'That Night' – Vane's struggle for Christian Identity in George MacDonald's *Lilith*

by

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Abstract

This study aims towards a contextualising, and reading, of MacDonald's last work of his life, the fantasy *Lilith*, in order to justify the argument that his work *in general* generously repays detailed study, in that it self-consciously addresses and reinterprets post-enlightenment and post-romantic theology in ways which anticipate future developments, both in theological and literary studies, and especially where the two overlap. In addition, the thesis also tends occasionally to point to how such close study may help in the future to clarify the importance of MacDonald's place within the Scottish literary tradition, and may also help to interpret that tradition, in the light of wider philosophical and literary studies. However, such clarification is left to a future study, and the main direction of the argument is concerned to address his writing both in its historic context and in terms of the question of identity raised in Romanticism and later, in twentieth and twenty-first century hermeneutics and theology.

Lilith presents us with a man searching in history (specifically in Vane's father's library); in his imagination; and in his action, for a source of meaning. The search however leads him to a reality which breaks in upon him, as it were, taking him by surprise on a journey which seems to take place in another world – one which utterly confounds the laws of reality as he has previously known them. In the process history, identity, notions of time, reality, being, morality and the place of knowledge in understanding are all rigorously questioned and interrelated. In Vane's encounter with the central character, Lilith (known in ancient mythology as Satan's wife), we perhaps have a further development of the way in which psychology and difficult theological questions are related to one another in the encounter between Wringhim and Gilmartin, in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The novel, like that of Hogg, leaves the reader with no clear conclusion as to its own concept(s) of reality. However, with intertextual references to the development of certain themes in MacDonald's other works, we can interpret where this strangely dark, last work of his life, may be reflecting the development of his thinking about the way in which the 'Christ-self' relates to the idea of identity, and goes on to inform one's concept of reality.

The person of Lilith is ambiguous, in that she may be interpreted either as the Church, or as everything which seems to stand against the Church. In her long mythical history she

has been seen as Satan's wife – a figure to be feared and shunned; in other forms she appears as the Black Madonna. In the novel she also functions as that within the protagonist's or narrator's character which teaches him about his true relationship to death; she is also a personification of the painful and confusing emergence of Christian identity. MacDonald uses all of this ambiguity to illustrate the *nature* of the identity of the church, a theme he addresses frequently in his writings; the nature, especially, of its identity in relation to death. The outcome of his concern, however, is that he finds himself exploring not only the nature of Christian identity but, ultimately, the nature of identity itself.

In much the same way that narratives or works of art tend to escape formal identification with any theory which the critic may introduce, MacDonald's experience of Christianity is that it functions not as a fixed viewpoint, but rather as a continually reinterpreted narrative, discovering, in its course, the identity of the interpreter. Such an experience, for MacDonald, raises in his theology and fiction many of the questions which will be later asked of texts: How is it that things; people; texts seem to have an identity so unique as to render them non-communicable, and yet demand to be interpreted, connected, formed and given meaning and identity in the context of communities? And *what is* the true nature of the relationship (or conflict) between a community and an individual?[1]

In the first section, the study considers briefly the cultural context of MacDonald's work – Romanticism – in terms of his approach to the text of the Bible. This is because the question of the groundedness of identity becomes particularly pertinent in Romanticism, especially in relation to the question of authority; such authority having been previously attributed to the written text of the Bible, frequently without a conscious attempt to explore why that should be. We then move to consider his treatment of nihilism, as it is encountered in that context, and read by *Lilith.* The section ends with a consideration of MacDonald's thinking about ethics in relation to nihilism. His move is - surprisingly - to *delimit* the didacticism which emerged in the Victorian church's response to nihilism, and to address the outcome as it occurs[2]. He neither directly attacks the nihilist stance, nor

[1] He says (*A Dish of Orts*, p7) "...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?"
[2]Disparagers of MacDonald frequently take his didacticism as being typically Victorian. My proposal is that he takes such a tendency in his time and experiments with it to its logical - rather than acceptable - conclusion, in order to expose the nature of moral choices

does he seek to embrace it into an Hegelian whole, and so simply submerge the question. This section includes a consideration of Gavin Hyman's essay 'John Milbank and Nihilism: A metaphysical (mis)reading?'[3], and how a 'fictional' approach to nihilism – such as that undertaken by MacDonald – may be achieved in a Christian context, without the background of an implied metaphysics, especially since MacDonald seems concerned to avoid such a background in his symbolic theology.

The second section considers the nature of MacDonald's symbolism, considering his use of scientific controversy – specifically Goethe's colour theory – as the means by which he explores difficult questions in theology. We then look at Lilith herself, relating the ancient myths to MacDonald's own symbolic theology, going on to see how MacDonald considers that female character in terms of his own experience of the patriarchal church, and considering precisely her significance in his exploration of the nature of Christian identity.

The third section uses the themes previously explored in order to suggest some links between MacDonald's writing and that of theologians, philosophers and writers on hermeneutics. Specifically, the study considers *The Nature of the Atonement* by the Scottish theologian and contemporary of MacDonald, McLeod Campbell, also relating *Lilith* in this context to the work of the German theologian, Bonhoeffer. Then moves on to a much more recent essay by the modern theologian Graham Ward, 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ'. Thirdly, we consider how MacDonald's thinking upon the nature of identity and being in relation to his symbolic understanding addresses the eschatological 'sense' of reality, found in Jurgen Moltmann's, book *The Theology of Hope*. The last part of the section considers the relationship between MacDonald's thoughts and some of those found in Caputo's *More Radical hermeneutics,* on the 'end' of ethics, and then Derrida's thoughts on the gift, the nature of responsibility, historicity and identity in his work *The Gift of Death.* This section concludes the study by considering the implications of MacDonald's approach to Christian identity for the individual, whether religious or not, bearing in mind the continuing desire for a fuller sense of meaning in the concepts of identity and community in the twenty-first century.

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themselves. For him, their importance does not lie in issues of social control, but rather in that they connect to the question of the nature of identity.

[3] *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 14, No 4, December 2000

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Brief Introduction to George MacDonald

George MacDonald was born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire in 1824. His mother died when he was eight, and he spent his childhood on the farm which was leased to the MacDonald family by the Duke of Gordon. The religion of the family was that of the Missionar Kirk, a fiercely evangelical movement of the kind which led to the disruption of 1843, and the formation of the Free Church. MacDonald left Huntly to attend the university at King's College in Aberdeen in 1840. There he took a four year MA course, which included Mathematics, Physics, Logic and Moral Philosophy. He was, in addition, taught a year of Chemistry by William Gregory, "a chemist of real stature"[4]. Such was his interest in the subject that his ambition to go to Germany to study under the famous Chemist, Liebig, almost overtook his desire to enter the ministry. He trained for the Congregational ministry but never settled down to preaching in any one church or denomination. Rather, he established contacts during his time in England; friends, and like minds here and there who secured for him preaching or lecturing engagements, enabling him to bring in some income for his large family, while yet remaining true to his own convictions about the nature of religious truth. Such friends included people like A J Scott, the principal of Owen's college, Manchester; the writer Margaret Oliphant; and Lady Byron.

However, MacDonald never entered a time of financial rest, relying mainly upon the goodwill of others and on bits of income from work whenever possible. He and his family spent a life characterised by financial insecurity, instability and movement (as well as his own bouts of serious illness) up until nearly the very end, when he spent his final years in Italy. His writing *was* his life in the sense of a 'calling'; he wrote not only for a living, but as it seemed to him the best way to communicate truth, in the sense that he saw deeply the connection between beauty and truth. His work includes fiction, poetry, essays and sermons, although he was known mainly in his time as a novelist. He has recently been recently recognised as one of the greatest writers of fairy tales in the English language[5]. In all of his works, critics have noted the same sense of mystery; of a vision too large to encompass which saturates his writing, whether one considers his fantasy works

[4] See Robb, (*George MacDonald*, p10). Also *George MacDonald and His Wife* for more detailed information on his life.
[5] Times Literary Supplement, quoted in newest edition of *Lilith* (see bibliography): "...the man who did one sort of work better than anyone else has ever done it....the writing of what are commonly called his fairy tales..."

(*Phantastes* or *Lilith*), or his many 'realistic' novels of fiction, or his poems or essays or sermons. G K Chesterton puts it very well, in his introduction to the biography by Greville MacDonald[6]:

> ...this is the very important difference between his sort of mystery and mere allegory. The commonplace allegory takes what it regards as the commonplaces or conventions necessary to ordinary men and women, and tries to make them pleasant or picturesque by dressing them up as princesses or goblins or good fairies. But George MacDonald did really believe that people were princesses and goblins and good fairies, and he dressed them up as ordinary men and women. The fairy-tale was the inside of the ordinary story and not the outside...it will be found, I fancy that he stands for a rather important turning-point in the history of Christendom...

He retained a singularity of focus, which, the broader his range of writing became, grew to become all the more intense[7]. William Geddes wrote this about him towards the end of his life, in *Blackwood's Magazine* (March 1891):

> ...to be one of those whose heart has kept pure the holy forms of young imagination, is the prerogative of genius: and to none has this...been given in our age more largely than to George MacDonald...

If the fairy-tale is the "inside", as Chesterton puts it, then it would seem to be that MacDonald's principal works of fantasy – *Lilith* and *Phantastes* – are seeking after a way of communicating this inside sense in ways which transform outer notions of existence and of materiality, wherever they are in danger of being taken 'as read'; as 'things in themselves'. He is taking as far as he can the mysteriously 'inner' notions of beauty and truth which impart meaning to the 'outer' realities and is seeking to expose the process to others, often by paradoxically disguising it. He notes, in his essay on the imagination that (*A Dish of Orts*, p9):

> ...the world is...the human being turned inside out...all that moves in the mind is symbolized in Nature.

He bases his method upon the way in which wisdom is perceived in the Bible in this essay, quoting *Ecclesiastes* (p42):

> ...also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end....

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[6] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p11, p13

[7] Consider his letter to a friend, near the end of his life (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p528): "...there is a live heart at the centre....all my life, I might nearly say, I have been trying to find that one Being, and to know him consciously present...hope grows and grows with the years..."

Lilith, the work upon which this study will focus, seems to have had a special significance for MacDonald in terms of the relationship between his writing and his working out of his Christian faith. His son writes in his biography that[8]:

> He was possessed by a feeling...that it was a mandate direct from God, for which he himself was to find form and clothing....Its first writing is unlike anything else he ever did...it runs from page to page, with few breaks...five years intervened between the initial writing and the final book; but in both the same note of present sadness echoes throughout – a note, however, in no way out of harmony with the far-calling chimes of an unfathomable faith.

[8] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p548

When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another... .So this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door...

John Donne, *Devotions*

I started to my feet, hurried across the room to the masked door, where the mutilated volume...appeared to beckon me...went down on my knees and opened it as far as its position would permit, but could see nothing....I could not carry discovery and was unable, in what I could read, to make any guess at the sense.....the door opened, the hand let mine go, and pushed me gently through. I turned quickly, and saw the board of a large book in the act of closing behind me. I stood alone in my library.

George MacDonald, *Lilith*

Introduction

The aim of the study, as stated, is to attempt an intertextual reading of George MacDonald's religious thought, as it is expressed in his fiction, and most particularly in chapter 39 of his last work of fiction, *Lilith*, entitled 'That Night'. In this chapter Lilith passes through various stages and definitions of death, whilst staying in the house of suffering, where she is required to let go of Nothing, which she holds in her right hand; an action of which she is incapable. What is required is to help her to gain a true death – which in *Lilith* is referred to as "sleeping" – a word which to MacDonald is no euphemism, but which denotes the gift of death, and of true life[9]. That is, the discovery – and with it the restfulness - of the givenness of one's own identity.[10] To work our way towards a reading of this chapter involves not only linking MacDonald's thought to that of other writers in various disciplines – but also reflecting upon the personal journey undergone by MacDonald, as it is encountered in his writings. All of his work represents an attempt to interpret religious tradition in the light of his inner experience[11], and *Lilith* may be seen as both the culmination and the encapsulation of that search for identity. A clue as to how it is that *Lilith* requires such a many-sided approach in the search for a reading may be discerned in the movement of his thought in general, such movement being illustrated by this extract from his essay 'Browning's "Christmas Eve "'(*A Dish of Orts*, p213):

> The love of God is the soul of Christianity. Christ is the body of that truth. The love of God is the creating and redeeming, the forming and satisfying power of the universe.

The interesting thing about this statement is its movement. That is, MacDonald's writing, like his thinking, seems to begin with a personal perception (the love of God); to move out towards its incarnation ("Christ is the body of that truth") and then returns, not to its own self-affirmation, but towards a transforming of the universal ("....the universe"). He seems initially to be projecting his own sense of identity from an inner experience of

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[9] *Lilith,* p31: "Sleep is too fine a thing ever to be earned," said the sexton, "it must be given and accepted, for it is a necessity."

[10] The way in which MacDonald emphasises the restfulness of this givenness in terms of death may be addressed by contrast to the anxiety concerning the very nature of life - of existence - which is emphasised in twentieth century existentialist writings.

[11] Which is why "As matter of fact, George MacDonald had expressed a hope that his Life would not be written: his message was all in his books, and no biography could add to it." (p2, *George MacDonald and His Wife*)

wholeness onto that which he describes[12]. Yet the process by which he does this cannot be described as projection – somewhere along the line there is a calling into question of his own 'groundedness', for his writing is more frequently than not radically questioning in its projection; it does not simply *use* the preconception of God's love to establish *itself*, rather MacDonald changes and grows as a result of the symbolic form of understanding to which his work attains; he is alongside the reader, often, rather than looking down upon the reader. Such love as he describes cannot be easily treated by the critic as purely theoretical or psychological. MacDonald holds with neither a Platonic ideal, nor a pragmatic religion.

Like the above-quoted statement, the movement of his fiction, from *Phantastes* to *Lilith*, if one is looking for a movement, is that the apocalyptic nature of the formation of Christian identity begins to gain prominence over a preconceived quest to master the apocalyptic vision itself.[13] While *Phantastes* emphasises the experience of the quest itself, and more clearly designates the waking and dreaming world (at the beginning and end of the novel), *Lilith* will tend to emphasise the ambiguity of existence, the confusion as to personal identity and its implications for the perception of reality, the *mystery* of the quest, its incommunicable aspect, and the notion of a *secret*[14]. Vane's name itself is an allusion to the book of *Ecclesiastes* in the Bible (amongst other things) and suggests a final concentration upon the very notion of what it is to learn (one's own identity), and of what history *is*, both in terms of one's own historicity, through a sense of a place in time gained through book learning, and through the exercise of the imagination in its relation to God[15].

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[12] David Robb (*George MacDonald*, p40), notes his tendency to project his personality *into* the novel, in such a way that he does not give the impression of his own omniscience, but nevertheless functions as a positive interpreting presence, while yet still causing writer, reader and character to seem to be inhabiting the same, constantly unfolding, puzzling world, together.

[13] Again, this corresponds with what is noted by Robb *(George MacDonald,* p32) "In many of the later novels, the triumph of the Christ-principle is not so much a matter of growth internal...but...the eventual establishment in a position of social authority." That is, he tends more and more in his later writing towards outward forms of *incarnation* of the truth, rather than the personal accumulation of knowledge *about* the truth. Yet in *Lilith* the nearer he comes to insisting upon such incarnation in reality, the more reality and identity as 'taken' rather than 'given' is called into question. The apocalyptic mode is not a representative one, but consumes the narrative itself.

[14] Although these issues *are* found in *Phantastes*, they are not so very insistent, so intense and nowhere near becoming the central issue, as they are in *Lilith*.

[15] *Ecclesiastes* bears the main theme of Vanity, beginning: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity (says the preacher). What profit has a man from all his labour in which he toils under the sun. One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down...man cannot express it..." (Ch1. vv2-5) . This

It is to *Ecclesiastes* that MacDonald refers as well, in his essay on the imagination (*A Dish of Orts*, p40)

> ..as setting forth both the necessity we are under to imagine, and the comfort that our imagining cannot outstrip God's making.

The manner in which this relationship unfolds in MacDonald's mind to shape one's identity remains ultimately a mystery, although *Lilith* is the work which allows us finally an insight into the uncomfortable and often confusing way in which MacDonald comes to experience such imaginative 'harmony'. The fact that there *is* a progression made in his writing along these lines is our main concern for the time being, when many critics note the similarities between *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, but have preferred not to consider the huge amount of time between them, and any theological reasons for their differences[16].

This very nature of the secret, of the mysterious aspect of the uncovering of one's identity, is something which occurs elsewhere, frequently, in his writing. In *Lilith* (p39), the Raven states that "There are no such things as wilful secrets." And in *The Flight of the Shadow* (p1), Mrs Day states:

> I would that not God only but all good men and women might see me through and through...but my very nature would shudder at the thought of letting one person that loved a secret see into it. Such a one never sees things as they are – would not indeed see what was there, but something shaped and coloured after his own likeness. No-one who loves and chooses a secret can be of the pure in heart that shall see God.

We should note from this that MacDonald does not use the issue of mystery in religion in order to avoid difficult questions. The love of secrecy as being a form of the mastery of the unknown is seen as evil here; something which distorts vision. He had a painful

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puts us in mind of the way in which Vane struggles to find language to describe what he is experiencing at the beginning of *Lilith*. Interestingly, it also puts us in mind of the great Scottish work, *Sunset Song*, with its notion of the land abiding forever, while man's history fluctuates. The end of *Ecclesiastes* represents a highly ambivalent approach to learning, and to the historicity of man, for "the words of the wise...and of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd" - and yet - "of making of many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh." (Ch.12 vv11-12). Raised here are two notions of history. Firstly, that of books and language, and, secondly, that of a more permanent wisdom which both informs and evades the mind of the scholar. Perhaps it is seen in MacDonald's notion of language and history as they are represented symbolically to the imagination - inscribed into the very landscape of the world by God, who inscribes, in turn, that world into "men's hearts", as he says in his essay on imagination.

[16] Eg Muirhead, in 'Meta-Phantastes: A self-referential faerie romance for men and women', speaks of MacDonald's old age at the time of writing *Lilith*, (*Scottish Literary Journal*, vol 19, no 2, Nov. 1992, p47). Or Wolff notes that *Lilith* seems more clearly Christian in outlook, having been possibly freer of the German influence, but does not go into any more detail. ('David Lindsay and George MacDonald', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, p139)

awareness (evident in his novels) of the way in which Federal Calvinism had sought to master and so had distorted the mystery of religious experience (particularly with regard to its view of atonement) in an attempt to cope with, and to dominate the rationality of the age. In seeking such mastery of the secret through metaphysics, *Lilith* indicates that the church enters the realm of the demonic, because its primary interest is sidetracked by a struggle for power. Rather, what is truly mysterious, while it is precisely what must be struggled with to the limits of one's intellect and imagination, must submit neither to despair, nor to an inflated sense of its own understanding, if it is not to submit to the realm of the demonic.

This is what makes MacDonald such a very interesting writer; he believes thoroughly in exercising his mind in search of truths; yet he does not ultimately believe in the autonomy of the human mind. He believes thoroughly in imagining all he is capable of imagining, yet does not use that faculty to retreat from logical difficulties. Therefore he does not tend to make of his art a substitute religion (as did a good few romantic artists), for neither does he believe in the autonomy of the human imagination. His striving for purity of thought shies away from all notions of secrecy, while he is yet ultimately forced to witness a vision of human experience (precisely because of his thoroughness) which has at its heart a great and painful mystery[17]. The acknowledgment of this mystery – allowing its coherence or harmony to emerge in one's life or in one's fiction – cannot in actual fact be attained; neither is it a matter of assent, but rather seems to be *given* at the *end* of one's struggle. For, while the final sentence of *Phantastes* seems to assert the necessary optimism for that struggle,

> Good is always coming...what we call evil, is the only and best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good. And so, Farewell.

Lilith is a witness to the strenuousness; groundlessness (and yet mysterious coherence) of *true* faith (as opposed to *theoretical* faith, which is merely an easily communicated optimism) in the light of what seems to be a vain (Vane) personal struggle[18]. Yet *Lilith* is

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[17] Like Novalis, whom he quotes at the beginning of *Phantastes*, he believed that "...everything must be wonderful, secret *and* coherent..." (my italics)

[18] in 'Browning's "Christmas Eve"', p215, he notes "...to the one who sympathises not with the thought of the Maker...who understands not the design of the Artist...when the confusion to him is caused by the order's being greater than he can comprehend...because he stands

also bound to become (by its very textuality) a witness to the necessity to communicate that which seems incommunicable. The necessity for death is unavoidable. It therefore deals head on with a paradox. *Lilith*'s intensity, its darkness, and the final and utter confusion of the protagonist, are both brought on by, and yet *can also be interpreted by*, its insistence upon the historic and textual communication of faith[19].

MacDonald's assertion that no-one who is pure in heart can actively *choose* a secret relates to the idea that a mystery is a paradoxical gift; given almost against the will to one who has striven to expose the secret (such as the artist or scholar, who strives to *discover or uncover*). The notion that what is secret cannot be kept secret, but becomes that which one strives to expose, is hard to comprehend in our age, when experience and identity tend to be measured in terms of the idea that they are cumulatively *acquired* in the individual's search for identity. In this economy, the secret becomes an exchangeable commodity, so that identity is defined by a philosophical materialism, rather than as an understanding which reinterprets 'taken for granted' notions of materiality. MacDonald, in particular, fought materialist philosophies, and so his notions of individual striving must be carefully distinguished from our own understanding of what constitutes individualism. We can see from his son's biography that MacDonald's personal life reflected a great struggle with a materialistic culture which tended to consume notions of identity[20], while replacing them with the individualistic notion of getting on:

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outside and not within, he sees an entangled maze of forces where there is in truth an intertwining dance of harmony....there is...no solution of the world's mystery, except he be able to say 'I have looked to Thee...'". In *Lilith*, the achievement of such sympathy, however, is the incompleted work of a lifetime.

[19] Since MacDonald was true to his assertion that man must take moral laws into the imaginary world, he could not, by definition, construct an escape from, or provide fictional solutions to, evil, despite the fact that – as a highly imaginative artist – he would, above all people, have been tempted and able to do so. He is bound (in order to be true) to throw the question out to the reader; and to ultimately leave the reader alone and aware of their own insufficiency of imagination or thought on this subject. All the writing in the world is ultimately no help at all to the reader, any more than it is to Vane himself, the author of *Ecclesiastes* (or *Lilith*), who sets out to discover from history the good, only to find so much evil as to overwhelm him. The gift of seeing the good, is therefore ultimately shown to be indeed a *gift*; not to be taken for granted, or seized upon for the purpose of inhabiting any world which the artist may choose to construct. *Lilith* makes it clear that this seeing of the good cannot be taken for granted.

[20] The logic of his approach to the material world is theologically informed, yet he allows his theology to expand imaginatively to *reinterpret* reality. Later in the study, this will bring us to consider how closely he may be allied to a modern theologian, Graham Ward, who – on this question of the interpretation of reality, of physicality - notes of Christ that "The paternity of God is formal, rather than material. But this formality informs substance, such that our notions of 'materiality' itself become unstable...The material orders are inseparable from the

...my father's work had to be apprised rather by some law of spiritual economics than condemned on the score of his not getting on...on market value...a few, like Lady Byron, understood that[21].

We will also consider whether MacDonald's cultural heritage – his childhood in the eastern highlands – may have played a part in his conception of the way in which identity is formed and given. For in this culture, identity tends to be relational, as opposed to individualistic, and yet, paradoxically, is thought to create the more radically original characters. This may have played a part both in MacDonald's interpretation of Romanticism and in his ecclesiology[22]. His ecclesiology, because the relationship between the individual and the community is most clearly seen in his view of the nature of the church's identity. Here, some relevant extracts on the nature of the church from *Robert Falconer* (pp361-415) are placed together, in order to illustrate the model we will be thinking of when we later come to his criticisms and vision of the church in *Lilith:*

"...are you a society, then?" I asked at length
"No. At least we don't use the word. And certainly no other society would acknowledge us."
"What are you, then?"
"Why should we be anything, so long as we do our work?"
"Don't you think there is some affectation in refusing a name?"
"Yes, if the name belongs to you. Not otherwise."
"Do you lay claim to no epithet of any sort?"
"We are a church, if you like. There!"
"Who is your clergyman?"
"Nobody"
"Where do you meet?"
"Nowhere"
"What are your rules, then?"
"We have none."
"What makes you a church?"
"Divine Service"
"What do you mean by that?"
"The sort of think you have seen to-night"
"What is your creed?"

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symbolic and transcendent orders, the orders of mystery...the logic here is theological..." ('The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ', *Radical Orthodoxy,* pp164-165).

[21] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p272.

[22] His son also writes (*George MacDonald and his Wife*, p77), that he was "in habit of mind, and in swift brilliance of fancy, radically a Gael". In addition, since Robb notes (*George MacDonald*, p34), that Scotland was seen by the Victorians as "the domain of untold eccentricities. Colourful behaviour could be located there without straining the reader's sense of credibility...", so, too, in the fantastic world of *Lilith*, moving further along the same lines, he is freer to deal with questions of identity in new ways begun in his Scottish novels, not constrained by social expectations which might cloud this complex issue of identity.

"Christ Jesus"
"But what do you believe about him?"
"What we can. We count any belief *in* Him – the smallest – better than any belief *about him* – the greatest – but we exclude no one...we are an undefined company of people, who have grown into human relations with each other naturally, through one attractive force – love for human beings, regarding them as human beings only in virtue of the divine...it is our work that binds us together..."
"Then when that stops you drop to pieces"
"yes, thank God. We shall then die...we are not the life of the world. God is. And when we fail, he can and will send out more and better labourers into his harvest-field. It is a divine accident by which we are thus associated."
"But surely the church must be otherwise constituted."
"My dear sir, you forget: I said we were *a* church, not *the* church."
"Do you belong to the Church of England?"
"Yes, some of us. Why should we not? In as much as she has faithfully preserved the holy records and traditions, our obligations to her are infinite. And to leave her would be to quarrel...I have no time for that."
"Then you count the Church of England the Church?"
"Of England, yes; of the universe, no; that is constituted just like ours, with the living working Lord for the heart of it."
"Will you take me for a member?"
"No"
"Will you not, if –"
"You may make yourself one if you will...do something...

...(415) ...if God must help ere a man can be saved, can the help of man go too far towards the same end? Let God solve the mystery....he will do his part, which is no part but the all in all...if man could do what in his wildest self-worship he can imagine, the grand result would be that he would be his own God which is the Hell of Hells."

We should note that MacDonald is here advocating both action, and yet the futility of action without the life of God. Further, he is hinting at what he will enlarge upon in *Lilith* – self-creation in relation to the imagination, as a means of identity – "which is the Hell of Hells." This community is bound together mysteriously, while at the same time, this member does his best to uncover that mystery, rather than hiding behind it. Further, MacDonald's belief is that all true communities find their identities in this mysterious way. There is an element to the struggle for identity which overcomes constructed boundaries, not just between different notions of church, but between traditional notions of the difference between the religious and the secular. For MacDonald, there was no such divide. *How* divisions are broken down, and false mysteries uncovered, during the search for Christian identity, is our concern in studying *Lilith.* Again, in a quotation from *Robert Falconer*, we find that MacDonald's theology emerges from a concern with the *process* of revelation, rather than seeking to define in advance the *content* of such a revelation.

Rather than revelation becoming a form of secret knowledge to be passed from one to the other, it becomes a spur to further *action.* A construction of whispered secrets is based on privileged knowledge as opposed to true revelation. It does not make a true community, according to MacDonald (*Robert Falconer*, p352):

> ...the Jungfrau withdrew into its Holy of Holies...but from the mind it glorified it has never vanished... to have beheld a truth is an apotheosis. *What the truth was I could not tell; but I had seen something which raised me above my former self and made me long to rise higher yet.* (my italics)[23]

We cannot ultimately locate MacDonald's loyalty as being either to the community *as such*, nor to the self *as such.* The responsibility he feels does not make his concept of ethics easy, and we will consider it both in the first section, and in the third, in the light of some of Caputo's and Derrida's comments on the relationship between a sense of giftedness and a sense of responsibility, and how easily one slides from the true notion of mystery in religious communities, into the formation of a demonic secret (as *Lilith* shows) which absolves one from *all* responsibility. The concept of morality or responsibility in MacDonald's work is easy to misunderstand, being placed too firmly within some brief outline of an accepted Christian or Victorian sense of duty.

Much of his thinking on ethics seems to correspond with the Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard. His work *Either/Or* explores and contrasts in turn the aesthetic, dutiful and religious concepts of identity and action. Kierkegaard represents the religious conception of life as being one which is leeched upon by the aesthetic and dutiful *ideals*, in order that the individual may extract an autonomous identity and sense of *self*-worth. The truly religious, however, when followed through on its own terms is paradoxical, deeply problematic, and involves what *seems to be* a complete negation or abandonment of both the aesthetic and dutiful selves – a kind of death – or a *gift* of death. For the issue in *Either/Or* is not merely that one has *done* wrong, but that one *is*, essentially, wrong. This realization significantly comes late – at the end of Kierkegaard's book, itself behaving like a stumbled-upon gift, just as Lilith will struggle until her hand may finally be severed, so that she is able to receive this gift of death.

[23] Derrida, to be looked at later, notes in *The Gift of Death* (p80): "To share a secret is not to know or to reveal the secret. It is to share we know not what."

This will bring us in turn, in the study, to consider MacDonald's treatment of nihilism in *Lilith*, and will also cause us to wonder which aspects of Calvinism he retains in his theology. For Calvinism, too, has an element in its negative assessment of the human condition which looks *quite like* the negative method of the discovery of the "Christ-self"[24] in *Lilith*.

Today, the Victorian sense of duty takes the form of a feeling of responsibility to the self or to the small group of one's friends or family or work, and seems, likewise, to shield us from the more fundamental questions of what is actually required in order for identity as responsibility to come into being in the fullest sense. These are not, therefore, theological questions which are, by definition, irrelevant to modern thought but, rather, mean that MacDonald's thinking and writing focus upon issues which are of universal concern. It is significant that *Lilith* is opened by a quotation from Thoreau's *Walking*, a writer who is seen today as a "champion of individualism"[25], and whose work is considered to be the epitome of the Romantic desire to escape the natural world through the individual's communion with nature. Yet MacDonald chooses to use a passage from this work which speaks of a hidden community, living amongst the trees. From the outset, then, MacDonald contextualises the anxious individualism depicted in *Lilith's* opening chapters in an anticipation of community. Perhaps, too, in his reference to Thoreau, we can see how MacDonald is anticipating Nietzsche's Zarathustra in his comment: "Can it indeed be possible? This old saint in his forest hath not yet heard that God is dead!", and is already seeking to uncover a certain emphasis in the Biblical interpretation of Christian identity for a future generation, who may function from a psychology grounded in metaphysics or materialism, and who will indeed feel that God is dead.[26]

In *Lilith*, we find many failures in the attempts to build communities and cities, perhaps anticipated in the destruction of the city in *The Princess and Curdie*[27]. The failures of

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[24] As Robb quotes it from MacDonald's own words in *Diary of an Old Soul*, in *George MacDonald, p54*.

[25] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*

[26] Caputo, in *More Radical Hermeneutics*, translates the "God is dead" movement in theology as a parallel movement to that of the delimiting of ethics, with which MacDonald is concerned, as we shall see in the section on ethics and 'The Giant's Heart'.

[27] One day at noon, when life was at its highest, the whole city fell with a roaring crash...Where the mighty rock once towered, crowded with homes and crowned with a palace, now rushes and raves a stone-obstructed rapid of the river...and the very name of Gwyntystorm has ceased from the lips of men (*The Princess and Curdie*, p221)

both Vane and Lilith to understand themselves and to understand one another are linked by this general background of disastrous city-building. So, too, we find ourselves heirs of a system of ethics which tends towards competitive values and which encourages city-building. self-protection or self-justification. MacDonald does his best to outline the price of accepting from this background our notions of ethical responsibility, where it began to manifest itself in *his* lifetime, in the mercantile Victorian mind. Here, he has many Scottish contemporaries, who examine the same issues. However, such examination tends to be dualistic. *The House with the Green Shutters* comes immediately to mind, portraying the battle between an unworldly, Romanticism and a materialistic work-ethic, in the characters of John Gourlay and his son. John MacDougall Hay's *Gillespie* also deals with the effects of capitalism and of the ethical foundations of communities.

However, it seems that MacDonald is addressing the more fundamental questions: What *is* a community? What *is* an individual? He does so from within the position of a man caught between various interpretations of selfhood, rather than from the standpoint of a theoretical dualism. For while Vane and Lilith seem for a time (as Vane would have it), to be on opposing sides, ultimately, no such simple story emerges. Lilith's story is also the story of Vane and of the community who are with her. And Vane's story places the reader within the narrative in a state of lostness so profound, that we require a certain amount of faith to continue the quest to make sense as we read. Like the method of the parable, this story allows for no privileged position of power, all such concepts being alien. Not even within the mind of the reader can there be any place of permanent rest[28]. Whenever such rhetoric occurs, it is ruthlessly exposed. Vane's explanations and reasonings are continually confounded, and along with them the reader's own expectations. MacDonald's work centres the issue of identity wholly upon the interpretation of Christ's identity and requires us, as does the twelfth century theologian Anselm, to believe in order to understand.

As already mentioned in the Abstract, in the third section we shall look in more detail at the work of McLeod Campbell, who takes up the problems of ecclesiology and Christian identity in the modern context of individualism. His work on the subject of atonement was in its time – as was *Lilith* – misunderstood in its attempt to lift the question of

[28] "For repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest", (p1, *A Dish of Orts*). The "sleep" of identity, then, is not achieved through education.

salvation out of an anxious, subject-centred attempt to appropriate salvation or Christian identity, and into a more thoroughly Christological, object-centred focus for Christian identity. Like Campbell, MacDonald was mistakenly labelled a universalist[29]. Both Campbell and MacDonald were too radical in their thinking for their time, yet also subtle enough to escape the attention they deserve today, as thinkers who dealt with issues which are still easily misunderstood, or mis-imagined, by all of us. John MacQuarrie, a twentieth century Scottish theologian, famous for his work linking Biblical theology to Existentialism in *An Existentialist Theology*, notes in another book that

> ...corrections in Christian theology are usually best made not by violent innovations but by recovering corrective tendencies within the tradition itself...[30]

MacDonald felt that truth itself was betrayed in some theologies, by the *form* which they took. This seems a radical complaint, yet it is important to note that he is not offering an alternative religion, but seeking a more truthful *form* of that truth which he discerns hidden behind the theologies he has come into contact with. He tries to explain this to his father in a letter[31]:

> ...does not all history teach us that the forms in which truth has been taught, after being held heartily for a time, have by degrees come to be held merely traditionally and have died out and other forms arisen? Which new forms have always been abused at first...there are some in every age who can see the essential truth through the form, and hold by that, and who are not alarmed at a change; but others, and they the most by far...think all is rejected by one who rejects the form of truth which they count essential, while he sees that it teaches error as well as truth, and is less fitted for men now than it was at another period of history. Paul, I think, could trust in God in these things and cared very little about orthodoxy...

It is the form, then, to which we should pay attention – his use of symbolism; his interpretation and imaginative treatment of the Biblical literature; and the direction he takes wherever a similarity can be shown to other, later *and* contemporary, thinkers.

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[29] Even though his son states that *Lilith* was "written, I do think, in view of the increasingly easy tendencies in universalists, who, because they had now discarded everlasting retribution as a popular superstition, were dismissing hell-fire altogether, and with it the need for repentance...with hell incarnate...all about and within, we are prone to find comfort in declaring that Evil is but shadow cast by the Light..." (*George Macdonald and His Wife*, pp551-552)

[30] *Mary for all Christians*, p23

[31] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, pp197-8

Section One

The movement from nihilism to community in *Lilith*

A. Brief outline of the relationship between *Lilith* and

B. MacDonald's approach to nihilism in *Lilith*

C. The end of Ethics and the beginning of community in
Heart' as an interpret

Section One

The movement from nihilism to community in *Lilith*

A. Brief outline of the relationship between *Lilith* and Romanticism

B. MacDonald's approach to nihilism in *Lilith*

C. The end of Ethics and the beginning of community in *Lilith* (using 'The Giant's Heart' as an intertext)

A. Brief outline of the relationship between *Lilith* and Romanticism

To start with, we must try to understand what MacDonald's purpose was in creating *Lilith*; to study some of the perceived problems of his time which are being addressed. In order to do this it is important to recognise how *Lilith* might address the issues which had arisen in Romanticism, and which had begun to settle into the wider consciousness during MacDonald's lifetime. Of particular interest at this time was the identity of the artist in relation to the notion of a divinely created world, in which God was seen as the ultimate and originating artist. With the question raised about man's origin in the light of science, came also the instability of the artist's role.

In *Creature and Creator, Myth Making and English Romanticism*, Paul Cantor draws attention to the way in which Romantic art, taking up this challenge, sought to provide new myths of creation in order to replace the oft-repeated story of creaturely fall and divine grace, which had been interpreted by the church in a way which asserted the power of the Christian church over its subjects, and led to the belief that human beings have no responsibility with regard to forming their own selves. Cantor points out that the Romantics were seeking to provide through their art both a *counterpart* to the growing panic created by the feeling that the human being was in control of his or her destiny; and also to provide a *remedy* to the problems which that feeling in itself created in the search for an alternative basis for society. Either it was despair, or a god-like demand for the power which would reflect such self-origination.

The Romantic remedy often took the form of a return; of the apocalyptic transformation of society into an harmonious Eden. However, the secularization of the story of the fall (notably by Rousseau) meant that there seemed no objective grounds (ie a good God) for such a hope for humanity. Inevitably this leads to the darker vision of apocalypse – Shelley's *Frankenstein* being a notable example. Cantor speaks also of Blake's vision of the demonic creator as being another attempt to find – through possibly Gnostic roots – an alternative to the traditional and limiting – interpretation of the Bible by the church which sought to control that literature. In these alternative visions, however, we frequently come up against the problem of dualism, and Cantor does not deeply question the Biblical literature itself as to how it seeks to remedy such dualism. What is interesting about *Lilith* is that it is a story about such attempts to create alternative myths and apocalypses – a

meta-Romantic novel. In it MacDonald directly draws on Biblical sources as well as others – notably Boehme and Novalis – addressing both Gnostic and mainstream dualistic views and deconstructing them through the vision he presents. For *Lilith* is more vision than myth, resisting the temptation to end; to draw a line under; to round off or to subdue history. In this he remains true to his assertion that his only purpose as a writer is to allow whatever light he discovers to shine for itself (he is a discoverer and not a metaphysician), trying hard never to attempt to convince another by argument of what he saw as truth.[32]

Interestingly, Cantor is not concerned in his analysis to recognise the vast array of interpretations which the Biblical literature inspires, choosing instead to portray the 'accepted message' of the Bible that man should be viewed as a "finished product" (p7) as its *actual* message. The representative text that he chooses for his preface to his study of Romanticism reveals his own interpretation of Deism: "...shall the work say of Him that made it, He made me not?" (*Isaiah* 29:16). A simple ethical choice between obedience and rebellion. However, because of his Christological interpretation, MacDonald certainly does not view man as a "finished product", yet considers himself deeply Biblical in his theology.[33] He instead asks if we really understand what this work (ourselves) *is* without reference to any relationship to a creator. At first glance *Lilith* seems to indicate precisely the static, dualistic approach caricatured by Cantor:

> "Why did he make me such?" gasped Lilith "I would have made myself oh, so different! I am glad it was he that made me and not I myself! He alone is to blame for what I am..." (*Lilith,* p202)

The first thing we can note about this is that Lilith is referring to the accepted notion (and the one which Cantor accepts) of (some) traditional interpretations of identity in religion. However, MacDonald is also showing how easily such an interpretation is turned on its head in order to absolve the person from all *responsibility* to such a creator; a movement which happens in both extreme Calvinism – in the form of antinomianism - and in nihilism. Such is the outcome of a religion which denies all mystery; which seeks to

[32] "The reality of Christ's nature is not to be proved by argument. He must be beheld." ('Browning's "Christmas Eve"', *A Dish of Orts*, p207,)

[33] In 'A Sermon', what he says of opinion is true in general of his view of human nature: "...to be of true value it must have in it not only the possibility but the necessity of change; it must change in every man who is alive with that life which, in the New Testament, is alone treated as life at all."

explain from its own standpoint of closed logic the notion of the Creator and the created[34]. Cantor perceives Rousseau as breaking free from this notion in his secularisation, while MacDonald perceives the 'breaking free' from such an originally misconceived notion as remaining, essentially, bound to it in that it is simply a *re*action to a reality misconceived, just as surely as the Calvinist is bound fatefully to their own perversion, in the darkness of the God who is divorced entirely from the imagination, and rendered merely a logical 'necessity'.

MacDonald goes deeper with his exploration, addressing the issue in terms of freedom of imagination, and relating it to perverted concepts of the self-made man. Lilith has earlier stated in response to Mara's comment ("You are not the self you imagine"), and in contradiction to her own (previously quoted) statement:

> "So long as I feel myself what it pleases me to think myself, I care not. I am content to be to myself what I would be. What I choose to seem to myself makes me what I am. My own thought makes me, my own thought of myself *is* me. Another shall not make me!" (*Lilith*, pp199-200)[35]

Out of this process of thought, Lilith has fallen back into the more childlike trap of demonising God, or annihilating her own identity, in the need to escape the evil she finds within herself. She shows herself incapable of precisely the free choice for good when faced with the knowledge of good and evil; a choice which is expected of her according to the secularised moral scheme. Here is Rousseau's picture of the self-made man or woman, born out of the struggle between reason and passion – the "limitless" progress which Cantor discerns in the movement toward a secular psychology. But in Lilith's experience, the struggle results in a similar attitude of reaction to, or acceptance of the negation of one's identity, and with it, of one's responsibility, when one faces the question of identity in isolation. That is, the instinct towards self-making exists *both in religious and secular thinking*, and both result in the same negative end – the loss of the self. For MacDonald, therefore, the issue must be preceded by a reinterpretation of the entire concept of selfhood and identity, otherwise the negative results emerging in Calvinist

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[34] His essay on the imagination gives us an idea of the way in which *Lilith* may represent a perversion of the religious intellect arising from the suppression of the imagination (*A Dish of Orts*, p26): "That evil may spring from the imagination...cannot be denied. But infinitely worse evils would be the result of its absence. Selfishness, avarice, sensuality, cruelty would flourish...and the power of Satan would be well established...disastrous consequences would soon appear in the intellect which they...worship."

[35] Perhaps she echoes both Descartes: "I think, therefore I am" but also thus comes to see herself as the divine "I AM"; a perversion of Descartes' thinking (see more detail on p43).

theology re-emerge on the secular level. And, in any case, to MacDonald, any distinction between the religious and secular is simply a matter of such mistaken self-making in the first place.

I do not think, then, that it is MacDonald's aim simply to pull down either Rousseau's or the Romantic attempts to tackle the issue of human freedom outwith the bounds of religious language, since it is the *form* of such religious language which has helped to bring about the crisis of Christian identity. He is, however, striking at one precious part of it in his portrayal of *Lilith*; what Cantor calls (p24)

> ...the heart of the romantic ideal of autonomy. Total self-determination ultimately requires total self-creation...

Neither is it MacDonald's intention to show merely that the problem existed before in religious thought, as being part of a linear history of ideas. For the novel plays with time, counteracting any notion that a final historical perspective can be applied in dealing with issues such as identity. Instead, MacDonald identifies the struggle for self-determination as being part of all searches for identity, whether religious or secular. For the issues he raises in Lilith's character are reflected in all of the various characters of the novel, most of whom have a counterpart in his own society (Vane, the little ones, the skeletons); *all* of whom are engaged in finding out the significance of the lives in which they find themselves. He presents the idea that lives are themselves signifying, not of a separate preconception of some other 'thing' which they signify analogically, but in the connection between the individual 'live' imagination and that which presents itself as gifted – beauty, truth, goodness, in feeding and informing its 'liveliness'[36]. This is a mysterious connection in that it defies appropriation. Identity is then informed from outwith its own limits (whatever they may be). MacDonald's conception of the imagination in relation to the world addresses in new ways the sense of objective groundlessness which will later characterise the existential search for meaning. Along the way, almost as a by-product of

[36] For his essay on individual development notes the growth in identity in the child as coming from the realisation that the world is "around and not within", while his work on the imagination is directly connected by him to the Biblical notion, found in *Ecclesiastes*, that "he (God) has put the world in their heart, so that no man can find out from beginning to end..." These notions must be taken together, and show that the formation of identity entails a continual movement outward which re-informs and in turn feeds the inward 'heart'. The 'live' connection between the outer and inner aspects of growth depends neither on an inner expansion, nor a losing of the self in the 'outer' world. Identity is *all* in the relationship which takes place in the movement between the 'inner' sense and the 'outer' sense, such movement defined by MacDonald as 'true life'. At all levels, grace precedes its working out, but that working out requires the willing of the individual to move in line with the direction of the 'life'.

this, he provides a close psychological study of the effects of the breaking down of organized religion upon his own society. He also addresses the postmodern aspect of Romanticism which comes from the notion that autonomy exists prior to community, as opposed to its being grounded in community, and thus linked to the concept of responsibility. However, MacDonald always leads the reader away from the position of the impartial investigator and back to this crucial question of identity, whichever angle we take, demanding that we first look more closely at the Biblical text itself. His blurring of the distinction between anti-Christian sentiments; and attitudes found within established Christianity means that he requires of us, firstly, a more imaginative reading of the tradition itself, for he has identified the suppression of imagination in that tradition to be the vehicle of much evil.

So where Cantor, and many writers on this theme, provide us with a simple polarization between the religious and secular attitudes, identifying the latter with the beginnings of freedom, MacDonald is constantly critical of any static position (the idol) – either religious or secular – portraying the making of such idols as being a generic expression of slavery (of a lack of identity), and of a lack of imagination, in all cultures. He portrays a mistaken concept of freedom and self-imagining in its exposed identity as slavery to the needs of the self. Indeed, in his novels he has already begun to portray the mistranslation of freedom (as self-making) within the context of the religious and political problems of his native Scotland[37]. In *Lilith*, he is broadening the context, even while returning to re-examine the Christian tradition of identity.

Similarly, his attitude towards ethics is not a simple one. As we have noted, the difference between his approach and that of Cantor can be illustrated by referring to their use of the Biblical text. Where Cantor chooses as his preface text for his book on Romanticism *Isaiah* 29:16, the image of the potter and clay, as representative of religious epistemology, and sets it against Nietzsche's conflation of creature and creature ("In man creature and creator are united" (ref)), MacDonald's point of reference is not a conceptual one; not one of external ideals inwardly applied, but a concern to interpret the deeper issues of the imaginative nature of art, which already exist in the text of *Isaiah.* The issue is reflected

[37] Consider the way in which he shows, in *AlecForbes of Howglen,* that ideal of Scottish freedom, Robert the Bruce, as greatly reduced in stature, by the confusion between true identity and mercantile allegiance.

within Lilith's own psychology, but the solution is neither conflation, nor theoretical atonement, but as to how exactly she may be helped to *do* something, in order to *become* herself. She holds within her right hand Nothing and – alone - is unable to let go of it (*Lilith*, p202):

> She was what God could not have created...her right hand also was now clenched...upon existent Nothing – her inheritance!

In *Lilith* there is another allusion to *Isaiah* which complicates Cantor's choice of the simple image of potter and clay as representative of the biblical treatment of human identity (*Isaiah* 44:20):

> And he cannot deliver his soul, nor say: "is there not a lie in my right hand?"

The context of this Biblical passage, towards which MacDonald has drawn our attention, is extremely interesting. Like the verse which Cantor chooses, it is set within the conceptual framework of God as creator but, from verses 9-17, deals with the issue of man as *independent* creator (rather than assisting creator); and yet in this new assumption of the divine role, the artist finds an ensuing and paradoxical compulsion to build idols, things which are metaphorically dead, lacking the life-source in their conception. This is a favourite subject of MacDonald's. The Biblical passage describes the way in which the craftsmen of different trades lovingly create objects. MacDonald, like the writer, thinks that this ability is a God-like and God-given attribute.[38] The writer of *Isaiah*, like MacDonald, is a poet; an artist considering the role of art.[39]. Artists, like theologians, have the additional temptation to worship their creation as their own, as opposed to the creator from whom they receive this gift of interpretation, so cutting off all basis for its coherence; effectively rendering it dead. This is one context in which to raise the image of Lilith's killing of her children. Here, however, MacDonald is addressing the autonomous tendencies of theology *and* of art, as being one and the same, rich in their own conception, representing all the stages of self-satisfaction; of stasis. In this self-reference he is typically Romantic[40], but is approaching the issue more thoroughly. From

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[38] "Here, the man may imagine greatly like God who created him" (from 'On the Imagination', *A Dish of Orts.*

[39] This issue also emerges in St Paul's theology, for example, in *Romans* 1v25: "Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator..." We should also note that Paul himself, like the writer of *Isaiah*, on MacDonald's thinking, fulfils the role of the artist, in that he may be seen as an *interpreter* of discovered truth, rather than a creator of new truth.

[40] Perhaps it is because Derrida is also aware of this wonderful and dangerous capability in the artist or thinker, that we can see so much in common in their preoccupations. Caputo

an *interpretative* standpoint, consistent with the tradition of divine wisdom in the Bible, he re-imagines the meaning of this tradition (which meaning remains in itself, the same), rather than seeking to create a new tradition *or* a new meaning. And because he emphasises form so much, we should at this point mark the 'living' relationship between form and meaning; meaning being a gift which attaches itself to different forms in different ages; as the Spirit of God breathes life/meaning – or not – into it. He also reveals that it is only by freeing the tradition from its habitual forms, that the tradition of divine wisdom truly discovers or uncovers this new life in every generation.

Cantor notes how the problems which arise from secularisation lead to the search for apocalypse. But MacDonald's treatment of apocalypse is always tied to this central notion of autonomy *as it exists*. It is like a form which will not let go of itself. For him, autonomy is not set ultimately against the tyranny of the ideal church; the ideal man or state, but in its *inability to form for itself a community*, because of its associated need for self-justification, which competitive stance leads both to moralising, and ultimately to a nihilism which undermines all moral stances and, indeed, existence itself.

So MacDonald's apocalypse, after all, is the result of a gift; a divinely gifted ability to cooperate; to communicate; to imagine. It is not a negotiated end, but emerges from a sense of how the fate of one is bound up with the fate of all. This relationship is reflected in the novel. It is Vane himself who will be sent to bury Lilith's hand, and he cannot sleep himself until this is done. Vane's own mother has a wounded hand which identifies her with Lilith (the mother church perhaps). Paradoxically, Vane must take the fate of Lilith upon himself; must even see her *as* himself. This cannot be done until he has given up the need to place a boundary upon his *own* existence and identity, and has ceased to attempt to justify his *own* actions.

Cantor identifies the movement to build community as taking place only once secular autonomy has been established. But MacDonald's Christian community which emerges subsequent to the failure of such autonomous action remains essentially mysterious. There is a 'gifted' aspect to the establishment of community in his thinking which is not a

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speaks of Derrida as "a master of self-creation...a genius of autonomy...composes..."(like MacDonald)"...rich, lush, over-full texts that allude to philosophers, psychoanalysts, poets and novelists in a way that sends his readers scurrying to the library..." (*More Radical Hermeneutics*, p90)

question of obvious duty, as opposed to the city or utilitarian construct of which Rousseau speaks. This mystery cannot be claimed, however, by particularly religious constructs, which also build their cities upon a rhetoric of power, only to be torn down. This mystery does not make such a 'gifted' community incoherent; it is simply that it can set itself no tangible borders, being bound to lack any rhetoric of power or of protectionism[41]. This tendency to define boundaries is something with which MacDonald has struggled in terms of the nature of his own beliefs and perceptions:

> ...we ought never to wish to overcome because WE are the fighters, never feel THAT IS MY TRUTH...Every higher stage of Truth brings with it its own temptation like that in the Wilderness, and if one overcomes not in that, he overcomes not at all...[42]

The greater the art, the nearer the truth, the more complete the vision, then, the greater becomes the danger of ensuing evil and destruction, for power only truly resides in truth. The corresponding beauty which speaks of that truth (or 'life'; they are the same in MacDonald's thought) will turn back upon itself all the more fiercely, when the individual artist or interpreter seeks to appropriate such a power or life, which never originally belonged to him or her. Such a turning back, then, since it is a turning away from life, will take the form of a death, or deaths, which are defined in terms of the degree of life (or truth) which they have attempted to appropriate. Lilith, therefore, is likely, upon MacDonald's own thinking, to represent an evil of the Christian or the artistic variety[43].

Isaiah, in its description of the apocalyptic provides a similarly non-protectionist, non-appropriative vision of community, in which artists exist not in competition, not as human gods build dead gods, in order retain a worthless autonomy, but where

> Everyone helped his neighbour, and said to his brother "be of good courage!" So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith. He who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil. *(Isaiah* 41:6)

[41] This makes it remarkably like MacDonald's Fairyland, the borders of which are stumbled upon, and remain secret - for example, in 'The Golden Key'. We will also consider this notion of the borders of a land in the study of 'The Giant's Heart'.
[42] Letter quoted in *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p204
[43] We can see also the appropriateness of MacDonald's use of the mythology of Lilith, Satan's wife, for this theme, Satan being a most beautiful fallen angel, guilty of the sin of pride, because he became jealous of that power and glory which belongs to God alone.

Such a community could not conceivably exist, were the notion of the artist that of the creator of separate, self-sufficient worlds, as MacDonald insists cannot be the case[44]. Apocalyptic revelation of one's identity and any sense of transformation is seen as possible only in the context of such a community, for only there can one begin to appreciate identity itself, in the form of the 'other'; one who may be known only through a kind of not-knowing, in a mystical, yet outward-looking sense. This is the admission of the mystery of identity in one another, rather than a knowing which is merely an acknowledgment of one about whose views or past we know (a 'dead', objectifying knowledge, which bears a relation to the 'dead' art of idol-making). This is neither the compromise community which, according to Cantor, Rousseau cannot avoid arriving at; one of a joyless and necessary civic duty. Neither is it an isolated community of *Lilith*'s "little ones", built upon and limited by unthinking assent to – rather than active imagination of - a proposition. But MacDonald's vision of community cannot really be understood in its fullness by reference to an opposition with any other concept of community because, by definition, *it may not exist in terms of an opposition* with anything, steadfastly resisting as much as it can any rhetoric of difference or power in its concept of its own identity. Indeed it only continues to live insofar as it avoids such self-awareness. The community of unique individuals is a gift which confounds all description.

Lilith, in representing MacDonald's own development of thinking, shows, too, how the individual 'quest' for selfhood is translated into a recognition of the reality of the 'other' towards whom one is drawn, and from whom, in the process, one uniquely receives a sense of identity. MacDonald has used this concept of the 'other' in much of his work, such as in his story, Photogen and Nycteris ('The day boy and the night girl'); or in the way in which the Princess must gaze upon the face of the 'other'; the Prince in 'The Light Princess'. His treatment of seeing and sight in general almost always involves such a corresponding 'other'. This will be explored in the second section, with reference to 'The Golden Key'. However, we have noted, for now, that he comes to this place from a background in which dualistic thinking of all kinds has surrounded him – in Romanticism and its tendency towards gnosis; in Calvinism, and in the temptations of the artist himself, from the need to create a sense of coherence in the post-enlightenment world. We need to

[44] *A Dish of Orts*, p20: "Is not the Poet, the Maker, a less suitable name for him than the Trouvère, the Finder?"

be careful, too, in studying his work, that we do not allow common dualisms (secularism/religion; reality/fantasy; spirituality/materiality) to define and condition our thinking when trying to understand the nature of his work. This would be to negate his entire struggle against the effect of such oppositions. They are like vast relics of the ancient struggle for autonomy which overshadow the human psyche and lie strewn about the philosophical landscape.

Especially in relation to the standard Victorian Christian interpretations of good and evil, *Lilith* is designed to challenge; and it is worth noting that MacDonald's exit from formal preaching was linked to an apocalyptic issue – a refusal to be limited in his religious vision by cultural standards. He refused to dismiss the idea that the renewal of creation might include the salvation of animals. Further, he has often been described as a universalist. However, his theology cannot be defined by the common usage of such terms. He insisted that the notion of hell must itself be interpreted with reference to God's love. The thing to keep in mind, when we are considering the historical context for *Lilith,* is that MacDonald does not have any alternative plan available, which is being offered through his works of fiction. Rather, such works are designed to enable the reader to step *out of* a world which has been constantly confusing itself with notions of categories and boundaries which can easily define this or that view in terms of dualisms; with the rhetoric of power. He can be clearly seen in *Lilith* to be addressing the concerns of Romanticism; not from any position which he defines as his *own*, in which he seeks an autonomous refuge; but in an effort to re*interpret* and re*discover* the apocalyptic nature of the world and body in which he finds himself.

The first thing to consider is how it is that the novel *Lilith* moves through such nihilism and concern with duty, towards a more fully grown ethics; a sense of identity and community. What is the nature of this apocalypse, and in what way does MacDonald allow us to *interpret*, *discover,* or *uncover* this mysterious happening?

B. MacDonald's approach to nihilism in *Lilith*

What is his concept of nihilism?

> A horrible Nothingness, a negation positive infolded her, the border of its being that was yet no being, touched me, and for one ghastly instant I seemed alone with Death Absolute. It was not the absence of everything I felt, but the presence of Nothing...it was the recoil of Being from Annihilation...then came the most fearful thing of all. I did not know what it was, I knew myself unable to imagine it, I knew only that it was Life in Death – life dead, yet existent, and I knew that Lilith had had glimpses, but only glimpses of it before; it had never been with her until now...something began to depart from me...the lamp of life and the eternal fire seemed dying together. And I about to be left with naught but the consciousness that I had been alive...she was in the outer darkness, we present with her who was in it. We were not in the outer darkness, had we been, we could not have been with her...the darkness knows neither the light nor itself, only the light knows itself and the darkness also. None but God hates evil and understands it...She knew life only to know that it was dead, and that, in her death lived...she had killed her life, and was dead...she had tried her hardest to unmake herself, and could not...she could not cease....her right hand also was now clenched – upon existent Nothing..."I yield" said the princess. "I cannot hold out. I am defeated – Not the less, I cannot open my hand..."I will take you to my father..." "How can he help me?" "He will forgive you" "Ah, if he would but help me to cease! Not even that am I capable of! I am a slave...Let me die..." "Verily, thou shalt die, but not as thou thinkest. Thou shalt die out of death into life...[45]

The entire novel has been a circling; a disorientating wander through the mires of unthinking obedience and thoughtful mistakenness, from Vane's first encounter with the 'other' world, which seems to operate according to an entirely unknown set of laws. This has been no *Pilgrim's Progress*[46]. From the start of the novel, Vane has wandered in a mist, circling back upon himself, in search of a horizon from which to gain his bearings. The novel has been a spiralling Vane's encounter with nihilism, which takes the outward form of Lilith's desire for death. Hell and death are notably here not physical places apart from other physical places, but neither are they interpretable merely as psychological constructs[47]. In this, MacDonald echoes James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and*

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[45] Extracts concerning the concepts of death and non-being, taken from *Lilith*, chapter 39.

[46] Despite the fact that *Pilgrim's Progress* was one of MacDonald's favourites, often performed by the entire family, in *Lilith*, he seems concerned to explore the wider implications for the formation of identity in terms of the nature of reality. Robb notes (p100, *George MacDonald*), that "In *Lilith*, more is at stake than Vane's inner growth...his action can be decisive in aiding or retarding the spread of evil as a whole...". The apocalyptic aspect of direct confrontation with the nature of evil is borne out by his son, who notes that MacDonald was happy for it to be described as "the Revelation of St George" (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p548).

[47] Although this *is* a matter of perception, for his son also notes that he quotes Marlowe's *Faust* in Salted with Fire(p123): "All places shall be hell that are not heaven" (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p551), we must *also* remember - such is the importance placed upon the relation between perception and reality - that it may not be termed psychological,

Confessions of a Justified Sinner in his refusal to grant a location for the reader from which they may judge their position. He draws us in to the experience outlined above. For while Lilith's experience may be interpreted psychologically, the fact that she is connected with Vane's desires and fears means that we must ourselves deal with the nihilistic possibilities which emerge on all levels, from the experience of self-consciousness, since they are present in a form which relates 'being' to history - the narrative form itself[48].

MacDonald's method of universal but indirect representation of Christian apocalypse in *Lilith* is concentrated mainly in the negative terms of Lilith's existence. This indirect method can be partly attributed to his assertion that the case for faith cannot be argued through logic.[49] And his son recalls the one time at which he encountered his father's anger:

> "Father" said I, tapping the table with a finger, "can you tell me that you *know* the God exists whom Jesus proclaimed? Can you tell it me with the same certainty

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according to MacDonald's thinking. Materiality itself is a matter of interpretation. This is, therefore, a *real* hell, capable of affecting the material world, for all that it is *also* a question of perception.

[48] As we noted on page 20, *Lilith* was written in response to universalism, to the idea that darkness is not *real*; being but a shadow cast by light, and his treatment of shadows in *Phantastes* suggests that he has formerly held, or at least considered, this view in terms of subjectivity. Here, however, we can see from this passage that darkness has reality; tangibility; and yet it does not *seem* real to those who are in it, for "the darkness knows neither the light nor itself, only the light knows itself and the darkness also...". Here, interpretation does not even become an issue until the reality of evil; the nature of reality apart from God is acknowledged. In this, we find a Calvinistic strain of the thought that one's intrinsic sinfulness – this experience of nihilism - must be acknowledged. However, it is also clear that because "only light can truly know darkness", that light must in some way be first involved in this apprehension of our own darkness, for: "If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imaginations, we might well fear..." ('On the imagination...', *A Dish of Orts*, p25). So the scene is set in the novel against this pre-existent background of the question of the relation between 'inner' and 'outer' light, rather than through any sense of dogma asserted. For "God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness...and sends forth...wonderful gifts into the light" (same essay, p25). This is consistent with MacDonald's view of the nature of truth; which is that it ii discerned in movement; the movement of 'true' life. His interpretation of darkness in relation to light shows that Calvinism lies in paradoxically killing a living truth by seeking to tell it, by attempt to equate it with the dogmatic form which it produces; while paradoxically seeking to tell it. See *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p309, where he quotes: " Calvinism is the only Theology that makes out a *perfect system*, but that does not establish it as truth." While universalism also seeks to represent truth (the universal love of God) but distorts it in order to contain its meaning in logical terms (by psychologizing the nature of perception) to become a lie. Both fail where they separate the inner and outer aspects of darkness or light, through their imaginative lack, in the attempt to gain some metaphysical ground of *defence*.

[49] "I believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of the eternal Father...I believe...though not for a moment would I endeavour by argument to convince another of this, my opinion. If it be true, it is God's work to show it, for logic cannot." (*A Dish* of *Orts*, 'A Sermon', p292)

> that I can vouch for this table I am touching?" A look of spiritual indignation – almost of momentary anger at my stupidity – flashed across his face. "Of course not!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I could believe in a God demonstrated, proved by weight, resistance, inevitability?"....what is the extent of our merely rational horizon? But for faith and imagination it were in truth a narrow one![50]

If he cannot express his belief in a positive manner, what he can do is to convince the reader of the reality of darkness so thoroughly, that such a reader will come to long for the reality of light, and through such longing be granted – through paying attention to 'inner' light - a perception of the nature of this darkness in terms of its estrangement from light for him or herself[51]. Such a perception, however, exists not as an isolated fact, but *in relation* to 'outer' light, and so cannot claim a metaphysical proof.

