed passion for that text will force the careful critic to pay attention to MacDonald's engagement with Scripture – a vastly under-researched area best addressed by MacDonald's own comment that without doing so "there are passages in his writing which we could not have understood." ("St. George's Day" 8) Failing to incorporate into critical scholarship MacDonald's reverence for (not merely his familiarity with) the Bible can lead to oversights or misinterpretations. Thus *The Princess and Curdie*, a text through which MacDonald argues for the primacy of God's Word, is instead read as "a severe crisis in MacDonald, indicating a complete, temporary loss of faith and optimism," or even as a text in which theology is completely "absent." (Lochhead 33; Mendelson 44) A failure to heed MacDonald's passion for Scripture obscures much that is otherwise readily evident, including the depth of literary and theological play that he weaves into his work. An exploration of how this literature professor is engaging

with his contemporaries in literary and biblical criticism challenges readings that declare: “the over-all pattern” of the book is simply “a movement from a female-oriented childhood world” to that of a “male-dominated adult world.”²⁴⁵ (Sigman 190) Yet it is not sufficient to simply be aware of MacDonald’s passion for Scripture: it must also be remembered that he is a literary scholar, never content to write something that is not “more than meets the ear.” Even Hein, who has argued tirelessly for the evidence of MacDonald’s positive Christian voice, asserts that though *Curdie* “makes good reading” and may even be “MacDonald’s best long fantasy for children,” it is nonetheless a story that does not contain much symbolism – and thus a critic “need not linger over the plot.” (*Mythmakers* 42) MacDonald is a much more careful and a much more complex literature scholar than most critics of the last century have acknowledged. Linger over the plot shows exactly why a writer such as the erudite Ruskin would choose him above all others to turn a student into “a living and thoughtful reader.” (Beinecke 1/3/127)

It should not be assumed from these comments that *Curdie* has avoided careful scrutiny: conversely, the book has caused much bemusement and frustration amongst critics. Most agree that there is something inherently different between this children’s novel and its predecessor, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1870-71) – something more than merely a ten-year lapse between publishing dates. The book’s conclusion is its most discussed and the most disputed aspect. Beginning as a happy fairy tale that brings the reader once again into the realm of the miner-boy Curdie, the young princess Irene, and the Royal Great-great-grandmother Irene, *Curdie* has the expected “fairy-tale-ending” – only to be followed abruptly by devastation and annihilation in four short sentences. Although these sentences seem to cause little concern to child-readers, adult critics are often confounded. As indicated, it has frequently been proposed that MacDonald is going through a crisis in faith; that he has lost his faith altogether; that he is in an “apocalyptic mood [...] convinced that evil triumphs in the end” (Wolff 176); that this “startlingly bleak” ending is meant to signify “the passing of Christendom.” (*Victorian Fantasy* 187, 188) Although primary MacDonald scholars put forth such propositions, they are inconsistent with MacDonald’s corpus as a whole, inconsistent

²⁴⁵ McGillis’ introduction to the Oxford University Press double-edition of the *Princess* books is a notable exception of considering the text within the body of MacDonald’s work – and his effort to do so gives integrity to his reading. He concludes that the end portrayed here is but “a sign of renewal, of new beginnings.” (xviii) Sigman’s argument, in a text edited by McGillis, does suggest that the nihilistic readings do not ring true, yet despite his engagement with both Scripture and other MacDonald texts, his interpretation remains limited by his anachronistic Jungian lens. (193)

with his biography, and inconsistent with his own expressions of intent and responsibility.²⁴⁶ Here Scott's assertion, that to consider an author's life and his wider body of work enables a more accurate perception of particular texts, is certainly relevant – as is MacDonald's plea to the critic to “not forget the builder while he admires the architect.” (“Imagination” 38) Revelations abound for those willing to engage more thoroughly with the context in which MacDonald consciously stands, aided by his persistent reengagements with certain themes. His frequent citing of sources and numerous explicit quotations not only enable a better understanding of the passage or text at hand, but also broaden the understanding of his writing in general; he is swift to invite his reader “into the society which he himself prizes most.” (39) A close look at a section of the particular ‘Book’ that MacDonald claims to have read and valued more than any other, the section known as *Isaiah*, enables a more accurate understanding of the contentious ending of *Curdie* as well as of numerous other perplexities.²⁴⁷

Unfashionable a text as the Bible may be in the twenty-first century, it has nonetheless been a formative influence on much of Western Literature, and it is evident that the work of MacDonald is no exception. The role of the Bible – its place in both culture and literature – was an issue of much debate in nineteenth-century London, and the book of *Isaiah* is a text that received specific attention from academics. This Old Testament text is by no means the only book, story, or poem with which *Curdie* has a relationship – as indicated by previous chapters, the interplay of texts and ideas was far too integral to MacDonald's understanding of communicating truths to be so limited.²⁴⁸ As audacious as it may sound to others in the field, this chapter proposes that critical studies of *Curdie*'s engagement with Grecian myths, English Romantics, or patterns in folklore, let alone psychoanalysis of MacDonald's intent, would be better directed for first taking into account the critically unique role *Curdie* has with *Isaiah*. Perhaps one could be so bold as to call *Isaiah*, in MacDonald's phrase, “the spiritual scaffolding or skeleton”: “those main ideas upon which the shape is constructed, and around which the rest group as ministering dependencies.” (39) It is of distinct interest, and instructive

²⁴⁶ MacDonald discusses an artist's responsibility at length in *Seaboard*: “in his hours of hopelessness [...] let him not sing aloud in such a mood into the hearts of his fellows, for he cannot do them much good thereby [...] let the hopeless moods, at least, if not the hopeless men, be silent.” (620)

²⁴⁷ MacDonald's daily habit of Bible-reading is detailed in his letters; doing so in New Testament Greek occasions him especial delight. (*Letters* 275, 278, 283, etc.) He states clearly that he has studied the Gospels more than any book. (153)

²⁴⁸ The role of *Isaiah* in the text, and in the life of MacDonald, could be discussed at great length, yet the purpose of this chapter is to look at why MacDonald chose *Isaiah* as an overarching framework for this specific fantasy, as many critical questions can be answered through recognizing the intentional relationship. As regards other influences, since the first delivery of the findings of this chapter (Hammersmith Symposium, June 2005), Amell has explored the influences of Shakespeare, and F. Soto has explored allusions to the myth of Eirene (following the lead of N. Willard and N. Patterson). Yet unexplored are the multiple allusions to Coleridge (relevant to the lengthy critical analysis in *There and Back*), Shelley (in particular *Prometheus Unbound*), and Plato (i.e. the sources of Human Nature, devolution into animals, servant-king/philosopher-king, and the unification of Justice, Beauty, and Truth).

for this study, to be aware that *Isaiah* is actually a text MacDonald references repeatedly throughout his corpus. F.D. Maurice and Matthew Arnold, both friends of MacDonald, and both voices with very attentive Victorian audiences, also give extensive attention to *Isaiah*, and a close consideration of how they do so reveals that *Curdie* does not stand independent of their commentary. Indeed, a close reading of Maurice's and Arnold's work reveals that *Curdie* is a text of greater critical import than it has hitherto been given credit – and its ending, when read in light of these *Isaiah* dialogues, perhaps not so disastrous after all.

This chapter then explores how MacDonald specifically pursues the concept of Scriptural Revelation as espoused by Erskine and Scott, under the guidance of a text by Maurice. In doing so he shows how the particular revelations of an Old Testament text continue to transmit universal truths that can challenge and change the reader. In the manner encouraged by Scott, MacDonald engages with voices that have gone before, adding his own voice to the conversation. He reveals how an engagement with the voices of tradition is not the regression or stagnation that some might bewail, but rather a tried and tested means of actively engaging with current issues: as the story of *Curdie* reveals the mythopoeic nature of the ancient text of *Isaiah*, the truths of the texts remain truths, and even if new elements arise to meet new audiences, the eternal truths yet continue to transform. In addressing the contentions that are raging in nineteenth century dialogue, MacDonald draws upon his own relational upbringing – specifically: how he has come to understand the issues of language and translation as well as those of identity and landscape; who he considers able to receive God's revelation or able to be mediums of that grace; and what he has learned of the essence of story and communication. Because of such schooling, MacDonald is better able to interpret these elements in his reading of *Isaiah*, and better able to translate them into the tale of *Curdie*. A number of late nineteenth and early twentieth century reviewers and critics considered MacDonald more successful at conveying the propositional concepts of the "Scotch divines" (Maurice included) than those men were themselves – MacDonald's readers imbibing the concepts more deeply through the storied texts than through sermons and lectures.²⁴⁹ This chapter examines how MacDonald does this – how in engaging with texts and stories from his Scriptural and literary heritage he draws out eternal truths "fresh expounded," rather than resigning the text to the nursery as Arnold is ready to do. Having himself received "the sort of inner revelations" of which Dante spoke, MacDonald is convinced that, as "all the depth of eternity lies in them," they will

²⁴⁹ *The Spectator* is representative, remarking that if "such divines": "have done much to reconcile reason and faith in Scotland, and to cast in new forms Scottish religion, George MacDonald has done even more, since for one man who can be approached by the logic of the sermon, twenty can be touched by the pathos and imagination of the story." ("A Great" 26)

continue to give hope to his readers and enable transformation. (qtd Greville 185; *Middle Ages* 71) The inherent relationality evidences that *Curdie* was written with the desire that it would, like its progenitor, be “a story out of which ever varying meanings will grow for different [recipients] in different ages.” (*Letters of CSL* 271)

Section I: Contexture: Recognizing the status of *Isaiah* in MacDonald’s corpus and in his culture

*We have called his acquaintance with Scripture profound,
and one peculiar way in which it manifests itself will bear out the assertion;
for frequently it is the very spirit and essential aroma of the passage that he reproduces,
without making any use of the words themselves.
There are passages in his writings which we could not have understood
but
for some acquaintance with the New Testament.
("St George's Day" 48)*

The *Commedia* is not the only text to which references recur throughout MacDonald’s corpus. From his first realistic novel, *David Elginbrod* (1863), *Isaiah* stands forth as a text of distinction. Within *Elginbrod*, the fortieth chapter of *Isaiah* is read in its entirety three times. Not only is it expressed upon each occasion that this is the favourite chapter of the saintly Elginbrod (a character based on MacDonald’s father [Greville 323]), but each time there is also a small exposition on some aspect of the Bible chapter. (4; 208; 367) It is arguable that the story itself is shaped by these expositions. The short story published the next year, “The Wow O’ Rivven” (1864), ends with a significant quotation from *Isaiah* 60, which calls for the reader to reflect anew upon the tale they have just heard. (189) In *Annals* the book of *Isaiah* is mentioned several times, and at one point its fortieth chapter is emphasized again, exegeted at considerable length, beginning with the words: “And the sermon I preached to myself and through myself to my people, was that which the stars had preached to me.” (512) This *Isaiah* sermon is a turning point in the novel, and is girded by several performances from Handel’s *Isaiah*-inspired *Messiah*. In *Wingfold* reflection upon words of the prophet *Isaiah* is part of an awakening for the curate (330), and paraphrases are scattered throughout the book.²⁵⁰ In the midst of the great storm in *Gibbie*, Gibbie remembers the words of the prophet “Esaías,” and thus we see how this story, too, is significantly shaped by the Old Testament text (202; Gibbie is so frequently named a ‘prophet’ that it is hard to overlook the parallels). In *What’s Mine’s*

²⁵⁰ The word *comfort*, which begins *Isaiah* 40, appears in various forms 123 times throughout the novel – a few too many to be unintentional.

Mine, the mother's memory of her husband preaching from *Isaiah* 28 is a pivotal moment in righting her relationship with her son and their land – just as in *Isaiah*, obedience to God and relationship with the land are key themes. (306) In *There and Back* (1890) Isaiah's vision is used as a prism through which to better understand the change in the protagonist Richard. (415) In *Hope of the Gospel* (1892), the book of *Isaiah* and the prophet himself are referenced frequently. At one point MacDonald gives careful emphasis to the fact that the text from which Christ read aloud when returning to his home synagogue was *Isaiah* – thus identifying himself as fulfilment of its prophecy. (63) *Isaiah* is, of course, the scriptural source for the character of Lilith, who figures in MacDonald's novel of the same name (1895), and whose name is also given to a character in the short story "The Cruel Painter" (1864), and to a horse in *Cumbermede* (1872). Such explicit references continue, and the implicit references are almost innumerable. *Isaiah* is also frequently referred to in the *Unspoken Sermons* (I-1866; II-1885; III-1889). Greville shows that the recitation of *Isaiah* is a habit that spanned his father's lifetime: as a schoolboy the young George regaled his friends with "a free metrical version of the 14th chapter of *Isaiah*" (a lengthy chapter); and late in MacDonald's life, according to a friend, "it was worth a journey from London [to Italy] to hear [him] read the 43rd chapter of *Isaiah*: 'The Divine Voice itself seemed to come to us as he finished by saying, 'Take it to yourself personally: what He said to Jacob, He says to you.'" (Greville 61; 507)

MacDonald was not unique among Victorian writers in giving close attention to this book, though his emphasis is extensive: *Isaiah* received substantial attention culturally. Handel's *Messiah* (largely based on excerpts from *Isaiah*, and emphasizing the fulfilment of this prophetic text in the person of Christ) was experiencing a revival.²⁵¹ *Isaiah* was dominant in many of the era's best-known hymns, including "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." (Sawyer 8) *Isaiah* 32:8 was used as a public epitaph by Queen Victoria, for herself and Albert. Holman Hunt's notorious paintings, such as *The Shadow of Death* and *The Scapegoat*, referenced well-known *Isaiah* passages. The celebrity Victorian preacher Charles Spurgeon, claiming that a verse from *Isaiah* had converted him, preached frequently from that book. (148) Ruskin's writings are littered with references to *Isaiah*, and he too could quote extensively from it by heart. (Milbank 29) Maurice's *Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament*,

²⁵¹ Furthering this revived interest was *The Works of John Newton* (1820), which contains thirty-eight sermons featuring the Handel libretto. (Sawyer 8) MacDonald referred to *The Messiah* in both sermons and novels, and Greville talks of "Handel's Largo from the far Jerusalem" being used to draw to conclusion their evening services. (508) Louisa, who sang with her daughters in the Handel Choir of the Crystal Palace, famously pounded away at the Hallelujah chorus on a church organ during an earthquake in Bordighera. (Beinecke Archive letters; Greville 515) In *The Elect Lady*, Handel is described in performance: "I saw him with his white rapt face, looking like a prophet of the living God sent to speak out the heart of the mystery of truth!" (113)

published in 1852/3, gave an unperturbed response to heated discussions of *Isaiah* in the field of Biblical Criticism and Historical Critical Method. Matthew Arnold published four different works commenting on *Isaiah*, making his own weighty contribution to the new Biblical study methods, and moving the influence of those methods promptly into the classroom.²⁵² He explains the import of this pervasive Old Testament book: “Isaiah is styled the greatest of the prophets, the evangelical prophet, and St. Jerome calls him not so much a prophet as an evangelist, and Ambrose told Augustine to read his prophecies the first thing after his conversion, and this prophet is of all Old Testament writers the one far most quoted in the New.” (*Prophecy* 4)

That *Isaiah* was receiving such attention is not as unusual as it might at first seem. Long known as the “fifth gospel,” it has always held a unique place as a text combining prophet, poet, and evangelist. Even intratextually *Isaiah* has prominence because, as Arnold points out, “this prophet is of all Old Testament writers the one far most quoted in the New.” (*Prophecy* 4) It is essentially a polyphonic text. Amongst early Church Fathers *Isaiah* has noteworthy influence on the writings of Augustine, and Jerome claims that it contains “all the mysteries of Christ.”²⁵³ (Sawyer 43, 48) In its role as Messianic prophecy and a call to Gentiles, it has been a key text for Chaucer, Dante, Dunbar, Milton, Bunyan, Herbert, Shakespeare, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Byrd, Bach, Pope, Byron, and Shelley – to name but a few. In the late eighteenth century Robert Lowth’s *Isaiah: a New Translation*, ensured that the text remained of principal literary interest. As widely read for Lowth’s introductory comments on the relation of prophetic and poetic language as for the translation itself, this and Lowth’s other writings on *Isaiah* were especially notable in their influence on Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Blake. That Isaiah the prophet was also a poet was a significant attraction to both pre-romantics and Romantics: a model to imitate.²⁵⁴

Yet of special pertinence to the current discussion is the fact that, being a text of such historical and literary significance – the “fifth gospel”²⁵⁵ – and yet safely *not* a gospel, *Isaiah* became the perfect test case for the Historical Critical Method. Its aptness was furthered by

²⁵² *A Bible-Reading for Schools (Isaiah, Chapters 40-66), Arranged and Edited for Young Learners* (1872); “Isaiah of Jerusalem,” an article in *Nineteenth Century* 13 (April, May 1883); *Isaiah XLXVI, with the Shorter Prophecies Allied to It* (1875); *Isaiah of Jerusalem, in the Authorized English Version with An Introduction, Corrections and Notes* (1883).

²⁵³ Augustine translates *Isaiah* 7: 9 into the Greek as: “If you do not believe, you will not understand” – evoking both ‘*Princes*’ books.

²⁵⁴ Coleridge makes use of Lowth’s translation in his 1795 lectures, and through Hugh Blair, Lowth’s thought on *Isaiah* also influences Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. This distinction is not surprising as in his introduction Lowth reconsiders what is understood to be the basic elements of poetry – pointing out that for the Hebrews, poetry was not necessarily defined by meter or rhyme. (“Introduction” np)

²⁵⁵ The “fifth gospel” is a term that has come to be applied to *Isaiah* precisely because of its relation with the four Gospel texts.

the discussion over ‘Deutero-Isaiah.’ As scholars considered the possibility of the book actually having two authors (Trito-Isaiah yet to be proposed), many questions arose with regard to who had actually written the book, when it was written, the actual identity of those referred to in the text, explanations for apparent inconsistencies, and probable text sources. Many Victorians held the King James Version of the Bible in such high esteem that some were even unaware that it was a translation; resistance to a new translation was high amongst the general population. (McGrath 301, 302) That such questions challenged the accuracy of a long-accepted translation disturbed many people; that authorship might also be in question was plain heresy. Prominent public figures, such as George Eliot, John Ruskin, and Leslie Stephen lost their faith over some of these issues. Wrote Arnold: “This is what everyone sees to constitute the special moral feature of our times: *the masses* are losing the Bible and its religion.” (*Dogma* 175) In large part it seemed like the church was in a divide, either liberally welcoming this new and revolutionary trend in Biblical scholarship or closing conservative doors soundly. And in the midst of this weighted, vested discussion sat the non-conforming George MacDonald, with his love of the book of *Isaiah*, and his insistence upon the importance of the poesis within it.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Should there be contention over discussing the *story* of *Isaiah*, rather than *poem*, it is important to remember that neither form necessarily excludes the other – as discussed in relation to MacDonald and Sidney in footnote 5 of the Introduction. Only about a century prior to MacDonald did ‘novels’ begin to be published in non-verse form. For a specific defense of *Isaiah* as narrative, see: “Is There a Narrative Substructure Underlying the Book of Isaiah?” by R.L. Routledge, Tyndale Bulletin (2004).

Section II: Correlations: The previously unrecognized infusion of *Curdie* with *Isaiah*

- i) Pervasive Correlations
- ii) A Concluding Correlation

*But no amount of knowledge of the words of the Bible
would be sufficient to justify the use of the word
profound.
What is remarkable in the employment of these passages,
is not merely that they are so present to his mind that
they come up for use in the most exciting moments of composition,
but that he embodies
the spirit of them
in such a new form
as reveals to minds saturated and deadened with the sound of the words,
the very visual image and spiritual meaning involved in them.
("St. George's Day" 50)*

i) Pervasive Correlations

Any reader of MacDonald familiar with *Isaiah* will quickly recognize the parallels to primary MacDonald themes. These include the call to obedience; responsibility to social justice; the primacy of Light over darkness; servanthood; the interconnectedness of the people and the land; the dangers of noble thought without noble deed. In *Curdie* it is easy to see how MacDonald's love of theology, literary criticism, and the stereoscopic nature of mythology fuse. Perhaps the most obvious image correlation between *Isaiah* and *Curdie* is Curdie's preparation for a mission he has offered to go on even though he does not know what it will entail. Just like Isaiah with his renowned "Here am I, send me," Curdie is commissioned before a royal throne, prepared with coals. Both Isaiah and Curdie confess to deeds ill done. Both are given the means to assess people's hearts, and the weight of a message the people will not want to hear. And both accept the mission. But this is far from all: the fine details of correlations abound throughout the story – even down to the specific actions of the caterpillar-creature (*Is.* 33:4; *Curdie* 181) and the maggoty scullery. (*Is.* 14:11; *Curdie* 181) The character Lina matches all too well the description of "a little child shall lead them," the creature with the hand of a child leading her group of Ugliers, together numbering fifty, and making Curdie not unlike the Isaianic description of the prophet being a "captain of fifty." (*Is.* 11:6, 3:3) In both *Isaiah* and *Curdie*, wild beasts cleanse the palace of corrupt courtiers who poison the wine.²⁵⁷ (*Curdie* 173-183; *Is.* 28:7,8; 57:9) In *Curdie*'s battle, the five face "thousands

²⁵⁷ As the once imprisoned now "take them captives, whose captives they were," the worst is reserved for the treacherous courtiers (*Is.* 14:1; 57:9) – who commit the same crimes in *Curdie* as in *Isaiah*, including poisoning the wine and denying bread

to one against them,” and victory is enabled by their ensign on a hill – with a cloud formed by doves also coming to the rescue. (210) *Isaiah* 30:17 tells the same story.²⁵⁸ Literally well over a hundred direct textual correlations exist between the two texts, including exact quotations. To tally these seems an endless task, and reveals an author astoundingly familiar with his primary text.²⁵⁹

Wider strokes include such parallels as when Peter and Curdie walk in the mines and “see a great light”: the great-great-grandmother. (*Curdie* ch.6; *Is.* 9:2)²⁶⁰ There in the mine Curdie and Peter are told, rather startlingly:

And now I am going to tell you what no one knows but myself: you, Peter, and your wife both have the blood of the royal family in your veins. I have been trying to cultivate your family tree, every branch of which is known to me, and I expect Curdie to turn out a blossom on it. Therefore I have been training him for a work that must soon be done.

(53)

Similar words are repeatedly uttered by the prophet: “The Lord formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob to him again” (49:5); “Thou shalt inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hand” (60:21); “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might [...] and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears” (11:1-3); Israel shall: “take root...blossom and bud.” (27:6) Thus is Curdie of royal seed as *Isaiah* is of royal seed, and soon he is, as bold and wise counsellor, to judge men with his hands rather than eyes or ears. The chapter in which this declaration occurs is called “What is in a Name?” and Curdie’s proper name, Conrad, is Old German for “bold counsellor” or “wise counsellor” – another phrase from *Isaiah* made even more familiar through Handel’s *Messiah*. (*Is.* 9:6) Curdie’s parents are called Peter – “the rock” – and Joan (feminine form of John) – “God is gracious”: Curdie has a rich lineage indeed. The Celtic church (through Lindisfarne and Iona) deferred to the authority of St. John ‘the contemplative’; the Roman

to the hungry king. (*Is.* 58:7; *Curdie* 140) The passages from *Isaiah* in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, will be from the contemporaneous King James Version.

²⁵⁸ *Is.* 30:17 reads: “One Thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of the mountain, and as an ensign on a hill.” *Is.* 60:8 adds: “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their window?” – the flying cloud in *Curdie* is the “white winged army of heaven,” the Great-great-grandmother’s doves. (*Curdie* 211) Down they swoop on the invaders, like “a storm in which the wind was birds, and the sea men” (*Curdie* 210): “But the wicked [were] like the troubled sea.” (*Is.* 57:20-21) Up the hill return the birds to that ensign of the Queen’s arm, raised for renewal, and with “trebled velocity” rush out to wreak more justice. (210) *Isaiah* repeatedly refers to the intervening arm of the Lord, which he raises before the nations, bringing salvation where there is no justice. “So shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend.” (31:4, 5)

²⁵⁹ A list of some of the additional textual correlations will be found in the Appendix.

²⁶⁰ *Isaiah* passage in full: “The people who walked in darkness saw a great light” – a passage traditionally understood to mean the Light of God.

church traced its lineage from the authority of St. Peter, the man of faithful action, the rock on whom Christ had promised to build his Church. In 644 this diversity was addressed in a significant and divisive synod. The Great-great-grandmother has intentionally reunified Curdie's lineage; faithful to Scott's concept of unity, his parentage defies schism. These 'converging patterns' give shape to the story.

With that in mind, a consideration of *Isaiah* within the writings of MacDonald's mentor Maurice clearly confirms that MacDonald has more than just the biblical text of *Isaiah* in mind. Maurice's *Prophets and Kings* proves to be a surprisingly useful tool with which to explore the interplay between *Curdie* and *Isaiah*, as a close read reveals that Curdie's adventure seems especially influenced by *Isaiah* as seen through Maurice's study. It is fascinating to read through Maurice's sermons – to see how deeply they enter the *story* of *Isaiah*, how intentional they are at trying to draw his listeners into the story that they might understand the book's complexities – and then to realize how closely the sermons also guide the unfolding of Curdie's tale. Maurice is clearly practicing the methodology he and Scott taught. Thus it is important to pay specific attention to how definitely MacDonald – by the 1880s himself a well-seasoned writer, critic, teacher, and preacher – is being guided by Maurice's theological commentary.²⁶¹ In "Sermon XIII 'The Vision of the King,'" a sermon beginning with the text of *Isaiah* 6:1, Maurice's description of Isaiah's vision parallels closely Curdie's 'commissioning' visits to the Great-great-grandmother, Queen-Princess Irene. Just as the novel does, the sermons detail ermine-covered mountains (evoking Ruskin's alps) and a degenerate hero who requires purgation before he is able to rescue a further degenerate people; they sketch the royal lineage of a protagonist who continuously needs to see the truth beneath the surface of appearances. And it is not just the generalities of Maurice that correlate with *Curdie*, but again a multiplicity of unique specifics: the repeated patterns and common symbols proliferate. For example, Maurice writes that in Isaiah's vision, "Each object was the counterpart of one that was then or had been at some time before his bodily eyes yet it did not borrow its shape or colour from those visible things." (222) This is Curdie's experience in his visits to the room of the Great-great-grandmother: a "bare garret, a heap of musty straw, a sunbeam, and a withered apple" (or later, a rickety spinning wheel, a moonbeam, and an old withered woman) become completely

²⁶¹ Although introduced by Scott, MacDonald and Maurice had an independent relationship. MacDonald dedicated *Miracles of Our Lord* to Maurice, and he was godfather to one of MacDonald's sons. From 1860-69 Maurice was the family's priest. (*AJS* 51) MacDonald also gives not only a description, but a defense of Maurice (as the character Robert Falconer) in *Elginbrod* – that book which focuses so closely on *Isaiah* 40. In 1869 Maurice wrote that he would "deem it a great honour" if MacDonald could collaborate with him on a book combining his prayers and meditations with MacDonald's hymns, with the intent of promoting and encouraging "the Unity of the Church" (cf. Maurice's letter in King's London archives). Maurice's ill health impeded the project, and he died in 1872. (Greville 399ff)

transformed into glorious counterparts. Maurice writes that, “For it is true of earthly symbols, still more of heavenly visions, that they are meant to carry us out of words and above words; not so that we despise them or think lightly of them, but that we seeing the reality of the invisible may not be greatly disturbed by the processes and conceits of our minds.” (222) This invocation of centuries of discussion about the limitation of words to convey meaning is paralleled in the Great-great-grandmother’s request of Curdie: “Listen to the wheel.” Curdie receives communication of something beyond even what the Great-great-grandmother can capture within words – yet he is somehow able, again in a mysterious manner beyond words, to convey some of his apprehension of this revelation to her. She then ‘words’ what she can of his reception, and the reader is able to read “something like the words of its song.”²⁶² (64, 65) Maurice explains that in *Isaiah* it is the holiness of God that is being expressed ineffably in the seraphims’ hymn, that which is beyond word and even beyond image. He writes of how the prophet says, “Woe is me! For I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” (223)

Curdie too first stands before the Great-great-grandmother “as a culprit, and worst of all, as one who had his confession yet to make.” As he makes his confession he comes to realize that it is not his most recent deed that he is in most need to confess, but rather that his whole way of living has become ‘unclean’, or, as Curdie himself phrases it, “the wrong had soaked all through me”: although he had “done right for sometime,” he had “forgotten how” and was now “doing the wrong of never wanting or trying to be better [and he] didn’t want to hear the truth.” (30) He is like the prophet of whom Maurice says: “All his uncleanness had come from this. He and his people were impure because they had lost that common life and love which belonged to them while they were living as the people of God.” (*Prophets* 226) Maurice expounds:

In such a revelation the discovery of personal evil comes first. The man does not look about him to compare his offences with those of other men and try which are the heavier. It is not this or that particular offence, no, nor a multitude of particular offences, that overwhelms him; it is the feeling of a root of bitterness; not ‘I have done this or that wrong,’ but ‘I am wrong.’ Not however that this thought could long be separated from the one of which it must take precedence. “I dwell among a people of unclean lips.”

²⁶² “The music of the wheel was like the music of an Aeolian harp blown upon by the wind that bloweth where it listeth.” (*Curdie* 65) Recalling dialogue with Ruskin, the words that Curdie hears from the Athena-like wheel, laden with familiar biblical imagery, has a strong semblance to the poem “Prayer,” by Herbert. It also serves as homage to Coleridge’s poem “The Aeolian Harp.” The song was published separately from *Curdie*, in both *A Threefold Cord* and *Poetical Works*. Ruskin describes Athena as “The Spirit of Wisdom in *Conduct*, bearing, in sign of conquest over troublous [sic] and disturbing evil, the skin of the wild goat [recall the goat skin given to Curdie], [and in] her hand, a weaver’s shuttle, or a spear.” (Birch 78)

There is the same pollution in them which there is in me. Each of us is living to himself. Each is living apart from that God who has called us to be holy as He is. He is attended by obedient Spirits, Spirits united in obedience, working together as His servants, for the fulfilment of His purposes. We are separate and broken; every man following a way of his own; not a people, because we do not believe that a King is with us. (224-5)

The further relevance of this passage becomes clear when it is explained that that which Curdie has need to repent is the same affliction that the people of his country suffer. Curdie must first deal with his own faults before he is able to serve the Great-great-grandmother in his mission – a mission to the city in which the people have ceased to believe that their King is one with them (let alone that the likes of the Great-great-grandmother may exist and thus is ‘with them’); a city in which each has very explicitly begun “living to himself” (*Prophets* 225), their “first fundamental principle [being] that every One should take of that One,” their proclaimed responsibility the “well-being of the original self.” (*Curdie* 189) As Maurice had explained in his passage dedicated to Scott, revelation is “the making known that which is, to the persons who are the most interested in knowing it.” (xxvii)

ii) A Concluding Correlation: A ‘new’ reading of the contentious ending of *Curdie*

*Our object has been to bring forward a few passages which seem to us
to breathe the very spirit of individual passages in sacred writ,
without direct use of the words themselves;
and, of course,
in such a case we can only appeal to the (no doubt)
very various degrees of conviction
which they may rouse in the minds of our readers.
("St. George's Day")*

A thorough exploration of Maurice's sermons and the book of *Isaiah* answers many of the perplexities that critics have with *Curdie* – including that of the book's conclusion. For Maurice reiterates throughout his sermon series that the central message of *Isaiah* is this: that though the whole land be shaken and seem to die, the Prince of Peace shall never pass – his word endures forever. (*Prophets* 231; *Is.* 40:8²⁶³) Maurice tells us that he has belaboured this segment of *Isaiah* so carefully,

because I believe that it leads us into the very heart of Isaiah's teaching, and that all the portions of it which we shall have to consider hereafter, are but expansions of the hints in this opening vision.... And if there should come a convulsion in that land, such as neither thou nor thy

²⁶³ The central message of *Is.* 40: 6-8, which in discussing the temporality of man concludes with “His [God's] Word endures forever,” is expounded upon in *I Peter* 1 – a chapter that concludes again, “His Word endures forever.”

fathers have known, be sure that it signifies the removal of such things as can be shaken, *that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.* (235; italics mine)

Maurice's interpretation of what he calls a key passage for understanding *Isaiah* is also a key for understanding what happens, what is being conveyed, at the end of *Curdie*.²⁶⁴ All that MacDonald leaves of the mighty gold-filled rock and the city that crowned it, is "a stone-obstructed river;" barely even a remnant.²⁶⁵ (*Curdie* 221) The very name of the town passes from the lips of men. The city ends in destruction: *is* this MacDonald's intimation that it has all been for naught, that his faith is in ruins? Aside from all else, such an interpretation does not follow coherently on the tail of the story (were the tale written centuries earlier one might hear calls for a 'deutero-MacDonald'). Yet that has not hindered such assumptions. Robb talks of the "aggressively pessimistic ending," commenting that "it still seems surprising that he should have articulated such a vision in a book allegedly for children." (*GMD* 115,116) Wolff asserts that the ending proves that MacDonald is a "man in despair." (179) Gillian Avery, after asserting: "it is unlikely, given the climate of the 1820s and MacDonald's Congregational background, that he was brought up on traditional fairy tales in youth," decides that *Curdie* is a story that springs "out of the black despair and rage against human folly that brings out the final desolation of the kingdom." (133)

But reading Maurice should give clarity. Gwyntystorm *had* been redeemed by the royal prophet who was sent by the Great-great-grandmother to save and rule them,²⁶⁶ but once he is gone and the people forget yet again all that they have been taught, including their own redemption, they descend yet further than before. Nothing is left of the city once its foundational pillars "left standing to bear the city" are over-mined in greed, and collapse. (219) The city falls "with a roaring crash,"

then there was a great silence. Where the mighty rock once towered, crowded with homes and crowned with a palace, now rushes and raves a stone obstructed rapid of a river. All around spreads a wilderness of wild deer, and the very name of Gwyntystorm had ceased from the lips of men.²⁶⁷ (219-221)

²⁶⁴ That message also holds resounding similarities with the closing remarks of the exiled laird in *WMM* (and of Mackintosh MacKay).