This negative approach to the expression of Christian belief is also reflected in a literary phenomenon - the tradition of reductive irony in Scottish Literature. Reductive irony is interpreted as the method which communicates what is valuable at times when its direct expression is simply not possible, because of the 'hijacking' of a language from those for whom it formerly expressed a living reality and identity. In and through its exposure of the nature of evil, it seeks the good, which it can no longer directly express. In Christianity, this happens with the Biblical literature where it begins to find attached to it connotations of power or religious self-justification, instead of encouraging the individual relation between word and mind, in which the individual or community can find itself addressed – reinterpreted the reader *in the act of* interpretation. MacDonald constantly refers not only to the content, but – more importantly – to the form of Biblical literature, seeking new ways of presenting interpretation which can defamiliarise the text, free it from the abuse of its *use*, and direct the reader towards this 'live' aspect of meaning. The link between irony and Christianity was also a preoccupation of Kierkegaard's[52], who as we have noted, has other interests in common with MacDonald. Reductive irony, however, is a modification of radical irony. It can find its expression in nihilism; and can reinterpret that nihilism[53]. A radical disorientation; a corresponding loss of inferior

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[50] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p336.

[51] The negative way never, however, becomes more important than the truth underlying it, never hardens into a negative *system* of truth-finding, which is precisely what he hated the term 'Protestant' for, stating that "You cannot...make a belief out of a denial" (*From a Northern Window*, p86)

[52] Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony, with constant reference to Socrates*

[53] in his *Theology of Hope*, p336, Moltmann speaks of irony: "In Western social philosophy....we repeatedly find attempts to retain the idea of estrangement and regain the human nature of man by means of transcendental reflection. 'I no longer coincide with my

conceptions of goodness (as duty, as fearful obedience) is required. However this way of darkness is often likely to result in such fear as closes down the imagination. It is a venture into the unknown, with no clear guarantees, but which should prove to itself its utter dependence on its creator rather than on metaphysical beliefs *about* the creator. Unlike Anodos, who in *Phantastes*, is required to "put forth on the open deep with but one ship...his tiny craft.", Vane is denied even that safeguard; but is himself plunged into the water[54].

Because of MacDonald's insistence upon the perceptual nature of reality, and yet the objectively *gifted* nature of such perception by God, he seems to bridge the gap between the commonsense, Scottish tradition of enlightenment philosophy, which emphasises a kind of self-evident perception of reality by the thinker[55], and the "radical pietist" tradition, characterised by, for example, Kierkegaard, which challenges the notion of autonomous reason, but often comes to posit faith as a *substitute* for knowledge, laying faith open to abuse. The twentieth-century theologian, Milbank sees such pietism as an

> ...influence...subterranean and concealed...yet...objectively traceable...if philosophy determines what it is to be and to know, then will it not pre-determine how we know even Christ to be, unless we allow that the structure of this event re-

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social "I"...I can now....be conscious of the *role*...I see myself and my roles falling apart. By means of such reflections, the self-consciousness of man withdraws itself from the compromising, confusing, social reality...in reflection, in irony....it regains that detachment in which it thinks to find its infinite possibilities, its freedom and superiority....but this...turns man into a man without attributes in a world of attributes without man." We see in *Lilith*, that MacDonald is using such irony as a 'fiction', however, showing that it serves a purpose in exposing false ideas about selfhood, illustrating in a negative fashion the nature of 'human being', in the case of Lilith. The use of irony against itself, in relation to the different roles in which Lilith and Vane are encountered, and encounter one another, exposes the 'lack' in such self-conscious irony. And yet, while showing the manifestation of this ironic form of knowledge, MacDonald resists the temptation to make of such 'lack' a 'secret' language for the oppressed. Nihilism in itself does not ground us, just as MacDonald objects to the negative form 'protestant' in the formation of the Christian faith, even while he also resists its positivistic verification.

[54] *Lilith,* p35: "I was lost in a space larger than imagination"

[55] Thomas Reid, for example, Professor of Philosophy at MacDonald's own King's College, Aberdeen, in 1752 stated: "I shall take it for granted, that I think, that I remember, that I reason, and, in general, that I perform all the operations of mind of which I am conscious." (*The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy*, p107). There are things which Reid says of the notion of 'ideas' which possibly trigger MacDonald's thinking on the relationship between 'inner' and 'outer' as well: (p112): "Ideas stand in two distinct relations to their external causes. First, the ideas represent their external causes, and secondly they resemble them. Reid does not like this. If the direct object of knowledge is an idea and the external object is no more than an indirect object of knowledge, it follows that we are never in a position to test the hypothesis...to test it...we should have to have equally direct access to both the external object and the internal one." MacDonald seems to be saying that imagination grants us such access, in relating the inner to the outer, *but only* occurs as a divine gift, and cannot be treated as an intellectual assumption.

> organises also our ordinary sense of what is and what we can know, in such a way that the autonomy of philosophy is violated...[56]

Yet MacDonald *does* allow such predetermination in *Lilith,* and instead of violating the autonomy of philosophy, helps it to pass through its logical conclusion, until the need for light becomes more pressing than the need for autonomy, and so has to be reinterpreted by the nature of its own desirein a non-autonomous fashion. There is no use in punishing philosophy since it is grace, not punishment, which causes the repentance of Lilith; her 'reinterpretation' by light. Light provides its own interpretation. Once the horror of darkness is entered into, the light alone can reach and understand Lilith, bringing its own interpretation of what appeared to be punishment, interpreting the darkness in retrospect, changing history by such reinterpretation[57]. MacDonald is therefore able to *interpret* nihilism without needing to *pre*scribe the way in which it sees itself at any given moment. This is because, as we have already noted, like John MacQuarrie, he is subtle, and does not favour violent innovations but would rather speak through – and so reinterpret - the nihilism which is the inevitable conclusion of Romantic individualism[58]. The dialogue we discern between him and Reid demonstrates this. He could be speaking to Reid's worry about 'ideas' when he says ('On the Imagination....', *A Dish of Orts*, p2):

> "Are there not facts?" say they "Why forsake them for fancies? Is there not that which may be known? Why forsake it for inventions? What God hath made, into that let me inquire." We answer: To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination...the word itself means an imaging or a making of likeness.

This is neither a theory of 'ideas' in the sense that worries Reid, nor a taking for granted of the appearance of reality, but a legitimisation of the artistic operation, which requires faith (the 'live' connection) in order to perceive and to image the effects of light and darkness. Broadie notes that (*The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy*, p118)

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[56] *Radical Orthodoxy*, p

[57] Indeed, he seems to take the approach to nihilism advocated by Gavin Hyman in an essay entitled 'John Milbank and Nihilism: A metaphysical (mis)reading? (*Literature and Theology*, Vol 14, No. 4, Dec 2000), in which he advocates a 'fictional' reading of nihilism. MacDonald's approach, I think, because of his understanding of the nature of fiction, is similar, although with important differences, owing to the way in which he links faith and imagination.

[58] He takes a similar line in his *Miracles of Our Lord* (p437) speaking of the transfiguration: "Like the other miracles, I regard it as simply a rare manifestation of the perfect working of nature..." C S Lewis, deeply influenced by MacDonald, seems to have applied this thinking to his study of miracles, where he attempts to show that Jesus's miracles need not be interpreted as a *violation* of natural laws, but as a sign of their fulfilment in realms outside of our conceiving (*Miracles*, p64). In the third section the study will consider that this thinking comes from a refusal to conceive of grace and nature as logical opposites.

> Reid appears to have held that the truth of common sense beliefs is underpinned by a benevolent God who created us with such a nature as to find those beliefs irresistable.

It seems that MacDonald is returning to Reid's assertion in his positing of the 'inner' light, but that his starting point is designed to ensure that the work of the imagination remains central in the working of the intellect. For we can see how Reid's *logic* of inner light is easily capable of translation into a theology which is closed, owing everything to philosophical necessity, and sharing none of the wonder inherent in MacDonald's insistence that coherence and inner light must be primarily conceived as a gift; and the intellect conditional upon it, rather than making such an imaginatively conceived 'gift' or inner light a necessary object in the mind. His high view of faith as 'substance', and his corresponding vision allow him to do this apparently without fear of the objective loss of such a gift of coherence, primarily because of his refusal to think of Christ in terms of the opposition between grace and nature, as he says in this letter:

> ...I think the law of the spirit is really the law of the universe; that as, when the Lord vanished from the sight of his friends, they found him in their hearts, far nearer than before...

Lilith, however, is a clue that there may be a long and distressing road between the vanishing of Christ from sight, and his reappearance in the heart. We find that the necessity of recognising this 'disappearance'; this occurrence and reality of nihilism as a universally defining experience is also considered by the twentieth century theologian, Jurgen Moltmann[59]:

> ...but it is a fact that the God of the resurrection is in some sort an atheistic God...the God who is with us is the God who forsakes us...

However Moltmann goes on to note that

> ...the romantic nihilism of the 'death of God', like the methodical atheism of science...is an element that has been isolated from the dialectic process to which it belongs...

That is, the nihilistic experience of hopelessness in the Christian tradition which previously informed philosophy, conceives of it in terms of a loss, which encourages a healing process of 'mourning', which serves a purpose in bringing the thinker to search for the grounds of his or her reality in God. The search or process, then, has a purpose; there

[59] *Theology of Hope*, p171

is some meaning in it. However, in post-enlightenment philosophy which ends or limits concepts to those of human reason, such a loss is an end of everything, and therefore cannot be conceived of as a loss at all. MacDonald comes to this philosophy, not armed with a metaphysic of grace, but with a demonstration that grace may yet inhabit this search, even where such an 'end' has seemed final. He cannot go back and re-philosophise; but he can demonstrate that writing and living have a faith-based process which implies the existence of meaning apart from its metaphysical expression. In this emphasis on 'process' he anticipates future hermeneutic and literary emphases, where they approach the question of meaning.

So perhaps, in *Lilith*, MacDonald is trying to reintroduce that dialectic where he anticipates the effect of its loss in *late* Romantic nihilism, but in new ways. These are not based on metaphysical logic, although they may well have such an aspect in their translation or interpretation. For, interestingly, Moltmann, in the same passage, identifies the possible origination of the modern 'death of God' theology in the phrase of an *early* Romantic poet, Jean Paul, where "...the message 'there is no God' is proclaimed in terms of despair of the hope of resurrection"[60], and that

> Modern atheism and nihilism, which causes the disappearance of all dogmatic philosophies and the nature religions to disappear...is a universalising of the god-forsakenness of Jesus...only then does resurrection...as a resurrection of the totality of being out of nothing...become a prospect necessary for all that is....

We can see how natural it is for MacDonald, whose conviction is that "the law of the spirit is really the law of the universe", to conceive the the reception of the loss of knowledge of the resurrection may be seen in terms of an utter despair; an utter incoherence; a final and necessary sense that all that is is dead, "Life in Death" as he puts it in the passage quoted from *Lilith*. Hence his recurring emphasis on a reinterpretation of 'being' or reality. It is also possible that his interpretation of nihilism grows directly out of that of Jean-Paul, or at least finds in it some direction for, in *Robert Falconer*, he pays the highest tribute to that poet's ability, p109:

> I know but one writer whose pen would have been able worthily to set forth the delights....Jean Paul...

[60] *Theology of Hope*, p168: "The early romantic poet Jean Paul in his nightmare vision placed this statement ('God is dead') on the lips of the risen and returning Christ. He himself wished only to give an idea of how it would feel if atheism were true – yet he had a greater effect than any other upon the romanticist nihilism of modern times....it is plain that for Jean Paul the reality of God and the hope of resurrection depend on each other both for faith and for unbelief."

Nihilism and Faith

We should return then to Milbank's comments, and see how MacDonald is subtly different, expressing his theology not in terms of an "influence", a kind of backdrop of hope or faith, but by noting how faith is inexplicably found in the midst of hopelessness. *Lilith* involves not the concept of influence, but of reinterpreting. Such interpreting is not a violation of the autonomy of philosophy, but *necessarily* cannot grow anywhere but out of the experience of nihilism which comes from such autonomy. In this process, nihilism is enabled to interpret its own nature.

It is also a participatory theology in the fullest sense: "we were with her, we could not have been with her if we had also been in the outer darkness". We can read this statement in many ways. We could read it as stating that one must keep oneself away from evil in order to save another; and therefore keep a distance. In doing so one is paradoxically nearer to the person (Lilith) one wishes to help. This is the safe reading. However, we must consider how very important is motivation in this novel. For, if theology is not 'with' in the first place, in being willing to enter such darkness, it, too, by definition, is in the outer darkness, which is defined by isolation (non-knowledge of the light or of itself). But an imaginative theology may willingly enter such outer darkness, and in this very act, find itself "with", thereby challenging the isolation which characterises outer darkness, and so its reality. In other words, Lilith's position is an inner one; though real to her. It only remains limited, however, to that innerness and subjectivity, inasmuch as it is perceived to be an 'outer' reality; because one which must be entered into and shared by all. Hell becomes real in the moment that truth takes the form of a denial, on the basis of a metaphysics or in the natural light of reason, of its reality. It also becomes real in the moment that the instinct for self-protection (isolation of the self) becomes of greater concern than the faith in, and interpretation of, light.

It is clear that MacDonald felt that the experience of the nihilistic route was much closer to his own coming to an experience of Christ's presence, than was a triumphalist or simplistic concept of belief in God's presence as being self-evident rather than 'gifted'

(even when such a perception comes through the seemingly 'evident' works in nature). He said in a letter to his son that[61]:

> ...existence is a splendid thing...but for my hope in God, I should have no wish for its continuance, and should feel it but a phantasmagoria...rather than believe in the popular God, I would believe in none...

Nihilism and theology

In his essay on Milbank and fictional nihilism[62], Hyman says:

> It has often been assumed that nihilism is the antithesis of theology. Indeed, such an opposition may be traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche, who saw his own nihilism as a direct inversion of Christian faith. Much of his virulent anit-Christian rhetoric reinforced the conception of theology and nihilism as rival combatants which 'squabble over creation as jealous rivals fight over a shared lover....I argue...that Nietzsche would be better viewed as a 'perspectivist' or 'fictionalist', and also that only a 'narrative' or 'fictional' nihilism can be a thoroughly accomplished nihilism....then the confrontation between theology and nihilism begins to subside....at this point...a reconciliation between a fictional theology and a fictional nihilism begins to emerge.....

Hyman quotes Kermode, who distinguishes between myths and fictions, noting that a fiction is self-reflexive in that it is aware of its own fictive status, whereas it may degenerate into myth whenever it seeks to repress or 'forget' its status. Here, we can see in MacDonald's emphasis upon books, upon the self-consciousness of the narrator, and upon the attention he pays to the questioning of Vane's eschatological dreams, that he is aware of the self-reflexive nature of fiction. Hyman says that 'fictions' are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Certainly here, we can see also in MacDonald's emphasis on the need for new forms of truth, which do not seek to claim to be truth themselves, also the notion of the 'change', which in the New Testament is defined as life at all. Hyman goes on: "myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change..". He notes also in Freud the referral to his own narrations as 'fictions', and MacDonald anticipates Freud, particularly in his essay on human development. Hyman goes on to state that if nihilism is metaphysical, then it is clearly making positivist claims about the 'real'. It claims that the real is really nihilistic: "...the result...is a metaphysics of the nothing, the nothing that is." (in the style of the 'negation positive' which enfolds Lilith). However, Hyman notes how this nihilism is not thoroughly nihilistic, exempting itself from the nihilism that it attributes to everything

[61] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p535
[62] *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 14, No4.

else. We see, too, how on the other hand, a thoroughly positivistic religious attitude cannot itself be truly positive.

Milbank, however, Hyman notes, poses Christianity as unfounded mythos in opposition to a metaphysical nihilism, stating that truths are merely assumptions, takings up from previous linguistic arrangements, and opposes nihilism on the grounds that Christianity tells a much better story. This is different to MacDonald's treatment of truth as a secret which must not be allowed to live – or to be entombed *within* myth; since God is the living I AM, whose life not only demands the strenuous and endless telling and reading of many stories or fictions, but who also supplies the means of interpretation of these stories, by voluntarily inhabiting them with (gifted) meaning, as opposed to being their static explanation.

Hyman also criticises Milbank's treatment of Nietzsche in that he 'names' him once, whereas "was not Nietzsche one of the few great thinkers who multiplied his names and played with signatures, identities and masks?" (very like Lilith, it seems). The difficulty with Milbank's approach, he suggests, is that it "represses Nietzsche's resistance to any unifying and totalising gesture." On the contrary, MacDonald takes Lilith's resistance further – her hand is cut off – a healing gesture which further fissures her identity, revealing that 'naming' is itself an act which God alone may undertake (for only the light understands and can therefore name the darkness and itself).

Further, Hyman notes the tendency of any attempt to systematise Nietzsche's thought as leaving out a huge quantity of 'artistic' material in order to fund a dualistic approach inconsistent with Nietzsche style. This, too, illustrates the significance of Lilith as representing the corruption of the artistic and the theological endeavour, where it holds onto dualism within the rhetoric of power. In bringing together the artistic and theological pursuit of truth, MacDonald shows an awareness of this tendency in both. Like Nietzsche, MacDonald is also concerned not to come to the early metaphysical conclusion that "essence of things is not to have an essence", in deciding what reality is like outside of our conceptual framework. Vane undergoes this temptation when the ground of his conceptual framework is removed, at the beginning of the novel. MacDonald tries, perhaps though, harder than Nietzsche, to understand the nature of the working of that

conceptual framework in terms of the imagination, perception and intellect as interrelated, in the growth towards one's participation in the divine 'body' of identity.

Further, Hyman quotes Nietzsche as saying that "we must journey through the land of morality with new questions and as it were with new eyes" and, indeed, this seems to be what MacDonald's fictions, as we shall see in the next section on ethics, suggest. Again, Nietzsche also sounds remarkably like MacDonald's Vane in this:

> "..the great triumph is to renounce faith in one's own ego and to deny one's own reality. This is a triumph not only over the senses but also over appearance..." However, Nietzsche perceives it as "an act of violation and cruelty inflicted on reason: a voluptuousness which reaches its peak when the ascetic self-contempt and self-ridicule of reason decrees: "there is a realm of truth and being, but reason is firmly excluded from it"...we are warned against such contradictory concepts as 'pure reason', 'absolute spirituality', 'knowledge as such'...to think such concepts is to "think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed...but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and non-concept of eye that is demanded..."

In his writing MacDonald relates the notion of an eyeless eye to the need for the individual to believe that God is thinking them, and not only dreaming them; the terrible need to ground one's existence in something which is not a fiction or dreaming, *whenever identity is conceived of in terms of selfhood*[63]. However, he does not relate this dreaming in opposition to reason, but only to its autonomous self-conception.

Hyman tells how Nietzsche suggests that both science and asceticism are on the same foundation in that they both overestimate truth, which is to say that they share the same faith that truth cannot be assessed or criticised. MacDonald is different to Nietzsche here, however, in that he carefully distinguishes between knowledge and truth in *Lilith* and elsewhere, reserving the term truth as a personal noun – Truth – in line with the vast difference between Jesus's statement "I am the Truth, the Way and the Life", and Pilate's question: "What is truth?" In this question, Pilate takes himself too seriously, he is looking for a grounds on which to establish; to justify himself in relation to Truth on the basis of knowledge. As Hyman observes, fictional nihilism opens the way to a

[63] Seen in the torture of *Robert Falconer's* Morison who wishes God to be thinking him, and in which the symbol of a terrible blind eye in the appearance of the moon, and then later in Vane, who finally 'waits' within the dream in which he is enfolded by God. Both of these are passages in his writing to which we will later return in more detail.

reconciliation with Christianity through "a reduction and weakening of its own ontological status." In this way, he says

> "Christian theology can only achieve non-mastery..." (the desired fictional status) ..."if, after Nietzsche, it acknowledges its own fictivity, playfulness and lightness of touch."

There is a difference here, however, between Hyman's approach and that of MacDonald – perhaps because of the difference MacDonald makes between truth and knowledge. In the sense that theology is seeking after knowledge of its own status in regard to Truth (like Pilate), such a playfulness and lightness are to be recommended, in order to avoid the rhetoric of power. If, however, it claims that its identity stands or falls with the person of Christ – Truth – as a personal name, then it needs also to adopt the idea that its own status is less important than the final granting of that Name which is its identity. This lack of concentration upon status is the true route to the 'playfulness' of theology, whose burden should be light, once it has learned the nature of such a death.

In this sense, the reconciliation which Hyman hopes for can be made on no other grounds than that which comes about through the future hope of identity which is eschatologically grounded. For, instead of a cosy relationship of playfulness existing between Lilth and Vane, both Lilith and Vane face an initial severing of any form of identity which takes the form of a self-preservation; even if it should masquerade as a harmless story. While Lilith's hand is severed, Vane faces the prospect of the loss of all knowledge, and the manner of Nietzsche's death implies that not all stories have happy endings, just because they are fictions. *Lilith* however, submits to the playfulness of its "endless ending", characterised also in MacDonald's life by his 'waiting' at the end. We cannot judge the lightness of Nietzsche's fiction, and we do not need to. Not because he took that burden of judgment upon himself, but because truth - unlike knowledge – may be harmonious *with*, but is not grounded *within,* human judgment.

The church's identity in relation to nihilism

MacDonald's challenge is that in seeking merely to act as an external influence, as Milbank suggests, the church places herself outside of the very experience which she must suffer – and herself precisely in that inner darkness which she hoped to avoid, merely by considering that any aspect of life can remain outwith the scope (and therefore, the

suffering), of divine love, which the church is called to witness to. Were she to claim the autonomy from Lilith suggested by the separating term 'influence', she would be claiming for herself the autonomy which cuts her off from the light she seeks. Neither does she have the right to explain its existence; or to preach against such darkness (for "only God himself can hate evil and understand it"). Nihilism, then, is not seen as the ultimate evil (despite the vivid description of it in those introductory extracts from *Lilith*), but rather the striving for autonomy; even for the autonomy of the church, where it seeks to transcend its own corporeal nature.

What is positive in this impossible challenge which is set for Vane, for the reader and for the church? What is truly innovative, as we see from MacDonald's thoughts in his essay 'On the Imagination' provides new life out of such darkness only in the sense that love is both ever-present and constantly new. Not in the sense that the next design for a car engine is new, because it replaces the previous one. For that simply relativises the value of car engines. (We shall come back to various interpretations of progress, and how some of them lead to a relativising of values, with reference to C S Lewis, on p66). For now, we note that in response to this problem of Christian identity, MacDonald's thinking about the movement from Romanticism to nihilism is not to *re-design* the church, but to *re-imagine* Christian belief, from the conviction that Christian belief, because of its symbolic expression, must retain the poetic aspect of truth which involves the imagination. This is not a modern concept of progress for the church to grasp hold of; but a perspective which is itself part of a living and alternative history of a continual transformation or transfiguration of truth and of its historical expression[64].

For the purpose of the study, then, we should note that the identity of the church is formed through the church's inner involvement with the Spirit of Life which extends to all creation and cannot be claimed as its own property. Such formation of identity seems to require an apocalyptic rediscovery of its nature in relation to God. However, we must also be true to MacDonald's thinking, and he has a sound reason for not generalising the theological into the philosophical or pantheistic as a result of this conviction. This is the very danger of systematisation from which the church has to be rescued:

[64] And the vision which precipitates such reinterpretations of truth may be dark, initially, for as he notes in a letter to his father "Increase of Truth will always in greater or less degree look like error at first... "(*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p198)

> Will you allow me to tell you one thing founded on the deepest conviction – that in Scotland especially...a thousand times too much is said about faith...I would never speak about faith, but speak about the Lord himself...not as to the why and wherefore of his death – but as he showed himself...full of grace, love, beauty, tenderness, and truth. Then the needy heart cannot help hoping and trusting...and having faith, without ever thinking about faith...how a human heart with human feelings and necessities is ever to put confidence in the theological phantom which is commonly called Christ in our pulpits I do not know. It is commonly a miserable representation of him who spent thirty-three years on our earth, living himself into the hearts and souls of men and thus manifesting God to them...[65]

It is also the *completion* of systems which witnesses to their emptiness of the element of the divine in their conception of God. Frequently, MacDonald reminds us that the Biblical writers themselves never claimed this for their own writings, and in *Robert Falconer*, the words of Falconer (a type of Christ) are that (p352):

> "If we could thoroughly understand anything, that would be enough to prove it undivine..."

How do these quotations relate to the nihilistic descriptions of chapter 39? First of all we should note that, despite the seeming fatefulness of Lilith's experience, there are elements of free will. The experience of nihilism is not *in or of itself* a necessary precondition of authentic life, any more than is that positive violation of philosophy which Milbank advocates. Everything is referred back to "that Life that is for you" (*Lilith*, ch39), and is not secured by means of any one-off transaction, but by a slow and painful process of interaction between the various characters in the novel[66]. The significance of nihilism lies in an imaginative apprehension of its truly conditional nature (rather than in the enabling of a theoretical challenge to the philosophy behind it). Nihilism is therefore related strangely to the most violent reaction against it, both being conditional and capable of change; both being related to the idea of a "gift" of life or death, which may also be interpreted as a punishment. It is the nature of MacDonald's working towards their being interpreted as gift which needs to be examined. Such an interpretation seems to take place in the light of the *subsequent* recognition that life, rather than death, is ultimately definitive. For such a leap to take place, to be *grounded* (which is what the act of *recognition* implies in *seeing* the truth through the form) seems to require the reversal of

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[65] Letter to his father, Feb 8th 1855, reproduced in *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p222

[66] In fact, the idea of an external transaction in theology; a theoretical substitutionary concept of atonement is referred to in *Robert Falconer* as a "wicked lie". MacDonald felt that salvation was an inner process, substantially related to a universal reality, sometimes evident in history; sometimes not.

time itself – a retrospective re-creation[67] of the intellect. It demands the willing participation of nihilism in its own death. It is like Lilith at last asking for her hand to be cut off.

Lilith's predicament and the forgiveness granted to her seem to be an illustration of this logical impossibility, while Vane's journey itself functions as an illustration of the giftedness – not the necessity - of the relationship between a Christ-inspired imagination and the experience of truth as life. The forgiver and forgiven do not conspire to deny or to forget history as though it were merely a psychological transaction. Neither do they come to the philosophical conclusion that forgiveness is logical. Rather the one who is forgiven is relieved of the burden of such history, while the forgiver must take the burden of historicity upon himself (we do *not* forget what we have forgiven). The closer Vane becomes to Lilith, the more he must learn to forgive, and so the more aware of the reality of evil and of historicity does he become, placing him in ever more danger of succumbing to the burden of evil. It follows that the more one needs, and is gifted the ability to forgive, the greater does the temptation become to judge the world as evil from our own experience.

This burden is taken from Vane, only to the degree that he allows that his own ability to forgive is itself a gift from Christ, the originator of forgiveness. For Christ is the only one able to fully bear both the evil weight of historicity, and the capacity for its transformation into a forgiven and truly conditional, rather than necessary, history. The playfulness or lightness of fiction of which Hyman speaks then, is not the same as that of an irresponsible, cavalier or antinomian playfulness in relation to forgiveness, exposed in James Hogg's Wringhim, for example. It is not freedom from responsibility, but freedom from guilt, which freedom *enables* responsibility. Instead, the playfulness is a sign of childlikeness; of a likeness with God, as the relation of children to their father. It is marked also by obedience which is not careful or self-conscious, but trusting. One does

[67] It is important here to note that the issue of such re-creation is related in the passage of *Lilith,* to the issue of forgiveness, by MacDonald. ("will he help me?" "he will forgive you"). Recent philosophers have also identified in the notion of forgiveness the implication that history itself is remade. Forgiveness, in its strongest conception, is not a conspiracy to forget, or an external transaction, but a real gift of an entirely new history to the wrongdoer, which has a material effect on future history. (see Hare: *The Moral Gap*) (p227): "Swinburne's analysis reveals the centrally mysterious ingredient of forgiveness, which is that it seems like an attempt to do the impossible, namely to bring it about that for both parties something which did happen did not happen."

not trust in the mode of playfulness itself, it is itself symbolic of the anticipation of our identity as children. Vane cannot alone rid himself of the burden of Lilith's evil, but rather must, through that experience, acknowledge his own historicity; the contingent nature of his own reality. One's relationship with others is therefore utterly bound up with one's relationship with God. This relationship therefore constantly redefines itself in terms of an increasing awareness of the importance of its connection with Christ as being essential to the manner of its connection with reality (or realities)[68]. It is also consistent with the logic of forgiveness found in the New Testament, which incidentally makes it crucial to the formation of Christian identity[69]. In the process, however, we cannot deny that such an expansion is bound to increase the risk that evil will become defining of reality for us. And so the continual increase of faith is a prerequisite for this experience of growth.

Both life and death become witnesses in this expansion, not to an abstract truth which would grant them their respective and polarised places in some larger scheme, but to Light, which bears witness *to itself*, through life and death, in challenging the notion of history; of what is knowable: "Now is the Life for, that *never was* against thee!" (*Lilith*, p207). MacDonald does not, then, bring any new, external solution to the problems raised by autonomy, but allows us to enter into the inner coherence of the logic of forgiveness by granting it an alternative, imaginary setting, as opposed to his making a theoretical contribution to Christian doctrine. Although his son, in his biography, sees his symbolic use of light and darkness in *Lilith* as intent upon illustrating the *reality* of evil[70], MacDonald has come to realise that the awareness of such vivid darkness must encourage the perception of the value of light, in order to participate in light's relation to, and perception of,darkness.

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[68] This also has coherence with what is noted above, in that Christ's life, in granting life to the world, does so through a gift of death, which does not merely undo, but which remakes history. Here, MacDonald is showing that this new history also challenges our concept of death. The implacable, unforgiving nature of time is itself challenged in the novel.

[69] Eg *Matthew* 5v44-45 "bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, *that you may be sons* of your Father in heaven, or *Mark* 11v25 "...if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you.... Or *Ephesians* 4v32: "...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

[70] "..we are prone to find comfort in declaring that Evil is but shadow cast by the Light, the devil but an imagined symbol of the distress caused by darkness...." *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p552

He does not supply the cheap comfort of which his son speaks, however. Even if his intention was to communicate the reality of evil, the reader's lostness - while itself an illustration of the way in which darkness validates its own reality - also *cannot help* but validate the light as necessary for its own existence (for only the Light can help Lilith cease to be, and so grant her true existence). By contrast, while the darkness calls for the light in order to understand itself, the light bears witness *to itself* as, in its excess, it acknowledges the darkness, which acknowledgement constitutes a gift of reciprocity, not a relationship of mutual dependence. In this, he seems to remains true to his resistance to dualism, even portraying dualism itself as the illusion of philosophies which would imply that the light cannot bear witness to itself, requiring some objective intellectual verification, as opposed to being characterised by an inner coherence.

Summary - nihilism

We have considered briefly the way in which nihilism is translated to become part of the inner coherence of the logic of forgiveness, with respect to the way in which Vane's identity is formed by forgiveness. In this, MacDonald has not denied the nihilistic impulse its historicity, but has allowed it to run its course, until the point at which its helplessness to form identity becomes clear. He has left the light to bear witness to itself, in remaking Vane's history; Vane's sense of self, until his great burden of historicity and death is so far retranslated by this gift of understanding and forgiveness that it – what seemed to be his *own* life - becomes a dream to him, in the light of a new perception of identity.

We will now go on to consider MacDonald's short story, 'The Giant's Heart' as providing another angle from which to consider the way in which MacDonald similarly delimits ethics, as he does nihilism, in order to allow a sense of reality to disappear, and to reemerge, translated; reinterpreted by the logic of the Divine imagination[71]. Again, we

[71] We can see, from the following statement, too, that this imaginative ability is what gives the human true identity, inasmuch as it emerges *out of* the divine identity, giving itself freely, and by such *outward* movement testifying to its divine nature: "...MacDonald is even more extreme and explicit than Coleridge in underlining the divine source of this faculty. Where, for Coleridge, the primary imagination was 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM', and the secondary imagination a power seeking unity and striving to enliven that which is dead, MacDonald displaces the notion of mere resemblance to God with that of identity with God..." (*George MacDonald*, p53). We should also be careful to note the distinction between the analogical relation of "like God" and the familial identity "with God" as one of quality and not mere quantity. It is not the autonomous "god-likeness" of the autonomous artist which we examined in relation to MacDonald's reference to *Isaiah*, but a familial connection with God through the self-interpretation of Christ; so that all are gifted with

should note that we cannot restrict this experience to literary or psychological categories. In his work, the imagination of the reader is made to work not only analogically, in relation to faith, but in terms of a *substantial* participation in a Divine economy as follows: the autonomy of ethics is violated or lost, as the ethical demands are intensified and elevated in the story. Finally, the original ethical position of the reader is rendered groundless, by reference to the nature of the narrative itself. Finding that its autonomous nature - the ability to judge - is temporary, the reader must give way to a concept of virtuous action which is specific, freely willed and courageous in being externally groundless. That is, the text or person must deny the notion that it is its textuality or self-consciousness which makes it complete. (Just as Vane must give up the notion that he can judge reality from an autonomous standpoint). It cannot achieve this without the help of the reader perceiving their own role as assisting in the perception of a wider, divine and unbound textual identity[72].

In breaking down its own logic, the story throws the question onto the reader, where its interpretation becomes a matter of free choice[73]. The reader can see him or herself as becoming part of a larger text, written by a divine Author; an open history, continually rewritten or reinterpreted through the act of forgiveness. Or the reader may choose to play God, to be god-like in Coleridge's sense, replicating the mistakes of both the human author, and the characters within the narrative, so creating (instead of an open historicity,

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God's image, in that they are adopted members of the divine family, rather than miniature gods.

[72] In this, it may be accurately described as "meta-fiction", as Graeme Muirhead puts it when considering *Phantastes*: "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" ('Meta-Phantastes: A self-referential faerie romance for men and women', *Scottish Literary Journal,* Vol 19, No 2, Nov 1992, pp36-49). We should note as well one other thing about the kind of reading enabled by such work, which is that of (same article, p37, quoting Fjellestad): "the critical reader, whose awareness of the incompatibility of the naïve and self-reflexive readings leads him to consider the act of interpretation itself: The critical reader's aim is not to zero in on one meaning and thus to master the text, but rather to notice how meaning can never be fixed, to *see how the emerging sense is provisional'* (my italics). This issue of provisionality makes us think both of what we noted about the conditional nature of our history, in speaking of nihilism and forgiveness; and also what MacDonald noted in his letter to his father about the way in which forms of truth change from age to age. We should, however, note that while MacDonald thinks that our own emerging sense is conditional, being a gift of God, inasmuch as it is a product of divine imagining it nevertheless is bound to retain a familial connection to meaning in its deeper sense – divine meaning – even if such meaning cannot be *fixed* at the human level of understanding.

[73] As Robb notes: "MacDonald's reader...must develop 'the power to read the hieroglyphic aspect of things', for he is dealing with an author who believes that literature ought to have as much conscious meaning crammed into it as possible and that, furthermore, any worthwhile piece of literature must have within it much more meaning still, far beyond what the author was conscious of devising." (*George MacDonald*, pp54-5)

as Derrida puts it[74]) an endless ending which does not indicates openness to the future, but remains nightmarishly locked in upon itself by its own - god-*like* - judgement. And here we see why it is that the analogical attempt to establish identity ("like"), is not sufficient for MacDonald's need to describe the human relationship to the divine, tending to fall back upon itself by reason of the illusory sense of self-sufficiency of the analogical form, and so to remove the crucial sense of dependence upon the forgiveness of God which is vital to the familial connection between one's identity and the 'I AM' of the divine identity of Christ. This explains why it is that MacDonald insists that his work cannot be treated allegorically; since allegory hinges on the logic of analogy. Anyway, we shall consider 'The Giant's Heart', and the way in which it represents MacDonald's thinking on these things; coming back to his view of the imagination in the second section.

[74] *The Gift of Death*, p5

C. The end of ethics and the beginning of community in *Lilith*

'The Giant's Heart' and Lilith

Moralism

Roderick McGillis, in his introduction to *For the Childlike*, is keen to demonstrate that MacDonald's stories, particularly his fairy stories and works of fantasy, tend, on closer inspection, to deconstruct the reader's sense of morality. Particularly, he cannot be pinned down allegorically by his work to a system of belief. Critics' comments often focus on the way in which MacDonald seems to subvert such traditional religious teaching, and seek to show how delightfully he undermines the ground beneath the self-appointed judge. There is truth in all of this, but often such truth as misses the exact target of MacDonald's narrative. We cannot forget that MacDonald was speaking to readers in probably the last days of an era when theological issues, and the philosophical problems that they raised, were almost universally spoken about, and at the very least well known. The picture of the ploughman conversing intelligently with the clergyman is not a false one. But familiarity had bred misunderstanding. MacDonald's view is that a doctrinal religion based on a theology divorced from philosophy simply talks itself to death. Both become philosophies – and both unwillingly nihilist – as we discussed in the chapter on nihilism. Yet this nihilism is interpreted as the symptom of a universally gifted death, so that MacDonald is not saying that philosophy or ethics are useless. And neither does he think that deconstruction is the *only* aim of the text. This writer wants his reader to find what he believes to be true light. In *Alec Forbes*, the narrator notes this (p385):

> Mr Cupples tried to lead Alec into philosophical ways of regarding things; for he had just enough of religion to get some good of philosophy – which itself is the religion of skeletons (for) "ye see....it's pairt o' the machine..."

This reminds us of the skeletons in *Lilith* (one of the many repeated symbols in MacDonald's work), who are still learning to communicate with one another at a better level. They are not, however, abandoned in the novel. MacDonald abandons nothing; condemns nothing.[75] Instead we meet those skeletons, as they exist, in the process of being redeemed. Dogma in and of itself (as a belief about something) is revealed as a

[75] Taking literally, in all of his fiction, Jesus's words: "I am not come to judge the world but to save the world..." *John* 12: 47-48

skeletal experience, denying its adherents the very life and humanity which they think they have been pursuing. Therefore, when the writer in *Scotland's Beloved Storyteller* (p179), quotes, in order to reassure the reader that MacDonald's theology is orthodox, that...

> ...his war was upon the faithlessness of the officially faithful, and incidentally only upon dogmas exaggerated out of all proportion...

...we must also remember that underlying this is MacDonald's belief that it is *only in the absence of an imaginative*, therefore living, understanding, that the faithlessness which ensues from a merely dogmatic understanding can flourish in the first place. He can forgive the preacher almost any dogmatic aberration[76], if he displays that imaginative life (*Malcolm,* p46):

> (though the preacher)...set himself to frighten the sheep into the fold by wolfish cries...his imagination was sensitive enough to be roused by the words of scripture themselves, and was not dependent for stimulus upon those of Virgil, Dante, or Milton...

MacDonald is signalling here that he is interpreting biblical literature in a way which might not be expected[77]. His point is that 'God works in mysterious ways', and that he will not be drawn into identifying one method or denomination over another as *in or of itself* good *or* bad. His faith in the power of the divine imagination is sufficient for him to believe that any evil element can be overcome by that imaginative working, even if it is communicated by means of the fear inculcated by 'wolves'. In *Lilith*, we note that Mara herself, who symbolises both wisdom *and* suffering[78], is the one who sends out wolves to gather in the sheep, so translating good out of the appearance of evil. Robb has noted (*George MacDonald*, p106), that

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[76] Consider his letter to his father (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p185): ...rather would I be such a Unitarian as Dr Channing that such a Christian as by far the greater number of those, that talk about his Divinity, are. The former truly believes in Christ – believes in him far more than the so-called orthodox."

[77] In referring to *John* 10, he does not liken the preacher to the hireling (as is suggested in the passage itself) but rather to the wolf, who may frighten away the hireling, suggesting perhaps that the role of hireling falls to the liberal, 'official' church, while this renegade preacher unwittingly fulfils God's will in being the wolf who sends the sheep back to Christ out of the despair of human attempts to accurately replace Christ with dogma. What is most important in his reference to this passage is the fact that no human preacher *can* fulfil the role of shepherd, but only Christ. Therefore, it is unfair to expect a human preacher or writer to be able to replace the Christ-like imagination in the individual, the most he may do is to arouse what is already there. He is, by implication, insisting upon the irreplaceable nature of Christ himself, and rendering religious disputes irrelevant.

[78] Mara (or 'bitterness')is also the name given by Naomi to herself, in the book of *Ruth*, a woman exiled to a foreign country, following the death of her sons, and who yet finds new life and hope, not from a restoring of what is lost, but through a new family which will represent the ancestry of the line of King David.

> it was open to MacDonald to make a point about good being brought about from evil...(but)...his heart is with the broad implication of the narrative, that Vane, with all his imperfection, is the necessary agent for the eventual triumph of good...the conflict...is really a reflection of how MacDonald's creed of the virtue of action essentially conflicts with his belief that God is all in all and human effort, considered as a thing itself, vain...The lesson of *Lilith* seems to be that righteous action should not be undertaken until the self is utterly dead, but such an impossible condition was of no use to an author who was, in his son's words, 'always a fighter'.

However, because we are more interested here in how MacDonald went about defining this 'self', we should note that although the outer logic of the story seems to be that of the grace of God working through the mistakes of human behaviour, it also allows us to see how the issue of good and evil, as we have stated, is neither that of a dualistic 'battle' between them, nor of a universally contrived scheme whereby good comes from evil, thus conveniently explaining it. Further, MacDonald himself is aware of the danger – as we have quoted – of perceiving that WE are the fighters[79]. But imaginatively conceived, the impossible logic of this conflict between the necessity for human action and the belief in God as the author of all good *reorients the mind* toward the necessity and therefore the ultimate reality, of light; of Christ alone, while *at the same time* conceiving of it as a priceless gift, not to be fully realised until all logical objections or solutions lose their tendency to claim independent validity. Hence the way in which what formerly seemed real in Vane's mind recedes from Vane, the more he realises that his being is contingent upon God's being, rather than being, of itself, necessary. Ultimately, in our common concept of selfhood, he seems required to lose himself.

However, we must focus where MacDonald himself focuses. MacDonald's point is that our sense of self – like our sense of the role of logic - is mistaken. We are in the process of being given selves unimaginable, in proportion to the amount that we hold back our autonomous selves (which are not, in actual fact, true selves) from divine change, through fear of the unknown; fear that we shall lose them. This again reminds us that divine selfhood – like philosophy - must first be construed as a unique gift from one self to another, notwithstanding that we must battle with the terrible power of our own instinct for autonomy (or survival) - and with *philosophy's own instinct for autonomous logic* - in order to receive it. It is worth noting here that the philosopher, Descartes, based his belief

[79] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p204.

in the conscious thought of the human mind – in the validity of that "I" - ultimately upon his faith in God. Descartes says that

> *I must not imagine* that I do not conceive the infinite by means of a true idea, but only by the negation of the finite, in the same way as I comprehend rest and darkness by the negation of movement and light...*on the contrary* I see manifestly that there is more reality in the infinite substance than in the finite. (And he goes on) ..I am aware in myself of a certain power of judgment which undoubtedly I have received from God.[80] (my italics)

In Vane's and Lilith's nihilistic experience, MacDonald is also thinking of the loss of this "gifted" ability, as Descartes describes it (p133):

> I observe that it is not only a real and positive idea of God...which presents itself to my mind, but also, so to speak, a certain negative idea of nothing...that I am, as it were, midway between God and nothing...placed so that there is nothing in me which can lead me into error in so far as a sovereign being has produced me; but that if I consider myself...insofar as I am not myself the sovereign being, I find myself exposed to an infinity of deficiencies...

Philosophy and logic tend to lose their inner coherence when they lose faith, hence the move to nihilism. MacDonald anticipates that loss, in identifying it as the religion of skeletons, but translates such an experience as an illustration of the contingency of all identity upon Christ's identity with us, and ours with his. More than ever before, in this novel, he is striving to remember for himself and to communicate to the reader, that sense of contingency of 'being', which extends even to the notion of morality. For, even though he insists that moral laws are absolute in themselves, he means by this that they are gifted. That is, even though they may be absolute, our experience of them is contingent and limited by our own imaginative ability to conceive of them[81]. They, too, lose their validity when conceived of in the abstract, that is, as things in themselves to be grasped whole and applied at will, without reference to the divine imagination from which they come.

For now, we should note that, with regard to issues of morality, the picture is not one of a simple externalised battle between good and evil. Neither is MacDonald's criticism of the church a case of social comment, or of a hatred of hypocrisy. Rather, it has philosophical depth, and is based upon a particular theology which has at its heart the notion that divine

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[80] Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and the Meditations*, p124, p133

[81] As he says in 'The Imagination....' (*A Dish of Orts*, p22): "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." Note here how the need for obedience in morality is not conceived of as a matter of fear or assent, but as informed (to a degree) trust.

Light interprets itself to itself in the imagination, imparting identity and therefore value to everything that it touches. In 'The Giant's Heart', however, he first encourages the stages of thought and judgment which falter, when taken to exist prior to this notion, before he encourages the reader to look within for the divine light of imagination. He does this by means of certain themes:

Lostness

Invariably, MacDonald's best work is characterised by his disorientation of the reader through the presentation of conflicting standpoints, none of which represent truly solid ground. This is reflected in many of his writings, in the lostness of the protagonists. In *Lilith* and in 'The Giant's Heart' landscapes in particular change, recede and are transformed (*Lilith*, pp11-12):

> I turned and looked behind me; all was vague and uncertain, as when one cannot distinguish between fog and field, between cloud and mountain-side. One fact only was plain – that I saw nothing I knew...might a man at any moment step beyond the realm of order, and become the sport of the lawless?...I was in a world, or call it a state of things, an economy of conditions, an idea of existence, so little correspondent with the ways and modes of this world – which we are apt to think the only world, that the best choice I can make of word or phrase is but an adumbration of what I would convey.

...and so on...there are doors in and doors out, staircases which appear and disappear....and undecipherable books. In all of these ways, MacDonald links for us the nature of reality and the nature of ethical judgement.[82] 'The Giant's Heart' begins with such lostness, anticipating the lack of closure which the reader will experience and the ethical problems ensuing. 'The Giant's Heart' will contain the abrupt killing of a giant by

[82] Note, too, how in this passage the issue is linked to the insufficiency of language. In his excellent essay, 'Language and secret Knowledge' in *At the Back of the North Wind*', McGillis notes (*For the Childlike*, p149) "...we realize the importance of language to MacDonald. Its effect on the reader is intended neither to suspend intellect nor to direct intellect, but rather to motivate it. Metaphor is that aspect of language that expresses the ineffable by envisaging an impossibility". However, in *Lilith*, it seems that MacDonald is more extreme. Poetic language fails entirely, and is replaced by characters who struggle in dialogue with one another against a kind of mental fog, which consumes the poetic impulse along with moral clarity. Perhaps this is to do with the nature of *Lilith*. MacDonald's description of a poet "is a man who is glad of something, and tries to make others glad of it too." (*Unspoken Sermons*, p20) *Lilith* is not such a work; possibly because it is an intensely personal expression of the author's own relation to the mystery itself, concerning his own questions about the nature of language and textuality. He felt, as we saw, that it was different to his other work, in being written, inspirationally, like a prayer in that it looks entirely towards God. Rather than being an attempt to make us glad, it is more consistent with the role of the wolf – to send us out lost and looking for God himself. We shall consider these things relating to language in greater detail in the chapter on 'The Golden Key'

an initially passive child and a confusing picture of a mild and well meaning woman who assists in the murder of small children. The story is a forest of such miniature encounters; tableaux of seeming revelation which become incomprehensible, the moment any one of them is taken as definitive of the place from which to assess events. The lostness of the children in the landscape is related to this deconstruction. *And yet, paradoxically, the attempt to superimpose a sensible moral structure is yet still a symptom of the reader's praiseworthy loss of him or herself in the events of the story.* We must lose ourselves ethically in the Biblical sense by becoming involved, as does Tricksey-Wee in this tale ("Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (*Matthew* 16:25)). There is no neutral, readerly, privileged ground; and therefore suspension of disbelief or belief is not an adequate response to the story. *For in order for us to understand that we do not understand, we must begin from some honest viewpoint of our own* and become, ourselves, lost. The story works effectively as a parable only if we allow ourselves to become involved. A distanced interpretation is simply not possible – it must be abandoned in favour of an active pursuit of truth. Further, the existence of stories or writing, is an intrinsic part of the necessary struggle against evil, and *itself is parasitic upon such a struggle with evil*, without which nothing will have meaning[83]. The story cannot, then, as it were, *by its very nature*, take a superior position to that of the evil with which it must deal. It cannot *replace* light. In *Mary Marston*, p67, MacDonald writes:

> For nobody can make a story without somebody wicked to set things wrong in it, and then all the work lies in setting them right again, and as soon as they are set right, then the story stops.

We see how 'The Giant's Heart', then, as does *Phantastes*, functions as "meta-fiction"[84].

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[83] We must not, however, confuse that struggle with the gift of self-interpreting light which is given in its course; for that gift is not dependent upon anything. The story, by *its very nature* of requiring this sense of battle, is a witness to its own imperfection; and to the notion that history is not yet fulfilled by light. Paradoxically, it is this admission which creates the gap through which we may be granted a self-explanatory vision of the light, and a transformed perception of the true nature of the situation in which we find ourselves.

[84] This view of the place and role of 'stories' can be seen to be emerging from his belief about the Bible (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p373): "But the common theory of the inspiration of the words, instead of the breathing of God's truth into the hearts and souls of those who wrote it, and who then did their best with it, is degrading and evil; and they who hold it are in danger...of being idolaters of the Bible instead of disciples of Jesus...it is Jesus who is the Revelation of God, not the Bible...the book is indeed sent us by God, but it nowhere claims to be his very word...Jesus alone is The Word of God."

Lostness and Language

One further thing to note is that this sense of lostness has itself had a long history before we as readers enter the story. In this, MacDonald is indicating a struggle which may take different forms in different ages, but which is essentially ancient. For it is at the *very beginning* of the story that (p64)

> ...*at last* she ran into the wood, although there was more chance of losing herself than of finding him.

MacDonald is not only giving us clues as to the parabolic nature of the story (parables which relate to losing and finding are numerous in the New Testament), but also warning the alert reader against quick judgement by hinting that there is more information involved here than we will have access to. The story does not function as an accumulation of information but, like a truly Christian concept of ethics, as an ability to move alongside; to identify *with.* The movement of ethics is neither linear nor inexorable, for "...only God's love is inexorable..."[85]. So morality is defined by its relation to faith, as those who are lost believe both against *and* by means of experience, that they may be found. In turn, faith relates to a new *kind* of understanding, for we find in *Hebrews* 11: 1-3:

> now faith is the substance...by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God...

Here, not only does 'The Giant's Heart' represent "metafiction", it is also anticipating *Lilith*; dealing with the idea of a metalanguage - the language of faith, which apprehends as it gazes upon what it cannot comprehend[86]. Language itself functions in a paradoxical manner, as does *lostness* in the story; finding *through* losing; finding not meaning itself, but the promise of meaning, not the boundaries of the world in which it is lost; but a vision and experience of a world without boundaries, informed by the realisation that boundaries are not defining of reality but of unreality. Poetry itself is not a defining presence; but a reaching out of language towards what is unknown; a participation through faith, in what is unknown. The use of language is itself, dependent upon a 'religious' experience, then. As such, it may, equally, signal not only the presence of the divine, but, should it deny its own nature, as does *Lilith*, is bound to experience an utter loss of its ability to communicate divine coherence; signalling even then, however - through its very tendency to chaos and confusion - its own contingency. Again, we have a sense in which language

[85] See MacDonald's essay 'The Consuming Fire' in *Unspoken Sermons.*
[86] This, too, is noted by McGillis (p158-9, *For the Childlike*), where he speaks of the "difference between "thinking" and "knowing" " in "At the Back of the North Wind". However he seems more positive about the role of poetry *as a thing in itself* than does MacDonald.

is bound to testify to light, even against its own will, as we discussed earlier, in relation to nihilism.

Landscape

The framing of this landscape in 'The Giant's Heart' works in contrast to that neat framing practised by Victorians, who would take picture frames out on trips to the countryside, in order to create a manageable piece of nature for abstraction and assimilation within a comfortable frame of reference. Here, however (*The Complete Fairy Tales,* p81),

> ...running on without looking, she at length found herself in a valley she knew nothing about. And no wonder; for what she thought was a valley with round, rocky sides, was no other than the space between two of the roots of a great tree that grew on the borders of Giantland...

In the passage which follows, MacDonald will convey a dizzying sense of movement, changing perspective and space, and yet he also believes that there is an absolute light; an absolute truth. His essay on the Imagination gives us a clue as to what morality might be like in relation to this kind of landscape: "

> What can be known must be known severely (but)...there are those infinite lands of uncertainty...(where) the man may learn to imagine greatly like God who made him...[87]

And because, while the imagination is formed in order to seek (the good), it is not to be equated with good as a 'thing in itself', so he goes on...

> If the whole power of pedantry should rise against her, the imagination will yet work; and if not for good, then for evil.

This relates back to what we noted at the end of the last paragraph on 'Lostness' and the function of the story. Notably, MacDonald here gives to imagination a female gender, perhaps equating her with the personification of wisdom, found in the Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament books – Sophia – a female figure who was present with God when the worlds were framed, according to the writer of *Proverbs* (*Proverbs* 3, vv13-20), and possibly also in the mind of the writer of *Hebrews*, who equates faith and wisdom. MacDonald is working from within the intertextual tradition of Biblical poetry in order to suggest that reason – that enlightenment method of making man divine – may also, as is

[87] We might be tempted to take the word "like" as indicating that the analogical connection is the important one. However the stress of the meaning in this sentence, I think, depends more upon the fact that it is God (the divine *Maker)* who, as man's *maker*, has a substantial connection to the imagination. The means may be analogical at times, but that analogical connection is itself only made possible by the fact that it rests upon a substantial reality.

the case with imagination, create in its isolation of self-making the monster that is Sophia's sister, Satan's bride; Lilith. The following passage, taken from chapter 28 of *Lilith*, shows that MacDonald's aim is not an Eden-like state of pre-reason (unlike the typically Romantic visions we alluded to earlier); not a pre-ethical stage, but a divine sisterhood of reason and imagination:

> "Is not a little knowledge a dangerous thing?"
> "That is one of the pet falsehoods of your world! The fancy that knowledge is *in itself* a great thing, would make any degree of knowledge more dangerous than any amount of ignorance. To know all things would not be greatness..." (my italics)

The idea of 'absolute' light or truth, then, is not related to quantity of knowledge, but to its direction of growth. Here, his notion of the hidden grounds and direction of absolute laws is similar to that of McLeod Campbell. In *The Nature of the Atonement*, his major - and controversial - work of Christian theology, Campbell says that (pp31-2):

> We do not know enough to say as to anything that transcends our knowledge of the reign of the law, in which way we are to view it, whether as belonging to the system of law, but to a region of it out of our sight, or as outside of it.

The accumulation of knowledge, therefore, can *of itself*, never bring us closer to the 'absolute' nature of things. So the 'absolute' nature of moral laws has nothing at all to do with rigidity or quantity; with the kind of limited morality he presents as inadequate, given the dizzying landscape of 'The Giant's Heart', but rather takes its notion of 'absolute' from those experiences of blinding light; moments of illumination which reveal merely the height and depth of landscape we encounter in allowing ourselves to become lost outside of our own conceptions, while yet remaining within the unseen vision of divine love.[88] This sense of limitlessness in relation to God comes up time and again in MacDonald's work, and in his private correspondence. In a poem to his wife, we find these lines:

> For all behind the starry sky
> Behind the world so broad

[88] This also relates to what Derrida describes as (*The Gift of Death*,p6) "the breadth or abyss of this experience" when noting that "responsibility and faith go together, however paradoxical that might seem to some", he describes the experience of the sacrificial gift as "This trembling (which) seizes one at the moment of becoming a person, and the person can become...only in being paralysed, in its very singularity, by the gaze of God. Then it sees itself seen by the gaze of another, "a supreme, absolute and inaccessible being who holds us in his hand not by exterior but by interior force." In this description we should note how faith, ethical responsibility and identity – the issue of 'becoming' a person, which MacDonald was also concerned with - are all one issue in this experience. Further, the question of boundaries disappears in the awareness of this 'absolute', for we are not held 'in'; but held from within, relating also to MacDonald's thinking about the nature of seeing in his essay on the imagination as being seen – being "thought by God" - from within.

Behind men's hearts and souls doth lie
The Infinite of God...
...And so I sit in thy wide space

And in the accompanying letter he says: "Oh, the great fact of God shooting up into great heights of space, grand indisputable Reality..."[89]

This is an illumination from within the imagination which in turn expands the 'without' of existence beyond what would be deemed 'reasonable', but which is connected to a realm of reason beyond logical comprehension, of which we have but glimpses which allow a sense of coherence to emerge. This expansion turns our world upside-down, just as the tables of the money-lenders at the temple are turned upside-down by Christ in the New Testament, showing how far apart from self-created, autonomous systems of ethics this 'economy' of light truly is.

His philosophy is not only like that of McLeod Campbell in having a broader – and an entirely different quality - of vision of the 'absolute'. Also, in his approach to reason in relation to morality, MacDonald is similar to a fellow Scot, the poet John Davidson, in not allowing that we may impose any 'reasonable' limits upon a love which operates in an economy unknown in its entirety. While John Davidson seemingly came to utterly different conclusions about the Christian God than did MacDonald, the two are very similar in their attitude to what passes as Christianity in much of Victorian culture. They both abandoned any concept of 'reasonable' or socially conditioned ethics, in their search for a better expression of their own belief that sacrificial – utterly unreasonable and passionate – love is the heart and soul of authentic faith. This is Davidson's scathing description of a more limited vision, where it occurs within the church, in his poem, 'The Rev. E Kirk':

And naught to do, the truth to speak,
Save sit and sip my toddy,
And write a sermon once a week,
And bury anybody

Some half-dozen marriages
Come in the pairing season;
I visit sick folk if they please –
Or anything *in reason*

[89] *George MacDonald and His Wife*, pp199, 201.

Delimiting the borders

In MacDonald's work we also find the demand that love, ethics and reason must be *delimited* to avoid such a travesty of religion. We find that our only relation to reason in his fairytales is that we experience it as inner coherence, looking outwards. When we do see limits they are merely those of our own sight, melting into the horizon of a greater landscape, an as yet incomprehensible reason. This does not destroy, but elevates reason until it goes well beyond the limits of Kant's confinement of moral reason. It is also more like the New Testament interpretation of Jewish law, echoing the intensification of that law by Christ beyond any possible reasonable interpretation that could be placed on it within the existing religious tradition[90]. It also echoes the concentration on the notion of sin as being primarily an "inner" state of being.

Yet such intensification is not ultimately perceived to be a burden, but a gift, in MacDonald's thinking. This is because he interprets divine holiness as being an expression, in another form, of divine love[91]. Frequently, however, the theology of his time interpreted the separate characteristics of God in terms of abstract concepts which must inevitably conflict, as is the case with the *Westminster Confession.* MacDonald instead allows for the concepts themselves to be reinformed, rather than using the concepts to inform his conception of God. This, possibly, is the main difference which distinguishes his – and McLeod Campbell's – approach to the question of atonement from that of the *Westminster Confession*, where the concept of divine wrath is treated as a philosophical proposition, set logically against the love of Christ, instead of allowing the Biblical writings to inform intertextually the concept of the atonement[92]. Campbell and MacDonald are looking *to* the intertextual tradition of interpretation found *within* the Bible for the corrective 'life' when they seek the meaning to which the text alludes, rather than

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[90] For example, "You have heard it said to those of old, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery...."

[91] I *John* 4:8 "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. *in this is love*, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." We should note that the philosophical implication of the sentence, in its context, is that our concepts (of love, of wrath, of justice, of ethics) can only be informed by their grounding in the identity of God. We cannot take these concepts as *existing in themselves*, and *then* apply them in order to supply some anthropomorphic concept of Gods attributes.

[92] In 'Browning's "Christmas Eve"', MacDonald notes the "errors...of old time...they speculated on what a thing must be, instead of observing what it was; this *must be* having for its foundation not self-evident truth, but notions whose chief strength lay in their preconception.. (*Orts*, p207)

attempting to force it into a prearranged system. And so it emerges that they are truer to the text than are those dogmaticians who also tend most ardently to propose its inspiration.

Corresponding with this, the hand that is taken from Lilith – the hand that has attempted to reign over itself autonomously and is buried – reappears in the novel as the hand of *God* at the end of the novel, reinterpreted as gift rather than as punishment, consistent with MacDonald's interpretation of hell as an expression of God's love[93]. We note that this hand at the end of the novel pushes Vane back into the life of the world he has sought to leave, but this time with a renewed perspective upon its nature (p250):

> A hand, warm and strong, laid hold of mine...the door opened, the hand let mine go, and pushed me gently through...[94]

We should note that this disembodied hand indicates an incompletion; a healing not yet complete, despite the fact that the moment of apocalypse (the appearance of Christ to the little ones) seems already to have taken place. Apocalypse for Vane means an unveiling of his *own* sight rather than a revealing of what is in general, or what might be seen in the future. It is not a sight which the reader may receive 'head on' as it were, but a seeing which 'has' us. We note this also in *Alec Forbes*, where (p147):

> Alec felt as if he had got to the borders of fairyland, and something was going to happen. A door would open and admit him into the secret of the world. But the door into life generally opens behind us, and a hand is put forth which draws us in backwards[95].

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[93] It is also consistent with the picture used in *Salted with Fire* (ch16, p203), where he says that "The outer darkness is but the most dreadful form of the consuming fire...his face is turned away, but *His hand is laid upon him still...*" There is a tradition of this question of the interpretation of hell, found in the writings of the mystic, Meister Eckhart, who thought that angels and devils may be different interpretations of the same beings, our perception depending on the state of one's attitude to death, either torturing or freeing the soul, only Christ providing the interpretation of death to which our perception should hold.

[94] We should note, however, in this description, that the key plays no part, although the door has "a golden lock". *Lilith* is not a story which functions as a key, unlike 'The Golden Key', but seems instead to indicate the nature of this last work of fiction as being about the nature of the quest for identity itself, rather than a following of an account of its progress. It is of a different order of literature, as MacDonald himself felt. In it, he is perhaps expressing for himself the eschatological sense which has informed his imagination all along, rather than trying to replicate it in the reader's mind. It is not a creative 'replication', then of the divine imagination; but the testament of his own 'given' vision of the way in which the imagination works *for him.* If symbolism is reciprocal, it is less about the 'going out' of MacDonald's writing, and more about what he finds coming back to him. This makes it more rigid in the varieties of interpretation available to us; but also more attractive as a way of perceiving the complex depth and nature of MacDonald's concerns in the rest of his writing.

[95] This description also corresponds with something written to George by his brother, John MacDonald (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p173): "I feel like one who is perpetually on the edge of vision but who is destined to be as perpetually snatched backwards by invisible hands." Greville goes on to say that (p175) "John, the philosopher and dreamer, found his theorizing and his visioning as constantly in conflect as were the terror and beauty of the

This apocalypse transforms the more severe reading of *Mark* 9:43 as it stands alone "If your hand causes you to sin cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed...". The words of Christ are interpreted by his actions. The interpretation of God by His *own* nature (of light by light) does not lead Vane to protest that this is not necessary; or to meet it head-on as an understandable necessity, but it leads him to see the *nature* of the act. The act of self-discipline is, essentially, an act of faith, otherwise it cannot be truly ethical either. *As such it is perceived as an act preceded and reinterpreted by the hand of God,* who cuts off his own life to save us, so that the cut of our own is now *experienced as a gain, rather than a loss. Lilith,* p219:

> The sword gleamed once, there was one little gush of blood, and he laid the severed hand in Mara's lap. "Will you not dress that wound?" I said. "A wound from that sword," answered Adam, "needs no dressing. It is healing and not hurt."

Further, this is an interpretation of one Biblical statement by another. Jesus's words in *Matthew* 34, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" are, first of all presented in terms of that which does not divide from without but from *within* (*Lilith,* p201)

> ....the creature had passed in by the centre of the blade's point and was piercing through the joint and marrow to the thoughts and intents of the heart.

This is an allusion to *Hebrews* 4:12:

> For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edge sword, piercing even to the vision of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

But in turn MacDonald is intertextually interpreting the apocalyptic vision of *Revelation* 19:13,15:

> And His name is called The Word of God...Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword...and He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.

We should note, however, that this universal power is not conceived as force, but in terms of a ruling *from within.* Because we should note that this in turn is an intertext with *Isaiah* 60, with regard to the promise of "the little ones" of *Lilith* "ruling the nations with a rod of iron", which renders that text free of the rhetoric of power. There is no sense in which such a *ruling* can be *appropriated* by the one who is subject to such an apocalypse.