²⁶⁵ The "stone-obstructed river" also stands as a reminder that the rock on which this city was founded, filled with stone that caused men like the baker to "stumble," mined by the petrous Peter and ruled by Curdie Peterson yet remains – though the city is shaken out of existence. Victorian readers familiar with Isaianic reference to the Messiah as the "stone that makes men stumble," and "Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord is the Rock eternal (...) he lays the lofty city low; punished them and brought them to ruin, wiped out all memory of them" would notice the allusions. (*Is.* 8:14; 26:5, 14)

²⁶⁶ Curdie, like Isaiah, is of royal blood.

²⁶⁷ This parallels the conclusion of *WMM*, in which the laird "dreams of the time" when the exiles can return to "repeople the old waste places, and from a wilderness of white sheep and red deer, make the mountain land a nursery of honest, unambitious, brave men and strong-hearted women, loving God and their neighbour." (417)

MacDonald has left no survivors *in the city*; in the tradition of fairy-tales such an ending may not be so problematic, not when one recalls the stories gathered by Andrew Lang and the Brothers Grimm. However, the reader of the story should remember that the city was only part of the setting of this tale: the land of the country miners and even of the villagers whose children threw stones at Curdie yet remain, and perhaps of even greater importance there still remains the forest where the “Uglies” dwell – the remnant Ugliers for which the reader sustains increased hope once the woman-turned-Lina-with-the-hand-of-a-little-child has been refined by rose-fire. Yet most important of all – and Maurice’s reading makes very clear that *this* is the crucial point – no child-reader fears for the eternal Great-great-grandmother, the Princess of Peace who first sent the prophet with his warnings. In *Goblin* she had been untouched by the flood that had filled the countryside-castle for days and days – indeed when Curdie expressed fear for her, knowing that the castle might fall, Irene had assured him: “My grandmother is in no danger. [She] knows all about it, and isn't frightened. I believe she could walk through that water and it wouldn't wet her a bit.” (303) So while the people of Gwyntystorm who were “worse even than in the old time” are now gone, the Great-great-grandmother – the apparently eternal Queen-Princess Irene – is in no danger. (*Curdie* 219) All that was destroyed with Gwyntystorm was evil; she endures forever. She will carry on, being a lasting guiding light, a wise counsellor, and as her name indicates, a Princess of Peace to her people.²⁶⁸ Herein, believes Maurice, is the heart of the message. And it appears that MacDonald concedes. Maurice’s reading of *Isaiah* clarifies that it is not the continuation of any specific person, family, or even nation that is the most important goodness, but rather, that of the eternally wise Great-great-grandmother, and the hope that is founded upon her. Instead of making this explicit, MacDonald makes it implicit – and yet inherent to the cohesiveness of the story: “the best must be set before the learner, that he may eat and not be satisfied.” (“Imagination” 38) This guiding Light has always been greater than just this one tale – even allusions by the king and Curdie’s mother keep the reader minded of that. (23; 167) In the vein of fantasy tradition hope is held out to the reader: although the pages of the story may close, she is still there, somewhere.²⁶⁹ As is, ever accessibly, her Story.

The more closely one reads Maurice, the more one recognizes the plot decisions and designs

²⁶⁸ The name *Irene* means *Peace* – of which her doves are a symbol. And the eternal nature of this Princess of Peace is emphasized by the king’s remembrance of overhearing *his* grandfather speak of her. (167) Deeds aside, her supernatural nature is indicated by her multiple forms: old woman by the wayside, majestic queen, vision in the mines, castle maid, titan overseeing living sacrifice. Yet, as she told Curdie at the beginning, she is still and ever “the same all the time.” (56)

²⁶⁹ Manlove picks up a sense of this: “At the heart of the book, in the midst of the darkness and the spiritual bolts of lightning cast against the sinful, we feel a hint of the world poised on the edge of transformation, about to pass away beyond the old husk to a new and more glorious form.” (*Fantasy* 98)

within *Curdie* – though not all the complexities are removed: reading him is but the beginning, because for MacDonald, as discussed, there is always a multiplicity of engagement with other sources. While *Isaiah* provides the dominant framework, it is still only one of the many voices shaping *Curdie*. Yet understanding the engagement with *Isaiah* gives much fuller insight into MacDonald's engagement with these other texts.²⁷⁰ No engagement stands independent of the others; the conversation is antiphonal *and* polyphonous. Deceptively simple in appearance, *Curdie* is actually a complex array of interweaving and re-presenting: "A fairytale, like a butterfly or a bee, helps itself on all sides, sips at every wholesome flower, and spoils not one." ("Fantastic" 195) Occasionally MacDonald scholars have postulated that the obvious presence of such influences as mythology or Romanticism makes evident that MacDonald's message cannot be of Christian intent. This is not only a misunderstanding, but a grave underrating of the depth and complexity of MacDonald's dialogic *Weltanschauung*. A student of 'Woolwich Scott,' MacDonald is actively engaging in a long tradition of Literary Conversation: poesis has evoked poesis. As explained by a twenty-first century poet quite unthreatened by imaginative interplay,

Whether a literary work occurs in prose or verse, whether it is also characterized as fiction, as nonfiction, or as drama, whether or not it may also support additional, extra-textual narratives or propositions, it is poetic to the extent that it occasions further generation. [...] One can hardly read a passage of Virgil or of Dante [...] without experiencing a responsive flight of the imagination; if the reader is also a poet, that flight may well result in a responsive (or, as George Steiner might say, a therefore critically responsible) poem; if the reader is also a scholar, that flight may well result in a similarly co-creative reading that provides for rich and enriching readings thereafter. (Cairns 55)

Intentionally a co-creator, MacDonald – independently and at fifty-eight a seasoned writer and thinker – has used the commentary of his mentor Maurice as a lens. However, alert to the significant nineteenth century dialogue about reception and evaluation of Biblical text, and aware that *Isaiah* is frequently used as the test case text for this Historical Critical dialogue, MacDonald characteristically embeds his own studied answer to the conversation. He actually engages with a specific hermeneutic method, used by Maurice, yet pushes it even further in a direction being given little thought by those involved in the exegetical debate. Seeking to be "critically responsible," he situates it in a direction diametrically opposed to the one successfully touted by a man not shy in his actual abhorrence of Maurice's methods: Matthew

²⁷⁰ In particular, readings through Greek goddess myths (i.e. as given by Willard, Patterson, Soto) – as modelled in the following chapter.

Arnold.²⁷¹

Section III: Conscious Conversation: How MacDonald engages with contemporary critics and issues by means of his interactive fairytale

*It seems to us one of the greatest advantages that can befall a poet,
to be drawn out of his study,
and still more out of the chamber of imagery in his own thoughts,
to behold and speculate upon the embodiment of Divine thoughts and purposes
in men and their affairs around him.
("St. George's Day")*

Prickett's *Romanticism & Religion* has established that a study of the differences between contemporaries Maurice, Arnold, and MacDonald has much to divulge to the student of nineteenth century criticism. Bringing into dialogue their mutual interests in the text of *Isaiah* both intensifies and clarifies some of the pertinent issues, and the result is perhaps surprising in its significance. Arnold gave considerable time and attention to the concerns of criticism in the context of the book of *Isaiah*; as mentioned, he actually wrote four complete works on *Isaiah*. The ethos of these works stands in direct conflict with Maurice's writings – and with the writings of MacDonald. Did MacDonald have his friend Arnold in mind when penning *Curdie*? He had certainly practiced such engagement with Ruskin. And close study of this seemingly simple fairytale does indicate that MacDonald believed an important element had been overlooked in the ongoing dialogue of criticism – or, more precisely as with Arnold, had been deliberately devalued – and with *Curdie* MacDonald consciously draws his readers right into this element: the essential poesis of the text.

In the midst of the culturally significant discussion about how to read and assess Scripture – a key issue in the Victorian academy – Arnold's voice was that of educated reason, calling out for the historicity of the Bible as an influential text, as a time-proven guide of morality and ethics and a beautiful literary resource, not to be lost merely because some of the historical facts seemed not to hold true and some of the traditional translations seemed inadequate. (*Bible Reading* 3-4) Maurice's voice, though too liberal for some 'evangelicals' of the day, was yet a considerable distance from Arnold; even if traditional understandings of the text – both in

²⁷¹ Arnold called Maurice "that pure and devout spirit" but claimed his declarations both mischievous and vain. (*Dogma* 200) Even after Maurice's death Arnold still holds him in *intellectual* contempt, and indeed attacked him bitterly. (*Romanticism* 215, 225)

content and history – were being challenged, Maurice did not see this as a threat to faith and the greater Truth of the text. Instead he saw a place for the questions and was not threatened by the answers or the debates – neither those with which he agreed nor those with which he disagreed. He was convinced that Scripture was much more than a well-crafted morality guide. Although he did not wholly endorse the Historical Critical Method, recent scholarship has shown that he engaged with it to a greater extent, and even more positively, than he has been given credit for in the past. (Rogerson 33²⁷²; *Romanticism* 133) His major point of contention appeared to be when the Bible was objectified, made “an object that was in an inferior position to the critic.” (Rogerson 53) He saw the Historical Method critics as “not sufficiently literary in their approach”; ultimately, “they remain[ed] systematisers.”²⁷³ (*Romanticism* 133) Maurice wanted readers to see that the God engaging with humans in Old Testament times was the same one with which they of the nineteenth century could relate. To endorse a historical reading in this manner was to say that in and of itself, before the text even folds out into the Messianic readings relevant to Christians (a relevance in which Maurice believed), that text has important things to say about its own world, and *thus* to the reader about their world: universally relevant *because* of its particular relevance.²⁷⁴ This is a claim Maurice scholar J.W. Rogerson calls a “brave thing to do in Britain in the Church of England in 1852” (35) – and it was a theological claim that Arnold certainly could not accept.

Prickett clearly states a historical fact often overlooked in the current divorce of disciplines: “The nature of literary criticism (and the kinds of sensibility it implies) cannot be understood in the nineteenth century without reference to contemporary theology, just as the contemporary theology cannot be understood without reference to the literary criticism of the period.” (4) For MacDonald, Maurice, and Arnold – and for the Coleridge with whom they all engaged – this was a foregone conclusion. The writings of Maurice and of his mentor Coleridge both explore the multiple levels in which Scripture works, of how it is stereoscopic in its function of revelation. They explore how language points beyond itself, and how it acts as both the vehicle and symbol used as history shapes and conditions the way humanity interprets the present. These concepts contributed significantly to MacDonald's own

²⁷² In conversation Rogerson has called Maurice “quite ambivalent, really” about German Historical Criticism. (Gladstone Library, April 27, 2004)

²⁷³ As vented by vicar in *Seaboard*: “They insist on the anise and cumin, and forget the judgment, mercy, and faith. These worship the body of the truth, and forget the soul of it.” (250)

²⁷⁴ Maurice's emphasis indicates the shift in perspective from only a few decades before (1838) when Scott was reminding his audience that to neglect “literal, or historical, understanding of Scripture ... is to despise the wisdom of the Spirit in selecting the matter for the record. [...] We lose the lesson of a great part of the Bible if we regard it merely as an inspired and authoritative announcement to us now.” (*Two Discourses* 52)

understanding of Story – biblical and otherwise.²⁷⁵ Coleridge conceived of Biblical narrative as “living educts of the Imagination,” drawing out and eliciting something deep within us; this fortified MacDonald's belief that stories could indeed “wake up” something within the reader or listener. (*Biographia* 321; “Imagination” 319)

In *Curdie*, MacDonald represented elements of the book of *Isaiah*, educting them from the “living educt” of one story into the living educt of another – rather than etherizing them upon the table of exegesis. Curdie's new story, conceived in part through the old story of *Isaiah* – a text seen by the Church to be both independently complete and simultaneously a forerunner of the Gospel – reflects back upon that old story of *Isaiah* while lending light as well to all of its later representations. For MacDonald, this intertextual interweaving of universal truths that enhances the reality – each of the other – is revelation functioning on multiple levels of time, space, and experience. He obviously delights in this as much as did his literary mentors before him, those who not only loved the interplay of Scripture within itself, but also with the ancient myths and great classics – such as Dante, Milton, Spenser, Shakespeare. Apprehending what Scott and Maurice called ‘converging truths,’ the story of *Curdie* follows the advice of Scott's Balbo: it is a recognition of and a response to an identity-giving story – as well as to other responses to that story. It “benefits by the labours of others” and:

we are thus able to start from the goal at which our predecessors stopped, and help our successors onwards on the path of which none of us can see or know the furthest point [...] an influence on future ages can only belong to him who accumulates information from the past as well as from the present. (Balbo 80)

This ‘literary conversation’ embodied a relationality that MacDonald, like his genetic and literary forbearers, considers able to transform those who choose to participate. And MacDonald, like Scott and Maurice, believes that such participation would greatly aid the society in which he lives. Both *Isaiah* and *Curdie* contain strong themes of apostasy and social injustice. Both address the interconnectedness of the people and the land, and a leadership that scoffs at the prophet's warning. MacDonald saw these themes as relevant to nineteenth-century Britain, a society that had increasingly refused to perceive the dire need upon its doorstep. MacDonald knew streets full of crowded and diseased tenements, widows and orphans without comfort, and people evicted from their land. The barons of the Industrial Revolution exalted in ‘progress’ as pollution and production raced on, side-by-side; the *laissez-faire* of London is the

²⁷⁵ As the reader of Prickett will already be aware. Regarding Coleridge, the word ‘mentor’ is used guardedly – Maurice, like MacDonald after him, was well-able to sort what he considered dross from gold. Maurice expresses his personal homage to Coleridge in dedicating to him his book *The Kingdom of Christ*. Although the two never met, Coleridge praised Maurice's novel *Eustace Conway* (1834). (Cf. archival notes, King's London)

laissez-faire in *Curdie*: “No man pretended to love his neighbour, but every one said he knew that peace and quiet behaviour was the best thing... The city was prosperous and rich, and if everybody was not comfortable, everybody else said he ought to be... The main proof of the verity of their religion was that things always went well with those who professed it.” (189) It is no coincidence that Maurice was widely recognized for his public criticisms of the individualistic nature of the economic principles of *laissez-faire*. Nor is it a coincidence that a similar critique is found in both *Isaiah* and *Curdie*.²⁷⁶

As poet and as Doric-speaking (and counter-culturally writing) Scot, MacDonald is intrinsically aware of the challenge of ambiguity that language brings to Scripture. Each word can carry with it a myriad of overtones, allusions, and insinuations; language is polysemous. Particular phrases are embedded with histories. Yet despite the accompanying challenges, MacDonald – as Tolkien, Lewis, and Barfield – delights in multiplicity of meanings and ever deepening intertextual dialogue.²⁷⁷ He had heard Scott propound on the language in which literature was conveyed: “not of mere dictionary meanings, but of all the fine distinctive shades in association, in tone, in the feel, so to speak, of a word, which lead a poet to cull one from among a score of seeming synonyms.” (*English Literature* 26) He had watched his uncle traverse the Highlands and Australia fighting to keep alive a language so that a cultural identity – and its inheritance of worship – might not be lost. (The same uncle for whom Arnold endeavoured to attain a Civil Pension annuity.) He had given his own people lyricized Scripture in Scots. He had discovered in his personal struggles with translation that it is virtually impossible to carry the full context of one word or phrase into the world of another language that functions within its own context. And yet he still believes it is worth the effort to convey as much as is possible if the text is important: he spent over twenty years struggling to make his own translation of Novalis more adequately representative of the text. (*Rampolli* v; *Letters* 295)

²⁷⁶ MacDonald’s disdain was for greed-driven progress: his love for mechanics is revealed in the intricate inventions described in *SG&SM*, a retelling of Edward Somerset, seventeenth-century inventor of the steam engine prototype. MacDonald utilized advances in transportation as he lectured and preached throughout the U.K., and Greville records his aged father riding the sensational new tricycle. Perhaps most impressive is MacDonald’s acquisition and use of typing skills, both for manuscripts and correspondence.

²⁷⁷ For example *Derba*, the name of the only town-dweller hospitable to Curdie, is also the name of a town that plays the same part for reformers Peter and Barnabas. (Cf. *Acts* 14) MacDonald’s *Derba* also takes in the wicked servants when they are expelled and denied help by their fellows. In Gaelic *Derba* means “free man” – and indeed she is free of the envy and suspicion that rule the other townsfolk. In Middle English her name means, “place where the deer graze” – foreshadowing the place where the deer will graze (as the reader is told) once Gwyntystorm is no more. It was unlikely to have passed the notice of a man who turned an anagram of his own name into the family motto – “corage, God mend al” – that *Derba* is also an anagram for the potent symbol, *Bread*.

Keenly aware of the challenges of translating his own work, he had an ever-growing awareness of the inadequacies of some of the existing translations of the Bible.²⁷⁸ “After all,” he writes,

translation is but a continuous effort after the impossible. There is in it a general difficulty whose root has a thousand ramifications, the whole affair being but an accommodation of difficulties, and a perfect translation from one language into another is a thing that cannot be effected. One is tempted even to say there is no such thing as a synonym.²⁷⁹ (*Rampolli* vi)

From his own history as well as from Scott’s many lectures, MacDonald knew the truth of Coleridge’s proposition: that as “living educts” of the imagination, language grows from within a community, developing as it grows, imbued with the story and belief of that people. He knew that the language and text of the King James Bible played this role in Britain as no other text ever had (or has since): “its influence on the general development of the nation being unquestionable.” (“St. George’s Day” 51) And yet, as a student of both Scott and Erskine, and a conversation partner of Ruskin, MacDonald knew that that shaping was not exclusive to the King James Bible; it is a role that other texts also fill (some themselves shaped specifically by the King James Version – and some, even, having shaped that book’s translation): “besides *the* Bible, every nation has *a* Bible, or at least *an* Old Testament, in its own history.” (51) Of the same mind, Coleridge not only believed that the symbolic language of the Bible “changed the way a reader thinks and feels,” he also believed that all great literature functioned in this fashion, expressing more than any one reader could know in any one time or place.

(*Romanticism* 26) And so as a member of a long tradition, MacDonald contributes what he can to ‘knowing God’ by drawing on that symbolic language and writing stories like *Curdie*, stories that might just act so that the reader, or listener, is ‘woken up.’ (*Miracles* 1; “Imagination” 319) Using Story in the manner modelled by the Scripture he knew so well: to illuminate understanding of God and of Truth.

Rogerson explains Maurice’s perspective that:

a writer who was concerned to understand the principles of God’s government could meditate upon an old story, and re-present it. In re-presenting it, this writer would be less concerned with what had

²⁷⁸ Exuberant when given a Greek New Testament in 1878, MacDonald writes: “Still I have the old story to tell you – more and more delight in my New Testament. I had no idea how inadequate was the English of the Epistles, nor how much I should learn from the Greek. [...] The English is vanishing from me as inadequate – and so will the Greek by and by, and nothing be left but The Word.” (*Letters* 278)

²⁷⁹ “I have paid a great deal of attention to translation [...] Of very little translation that I have read could I say it was well done; of most I think abominable, but I know some translations that are as translations works of art. Among these is one of *David Elginbrod* into German by [Julie Sutton.]” (*Letters* 304) Also see discussion in *Elect Lady*: “I will reconsider the passage. We must not lightly change even the translated word!” (20)

originally happened *than with bringing out the truths* about God's Government that he saw in the story.²⁸⁰ (52; italics mine)

It is difficult to find a more accurate description of what MacDonald has done with *Isaiah* and *Curdie*. He weaves aspects of great literature – taking the language and symbols he believes to convey Truth – to yet present it again. Perhaps for some readers this re-presentation will help what MacDonald sees as the ‘truth of the story’ to go yet deeper. Whether the reader makes a direct connection to the story of *Isaiah* is not important; what *is* important is that he is, in Maurice's words, “*bringing out the truths* about God's Government that he saw in the story” of *Isaiah*. The resulting work offers an exegetical hermeneutic of *Isaiah* that stands in significant contrast to the contemporary attempts of Arnold. MacDonald – true to the models of his father and other mentors – both cared for and respected Arnold, yet he was in very strong disagreement with him in regards to Biblical and literary criticism.²⁸¹ This is made evident in the manner (to be discussed) in which *Curdie* stands in significant contrast to Arnold's work on *Isaiah*. Indeed, it is conceivable that the Maurice-influenced *Curdie* was in part a response to Arnold's ideas.

Section IV: Challenging the Contemporary Critic: How MacDonald uses mythopoeic writing to contend Arnold's critical claims

*And while the utterances of to-day pass away, the children of to-morrow are born,
and require a new utterance for their fresh need
from those who, having gone before, have already tasted life and Shakspeare,
and can give some little help to further progress than their own,
by telling the following generation what they have found.
("St George's Day")*

Both MacDonald and Arnold agreed that there was need for a more accurate translation of the Bible, but as to what such efforts might achieve they did not agree. MacDonald pointed out to his readers that words could be translated in different ways, could hold more than one meaning – but more importantly, that the text as a whole was infinitely full of multi-dimensioned truths which could never be successfully explained or contained by academic

²⁸⁰ Rogerson wrote this unaware of the MacDonald-Maurice connection (discovered in conversation, April 27, 2004). It is another reiteration of the Balbo concept. In *Seaboard* Maurice's sermon-story method is illustrated when the vicar communicates to some shipwreck survivors by re-telling the story of Christ stilling the waters, then saving Peter. (208)

²⁸¹ Arnold wrote MacDonald a very moving thank-you letter after the death of his daughter: “My dear MacDonald – You are one of those whose [–?] thoughts and kind feelings I especially value. [...] I do not quite like your writing from Hastings, it looks as if you were not strong yet. You should not overwork yourself, though you have many temptations. I constantly notice how your words make way and how warm as well as wide is the intent felt in them...” (Beinecke 1/41/1) In *Antiphon* MacDonald lists Arnold as one of England's heritage voices, contributing as a “reverent doubter” to her literary dialogue of faith, and expresses admiration for Arnold as both a critic and a poet. (283)

means; thus a fairytale serves to show how full and complex even part of that text could be. Arnold, however, was convinced that academic advances, scientific advances, meant that all ambiguity would be – and should be – eradicated. Stories, fairytales, are that which “no man can verify,” and so he fears people will say: “The Bible takes for granted [stories] and depends on the truth of [them]; what, then, can rational people have to do with the Bible?” (*Dogma* 175)

While Maurice may have felt that if forced to choose, the truths were more important than the facts, Arnold believed that the facts were everything. The concept that “myth” was a manner of conveying something “wider and deeper than the rational and propositional” (*Romanticism* 240) was for Arnold dangerous and deceiving. Maurice had welcomed Coleridge showing how theology and literature are inextricably entwined; it was congruent with the teaching of Scott and Erskine. Arnold, however, though he did see the Bible as a beautiful piece of literature and argued vociferously for the cultural import of not just the Bible but of the King James Version specifically, feared that legend, superstition, and fairytale had “grown up around the basic moral truths of Christianity” and were, “in danger of strangling it.”²⁸² (*Romanticism* 213) He writes:

That men should, by help of their imagination, take short cuts to what they ardently desire, whether the triumph of Israel or the triumph of Christianity, should tell themselves fairy-tales about it, should make these fairy-tales the basis for what is far more sure and solid than the fairy-tales, the desire itself – all this has in it, we repeat, nothing which is not natural, nothing blamable...In religion, above all, *extra-belief* is in itself no matter, assuredly, for blame. *The object of religion is conduct*; and if a man helps himself in his conduct by taking an object of hope and presentiment as if it were an object of certainty, he may even be said to gain thereby an advantage.

And yet there is always a drawback to man's advantage in thus treating, when he deals with religion and conduct, what is extra-belief and not certain as if it were a matter of certainty, and in making it his ground of action. *He pays for it*. The time comes when he discovers that it is *not* certain; and then the whole certainty of religion seems discredited, and the basis of conduct gone. (*Dogma* 80, 81)

Literature and Dogma shows how Arnold was persistent in attempting to demythologize religious belief, showing that modern man needed to move beyond “fairy tale” belief in Scripture and, as Prickett phrases it, “separate the kernel of abstract truth from its poetic husk.” (58; 214) Rather than embracing an existing paradox as had Coleridge, Arnold could only believe in “*one* world.” His stance was almost antithetical to Ruskin's. Prickett explains that for Arnold,

²⁸² Prickett suggests that Arnold's use of the word “fairy story” is a colloquialism for what Coleridge meant by ‘myth.’ (214)

“values must ultimately be deduced from the same material world as science and technology, because there was and could be no other.” (216) For Arnold this one world was decidedly not multi-dimensional – a contrast to the Aberdeenshire-raised MacDonald. The importance of this emphasis becomes evident in Arnold’s various studies of *Isaiah*.²⁸³ Arnold indicates that it is possible for a translator to aim to be “purely scientific” when translating, in order “to render his original with perfect accuracy.” (*Prophecy* 11) Indeed he lauds T.K. Cheney’s objective with *Isaiah*, in 1870, which is “simply scientific, to render the original with exactness.”²⁸⁴ (11) Arnold calls Cheney “one of that new band of Oxford scholars who so well deserve to attract our interest, because they have the idea, which the older Oxford has had so far too little, of separated and systematized studies.”²⁸⁵ (13) Such an idea was in stark contrast to the earlier educational efforts of Scott, who had warned against that very accolade:

A man is praised because he has brought the truth into a nutshell; pared it down to suit his own grasp, determined it all by some single, simple proposition (because the rest of its elements ask for more room than he has to give): such a one is called a clear-headed logician. But all the while, the truth has escaped him; it is but a *caput mortuum*, but ashes, that he has collected in his logical crucible; and truth remains as before, wide and free as the heavens. And the heart is narrow as well as the head. We do not like the demands of the Divine Spirit upon us. (*First Principle* 330)

Arnold is not a student of either Coleridge or Scott; he believes that “to have one version universally received is of the greatest advantage.” (*Prophecy* 2) The way in which he articulates this may not sound surprising until one stops to consider that Arnold, like MacDonald, Coleridge, and even Maurice, is a poet. The *desire* for a single sufficient translation of this Hebrew poetry is not as disconcerting as the implication that Arnold believes that such a feat is possible.

Arnold is careful to make clear that such a feat is not possible for *him*, for his own grasp of the language required is not sufficient. And so with his commentaries, while awaiting the forthcoming “officially revised version,” he offers something different. He differentiates between “correcting the English Bible” – the task he sets out to do with *Isaiah* – and “re-translation in an aim of scientific exactness.” (15) He claims that any alterations he is making

²⁸³ Of Arnold’s four different pieces specifically on *Isaiah*, three are commentaries, with introductions that carefully detail not only the importance of the text of *Isaiah*, but also the importance of the King James translation of that book. One of these commentaries was a text for school children – a more formative and influential venue for Arnold’s voice than perhaps has been given consideration. This “Religious Education” textbook, highly lauded by *The Times* and written by a man who was also the prominent ‘Inspector of State Schools,’ undoubtedly shaped an entire generation of young thinkers.

²⁸⁴ Cheney’s influential volume *The Prophecies of Isaiah* was first published in 1880. In 1870 he had published an earlier work on *Isaiah*, which “aimed at reconciling in some degree English style and Hebrew scholarship.” (Cheney ix)

²⁸⁵ Arnold was aware that Maurice studied at that ‘older Oxford’ under the Colridgean, Julius Hare.

to the text are merely to remove comprehension difficulties. He is intent on making clear that he leaves “the physiognomy and movement of the authorized version quite unchanged.” (1) Arnold is obviously conscious that any change whatsoever to the King James Version raises a delicate issue. Again and again, almost to a point of paranoia, he stresses that the old text of the English Bible is “a literary work of the highest order”; indeed, “the Book of Isaiah, as it stands in our Bibles, is this in a double way. By virtue of the original it is a monument of the Hebrew genius at its best, and by virtue of the translation it is a monument of the English language at its best...the power of the English version must not be sacrificed.” (12)

Yet what Arnold *does* change is curious. His mandate is clarity: “A clear sense is the indispensable thing.” (8) For Arnold this means that he *will* make corrections to the text where the King James Version is confusing. However he will *not* change any text just because he knows the translation to be wrong – not if keeping that wrong translation retains clarity. “Even where the authorized version seems wrong, I have not always, if its words give a clear sense, thought it necessary to change them” – only if the correct translation gives a higher “poetic propriety and beauty” than the King James Version will he change it. (8) And yet he had said he regarded it “quite forbidden” to “alter by guess the original” no matter how “pleasing and ingenious.” (10-11) The very man who has called for a “scientific” treatment of the text is here approaching the text himself in an entirely subjective fashion, taking it upon himself to decide when he can assist a portion of the text to a higher beauty and when to allow the translation of the text to stand incorrect. While disagreeing with Maurice that ‘truth’ is more important than facts, here Arnold acts in a manner that claims that beauty is more important than either truth or fact; hardly a scientific approach. Arnold seems to represent Victorian disillusionment: he is torn between wanting indisputable and provable theological clarity, and remaining intrinsically a poet; he has been persuaded that science has the power to prove all things with concrete fact, and yet he is still in love with the abstract poesis of language. (12-14) Arnold writes: “The English version has created certain sentiments in the reader’s mind, and these sentiments must not be disturbed, if the new version is to have the power of the old.” (12) What he says here is quite opposite to Maurice, who had claimed: “the mere sentimental feeling which attaches a particular passage to a particular name will be readily sacrificed by a lover of truth. The more firmly we believe the Bible to be from God, the less serious will that sacrifice seem to us.” (qtd Rogerson 34)

Arnold in his quandary is an interesting contrast to MacDonald, with his university training and teaching background in physics and chemistry. MacDonald continued to love and be fascinated by science, but – as endorsed by his science-loving mentors – he saw Science as another dimension to the same truth of which Poetry was a part. In the passage that seems to have influenced Tolkien and Lewis' descriptions of what a star *is*, he writes: "Poetry is as true as Science, and Science is holy as Poetry."²⁸⁶ (*Development* 51) In this essay, "A Sketch of Individual Development," which makes utterly clear his stance, MacDonald writes of a young poet who in "a new phase of experience" has "wandered over the border of what is commonly *called* science," and is now unable to grasp that true science and true poetry cannot be at odds. (51; italics mine) MacDonald shows the youth struggling between "quantitative analysis" and the poetry of Coleridge. This "young poet" seems a clear Type of young Matthew Arnold. (51)

As earlier intimated, MacDonald himself is more than comfortable with the interplay of science and poetry: he loves it, as did each of his mentors. For this man who writes of multiple dimensions and the refraction of light, and for whom inexactitude implies a possibility of even more truths rather than a proof of none, the very sense of fairy tale is an inextricable aspect of the essence of Scripture. That very thing that Arnold believes obscures the essence of Scripture, MacDonald insists is crucially inextricable from it. Arnold insists that the essence of Scripture is, as quoted earlier, moral conduct – yet while MacDonald does believe that the import of moral conduct is something that the mythic element of Scripture will convey, being woven into the very fabric of that element, moral conduct itself is *not* the purpose of Scripture or religion. That purpose, MacDonald claims, is the very poetic – and non-systematic – revelation of the love of God. MacDonald seems to have Arnold's ideas in mind when he describes Gwyntystorm's celebration on "Religion Day," when the priests "talked ever about improvement": "The book which had, of late years, come to be considered the most sacred, was called *The Book of Nations*, and consisted of proverbs, and history traced through custom: from it the first priest chose his text; and his text was, 'Honesty Is the Best Policy'"²⁸⁷ (188-90) When the head priest of Gwyntystorm is removed by one of Curdie's beasts, he is dropped "into the dust hole among the remnants of a library whose age had destroyed its value in the eyes of the chapter" – and the new priests rename themselves "The Party of Decency." (188-190) MacDonald makes clear with these images that a religion or movement *based* on good

²⁸⁶ A theme reiterated throughout his corpus, even in fairy tales.