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universe...his honesty of mind so often overwhelmed his imagination that his faith never got beyond that of a great and uplifting hope...". It is interesting to think that George MacDonald may have been thinking not only of himself, but of his dead brother, when he began to think about Vane's character, and to reinterpret the meaning of faith in relation to philosophy.

Instead, it takes the form of a promise that the inner cut represents a truth about the nature of reality. For Vane himself in *Lilith* is told of the little ones that "you were not a rod to measure them with." Ethics, like the concept of atonement, is not established by means of a projection of the concepts of right and wrong onto a situation, but by reference to a vision of the incomprehensible love of God, expressed in the self-sacrifice of Christ. An apocalyptic event which *radically* (and it cannot be expressed how so *very* radically) alters the outlook of the individual from *within.*

We move now to consider how the idea of such an infinite landscape; an immeasurable inner excess in relation to morality, touches upon MacDonald's treatment of time, and its relationship to the concept of progress in modernity.

Modernity and Progress in Giantland

In 'The Giant's Heart' we come across various groups of people who dwell in the limited philosophical world of modernism – no matter how large it at first appears. For at first Tricksey-Wee sees so much, but now there is so much more that can be disappointing when its limits are discovered:

> You would have thought you saw the whole earth through the door when he opened it, so wide was it...(but)...when he closed it, it was like nightfall...

Here MacDonald anticipates the failure of modernity. But we should also note that even though the failure seems dark, it was not *really* nightfall. Such worlds are built around a measurable and therefore finite understanding of the concept of progress, therefore their failure does not really make one bit of difference to one's *actual* progress. As we have already noted, MacDonald's *Lilith* presents a dark vision of the world, and yet is pervaded with a hopefulness which indicates that his frame of reference is outwith the reader's view. Where other Scottish writers may have been left disillusioned, MacDonald's darkness is not a defining experience for him, for his horizon has not depended upon a particular – modern – understanding of progress. For this reason, he has often been misunderstood as shallow; an unfair accusation, given his grasp and personal experience of misery. Rather, his experience of reality seems to be that of Browning, whom he quotes in his essay on that poet[96]:

> O struggling with the darkness all the night
> and visited all night by troops of stars

[96] *A Dish of Orts*, p212.

So just as Vane, himself the modern 'giant' man, is told of his assessment of the little ones "you were not a rod to measure them with", the Giant and his wife also have the attributes of largeness of soul – great voices, great movements and gestures – and yet they are pictured as having a materialist, inward-looking ethic, fixed mainly upon the provision of food, ignorant of the reason for their vast appetite. Here, progress has been translated into acquisition, they have swollen up into giants in their effort to inhabit this new, huge world upon their own terms. The tone of their dialogue puts one in mind of the blustering religion of the upright Victorian capitalist, caricatured in so many Victorian novels. However, the giants' cruelty is that of a lack of imagination, rather than the evil of an imagination perverted (as is the case with *Lilith*). MacDonald's portrayal of them betrays a sympathy for their lack. The Giant wills to be himself, since his imagination conceives of nothing that is not in terms of appropriation.

The Lark, however, wills to be Christ. He could be perceived as being worse off, being beyond dialogue. His progress consists of a denial of experienced reality. But MacDonald never encourages such comparisons, simply presenting various extremes of the same problem: all closed philosophies or theologies behave like answers, whereas true theology or philosophy is characterised by lostness; a questioning which leads us beyond the borders we had previously constructed. Its expectancy is seen as the outfolding and growth of an inquisitive nature, when it reaches beyond the stage of mere acquisition of knowledge in its search for wisdom. It has a childlike nature, needing some other, some twofoldedness, to emerge. Significantly, in his essay on Browning, MacDonald quotes Novalis:

> Philosophy is really home-sickness, an impulse to be a home everywhere...

Without acknowledging that, it becomes merely the religion of bones. It is not enough, however, to acknowledge this fact in an academic sense. To do that without experiencing the terror of 'homesickness' is a denial of its own nature.

Within this landscape of our lostness, we see that we are like children trying to impose our values upon some great borderless country. In an effort to make ourselves feel at home, we convince ourselves that we *are* at home. Here, MacDonald even addresses the movement of deconstruction which sometimes insists upon being at home in the

wilderness. But Giantland is not that home – and I am suggesting a reading of Giantland as the post-enlightened, modern mind. For Giantland *does* have borders, which "touch...at the roots of a great tree" – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil perhaps; a representation of the main theme of the story – of the *self*-conscious nature of much modern ethical thinking. But in Fairyland, within and without are inseparable – there are no borders. C S Lewis's thoughts are helpful here – and he was a writer greatly influenced by MacDonald. For Lewis, this question of how to describe the nature of progress is vital. It is something which he suggests has been better understood in past epistemes. Worlds of thought which, imaginatively entered, can help to free us from "an eternal present". He says in 'De Descriptione Temporum'.[97]:

> ...the image of old machines being superseded by new and better ones...are...the stages of our pilgrimage...the thing that separates us most sharply from our ancestors...our assumption that everything is provisional and soon to be superseded...is...the greatest change in the history of Western Man.

A particular sense of a measurable notion of morality abandoned in the Biblical literature[98] links into the modern concept of biological evolution, which continually needs to compare itself with what has gone before. Both morality and evolution are often perceived as emerging to provide some linear order of progress which may be taken 'as read' and so measured as a sign of our superiority. The title of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* itself bears witness to, and ironically undermines this mood. However, MacDonald's characters – thinking of Lina in *The Princess and Curdie* or the skeletons of *Lilith* – often have the appearance of regression in evolutionary terms. What to the modern mind looks like a step backwards is precisely the route towards true progression in this strange economy of ethics. MacDonald took a keen interest in scientific discoveries and, far from shunning them, seems often determined to show how constructs which claim to have at their basis scientific truths are in fact merely using those facts to cover up social conventions which rely upon comparative notions of ethics. MacDonald himself seemed keen to show how a more imaginative treatment could illuminate and free scientific facts.

MacDonald does not hide from scientific discovery, but he regrets its assimilation – and perversion – as it is translated into the social conventions of moral thinking, as though it

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[97] Essay in *They Asked for a Paper*, p21.

[98] It is the notion of comparative morality, the stance comically taken by *every* character in MacDonald's story, which is rejected in 2 *Corinthians* 10v12: "for we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

were a replacement for meaning. The sense of some *inevitable* growth of machinery as defining progress denies the giftedness of meaning, which values and encourages growth, and so takes away the foundation for its own contingent coherence. The city of *The Princess and Curdie,* has its downfall precisely at the height of its own success, in its temptation to philosophical self-sufficiency[99]. MacDonald does not seek the past (unlike C S Lewis), but he does frequently in his narratives – as in 'The Giant's Heart' - abandon us in amoral space-time. Perhaps this is so that we might realise the implications of our assumptions about the nature of ourselves in relation to history. He is acutely aware of the way in which modernity is going to impose its interpretation upon the world, anticipating writers like Edwin Muir. Consider this extract of *Ranald Bannerman* (p51):

> If there had been a steam-engine to plough my father's fields, how could we have ridden home on its back in the evening? What more machines are there now? Strange wild-looking mad-like machines....are growling and snapping and clinking and clattering over our fields...

Then Muir's 'Horses'[100]:

> ...we had sold our horses in our fathers' time
> To buy new tractors. Now they were strange to us
> As fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield

In MacDonald's lifetime, these things are still within the memory of a generation, but nevertheless, he anticipates the tone of bewildered estrangement from a sense of one's own historicity which will accompany this later writing. He also defines the tone which will inform *Sunset Song's* criticism of man's ideas about the nature of progress towards utopia (p252):

> ...the land changes...great machines come soon...Nothing, it has been said, is true but change, nothing abides...lest we shame them, let us believe that the new oppressions and foolish greeds are no more than mists that pass. They died for a world that is past, these men, but they did not die for this that we seem to inherit. Beyond it and us there shines a greater hope and a newer world, undreamt...

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[99] In addressing the central and related concerns of dependency and philosophical contingency in *Lilith*, MacDonald is perhaps especially speaking to himself, for we find this in a letter to his father (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p283): "May the one Father...wake us out of this sleep into the new world....I for my part would not go without one of my troubles – the *only one I fret at is being dependent...*" For most of his life MacDonald struggled with the constant need to depend upon charity, jobs here and there, goodwill...to accept his role as dependent within a community, rather than financially independent enough to do exactly what he wanted. This is likely to have caused him to examine deeply exactly what it is in the human psyche which causes such intense need for security through independence.

[100] *Selected Poems*, p85.

Like Grassic Gibbon's minister, MacDonald does not lament modernity; does not wish for the kailyard and the small world to come back, but does show how the space of such a new, huge country is, of itself, as it is paid for in the greater grief of men and women, being interpreted as a witness to the need for an entirely new notion of progress; a different kind of wisdom than that which merely disowns its parents or murders its children. Here, the link between the way in which time must be reinterpreted against the trend of certain ideas about progress also translates MacDonald's treatment of eschatology; the notion of the transformation or delimitation of time, rather than of an inevitable progress towards an 'end'. Where Gibbon leaves us with the sense of the infinite pain of hope, moving only forward in time, MacDonald goes on to introduce us to Fairyland, a world in which not only space, but the notion of time, is transformed by hope and desire.

Fairyland

"Can that be true which mocks at forms?" said the King
"Truth rides abroad in shapeless storms." Answered the Shadow[101].

Contrasting with the image of Giantland's horizons, Fairyland is that which involves a moving deeper *into* life; an apprehension of that which is covered over and over (instead of expressed) by illusory forms, or by self-delusion, in very much the same way in which Derrida treats the issue of responsibility. Speaking of the subordination of the orgiastic to responsibility, he notes that (*The Gift of Death*, p11):

> This subordination takes the form of an "incorporation" whether that be understood in its psychoanalytic sense or in the wider sense of an integration that assimilates or retains within itself that which it exceeds, surpasses, or supersedes. The incorporation of one mystery by the other also amounts to an incorporation of one immortality within another, of one eternity within another. This enveloping of immortality also corresponds to a transaction between two negations or two disavowals of death...it will be marked by an internalisation; by an individualization or subjectification, the soul's relation to itself as it falls back on itself in the very movement of incorporation...[102]

This passage is a part of a description of the difference between Plato's cave allegory in the way it involves a subordination of the orgiastic in the notion of mystery; and an

[101] 'The Shadows', *The Complete Fairy Tales*, p97.
[102] C S Lewis is also concerned in his writing to point out the difference between a conscious self-discipline; a reinterpretation of the orgiastic secret, and the Freudian interpretation of the suppression of unconscious desire.

interpretation which reads either a dualistic alliance with, or confrontation between, the notions of orgiastic secrecy and religious responsibility. Frank Riga has written an interesting essay on the correspondence of MacDonald's imagery with that of Plato's allegory of the cave, entitled 'The Platonic Imagery of George MacDonald and C S Lewis, The Allegory of the Cave Transfigured' (in *For the Childlike*). He notes how such interpretations must be accompanied by an awareness of how the Christian nature of MacDonald's thought will temper the notion of transcendence of the material world, into a sense that the material world must have substantial unity with its creator, through the notion of incarnation. He tends to look mainly at the outward emphasis of MacDonald's fairyland, however, looking more at concepts of spiritual worlds, rather than at the implications of this sense of envelopment of one world within another in terms of language, morality or identity.

Derrida's description seems to describe the characteristic treatment of Fairyland, which has generally been treated in a Freudian manner, by reference to MacDonald's individual symbols. However, it is the way in which he layers symbol upon symbol, literary and scientific allusion on top of one another, to *discourage* the individual interpretation of one symbol out of its context, which ultimately makes this movement of "enveloping" meanings which define his narratives. *Lilith* is a grand example of the way in which coherence emerges *between* levels, rather than *from* any one of them. Vane and the reader are likewise enveloped, such that the nature of reality is brought into question. In the novel, we move further away from the self as we move further into the actions and experiences of the narrator. The revelation is that there is an immortal depth to this experience, so that even while seeming to move further from himself, Vane expresses the growing faith that he is in the process of finding identity; finding a 'home', as MacDonald puts it. The Freudian interpretation, in attempting to ground the individual in himself, actually parts the unconscious and conscious in practice, by seeking to make all conscious, all self-knowing, while MacDonald insists that neither of them has a claim upon the notion of identity which is not mysteriously connected to the other. Vane's reasoning begins as a consciousness of what he feels to be himself, but will end in his being grounded in the identity of an 'other', even while Derrida's 'internalization' is characteristic of the inner aspect of Fairyland. For, radically, MacDonald believes that our deeper identity is God

within us, so that we only come into 'being' as we grow into God's being: "God sits in our very being, *deeper than we are in ourselves*":[103] (*Lilith, p14*):

> Indeed, who was I?...then I understood that I did not know myself, did not know who I was, had no grounds on which to determine that I was one and not another...I was a stranger in a strange land...."What right have you to treat me so" I said "Am I, or am I not, a free agent?" "A man is as free as he chooses to make himself..." "you have no right to make me do things against my will!" "When you have a will, you will find that no one can" "You wrong me in the very essence of my individuality!" I persisted. "If you were an individual I could not, therefore now I do not. You are but beginning to become an individual".

We see a counterpart to this state of being in his comments on 'Browning's "Christmas Eve"":

> The life of a man here, if life it be, and not the vain image of what might be a life, is a continual attempt to find his place, his centre of recipiency and active agency. He wants to know where he is, and where he ought to be, and can be; for rightly considered, the position a man *ought* to occupy is the only one he *can* occupy

Fairyland and Identity

Fairyland is not a 'concept', humanly conceived – whether geographic, psychological, social or religious, but a divine sense of 'place' unlike any place we can conceive of – outside of space or time, not 'located' in the brain, but transforming the imagination, in turn reinforming all of our concepts from a different economy of knowledge; granting an identity which is not locational or psychological, but which may be translated as such, in an attempt at description. It is the true mystery of the soul's relation to God. It does not demand utopian projection; although it may take that form mistakenly in its expression. It demands ultimately an acknowledgment of the delimiting of any interpretation we may place upon it; a space in which we can *grow and change into* our relationship to truth, rather than *expand* within our own selves. And the idea of growth for MacDonald is always specifically related to the notion of faith. The concept of faith is not posed as a challenge to the intellect, but has this mysterious enveloping movement. It is very important here not to equate this enveloping as being a suppression through necessity.

[103] We can also see, from this quote, how MacDonald both agrees and disagrees with Calvinism on the matter of the wickedness of the 'self'. Such a self may be wicked, he might say, but that is not the true self in any case. The cutting off and the relegation of this false self to fire comes to be deeply desirable, whereas the Calvinist tends to see hell merely as a place for the self to avoid. Rather than to come to love goodness so much that hell is seen as greatly preferable to the hurting of goodness. In this, the power of hell over the imagination is really lost, rather than being merely subordinated. The true self is the development of God from even deeper within our consciousness. We can see this belief applied practically to *Lilith* in every detail.

For, were the main thing in identity coherence for its own sake, then faith and the imagination would themselves have no meaning. As he says at the beginning of his essay on the imagination: "repose is not the end of education...rather a noble unrest". The gift of faith, the identity, is formed in the *process* of unrest, rather than being a goal achieved at its end. However, it seems that it is only towards the end of *Lilith* that Vane starts to be able to accept the notion that his nature consists of a number of 'gifted' aspects. MacDonald says this in his essay on Browning, in relation to the way in which the 'gift' may function:

> A contradiction, or a thing unrelated, is foreign and painful...even as the rocky particle in the gelatinous substance of the oyster; and, like the latter, he can only rid himself of it by encasing it in the pearl-like enclosure of faith; believing that hidden there lies the necessity for a higher theory of the universe than has yet been generated in his soul. The quest for this home-centre...

It is important here to note how inferior concepts of "faith" will result in us treating it as a "theory" itself, in relation to the construction of identity. It is not, however, for we saw how carefully in *Robert Falconer*, MacDonald distinguishes belief *about* God (the theory) from faith *in* God. In his imagery of the pearl, MacDonald is also using the imagery of 'the kingdom of heaven' (or the kingdom of fairyland), for in *Matthew* 13:46, Jesus refers to the kingdom of heaven as "one pearl of great price". We should also consider how MacDonald uses the imagery of the young girl's globe in *Phantastes*, implying that there are many self-constructed worlds or theories which are not solid, as is the pearl, in representing a true process of growth towards identity, but which are hollow, such as is the one which Anodos shatters. Such 'practice' globes perhaps prepare one for the difficulties of an identity built solely through faith. The pearl; one's identity; is made up of many layers, painfully grown – with the seed of faith at its heart, itself a divine gift which comes in the form of "a contradiction". A pearl cannot shatter, being solid. Like the symbol, it has substance. Perhaps this is the way in which to visualise the "worlds" of MacDonald; as many translucent layers and depths in the perception of reality, the self grows outward, not in the sense of being blown up, but through a slow process of solidification, which is not perceived in terms of 'material' solidity as a thing in itself, but whose substantiality remains mysterious and endlessly interpretable, being based upon these inner contradictions.

Reactions to modernity; Transcendence or transfiguration?

Jesus also describes elsewhere the kingdom of heaven as being 'within you' – it is both within and without. There is also a connection then, in this coincidence between MacDonald's pearl and the pearl of the kingdom of heaven, in the inner and outer aspects of Fairyland, which exposes the mistaken boundaries of modernity and the mistaken notions of transcendence in the figure of the Lark, by noting their limits. We see how the Lark attempts (in a Platonic manner) to transcend the material world, assuming that it is inferior (p77):

> So he flew, with the strength of a lark he flew,
> But as he rose the cloud rose too...
> Till, weary with flying, with sighing sore,
> The strong sun-seeker could do no more...
>
> So he quivered and sighed, and dropped like a stone
> And there on his nest, where he left her alone
> Sat his little wife...
> Did I say alone? Ah, no such thing!
> Full in her face was shining the King

This *transformation* of the material world is contrasted to the Lark's attempt to *transcend* the physical world[104]. MacDonald is portraying the nature of the 'home-centre'. The description of the shining face of the Lark's wife parallels what is described by Graham Ward, in his essay 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ' (*Radical Orthodoxy*, pp166, 176):

> ...what is glimpsed...is the trace of the uncreated in the created...the transfiguration does not simply portray a resurrection hope, it performs it, it solicits it...not having the body of Christ is not a negative because Christ's withdrawal of his body makes possible a greater identification with that body... Notice how...we focus upon the face of Christ. It is a face full of light and energy...he writes of Jesus's face "shining like the sun"...his corporeality becomes iconic...

It seems that MacDonald's work is seeking this solicitation. Like McLeod Campbell, it is a seeking for a substantial participation through faith. Faith is a substance and not a belief. Rather than tracing a picture which it would be possible for us to interpret, the profusion of possible interpretations makes the 'substantial' nature of his language clear. It is symbolically participating in the transfiguration. The search for concrete identity is bound to encounter the search for a 'concrete' set of morals, if it is participating and

[104] As McGillis says, the function of MacDonald's writing "is to enhance, not dismiss, material reality" (*For the Childlike*, p114). In the third section, with reference to Graham Ward, we shall examine how he is transfiguring notions of materiality.

reinterpreting the 'substantial' world. But the search gradually becomes concerned with a transfiguration of all the world, not only with one's own spiritual holiness (unlike the Lark's). Therefore MacDonald also notes in his essay on 'Browning's "Christmas Eve"' the correspondence between true identity and true community:

> What central position can he gain, which, while it answers best the necessities of his own soul with regard to God, will enable him to feel himself connected with the whole Christian world, and to sympathize with all, so that he may not be alone, but one of the whole. Certainly the position necessary for both requirements *is one and the same*

Notice how MacDonald rejects the notion of a competition between the concerns of the world as he finds it, and the notion of personal, spiritual growth. The difference of which Ward speaks, then, is not the difference which seeks to define itself through a concept of borders. It is not the competitive, comparative morality of the Giant who boasts in having cleaner socks than anyone else; or the Lark's attempt to separate himself from the physical world in order to find himself. These are pointed out by MacDonald as being the traits of a vain (Vane) attempt at identity. The notion of "difference" should not be treated as an economy of 'lack'; working from a Freudian concept of wholeness as being a taking into oneself. Rather the sense of the unique difference of Christ results from an acknowledgement of the utter sense of non-identity which exists without him. But such a sense comes from a recognition of the all-encompassing identity of Christ. We do not take him into ourselves; we have no selves to start with. Our identity is *all* in its *becoming* 'like' Christ[105]. To do this, we must see how radically different Christ is from us. Paradoxically, we only do this by seeing how, materially, he is the same, and only thus can *his difference inform our very concept of materiality* ('Browning's "Christmas Eve"'):

> ...so Christ must prove himself to the human soul through being beheld. The only proof of Christ's divinity is his humanity. Because his humanity is not comprehended, his divinity is doubted....for a man to ..neglect the gazing on him...is to bring on himself...such errors as the expounders of nature in old time brought on themselves, when they speculated on what a thing must be, instead of observing what it was...

The sudden drop of the self (of the Lark or of Satan), from its own concept of comparative greatness into its true glory of beholding its source of identity both exposes and erases a line; the invisible border which separates the outward notions of appearances and

[105] As we noted on p21, he gets this concept of identity from the New Testament where "...it must change with that life, which in the New Testament is alone treated as life at all..."

comparisons from the inner illusion of selfhood against those outward standards. Such a drop and such an exposure is both nightmare and gift.

The desire for identity is transformed by a vision which itself transforms the nature of desire. Ward goes on in his essay to note:

> The structure of Christian desire is...twofold...not only my desire, but God's desire for me. It is this twofoldedness which characterizes participation...the self...never had the unity of the Hegelian and Freudian ego living in and for itself...the lack, and the mourning...feed a positive regeneration.

The desire, however, may have dissymmetry...

> ...the dissymmetry of the gaze...is...what is identified in Christian mystery as the frightening, terrifying mystery....the gift of something that remains inaccessible...the gift is the secret itself, if the secret itself can be told[106].

Like the secret of fairyland, the perception of this gift is 'stumbled upon', is not within our control, though we may seek for it. There remains a nihilistic possibility in its interpretation, because of the dissymmetry; because faith, like the secret, remains a gift, no matter *how long* it may characterize the life of the one who is given it, or how quickly they may perceive things.[107] For, in this story, the Sun is no worse off for the children's not seeing him first; and we note how the perspective changes from the desire of the subject to the nature of the object.

In approaching the issue of apocalypse in MacDonald's *Lilith*, we see that he is aware of the notion that the dissymmetry or contingency inherent in the experience retains the possibility that apocalypse may be taken as the notion that destruction is, of itself, defining of the experience. Especially in the absence of a provable connection or a symmetrical concept which grants one any power over the object of desire or sight. Indeed, on only p12 of *Lilith*, the narrator is saying:

> I begin indeed to fear that I have undertaken an impossibility, undertaken to tell what I cannot tell...I find myself in danger of losing the things themselves...

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[106] *The Gift of Death*, p27.

[107] Here, we may refer to the essay by Cynthia Marshall, (For the Childlike, p99) who discerns the parable of the labourers in 'The Golden Key', noting how MacDonald, in making Tangle's story central, although she is the last to achieve the supposed 'goal', does not apply a measurable concept of justice to the story, but rather the idea that 'the last may be first and the first last'. This is consistent with what we noted about the idea of the 'gift', in that he allows it to inform the logic of his writings, consistent with his stating in his essays that truth cannot be found by applying pre-conceived concepts to divine material.

We should note as well that this difficulty of contingency is characteristic of the nature of language itself. Meaning is left open in a way which, if it is not quite a hermeneutic circle, seems to represent more of a hermeneutic spiral (or perhaps a hermeneutic *pearl*), having at its centre a faith which reaches ever outwards in search of meaning. We will come back to this difficulty with language in the third section. The terrifying mystery or uncontrollable desire, which is dangerous, causing the lark to fall like a stone, is nevertheless not content with a definition of the experience in and of itself. An endless falling merely contains that demonic aspect of which Derrida speaks[108]. It may be characterised, though not necessarily (which is what makes it so terrifying) by change, deferment and transfiguration. That is, we do not know before we leap, whether our leap is a leap of faith. Similarly, we cannot know what Fairyland is until we enter it. However, authentic life or Christian responsibility – as opposed to a frightened moralism – are not possible until *after* such a fall.

Fairyland as a means of deconstruction *and* recreation

In his landscapes, MacDonald deconstructs ethical structures; and unpacks common theological forms in his stories by using unfamiliar patterns and strangely positioned wording so as to render obscure what *seems* to have been revealed, remaining true to the fact that the gaze of God remains unseen, as Derrida says[109]. But he does this so as to re-reveal this gaze of desire at the moment of recognition. He feels that the role of the writer is to provide as much space as possible for many such moments to emerge for the reader[110]. And each moment is different for each reader of his stories. This obscures all systematic attempts to link him to one single ethical or philosophical mode of thought. Which may be why, at one moment he is being described in *The Theology of Modern Fiction* (p136) as a "benign determinist", while his son describes him in *George MacDonald and His Wife* (p341) as "primarily and splendidly inductive". Induction runs into trouble when it starts to generalise into theory, while determinism prevents the movement required for authentic (fallen) interpretation.

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[108] "The demonic is to be *related* to responsibility; in the beginning such a relation did not exist." (my italics), (*The Gift of Death*, p3)

[109] And to his words in 'On the Imagination...." (*A Dish of Orts*, p6): "...for it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully; undefined, yet vivid visions of something beyond...have far more influence..."

[110] "He may, indeed, in rare instances foresee that something is coming and make ready the place for its birth; but that is the utmost relation of consciousness and will he can bear to the dawning idea." ('On the Imagination, *A Dish of Orts*, p5)

But in the course of his writing, MacDonald has seen this contradiction himself and considered its implications for the formation of Christian identity. Quite clearly, he has moved some distance from his earliest work, *Phantastes*, in which Anodos is shattering other people's worlds (that crystal globe held by the girl he encounters). Instead, he is speaking from a transformed sense of the world in relation to himself, and like Shelley, whom he quotes (in *A Dish of Orts, p6*), sees life

> like a dome of many coloured glass
> Stains the white radiance of eternity
> Until death tramples it to fragments.

Mortality and Modernity

This sense of looking outwards is peculiarly strong for MacDonald. It does not translate into a worship of death, but a sense of life so strong that the concept of death is transformed in his hands. This simply cannot be emphasised enough for its importance to his approach, and is true in many of his works; *At the Back of the North Wind* being an especially noteworthy example. He has died to death, "a double death", as Derrida puts it in *The Gift of Death*. This looking outwards is frequently characterised by the appearance of rainbows in his work, as in 'The Golden Key' for example, as an integral part of his light and colour symbolism. We will look at this in detail in the second section. His presentation of the problem of evil, likewise, has changed significantly as a result of this attention to light, by the time we reach *Lilith*. The novel seems somehow to have a more colourless; more black and white, light and shade tone than do some of his other works, and this perhaps has led some critics to treat it as a more straightforward allegory, concentrating as it does more upon the notion of language, and its Biblical allusions. However, the sense of mystery has deepened; and it is almost as though MacDonald is already looking through death; through the rainbow, and anticipating a light so blinding that his own, hugely sensitive, appreciation of colour will be transformed.

The concentration upon language and Biblical literature is in fact what has originally informed his notion of symbolism, and fed his imagination as we have seen and shall see. Instead of treating *Lilith* as a return to allegory; it should be treated as a recognition that the imagination, when very close to its source, like that of the preacher in *Malcolm*, needs less stimulation, once aware of the dazzling nature of the black and white print of the text,

of the rainbows which may emerge from the greyness between reader and text. We have an anticipation of this sense of buried or disguised treasure in Diamond's vision in *At The Back of the North Wind*, where Diamond is "quite dazzled" at the blaze of golden or bluish light of the stars which are dug up out of the ground; and also in the concept of a light so bright in 'The Shadows' that angels are interpreted as "white shadows cast in heaven from the Light of Light'.

Light and mortality in relation to Lilith

The light which is in the face of the Lark's face which is the transfiguration of her mortality may be linked now to what we will study in the second section in regard to Goethe's Theory of Colour. As in 'The Golden Key', and in *Lilith*, the vision of Diamond accompanies the notion of as-yet undiscovered colours, which seem to signify a renewed sight after the moment of earthly death. Indeed, MacDonald, in his essay on the imagination, describes death as the "revealer of secrets" (*A Dish of Orts*, p6) and specifically relates that sense to lines by Shelley which speak of life as the colours of glass, interpreting "the white radiance of eternity."

In 'The Shadows', too, we find that the sight of the mortal king is characterised by a "shadowy" sense – he himself hovers between life and death – it is indeed the only way he can be 'crowned' and be granted the ability to see the shadows for what they are. Perhaps it is the case that, near the end of his own life, MacDonald's vision, while more intense in terms of what he senses, is less easily communicated in the decorative and rich colours which have informed so many of his previous works. As the light becomes more brightly apocalyptic, shadows and darknesses become more intense before finally ceasing. The light which was only within – a transfiguring light – now perceives light emanating from the 'outer' world all around. The natural world is lit with grace. That reasonable light which has "lit" as much as we can understand of the novel is seen to be replaced by a light which emerges from within. It is the replacement of translucence with a kind of substance which itself emits light, in a manner reminiscent of *Revelation;* where the lamb is the light and "they have no need of the sun" (and where the poet's language is fulfilled in the idea of a 'heavenly' language), (*Lilith*, p219):

> ...a wondrous change had passed upon the world – or was it us? Without light enough in the sky or the air to reveal anything, every heath-bush, every small shrub, every blade of grass was perfectly visible – either by light that went out from it, as

> fire from the bush Moses saw in the dessert, or by light that went out of our eyes. Nothing cast a shadow, all things interchanged a little light....

Vane has moved this far, then, from the role of the objective subjectivity of *Phantastes*, who comments upon the problem of evil as though it were merely a thing which acted upon a person, towards a sense that he himself is the one who is being thought or dreamt; and that his substantiality is far different from any sense of substantiality that he has hitherto understood. Vane, as a human being, occupies, as it were, equal ground with concepts which have themselves become tangible 'things' as opposed to 'ideas' contained within the author's head (*Lilith*, last sentences):

> ...when most awake, I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more. I wait, asleep or awake, I wait.
>
> Novalis says, "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one."

Although the novel seems to deconstruct our material senses, we should note that it sees itself as enabling a new creation; a new conception to take place over which it has absolutely no control, and but a very shadowy, apocalyptic sense of, but in which it has faith that the senses will be re-awakened in a more real, sensible, tangible way than before. It is in fact the strength of MacDonald's faith which has not only driven his imaginative power in the first place, but which has ultimately led him, in *Lilith*, to deconstruct that power (and with it our natural sense of the material world). *Lilith* breaks down the self-sufficiency of the narrative for the reader in a most consciously deconstructive way. Not only is he enacting that breaking-down, he is attempting the impossible in envisaging the breaking down of even what we have understood as being the symbolic potential of earthly language. Everything is ultimately relinquished and existence made to depend on the trust that there does exist 'that life which, as mother her child, carries this life'. The 'Endless Ending' of the last chapter, like the hermeneutic circle, and like Lilith's immortality, is a curse only without the existence of the trust that defines and shapes the nature of authentic life. Trust is all in all for MacDonald, and trust is often characterised in his stories by an active expectancy or 'waiting', which denotes neither belief in its weaker sense, nor objective certainty.

Waiting, Time and Morality

'The Giant's Heart' points towards the fact of this waiting in that it represents an ethical position which is also characteristic of the kingdom of heaven of the New Testament, where a sense of time is distorted, so that we see in the present what is clear; but that what we see has not actually happened yet and cannot be forced to happen. Justice remains outside of time, while our human conception of it is imperfectly enacted inside of time. What is particularly important for this section of the study is to remember that this 'waiting' in Fairyland (which land in *Lilith* has itself proved to be entirely dependent upon a yet greater notion of life outwith even the poet's imagination) resists the notion that there can be any final assessment of the characters' morals. MacDonald emphasises the human fallibility of the Giant, while also displaying the coldness of the Lark. There is not the sense of being let down by the hypocrisy of either, but rather a note of general humorousness, which betrays the fact that the fulfilment of justice was never expected to come from within the logic of the story. There is a subtle comment too on the notion of permanence, in much the same way that Peter's idea of building tabernacles upon the mountain of transfiguration is tactfully ignored by Jesus, who is waiting for something else[111]. The Giant's home, a huge structure, yet becomes a prison for the children, and the home of the Lark seems to be an endless, transcendent sky of religious experience, yet his glory lies in the opposite direction. Just as both Diamond and Mossy and Tangle seem to have to go down in their stories in order to get up. As in 'The Golden Key' we are often not quite sure what it is we are searching for when we are making moral judgements:

> "And what is the key for?" the boy would ask. "What is it the key of? What will it open?"
> "That nobody knows," his aunt would reply, "He has to find that out."

This conversation is descriptive of the way in which Macdonald's own narratives work, in that they do not define moral behaviour, but only behave like keys to a structure anticipated, inhabited, but unknown. The narratives are not doors but keys. Similarly, true morals do not behave like ends or structures in themselves, but work in relation to the mystery of the 'other'. They are keys to a yet greater world, and they will disappear when the time of their fulfilment comes, just as the key does in 'The Golden Key'. But their temporal nature must embrace its own transience in order to find fulfilment. For it is that

[111] Matthew 17v4. As Jesus emphasises constantly, it is not in the nature of the kingdom to express a desire for material permanence of the kind that Peter envisages initially.

sense of transience which contains the hope from which it draws its own meaning. *Morality has no meaning of its own*, as we understand it. We must, as MacDonald insists, take our morals with us in our imaginings, but only in the sense that they are keys to guide us towards their fulfilment in altogether huger concepts of righteousness or justice from those with which we started out.

Morality and Obedience

So in 'The Giant's Heart' we are kept reading, kept moving. A notion of self-contained objectivity is revealed as illusion. No matter the hugeness of the worlds to which we are introduced, they discover themselves in us as relative – a matter greatly relevant to a post-enlightenment search for a basis for morality. Like Anselm, we find ourselves in relation to true morality as we are in relation to God – as "that than which nothing greater can be thought"[112]. MacDonald leads us in this way to see how the question of ethics is related to the nature of reality, and finally to the location of authority, the ground of reality. This is why our gaze is shifted in the last page of the story from the questionable motives of Tricksey-Wee, who

> believing it would be good for his morals insisted...

to the question of an author who allows such needless killing to take place. For Tricksey-Wee

> ...could not help being sorry for him, after all.

Ethical questions are referred back to this problem of the temporary and finite aspect of all such judgments which rely upon a formulaic notion of morality. After all, why should the author, being human, have a better solution than the characters. We can see why it is that so many Victorian critics had a problem with MacDonald's stories, where he actively encourages the reader *not* to take him as an example, but to learn wisely from the fact that - no matter how imaginative the writer - morality, thought of as *a thing in itself*, merely detracts from the direction in which he invites his readers to look – within to the divine light, without which morality is meaningless. In this, MacDonald seems to represent the Romantic approach which will inform later existential interpretations of morality or, for example, Bonhoeffer's rigorous questioning of ethics. However, this inner light is exceeded in his work by the emphasis upon the *relationship* between the inner and outer

[112] *Proslogion*, p

light, where he follows up on that interpretation, to question notions of materiality. We will see later, in relation to Graham Ward's thinking, where this will lead him.

Abstraction and judgment

So MacDonald initially moves the question from the abstract to the existential. Once released from the confines of the children's moral 'bag', the giant's heart "expanded to the size of a bullock." Now this happening is related to the fact that it is while the giant and his heart are so separated that he, with "...rage and vengeance, rushed on the two children." Caught between the evil of a man separated from his heart, and the threat of the heart itself, the boy chooses to kill the heart itself. One is left wondering whether simply restoring the heart to its owner would have helped more. Perhaps MacDonald is making a point about the way we tend to think of morality in the abstract, treating it as a means of social control rather than a method of navigation; of an *increase* of desire, and its direction towards an unlimited world. This makes his concept of ethics remarkably like that of Jesus, as we saw, and, by implication subversive, in that it will certainly come in its course to demand more than social conventions allow.

McGillis also points out how MacDonald states in the text that "gentlemen do not tell stories"[113], placing his own moral superiority in question. However, we have seen that all forms of moral superiority are inherently mistaken; the very idea that there can be 'guardians of morals' such as Tricksey-Wee is being challenged. And we, the readers, also have to take responsibility for placing that burden upon her. Quite often, MacDonald questions the social conventions which afford superior moral or intellectual status to certain groups. His novels are full of instances of a reversal of roles, in which exiles – Scots in positions of servitude, usually – cause their 'betters' to think twice about their own position. *David Elginbrod* is one such example, as is *The Marquis of Lossie*, where Malcolm the groom reads Epictetus (p85), and Clementina wonders (p314):

> ...for anything she knew...they might all be philosophers...more than in the society to which she herself belonged....

[113] *For the Childlike*, p13

Ethics and society

Ethical questions are also contextualised in terms of the problems inherent in forming hierarchical societies. Further, the theme of this novel is one of Malcolm's secret identity, and MacDonald specifically subverts the notion of identity, relating the replacement of authentic identity by social status exactly to the empty nature of social morals – as opposed to those which are truly 'aristocratic', in the sense that they ground their authority and identity in Christ. It has been said that MacDonald fails by using the hierarchy which he subverts as a measurement of Malcolm's identity. However, Malcolm's enduring ability to hide his secret status throughout the novels is MacDonald's most powerful evidence of the fact that he does not acquire identity *from* his status, his identity being the same, whether or not it is recognised in society[114]. Rather he plays on the eagerness of the reader's wish for Malcolm's status to be *known*, revealing the way in which we tend to conflate identity and status. Here, we see also how the issue of community is important to MacDonald. He is not making a point about 'noble savages', but rather attempting to cause the reader to rethink their concept of the constitution – the identity - of an informed, moral community.

We find, ultimately, that injustice is not a symptom of too much involvement in the actions of others, but of too little. There is a gap in the abstract formulation of morality which allows the mundane, autonomous comparison with the other to be made. It is not the deconstructive gap within the sense of self (which he encourages), but the idea of a demarcation between the self and others. This is reflected in the Giant's own moral self-consciousness: "he always said to himself that he wore whiter stockings on Sunday than any other giant in all giantland...". It is not an amoral universe which is demanded by MacDonald's imagination, but a closer, more intense, identification with, rather than judgement of, another; the relinquishing of common notions of *self-containment* as identity. The narrative of the story fails for us, but succeeds in its aim as we, the readers, find ourselves falling short of the required identification, but nevertheless too involved to pretend moral indifference. That is, MacDonald leaves us at the point of

[114] This is made quite clear, in the *Marquis of Lossie*, for example, where (of Clementina), the narrator notes (p50) "Her rank had already grown to seem to her so identified with herself that she was hardly...capable of the analysis that should show it distinct from her being....social standing...was the Satan of unrighteousness worshipped all around....how could it be otherwise with the offspring of generations of pride and falsely conscious superiority."

> ...the rupture that functions in the mode of, and within the limits of, a repression; between the metaphysics, ethics, and politics of the Platonic Good (that is, the "incorporated" orgiastic mystery) and the mysterium tremendum of Christian responsibility.[115]

MacDonald's great talent as a writer is that he finds richly imaginative ways to help the reader to acknowledge (having fallen into) the abyss created by this rupture.

Ethics and Identity

The scientific pose of judge or reader allows for no distinction between persons, no difference (only comparison, which is not difference), and therefore no true communication (or community) between the observed and the observer. It depersonalises the question, so denying the 'mystery' of identity. As MacDonald notes in *Alec Forbes* (p148):

> For to no mere onlooker will Life anymore than Fairyland open its secret. A man must become an actor before he can be a true spectator.

...just as Vane cannot 'wait' until he has acted (even wrongly). Such a distance denies, but intensely represents, the acceptance of fatal distance for MacDonald; the distance which separates the giant from his heart, the lark from his family, and the morality of the children from their compassion. What he recreates in the reader is the means of recognizing this same duality, which encourages us to distance our judgement from our humanity. The laughter, which McGillis notes[116] that the story encourages, and which he also has seen as involved in the establishment of community, reminds us of our humanity. It is this sense of dualism – of seeing the world as a battleground between beliefs – which is revealed as being problematic in the formation of identity and of community. MacDonald, however, is thoroughly apocalyptic in his rejection of much of the dualism inherent in 'religious' ideals and ethics. For the New Testament Christ is the hidden revelation of the true nature of things, according to MacDonald. A revelation who cannot be watched or assessed, but who holds us in his gaze. Richard Hays notes how apocalyptic literature expresses the outcome of the revelation of the apocalyptic nature of morality[117]:

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[115] *The Gift of Death*, p31
[116] *For the Childlike*, p13-14
[117] *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p38

> ...God's justice will necessarily bring radical reversal. A major purpose of the revelatory prophecy is to disclose the truth about the world from God's perspective and thereby to remake the community's understanding of reality...the moral strategy of the Apocalypse, therefore, is to destroy common sense as a guide for life...the ethical staying power of the Apocalypse is a product of its imaginative richness...[118]

'The Giant's Heart' is a sophisticated description of the impulse to form a rational morality, by which we attempt to assert our autonomy. Such autonomy demands self-defence in the form of a detachment which seeks to judge others, according to its own reduced (common, general or abstract) sense. In doing this, we assist in the dehumanisation of those whom we judge (we separate the giant from his heart). To accept this state of affairs as the final word is to deny that all are fully human, because "all are one in Christ Jesus"[119].

Hume

Here MacDonald is accepting his fellow Scot, Hume's description of our reaction to evil as being prior to its expression, but does not leave it at that. Hume suggests that our instinctive reactions place identification with the victim first[120]. However, because MacDonald believes that God is deeper in us that we are in our own 'selves', this immediate reaction of identification with the victim is *not* a truly unconscious identification, but a masking – through a false concept of selfhood - of the deeper realization that – through our common humanity - our identity is *also* related to the identity of the offender. This would imply a common guilt, which the retreat into identification with the victim, as representing the false self, allows us to ignore. And it is also only by so separating ourselves in adopting the false self (the *role* of judge) that we develop the ability to judge at all. In identifying only with the victim, we *seem* to place

[118] This imaginative richness is frequently hinted at ('the Shadows', p103): "But if the stories that the Shadows told were printed, they would make a book that no publisher could produce fast enough to satisfy the buyers." Which is practically a paraphrase of John (21:25): "And there are many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." Perhaps, for MacDonald, the apocalyptic sight of Jesus as the truth of the imagination, means that all honest quests for interpretation of the divine Word and the meaning of the world, tend towards his person. And also that the forms of this will be limitless

[119] This is also why the wartime theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer so fully rejects dualistic notions in his *Ethics*, stating (p1): The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge."

[120] He also suggests (*Treatise*, p624, quoted by Broadie)that "Belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes." In sharp contrast to this MacDonald thinks that to believe and to will what God wills is the gift which comes through faith; the most powerful element in the working of the will, which he places above everything else.

ourselves in the position of Christ, but we exclude the offender, betraying that fact that the Christ-self is not truly present in such a judgement.

It is therefore a sign of our own guilt and lack of true humanity (in so separating ourselves from one another) that we can judge. It is also a major theme in the New Testament that it is a divine law that to judge another brings judgement upon the self[121]. MacDonald's notion of identity therefore sees guilt and judgement as a sign of separation from one's humanity, being symptomatic of our self-consciousness, and lack of identity with God, precisely at the point where we succumb to the 'religious' impulse to be 'like' God in the analogical sense only. The main problem for Lilith, indeed, is that she is presented as separate from God, and therefore separate from her true 'Christ-self', and therefore separate from others. She does not need to be judged in addition to this; this *is* her judgement ("caught afar off in the hell of her self-consciousness"). Indeed it is the judgement of all the characters within the novel whenever they act, not as part of the apocalyptic community, but in self-defence. A defence which implies, in fact, the *lack* of self, as we see in Vane's introductory conversation with the Raven. We find that we are moving towards the notion of the identity of the church as being that of the apocalyptic community, and we shall return to it shortly.

At the moment, however, we are mainly concerned with the psychological depth of George MacDonald's thinking on this issue of ethics and identity, as to how self-consciousness and judgement are related in this 'interim' ethical stance. He does not settle for a primitive notion of a pre-ethical stage, but encourages a process of natural growth towards a deeper sense of the unconscious, a moving *through* that inevitable stage of self-conscious separation. He anticipates Freud in his essay 'Individual Development', (*A Dish of Orts*, p45):

> The child knows nothing of growth...by slow, inappreciable, indivisible accretion and outfolding, he is lifted, floated, drifted on towards the face of the awful mirro in which he must encounter his first foe – must front himself. By degrees he has learned that the world is around, and not within him – that he is part, and that is apart...then first the possibility of a real life commences

We can read Lilith's progress towards identity in relation to this description: (p204):

[121] eg *Luke* 6:37: Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven...

> I looked, and saw before her, cast from unseen heavenly mirror, stood the reflection of herself, and beside it a form of splendent beauty. She trembled, and sank again on the floor helpless. She knew the one that God had intended her to be, the other that she had made herself.

Lilith's Identity as the Giant and the church

Lilith, then, is stunted (childish) in her growth, which accords with the emotions Vane feels on caring for her while she is asleep, sensing her as vulnerable. The novel seems to imply that childishness (rather than childlikeness), as in the case of the Giant, may be funny, but it may also be terrifying. Especially if the childish one has great power; great self-consciousness. Lilith may be Vane's self-conscious, struggling against the notion that this dream of himself as a woman can be the reality of him. (we shall come back to the implications for this loss (or fulfilment) of gender in relation to Graham Ward's writing). There is also another reading, given that the 'speculation and dreaming' required for growth have been singularly absent from the church with which MacDonald is acquainted, thus stunting its growth. The Giant goes to church and Lark is religious, identifying the nature of this manifestation of wrong growth.

Since Vane's own destiny seems tied up with Lilith's salvation, we must ask whether it is not Lilith herself who represents many aspects of the church herself – a bride not yet ready[122]. Indeed, to be true to MacDonald's own sense of what identity is, we should not be able to separate Vane's identity from that of the apocalyptic church, their being bound together in Christ's identity. There is justification for this interpretation, given MacDonald's great love – and great criticism – of the church. His groundless hope for it, and Vane's for Lilith. For Vane may also be vain – one who gazes in a mirror; and MacDonald also tends to portray the mirror as being not a very good revealer of true

[122] Indeed, there is a hint that MacDonald's treatment of the church in terms of the development of the character of a woman is found in *Robert Falconer*, for on p353, Falconer speaks of the very primitive stage at which the church finds herself: "Time is as cheap as space and matter. What we call the church militant is only at drill yet...." And the conversation moves on as the characters encounter, on the next page, a woman who seems to have no hope of finding goodness. The very same notions of time and development are employed; a comparison is implicit: "Shall it take less time to make a woman than to make a world...she may have her ages of chaos, her centuries of crawling slime, yet rise a woman at last..." Perhaps it is during the writing of this novel, that the idea for *Lilith* begins to germinate.

selfhood, but rather a confirmation of its lack[123]. There is, in *Lilith* a recognition of a terrible beauty. We should consider carefully this extract (p109):

> ...had all my despairing hope gone to redeem only ingratitude? "No", I answered myself, "beauty must have a heart! However profoundly hidden, it must be there! The deeper buried, the stronger and truer will it wake at last in its beautiful grave!"...her paleness was not a pallor, but a pure whiteness, her breathing was slow and deep. Her eyes seemed to fill the heavens, and give light to the world. It was nearly noon, but the sense was upon me as of a great night in which an invisible dew makes the stars look large

It is also noteworthy that this is a dark reflection of the earlier description of Eve on p28:

> The life of her face and her whole person was gathered and concentrated in her eyes...the eyes had life in them for a nation – large and dark... A whole night-heaven lay condensed in each pupil; all the stars were in its blackness and flashed...

And of Mara on p80:

> Her face; it was lovely as a night of stars. Her great grey eyes looked up to heaven...something in the very eyes that wept seemed to say, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning..."

In all of these descriptions is an anticipation of the imagery of the woman of *Revelation* 12:1, the church, described as the bride of Christ; as

> ...a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars

This woman is in labour and a dragon waits to devour her child. Lilith kills her own child. Later the beast of John's *Revelation* will take the form of a Leopard, while in MacDonald's vision, Lilith herself at times takes the form of a Leopard, seeming to refer to the text of *Jeremiah* 13:23 ("...can a leopard change its spots...?). As before, however, it is the way in which MacDonald conflates the references in apocalyptic literature, such as *Revelation* and *Jeremiah* which gives a particular slant to his treatment of the issue of the church's identity in the character of Lilith. His answer seems to be that a Leopard *can*

[123] 'The Shadows', *The Complete Fairytales*, p75: "When she took her last look at the phantom in the glass, she half smiled to it – But *we* do not like those creatures that come into the mirrors at all...they are dreadful to us..." The notion that we find a dark image of ourselves in a mirror also comes to us in Biblical literature. In particular 1 *Corinthians* 13 combines the notion of 'becoming' and forming identity; the notion of the breakdown of language; and the illustration of the mirror, in envisaging a time when love itself will be both language and identity: "Love never fails. Whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away...when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child...For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." It seems that this passage combines together the same themes as *Lilith*.

impossibly change its spots. Richard Hays has noted how the apocalyptic literature tends to be abused at times when it is used in a dualistic fashion to further the need for power, for the group which feels threatened[124]. This use betrays the very nature of apocalyptic literature, if it is supposed to be an overturning of the concept of power, and of the dualism which accompanies such a rhetoric of power.

It seems that MacDonald, aware of the way in which the figures of the Harlot and the Bride in *Revelation*, have been abused in a dualistic fashion, in order to support the rhetoric of *sides* in religious debates, has chosen to show the *similarity* between Mara, Eve and Lilith, possibly even to hint that they may represent different corruptions of the church. If this is the case then MacDonald's vision is frequently a dark one; suggesting that she behaves like the whore of Babylon at times. However, he is consistent with the presentation of apocalypse in *Revelation* as being concerned with the judgement of the churches and, as we have seen, that vision of the 'sword' is one which does not divide the 'inner' concept of individuality from the 'outer' concept of the church[125], but rather divides one within – a healing cut which causes an apocalypse of the self:

> ...I heard behind me a loud voice....saying "I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last." And "What you see, write it in a book and send it to the seven churches....He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword..." (*Revelation* 1vv 10,11,16)

If it were not for the great and paradoxical hope of apocalyptic vision – a hope which overwhelms and retranslates the sense of darkness which it finds all around, then the novel would be simply a condemnation of the church. However, in this apocalypse, as we noted earlier, the sword which cuts off Lilith's hand has a healing effect (*Lilith,* p219)

> "A wound from that sword" said Adam "needs no dressing. It is healing and not hurt."

We saw earlier how the sword penetrates the inner senses in the novel's description. In the light of this vision, we see also how the separating effect of ethical judgement is *not*

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[124] *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p183: "Something very strange happens when this text is appropriated by readers in a comfortable, powerful, majority community; it becomes a gold mine for paranoid fantasies and for those who want to preach revenge and destruction."

[125] MacDonald also perceives, with some humour, that the mistaken notion of this 'division' into categories of *theoretical* knowledge is a problem which has arisen again in the philosophy of knowledge out of a *theological* question which arises from the issue of how the atonement of Christ can or should affect the individual: 'The Light Princess', p23: "For the condition of the princess afforded delightful scope for the discussion of every question arising from the division of thought – in fact, of all the Metaphysics of the Chinese Empire."

that cut; such a separation signifying a dualism which denotes an incompletion. Ethical judgment takes place in the space of a deferment between the cut and its healing (opening up the discrepancy between the inner experience of apocalypse and the world as it is often experienced) albeit a deferment which may be characterised by hope. MacDonald is most concerned that the church should not find its rest in this state of deferment, a state which is utterly dark when accepted upon its own merits -for it has none of its own. This is perhaps why apocalyptic literature is of necessity so *utterly* dark and so *completely* hopeful.

This dualistic notion of good and evil, respectable and whorelike, sexual and spiritual, indicates a complete satisfaction with 'interim' ethics suggests a notion of opposites which the *Westminster Confession* falls into, in making use of pre-conceived logic, in seeking to explain the 'plan' of the atonement.[126] Such oppositions are always, to MacDonald, signs that a complete theory is lurking and, as he says in *Malcolm* (p58) "A complete theory is a vault of stone around the theorist." MacDonald must unsettle the idea that the church can retain some equilibrium of form; for as we noted earlier, it is in the nature of truth that forms must change, "...with the life, that in the New Testament is life at all...".

Relationship between pragmatic and legalistic religion

In pursuing its apocalypse the church cannot afford to be pragmatic, like the Giant who, *like Lilith,* eats children. Or rationalistic like the Giantess, who conveniently dehumanises the victims of her need, comforting herself (p83)

[126] Unfortunately, most of MacDonald's present-day critics seem to fall into this same trap of oppositional thinking. Knoepflmacher, for example, in his introduction to *The Complete Fairy Tales*, describes 'The Light Princess' as a mix of "carnivalesque levity...absurdism, parody and extended punning with a spiritual seriousness that befits Protestant symbolists such as Spenser....But that mix also creates deliberate tonal discordancies between the story's *two halves*..." However, it is not that mix which causes the story to *seem* to have two halves. We find on closer reading, that the 'religious' sense has been there all along. When it is read with MacDonald's *own* interpretation of the term 'Christian'; one which does not oppose the sexual and spiritual; one which considers not only specific events to be sacred; but all true humour; emotion and experience, then there is no discord – the tones blend together with a complementary harmony; "for the end of the imagination is harmony" (*A Dish of Orts,* p35). The discordancies his stories cause are designed to emerge only to the precise extent that the reader brings to the text a preconceived notion of a 'spiritual' tone. Time and again, MacDonald is trying to encourage the notion that theology must not be treated as a separate discipline; that it comes in many literary forms, not only the traditional ones. Wherever he finds truth, it is divine truth, causing no disharmony. Because his conception of theology is so far ahead of his time, in that it causes him to embrace the material world, without reservation, as a divine gift, there is an excuse for his contemporaries. There is, however, no excuse for us to divide the 'magical' and 'spiritual' elements of his work; the theological and imaginary any longer. They are, to him, obviously the same. In *The Marquis of Lossie* he states (p310) "Whoever thinks of life as a something that could be without religion, is in deathly ignorance of both."

> ...with thinking that they were not real boys and girls, but only little pigs pretending to be boys and girls.

We have here some of the themes of self-delusion which will characterise the author's approach in *Lilith.*

Opposing the pragmatic, rationalising, yet childish religion of the giants comes an equally faulty reaction of fear and of legalism, in the actions of the children. Their morality, while masquerading as a sense of justice, has more to do with self-protection; and finally destroys what good there is in the giants because, in the notion that good may be forced upon them from outside, genuine morality is replaced with control; trust in God with fear of others[127]:

> "now," said Tricksey-Wee to the giant, "will you promise to carry off no more children..." "Yes, yes! I promise" answered Thunderthump, sobbing. "And you will never cross the borders of Giantland?" "Never" "And you shall never again wear white stockings on a Sunday...?" The giant hesitated at this...

In *Robert Falconer* (p167), MacDonald states that

> ...it is the half-Christianness of the clergy of every denomination that are the main cause of the so-called failure of the Church of Christ...

As we considered earlier, his main concern is not simply the eradication of hypocrisy, but an examination of the all-too-human motives of fear which lie behind much of this 'half-Christianness' and hypocrisy. In both the children and the giants we see a portrayal of good intentions which fall short, being founded on an interim, dualistic and competitive sense of identity and morality. The birds of the story offer yet more cameos of this 'half-Christianness'; of people in the process of becoming. Yet we are, as Knoflmacher says, finally encouraged to laugh, rather than to judge, (an activity which banishes fear) since it cannot be denied that all are equally ridiculous in this story of human failing; author, reader and fictional characters alike.

The Birds

The birds seem to offer a particular picture of the church, rather than of the more general human instinct to moralise, but clearly all grow out of the same instinct. The central passage of the story describes the way in which the children seek the help of the birds.

[127] A noteworthy anticipation of the main theme of Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange,* it being an illustration of the way in which all social attempts to impose ethical order are corrupted by the same distorted religious impulse to protect the self by controlling others.

But the owl will not reveal his secret; and we noted how MacDonald believes that the pure in heart cannot love a secret. The nightingale sings prettily, but causes them to forget why they came (perhaps a comment upon the conception of what is truly aesthetic).[128] The lark who, as we have seen, while he holds to abstract notions of transcendence, also presents the consequences of such 'spirituality' as it affects, and appears to, *others*; a selfish means of escape; a meditative detachment:

> "Poor little things! You can't fly" said the lark,
> "No; but we can look up," said Tricksey
> "Ah, you don't know what it is to see the very first of the sun."
> "But we know what it is to wait till he comes. He's no worse off for your seeing him first, is he?"
> "Oh no, certainly not." Answered the Lark, with condescension; and then, bursting into his Jubilate, he sprang aloft, clapping his wings like a clock running down.
> "Tell us where – " began Buffy-Bob. But the lark was out of sight. His song was all that was left of him. That was everywhere, and he was nowhere. "Selfish bird!" said Buffy "It's all very well for larks to go hunting the sun...the lark's wife...stayed at home with the young larks while her husband went to church...she looked up after him into the sky, whence his song was still falling like a shower of musical hailstones.

This last description of "musical hailstones" illustrates very well MacDonald's genius in making perfect descriptions of *things* (for that is exactly what a lark's song is like, as it falls down toward the listener) work as fitting illustrations of *ideas* (that of the harshness of religious celebration unaccompanied by compassion). He is, of course, doing exactly what he describes in his essay on the imagination, in finding forms in nature which function perfectly as symbols – even revealers - of something seen and unnamed in the mind. With all of this clear-sightedness about moral and religious motivations, MacDonald's hope in the beauty of the future church is indeed amazing; illustrating how obviously it is not based on any merit intrinsic to human nature when it functions apart from its divine source. Despite his clear ability to deconstruct what passes for 'the church', we find these words in *The Marquis of Lossie*:

> No worst thing ever done in the name of Christianity, no vilest corruption of the church, can ever destroy the eternal fact that the core of it is the heart of Jesus. Branches innumerable may have to be lopped off and cast into the fire, yet the word 'I am the Vine' remaineth.

[128] For MacDonald notes that the true teacher of art "will not forget the builder while he admires the architect" (*A Dish of Orts*, p38)

Here also is a further clue about the nature of the 'lopping off' of Lilith's hand! MacDonald is quite clear about the danger of scepticism – which all too easily occurs when one takes things at their 'face' value; but for him it has no excuse, because of that light within. He constructs in the same movement with which he deconstructs. Scepticism is entertainingly described in *The Princess and Curdie* (p180)

> ...this difference between the growth of some human being and that of others; in the one case it is a continuous dying, in the other a continuous resurrection. One of the latter sort comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true....one of the former class grows more and more afraid of being taken in, so afraid of it that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner...[129]

This view in *Lilith* is clearly balanced, however, by the obvious pitfalls that emerge when one hopefully assumes that one's dying is a resurrection, and so mistakes truth for illusion. He represents the process towards identity as being a precarious business, which risks – and almost certainly entails - our being one or another of his caricatures at any given time. There never can be any scientific certainty about the rightness of our decisions, for MacDonald, but a tendency to courage - inspired by faith rather than self-confidence; an inner sense of reality, rather than a judgement by appearances. Appearance and reality are also major themes in MacDonald's treatment of ethics, and *Lilith* is probably the most extreme example of this, if we do take her to represent the preparatory 'incarnations' – mis-conceptions - of the church in history. There is, perhaps, a preliminary vision of the church of Lilith in *The Marquis of Lossie* (p238)

> ...men who, professing to gather their fellows together in the name of Christ, conducted the affairs of the church on the principles of hell...men who sought gain first, safety next, and the will of God not at all...whose presentation of Christianity was enough to drive the world to a preferable infidelity

Appearance and Reality

MacDonald's consistent complaint, as we have just seen, is that the divine creator is betrayed by the capitulation of the church (either way) in response to the tension between ethics as it is experienced (often illusory and always temporary) and the absolute vision of Christ which can define its existence, and light up what has been only partly discerned. This capitulation seems to occur in MacDonald's novels when the church (in its imperfect

[129] We could apply this, interestingly, in relation to theories of interpretation, which often seem characterised by a resignation to meaninglessness, rather than a concern with the *act* of interpretation.

incarnation) loses its vision of its own source of reality – the body of Christ. In *The Marquis of Lossie*, we find this comment: (p242):

> The church of England....is the most arrant respecter of persons I know, and her Christianity is worse than a farce." Clementina saw that if what this man said was true, then the gospel was represented by men who knew nothing of *its real nature*. (my italics)

We can see how far MacDonald is from the sentimentality he has been accused of, it being defined as "a tendency to indulge the emotions". He clearly does not allow his emotions to unduly influence his assessment of the facts. We also see how true morality and pure goodness has to be, for him, a truly magical thing; a thing "impossible with men but possible with God"[130], on his own assessment. This magical thing does not fit into either the Calvinist or liberal traditions (the legalistic 'little ones' and the pragmatic 'giants'), which react upon and limit one another; the one by a limiting of reason through a denial of experienced reality, so as to elevate a God misconceived, the other in its reaction of a subsuming of God within the human ego. In 'The Giant's Heart' we see, then, a narrative strategy which anticipates *Lilith,* telling the stories of both childishly egotistical giants, and stunted 'little ones'. Behind the story resides the way in which they interrelate, itself telling a 'secret' story about the hidden nature of things like morality, which lies behind their first appearances.

To conclude, MacDonald subtly, but inextricably weaves together the issues of ethics, identity and community so thoroughly in the experiences of the characters that they cannot be treated separately. He does this by an exposure of the psychology behind such attempts at separation in the reader's mind. This is a kind of negative theology; such an experience taking away any secure ground upon which we may build our own peculiar tabernacles and forcing us to concede the death of 'textual' authority, as soon as it is taken and used to enforce a preconceived notion of anything. This is not to apply the text in terms of the 'gift' of interpretation, but to use it as a weapon to protect ourselves. At the point at which we are willing to concede this about his writing, his work reveals to us another aspect, behaving like a holographic image; changing as the angle of view changes. In this way, the body of the text behaves rather like the body of Christ – the church - revealing a very different face. In this, he senses a 'magical' effect, which links together concerns of

[130] A statement attributed to Christ in the New Testament, in relation to the possibility that human beings might enter the 'kingdom of heaven', but also used of Lilith in MacDonald's novel (chapter thirty-nine).

literary criticism[131] with his theological treatment of issues like morality. It is no coincidence that the words of the text themselves operate like symbols which become an illustration of the church, constructed of the 'living stones' of human lives[132], participating in a growing narrative or living body of truth which we are all writing. Because of his concern with words as divine symbols[133], literary theories may be reinterpreted, such that the reader who becomes ethically 'lost' in the process of building meaning, mirrors the character in Lilith who must die a death[134] – allows that they must be given death – in their search for identity[135]. Each word and stone, like each reader or life, is different, for

> everyone....who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development; one man will read one thing....

Summary of section one

Lilith comes at the end of the life of a poet, whose use of the 'living' symbols around him is beginning to be replaced by a sense of greyness, which is not interpreted by him as a symbol of twilight, but as if it were the grey light of a dawn. One which lies beyond the colours – and colourful metaphors and symbols - of a present 'rainbow', and which will soon be truly illuminated by the gift of death. In the passage upon which he comments on Shelley's poem in his essay on the imagination (quoted in part earlier), he goes on to describe the poet's vision:

> And last, he shows us Death as the destroying revealer, walking aloft through the upper region, treading out this life-bubble of colours, that the man may look beyond it and behold the true, the uncoloured, the all-coloured.[136]

We have attempted to discern through his writing, in this section, the way in which MacDonald deconstructs the rhetorics of philosophy, ethics and identity, through the

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[131] For example, the ideas employed in Wolfgang Iser's *The Implied Reader* (p274), 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach': "The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized....it is the virtuality of the work that gives rise to its dynamic nature."