²⁸⁷ An interesting juxtaposition to Arnold's discussion of the same phrase, "Honesty is the best Policy." (*Dogma* 211) MacDonald's passage lampoons Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859) – the vastly popular first self-help book, for which the 'honesty' mantra is a central concept, promoting individualism.

moral conduct is vacuous, and that a venture that believes itself above the wisdom of the ages, which no longer has a relationship with its texts, will remain ineffectual.

It is interesting to see how MacDonald's "extra-belief" frees him up in a way Arnold's lack does not.²⁸⁸ Arnold believes that "the object of religion is conduct," and that any "extra-belief" runs the risk of setting one up for disillusionment and thus a loss of even the "basis of conduct."²⁸⁹ (*Dogma* 80) He also believes that Scripture can be translated with exactitude and that one ultimate version can result. And yet Arnold spends pages and pages dancing around the revered reputation of the English Bible with which he is about to tamper – in the name of clarity. MacDonald, who is tied to an old-fashioned "fairy tale" belief, full of things difficult to prove, is infinitely more comfortable with re-presenting the "word of God." In part it seems that for Arnold, the King James Version has become more "holy" than what he calls "the original." For MacDonald the "original" is unquestionably more holy than the King James Version, and still yet the *essence* of the "original" – as Scott and Erskine had repeatedly discussed – more holy than the words upon the page. It is the Living, not the printed, Word with which – with Whom – they have a relationship; through which – through Whom – they are transformed.

MacDonald the poet goes further than making clear that no single English translation could ever adequately represent the "original" Hebrew or Greek Scriptures. He is so bold as to retell aspects of the stories himself, within his own tales...his own answer to Arnold's attempt to "clarify" Scripture. Rather than anguishing over "scientific exactitude" versus clarity of phrase versus higher beauty, MacDonald re-presents that which is mythic within the same medium: the ancient tradition (used even in Scripture) of story telling story, of story conveying the meaning of that which words alone cannot capture. It is arrestingly ironic that it is Arnold who writes:

Whoever began with laying hold on this series of chapters [*Isaiah*] as a whole, would have a starting-point and lights of unsurpassed value for getting a conception of the course of man's history and development as a whole. *If but for a certain number* of readers this could happen, what access would they thus gain to a new life, unknown to them hitherto! What an extending of their horizons, what a lifting them out of the present, what a suggestion of hope and courage! (*Prophecy* 32-33; italics mine)

²⁸⁸ Arnold abstracts his term "extra-belief" from the German word *Aberglaube*. (*Dogma* 58)

²⁸⁹ While superficially similar, there is a vast disparity between Arnold's 'right conduct' and MacDonald's frequently emphasized *obedience*. It is summed up in one word: *Relationship*. MacDonald writes: "But the constant tendency to consider Christianity as associated of necessity with this or that form of it, instead of as simply obedience to Christ, had grown more and more repulsive to me as I had grown myself." (*Seaboard* 462)

The irony is, of course, that one realizes upon comparing the work of these two authors that for “a certain number of readers” who have followed their imaginations into the fairy story of *Curdie*, it is MacDonald who has accomplished exactly the extending and uplifting that Arnold describes. And MacDonald achieves this because he upholds the very things Arnold says must desist.

Arnold had argued, in a book now only known to scholars, that the age of fairy stories – of extra-belief – was past. MacDonald’s response, guided and shaped by Maurice and Coleridge, by Scott and Erskine, by his family and his Celtic heritage, was that the age of fairy stories – the age of Bible Stories – is the age of humanity. One could be so bold as to say that for MacDonald and his mentors an age of poesis *is* an age of Truth – and thus they do not believe that the age shall ever pass, although at times it may suffer from the lack of apprehension of that Truth. Coleridge had stood as a reminder that there was an ancient tradition of religious thought that was not systematic, an aeons-old tradition in which the theological and the literary were inseparable, a tradition in which poesis was an essential means of conveying Truth. Maurice and MacDonald included themselves in that tradition, and saw in it an answer to a vacuous sterility that they felt was emerging from the polarized approaches to Scripture in their day.²⁹⁰ Maurice, Coleridgean in his understanding of Scripture and Story, did not simply deconstruct the text in his sermons. Instead of sifting away the story to search for the Truths, he strove to make the story more accessible, evoking its sight and sound, attempting to draw those attending further in. He is much freer with the text than the agnostic Arnold, *because* he values it so highly – because he believes that it is “from God.”

More than refusing to divorce ‘Literature and Dogma,’ MacDonald declares such an act impossible. He will not even allow that Science and Poetry can be divided. He delights in bringing the tools of Science to the text – not only to better understand the meaning or context of a word, but to better understand the poetry. He explores the trendy new theories of evolution and of geology, using them to enrich metaphors and enhance understanding of what he believes to be Truth.²⁹¹ And he revels in being able to wrestle with the technicalities of linguistics as he mines the Greek and Hebrew languages. MacDonald’s approach is not ‘either Science or Poetry’

²⁹⁰ Chesterton, Tolkien, and Lewis followed suit. Twenty-first century poet Scott Cairns joins the lineage: “Words have, therefore, agency. They don’t simply name what was – though they certainly do that – but they generate new thought, bring about new identities. [...] The Scriptures, by extension, would not be understood simply as narratives of past events nor simply as exhortations to belief (though I believe they are both of these); they are also scenes into which the believer (whether patristic author or contemporary pilgrim) enters in order to make something new of them, in order to develop into something new – a new creature, say – receiving the Scriptures’ empowering assistance.” (55)

²⁹¹ *Curdie* begins with a lengthy poetic lesson in geology.

– in his desire to stay true to the text he shows that he does not believe that ‘either/or’ is actually possible.²⁹² Arnold’s inconsistency is for MacDonald ‘living proof’ of this. MacDonald, very aware of the contemporary theological dialogue that intimately involved *Isaiah* – so valued, so influential, and yet so difficult to understand – seems to respond to Arnold’s anti-Coleridgean, anti-Maurician approach by showing, by doing, what his mentors had talked about. Rather than attempting to clarify each and every aspect of the text in a supposedly ultimate “clear sense,” he shifts the angle. Almost subversively. It is obvious that he has “meditated deeply upon an old story” (in the words of Maurice) and is now “re-presenting it [seeking to bring] out the truths about God’s Government that he saw in the story,” in true Maurician fashion. He has spent time with the Hebrew text, the King James Version, the New Testament response, and Maurice’s explorations. He has engaged these words with a myriad of similarly responsive authors, seeking the ‘converging truths’ so important to Maurice and Scott. The resulting *Princess and Curdie* stands as a tribute to both Maurice and Coleridge, and contains many allusions to both. Also, MacDonald takes care to reveal that the text remains as contemporary and relevant as Maurice has argued *Isaiah* to be – whether regarding such ‘Isaianic’ issues as trust and obedience, political deceit, taxing the land, materialism, or social welfare. Should MacDonald’s readers return to the biblical text they might be doing so with renewed interest or understanding. If they do not, they have nonetheless journeyed through a story that seeks to re-present some of the same truths.

*No man knows till he has made many attempts,
how hard to reach is this simplicity of art.
And the greater the success, the fewer are the signs of the labour expended.
Simplicity is art's perfection. [...] Shakspeare will not spoil his art to show his art.
It is there, and does its part:
that is enough.
If you can discover it, good and well; if not, pass on, and take what you can find.
He can afford not to be fathomed for every little pearl that lies at the bottom of his ocean.
If I succeed in showing that such art may exist where it is not readily discovered,
this may give some additional probability to its existence
in places where it is harder to isolate and define.
("St. George's Day" 78; 92)*



²⁹² A point most of MacDonald’s writings take time to establish, whether explicitly or implicitly.

In *The Princess and Curdie*, MacDonald enters a tradition and a dialogue poetically exploring a famous, oft-quoted, notoriously-difficult-to-read text. He unveils the ability of that Literary Conversation to function on multiple levels of time, space, and experience. The result is a gift to both those who value *Isaiah* merely for its literary and historic import, as well as those who consider it of greater worth. Awareness of this puts the ending of *Curdie* – even its role in the context of the story as a whole – into an entirely new perspective than one of conclusive doom and despair. As Arnold laboured over his commentaries on *Isaiah*, seeking to attain a single “clear sense,” he mused that, “to make a great work of soul pass into the general mind is not easy [...] the more these chapters sink into the mind and are apprehended, the more manifest is their connexion with universal history, the key they offer to it, the truth of the ideal they propose for it.” (*Prophecy* 31, 32) MacDonald, instead of telling *his* readers what to think, invites them into the story – a living story. It is this that passes a “great work of soul” not only into the mind, but into the soul. “Bringing out the truths [...] that he saw” in the story of *Isaiah*. Not by dissection, or distillation, but by story telling story; a story-begotten story. A story that he hopes will “wake something up in the reader” – as it does the king in *Curdie*. Curdie, whose proper name ‘Conrad’ means *Wise Counsellor*, and Irene, whose name means *Peace*, unite to bring about the salvation of the Kingdom. When they bring the poisoned and disillusioned king restorative bread and wine, they also aid his recovery by telling him stories. It is a Eucharistic pairing of sustenance:

When His Majesty was awake, the princess read to him – one storybook after another; and whatever she read, the king listened as if he had never heard anything so good before, making out in it the wisest meanings. Every now and then he asked for a piece of bread and a little wine, and every time he ate and drank he slept. [Later, when Curdie and Irene each tell their own stories to the king – reaching back to the beginnings of *Goblin* –] the king listened with wondering and delighted ears, astonished to find what he could so ill comprehend, yet fitting so well together from the lips of two narrators. At last [...] Curdie brought up the whole tale to the present moment. Then a silence fell, and Irene and Curdie thought the king was asleep. But he was far from it; he was thinking about many things. After a long pause he said:

“Now at last, my children, I am compelled to believe many things I could not and do not yet understand - things I used to hear, and sometimes see [...] and I shall just hold my peace, and lie here quite still, and think about them all till I get well again.”²⁹³ (150,167)

As they participate in their communal story, Curdie and Irene are *trouweres* of their own story, invoking awareness, opening up the king’s consciousness to the mythopoeic element already

²⁹³ In a lovely paralleling accolade, Lewis’ character Jane Studdock lies in bed, receiving healing, understanding, and fortification from the exact same *Curdie* tale.

present. The relating of their particular tale has helped him to begin to see a greater truth. The king is healing, though these elements that strengthen him are not solely sufficient to fight the evil within the kingdom. That requires further intervention of their Great-great-grandmother, the Ancient Princess of Peace. As her aid brings about seemingly impossible victory, the story draws to a conclusion. And when the good reign of Curdie and Irene passes and – just as in *Isaiah* – the whole land seems to “be shaken and die,” the reader implicitly knows that the great-grandmother, the great Princess of Peace, shall never pass – that her word, reminiscent of a greater Word, endures forever. The story concludes as it must: with grounds for a new beginning.

As reiterated, the mythopoeic and spiritual influences upon the crafting of *Curdie* are innumerable. However, *Isaiah*, much loved by MacDonald and oft explicitly and implicitly shaping his other writings, appears to be the mythopoeic and spiritual “scaffolding” upon which the story hangs. (“Imagination” 39) The depth contributed by this one particular poesis gives a sense of the richness of the resource upon which MacDonald draws, and how multifaceted the possible responses. Contrary to the expectations of Arnold, there is no single “clear sense.” MacDonald writes, reads, and lives in a multi-dimensional world, prescribed by the multi-dimensional text through which he sought to dwell. When he, like Scott, encourages his readers to consider the author and his other works when seeking deeper truths from the text, this does not conflict his refusal that single “clear sense” of a text can emerge: rather it is MacDonald’s assertion that such an approach provides a rich resource, from which may be evinced multiple converging truths: “The truer its art, the more things it will mean [...] when such forms are new embodiments of Old Truths, we call them products of the Imagination.”²⁹⁴ Taking these literary (and necessarily theological) relationships of MacDonald’s into account provides a foundation that may bring into question certain readings of *Curdie*. For example, Sigman’s chapter “A Jungian Reading of the ‘Princess’ Books” in *For the Childlike* sees the Great-great-grandmother’s relationship with Irene as being a “sexually charged image of incest” as indicated “when the Grandmother takes Irene to bed with her.” (192) Aside from betraying a lack of familiarity with Victorian culture (and much of today’s global culture), such a reading can impede consideration of resonances within MacDonald’s own corpus, such as the passage that follows his discussion of “new embodiments of Old Truths,” one that seems to more congruently represent the commissioning queen and the text in which she resides:

²⁹⁴ Rather than believing that *any* meaning can be evinced, as a student of Maurice and Scott MacDonald believed that truths converge rather than conflict. For instance, he believed that Arnold’s reading was wrong.

In very truth, a wise imagination, which is the presence of the spirit of God, is the best guide a man or woman can have; for it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully; undefined, yet vivid visions of something beyond, something which eye has not seen nor ear heard, have far more influence than any logical sequences whereby the same things may be demonstrated to the intellect. It is the nature of the thing, not the clearness of its outline, that determines its operation. We live by faith, not by sight. ("Imagination" 20)

This passage strongly evokes that Great-great-grandmother's spun song: "Oh, the dews and the moths and the daisy red/ The larks and the glimmers and flows! / The lilies and sparrows and daily bread, / and the something that nobody knows!" So sings, ineffably, her Athena-like spinning wheel. In truth she seems to embody "a wise Imagination." A decade later George MacDonald re-echoes her wheel as he concludes his essay on the Imagination:

Thus to be playfellows with God in this game, the little ones may gather their **daisies** and follow their painted **moths**; the child of the kingdom may pore upon the **lilies** of the field, and gather faith as the **birds** of the air their **food** from the leafless hawthorn, ruddy with the stores God has laid up for them; and the man of science
 'May sit and rightly spell
 Of every **star** that heaven doth shew,
 And every herb that sips the **dew**;
 Till old experience do attain
 To something like prophetic strain.'²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ The quotation is Milton, *Il Penseroso* CXIII. Bolding mine. ("Imagination" 28)

CHAPTER SIX

New Embodiments “Echoed Back”: Redirected Critical Forays into *Lilith*

*Sad our poverty doth bow
Before the riches of thy making might:
Sweep from thy space thy systems at thy will –
In thee the sun sets every sunset still.*

*And in the perfect time, O perfect God,
When we are in our home, our natal home,
When joy shall carry every sacred load,
And from its life and peace no heart shall roam,
What if thou make us able to make like thee –
To light with moons, to clothe with greenery,
To hang gold sunsets o'er a rose and purple sea!*

*Then to his neighbour one may call out, "Come!
Brother, come hither – I would show you a thing;"
And lo, a vision of his imagining,
Informed of thought which else had rested dumb,
Before the neighbour's truth-delighted eyes,
In the great ether of existence rise,
And two hearts each to each the closer cling!*

*We make, but thou art the creating core.
Whatever thing I dream, invent, or feel,
Thou art the heart of it, the atmosphere.
Thou art inside all love man ever bore.*

(Diary of an Old Soul, March 2-5)

Section I: A Cumulative Conversation

Section II: A Critical Reading

Introduction

*what distinguishes the true bard in such work is,
that more is meant than meets the ear;
and although I am no bard, I should scorn to write anything that only spoke to the ear,
which signifies the surface understanding.*
Adela Cathcart

As revealed in the construction of *The Princess and Curdie*, MacDonald is an author and a literary scholar who revels in the power of the particular to express universal truths by engaging with both ancient and contemporary texts; in *Lilith* he enriches this expression by also engaging with the life of a contemporary person. A close reading of *Lilith* shows how MacDonald's understanding of the essentially relational nature of Story is further revealed – and also embodied – in his relationship with Ruskin. *Lilith* is, through a vision of landscape and soulscape, a poesis that explores what it means to be fully human – as necessitated by the choice of death to self. A romantic grotesque, it is the culmination of a polymath's visual, literary, scientific, and relational experiences. Even more than *Curdie*, this profoundly full expression of a poet's soul will continue to provide both the individual and the academy years of study. It came – not unlike Tolkien's *Rings*, Bunyan's *Progress*, or Dante's *Commedia* – almost as a vision: an inspiration, breathed into the apprehending receptacle.²⁹⁶ MacDonald, the literary scholar who Ruskin would choose above all others to tutor a son, then spent five years of meticulous crafting, shaping, revising.²⁹⁷ The final text has the soul of the first, but significant details have been removed, added, turned about. Giorgio Spina writes that if *Phantastes* is MacDonald's alpha, then *Lilith* is his omega, his “farewell masterpiece, the *summa* of an existential journey, the realization in artistic form of the deepest intellectual meditation and noblest spiritual aspiration.” (23) It was, says Raeper, “the book MacDonald had been trying to write all his life, indeed had been writing all his life.” (365) Few dispute it is MacDonald's most complex work. And few would now concur with Wolff that it is a resentful, violent, and senile work; rather, most agree with literary critic Harold Child, that it is “so packed with meaning, so full of images of which the meanings seem inexhaustible, that it is marvellous to see how George MacDonald keeps it, as a story, moving.” (qtd Spina 23) Reis

²⁹⁶ Greville writes: “He was possessed by a feeling – he would hardly let me call it a conviction I think – that [*Lilith*] was a mandate direct from God, for which he himself was to find form and clothing; and he set about its transcription in tranquillity. Its first writing is 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.” (548)

²⁹⁷ A striking contrast to *Phantastes*: written in one month.

nonetheless, while acknowledging the re-emphasis of familiar themes, is representative of many readers when he sees the text as dark, tainted by “the repeated disappointments and sufferings of MacDonald’s long life.” (94) Spina counters that if indeed the text is darker than most, it cannot be called “an expression of the nightmares and rancours of old age, nor a ‘sermon of despair’” – rather, it is MacDonald’s “greatest representation of the conflict between light and dark [...] It is terrifying because the way to God is terrifying. Was the way not also terrifying for Dante in the *Divine Comedy*? And *Lilith* is a modern allegory with strong parallels to Dante’s poem.” (25) Hein observes that one of the notable changes between the initial and final manuscripts is that the explicit references to Dante have been whittled down to only three, and he wonders if MacDonald removed explicit references to avoid “the impression that he was unduly leaning upon Dante’s text.”²⁹⁸ Yet the *implicit* allusion and permeation of the *Commedia* remain equally pervasive in the final manuscript. Italian scholar Spina observes that it is not just the specific quotations that bind the text to the *Commedia*, it is “the whole structure of the romance.” (25) Raeper suggests that *Lilith* was intended to be MacDonald’s “equivalent of the *Divine Comedy*.” (367) I would suggest that it is, rather, his *response* to the *Divine Comedy*. MacDonald is not “leaning” on Dante not attempting to copy him: this student of Scott, already famed for his own Dantean lectures, is engaging with and responding to Dante, continuing the conversation – as the *Commedia* itself had done with anterior texts. Just as in *Curdie*, a plethora of texts contribute and give form to *Lilith* – many of them over-laying and conversing one with another. Many are the same: Biblical and mythical allusions abound, as do engagements with Spenser, Shakespeare, Boehm, Milton, Bunyan, Blake, Novalis, Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc.²⁹⁹ But a number of scholars agree that the evidence of Dante in the shaping of the entire tale stands out – though close critical study of that relationship remains limited. Perhaps most striking is Prickett’s comparison of MacDonald’s carefully cohesive “philosophical and theological principles” to those of Dante, noting that in his Dantean references, MacDonald,

like Chesterton, is seeking to establish himself within a literary tradition – a tradition not of folklore and primitive ritual, but of complex theological sophistication [...] attempting to open up and articulate areas of human experience that had been more or less dormant ever since the Renaissance.... [he] reasserts the *value* of myth and symbol, not as a primitive relic, nor simply as a literary device, but as a vital and irreplaceable medium of human

²⁹⁸ See <http://rollandhein.com> for relevant lectures. Hein makes an important observation that like the *Commedia*, *Lilith* functions on the four medieval literary levels: the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

²⁹⁹ Just before commencing *Lilith*, MacDonald published what his sons considered his “greatest achievement of literary interpretation,” his edition of *Hamlet*. “It is a work of deep insight and high scholarship. Its production was a labour of love extending over many years – six, I think he told me.” (Ronald 57) *Lilith* is redolent with Shakespearean influence.

consciousness.... – a symbolic and myth-making activity that taps the very roots of human creativity. (*Two Worlds* 22)

Prickett recognizes that MacDonald does not view himself the equivalent of Dante, but rather as an active member within the same tradition. Inadvertently Prickett highlights Scott's influence, by noting that MacDonald was engaging with aspects of literature that had not been addressed in England "since the Renaissance." If there is audacity present, it is not in MacDonald seeing himself as equivalent to Dante, but rather in seeing himself as one with a voice worthy to participate in the same conversation: to concur, build upon, and also to abstain and disagree. Yet it should be noted that if such self-positioning is audacious, it is an audacity into which MacDonald – a true student of Scott – invites his readers as well. Not only that: he anticipates their transformation.

Section I: A Cumulative Conversation: A presentation of some relational particulars that assist critical understanding of *Lilith*

- i) A Particular Relationship
- ii) Shared Literacy
- iii) Manifested Genre: The *Grotesque*

*No man could sing as he has sung,
had not others sung before him.
Deep answereth unto deep,
face to face, praise to praise. To the sound of the trumpet the harp
returns its own vibrating response – alike, but how different!
(England's Antiphon)*

i) A Particular Relationship: How elements of Ruskin's romantic relationship colour the story of *Lilith*

As discussed in a previous chapter, familiarity with the more explicitly presented themes in *Seaboard* makes evident the recurrent themes in *Lilith*, particularly those that are relevant to MacDonald's friend Ruskin. *Lilith* begins with an epigram alerting the reader to the narrator's homeless state. The first sentence declares him, like Ruskin's alias, an Oxford Graduate. (1) Almost immediately his experiments with light and vision plunge him into a world of myth and wonder, coloured not only with allusion to such recent poesies as those of Blake and Novalis, but also to those as ancient as Scripture and pre-Scripture tales. The Nicodemean call to die to self discussed in *Seaboard* pervades the text, interwoven with concepts of obedience and will – and although these may seem explicit to a reader familiar with Scripture, the readings of this

aspect of *Lilith* have actually been wide and varied. For example, critic and folklorist Cuisick writes that Lilith's nature is expressed "though haunting images" which "seize the imagination" but cannot be rationally comprehended. (69) Yet familiarity with *Seaboard* does grant comprehension to at least some of those images – and familiarity with MacDonald's biography grants even more. These also challenge Cuisick's reading of Lilith as the "the one lens through which all women are perceived, the inner form through which they find (emotional) meaning in the psyche of the man who perceives them." (69) Cuisick argues that the "conscious text" of "conscious Christian beliefs" in MacDonald's novels is "interrupted" throughout by "an unconscious one, which appears through images and metaphors, and which bears little allegiance to the purposes of the conscious text." (63) Yet when placed next to *Seaboard*, it is clear that *Lilith* is redolent with "images and metaphors" that to have *everything* to do with the conscious text. *Seaboard*'s all-encompassing engagement with Ruskin's revered Dante further proves the cohesive nature of this novel written by a literature professor who declared repeatedly his "scorn to write anything that only spoke to the ear." (*Cathcart* 64) MacDonald deliberately followed Dante's method of drawing together elements of Scripture, myth, history, current events, as well as his own personal relationships into the *Commedia* – and the indications are that in *Lilith* he did it like in none other. Whilst MacDonald was re-writing the inspired manuscript of *Lilith* his friend Ruskin was rapidly deteriorating in strength of body and spirit, and in mental health. Just as his vicar in *Seaboard*, MacDonald was not averse to hiding things in a text specifically for one individual to notice: "last Sunday, for instance, I did not expect anybody there to understand a certain bit of my sermon, except your mamma and Thomas Weir." (9) Evidence that he did so for Ruskin is abundant, and its consideration sheds valuable insight on a complicated – yet consciously and profoundly integrated – text. McGillis' claim that *Lilith* is a portrait in which "sexuality defers eschatology" ("Femininity" 47) does disservice to the literary tradition in which both Dante and MacDonald partake, and obscures the proffered hope to Ruskin; biblical eschatology (even when not presented by a Celt) has been explored through discussions of sexuality for centuries. It is a tradition from which the book entitled "*Lilith, A Romance*" does not shirk.

Awareness of both the literary and personal relationship between MacDonald and Ruskin thus clarifies a number of the complicated aspects of *Lilith*, yet erstwhile it remains a comfort to the close reader to know that MacDonald did not expect all 'bits' to be apprehended by all readers. This is particularity in the extreme, yet MacDonald clearly does not believe that it detracts from the universal message, and indeed he assumes that to the average reader those 'certain bits' will probably appear quite "commonplace." (*Seaboard* 9) He also makes clear, in that same *Seaboard*

conversation about personal particularities, that one needs to be familiar with an idea, an image, or a feeling before recognizing it in a discussion or a text. True to his Celtic heritage, MacDonald explains that relational engagement – with humans, with Nature, with other texts – betters equips the reader. This is the same concept the vicar had pursued with the young artist when discussing a viewer's response to a painting. When considering the potential MacDonald perceives in the medium of Story – how full a story can be in its relational, mythopoeic nature – one also must remember his emphasis that a book which is a work of art must necessarily contain within it more than the author ever intended it to mean: “that there is always more in a work of art – which is the highest human result of the embodying imagination – than the producer himself perceived while he produced it, seems to us a strong reason for attributing to it a larger origin than the man alone –.” (“Imagination” 18)

As for the elements in *Lilith* which might have only been present to be grasped by Ruskin and perhaps those who knew him well, this thesis will proffer but a glimpse; of those elements that interrelate with various Ruskin texts, it will merely initiate the (overdue) discussion. Vast amounts of material are yet to be explored in these areas. For the present purposes merely establishing their existence is sufficient, for that which they evidence is the crucial point: MacDonald was writing a story in which relational particularity continues to convey universally transformative truths – and one that continues to hold wide appeal. *Lilith*, despite its perennial ability to perplex its readers, also fascinates and moves them. It continues to appear on university syllabi, on lists of ‘best books,’ and even on published lists of favourite books right into the twenty-first century.³⁰⁰ Although MacDonald may never have expected a broad audience to apprehend ‘certain bits,’ recognizing some belies them being either incidental or accidental. “Not one such ornament can belong to a polished style,” he declares, refusing to allow anything to appear in a piece of careful writing without specific, rational intent. (“On Polish” 154) *Lilith* is one of his most careful, most polished. Contextual comprehension of *Lilith* may thus further enable both enjoyment and apprehension – and may even better enable its commission as a medium of Mythopoesis.³⁰¹

Perhaps the most poignant of the personal and particular relationships that shape *Lilith* is that of Ruskin with his love, Rose La Touche. Knowledge of this relationship when reading the text is not unlike being equipped with a cipher. The involvement of the MacDonalds and the Mount-Temples in this complicated relationship has already been mentioned. Correspondence indicates

³⁰⁰ I.e. “100 Best Scottish Books of All Time” produced by *The List* and ‘The Scottish Book Trust’ in 2005, and Victorianist Phillip Davies’ “Top Ten” of Victorian literature: “This great neglected work of fantastic imagination rivals anything written by Tolkien or Philip Pullman.” (www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/mar/18/bestbooks.classics)

³⁰¹ Greville writes: “*Lilith*, indeed needs reading and re-reading before the heart of its magic is reached; and even then much may be missed by those who are not already intimate with its writer’s spirit and style.” (548)

clearly that Ruskin had discussed Rose with MacDonald before this period in which the two families – determined that Rose and Ruskin should be able to spend some unimpeded time together – provided a space and place for that to occur. For the remainder of her life, Rose's letters to the MacDonalds indicate that she had been virtually adopted by the family – and that she desired to perpetuate that relation. The letters reveal her intense struggle with how to live out her faith and with the disparities that she saw around her, not the least as displayed by her parents. Ruskin's vacillation between apostasy, heterodoxy, and plain confusion petrified her. The letters Ruskin wrote to MacDonald throughout the years reveal that the two men discussed intimately, in person, the emotionally exhausting relationship – and as scholarship on Ruskin makes clear, that relationship became inextricable both from Ruskin's thoughts on faith and his writing. References to Rose and sometimes even explicit messages for Rose permeate his work. She is represented by roses, hawthorns, poppies, St. Ursula, Joan of Arc, Ruth, and even by prints that depict a rose – such as Richter's *Love is Stronger than Death*. Obsession with Rose, even after her death, guides Ruskin's themes and subjects of study. It is no wonder MacDonald shared the poems of Novalis with him – Ruskin was as a nineteenth century Novalis with Sophie, or, as Dante with Beatrice. As Ruskin slips in and out of mental illnesses his thoughts remain with Rose, dreaming of her, sometimes convinced that she had been with him again, often sure she was caring for him across the boundaries of mortality; he was ever waiting for a sign of communication from her.³⁰²

An early engagement with the Ruskin-Rose relationship in MacDonald's own work appears in his *Diary of an Old Soul* – a piece of meditative reflection which, as mentioned, was initially intended to be printed only for close acquaintances. Noting that “Rose la Touche and Ruskin had had no more mutually intimate friend and advisor than George MacDonald,” Viljoen records Ruskin's diary entry 2033, July 16:

Monday Fits of darkness and rain – Heather all blighted, and raspberries. Conf. entries for August (14th through 17th) 1879, p.p. 157 158 Slept better, and down in good heart, but mouth sore and head giddy

Read in MacDonalds Diary of an old soul the verses for 3rd Jan and Feb 8. D.G. [sic] ³⁰³ (325; 593)

Ruskin was known well as a compulsory keeper of anniversaries. In *Diary*, seven-line stanzas mark each day of the year. January 3 is Rose's birthday, and reads:

³⁰² Rose died just as the second *Proserpina* was to be printed. Ruskin wrote to a friend: “there were many little things going to be said in it, which nobody but she could have understood. I daresay I shall try to say them yet and think she's reading them. I daresay *you* will understand some of them too.” (Birch 175)

³⁰³ D.G. – *Deo gratias* – thanks be to God.

Sometimes I wake, and, lo! I have forgot,
 And drifted out upon an ebbing seal
 My soul that was at rest now resteth not,
For I am with myself and not with thee;
 Truth seems a blind moon in a glaring morn,
 Where nothing is but sick-heart vanity:
 Oh, thou who knowest! save thy child forlorn.