[132] This, also, is linked to the 'becoming' of the church: "..having been built on the foundation...Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit..." (*Ephesians* 2vv20-21)

[133] "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...(*A Dish of Orts*, p6)

[134] "death as the destroying revealer..." (*A Dish of Orts*, p6)

[135] We should note- the difference between the 'magical' death of the imaginative reader or liver, and the stultifying death, where it is the imagination itself which dies, wherein "...thousands of words which were originally poetic lose their vitality, and harden into mummies of prose..." *(A Dish of Orts*, p7)

[136] 'On the imagination....', *A Dish of Orts*, p6

nihilistic impulse which accompanies their existence as 'things in themselves', examining how it is that these issues are intertwined for him by the notion that their meaning is only fulfilled in a sense of their giftedness or contingency. Such an impulse expose a radical instability within these concepts, when treated as things in themselves, which testifies to their utter dependence upon their being divinely imagined by God. He does not, however, present this belief as a closed philosophy of deconstruction in order to clear the way for the reinstatement of a positivistic religion, but feels that it is only remedied by the development of a 'magical' sense of meaning, which has at its heart the notion that faith must not treated as dogma, but as the substantial means by which text (the body) and belief connect symbolically with the reality of their object and which represents the foundation of their (provisional) existence in time and space. He sees individuals, the church and the world straining for a sense of identity with which to define themselves.

All of MacDonald's treatments seem to represent interpretations of reality and experience found within the Biblical literature itself and which have, mainly, been left unexplored in the critical literature so far. Finally, death itself has become the gift in *Lilith,* anticipated to a degree in some of his other works, but not 'enacted' in the way it appears to be here, in involving so fully the author, that his final gift to the reader seems to be that he 'gives' the reader death, as he himself receives it as a writer. The 'Endless Ending' leaves the reader in a position of choice, as to whether or not he will take the novel on 'faith'. To do so treats the tension between faith and death as an enactment of the vital relationship between reader and writer, and also enables the reader to consider Macdonald's work in a new light, as an enactment, rather than expression, of his theology[137]. Or the reader may take *Lilith* at face value, consider literature to be entirely dreamlike, the symbol to be only a literary device and, with the numerous options available from the sense of contingency that MacDonald deliberately creates, so decide to separate author and work. My

[137] It seems that MacDonald has attempted to go further in his self-conscious treatment of death as a writer than almost any other. We find Joseph Brodsky (John Givens, 'Art and Remembrance....', *Essays in Poetics*, Autumn 1998, Vol 23) stating that "In the final analysis every writer strives for the same thing; to regain or hold back time past or current...(to write)....means no less than to grapple with death....one could say that writing poetry....is an exercise in dying...." It seems that because of his deep consideration of the role of the imagination in theology, MacDonald comes to see that they are concerned with the same thing, and find hope in the same place – the reinterpretation of death and of history, such that he achieves (or is granted) what few writers or theologians receive - as opposed to raging against the dying of the light – the end of himself'. That is for him, and no other, however, and does not prove anything (as if it could or should) apart from in the sense that *Lilith* witnesses to its own apocalypse, and so grants hope to the searching reader.

contention so far is that a fuller appreciation of his work is gained by taking the former approach – that of faith, or a sense of 'giftedness'. It seems to me that it immeasurably deepens the interpretation of MacDonald's work, by granting a great excess of meaning to the imaginative power of writing, especially in the parabolic, poetic and fairytale modes of writing, in that such meaning may be treated as symbol and not only sign; reflecting more accurately MacDonald's sense of the poetic nature of both language and religion, when they are both truly alive, allowing them to address one another. A reestablishment of this dialectic is rewarding for the reader of his work.

Section Two

Symbolism

A. MacDonald's interpretation of New Testament symbolism

B. 'The Golden Key' and Goethe's colour theory

C. Lilith as a symbol

A. MacDonald's interpretation of New Testament symbolism in *Lilith*

Introduction

As an introduction to the way in which MacDonald attempts to articulate the nature of truth and meaning, we should consider how his reading of Biblical literature has informed the way in which he approaches representation. In particular, we should allow his view to inform our understanding of what has been called his mysticism[138], since he relates it directly to his use of the symbol. This is an extract taken from his essay 'The New Name':

> I use the word mysticism as representing a certain mode of embodying truth, common, in various degrees, to almost all, if not all, the writers of the New Testament. A mystical mind is one which, having perceived that the highest expression of which the truth admits, lies in the symbolism of nature and...human necessities, prosecutes thought about truth so embodied by dealing with the symbols themselves after logical forms. This is the highest mode of conveying the deepest truth; and the Lord himself often employed it, as, for instance, in the whole passage ending with the words, "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Having considered how problematic are standard didactic readings of *Lilith*, which rely on a straightforward confrontation between good and evil, because of the ambiguity of its symbolism – especially in relation to the character of Lilith herself – we should return, before studying the character of Lilith, to think about how the vast array of symbols which he uses operates for MacDonald. Night; the shadow; the rainbow; light and colour; the forest; the staircase...all of these are used frequently in his writing and are linked by the common theme of vision or sight. Ultimately, they find their source in the symbolism of Biblical literature; a symbolism which requires a symbolic grounding for theological questions. In *Lilith*, MacDonald gives us some particular clues as to how he sees the relationship between the "worlds" of the symbolic and divine, and the "world" of the senses, as they perceive reality[139] (pp25,26):

> "I see a pigeon!" I said. "Of course you see a pigeon," rejoined the raven, "for there is the pigeon! I see a prayer on its way..." "How can a pigeon be a prayer?" I said. "I understand, of course, how it should be a fit symbol or likeness for one; but a live pigeon to come out of a heart!" "It must puzzle you! It cannot fail to do so!" "A prayer is a thought, a thing spiritual!" I pursued. "Very true! But if you understood

[138] By G K Chesterton, for example, in his introduction to the biography by Greville MacDonald.

[139] An exposition of the way in which the perception of truth occurs may be found also in his essay entitled 'A Sermon', in *A Dish of Orts*.

> any world besides your own, you would understand your own much better...when a heart is really alive, then it is able to think live things...when some pray they lift heavy thoughts from the ground, only to drop them on it again, others send up their prayers in living shapes...when one says to the great Thinker "Here is one of thy thoughts: I am thinking it now!...that is a prayer..." "Could you not teach me to know a prayer-flower when I see it?" "I could not. But if I could, what better would you be? You would not know it of yourself and itself! Why know the name of a thing when the thing itself you do not know?"

In one sense, MacDonald considers all symbolic understanding to fall short of the divine communication of God with the human soul ('True Christian Ministering', p302, *A Dish of Orts*):

> Use all the symbols that we have....but you can never come up to what God's ministration is...

But he nevertheless believes that symbolic understanding is vital with regard to its being a divinely given means of 'knowing' the thing itself; a way of escape from the circular, anthropocentric theology which 'names' facts about God while learning nothing *from* him. Somehow, symbolism enables us to receive the infinite in the finite, and therefore to make Vane know the nature of what he *does* see, in perceiving some truth which has remained invisible, in that it 'belongs to another world'[140]. We have here the idea of a 'blind' and knowing seeing and a wise seeing. Sight itself is reinformed by such an understanding. It is not simply that Vane is receiving another explanation of what he sees; but that he must learn to see all over again. This, of course, is a well-known theme in the New Testament[141]. And in MacDonald's own view, the nature of understanding is itself to be

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[140] It seems especially that this allusion to 'other worlds' has always tended to mislead critics, who sometimes take MacDonald to be messing about with dimensions in a kind of religious version of science fiction. However, it seems more likely that his insistence upon the fact that Vane does not even understand the nature of his *own* world without this knowledge of the logic of 'other worlds' strengthens his presentation of symbolism as a kind of divine language, having an ability not merely to inform, but to transform the senses; not merely changing what we see, but changing we who are the seers. However, because MacDonald is attempting to show the reality of what is seen, and to show how it is capable of transforming the senses themselves, his own metaphor of 'worlds' needs to be retained, it being deliberately chosen to avoid the chance of this symbolic 'language' being treated as a psychological category. And it cannot be, for since symbolism is not in the order of a language which can be mastered, but is that which masters us, it is also bound to be in a different category from the language of any science, as a method of understanding. This strengthens MacDonald's contention that symbolism is as much a case of God speaking *to* us through our physicality (or thinking or dreaming us as he puts it) as it is of us finding suitable ways of knowing him. Symbolism has, then, the attribute of reciprocity. It is in this that his writing seems to represent 'two worlds'.

[141] For example, *Matthew* 13:13, there are Jesus' own words "...therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" which, incidentally links together the themes of sight and the methods of

"seen" in this way. There is clearly a lot of scope for examining the relationship between MacDonald's ideas and those found in phenomenology, in relation to the nature of perception and an examination of what it means to 'know' the nature of a thing. However, such a discussion needs to be left for another time, since there is not time to do more here than to examine how MacDonald's theology is affected by his views.

There are three things in the above passage from *Lilith* about prayer which are of interest. The first is that symbolism is presented as a divine language, having theological significance in understanding such things as prayer. The second is that the symbol does not function as a general sign, but as an individual relation which has a triune nature, in that the individual, the object, and what they both mean are connected and given life in each encounter by the 'live' meaning itself, which yet presents itself differently for each person. The third thing that this passage tells us is that, to minds which are 'alive' to this aspect of symbolism, there is involved a *substantial* connection between the person, the object and the shared (but unique) meaning to which they are attracted.

In 'The Two Worlds of George MacDonald', Stephen Prickett remarks of this way of expressing meaning:

> At its simplest it resembles the medieval idea of "correspondences" so prevalent also in Dante, but MacDonald's way of applying them is very unmedieval...(p22, *For the Childlike*).

We shall return to this "medieval" question later. Stephen Prickett also quotes Greville MacDonald recalling this conversation with his father (p23, *For the Childlike*):

> He would allow that the algebraic symbol...has no substantial relation to the unknown quantity; nor the "tree where it falleth" to the man unredeemed...but the rose, when it gives some glimmer of the freedom for which a man hungers, does so

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parabolic construction already found in MacDonald's stories. Also 2 *Corinthians* 4:8 provides a metaphor for faith as sight: "...while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen...the things which are not seen are eternal..." or *Hebrews* 11:1 emphasises the substantial aspect of that metaphor: "...faith...is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Or *John* 8:38 makes a connection between perception and identity "I speak what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." Or *John* 9:32, which links the person of Christ "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind..." with the perception of Christ (in both senses of the word "of"): (39)...I have come into the world that those who do not see may see and that those who see may be made blind...then some of the Pharisees...said to Him "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'we see', therefore your sin remains...."

> because of its substantial unity with the man, each in degree being a signature of God's immanence...so may we also find co-substance between the stairs of a cathedral-spire and our own 'secret Stair' up to the wider vision...

This leads him to define where it is that MacDonald differs from Coleridge (p24, *For the Childlike*):

> ....the defining quality of a "symbol" in Coleridge's sense was that it brought two separate world into relationship with one another...(but)...for MacDonald, it is the role of the gem not simply to inspire us, but to awaken within us memories that we have in some sense always possessed...

Here, this critic points out the Platonic theme of this "recognition". However, we have already considered the similarities and differences, of which MacDonald was himself aware, between his own treatment of truth and the division between the physical and spiritual 'worlds' of Plato. The alternative reading, and the one with which we are concerned in this thesis, is how this kind of thinking about symbolism is related to the nature of MacDonald's theology (for they are inseparable) and, specifically, to his ecclesiology, regarding the identity of Lilith. For his own Christian interpretation is the one which gives a fuller reading of the substantial aspect of symbolism. It simply cannot be avoided that in MacDonald's treatment of the symbol, his own words apply, as he stated them in *Salted with Fire* (quoted in *George MacDonald and His Wife* (p556):

> God is deeper in us that our own life; yes, God's life is the very centre and creative cause of that life which we call ours...

So this 'awakening' of meaning of which the critic speaks must be examined in terms of the awakening of the "Christ-self". For MacDonald, all thoughts are related to the "great thinker"; words must be related to the Word; life to its life-source. Specifically, substantiality implies embodiment; and MacDonald's thinking on what constitutes the body of the church is therefore highly relevant to the way in which he approaches the symbol; and that he appears to have a kind of negative theology. In his essay, Stephen Prickett does not pay much attention to the effect of MacDonald's belief on his work or the implications of his views on the constitution of the "body" of the church, and therefore interprets MacDonald as merely taking part in the shift towards individualism, as opposed to examining the way in which his awareness of Christian symbolism reinterprets the nature and role of the church and, consequently, the nature of individual identity and the concept of symbolism itself in relation to identity. The critic states that (*For the Childlike*, p24):

> Whereas for Plato and Dante alike the perception of spiritual truth was a collective process...for MacDonald, living in and belonging to the world of nineteenth-century individualism, we climb our own "secret stair" to the wider vision...

Although comments in *Lilith* such as that of the Raven that he cannot teach Vane; that Vane must find things out for himself may seem at first to support this reading, the movement of the novel, and of MacDonald's work in general, is of a mysterious collectiveness which begins to emerge *through* that experience of individual lostness by means of the emergence of the Christ-self. It is a vision in which the development of selfhood and of a sense of community are indivisible, neither one comes before the other; being informed by a New Testament concept of the 'body' of the church, in which all parts are different, yet essential; all growing together towards a whole mysteriously, a community which behaves as a single body, being divinely put together, and which undoubtedly informed MacDonald's view[142]. In support of this, we find that the development of his characters generally consists of a paradoxical mixture of individuality and community; times of solitude and times of an intense closeness with others. And we find his thinking elucidated in *Robert Falconer*, (p270), regarding Falconer and Ericson:

> Neither was a guide to the other; but the questioning of two may give just the needful points by which the parallax of a truth may be gained.

He further states in the novel that it is God who puts Falconer together with the right people at the right time. This sense of divine 'gathering' as corresponding *exactly* with the progress towards individual identity is seen, likewise, in the final part of 'The Golden Key', where "Stairs beside stairs wound up together, and beautiful beings of all ages climbed along with them." This movement towards reconciliation gravitates from the solitary, Solomon-like search of Vane for wisdom towards a sense of the divine community in *Lilith*, mirroring the dawning of the author's own perception of the nature of identity and community. For in *Phantastes*, in his early literary career – as for Vane at the beginning of the novel - the individual aspect remains the strongest. It is not that the one

[142] For example *Romans* 12:4,5 "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, *and* individually members of one another. Also 1 *Corinthians* 12:27: "Now you are the body of Christ, *and* members individually." (my italics). We find also MacDonald's notion of "co-substance" in symbolism also emerging from this theological sense of identity: *Colossians* 1:15,16,17,18: "He is the image of invisible God, the firstborn...by Him all things were created...visible and invisible...And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church...you, who once were enemies in your mind...yet now He has reconciled...in the body of His flesh through death..." Here is a picture of the universal, the religious, the poetic, the things invisible and visible in the process of reconciliation with, growth towards divine identity, in the universal redemption of creation in Christ's death, transforming the nature of being, of identity, even of death.

leads to the other, but that it gradually dawns upon Vane that his 'selfhood' is – and has always been - somehow divinely bound up with the others with whom he comes into contact. In exactly the same way the symbol binds together the human being and the rose, creating the connection which enables the perception of beauty and of truth in the physical beholding of the rose as an 'other'. Further, MacDonald's Highland sense of *community* - as opposed to society - complements very well the New Testament emphasis upon the symbolic nature of the community, as itself partaking in the divine body in exact proportion to its true cohesion[143].

This sense is reflected in MacDonald's construction of literature. For in 'The Golden Key', while Mossy's or Tangle's journey may be unique, the fact is that the reader or listener, on 'entering' the narrative and engaging in symbolic interpretation, becomes part of a unifying symbolism, "co-substantial" with the rose. Thus is the reader linked to the text and in being so linked is, by analogy, repeating the way in which the individual is linked to the divine body of the church community. Thus, the way in which the symbol of the body of the individual is a miniature symbol of the body of the community is *also* the way in which the movement and growth of the reader discerns individually *only inasmuch as* he takes part in an understanding of the text, rather than seeking to master it. Should the reader attempt such mastery - because the direction of MacDonald's writing is all directed outwards, towards the symbol of Christ's body, which encompasses the material universe - such a move on the part of the reader actually destroys the sense of the symbol; the body or the community; and with it the legitimacy of the unique identity which it claims. By substituting the self for Christ, as opposed to taking part in his death, the reader destroys the life of the text itself, which exists through a kind of 'death' of the writing, a death of the perception of it as a thing isolated. Writing dies in two senses, one

[143] The thought is frequently found in MacDonald's writing, that the entirely wrong vision of the church; of the divine community, is evidenced by this lack of cohesion; whereas the true church of *Robert Falconer* carries on regardless, needs no meetings, social documents or plans, but works upon the nature of relations already divinely given between individuals. We find this frequently in other Scottish writers, a sense of community which contains frequent allusions to the breaking of bread; to the sacramental nature of any true community; thinking of Neil Gunn's work in particular. The 'church' therefore, is based upon the same sacred relationship which exists as a 'gift' wherever it occurs in this way. There is, therefore, a 'visible' church and an 'invisible' church; the visible church being so inasmuch as it shares this sense of 'giftedness' and *also* testifies to the source of its cohesion; its giftedness, as being Jesus Christ. Such a testimony is a revealing of the 'sacred' and gifted nature of *all* community, however, rather than a 'claim' to anything – it therefore functions apocalyptically, not perceiving itself as 'different' in any way, but rather as an interpreting presence.

of them life-giving, one of them life-sucking[144]. Rather than community being a theory for social cohesion, MacDonald does not recognise individuality or community as separate issues; and as separate from question of the symbol of the body of Christ, or of his belief about symbolism in general.

The nature of progress towards divine 'sight'

We should consider, thinking of the rainbow that is present in 'The Golden Key', how symbolic understanding of theological issues, and the inherently theo-logical nature of symbolism are inseparable for MacDonald. As an example we should look at his approach to a reading of St Paul, in 'A Sermon' (*A Dish of Orts*, p286):

> There is no room here for that unprofitable thing, bare logic: we must look through the shifting rainbow of his words, - rather, we must gather all their tints together, then turn our backs upon the rainbow, that we may see the glorious light which is the soul of it...all who believe...that the perfection of Christ is the sole worthy effort of a man's life...are...even now, not indeed grasping, but in the grasp of, that perfection...

The ascent towards participation in the rainbow of meaning in 'The Golden Key' is a process which involves more than a linguistic agreement to move towards what has seemed to be a distant symbol. We as readers are first tempted to look *through* the rainbow of meaning, as though meaning were a thing which could be perceived in the distance. Some have a quicker understanding than others, and Mossy appears to reach his 'goal' the quicker. He has followed the rainbow faithfully. In the above passage,

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[144] There is a reading of Lilith here which implies that she represents a monstrosity of MacDonald's own creating when she is treated in such a way; divorced from the life that is for her. For Lilith herself is seen to be feeding upon Vane, sucking the life from him, just as a dead story might direct attention towards its own self - its form. Feeding upon the essence of poetic meaning – the divine symbol, the divine Word, it sustains itself upon a sense of meaningfulness, which it yet denies in practice through an insistence upon its own independent nature. *Lilith* may yet also, then, represent the ultimate nightmare of an author intent upon bringing glory to God, but losing momentarily the faith that his work is so oriented. On such an occasion, the beauty of poetry appears as a nightmarish terror, the author's sub-conscious may emerge to torment him with the possibility that his God is instead his ego. In the end, as Vane himself admits, the very perception of language itself rests upon the question of trust. In turn, the responsibility passes to the reader, who is put in the same position by the issue of creative interpretation. In support of this suspicion, much earlier, he has written to his wife, *George MacDonald and His Wife*: (p158) "...is not *nervousness* the *tap-root* of all genuine poetry?" (perhaps as faith finds its first expression in doubt, as he notes in *Robert Falconer*). In 'The Light Princess', also, there is a vampire-like snake, who sucks the water from the lake, making the 'atonement' of the Prince necessary. Strangely, the theology which is seen as draining the life-force from the lake in the first place, also arises, leech-like, in that it continues to feed upon, in its attempt to interpret the act of atonement, the very life of that act. Theology and writing, then, have in common this tendency to 'vampire' behaviour.

however, MacDonald suggests that, like Tangle, it may be better, in order to take part more deeply in the *meaning* which the rainbow itself reflects, to turn our backs upon the beauty which we are tempted to *possess,* in exchange for the deeper satisfaction of being possessed by...meaning; becoming meaning ourselves[145]. This, of course, reflects also the fact that rainbows are seen against cloud, with the sun behind the observer. In turning towards the light one actually becomes blinded (as Paul was on the road to Damascus). Thus our life receives the greater significance; the more divine identity, not by means of our intellectual possessions, but in proportion to the depth to which we allow ourselves to be *possessed and blinded by meaning*...which is itself to MacDonald nothing less or more than possession by the person and identity of Christ.

In her excellent essay in *For the Childlike*, Cynthia Marshall perceives the parabolic nature of 'The Golden Key' which 'leads us to assume a meaning in the process of search itself"[146], much as Falconer is led into the meaningfulness of his life, as he searches for his own goal (the finding of his father). We have already commented upon how the themes of sight and parable are linked in the New Testament, as evidence for the direction from which MacDonald takes his treatment of the perception of symbolic meaning. We should note, too, in *Robert Falconer*, the Christian connotations of the Christ-type (Falconer) who finds connection with his heavenly father by doing his will, while searching for his earthly father, in much the same way that Vane begins the search in his father's library – perhaps for the hidden Father in the church 'Fathers' of theology. In doing this, the novel itself seems to be intent upon recovering the face of the divine in the distortion of that face in the 'Christian' theology of the earthly 'Fathers' of the church and their theologies. We shall come back to this theme in considering the links between MacDonald's thinking and that of McLeod Campbell. We should note here, however, in trying to ascertain the nature of MacDonald's development of symbolic understanding, how it is not at all the medieval idea of being lured in a straight line from the lower to the higher love (as though the rainbow were merely a lure). For that cheapens the nature of human love. Here, he resists the Platonic temptation to 'transcend' or to attain the object, and so fall into the Calvinist

[145] MacDonald seems to be thinking of something like this in *Robert Falconer*, when he states (p109) of the difference between town and country boys that "They are cleverer than country boys, but they are less profound; their observation may be quicker; their perception is shallower..." although he goes on to disown this statement as prejudice, he yet leaves it in, for it obviously reflects something which he is trying to express about the nature of understanding itself.

[146] 'Reading "The Golden Key": Narrative Strategies of Parable', *For the Childlike*, p105.

trap. Again, in *Robert Falconer*, we have a portrayal of where this religious philosophy leads in its theological expression (p91):

> The strife which results from believing that the higher love demands the suppression of the lower, is the most fearful of all discords, the absolute love slaying love...

It seems again that Macdonald resists corrupting his conception of beauty and of truth exactly where he returns to Biblical poetry[147]. For in notions such as transcendence, there is a sense in which the reader or seeker is attempting to 'suck' in the beauty and meaning which lies, as it were, scattered about, in the quest for selfhood. In this kind of attempt, we leave behind the supposedly worthless 'husks' of material objects, sucked dry of meaning, thus denying the significance of material creation. Instead of this, MacDonald grounds his notion of the connection between the idea and the thing in an allusion to *Ecclesiastes 3:11*, where he quotes in his essay upon the imagination (p42)

> He hath made everything beautiful in its time...he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

And so MacDonald grounds the imagination, and with it identity and the poetic conception of things, not in the notion of the person growing in order to encompass beauty, in the sense that the Giant (or the text) swells, but alludes to it as a process by which one is *turned inside out*, finding correspondence between the inside and the out, so losing in a sense the self which originally possesses the knowledge of beauty, until the process of this turning, and dying to possession of the self, involves a becoming alive, a making exterior of that 'world' which is in the heart. This corresponds also to his description in his essay, 'Individual Development', of the child 'becoming' and realising that the world lies outside and not within, that the world 'within the heart' is not a self-sufficient one, but one whose essential motivation is to journey outwards (to be literally turned inside out, as MacDonald was fond of explaining) in order to find the substance and fulfilment of this torturing beauty which is placed within the consciousness by God. And because "no-one can find out the work" from beginning to end, there remains an incompletion, a necessary and good

[147] And it seems especially important to note that a good proportion of the Bible is poetry, and relies on the capacity for poetic understanding. Something which MacDonald was acutely aware of, when he attempted to expand upon the Biblical literature, and to portray the nature of Christian identity by means of taking further the symbolism to which it points. This, in particular, led to the accusation that he was attempting to expand upon completed revelation, when he was seeking to be most true to its nature of itself *as revealed.*

tension, in the notion of what it is to write; to live; to die; and in that to perceive the truth about one's self in relation to God[148].

The incompletion of the identity of the 'body' and of the symbol

There is, then, despite the sense of everything being informed by the whole, the notion of incompletion in MacDonald's treatment of symbolic meaning. While in 'The Golden Key' it is found in the fact that the story still continues, as Mossy and Tangle disappear out of sight; in *Lilith,* the Raven himself signifies incompletion; being the bird sent out from the ark of Noah, who continues to go to and fro over the waters while they yet cover the earth. MacDonald's writing always seems to imply that the journey towards participation in meaning which benefits from the symbol, is itself, in its incompletion, a symbol of the promise of an excess of meaning; of the incompletion of the world itself[149]. Therefore the very concept of symbolism witnesses to its own nature as, we saw in first section, does light. These are not only signs which help us towards a hope, but their nature is intrinsically hopeful in such a way that they cannot be appropriated as objects to support or verify any preconceived utopia, ideal or abstract notion. For as themselves and in themselves they are *contained* in hope by the very fact and nature of their existence. As MacDonald says in his essay 'The Child in the Midst':

> ...the blessing *is* the perceiving – the blessing is the truth itself – the God-known truth.

There is something of the negative method in this treatment of the symbol, as in MacDonald's theology, for we are prevented from treating evidence *as* evidence in the strictest scientific usage of the word. Rather, the clues we are given mean that faith and understanding are inseparable, being based upon a kind of *testifying* or *witnessing* of objects as to the endless depth (or inside-outness) of their own existence, just as the apostles or disciples *witness* to the identity of Christ by means of identifying the 'body' of the church as founded upon the notion of Christ *fully* dying (the double death), and so entirely turning death inside-out, making this process of exteriorising the self possible at

[148] This is expressed in *Thomas Wingfold*, p135: "...inside the Spirit; outside, the Word. And the two are ever trying to meet in us; and when they meet, then the sign without, and the longing within, become one in light..."

[149] We find the Raven appearing earlier, in relation to a comment upon Scotland's history, in *Malcolm (*p261): "Worst of all, the clan-spirit was dying out...the patriarchal vanishing in a low form of the feudal...the hour of the Celt was gone by, and the long-wandering Raven – returning at last, found the ark it had left afloat..." Yet the context of this Biblical allusion – the divine covenant - suggests a background of hopefulness in MacDonald's attitude to Scotland's history which parallels his attitude toward the history of the church; a way of seeing which does not have to be conditioned by present experience.

all[150]. The ability to die is gifted. The receipt of the gift and precedes the perception of the new, endless life which reinforms the vision of the world. There is here no guarantee of a closure of history, but an anticipation - rather than a visualising - of the sense of completion which accompanies every new level of meaning; of a depth in the experience. Just as the journeys of Mossy and of Tangle are marked by various "baptisms" in their descent/ascent, so too the reader passes through a sensation of meaning[151], and emerges, having perceived and received an anticipation of wholeness and identity; and of a deeper meaning yet.

The 'baptism' of the imagination – death and poetic language

Lilith's baptism into suffering in chapter thirty-nine is marked by water and by fire, as is that of Mossy and Tangle. It is a baptism which signifies an identification with, an anticipation of death itself. It is a baptism into the 'body' of the church; of Christ. Here, too, there is no sense of finality as in of any resurrection vision presented. Although in *Lilith* there is an anticipation of fulfilment in the progress up the river towards the heavenly city, as there is anticipation in the sight of the figures in the rainbow of 'The Golden Key' disappearing out of view. Rather, the author returns us (by means of the divine hand, which pushes Vane back into the 'dreaming') to the life; the incomplete body of the story (or the church) and the 'night' of dreaming, having imparted a sense of meaning and of hope which is nevertheless not allowed to operate as a 'proof'. Indeed, and tellingly, the sense of evil in the novel seems mainly concentrated upon the dangers of a premature completion; a grotesque representation of an inadequate vision (this is indeed the curse of a 'death in life', as Lilith experiences it). Evil is seen to operate through the failure of inadequate visions – and that includes the possibility that the reader may be led to interpret the author's vision as definitive, rather than as testimonial. However a testament, as MacDonald will be well aware, requires for its fulfilment the death of the

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[150] The notion of living through a second death is found in 1 *Corinthians* 15, as is the faith upon which Lilith takes part in the life of the church, and by which the notion of embodiment and of life itself is reinformed: "For since by man comes death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead...for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive...what you sow is not made alive unless it dies...you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain..."

[151] For (*A Dish of Orts*, p18), "the forms of nature...the man, then, who, in harmony with nature, attempts the discovery of more of her meanings, is just searching out the things of God. The deepest of these are far too simple for us to understand...let our imagination interpretive reveal to us one severed significance...such is the harmony of the whole, that all the realm of Nature is open..."

testator[152], and so it is that the experience of death becomes the symbol and the hope of life in *Lilith*. It is death, therefore, which continues to define the oneness of the church in this, George MacDonald's final work of imagination. He leaves us with the thought that the death – the failure - of this one, particular, imagination of the author – who will imagine no more, is itself his final means of witnessing that what he is seeking to communicate is far greater than his own imagination. The imagination retains its divine force inasmuch as it is truly divine, in identifying with Christ's death.

For inasmuch as the death of Christ persists; so does the force of the testament or testimony. The testimony of the imagination; of poetry, of the body of the church and of the text[153]. Conversely, inasmuch as there is such death, divine life emerges, informing the church, the imagination and the writing in such a way that it is able constantly to relinquish its claim upon the power over (by going through) death which is attendant upon its renewed discovery. And perhaps this is why apocalyptic literature seems always to overturn the rhetoric of power in anticipation of the fulfilment of its poetry. It is a power regretfully experienced; an identity held provisionally until its promised fulfilment is found in the gift of the death of death[154]. And so the imagination works paradoxically against itself and therefore does not insist upon nor cling to the visions which it has

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[152] *Hebrews* 9vv16,17: "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

[153] All of these require faith - life – in order to function, so MacDonald does not equate faith with imagination, although linking them (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p495): "We often think we believe what we are only presenting to our imagination. The imagination is an endless help towards faith, but it is no more faith than a dream of food will make us strong for the next day's work." In particular *Lilith* seems to be emphasising the role of faith more, for he goes on in the same letter with a theme which will occupy *Lilith*: "Being then in the light and knowing it, the lack of intellectual proof will trouble you no more than would your inability to silence a metaphysician who declared that you had no real existence." The lack of ground for his own being in Vane's intellectual and imaginative search comes to trouble him no more, for his search leads him to ground his existence in hope, in anticipation of "being then in the light".

[154] There is also in his poetry evidence that the *rainbow* of the imagination – the 'old' covenant was a very important symbol to him in his own search for identity, not only illustrating the nature of the imagination, but also implying that there is an unfinished nature to faith; it is not an assertion of ultimate triumph, but a transformation of the present insofar as it is held in faith:

And when grim Death doth take me by the throat
Thou wilt have pity on thy handiwork'
Thou wilt not let him on my suffering gloat,
But draw my soul out – gladder than man or boy
When thy saved creatures from the narrow ark
Rushed out, and leaped and laughed and cried for joy,
And the great rainbow strode across the dark.
(*Diary of an Old Soul*, October 12)

discovered. They emerge in their true colours occasionally, as the need arises in the imaginative life of the reader or listener.

As we noted at the end of the last section, we may take *Lilith* in two ways. The lack of colour – its starkness - may be seen as a sign of hope, as a *literary form of a willing death enacted prior to the physical death of the author*, which represents an imagination 'gone to seed' in the best sense, overturning its own terrible power, lying dormant in anticipation of its life-source (as the author himself spent his last few years "waiting")[155]. Or as the failure of the author to present a personal vision which has been intended to become a kind of substitute for religion. In taking the former meaning we can see that in the experience of the Eucharist - the substantial and imaginative partaking of death - that the dream of one day waking up begins to become a reality while the imagination yet lives. We can take this further. The imagination functions for us as a part of what exists through and beyond death; *it is the experience of death coming back at us* from beyond the grave, testifying through the symbol to the 'live' nature of death; bringing with it an illumination of the nature of this life. With mention of the Eucharist, we come to the heart of MacDonald's symbolism. Indeed, his son notes (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p481):

> ...to him a symbol was far more than an arbitrary outward and visible sign of an abstract conception: its high virtue lay in a common substance with the idea presented. Perhaps this accounts for certain Roman Catholics claiming that he was never really outside the pale of the Church...

The Christocentricity of his symbolic understanding

Interestingly, MacDonald's thinking about the imagination brings together two warring aspects of theology regarding the Eucharist, in that the Catholic insistence upon the reality of the bread as Christ's body (its substance) and the Protestant insistence upon the representative nature (the idea) of the bread are brought entirely together in MacDonald's treatment of the symbol as offering both an imaginative and a substantial relation to truth, and in that truth, becoming themselves bound to one another[156]. Despite this, he has often been described as tending towards pantheism.

In her introduction to *The Gold Key and the Green Life*, for example, notes:

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[155] *George MacDonald and His Wife*: p562 (towards the very end of his life), "...he was always waiting.."

[156] There are many comments of his which testify to the notion of writing itself interpreted as sacred, upon this thinking, for example, in *The Portent*, p82: "..the very outside of a book had a charm to me. It was a kind of sacrament – an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace..."

> ...in his fantasy writing what could be considered as elements of pantheism in his declared belief that God was the Father of all life, to be found in nature as certainly, if not so fully, as in Jesus Christ...

However, this oppositional way of dealing with 'nature' and 'Jesus Christ' is entirely opposed to the spirit of MacDonald's thinking. It is important to note that his Christology is so radically high that it involves the reinterpretation of every thing in existence, not through a kind of transcendence of the material, but from a reinforming of the sight. It is less pantheism and more immanence, but an immanence which remains undeterred by the lack of *apparent* divine presence. In this, as well, he will have drawn justification from New Testament imaginings of the nature of the relation between Christ and creation, as we saw earlier in *Colossians* 1, for example ("in Him all things consist..."). In *Robert Falconer* we see this being expressed: (p335)

> "This is the kind of thing" I said, "that makes me doubt whether there be a God in heaven" "That is only because he is down here" answered Falconer...where I saw only dreadful darkness, Falconer always would see some glimmer of light...

MacDonald is intent upon insisting that Christ's death and suffering themselves reinterpret our very notions of death and suffering; just as his existence upon earth reinforms and redeems all previous notions of earthly existence and substance.

In relation to MacDonald's symbolism we must use these kinds of comments to help us to see how his direction of thinking entails a profound reversal of the usual means of 'attaining' understanding through domination of the object. Rather, it is only as one allows the divine thinking to reverse this logic that we begin to see the rose; only as the vision of Christ as a human being is allowed to reinform our notion of what it is to be a human being, that we begin to see the divine in the apparently mundane. This process seems to start with a denial of the 'real' world; with the denial of the 'rose'. It has what appears to be a negative face – in *Lilith* especially – as though MacDonald were trying to discourage us from all attempts at mastery of meaning. And indeed he is; just as he demonstrates the circularity of all ethical judgements (as we saw in the first section).

Such a process, however, ends with an affirmation of a hitherto unsuspected and far deeper perception of things in and uniquely as themselves, rather than rendering them a pantheistic mass. Clearly it was vital to MacDonald that such an appreciation for the uniqueness of everything in nature should not be rendered less meaningful by any

theology which he might hold, as he says to his father in a letter (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p108):

> One of my greatest difficulties in consenting to thinking of religion was that I thought I should have to give up my beautiful things and my love for the things God had made. But I find...Nature is tenfold brighter in the sun of Righteousness, and my love of Nature more intense since I became a Christian...

The fact remains, however, that he has initially had to abandon all previous expectations of theology and notions of beauty before this discovery. The poet, then, as does Vane, must, Dante-like, abandon hope (that is hope in the weaker; fearful sense)[157], before experiencing it as faith; as gift; as an experience operating beyond the *pre*scription of any law of nature or assent to belief in a theology.

MacDonald's 'medievalism' and the apocalyptic nature of symbolic meaning

We should emphasise again that views of MacDonald's work seem to have sometimes suffered from a simplification of the theological issues themselves with which he was dealing and consequently have confused the related issue of his use of symbolism and metaphor. Stephen Prickett notes the false simplicity of viewpoints which[158]

> Decry the passing of the time when it was possible to hold a unified religious "world picture" in which all human knowledge could be integrated into a single, coherent whole, expressive of the greater glory of God.

There is, however, a notion of symbolic coherence which does not supply a "world picture" but a sense; a metaphorical 'sight' of harmony. Certainly MacDonald never had such a simple view as the one above, and he can be compared with Scottish writers such as Robert Henryson or David Lindsay, medieval poets who questioned this view as it existed then, as much as it does now. He shows that he is himself aware of his own tradition, in terms of its literary sophistication, stating in *Alec Forbes* (p107):

> I do not however allow that the Scotch is a patois in the ordinary sense of the word. For had not Scotland a living literature, and that a high one, when England could produce none, or next to none – I mean in the fifteenth century? But old age and the introduction of a more polished form of utterance, have given to the Scotch all the other *advantages* of a patois, in addition to its own directness and simplicity.

What is interesting about this statement is that not only is he hinting at the sophistication of the Medieval Scottish writing, in terms of its self-awareness, he is also linking the

[157] And we shall return for a description of hope(s), when we attend to Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* in the last section.
[158] *For the Childlike*, p28.

continuation of that advance not to empowerment, but to the enlightening experience of powerlessness (in that it is seen as a 'patois')[159]. It learns that it does not have to supply a 'world-picture', and is thus more likely to take the apocalyptic turn towards perceiving the nature of reality (and of writing), in reinterpreting the loss of a rhetoric of power. This patois is not what it seems; the dominant picture of the world is not what it seems. This language has the opportunity for self-awareness; and that opportunity is linked to the opportunity for perceiving the apocalyptic nature of things in general; for an undermining of the rhetoric of power, along with the unnecessary and illusory claim for linguistic or philosophic dominance. It follows that the Scots language is a more suitable creative means for communicating the apocalyptic (Christian) vision of reality in MacDonald's time. And indeed this suspicion is upheld by the fact that he reserves those moments of especial wisdom or insight into 'true', poetic or religious meaning in his novels for the speakers of Scots; while footnotes, explanations and the mundane plot are supplied in English. If we were looking for an analogy, we might say that English relates to Scots in his novels, as scientific knowledge relates to gifted wisdom. We should note, however, that such an observation does not confer any special status upon the Scot, since it serves as an illustration of something which comes about through a free gift, rather than making the gift subject to the form, as though the Scot were *intrinsically* wise, simply because he were a Scot.

However, Stephen Prickett states that

> allegory, myth and symbolism are not the media of a unified world picture, but rather technical literary devices for coming to terms with its essential incompleteness

This seems true to some extent, but it is also misleading, for it depends upon what idea of 'completion' we start with. Firstly, the idea that symbolism is a technical literary device seems to fall somewhat short of MacDonald's view of poetic language. For him, as we saw, even more than for Coleridge, a word is not an extra signifying device – but a 'thing'

[159] This, of course, reminds us of Nietsche's chief complaint against Christianity, in that his main criticism of the concept of powerlessness, was that it was dishonest, retaining power covertly through a continuing use of the concept of power. It is a legitimate argument in theory, and one which MacDonald would accept with regard to the behaviour of most of the Christian 'church'. It is only the 'witnessing' or enactment of the meaning of that powerlessness, a true and not a 'triumphant' suffering, however, which allows one to perceive its honest nature, and one has to do one's utmost not to allow that fact in itself to create a 'powerful' sense of the secret. One has to strive for exposure; for apocalypse in order to counter in practice Nietsche's argument; for it cannot be contradicted in a logical fashion; and this MacDonald was aware of. Derrida is therefore more perceptive (or possibly just has more faith) than Nietsche, in conceiving of the worth of the gift of death.

amongst other things, having many facets apart from its relation to its face value. Its sense of incompletion originates in the lust after completion. It would be a poor poet indeed who was happy with the notion that language could complete a world quite clearly incomplete, even while it might seem by its nature to bring temporary relief[160]. This is why, like his predecessor, the poet Norman MacCaig longs for its ceasing, cherishes the gift of death – even the death of language[161]:

> ...if these cold stones
> Could be stones only...
> ...I be unbound
> from all the choking folderols of choice.
> ...And all at last would be
> Existence without category – free

Further, on MacDonald's view, words are fulfilled in the Word, as life is fulfilled in the divine Life, and should they be tempted toward any sense of self-sufficiency, they betray their own nature. Not only would they not be religious, they would not be poetry.

Secondly, to say that incompleteness is "essential" actually lessens the meaning and impact of what the critic notes is the "tensional language of metaphor". Such tension is destroyed just as surely by the acceptance of incompletion as by the illusion of completion. It simply functions as a negative form of completion. We find once again that symbolic language belongs to a world unaware of dualisms. Rather, participation in the symbol involves the creation of meaning through hope. And Prickett does note that "a new sort of reality emerges" from this tension, although he does not suggest why this might be.

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[160] This is where MacDonald seems a little more sophisticated than Coleridge, who conceives of the imagination as "living power....a repetition....of the eternal act of creation...", in itself a creative force, rather than a living faith. Conversely, while this seems to grant more importance to the artist, it ultimately works against itself, perhaps not anticipating the way in which it encourages a confrontation – a competition between notions of reality, rather than a sense of truth which is more true to its own 'absolute' nature. It is open to an abuse of being 'used' (which may be partly what *Lilith* is about), rather than conceiving of power as that which grasps us, and us alone, turning our own sense of power against us. For the self-aware writer imagines *against himself,* dying a death in order to communicate imaginatively. It is the same as the notion of apocalypse in conversion, which MacDonald describes as "...Christ's giving testimony...in a way which spoke to the inner longings of his children, so that they would take a *stand against themselves*...and confidently cry out to the Spirit within..." (*Sir Gibbie*). Writers, for MacDonald, are not Christ, but they should share his testimony in death (the death of the text as a 'thing in itself') and, "take a stand against themselves..."

[161] from 'Double Life', *Collected Poems*, p18.

We might see why this is if we consider it by comparing metaphor and faith. In Hebrew, the root meaning of the words 'faith' and 'hope' is tautness or tension, something of which MacDonald will have been aware from his studies. The act of faith and the act of writing share a common element of tension. For MacDonald, symbolism neither proclaims the world complete nor essentially incomplete. The poetic and divine Word divides and connects. It divides[162], not amongst but within, separating us from our preconceptions of wholeness. It connects us – not to a theory – but to an experience of wholeness (or peace) which comes to be able to accept its utter dependence of identity upon an 'other' in terms of trust[163]. For MacDonald, the poetic force of language resides in its demonstrating the truth of the fact that the divine kingdom exists here and now, and yet, paradoxically, remains covered, remains secret, in that poetry (or faith) cannot grasp or hold onto it in any firm sense, but can only uncover tantalising glimpses of what it can never prove – that it is held by an 'other', and only in so doing does it retain its own identity as poetry.

Yet the poet is bound to seek to uncover what is covered and to attempt to destroy the power of the secret, just as faith is bound to testify to what it can never prove. As MacDonald says, the poet is a discoverer, and he describes death as "destroying revealer", as we noted earlier. Poetic language is, essentially, apocalyptic in that it seeks to uncover and thus destroy the power of the secret, leaving only love (where God *is* love – MacDonald's major premise). Because, however, such love remains inexhaustible (being reciprocal by nature), the notion of the secret remains; as does the necessity for poetry as testimony. On Derrida's thinking, this makes poetry a deeply 'responsible' act.

It is noteworthy that the Scots medieval poets, although they seemed to concentrate more on form, than on expression; and while it would seem to follow – upon modern definitions of poetry – that they were less 'original' and should therefore be thought to be less challenging, by contrast, were deeply responsible – and effective - in their challenge to notions of political, social, or religious 'reality', precisely because of such perception of their role as 'uncoverers' of truth.

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[162] *Matthew* 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword..."

[163] *Romans* 5:1 "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This brings us to MacDonald's thinking upon the relationship between form and truth. The emergence of new poetic forms testifies to the existence of 'live' truth, while their translation into prose is a sign that the living truth has passed by and that the form it leaves behind is, already, becoming "mummified", in MacDonald's own words in his essay 'On the Imagination'. The theologian or theoretician solidifies the poetic form, giving death to meaning by explaining it. Nevertheless this frees the divine identity or 'live' meaning from identity *with* the poetic form which it has originally informed and driven. In the same way, MacDonald sees the poetic impulse also shaping new forms from the truth it perceives inhabiting theoretical 'facts', in turn freeing that divine truth from the logical form of the theology which claimed to represent it. The language of the poet and of the theologian, therefore, complement one another in a strange kind of way, conspiring to uncover one another – to give one another death by ensuring the temporality of the form – and so enable life to move on. The power which language retains where it resists temporality, therefore, is its own testimony to the 'unfinished' business of revelation. It follows that the need for language – for the golden key - disappears once the rhetoric of power is spent and only love remains. And so we come back to St Paul, one of MacDonald's favourite writers, who knew more about language than most[164].

Importance of reciprocity in symbolic understanding

Mossy and Tangle's journey tells us more about MacDonald's attitude towards symbolic understanding. Throughout the story, critics have remarked on the progressive 'baptisms' of Mossy and Tangle, which would seem to support a Christian reading. As we noted, the idea of individually partaking substantially in something which in turn envelops us and confirms our oneness is highly evocative of the experience of the Eucharist or 'Communion'. We seem to consume – to eat – just as we seem to read and digest; but in so doing become part of that bread or body, just as in MacDonald's stories we become part of the writing, in the very moment that we seek to judge (so a curse becomes a blessing; a punishment a gift). To take part in language is to be baptised; just as one is baptised into Christ's death. However, while the many names of Christ confirm the many-sided nature of identity – symbolic names and universals; word, water, light - they are yet also proper names, which seem to affirm some sense of a unity of identity which is not quite the same

[164] 1 *Corinthians* 13:8: Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away...when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will vanish away"

as Pantheism. And Jeshua is both a proper name and also means in Hebrew "everything". Since, for MacDonald, we are thoughts of God, it is only as we allow the reality of this divine thinking that we may begin to see where MacDonald is leading us; how it is that we can re-imagine the rose only inasmuch as we are willing to partake of a shared reality *with* the rose; allowing ourselves to be re-made through the communion. This does not dematerialise the rose or make of it a vehicle for our own spiritual experiences. We encounter, rather, to the exact degree that we are encountered by. There is reciprocity – therefore giftedness - implied in the very act of perception. We pierce or perceive reality, inasmuch as we are ourselves pierced or perceived by it. We see this thought working itself out all the time in MacDonald's writing. Here, for example *(Lilith*, p41):

> "Where are the sunrays gone?" I cried "that I cannot tell", returned Mr Raven, "back, perhaps to where they came from first. They now belong, I fancy, to a sense not yet developed in us." He then talked of *the relations of mind to matter*, and of sense to qualities, in a way I could only a little understand, whence he went on to yet stranger things...He spoke much about dimensions...some of which...as yet we knew absolutely nothing...

Here is the idea that perception and reality are created *within* one another; *for* one another, rather than the one being passive and the other acted upon. There is also the notion here of realities only partly perceived in relation to the development of the perceiver. We can see how well this connects MacDonald's portrayal of the partially revealed nature of ethics (considered earlier) to his view of symbolism, in that both involve the necessity for an apocalyptic understanding which is characterised by trust, out of which the imagination finds its freedom and scope. The tension characterising both 'living' ethics and 'living' symbolism, characterises also the reciprocal nature of 'live' understanding or imagination (just as the prayer has the capacity to be seen as a 'live thing' according to the Raven in *Lilith*). The deadness or liveliness of things perceived is to do with senses "not yet developed"; namely trust and imagination. There is, therefore, a reciprocal, creative connection between what is, and what is perceived to be.

The connection between appearance and reality in apocalyptic symbolism

The rainbow in the story of 'The Golden Key' *seems* at first to exist as a kind of lure towards the encounter with revelation, for which our senses are not yet developed (*The Complete Fairy Tales*, p122):

> He drew nearer to the rainbow. It vanished. He started back...it was there again, as beautiful as ever.

It seems that there is a so-called 'other' world which is immaterial, as Prickett says. But there is a reversal of this method of understanding reality involved in the story. The rainbow, of course, can be seen as referring to the Biblical promise of God, in the story of Noah's flood in *Genesis*, a sign of a covenant with the earth, which signifies an interim period of waiting – for the promise to materialise[165]. Just as the presence of the Raven – sent out from the ark before the waters have receded - in *Lilith* communicates to us the sense of a deferment before the promise[166]. However, in this story, the rainbow does not just function as the promise of an 'other' reality which comes *at* us externally; but as a symbol of our own deeper and unknown natures. In this dual role is implied the promise of a connection to an understanding of the relationship between 'inner' and 'outer' states of being which will translate materiality – and also translate the nature of words or narratives themselves. For eventually this rainbow will become so solid that human beings will be able to use it as a staircase. The sense of solidity is emphasised by appeal to the senses of sight, sound and touch at the end of the story (*The Complete Fairy Tales*, p144):

> ...the same new colour that he had seen in the rainbow when he saw it first...on it he saw a sparkle of blue. It was the sapphires round the keyhole. He took his key. It turned in the lock to the sounds of Aeolian music. A door opened upon slow hinges, and disclosed a winding stair within...the key vanished from his fingers.

The sapphire, in *Castle Warlock* (p541) also functions as the symbol of "the unfathomable truth". Here, it is clear that it is the key – the signifying aspect of symbolism and of the rainbow and the surface logic of the narrative - which disappears while what is left – the interpretation, the rainbow, the narrative – has a solid aspect inasmuch as it can be absorbed into this more solid reality, a tangible truth. MacDonald will not make of the rainbow a 'vehicle' any more than he will render the rose or the text a 'vehicle' in his concept of symbolic understanding.

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[165] *Genesis* 9:14,15: "It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant...I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." It can be noted here, how it is that the rainbow is a sign for *God* to remember, indicating that, just as MacDonald feels that it is God who dwells in the imagination; it is *also* a sign of the 'seeing' of the divine within us that enables us to recognise the rainbow for what it is – the gifted nature of its substance. This is significant to bear in mind, when we come to consider the rainbow, in perceiving the relationship between MacDonald's imaginative theology and Goethe's colour theory.

[166] *Genesis* 8:7: "then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth."

Interestingly, we find that in the apocalyptic literature of John's *Revelation*, there is also, despite its introduction as a vision, an emphasis upon solidity; vivid descriptions of stones, gems and buildings, which occurs in MacDonald's writings, and which often seems to deliberately contrast with, and to defy, those passages of misty confusion which characterise the protagonist's (and the reader's) attempts to impose order upon what is dimly apprehended. This is a method also used in the telling of traditional folktales. As well as this, the apocalyptic literature emphasises the seeing, the involvement of the perception of the re-teller of the vision.[167] This, too, is a phenomenon common both to many of MacDonald's novels, in which comments are inserted, which make clear the involvement of the author in the progress of the narrative; and which is common, too, to the teller of the traditional tales of MacDonald's childhood. MacDonald is perhaps aware of the importance of the aspect of testimony which is involved in the way in which a narrative is introduced into the minds of the reader or listener in order to emphasise the teller's identity in relation to the narrative. The teller is one who emphasises their humanity in merely passing on the gift, but who in such an emphasis upon their humanity; personal relationship with the listener, can draw the listener into the sense of a larger community of the 'story', granting to the story a solidity – its occurrence in history as an ongoing happening.

We have already considered how testimony is introduced into MacDonald's theology as a somewhat different concept to proof. This *personalising* of the narrative links also to what we noted about his attitude towards ethical judgments in the first section, where he seeks to make the reader aware of their own humanity in relation to its expression in the implications of interpretation, by means of introducing the question of authorship. Perhaps it is significant that this method is found both in the Biblical and apocalyptic literature – the literature of MacDonald's fathers; and also in the folktale – the narrative of his grandmothers. And here, we reach a point at which his narrative style, the nature of apocalyptic perception and the growth of a new kind of theological thinking coincide; to explain how he may be seeking to reintroduce into Christian theology an awareness of how its own traditions have in the past functioned. This he seems to do by way of introducing a vast array of significant female characters.

[167] For example, *Revelation* 1:9: "I, John...heard (12) Then I turned to see....etc.

Male and female as symbols in apocalyptic perception; a new relationship between appearance and reality

So this quality of fixing upon *objects* and of emphasising – as a kind of testimony – the source of the tale, as though its retelling is a vital aspect of its substance, is shared in common between apocalyptic literature, MacDonald's work, and *folktales*. And what we have in 'The Golden Key' is a textual representation of a folktale which has been passed down through generations[168]. This tendency to fix upon physical objects perhaps exists in folk literature to compensate for the lack of a physical text.

Here, MacDonald seems to be altering the balance in this way within the *literary* tradition. The male and female aspects of representation in the story co-exist in a way which makes of words both less and more than they seem to be. The text seems insubstantial (like the rainbow) in that it is picturing, rather than describing what is seen (and we should remember that he describes the words of the biblical (Pauline) text as a rainbow). And yet it is substantial (also like the rainbow) in that the words so used seem to take part in what they are picturing; just as the key disappears into the lock. Somehow, had the key (the male text) remained all-important, it would have denied that which it purported to unlock. It would have resisted an absorption into the truth by seeking to master it. In doing so it also would have denied its own solidarity with the female and folkloric, as that which is also addressed by the greater reality which it seeks. Further – and most importantly of all - it would have taken away the ground of its very existence; its genesis in materiality which originally emerges from the story told by Mossy's great aunt, a story which precedes and informs the text.

Somehow, this notion of a man wandering around with a meaningless key reminds us of MacDonald's picture of philosophy without religion; theology without imagination; of the circular wanderings of Vane as he attempts to navigate in a solid world by means of one-

[168] eg "There was a boy who used to sit in the twilight and listen to his great aunt's stories" However, we note that this is not an *exclusively* female happening, for the involvement of the male is at the point at which the "key" is found (which is merely a part of the greater story, although it seems at first to be its *point):* "Yes. Your father, I believe, found it." This might be a good point at which to note that James Hogg, who has been previously alluded to in his similar portrayal of the evil of distorted theology, is often noted for his double inheritance: a mother who told him endless folktales; a father whose preaching was strictly within the realm of the proscribed Calvinist view of the Biblical literature.

dimensional thinking. Critics have already noted MacDonald's deliberate use of the female folkloric tradition in order to make this point[169].

Now we could infer – as Wolff in particular has – that there is a Freudian element to this male/female symbolism. This may be true, but there is much more to find, when we examine how this merging of female and male tradition affects the very notion of textuality and of the substance of things and words themselves, rather than their mere fulfilment in any sense of the one-dimensional desire of 'lack'. This is why we are first examine this mixing and reinterpreting of gender in relation to the writing itself, as it affects the very perception of what a story *is*. In the type of literature we are dealing with there is a sense of the vanishing of the writing in the act of writing, through the anticipation of fulfilment in the rich and multi-sensory nature of 'things'. Just as the notion of prayer is linked to the solidity and 'live' meaning of the pigeon in *Lilith*. We find this in Dunbar, much earlier, especially thinking of *The Goldyn Targe*, a work which, incidentally, also intensely merges the waking and dreaming world, just as does *Lilith*. And perhaps such a quality of words being both transparent and solid at the same time is to do with an awareness of the way in which words themselves, when most anticipating the fulfilment of symbolic understanding, are more easily absorbed into a dimension of interpretation which is not a question so much of 'making sense' – a reductive logic – of what is seen; does not draw attention to the appearance of words, but relates more directly to the method of understanding by apprehension, rather than comprehension; a poetic intuition or 'reading' which involves all of the senses. This is, of necessity, vague, but it is upheld by MacDonald's description of the nature of poetic discovery:

> "But the facts of Nature are to be discovered only by observation and experiment." True. But how does the man of science come to think of his experiments? Does observation reach to the non-present, the possible, the yet unconceived? Even if it showed you the experiments which *ought* to be made, will observation reveal to you the experiments which *might* be made?. "He hath set the world in man's heart," not

[169] And it has been present consciously in his writing for a long time, for example, in *Phantastes* (p5): "But you are not my grandmother," said I. "How do you know that?" she retorted. "I dare say you know something of your great-grandfathers a good deal further back than that; but you know very little about your great-grandmothers on either side...", or p61, "..Now you would hardly credit it, but my wife believes every fairytale that ever was written. I cannot account for it..." "But should not that make you treat her belief with something of respect...?" Interestingly, this man himself is part of a fairytale – or possibly even a figment of Anodos' imagination, of which narrative reality he is blissfully and ironically unaware; just as Vane inhabits a world which he cannot make sense of, and which may also be the dream of another.

> in his understanding....the imagination often gets a glimpse of the law itself long before it is or can be *ascertained* to be a law.[170]

So the imagination informs the intellect; as the story informs the search; as the female grounds the male. Such analogies are, however, misleading; relying as they do upon a 'systematic' method of understanding, which in turn can think only in oppositional terms. This is not an interpretation, but a reduction – even a distortion of the way in which MacDonald interprets gender, language and understanding. We need to touch the essence of meaning, if we are ever to appreciate the character of substance and identity itself, as MacDonald communicates it to us. This possibility we seem to lose when we *only* treat literature and language as self-referential, in terms of what it 'seems' or appears to be from observing it, as opposed to *first* paying attention to the *direction* in which poetic language tends to go. Just as the attention of the listeners to a fairytale is preoccupied with the deeply personal vision communicated through the storyteller; and through their relation to the storyteller, rather than by any straightforward referential logic of the words upon the page[171]. It is *through* this process of 'seeing' that the words themselves gain an excess of meaning. It is also notably in that 'twilight' poetic world of Mossy that things such as rainbows are perceived which may not otherwise be seen.

Words themselves, then, seem to have a quality which belongs to rainbows and keys in this story, communicating paradoxically, by the nature of their transparency, a hope of future solidity; a declaration of present solidity. This can be connected to the way in which the idea of the *testimony* works, for in making apparent the humanity; the fallibility of the teller of tales, the listener is freed to put the issue down to a question of trust; to 'enter' the story on a personal level; to look *within* the story, where it comes to reside in the imagination, rather than *at* the story as it appears, for its proof. This cannot be categorised only as a concept or as an idea about language, but is rather a belief about the true nature of *things* – language being amongst those 'things'. The concentration of attention upon recognising the hidden nature of 'appearances' which accompanies the

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[170] 'On the Imagination...', *A Dish of Orts*, p12, p13. Later we will see how this "might" relates MacDonald thinking upon the nature of imaginative discovery to his treatment of the theology of Biblical literature, when we consider its relation to the eschatology of Jurgen Moltmann, in the third section.

[171] In the same way that MacDonald tells us that we must turns our backs upon the rainbow of Paul's words – to *hear* them, while the eyes of our imagination and faith remain set upon Paul's own focus, not upon the words themselves, as though they were inherently 'magical'.

sight of fairyland makes this look like a promising direction to think in. For the narrator notes that (p120, *The Complete Fairy Tales*):

> ..in Fairyland, while some of the things that here cannot stand still for a moment, will not move there.

The restlessness of rainbows and words itself witnesses that they do, indeed, belong to a larger notion of reality than that which would attempt to assign them a particular 'place'. The one state of reality (the key) links what *seems* to be real and fully seen and what *appears* in a partial sense, to what cannot be perceived fully. The end of that reality, the absorption of the key, finds a connection within the reader's mind with what is utterly real because it is meaningful. Yet also a poetic sense of what is as yet, not perfectly capable of expression. In turn that mystery that accompanies meaning turns again to the notion of key to try to discover anew what it has dimly begun to apprehend. The movement is not quite circular, because there is a movement into meaning (though meaning can never be accumulated). The movement and life of the story seems to take place in the tension between meaning and mystery; understanding and intuition. It seems sometimes that the latter is represented by women characters, the former by men. Now this linking of the female with the intuitive and the male with the logical and then mixing them together to provide, as it were, a third perspective, as we have said, is an obvious one, and were it all that MacDonald is doing then it would not be very interesting.

However, MacDonald has particular theological themes and aims in mind, and it is not so much that he simply is encouraging a dialectic to emerge between male and female ways of understanding, although he is doing that. He is also altering the very interpretation of sexuality by means of the way in which he constructs that dialectic; reinforming the material world with a poetic and theological basis for its substantiality. Lilith is not merely Vane's 'other', complementary, intuitive self, she is also interpretable as a part of himself, as he exists as a man. Tangle herself experiences a rebirth by means of a male child, which is more than a simple sign of baptism, occupying as it does the centre of the story, by virtue both of its physical place and the hypnotic intensity of description. We shall come back to this issue of gender and sexuality shortly, in relation to Graham Ward and Goethe's colour theory.

Reinterpretation of reality

In the meantime, if MacDonald's stories provided us with mere conceptual *access* to another 'dimension', we would not move at all. However, they involve us in an intricate attempt to define what we mean by what we say – even by who we are - in new terms of gender, and of age, which requires a thoroughly rigorous and alien logic. That logic is apocalyptic. The stories return us to ourselves in an altered state of understanding of what it is that constitutes reality, and of what we are doing when we use language. Metaphoric or symbolic understanding does not allow the logic of parallels to dictate, but involves a movement deeper into the notion of reality, which yet does not allow us to exit the *experience* of apparent reality, and so it creates tension. MacDonald's stories, for all of their fantastic imagery and detail, never function as escapist literature precisely because of their understanding of the tension of meaning. It is the fundamental difference between the utopian and the apocalyptic vision. And this may be what causes such resentment and disappointment in readers who generally accuse him of didacticism, because he does not allow that entry into another world constitutes an escape from this one, but a reinterpretation of it. Mossy and Tangle *really do* grow old, unlike Peter Pan. (*The Complete Fairy Tales*, p133):

> How long they were in crossing this plain I cannot tell; but before night Mossy's hair was streaked with grey, and Tangle had got wrinkles on her forehead

Here, MacDonald, by condensing time, pictures what he describes in *Robert Falconer*, in relation to the development of the church, in which he comments that time is as cheap as space and matter[172], while nevertheless not attempting to transcend time through such a belief. To him, the reinterpretation of time from a different perspective is a vital aspect of his theological imagination; and so it is commonly played with in the fiction through which he communicates his thoughts. As with gender, it is the nature of old age which is reinterpreted in the sense that it is transfigured, rather than the issue of old age becoming a thing from which to escape *through* interpretation. Interpretation in the fullest sense of MacDonald's meaning is not a vehicle for wish-fulfilment, but a singular, apocalyptic 'happening' which transforms the reader's preconceptions. He does the same thing with time that he does with Calvinism – not a rushing from or reaction to; but a reinterpretation.

[172]See note 108. He may find the inspiration for this in 2 *Peter* 3:8: "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

This is more demanding for the reader[173]. As we stated earlier, when MacDonald speaks of sleeping it is not, for him, a euphemism. And we note in addition that the characters of the story themselves demonstrate this reinterpretation of the factual (p141, *The Complete Fairy Tales*):

> "Will you tell me where to find the Old Man of the sea?" "I am the Old Man of the Sea," the figure answered. "I see a strong kingly man of middle age," returned Mossy. Then the Old Man looked at him more intently, and said – "Your sight, young man, is better than that of most who take this way..."

And while Mossy will reach his 'goal' more quickly this way (having the key), it is the female, folkloric, apocalyptic Tangle, who will meet with the oldest man of all, a man who in reality is no more than a child. Here, too, there are similarities to 'The Giant's Heart', in which we noted that the Lark seems to feel that understanding is a goal which involves him in some race against the clock; his competitive 'form' betrays his lack of knowledge of the nature of that which he seeks. MacDonald's generosity, however, allows him to see Tangle, to see the Lark attain their goal, for the knowledge of God is, after all, gifted, and not merited. Were this not to be, MacDonald would simply fall into the dualistic trap (male vs female; rational vs intuitive etc...). He simply shows that there is gifted to us the ability to see other, more beautiful, more satisfying, richer and deeper aspects of the truth of things; such 'meaning' being its own reward. We should also note that Mossy's particular mode of perception does not take him as 'deep' as Tangle's, in the same way that Vane's slow perception of *Lilith*'s identity – and of his own nature - is constantly changing as his 'sight' fluctuates.

What we see emerging, then, is the apocalyptic tendency of the story, which Richard Hays notes in relation to ethics (see p84), to overturn preconceived notions of what "is". Here, what "is" and is accepted as such is challenged in relation to time. Further, and very importantly the rainbow, as a chief symbol of the presence of another reality, functions in his literature in exactly the way that the divine biblical promise (of which the rainbow is the main motif) functions in relation to the interpretation of eschatology (the end of times

[173] It seems that MacDonald's view of interpretation corresponds to Bonhoeffer's notion of responsibility in relation to reality (*Ethics*, p198): "The true meaning of correspondence with reality lies neither in this servility towards the factual nor yet in a principle of opposition to the factual, a principle of revolt against the factual in the name of some higher reality. Both extremes alike are very far removed from the essence of the matter. In action which is genuinely in accordance with reality there is an indissoluble link between the acknowledgment and the contradiction of the factual."

or time), in the sense that it is perceived in such a way that the "seemingness" of the world is reinterpreted by faith in such a promise.

The shadow, the staircase, the forest and the golden thread have all been mentioned at the beginning of this section as significant symbols in forming an idea of MacDonald's thinking. The shadow has been briefly considered earlier in relation to the emergence of the self in *Lilith*, as has the mirror. The Golden thread is another symbol which appears in one of MacDonald's best fairytales, *The Princess and the Goblin.* It leads to a room at the top of a secret staircase in which a beautiful and ancient woman sits spinning. In thinking of the thread, and of the significance of female characters in his work, we should note how in Blake's poetry, the golden thread leads ultimately to the New Jerusalem, the Holy City of the New Testament, where Christ will receive his bride, the church. The thread itself joins, as it were, the apocalyptic vision of the Bible to the presence of significant female 'others' in MacDonald's work, and also further supports the idea that Lilith is some form of presentation of the church embodied as female, and is also, in turn a female aspect which informs Vane's own male identity, and has relevance to the way in which MacDonald allows that a perception of the nature of the body of Christ may itself inform the issue of sexuality in identity, just as symbolic perception overflows predetermined limits.

We find, also, in the story of *The Princess and Curdie*, that the issue of the Holy City of apocalyptic literature involves the issue of perception, as one boy can see the thread which leads to the city while another cannot, and even *within* individuals like Vane, sight fluctuates. This movement towards the issue of the metaphor of 'sight' bring us to consider how MacDonald may be making use of Goethe's colour theory to communicate his sense of the apocalyptic way in which symbolism functions, as it does in the interpretation of Christ-ian identity.

B. 'The Golden Key' and Goethe's Colour Theory

In this section we shall try to understand the manner in which MacDonald links together the observations of Goethe with his own imaginative exploration of the development of Christian identity. Towards the end of the section we will come to analyse 'The Golden Key' in specific relation to Goethe's theory of colour.

The Context

First of all we should consider a poem by Goethe, quoted in MacDonald's essay 'Browning's "Christmas Eve"' (in *A Dish of Orts*):

> Poems are painted window panes
> If one looks from the square into the church,
> Dusk and dimness are his gains –
> Sir Philistine is left in the lurch!
> The sight, so seen, may well enrage him,
> Nor anything henceforth assuage him.
>
> But come just inside what conceals;
> Cross the holy threshold quite –
> All at once 'tis rainbow-bright,
> Device and story flash to light,
> A gracious splendour truth reveals.
> This to God's children is full measure,
> It edifies and gives you pleasure!

Then we should consider, with this in mind, a quotation from Goethe, entitled 'The Allegorical, Symbolical and Mystical use of colour' (quoted pp205-6, *Goethe's Theory of colour applied by Maria Schindler):*

> And finally one can well imagine that colour has a mystical significance. For, as any diagram that shows the many colours is suggestive of primeval conditions which belong equally to man's perceptions as to Nature, so there can be no doubt that they are able to serve us as a language in which to express those primeval things, which in themselves are not able to affect the senses powerfully, nor are they so easily accessible to them.

In speaking of the above poem in his essay MacDonald clearly shows that he is aware of Goethe's attitude to perception in relation to nature and interprets it through his own emphasis upon the 'inner' and 'outer' aspects of beauty and truth. He notes that:

> ...of all the arts it is most applicable to poetry...the others have more that is beautiful on the outside....poetry, except its rhythmic melody, and its scattered gleams of material imagery...has no attraction on the outside to entice the passer by to enter...if one has been able to reach the heart of a poem, answering to Goethe's

> parabolic description; or even to discover a loop-hole, through which...the glories of its stained windows are visible; it is well that he should seek to make others partakers...[174]

Now, because in the essay, MacDonald makes clear that he believes that the true - the divine truth - is revealed through the beautiful, we can see how he is using colour in 'The Golden Key' in order to reveal something about its own inner nature; he entices or tricks the reader inside of the meaning of the story, where he trusts that the rainbow without, those "scattered gleams of material", will find their correspondence with a rainbow within. In this story, as in Goethe's poem, it seems that its 'heart' is our interpretation from within, an illustration of 'innerness' which is illustrated in that part in which Tangle falls down and down – to the very middle of the earth or the story. The story itself then seems to function as an exterior symbol of the way in which beauty and truth are perceived in literature. The central point is that beauty is not always apparent from the 'outside'. The story also has clear Christian connotations, which in turn inform and link with his observations about poetic perception. It can function doubly as a portrayal of the way in which beauty and truth connect in the person of Christ, but only when he is seen 'from within'. The way in which one views the 'old men' of the story, like poetry, is a matter of perception, and the oldest man of all may be seen to function as a picture of Christ, of whom, it is said in the tradition of Christianity

> He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.[175]

The first thing to concentrate on, then, in observing how the colour theory is applied, is to note how Goethe's comment about the way in which colour relates to the 'inward' sense of beauty is being applied in MacDonald's vision of Christian identity, in terms of his treatment of 'sight' or perception *as interpretation* of identity.

Eyes and sight - the theological background to MacDonald's use of Goethe's colour theory

Eyes are a significant part of MacDonald's treatment of the theme of perception in *Lilith.* Earlier, we noted passages in which the eyes of Eve, Lilith and Mara seem to contain worlds, when Vane looks into them. We also noted the reciprocity implied in 'seeing' by the fact that there is usually an 'other' person involved in the act. Behind all of these

[174] 'Browning's "Christmas Eve"', *A Dish of Orts,* p196
[175] Isaiah 53:2

'worlds' of sight, however, is a particular notion of perception in the fact that Vane comes to 'see' not exactly what Eve, Lilith or Mara are seeing, by studying their eyes, but to understand that there is a reciprocal action in 'seeing'. Sight itself is dynamically linked to that which is seen. We also considered earlier in the section how this links to the frequent allusions to sight in the *New Testament*. It is not that there is a right or a wrong sight; but that the senses themselves are changed – in that those who are blind can see, while those who think they see are described as blind. Faith is described as sight, in that it is a God-informed seeing; one which transforms the reality of what is seen, challenges what is thought to be understood. And so Vane finds his powers of language and logic failing dramatically as he stands upon the threshold of this new kind of vision, in which the Christ-self can begin to see.

Especially important, when we are considering this, then, is to take seriously MacDonald's thought that God is thinking us when we are thinking in a certain way; and to that it relates to the notion that *God is seeing us,* when we are seeing in this way. We have considered how the symbol of the rainbow is especially important to MacDonald's communication; and that the rainbow is, in the Biblical literature, that which is *seen by God*, as opposed to the common misreading, that it is seen by us as a sign *of* God. The significance of this cannot be overestimated. Faith and sight are not attributes of the faithful, who grasp the symbol as a divine sign; but attributes of God, which operate through the human being, who in being baptised, as it were, by the imagination, dies a death to the mundane sight, and takes part in a community which sees divinely. In this, faith and imagination are the means by which we are able to take part in a *literally* new creation; one which substantially connects to its creator.

MacDonald's great emphasis on the humanity of Christ, as extending to all creation by the transformating of what it means to be human can be seen to be the source of his feeling that there is a light – a rainbow – within, which enables this seeing. This is important, for otherwise it would render his presentation of this truth to be that some alien force has taken over the seeing or thinking of the individual – an alien, transcendent God, acting through us, as though we were puppets. This, indeed, is what leads to accusations that free will is entirely done away with in MacDonald's notion of perception. However, far from this, his insistence upon the notion that Christ is fully divine, yet entirely and utterly human in every natural sense, means that the very essence of authentic humanity depends

to some extent or another upon this 'gifted' capacity; gifted through the transformation of human 'being' in Christ. And here he remains true to his Bible, for there is great emphasis placed on the notion by Paul in the epistles that humanity is remade from the blueprint of Christ; and that this new notion of human 'being' is recognised through the faith or sight *of* Christ. So faith or imaginative sight is essentially a gifted, yet also the most truly human means of interpreting the nature of the reality with which it is confronted. This brings us a sight of the rainbow 'within', so that we are no longer merely *told* about it by God, in terms of a story 'about', but are enabled to 'see' its nature for ourselves by inner interpretation. This brings with it the implication that concepts of authority and obedience must now be of a different order[176].

The rainbow seems to divide and to connect between light and darkness, and yet presents us with reality in terms of a spectrum. That which is perceived as God's sight now exists also as that capacity for faith or sight within all human beings which is gifted. There now corresponds to the rainbow without (the 'old' covenant) a rainbow within (the 'new' covenant). This does not separate the two but rather reconnects the outer and inner aspects of divine grace. We shall examine later how it was that much atonement theology of MacDonald's time tended to present the work of Christ as a work 'without', for God's benefit, as the Old Testament rainbow was often mistakenly seen to be, rather than as a work 'within' which can transform the nature of being human. Indeed, in 'The Light Princess', MacDonald seems to be making just this point about atonement – it being the central theme of the story. The lake functions in the story as the 'outer' aspect of atonement or the 'outer' relationship with God, which is often perceived as an objective event in reality which must be 'appropriated', as opposed to being that which is to do with an inward and universally gifted transformation. The tears of the princess are significant of a transformation of the 'inner' nature of the person, which *substantially* links us with God and with our truly gifted natures, in the body of Christ and which is seen to be at the heart of the rainbow:

> And a rain came on, such as had never been seen in that country...the palace was in the heart of a rainbow...the lake would have overflowed...it was full from shore to

[176] In ethical terms, it corresponds with the promise made in *Jeremiah* 31:33: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord' for they all shall know Me..."

> shore. But the princess did not heed the lake. She lay on the floor and wept. And this rain within doors was far more wonderful than the rain out of doors.[177]

MacDonald goes on, in 'The Golden Key' to apply Goethe's notion of an 'inner' sense of beauty and colour as being related to the discovery of the true aspect and means of perceiving this universal and general gift of rain, or of colours in general. For in this instance, the sight which belongs to God – which finds the sight of his son beautiful - becomes the sight of every one who chooses to see in this way through faith. We find that his writing is so constructed that such sight is anticipated in the reader. We are attracted to the threshold through 'gleams', through curiosity, through a drawing of the reader into the 'secret' world of Scots (who, as we saw, function in his novels as a form of communication of this apocalyptic truth). His presentation of the inner beauty found and yet denied in Calvinism in the person of Falconer's grandmother is very like this. Indeed, we often find such personification of a theme in his work, since it is in relation to the new nature of being human - the open secret - that such an 'inner' sight of things occurs[178]:

> Few English readers will like Mrs Falconer; but her grandchild considered her one of the noblest women ever God made; and I from his account, am of the same mind.

Perception and Calvinism

Further, such an inward sense is not presented as a subjective, individual creation of the human mind alone – it is not another 'appropriation', which causes the disconnection of subject and object. MacDonald's theology connects with Goethe's theory about the connection between colours and the 'inward' effect of them. In the same novel, MacDonald also says that:

> There must be truth in the scent of that pine wood; some one must mean it. There must be a glory in those heavens that depends not upon our imagination; some power greater than they must dwell in them. Some spirit must move in that wind that haunts us with a kind of human sorrow...it must be something human, else not to us divine.[179]

And there is a most important link between the reader's discernment of beauty and the recognition of the nature of Christian identity as both fully divine and fully human in 'The Golden Key'. In *Robert Falconer* we find that (of the grandmother) it is said that: "There

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[177] 'The Light Princess', *The Complete Fairy Tales*, p51

[178] In this novel there is also a key to a secret door, which Falconer finds as a child, which significantly and secretly connects the house of his grandmother (Calvinism) to the house where resides beauty (Mary St John's home – and her piano).

[179] *Robert Falconer*, p123

was no smile in her religion." While in 'The Golden Key', Tangle is brought face to face with a child:

> ...the child...had no smile, but the love in his large grey eyes was deep as the centre. But the smile never came, and the moonlight lay there unbroken. For the heart of the child was too deep for any smile to reach from it to his face.[180]

This child is, incidentally, "the oldest man of all". The links between them remain optional (as MacDonald insisted should be the case) but we can see how we are being offered in the novel an internal access to the nature of Calvinism, should we choose to read it. A view of Calvinism which relates its worst excesses to its lack of symbolic expression. This is the case with Falconer's grandmother who, to the shallower members of the community, appears stern, generally unattractive and unfashionable; while to those more discerning, she is trusted, respected – and loved. In the novel it is the grandmother herself who suffers most through her fearful theology, because her perception of Christ conflicts with her Calvinist *con*ception of God.

We see that Calvinism – at least its development in Scotland – is itself a victim to this lack of expression or symbolism; existing in the form of a love which has not enough faith or imagination to move towards its desire; which burns within itself (like hell); unable to communicate that which it experiences. It professes belief in the new, 'inner' covenant, while yet looking all around for the 'signs' of redemption in the manner of the old 'external' covenant. This creates a gap, space or painful depth which the reader him or herself is required to fill; recreating the imaginative reciprocity of desire, by drawing him or herself upon the 'inner' sense of beauty. So MacDonald allows the reader space to come out towards the character of Falconer's grandmother and in so doing enacts the movement required of the 'new' covenant, finding *within* the knowledge of Christ which is despaired of, when one looks merely for outward signs of beauty to be presented directly in the text or narrative of Calvinism.

And in 'The Golden Key', MacDonald further allows, in the absence of the outer beauty or smile of the child, for the imagination of the reader to contribute to the rescuing of this theology from its hell of misconception, and to recognise the 'inner' nature of beauty as we discern it in the poem or in the act of interpretation itself. In the story, we are granted

[180] *The Complete Fairy Tales*, p140

an 'inner' vision – that of the Christ-child who suffers at the centre of the world; and in 'seeing' that he is at the heart of it, we are able to discern the presence of beauty by perceiving the presence of an unseen smile which, if it were to appear to our 'outward' eyes "would cause the beholder to weep himself to death"[181]. We are able to perceive the true nature of Calvinism, of which many of its followers are unaware. It is the *same* method of 'inner' interpretation of beauty which informs both religious identity and an understanding of the beauty of 'The Golden Key' – the story itself. Perception and interpretation are solidly linked in the idea that the inner 'vision' of a thing is one with its interpretation, its identity. Indeed, MacDonald states that "To know a thing; to love it, to understand it, are all one...."[182]

Perception and Interpretation

To provide an historical context for this method of interpretation, we should consider that MacDonald might offer an interesting comparison to the Romantic theologian, Schleiermacher, who considered style to be the "inner" form of a work, and also considered the symbolic nature of art as giving rise to an infinite number of interpretations. The "inner" form of the grandmother or of Calvinism is left to us. MacDonald makes it clear that he is not going to 'sell' this interpretation of Falconer's grandmother. He confesses that he does not expect the reader to like her – a very cunning way of making the reader's imagination work all the harder to interpret why this should be. In such a way he lets the reader in on the 'open secret' by enacting a covering up, prompting the movement which may precipitate its discovery. He allows the reader to see beauty, if beauty is what the reader will choose to see. It is the interpretation which is important; and it is the important things which cannot be imposed outwardly. As a writer, he cannot give away the secret or the gift itself, but the means by which we may receive it. The text in which it is written requires the gift of a certain correspondence between inner and outer sense of beauty. And because the gift is given individually, the meaning for each varies, as MacDonald is fond of saying, while the truth in its openness remains open, yet hidden in its demand for interpretation.

The Christ-like attributes of the child of 'The Golden Key' and the fact that he, too, has no smile are, then, interpreted by that story optionally – through the character of Tangle - as

[181] *The Complete Fairy Tales*, p140
[182] 'The Consuming Fire', *Unspoken Sermons*, p28.

testifying to the depth of his love. For those who would rather not consider this, they will be more interested in Mossy's progress; or the descriptive passages; or in constructing a system to explain it all. MacDonald's own interpretation, I think can be discerned by means of this intertextual interpretation with *Robert Falconer*. It is treating the lack of symbolism in the text of Calvinism as itself indicating a depth of awareness of the divine which is unutterable; of the presence of a religion for which there is no "smile" – no adequate expression of language in the realms of logic or science. Hence it is that Mossy with his 'key', achieves his goal more quickly, not having adequately discerned the nature of the search. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way here, but a variety of expressions or interpretations which find their own level of accommodation with truth. The truth itself never changes and, like light, is only mediated, never grasped. The Calvinism of Falconer's grandmother refuses the symbol *in a symbolic way;* suffering intensely for its lack of expression. For, through a dim awareness of its 'secret' nature, it comes to make a doctrine of utter transcendence, so closing down the secret entirely through suppression of the imagination. In so doing it closes down the given means of transforming rather than transcending the 'factual' world. However, it is the *interpretation* of that suffering (as is the case with the interpretation of hell) which is important for *us*, since it defines the way in which *we* will approach the open secret.

MacDonald is not alone here in experiencing an ambivalence towards the religion of his elders, in discerning great and hidden passion in the most unlikely places. Many other Romantic writers find a truth in the idea of the 'giftedness' of selfhood implied in Calvinism, resisting the idea of outward pride or the show of self-making. However, in examining where Calvinism falters in creating such terrible anxiety, MacDonald seems to have found an especially creative and *self-conscious* **interpretation *of* interpretation** in using Goethe's theory, which has surprising consistency with perception theories in literary studies, and postmodern theologies. Theories which place stress upon *interaction*, upon the nature of the process of understanding. Unlike some of those studies, however, he does so without relativising anything. Indeed, his method seems to *add* excessive value to notions of the absolute, as we saw earlier in the section on morality.

MacDonald even seems to take this further in his symbolic treatment of symbolic understanding. For such severity as is found in Falconer's grandmother is seen to cover a religious experience so profound; so treasured, as to deny itself expression in the symbol,

so enacting its own death – symbolically (for it cannot escape the inescapable nature of its own faith). It is as though, in the figure of the grandmother of *Robert Falconer* or in the child of 'The Golden Key', MacDonald re-symbolises and recreates a world forsaken by language; as the blind man is given sight. He discovers buried treasure – the poet-discoverer, and invites us to interpret what is uncovered. Even the most terrible distortions of belief, held mistakenly through love of truth are described in a way which does not allow for their judgment by the reader, but emphasises the *depth of their source, and therefore the huge capacity for distortion in their emergence to the surface.* He treats what seems to be a 'greyness' *as* a rainbow. For example, in *Alec Forbes*, (speaking of the dissenting minister p113):

> ...one whose opinions – vague half-monstrous embodiments of truth...helped to give him a consciousness of the life which sprung from a source far deeper than his consciousness could ever reach...

This treatment of life which is to be discovered emerging from the depths of despair will develop towards the treatment of death as the 'revealer' of life in *Lilith*; the last human experience to be interpreted. There is always a route downwards that his reader can take, if they are not too concerned with premature explanations of MacDonald's meaning. Beauty is seen to be placed in the eye of the beholder, and the best kind of beholder, for the reader of MacDonald's work, is not the aesthete; nor the exegete; nor the philosopher, but the blind. His work is designed to reward the reader who approaches his characters with humility; with self-confessed 'blindness'; one who is willing to lay aside all preconceptions and judgements and confront the text as it speaks reciprocally, of a self to a self. The 'blind' reader of MacDonald's work is like Blind Tibbie in *Alec Forbes*, (p219):

> Death and resurrection were the same thing to blind old Tibbie.

With that capacity for blindness comes the scope for as much generosity and imagination as lies within the grasp of the reader. And there is a startlingly human quality which emerges from the text once this move is made. It is that which comes back at the reader, in 'going down' to meet with such characters. Again, in *Alec Forbes,* such sight is both 'gifted' and found in the opposite direction to that which *seems* promising (p220, *Alec Forbes*):

> ...but was it another kind of brightness...that Moses was unfit to see...until the humble son of God *went up from the lower earth* to meet him there, and talk with him face to face as a man with his friend...

As we noted, the 'baptisms' of the characters of the book, are also 'baptisms' of the readers, who travel down towards death, only to meet life and living understanding coming back at them. This may be why C S Lewis states that he learned to *love* goodness – *to be mutually attracted to it* - through MacDonald's work; not that he picked up a sense of morality[183] *from* it.

In MacDonald's work, the reader is also faced with the thought that while human imagination does not itself create reality, the imagination is dynamic, informing and taking part in the creation of reality, rather than simply reacting to a reality which is presented in its entirety, as Calvinism teaches that we 'appropriate' the sacrifice of God. By re-symbolising the severe world of Scottish Calvinism, MacDonald makes the ultimate gesture of faith in the imagination, and also chooses not to polarise the worlds of science and art, imagination and reason, Calvinism and liberalism, where so many of his contemporaries made use of their art to attack that lack of imagination which they found in so much orthodox religion or science. MacDonald's readers find that the repression of love in a religion, when rationality suppresses what is beautiful through fear of the loss of that love, cannot destroy it, but that it becomes buried, kernel-like, at the heart of the most extreme attitudes of severity. It is indeed this severity which tells of its passionate nature. And it is the great capacity for good in *Lilith* which is distorted to become the more powerful evil.

That evil is redeemed *by its destruction through reinterpretation.* The idea of a destruction or deconstruction through interpretation is remarkably like that of 20th century literary theory, but here it *must* correspond with the 'deconstruction' of the individual's preconceptions by the text. There is reciprocity. It is not that one poses the theoretical question about evil, and longs for its 'outward' destruction. But that one takes the problem of evil as it exists – in rebellion[184] and opposition - and allows such conflict to

[183] The quality which had enchanted me in his imaginative works turned out to be the quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic reality in which we all live....I should have been shocked....if anyone had told me that what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness.... That prosaic moralism which confines goodness to the region of Law and Duty, which never lets us feel in our face the sweet air blowing from the land of righteousness, never reveals that elusive Form which if once seen must inevitably be desired....the thing....more gold than gold. (Introduction to *Lilith*).

[184] Perhaps we should note how different are rebellion and contradiction, since rebellion requires some external hierarchy against which to set its challenge and through which to seek

undermine the rational limitations of the imagination. Where the imagination seeks to be 'a world in itself' is exactly where it will retain such 'oppositional' or dualistic thinking, seeking to understand and separate good and evil as *concepts*.

Sight and light as questions in *Lilith*

For MacDonald, the role of the imagination, undertaking a path through faith, as it is purified, seeks the death of such preconceived knowledge, comes to rely entirely upon its connection with God – becomes blind - and can no longer 'see' evil, just as God cannot look upon sin. It seems that in this way the existence of evil as a separate concept becomes unthinkable; one simply becomes 'innocent' – rather than naïve - incapable of imagining any existence which is separate from God. The perfection of love sees no evil whatever. Therefore not only is evil non-existent as being 'present' to pure goodness (in human terms), love informs the imagination towards a purification, the end of which is the sight of God, a glimpse of love, where only hatred or fear are outwardly apparent.

It seems then that the end of the imagination is also the end of its own necessity. Its 'colours' assist us towards light, through the greyness which encourages the imagination to abandon dualism. The attraction towards light through *colour* depends then upon the presence of darkness (although we cannot understand the nature of that darkness). The light, however, itself shines through the darkness, knowing both itself and the darkness in a way which remains ultimately mysterious to human knowledge. It seems that that is the terrifying question about God's sight, capable of 'knowing' darkness in an intimate and interacting way, without any change to the nature of light *as* pure white light. This explains the importance of MacDonald's statement in *Lilith* that while *we* can only conceive of the *destruction* of evil within our imagination through interpretation, through the 'colour' of imagination, that (*Lilith*, p206):

> The darkness knows neither the light nor itself; only the light knows itself and the darkness also. None but God hates evil and understands it.

Dualism results when we wish to see things from a 'Godlike' point of view; when we seek to appropriate the place of God in order to see things 'in black and white'. It is to attempt to escape from our humanity, rather than to reflect upon that aspect of goodness which is communicated *by means of* our humanity. The imagination, in the greyness which colours

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its power, while responsible contradiction implies that a sense of authority exists which is impartial and implicit.

it, cannot so separate the knowledge of good and evil, light and darkness, but renews our humanity to an association with God which is familial, rather than competitive; one which is characterised by trust, rather than by sight or assessment. The 'childlike' is that which knows God as the 'father of lights' *through* the promise of colour – the rainbow.

It should be emphasised that this view of evil is seen by MacDonald as a work of divine imagination within the individual, and does not in any way solve the philosophical problem of evil, as it is treated in an 'outward' sense. It is one which concentrates the attention of the human imagination upon the appropriate reaction to a sense of evil 'within', and treats the understanding of its nature 'in itself' as that which is beyond our character and knowledge. Neither can we hate that which we cannot see. And so all hatred of evil is beyond us. We merely become blind in relinquishing the knowledge of good and evil. As the imagination draws us towards true light, we are prevented from thinking in categories. Conversely, it is only as we are estranged from and blinded *by* light *to* light, and to the 'concept' of evil *as* evil, that we are in any measure able to resist its demand for attention. In his emphasis upon faith as sight, rather than sight as appearance or seeming, MacDonald may be thinking of 2 *Corinthians* 11:14:

For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

So even although in our experience good may come about through evil, that does not allow us to draw any *general* conclusion or perception about the nature of evil *as a thing in itself.* MacDonald changes his mind somewhat since the metaphysical assertion of *Phantastes* (last sentence): "What we call evil is only...". Indeed, it follows that the more light is discerned by faith, the less we shall have to say about light or darkness, becoming more and more completely 'blind'. It is a characteristic of *Lilith*, growing out of that stage near death and blindness, of both the body and the 'colours' of the imagination and mind, that, while it presents us with the most powerful sense of evil of all his work, at the end it has the very least to say about it *in theory*, finally reaching a stage in which *everything* is perceived solely in terms of Vane's relation with his creator. This 'endless ending' is preceded by many small deaths, every time the imagination has deepened its perception and has rendered one a little more blind, gifted a little more faith, revealed a few more colours.

Art and religion

In *Lilith,* as well as in *Robert Falconer,* we find that MacDonald is making of the nature of such severity as is found in Calvinism a point about the history of religious consciousness in Scotland. For, upon burning her grandson's violin, a symbol of expression, Falconer's grandmother is described as standing over the fire "like a Druidess". There is a fear in Scottish Calvinism, of the passion in religion which has, in the past, led to horrors in religious or pagan expression. However, for MacDonald, divine love cannot be extinguished. When denied the beauty and symbolism which belong to it, it burns everything else in pursuit of that expression or incarnation. Fear implies a less than perfect love; and MacDonald describes the love of God as the one thing which is "inexorable"; working towards its incarnation in the whole of creation. Edwin Muir condemns the "iron text" of Calvinism in his poem 'Scotland 1941'[185] as that which destroys art. MacDonald might see it as that which, mistakenly, has sought to protect the very essence of art – the beauty discerned in the divine - from the rationalistic age by hiding it away beyond the reach of humanity and art, in notions of transcendence or secrecy[186]. Such extreme adoptions of Calvinist theology so *deny the church in practice the incarnation which it knows secretly,does not allow itself to know, and which it claims as its theoretical base*[187]. However, such a secret cannot be *deliberately* kept – as MacDonald tells us in *Lilith*, and *Robert Falconer*.

But in 'The Golden Key', as in *Robert Falconer*, MacDonald offers a better option than condemnation in our approach to religious distortions of Christian identity. He offers us the chance to *supply* the unknown colour of the rainbow, instead of lamenting its lack of colour; to *imagine* the kind of smile which the child holds deep within his heart, instead of doubting its existence. He gives the reader the option of being 'responsible' for seeing imaginatively instead of *reacting* through fear of the unknown, in a self-righteous separation from and condemnation of this Calvinist 'other'. In doing this he allows the

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[185] *Selected Poems*, p34.

[186] *Robert Falconer*, p87: "It is a grand thing to obey without asking questions....Only Grannie concealed her reasons without reason; and God *makes* no secrets."

[187] Its simplest followers, however, such as Falconer's grandmother, despite "the evil phantasms of a theology which would explain all God's doings by low conceptions, low I mean for humanity even, of right, and law, and justice...." are shown in a different light "And this God they said was love. It was logically absurd, of course, yet, thank God, they did say that God was love; and many of them succeeded in believing it, too, and in ordering their ways as if the first article of their creed had been "I believe in God"...it was the first in power and reality, if not in order; for what are we to say a man believes, if not what he acts upon?" (*Robert Falconer*, p77)

reader to experience the nature of identity itself through the exercise of the imagination. How does his theory of imagination work exactly in relation to identity? We shall look at this as an introduction to the angle which MacDonald's work takes in relation to Goethe's colour theory. We shall start with a more detailed examination of the implications of MacDonald's thinking about the imagination.

Imagination and Identity

We have looked at how the faculty or notion of 'sight' in a theological context can connect with the manner in which colour, darkness and light are conceived within the imagination and enable a fully human interpretation which is attracted *through* its humanity and blindness towards the 'Father of Lights'. In this part we shall try to see the beginnings of the theology which is informed by the function of colour symbolism in the imagination. This will form the second part of the context against which we see how Goethe's colour theory is adopted by MacDonald.

In his essay on the imagination (in *A Dish of Orts*), MacDonald says this:

> ....it is that faculty in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has, therefore, been called the creative faculty, and its exercise creation. Poet means maker (but; however)...it is better to keep the word creation for that calling out of nothing which is the imagination of God....

We have already noted that this word "likest" implies that imagination provides an analogical connection between the human and the divine. However we have also noted that there may be a better way of understanding what he means. The character of imagination is God-like through *family resemblance* rather than through analogy. In fact, the analogical connection itself, as we have noted, is *preceded* by the symbolic apprehension – which denotes a *substantial* connection between the thing and the idea; the inner and outer; the subject and the object. For we already quoted MacDonald elsewhere as saying that the man may imagine "greatly like the God who made him", where the emphasis is on the connection or relationship, rather than on the property as a thing in itself. Imagination connects, and only insofar as it connects, does it empower. It is not a licence for power, but a communication of a *dynamic* power which rests upon its *not* being a property; but upon its being given away – as the secret is given away.

This makes the work of art an ambivalent gift; liable to turn upon the practitioner as soon as the creative exchange ceases. However there is an acceptance of this ceasing of the artist's *own* making ability which comes through a death, in which the individual relinquishes all power and comes to live purely in terms of the symbol or substance. It is the end of art, but in a good sense; the end of (this) life in a good sense. Such an end is taken up into the realm of life as identified by the death of Christ. The completion of all works of art becomes itself a symbol of the death of Christ. This also connects to what we

noted earlier about the rhetoric of power being challenged by MacDonald's apocalyptic treatment of sight. This is why MacDonald prefers the symbolic (mystical) mode in relation to the expression of truth. For in the symbol we have a *participatory* understanding which *enables* the analogical relation but also *disables* its claim to closure of the issue. Closure is not a true 'death', but the death in life of attempted perpetuation. MacDonald's notion of death discourages the autonomy of explanation, which makes of us gods; it is the death of philosophy which takes place either in the good sense of its relinquishing of the prime position or in its insistence upon autonomy which renders nihilism self-explanatory and becomes the end of meaning, in the destructive sense that it puts a stop to meaningfulness in art and in life. Earlier we noted how yet even such an experience as that, for MacDonald, may yet be a good thing, in that in provides an opportunity for a new creative interpretation. It puts to an end to its *own* ends, the self-satisfaction of science or of the logic of analogy.

This means that poetic language – as a symbol of meaning – has a substantial relation to that meaning *first*, and only secondly a signifying relation which is subsequent to it. How does this work in relation to 'The Golden Key'? We are sent down in 'The Golden Key' as it were; *descend* through the failure of the analogical and signifying interpretation - to death - and re-emerge 'baptized' into a new sense of meaningfulness. It has come by way of the analogy, but on the preceding understanding that this understanding itself rests and is reinterpreted within a wider picture – one which involves a certain 'death'. MacDonald seems to anticipate Wittgenstein in his approach to meaning, as Wittgenstein is quoted by John Wisdom in *Paradox and Discovery* (pp87-88):

> ...in applying the same word to several instances we mark a family resemblance and not the possession of something in common...*the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification*...

We should note, for future reference, that MacDonald is doing the same thing in 'The Golden Key' with colour as Wittgenstein does with words, in relation to meaning and method. Coleridge, too, is aware of this surplus of meaning, which encircles and submerges the analogical relation. However, in his initial attraction to the dynamic 'power' of imagination, Coleridge was tricked into the pantheism which comes from the analogical, secondary relation and which attempts to make that meaning or power stand still and be observed from the outside. In losing its dynamism it reverts to a systematic explanation or passive notion of divine presence - pantheism. Coleridge is quoted,

speaking of Behmen (*The Damnation of Newton; Goethe's Colour Theory and Romantic Perception* p252):

> ....Behmen has constructed in his spirit the working of the spirit on the faces of the Waters, and of God the word in the creation out of the indistinction...and receives this as deity...I was myself intoxicated...from the flowers and fruits of pantheism, unaware of its bitter root, pacifying my religious feelings meantime by the distinction, the thought that God was=the world, the world was not=god – as if God were a whole composed of parts, of which the world was one.

MacDonald, by concentrating on the familial resemblance, rather than being drawn into using the logic of analogy as a *preceding* logic, does not come to this pantheistic conclusion. He does not read out of the world into God's character in a *logical* fashion; but pays attention to the *manner* of the imagination's working (as Goethe does with his theory of colour, in observing the manner and conditions of colour perception). He remains focussed upon the fact that the nature of the symbol *is* the method of the verification of its meaning. Although it produces a harmony; and secondly, a logical sense, it does not *explain away* the mystery of this relation to meaning. In his thinking, there remains an irreducible 'other' which retains the concept of the 'giftedness' of surplus meaning; and with it the identity of God as distinct from the human being in this reciprocal working of the imagination. Without this concentration upon identity as discovered in action; as 'in the act of' discovery, the dynamic relation between the divine and the human, the power and effectiveness of the imagination which comes about through such a dynamic relationship disappears.

This redefining of the imaginative faculty as primarily familial, rather than analogical also helps to explain why harmony is not the same as the static 'balanced repose' (essay on the imagination, *A Dish of Orts*, p1):

> ...by those who consider a balanced repose the end of culture, the imagination must necessarily be regarded as the one faculty before all others to be suppressed.

Colour, symbolism and atonement

We might speculate further that the source of MacDonald's insistence upon this familial relation in the notion of symbolic meaning is to do with his understanding of the depth of Christ's identity with the human being, which as we saw earlier, can easily be taken from St Paul's expression of the rebirth of the human race and the renewal of creation *in* Christ and *through* Christ. And MacDonald is always quoting Paul. *The atonement theology he*

hits upon then is one in which the person and the work of Christ are indivisible; as are the meaning and method of verification of symbolic meaning. It is similar to the holistic approach of the atonement theology of the eastern church which had been lost in the protestant west[188]. It is also similar to the approach taken by McLeod Campbell, and we shall also come back to this in the last section.

And let us also note that *this* analogy which we have made between theological and poetic understanding is a *secondary* analysis of a symbolic relationship which is much greater than its analogical expression[189]. We do not draw from this the idea that Christian identity and the dynamic power of the imaginative faculty can be conflated or are reducible to conceptual terms; but that they are related through a resemblance, the verification of which is proved through the working out of that relationship in practice; in creative interpretation. This connects to what we noted earlier of MacDonald's statement about scientific method in his essay on the imagination:

> ...does observation reach to the non-present, the possible, the yet unconceived?
> ...will observation reveal to you the experiments which *might* be made?

Here, the poetic understanding of what may be possible *precedes* its working out into hypothesis, and he maintains the distinction, thinking in terms of 'orders' of imagination and thought. We should be quite clear then, by this time, that this does not amount to a *logical proof* of a connection between, or existence of, God and the divine nature of imagination, or their connection in terms of predetermined concepts. Rather, it amounts to a creative means of expression; which finds harmony by way of its intrinsic meaningfulness (not through its explanation). And perhaps another word which resembles meaningfulness is identity. On a conceptual level it looks circular (the identity/meaning is all in the action. The action is all in the giving and receiving of identity/meaning.) However, through a symbolic, poetic, theo-logical activity the reciprocity is *creative* because it does not have the balanced repose of analogy; it is *not* an

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[188] The original resistance of the West to the Eastern orthodox theology was on the grounds that the concept of atonement was too static, being to do with natures and substances rather than action. However the separation of the action of Christ from his person reveals that there is a connection between concepts of 'being' – identity – and ability to act. Perception theories show this to be true. This will be examined later in relation to McLeod Campbell's concepts. Interestingly, Anodos travels eastwards on his journey (*Phantastes*, p15).

[189] 'On the Imagination', p11: "The work of the Higher must be discovered by the search of the Lower in degree which is yet similar in kind... man is not divided when the manifestations of his life are distinguished...(p12)....the poetic relations themselves in the phenomenon may suggest to the imagination the law that rules its scientific life...the imagination often gets a glimpse of the law itself long before it is or can be ascertained to be a law.

equal exchange, and this, therefore, may distinguish MacDonald's thought from the more dualistic aspects of Goethe's thinking about colour perception[190].

Reason and imagination must work together, inasmuch as they have faith in this familial connection. Reason, through the realisation that the familial relationship involves a *sense of responsibility* precisely because of its 'living' relationship with meaning. Here, we find that MacDonald's method of thought is consistent throughout his novels, fantasies and essays. For we find an interesting concurrence with the linking of the concepts of power and identity in the writings of the New Testament, where we find that Jesus is described as speaking with authority because of who he is, rather than because of some rank possessed – an inherent rather than attributed position of power. We saw earlier that MacDonald himself makes this distinction between the person and rank; identifying two different relations of power or authority in *Malcolm.* That which is deserved because it is due to the 'person'; that which is illusory, because it identifies identity with rank. Obedience is in morality, then, as reason is informed by imagination, both relationships are read by MacDonald as indicative of familial identity, rather than of passive enslavement, and he speaks a great deal about the nature of obedience in his work. He asks the reader, in his sermon 'True Christian Ministering', this question about Christ:

> Do you think that he was less divine than the father when he was obedient?

This in turn helps to clarify what seem to our minds to be the strange words of Jesus:

> You are my friends if you do whatever I command you[191].

The demand for obedience therefore should not be treated as resting upon the logic of power but upon the recognition of identity as being 'in relationship with'.

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[190] Although when he was younger (33), MacDonald admired Goethe's fighting spirit saying of him: "...I like Goethe...he is....wholehearted, heroic...and in most modern writers... there is an obvious effort to smother, harmonise and reconcile whatever is discrepant...instead...of doing battle with the Devil...." (*George MacDonald and His Wife*, p175), even then he was wary about the tendency to take this battle upon ourselves as though *we* were the heroes (p204: "we ought never to wish to overcome because WE are the fighters..."). Later, and seen in his fiction, his approach can neither be reduced to this "effort to harmonise", but neither does he look upon spiritual warfare in quite the same way. Rather, he adopts a particular view of apocalypse which reinterprets the 'battle' mentality itself – an apocalypse of common notions of apocalypse. Such an approach lays a huge emphasis upon faith *as* wisdom in relation to problems of evil, rather than upon meeting them head-on, on the terms in which they initially present themselves. This can be clearly seen in Vane's changing attitude to Lilith (as an object of desire, as an enemy, then as a fellow-being, and reflection of his own humanity in relation to death). This will be important to remember when we come in this section to examine where MacDonald differs from Goethe, in his use of colour and in his interpretation of the apocalyptic vision.

[191] *John* 15:14

Meaning then, as with morality in MacDonald's thinking, possesses a vitality which witnesses to its identity *as* meaning. *It is the meaning which demands explanation from us, then, not we who demand an explanation of meaning.* It seems to be that this obedience to meaning is involved with a continuing relationship *with* meaning. We must therefore strive to find its correspondence in the 'outer' things of nature. And so the explanation always remains secondary to the meaning to which we attach it. And the same applies to the relationship between aesthetic worth and symbolic meaning. As philosophy dies without meaning (betraying its lack of autonomous identity), so does the 'sense' of beauty. MacDonald is not worried about 'levelling' the ground, so to speak, by dividing them all up and granting them their own ground. Such a power-based division of disciplines is the very antithesis of the nature of meaning. In his introduction to his fairy tales he relates this imaginary conversation between himself and a reader. The questioner asks:

> You write as if a fairytale were a thing of importance; must it have a meaning?" To which he replies: "It cannot help having some meaning...the beauty in it may be plainer than the truth, but without the truth, the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give no delight. Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development, one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another."
> "If so, how am I to assure myself that I am not reading my own meaning into it, but yours out of it?"
> "Why should you be so assured? It may be better that you should read your meaning into it...as meaning may be there but it is not for you....

We should note that this apparent 'subjectivity' reminds us also of Kierkegaard's comment at the end of his work *Either/Or* when, having examined the worlds of the judge and of the aesthete in their isolation, he finally says: "...only the truth which edifies is truth for you...". Since the notion of meaning is retained, this statement implies not endless relativity, but the individual nature of one's relationship to absolute truth. We should note, then, that the apparently contingent nature of morality and beauty does not worry MacDonald. By remaining true to their nature (in their relationship to living meaning) they are bound to escape the effects of abuse. Just as false moralising undermines itself in the story of 'The Giant's Heart', the deflation of his work to didactic allegory also takes away the power of the symbol, betraying the fact that explanation cannot replace meaning. The seeing of the pigeon in *Lilith* as a 'sign' does not counter its vision as a 'live' prayer. But Vane's 'signifying' tendency does not get him very far; it is

only when he begins to 'see' these correspondences between nature and 'inner' things that he encounters real danger; in that he is dealing with 'live' things.

The symbolic nature of the discovery of meaning, then, in the nature of the rainbow or of colour should be seen as reflected in the entirety of his work, no matter what aspect of it we examine. Stephen Prickett also notes this (slightly contradicting his notion of metaphoric understanding as a literary device):

> In the face of a predominantly empiricist and scientific culture, concerned to rationalize and, where possible, demythologise the long record of man's awareness of the numinous, MacDonald 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 consciousness. Religious experience is seen not as something to be reduced to psychological or physical terms in order to be articulated, but as itself a new kind of articulateness...thus MacDonald's philosophy is inseparable from his theory of symbolism....

We should now go on to note in the context of the preceding observations about MacDonald, how – with more exact reference to the text of 'The Golden Key' - he may be making use of Goethe's colour theory or *Farbenlehre*, and where he may be modifying it.

Goethe's Theory of Colour

The first English edition of the *Theory of Colour* appeared in 1840, although it is possible that MacDonald read it in its original German as, because of his interest in Chemistry, he was reading a lot of other German science early in his life before it was accessed by any other English-speaking writers. [192]

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[192] We should point out at this stage that, because of his interest in Chemistry, MacDonald would probably have taken particular interest in Goethe's comments upon this. *And this may be why he decides, from his own observations, that Goethe is possibly wrong* in the way in which he treats the imagination in relation to that science, for Goethe says that **"I am speaking of Chemistry...how many discoveries are shelved...if one knows how easily a superficial idea is taken up by the imagination and how the man persuades himself that he has grasped some truth with his intellect; if one notices how complacently he thinks he understand something which in reality he only knows...it will appear pardonable if someone undertakes to examine the documents on which an important theory is based.**." On the contrary, MacDonald, in his essay on the imagination says that the imagination is involved prior to the idea, it is the means by which the original idea comes into being, and that, in addition **"what can be known must be known severely...but is there, therefore, no faculty for the infinite lands of uncertainty...?"** He sees the scientific 'idea' as a gift which comes by means of the imagination, from those 'lands of uncertainty' to inhabit the mind, and which is *then* to be worked out 'severely'. And, in addition, because his primary emphasis is upon a Christ-informed reality he further comments in 'A sermon' that **"knowledge is not necessarily light; and it is light, not knowledge, that we have to diffuse...beyond all doing of good is the being good."** Where Goethe's emphasis is upon

Brief outline of the two main aspects of the theory apparent in MacDonald's work.

There are two main characteristics of the theory which are of interest here[193]. The first is to do with the study of colour itself. Newton had imagined colour as a splitting up of white light into its component parts, believing that there were seven substances composed of corpuscles of different sizes, the smaller ones corresponding to the blue colours, the larger to the yellows and reds. He imagined a kind of chemical de-composition of the light. Huygens and Euler later undermined this conception, conceiving of light as a movement taking place within a particular state of matter. Although the notion of movement is involved it is limited to a one-dimensional, mechanical concept of movement. There were later developments which concentrated upon the eye itself, for example, by Young, speculating upon the activity between the eyes and the brain.

The one thing which these theories have in common is that the perception of colour is thought of as being an automatic response of matter, whether external to man, or within the eye, or the brain. Science resigns itself to the notion that such phenomena must be observed in isolation from any sense of 'meaningfulness' which we derive from colour – such a sense being an 'inner' one which cannot be shared or communicated. It might be expected that any reaction to this would be one which would reject observation in favour of imagination. However, such an approach produces the same division between what is observed and what can be known.

Goethe, however, takes observation much further, and is systematic, but starts with a much more optimistic view of what can be known from observation. The first difference is that he studies the conditions of the *perception* of colour more thoroughly, thinking about how his observation of 'inner' or 'outer' perceptions are also related to himself, as one who studies. He examines the organ of the eye itself in relation to the way in which we perceive colours in different environments of light (reflection, refraction, refraction, etc). Schindler notes that (p10):

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the activity of the intellect, then, MacDonald's is upon the intellect in this wider context of activity.

[193] These two main characteristics are taken from *Goethe's Theory of Colour, as applied by Maria Schindler.*

> Goethe's concept does not contradict modern physics. The wave-theory came into existence in his lifetime and he saw nothing in it which could not be brought into harmony with his conviction concerning the nature of colour...when a colour phenomenon takes place it is accompanied by processes in matter, perceptible to the sense. Matter, however, can only react to any stimulus with movement...when we examine these movements, we do not come to know what is mediated, *we only come to know in what manner it is brought to us...*[194]

The second difference is that, because of this emphasis on the *conditions for perception*, Goethe comes to see the role of light in the perception of colour as slightly different. He also comes to the conclusion that light is the necessary basis of every colour. Yet, because of his emphasis upon the conditions of *perception* of colour, notices that it is *modified* light which produces colour. That is, the interplay between darkness and light. *It is not, however, the idea that in each colour both lightness and darkness are physically present.* What meets the eye is a definite shade of colour, but thought itself may distinguish two conceptual entities in this tangibility – light and non-light. That is, the relationship between light and darkness is *perceived* in terms of colour, but *conceived* in terms of light and non-light. This writer on Goethe also notes that

> If one understands by light only a mixture of all colours, then any idea of "Light" as a concrete entity disappears. But such abstractions were foreign to Goethe. For him, every idea must have an actual content. Therefore the 'concrete' did not come to an end with the physical but, contrary to modern ways of thought, was also present in the spiritual.[195]

Unfortunately, this writer on Goethe tends to oppose the 'physical' and 'spiritual' perceptions, whereas, as we have seen – and especially in MacDonald's use - the one requires the other, they have a reciprocal, inner' and 'outer', aspect. And so the perception and conception inform one another. However, the writer goes on:

> Darkness to him was not the total and actionless absence of light. It is an activity. It sets itself in opposition to the light and enters into reciprocal action with it. Modern science sees darkness as absolutely non-existent as an entity, and light that streams into a dark space has, according to this view, no opposition to overcome. Goethe, on the contrary, considered that light and darkness are related to one-another as the north and south poles of a magnet.[196]

Now it would be very easy to infer from this that Goethe has precisely the dualism in his thinking which MacDonald was trying to overcome. Indeed, Schindler posits the battle

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[194] Schindler, p10.
[195] Schindler, p10
[196] Schindler, p10

between light and darkness as a *prerequisite* for colour, rather than sensing the perception of colour as that which is first presented to the human mind as being its true relation to these concepts:

> In the colour scale of the rainbow...these powers stand opposed to one *another in battle.* Then, like the birth of a new world, radiant colours appear[197].

However, because the perception of colour and the concepts of light and darkness are related (substantially), we find that in practice, there is not a battle between light and darkness going on, but a perceptive reinterpretation of seemingly equal oppositions in the very midst of the supposed conceptual battle. For the manifestation of colour is a perception which transforms the grey flatness of the conceptual mixture into a beautiful spectrum. So the perception of colour itself precedes its conception (both as it appears to us, and as it is) Thereafter, it is colour, and not a false appropriation of the concepts of darkness and light 'in themselves' which must inform and precede such concepts, just as the imagination precedes the intellectual action, in MacDonald's thought. The rainbow can therefore be read as a promise about the true nature of this apparent 'battle'[198]; a promise which is 'read back' into a mistakenly preceding metaphysical concepts of greyness and of black and white, transforming our view of them[199]. It transforms, apocalyptically, dualism into prism.

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[197] Schindler, p90.

[198] This is Derrida's complaint against the Platonic element in Christianity, in that the glorification of the 'front' or of the battle comes from the idea that the reign of Christian responsibility attracts to it a certain glorying in triumph, which retains traces of 'battle' language (*The Gift of Death*, p17). Interestingly, Derrida speaks of an alliance, which relies on a certain concept of balanced repose, while MacDonald speaks of harmony. This is why, as we saw, MacDonald is so insistent that we must not perceive ourselves as being victors in a certain way, in case we should begin to 'glory' in ourselves, and bring back the dualism which is conquered by *Christ.* He is also true to the words of Jesus in this, which can be seen as a warning against this tendency which is noted by Derrida: *Luke* 10:20: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

[199] This also is consistent with MacDonald's theological interpretation of the rainbow, as God's promise. It is a promise which we *conceive* of inside of the limits of time. We must not confuse, as he says "that creation out of nothing", a concept which lies outside of time, with the emergence of our own *perception* of the rainbow, because the relation is not necessary but contingent, requiring faith in God as a person, not in a concept. Even so, the imaginative interpretation strives after and serves faith and meaning as its unknown source. It therefore relies entirely upon the promise *as* promise. In 'A Sermon' (p294), he says that "it is impossible a man should hold anything aright. How shall the created embrace the self-existent Creator? That Creator, and he alone, is the truth; how, then, shall a man embrace the truth...to him who will live it...the truth will reach down a thousand hands for him to grasp."

Further, Goethe's experiments with prisms support this notion of greyness as the more accurate *condition* of the perception of colour. The 'greyness' which had been previously associated with dullness is, by way of Goethe's experiments, now associated with the spectrum of colour – informing and supporting in a more systematic way seemingly colourful and romantic notions of half-light – such as dusk or dawn - and all of the associations of liminality, of the edge of things, with promise; in the sense of the imminence of life and death, or of meaning[200]. We shall shortly look at how MacDonald expresses his interpretation of this thinking about colour and half-light – liminality - in his writing and theology. First we will just note some similarities in their approaches to concepts of discovery and knowledge about the world.

Similarity between approaches of MacDonald and Goethe

There are various similarities between MacDonald and Goethe in their approach to discovery of truth which can be outlined in terms of Goethe's treatment of the nature of colour. The first thing to note is that neither of them sees the need for a division between the scientific and poetic goal (although their methods and overall view may be different). Goethe, like MacDonald, is systematic in his observation of phenomena, but he yet does not allow his imagination to be *limited* by the 'reasonable' explanation of what is perceived (since it had no prior place in the perception), but rather allows what is perceived to *inform* the intellect. For, as we noted, meaning demands an explanation. Goethe writes "Nature conceals God, but not from everyone." He believes that this concealment is an encouragement to use the imaginative faculty as part of the process of 'observation', just as MacDonald states that there is no imagination without observation. MacDonald and Goethe both have an interest in science *and* poetry, and both have this approach to methodology, in insisting upon rendering method itself (the search) meaningful. Imagination, then, is not to be thought of as we often think of it often today, as a world unto itself, disconnected from the other senses.

MacDonald's thinking upon the connection between the 'inner' and 'outer' nature of perception, which comes from his noting that "God has placed the world in man's heart,"

[200] Thinking here of the way in which MacDonald's brother, John, as we noted earlier, always felt as if he were on the edge of knowing something; sensed the promise of meaning, but found it withdrawn at the last moment; his faith being different to MacDonald's, in that it existed largely in terms of Hope.

found in *Ecclesiastes*, is found in Goethe in the form of a thinking about colour, as expressed by the artist in this case:

> ..if we examine the effect of colours upon our feelings, we have to do with an inner world whose importance for us is a personal question...What we can feel about colours is our own personal possession....If, however, we think about colour purely *as* colour, then our attention is no longer directed to our inner psychological experiences nor is it directed towards the outer world...it has an objective reality....these differences can be understood by us because, as human beings....*we can perceive colours in their natural and outer appearance because we possess a physical organism. Physiological colours are manifestations of our own corporeal vitality*...these different levels of being are always both within and around us...[201]

With this in mind, we should consider MacDonald's comments, in his essay on the imagination, upon the man who is enabled to express a seemingly 'intangible' inner feeling to his friend, by means of pointing to some 'outer' quality of the natural world as expressing a 'spiritual' thought. Although such an 'inner thought remains exclusively and deeply personal can yet – paradoxically – be shared as a thing independent of personal ownership. Therefore, he does not *quite* replicate Goethe's view of colours as manifestations of our *own* corporeal vitality, but of a vitality which inhabits our corporeal world, *gifting* it with vitality and meaning. It is the miracle of symbolism. It also helps us to see the connection between MacDonald's comments in his essay to this effect, and that notion found in 'The Golden Key' amongst other works, of a new colour, peculiar to the individual (Mossy, in this case), and not *yet* capable of description for the benefit of the reader. It implies, too, the notion of the fact that the imagination discerns a possibility inwardly which may connect to an 'outer' phenomenon which has not yet been perceived in scientific terms, and that it must struggle by intellectual means to do so, rather than assume that such a 'feeling' belongs to some isolated world of the imagination, which would be the very antithesis of MacDonald's premise in his essay on the imagination.

We can see also how, if we turn this around, it is an expression of the theological 'promise' of the rainbow, in that the rainbow is somehow a physical manifestation of an inward spiritual promise, having different meanings in each individual case (as faith is individual, and as MacDonald notes that meaning is individual). And yet both the inward and outward aspects may be related in this case – through the incarnation – to each imaginer or believer in a substantial manner. Meaning is shared dynamically by means of the outward aspect of the symbol (the rainbow; the bread), and rendered connected

[201] pp91-2, *Goethe's Theory of Colour, applied by Maria Schindler.*

inwardly and substantially to individual identity by *means* of that incarnation. The notion of meaning on this interpretation means that *as* meaning, it wants to be *expressed,* while resisting explanation's claim to its possession. This ties in to the notion of the poet as the 'discoverer' of the secret; the *sharer out* of the bread, the 'colourist', perceiver, transformer or re-interpreter – of meaning, but not its owner. Here, perhaps, we come to the idea of the poet as priest. This is, however, exceeded by the realization that meaning is not confinable to any one discipline but emerges wherever the act is not limited by a notion that it has some claim of its own upon meaning.

We shall now look at how MacDonald may be interpreting this theory and implementing it in 'The Golden Key, and in his other work, in his interpretation of theology and Biblical literature.

Application of The Theory of Colour

In 'The Golden Key', we are told that

> There was a boy who used to sit in the twilight and listen to his great-aunt's stories. She told him that if he could reach the place where the end of the rainbow stands he would find there a golden key.

Already we have here Goethe's idea of grey (twilight) as the passive surrender of light to darkness, now known as the Purkinje effect (*The Damnation of Newton, Goethe's Colour Theory and Romantic Perception,* p77):

> At twilight, slower night time (scotopic) vision begins to take over from the faster photopic vision...because night time sight is less colour sensitive...where colour is still perceived it seems to flicker...the eye may see the same image twice at twilight...the 'flash' is startlingly perceptible.

In the story MacDonald informs this notion of a dynamic 'overlap' with the idea of the overlap of the male and female aspects of symbolic understanding, as we noted earlier, and moves from this dualistic sense towards a reading of the spectrum which overflows simple opposing notions of sexual identity (as it also challenges notions of age and time). Further, the notion of quicker and slower vision may also be discerned in the speed with which Mossy reaches his 'goal', while Tangle's route is deeper, yet slower. Burwick notes (p77) that Coleridge makes use of this 'overlap' at the close of his poem 'Shurton Bars':

> In Summer's evening hour
> Flashes the golden-colour'd flower

MacDonald similarly explores the notion of half-light, using it as a means of symbolising an overlap; a shared vision. It is the half-light which encourages the connection between the boy's vision and the great-aunt's story. He uses it then as an illustration of the nature of symbolic meaning. Out of this passive greyness emerges the possibility of the reciprocity of symbolic understanding which, by its nature, is shared, and breaks down the traditional boundaries between storytelling and 'real' life. This is found too in 'The History of Photogen and Nycteris'; the story of the day boy and the night girl. Interestingly the story is contextualised with reference to a certain witch:

> Her name was Watho, and she had a wolf in her mind. She cared for nothing in itself – only for knowing it. She was not naturally cruel, but the wolf had made her cruel[202].

[202] *The Complete Fairy Tales*, p304.

One interpretation of this is that of the 'cruelty' of the pursuit of theoretical or scientific knowledge, which does not care for the meaning of colour as a symbol; but only for the knowledge it encourages, which brings with it the power associated with meaning. Indeed, the essence of the story, which has told of the isolation of night and day from one another, is of a cruel duality which is the result of this pursuit of knowledge for its own sake on the part of the witch Watho. But at the end there is a final coming together:

> ...if ever two people couldn't do the one without the other, those two are Nycteris and I. She has got to teach me to be a brave man in the dark, and I have got to look after her until she can bear the heat of the sun...

The result is that the division fails, Watho is killed when she appears in her true colour, in the form of a great red wolf - red being also a very important colour in Goethe's *Faust*. And so we see how MacDonald uses the theory in relation to his insistence upon the need for cooperation between aspects of 'knowing'; to illustrate the manner in which the perception or discovery of truth takes place. And, possibly, this is his criticism of Goethe's pursuit of understanding. He notes in 'A Sermon' *(A Dish of Orts* p211):

> Unhappy is that man...whose perceptions are keener than his faith is strong...

Perhaps he thinks that Goethe's emphasis comes to rest upon the 'demand' of the intellect, instead of remaining true to the 'demand' of meaning. In a right relationship between them the intellect is 'redeemed' by the relationship of dependence. In the same way that the fulfilment of moral law is demanded by Goodness, rather than being conceived of as that which places one in an autonomous place of negotiation in relation to Goodness.

To return to 'The Golden Key', we should notice that as twilight turns to night, the perception of the rainbow intensifies; in opposition to its expected diminishment. MacDonald seems in this to be more optimistic than Coleridge, and more generous to Newton. For where Coleridge was critical of Newton (Burwick, p177): "...a mere materialist. Mind in his system is always passive....", MacDonald typically sees the opportunity for such passivity to be interpreted as being *receptive*. The experience of perception begins with the receipt of a 'gift'. Soon after his initial reception of the story – the gift – however, Mossy concentrates upon the pursuit, upon what he can accomplish -

with a key – a law, an intellect, or a text; much as Goethe sees the advantages of his colour theory[203] :

> ...it helps us through the most intricate subterranean labyrinths; it aids us in finding our way through difficult country...because it obeys immutably a simple law, which applies to the whole of our planet, indicating everywhere a certain Here and There, which the human mind grasps....

But there is some other element required in 'The Golden Key'. In the story, it is *Tangle* who is guided through the labyrinth without such a key, and the certain 'Here' and 'There' of Fairyland is something which never can be 'grasped', just as MacDonald believes that we are 'had' by truth, rather than us having it. In *Lilith*, it is precisely Vane's problem that his 'key' fails him. He is lost and does not know what 'here' and 'there' are in the first place. There is no "simple law"[204]. This leads us to suspect again that MacDonald is not only making use of the colour theory, but commenting upon it in a different way from Goethe.

But even greyness for MacDonald is an opportunity for vision, such that those completely in the dark may be led to 'see', even while they are yet insisting upon the primacy of scientific knowledge in their search, as Mossy perhaps does. This again connects to his presentation of the religious preacher as one who does not understand the source of his life, and is yet drawing on that source, despite his preconceptions about the nature of its laws. This shows, too, that he is not using his observation in order to draw conclusions about the competitive merits of methods, but to draw attention to the mystery of the meaning which lies behind or elicits them, taking the generosity of the giftedness of meaning as his lead.

Twilight and Fairyland are linked also as symbols, through the concept of liminality. Borders are not quite definable; these are places of greyness or in-betweenness, through which the rainbow appears. The spectrum of the rainbow in 'The Golden Key' is not limited to the seven colours, but seems flexible, limitless in its liminality. The rainbow which comes at twilight, as does Fairyland, communicates the concept of a 'threshold' at which the promise appears as something which is properly discerned only at the edge of

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[203] *Goethe's Colour Theory applied by Maria Schindler,* p160.

[204] *Lilith,* p22 "Where do you think it stands?" "Why there, where you know it is!" "Where is there?" ..."Two objects," I said "cannot exist in the same place at the same time" "Can they not? I did not know! I remember now they do teach that with you. It is a great mistake...."

vision, rather than being fixed upon *within* the confines of focussed sight. We can see very well how this 'unfocussed' quality complements his thinking in his essay on the imagination, about the initial poetic 'suspicion' or 'intuition' about the nature of things which may precede the scientific discovery of laws. One lives within the promise of perception, rather than mastering it, for:

> ...it is perfectly well known that out of fairyland nobody can ever find where the rainbow stands[205].

It seems also that MacDonald is not so confrontational as Burwick would imply is the case with Goethe and Coleridge. This may be because MacDonald is more confident with scientific concepts; more likely to play with them, and to be acquainted with other scientific reactions. For where Coleridge simply abandons Newtonian physics as 'monstrous fictions', Engel – for example - tries to find the source of objections to it, which he identifies as a resistance to the notion of the impenetrability of matter: (Burwick, p175):

> ...if rays of corpuscles, even the most minute, were supposed to be whizzing about at immense speed....the manifold impact would riddle and disintegrate all solid objects whether opaque or transparent.

It is quite possible that MacDonald has also read Engel, and certainly solidity and transparency are great themes in his treatment of Fairyland and of the rainbow. Such 'thickness' and 'thinness' are themselves related to perceptual notions. This relates also to the "here" and "there" of *Lilith*. The idea that trees and pianos may coexist in the same place is related to the fact that two people may see two different things, which are merely aspects of a far greater concept of reality than either of them have. He is using scientific concepts to inform a more imaginative treatment of what constitutes reality and the perception of it.

Movement and Life in Colour

Another characteristic of MacDonald's treatment, and which also makes his work difficult to 'pin down' allegorically, is the way in which he creatively uses Goethe's concept of the

[205] p120, *The Complete Fairy Tales*.

interplay between light and darkness, colour being not a state but a representation of activity.

The sun, for example, appears in different 'lights' in 'The Golden Key'. In MacDonald's use of personification or the pathetic fallacy in describing the sun, he achieves an effect of moveable meaning. Such a presentation of the symbol encourages a reciprocal relationship *with* that symbol, rather than enabling the reader to draw conclusions *from* it. This reflects the way in which true meaning seems to overwhelm us; to defy explanation; to come at us with *its own mind.* The sun first looks "straight into the wood with his level red eye", here representing perhaps the way in which the 'enlightenment' of reason - that which claims to swallow all other methods of perception – may be an *aid* to perception (as the intellect helps the 'architect' of the imagination), when it is nearing its dusk or 'death'.