February 8, the date of Ruskin's birthday, and the day following read:

Thou wilt interpret life to me, and men,
 Art, nature, yea, my own soul's mysteries –
 Bringing, truth out, clear-joyous, to my ken,
 Fair as the morn trampling the dull night. Then
 The lone hill-side shall hear exultant cries;
 The joyous see me joy, the weeping weep;
 The watching smile, as *Death breathes on me his cold sleep.*

I search my heart – I search, and find no faith.
 Hidden He may be in its many folds –
 I see him not revealed in all the world
 Duty's firm shape thins to a misty wraith.
 No good seems likely. To and fro I am hurled.
 I have no stay. *Only obedience holds: –*
I haste, I rise, I do the thing he saith.

(33; italics mine)

Ruskin's diary entry indicates that he recognized – if indeed he was not already familiar with – the references to himself, and that, even years after Rose's death, he found succour in them. The letter Ruskin wrote to MacDonald after his last visit with Rose has already been recorded, in which he says, "what good there may be for either must be – where Heaven is – but I don't know that much of the Universe – and of Time" – a comment that adds pertinence to the multi-dimensional explorations of *Lilith*. (Leon 500) After Rose's death, MacDonald wrote the following to letter to Ruskin, which must be quoted in full:

My very dear Ruskin,
 I want just to speak a word in your ear. I do not know what it shall be. I only want you to know it is my voice. Do not turn your head to look at me, or stop what you are doing to think a moment about me. Go on. But the Psyche is aloft, and her wings are broad and white, and the world of flowers is under her, and the sea of sunny air is around her, and the empty chrysalis – what of that?

Now we are all but Psyches half awake, who see the universe in great measure only by reflection from the dull coffin-lid over us. But I hope, I hope. I hope infinitely. And ever the longer I live and try to live, and think, and long to live perfectly, I see the shame of things grow more orderly and more intelligible, and am more and more convinced that all is on the way to be well with wellness to which there was no other road than just this whereon we are walking.³⁰⁴

Let us then call a word now and then through the darkness as we go. There is a great sunrise behind the hill. But that hill Death alone can carry us over. I look to God to satisfy us all. It cannot be but that he will satisfy you to your hearts content. You have fought a better fight, I think, than you yourself know, and his gentleness will make you great in the kingdom of love. For Rose, is there anything fitting but gladness? The growing weight is gone; the gravestone heaved from off her; the fight with that which is as and yet was not herself is over. It may be she haunts you now with ministrations. Anyhow the living God does. Richter says it is only in God that two souls can meet. I am sure it is true.

My wife's heart is with yours in your loss. She sends her love. If we could do anything for you!

Your friend ever

George MacDonald

I have just bethought me of the enclosed. Perhaps I may have sent you a copy before. They are the fruit of bereavement in one of the loveliest thinkers of last century. I have spent immense labour on their English dress – extending over more than twenty years – because I love them so much. The more you read them, even in a translation, the more I think you will like them.

G.M.D.³⁰⁵

“The enclosed” refers to MacDonald’s translation of Novalis’ *Hymns to the Night*. Greville includes Ruskin’s reply to this letter in his *Reminiscences*:

Dear MacDonald,

I am so grateful for your letter and those Novalis things.

I am a very different creature and can only read for him not myself, but I can take the first verse of the VIth for myself otherwise.

I have fought no good fight except that the little fight I have made is from narrow vantage-ground. For, you know, so far as I can see or feel or understand, she is only gone where the hawthorn blossoms go.

³⁰⁴ This echo of Julian of Norwich’s “All shall be well, all manner of things shall be well –” reappears in *Lilith* as “I told you, brother, all would be well! – When next you would comfort, say, ‘What will be well, is even now well.’” (332)

³⁰⁵ Ruskin’s letter escaped censure, found in 1935 inside the *Alec Forbes* that MacDonald had given him. The latter was inscribed: “In faith and Love from the Author.” (W42 32)

Ever lovingly yours,

J.R.

(June 2nd, 1875, Corpus Christi College)

'My faith to thee I break not/ If all should faithless be,/ That gratitude forsake not/ The world eternally./ For my sake Death did sting thee/ With anguish keen and sore,/

Therefore with joy I bring thee/This heart forever more.'³⁰⁶ (122)

Greville remarks that after this letter not only was Ruskin never again fully himself, but that "all attempts at conversation were frustrated." (122) He is insinuating, as is concurred by others, that Ruskin's cousin Joan (who by that point was taking care of many of his affairs and with whom he lived) impeded further correspondence with this man who had sought to facilitate Ruskin's romantic relationship.³⁰⁷ As noted previously, about a decade after Rose's death correspondence between the two men did resume, and with it Ruskin's editorial engagement with MacDonald's texts.

These correspondences at the time of Rose's death are important because there are many elements of the discussions that reappear in the text of *Lilith*. Novalis' hymns, with their discussion of the True Homeland, of the importance of brotherhood, and of heritage, and not the least of course Novalis' own Beatrician perspective of his Sophie (whose name he consciously engages with Sophia, the Wisdom of Scripture) are a strong presence. And of course they follow in the Dantean tradition of coming to understand *agape* through the mediums of both *eros* and *philos*. MacDonald had repeatedly shared Novalis with Ruskin, and so it is no surprise that as *Lilith* weaves between dreams and dimensions, it plays with the poetry of Novalis: its concluding quotation, MacDonald's favourite "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one," had already found its echo through a number of Ruskin's writings ("Some dreams are truer than some wakings" he writes in the lecture on Neith, in *Ethics of Dust* (1865) – a lecture which will be shown to have a number of resonances with *Lilith*). Hilton claims Ruskin was one of the first men to make a record of his dreams in order to understand his own life and personality, and as time passed and Ruskin became more emotionally frail, he became increasingly unable to distinguish 'reality' from dreams. (128) MacDonald would have been aware of this not only through Ruskin's written discussion of the fact, but because Georgiana Mount-Temple spent a period nursing Ruskin in his serious illness of 1871 and again in 1882. (Burd 7; Hilton 419) Ruskin also wrote to other intimates of MacDonald of the merging of realities, such as Ann, A.J.

³⁰⁶ This quotation is the first stanza of *Hymn VI* in MacDonald's translation.

³⁰⁷ Disapproving of the relationship with Rose, Joan attempted to destroy all evidence of it. Only one known letter between the two exists today, and that only because Ruskin published it in *Præterita*. (Hilton 21) This increases the import of the correspondence with MacDonald.

Scott's widow: "my days pass much now in a kind of dream." (Whitehouse 178) Even in relative health Ruskin began to have difficulty recognizing what was a dream and what was not. (Hilton 390)

The references in the letters above to Death's "cold sleep" will need no parallel drawn for the reader of *Lilith*, as the call to the cold Sleeping Chamber is clarion throughout. That "great sunrise behind the hill" which can only be seen once Death "breathes on me his cold sleep," and the note that we are all Psyches needing to be reborn, foreshadow *Lilith*.³⁰⁸ Ruskin's bleak: "she is only gone where the hawthorn blossoms go" is yet another example of the personal themes picked up by MacDonald. Ruskin made many references to the hawthorn when writing of Rose's death, and Hilton notes that hawthorns were "ever afterwards associated with Rose's end" (304): the hawthorn is a wild member of the rose family, also known as the Mayflower because of when it blooms – the month in which Rose died. The morning Ruskin heard of her death he wrote to one friend: "I've just heard that my poor little Rose is gone where the hawthorn blossoms go." (303) To Carlyle he wrote, "the news came that the little story of my wild Rose was ended, and the hawthorn blossoms this year would fall – over her."³⁰⁹ (Leon 500) The hawthorn thus makes its appearance in *Lilith* as well. As Vane discusses crossing the threshold into another world, he – like Dante – "went out into the wood, at once to resume my journey. Another moon was rising, and I turned my face toward it." (34) There, after he moves "deep into the pine-forest," Mr. Raven points out a blossoming hawthorn growing within "the ruins of the church on your home-farm." (34, 35) "It may be she haunts you now with ministrations," MacDonald had said – and indeed even this one scene shows how *Lilith* is redolent with hauntings of Rose. Just moments after discussing the hawthorn Mr. Raven points out a "prayer-flower" at the feet of Vane: "I had never seen one like it before, and cannot utter the feeling it woke in me by its gracious, trusting form, its colour, and its odour as of a new world that was yet the old. I can only say that it suggested an anemone, was of a pale rose-hue, and had a golden heart."³¹⁰(35) The anemone-like flower described suits perfectly the delicate *Rosa canina* when in full bloom, the wild rose both Ruskin and Rose herself identified with Rose, and of which Ruskin painted an almost ethereal watercolour. Perhaps MacDonald is remembering that when Ruskin first lost his reason in 1876

³⁰⁸ There is also a very strong resonance with the imagery throughout MacDonald's aptly named "Somnium Mystici" (1868).

³⁰⁹ The issue of *Proserpina* retrospectively dated to Rose's death date states: "I suppose there is no question but that all nice people like hawthorn blossom," and carries on with an examination as to why. Ruskin wonders if the juvenile-like hawthorn flower is "going to be a Rose, some day soon..." (Hilton 311)

³¹⁰ In the earliest manuscript this 'prayer-flower' is a rose with a purple heart. In Greek *anemone* means "daughter of the wind." In "Birth, Dreaming, and Death," MacDonald writes "the wind-tossed anemone is a word of God as real and true as the unbending oak beneath which it grows – that reality is an absolute existence precluding degrees." (*Cathcart* 91)

he had imagined that the dead Rose had personally sent him a flower from heaven. (Hilton 30)
The novel is full of such particular and personal connections.

The shared relationship between the Mount-Temples, the MacDonalds, Rose, and Ruskin provides a surprisingly wide window into the text of *Lilith*. The letters from Ruskin to the Mount-Temples that are still extant are so numerous that they have been published into a book. Just as many letters exist between the MacDonalds and the Mount-Temples – letters evidencing how much their friendship meant to Georgiana and how much she looked up to MacDonald. The shared experience of bringing Ruskin and Rose together, and the continued concern for Ruskin expressed by both parties long after Rose’s death, likely resulted in many conversations about his ongoing struggles.³¹¹ In the October after Rose’s death Ruskin began boarding at the Mount-Temple’s home, Broadlands, while he was giving his Oxford lectures. MacDonald visited him there. In December another visitor, a practising spiritualist, claimed to see a young unmarried ‘spirit’ first standing beside Georgiana and another time stooping over Ruskin. Although the woman had never met Rose, the description given was clearly of her. (Burd 25) This incident quite shook Ruskin, and the fact that it had occurred quietly and apparently ‘naturally’ is part of what convinced him of its veracity. (26) A few days later when MacDonald came for a visit Ruskin told him all about it. Some of MacDonald’s reserved response was recorded in a letter to Louisa, noting that the woman: “has seen and described, without ever having seen her, Rose whispering to Ruskin. He is convinced.” (26) It is no wonder Ruskin was eager to tell MacDonald, who had once written so deliberately to him: “It may be she haunts you now with ministrations.” Here to Ruskin’s mind was evidence that this was true. And the certitude persisted. Sometimes in his letters to Georgiana Ruskin would refer to “my little ghost,” wondering if Rose’s ghost had been planting certain flowers in a ruined chapel (Hilton 334) – like Vane’s “prayer-flower” – or, on the anniversary of Rose’s death, asking Georgiana: “have you *no* little ghost’s word or work for me? Can’t she come to *you* sometimes –.” (Bradley 371)

Knowledge of this history brings new relevance to Louisa’s letter to Georgiana, included with a copy of the just published *Lilith* in October 1895:

I send you a birthday book present which I hope you will love. When I first read it
in the proof I used constantly to be longing for you to read but as I went on, I
thought it so terrible that I did not want you to see it, but now it is out, I cannot bear

³¹¹ The details of Ruskin’s state were hardly private: they were reported in newspapers, and the Fine Art Society made “announcements about the patient’s progress.” (Hilton 390)

to think you have not got a copy. You of all people in the world – ought to have one
– but I am writing especially to beg you to stop directly it hurts or vexes you.

There are terrible haunting things in it – so don't go on with it when it hurts –

The end is glorious I think you will think –

(Beinecke 1/1/26)

Obviously Louisa expected Georgiana to recognize many elements in the story, and knew that some of the memories would be painful – and perhaps some of the expectations as well. From both her nursing and the correspondence Georgiana was all too familiar with the wanderings in and out of dreams and dimensions now encountered by Ruskin, of his periods spent – as he wrote to her – of being “lost in a wilderness of thoughts again.” (qtd Hilton 419) She would recognize many of the allusions to and engagements with his theories and discussions. She would also recognize the semblance of personal trials faced – and not always won. Yet Louisa hopes that the final message of anticipated peace and anticipated union, a finding of True Home, would give Georgiana joy. Vane's confusion in *Lilith* over the multiple dimensions when Mr. Raven claims a lady is playing Grieg's wedding march on a piano in the same spot in which Vane can only see a rose-bush, could not but have brought back recollections of Rose's spirit supposedly being seen, whispering in the same home in which Rose had once played the piano for Ruskin. (*Lilith* 35; Burd 25) How like Ruskin – perhaps a Ruskin a bit more at peace – seems Vane in the final chapter:

At times I seem to hear whisperings around me, as if some that loved me were talking of me; but when I would distinguish the words, they cease, and all is very still. I know not whether these things rise in my brain, or enter it from without. I do not seek them; they come, and I let them go. (358)

And in the woman-child Lona, Georgiana would have recognize many elements of Rose – not the least in that she is still a child when Vane begins to fall in love with her. There are resonances too of the letter from Rose's mother to MacDonald in 1863, about one of the strange events in Rose's early mental illnesses: upon waking Rose had regressed eleven years in age, and then slowly and “gracefully” in a fortnight ‘re-aged’ from childhood. (359) In a letter to Louisa Mrs. La Touche had also had compared Rose to Spencer's Una, adding: “I wish Mr. MacDonald could put her in a book.” (Viljoen 104) In *Lilith*, in some aspects of Lona at least, he did – and evidently clearly enough that Louisa knows Georgiana will find the reading an emotional experience.³¹²

³¹² Some critics suggest that MacDonald added references to his eldest daughter after her death (i.e. Docherty 361). That may be so: the argument is not that Lona *is* Rose, but that there are sufficient obvious parallels between the two to suggest intent.

A year after Rose's death, while Ruskin was copying Carpaccio's *Dream of St Ursula* in Venice, he felt as if Rose was guiding him, aided by the intervention of St. Ursula: a strong parallel to St. Lucia's action on behalf of Beatrice for Dante. The marble-like image of St. Ursula asleep on a raised bed is hard not to equate with MacDonald's image of the sleeping Lona in the death chamber. Ruskin had written in a letter: "There she lies, so real that when the room's quiet – I get afraid of waking her! [...] Suppose there is a real St Ursula di ma, - taking care of somebody else, asleep for me?" (Hilton 346) Ruskin publicly discussed this experience of his St. Ursula's "dream" in *Fors Clavigera*. Later in his "The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism" (1878) he wrote of another similar experience. The tomb of Ilaria del Caretto by Jacopo della Quercia was a work he greatly admired, having first seen it in his youth and then revisiting it many times. The great detail in which he describes the statue again draws the reader of *Lilith* right down into the sleeping chamber with the Little Ones and Lona, who lies "like a statue carved in semi-transparent alabaster" in a "snowy covering" over her daily "long loose mantle, [made] to fasten at the throat and waist" (309):

This, as a central work, has all the peace of the Christian Eternity, but only in part its gladness. *Young children wreath round the tomb* a garland of abundant flowers, but she herself, Ilaria, yet sleeps; *the time is not yet come for her to be awakened out of her sleep*. [...] in the marble we may see that the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth: yet as visibly a sleep that shall know no ending until the last day break, and the last shadow flee away; until then, she 'shall not return'. Her hands are laid on her breast – not praying – she has no need to pray now. She wears her dress of every day, *clasped at her throat, girdled at her waist*, the hem of it drooping over her feet [...] the rippled gathering of its close *mantle droops* to the best, then sweeps to her feet, *straight as drifting snow*.

(qtd Meynell 268; italics mine)

As Ruskin found Rose in art, so MacDonald painted her into text.

In 1878 as Ruskin slipped into the first really serious bout of mental illness he wrote three letters, one of which was to Georgiana, another to MacDonald. (376) The latter proclaimed: "Dear George, we've got married – after all after all," and asks him to tell Louisa and Lilia, using one of Rose's pet names for Louisa. (Leon 510) In death, as in life, Rose repeatedly "has come to me – and gone from me again –." (302) Ruskin's experience over the years is very like Vane's confusion of dreams with Lona when in the last chapter, "The 'Endless Ending,'" he continues to struggle to discern what is waking and what is dreaming. Vane's cry in "moments of doubt" holds strong resonance with letters between Ruskin and MacDonald. Ruskin had written that MacDonald's vision of God was "unspeakably beautiful." He adds, "If they were but true! [...] But I feel so

strongly that it is only the image of your own mind that you see in the sky! And you will say – ‘And who made the mind?’” (Kings 1/1/41) Vane similarly asks if God could “create such lovely things as I dreamed?”

“Whence then came thy dream?” answers Hope.

“Out of my dark self, into the light of my consciousness.”

“But whence first into thy dark self?” rejoins Hope.

“My brain was its mother, and the fever in my blood its father.”

“Say rather,” suggests Hope, “thy brain was the violin whence it issued, and the fever in thy blood the bow that drew it forth. – But who made the violin? and who guided the bow across its strings?? Say rather, again – who set the song birds each on its bough in the tree of life, and startled each in its order from its perch? Whence came the fantasia? and whence the life that danced thereto? Didst THOU say, in the dark of thy own unconscious self, ‘Let beauty be; let truth seem!’ and straightway beauty was, and truth but seemed?” (357-8)

In 1886 Ruskin wrote of fits in which he was visited at Brantwood by Rose: “Then I got up to heaven with her – but was presently sent down again, and lost in more confused horrors of earthly Death than I ever dreamed yet.” (Hilton 531) Perhaps MacDonald hoped that Vane, who likewise makes it to the Holy City with his Lona but to be drawn back down again, will somehow give encouragement to Ruskin; perhaps he hopes Ruskin will recognize the journey through the domain of Death which yet, like its Dantean predecessor, leads to fuller life and Hope.

ii) Shared Literacy: How an understanding of Ruskin and MacDonald’s adherence to the tradition of stereoscopic engagement with myths provides insight to the particular stereoscopic play in *Lilith*

If the Lona Vane longs for is a Beatrician Rose, then MacDonald, just as Dante, has woven ‘contemporary’ characters into his poetic work. He clearly follows Dante’s lead in placing these alongside the biblical characters such as Adam and Eve, and in allowing the tale of all of these characters to be shaped by ancient myths, explicitly uses the names of “Lilith” and of “Astarte” for characters in the book. MacDonald was well aware that Ruskin had been troubled by conflicting feelings about myths, especially as he became more enamoured with them and began to consider them important – not the least for their expression of eternal truths – and that he had questioned whether they could be reconciled with a Christian perspective.³¹³ Discovering

³¹³ Birch records Ruskin beginning his career as “either indifferent or hostile to mythology,” partly due his upbringing, partly his Oxford training. (4)

the “general relation between language and myth” that Barfield and Tolkien would consider “almost unfathomable,” fascinated him, but it did not fit into the Christian framework of his upbringing. (*HEW* 83) As early as 1861 (just before he met MacDonald) this angst contributed to a breakdown for Ruskin. (Hilton 18) In Scott and MacDonald both, Ruskin met men who actually considered their faith enriched by the myths that they knew, and men who, being thus unthreatened, loved to delve deeper and learn more; they did not desire to change or sweep away anything that pre-dated the Christian Bible, instead they understood God’s truths to even then be working the mystery of transformation in the lives and cultures of his beloved creation. The Gospel was seen as fulfilling rather than destroying what had come before. Eventually Ruskin himself moved closer to their understanding, and in *Queen of the Air* (1869) his pronounced perspective is remarkably similar to that of both Scotsmen:

The first of requirements, then, for the right reading of myths, is the understanding of the nature of all true vision by noble persons; namely, that it is founded on constant laws common to all human nature; that it perceives, however darkly, things which are for all ages true; that we can only understand it so far as we have some perception of the same truth; and that its fullness is developed and manifested more and more by the reverberation of it from minds of the same mirror-temper, in succeeding ages. You will understand Homer better by seeing his reflection in Dante, as you may trace new forms and softer colors in a hillside, redoubled by a lake. I shall be able partly to show you, even to-night, how much, in the Homeric vision of Athena, has been made clearer by the advance of time, being thus essentially and eternally true...³¹⁴ (sic; 22)

As Ruskin explores that “Myth of Athena” in *Queen* he recapitulates some of what he has already said about her, and about myth, most especially in *Dust*. Interestingly, both of those books were written during the most intense period of his friendship with MacDonald, and it should thus come as no surprise that Athena – she who Ruskin calls “directress of the imagination and will” – should hold very strong resonance with MacDonald’s character of Mara.³¹⁵ She is goddess of *spiritus, psyche, pneuma*, “The Spirit of Wisdom in *Conduct*, [who bears] conquest over troublous and disturbing evil.” (qtd Birch 78) This correlates with MacDonald’s tracing of Psyche’s rebirth, and also with Ruskin’s tracing of pre-Athena figures through to that of the biblical figure of Wisdom and Inspiration, Sophia. In Mara in particular it can be seen how MacDonald’s Celtic and Christian understanding of the sanctity of Nature works easily with Ruskin’s passion for a

³¹⁴ Ruskin sets out the caveat: “I have gathered for you tonight only instances of what is beautiful in Greek religion; but even in its best time there were deep corruptions in other phases of it, and degraded forms of many of its deities, all originating in a misunderstood worship of lower races, little less than these corrupted forms of devotion can be found, all having a strange and dreadful consistency with each other, and infecting Christianity.” (*Queen* 90) On notes of Egyptian mythology he wrote: “Begin Myths with clear conviction that *all* Good and Truth is of God, in man, as in stones and animals.” (Birch 74)

³¹⁵ Much he says of Athena in these works reiterates *MP V*, only now incorporates the Egyptian Neith.

continued understanding of the ancient myths embodied in various aspects of Nature. In discussing *Queen* Hilton quotes Ruskin's secretary Collingwood: "He traced with appreciation the development of the notion of Athena, as the chief power of the air, from her character of actual atmosphere to that of the breath of human life." (156) Ruskin confessed to Georgiana that within the text of *Queen* there were messages to Rose – "things that only she could understand. Rose knew that the book's author was thinking of her, and that his book was also hers." (156) This provided yet another reason for MacDonald to engage with that text.

Recalling the explanation by MacDonald that Paul is able to explain even more fully the truth that the Greeks had glimpsed in the concept of Psyche, gives clarity to the stereoscopic nature of characters such as Mara – and the tradition in which they are formed. A 'stereoscopic' manner of both reading and writing is the heritage of Ruskin and MacDonald, readers of the iconological tradition of Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare – of Scripture – and students and friends of Scott. This was a way of understanding God's 'converging truth' that Ruskin began to recognize even in medieval Christian art and architecture; it was evidence again of the long conversation. Even MacDonald's Celtic heritage helped him to express faith in a manner that need not exclude the stories or the Nature that Ruskin loved. By 1868 Ruskin wrote, in very Scott-like terms:

For every fairy tale worth recording at all is the remnant of a tradition possessing true historical value; – historical, at least in so far as it has naturally arisen out of the mind of a people under special circumstances, and risen not without meaning, nor removed altogether from their sphere of religious faith. It sustains afterwards natural changes from the sincere action of the fear or fancy of successive generations; it takes new color from their manner of life, and new form from their changing moral tempers. As long as these changes are natural and effortless, accidental and inevitable, the story remains essentially true, altering its form, indeed, like a flying cloud, but remaining a sign of the sky; a shadowy image, as truly a part of the great firmament of the human mind as the light of reason which it seems to interrupt. ("Fairy Stories" xx)

Thus quite easily the goddess Athena, the weeping goddess of Wisdom – one of Ruskin's most frequently referenced myth-symbols³¹⁶ – who wrapped her head in a veil and had, Ruskin explains carefully, grey eyes, is suggestive of *Lilith's* Mara:

She stood in the middle of the room; her white garments lay like foamy waves at her feet, and among them the swathings of her face: it was lovely as a night of stars. Her great gray eyes looked up to heaven; tears were flowing down her pale cheeks. (*Lilith* 114)

Ruskin also repeatedly discusses how Athena, of wave and white cloud, is a later embodiment of

³¹⁶ MP V, *Queen*, and *Ethics* are key sources.

the Egyptian goddess Bast who symbolized the moon, sometimes had a cat's head, and sometimes was pictured with her kittens (i.e. *Queen*). The reader of *Lilith* will recall that Mara, who has a large cat of her own named 'Astarte,' is called by some the Cat Woman and even has kittens; the moon is, of course, ubiquitous in the novel. While exegeting a dream in *Dust* Ruskin explains that Bast is also related to the Egyptian goddess Neith, the goddess of the Night who has a lion as a companion and sometimes wears a lion's head.³¹⁷ Here and elsewhere Ruskin explores the links from these Athena-figures to Sophia, the Lady Wisdom of Proverbs, Psalms, the apocryphal 'Wisdom of Solomon,'³¹⁸ and even to Mary the Lady of Sorrows.³¹⁹

What the Egyptians meant, who called her 'Neith,'— or Homer, who called her 'Athena,'— or Solomon, who called her by a word which the Greeks render as 'Sophia,' you must judge for yourselves. But her testimony is always the same, and all nations have received it: 'I was by Him as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.'³²⁰

These stereoscopic interpretations of mythology find their counterpart in *Lilith*.

Awareness of such interpretive links drawn by Ruskin, combined with MacDonald's understanding of foreshadowed and stereoscopic Truth, expands insight into the elusive character of *Lilith's* Mara (her own name a derivative of Mary). In doing so it reveals how MacDonald's Celtic and Christian understanding of the sanctity of Nature works easily with Ruskin's passion for a continued understanding of the truths of the ancient myths as embodied in various aspects of Nature. Mara's name in Gaelic means "of the sea," and she is not dissimilar from the Celtic Banshee, who is known variously as the "White Lady of Sorrow," the "Lady of Death," the "Woman of Peace," and the "Spirit of the Air." In some Celtic tales, despite her keening that foretells death, she is a graceful and peaceful character. Critics familiar with the Bible, such as Hein and Spina, correctly observe that *Mara* is the name claimed by Naomi from *Ruth*. However it does not follow that Mara is a Naomi figure — a reference in "The Gifts of the Child Christ" helps

³¹⁷ Ruskin's dream exegesis tracks similarly: "The Nemean lion is set beside the lion of the tribe of Judah, the lion of St Mark, the lion of St Jerome, and the Egyptian lion of the Zodiac." (Birch 167) Birch claims that for Ruskin and his contemporaries the new science of Egyptology provided a measure for the historic authenticity of the Bible. (74)

³¹⁸ "The most mythic [saint] is of course St Sophia; the shade of the Greek Athena passing into the 'Wisdom' of the Jewish Proverbs and Psalms, and the Apocryphal 'Wisdom of Solomon.' She always remains understood as a personification only; and has no direct influence on the mind of the unlearned multitude of Western Christendom, except as a god-mother..." (*Pleasures* 134)

³¹⁹ Mara is occasionally called "Lady of Sorrows." In *Stones* there is a "weeping Madonna in the act of intercession," and a "Madonna, her tears falling" who is part of an ecclesial expression of "the deep sorrow and the sacred courage of men who had no home left them upon earth, but who looked for one to come." (22; 19) Ruskin occasionally mentions Athena's spindle, recalling the great-great-grandmother, who — as previously mentioned — evokes MacDonald's phrase that "a wise imagination" is evidence of the presence of "the spirit of God." ("Imagination" 29) In some Mediterranean iconography Mary has a spindle, congruent with the *Proto-evangelium of James*. (11:1) MacDonald's friend and illustrator Hughes follows this Athena/Mary tradition in his *Annunciation* (1858) with veil and spindle, much to Ruskin's interest. (Cf. addendum to Roberts' book: www.arthurhughes.org/addenda.htm). In a vision in *Lilith* Mara is also called "the Magdalene," insinuating her stereoscopic nature — Magdalene being she who wept at Christ's grave, and the first to comprehend his resurrection. (324)

³²⁰ The quotation is Proverbs 8:30-31, a chapter describing Wisdom.

clarify: on the night the infant dies, “the waters of Mara had risen and filled the house.” (40) These “waters of Mara” are the ‘place of bitterness’ in the flight from Egypt. (*Ex.* 15:22) God sweetens the water for the wilful Israelites, and they travel on to Elim where there are fountains of water and palm trees (more *Lilith* images), and ‘Manna,’ akin to Mara’s bread that expires daily. The stereoscopic character of Mara also functions as a Wisdom-figure acting foil to Vane’s hunger for Knowledge. This resonates with Ruskin’s Slade lecture titled “Imagination,” in which he discusses Athena’s moral rather than aesthetic rule (“she does not teach them to make their work beautiful, but to make it right”): her power lay in “enabling the hearts of men to discern the one from the other [...] to choose, not unaided, between submission to the Love that cannot end, or to the Worm that cannot die.” (*Queen* 124; *Olives* 346) MacDonald’s Mara does just that: she enables Lilith “to choose, not unaided,” to submit to Love that she be rid of the Worm. Fittingly, at the novel’s end Vane ‘recognizes’ Mara with an allusion to that passage beloved by MacDonald, *Isaiah* 40:

I told you, brother, all would be well! – When next you would comfort, say, ‘What will be well, is even now well.’” She gave a little sigh, and I thought it meant, “But they will not believe you!”

“–You know me now!” she ended, with a smile like her mother’s.

“I know you!” I answered: “*you are the voice that cried in the wilderness* before ever the Baptist came!” (341; italics mine)

Thus Mara is also the voice that called those who could listen to truth, before the Incarnate Truth arrived in all fullness – and the reader of MacDonald is returned again to *Isaiah* 40: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people...the voice that crieth in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” All truth, confirms MacDonald, is God’s truth. His novel repeats, in layers of storied pictures, patterns of this that Ruskin will recognize – along with the assertion that it is truth that sets a man free.

Identifying this stereoscopic manner of reading and writing can significantly alter interpretation of the text. McGillis’ studies of the various manuscripts of *Lilith* have alerted him to MacDonald’s “explaining biblical Jewish characters through their Greek counterparts.” (*Manuscripts* 56) However McGillis appears not to be aware of the theological nature of MacDonald’s stereoscopic practice – let alone of that which would perhaps make MacDonald’s intent most obvious: his relationship with Ruskin, a scholar obsessed with the stereoscopic nature of myth. Thus McGillis insists: “surely we can see that MacDonald’s ‘poetic genius’ intended his book to be read

poetically rather than theologically, philosophically, or psychologically.” (56) He maintains that MacDonald “clearly intended to avoid, for example, direct references to God,” suggesting that the move is “important since it encourages us not to read *Lilith* as a Christian document, as many readers do.” (56) Yet if that were true MacDonald (despite five years of careful editing) did an inadequate job, missing at least sixteen direct references to God, let alone a myriad of direct scripture quotations, scriptural allusions, and scriptural references. McGillis comments on the “grand vision of resurrection reminiscent of the final cantos of the *Paradiso* and the book of Revelation” at *Lilith*’s end, concluding that with this “we realize we are in a visionary world, not a doctrinal one.” (56) Again this is an example of the necessity of an increased awareness in MacDonald scholarship of MacDonald’s *Weltanschauung*, for like those in the literary tradition with which he engages, with MacDonald there is no disparity between the world of vision and the world of Christian doctrine – literary tradition is, in fact, replete with doctrine conveyed in and through vision.³²¹ Nor, in MacDonald’s worldview, can theology, philosophy, or psychology even exist independent of one another, let alone be mutually exclusive. That MacDonald made the literary decision to leave more suggested than explicit in his novel, and that he may have even intended some of his imagery to be so subtle that the reader might not consciously notice it, will be further explored – for they are concepts integral to MacDonald’s intent. But this limited perspective of a deservedly respected MacDonald scholar such as McGillis serves well to show how contextualization – in this case, delving into the Ruskin-MacDonald relationship as well as being aware of MacDonald’s own worldview – can significantly alter critical study.