There is, as we noted, also perhaps a comment on Goethe's belief that red contains all other colours. MacDonald is not so certain about this perhaps, especially since the red wolf is killed in 'Photogen and Nycteris'. This 'red' is itself merely one manner of seeing. We should note, too, the context of 'The Golden Key': a *forest* in which "the trunks stood like rows of red columns in the shine of the red sun."[206] These trees are all waiting for Mossy himself; they do not 'contain' the perception of colours, but enable them to appear. For it is in the context of this forest that Mossy is able to perceive the rainbow. If we interpret this intertextually with 'The Light Princess', we see how meaning emerges in its manageable form, *filtered* through the forest; the redness of the text, science, or methodology:

> One day he (the Prince) lost sight of his retinue in a great forest. These forests are very useful in delivering princes from their courtiers, like a sieve that keeps back the bran.

We have here a complex mixing of different symbols. The 'courtiers' of explanation perhaps like the theologians or scientists, who seek to 'explain away' the arrival of the 'Prince'. The forest itself possibly representing the story or text which, while it partly conceals, yet enables the revelation to be bearable and not blinding, in its poetic dusk. These, of course, are secondary analogies. Mossy is directed through his analogical relation to fairyland, for he has the key. But he does not look at the red sun himself, as though it *did* contain all the colours within itself; but only as though it could be a filter,

[206] p121, *The Complete Fairy Tales.*

enabling the perception of other colours[207]. And in the impossibility of interpreting the forest, the sun, the rainbow as any one phenomenon, of making them 'stand still', just as fairyland will not stand still, all are rendered more 'lively'; more like the act of perception itself; rather than being merely the portrayal or 'still shot' of such an act. In this, MacDonald enables the reader to experience the liminality; the feeling of being upon the edge of some great discovery which is yet in the process of revealing itself. As we noted earlier, his *Lilith* is also preceded by a quotation from Thoreau about this forest which filters sunlight; which also contains a sense of being at the trembling edge of some wonderful meaning[208].

Life, light and colour

The aspect of the sun changes. In the morning Mossy encounters a different angle to its manifestation in that it blinds him:

> ...the sun was looking straight into his eyes. He turned away from it, and the same moment saw a brilliant little thing....it was the golden key.

This reminds us of MacDonald's comments upon the way in which the Biblical text should be studied, in that we are advised to turn away from the fascinating rainbow of St Paul's words (the 'key' of the text), to look in the direction in which he looks. The text or the key – exists as a mediating or filtering of a presence or meaning which it cannot contain, but to which it directs our attention (away from itself). And MacDonald is fond of quoting often in his writings the idea that all of the books, stories or words, like light, cannot *contain* the life of Christ[209]. And in his sermon, 'The Creation in Christ', MacDonald tells us that "light is not enough...we must have life...". We see how light itself in his writing is always related to movement, drawing attention to the 'mode' of perception instead of creating the illusion that light 'in itself' can be gazed upon.

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[207] As Vane notes in *Lilith* (p49) "the staring moon. Though hers was no primal radiance, it so hampered the evil things, that I walked in safety. *For light is yet light, if but the last of a countless series of reflections!*" Here it is clear that MacDonald does not condemn the rational approach, he never undermines any source of light, as long as rationality is not worshipped as though it were meaning.

[208] *Lilith,* p3 (from "Walking"): "I saw the setting sun lighting up the opposite side of a stately pine wood. Its golden rays straggled into the aisles of the wood as into some noble hall...as if some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had settled there...to whom the sun was servant...if it were not for such families as this, I think I should move out....."

[209] This he seems to get from *John* 21:25: "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." This implies that the hermeneutic exercise, like the knowledge of Christ, is an unlimited task, incomplete by virtue of its very nature. The text is not the source, but the expression of its source, and the self-confessed unfinished expression of that source.

MacDonald would rather that we gazed upon the face of the 'Prince', such a gaze being reciprocal; as to gaze upon the sun alone cannot be. To gaze upon the sun is perhaps the analogy for the attempt to gaze directly upon meaning; upon the divine. It blinds us, turning us back again towards its mediation of itself in colour. This, too, relates to Goethe's comments on light:

> ..we can never think of light as something abstract; we become aware of it as the effect of a certain definite thing which exists in space and which by its effects makes other objects visible..[210]

Perhaps, also, MacDonald is familiar with Hegel's theory of physics, as related by Burwick, in the way in which he uses Goethe's theory. Burwick states (p70) that Hegel relates Goethe's theory of light and colour within a scheme of 'differenz', which identifies three concerns. The first, physical identity (the object generically conceived); the second "in-sich-sein" (specific entity distinguished from totality); the third "an-und-fur-sich-sein" (the process through which the individuality comes into being). It seems that MacDonald, because of his theological symbolism, interprets the last as 'life', the first two as 'light'. In the rainbow, the colours of the first two are informed by the promise of a process defined as 'life'. The *process* cannot be observed - being in a state of constant movement (reciprocity), although some of its colours can be (the colours operating as promises of its 'liveliness'); indeed we are within the rainbow. For MacDonald, only the life of Christ is life at all (as we have quoted), and it would follow that the creative process itself (although it cannot be conflated with the person of Christ), must be dependent upon it. This process of lively creation is encouraged in the story, through the intensity of the reader's pursuit of meaning, because of the very resistance of the text to simple analogy. MacDonald creates a "subterranean labyrinth" for the reader, which cannot be negotiated by Goethe's "simple law". Hence each reader 'feels' this process of "an-und-fur-sich-sein" in proportion to the awakening of meaning or life, as the attempt to reduce the meaning which he senses to an explanation fails. MacDonald states himself that he can only attempt to *wake* meaning. Any understanding of the meaning his stories is impossible, inasmuch as it is attempted by means of the colourless light of reason or explanation *alone.*

[210] *Goethe's Theory of colour, as applied by Maria Schindler*, p129.

Interpretation of the story by colour

Light and white

The following is an extract from Goethe's criticism of Newton's concept of white[211].

> ....he does not prove anything....for who does not see, that the word "white" is used here quite arbitrarily and is really useless and superfluous. Indeed....would any observer...today be permitted to say "white as ash, mortar or dirt!

In *Lilith* we are told by MacDonald that the darkness does not know itself or the light, only the light knows itself *and* the darkness. So how is one to come out of such darkness if it cannot 'see' the light. How can one discern white if all is utterly black? One is blind. In the Bible, one has to be "called" out of darkness into the light[212]. One perceives the presence of light only once one has begun to walk in it. As in Goethe's own poem, one only discerns the true nature of colour once 'inside' the rainbow, not from the outside. We can see that MacDonald is adopting Goethe's insistence that the light bears witness to its presence through colour, rather than being posited by us as that which can be seen to 'contain' colour. In the Biblical terms of expression the rainbow is the promise of the light, testifying through that promise to its own nature.

However, MacDonald is also different from Goethe on this issue of 'light' or 'whiteness'. It also follows that any appearance of the light *as* light upon which one may gaze – as pure white light - is bound to be illusory. In such a moment, one is instantly blinded into another kind of darkness. This testifies to the mistakenness of the idea that one can, without help, discern and independently verify the existence of pure light, or pure white and so it is that Satan himself appears as an 'angel of light'[213]. It follows from this, therefore, that Goethe's criticism of the greyness of Newton's white in his experiments cannot really be sustained except by an abstract notion of pure white – one which we cannot possibly have seen. For if one saw the light or true white, one would be blinded, and could not judge or distinguish. Similarly, the Biblical concepts of white in relation to purity use phrases such as "whiter than snow"[214], discouraging a 'competitive' sense of whiteness to emerge, as MacDonald does with the reader's sense of morality in 'The

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[211] *Goethe's Theory of Colour,* p179

[212] eg 1 *Peter* 2:9

[213] 2 *Corinthians* 11:14 "...For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." It is interesting, also, that this is said in the context of the corruption of the simplicity of the good news of Christ by religious demands; a theme which is always with MacDonald, with regard to the tendency of the law to attempt to outrun grace.

[214] *Psalm* 51:7

Giant's Heart', and the giant's socks, which are whiter than any other giant's; showing how comical this competitiveness is.

As though to prove this, in his story of 'The Shadows' MacDonald takes the purest conception we have – that of angelic white - and makes of those 'angels' shadows against an inconceivably white white. That is, he takes Goethe's objection to Newton's definition of white and *moves it the other way*, so that it becomes clear that even snow itself, Goethe's own notion of white, seems grey. *That is, all observation is superfluous on the logic of Goethe's criticisms, when it is quite clearly subject to relativising to any degree, should it have no reference outside of such observation.* And so the role of the imagination in perception becomes clear, as that by which we form our concepts of purity. Imaginative *per*ception is seen to be that which informs intellectual *con*ception, delimiting the conception and freeing it from measurement by intellectual means alone.

Apocalyptic vision, therefore, is that which comes in the midst of an uncomprehending darkness. The light communicates in the form of the rainbow, a personal witness to itself which tends outward. One is 'attracted' to the light, through the beauty of colour. One is attracted to goodness because of beauty. Truth and beauty therefore appear in personal form, are a matter of perception. But that perception takes place not through observation, but through an inner concept, which is possibly similar to Plato's 'idea'. With MacDonald, however, the idea is concrete, is more real in the sense that it is moving towards a real transformation of observation, through the inner 'light' or concept. Further, colours seen by the eye constitute the 'language' by which we communicate the 'idea' with one other. The 'idea' thus mediated does not remain entirely transcendent. The 'showing' is therefore not the role of the writer or preacher; the 'showing' is the role of God. MacDonald sees his role as one who points to colours which are personal testimonies, establishing a reciprocal rather than an impartial relationship to the reader. He cannot 'show' light, but can point at its effects and mode of operation. As he says, he can attempt to *awaken* the meaning or movement of the 'inner' light by outer means which correspond to the inner senses.

Even here, then, we find again that light alone – the 'showing'- must be informed by a personal 'knowing', which calls for inner light. In 'The Golden Key' there are seven columns or colours of the rainbow, which represent "every colour that light can show."

However Mossy also sees another colour, which seems to belong just to him – it is not described, except as a 'new' colour. MacDonald is clearly pointing to the hidden presence of colours which outward light *cannot* show. That is he conceives of a spectrum which exists universally as an 'open secret'. It is inconceivably larger than we can see, and varied in its appearance to the individual. In each case there is a 'new' colour which, while impossible to mediate, is mediated inwardly to one alone – perhaps the individual's secret relationship with God. But it is not part of a different rainbow; still being part of the spectrum, yet it is personally mediated[215]. The notion that natural light does not contain seven colours, but reveals a certain part of its spectrum is borne out by the discovery of infra-red and ultra-violet light. These exist, they do not hide themselves, but simply cannot be revealed in the same way as the seven colours can. Further, in pursuing the notion of white which cannot be observed; a 'new' colour which is mediated personally, he is taking a different route to Goethe, who does not depart from the idea of observation as the 'uttermost' means of sight, even when it is clear that this relativises all notions of colour. For Burwick (p37) notes that

> Red for Goethe is the primary colour...it includes all other colours...is the creative positive in the emergence of light....

Red, the battle between light and darkness and MacDonald's rejection of dualistic interpretation.

We have already noted earlier in the section how MacDonald – in his description of Watho as a red wolf consumed by the pursuit of knowledge - may be critical of Goethe's use of red as the 'primary' colour, seeing it as a reflection of his tendency to be satisfied with 'observation' as a means of perception; to look upon knowledge as desirable for its own sake. Now we shall move on to see how MacDonald creatively expresses his own feelings toward the claim of such a "red" upon the imagination.

> If we have seen how intensification strives towards red both in yellow and blue, and have taken note of our feelings about this, we might suppose that the union would really produce final calmness or ideal satisfaction. And this highest of all colours is

[215] In *Lilith* the resistance of colour, like meaning, to ownership is made clear (p47) "...the creature hovering over my head, radiating the whole chord of light, with...some kinds of colour I had never seen before...I felt as if the treasure of the universe were giving itself to me – put out my hand...but the instant I took it, its lights went out....a dead book...lay cold and heavy in my hand." We can see here that MacDonald is specifically relating the grasping of colour to the wresting of meaning from the text, in which instant the text becomes a dead thing. We behold or receive meaning, we cannot grasp it. Therefore the personal aspect of meaning avoids the pitfall of the isolation of the individual, which comes about through a self-satisfaction – a 'having' of something which sets us apart from others in competition.

> produced in physical phenomena by the meeting together of two opposite poles, which have gradually prepared themselves for this union.[216]

Here, Goethe betrays his aim – a calmness or satisfaction – where MacDonald has stated that harmony differs from such 'repose' (which the words "calmness" or "satisfaction" imply) in being the aim of the imagination. The "ideal satisfaction" of which Goethe speaks is one which comes from treating colour as an access to knowledge of the self. However Mossy's rainbow reveals a colour which is *before* the red (as well as having many colours which are beyond the violet). This is a colour which Mossy alone can perceive, perhaps denoting the singularity of his identity. And yet it is not an *isolated* identity, for it is nevertheless perceived to be part of the spectrum of colour; a spectrum which is, however, only partly revealed by outward light. We have again, therefore, the notion that the process of the individuality coming into being (an-und-fur-sich-sein) *precedes* the red; the life precedes the light; for the light is 'spoken' into the darkness[217]. Again, we note that MacDonald says that "light is not enough, we must have life".

Again, too, in the idea of Mossy's own colour, there is MacDonald's address to his questioning reader that "only the meaning which is revealed is the meaning for you", and also his speaking of Paul's wisdom, in stating that revelation is not a matter for logical persuasion[218]. Here we have a view of truth which is objective, but subjectively revealed; the connection between them is 'live' and substantial, but veiled in its symbolic mediation and revelation, rather than gazed upon, dissected and examined.

Red itself, preceded as it is by such an understanding, is therefore tempered in its harshness; in its claim to pre-eminence in the story (*The Complete Fairy Tales*, p141):

> Tangle followed the serpent; But she could not go far without looking back at the marvellous child. He stood alone in the midst of the glowing desert, beside a fountain of red flame that had burst forth at his feet, his naked whiteness glimmering a pale rosy red in the torrid fire.

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[216] Goethe, The Moral Effect of Colours 37 (794), *Goethe's Theory of colour applied by Maria Schindler,* p195

[217] *Genesis* 1: 2,3: "...and darkness was on the face of the deep...Then God said "Let there be light"; and there was light" *John* 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

[218] 'The Child in the Midst', *Unspoken Sermons.*

Perhaps MacDonald is thinking of *Faust*[219]:

> A melancholy light, like the red dawn
> Here the light burns soft as the enkindled air
> Or the illumined dust of golden flowers
> And now it glides like tender colours spreading
> And now bursts forth in fountains from the earth
> And now it winds, one torrent of broad light

By means of his personification and of his introduction of the idea of reciprocity in vision, MacDonald tempers the hot reds of *Faust* in the gaze of the child's eyes, and the image and effect of the child's white skin. The red is subdued at his feet, as the "red spaces of the judgment court of God"[220] are confounded by the paradoxical colours of *Revelation* (7:14,17), in which

> These are the ones who come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...the sun shall not strike them any more, nor the heat...for the Lamb...will...lead them to living fountains of water...

And in 'The Golden Key' we have a similar deflation of the 'colours' of battle and judgment by the imagery of water and of white.

> ...the heat was terrible...do not send me out into the great heat again," prayed Tangle. "I will not," answered the child. And he reached up, and put his little cool hand on her heart. "Now," he said, "you can go. The fire will not burn you. Come."

The vulnerability of the image, *in its very vulnerability*, defeats the outward and harsh colouring of the 'red dawn'[221]. It is not light itself which 'burns soft', but the cooling touch of the child on Tangle's skin, which makes the light and heat bearable. MacDonald is more true to the colour theory and to the apocalyptic literature than is Goethe, in rejecting the stasis implied in notions of a 'battle' between darkness and light, which requires the outward conception of a 'mixture' of concepts, in favour of a notion of perception which involves the personal and inward 'reflective' tempering, which is able to translate the terrible outward light and heat. Perhaps he is following Novalis[222], who

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[219] Quoted by Burwick (p268).
[220] Comment by Rudolf Steiner, translator of the colour theory, *Goethe's Theory of Colour*, p88.
[221] And this is where critics often stumble at MacDonald, in his introduction at strange moments of the childlike, the seemingly foolish and in his indulgent playfulness, which sometimes sits oddly with the depth of his themes, and embarrasses the reader. However, he is being entirely true to the biblical literature, in which the vulnerable, foolish and odd things are seen to confound and reinterpret the 'holy, sacred and serious' things.
[222] MacDonald is certainly thought to have adopted some of the motifs of Novalis's uncompleted work Heinrich von Ofterdingen elsewhere, in his novels. He can be seen here,

rejected a theory of polarity in relation to colour. Burwick notes (p130) how it was that Novalis felt, in opposition to Schelling, that

> such polarity cheated man of his capacities to reconcile matter and energy; body and mind...he affirms the sexual embrace...

The presence of the serpent in the passage quoted above, as well as the overall theme of the reconciliation of male and female in the story suggests that this is the route which MacDonald prefers to take. However, the reconciliation and the passage which involves the child, suggest an excess of desire which overflows the sexual identity of Tangle and re-informs notions of sexuality. His resistance to dualism in his poetic treatment of colour has a theological basis. The motifs of baptism, as symbols of union with Christ in death, inform the nature of reconciliation itself, and the treatment of apocalypse, and we shall come back to this later.

Summary

What we have seen so far in 'The Golden Key', is that MacDonald certainly is aware of the German tradition, and we have examined just a small section of his 'fairytale' symbolism to show the manner in which he uses the motifs and research of Goethe's theory of colour in particular. However, we have also seen how he does not borrow the ideas themselves wholesale, but alludes to the theory in his own way. MacDonald's notion of perception, in particular, pays particular attention to the 'mode' of seeing colour, and draws from this conclusions about the nature of artistic discovery or uncovering which are leading towards a richly imaginative theology of 'colour'. After moving on to consider the symbolism which surrounds the person of Lilith herself, we shall go on to consider in the third section, and in greater relation to Goethe's work, and MacDonald's own fiction how the way in which he develops the theory can be seen to correspond with an essay by Graham Ward.

It is clear so far that MacDonald's understanding of Christian identity does not come about through the dualisms which he resisted – even when they are present in his sources. He has been entirely consistent so far, between his artistic practise and his theological

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therefore to be recreating the dialogue between the German writers and the implications of Christian symbolism and theology.

observations; leading us to confirm that it is justified and rewarding to treat them as connected aspects of the same work. This is not a story of the triumph of light over darkness, then, but of the triumph of the life which precedes and informs our relation to light. His work concentrates more upon the activity of a many-coloured faith and on the promise of the rainbow as an all-embracing mode of perception and growth of identity. This does not occur in competition with other notions, or appropriate to itself a claim to knowledge *of* light, but merely is enabled to move within that light; to "walk in the light as he is in the light". The seemingly obvious and 'taken-for-granted' interpretations of light and darkness, good and evil are exposed in their insufficiency, in order that we may come to see or imagine for ourselves the gifted, excessive 'colours' of Christian identity, morality and meaning. It seems also that this theme of polarised light is at the back of MacDonald's mind in relation to his exploration of identity in *Lilith,* where McGillis notes that in the manuscript, *Lilith* A, "The librarian testifies that Fane's father was interested in polarised light."[223], perhaps suggesting that Goethe is even seen at one stage as being MacDonald's 'poetic' father; the one who has left behind manuscripts as to his experiences and experiments. However it may be that this 'fatherhood' in *Lilith* is seen to grow into a more clearly apocalyptic sense of selfhood in relation to the 'Father of Lights'.

Where many Romantic writers may have followed Goethe's thinking entirely, in placing the emphasis upon observation in perception, creating another science out of such creative observation, MacDonald is examining the growth and nature of the 'inner' meaning which enables such observation to develop systematically in the first place. Many Christian and Romantic writers detail the appearance of the Christ-self, by giving examples. While he does this, MacDonald also draws the reader into the nature of the creative process involved in his construction of the text or story, so externalising the process in himself, demonstrating how meaning emerges *as* meaning. For it is only as the Christ-self within the reader emerges and becomes responsible in its relation to light that it is enabled to discern harmony. He is thorough in confounding any other route by which 'sense' may be made of symbolic meaning, even 'colour' sense. Again, the colour theory, as a 'thing in itself' is confounded, wherever it tends to pre-eminence in the mind of the interpreter, wherever method becomes autonomous activity instead of tending back – down - towards

[223] 'The *Lilith* Manuscripts', 1975

its source. In his work, then, it is clear that interpretation is a reciprocal activity, in that it gives itself death, as it is itself given life.

We shall now go on to consider Lilith, as one who is in the process of being given this life, and becoming enabled to give herself death.

C. Lilith as a symbol

Lilith as shadow-self

Lilith is considered in relation to ancient myth by Ean Begg in his book *The Cult of the Black Virgin*. On page 35 he notes:

> Lilith remains surprisingly little known to the educated public. Alfred de Vegny, friend of Nodier's writes of her as the spirit of night, Adam's mistress, the rival and enemy of Eve and her children. Victor Hugo makes of her Satan's eldest daughter, the black soul of the world, the great woman of the Shadow.

Here, we note that MacDonald makes use of this motif of the shadow as a theme of enslavement. Lilith is enslaved to herself, as she is enslaved to the shadow, and on p240, we find this observation:

> "You hear his wings now!" said Adam..."It is the great Shadow stirring to depart," he went on "Wretched creature, he has himself within him, and cannot rest!" "But is there not in him something deeper yet?" I asked. "Without a substance," he answered, "a shadow cannot be – yea, or without a light behind the substance!"

Here, we find that MacDonald is linking the presence of evil to enslavement to the self – the self which is no self, as Vane is not yet a person (as we saw in his conversation with the raven)[224]. This is existence as it is before the Christ-self will emerge[225]. He is also using such a motif, however, to denote the presence of light and substance as that without which such an insubstantial shadow cannot be. Even in her defiance, Lilith remains enslaved to the life that is universally for her; that she will not acknowledge. The clue that Lilith's identity is complex, however, is found in MacDonald's story of 'The Shadows', who are presented as much-misunderstood creatures in being treated in terms not of their relationship to light or substance, but in terms of darkness. Perhaps this is why MacDonald invites us to perceives angels as white shadows; to make unlikely associations in our minds between what appears to be sinister and what is good[226]. Similarly, in 'The Golden Key', Mossy and Tangle are going up to the country "from whence the shadows fall." Without a shadow-self the journey would be impossible and the light blinding, for it

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[224] This is consistent with what we noted earlier in that he is no longer attempting to explain evil as a 'general', outer phenomenon, but only in terms of the relation of the dark portion – the shadow-self – to the 'light' of God.

[225] And McGillis confirms that "MacDonald (on the evidence of the first manuscript – Lilith A) clearly indicates that the spectre of self consciousness, the beast which all Romantic artists face, is his theme." (essay 'The Lilith Manuscripts', 1975)

[226] MacDonald's fondness for breaking down traditional associations with morality and goodness is seen in the manner in which the King – Ralph Rinkelman – must learn a different notion of 'being': "But he soon found that amongst the Shadows a man must learn never to be surprised at anything..." (*The Complete Fairy Tales*, p60)

is from the grey shadow that the rainbow emerges. The shadow witnesses to the presence of light, even against its will. Without the acknowledgment of the inner light, its relation to the outer light is one of enslavement rather than friendship. The shadow is one to be pitied, rather than one to be feared.[227] The shadow is 'the shadow of what it means to be human' as opposed to the embracing of one's humanity in Christ.

Further, the bodilessness of the shadow in *Lilith* is linked also to the fact that Lilith has killed her body in an attempt to gain immortality. Instead of giving herself death, she has given herself death in life; for the Christ-self is substantial, is that which alone can give one a true death. In 'The Shadows', there seems to be an allusion to Satan and Lilith (p69). It is told, however, in terms of their *lack of acceptance of their own nature*; the characteristic of being able to forget the previous day. Here, MacDonald seems to be envisaging a parallel to the fate of Adam and Eve who rebel against their own humanity and become 'unnatural' humans in seeking to be in control of the nature of their nature[228]:

> I will tell you the awful fate of one Shadow who rebelled against his nature, and sought to remember the past...He fought with the genial influences of kindly sleep when the sun rose on the awful dead day of light....he never forgot his dream....he tempted another Shadow to try it with him....instead of continuing to be Shadows, they began to cast shadows...They are now condemned to walk the earth a man and a woman, with death behind them, and memories within them... Ah, brother Shades! Let us love one another, for we shall soon forget. We are not men, but Shadows." The king turned away, and pitied the poor Shadows far more than they pitied men.[229]

That is, the shadow seeks substantiality within himself, which is not his true nature. As Lilith or the human may seek immortality, through their unwillingness to embrace death or "sleep" as being representative of their own natures:

> There was yet a way...through the world of the three dimensions, only from that, by the slaying of her former body, she had excluded herself.[230]

The Shadow and the Nothing, which Lilith holds in her right hand are both related to this holding on to a notion of selfhood, to the appearance of a counterfeit life which is treated as though it were a thing in itself instead of a shadow. Here, MacDonald may be

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[227] "And Ralph Rinkelmann rejoiced that he was a man, and not a Shadow." *(Complete Fairy Tales*, p79)

[228] And interestingly Adam means 'you are made from dust' in confirmation that *materiality* is an *essentially* human trait, not to be viewed in the neo-platonic manner as a 'prison' for the soul.

[229] *The Complete Fairy Tales*, p69.

[230] *Lilith*, p151.

addressing a concept of Christian selfhood which also disconnects itself – or attempts to disconnect itself from substantiality – from its humanity or embodiment. This seems highly relevant, linking as it does to Platonic perversions of Christianity, and also Romantic idealism, in which one attempts (like the Lark in 'The Giant's Heart') to transcend the material world and experienced reality; to disembody truth in the hope that it will be perpetuated; to distance the body of the Church from the world of substance. The image of Plato's cave seems especially relevant here; where it may be considered, in the context of MacDonald's *Lilith*, that the shadows exist for a reason; as the sun itself creates such shadows. The sun or the light cannot be regarded in the abstract without reference to its effects; as we saw in the last section. The emphasis upon the importance of inner light in MacDonald's work means that it is not sufficient to simply leave the cave or to deny the meaning of shadows. Rather they represent a truth about our own selves. One cannot give oneself immortality; one is bound by the very nature of light to the way in which it is mediated. To undertake a downward course, either willingly or unwillingly, to death, and to the gift of death which translates itself.

Further, the myth which Begg speaks of - that Lilith is Satan's daughter – perhaps may also be taken up into the idea that Satan is that which 'gives birth' to the idea of self-making or self-ruling; but also that which denies the truly free will to be oneself. They are two sides of the same coin. Faced with free choice, the fall and the original 'sin' (not sins) of the human represents that which he cannot choose – a sense of darkness, estrangement from God and consequently from himself. However, this 'sin' of incapability is precisely that which is universally redeemed in Christ, placing the human being in the position of being capable of that free choice once again, through the nature of this redemptive 'gift' – the ability to accept death as a transforming experience. So it is that Lilith's powerlessness may also be seen in the doctrine of double predestination; the terrible notion that redemption is not promised to all, but only to some. This makes a mockery of the notion that free will – the ability to receive the divine will freely – is available to all who will choose. The *ability* to engage on that course is universally gifted; the *decision* to follow it is, at any point, entirely free to be willed by the free will which is only truly free in the moment that it sees itself as gifted by God, rather than independent of God. *The concept of freedom is found in the concept of gift.* So it is that Lilith, in that she finally freely chooses to open her hand, is acknowledging the fact that such redemption of the will is universal. In being unable to carry through the *action*, however, she proves that the

universal must *also* become that which is personally asked for and received in order to become, to her, the gift. It seems that MacDonald is also trying to show that the ways in which doctrine has sometimes been presented have denied its very essence; the joy of the gifted ability to freely choose that which seems impossible. He is therefore emphasising more the individual *process* of growing into freedom, in order to place the universal action of Christ, which enables such freedom, in its proper context. This we shall come back to the third section on McLeod Campbell. But we should note that he is indicating that the realms of 'slavery' to the shadow-self are found in some "Christian" doctrines themselves. And indeed, he makes his view of double predestination as a terrible curse perfectly clear throughout his novel, *Robert Falconer.*

It seems then, that MacDonald is implying that the rebellion of Satan and that of the human against his or her 'gifted' nature are essentially of the same order. Vane is 'educated' by understanding that Lilith's fall is another form of his own "fall". Satan and Lilith are pairs who rebel; as are Adam and Eve. And it is this which leads to MacDonald's hope that they also may come to know that they are redeemed, and can grow into a right association with the light; with God.

The escape from historicity and the competitive notion of identity

Another characteristic of Lilith is that she seeks to deny her limitations to historicity. These limitations frighten her, challenging her desire for escape from her nature, and so she is bound to seek a *competitive* notion of identity, one which is bound to the notion of power. This explanation is given for her behaviour towards Lona, *Lilith* (p150):

> She fears, therefore hates her child...the birth of children is in her eyes the death of their parents, and every new generation the enemy of the last[231]

This, also, is something which MacDonald discerns, as we have seen, as a characteristic of his society. One in which status and identity are built upon our mundane difference from others, as opposed to the nature which we share in common – the fact of our mortality –

[231] Begg (p36) "In 7th Century Syria...she was ...to be feared as a killer of new born infants....in the role best known by the Jews from 8th BC...also well-known as a seductive and destructive nocturnal temptress...." There is also, in *Lilith,* the notion of the seduction of Vane by Lilith, denoting the role of the misuse of sexuality in the search for a power which will inform one's identity. Interestingly, MacDonald promotes the role of women, and implies that instead of demonising Lilith as the temptress, Vane comes to see that "...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his *own desires* and enticed..." (*James* 1:14) Lilith is merely the outward form which Vane distorts to fit his inner desires. Here, we see the negative correlation between the 'outer' and 'inner' aspects of *unreality.*

which is paradoxically the basis for a notion of unique difference. Victorian and modern competitive notions of morality as a basis for identity have been dealt with in the first section of the study. We should note that this unwillingness to acknowledge one's solidarity with the human race, with one's own mortality, is another manifestation of the competitive notion of identity; another barrier to the gaining of one's true identity.

Further, Adam's attitude towards Lilith also seems to function as a demonstration of the all-pervasive nature of this tendency to competition. Adam is an ambivalent figure in the novel. He is also the 'old' Adam. And we find him stating this (p147):

> He brought me an angelic splendour to be my wife: there she lies! For her first thought was power; she thought it slavery to be one with me...

Perhaps MacDonald is thinking here of the myth in which it is said that the world became fallen because mortals and demons had sexual intercourse; for Lilith may be taken as the old Eve; and yet Adam speaks of Lilith as 'an angelic splendour'; someone not quite human. Adam's triumphant note is here ambivalent; not being exactly what we would expect of the 'new' Adam. He perhaps is that part of Vane which rejoices in the notion of power just a little too much; happy to condemn. It may be that here MacDonald is thinking of the New Testament advice of Jesus *(Luke* 10:19,20):

> Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Here again, MacDonald seems to be pressing a point about the ease with which Adam – the human nature – may stray away from the source of its true identity. A gift of identity which does away with the delight of power and the sense that one is 'different' and better than others, and concentrates upon the notion that only God may write one's name in a book of life. Perhaps this is the book which Vane cannot get at properly in the library[232]. Indeed, Vane is not even sure what his own name *is* at the beginning of *Lilith*[233].

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[232] It also echoes the 'scroll' of Revelation 5:3, 4: "And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it..." In *Revelation*, the only one permitted to read the scroll, is the Lamb of God, Christ himself.

[233] "Then I understood that I did not know myself, did not know what I was, had no grounds on which to determine that I was one and not another. As for the name I went by in my own world, I had forgotten it...I had indeed almost forgotten that there it was a custom for everybody to have a name..." (*Lilith,* p14)

Further, Adam here is seen to be guilty of the same sin as is traditionally assigned to Satan; in that he wishes to stand in the place of God: "She thought it slavery to be one with me...". This is secondary, however, to the main problem, which is that she thinks it slavery to be subject to God. Adam seems to entirely blame her for all evil, taking no responsibility himself, and thinks more of what is due to him than to God. He also therefore functions as the patriarchal notion of the church, which may distort the selfhood of women, who are encouraged in the thought that their self must come from a partner, rather than being similarly gifted. Indeed, Adam may be seen as preventing Lilith's growth, as the little ones are prevented by Vane from growing, because he does not show them how to find water. It is the women who provide the large part of the practical 'help' in the novel. Begg notes in his book, interestingly, the correlations between Lilith and Isis, and describes the earliest known portrait of Isis (c1950BCE) is found in the British Museum (p36):

> ...a beautiful, winged, naked woman with the feet of a bird...this figure has come to stand for feminine rebellion against masculine denial of woman's right to freedom and equality.

MacDonald has specifically dealt with the female character Isis, in *The Marquis of Lossie*, in which Malcolm encourages the artist, Lenorme, not to think of the woman, or of the mysterious, as *merely* a representative *object* of desire and mystery; to show that she is more than she appears to him (p118):

> "....an air of mystery?"
> "That was so much involved in the very idea of Isis, in her especially, they said she was always veiled, and no man had ever seen her face."
> "That would greatly interfere with my notion of mystery," said Malcolm. "There must be revelation before mystery. I take it that mystery is what lies behind revelation; that which as yet revelation has no reached. You must see something – a part of something, before you can feel any sense of mystery about it. The Isis for ever veiled is the absolutely Unknown, not the Mysterious....And can a goddess ever reveal all she is and has?"
> "Never."
> "Then ought there not to be mystery in the face and form of your Isis on her pedestal?"

Hence, when we come to *Lilith*, we realise that we are dealing with an author who had given a great deal of thought to the objectification of women in his literature, and who saw mystery, not merely in terms of the *effect* of mystery, but in terms of the one who is

'other' than the self, never to be appropriated, or shown off, or used as a 'personal' mystery.

Lilith as metonym rather than metaphor

> "What are you helping her to do?"
> "To go where she will get more help – help to open her hand, which has been closed for a thousand years."[234] (*Lilith,* p210)

The great age of Lilith encourages the reader to think of her as a continually recurring phenomenon in the search for identity. Being metonymic rather than metaphoric, however, encourages a two-sided approach to the issue of identity on the part of the reader. Standing for the tendency throughout time, of the attempt to master one's identity, she becomes representative of it. However, because she is presented as a person, the reader is more likely to be drawn into an empathy (to feel sorry for Milton's Satan, as Falconer does in *Robert Falconer*) which makes one recognise the tendency to resistance in oneself; the inability to be childlike. That is, the tendency to value our identity in relationship to the lack perceived in others, as do Adam and Vane. MacDonald, as ever, is leading us away from the abstract problem of evil; or abstract systematic attempts to 'locate' selfhood externally, or pretend an overview within which we may locate ourselves, towards the *inner* darkness and light. It is from that position that he encourages us to view our historicity. The *method* is existential.

Lilith as Vane himself

All of the attitudes of Lilith which are clear to Vane are, then, the ones which he finds within himself: pride, vanity, the pursuit of power (often in the form of intellectual power to 'make sense' of it all). He confesses this; having pursued *her* as an adversary (in a dualistic universe), he comes to see that he has pursued knowledge itself, instead of an awareness of his own shortcomings *(Lilith, p158):*

> But a false sense of power, a sense which had no root and was merely vibrated into me from the strength of the horse, had, alas, rendered me too stupid to listen...rejoicing in the power of my steed and in the pride of my life, I sat like a king...the mighty steed was in the act of clearing a wide shallow channel when we were caught in the net of darkness...

[234] This also corresponds with the description of Satan in *Revelation* 20:2 "...that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.."

It seems that, possibly subconsciously, MacDonald draws upon the imagery which is prevalent in the Psalms in which human power and divine power are contrasted. There are horses; the great theme of pride; the coming to a sudden fall; the deception of strength; and humbling self-knowledge. The aim of the Psalmist is knowledge of God, through which he is in the process of coming to know himself. At times he is seized with the idea that he is powerful, that he has God 'behind him'. At other times the rhetoric of power is utterly rejected. It is precisely in times of righteous pursuit, when he seems to be at the height of his human powers, that he finds himself falling. The conclusion of the writer of one Psalm seems remarkably like the character of Vane, in the notion of the immateriality of what is apparently solid, the idea of a shadow-self; and the idea of the vanity of actions which emerge from anxiety, *Psalm* 39: 5,6:

> Surely every man at his best state is but vapour. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain.

MacDonald's description of Vane is also comical at times. In his confusion, and in his great capacity for getting 'carried away' by himself - by his shadow-self - he seems to echo another character in Scottish literature, Burns's *Tam o' Shanter*, who also finds himself living in a nightmare – living *on* a night-mare. The horse who carries him off – interestingly – to church. But a church of his own imaginings, in which dance witches, much like the scene in which Vane encounters the skeletons dancing in the ruins. In the surreal setting and atmosphere of that poem we seem to have an anticipation of the surreal world of *Lilith.* Burns's great themes: the corruption of much of what passes for religious thought; the real seen as becoming surreal; the difficulty of seeing and being honest about one's self. These are all central to MacDonald as well. It seems then that MacDonald finds surprising allies. He escapes the traditional limitations which would assign his writing as 'religious' literature because, paradoxically, his religion has led him to pay such close attention to these issues, and to challenge notions of category, boundary, morality, and the nature of the 'real', where they have distorted his own struggle for Christian identity. Like Lilith, Vane comes to experience the dread of self-consciousness apart from the consciousness of God (p48):

> Then first I knew what an awful thing it was to be awake in the universe: I *was*, and could not help it!

Lilith and God's secret name

Begg notes in his book also (p36) that Lilith and Isis have in common their knowledge of the secret name of God in mythology. This seems to correspond with the idea in MacDonald's book that there is a secret knowledge which frustrates Vane, in that he cannot 'make sense' of it. His attempt to prematurely open the book in the library – to *read* it - is paralleled to his pursuit of Lilith as one who seems to hold a secret knowledge which he desires to 'have' as a 'thing in itself. She is one whom he desires to 'read' as though she were a thing. This objectification of women also denies the sacredness of the secret; a thing which is given freely, as friendship is. It is also – paradoxically - that which we find belongs to the part of our nature which is utterly secret; utterly alone[235]. Vane continues to search for access to this secret as though it were a thing in itself which could be 'told' in its entirety (just as Mossy looks for the key), despite the fact that he is advised, and his father before has been advised[236] (p39)

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[235] We have already noted how Vane, early on, loses the name he has for himself. There are two aspects of a 'name' in the Revelation of John which MacDonald may be thinking of. There is that 'secret' name in *Revelation* 19:12 "His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written *that no one knew* except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, *and His name is called* The Word of God." This means that it is one thing to know what a name is *called* (The Word of God) but it is another to know what that name *is*. So the Raven asks Vane (p26) "Why know the name of a thing when the thing itself you do not know?" What is secret – what the name *is* – is an open secret – the redemption of the world, which only God himself knows the true nature of, while we only know the name by which it is *called*. Perhaps Vane is pursuing the knowledge of what this name is *itself* – which always remains the open secret. The knowledge of what the name *is to us* - the interpretation which is one's whole life – is that which is given freely from Christ to the individual self, that which Vane comes to be aware of. One which is always new, and always keeps its name secret from the one who has it, because it is the very basis of one's uniqueness. But it may be read, in turn, by others, who will interpret it themselves.(*Revelation* 3:12): "He who overcomes, I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God...And I will write on him My new name." There is the possibility that, even then, one may still not be able to read *it*. This may be what makes it terrifying, just as Derrida notes that the gaze of God is terrifying, because of this unequal, yet intimate knowledge of the self by God. The thing which takes away that fear is the faith – in the perfect love of Christ - that it is Christ's name which is written; that that is the thing which is read by God.

[236] The fact that Vane's father has also travelled this route, making the same mistakes relates to what we noted earlier also, about Lilith's unwillingness to acknowledge her historicity; the sense that she is linked to others and has not the ownership of an 'own' self which is not touched by this. We note that she is afraid and therefore hates. Vane is, however, encouraged by the notion that he shares this route with others before him (it allows him to feel that he might 'make sense' of it. The need for control (as Lilith requires it) is also however seen in his attraction to Lilith and fear of her (this is very Freudian), just as she fears her own enemies. However, it is Vane's fear which leads him to seek help, while it is Lilith's knowledge of her lack of control which forces her to seek help. Interestingly, this corresponds with the experiences of Tangle and Mossy in 'The Golden Key'. For while Mossy puts his faith in the key (which is the danger of treating knowledge as of utmost importance), Tangle must 'face' the child alone. The route of men and women towards the knowledge of their dependence upon God is treated differently, the man's route causes the nightmarish abandonment of the 'female' imagination. The female imagination, so abandoned, takes the more painful, yet deeper route. Neither is more necessary than the other, however. Both

"Would you mind telling me all about that?" I said
"By no means – as much at least as I am able; there are not such things as wilful secrets."

The distortions of imagination which produce Lilith and entice Vane towards her in his mind, go hand in hand with the fact that he treasures intellectual knowledge more than anything, as we have quoted earlier (*Lilith,* p142):

> The fancy that knowledge is in itself a great thing, would make any degree of knowledge more dangerous than any amount of ignorance.

Here, we can see that MacDonald is not using the 'evil' imagination of Vane to justify the religious suppression of the imagination itself, but is demonstrating that which he speaks of in his essay on the imagination. We will quote it at length, because it is a good context in which to view the character of Lilith *(A Dish of Orts*, p26, p27)

> Those (of the class who wish to suppress the imagination) will now say "....we were opposed to those wild fancies...in which young people indulge, to the damage and loss of the real in the world around them..." You would rectify the matter by smoothing the young monster at once – because he has wings and...flutters them about in a way discomposing to your nerves...you stop not to inquire whether angel or pterodactyle -...as well speak of religion as the mother of cruelty because religion has given more occasion of cruelty, as of all dishonesty and devilry....Are we not to worship, because our forefathers burned and stabbed for religion? It is more religion we want. It is more imagination we need...that evil may spring from the imagination, as from everything except the perfect love of God, cannot be denied. But infinitely worse evils would be the result of its absence. Selfishness, avarice, sensuality, cruelty, would flourish tenfold; and the power of Satan would be well established ere some children had begun to choose. Those who would quell the apparently lawless tossing of the spirit, called the youthful imagination, would suppress all that is to grow out of it. They fear the enthusiasm they never felt...instead of cherishing this divine thing...giving it room and air for healthful growth, they would crush and confine it – with but one result of their victorious endeavours – imposthume, fever, and corruption. And the disastrous consequences would soon appear in the intellect likewise which they worship...

So Lilith is not in herself dangerous to Vane; it is the pursuit of her (as a metonym for the pursuit of knowledge) which is dangerous both to him and to her, leaving, as it does, the imagination in a 'no-man's land', neglected in such a concentration upon knowledge for its own sake. And so she also comes to appear perhaps as Vane's neglected imagination, working out her own world in the absence of a relationship with her creator.

Lilith and Vane – the relationship between male and female

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meet at the other side, and the male and female (intellect and imagination) are seen as necessary to one another, and influencing one another, while yet being equally responsible for the nature of themselves.

Begg notes of Lilith (pp36-7) that:

> Her main threat to Orthodox Judaism may have been the recurrent temptation to the cult of the goddess...in 'The Alphabet of Ben Sira'...the first man and woman were created simultaneously from the same substance, with equal rights as the primal androgynous being...Lilith resented Adam's pretensions to superiority...in her despair she invoked the ineffable name of Yahweh, and was forthwith granted wings with which she flew from the paradise that had become her prison...she was sentenced to give birth to innumerable progeny, of which one hundred would perish daily. Crushed...she cast herself into the Red Sea, at which the angels, pitying her sorrow, accorded her power over all new-born babies...

MacDonald hints at this tale on page 148 of *Lilith:*

> ...finding that I would love and honour, never obey and worship her, she poured out her blood to escape me...and soon had so ensnared the heart of the great shadow...Then at last I understood that Mr Raven was indeed Adam, the old and the new man.

Lilith, then, is one who is caught in the conflict between the old and the new man, as is Vane. All are in a state of change. We find, indeed, that Vane has dreamt of himself as being in the role of both the old and the new Adam. The new Adam in the New Testament is Christ himself, however, not any one man, and not the patriarchal Church. Rather, the church is intended to see itself as female. MacDonald is providing then a reversal; a mirror image of the traditional story of the fall of the man through woman, and is perceiving the results of that fall as being carried out through the denial of the female aspect of the church – the bride of Christ. The old Adam is that which rejoices in the fall of woman; seeing her receiving her just desserts; the new Adam is Christ himself, who lays down his life for the bride; who voluntarily accepts humiliation[237]. We find then, that we are getting closer to the interpretation of Lilith as being the struggling church; the result of such a conflict, caught between the old ways – the spirit of law, of power and patriarchy, and the new ways – of cooperation and humility. As the church, she is both victim and perpetrator of this conflicting state; inasmuch as she represents the body of Christ, she is identified with him as the victim of a lack of imagination in the 'religious' mind. Inasmuch as she resists that identification she is the persecutor of Christ. The power ("over new-born babies") which she is given is misused, while she is wedded to the

[237] And McGillis notes that this ambiguity is clearly intended in the previous manuscripts to act in a parabolic manner, so that the church cannot identify itself clearly with one or the other; cannot escape its flawed and human embodiment other than through the apocalyptic route to identity: "Nor will Adam clarify whether he is librarian, sexton, the Old Adam or the new man....MacDonald refuses to allegorise" (p48, 'The Lilith Manuscripts' *Scottish Literary Journal* 4, Dec 1977 pp40-57)

"heart of the great shadow". This shadow seems to be different to the other shadows in MacDonald's work, and it is possible that it may be interpreted as the spirit of the law, where it opposes the spirit of Christ, instead of finding in him its fulfilment and true identity (*Hebrews* 9:28, 10:1):

> So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. For the law, *having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things*, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect...

This notion of female vs male, then, is essentially wrong. MacDonald envisages the church as often killing her own self, her own body. As Lilith slays her former body in her resistance to her nature, so has the 'male' church many times also killed its own 'female' body through the suppression of the imagination and the denial of its humanity. Such 'sacrifices' are mistaken in that they have in them the spirit of the 'shadow', not being responses to Christ's humanity but efforts to avoid that humanity.

Legalistic interpretations of religious identity in the church

Lilith's murdering of her children may also be interpreted as the degree to which those who consider themselves religious may continue to 'sacrifice' unnecessarily, for the sake of an independent identity. Such sacrifices continue to the extent to which they seek to understand their religious identities in a competitive sense; in which religion is seen as a transaction; a demand rather than a gift. Further we note that it is not until Lilith's gift of sleep, and the severing of her hand, that Christ is embodied in the narrative – for such an embodiment would imply the final uniting of the church with Christ. The interpretation of Lilith as the "bride not yet ready" is sustained also by the progression of the story in ancient mythology, for Begg notes (pp37-8) that:

> ...Lilith from being an abhorred demoness, becomes the bride of Yahweh, the spirit of the diaspora, after the destruction of the Temple...Lilith, wife of Samael/Satan, changes place with Matronit, consort of Yahweh. In the contrast between Lilith and Matronit, we might perhaps see a parallel with the opposing pairs, Mary, Queen of Heaven and Mary Magdalene.

There is, however, a biblical allusion which MacDonald makes in *Lilith*, which suggests that – instead of an opposing pair of women, Lilith may be viewed in *two ways*, representing the stages before and after she has been blinded, or the ways in which Vane

views her himself, either as a competitor or as a fellow seeker after identity. On p154, Adam states of her:

> When she confesses her last hope gone, that *it is indeed hard to kick against the goad,* then will her day begin to dawn.

This seems to be a reference to the experience of Paul, formerly known as Saul, in *Acts* 9:1-25:

> Saul....came near to Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And he said, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the goads...*" and he was three days without sight...

This is the account of Paul – one of MacDonald's favourite Biblical writers – who was formerly the perfect "religious" man, named Saul; one who could not be faulted with regard to his keeping of the law. However, it is his very religious conviction which leads him to track down and kill the followers of Christ. His "blinding" experience – such as that which Lilith experiences - is one which convinces him that Jesus is greater than the law; that his mistaken legalistic interpretations have led him to commit murder; that he must seek his identity in an entirely different direction from this competitive notion of religion. It is not hard to see that MacDonald may be drawing a parallel between the greatest evil and the most ardent and devoted religious people of his own day. We have already seen how Lilith's appearance may mark the result of what MacDonald sees as the dangerous tendency to suppress the imagination, in favour of a rigid code of behaviour. Instead of opposing one to the other, though, he has a transformation in mind, such as that which happens to Saul, when he becomes Paul. This also is closer to his resistance to dualistic modes of thinking.

Male prophecy and the female wisdom tradition

> ...it is not only in the Jewish esoteric tradition that Lilith sometimes appears in a favourable light. The Gnostic Mandaeans, whose origins...stem from John the Baptist, and who have practised their religion uninterruptedly for 2000 years...know of her from their sacred book, the Ginza. In it Lilith Zahriel is the daughter of the King and Queen of the Underworld whom they give in marriage to the King of Light....[238]

[238] *The Cult of the Black Virgin*, p39.

It is possible that MacDonald knew of this tradition. If not, he certainly links that prophetic voice of John's, who announces the arrival of Jesus[239], to the much older – female – voice of prophecy found in the wisdom literature (especially in *Proverbs*)[240]. Mara, who appears in *Lilith* as a presence of both suffering and wisdom, perhaps represents a conflation of the suffering of *Job* (the wisdom literature of protest) and the sayings of *Proverbs* (wisdom as established)[241]. Certainly Vane's journey might be seen to represent the mental searchings of another wisdom writer in *Ecclesiastes* (whose favourite word is "vain"). This man has sought out knowledge and wisdom, and has come to have a different view of its place in the mind. The writer of *Ecclesiastes* introduces the idea that wisdom and suffering will go together (*Ecclesiastes* 1:17-18):

> I communed with my heart, saying, "look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge. And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly, I perceived that this also in grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Interestingly, Begg notes that in ancient myth (p101) it was Asmodeus, son of Lilith, who was supposed to have tricked Solomon, reputedly the wisest man in ancient civilisation (to whom the book of *Ecclesiastes* was often attributed) out of his ring of wisdom, through which he knew the language of the birds. In *Lilith*, it seems that Vane finds what is missing in current ideas about theological wisdom, in reconnecting with this female voice of wisdom; yet who is tricked by the beautiful appearance of Lilith. MacDonald seems to go out of his way to ensure that the ancient female presence is not abandoned, in reaction to this tendency to be seduced by knowledge, but rather that a right attitude towards this female 'Sophia' or wisdom as present with God is worked into the rather male voices of prophecy in the New Testament:

(Vane to Mara, *Lilith*, p239):

> "I know you! you are the voice that cried in the wilderness before ever the Baptist came. You are the shepherd whose wolves hunt the wandering sheep home."

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[239] *Matthew* 3:1-3: In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, for this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying "The voice of one crying in the wilderness..."

[240] Eg *Proverbs* 8:1 "Does not wisdom cry out, And understanding lift up her voice....8:12: I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion....by me kings reign....(8:22)...The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before his works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth...."

[241] Although this is a great simplification of the wisdom traditions, for there are elements of each in all.

> "My work will one day be over" she said "and then I shall be glad with the gladness of the great shepherd who sent me."

We noted earlier, how MacDonald describes the renegade preacher as one who frightens the flock with wolfish cries. MacDonald is finding consolation in the thought that there may be renegade preachers who lead the flock astray – and seemingly away from the church but that, even though they may themselves lack wisdom, there is at the back of the confused and divided state of the church, this ancient female voice of wisdom, which still is playing a secret part, suffering for the lack of 'male' wisdom in the neo-Calvinist doctrine; hidden at the heart of the old literature of the faith. Again, we find that MacDonald is not introducing new ideas into the theological thinking of his day, but is returning to ancient sources which are a part of the tradition itself. The male knowledge or 'key' which Vane wishes to acquire is seen to be a complex matter, involving his relationships; costing him great suffering; and forcing him to confront this 'female', passive aspect of wisdom. We noted how it is that Vane ends his journey by waiting, just as MacDonald at the end of his life, waits. If Lilith is coming to represent the church, as we think, then MacDonald implies that she should be prepared for great suffering, to the extent that she may experience the loss of many things which she feels are essential for her 'selfhood'. Her love of self-determination; her pride; her beauty and her independence are all things which she must give up as being her own personal property. We find that his attention to the Biblical literature makes MacDonald 'radical' – yet radically orthodox. Indeed he is far more attentive to it than those who adhere to a tradition of word by word inspiration.

Lilith's identity in Christ

Ean Begg also links Lilith to Inanna (p37) in the writings of the 3rd millennium BC in Sumeria:

> ...when the hero, Gilgamesh, cut down her tree, and the sky-god Enlil, dispossessed her, she became a homeless wanderer, like Lilith, the Shekinah of the exile, and like Jesus himself, this is noted of her in the literature:
> The bird has its nesting place, but I – my young are dispersed
> The fish lies in calm waters, but I – my resting place exists not
> The dog kneels at the threshold, but I – I have no threshold

This links to Jesus' description of himself (*Matthew* 8:20):

> Then a certain scribe came and said to Him "Teacher, I will follow You wherever you go" And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

It is easy to assume that MacDonald is merely trying to inject a little 'female' wisdom into what has become a very 'male' tradition in his day. But what we find, if we think about it a little harder, is that it is Vane's mistaken quest for 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' as though it were a 'thing in itself' is that which has led to his misconception of Lilith in the first place. As he seeks for a 'whereness', which is denied to Jesus, he is tempted by her, as he is tempted by the promise of self-determination through knowledge. But she is that which leads him away in search of his own desires. That which he desires for the wrong reason or with a wrong conception is that which will overpower or enslave him. It seems that Lilith is both the monster of which MacDonald speaks in his essay upon the imagination, *and* the victim of a warped imagination. A demonised woman is one who has lost her humanity through her estrangement from the imagination; she therefore becomes threatening to it. Dehumanising the concept of wisdom and so taking away the personification given to it in the ancient scriptures is, to MacDonald, a deeply meaningful tendency. His great argument about the treatment of Christ in the church is that we must not dehumanise him in order to emphasise the fact that he is divine; that it is precisely his humanity which is able to show his divinity.

Similarly his great argument in his essay upon the imagination is that it is necessary that it is given its place in order that the intellect may work correctly. The imagination is that which 'humanises' the other faculties; and allows us to see one another as human. However, Lilith is the monster within us, and whom we project onto others – ultimately distorting the face of Christ himself – she is the one whom we create out of our desire to obtain a selfhood that is manageable; comparable and definable. We note how Vane's sense of self is hugely important to him at the beginning of the novel; at its end he is too caught up in what he has caught sight of to worry too much about his 'groundlessness', even though things are even more unstable at the end than they were at the beginning. Indeed, his anxiety about the 'now' is not satisfied by knowledge, but has translated into an attitude of careful expectancy – of active 'waiting'. Wisdom, MacDonald implies, is not merely a question of 'knowing'. Wisdom must be treated as a person upon whom we wait and not a thing. It is the person of Christ, who identifies himself as being with the female as well as the male; who further identifies himself as being with the suffering and

sinning women of his time. When the person of Christ is treated as a doctrine; this 'female' interpretation of his character is lost; along with the right notions of wisdom, suffering, and any other characteristics which may be treated as 'things in themselves'.

This loss is not merely the loss of the sight of Christ, but the loss of our contact with every form of true meaning that exists for us. The world becomes a nightmare; the self deluded; reality questionable. The church itself – the apparently male church - must find itself again identified with that wise suffering, and embrace it instead of rejecting it, or it will continue to create monsters such as Lilith; to destroy her as an 'enemy' while failing to recognise her as a victim; as a mirror of the church's relationship with Christ. We noted how the figure of Mara herself is used in the novel as she who signifies both wisdom and suffering. Mara ('bitter') is the name given to the waters of Mara from a particular source in the desert (which is so bitter that even camels refuse to drink from it); water which is turned sweet, so that the children of Israel can drink from it during their time in the wilderness[242]. Mara is also the name given by Naomi to herself in the book of *Ruth*, because of her great bitterness at being in a strange country, and alone. Again, her experience is one of sweetness which emerges from suffering. We can see how this 'water' is applied in the case of *Lilith*, when she stays at Mara's house of suffering. Again, MacDonald is drawing attention to the parallels between the fallenness of women, where their suffering (and that of the Israelites, and all who confess themselves as being in the desert; outcast, and in a strange land) becomes transformed in its 'wise' identity with the suffering Christ.

MacDonald is quite prophetic in his *Lilith,* in seeming to anticipate the horror of a church which promotes Christ as a male hero; which fails to see that he is not one who promotes himself as a mere 'solution' to problems, but one who identifies himself *with* those problems and transforms terrible appearances into divinely informed reality. MacDonald's attention to the Biblical literature again leads him to discern love in its appearance as wrath; sweetness in its appearance as bitterness; and to discern the root of the problems in the theology of his time as owing much to intellectual attempts or despair at resolving a (logically) unresolvable dualism. MacDonald's attention to the Hebrew scriptures makes him aware of the vision of Israel as a fallen woman. The prophetic

[242] See *Exodus* 15

tradition contains frequent descriptions of the people's relationship with their God as being that of an adulterous woman; one who falls and whose shame is apparent[243]. It is precisely in that shame that the church in Christ finds begins to find her identity in the novel; as Vane finds that his 'homing' instinct leads him to confront his own failure. Lilith is described like this by Adam (p213)

> "I left her with him who had been her husband – ashamed indeed of her gaunt uncomeliness...."

MacDonald seems to be implying that the church must identify herself with that woman – with the idea of herself as Israel – rather than seeking to distance herself from those she perceives as fallen by pronouncing God's judgment upon them.

The tendency to distance the church from that identification, a few decades after MacDonald's death, will lead to the German churches' persecution of the Jews, the female Israel, in the name of the male 'hero', Christ. And it is interesting that among the few Christians who stood against that persecution was Dietrich Bonhoeffer[244], a theologian whose *Ethics* took exactly the line with regard to the interpretation of Christian ethics as does MacDonald in 'The Giant's Heart', and one whose notion of Christian 'selfhood' in his book *Creation and Temptation*, is very similar to MacDonald's in *Lilith*. We will look at this work briefly in the last section, in relation to McLeod Campbell.

Development of female imagery in MacDonald's writing

There are many other female figures in MacDonald's writing – aunts, grandmothers and fairy godmothers, who tend to be identified with the search for wisdom. In *Lilith* however he seems to develop this theme more fully; to find its place of marriage to the Christian apocalyptic vision. Begg notes links between Lilith and the fairy godmother tradition in Egyptian mythology (p46):

> ...figures who were known as Hathas and were associated with the symbol of a sycamore – the Egyptian tree of life. They shared this symbol with Diana of the

[243] Indeed, one of the prophets is instructed by God to love a woman who is a prostitute, in order to provide a picture of the love of God for Israel: (*Hosea* 3:1): Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods...."

[244] Hanged for his protest April 9, 1945 at Flossenbürg.

> Ephesians and Zaccheus[245]. As well as a tree, Hatha was, like Lilith, the ladder on which the righteous could ascend to heaven.

Begg goes on to note that the later Troubadours went so far as to suggest that one must tend towards heaven through the love of women: "...extra-marital union, undertaken freely, was preferable to the conjugal bed." This, undoubtedly, is not what MacDonald had in mind, seeming to represent a distortion which objectifies women, instead of humanising them; making of them objects to be used in the ascent towards the divine. This is not *identifying with*, but *using*, the love of the female. It is possible that he may have begun with this 'idealising' or objectifying of women, though. Certainly he would have been aware of such works as the chivalric poem, the *Romance of the Rose*, in which one progresses from lower to higher loves. And it is interesting to note how the chivalric tradition is guardedly praised by MacDonald in his essay 'On Obedience'. His *The Princess and the Goblin* has a boy-hero who ascends a secret staircase, at the top of which lives a beautiful woman who spins golden thread. His early novel, *Phantastes*, has links between women and trees, and indicates an early 'worship' of women, in the way that Robert Falconer, early on, 'worships' Mary St John, until he comes to see her as his sister. *Lilith,* instead, seems to be about the result of such an objectifying tendency, and it is perhaps a deeply personal account of his own mis-imaginings, and a cure for the idealising tendency which also afflicted most churches of his day with the tendency to either demonise or divinise women; the one being the result of the other.

Lilith as a sign of the nature of the church's identity

On p127 of his book, Begg links the figure of Lilith to that of the Black Virgin, whose history, he states, has been

> ...traced from the great goddesses of the pre-patriarchal period, especially Inanna and her handmaiden, Lilith.

It seems that MacDonald's development of his thinking about the role of female imagery in his own writing, which in turn has been an expression of his Christian faith, has led him to discern the development of the church's attitude towards women. Lilith's story in the novel is a complex one, in which she is seen as desired, as objectified beauty, as the struggle for self-determination and the victim of that struggle and, finally, one who is

[245]In the Gospels, Zaccheus climbs a sycamore tree in order to be able to see Jesus more clearly.

given death – sleep – not in the sense that she is put to death; is destroyed or conquered, but who finds her true end in Christ. She feeds on Vane's lifeblood at times, she is excluded, feared, made homeless and descends into humiliation. MacDonald does not make her easy to understand, but seems to put into her a little of everyone. We should look first at what Begg himself says about the implications of the reception of this figure and its associations in the church tradition.

He quotes, on p129, the *Pistis Sophia,* in which Mary tells Jesus of her fear of Peter (Peter being often taken to represent the rock upon which the church is built):
"Peter makes me hesitate; I am afraid of him, because he hates the female race." Begg goes on to speak of the polarity which seems to accompany such writings as defining the history of the Christian church (p129):

> If we think of this polarity not in personal terms, but as two traditions within Christianity, what we see are the church of Peter, catholic, orthodox, male-dominated and victorious, and the rival church of Mary, Gnostic and heretical, worshipping a male/female deity and served by priests of both sexes.

Begg, then, sees a history of mutual fear emerging. However, we find that Begg himself adheres to the polarity which encourages that fear. In speaking of such a division as self-evident; his notions of male and female identity are themselves taken as self-evident, rather than allowing themselves to be redefined in the person of Christ[246]. This is very important in MacDonald's theology, and we shall soon come back to see this in the work of Graham Ward. Begg goes on to note (p129) that:

> ...in the Celtic world (women) retained many of their considerable ancient freedoms...it was this Celtic Christianity that re-evangelised Europe...in the Dark Ages." (p131) ...the Black Virgin is a Christian phenomenon as well as a perseveration of the ancient goddesses and compensates for the one-sided conscious attitudes of the age...against the frenzied fascination for denying, defeating and transcending nature, the Black Virgin stands for the healing power of nature, the alchemical principle that the work against nature can only proceed in and through nature...

[246] *Galations* 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The interpretation of this statement frequently itself does not take seriously how it is that the body of Christ himself becomes both male and female, in that he 'gives birth' to the church. Instead, there is a tendency to retain the male chivalric, heroic image, and not allow the implications of the transformation *of* life itself, of sexual identity; as of all forms of identity, which takes place because of the resurrection.

However, the idea of a "compensation" or a "perseveration" which creates a balance between the male and female does not sit well with MacDonald's resistance to the notion that we are after such a balance – or "fixed repose" as he says in his essay on the imagination. Such a balancing 'act' remains precisely an act; revealing that this 'alchemical principle' does not quite hit the mark; does not really transform one's identity[247]. The work, whether 'against' or 'in and through' nature still has as its fundamental principle the notion of a manipulation of forces – a kind of witchcraft which the church itself sometimes seeks to engage in wherever it loses sight of the nature of its identity in Christ. Access to power can never in itself change the way in which women are viewed, as long as the expression of power is seen as a sign of godlike authority.