³²¹ It was imperious dogma with which MacDonald had a problem, not the concept of doctrine. Most assuredly he did not intend *Lilith* to be read as a “Christian document” but nor did he intend for his readers to eschew its fairly explicit Christian intent. Anticipating the choice of obedience made by both Vane and Lilith he writes in “Imagination”: “As he that is willing to do the will of the Father, shall know of the doctrine [...] the man who is growing into harmony with His will, is growing into harmony with himself.” (24) This references John 7:17 – the passage on Scott’s tombstone.

iii) Manifested Genre: How awareness of the *Grotesque* as discussed by Ruskin enables its recognition as a literary tool specifically utilized to further the relational message of potential transformation in *Lilith*

- a) Ruskin's understanding of the *Grotesque*
- b) The 'Grotesque Tragedy' in *Lilith*

*the greater the number of meanings, harmonious with each other,
which any work of art presents,
the greater claim it has to be considered
a work of genius.*
"Shakespeare Revealed as Himself"

a) Ruskin's *Grotesque*

Many more unusual correlations exist between *Lilith* and the writings and life of Ruskin, indicating a vast amount of potential for further study. Of considerable relevance to this thesis is the manner in which Ruskin's discussions of the concept of the Grotesque illuminates MacDonald's use of the same in *Lilith*: what many modern readers have viewed as disturbingly dark is actually MacDonald's engagement in a specific literary tradition. The tradition is one in which Ruskin was quite interested, and the manner in which MacDonald utilizes it garners detail from both his literary and personal relationship with Ruskin. Not only does MacDonald appear to interact with Ruskin's specific explorations of the concept, but he references traditional images of the Grotesque, and – seemingly to help the reader along – strategically places the word in a chapter title. Chesterton recognized this, and commented: "There is another artistic matter in which Dr. MacDonald gave a profoundly original lead, and a lead which has never been followed. This was in his realization of the grotesque in the spiritual world." (*Work* np) With the aid of Ruskin this 'realization' can be better understood.

In *Modern Painters III* Ruskin had written:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in a bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself. [...It] arises out of the use or fancy of tangible signs to set forth an otherwise less expressible truth; including nearly the whole range of symbolical and allegorical art and poetry. (93)

Certainly in *Lilith* there are passages of visual and visionary experience that draw both general and exact 'symbolical' correlations, not the least with Ruskin's own explorations and examples of the same. For instance Ruskin's presentation in *Queen* of serpent and bird dichotomies is drawn out

when Lona is garbed in her feathered garment, and Vane in his “scale-armour” one.³²² (*Queen* 88ff; *Lilith* 249) Ruskin’s repeated play with signs and symbols of light and mirrors is referenced in the very staging of *Lilith*, as the self-oriented Vane tries to understand refraction, observes the effect of light upon pictures and his “optic nerves,” catches sight of things in reflection, and becomes dependent on the saving light of the Moon. (11ff) His entrance into the “region of the seven dimensions” in the manner of his father, through the mirror, recalls not only *Modern Painters V* – “the soul of man is still a mirror, wherein may be seen, darkly, the image of the mind of God” – but also the passage by Wordsworth that was included on the title page of each *Modern Painters* volume, ending: “the transcendent universe,/ No more than as a mirror that reflects/ To proud Self-love her own intelligence.”³²³ (21; 199) In *Deucalion* Ruskin explains that *Paradiso*’s Canto XXI is one of his favourite sections: in that canto there are allusions to self-contemplation, mirrors, and the light of the sun – the mirrors and the light enabling the contemplation. (Norton 196) Another *grotesque* play that MacDonald appears to make between Ruskin’s writing and *Lilith* becomes evident in the specific copy of *Lilith* gifted from MacDonald to his personal secretary, William Carey Davies. On the title page, following the epigraph, is penciled: “The death of Self is the gate of Life.” On pages sixty-two and sixty-three (the first two pages of the chapter “The Bad Burrows”) is handwritten, at the bottom, an excerpt from Ruskin’s description of a gothic Italian wasteland:

‘Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on earth than the solitary extent of the Campagne of Rome under evening light. Let the reader imagine himself for the moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and send forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, treads he never [sic] so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men, ...Hillodes of mouldering earth heave around him as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep.’

Ruskin: Preface to the 2nd Ed. of *Modern Painters*. 1843³²⁴

On those two pages – sixty-two and sixty-three – Vane, as he walks in the evening on a “bare,” “powdery” soil, is startled by earth that “heaves” around him with mouldering monsters struggling forth. (Both texts evoke Dante’s Malebolge.) Such correlations to Ruskin’s own

³²² Raeper suggests this passage evidences a Swedenborgian twist. (“Diamond” 144) Ruskin presented two groups of Animal-myths: those connected with birds (especially the dove) as type of Spirit, and those connected with the serpent. (*Queen* 88) In *Lilith* Mara is sometimes associated with a dove, and Lilith a serpent. *Ethics* extends Ruskin’s challenge, including the perspective of self as a crystal. *Lilith*’s Mr. Raven explains that everyone has: “a beast-self – and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent-self too – which it takes a deal of crushing to kill! 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. You can tell what sort a man is by his creature that comes oftenest to the front.” (43)

³²³ The passage, from *The Excursion*, is part of the opening stanza for the section: “Despondency Corrected.” MacDonald responds in *Faber*: “It is God who gives thee thy mirror of imagination, and if thou keep it clean, it will give thee back no shadow but of the truth.” (19)

³²⁴ The excerpt is replicated exactly. I noticed these inscriptions when the first-edition books were shown, upon their gifting to the George MacDonald Society, at the Hammersmith Symposium, June 2005.

symbolic play, ones that appear to be intentionally *grotesque*, are legion. To better understand the importance of their role in *Lilith* – regardless of how many of the correlating signs and symbols are apprehended – requires that one recognize the Dantean “scaffolding,” for even when such play strengthens the story, it remains subservient the larger framework. (“Imagination” 39) Yet even that very element of *grotesque*, which must be considered further, finds its precedence in Dante.

Understanding what Ruskin had to say about the concept of the Grotesque and looking at how that is manifested in *Lilith* also reveals more of the mythopoeic character of the novel.

MacDonald knew that Ruskin considered myth a special form of what he called the *Symbolical Grotesque*, able to veil “a theory of the universe under the grotesque of a fairy tale.” (*Queen* 2)

Victorian Literature critic and Ruskin scholar George Landow explains Ruskin’s perception that, “like other forms of the Symbolical Grotesque, a myth indicates the presence of deeper meanings by an enigmatic literal or narrative level.” (Landow 5:5; cf. *Queen* 2) Ruskin’s thoughts on the Symbolical Grotesque – conveniently collated by Landow – clarify some of the literary method used in *Lilith*. These thoughts make evident that though the fantastic *Lilith* seemed strange to its immediate audience (perhaps more so than to today’s audience, familiar with its fantastic descendants) its style was part of a long and well established literary – and truth-seeking – tradition. (5:4) As noted, MacDonald uses the word *grotesque* in the chapter title “A Grotesque Tragedy.” A Shakespearian scholar, he would not use the word *tragedy* lightly, especially when coupled with another literary term. Considering the chapter’s contents, no less than those of the novel as a whole, it seems likely that MacDonald was using the word *tragedy* to indicate “that branch of dramatic art which treats of sorrowful or terrible events, in a serious and dignified style; a literary work of a serious or sorrowful character, with a fatal or disastrous conclusion.” (OED) It is *tragedy* in this sense then, that is shaped by Ruskin’s concept of the Grotesque: a mythic faerie tale, indicating “the presence of deeper meanings by an enigmatic literal or narrative level” – with symbols and signs boldly “thrown together” – to treat an event of “serious or sorrowful character,” and with a “fatal” conclusion. An apt, if convoluted, description of *Lilith*.

In the second volume of *Modern Painters* Ruskin writes that the “power of prophecy is the very essence” of imagination – and that there are “many grotesque ideas which may be with safety suggested dimly by words or slight lines, but which will hardly bear being painted into perfect definiteness.” (144; 98) He declares that the “first and noblest use” of such writing is “to enable us to bring sensibly to our sight the things which are recorded as belonging to our future state, or

as invisibly surrounding us in this . . . [and] to give to all mental truths some visible type in allegory, simile, or personification, which shall more deeply enforce them.” (qtd Landow 5:4)

Landow explains Ruskin’s perspective that Imagination, which Ruskin calls “that prophetic action of mind” (*MP* 146), acts

as solace and salvation for man, who confined to the prison house of this world, can sustain his faith and correct his life with its aid. Sounding much like Dante, upon whom he frequently draws in discussing the allegorical in art, Ruskin reminds us that “Imagination is a pilgrim on the earth – and her home is in heaven.” The imagination allows us to escape the bounds of time and space for the sake of our spiritual welfare, for according to Ruskin this faculty is “an eminent beholder of things when and where they are NOT; a seer, that is, in the prophetic sense, calling ‘the things that are not as though they were,’ and for ever delighting to dwell on that which is not tangibly present . . . its great function being the calling forth, or back, that which is not visible to bodily sense.” The imagination is prophetic in two ways: it can move through time, reinforcing hope in the central truth of Christianity, eternal life, while in the form of the Symbolical Grotesque it can also convey to us spiritual truths, the truths that originate beyond our terrestrial existence. (5:4)

This passage resonates powerfully with *Lilith*’s general multi-dimensional framework in which a man never leaves his home as he pilgrimages on a journey which yet reveals his True Home. Seeming to foreshadow MacDonald’s ‘apprehension’ of *Lilith* (“he was possessed by a feeling – he would hardly let me call it a conviction I think – that it was a mandate direct from God, for which he himself was to find form and clothing,” [Greville 548]) Ruskin writes in *The Stones of Venice*, “The noblest forms of imaginative power . . . are in some sort ungovernable, and have in them something of the character of dreams; so that the vision, of whatever kind, comes uncalled, and will not submit itself to the seer, but conquers him, and forces him to speak as a prophet, having no power over his words or thoughts.” (151) He adds in *Modern Painters III*, “very often the mental vision is, I believe, in men of imagination, clearer than the bodily one; but vision it is, of one kind or another, – the whole scene, character, or incident passing before them as in second sight, whether they will or no, and requiring them to paint it as they see it [...] “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are.”³²⁵ (77) Thus according to Ruskin the true artist will not be egotistic for he is, consistent with MacDonald’s own understanding of ‘creation,’ “a mere witness and mirror of truth, and a scribe of visions, – always passive in sight, passive in utterance.” (88) Noting the long tradition of such dream literature, Landow claims that Ruskin is unique in being willing to consider the work of contemporaries as prophetic, but points out that Ruskin does not allow the honour to come lightly: “The great artist must work a lifetime,

³²⁵ This quotation is John’s mandate in *Revelation*.

preparing himself, storing visual truths in his memory, learning the ways of man and nature, so that, ultimately, he may become a vehicle for truth.” (Landow 5:4) That a ‘great artist’ must prepare in such a manner was not unique in Ruskin’s own Scottish heritage: as discussed in Chapter Two, the Celtic tradition was one in which poesis and prophecy went hand in hand as a matter of course, both requiring “a heightened spiritual awareness.” (*Listening* 68) It could be argued that MacDonald’s lifetime of work had prepared him to be just such an artist. Certainly his ‘Inkling’ inheritors thought so.

When Ruskin defines the Grotesque in *Modern Painters III* – “a series of symbols thrown together [...] truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way,” the connection of which is “left for the beholder to work out for himself” – he explains that it is those “gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination” which form the “grotesque character.”³²⁶ (93-94) He draws upon Spenser as an example, and names Solomon and Dante among the great practitioners: artists who convey through the Grotesque spiritual truths that in “the noblest” could be conveyed in no other manner. (92) Sometimes this is achieved in a manner delightful, sometime with awfulness, and yet always in a manner in which it is left “to the effort of the mind to unweave the riddle, or to the sense it has of there being an infinite power and meaning in the thing seen, beyond all that is apparent therein, giving the highest sublimity even to the most trivial object so presented and so contemplated.” (92) Of particular importance when contemplating the mythopoeic nature of MacDonald’s work, Ruskin observes how such riddles “stimulate the mind, delighting it with the joys of discovery that commit truth thus discovered to memory.” (Landow 5:4) Landow draws an apt parallel from a work foundational since childhood for MacDonald and Ruskin both: *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Its preface proclaims “Dark Clouds bring Waters, when the bright bring none,” and then cites the scriptural precedence:

Were not God's Laws,/ His Gospel-Laws, in olden time held forth/ By Types, Shadows,
and Metaphors? Yet loth/ Will any sober man be to find fault/ With them, lest he be found
for to assault/ The highest Wisdom.

Making readers aware that this is a precedence set not only by the prophets but Christ as well, Bunyan continues: “Am I afraid to say that Holy Writ,/ Which for its Stile and Phrase puts down all Wit,/ Is everywhere so full of all these things,/ Dark Figures, Allegories?” adding, “This Book will make a Traveller of thee,/ If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;/ It will direct thee to the Holy Land,/ If thou wilt its directions understand.”³²⁷ (5:4) After

³²⁶ In *Stones* Ruskin explains the difference between ‘noble’ or ‘true’ *grotesque* and ‘ignoble’ or ‘false’ *grotesque*, the former addressing man’s tragic and imperfect nature, the latter being mere frivolity.

³²⁷ Landow also quotes *Pilgrim’s Progress II*: “Things that seem to be hid in words obscure,/ Do but the Godly mind the more allure;/ To study what those sayings should contain/ That speak to us in such a Cloudy strain/ I also know a dark Similitude/ Will

noting the parallel, Landow references Dante's injunction in the *Inferno*: "Observe the doctrine that conceals itself/ Beneath the veil of the mysterious verses!"³²⁸ – in doing so he re-emphasizes that what Ruskin was discussing was a literary method of long standing "with which to comment upon a world endowed with sacred meaning." (5:4) *Lilith*, by Ruskin's definitions, steps into that methodology.

b) A Grotesque Tragedy

Lilith's chapter "A Grotesque Tragedy" clearly fulfills Ruskin's insistence on the combination of the ludicrous and the terrible in the Grotesque, and the association of the terrible with horror, anger, or awe at the human condition. MacDonald illustrates the juxtaposition with vivid illustrations of traditional Grotesque themes. An article on the "first principles" of the Grotesque by Geoffrey Harpham explains that "the characteristic themes of the Grotesque – the Plague, the Dance of Death, the masked ball, the Temptations of St. Anthony, the Apocalypse, to name a few – jeopardize or shatter our conventions by opening onto [reality] vertiginous new perspectives characterized by the destruction of logic and regression to the unconscious-madness, hysteria, or nightmare."³²⁹ (462) In MacDonald's chapter, the memorable Lord and Lady Cokayne are tragic, comic, and, simply, grotesque in their state of non-relationality.³³⁰ The grand ball, at once beautiful and terrifyingly disgusting, is a vivid variation on an ancient motif – the beautiful attire masking a horrible reality: a *Danse Macabre*. After the novel's turn both of these scenes reveal the onset of redemption: the ribald Cokaynes begin to communicate and receive physical care from the Lovers, the decomposing dancers engage with the redemptive and playful childlikeness of the Lovers.³³¹ Interestingly even the horrific burrow of monsters – with

shapes more fantastic in ghoulish, blasting dismay, than ever wine-sodden brain of exhausted poet fevered into misbeing. He who dived in the swirling Maelstrom saw none to compare with them in horror: tentacular convolutions, tumid bulges, glaring orbs of sepian deformity,

on the Fancie more itself intrude,/ And will stick faster in the Heart and Head/ Than things from Similes not borrowed."

³²⁸ Canto 9:62-63

³²⁹ Harpham renames the 'terrible grotesque,' for modern sensibility, the 'fantastic grotesque.'

³³⁰ *Cokayne* is actually the man's nickname, but it serves as a moniker. "*Cokayne*" was traditionally the "name of an imaginary country, the abode of luxury and idleness" (*OED*), and dates to at least the fourteenth century. According to the *OED* the word was common in Victorian London, sometimes a punning reference to Londoners.

³³¹ The potential for physical and spiritual evolution here is similar to that discussed in *Curdie*.

would have looked to him innocence beside such incarnations of hatefulness – every head the wicked flower that, bursting from an abominable stalk, perfected its evil significance.³³²

– even this burrow becomes “indeed, as I had beheld it in my dream, a lovely lake.” (244) MacDonald is clear however that the monsters are not exterminated: “So long as exist men and women of unwholesome mind, that lake will still be peopled with loathsomenesses.” (244) Just as with the Cokaynes and those at the ball, the cleansing has begun but it is not yet complete. Hope is evident, but not yet fulfilled.

In his article Harpham explains that the Grotesque “remains primarily a pictorial form, with its greatest impact in moments of sudden insight. Prolonged, it loses its force; most instances in literary art are merely instances.” (465) And this is clearly what MacDonald has done: written vivid *images* of Grotesque Tragedy – not ones vacant of hope, but ones requiring a “fatal conclusion” for redemption to be enabled. He has, as Ruskin described Dante doing, scribed “picture writings for children who live in the nursery of Time and Space.” (*Stones* 110) As discussed in an earlier chapter, the ease with which dark and light can co-exist in a tale, in a manner which refuses to deny darkness, pain, and suffering and yet exults in the fullness and goodness of life, and which combines these with an acute sense of the liminal, was common to any reader familiar with Scottish myths and legends. In *Lilith* this is bound, in the manner of Celtic tradition, with the concept of Heaven being one’s True Home. According to Ruskin,

in all ages and among all nations, grotesque idealism has been the element through which the most appalling and eventful truth has been wisely conveyed, from the most sublime words of true Revelation, to the . . . [words] of the oracles, and the more or less doubtful teaching of dreams; and so down to ordinary poetry. No element of imagination has a wider range, a more magnificent use, or so colossal a grasp of sacred truth. (*MP III* 94)

Harpham adds that “in works with such themes, the Grotesque can serve as a thematic metaphor for confusion, chaos, insanity, loss of perspective, social collapse, or disintegration, or angst,” suggesting appropriately that “when we begin to doubt that man is made in the image of God, we begin to reflect differently on distortion and perversity. In such a state of doubt the Grotesque may offer itself as a reflection of the higher truths.” (465) In *Modern Painters III* Ruskin recommends Dante’s *Commedia* as a model of this “reflection of the higher truths.” MacDonald seems to have accepted the suggestion, “clothing” the “scaffolding” of Dante with signs and

³³² This burrow is highly reminiscent of the disturbing creatures in Grünewald’s *Temptation of St. Anthony*: “If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imaginations, we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of a decay which could never feel – only declare – a slow return towards primeval chaos.” (“Imagination” 25)

symbols intimately known to Ruskin, daring to suggest the potential of embedded revelation, and a hope for transformation. (“Imagination” 39)

Section II: A Critical Reading: A new critical reading of *Lilith*, informed by the findings of this thesis and the methodological assertions of Scott and MacDonald

- i) Master of the Art
- ii) The Ruskinian Prism of Dante
- iii) Shared Convictions, Visionary Dreams

*when we reflect with how much labour we have deepened our knowledge of him,
and thereby found in him the best – for the best lies not on the surface for the careless reader –
our own conviction is, that not half has been done that ought to be done
[Few] can ever give the attention or work to it that we have given;
but much may be done with judicious aid.
("St. George's Day")*

i) Master of the Art: A reminder of the masterful tale through which MacDonald tells his own.

In *Queen* Ruskin suggested:

when you have learned to draw thoroughly, take one master for your painting, as you would have done necessarily in old times by being put into his school [...] and having chosen, do your best to understand your own chosen master, and obey him, and no one else, till you have strength to deal with the nature itself round you, and then, be your own master, and see with your own eyes. If you have got masterhood or sight in you, that is the way to make the most of them.” (*Queen* 208)

And so it seems that MacDonald has chosen Dante as master – or, as a “scaffolding or skeleton” for his pen. (“Imagination” 39) After studying Dante so closely that he can give lectures in which he quotes the *Commedia* by heart, MacDonald then crafts into his own work what he sees ‘with his own eyes.’ In doing so, as Balbo proposes, MacDonald both responds to Dante’s message and seeks to advance it. Ruskin had said that an artist must work a lifetime, “preparing himself, storing visual truths in his memory, learning the ways of man and nature, so that, ultimately, he may become a vehicle for truth.” (Landow 5:4) This MacDonald had done. Aware of Ruskin’s own vast admiration for and frequent reference to Dante, MacDonald follows Dante’s lead in daring not only to use Greek myths with which to illustrate and explain his Christian epic, but in intermingling the references to and engagements with other literature he and Ruskin shared, with

contemporary people and places. Layer upon layer. Each of these layers reinforces the story's vision; each adds its own richness, its own confirmation – particularities informing the converging general truths. Yet a reader need know only some of the patterns of the *Commedia*, completely apart from Ruskin's relation to *Lilith*, to be confirmed of Vane's Dantesque pilgrimage. The specifics of Ruskin's life might assist in confirming or clarifying critical insight, as recognizing the patterns of other texts, myths, and literary constructs will also do, but the story's power is not at all dependent upon knowing these – as the history of its reception testifies. These details can confirm however the patterns of which the *Commedia* in and of itself should be a sufficient key to unlock, the repetitions countermanding – for example – assertions that *Lilith* is a God-free text. In “otherwise less expressible truth,” MacDonald offers a story about transformation that has itself the potential to transform. (*MP III* 93)

An overview of the *Commedia* might serve the reader's recognition of these patterns, before following them through in a critical reading of *Lilith*.

After “coming to himself in a wood,” Dante is rescued from the threat of a leopard, lion, and wolf, by the classical poet Virgil. Virgil explains that St. Lucia, the patron saint of light, sight, and vision, had sent Beatrice to him, asking that – on behalf of Mary, who weeps with “bright beaming eyes,” he would intervene in Dante's life by guiding him through Hell and Purgatory. (Cary 6) The choice of Virgil as escort is important, as it indicates a specific guidance by the literature of others – and indeed the entire *Commedia* is, as discussed, expressly intertextual, engaging with Scripture, myth, and history, in a fashion (as Scott had pointed out) then new to the genre. Additionally Virgil, chosen by the Queen of Heaven to expose redemptive truth, is a poet of pagan myth.³³³ As Dante the pilgrim follows his guide, he learns the consequences of various sins. Eventually they come to the deepest level of Hell, where all the inhabitants are frozen in ice in increasing isolation, culminating in the glacial Satan. There, in utter isolation, Satan fans his wings and thus sustains the state of all things being frozen and apart. The two poets climb from here up to ante-Purgatory, and Dante is conveyed to Purgatory proper by St. Lucia – though in his dreams he believes his usher to be an eagle. As he sojourns the seven terraces of Purgatory, Dante learns that the shadowless shades are being purged so that they may pass up to Heaven – each penance relating directly to the sin that has weighed the penitent down. In the middle canto, at the centre of the *Commedia*, Dante realizes that Poetic Imagination and Divine Love are

³³³ Notably one already famed for being a herald of Christ: Dante has Statius explain that his conversion was incurred by reading the *Aeneid*.

together guiding him into salvific vision, Light. Continuing upwards, Virgil escorts Dante into the skirts of Paradise, from whence he is guided by Beatrice and finally by the theologian of love, Bernard, up to the very heart of Heaven. His comprehension of love, light, and the joys of those communing in the spheres increases with each circle he passes through. At the zenith Dante is granted vision of the fiery rose, in which the concentric petals and their glowing occupants interweave in a constant dance of the joy, light, and glory of Love, culminating in the revolving, co-inhering circles of the Trinity. Thus the utter separation and isolation of Hell to which Dante was first exposed is contrasted with the utter relationality and communion of Heaven. Bernard petitions Mary to enable Dante's vision – to remove the “mortal clouding which impairs” – and henceforth protect his pursuit of purity. In that final beatific vision Dante apprehends two revelations. (Reynolds 344) First, he realizes that in that Divine Light, “the form, or exemplar, of all creation” (347) – *all* things – are bound together. Next, he beholds the Creator: one circle reflecting from the other, the third like a flame emanating from both. When the circle of “mirrored light” (346) shows within itself the human form, Dante struggles to understand – until a ray of Divine Light floods his mind with ineffable comprehension: no longer through a mirror dimly, he has “seen face to face” – and he sees that “all creation and all time are bound up, like the pages in a volume, in God.” (348) Thus the exile finds his True Home, in union with “Him in whom I live, and move, and have my being.” (Amell 15) What Dante calls the “High Fantasy” then ends, Dante's will and desire surrendered to the “Love that moves the sun and other stars,” as he is left to remember, yearn, and communicate with others the transforming vision. (Reynolds 125)

ii) The Ruskinian Prism of Dante: A critical reading of *Lilith*, understood as related in particular for Ruskin and in general for any reader willing to ‘hear’

It is striking when one returns from reading the *Commedia* to *Lilith* just how many of the difficult passages become clear. The reader may view this as either a failing or a gifting of MacDonald's text – but it is not incidental. Certainly awareness of MacDonald's relationship with Ruskin, their shared passion for Dante, and even some of the resonances of Ruskin's life within *Lilith* can highlight certain emphases. Dante's heavenly vision is one of complete communion, utter relationship, and it is clear that MacDonald concurs with Dante that one's divine ascent or descent is directly affected by one's interaction with others – and that true communion is enabled only through willing relationship in God. MacDonald explains this in one of his Dante lectures:

[In Paradise] the spirits each know what everyone else is thinking. The moment they want to know they can know it, and the moment they want each other to know, the other knows and

answers to it. But how? They are always looking up to God, and God includes everything, and they see in God the reflection of the mind of their fellow, and read in God the thing that their fellow is thinking. [...] it signifies one of the deepest truths belonging to our nature, that none of us can rarely meet except in God. [If] your will become gathered up into his, and live in his, then you will meet indeed, and know the God who created your love, and whose care over your love is above that which can make it last. [T]hat holds throughout the poem. (qtd “MacDonald on Dante.” 19)

Thus that it is established from the outset that the protagonist of *Lilith* is a solitary scholar is clearly intentional. Vane is presented as an isolated, orphaned Oxford student, alone in a vast house full of ancient books – there are strong overtones of Ruskin’s own biography: the only-child bibliophile who once published under the name “An Oxford Scholar.”³³⁴ The scholar’s journey in *Lilith* requires that he develop a practiced understanding of relationship, outside of his books – and that he learn to participate maturely and selflessly. As Vane struggles both in apprehension and in perseverance, his pilgrimage is highlighted by the stories that surround him: for instance his Virgilian guide, Mr. Raven, turns out to be that Adam who first learned that it is *not* good for man to be alone. The title character Lilith is – in accordance with Hebraic legend – Adam’s first wife who had rejected what she considered the slaving chains of relationship.³³⁵ Thus Vane finds himself right in the midst of the First Family – which is of course *his* family, his heritage. As he progresses, Vane begins to recognize in Lilith a struggle similar to, though more profound than, his own (he frequently condemns her for the very things he himself has not yet conquered). Many of the incidents and characters he meets are explicitly Dantesque, further underscoring the direction of his ponderous progression: up, towards an increasingly better understanding of the Divine call to relationality.³³⁶

As indicated, MacDonald fills Vane’s journey with a cornucopia of symbols and allusions, far beyond those with personal connection to Ruskin. Both men loved and sought after the mythic, and engaged with it in their work regardless of whether their readers understood the resulting pattern. They both believed that the power of what had been woven into the text would be strong enough to convey meaning even when the reader could not make all the multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary, encyclopaedic links. This is evident in such subtleties as the naming of characters – names that may appear simple, but upon close consideration serve as weighty commentaries upon

³³⁴ Vane says he was “as much alone in the world as a man might find himself” who mostly spends his time “reading books of science, old as well as new; for the history of the human mind in relation to supposed knowledge was what most of all interested me.” (1;8)

³³⁵ For more ANE correlations, see Jeanne Murray Walker’s “The Demoness and the Grail.”

³³⁶ Vane’s otherworldly journey parallels Dante’s from its inception: being lost he sees “a wood of tall slender pine-trees, and turned toward it,” but stumbles and falls. Fleeing through the mirror, in fear of a leaping creature, he darts “down the spiral,” falls, rises, and runs again. Only at “the top of the great stair” does he “come to myself,” and then recovers in the library. (14 -16)

key themes. Believing strongly in the power of both words and the Word, MacDonald interweaves Biblical text with a myriad of other texts and myths, using both their commonality and their differences to colour the vision he is painting. Yet the overriding and cohering text remains the *Commedia*. The book *Lilith* is in a sense, a culmination of most of the themes MacDonald worked and reworked throughout his writing and preaching career. In his first fantastic work, *Phantastes*, two dominant themes were “Nobleness of thought is nothing without nobleness of deed” (138) and that to truly live, one must first ‘die to oneself.’ The discussion thus far shows the frequent reappearance of these themes – but in *Lilith* the themes become even more intrinsic to the tale. In the young scholar’s journey in *Phantastes*, in his learning to act and live well, there does not seem to be as strong an emphasis on the need of relationality as found thirty years later in *Lilith*.³³⁷ In *Phantastes* there had been an explicit emphasis on learning vicariously through Story, now MacDonald ensures that the reader does not mistake Story – still of grave importance – as more important than the acting out of what is learned from stories in one’s relationship with actual people.³³⁸ It is a more thorough exploration of the futility of noble thought without noble action, and MacDonald makes sure that the reader recognizes the connection by indicating that Anodos was Vane’s ancestor.³³⁹ And in this more explicit journey towards acceptance of death to self it is patently clear that the act cannot be made in isolation.

The protagonist’s surname is Vane – his first name is never given. Although much has been made of Mr. Vane’s name being a homonym for one who is proud (it is also a homonym for “devoid of meaning”), his name is more explicitly the word for a weather-cock, something blown about in any direction by the wind. The *OED* defines *vane* as “an unstable or constantly changing person or thing,” and notes that the alternative spelling is *fane* – the exact word used for protagonist’s

³³⁷ Integral to the concept of *relationality* is the supposition that humans are not fully themselves unless they are in relationship. The term indicates the ‘lived relation’ maintained between persons, which shapes the essence of those persons. More specific than *relationship*, *relationality* is – in human terms – the function of relationship in which a healthy sense of self is able both to give and receive in equitable measure, thus increasing both the self and the other. Colin Gunton explains: “a true community – any true community – is one whose patterns of relationality enable its members to be, as members, distinctively and particularly themselves.” (131-32) The aspect of Dante that is important for *Lilith* is not the larger sense of *community* that MacDonald explores in other novels and which shaped his childhood, but rather the foundational element in the health of such community: the participation in a healthful giving and receiving.