We have seen earlier how this notion of what a church is, is addressed in *Robert Falconer*, and MacDonald returns to the New Testament literature itself for guidance. The protestant tradition in which he grew up is one whose description of itself he resists[248]. His return to his sources, however, takes one vital part of that tradition – the close study of the Biblical writings themselves – and uses all of his imaginative power of interpretation to uncover that tradition to itself. Begg speaks of the subordinate role of women in the *New Testament* (which is arguable), but fails to see that it is women who discover the fact of the resurrection first, that women are constantly asserted and affirmed in the presence of Jesus and ultimately that subordination itself (of which the subordination of women is but one example) is reinterpreted by the writing as the being the foundation of the Church's identity. However it is not subordination 'in itself' but the subordination of Christ, being one who becomes subordinate to the point of death; and who in rising again reinterprets the nature of subordination. This reinterpretation of subordination has been frequently distorted in the history of the Christian tradition, often in justification of the social order of the day, but it is clear that when it is taken literally as being a sign of the presence of a

[247] This corresponds interestingly with Derrida's thoughts on identity in *The Gift of Death* (to be looked at briefly later). On p36, he notes how European civilisation frequently takes its concept of personhood from the Renaissance, which is concerned not with *persons*, but with *personas*. He notes that individualism comes to relate to a role and not to a person, and consequently *being* is translated as *force*. Even the seemingly essential male/female differences, then, cannot be grounds enough for identity; these differences also relate to roles (even if they are biological roles). MacDonald is finding an entirely different notion of identity, grounded in relationship, and in an unresolvable tension between uniqueness and community. It might be interesting at some point to examine whether this is a result of his awareness of the Scottish literary tradition, as well as of his Christian belief, since the Scottish adoption of the Renaissance came from different and older sources than the English.

[248] His son remembers that (*From a Northern Window*, p86) "He hated, as a designation, the word *Protestant*. You cannot, he would say, make a belief out of a denial."

new and entirely foreign order, it offers the ultimate challenge to the location of authority and identity, and to any repose of individuals, civilisations (or churches) which is built upon the notion of a competitive source of identity[249].

Begg offers his own solution to hierarchical notions, suggesting that (p137)

> ...once women are free to bestow their favour and affections where they will, the whole structure of patriarchal society starts to crumble...

However, this "where they will" is located as being the problem in MacDonald's *Lilith.* The will is the 'will to power' of Nietzsche; it is the acceptance of the rhetoric of power, which makes one blind to the true identity of the poor, the weak or the demonised. It is clear that women, while seemingly faced with a free choice, are equally subject to the need to compete, as long as the rhetoric of power (of being as *force*) is still present. They do not find their identities in such a society as being formed in any way which is less harsh, destructive or competitive than it was or is in patriarchal societies. This rhetoric of power is, however, so powerful that it is hard to conceive of a different measure of identity or status without being suspicious that it is itself subject to such a rhetoric of power, only covertly. This was Nietsche's most powerful argument against Christianity, as we noted earlier.

Liberation theology – the assertion of such a new foundation of identity – came about again in the mid-twentieth century, and is a movement which MacDonald comes close to anticipating in his *Robert Falconer.* In that novel, the poor are not objectified or romanticised, but are concentrated upon in terms of their intrinsic worth as human beings in the fullest sense, and are seen in some cases to improve their material circumstances as a result of this new awareness of their identity, while nevertheless not making that their aim, or the basis of their identity. And this is where liberation theology itself sometimes failed to carry itself forward, once material circumstances had been improved, falling back into the old definitions of identity once again[250]. Where the objectification of the poor is

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[249] MacDonald recognises that Christ's kingdom is not *of* the world, but *for* the world, being both intimately concerned with the world, in asserting that it belongs to God, yet remaining unbound to any limitations placed upon it which arise *out of* the world's self-understanding. The kingdom or 'fairyland' of which MacDonald speaks contains an implicit criticism of, and serious challenge to, any attempt to limit its borders to the religious, material, political or hierarchical worlds of thought.

[250] This is also the problem encountered by many nineteenth century novelists who sought to secularise Christianity in the hope that its challenge to society would be clearer by means of a metaphoric understanding of material reality, by its reframing as socialism. It is a problem

seen in the novel it is in order, precisely, to shock the reader by the extent to which the poor are dehumanised. In the novel, their progress involves a challenge and a loss to those who profit from their existence, such as the property owner who also profits from the poverty of his tenants by being an undertaker. MacDonald pictures an alternative community which provides a painful contrast in the novel with the posturing and empty words of the 'better' members of society. It is vitally important to recognise where it is that this vision comes from, however. His vision is not essentially a vision of protest – *but is much stronger.* It is a vision which asserts itself – 'seeing' things both as they appear to be – and as they *really are* (*Robert Falconer*, p346):

> I...was walking up one of the streets near Covent Garden, when my attention was attracted to a woman who came out of a gin shop, carrying a baby. She went to the kennel, and bent her head over, ill with the poisonous stuff she had been drinking. And while the woman stood in this degrading posture, the poor, white, wasted baby was looking over her should with the smile of a seraph, perfectly unconscious of the hell around her.
> "Children *will* see things as God sees them," murmured a voice beside me.

One's initial reaction is to dismiss this statement as hopeless romanticism – but it turns out in the novel to be more *materially* successful than all other efforts at social reform have been up to now. It would be a mistake to view it as a romanticising of the "hell" of the circumstances of poverty (doing so completely ignores MacDonald's clarity of thought and integrity, and a personal experience of misery which most modern critics have never

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which MacDonald avoids precisely because of his insistence upon the symbolic interpretation of reality, and his resistance to a metaphoric language of 'spirituality' which merely paraphrases the material. Lynne Hapgood, in her essay 'The reconceiving of Christianity; Secularisation, realism and the religious novel 1888-90' (p347, *Journal of Literature and Theology),* notes: "The difficulty each writer found in realising the city that was central to their ideas, and the failure of each of their attempts to assert the material nature of the city in spiritual terms is ironic...in fact they promulgate the very ideas they wish to qualify...Socialism.....its own material definiteness became leavened with metaphor" MacDonald, noted for his insistence upon the 'fairytale' and his symbolic language, brings to *Robert Falconer*, twenty years before these novelists, not a modern materialism or a weak spiritual metaphor, but a radical challenge to materialism in its own sense of "definiteness" as being allied to the source of such mistaken definiteness in Christian doctrine. It is far more than a spiritual metaphor for a material problem, but a challenge to the source of material *and* spiritual interpretations and measures of reality, as they understand themselves. Lynne Hapgood also notes how "These novels deal with the confusion by transcending it for utopian worlds." Also a move which MacDonald anticipates (for example, in the Lark of 'The Giant's Heart'). She goes on to state that "The evolution of Christian thought...had moved through successive stages of secularisation to emphasise contemporary rather than eschatological realities..." MacDonald, of course, knows no distinction, the worlds of *Lilith* are in one another, challenging theories of time and space, and must be understood as within one another if they are to be understood at all. The dualism of the essayist reflects the same problem, expressed differently, by the 19th century novelists, and is precisely what MacDonald seeks to overcome.

faced). For MacDonald this vision can provide the only true challenge to those circumstances, in that it retains the hope necessary in the face such of hopelessness. It is not grounded in the circumstances as they appear, but in their interpretation as they *really are*. Action is not possible without hope. Hope is not enduring if it is not founded upon a sense of reality which challenges appearances[251].

Faced with such a hell, the social reformers, of whom Lady Clementina in the novel is the example, can offer only a *re*action, which remains enslaved to appearances (to identity as social *role*), and therefore to values which seek to impose themselves upon the poor. MacDonald perceives that only the vision which sees on its own terms, and with new values, can offer the hope of transforming what appears to be hopeless. MacDonald works with the notion that Christ is not only in the church; in middle class respectability, but present in the 'hell' of life. Where so many well-meaning people are attempting to rescue people from this 'hell' into a displaced respectability, MacDonald asserts that Christ is *in* that hell, transforming it in anticipation of its conforming to what it truly is. This is a truly apocalyptic vision. He anticipates the importance of self-image; of self-determination, not in the sense of an independence of will (will to power), which may be allowed to compete in the 'marketplace economy', nor in a Marxian establishment of material equality of *roles* (although it will have such an equalising effect in its natural outcome), but in the assertion of an entirely new foundation of the idea of community, which has the authentic mark of identity and meaning which is lacking in 'marketplace' economies and competitively driven concepts of identity.

This approach retains its relevance, wherever such a society as an 'underclass' operates in contradiction to the 'marketplace' economy, holding onto values such as extravagant generosity or unprofitable loyalty, distorted as they may be, as reflecting a more coherent notion of identity than those of the 'wealthy' classes to whom they are encouraged to look as 'role' models. The abandonment of participation in the wider 'society' (although just as often the result of resentment), may also be the result of an understanding that a society in which one's main function is to 'play' a 'role' does not well express or feed the humanity of its participants. Such notions that one's identity may be gained from one's career or

[251] As he notes in *The Seaboard Parish*: "...from mere suffering people will turn away....every show of it....only urges them to forget it all...give people hope, if you would have them act at all...."

from material wealth can be freely rejected by those whose own construction of selfhood has been separated from these competitive models. Not being bound to deceive themselves in such a way, they may deceive themselves or compete in other ways. But frequently the notion of competition (and with it a certain neurotic compulsion to do in order to be) is abandoned entirely. Whether conceived as 'right' or 'wrong', the survival of this difference between concepts of selfhood which brings about radical divisions within societies is a challenge to the universal validity of any societal model which takes 'role' as being equivalent to identity.

The point here is that MacDonald, early on, sees that the replacement of the patriarchal society with the mercantile society, will still fail to provide the kind of identity it seeks for and promises itself. The only society he anticipates is the apocalyptic society; the church itself, as it is formed in various ways on the basis of the growth of what he calls the Christ-self, which is driven by selflessness, rather than by a lack of identity. All mistaken forms of society are seen as the result of forms of enslavement to, or protection of, the 'self', and women, in MacDonald's view, seem to find this slavery easier to escape from than men, in the time that *he* writes (*Lilith,* p228-229):

> Every creature must one night yield himself and lie down...he was made for liberty and must not be left a slave..."It will be late, I fear, ere all have lain down!" I said. "There is no early or late here," he rejoined "For him the true time then first begins who lays himself down. Men are not coming home fast, women are coming faster..."

Lilith and apocalypticism

We find, then, that the problem as it exists for women, for the poor, for those who are demonised, is merely the outward expression of a problem which is within all; within Vane himself. It is the lack of the ability to lose 'the self'; and the fear of losing oneself is precisely that slavery which must be overcome if one is to gain one's soul. In fact, in the effort to accumulate the whole world as a sign of one's identity, one loses one's own soul. We find that even Vane's religious and apocalyptic vision is itself tainted with traces of this 'self' ishness (p192)

> ...must not the Little Ones, from a crowd of children, speedily become a youthful people, whose government and influence would be all for righteousness? Ruling the wicked with a road of iron, would they not be the redemption of the nation? At the same time, I have to confess that I was not without views of personal advantage, not without ambition in the undertaking....what might we not do, with such a core to it as the Little Ones, for the development of a noble state? I confess also to an

> altogether foolish dream of opening a commerce in gems between the two worlds – happily impossible, for it could have done nothing but harm to both.

MacDonald makes it clear that the problem evolves from deep within the religious impulse. He anticipates Freud, but sees that it is the distortion and suppression of the religious impulse, rather than the sexual (which is its expression), which causes the problem, and which must be addressed, rather than ignored. Vital to a right understanding of apocalyptic vision, then, is a symbolic form of understanding the meaning of such 'sights' or visions, which we have studied in this section on symbolism. This needs to precede the apocalyptic vision, otherwise that sense is tainted with an acquisitive rather than participatory notion of sight or perception.

Quite possibly this is a reflection of MacDonald's own mind, in that he - sometimes mistakenly – has sought, prematurely, ways to transform the appearance of things into what he 'sees' apocalyptically in the reality of them as universally redeemed by Christ. His symbolic 'seeing' is therefore aiming *towards* the purity of the apocalyptic rather than representing an attempt to claim the apocalyptic vision as that which may be 'owned' by one particular group of interpreters. He may be seen to be following Isaiah's emphasis on the notion that such a vision is a matter in which God himself speaks. Such speaking takes place *before* the interpretation of those words, which may be why the emphasis in apocalyptic literature is so much upon the visual aspect of apprehension, rather than upon the midrashic tradition of interpretation. The apocalypse is that which takes place in an unmediated fashion, once the effort of interpretation (and all of the ensuing divisions) has broken down, and yet it has also preceded its interpretation. It is, paradoxically, both the beginning and end of interpretation, and of the violence and dispute which comes about through the confusion such interpretations with identity itself (*Isaiah* 10:17-23):

> ...instead of iron, I will bring silver...violence shall no longer be heard in your land...the sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you. But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light...a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.

In *Lilith*, this 'sight' is clearly alluded to, but is hampered and mixed with other notions, which relate to Vane's impatience, his concept of time and his continued 'self' ishness; traces of the *old* Adamic ways of seeing. He wishes to see fulfilled by private interpretation the promise of what he 'sees' is the true state of being, and yet is told "for

him the true time first begins who lays himself down". This infection of the apocalyptic vision corresponds with MacDonald's comments in 'True Christian Ministering' (A Dish of Orts, p298) upon the purity of Jesus's vision of the kingdom in *Matthew* 20:

> Every man would make his neighbour his footstool that he may climb upon him to some throne of glory which he has in his own mind....there are known and noble exceptions; but still, there it is...we call ourselves "Christians"...and yet this is the way in which we go on!...the notion of rank in the world is like a pyramid; the higher you go up, the fewer are there who have to serve those above them...it is not so in the kingdom of heaven...the Son of Man lies at the inverted apex of the pyramid; he upholds, and serves, and ministers unto all, and they who would be high in his kingdom must go near to him at the bottom...that is the kingdom. The other kingdom passes away...it is only there on sufferance....but the man who seeks this rank of which I have spoken, must be honest. It will not do to say, "I want to be great, and therefore I will serve."...it is the bad that is in us that makes us think about ourselves, but as we go on we think less and less about ourselves, until at last...we are possessed with the spirit of the kingdom, and live in gladness and in peace...

As we saw earlier, the artist must also lay himself down, rather than attempting to fashion in advance what he 'sees'. MacDonald is seeking, then, in *Lilith*, (amongst other things) to understand the artist's role in this apocalyptic community. The artist must concern himself with 'waking' this vision in others, rather than in concerning himself with plans for its architecture, or with a claim to its interpretation.

Begg outlines the disappointments which frequently condition the thinker, artist or community, whose apocalyptic sense remains disappointed by the appearance of reality and the failure of interpretation (p149):

> ...the Great Goddess is now unmanifest, save as mother of the outcast Egyptians....disappointed apocalypticism is commonly transmuted into mysticism...meantime let us hope....as we recall that, to the Sufis, blackness is the final stage of the journey of the Soul towards beatitude...

The wonder of MacDonald's mysticism – his understanding of the symbolic mode, as outlined at the beginning of this section on his symbolism – is that it is *not* the result of such a disappointed apocalypticism, but a disappointment with the continued existence of his own dying 'self' which continually infects such apocalyptic vision. It rather seeks to grow *out of* its disappointment with itself, to an *increasing* awareness of the nature of the role of the apocalyptic imagination; growing in its intensity in *Lilith*, to supply us with an outline of its working out into and towards the mind of Christ, as it grows out of its despair with itself, towards its hope for identity and self-forgetfulness. It remains an action. But

rather than an *anxious* action – which is really only a seeking to *acquire* identity - it becomes a *waiting* action (*Lilith*, p233: "even in a dream, however, the dreamer must do something"). It is a waiting for the revelation of Christ's identity to be given fully to one who sees what it has *seemed* to him or her. (end of *Lilith*):

> Surely it was a dream of a better waking yet to come, and I have not been the sport of a false vision! Such a dream must have yet lovelier truth at the heart of its dreaming! In moments of doubt I cry:
> "Could God Himself 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 they dark self?" rejoins Hope "...when a man dreams his own dream, he is the sport of his dream, when Another gives it him, that Other is able to fulfil it...."

The presence of doubt is seen as a necessary part of this hope. It is not a crushing disillusionment, however, but a doubt of the self - which is the strongest indication that this 'false' self is being lost - as it approaches a greater vision of identity: (p235)

> "I am trying hard to believe you, father. I do indeed believe you...although I can neither see nor feel the truth of what you say..."
> "...thou doubtest because thou lovest the truth...remember the things thou hast seen. Truly thou knowest not those things, but thou knowest what they have seemed, what they have meant to thee. Remember also the things thou shalt yet see. Truth is all in all, and the truth of things lies at once hid and revealed in their seeming...."

The 'seeming' is that which cannot be known, yet is in itself also that which challenges time, as it need not rely on the acquisitive or cumulative 'knowing' of memory or experience, but on the knowing of Christ who is still to be fully revealed, but who has existed before the effort at interpretation began. It is the idea of God's interpretation in Christ; an apocalyptic interpretation which precedes, fulfils and so reinterprets reality itself. It is received not as we understand interpretation, but challenges by reference to the nature of symbolism, previous notions of interpretation as being that which ties down the text; that which quantifies or categorizes the text.

Here, the 'rainbow' promise is of taking part in a reality which both precedes and exceeds one's own reality of being, one's own memories and expectations. Where that sight of the rainbow is temporarily limited by death and mortality, such temporality also enables the anticipation and experience of an excess, which in turn makes one live 'out of' oneself towards hope (not in a one-way transcending, but in a manner which reciprocally informs life and mortality – the experience witnessing to its being indicative of true life. This is

possibly why Vane is oddly advised in the last chapter "remember also the things thou shalt yet see...". It is the apocalyptic aspect of the imagination; its ability to apprehend what is not yet known, and what has been known before one's own existence inside of time began. It connects the imagination to grace in that familial sense we spoke of, and alerts artists to the need to continually reinterpret the reality in which they find themselves. And that effort continually leads to a conceding of the inability to grant a final and deciding interpretation, and leads the artist back again to the notion of grace. Where such a movement does not occur, the art and the meaning die, fossilized as it were, and become empty forms. In this way, all art comes to represent a shell, a form which once, by grace, imitated a moment of truth which has entered time, and moved on. In this way, art and death are related, being forms which represent the clothing of life in recognisable form in time. They are evidence of life past, and of life continuing, in that they have not enclosed or killed this kind of life in death, but serve to give some recognisable, shareable form to the process. And we all share death as we share the need to interpret.

Conclusion to section two

In this section on symbolism, we have moved from a consideration of the way in which MacDonald understands the nature of symbolic 'seeing' towards its tendency to an apocalyptic conclusion. We have briefly considered its implications for the formation of Christian identity or selfhood. The apocalyptic vision is ultimately characterised by hope rather than by the assurance of some separate 'outside' source, and is seen to address the foundations of both individual 'selfhood' and the way in which societies see themselves. It is deeply challenging to both, addressing, by way of a rigorous questioning of perception, their grounds of 'being'. It is, further, that which recognises its own nature as being interpretive, and professes the nature of that interpretation as resting upon its relationship with the 'text' or Word – a relationship which can never be taken for granted, but in which it is held through faith. Apocalyptic thinking and hermeneutic practice have, therefore, very similar themes in common. The apocalyptic method of interpreting reality is a deeply challenging one, and we shall now go on to examine how it is that some writers on the questions of Christian identity and apocalyptic hope may be standing on common ground with George MacDonald. We shall also briefly look at some hermeneutic themes

which are dealt with in Caputo's book *More Radical Hermeneutics*, especially where they seem to address the relationship between the questions asked by Derrida and by MacDonald. We shall first consider the relationship between MacDonald's work and that of his contemporary, the theologian McLeod Campbell.

Section Three

What *is* Christian Identity? George MacDonald and other writers

A. 'The Light Princess' and McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement.*

B. 'The Golden Key', Goethe's Theory of Colour and Graham Ward's 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ'.

C. George MacDonald's *Lilith* and Jurgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope.*

D. *Lilith*, John Caputo's *More Radical Hermeneutics* and Derrida's *The Gift of Death.*

George MacDonald and other writers

This section does not aim to provide a comprehensive link to any area where MacDonald's work may be linked to other writers, but rather to demonstrate briefly the similarities which emerge between his thought and the work of a wide range of writers, in examining this particular question of Christian identity. It is hoped that it provides an example of how his work is helpful in clarifying some similarities in approaches to themes found between Romantic fiction and later theological and hermeneutical studies. To begin with, however, we consider the links between MacDonald's fiction and the theology of McLeod Campbell, as they were already emerging in that era.

A. George MacDonald's 'The Light Princess' and McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement*

McLeod Campbell lived from 1800 to 1872; being two decades older than MacDonald. They had in common their friendship with Thomas Erskine, an advocate, and owner of an estate in Angus, who is described in MacDonald's biography by his son, Greville, as (p194):

> ...that loving support to all who dared preach universal redemption.

In his introduction to the new edition of Campbell's book, Torrance notes that (p1)

> ...during the past two decades theological scholarship has witnessed a resurgence of interest in J McLeod Campbell.

Campbell's thinking touches upon a particular and recurring problem in the church's history; that of the nature of the Christian's perception of their own identity, and specifically the *way* in which it is linked to that of Christ. As we have seen, MacDonald's work similarly consistently refers to this struggle, and his work has also received an increase of interest after being left alone for half a century. Torrance's introduction goes on to outline more clearly Campbell's concern (p1):

> ....from his earliest days in the parish ministry and throughout all his writings was so passionately concerned to call the church back to the Triune God of grace in a

land where he felt so much 'religion' was moulded by concepts of God which owed more to some 'light of nature' where God is conceived primarily as Lawgiver and judge, than to the 'light' of revelation, where the Father makes himself known in the son...

He quotes from Campbell's Reminiscences and Reflections, p133:

...my labour was to get them into the mental attitude of looking at God to learn his feelings towards them, not at themselves, to consider their feelings towards him...

Torrance notes that he also taught (p3) that

...repentance, faith and love are not conditions of grace, but our response to that grace....

McLeod Campbell and MacDonald were both engaged in a struggle to direct the attention of the individual and of the church towards the person of Christ, as God's revelation of himself, in opposition to attempts to presuppose the nature of God's character, or the nature of human identity.

Grace[252] and nature

The root of the problem which Campbell perceived the corruption of Christian identity originated historically in the interpretation of Federal Calvinism, as it developed at the end of the 16th century in Holland and New England. Such Calvinism places the concept of covenant as central but, in its emphasis upon the 'Old' and 'New' covenants of religious history, leaves it with an interpretation which sees a covenant of 'works' and of 'nature' as preceding the covenant of grace. God's promise to the people of Israel – of which the rainbow is a central motif – is representative of the 'old', while the 'new' covenant is seen as a dispensing with the old, in the coming of Christ. That is, the 'light of nature' is thought to precede the work of grace *historically,* rather than the revelation of Christ being seen as an apocalyptic event which addresses history itself. This 'light of nature' is used to formulate the coming of Christ as part of an overall plan which the human mind can understand, and such a plan is adopted as a *preceding theological and philosophical proposition.* In practice, the emphasis on the plan radically divides the world of nature and logic from the world of grace since it cannot satisfactorily combine them without losing the basis of its own 'natural' logic. There is, in addition to this problem of the ordering of such covenants within a logical scheme, the perception of a covenant as being merely a 'contract' between two equal partners – a definition which itself comes from

[252] See p212 for an explanation of what may be understood by 'grace' in this context.

logical deductions which are drawn solely from the 'light of reason'. There is little room for the surprise, wonder, and transforming power of grace to work in this schematization, since grace (the coming of Christ) is relegated to being a part of some larger scheme, losing the quality of 'excess' and of revelation which makes it interpretive *of* reality.

We should note how it is that in MacDonald's symbolic treatment of the rainbow – that symbol of covenant which we studied in relation to Goethe's colour theory - he emphasises its presence not only as a 'sign', but also as a mediation, which has a meaning or colour corresponding to the inner working of grace. He subtly shows the 'substance' of the covenant as relating the spheres of nature (the outward rainbow) to those of grace (the inward rainbow), and finally as both mediation and substance. It is sign and symbol together which mediate truth – not the truth *about*, but Truth as irreducible to fact, living beyond and able to inform our conception and perception of what is reasonable. This is somewhat different to the notion that reason perceives truth independently and can assemble a theory which corresponds to it.

Such a notion is very similar indeed to Newton's notion that colour as a concept must be limited to its existence within a structure which contains and explains it; the pure white light of which it is supposedly composed. On the contrary, both MacDonald and Campbell say, truth or grace is irreducible to reason, although reason may find harmony within it. With regard to writing, MacDonald feels similarly as an artist, that truth or grace inhabits writing in the living relationship between reader and word, in the 'live' giving and receiving of 'signs' as symbols. It may allow itself to be passively contained within words, but this is itself an act of grace, and does not allow for the conclusion that it can therefore be entirely represented by words. We find here another context for MacDonald's allusion to John's gospel, in which he states that the world could not contain the books which would be written; or the comment at the end of *Ecclesiastes* upon the endless books which still do not 'tell' comprehensively the truth; do not put an 'end' or 'finality' to truth[253].

[253] It is also the adoption of Jesus's statements which link his 'being' to truth, and his advising the religious leaders of his day that they search the scriptures in vain because they will not come to Him, the living meaning or Word of which the text testifies. It is also the difference between Jesus's statement "I am the truth" and Pilate's question: "What is truth?" This relates also to Falconer's statement about the nature of the church's identity as related to belief 'in' rather than belief 'about' Jesus.

On this thinking, Truth is by its very nature a work of grace; continually mediated; *received* from the text or Word as a gift of interpretation and not taken, wrenched or 'worked out' *from* it[254]. Truth subjects itself to such abuse by *choice* passively accepting this 'death' in the form of writing for the sake of its free mediation of itself to the reader, with all the risks of religious and philosophical abuse which that passivity entails. Jesus dies not only on the cross, but in submission to crucifixion by the text which seeks to bear witness to him. In freely inhabiting and submitting to the 'textualising' of his existence, as he inhabits history and mortal life, he changes forever the nature of both living and reading; writing and death, imparting a meaning to the act of interpretation which it would not otherwise have, and which, when taken as an isolated activity, becomes entirely meaningless. In relation to Campbell's findings, Torrance notes that one effect of this tendency to 'take' meaning meant that "the Federal scheme made a radical dichotomy between the sphere of nature and the scheme of grace."

Interestingly, this separation amounts to a reversion to the pre-reformation medieval view that grace presupposes nature – and grace perfects nature; a departure from the great emphasis of the reformation that nothing is prior to grace[255]. Torrance, in his introduction, notes that (p7)

> ...the doctrine (of the medieval view) implies a loss of the notion of Christ's headship over all creation as mediator, his solidarity with all humanity as the Head of the race, as in the theology of Ephesians and Colossians, or as expounded by Irenaeus, Athanasius, and the Cappodocian divines as well as by Calvin.

The emphasis is no longer on the person of Christ himself in this doctrine, but only on his work as an isolated event. We have seen in MacDonald's symbolism his emphasis upon

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[254] There is a difference between the working *out* as in the solving of a puzzle, in which one *uses* the text as a thing and the 'working out' of one's own salvation to which Derrida refers (p56, *The Gift of Death),* in that in the latter one works out the implications of one's *own* salvation or interpretation in the context of 'inner light' or grace, rather than claiming to understand some 'general' plan of salvation or to master the text, making of it a logical work and so emptying it of 'grace' and therefore meaning, as the Federal Calvinists find in such 'working out' of a plan. However Derrida has a rather more bleak view of it, not allowing for the reality of Christ's spirit as present in this working out, while Christ is bodily absent, for he is happy to quote Paul "...in my absence...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, from *Philippians* 2:12, he perhaps does not see how Paul is calling forth the activity of Christ's spirit in so doing, perhaps referring to Jesus's words in *John* 16:7: Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."

[255] And if 'nothing' is prior to grace, we can see why all of MacDonald's stories lead downwards; we can see the theological significance of the path through nihilism; the place of an interpretation which finds no meaning at the heart of 'things in themselves' outside of its experience of grace.

the importance of seeing creation as God sees it; upon an inner light or grace which is gifted, and which re-informs creation with the meaning of Christ's presence to it, not supposing any definition which can precede this perception with conception. Rather, by reference to the *outward moving* tendency in the imagination, MacDonald suggests that the inner grace and truth which precede and inform notions of beauty show by their own nature their origin and goal in Christ. Behind the depth of MacDonald's vision of beauty, colour and form is the perception that these are *mediated and interpreted* by Christ, the source and meaning of all interpretation and life, without whom vision and interpretation remain lifeless and meaningless. This is made clear in his characterization of that belief, in the person of Mysie in *Robert Falconer (*p220):

> ....he had taught his daughter next to nothing. Being his child, he had the vague feeling that she inherited his wisdom...the result in Mysie's case would be this – not that she would call evil good and good evil, but that she would take the beautiful for the true and the outer shows of goodness for goodness itself – not the worst result, but bad enough, and involving an awful amount of suffering...all will acknowledge it of the woman; it is as true of the man...

It is in this way that MacDonald does not become a pantheist[256], for 'grace' interpreting creation is the personal grace of God in Christ, and retains and informs the individual form of all things, but without treating them as 'things in themselves'. While this treating things as 'things in themselves' seems initially attractive, and a sign that the symbolic mode is being followed, it does, however, seem to lead to the loss of the possibility of the mediation of Christ as the head of creation, one who mediates beauty and identity, and so it results in a loss of meaning of the 'things in themselves'.

It is in this way that the twin emphases on the aesthetic or doctrinal nature of truth as essential and prior to personal 'grace' are related to one another. And so it should be clear that MacDonald's theology, like Campbell's, is not the result of sentimentality, but of a firm belief in the priority of grace – that which is freely given by God to creation.

In MacDonald's resistance to the protestantism of his day, as is the case with Campbell, he is able to escape the loss of this 'headship' over creation and solidarity with humanity, while yet not reverting back to the medieval separation of grace and nature which had

[256] He seems often to take as his lead the kind of 'picturing' (that of things observed in nature) used by St Athanasius, who in *De Incarnatione* says: "His being in everything does not mean that he shared the nature of everything...the sun is not defiled by the contact of its rays with earthly objects."

come to infect the new, Federal Calvinism. It is strange that he is most clearly catholic when he is most true to the reformation. Indeed, as we noted when thinking about philosophy, he shows himself to be well aware of this post-Calvinist tendency to 'presuppose' in the pre-reformation writers ('Browning's "Christmas Eve"' *Orts,* p207):

> For a man to theorize theologically in any form, while he has not so apprehended Christ, or to neglect the gazing on him for the attempt to substantiate to himself any form of belief respecting him, is to bring on himself, in a matter of divine import, such errors as the expounders of nature in old time brought on themselves, when they speculated on what a thing must be, instead of observing what it was; this "must be" having for its foundation....notions whose chief strength lay in their preconception....there are thoughts and feelings that cannot be called up in the mind by any power of will or force of imagination...

This 'gazing' is not the observation of Goethe (an assessing look) but the individual relation of the mind with the God who sees and gifts his 'seeing' as it is mediated in Christ. This is what informs and is prior to the working of the imagination (for God to "think us" requires submission to, and acknowledgment of, the prior action of God). The imagination, then, is not seen as the initial primeval link with God which *transcends* nature. It emerges as a secondary relation but, nevertheless, in its symbolic, 'covenant' grounding a retains a more substantial affinity with creation through the mediation of the humanity and meaning of the Christ-self. That affinity is always and only possible through the mediation of Christ, the Meaning of creation. We can see why MacDonald is careful then to distinguish the creation of God – "that calling of things out of nothing" from the imagination of the artist, who discovers and presents those things by means of an inner work of grace.

When Chesterton sees MacDonald, then, as somehow putting the 'colour' back into the religion of his day, he has good grounds, yet not the medieval tendency in philosophy which is often thought to accompany his work and such colour in literature. We see also, then, that MacDonald's 'medieval' tendency is not so old as those "expounders of nature in old time" he mentions in his essay, and to whom Chesterton alludes, but is linked more to the 'old' reformation – the one in which Luther takes part in his concern with *reform* of the church, rather than with revolt *against* the church, as becomes the case with later 'reformations'. It is also what enables MacDonald to uncover once more the true heart of Falconer's grandmother's Calvinism, instead of merely revolting against it. We have already seen in his comments in his novels how MacDonald remains true to this

'reforming' model, while refusing the term 'protestant'; never abandoning the church, despite his despair about its state.

Fatherhood

The mediation and prior existence of grace, then, as it informs the imagination, is also linked to the seeing of God as Father, for Christ's mediation is one of sonship. This is why, although the imagination is entirely grace-informed, it is yet stronger in its familial connection than it is in the analogical sense, which does not allow for the role of grace so much in its tendency towards self-sufficiency. Both McLeod Campbell and MacDonald refer to God as 'the Father of Lights'. Not a sentimental emotion or euphemism, but one which is a deliberate affirmation of the character of God as primarily that of Father. It is an expression of the priority of grace; of their free choice of concrete participation in Christ's sonship, which comes through his universal solidarity with and redemption of the human race[257]. And, again, this universal redemption is not turned into universal salvation, as Greville MacDonald insists was not the case. It is not something which detracts from the struggle and demand implicit in believing and acting upon such a relation; but nevertheless causes both thinkers to view the entire human race (and in the case of MacDonald, even flowers) as brothers and sisters. Like his description of death as 'sleeping', MacDonald is taking care to accurately express what he believes to be true about the nature of grace-informed reality. This is borne out by the fact that in *Lilith*, rather than projecting his 'own' reality onto an unreal world, Vane comes to doubt the nature of his own reality as he has hitherto understood it, but is reassured, by Hope personified, of the existence of that which is real *because* it is informed by grace – the revelatory nature of perception.

Light

Campbell, in speaking of light in the following passage, refers to God's character as mediated through such grace, rather than relying on his own prior definition of light. It is somewhat similar to Anselm's "believing in order to understand", but differentiates

[257] We can see here also the theological context for MacDonald's notion of the imagination as being that which bears witness to a *familial* connection to the Father, the familial connection being noted as that which communicates living meaning. This is its primary characteristic, and makes the notion of the *power* of the imagination and the analogical connection secondary.

between this concept of light as grace and "unreasoning faith" (*The Nature of the Atonement*, p17):

> We believe that God is, that God is light, that it is His will *that in His light we should see light* (my italics). We, therefore, cannot recognise, in the questioning and controversy which abound, a reason for suspended faith or universal doubt on the one hand, or for an unreasoning and blind faith on the other.[258]

We see here how 'inner' and 'outer' light correspond because of an act of divine will, which we cannot go behind, to find the cause of, but which can be shown to exhibit harmony with the rational mind. The issue of "blindness" in relation to light is important to define here, for in *Alec Forbes* Blind Tibbie's inability to distinguish between death and resurrection is not the sign of a blind faith, but of a faith which is informed by God's light, rather than by the natural light of reason or by natural sight (which it does not belittle). MacDonald, in his essay on the imagination, makes it clear that he believes that the intellect must struggle to be in harmony with such a light; but must not seek to 'order' grace. Reason – as we noted – is perceived here as a working out *of* that grace or light rather than a working out *from* that grace or light in terms of intellect *alone*. Such an approach is bound to conclude with a 'something' which posits itself as a thing or end in itself and therefore as higher than its purported origin. The light of nature, when taken as determinative of what things 'must be', tends to a fixed repose which MacDonald avoids at all costs; it tends to a paralysing effect on both the imagination and the intellect, in denying that grace which is its own vitality – that which originally brings it into being. It cannot 'go behind' that grace to something higher[259]. This attempt to 'go behind' grace can be seen in Bonhoeffer's approach to the story of the fall, as dealing essentially with a religious impulse which comes about because of the false separation of nature and grace. We shall consider it briefly, before considering 'The Light Princess' in relation to McLeod Campbell's atonement theology.

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[258] Campbell, like MacDonald, also speaks frequently of the 'harmonizing' gift of light, see *The Nature of the Atonement*, p30, for example.

[259] Bonhoeffer, in his *Creation and Temptation* also comes to this tendency to the wish to 'go behind' grace; it is the questioning of God's being from the standpoint of independent being, rather than the direct address of one's question *to* God. It seems to correlate in literary critical terms with a judgement upon the text as opposed to the interpretation of its meaning, and this would make it an interesting comparison with the emergence and methods of historical criticism in relation to literary criticism.

The image of God, Imagination and knowledge of God in Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Temptation.*

In the chapter entitled 'The Religious Question', Bonhoeffer notes the nature of this 'religious' temptation, which posits the intellect as higher than God (p66):

> The serpent asks: "Did God say, "You shall not eat...?" The serpent does not dispute this word but it enables man to catch sight of a hitherto unknown profundity in which he would be in the position to establish or dispute whether a word is the Word of God...The decisive point is that this question suggests to man that he should go behind the Word of God and establish what it is by himself, out of his understanding of the being of God...it knows that it only has power where it claims to come from God...it is evil only as the religious serpent...but with the first religious question in the world evil has come upon the scene.

Since Campbell and MacDonald are dealing with the question of the atonement of Christ, God's living Word and Revelation, any interpretation or plan of salvation which does not see Christ as its sole, undisputed source of knowledge of God is making this same move. Even that approach which takes the Bible before or instead of the revelation of Christ[260]. And it is the most religious who are tempted to make such a move, as were those sincere and agonising Federal Calvinists. The central need to establish independent grounds for belief comes about through the lack of trust, not the lack of knowledge. This is what Vane is coming to learn about his existence.

Interestingly – especially in relation to *Lilith* and notions of life and death - the tree of knowledge is related to death by the creator, as Bonhoeffer notes in the story of the Fall, but to life by the serpent. The serpent promises that "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." Bonhoeffer goes on (p70):

> It is true that man becomes *sicut deus* (like God) through the Fall, but this very man *sicut deus* can live no longer; he is dead...."You will not die!" "You shall die!" In these two statements the world gapes asunder for Adam.

Bonhoeffer goes on to distinguish between:

> *Imago dei* – Godlike man in his existence for God and neighbour, in his primitive creatureliness and limitation...man bound to the Word of the Creator and living from him, and *sicut deus*...godlike man in his out-of-himself knowledge of good and evil, in his limitlessness and his acting out of himself; in his underived existence; in his loneliness.

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[260] *John* 5:39,40: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

And he goes on to speak of (p71):

> agnus dei – the One who was sacrificed for man sicut deus, killing man's false divinity in true divinity, the God-Man who restores the image of God.

Here, we clearly see how the giants and children in 'The Giant's Heart', Vane and Lilith display this *sicut deus* tendency in their independent awareness of good and evil, and how MacDonald seeks to make the reader aware of this tendency in themselves, in his complication of the question, and his relating it to death. The tree of 'The Giant's Heart' also brings home the relationship between human fallenness and this godlike ability to judge.

In relation to the imagination, we see how Lilith's life as the imagination, separated from God and grace through its independence, loses its *imago dei* – its connection to God as Father – all becoming nightmarish and deathly in the midst of its desire for life. However, the little ones of *Lilith* display the wish to go *back* into the garden, to become *imago dei*, without acknowledging their *sicut deus*. They fear knowledge, and so prefer not to grow at all. Significantly this is related in *Lilith* to the eating of forbidden fruit (p65): "We were afraid he was growing, for he would not believe anything told him...!", they say of the boy who has been eating apples, and who is destined to grow into a horrible giant. The knowledge of good and evil *does* exist, and the battle between knowledge and trust (or wisdom) cannot be avoided. Vane is made to feel that he should have educated these little ones. But such knowledge requires retranslation, reinterpretation through growth into the 'Christ-self', *agnus dei*, exceeding, rather than reducing *sicut deus*, through the gifted ability to freely will the restoration of the *imago dei* relationship[261]. Faith and knowledge are required to co-exist. Such a co-existence of logic and faith seems impossible. It is this impossibility which requires the God-Man.

We can see also how MacDonald's resistance to dualism as the final word comes about through this awareness that godlike discernment conflicts with *imago dei.* Perhaps he has formerly hoped that the imagination *itself* provides us with *imago dei*, because of its 'imaging' nature. However, he later comes to feel that the imagination itself requires the working of *agnus dei* in order to find its true glory. The shadow-self and the dark imagination is seen to

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[261] *The Seaboard Parish*: "The highest in man is neither his intellect nor his imagination nor his reason; all are inferior to his will....dependent upon it....his will must meet God's – a will distinct from God's else were no harmony possible...not the less, therefore, but the more, is all God's. For God creates in man the power to will His will..."

reflect this *sicut deus* of Bonhoeffer, then, while the emerging Christ-self exists to glorify God through its bringing the imagination back to a relationship with its Creator, whom it 'images', rather than attempting to be like.

Knowledge and Wisdom in *Lilith*

This 'new' wisdom, then, which can no longer be the old, primitive, pre-fallen trust and equally cannot be worldly-wisdom, requires a new approach by the artist (who is intimately involved with the act of 'imaging' the divine) and the theologian who seeks to ensure that knowledge is translated and informed by the grace and truth of *agnus dei.*

On p23 of *The Nature of the Atonement*, Campbell says this:

> Scientific minds...satisfied to take the facts of existence as they present themselves, regarding the contemplation of them as...revelations of a divine mind and as an exercise of speculative thought in which we have no sure footing.... it is not too much to say that what is thus rejected...is what the laws of thought necessitate...thus to stop short of God is, we feel, to do violence to a deep instinct of our being.....it raises our faith to a divine purpose....to that will as the source of their existence. Here we come to the point at which we pass from that in God of which there is an image in man, to that which is distinctive of God as God...we pass from the relation of a reign of law to thought and design using law, to the relation of that reign to thought and design manifested in giving laws their existence....that capacity must be traced to wisdom....

He goes on further to say that (p24)

> ...we cannot lose the living God in the reign of law, if we freely yield ourselves to the necessary relations of thought in our meditation on that reign...still less I may say is this possible in regard to the moral world, although the tendency to rest in law without ascending to God is manifested in relation to moral law also...there is this difference between the laws of the moral universe and those of the physical universe. That we do not trace the existence of the former to an act of will in God, as we do that of the latter....so the differences between the physical universe and the moral universe in respect of law is that the former we trace to the will of God, the latter to what God is...

It seems that here is a context for MacDonald's comment about the taking of moral laws with us into our imaginary worlds, and for his treatment of this theme in 'The Giant's Heart'. He allows, as Campbell advises, not that the law tells us about itself as though it were a form of the knowledge of good and evil, but rather about its origin in its creator. Law is seen as a mediation of God's will rather than as a method of assessing what is or is not God's will. Here, MacDonald's endless 'spectrum' of colour is seen as a promise about the will of God towards the physical universe, as it is mediated. The ' outward

light' of the physical universe and the deathliness of law as a 'thing', finds its true mediation in the 'inner light' of God's mediation of his being in the moral law. The two are only related in that the 'inner' and 'outer' are related through the relation of the imagination with *agnus dei.* Hence Goethe's comments about the 'moral' effect of colours. And so the fulfilment of the physical ultimately *also* finds itself in the being of God himself, but only through the mediation of God's love – this 'inner light' which, although it cannot be obtained through such outer 'natural light', nevertheless enables us to see the outward manifestation of those physical and moral laws in a new light not unharmonious with the natural light of reason. Imagination, then, has its source and end in the 'new creation' of grace, and an indissoluble debt to the realm of morality as the expression of the being of God, whose will brings us into 'being' and into the possibility of 'being in grace' in *agnus dei.*

In *Lilith*, it is the tendency of Vane to appropriate 'outer light' as though it would lead him to the essence of his *own* being in a way which would make him master of the physical universe. This results in a distortion not only of the imagination in relation to the physical universe (for Vane, like Lilith or the fallen shadow, comes to misunderstand his own 'being' or existence, or the nature of his *own* world) but also in a distortion of the relationship between one's own will and the will of God; one's being and the being of God. Further, such a taking of 'outer' light as its own end (the seeking for knowledge as an end in itself, or as a 'power') results in the inability to find out what it is that the 'inner' light mediates as to "what God is", since it is not concerned to be led towards light or grace, but merely to master its mystery. It therefore finds God against itself, in the absence of a mediation through grace of God's character as love. Lilith's will therefore – the mastery and subjugation of her inner light or grace – comes to its natural end in seeing God as 'enemy'; her will works in revolt against her own being, and as *sicut deus* she lives unwillingly in relation to God as the source of her being. We see, then, that MacDonald relates the physical to the moral, as does Campbell, and also makes the same distinction between them, but describes in *Lilith* how it is that they may also act upon one another in destructive ways.

Campbell's location of the apprehension of God's being is characterised as Wisdom, the female figure in *Lilith* represented by Mara, who indicates the link between suffering and wisdom. We see how MacDonald's use of the ancient female figure of 'wisdom', as do

many of his old testament or 'old' covenant references, accentuates Campbell's insistence on the equal priority of grace as wisdom in the old covenant and as prior to the 'natural' light of reason. Further the female personification also differentiates and distances the source of wisdom from the intellect or reason alone, by virtue of making them female characteristics as opposed to male. MacDonald therefore seems to be 'imaging' Campbell's wording. One third effect of this female and suffering image is that he locates wisdom in female 'foolishness'; wisdom in suffering, rather than in mastery, and so remains true to ideas of grace found in both the old testament and the new, where the wise suffering of Christ is seen as foolishness by *sicut deus*, but as the expression of God's wisdom by *Imago dei.* This does not create a dichotomy between such 'wisdom' and reason itself, but only becomes a 'stumbling block' where reason posits *itself* as the location of wisdom, and denies wisdom its primary place as preceding creation itself.

One word which we have been using a lot is 'grace', and central to the idea of grace is the notion of a gift; a free gift which is implied in the term 'covenant' and which, while it entails consequences for the receiver (a concern to attain towards this gift of 'being in grace'), remains *in itself* entirely free. The sense of obligation or 'duty' on the part of the receiver comes from an apprehension of worth of the gift and does not precede or condition the free giving of the gift itself. 'Duty' cannot then be sufficient to define the essential attitude of the religious believer towards the giver of such a gift. Just as morality cannot be taken as a sufficient expression of our relationship to God, when treated as a 'thing in itself'. The little-considered concept of grace is essential, both to MacDonald and to Campbell. Its misunderstanding had led to the related misunderstanding of sacrifice and therefore of the doctrine of atonement which is the theme of Campbell's book.

Misunderstanding of sacrifice[262]

In her book *Sacrifice and the death of Christ,* Young looks at the way in which sacrifice has been interpreted in ancient and various traditions, and considers the interpretations which have affected the Judaic understanding of sacrifice. She calls for understanding of the Jewish sacrifice rather than for alienation from it, because of its association with corrupted ideas. She begins with an overview of the traditions of sacrifice in general and their rationale(s). In pagan religions, she identifies the Votive offering (a form of bribe); the idea of a placation or propitiation of an angry god and also thanksgiving sacrifices, which reflect a 'giving back' to the god of what has been given. There are also aversion sacrifices to ward off evil. She discerns that many of these interpretations have been imported into the Christian concept of Christ's death as sacrifice. Further, she notes that the prophets of the Old Testament frequently speak of the unsatisfactory nature of such attitudes in the offering of sacrifices.

However Young also notes in the Judaic tradition sacrifices which denote a more personal relationship: The communion sacrifice – an early version, which denoted the participation of God with the eating of the sacrifice; sin-offerings, which are seen as provided by God himself; the Passover, which stressed the saving acts of God as merciful and the Day of Atonement – a kind of 'super' sin offering. They are acts which express God's character towards the human being, rather than representing attempts by the human to 'buy' God's attention or love. It is the Atonement offering which is most often alluded to in the Christian interpretation.

At various times, Young notes, the motives behind sacrificing become confused in the histories of religious thought. The most common misunderstanding, she suggests, was the result of the importation of pagan imagery in terms of aversion or propitiation, to interpret the death of Christ in only one or two verses within the New Testament. When Christ's sacrifice is seen in such a way, it is seen to be 'changing' the mind of God, rather than

[262] "Let us emphasise the word "gift." Between on the one hand this denial that involves renouncing the self... the generosity of the gift that must withdraw, hide, in fact sacrifice itself in order to give, and on the other hand the repression that would transform the gift into an economy of sacrifice, is there not a secret affinity, an unavoidable risk of contamination of two possibilities as close one to the other as they are different from each other?" (*The Gift of Death*, p31). So close, in fact, that the receiving of the one by the Christ-self, and the subduing of the 'shadow-self' from its tendency to adopt instead an economy of sacrifice must be an act of God every time it occurs.

representing an attitude which has always remained the same – the attitude of divine love towards the human. The enmity of God comes to be understood as an emotion of God in anthropocentric terms, rather than a sad state in the *relationship* between God and man, because of his becoming *sicut deus*, which God is himself concerned to break down. And so the death of Christ comes to be seen as that which changes or placates God's being, rather than as that which represents most fully the concern of God to mediate his true being in relation to humanity, and to conquer the state of enmity. For enmity is the original false state of being *sicut deus*.

Young notes that the early Christian church was seen by religions as atheistic because of the ending of the concept of sacrifice as being that which changes the attitude of God or the gods. We can see, then, how Lilith's perception of God as enemy is linked to this misunderstanding of atonement in the church which has arisen precisely because of the reliance on false preconceptions in the human mind (rather than on grace) which preconceptions are themselves the result of such a state of enmity.

Misunderstanding of atonement theology

Campbell is especially concerned to correct this ancient confusion as it is inherited by the Federal Calvinist tradition, which says that forgiveness is not prior to repentance; that Christ is not the mediation of God's love; but the propitiation of his anger. In such a theology the emphasis comes to be upon the anger of God and the attention of the individual diverted to a fearful attitude which results in a questioning as to whether forgiveness is truly granted. It is one where repentance is sought for *in itself* as a sign of forgiveness, rather than being experienced as a natural response to the gift of forgiveness or of grace. And so the need within oneself to *feel* accepted is caused by and becomes overwhelmed by the need for repentance, and psychologically blocks its possibility through fear. In such a movement the attention is taken from God's character and placed upon the human character in such a way that it denies in practice the love of God for which it seeks, and hides the nature of the atonement as being that which enables such fear to be overcome. Campbell argues that what is needed is for the individual to stop looking anxiously within for signs and evidences of grace (the assurance of the pagan aversion sacrifice), and to begin to see forgiveness as the free gift which makes possible repentance; and which makes it therefore a joy rather than a fearful duty.

The theology of the overview of the 'plan' results in an emphasis on looking for 'the work' which Christ has done, instead of a gazing upon the character and death of Christ himself as testifying to his own identity as the God-man; fully breaking down the enmity between God and the human being. So the 'works' of Christ come to be more important than Christ himself in such a scheme. The ground of one's own being is removed through this concern with 'selfhood', rather than being affirmed through the mediation of the 'Christ-self' of whom MacDonald speaks. It is such a 'shadow-self', however, in his fiction, which serves some purpose in allowing the person to see that the source of their inner light does not lie within themselves, but upon the existence of a light beyond and behind the colours of its promise; colours which are illuminated by this promise and attract the attention away from the 'shadow self', for (*Lilith*, p240):

> ...without a substance, a shadow cannot be – yea, or without a light behind the substance....

Torrance, in his introduction to Campbell's book, speaks of Jung's insights into the healing of neurosis, in which he speaks of Jesus Christ as functioning "in western society as the numinous paradigm of wholeness (the integrated self)". However, the stress which Jung lays upon the 'function' rather than the person of Christ repeats the mistake where it caused the neurosis emerging from the response to Calvinist doctrine. It seems that this neurotic tendency is particularly what MacDonald has in mind, in his characterisations of selfhood distorted, stunted or incomplete, through an inadequate understanding of the 'grace-informed' nature of reality and being. Lilith herself is characterised as being in the hell of knowing only herself, rather than the light. The culmination of this comes in the moment in which she recognises her self-creation as fictional and yet determining her character, in contrast to the reality of selfhood as grace, presented as a gift (p204):

> ....before her, cast from unseen heavenly mirror, stood the reflection of herself, and beside it a form of splendent beauty. She trembled...she knew the one that God had intended her to be, the other that she had made herself.[263]

The same quality of nightmarish existence is found as characteristic of the loss of faith in other romantic literature. In *The Romantic Period in Germany*, the writer notes (p8) that

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[263] This does not alter the fact that the light is "for her". Campbell notes (p261) what *Lilith* explores "...the great mystery of combined dependence and independence, as presented by our relation to God – the mystery implied in the fact that in God we live, and move, and have our being, and yet that we may be the opposite of what God wills us to be...."

> ...when...faith proved unattainable, the world could take on a nightmare quality and Romantic heroes could fall prey to a nihilism....

Torrance notes that the model which comes to characterise a mistaken view of Christian selfhood is the *appropriation-centred* model which, like Federal Calvinism, lays stress upon the personal benefits and being of the individual in 'appropriating' Christ. This stands in contrast to the *object-centred* model, which concentrates upon the 'other' in the relationship, following St Paul's summons to be baptized into Christ's death, and giving priority to God's activity in Christ, the Christ-self as MacDonald might put it. The parallel to the appropriation-centred model in religious thought may be found in apparently non-religious thinking, wherever stress is laid on the idea that selfhood is determined through the appropriation of 'things' which seem meaningful and contribute to the fictional 'self'. It is found also in the medieval, pre-reformation concept of selfhood as presented in poetry which uses a 'listing' method of concrete things in order to describe and characterise the person.

Selfhood and nihilism

Further, in the appropriation-centred model, faith comes to be viewed as a 'thing in itself', as evidence not of things hoped for, but as separate evidence of one's own standing or salvation, and so paradoxically loses its 'substantial', relational quality. Rather than as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"[264], faith is seen as a form of assent, no longer a substantial connection to, and gift of, the person of Christ, linking God and the human being. Here McLeod Campbell was also truer to Luther's view of faith *as* righteousness – the righteousness communicated by Christ, rather than as some separate 'evidence' of righteousness. Such a belief in faith as a 'thing unto or in itself' parallels the ideas about truth, knowledge, beauty or selfhood as 'things in themselves' which become separated from one another and distorted in such a process. In *Robert Falconer*, the doctrine of imputed righteousness is also distorted by such a view of faith, in that it denies faith its substantial relationship with righteousness, and relies on a fictional concept of Christ's death as being one where God pretends to see Christ's righteousness as ours. It contains the idea that one can 'hide behind' Christ's death

[264] *Hebrews* 11:1

instead of taking part in it as a real and 'gifted' death of false selfhood; *(Robert Falconer*, p298):

> ...not the imputed righteousness of another...that is a lying doctrine...but their own righteousness, which God has wrought in them by Christ.

In turn, the 'giving up' of one's fictional selfhood is no longer perceived to be a separate sacrifice or a mere duty or obligation, but rather becomes a joyful demonstration that one's selfhood can only be 'gifted' in the first place. In the lack of such a conviction, faith becomes inward looking, denying its nature, and binds the thinker to its 'self' rather than moving outwards to a view of all humanity as re-informed by the grace of Christ. And so neurosis develops into loss of the self in this separation of attributes and the killing of them by treating them merely as 'things' to be mastered en route to the attainment of identity – an identity which loses its own ground and becomes a fictional nihilism. So we come also to see the relationship between nihilism and Federal Calvinism as both symptomatic of that 'nothingness' of 'things in themselves' which posit themselves as things or as a 'nothing' which precedes or succeeds, and so separates itself from the influence of grace. The negative way or theology of MacDonald, in *Lilith*, becomes illustrative of the painful route often taken towards grace in the development of religious thinking. Not-grace cannot precede grace, 'nothingness' becomes simply non-being – for which Lilith longs – but a fiction which must admit its fictionality and so eventually turn towards grace as its origin and ground of being. It must cease to attempt death on its own terms or it 'dies' as reality. Death as it presents itself as a separate 'nothingness' or as the end of reality is therefore rendered a fiction, since it must be preceded by grace or lose its power of reality. It must become – by the acceptance of its gifted nature, a good, real and gifted death. The alternative is only that it continues to exist as a nightmarish fiction which has no 'being' and therefore cannot truly die. This is one interpretation of death and nihilism in relation to the mistaken development of atonement theology and its associated philosophy of knowledge as it is foreseen and looked back on in *Lilith.*

The tendency to evade grace in religious thought

Vane, however, must *also* accept the mystery of his relationship to God as the grounds of his being as an act of grace mediated through faith. And so, although he becomes aware of the fact that death as 'end' is challenged by its own nature, resurrection as 'end' in terms of the final word of history cannot be deduced *either* as a logical necessity of being,

but is different from nihilism in that exists in the wisdom of hope as opposed to the denial of wisdom through self-knowledge. That female figure, Wisdom, is one who in the Biblical literature is present before the world was formed out of 'nothingness'.

And just as 'nothingness' cannot offer a challenge to the wisdom of Mara, who exists before it, so 'being' as understood by one who is himself created being cannot claim any privileged ground *of its own* from which to challenge this nihilism. Both are preceded by grace. The wisdom which challenges nihilism is itself 'gift', but one whose relationship with God exists outwith - before – the existence of the world of self-conscious history in the realm of mystery, and is mediated through faith alone. As such, it cannot inform Vane or MacDonald in a way which can be appropriated by the imagination to make it work for a venture of that being's own conceiving. We see this in Vane's failed attempt to adopt the vision of Isaiah and make it work in confirmation of his *own* being. Such a vision remains *entirely* apocalyptic in its challenge to reality. And perhaps this provides the most and only appropriate context for MacDonald's final and apocalyptic sense of the direction in which grace-informed reality tends as it is expressed in that novel, in the end of the human imagination and the beginning of its own end in the divine[265], end of *Lilith*:

"Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one."

'The Light Princess'

In this story, in particular, we can see a complete illustration of the attitude which is characteristic of exactly the subject-centred atonement theology with which Campbell was wrestling. MacDonald provides a psychological illustration of this state of mind, which consists in a lack of recognition of identity of, or responsibility towards the 'other'. In the story, we are introduced to a Princess who has no gravity (perhaps this is equated with

[265] Perhaps, then, he is changing the emphasis upon what is noted by McGillis, but in more theological terms: "...MacDonald's prose suggests that Fane has recovered reality, attained identity, which – as Frye tells us – has 'some connection with a state of existence in which there is nothing to write about'. ('The *Lilith* Manuscripts', 1975). This is an apprehension of a state of existence in which there is nothing to write *about*, yet the task of writing clearly must go on, beyond and outwith the fulfilment of MacDonald's personal vision in its being taken up into the realms of apocalyptic vision – for the task of the reader has only just begun at the end of *Lilith* – he is send back to the start – every new interpretation must culminate in an apocalypse of identity for the reader, or it becomes locked into the nightmarish cycle of logic, and of Vane's experience inside of time. This is also borne out by McGillis's further comment in the essay (p51) that in the manuscript Lilith B, "MacDonald stresses Vane's resistance to learning" (or perhaps a better work would be wisdom – for learning as a 'thing in itself' is clearly not the aim.

responsibility). She discovers, however, that she can *relieve the symptoms* of this lack of gravity temporarily by swimming in water. Her 'lightness' is not a true happiness because it does not correspond to a genuine gravity, however, for (p24)

> ...only in her laugh there was something missing. What it was, I find myself unable to describe. I think it was a certain tone, depending on the possibility of sorrow...she never smiled.

We can note here that this is different to the lack of smile of Falconer's grandmother; which is related to the 'deepness' of the smile of the child in 'The Golden Key'. Here the lack is a true lack, that which has not yet apprehended the nature of the Prince's sacrifice and the meaning of the 'water' of salvation, rather than reflecting an inability to express that reality. Whereas the absence of smiles in these other two characters are portraits of something inexpressible or represent the suppression of symbolism with regard to the death and life of Christ, the Princess may be more closely aligned to another outcome of the same distorted atonement theology, James Hogg's Wringhim in his *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. In the novel, the result of the theology is an antinomian tendency to feel that one's inner state (or gravity) is unimportant. All that matters is that, because of Christ's death and forgiveness, we are free to do exactly what we like without conscience. The 'outer' world is utterly divorced from the 'inner' in this tendency.

The Princess's concentration on her own well-being and utter lack of regard for the Prince's suffering which brings it to her seem characteristic of the problems found in the subject-centred theology:

> When the princess heard that a man had offered to die for her, she...danced about the room for joy...she did not care who the man was; that was nothing to her. The hole wanted stopping; and if only a man would do, why, take one.

There are a number of further motifs in the story which confirm that it is the atonement theory of 'imputed righteousness' found in *Robert Falconer* which is on MacDonald's mind. The characters of Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck, the Chinese metaphysicians who are called in to solve the princess's problem are interpreted by the notes as being an allusion to Hume and Kant, materialists and metaphysicians alike who try to *explain* the nature of being and whose thinking is reflected in the 'natural light' which Federal Calvinism relies upon to explain the 'plan' of salvation. In *Robert Falconer*, MacDonald makes his own

interpretation of such Chinese Puzzlers as are found in 'The Light Princess', where the subject is, specifically, the view of atonement (p99)

> ...nor was it as the Chinese puzzlers called Scotch metaphysicians, might have represented it...

Further on in the story, the allusions become stronger. In the feeding of the bits of biscuit and wine to the Prince as he is dying, we find a distinct reference to the Eucharist. Then, in a reference to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ asks the disciples to stay awake with him, the Prince of MacDonald's story says

> ...now for your own sake...I cannot let you go to sleep. You must sit and look at me....

Finally the Prince dies, "...the bubbles of his last breath bubbled up through the water...." And the image here is very powerful, and the implications profound, for it is seen that it is the distorted religious impulse itself; the concentration upon the 'water' of salvation, which has caused the death of the Prince...a demand for death which is fed by the self-ishness and lack of gravity of the Princess and of the wider people of that land; their lack of responsibility. No-one from that country volunteers to die and the Prince comes from a different country.

It is, however, through an awakened love for the Prince that the Princess at last gains a gravity which has more to with "...this rain indoors" which was "far more wonderful than the rain out of doors". Here, MacDonald seems to be presenting us with a more thorough link between gravity and an 'inner' transformation. It is one which illuminates and corresponds with a wider 'outer' reality of water in general, but which illustrates an atonement theology which concentrates upon the inner growth and gift of grace (the tears), rather than upon the appropriation without responsibility of the benefits of this mysterious grace[266]. It is the knowledge of a personal – and sacrificial love, rather than hearsay about

[266] Bearing in mind what we noted earlier about the little ones of *Lilith* in relation to Bonhoeffer's thinking on the impossibility of simply returning (via some short cut) to the state of *imago dei* of the Garden of Eden without this inner transformation, we should note how they, too, have never experienced this 'inner' water, and are amazed at Vane's tears. Perhaps they are associated with the simple trust (still applauded by MacDonald, as any attitude of trust is), which dares not to radically question itself, and does not grow much from assent into personal faith, but is ill-equipped to deal with the 'giants' of the age. It is nevertheless these little ones who call forth the tears from Vane. Interestingly, they have a 'general assembly', with the allusion, perhaps, to the general assembly of the Church of Scotland here (p63): "now and then they would call a general assembly to amuse me...on one such occasion a moody little fellow sang me a song that...caused the tears to run down my face..."

the results of a distant sacrifice, which causes the response of love and the gravity (or responsibility) in the Princess herself.

McLeod Campbell's motivation for writing his book about the nature of the atonement was mainly to do with the lack of joy he discovered amongst his parishioners, who were constantly worrying about whether or not they were elect, and were either forced into despair, or into an inflated assurance based on the perception of their own 'good' works as evidence of their salvation, or into the cavalier attitude of Hogg's Wringhim (*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner),* treating the atonement as a work to free him from guilt, rather than as a statement about the nature of selfhood in relation to God. It is this last effect of that theological interpretation which seems to be dealt with in 'The Light Princess' by MacDonald, as its many other effects are dealt with in *Robert Falconer* and elsewhere in his work.

In 1831 Campbell was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland because of his insistence that Christ died for all; a universal expression of God's love for the entire human race. He then continued to preach up until 1870 in an independent church in Blackfriars Street. His theology has since been re-adopted by the church as more truly reflecting the work of the atonement.

In contrast to the anxious seeking for an assurance of Christian *selfhood,* both Campbell's and MacDonald's work was concerned with finding descriptions of the way in which Christ's identity is transforming of all previous notions of selfhood. They did not, however, conceive of this transformation in terms of a loss of connection with the material world, but rather as a work of grace which is seen as the basis of human 'being'. Accordingly, they affirm identity through familial imagery – brotherhood, sisterhood, fatherhood and sonship - seeing it as *primarily* relational. Just as the work of the intellect, of reason, or of imagination similarly finds the identity 'being' its true self only when its creaturely, yet divinely connected, nature is mediated to itself from a relationship with some, greater 'other'.