³³⁸ This recurrent theme is explicitly discussed elsewhere. In *Annals* the vicar recognizes a contrast between his knowledge of theory with little practice, and that of Old Rogers who has made his life a concerted practice. (226) In *Rough Shaking* the protagonist discovers “that to think rightly – to be on the side of what is honourable when reading a story, is a very different thing from doing right, and being honourable, when the temptation is upon us.” (117) In *Gibbie*: “To know and not do would have seemed to him an impossibility as it is in vital idea a monstrosity.” (305)

³³⁹ Vane’s ancestor, who the reader is told knew the way to the region of seven dimensions, bears the name ‘Sir Upward’ – ‘upward’ being a form of *Anodos*, the knighted protagonist of *Phantastes*. Reiterated eight times, this is not incidental. Vane later recognizes a song – as will the reader of *Phantastes*: “Many a wrong, and its curing song [...] Room to roam, but only one home ...” (325-326)

name in an early draft.³⁴⁰ *Fane* was perhaps most familiar in MacDonald's day as trendy slang, used by those wishing to escape either an expected duty or participation in some event. The *OED* explains that one would avoid responsibility by crying "*Fain I*." It is of relevance that the dictionary goes on to reveal that a boy "could shout '*fain I* to be rid of an obligation and '*bags I* to secure an advantage" – "*bags I*," or even simply, *Bags*, it is explained, was the "formula used (originally by children) to assert a claim to an article, or the right to act a certain way." "*Bags nol*" established exemption from anything unpleasant. As the name of the greedy, self-indulging, and self-oriented giants to which the Little Ones first fear Vane/Fane belongs is "the Bags," it appears that MacDonald's conference of names is unsurprisingly multifaceted.³⁴¹

Carefully named, Vane reveals in his ruminations that he has considered himself a self-sufficient character: "preferring the company of book or pen to that of man or woman," he has neither friend nor lover. (119) He is the embodiment of what Scott persistently warned against: "independent completeness in self, which shuts out all that is beyond the range of one's own sense and intellect." (*Reformation* 637) Even Vane's family history – that key aspect of self-knowledge – is unknown to him.³⁴² In the early drafts of *Lilith*, MacDonald had included both a sister and her friend (who seems to have a Beatrician effect on Vane) – but these are removed. The published book leaves no room for doubt: Vane is a too solitary man. The only other person revealed in his world is a butler – and he but briefly. This self-imposed isolation highlights the relevance of the preface to *Lilith*, a passage easy to overlook. It is a fairly lengthy piece from Thoreau's essay "Walking," and its inclusion serves a number of purposes, not the least an enhanced understanding of the reclusiveness of Vane.³⁴³ Within the essay is an exploration of the word 'saunter' or, 'sans-terre' – without land, or home. The word was originally used for those on pilgrimage to the holy land, but came to indicate any who wandered about without a place of their own. This did not refer necessarily to the house-less. It could also, Thoreau explains, mean the man who is at home anywhere. However, it might be that he who "sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all."³⁴⁴ (1, 2) This last is pointedly Vane – and so Mr. Raven tells him from the start, as they dialogue about the concept of "home." Without even leaving his

³⁴⁰ This thesis primarily references only the published *Lilith*. To do otherwise would detract from the intent: to attend to MacDonald's well-considered final publication. However the comparative analysis of Janet Carr Zellman establishes that all versions "consistently reinforce the same theology and morals that are trademarks of MacDonald's career." (58)

³⁴¹ Lest such word inspection seem irrelevant, despite previous discussions of language and meaning, consider MacDonald's very lengthy footnote discussing the etymological and literary development of the words *nup* and *wan* in his essay on the Imagination. (16)

³⁴² The third sentence of *Lilith* explains Vane "had made little acquaintance with the history of my ancestors." (1)

³⁴³ Thoreau credited Ruskin for teaching him "how to see, and how to describe what he saw." (Lebeaux 144) In *Walden*, the chapter "Sounds" begins with a warning against relying too much on literature as a means of transcendence. The epigraph also plays with relevant concepts of light and multiple dimensions, and his discussion of "Reading" is highly relevant.

³⁴⁴ Trexler further illuminates this textual relationship in "Mr. Vane's Pilgrimage into the Land of Promise" (*George MacDonald: Literary Heritage and Heirs*, 2008). In his discussion of Browning's "Christmas Eve," he quotes Novalis again: "Philosophy is really home-sickness, an impulse to be at home everywhere." (131)

house, Vane is lost, not knowing who he is, and thus having no sense or place to call home; he definitely is not progressing towards the Holy Land.

While wandering, lost like Dante in a wood – a wood somehow accessed without ever walking outside his own house – Vane realizes:

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 had never had a bosom-friend [...] I sighed—and regarded with wonder my past self, which preferred the company of book or pen to that of man or woman [...] I had chosen the dead rather than the living, the thing thought rather than the thing thinking! “Any man,” I said now, “is more than the greatest of books!” (83, 84)

It becomes clear that a significant part of why Vane is unable to know who he is, and is far from being able to die to himself – as so invited by Mr. Raven – is because he knows no others: “Hitherto I had loved my Arab mare and my books more, I fear, than live man or woman.” (79) His relational lack has even impaired his book-learning, for he does not understand that the authors he reads call him outwards; thus Mr. Raven opines, “books are but dead bodies to you, and a library nothing but a catacomb!” (37) Mr. Raven (the librarian, sexton, and forefather who learned early that it was not good for man to be alone) has come to guide Vane, as Virgil guided Dante, through the circles of his barren house out into a world of otherness. First Vane must walk through the eagle-topped mirror – a passage enabled by the correct direction of light – into the revelatory region of seven dimensions.³⁴⁵ There, through Mr. Raven’s admonishments, he begins to understand that the nobleness of thought enabled by his former reading is not sufficient if not embodied with relational deed. And through Mr. Raven’s persistence Vane is finally able to relinquish his will and obediently die to self. This, as MacDonald explained in his lecture on Dante, is the necessary step to find one’s True Home, “to return again there where I am” (as he translates *Purgatorio* Canto II) – for, says MacDonald, the exiled Dante understands one’s True Home to be God: “Him in whom I live, and move, and have my being.” He explains this as a proclamation of the *Commedia*: “I am going [sic] this journey in order that I may get back to the home where I am now, namely, to the heart of God only,” adding: “How differently does the man enter the heart of God that knows it as his home, and his joy, and his bliss, from

³⁴⁵ As Dante has been carried, in reality by the patron of light and vision and in dream by the eagle of the deity, to the seven-terraced mount of Purgatory; in *MP* Ruskin links the sun of justice, risen with healing in its wings, with Dante’s eagle: “Dwell a little while on this intense love of Dante for light, – taught as he is at last by Beatrice, to gaze on the sun itself like an eagle.” (*MP III* 243) In *Queen* he writes: “while the bird’s wings, with the globe, become part of a better symbol of deity ... an emblem of purification, is associated with the earliest conception of Athena. [For the Greeks the eagle was] their hieroglyph of supreme spiritual energy, and it thenceforward retains its hold on the human imagination, till it is established among Christian myths as the expression of the most exalted form of evangelistic teaching...” (92)

the man that never knows he is in a home at all.” (Amell 15) Only once self-orientation and self-will are relinquished can Vane progress onward and upward, leaving behind mere textual knowledge, and thus becoming more fully himself, finding his True Home.

MacDonald is very clear throughout his writings that he places an incredibly high value on the reading of good books. But to stay only in the false safety of the world of the mind is to betray the good of those texts. To hoard what one has learned without bringing it to life in one's daily interactions with the world is to extinguish the life of the text; it is to have read in vain, if *every* man is not greater than *any* book. “A book is a door in, and therefore a door out,” repeats an exasperated Mr. Raven. (58) Its light will not last if the reader treats the contents merely as acquisition. Vane has this manifested for him long before he is able to understand it, when following the guiding light of one of the worms tossed into the air by the librarian-sexton. Becoming a glowing bird-butterfly, it illuminates Vane's path. However when Vane becomes too absorbed in the beauty first a rock makes him stumble, and then a stone makes him fall (hardly subtle imagery for biblically literate Victorians). (68-69) And then as the living light begins to descend into his open reach and Vane feels as if “the Treasure of the Universe is giving itself to me,” he – “longing to have it in my hands” – *takes* the light, grasping rather than receiving it open-handed. At that instant its light goes out: “A *dead* book with boards outspread lay heavy in my hands.” (69) Here the intertextual expression weaves together biblical text with Dantean imagery, further exploiting the Psyche symbol, and calling up Blake's reiteration.³⁴⁶ Dante's *Prideful in Purgatory*, weighted down by stones, had been accosted with: “O Christians, arrogant, exhausted, wretched, whose intellects are sick and cannot see, who place your confidence in backward steps, do you not know that we are worms and born to form the angelic butterfly that soars without defenses...?” (Canto X ll0-116) Calling up that passage, Vane is clearly of sick, of stunted intellect, for despite his Oxford education he himself is a dead book. Bound between the safe covers of a literary life, protected from the discomfort of engaging with less-than-perfect humans, he has been moving backwards rather than progressing forwards in his own humanity; becoming less rather than more human. But after a few days of dwelling in the realm of seven dimensions this begins to change. Like the *Prideful in Purgatory* who relinquish their will and intellect, and ask for a daily manna to aid their journey through the

³⁴⁶“He who bends to himself a joy / Does the wingéd life destroy.” (Blake 176) It also recalls Milton's proffered alternative, quoted by Scott: “These books were not absolutely dead things, but the precious life-blood of master-spirits, embalmed and treasured to a life beyond life.” (*Reformation* 632)

desert, Vane must learn that he cannot hoard the bread that Mara gives him – or it will shrink and harden “to a stone.”³⁴⁷ (117)

It is with the Little Ones, the Lovers, that Vane begins to understand this truth and learns to say: “To understand is not more wonderful than to love.” (81) Although their lack of knowledge and lack of interest in becoming more than what they are indicate clearly that they themselves are not yet growing, these pure-in-heart nonetheless have more to teach Vane about how to live and love well than he can intellectually grasp. They are a type of MacDonald’s Holy Fool, their initially somewhat static state pointed out as a negative abnormality which needs must change – although Vane has to learn what is and is not his role in this change. But they *are* mediums of revelation, teachers of him who would teach them, and eventually they do – like all such characters in MacDonald – begin to grow, change, and learn, whilst never losing their purity.³⁴⁸ The conclusion of *Lilith* reminds the reader: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” and so the Little Ones, including the more developed Rose-like Lona, are able to both see and hear “the Beautifullest Man,” (352) the Christ who MacDonald calls elsewhere “the bonny man.”³⁴⁹ Yet Vane, like Dante, can only see a blinding beautiful light. This indicates that like Dante who similarly needs Beatrice and Bernard to interpret the words and image of the Godhead, Vane is only the blessed recipient of vision rather than a new inhabitant of Heaven. Like Dante Vane must return to his daily life, and relate to others the truth of the vision he has received – and learn to live with these others rather than in his own isolation – before he himself can come to rest permanently in the Eternal Home. He like Dante must navigate the bittersweet longing of waiting, of sorrow even, for the glory of Paradise – for the full and holy union with his Beatrice, his family, his God. “I wait,” he writes, in the closing words: “asleep or awake, I wait.”³⁵⁰ (359)

As Vane grows along his Dantesque journey he is shown others who are likewise struggling with the consequences of their selfish living, yet who are slowly becoming more fully human as they move out of their self-orientation. The decayed yet dancing skeletons, in what he recognizes to be a “frightful punishment,” are incomplete beings with lidless eyes gazing out of their horrific skulls:

³⁴⁷ Ironically Wolff suggests that the book-butterfly scene reveals an anti-intellectual bent in MacDonald. (340-41)

³⁴⁸ They show Vane how, when a caterpillar comes “from its retirement with wings” they “address it as Sister Butterfly, congratulating it on its **metamorphosis** – for which they used a word that meant something like REPENTANCE – and evidently regarding it as something sacred.” (238)

³⁴⁹ He uses this term for Christ in several places, uttered by ‘innocents’ in the text, including in *Malcolm* and *H&S*.

³⁵⁰ Reis wonders if the ending indicates an abdication of responsible living on Vane’s part – perhaps even an error on the author’s. (*Narrator* 27) However Vane’s words echo the holy action as described by Milton: “they also serve who stand and wait.” MacDonald’s intentionality is revealed elsewhere: “Most authors seem anxious to round off and finish everything in full sight. Most of Shakspeare’s tragedies compel our thoughts to follow their *persons* across the bourn. They need, as Jean Paul says, a piece of the next world painted in to complete the picture. And this is surely nature: but it need not therefore be no design.” (*St George’s* 79)

Had they used their faces, not for communication, not to utter thought and feeling, not to share existence with their neighbours, but to appear what they wished to appear, and conceal what they were? and, having made their faces masks, were they therefore deprived of those masks, and condemned to go without faces until they repented? (123)

Immediately after this *Danse Macabre* encounter Vane meets the skeletal couple who, it is intimated, are what Dante's damned lovers Paolo and Francesca would have been had they lived beyond the moments of their passion. Lord and Lady Cokayne are far from being able to engage in a dance, for that requires a level of relating that they have yet to achieve. Mr. Raven explains that the dancing skeletons are "centuries in advance of these." (134) Yet the next time Vane sees them they have begun to both receive and give help to each other, and as the couple's relationship begins to knit together so do their bones. Slowly they become more human again.³⁵¹ Vane realizes how like them he actually is, for having made himself so independent he is but "yet a possible man!" (146)

Vane's journey reveals that part of his relational lack is in failing to give well. Mr. Raven explains that in Vane's decision to be the heroic saviour of the Little Ones, he abandons them – at a point when his staying with them and doing some lowly practical labour would have provided significant and necessary aid. While not Vane's place to judge how to advance the maturation of the Little Ones, it *is* his duty to help them in ordinary ways. It is notable here that Mr. Raven does not restrain Vane from riding off and committing that which he knows will end in disaster; rather he tries to help Vane to understand why he should not go, and afterwards Vane is able to reflect upon the wisdom of the words – perhaps something he could not have been able to do had he, in his willfulness, been restrained: "the antidote to indulgence is development, not restraint, and that such is the duty of the wise servant of Him who made the imagination." ("Imagination" 19)

When Vane tells Mr. Raven that he would at all costs keep the Little Ones from the water of sorrows – tears – Mr. Raven grieves aloud that Vane still does not see that this type of water – the water of Lady Wisdom – is most essential for growth. Vane refuses to understand; later, he will be forced to learn from Mara. Remaining determined to be the magnanimous hero he continues to ignore direction and advice.³⁵² When Mr. Raven explains that Vane's choice of heroism over entering the Chamber of Death actually endangers the Little Ones, Vane's spurious retort of his love for the children is reminiscent of the discussions of misdirected 'love' in *Purgatory*, and even

³⁵¹ This scene marks an important difference between MacDonald and Dante. In the *Inferno* this couple receives no compassion: they are where they deserve to be. By MacDonald's day the scene had become iconic – but popular sympathy lay with the lovers. (cf. Brand 69) MacDonald makes it entirely clear that the couple should not be romanticized, yet he does not eternally condemn them: they are slowly learning the same lesson as Vane, and slowly ascending into full humanity.

³⁵² Almost antithetical to Curdie – instead of saying "Here I am, send me," and offering himself to a wiser one for service – Vane departs, ignoring all advice.

of the Dantean Ulysses' addiction to adventure. (Perhaps it is even not unlike the driven Ruskin, so keen to save the world that he takes little time to sort himself out before publishing his manifestos.³⁵³) Vane betrays his oath – committing that perjury that Dante tells us is the worst – and sets off to save the Little Ones by his own design. Yet even as he does so, he admits that his motives are mixed with those of self-gain. The result is several deaths, including that of his beloved Lona. He has failed even Lilith, explains Mr. Raven, in not revealing to her his hatred of her deeds, nor removing himself from her traitorous charms – thinking himself sufficient to face her on his own. The books Vane had read at Oxford contain what he needs to know in facing these trials – they detail the Seven Deadly Sins, Aristotelian ethics, Augustinian ecclesiology³⁵⁴ – but he has obviously failed their education, for he has not learned to apply their teaching. Only in the wake of his impaired attempts is Vane beginning to learn how to both give to and receive from others – and why this is necessary: “I saw now that a man alone is but a being that may become a man...” Vane himself had finally come to realize:

Only by the reflex of other lives can [a human] ripen his specialty, develop the idea of himself, the individuality that distinguishes him from every other. [...] or the development of the differences which make a large and lofty unity possible, and which alone can make millions into a church, an endless and measureless influence and reaction are indispensable. A man to be perfect – complete, that is, in having reached the spiritual condition of persistent and universal growth, which is the mode wherein he inherits the infinitude of his Father – must have the education of a world of fellow-men. (114)

Gradually Vane is coming to understand the concept of Relationality, that function of relationship in which a healthy sense of self is able to give and receive in equitable measure, thus increasing both the self and the other. (146)

Lilith herself, at a much deeper and more developed level than Vane, refuses to need Another. With this character MacDonald takes the ancient yet open-ended Lilith-myths and provides a redemptive conclusion.³⁵⁵ Dante had drawn upon characters of myth to convey eternal truths, and here MacDonald does the same. The central theme of the myths that evolve from Lilith is self-sufficiency: she did not need Adam; she did not need God; she refused to bear children that she

³⁵³ In the 1870s Ruskin declared: “Here I am, trying to reform the world, and I suppose I ought to begin with myself.” (Collingwood 223) *Munera Pulveris* discusses how sirens tempt not the passions of Ulysses, but (according to Dante) his “pride of knowledge” – and how the only man who escaped untempted was Orpheus, “who silenced the vain imaginations by singing the praises of the gods.” (91) Ruskin recalls that Dante’s Siren, whose name means “love of honour,” is the presiding Queen of Hell. (80) He comments on her link to Eve and Creation, that she lives in a dim cave, and that her eyes send light onto others but not herself (indicating vanity). Also duplicitous and a beautiful temptress, she shares much with Lilith.

³⁵⁴ These being Oxford subjects Ruskin studied. Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare were not yet in the curriculum: it was for such that Scott was fighting. In *For* Ruskin sets forth numerous lists of essential reading: Dante is on them all.

³⁵⁵ In *Falconer* a character asked what would happen if a fallen angel repented: here is a postulation. (93)

could not independently own. In MacDonald's book *Lilith* considers her one child Lona to be her own creation, and herself to be god-like for having thus created. Yet she hates Lona, for it is evident that the child cannot be controlled. Instead of being a conduit for Lilith's power, Lona is a creature who longs to both give and to receive from others – her mother included. Lona is living proof that only God can make; that human creation is a participation *with* him, not something independent of him – a key concept in MacDonald's discussion of creation, and one (as quoted previously) on which MacDonald specifically names Ruskin's approbation. Yet Lilith can only view participation as slavery. She desires the power to exist completely independent of anyone, including God. She, like Vane, must accept dying to herself, so that she might truly live – in and through and with others. Only in such co-inherence will she become whole. Mr. Raven explains that for Lilith the prophecy “a child will be the death of her” also means that a child will be the life of her – the paradoxical Messianic prophecy. (163) And in a phrase immediately recognizable to Victorian readers, Mr. Raven explains that Lilith “poured out her blood” to escape relationship with Adam (213) – another explicit inversion of what the “beautifullest man” did: ‘poured out his blood’ so that relationship with Adam might be restored.³⁵⁶ The one act is an insistence on isolation, the other an invitation of communion. Lilith's choice, Mara the interpreter explains, is an active rejection of relationality: “She loves no one, therefore she cannot be *with* any one. There is One who will be with her, but she will not be with Him.” (279) Yet Lilith insists that she alone can and does make who she is. Not only does she not ‘need’ other humans, but she calls Mara a “slave” for accepting that she has been created by God, and for conceding that only in her relationship with him can she be fully herself. Mara replies that: “There is no slave but the creature that wills against its creator. Who is a slave but her who cries, ‘I am free,’ yet cannot cease to exist!” (246)

Finally, in Lilith's striking baptismal purgation with ‘refining fire,’ rushing wind, and cleansing water, Vane watches her being brought – with Mara's assistance – to a place of seeing the image of herself as God intends her to be, in her fully relational state, standing next to an image of herself as she has insisted on being. Yet though the glorious sight overwhelms Lilith she still refuses to admit need, and must experience existence fully apart from “the source of life” – only in this emptiness does she finally understand that she cannot “unmake” herself.³⁵⁷ (286) Her existence is bound with the Creator regardless of whether she hates or accepts this fact. She has been brought down to that lowest depth of Hell, the place in which Vane now knows – like

³⁵⁶ This particular phrase appears in liturgies and hymns through out the centuries of Christian tradition.

³⁵⁷ This same term appears almost two decades earlier in *Wingfold*: “Oh! if God would only be good and unmake me, and let darkness cover the place where once was me!” (136)

Dante before him – that all beings are “timelessly, spacelessly, absolutely *apart*.” (294) Finally in these deepest depths Lilith is able to ask for help. The darkness passes, and a life-giving Spring rain greets them with the arrival of the morning.³⁵⁸ With this her journey towards who she was intended to be has only just begun, but now that Lilith is able to ask help of those around her and is able to acknowledge that she is not her own independent maker, she chooses to die to herself so that she might wake to participation in life with her Maker – and with others. Her journey is one that goes beyond the remit of Dante, for after travelling down to the isolation of Godless Hell this fallen creature is allowed to ascend. Yet her ascent, like the descent, is shaped by Dantean concepts. The central cantos of the *Commedia* (*Purgatorio* XVI-XVIII) discuss the necessity of Free Will, and MacDonald repeatedly emphasizes that Lilith must freely choose to be obedient and give herself to Another. Only once she has done so can she begin to become her true self, as she was meant to be.³⁵⁹ And crucially MacDonald makes clear that even that choice of Another requires the participation of ‘others.’

As *Lilith* ends MacDonald leaves the reader with a vision of “farther in, higher up than the seven dimensions.” (329) Echoing verbatim MacDonald’s own translation and commentary of Dante, Vane says, “I think I was where I am – in the heart of God.” (329) The strong presence of a physical landscape in Vane’s journey, a landscape he enters without having ever left his home and yet leaves behind, although it yet remains in his memory, should not be overlooked. In *Lilith* as in *Curdie*, landscapes pervade the story, underscoring the emphasis on relationality and revelation and – like the *Commedia*, like *Pilgrim’s Progress*, like *Modern Painters* – that which is depicted is not incidental to the story’s message. Whether Vane comes to himself in an inhibiting forest, a wasteland desert, or a paradisiacal mountain, that landscape – its flora and fauna (or lack thereof) carefully detailed – is almost as another character in the text. Consistent with MacDonald’s lineage (Biblical, Scottish, literary), in *Lilith* the health of the land is tied to the state of its people; the soil, society, and soul of the land of the seven dimensions is intricately linked: Lilith’s hand literally withholds its health. Whether in lack of water, abundance of monsters, or Bulika’s damaging industrialization, it is not until after Lilith has repented, not until she has submitted in obedience to be in relationship and removed her clenched fist (recalling *Matt.* 5:30), that the land begins to be restored. Here is that understanding of Nature as part of the community consciousness found in the Celtic tradition and in the mythic traditions Ruskin was researching – an indication that

³⁵⁸ The ordeal’s conclusion evokes *Psalms* 30, the central passage of which is: “For his anger is but for a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Also Hosea 6:3 – “Let us acknowledge God [...] As surely as the sun rises, he will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth.”

³⁵⁹ In “Birth, Death, and Dreaming” MacDonald writes that “to deny God in my own being is to cease to behold him in any. God and man can meet only by the man’s becoming that which God meant him to be.” (91)

“living spirituality connects soil, soul, and society [;] *community* in that word’s most holistic sense.” (McIntosh 20) As Ruskin has repeatedly told his own audience, the landscape not only calls for interpretation from the people, it is integrated with the lifestyles of those people.³⁶⁰ *Lilith* conveys that “unified perception” in which Nature must be allowed a role in the revelations of mythopoeic tradition.

Climbing further in and farther up on “a glorious resurrection-morning,” Vane references the second Canto of *Purgatorio* when he finds the glory ineffable. (349; 355) He also references the “tin-tinning” song of unifying love in Canto X of *Paradiso*, in which former theological rivals are now drawn together in a schism-defying perichoretic dance. (347) And like Dante – blessed with the vision of what is more real than he could conceive – Vane has now to balance the joy of that vision with the sorrow of being separated from full participation in it for some time to come. He must first relate that vision, which means being separated from its immediacy and his newly loved ones, so that the good of these things may touch even more lives. He has to face what, pre-journey, he had avoided: the pain that necessarily results from being in relationship. The bitter-sweetness of Mara, he says, will be much with him.³⁶¹ (357) He is returned to write his own contribution to the literary heritage from whence he came, but now under the accepted tutelage of Mara. (357) Behind Vane the book cover closes, and behind him he leaves the book – as did Dante – in which “all creation and all time are bound up, like the pages in a volume, in God,” “one volume clasp’d of love” – thus marking Vane and Dante’s return to the place in which they must live in response to what they have learned. (Sayers 348; Canto 33, ll. 83) It is a situation in which any friend of Ruskin would hope Ruskin could find resonance. Not dissimilar to the expectation of the reader of *Curdie*, Vane knows that he will yet have a lasting guiding light, a Wise Counsellor, albeit one who bears sorrow with her wisdom. Like his ancestor in *Phantastes* he has been both equipped and transformed by participation in Story:

From many a sultry noon till twilight, did I sit in that grand hall, buried and risen again in these old books. And I trust I have carried away in my soul some of the exhalations of their undying leaves. In after hours of deserved or needful sorrow, portions of what I read there have often come to me again, with an unexpected comforting. (*Phantastes* 104)

MacDonald, since his very first novel, had continued to portray that confident conviction. *Lilith* is ensconced in the certainty that one must also participate in the revelations of one’s *unwritten* community, for “to understand is not more wonderful than to love.” (57)

³⁶⁰ As early as Ruskin’s fairytale *King of the Golden River* (1841) this had been a prominent theme.

³⁶¹ In his last and confused years Ruskin writes of being “tired of waiting” to join Rose. (Leon 570) Here was encouragement that, as he himself had written to MacDonald and in words that anticipate Vane: “Better all the pain, than to have gone on – as I might twelve years ago – with nothing to love – through life.” (Leon 495)

iii) **Shared Convictions and Visionary Dreams:** the deep-rooted Mythopoesis that binds Ruskin and MacDonald, and through which the latter hopes to evoke transformation

*Divinely taught the craftsman is
Who waketh wonderings;
Whose web, the nursing chrysalis
Round Psyche's folded wings,
To them transfers the loveliness
Of its innoven things.³⁶²
(from "My Heart")*

In *Stones of Venice* Ruskin had called the poetic visions of Virgil, Dante, Bunyan, and Spenser "all of them true dreams; only the sleep of the men to whom they came was the deep, living sleep which God sends, with a sacredness in it, as of death, the revealer of secrets." (Vol. III: ix) The final words of *Lilith* would have meant much to Ruskin even if they did not evoke – as they did – his relationship with MacDonald, the poems and conversations that they had shared: "Novalis says, 'Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one.'" It is a close reiteration of Sidney, reprinted by MacDonald, repeated by Barfield: that poesis should range "into the divine consideration of what may and should be." (148) How apt to the entire text is that stanza MacDonald had gifted Ruskin: "Where I have but Him/ Is my Fatherland;/ And all gifts and graces come/ Heritage into my hand:/ Brothers long deplored/ I in his disciples find restored." In *Munera Pulveris* (1862) Ruskin remarked on how: "Homer, the Greek tragedians, Plato, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Goethe" knew that "the highest truths and usefulest laws must be hunted for through whole picture-galleries of dreams, which to the vulgar seem dreams only." (Hilton 34) Here is argument enough for the framework of *Lilith*: it follows a long tradition of Christian and classical literature in which dreams were a standard and accepted form of revelation from the Divine Light; as old a tradition as the perspective that to mix sacred and fantastic was not sacrilege.³⁶³ In *Deucalion* Ruskin explains that he is never without his 'portable' Dante, "not exactly for reading but as an antidote to pestilent things and thoughts in general; a store, as it were, of mental quinine, – a few lines being enough to recover me out of any shivering marsh fever fit, brought on among foulness or stupidity." (Norton 29) MacDonald – who had wondered: "Who can tell [...] how much of the madness in the world may be the utterance of thoughts true and just, but belonging to a region differing from ours in its nature and scenery!" –

³⁶² From "My Heart," *Poetical Works* (1893).

³⁶³ For further discussion on MacDonald's participation in this long Christian literary tradition, cf. Frank Riga's "From Time to Eternity." Riga counters the typical psychoanalytic readings of MacDonald's dream-use by recollecting the "conventional and commonly used narrative device," a literary technique that for MacDonald is "a mode of knowing [...] one of the ways that God's revelation manifests itself to individuals." (83-84)

takes the biblical, literary, mythic tradition of dreamscape to re-explore the antidote Dante had presented. (*Fancy* 155) He had called the *Commedia* “a great dream.” (*W49* 7) *Lilith* is a response to his own poetic query: “Dreaming, I wept. Awake, I ask – / Shall earthly dreams, forsooth, / Set the old Heavens too hard a task / To match them with the truth?” (*Poetical* 494) MacDonald was well aware that as Ruskin himself slipped in and out of dreams and visions – increasingly so as time passed – his mental state was becoming more and more fragile. To many he was already written off as ‘mad.’ Recalling MacDonald’s long history of gentleness and understanding in the face of such terrible challenges, one is reminded in particular of those words in the first novel Ruskin critiqued, *Elginbrod*:

it yet appears to me that if the physician would, like the Son of Man himself, descend as it were into the disorganized world in which the consciousness of his patient exists, and receiving as fact all that he reveals to him of its condition – for fact it is, of a very real sort – introduce, by all the means that sympathy can suggest, the one central cure for evil, spiritual and material, namely, the truth of the Son of Man, the vision of the perfect friend and helper, with the revelation of the promised liberty of obedience – if he did this, it seems to me that cures might still be wrought as marvelous as those of the ancient time.³⁶⁴ (449)

MacDonald argued persistently in his novels that such healing is fostered in quiet and loving relationship, in community. In *Lilith* the healing call to be in relationship, and to learn to be so with maturity, is central. MacDonald follows Dante’s Ruskin-blessed and Scott-taught lead as he engages in the literary dialogue of centuries, warning that self-sufficiency is a sure path down and out of humanness. He also makes clear that though literature can explore this reality well, such education is insufficient (possibly even damaging) if it remains a matter of intellect and does not become actual human practice. That is a true challenge to academic intellects like Ruskin, for whom everyday relations with people could be work-impeding distractions. MacDonald argues that humans must freely assent to participate in one another – and that when they choose to do so they become more fully themselves, more fully human; he also believes that this is inextricably linked with the call to participate in the Divine Will. In so doing, humans find the Home that pieces them together and makes them whole.

Ruskin had suggested taking “one master” under whom to study and develop one’s own means of communication, and it appears that by the time *Lilith* is written, MacDonald has studied the master Dante well; once again he has ‘meditated deeply upon an old story’ and is now ‘representing it...bringing out the truths about God’s Government that he saw in the story’ in

³⁶⁴ Ruskin had then compared himself to the protagonist of *Elginbrod*: being “awake in his coffin.” MacDonald conjectures that psychological peace may only come for some in the life after death. Cf. Charley’s suicide in *Cumbermede*.

true Maurician fashion. In his essay on the Imagination (published in *Orts* in 1893, while MacDonald was working on *Lilith*) MacDonald had remarked on similar advice given by Goethe – however, he warns, “although no better advice could be given, it involves one danger, that of narrowness.” And so he does not advise *one* master only: “in variety alone is safety from the danger of the convenient food becoming the inconvenient model.” (25) Thus, following the example set by that book of Dante’s, MacDonald interweaves the complementary allusions and images of many others. This also enables him, as reader and critic, to understand where he might differ from a primary influence. As said when discussing how he differed from Dante in his understanding of God’s response to sin: “we inherit something from these men, and we ought to feel an awful reverence towards them” – yet reverence does not require complete adherence. (“Dante’s Divine” 12) It is a lesson MacDonald has learned throughout his life, in his community, from his mentors. As habituated throughout his corpus, in varying fashions and genres, he takes the language and symbols of great literature and myths that he believes to convey Truth, and represents them. The intertextual interweaving of universal truths was a tradition MacDonald consciously entered, believing that it could facilitate revelation on multiple levels of time, space, and experience. Using that text Ruskin treated “as if it too were some sort of biblical commentary,” the book that was for Ruskin “a way of first seeing and knowing, and then of imposing order and design upon experience,” MacDonald engages with the myths, stories, poems of others. (Milbank 29, 30) Whereas Arnold wanted to move beyond ‘ancient storied beliefs,’ Ruskin, in *his* faith struggle, was clinging to them – and MacDonald meets Ruskin’s obsessions with a type of sanctifying poesis; a baptized imagination; Mara-beyond-Athena. *Lilith* underscores that the inseparability of theology and literature is indeed aeons-old, and it stands comfortably in the Celtic tradition, in the Scriptural tradition, in Dante’s tradition, of consciously being part of a greater story. *Lilith* remains consistent with the traditions in which inspiration was often associated with ‘liminal’ or threshold states of consciousness – “those places mediating between this and the ‘otherworld’ [...] the realm of *poesis*.” (*Listening* 68)

Ruskin took quite seriously and quite literally the idea that to imagine deeply is to prophesy; to be an artist and poet is to be a prophet. Likewise, in the culture of MacDonald’s own forbearers – as well as within the Scripture they read – poetry and prophecy, prayer and inspiration were inseparable notions. MacDonald, himself so often labelled “Poet, Prophet, Seer,” proclaimed: “I believe in the inspiration of the Almighty. I believe in fresh inspired thought. It is because of that that there are fresh impulses, starts to conscience.” (“Robert Burns” np) Doctrinal conformity was not the criterion that MacDonald required of Ruskin, or any reader of *Lilith*. Instead he

desires that something will be ‘woken up’ in the reader, to which to reader will choose to respond. His book conveys that there exists an intrinsically relational God who seeks to restore broken relationship through a choice of obedience and rebirth: Death enabling More Life. And that that is good, if not without sorrow. Adam explains to Vane as he traverses his series of dreams:

Thou hast not yet looked the Truth in the face, hast as yet at best but seen him through a cloud. That which thou seest not, and never didst see save in a glass darkly – that which, indeed, never can be known save by its innate splendour shining straight into pure eyes – that thou canst not but doubt, and art blameless in doubting until thou seest it face to face, when thou wilt no longer be able to doubt it. But to him who has once seen even a shadow only of the truth, and, even but hoping he has seen it when it is present no longer, tries to obey it – to him the real vision, the Truth himself, will come, and depart no more, but abide with him for ever. (334)

What Vane experiences in the final scenes of *Lilith* comes close to Erskine’s dictum that God longs for us to reach “real participation in his own holy and blessed nature,” a transformation enabled by an assenting will, an engagement that Erskine understood to take place within man’s conscience:

The doctrines of revelation are the manifestations of that ever-present Almighty God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. They are lights to guide us back to God, our long-lost heavenly Father, and if they serve not this purpose, they serve no purpose. They are channels through which his Holy Spirit, which is our life, may be received into the heart; and if they bring not his Spirit, they do nothing. (qtd Hart 255)

Adhering to MacDonald’s own encouragement to understand the context out of which a book and its author have come reveals that *Lilith* is indeed a book that culminated his own life training and experience – his culture, his family, his received pastoring and mentoring. The result is a book that not only conveys the message that through relationship transformation is possible, but a book that is able, in its very reading, to bring a reader to a place of transformation. As in any relationship, as the vicar had explained in *Seaboard*, participation is necessary: “Revelation is not enough, the open trap-door is not enough, if the door of the heart is not open likewise.” (181) MacDonald hopes that the reader of *Lilith*, whoever he or she may be, “may go on to fresh experiences of [one’s] own.” (181) Constant is the reminder of Vane’s butterfly-book, that a story and what it has to offer is not meant to be grasped tight, to stagnate: a relational medium, it is meant to evoke a response – and it must, if it is to allow Mythopoesis.

But while the imagination of man has thus the divine function of putting thought into form,
 it has a duty altogether human, which is paramount to that function –
 the duty, namely, which springs from his immediate relation to the Father,
 that of following and finding out the divine imagination in whose image it was made.
 To do this, the man must watch its signs, its manifestations.
 He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the works of His hands
 (“The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture”)



The following poem was published in London’s high-standing literary magazine, the *Athenaeum*,
 after MacDonald’s death:

TO JOHN RUSKIN

O friend, since I have seen thee this fair day,
 The day is fairer; for its golden show,
 Long ere the evening, rosy all doth glow:
 Thy face hath changed it – tho it be not gay.
 Not as a bridegroom’s clad in radiant play,
 But calm and strong, serene, divinely slow,
 With sorrowing smiles that to my bosom go:
 Thy soul looks forth crowned for a kingly sway:
 Some men would hold thy sun was in the west,
 And hid with rosy clouds its dying head,
 Flushed with the blood thy trampled heart hath shed,
 Weary with waiting and not being blest:
 I say ‘tis morning that dawneth in thy breast
 Tho dark-plumed night would brood the glory dead.

CONCLUSION

*Wherever the rainbow of [his] genius stands, there lies, indeed, at the foot of
its glorious arch, a golden key, which will open the secret doors of truth, and admit the humble seeker into the presence
of Wisdom, who, having cried in the streets in vain, sits at home and waits for him who will come to find her.
("St. George's Day")*

It may be unpalatable to some that MacDonald's faith is inextricable from either his crafting or his critique of literature. Yet this fact deserves attention.³⁶⁵ While studies of MacDonald's work and his life might be directed at either the increasing academic or the increasing popular audience, scholarship is impeded if the latter is deemed the only appropriate forum in which to discuss MacDonald's Christian worldview. Likewise, assessments of MacDonald's theology will be bereft if they do not account for his wider corpus. His own *Weltanschauung* makes this evident, his mythopoeic practice cannot be understood apart from it.

This thesis began with an exploration of the concept of Mythopoesis as understood by storytellers and scholars who consider MacDonald a master: "the greatest genius" in what "may even be one of the greatest arts." (*Anthology* xviii) They describe Mythopoesis as the experience of receiving and being transformed by a "story out of which ever varying meanings will grow." (*CSL Letters* 271) For Tolkien and Lewis the greatest such tale is that of the Gospel – the Truest Myth. Avid and prolific writers, these men believed that as creations of the Creator, humans are invited to engage in the relational act of sub-creation. It is an invitation MacDonald took very seriously. A study of his mythopoeic practice proves it to be decidedly intentional and intrinsically relational; he did not produce mythopoeic writing by chance. Following his own prescription for literary criticism, close consideration reveals that MacDonald's life was shaped from inception by a highly relational and storied environment, in a culture that understood that Revelation was never the prerogative of expository thinking. He was raised to believe – and his later understanding of Scripture and teaching from mentors concurred – that transformational truth must be something that all persons can both access and convey. As the "soil, society, and soul" out of which he came ensured a dialogic *Weltanschauung* that considered *all* persons worthy of receiving God's truths, he was compelled to communicate the truths he had apprehended to as broad an audience as possible. His upbringing and his on-going education clearly taught the power and precedence of Story as a medium through which to do this work.

³⁶⁵ Had Wolff read the above epigraph for example, he might not have been so confident that Mossy's Golden Key was a distinct phallic symbol.

MacDonald's children saw him – and he presents himself – as a Celtic Makar: ever aware “of his privilege and duty of interpretation.” (Ronald 30) He placed himself within a bardic tradition that intentionally engaged with conversation that traversed liminal boundaries. The Celtic Christian understanding that their pre-Christian myths could be portents of truth, and Nature and history be mediums of poetic communication from “the world's great Author,” was reiterated both by MacDonald's mentors and by his protagonists. (*Seaboard* 407) It was a communal tradition of apprehension, engagement, and transmission that resonated with the Scripture with which he was raised and the literature to which he was introduced. From childhood MacDonald's heritage ensured awareness of the importance and the power of language. His forgotten minister-uncle spent a lifetime striving to preserve a language in which was held a culture, a way of life. His father enjoyed speaking the local vernacular and employing its colour in his letters. MacDonald followed suit in novels and poems despite the fact that it occasioned ridicule and condescension and was an impediment to sales. Not only did his determination to be true to a threatened language break important ground historically, but it conformed to a passion held by Scott: important truths must be communicated in vernacular languages, not held in reserve for the intellectual elite. While Dante may have been revolutionary, he was not the first to proclaim the importance of communicating in the vernacular – the precedent had been a divine one, manifested in the act of Incarnation, which “translates the ineffable language of the Most High into man's native tongue.” (*Two Discourses* 15) Here in this most profound expression of the vernacular was an element very basic to the Celtic expression: that word and Word, light and Light, mythic god of Truest Myth transcended time, space, and sense, so that any person might apprehend the most important revelation. The sacramental does not recognize a division between earthy and holy: earthiness is holiness, by definition of the Creator's own act.

Unpublished material redolent with significant information about MacDonald and the much-maligned community of Huntly yet exists in archives, further evidencing the need for reassessing the standard “mental position of enmity” towards MacDonald's Christian upbringing. (*Falconer* 174) Long before Aberdeen, MacDonald's farming father had prepared MacDonald for Scott's teachings on the importance of Story, of language, of relationship, of receiving revelation, and of education. Their shared love of literature and enjoyment of Chalmers laid important foundations, as did their shared personal, familial, and cultural history, the stories they had read and heard, the languages of their land and faith, and that very landscape itself. MacDonald was “rooted deep in all its story.” (*Antiphon* 3) The endeavours of

Mackintosh MacKay ensured that even as a youth MacDonald was acutely aware of how these poems, stories, and prayers of their genetic and spiritual heritage were being lost. Throughout MacDonald's lifetime the Industrial Revolution continued to incur disintegration of rural and familial communities – his own included. Hundreds of thousands of migrants left behind the environments in which their identities had been formed, the places they knew and in which they were known. Many were unsure of what to call 'home.' Communities were broken; lore, identity, and dialects lost.³⁶⁶ This is the context within which MacDonald's mythopoeic art was forged.

Despite assertions to the contrary, a great amount of unacknowledged archive material also exists relating to the writing and life of A.J. Scott, the man chosen by MacDonald to be a mentor and named as his greatest intellectual influence. The threads of Scott's theology that so resonated with MacDonald, he discovered to be tightly bound to the truths he had loved since his Aberdeenshire youth. The relational theology of both Scott and Erskine reflected the importance of the Scottish emphasis upon community, nature, and education. Their conviction that theology could not be abstract but required a practice of engagement fuelled MacDonald's own pen and praxis. Their understanding of Revelation acknowledged the mythopoeic potential of his craft. By the time MacDonald met Scott, Scott's passion to bring his own Scottish understanding of identity, education, and revelation to his host nation was being widely manifested, and Maurice had joined him in the work. This practice of their *Weltanschauung* initiated a new discipline into the enclave of the university – an institution already permanently altered by their conviction of who was capable of receiving revelation, and with whom they were called to be in relationship. These men believed that engagement with the "converging truths" of literature could alter a society; that such an engagement would force reconsideration of exclusive education, prohibitive voting rights, demeaning labour laws, sterilizing land practice. In the subsequent lectures and the praxis of Scott, and through an understanding of why he found Dante so compelling, is found the environment in which MacDonald's own compulsion to "sub-create" the mythopoeic was materialized. MacDonald's literary criticism follows Scott's lead in directing readers to biographical and literary influences and engagements. MacDonald carries forward Scott's torch by becoming a life-long lecturer on the literature of Britain and of Dante. Most critical studies that reference MacDonald, whether favourably or not, do so with the working assumption that they are discussing a 'former minister.' This is a significantly misleading premise from which much misconstruction has

³⁶⁶ For many the only lore they could maintain, because it was written down and was valued cross-culturally, was the Bible – it is no wonder some clung to the familiar forms of that text so ferociously.

ensued. A rectified perception – that MacDonald was for decades a career professor and a career lecturer of English Literature (and of Dante), in addition to being a literary critic and a writer – invites entire new vistas of critical study. MacDonald ‘hosted’ the introductions of thousands of individuals in multiple countries to participate in their literary heritage, yet his career path has been obscured by twenty-nine months in Arundel, while yet in his early twenties.

Misinterpretation of MacDonald’s relationship with Christianity has also belied how very conscious he was of his role as another Ezra-figure. He called himself “Master of the Hearing,” evoking the pivotal text of the *Shema* referenced in Chapter One: “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one God.” (*Antiphon 3; Deut. 6:4*) The *Shema* is in and of itself sufficient argument for the theological importance of what MacDonald and his mentors were doing, for it commands the telling and retelling of a community’s lore; it is their duty, lest they forget who they are, and in so doing, forget what God has done for them.³⁶⁷ The *Shema* is also a command to engage with the text communally, not in isolation. Knowing how God had engaged with the Israelites was a crucial aspect of their relationship with him; that that knowledge was communal was a crucial aspect of their relationship with one another. Despite their diversities, by engaging with the stories communally they could hold each other accountable both in how they told the stories and in how they interpreted the tellings. The passage in *Deuteronomy* continues with the directive that: “when your children ask you in the time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?’” the adults are to respond by telling the stories of their history. (*Deut. 6:20-25*) In the stories lie the meanings. This was MacDonald’s challenge to Arnold. When MacDonald – a fluent reader and avid student of Biblical Hebrew – calls himself “Master of the Hearing,” he does not do so lightly.

In *England’s Antiphon* MacDonald is absolutely clear that his intent in this role of “Master of the Hearing” is to reintroduce a readership to their diverse inherited community, “to say with regard to the singer himself, his time, its modes, its beliefs, such things as may help to set the song in its true light – its relation, namely, to the source whence it sprung, which alone can secure its right reception by the heart of the hearer.” (4) He facilitates this relationship in order that his readers might better know their own heritage, and thus – defying schism – might be better able to “worship with them.” (4) As Vane discovers,

³⁶⁷ The Hebrew verb *shema* is active: ‘to hear’ means more fully ‘to listen, understand, respond/obey.’

Only by the reflex of other lives can [one] ripen his specialty, develop the idea of himself, the individuality that distinguishes him from every other. [For] the development of the differences which make a large and lofty unity possible, and which alone can make millions into a church, an endless and measureless influence and reaction are indispensable. A man [...] must have the education of a world of fellow-men. (146)

As early as *Phantastes* MacDonald's protagonist talks of being "buried and risen again in these old books" – of being transformed by the renewing of his mind. (76) The language of narration is expressly Christian. Here in his first novel MacDonald is already storying Scott's message, very intentionally shaping his text with the stories that have shaped *him* – and showing a protagonist who claims he is transformed through the revelations communicated to him in stories. It is a pattern MacDonald's writing is never without. When Lewis writes of how the mythopoeic *Phantastes* baptized his imagination, he explains that he was an assured young atheist at the time – it is only retrospectively that he recognizes the experience to have been either transformational or theological: "nothing was further from my thoughts than Christianity." (*Anthology* 21) But Lewis was a very *storied* reader. The pantheon of allusions and images that weigh down every page of *Phantastes* worked on Lewis the same way the library worked on Anodos – converging truth after storied truth, until Lewis was, he writes, rescued from the "darker and more evil forms" of Romanticism, from sliding down into "perversity." (21) One does not have to have a literary background equivalent even to the eighteen year old Lewis to engage productively with *Phantastes* – but clearly the more stories one shares with the text the more riches it has to offer, and the more ready the receptacle. And so for MacDonald libraries are hallowed places in which gathered truth is related – is revealed. In the Scottish novels especially, the close reader familiar with MacDonald's biography can see how relational truths from his familial experience engage with truths from the literary tradition. MacDonald believes that both particular and general truths can be mediums of Revelation, never more strongly than when they converge: the "converging truths" weave new tales with potential to transform the receptive reader. When MacDonald's readership claims that his stories are transformative, despite the contradictions of Arnold they not alone in believing that such a thing is possible: MacDonald himself is certain that Story can evoke transformation.

The seriousness with which MacDonald took his role as interpreter is most exemplified in *Lilith*. Uniquely conscious of feeling that this story had been *received*, in the words of Erskine: "breath(ed) into my conscience," (qtd Horrocks 37) he responds with a practice of Erskine's conviction that relationship is necessarily participatory, and thus he meticulously works and reworks the "inspired" manuscript of *Lilith* for five years before

‘communicating’ it to his readership: “the end of polish is revelation.” (“Polish” 153)

The careful labour is MacDonald’s agreement that the purpose of revelation is to further relationship and requires intentioned participation – as Scott had observed: “the mere presence of the demand does not necessarily imply such obedience.” (*Two Discourses* 49)

Thus to the received storyline of *Lilith* MacDonald brought a lifetime of relational engagements and careful exegesis. What he portrays occurring in the early novel *Catbcart* it seems he sought to *do* with his late work *Lilith* – for his friend Ruskin. Drawing upon divine revelations through Scripture and Nature, upon centuries of conversations that engaged with these, and upon his rich relationship with his fellow Philomythus, he invites revelation to function on multiple levels of time, space, and experience. He is convinced that the particularities of the text, even if never decipherable, will not hinder the heavily storied Story. It was a method long established, as exhibited by *Isaiah* and the *Commedia*. MacDonald was confident that if he wrote truths, then truths – even ones he might not have anticipated – would be educed from the text when and as the readers were ready. Indeed for him such educts attest to “the inspiration of the Almighty.” (“Imagination” 28)

The recognition of the structural skeleton on which MacDonald hangs his tale in *Curdie*, the pointed exploration of the revelatory nature of Art and the discussion of Paul’s representation of the transformation of Psyche in *Seaboard*, make it difficult to deny the repeated patterns in *Lilith*. The stories help to exegete the stories.

Lilith boldly asserts the message of Balbo: that benefiting “by the labours of others” one might be “thus able to start from the goal at which our predecessors stopped, and help our successors onwards on the path of which none of us can see or know the furthest point.” (80) And although *Lilith* continues to baffle readers into the twenty first century, it also continues to be called a great mythopoeic tale, and readers and scholars continue to choose to wrestle with it. Interpretations of the text vacillate wildly, and while MacDonald does assert that every text may speak differently to every reader, and that “the truer its art, the more things it will mean,” he also repeatedly tells his readers that if they want to be good critics, if they want to better understand a text, they must look to the author – understand his environment, his stories, his community – and read other texts that author has written. (“Fantastic” 230) MacDonald gives a warning that perhaps has not been given much heed when he portrays in *Home Again* the pitfalls of critiquing a text for which one has no respect: both text and critic will suffer. As written elsewhere: “Caught in a hand which does not love its kind, it will turn to an insignificant, ugly thing, that can neither flash nor fly.” (“Fantastic” 97) A critic, MacDonald

writes, must enter into “close, silent, patient study” to achieve “the right understanding of what [an author] has written” and thus bring the reader “into communion” with the author. (“St. George’s” 84) For MacDonald as for Scott this was a profoundly theological concept, relevant not only to biblical texts but also to the biblical ‘Author.’ MacDonald and his inheritors plead with their audiences repeatedly to not enter the foray of exegesis in solitary fashion, but to humbly refer to the existing rich tradition – engagement with which will evoke ever-new riches. Utilizing MacDonald’s methodology on his own work results in readings quite different from those commonly asserted.

For MacDonald it is a fundamental truth that not only is it not good for man to be alone – it is impossible; and, isolation impedes Revelation, as both Dante and Vane discovered. MacDonald believes that writers most especially must be transformed by engagement with others, by contemplating the ways of God, nature, and man, before they can give voice to something new – something that is, in and of itself, a response to that which has gone before: an “effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation.” (qtd *Inklings* 42) It is then the writers’ responsibility to “mediate,” bringing their readers into “vital contact of intelligence; directing the observation.” (“Imagination” 26) Out of such communion and interrelation is born the great mythopoeic tales; artists such as Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare are explicit in their recognition that they do not, cannot, create out of a vacuum. Likewise the myths of Balder, of Athena, of the Celts, do not rise out of nowhere, nothing. They are stories informed and shaped by a people and their language, a culture and its place – as are the stories, the poems, and the laws of Scripture. MacDonald is very intentionally following a long tradition as he enters the dialogue as but one of the participants, seeking the truths he recognizes and with which he resonates, and participating in the conversation. His very participation invites his readers to do the same. He is intensely aware that the right to engage in and learn from this conversation has little to do with his class or his abilities – it has everything to do with his shared humanity: a relational being.



Scott had explained how important it was to be a storied people, and MacDonald spent a lifetime responding to that. He is aware that he himself is a “story” of people, place, language, and experiences, ever being transformed, ever becoming more fully human through relationships. MacDonald understands God to be the Primary Makar, the Author of all – whose communications are richly storied revelations, awaiting participatory reception. MacDonald is not coy about the fact that in crafting stories he was intentionally engaging in

theological practice: his intent is to make way for such divine revelation, as for him nothing is more important than “unveiling the Word of God.” (*Miracles* 1) His literary *Weltanschauung* cannot be differentiated from his theological *Weltanschauung*. His novels, sermons, poems, fairy tales, and even essays and lectures are a continual invitation to engage in imaginative inquiry, to draw the reader into “the wisdom wherein we live and move and have our being.” (“Imagination” 30) MacDonald did not become a writer because it was merely a convenient means of feeding his family: “If a man make literature a profession, a means of getting his bread without any other motive, if he writes what he thinks his people like to read, he is miserable! He should not write unless something presses upon him that he is to give to the world.” (“Robert Burns” np) Rather, MacDonald responded to the conviction that as a storyteller he had a responsibility to wake up receptivity to truth in his readers by re-storying them. It is something that “presses upon him;” it is his vocation. (*Miracles* 1)

The long tradition MacDonald was following had been practiced by the Vernacular Word. When asked by his disciples “Why do you tell stories?” Christ reiterated the dictate of the *Shema* and the reminder of Ezra:

You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they're blue in the face and not get it. I don't want Isaiah's forecast repeated all over again:

Your ears are open but you don't hear a thing.

Your eyes are awake but you don't see a thing. (Mt.13: 10-14)³⁶⁸

Here is the model of what Scott taught and what MacDonald sought to exemplify; Christ's New Testament stories draw upon, respond to, and expand the stories of his listeners' heritage. He integrates these with his listeners' culture, community, language, and landscape: the Biblical tradition of polyphonic text. Throughout the Bible, MacDonald saw an understanding of revelation as history, revelation as dialogic encounter (with text and person alike), revelation as personal relationship, revelation as communal living, revelation as lived engagement with the land. Like Erskine and Scott, he did not consider Revelation to be ‘knowledge grasped,’ not even knowledge retained – a definition which could easily exclude certain members of the population – but rather a communication proffered, received, and engaged. The fullness of this

³⁶⁸ The version used here is *The Message*.

revelation for MacDonald is that of the Embodied Word, come to dwell amongst men. It is no textual coincidence that the pilgrims of Emmaus recognize Christ *after* he has revisited stories with them as they “walk(ed) along the road,” and as they sat “at home” eating their meal: “beginning at Moses and all the prophets,” their hearts “burning within them” as he did so. (*Deut.* 6:4; *Luke* 24: 27-32) Through enacting the *Shema*, retelling his disciples their own stereoscopic story, Christ prepares them to see that *he* is the fulfillment in which all the truths converge; he is the “ancient semantic unity” of myth and language, giving his puzzled listeners a very “renewed perception informed by the past.” (qtd *Inklings* 42) Christ practices what Maurice declared the best kind of literary criticism, that which “delights to draw forth the sense and beauty of a book, and is able to do so because the heart of the critic is in sympathy with the heart of the writer.” (qtd Palmer 37) Christ then breaks the bread with the invocation: “Do this, in remembrance of me.” Such is the model of the Incarnate Story through whom all Creation is transformed; enacted exegesis in sympathy with the heart of the Author.

Although many within the discipline of English Literature have railed – sometimes reasonably, and sometimes not – against ‘religion,’ it is difficult to deny the evidence that the discipline was established and even enabled by those convinced that their Christian faith demanded that English Literature, that vernacular literatures, be taught academically. Scott’s encouragement and MacDonald’s practice of Mythopoesis suggest that the study of theology and the study of literature are difficult to divorce, especially if one approaches Western literary heritage with integrity. An important aspect of Scott’s and MacDonald’s communication to Ruskin was that Christ did not come to wipe out the past or its rich stories, but to transform people as they engaged their present with the truths of the past: “a renewed perception informed by the past, rather than reverting to it.” (*Inklings* 42) In the imagery of Erskine and Scott, and of *Lilith*, Christ is a prism through which the old truths are refracted: transforming our stories and thus ourselves more fully into who we are meant to be – scandalously particular and embracingly general. But the old needs to be recognized before it can be renewed, as Mr. Raven struggles to show Vane – trying to convince him to die, that he might thus be better able to see, to hear, to read, to live.

Not only are twenty-first century Theology and Literature disciplines quite divorced but much of the western Church (most markedly the Protestant portion) suffers from an ignorance of its own post-biblical story. There is a paucity of knowledge of historical events as well as of its tradition of literature and tales. MacDonald argued that such

ignorance of inheritance impedes receptivity to divine revelation. Stories, he believed, could wake one up to being in a place of reception. Full reception of revelation requires one to respond; this is the essence of the Great Commission. Yet not only is it important for an audience to be able to receive a story for it to have any impact, the tellers themselves must be storied. A renewed engagement with more recent mythopoeic tales, such as those scribed by MacDonald and those inspired by the Mythopoeis of MacDonald, may help renew perceptions, inform identities, re-story a people so that they might be awakened to a rooted and perpetuating relationship. As a result of this type of engagement MacDonald's art has evoked art from others: Chesterton, Lewis, Tolkien, Auden, Sendak, L'Engle, Overstreet – the list continues to grow as new responses are called forth, and new voices join the conversation. Thus readers who have never heard of MacDonald have nonetheless been transformed by stories that arise from his Mythopoeis.

For MacDonald, as for his mentors, theology without Story is decidedly unbiblical. These men believed that the one Triune God persists in seeking relationship by proffering revelations of himself – and that in him humans can live, and move, and have their being; their “True Home.” MacDonald was aware that the text he read daily – Scripture – called for its readers to be a *mythopathic* people: a people consciously seeking to be transformed by Story. He was convinced that his stories and poetry could themselves be an actual space in which, through vicariously experiencing the story, readers could be changed, find ‘ever varying meanings’ which could help them be ‘fresh born.’ But he also believed that to remain safely between the pages is to betray the text: it is to have read in vain, if *every* man is not greater than *any* book. It is a message voiced with increasing emphasis, and is a key element of *Lilith*. Never losing sight “of his privilege and duty of interpretation,” MacDonald engages with “heart after heart lifting up itself in the music of speech, heart after heart responding across the ages.” (Ronald 3; *Antiphon* 4) He hopes that some day his readers will respond by joining in “worship” with this “cloud of witnesses” (4; *Annals* 225): entering into the dialogue, responding to the Story out of which ever varying meanings will continue to grow – choosing to be mythopathic.

"There is in your house a door,
one step through which carries me into a world very much another than this."

"A better?"

"Not throughout; but so much another that most of its physical, and many of its mental laws are different from those of this world. As for moral laws, they must everywhere be fundamentally the same."

"You try my power of belief!" I said.

"You take me for a madman, probably?"

"You do not look like one."

"A liar then?"

"You give me no ground to think you such."

"Only you do not believe me?"

"I will go out of that door with you if you like: I believe in you enough to risk the attempt."

"The blunder all my children make!" he murmured. "The only door out is the door in!"

I began to think he must be crazy. He sat silent for a moment, his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, and his eyes on the books before him.

"A book," he said louder, "is a door in, and therefore a door out."

Lilith.

APPENDIX

- A) Further information on Mackintosh MacKay
- B) Further information on the play with family names and history
- C) Further information on two significant Aberdeen Friends
- D) Further Contention with Tim Hilton's *John Ruskin*
- E) Further Isaiah correlations in *Curdie*

A) Further information on Mackintosh MacKay

i) A Champion of Gaels

Greville writes of an inherited Celtic tradition that shaped MacDonald's "devotion to the soil, his love of liberty, his intolerance of justice, his eloquence and love of learning," and history bears him out. (38) Yet while recording that the MacKays were "renown in science and travel, in adventure and arms, in piety and politics," it is the fame of his mother's cousins rather than of his direct ancestors that he recounts. (46) He overlooks much of what is hinted at by Ronald's reference to barely concealed "family history" in the novels. It is unfortunate that Greville neither gives more detail nor makes more evident the deep resonance MacDonald had, not only with his maternal grandfathers but also with his maternal uncle, who so closely resembles Ian MacRuadh, the elder brother in *What's Mine's Mine*.

Mackintosh MacKay's father – MacDonald's maternal grandfather – Alexander (Alister) M. MacKay of Duard Beg was a tacksman (a tenant farmer) who leased land from his clansman Lord Reay in the 1790's. This was a time when most landowners were clearing their land of people, sheep being more profitable than leases. In an active effort to stop land from falling entirely into southern hands for these vast sheep farms, the MacKay tacksmen subleased their land to other locals.³⁶⁹ Alexander was highly respected for both his person and his faith, and was described as, like his father, "intensely interested in the moral and material welfare of his beloved countrymen of Strathnaver." That father, John MacKay (known in Gaelic as Ian Macechan), had received enduring accolade in a composition by the renown Gaelic bard Rob Donn (or Doun), entitled "A Dirge for Ian Macechan." The song notes that with Ian's death the country had lost a source of hospitality and of joy in the face of poverty, and also, a patron of the arts. The poet sees "the unrequited wrong/ Call for its helper, who is not": "You ask me *when* this deep distress/ Began to rage without redress?/ 'With Ian Macechan's dying sigh!'"³⁷⁰ (Rogers 318) Hospitality, joy despite poverty, patronage of song – all bound by a strong Christian conviction: these are not just MacDonald's family heritage, but also the recognized hallmarks of the MacRuadh brothers in *What's Mine's Mine*. In the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Mackintosh MacKay was a patron of Rob Donn, and he was respected for his concern for community – his practiced faith continuing a family conviction that poetry, community, and faith were matters of society, soil, and soul.

Mackintosh MacKay was born in 1793, in Eddrachillis of Strathnaver. After receiving an elementary education at home, his studies were first conducted in the parish school of Tongue, then in an academy at Ullapool, and then in 1815 at University of St. Andrews. In 1820 he entered the theological hall at Glasgow. While yet a student he completed his work as editor of the Highland Society's Gaelic Dictionary. (Kennedy np) London's *Quarterly Review* suggested

³⁶⁹ Mackintosh MacKay later became very active in promoting this option of leasing, to improve conditions and counter arguments for clearance. (MacColl 27)

³⁷⁰ This was, and is, considered one of Donn's most famous poems. (MacKay 231)

that MacKay should be made a Professor of a ‘Chair of the Celtic languages’ as he was so well versed in all the “dialects of the Celtic race.” It described him as having “already done more for the language of the Scottish Gael than any other individual of the present or last age,” although at the time he was “still a very young man.” (*Quarterly* 359) In an era in which oral tradition – what MacDonald called “living literature” (*Forbes* 219) – was being lost and when even the language was starting to be lost, MacKay applied his own academic training with incredible energy into the conservation of both. His collection of Donn’s poems was as admired for its English essay on Donn’s life as it was for its introduction to the Gaelic poems. (*Quarterly* 359) Today Donn is recognized as an important Gaelic bard, and his work is back in print. He had been raised by MacKay’s grandfather, and worked for him as a cattle-herd – and the elegy of accolade he wrote for John MacKay (quoted above) is considered one of his best. In Donn’s later years, after being an under-forester for the laird (not unlike ‘Rob of the Angels’), he worked for and lived under the protection of MacKay’s father. (*Quarterly* 364) But Donn was not the only such bard MacKay knew – he was intimate with a number of Celtic Seanachies, from whom he garnered Highland histories, and whose work he promoted.³⁷¹ (Greville 43; Henderson 12) MacKay was also editor of the Gaelic newspaper *An Fhianuis* (“The Witness”), partner to Hugh Miller’s circulation of the same name to which he also contributed. (Henderson 20) He even translated some ‘bardic’ English into Gaelic – such as the Olney Hymns. (H. Scott 24) It would have been strange had MacDonald not remained conscious and proud of this Celtic uncle.

MacKay was for some time a schoolmaster at Portree. In 1825 he was ordained as minister of Laggan – his predecessor was a friend, the husband of poet and historian Anne Grant. In 1829 Glasgow conferred upon MacKay the degree of LL.D. – as it would later do for MacDonald. (Mcpherson 240) In 1831 he was appointed Justice of the Peace for Invernesshire. In the year 1835, from May 1, he travelled 1577 miles – all within the bounds of his own charge – visiting and catechising, holding meetings “for prayer and exhortation,” and conducting parochial business. He was frequently called to guest-preach. In 1843 his fragmentary diary shows that in five months he preached seventy-seven times, in twenty-five places beyond his own charge; during 1845, it was 169 times in forty-seven places. During the years of Disruption the numbers multiplied. He travelled “over almost all the Highlands and the Islands, preaching the gospel, explaining the causes of the Disruption, and organising congregations in connection with the Free Church. But his going to Australia [1854] was the crowning proof of his deep love for his countrymen.” (Kennedy np) In 1849 MacKay became Moderator of the Free Church. As one of the too-few men of influence who did protest the Clearances, not unlike the fictional MacRuadh (another patriarch, pastor, and scholar), MacKay was practical in his concern. When asked of the necessity of emigration, he said (recorded in the *Report to Board of Supervision, 1851*) that there was “no necessity whatsoever, the very idea is monstrous.” (MacColl 48) But though he believed that the lack of national intervention was suicidal, the monstrous was none-the-less happening – and so he did what he could for those affected.³⁷² (24) As a result, “various societies for aiding

³⁷¹ Seanachies – bearers of old lore, being the culture, history, and laws of the people which were preserved in oral memory, recited by the bards. One such man was John Morison (*Gobha Na Hearadh*), the “songsmith of Harris” – who named a son after MacKay. (Henderson 2)

³⁷² In an article for Hugh Miller’s *The Witness* (17 June, 1848) he wrote: “The depopulation of a country is a matter of national concern. Let the national councils consider it in time.” (MacColl 28) For MacKay the whole clearance and emigration debate was inseparable not only from issues of faith, but from responsibilities of the Church. In his 1853 Highland Committee report to the Free Church General Assembly he referred to these two evils as “a disturbing force upon the social and economic temporal condition of our adhering population.” He suggested that “with the poor laws on the one hand...and the profits, as they are thought to be, of sheep-farming on the other, there seems practically a crusade against the whole population of the Highlands and Islands.” Recognizing the legal limitations of the Church, he nonetheless articulates the “strong temptation to enunciate our own judgments upon such points, especially when we see such controversies waged between the rich on one hand, and the poor on the other.” Like the MacRuadh brothers, in 1853 he actively counseled against violent reaction or confrontation with: “Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.”

emigration of Highlanders to the Colonies owed their existence largely to his advocacy.” (*Kennedy np*) At the late age of sixty MacKay chose to go to Australia for a decade, so that he might minister to the remote Gaelic communities there. Remarkably, a sermon by MacKay in 1855, published by George Robertson, marks the inception of Australian publishing.³⁷³ The lack of attention granted this Gael in MacDonald scholarship is a significant oversight. For further detail of MacKay’s biography, see Macpherson’s *Glimpses of Church* and Sanderson’s *Jubilee History*.

ii) More on the Walter Scott connection

Sir Walter Scott mentions MacKay several times in his journal, and calls him: “a simple learned man, and a Highlander who weighs his own nation justly, – a modest and estimable person.” (820) In 1830 he records that MacKay is helping him translate an Irish Gaelic manuscript. (704) MacKay also brought Scott some of the Highland history artefacts that the antiquarian loved so much:

February 13 [1828]. – He left in my hand some papers of Cluny [Ewen] Macpherson concerning the affair of 1745, from which I have extracted an account of the battle of Clifton for Waverley. He has few prejudices (for a Highlander), and is a mild well-mannered young man. We had much talk on Highland matters. (537); May 25. – Dr Macintosh Mackay came to breakfast, and brought with him to show me the Young Chevalier’s target, purse, and snuff-box, the property of Cluny Macpherson. (702)

Greville quotes MacKay’s own remark that his full account of the Battle of Mulrog was bodily transferred into Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather*. Within the novel *The Two Drovers*, Scott expressly notes his indebtedness to MacKay. MacKay clearly helped Scott give a more accurate picture of the Highlands, but it was still Scott’s rendition. A few decades later Scottish literary critics frequently observed the difference between Scott’s romanticized portraits, and MacDonald’s “inward fidelity”: “He wrote out of his heart, he wrote from his own experience.” (“A Great Scottish Teacher” 382, 383)

B) Further information on the play with family names and history

Family names run throughout MacDonald’s novels (and are sported by his children) – for example the surnames of every one of his paternal aunts appears in his novels. It has been shown that MacDonald views the names of his characters as contributing portents of meaning, as evidenced from the very first novel with the naming of Anodos. His use of names to explore particularities is especially evident when considering MacDonald’s MacKay predecessors.³⁷⁴ The name ‘MacKay’ is a translation to English of the Gaelic ‘MacAoidh,’ meaning ‘Son of Aodh’ (Son of Fire). As root names that begin with a vowel have an ‘h’ placed before them when they stand on their own, the personal name Aodh/Aoidh/hAoidh is translated as ‘Hugh.’ In the Germanic form that same name, Hugh, means *heart/mind/spirit*. The fact that the protagonist in MacDonald’s first ‘realistic’ novel *David Elginbrod* is named Hugh Sutherland (Sutherlandshire being the late nineteenth century name for the MacKay’s homeland) indicates that despite the attention given to the title figure as a caricature of MacDonald’s father, MacDonald’s maternal family makes a show in this book too – if but in name. That name combines within it the historic rivals for ‘Lord Reay’s land’ – Sutherlandshire. The character of Robert Falconer also bears a name of significant combination. Here it is the maiden names of both of MacDonald’s

³⁷³ Another twenty-three years passed before Cambridge U.K. published the first Australian book. (Cf. Christian Bookselling Association Australia, <http://www.cbaa.com.au/aboutus.html>)

³⁷⁴ So too, repeatedly, does a name local to both that area and to Aberdeenshire: Gordon.

grandmothers – Robertson and Falconer. This was not only the title of a novel, but also the name of MacDonald's second son. It is interesting to note that before MacDonald's first child was born, he and his father discuss naming and agree that a child should never be given a name merely to keep a relative happy – there must be weightier intent. (The letter itself is full of George Sr.'s somewhat corny humour.) (Beinecke 1/1/15)

Heather and Snow, one of MacDonald's last works, is another novel in which his engagement with the MacKay family is readily evident. MacDonald's maternal grandfather Alexander was a captain and general in 'the Reay Fencibles' under a laird who was also his friend³⁷⁵ (Kennedy np); in his novel the humble and soft-spoken farmer David Barclay was formerly a sergeant and maintains several historic similarities with this maternal grandfather:

When [colonel and sergeant] returned to their country, both somewhat disabled, the one retired to his inherited estate, the other to the family farm upon that estate, where his brother had died shortly before; so that Archie [Gordon] was now Davie's landlord. (24)

The fictional man and the historical man are also alike in personality, and both respected by their neighbours and their landlord. MacKay is described much like Barclay, as: "an amiable man, and a pious Christian of superior intelligence and a consistent life." (Kennedy np) It is said that Alexander MacKay, again like Barclay: "became a commissioner or administering factor for the Reay estate, and with great humanity devoted himself to the improvement of the lot of the smaller tenantry." (M. MacKay 219) Malcolm MacKay's book of family history describes how the system of sub-tenant to tacksmen was open to much abuse: "This vicious system, which enabled selfish men to grind the faces of the poor with impunity, General MacKay set himself to root up with a determination which does him infinite credit." (219) Alexander MacKay's wife Helen, MacDonald's maternal grandmother, was described as "the eldest daughter of the Rev. Alexander Falconer, minister of Eddrachillis, an admirable woman, of a loving cheerful disposition, a delightful companion, a wise and disinterested friend, a devoted wife and mother, and an intelligent and devout Christian." (Kennedy np) This is again a picture congruent with the character given in *Heather and Snow* of Barclay's wife who "had in her material enough, both moral and intellectual, for ten ladies better than the wife at the castle." (M. MacKay 36) Had Greville given more matrilineal details in his biography, perhaps more such parallels would be evident. Despite this, even a cursory familiarity with MacDonald's family tree unveils a myriad of familial allusions and characterizations throughout his corpus.

C) Further information on two significant Aberdeen Friends:

A brief overview of these two individuals serves to reiterate of how relationally entwined was the development of MacDonald's career, and how far reaching of Scottish culture upon it.

i) Norman MacLeod

Norman MacLeod, one of MacDonald's friends at Aberdeen, went on to Edinburgh to study divinity under Chalmers. He perpetuated Chalmers' emphasis on a faith that compelled praxis. Choosing to remain in the Establishment when the Disruption took place, MacLeod sought to change the Church from within. (*AJS* 80) He eventually became Moderator of the General Assembly and also the Royal Chaplain of Scotland. A true student of Chalmers, he was full of practical schemes for the social improvement of the people – one of these was a belief that good

³⁷⁵ The Reay Fencibles, consisting mainly of MacKays, was one of four Sutherland Fencible (home service only) Regiments raised during the eighteenth century. Two of Donn's more famous poems are about his laird and his employer, the laird's tacksman, both being patrons. (MacKay 231)

literature could be made available to all people, even those who could not afford books.³⁷⁶ (Anderson 54) In 1860 fellow Scot Alexander Strahan appointed MacLeod as editor of the new monthly magazine *Good Words* – one of the earliest publishers of MacDonald’s fiction (i.e. “The Wow O’ Rivven” in 1864).³⁷⁷ Together the two men challenged the reading restrictions of Sabbatarianism. Breaching the Sabbath prohibition against fiction, *Good Words* proffered material that Sunday readers would find difficult to justify rejecting. (Anderson 54) It was a strategy similar to that employed by the MacDonalds when they performed *Pilgrim’s Progress* on stage – and it was one to which MacDonald publicly gave his support as he not only contributing writing, but followed MacLeod as editor.³⁷⁸ Strahan (for several years the exclusive publisher of Tennyson) became a good friend of the MacDonald family. Eventually he published, in one form or other, a large portion of MacDonald’s writings.³⁷⁹ (Cf. archive letters) He and MacLeod were regarded as men who fused a firm Christian faith with their “Liberal politics, and high literary idealism.” (Sutherland 1987)

ii) John Stewart Blackie

John Stewart Blackie, who would also publish a number of MacDonald’s novels (mostly the children’s literature), was already a young professor when MacDonald was studying. An Aberdeen alum, he had furthered his training in Germany before returning to the city. He then married the sister of MacDonald’s friend and Aberdeen pastor Rev. John Kennedy. Greville notes that despite theological differences – Blackie being more liberal than Kennedy – a strong friendship and respect existed between the two. (69) Blackie was another passionate Scot, known for his flamboyant tartan attire and his radical support of Highland culture and language. (Anderson 54) He was also a poet and reformer. He challenged University religious testing and, although he signed the Confession of Faith, publicly announced that the action was pure formality – claiming himself an “undogmatic Christian.” (Anderson 55) The situation was well discussed throughout the university, with the unwilling Senate forced by the courts to nonetheless install him as professor. In the dramatic year of 1843, when MacDonald was eighteen, Blackie further contributed to the controversy over religious testing with his own pamphlet. He argued that healthy scholarship could only flourish “where there is no exclusive influence of self-electing scholastic corporations, and no jealous control of ecclesiastical persons sympathizing with learning only in so far as it subserves the purposes of the Church.” (qtd Anderson 56) This perspective would become a founding principle of the educational institutions at which A.J. Scott and F.D. Maurice would invite MacDonald to teach.

³⁷⁶ Such as his own *Reminiscences of a Highland Parish*. (1867)

³⁷⁷ In 1862 Strahan and MacLeod moved their base to London. Within two years it was one of the biggest selling magazines, far outselling Thackeray’s *Cornhill* (whose first editor choice was the Scot A.J. Scott). In 1864 Strahan had the confidence to start selling the potentially self-rivalling *The Sunday Magazine*. In 1866 he added *The Contemporary Review*, which continues in publication to this day. (Sutherland 122)

³⁷⁸ He continued to do so through Strahan’s later fiscal crisis, editing without salary. (Srebrnik 118, 121)

³⁷⁹ Greville credits the publisher’s generosity with alleviating the family’s financial strain. (353) The first chapter of *The Vicar’s Daughter* contains a tribute to Strahan, a publisher “not like any other publisher.” (Srebrnik 118; *Vicar’s* 3)

C) Further Contention with Tim Hilton's *John Ruskin*

Considering the high critical acclaim received by Tim Hilton's compendious work on the life of Ruskin and the significant contribution it undoubtedly is to scholarship, it is important to pay close attention to the errors Hilton nonetheless makes as regards Ruskin's relationship with MacDonald. That there is sufficient error to justify a response highlights the need for a fuller articulation of MacDonald's history within MacDonald scholarship; it proves the necessity of contesting an inaccurate perspective of MacDonald pervasive within nineteenth century scholarship. It is also hoped that this thesis proves that a better understanding of MacDonald can contribute significantly to a better understanding of the subjects with whom he engages. Ruskin is a prime example.

It would be a minor miracle to compose a work the length of Hilton's that was completely free of error (and to exhaustively research every relationship Ruskin had would be impossible). That said, some of Hilton's mistakes regarding MacDonald are curious, for not only does he make claims that are contradicted on the very page of the source he has just quoted, but sometimes he even contradicts himself. Considering how much attention he gives to Georgina Mount-Temple (the close mutual acquaintance of both MacDonald and Ruskin, who joined forces with MacDonald in attempting to resolve the 'La Touche affair') it is curious that Hilton gives MacDonald such short shrift. Part of this may be due to preconceived notions Hilton holds about MacDonald and his family. He certainly does not write of the household in a flattering manner, and it must be noted that his descriptions do not ring true with any source of which I am aware: all the more unsettling then that Hilton does not name his source when he paints such a vivid and unappealing portrait.

Hilton begins his comments on MacDonald with the mistaken claim that: "Ruskin had known George MacDonald, vaguely, since about 1863." (173) He uses both of Greville's texts as sources, as well as Derrick Leon's, and so it is odd that he overlooks the abounding evidence that the relationship between the two men had been anything but vague – he himself quotes from letters that belie this.

The most disturbing section about MacDonald is when Hilton describes the rendezvous set up by the MacDonalds and the Mount-Temples between Ruskin and Rose. On page 239 he begins by describing how the MacDonald home was "famous among its many visitors for the untidiness in which the two parents and eleven children lived." I know of no source that discusses this supposed "untidiness." Rather the letters, newspaper articles, and memoirs that describe the MacDonald home dwell repeatedly on the generosity, hospitality, and entertainment experienced by its guests. (Cf. the Beinecke and Kings archives) Hilton claims that due to the supposed unkempt and servant-less state of the house, "Rose was taken aback, but intrigued." (239) It was certainly an unusual home, as The Retreat was seldom without guests (ranging from the impoverished to the royal), and somewhat Bohemian (ceilings painted with stars, contemporary art from artist friends, and filled with many children delighting in dressing-up and performing theatre). Anecdotal stories exist of guests – including a Canon – joining in on the washing-up on Sundays, the day the servants had off. And the servants were so well trusted that the housekeeping finance box was available to them as they saw fit. ("Update to Fall" 35) These details show that the MacDonald home might have been unusual in its London setting, but not slovenly. They also contradict Hilton's claim that "There were no servants." (239) Rose was actually quite familiar with unkempt and servant-less homes such as Hilton describes, from her visitations to impoverished Irish families in her home neighbourhood – but that is not what she found at The Retreat. However what she did find *did* intrigue her: her letters (to which Hilton also had access) reference her love of the fun, the joy, and the beauty redolent in this passionately

Christian, yet very un-dour household. Hilton's descriptions of the home are a strange contrast to that given by one of his primary MacDonald sources, Derrick Leon, who, in *his* descriptions of The Retreat upon Rose's arrival, notes the "handsome Georgian façade," the "gracious lawn," the "statue of Artemis and her stag leaping from the shrubbery," and recalls walks in the garden, games with the smaller children, music from Greville's violin, and a large velvet chair in which Rose sat. (484) Hilton's claim that MacDonald's "rhythmical, slightly Scottish, kindly voice...had an especial talent for such indistinct reassurance," seems to insinuate that Rose was practically brainwashed – an insinuation for which it is hoped that this thesis itself is sufficient to render comment unnecessary. (521)

Hilton then claims that Ruskin did not know, until abruptly contacted by a letter announcing Rose's arrival in 1872, that MacDonald and Rose knew one another. (241) Yet again one of Hilton's named sources, Greville's *Reminiscences*, explains that Rose was intimate with the family from 1863. (103) At least as early as 1865 Ruskin was mentioning Rose in a familiar manner to MacDonald, indeed writing to him that Rose had told him: "you were the only person she thought, who could do me any good," (Kings 1/1/31) and in March of that year, as Hilton himself notes, Ruskin asked MacDonald to cease acquaintance with Rose's mother. Even more striking is the fact that Hilton himself writes that MacDonald first met Rose and her mother in 1862 or 1863 – remarking specifically that in February of 1863 Rose was attending MacDonald's lectures on Shakespeare. (69)

On page 241, Hilton says that MacDonald was unable to talk to Ruskin about the sexual issues involved in the relationship complications. Although it is true that Ruskin expresses frustration that the accusations which worry Rose are not detailed in the letters, MacDonald's writing makes clear that he saw no need to do so, for he does not believe them to be true. He and Ruskin had, indeed, talked bluntly about the topic long before – at a time when Ruskin could even laugh about it (again, described in *Reminiscences*). Hilton supplies the detail that Ruskin asked (or, "raged"): "Was there not the 'medical evidence' that he had given to William Cowper-Temple?" and yet Hilton fails to mention that his source – Leon – also details MacDonald's frustrated response:

First, I must repudiate with what would be contempt, but for the love I bear you, your requesting me to speak with Mr. C.T. for my own satisfaction. What satisfaction can I want? Even if you had not yourself satisfied me concerning what I wanted no satisfaction in, years ago, what right should I have to seek satisfaction? I want no satisfaction concerning you. Nor will I consult with him at all. I have nothing to consult about. (492)

It should also be remembered, as discussed in Chapter Seven, that MacDonald was far more comfortable with topics of a sexual nature than was Ruskin. Hilton is clearly unaware of this. This thesis has already referenced MacDonald's assertion to Ruskin that there is a need for people to be able to more freely "discuss the passions." (Kings 1/1/78) With that in mind, the following passage from Hilton again makes little sense:

'Speak plainly and *utterly*,' Ruskin once more demanded.³⁸⁰ MacDonald could not. He did not know himself what was in question. He had not attempted to tell the virginal Rose the first thing about sexual character, let alone sexual perversions [how could Hilton possibly know this?]: it was vagueness about such subjects that had kept Rose at the Retreat. (241)

Hilton's description indicates that his preconceptions about MacDonald are colouring his representation of the event.

Hilton continues to contradict himself in the text. Commenting on the cessation of the apparently happy rendezvous of Rose and Ruskin at The Retreat, and its unhappy ending, Hilton claims: "On such a note the language of flowers ceases. So too does the correspondence both

³⁸⁰ Hilton extracts these words from another letter written on 5 July 1872, found in Leon. (491)

between Ruskin and MacDonald and between Rose and MacDonald, as though neither had any further use for the man who had brought them together.” (246) Hilton fails to realize that the reason that letters were not written for the next few months was that the MacDonalds had almost immediately left for their several month Literary Lecture tour of America. Even so Ruskin manages to scribble off a letter just before they leave: to “My dear MacDonald,” asking if (typically) he could help with the expenses incurred through all the ‘rendezvous’ events and the hosting of Rose. (1/1/47) Hilton himself quotes from later letters exchanged between the men, well after this supposed commencement of “no further use” – and even one from Rose. (300) Rose actually wrote some long and moving letters to the MacDonalds after this period – they are kept in the Beinecke library, in folders containing other letters from which Hilton quotes. She constantly reiterates her love of the family and also the haven-nature of their home, longing after the safe and quiet days she had spent with the MacDonalds and calling herself their “twel[f]th child.” (Beinecke 1/2/15)

On December 6, 1873, when Rose and Ruskin are again reconciled, twenty-one year old Lily MacDonald writes a letter to her mother saying that she and Mary had visited Rose and were surprised to find Ruskin – they used one of Rose’s name for him: “The Professor” – playing chess with her. “Both looking blissful – gratitude joy & bashfulness nearly over whelmed us – & for the first 5 minutes we hung on to our reasons by a single thread & it was all I could do to prevent my self from rushing out of the room again. They were so sweet.” (Beinecke 1/2/12) The young women show themselves sensible to the moment and to the fragile nature of this couple’s peace – but Rose and Ruskin keep them there for a bit to chat, Ruskin keen for “news of Papa” and apologizing for not having been in touch, adding “He told me to say it wasn’t want of love that prevented his writing to Papa.” (Beinecke 1/2/12)

Later that same month, Rose writes a long and caring letter, asking that MacDonald send her some “good words” either for the New Year or for her birthday on the third day of January. (Kings 1/2/13) On page 499 Leon writes of her letter to Louisa in February 1874, written while she was at Broadlands (home of those mutual friends the Mount-Temples), and again in June, and then December. Leon then quotes from the letter from Ruskin to MacDonald on February 25, 1874: “Poor Rose is entirely broken – like her lover – and what good there may be for either must be – where Heaven is – but I don’t know that much of the Universe – and of Time.” (500) This letter is an important one, especially as it comments on Ruskin’s final visit with Rose before her death. Yet oddly Hilton, while citing Leon as his source and giving the correct page, yet gets both the date and the quotation wrong – and for some reason also drops the reference to “Time.” (302)

When MacDonald hears of Rose’s death he writes the moving letter quoted in full in the thesis text. Ruskin’s response to MacDonald is also recorded. Greville, in *Reminiscences*, says that after this exchange “all attempts at conversation were frustrated,” insinuating in concurrence with others that Ruskin’s cousin Joan – who by that point was taking care of many of Ruskin’s affairs – impedes engagement with this man who had sought to facilitate Ruskin’s relationship with Rose. (123) As previously explained, Joan notoriously destroyed any documents she found relating to Ruskin’s relationship with Rose – the only known letter to survive between the lovers is that published in *Præterita*. (21) Yet this very fact makes all the more important the correspondence between MacDonald and both Rose and Ruskin – one of the few people intimate with them both, and in whom they both confided.

Hilton also makes some blanket claims about Ruskin’s engagement with “Christian Socialism” which seem difficult to accept once one is more familiar with Ruskin’s relationship with A.J. Scott. Hilton writes that although employed at the Working Men’s College, “Christian Socialism

was so antipathetic to Ruskin's temperament that an intermediary was needed," and he names James Furnivall as that necessary "intermediary." (150) However Furnivall was himself an important leader in the Christian Socialist movement, alongside Scott, and thus to name him as an "intermediary" is somewhat misleading. And it should not be overlooked that it was Octavia Hill's enthusiasm for the Christian Socialist teaching of Maurice that first brought her into contact with Ruskin at the Working Men's College.³⁸¹ Hilton particularly emphasizes dissent between Maurice and Ruskin, writing that Ruskin:

was distant from [the College's] principal, F.D. Maurice, and from other founders like Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. He had nothing to do with their Christian Socialism. [...] Ruskin might therefore have brought contention into the new foundation. But this did not happen, especially since nobody of Maurice's or Kingsley's type was likely to think that art lessons were important. (203-4)

Yet this suggestion that Maurice had no time for art, and little for Ruskin, does not ring accurate with several known facts. Not the least of which is the incident discussed in Chapter Four, in which Maurice makes the time and effort to read *Modern Painters III* to the invalided MacDonald in Devon, in 1865. Also, in *the Winnington Letters* Van Aiken Burd points out Ruskin's own public statement in *Praetoria* "that despite his differences with F.D. Maurice he had in fact loved him." (69) She also records Maurice's concern for Ruskin's emotional struggles when he comments to a friend in 1862: "I am much touched with what you say of Ruskin. Anything which makes him doubt his own infallibility will, I am sure, do him good. He is earnest, I am convinced, and will come quite right." (376) Despite their differences, Ruskin and Maurice had much in common – not the least their deep respect and love for Scott and MacDonald. According to words written by the men themselves, they also cared for each other. Such details are worth attending. It is unfortunate that Hilton's readers will, in these particulars, be misinformed.

E) Further Isaiah correlations in *Curdie*

The instances of evident use of the book of *Isaiah* in *Curdie* are overwhelming in number. Here is an introduction to some. I have elsewhere collated a long-list of direct paralleling between Maurice's *Isaiah* sermons and *Curdie*, presented at the Baylor Conference, 2005.

During Curdie's journey to Gwyntystorm when he faces trial and assault in the "desolate heath," faithful Lina saves him and then leads him to much needed water.³⁸² (59) It is hidden under a rock, thus recalling: "they thirsted not when led through the deserts; he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them." (*Is.* 21:1) When Curdie arrives at Gwyntystorm, the city is just as described in *Is.* 24:10-13: "every house is shut up, that no man may come in. There is crying for wine...all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction." When he attempts to remove a rock that has caused someone to "stumble" and "fall," great offence is taken: "but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." (8:14) Curdie ends up in prison because, as in *Isaiah*, the leaders and courtiers have become corrupt: "the leaders of this people cause them to err." (9:16) Both *Isaiah* and *Curdie* are books with strong themes of apostasy and social injustice, of a leadership that scoffs at the prophet's warning, choosing their own rebellious counsel while pretending to follow their King. Each book reveals but a few faithful. "The faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of judgment, but now murderers. Thy Princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves – they care not for widows or

³⁸¹Eager to join Maurice's work, she was employed there as a secretary. (Whelan 3)

³⁸²This incident on the heath, coloured with Celtic legends of the dangers from fairies when resting under a hawthorn tree, is a tribute to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, in which Prometheus is tempted to despair by a chorus of aerial Furies (a line is quoted from the poem). Shelley introduces his work with a piece entitled: "The role of poetry in reforming society," that discusses intertextuality. The poem also shows Shelley's love of the inextricability of Science and Art.

orphans.” (1:22-23) But, “I will restore thy judges...and thy counsellors.” (1:26) The word “harlot” may seem harsh for Gwyntystorm, but truly she has sold herself to the enemy country, Borsagrass. The courtiers plan murder and perform thievery. The leaders, and so the people, do not welcome ‘strangers’ (and as such is Curdie warned and labelled numerous times), nor do they care for the widows and orphans, as represented by old Derba and her grandchild Barbara (whose name also means ‘stranger’). “Woe to them that turn out the needy...take away right from the poor...that widows may be their prey...that rob the fatherless.” (10:2) Lack of care for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers is reiterated repeatedly in *Isaiah*, indicative as in *Curdie* of the dire state of the nation. Hounded out of his refuge with Derba and Barbara, Curdie gets thrown into light-less prison, his hands bound behind him. (61:1)

Lina, whose own name is a diminutive from the Greek for ‘light,’ has eyes that emanate sight-giving light. Protecting Curdie in the corrupt city, she “tears a carcass in the midst of the street” (*Is.* 5:25; *Curdie* 101) and “roars like a lion.” (*Is.* 5:29; *Curdie* 104; 110) She is revealed through her hand to have become in nature a little child – though her form still reveals the beast into which her former vanity had transformed her. Lina thus invokes the familiar Isaianic line: “And a little child shall lead them,” as she leads not only Curdie but her forty-nine fellow “Uglies” – other beasts who have suffered similar ‘devolutionary metamorphosis.’³⁸³ (11:6) This also makes Curdie the “captain of fifty,” as described in *Isaiah* 3:3. These creatures that, “he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them [...] all these gather themselves together and come to [him]” (*Is.* 49:10,18; *Curdie* chs. 12, 25) are surely the “outcasts of Israel” which are “gathered to him. All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all the beasts in the forest.” (56:8, 9) For devour is what these “avengers of wickedness” (as MacDonald calls them) do, with their “purgation of the palace” – where “everything was filth and disorder,” food going to waste and making the place a maggoty sty (173; 126; 183); the servants are in a drunken state -- “But they have also erred through wine...they are swallowed up of wine...they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all the tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so there is no place clean.” (*Is.* 28:7, 8) The pompous servants who denigrated Curdie and the maid have “thy pomp brought down to the grave...the worm spread under thee, and the worms cover thee” (14:11), for they are “smeared with rancid dripping” and their faces are “rubbed in maggots.” (181) Roles are reversed as the once imprisoned now “take them captives, whose captives they were” (14:1); “woe to those that spoilest...thou shalt spoil.” (33:1) “And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar,” writes Isaiah – and sure enough a “three foot centipede kept screwing up their bodies, nipping” as he herds the evil servants. (*Is.* 33:4; *Curdie* 181) The worst is reserved for the treacherous courtiers who “wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself” – MacDonald shows them doing these precise things, as they falsely flatter the king, lead his messages astray, and poison him. (*Is.* 57:9) In consequence the lord chamberlain, imprisoned by the “leg-serpent,” is given a ‘hooked nose-bite’ and his mouth is silenced – just as the text of *Is.* 37:29, complete with hook and nose, explains – and the master of the horse is sent “back by the way he camest.” (*Is.* 37:29; *Curdie* 184, 5) The Uglies “clear the house of the vermin” – the courtiers. (187)

When Curdie finds the king, he is close to death. Broken hearted about his people – “the main cause of his illness was the despondency with which the degeneration of his people affected him” – having given up hope, he is now being poisoned and starved. (140) He is wracked with nightmares: “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint” (*Is.* 1:5); “It shall be even as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth...” (*Is.* 29:8) But Curdie has been sent to “bind up the broken

³⁸³ The toddler Barbara also, upon meeting Curdie and Lina, takes Curdie by the hand and leads him to the house.

hearted” (*Is.* 6:1) – an important part of which is telling the King his story. Thus the king begins to understand his own story, and the role of the Great-great-grandmother in it, with a revelational clarity: “Awake, awake; put on thy strength O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments...shake thyself from the dust.” (*Is.* 52:1-2) The king’s purging, refining through red and white rose-fire, will prepare him for battle and life: “though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be as crimson, they shall be as wool...I will purely purge away thy dross” (*Is.* 1:18; 25); “and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day.” (*Is.* 10:16, *Curdie* 201-2) Like *Curdie*, like *Lina*, the king has been “chosen in the furnace of affliction.” (*Is.* 48:10) *Curdie* and the King, “through the fire [are not] burned; neither [does] flame kindle on” them. (*Is.* 43:2) “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?” asks the prophet, “who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” *Curdie*, the King, and *Lina* shall: “he that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from the holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from the hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munition of rocks: bread shall be given him...Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty.” (*Is.* 14:14-17) The king and the castle have been “purged...by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.” (*Is.* 4:4) They are now prepared for battle.

“There were thousands to one against them, and the King and his three companions were in the greatest possible danger. A dense cloud came over the sun, and sank rapidly toward the earth.” (210) The odds are impossible, and yet that cloud is a wind of change ruled by the grandmother/maid, which causes the enemy to flee. The four companions on the field plus the one above on the hill will be the victors, and *Is.* 30:17 tells the exact same story, as described in Chapter Five of this thesis. The army of “Borsagrass” – a purse of grass – becomes truly like the grass that withers and fades (*Is.* 32:27, 51:21, etc). When the victors return to Gwyntystorm, they bind the remaining evildoers, those who have hands of hoofs and claws, to the backs of some Ugliers of the forest, and banished them forever. “Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high [...] Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness [...] And the work of righteousness shall be peace [...] And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation [...] Blessed [are] ye that [...] send forth the feet of the ox and the ass.” (*Is.* 32:15-19)

It is not until *Curdie* is attended at the victory banquet by the maid that he realizes that she is also the Great-great-grandmother. In an Emmaus-like moment he starts up with tears and hears, “Did I not tell you, *Curdie*, that it might be you would not know me next time you saw me?” (216); “I call you by your name, your surname, though you do not know me.”³⁸⁴ (*Is.* 45:4-6) At that moment she leaves the room, and returns “in royal purple, with a crown of diamonds and rubies [...] ruby-slippered feet. Her face was radiant with joy, the joy overshadowed by a faint mist as of unfulfillment” (216); “My soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels.” (*Is.* 61:10). As such, the Queen of Peace who sat weeping over the fire as a lowly maid, over *Curdie* as a beauteous spinning minstrel, over the king as the old yet Titanic princess, serves them all. “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed.” (*Is.* 54:10)

And the story ends as does what Maurice calls the central chapter of *Isaiah*: “how long? until cities be laid waste without inhabitant, And the houses without man, And the land utterly desolate, And the Lord have removed men far away, And there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But in it yet [...] shall be, and shall return [...] so the holy seed shall be the substance

³⁸⁴ Also, “Have I been with you all this time and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father?” (John 14:9)

thereof.” (Is. 6:13) The elements of *Curdie* are hardly more fantastical than those of *Isaiah*. When one realizes that the story of Isaiah, while arguably the dominant framework, is still only one of the many stories shaping *The Princess & Curdie* – for there are other Biblical tales here, many ancient pagan myths tapped into, nods to Scottish mythlore, Dante, Coleridge, Shakespeare, Shelley, and yet much more – one cannot but be astounded at the multiplicity of levels and meanings that this (in true MacDonald form) seemingly simple tale interweaves and re-presents.

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