We shall look at the nature of the identity of bodies next in more detail, in terms of Graham Ward's thoughts about Christian identity in relation to the body of Christ as illuminating the mediation of Christian identity.

B. 'The Golden Key', Goethe's Colour Theory and Graham Ward's 'The Displaced body of Jesus Christ'

Radical Orthodoxy

In their book of essays, having the above title, Ward, Milbank and Pickstock in the introduction speak of their return to a certain orthodoxy, and of its avoiding certain pitfalls in the wake of secularisation (p2):

> ...both Protestant biblicism and post-tridentine Catholic positivist authoritarianism are seen as aberrant results of theological distortions already dominant even before the early modern contemporary theological project. (they argue of their theology that) ...it does not, like liberal theology, transcendentalist theology and even certain styles of neo-orthodoxy seek...to shore up universal accounts of immanent human value (humanism) nor defences of supposedly objective views. But nor does it indulge...in a baptism of nihilism in the name of a misconstrued negative theology...(it) may indeed hover close to nihilism, since it, also, refuses a reduction of the indeterminate...yet distances itself from it.....in its proposal of the rational possibility and the faithfully perceived actuality, of an indeterminacy that is no impersonal chaos but infinite interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates

In this section it is argued that MacDonald has such a 'radical orthodoxy': also coming near to a negative theology; also refusing to reduce the indeterminate; also celebrating an harmonious order in which time participates. In particular, we shall look at Ward's essay in relation to the body of Christ, and how such a theology relates to MacDonald's fiction and thinking.

Introduction

Many of MacDonald's works of fiction seem to take place in an 'in-between' time or times. For example, in MacDonald's short story 'The Shadows', Ralph Rinkelman is enabled to see the shadows only as he nears death, and those tales where the protagonists come across the strange new definitions of things in another world occur when they are journeying between stages of life and moving into a greater sense of life by means of a series of deaths or baptisms. Vane's journey is also one in which his ideas about 'ends' and 'beginnings', about reality and his own desires and identity are all destabilised. These 'in-between' ventures into fairyland are all about the destabilisation of common conceptions of corporeality, time, ethics and identity itself, by way of a gap or space.

This destabilisation should be linked first to MacDonald's concern about the way in which Christian identity is portrayed within the church, and it allies him to McLeod Campbell.

MacDonald's feeling, as we have seen repeatedly, is that the church – both the universal church, which finds its identity in the body of Christ; and the churches, which seek to grow into that identity – must come to understand the nature of corporeality and identity in terms of this destabilisation and in terms of a certain new understanding of bodiliness.

His fiction, then, does not function as apocalyptic in the sense that the 'apocalypse' is to do with some distant, eschatological horizon or final revelation, the content of which is taken for granted. Instead, by making use of 'in-between' time (for example dusk, half-light, sleep and dreaming), it helps to reinterpret eschatology in such a way that it cannot be taken for granted, for it is also an apocalypse or uncovering of the 'taken' reality of things like bodies and time as defined by 'natural light', wherever they are perceived to be functioning – prior to grace - as the mistaken basis for Christian eschatology. R F McGillis notes that in manuscripts B and C of *Lilith,* MacDonald actually uses the word 'eschatology', but then drops it[267]. This shows that such things are on his mind, but also that he is concerned to distance his interpretation of Christian identity from theories about eschatology which are formed by 'natural light' and which claim to have some 'extra' knowledge of the overall plan outwith that which is personally revealed by a grace-informed destabilisation. Such an eschatology merely conditions or modifies ideas which exist in the present, whereas MacDonald's interpretation of identity in Christ is that it must function as a destabilising *symbol* which apocalyptically transforms the present; bringing it into active conflict with other notions of identity which have at their base such a 'natural' understanding. He is not seeking to separate nature and grace, as we saw in the last section, but to bring this theo-logic of grace to bear on all areas of understanding, including theology and logic, so that a new harmony emerges which exceeds and informs logical argument. It should be clear by now, then, that we are not arguing that MacDonald's work can only be understood by means of theology, but that theology itself, along with all other studies, stands under the judgment of this new economy of grace. We saw in the last section how his insistence on the importance of symbolic understanding in theological thought relates to his similarity with Campbell in insisting upon the symbol as expressing both a universal reordering of the concept of being (not merely an individual 'feeling' or perception) which occurs as a result of Christ's life and death. And this brings them both into conflict with the theology of their own time.

[267] p56, 'The *Lilith* Manuscripts'

His fiction may be seen to function as an anticipation of the comments which will be made by Graham Ward, in his essay upon the interpretation of the "displaced" body of Christ. We will quote fully from its beginning, in order to introduce a basis for discussion of this essay:

> Karl Barth announced that theology is always a post-resurrection phenomenon working within an eschatological horizon. Theology reads Scripture, the traditions of the Church and the world in the light of the glory of the Risen Christ in the space opened between that resurrection and our own. While not wishing to contradict that, I want to argue for the place of the ascension in Christianity. This nascent theology of the ascension will...attempt to demonstrate, through this approach, how questions such as 'Can a male Saviour save women?' and modern investigations into the sexuality of Jesus, which simply continue the nineteenth century rational search for the historical Jesus, fail to discern the nature of corporeality in Christ. *For these approaches take the human to be a measure of the Christic...*[268](my italics). I wish to argue that, since none of us has access to bodies as such, only to bodies that are mediated through the giving and receiving of signs, the series of displacements and assumptions of Jesus's body continually refigures a masculine symbolics until the particularities of one sex give way....It traces the economy of the deferred identity of the body of the Messiah; an economy which becomes visible in a series of displacements.... [269]

I wish to argue that the deferment of the presence of Christ's body is clearly seen in *Lilith*, in relation to its being a novel about such a deferment of meaning which has radically destabilised Vane's previous concepts about identity and sexuality and, indeed, has exposed the flaws in his previous apocalyptic 'hopes', where they are yet contaminated by the old, 'natural', interpretations of self-centred thinking and apparently apparent (yet preconceived) notions of reality. Further, MacDonald has shown in his essays that he has paid specific attention to the way in which Christ's body is presented in scripture[270].

We should note also that MacDonald himself will be aware of this nineteenth century search referred to by Ward, and is also finding that the insufficiency of this approach has

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[268] Chesterton's observation that in MacDonald's stories all people become kings, queens and princesses may be seen to be emerging from a vivid sense of a potentially *universal* priesthood bestowed on humanity by Christ, which in turn makes creation alive as it is perceived from the gaze of such a new humanity.

[269] 'The displaced body of Jesus Christ', *Literature and Theology*, p163,

[270] For example, in his essay on 'The Resurrection' (Miracles of our Lord, p431), he asks "Why was this miracle needful? Perhaps, for one thing, that man should not limit Him, or themselves in Him, to the known forms of humanity...that their instinctive desires....might thus be infinitely developed." He says, further, in defence of his concentration upon the manner of Christ's bodily appearance (p438): "Some will object that this is a too material view of life...in my theory, the spiritual both explains and accounts for the material."

its root in the distortion of atonement theology, namely the taking of 'things in themselves' by means of merely accepting them 'as they appear to be' in the natural light of reason. Both the nineteenth and twentieth century tendencies of thought to take the human as a given measure of reality are approaches which alike "take the human to be a measure of the Christic", perhaps in justified *reaction* to the transcending tendencies of religious thought. Destabilisation is the very first movement towards disrupting such appearances. R F McGillis has noted that:

> MacDonald shows a greater concern for states of being rather than for the more theological question of man and God.[271]

However in this context we can see that in MacDonald's last work of fiction, theological questions about apocalyptic vision and eschatology are just some among many which cannot be approached until the Christic has first become the measure and source of "being" itself, and none of these questions can be treated separately from one another on such a view.

Both Ward and MacDonald are looking at the gap, space, or in-between time in symbolic terms as indicating that there is something further to say about this reality in which we find ourselves.

Liminality and borders

The next concept which occurs in relation to both Ward's and MacDonald's thought is that of *liminality.* Ward notes in the essay:

> Displacement of identity itself, the expansion of the identified Word to embrace all that is other, becomes the mark of God within creation. Iconicity transcends physicality. It does not erase the physical but overwhelms it, drenching it with significance. The maleness of Christ is made complex and ambivalent, in the way that all things are made ambivalent as their symbolic possibilities are opened up by their liminality.

Ward speaks of the gradual withdrawing of Christ's body in previously understood terms of 'bodiliness' as being marked by stages in the biblical narratives: Incarnation, transfiguration[272], crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. At each stage, previously

[271] p56, 'The *Lilith* Manuscripts'

[272] in MacDonald's essay on 'The transfiguration' (*Miracles of Our Lord*, p440) he notes particularly how light appears as the sign of life; an overflowing of life: "..except by violence I do not think the body of Jesus could have died...the transfiguration of Jesus was but the visible outbreak of a life so strong as to be life-giving, life-restoring. The flesh it could melt

marked borders which have sought to contain and explain the identity of Christ are lifted away until, finally, a complete withdrawal allows for the symbol to be all-embracing, yet itself borderless; that which allows the 'body' of the church to grow and to identify with the body of Christ; and so with the borderless kingdom of heaven.

We can see the tendency in MacDonald's fiction to move in the same direction. Firstly, in the way in which the characters of his stories grow and journey in relation to reality in strange ways, which model themselves on the Christic development, as we noted at the beginning of the section. Secondly, in the related emphasis on the liminality which accompanies such movement and growth into being and meaning. The borders in Fairyland are impossible to point to, and we have looked at this in relation to 'The Giant's Heart'. In 'The Golden Key', the rainbow exists as a spectrum whose borders cannot be defined by any one colour, there being colours beyond the red and before the violet. In *Lilith*, Vane's explorations lead him to a delimiting of the familiar borders of time and place and of the nature of physical being, even so that he comes to doubt the nature of his own existence.

Lilith in particular links this gradual withdrawal of previous notions of 'being' to the gradual dawning of the appearance of Christ "the beautifullest man"[273]. However, significantly, this appearance is heard about indirectly rather than seen by Vane himself, and in this way MacDonald demonstrates the liminality of which he speaks in not making of the novel a 'complete' vision, drawn in itself by borders or boundaries marked by intellectual or imaginative *con*ception. He is thus encouraging the tendency in textuality itself towards this Word which is characterised by endless interpretation, which cannot be contained in all the books or interpretations which might be written. It indicates that he is aware of the nature of writing as a sign functioning only truly in its relation to the symbolism granted it by allowing an illimitable presence of meaning or significance.

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away and evermore renew...a body thus responsive to and interpenetrative of light, which is the visible life...would never have died." We should carefully note here that MacDonald is not saying that Jesus was not human in every way, but that he was human in the fullest sense, as God intended all humans to be, for this 'life', MacDonald attributes to nothing less than purity of spirit, making it clear that the physical and spiritual are connected in every way.

[273] *Lilith*, p247.

Liminality and sight

Such liminality can be seen both directly and indirectly in 'The Golden Key' in its allusions to *Faust*. Burwick notes that Goethe made use in his *Faus*t of the results of his experiments with prisms. In these he noted the presence of black and white crosses which, although only viewed in succession by the human eye, seem to exist simultaneously; the relation between poles remaining outwith the assessment of human eyesight. Burwick thinks that in *Faust,* he links this cross to the figure of Christ in the form of the child Homunculus (p93):

> ...born of the positive negative coincidence of entoptic polarity, could represent for Goethe, the mercurial liminality of perception...in his final scene he becomes a Christ, waiting to be born again.

Again, we see that Goethe, in particular, concentrates upon the perceptual aspects of liminality in relation to Christ, which leads him to speculate upon the relationship between the poles; between light and darkness, where MacDonald concentrates on Christ himself, as the source of such unfathomable liminality. And such an identification of the phenomenon with Christ-ian thinking is only perceived as 'limit' if one does not allow that this belief cannot exist academically but is held as a relationship to reality which undermines all preconceptions of one's own, in regard to the nature of 'being'. The very nature of Christ-centred thought evades and eludes any claim of intellectual ownership or limit. For MacDonald, liminality is personal, and is related not so much to the abstractions of the sexes or of the poles, but instead to the reciprocity of desire; of the gaze with which the child holds Tangle. The "positive negative coincidence" between black and white is stilled in the grey of the child's eyes, as Tangle perceives and is informed by the presence of the child, the Old Man of the Fire (pp139-140, *The Complete Fairy Tales*):

> She stood looking for a long time, for there was fascination in the sight....for seven years she had stood there watching the naked child....and it seemed to her seven hours...there was such an awfulness of absolute repose on the face of the child that Tangle stood dumb before him. He had no smile, but the love in his large gray eyes was deep as the centre. And with the repose there lay on his face a shimmer as of moonlight, which seemed as if any moment it might break into such a ravishing smile as would cause the beholder to weep himself to death...but the smile never came....

The liminality perceived by MacDonald in the person of Christ is, then, one which finds itself assured by such liminality rather than perplexed by its inability to see beyond the "grey", or to make black and white stand still. For this greyness, dusk or liminality indicates a 'good' end and informs also the 'life' of natural vision; as opposed to being

that which must be overcome by explanation. Harmony, as MacDonald notes, is not the same as explanation or repose. The child does not explain anything to Tangle, but his presence reassures her and enables her to walk unharmed through the middle of this terrible "red" battle between black and white. While MacDonald, in his essay on the imagination, has said that what can be known must be known 'severely', here we come to the excess; to what cannot be known in its entirety. The child, further, is served by the serpent, in anticipation of a new relation between the woman and the serpent, previously marked by a curse in *Genesis*[274]. This allusion has connotations both of sexuality and of the knowledge of good and evil, and also can be seen to be alluding to a new order of 'being', which can reinterpret the curse of helplessly knowing good and evil as a blessing which brings one to the knowledge of Christ[275]. Again, such a transformation cannot be translated onto a plan or general order, but is that which must be experienced, rather than speculated upon. And this is where Hogg's Wringhim falls foul of a theology which races ahead of experience, replacing faith with knowledge.

Desire

Ward himself also interprets the relationship to Christ in terms of desire; a deeply personal desire. In speaking of the way in which Christ's maleness is reinterpreted, he comments (p166):

> The erotic economy propels our desire towards what lies beyond and yet does so in and through this man's particular body. This economy of desire does not deny the possibility of a sexual element; it does not prevent or stand in critical judgement of a sexual element. It simply overflows the sexual such that we cannot, without creating a false and idolatrous picture of Christ, turn this man into an object for our sexual appropriation...he exceeds appropriation...

In 'The Light Princess' especially, we find such elements of desire, in the gaze of the Princess, which is commanded by the Prince, and which is exceeded by the transformation which takes place 'in and through' the Prince and is clearly interpreted by the allusion to the Eucharist. It is precisely this clearly sexual element combined with the religious – this non-avoidance of the physical - that made some contemporary religious critics of MacDonald nervous about the story. And we have already noted the element of desire in the above passage of 'The Golden Key'. Sexuality is both suggested and overflowed in

[274] Genesis 3:14: "So the Lord God said to the serpent...you are cursed more than all cattle....And I will put enmity between you and the woman....he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel..."
[275] As we saw in relation to Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Temptation*

this 'grey' gaze, in the sensuality and yet coolness of the skin of the child's body and in the subduing of the serpent. The smile which might suggest some premature completion or roundedness "never came". Greyness is then linked both with the overcoming of polarity and with the promise of an excess of the male-female; light-dark, understanding of the concepts of polarity and sexual identity. Mary St John, with her grey eyes and her male/female name, in *Robert Falconer*, is also linked to the overflowing of such identity in terms of colour. In the novel she is initially an object of desire, but the relationship between Falconer and herself, and his perception of her identity as mere 'woman' is transformed through their mutual attraction to Christ, as it transforms the nature and perception of their own desires:

> Tears had changed her bright-hued hopes into a dove-coloured submission, through which her mind was passing towards a rainbow dawn such as she had never dreamed of.

In turn, this overflowing of desire is linked by MacDonald to the covenant and its 'promise' of atonement through the common motif of the rainbow in both the novel and the story.

The Gaze and Desire

This 'gaze' alluded to by both Ward and MacDonald is also recorded in the experiments of Goethe himself:

> ...the entoptic figure reveals something more than reciprocity...the eye looking into the tempered glass sees another eye, not its own image, looking back....[276]

Like the exceeding of polarity or sexual desire, this 'gaze' upon Christ is not merely reciprocal; there remains an excess, which is both reassuring and frightening to Tangle. As Ward notes that Christ exceeds appropriation, we find also the direction from which both MacDonald and Campbell resist the appropriation-centred models of atonement, which are bound to limit and distort desire. We also examined the gaze of the princess upon the Prince in the story of the Light Princess, and noted there, too, how she was lifted out of the question of her appropriation of the water for her own good; and how her desire is not suppressed or diminished, but increased and given life in this new kind of gaze; of looking and wanting. Here, liminality functions as indicative of an excess of meaning; as exceeding human desire. And we noted earlier that Derrida alludes to the terrifying nature

[276] Burwick, p90

of this excess of reciprocity, as one is 'held' by the gaze of God. This is the gaze of God, God's desire for us, intense, yet mediated in the greyness of the child's eyes. There is an exceeding of reciprocity; of the gaze of desire, in this perception of atonement, because of Christ's identity as God; while the gaze is yet bearable, not only because it is mediated through the sympathetic humanity of Christ, but because such a divine humanity is enabled to transform the nature of our own desire and concept of bodiliness.

Therefore greyness itself comes to function as an expansion for MacDonald, being the first condition for an excess of 'grace' which enables light to emerge in the 'bearable' colours of the rainbow as a promise which transforms past, present and future reality. Whereas for Goethe black and white signify the battle between light and darkness itself, in MacDonald's work they tend to be interpreted in grey, by the presence of colours in the rainbow as an all-embracing promise; one which reinterprets not only sexuality, but any form of a conflict based on opposites. In this, too, he deconstructs the rhetoric of power which lies behind the idea of a 'confrontation' between sexes or a battle between light and darkness.

Desire and meaning

In relating desire to meaning, and thinking back to Goethe's experiments and the seeming simultaneous presence of black and white crosses, we should note Prickett's quotes Berggren upon the way in which symbolic understanding itself functions[277]:

> ...the possibility requires...the ability to entertain two points of view at the same time...a new sort of reality is achieved which cannot survive except at the intersection of the two perspectives which produced it...

So we can see, too, how this 'greyness' of the intersection between the black and white crosses of the prism, which cannot be viewed at the same time, represents not a mixing of black and white themselves, as though we could objectively view Christ in himself, but serves as a metaphor for the nature of symbolism itself in relation to Christ – both fully God and fully man. In the context of this mediation, opposites are reconciled not through compromise, but through a new sort of relationship which does not deny differentiation, but does not interpret it as 'being' in opposition. This 'fully God and fully Man' appears to us by the natural light of reason as a greyness which confounds black and white logic; but it is from this mysterious greyness that all the 'graceful' colours of MacDonald's

[277] p27, *For the Childlike.*

world emerge. And this is translated into all of his stories. So Photogen and Nycteris are united and the result is a *new*, and fuller, sight, rather than a negotiated sight which must concede or compromise its own nature. The symbol, like the colours of interpretation which it produces, cannot be 'explained' by successive references to black and white; male and female, divine and human, as though such forms of being were 'taken' as read, but only by this new kind of understanding or reading of reality through symbolism; the symbolism which MacDonald himself recommends on the basis that it is used in the Bible to communicate the 'highest truths'. And as Ward notes, all identity is transformed or refigured by the absence of Christ's body from sight and rescued from objectification, because it imparts a substantial, symbolic understanding to our notions and signs of being and identity.

Lust and the desire for meaning

While Tangle seems more passive, Mossy seems to demonstrate more what Burwick describes as "a lust for light" in Goethe (p87):

> Were he not impelled by a lust for light, the "truber Gast" would passively await...the rainbow caress of the passing day. But impelled as he is...the transitory is not enough...

This may also be seen as echoed in *Lilith* (p229), where we are told that "women are coming home faster....". Despite the fact that men – Mossy – seem to be racing ahead, the destabilising of time and the importance of 'receiving' identity as opposed to gaining it for Tangle, betray in Mossy a certain concept of desire as 'lack' in the pursuit. Mossy's active pursuit of the rainbow, as it parallels Vane's pursuit of knowledge as a 'thing in itself' will bring him eventually into what he seeks, but without the measure of understanding granted to Tangle in her more passive instinct to obey while yet "in the transitory", so transforming the transitory. Vane will come to this passive state of waiting within the transitory, but only after a long struggle to dominate and appropriate the object of his desire, continually losing his end and beginning in the objectifying of that desire. For although time seems to stand still for Tangle, and years pass, Mossy finds her in the rainbow before him, so reflecting the transformation of time itself. Again, we see reflections here of the way in which MacDonald addresses the troubles and pain caused in a mistaken 'appropriation' of Christ's person in the theology of atonement. Not allowing the Christic to inform one's own human identity, but seeking to apply the human intellect

in an attempt to gain a prior understanding of the Christic, without reference to the nature of symbolic understanding itself, as *given and received*; as the bread of life itself.

Freudian interpretations of MacDonald

Ward notes the difference between the structure of Christian desire on this Christic interpretation, and the structure of the desire of 'lack' (p172):

> ...structural function of lack in the economies of desire in Hegel, Freud and Lacan...in none of these foundational origins which bring about separations or alienation...do we ever consciously participate...belonging to pre-self, pre-linguistic consciousness (whereas)...the structure of Christian desire is, significantly, twofold – not only my desire, but God's desire for me. It is this twofoldedness which characterises participation. The self is fissured in such participation and fissured endlessly...

The difference is related specifically to language and meaning. In MacDonald's use of symbolism, Christ is understood as informing the symbolic logic and order of reality. Reality is given excessive meaning by such an order, rather than being a 'something' which exists prelinguistically or prior to the individual's awareness of Christ. While the Federal Calvinists refer to a natural 'something' which precedes the informing of the world with grace in the symbol of Christ's death and resurrection, MacDonald, again, in his emphasis on symbolic understanding, in his essay 'Individual Development' does not conceive of a state of being which is outside of that symbol. For even though the child comes into an awareness of being *through* the symbol's mediation of itself in signs of language, he has always remained inside of the reality which it signifies, although not aware of it; for meaning exceeds the awareness of it. This is because, in MacDonald's atonement theology, the emphasis is not upon the *appropriation* of the symbolic. The 'pre-linguistic' stage becomes, then, not a stage of 'pre-being' but merely pre-awareness of being. For MacDonald grounds "being" in Christ, who precedes and informs being, as the symbol, informs the substance of reality even when that reality it is not capable of articulating itself[278]. Meaning does not reside in self-consciousness, which to MacDonald is "the hell of hells". Self-consciousness, which *also* emerges with the grasp of language, forms itself as existing against or in opposition to the mediation of 'being' in Christ. With language comes self-consciousness and therefore choice, not 'being'. As seen in *Lilith,*

[278] And this may be why he became known as a universalist, holding the view, like Campbell, that all creation is brought universally into a new relationship with God and with reality through the atonement of Christ; the only difference being whether such a relationship is unconscious, consciously opposed or consciously willing.

self-consciousness may take the form of a refusal to acknowledge the nature of being. With that comes the taking away from language of the source of its meaning, and causes it to experience meaninglessness.

And so in MacDonald's thought, different forms of linguistic consciousness are reflected in different concepts of responsibility – which he perceives as primarily emerging through trusting relationships, rather than through the modern anxiety of the 'law' of being which characterises self-consciousness. We can note here the emphasis which MacDonald lays on obedience in his essay on individual development, then, as an expression of consciousness as relationship, rather than as the self-consciousness which questions that relationship, by positing the self in relation to the law as an abstraction.

MacDonald, then, shows himself as anticipating, and aware of exceeding, the grounds of Freudian constructs of desire in their concentration upon the structural 'lack' in concepts of pre-linguistic selfhood, which think of the 'sign' but do not take account of the substantial nature of the symbol, where this has manifested itself in the religious anxiety surrounding atonement theology. And so he reinterprets in advance those Freudian interpretations which have been taken from his work, notably by Robert Lee Wolff.

The dead gaze

In the structural 'lack' of subject or appropriation-centred thought, the anxiety which emerges about the grounds of the self or being in relation to reality is seen in the 'dead gaze', alluded to in the writing of both MacDonald and Coleridge[279]:

> "Look there" said Ericson, Robert looked up. Close about the moon were a few white clouds. Upon these white clouds, right over the moon, and near as the eyebrow to an eye, hung part of an opalescent halo...the full moon, half formed the white pupil; the whole was a perfect eye of ghastly death...

This is set in connection with the character of Morison, one who is described as looking "...to himself, and not to the atonement". It also seems to be a reference to Coleridge's 'Limbo', quoted by Burwick in relation to the thinking of Goethe (p231):

> Yet having moon-ward turned his face by change –
> Gazes the orb with moon-like countenance
> With scant white hairs, with foretop bald and high
> He gazes still, his eyeless face all eye

[279] *Robert Falconer*,p235.

Here we can see that MacDonald's use of the 'eye' motif in *Lilith* also refers in his work to a self-consciousness which stands in opposition to true 'being'. Such an eye remains blind, for all its looking. Again, such a motif is connected to what we noted of subject-centred atonement theology, which is characterised by a lack of trust; an anxious need to ground the self and establish it in opposition to all other realities: In *Robert Falconer* Morison wishes: "If God be thinking me....ah...but if he be only dreaming me....."[280] Ward notes that in Christian desire, "the self is fissured...and fissured endlessly", there being no boundary apparent which can define the self to the self as a ground of identity or reality. Morison wishes to be "thought" rather than "dreamed", indicating the anxiety in his desire.

Being

Vane, by contrast, comes to exist for the reader – or to disappear - in this fissuring of himself. He is no longer one who merely seeks the violin, like the boy Falconer, but is one who comes to feel that he *is* the violin, existing more and more purely in terms of a relationship to his creator. Perhaps MacDonald is remembering Falconer in relation to the violin (*Lilith* p251):

> ...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...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!...I have never again sought the mirror...I was Adam...I was not Adam.

He expresses his hope in this fissuring, by contrast to Morison, in the words of Novalis, as quoted earlier: "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one...".

Ward goes on to note in considering being, that (p168):

> In Greco-Roman culture (of bodies)... "the differentiation between the inner and outer body was fluid and permeable..."

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[280] *Robert Falconer*, p214. However, even in this, to Falconer "...such words, falling from such a man, were to him as dim breaks of coloured light from the rainbow walls of the heavenly city." Therefore he does not condemn Morison's fear, but sees in it evidence of the longing of the man for more knowledge of God. It is possible that Ericson is modelled on his brother John, who died in early middle age, and whose outlook was characterised by a great but tragic sort of hope. Such a hope to MacDonald is better than an ill-founded certainty, which betrays a certain arrogance (p216): "If there is no God, let me know it" Yet in his misery, he cried upon God.

It seems that MacDonald has recovered this aspect of thinking about the self in relation to reality, through his concentration upon the meaning of 'being' in relation to Christ. Ward goes on to quote (p168):

> For most people of Greco-Roman culture the human body was of a piece with its environment. The self was a precarious, temporary state of affairs, constituted by forced surrounding and pervading the body....the body is perceived as a location in a continuum of cosmic movement

This is the initial adjustment which is required of Vane when he is originally addressed by the Raven in relation to his own selfhood in what seems initially to be a strange and new world, which may only be understood symbolically, at the beginning of the novel. But later, as promised, it comes to him in relation to his perception of the outer as well as the inner world, going somewhat further than would be expected (*Lilith* p251):

> ...I look round on my books, they seem to waver as if a wind rippled their solid mass, and another world were about to break through

Ward goes on to say of this culture of thinking that (p168):

> ....Even so, the displacement of Jesus's body at this point (the Eucharist) is somewhat different, more radical...it is not just a blurring of the boundaries between one person and another – though it effects that through the handing over and the eating of the 'body'... for "this is my body" is not a symbolic utterance. It is not a metaphorical utterance...the bread is also the body of Jesus...the body of Christ can cross boundaries – gender boundaries, for example.

What happens to Vane indicates both this blurring of boundaries and a displacement of being which results in his admission of his inability to create new grounds for being out of himself. Whereas before, MacDonald has emphasised the mediation of Christ; his humanity, in *Lilith* he seems concerned, at the end of his writing, to make clear the radical difference of this ground of being, the difference between self-consciousness and consciousness of God. He seems to want to send the reader back to the place in which he has begun himself. It is as though he feels that he has emphasised Christ's humanity rather too much without explaining what it means to him, and must now ensure that we see what a radical change this humanity of God proposes to all previous notions of existence. So instead of a reassuring end to the novel, we are faced with that passage (...who made the violin...?) in which God is drawing attention to his difference from Vane, which is rather like the address to *Job (38)*:

> Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding....have you commanded the morning since your days began?...Where

> is the way to the dwelling of light?.....Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion...who provides food for the raven, when its young ones cry to God...

In regard to being, it seems that in these closing passages of *Lilith*, MacDonald is seeking not only to show the instability of 'bodies' as they were perceived in ancient culture but how, in relation to theories about matter and space and perception (as we saw in the section on Goethe's colour theory), such concepts may open up the possibilities closed down in an atonement theology which has relied heavily upon intellectual categories of reality and being. This closing down is related to the rendering of the symbolic as merely psychological or linguistic, bringing with its closedness a radical anxiety about the nature of the self. And so, in *Lilith*, the question of being is related only to the personification of Hope that informs this new concept of being, since it is *also* a questioning of the outer world not only the projection of the inner onto the outer.

In the final chapter of *Lilith,* MacDonald is making it clear, as he does in his essay, that the imagination cannot be equated with the creating power of God, although it can go so far as to deconstruct itself as a ground of reality. It seems that here, MacDonald goes as far as the crucifixion in his novel, where Ward notes that (pp169-70):

> The displacement of the body here effects a detachment... Displacement is becoming loss, and with the loss a new space opens for an economy of desire experienced as mourning[281]....without the sharing and participation there cannot arise the sense of a coming separation and loss. With the sense of loss comes also, paradoxically, the recognition of an identification, but an identification now passing...his body becomes the symbolic focus for all bodies loved....the allure of the abject, and the mourning which now will always accompany Christian desire, manifests an internalisation of displacement itself...the lack will now foster an eternal longing and will structure our desire for God....our bodies, too, participate in that displacement in and through the crucifixion...

In reflection of that participation, all of the characters in the novel must lie down to sleep, but Vane realises that his sleeping begins in his life; in his waking (p251):

> All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come....

[281] Perhaps this is why the theologian Karl Barth says that: "...there is no positive possession of men which is sufficient to provide a foundation for human solidarity...genuine fellowship is grounded upon a negative...". (*Romans*, p100) And yet that (p119) "In this man what he is calls to mind what he is not, that a secret...is hidden as well as illustrated by his conduct." And (p106): "True negation is directed as much against the denial of this life as it is against the acceptance of it."

As Ward notes (p173):

> This redemption is not an emptying of oneself into nothingness; but a recognition of the lack of foundations within oneself which requires and enables the reception of divine plenitude. Lacan returns the subject to the nihilo and denies that God made anything out of it. The Christian awareness of the absent body of Christ, and of death itself, returns us to our createdness – to the giftedness of creation out of nothing.

Lilith has up until this point *described* the instability of being, has *witnessed* this dying and reception and sought to communicate it by means of language. Now it seems that MacDonald *enacts* such a death; laying the responsibility of response upon the reader, as to whether they will choose to continue to read this question of 'being' as read by psychological or metaphysical categories (as those moments when Vane looks within to his self conscious), or whether they will choose to treat this absence as hope. MacDonald places us the readers, as the disciples are placed (Ward p176):

> The disciples are caught between memory and anticipation

It seems that we are offered, in *Lilith*, hope itself rather than the incentive to hope; the opportunity to lie down in this 'cold' place; this tomb of selfhood; which may be also interpreted by the reader as a *womb*, in the way in which Ward speaks of it (p176):

> The logic of the ascension is the logic of birthing...not dying....The withdrawal of the body of Jesus must be understood in terms of the Logos creating a space within himself, a womb, within which the Church will expand and creation be recreated

MacDonald himself does not provide us with any ground for so doing apart from the clues given in the narrative itself. He does not, in this work, as much as in his others, provide any positivistic method of placing or identifying the 'good' or the truly Christian, nor does he bring Vane face to face with Christ while he is yet in the process of dying, for...(Ward, p177)

> ...it is pointless not only because it is a human attempt to give Christianity an empirically verifiable foundation and because the metaphysics implied in believing that project to be possible are profoundly anti-Christian (atomism, positivism, atemporality, immanentalism, access to the immediate and subjectivism). It is pointless because the Church is now the body of Christ...

In *Lilith*, we come to see that all along the Christ-self, the 'life' that is for you, and all of the other wonderful things by which MacDonald has sought to attract the reader to a love of Christ as the good, the true and the beautiful, involve a certain death to one's grasp of selfhood and the concept of all things as 'things in themselves'. This death he finally enacts by making the ultimate sacrifice in letting go of his cherished imaginative faculty in

case the reader may treat it as a 'thing in itself'; a positivistic method of locating the self without Christ; or of locating Christ in the narrative, without reference to the self. It is a way of witnessing that his imagination, too, receives its being from "Another", and so places vision out of the reader's reach, in the realms of this new personification of 'Hope'. MacDonald allows the reader, through his acknowledgment of the contingency of Vane's imagination, both a way out and a way in, should they choose to live consciously in relation to the presence of Christ, mediated through the absence of his body. It is reality experienced purely as Hope.

C. George Macdonald's *Lilith* and Jurgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*

In the previous chapter we noted how the perceiving of the kingdom of heaven, that magical state of reality which is presented by MacDonald as its truth in his fiction, must be preceded by an identification with the body of Christ, which makes "the Christic the measure of the human", to quote Ward. In *Lilith*, especially, it seems that he is returning to bring to the reader the importance of this identification with Christ in terms of death or sleep, before a true perception of such a kingdom may begin. The emphasis in the novel on the contingency of human 'being' brings with it a renewed emphasis on the importance of hope when undertaking this identification. With this emphasis comes a certain return to the Calvinistic emphasis upon faith (or Hope) as justification, but with a difference which is made clear by the nature of symbolism as that which substantially connects the meaning and future of being to that which is experienced by being hoped for. The personification of Hope in the final chapter of *Lilith* emphasises its importance as a real presence which mediates the reality of Christ, rather than as a form of belief, which word had already lost much of its significance with the advent of enlightenment methods of verification of reality. In this section, we shall look briefly at MacDonald's treatment of hope in relation to Moltmann's work. Then, in the context of Moltmann's eschatological thinking and MacDonald's views on the 'end' as a delimiting of ethics, time and history, turn to examine the differences and similarities between them.

Calvinism, Hope and Reality

MacDonald presents the power of the imagination as that which both works for and against Vane, in the process of a laying down to 'sleep' in the Hope of Christ. At the very beginning of the novel he notes how it is that the imaginative ability to 'see' draws him into metaphysical dreams, prematurely exciting his desire to know and master the patterns dimly perceived by the imagination in intellectual terms *alone* (p5):

> I was constantly seeing, and on the outlook to see, strange analogies, not only between the facts of different sciences of the same order, or between physical and metaphysical facts, but between physical hypotheses and suggestions glimmering out of the metaphysical dreams into which I was in the habit of falling. I was at the same time much given to a premature indulgence of the impulse to turn hypothesis into theory...

The novel seems to function very much as a warning against this 'premature indulgence' of the imagination by the intellect. *Lilith* ends on a quite different note to most of his other works; one which more directly confronts the nature of the Hope which lies behind and

ahead of such indulgences. Hope is seen to be distorted or transmuted in this process of pursuing knowledge in order to pacify the imagination. Yet this Hope which arouses the desire of the imagination is never satisfied by the intellect. It has to do with eschatology, with a certain 'end' of things which is yet not the 'balanced repose' which MacDonald speaks against in his essay upon the imagination. Hence, perhaps, the idea of an "Endless Ending" to quote the chapter title of *Lilith*. Such an ending denotes constancy, but not permanence; deconstruction but not destruction, harmony but not repose. It is not, as it might be interpreted, the same as a circle or as a feeling of being trapped in time, since it denotes the kind of delimiting which is promised to satisfy the hope of the imagination through its translation by death[282]. As we noted, MacDonald directly alludes to the word 'eschatology' in previous *Lilith* manuscripts. It seems to function for Vane as that which is enacted in the form of apocalypse, of the uncovering and deconstruction of all hopes and hypotheses which might replace this one Christian Hope, and for which, as Ward notes, metaphysical speculation tends to lay its own foundations, instead of allowing one to exist *in* Hope and so partake of the absent body of Christ which makes room for such a Hope to grow into its true desire.

By making so very much in the novel of Vane's tendency towards premature indulgence, and by continually confounding the satisfaction of any of his desires (whereas in other works the protagonists may get married, ascend the rainbow, or in some way be very definitely on the way 'home' to their true end) MacDonald may be noticing that his own imaginative and intellectual powers can tend very much in the same direction of that

[282] And it is not the delayed ending of German Idealism, as it is portrayed in *Delayed Endings* (p2): "...a theoretical problem...common to the German Idealists: what does it mean to lose the belief in endings and ultimacies?....in Romantic novels at the turn of the century....closure in unstable....open ended texts bespeak a hesitancy and self-interrogation on the part of the writer in his question for a proper voice...." However, MacDonald is seeking to show that this open-endedness is symptomatic of something lacking in our concept of identity; the lack of a "proper voice" is not merely a problem for the writer, but a metaphor for the way in which Christianity continually seeks positive grounds for a faith which can only be built upon a relationship....a relationship whose desire increases near death, and is able to embrace death rather than to put it off, or glorify it either. The writer goes on (p5) "writing which seeks to be sacred by withholding closure in fact admits also a lack of divinity in its lack of willingness to be human. To be human is to err...to be subject to death." However, as we have clearly seen, and shall see, MacDonald embraces above all the humanity of Christ, and humanity in general, rather than seeking to attain to some transcending ideal. Therefore his open-endedness in *Lilith* must be read as an attempt to demonstrate the self-grounding and harmony of faith – and such a harmony as this cannot be wrought by the narrator, such a faith must consist in "his own righteousness, wrought in him by Christ.", as we quoted earlier from *Robert Falconer*. Indeed, in this case, open-endedness is symptomatic of the text's *embracing* of the author's humanity, and trust in God to provide fulfilment, rather than an attempt to usurp divine ground himself.

wrong thinking about the atonement in Federal Calvinism, which tends to look within, or to the natural light of reason, to 'chinese metaphysics' as he puts it, to find some extra, substitute ground on which to found its existence or being; to avoid a certain completeness of death which is required of one before it finds the self in true harmony with the 'life that is for it'. *Lilith* seems very much to represent MacDonald's own battle to expose the death out of which his Christian identity comes to be grounded in Hope.

We will briefly look at some comments of Moltmann on the nature of such a hope, to establish how MacDonald may be addressing the thinking of some twentieth century theology, where it sometimes seems to return to Calvinism, and where he may be able to add a different or fuller interpretation to this twentieth century return to his childhood religion. (*Theology of Hope*, p18):

> Hope's statements of promise....must stand in contradiction to the reality which can at present be experienced...they do not seek to make a mental picture of existing reality, but to lead existing reality towards the promised and hoped-for transformation.

And also p40:

> The real language of Christian eschatology...is not the Greek logos, but the promise.

At the beginning of Vane's journey, the Raven affirms that his experience will begin to bring him into a troubling conflict with the reality he has hitherto experienced, which will no longer be resolvable by the natural light of reason. However it is both Vane and reality which change together; the inner transformation corresponding with the outer. The idea of a conflict or battle with reality is gradually itself destabilised as it is translated into its correspondence with Hope. And we saw earlier that MacDonald resisted the tendency in Goethe's interpretations towards battle as a final state of being, while also seeking to resist a sense of premature completion. He places great importance upon the sense of correspondence or harmony which rests upon Hope and which enables such a conflict with existing reality to have *meaning*; even when it cannot be externally verified by explanation. And MacDonald always emphasises that for such contradiction with reality to effect a change depends upon the changing of inner characteristics in line with a perceived and underlying sense of harmony. Robert Falconer's vision of the city corresponds with the presentation of his character as itself the result of a transformation which makes his perception positive and his action meaningful as well as challenging. Vane finally comes to the point which perhaps precedes the change which has already

taken place in Falconer. It is the point at which he accepts, through Hope, the meaning of such correspondence between inner and outer destabilisation which transforms his perception of death. It should not be confused with resignation, because of the emphasis upon Hope[283].

Moltmann goes on:

> Everywhere in the New Testament the Christian hope is directed out towards what is not yet visible....

And interestingly he quotes Calvin (p19):

> To us is given the promise of eternal life – but to us, the dead. A blessed resurrection is proclaimed to us – meantime we are surrounded by decay. We are called righteous – and yet sin lives in us. We hear of ineffable blessedness – but meantime we are here oppressed by infinite misery....What would become of us if we did not take our stand on hope....

Moltmann says that "it is in this contradiction that hope must prove its power". Undoubtedly *Lilith* presents us with a dark vision, and one which is somewhat more black than MacDonald's work taken as a whole. His work has often tended to *express* Hope by symbolic transformation of the present in anticipation, yet, as he confesses in *Lilith* (p5) "I was at the same time much given to a premature indulgence....". Is MacDonald coming back to Calvinism? Partly, perhaps, because, as Moltmann notes in response to these comments of Calvin, (Moltmann, p19):

> Faith does not overstep these realities into a heavenly utopia, does not dream itself into a reality of a different kind ...it *can* overstep the bounds of life, with their closed wall of suffering, guilt and death, only at the point where they have in actual fact been broken through....Where the bounds that mark the end of all human hopes are broken through in the raising of the crucified one, there faith can and must expand into hope...

However, MacDonald is perhaps attempting in *Lilith* to wake Hope in the reader, as he has stated that he attempts to wake meaning in his other fiction. To do this, he can lead the reader only so far – up to the point at which "the bounds that mark the end of all human hopes are broken through...". But he cannot go further than this. For it is in the space between inner and outer death that the meaning of Hope establishes its link with the future and its reinterpretation of the present.

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[283] To emphasise this, we should consider the comments of Kierkegaard upon the difference between faith and resignation, when he speaks of the faith of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*.

MacDonald is also exposing himself in *Lilith*, in revealing that his struggle against the more extreme varieties of Calvinism, its neuroses and tendency to look away from Christ in despair, is one which is deeply personal to him. He has existed in tension between his awareness of the need to escape this stark theology into 'a reality of a different kind' and his motivation to look to Christ, in order to ground that imaginative pursuit in this Hope.

However this leads us to think that he has an even higher view of Hope or faith than Moltmann (or Calvin). Hope has substance in *Lilith*, and affirms the role of the imagination in its substantial connection to its creator. He affirms that 'Another' dreamed this dream and not himself; but he grounds that affirmation not in the strength of his imaginings but in Hope. He cannot present this as a straightforward affirmation in the text, for Hope would be denying its own nature, but clearly indicates that he holds in hope that such a hope has been the origin of his writing and dreaming. It seems then that *Lilith* indicates for MacDonald the triumph of this Christ-principle over his own tendency to create for himself. And of course the stronger that impulse is, the more one tends to rely on it as a 'thing in itself'. Hence the terrible beauty of Lilith. It seems that he overcomes Calvinism with Calvinism, in applying its own principle of Hope in order to reaffirm the role of the imagination.

"The bounds of life" as Moltmann puts it, must then be continually overstepped in this living in Hope by grace. For nothing – and especially the perceived bounds of reality - can precede the new creation in Christ; for he himself forms both the old and new creation. He exists before creation, as grace precedes and informs the natural light of reason. This is what we discovered in the similarities between McLeod Campbell and MacDonald in their approach to Calvin's theology. And so the contradiction between reality as experienced and this Hope *is already broken down*; and so the struggle must not in any way whatsoever be informed by "reality as experienced" in terms of present conflict, but in terms of conflict past, won and transformed from conflict into harmony, as it is experienced in the mediation of Christ's reality through Hope.

In the thinking of MacDonald and McLeod Campbell such an experience of conflict does not tend to anxiously concentrate on its own struggle as though it could in any way be interpreted by itself to itself, but looks to Christ, who has preceded and exceeded those "bounds"; who informs the manner in which this conflict is to be thought of. So where

Moltmann feels that Hope must prove itself[284] (as some Calvinists felt that they must prove ownership of their own particular saving faith, and so came to deny the primacy of faith), for MacDonald the voice of Hope, as it addresses Vane in the final pages of *Lilith*, is no other than the voice of God. This is both one's own hope and not one's own hope; but the hope of God, mediated in Christ. As such, it exists *for* one; it is the Christ-self, speaking of the Father, requiring the 'other' self to wait and to obey; to die. For MacDonald believes that God is deeper in us than we are in ourselves. The being-in-ourselves must give way to this new and deeper identity. It is therefore the Christ-self who comes to stand in conflict with reality (so reinterpreting that conflict as joyful paradox); not the self as pre-existent individual standing in puzzled opposition to the 'being' of God, as happens initially with Vane. When it is the Christ-self who comes to stand in conflict with reality, that reality is itself reinterpreted and transformed.

Here MacDonald is true to his favourite Biblical writer, Paul, on the dying of the old man or 'Adam' and the coming to life of the new man or Adam. Vane is caught between the one and the other, he is both Adam and not Adam, as he says himself. Hope is leading him to his 'being' in God. It seems to lead him initially into conflict with reality, but it ultimately comes to bring him to conflict with his old, dying self; to put *himself* to death. Such a putting oneself to death, however, is not possible without the presence of a living Hope, as Lilith's experience makes clear (for she cannot put herself to death, she has tried). Hope or faith provides its own witness to the reality of that which it hopes for.

It seems that in *Lilith*, MacDonald is trying to walk a fine line between the Calvinism which has engendered so much despair by setting the 'natural' against the 'graceful' in a way which does not make clear that the true ground of natural being is only ever found in the 'graceful'. He is trying to walk between this, and the tendency which opposes it with an overly optimistic view of the way in which appearance comes to conform to the reality of its being grounded in grace; in the fact of universal redemption. He must promote this sense of universal grace; without asserting it in the form of a new metaphysics of grace,

[284] Moltmann argues that in making eschatology a question of identity, we make it transcendental, as does Kant (p46): "...revelation and the eschaton coincide in either case in the point which is designated God's or man's 'self'." However, he seems to think that this always amounts to a reduction of eschatology, reading it as concluding that it becomes a case of subjectivity, not having any future greater than itself, without allowing that the coming of the 'Christ-self' to man can open up his perception of things in general rather than simply, being a case of "the coming of the eternal to man or the coming of man to himself."

which denies the fact of the battle altogether, and in fact renders it worthless through such a systematisation, resulting in antinomianism. Both extremes are similarly results of the Federal Calvinism which separates nature from grace.

And this may be why he states (as we noted earlier) that "far too much is said about faith", and prefers to direct his reader through a route which he hopes will lead them to Christ. The route itself, however, is both inner (towards the Christ-self), and outer (towards the symbols in nature which communicate the universal grace of that personal presence). In *Lilith,* he shows that he is aware of the danger of this route, for self-consciousness will seek to take precedence in this turning inwards, and one has the ability either to turn outwards in Hope, or outwards in the sense that one will project one's self-consciousness outwards in *anxiety* rather than Hope, so seeking to establish 'selfhood' before the Christ-self; either in the form of the metaphysical speculation of Vane or in his despair of reality.

MacDonald is drawing our attention to the role of the artist as it reflects this tendency, the process being often stimulated by anxiety to seek Hope through a renewed 'discovering' of creation. This may be why MacDonald insists that the artist does not create, but discovers. For to state that one is happy to create worlds for oneself is to render one's own venture meaningless. While to undertake the venture with more anxiety than hope will prevent much discovery. This links the way in which the atonement is variously received to the way in which the artist seeks for truth. Both undertakings find themselves in relation to the same economy of anxiety and hope. For MacDonald, the key thing to note is that he is deeply aware of the possibilities which confront the artist and the pursuer of truth, and so he should never be underestimated as though he were blindly projecting wishful thoughts, or took the hope of meaning which is inherent in the artistic pursuit for granted. We see clearly in *Lilith* that without the testament of Hope he feels that his work would be meaningless if it were a work which was merely projected; is aware that others may take it to be so; and has feared at times that this is the case.

We shall now move on to briefly consider a few of Moltmann's comments which deal more specifically with eschatology in relation to hope.

Identity and history

Moltmann speaks of the "eternally present" of Hellenization as being a substitute for (p159)

> ...the old apocalyptic dualism which understood the coming as the eternal and the passing as transient...in place of the eschatological 'not yet', we have a cultic 'now only'

It seems that, just as he tries to walk between despair and Hope in relation to Calvinism, MacDonald is also trying to walk between two notions of apocalypse which both result in the loss of hope; between a sense of premature completion through the formation of a metaphysical structure (eternal versus transient) and the interpretation of the eternal present (now only) in terms of despair. The Lark in 'The Giant's Heart' can clearly be seen as representing one aspect of this attempt to transcend the 'now only', which has resulted from the despair of Hellenization and which goes on to transform itself into the permanent metaphysical assertion that 'God is dead'. Moltmann quotes Paul (*Theology of Hope*, p161):

> Against the uniting of the believer with the dying and rising Lord, Paul asserts an eschatological distinction...the baptized are not already risen with him...they attain participation in the resurrection by their obedience, which unfolds itself in the realm of the hope of resurrection...trials...are not understood as signs of a paradoxical presence of the eternal...but....in terms of seeking after, and waiting for, the coming freedom.

Here, against his earlier emphasis upon the confrontational aspects of Hope, Moltmann defines this seeking after as also a waiting, which is a little more in line with MacDonald's promotion of the worth of an active passivity and of the significance of greyness and 'in-between' aspects of light. It is seen in the way in which he differs from Goethe in his perception of the 'battle' between light and darkness. Moltmann also emphasises the importance of promise; of the rainbow. Seeking after and waiting for is not defined in by him in terms of (p103):

> evolution, progress and advance...but the word of promise cuts into events and divides reality into one reality which is passing....and another which must be expected and sought...

In terms of the way in which MacDonald communicates these aspects or attitudes towards reality(ies), it seems that Tangle is the more expectant, while Mossy is more actively seeking. He emphasises the worth of this expectation as vital in the process of seeking,

both in 'The Golden Key', and in *Lilith* in relation to the manner of Vane's seeking. Moltmann further asks, when one is trying to find the nature of such a seeking (p125):

> Does the eschaton mean merely 'future', or is it applied to the absolute future as opposed to history?

In other words, does a certainview of eschatology imply the delimiting of history, in the same way that it implies the delimiting of ethics? By a challenge to its limits, rather than to its nature. For the *word* of promise of which Moltmann speaks, functions also as a sword in *Lilith* as that which "cuts into events....", dividing 'being' from 'being in itself'; as ethics or time may behave as 'beings in themselves'. But because it is a word of promise (for the sword is described as for "healing and not for hurt") it perhaps can be likened to the action of that endless "fissuring" described by Ward, which comes about as a sign of the presence of Christ's body, as it re-informs creation with a new logic of being, reuniting it with its limitlessness in the process. This cut delimits ethics and time, allowing growth where the branches of 'being in itself' are cut off.

Therefore eschatology is related to apocalypse in that the cutting off is also an exposing of history in its new light. In MacDonald's writing such a cutting off is applied in 'The Endless Ending', where Vane, finding reality thus delimited, finds himself in the position of an active "waiting for the coming freedom". In seeking to reveal the secret, he finds *himself* exposed. So MacDonald is not seeking to create myths which function psychologically, but to expose this new logic of being, which creates a 'waiting' attitude and radically exposes and makes deliberately vulnerable the one who waits. This vulnerability enables the continuation of the narrative, for such exposure is a gift to the reader, who may be open to experience limitless life in the 'endless ending'.

This makes MacDonald different to Blake, for Martensen notes that (*Jacob Boehme*, p63)

> As Blake's conception of his myth became increasingly psychological, the linear shape of his narrative began to break down. Instead of dealing with unique events...he ceased thinking of the apocalyptic as a final state and began to view it as an ongoing activity...

It seems that Blake succumbs to the despair of the 'now only'. For MacDonald, such an 'end' of the imagination has never represented a 'final state'; but finds in the process of the constant discovery or uncovering or delimiting of its own 'ends' – of ethics, identity or metaphysics - the emergence of the precedence of hope. The process finds its own end,

then, not as the grand discovery or grand uncovering; not as the apocalypse towards which one has wended one's way, but rather it finds its end in its source – hope. Hope witnesses to its own origin. The end is the beginning[285].

As Ward notes, the logic is not one of dying but of being born – and it is not a *cycle* of rebirth, but the birth of authentic identity into a space created by a mourning which represents hope rather than despair. Identity itself has its origin in God's I AM, and its movement is outward in expansion, in the giving nature of identity[286]. This takes place in and through time (though not confined by time) because of Christ's humanity. And, because it takes place in time and space, such a process is able to re-inform, reinterpret and transform (not transcend) time and history. This corresponds with the transformation of bodies which we noted in the chapter on Graham Ward. The New Testament literature itself speaks of identity as absolute in relation to Christ, which is to become a most startling assertion of the way in which Christ's identity as God re-informs humanity with its true identity through hope *because* of his bodily absence (*John* 8:57-8):

> Then the Jews said to Him "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Hope, in *Lilith*, represents the presence of the bodily absent Christ, and this reflects the emphasis upon Hope as signifying the presence of Christ, rather than being thought of in terms of abstract belief in the New Testament. For example *Colossians*1:27: "...Christ in you, the hope of glory." Or Christ's words in *John* 16:7:

> Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

And in *Alec Forbes*, we have this hint of the way in which MacDonald will present the idea of this final receiving of identity (p213):

> "...do ye min' the veesion that the apostle John saw...they war gran' sichts! It was the veesion o' the saviour himself' – Christ himsel'"....I suppose that Tibbie was right in the main...but was it another kind of brightness....that Moses was unfit to see....until the humble son of God went up from the lower earth to meet him there,

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[285] *Revelation*1:8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come..."

[286] *The Marquis of Lossie*, p121: "The individual, that his individuality may blossom, and not soon be massed into the common clay; must have the vital indwelling of the primary Individuality which is its origin. The fire that is the hidden life of the bush will not consume it."

> and talk with him face to face as a man with his friend?...Annie went home....and she dreamed that she saw the Son of Man.

If MacDonald sees *Lilith* as his own Revelation of George, then he clearly leaves room for this 'other kind of brightness', opening up a space for mourning which anticipates its hope in Vane's 'dreaming' the Son of Man, but does not present this vision 'face to face' in the narrative as metaphysical assertion. The 'waiting' and the 'mourning' are regenerative of time. For rather than being hastened by time, or conditioned by death, they deliberately choose not to treat it as that which confines the event of Christ, but as that which is defined by the 'new' time made by resurrection.

In relation to time, we may further note that *Isaiah* is alluded to in *Lilith*, as we have seen, and Moltmann states that the vision of *Isaiah* (p133):

> ...speaks of history as the 'work of Yahweh'..yet that is not a history surveyed apocalyptically from the standpoint of the end at which all things stand still...but...a future announced from the midst of the process of history...

Vane may dream of the end and of the Son of Man, but MacDonald presents this dream as 'announced from the midst'. The visionary does not survey time but announces from within it. The reader of MacDonald's written dream is required to enter the process of history. Just as the Federal Calvinists cannot announce the general plan of salvation as a something which can be surveyed, the visionary cannot say of history that it may be located here or there; that time is this or that, without losing the sense of contingency in relation to truth which enables hope to be present, and reading to continue. Vane is a part of the process and not I AM, and this is both a terrifying and a glorious thing for him to realise.

The lust after identity may be understood in this context as a substitute for the mourning of the loss of the visible identity of Christ within creation; a loss which is marked by absence, rather than non-existence. And finds itself through discovery rather than one (work of art or world) being superseded by another, different creation. This absence enables Hope to speak to Vane, and elicits from the artist a regenerative mourning and searching for what is withdrawn from the self, and for which the self reaches out in hope. For Vane, the search is 'shadowed' by the temptation to lust after identity as though identity consisted of knowledge and could be contained within the borders of the shadow-self.

Vane, then, does not turn his back upon the shadows which play upon the walls of Plato's cavern. Neither does he deduce from them a metaphysical proposition about light. He lies in the darkness and imagines what the light will be when it comes. He accepts the imagination as being that gift of sight which comes through Hope. The imagination for which MacDonald is noted is described as childlike by Chesterton in his introduction to MacDonald's biography, because the childlike attitude is one in which hope remains undeterred by appearances, and so keeps alive the link between imagination and hope. This is also the explanation given by Falconer for the beatific attitude of the child as it is held by its despairing mother[287]. So, too, Vane is held in death by life. Christian identity is represented in *Lilith* as an acceptance of death as gift, which takes the form of a challenge to its nature, rather than a resignation to its appearance, or a transcending of the mortality through which it speaks of life. Derrida notes of Patocka, in speaking of Christian life, that he "speaks less of a past event....than he does of a promise." (*The Gift of Death*, p29). In the next section we shall consider a little further the idea of death as gift in relation to Derrida, and the relationship between hermeneutics and the idea of death as delimiting, with reference to John Caputo.

[287] See previous allusion, and *Robert Falconer*, p346.

D John Caputo's *More Radical Hermeneutics* and Derrida's *The Gift of Death*

Caputo's *More Radical Hermeneutics* and *Lilith*

In his book, Caputo is concerned with almost exactly the same themes which occupy MacDonald's *Lilith.* In this brief consideration, we should consider especially their shared emphasis upon the effects of delimitation or borderlessness. First, in relation to the notion of understanding or interpretating meaning.

"Tragic knowledge" and Christian wisdom

There are a number of things which bring MacDonald's fiction into dialogue with Caputo's thinking. First, this extract from *Lilith:*

> The fact is, no man understands anything, when he knows he does not understand, that is his first tottering step – not towards understanding, but towards the capability of one day understanding.[288]

From this, it might be expected that Vane would give up striving completely, would resign himself to not-understanding, and enjoy life as it presents itself. But he cannot. He is constantly thrown into situations in which he is required to undertake actions which appear to have no ground in theories of knowledge. He is required to be involved. Just as we noted that suspension of belief is not a desirable state in which to read a story, if one wants to receive the 'shock' of failure as a desirable prelude to creative interpretation, one cannot prematurely conclude that the absurd task should not be undertaken. We can relate this to Kierkegaard's thinking upon the absurdity of Christianity, and his corresponding emphasis upon the nature of faith. Caputo seems to agree with the above statement by MacDonald:

> There is no royal road that some philosopher's Method or divine Revelation will open to us, if only we obey its methodological strictures, or pray and fast, or learn how to run Windows 2000[289].

But then MacDonald makes it clear that the failure of a Royal Road, a method or a revelation to deliver fulfilment, a true end or a good death, is a lack which may *only* be experienced as genuine lack, once one has tried and failed with Royal Roads, methods and revelations; has taken some *action* in sincerity; and continues to do so. In the novel, Vane eventually unlearns something, and passes his wisdom on to an old man, tired of life and wishing to die; to enter the house of Mara, the mistress of death:

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[288] *Lilith*, p152
[289] *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p2

> You wish to die because you do not care to live; she will not open her door to you, for no-one can die who does not care to live.[290]

The acceptance of death of which we spoke in the last chapter has this curious quality about it, in that it is an acceptance which comes about through a love of life, rather than a love of death. It is a death experienced only through life, rather than through a certain attitude to metaphysics, or a determination to reserve judgment which betrays a certain resignation or weariness. It is, then, not a matter of the 'normal' course of life running itself down *into* death, but of a passing *through* this bitterness in hope of a greater, sweeter sense of life which is to be even more fully experienced. This attitude to death and life is linked, through the person of Mara, to Wisdom, that female Biblical personification, with whom Vane comes to be acquainted, and who teaches him the true source and goal of what he originally experiences as a lust for knowledge.

As is the case in *Lilith*, Caputo also links meaning with identity. He begins his book with a chapter entitled 'On Not knowing who we are; madness, hermeneutics and the night of truth in Foucault'. He asks "suppose we confess that we do not know who we are?" Of course, this is the confession to which Vane is led in MacDonald's novel; is led to feel that he is not yet a true self at all; even forgetting that there are such things as names. And Lilith will pass through such a 'night of truth' in the chapter entitled 'That Night'. Caputo goes on to speak in this chapter of the importance of "tragic knowledge" in Foucault's thinking (p20):

> Foucault is not saying that the mad are the true philosophers but rather that they are precisely not philosophers at all, that they are the most forceful testimony to the breakdown of philosophy. They...speak with tragic knowledge...from the depths of an experience in which both the reassuring structures of ordinary life and...of scientific knowledge have collapsed. They experience the radical groundlessness of the world...they are voices from an abyss.

Vane begins his search in the library of his ancestors, of whom a notable number had been given to study. He confesses (p5) an inherited tendency to scientific, systematic modes of thought, which tends to this "premature indulgence of the impulse to turn hypothesis into theory". He describes this inherited tendency as a "mental peculiarity", rather than as a normal state of affairs, which perhaps provides us with the first clue that we are on our way to being introduced to a view of reality which will radically dissociate itself from the

[290] *Lilith*, p225

"reassuring structures...of scientific knowledge...." and will present itself as a voice from the abyss of which Foucault speaks. MacDonald is acknowledging philosophy as Vane's starting point, in this discussion of Vane's ancestors, but making it clear that the exploration will take us beyond, over the edge of philosophy, and will result in its breakdown but strangely in its fulfilment in such a direction (in the Wisdom of death). We have already examined MacDonald's tendency to disorient the reader of his fiction, pointing them in the direction of such a breakdown. In *Lilith,* both Vane and Lilith speak more directly to us about this disorientation; with tragic knowledge in their lostness, as such knowledge reveals that it is *its very nature* which betrays the fact of its lostness; of the *homesickness*[291] which reveals that it is not at home. Knowledge desires what it cannot have, and loses even what it does have. In doing this it encounters the Wisdom of learning the meaning of its desire; which must grow in order to pass through death. Death is that which delimits. Desire and anticipation themselves are seen to be continually disappointed, because it is in their nature to desire what occurs beyond and through death.

On closer study, we find that it is always where MacDonald refers to the Biblical literature that he anticipates such thoughts. Especially in relation to Paul, on whom he writes many essays and sermons, and whose common theme is the seeming madness and difficulty of belief in Christ and how to understand the relation of life to death. Vane's learning that he knows nothing is reflected in MacDonald's essay on *Philippians*, 'On Christian Ministering', where he quotes from it:

> ...if anyone thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing...but God will yet reveal even that....

Such thoughts are common in the Biblical literature, where Christ's death is seen as the revelation of a divine economy of knowledge which challenges the unstated motive[292] of human knowledge[293].

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[291] MacDonald quotes Novalis as saying that philosophy is really homesickness (as we noted earlier); and it is Novalis he quotes at the end of *Lilith*. We can see this in Vane's worry about how he is ever to get home. Behind the casual manner in which he begins his enquiries rests a radical and anxious uncertainty about the nature of his own being. He characterises what will later emerge as twentieth century existential anxiety. He is told not that 'home' is a bad idea, but that neither can it ever be represented as an object or thing – it is to do with the nature of his own desire.

[292] To go behind God; to seek to understand the being of God from an independent point of view – to establish the pros and cons of God himself, as Bonhoeffer points out regarding knowledge *sicut deus*.

Ethics and delimiting

Caputo goes on to speak in chapter 7 of 'The End of Ethics', and here, too, by referring back to our study of 'The Giant's Heart', we see how fully MacDonald has anticipated this end of ethics, and how he is carrying it through more radically in the confounding of all of Vane's expectations and desires. They are confounded, yet exceeded, as Vane comes to view Lilith as an 'other', rather than as an object which may contain the object of his desire, or as one who may hinder him by falsely presenting herself as the object of his desire (the two are related). In both cases he is governed by the tendency to limit his desire to her objectification, either by demonising or divinising her. On p173, Caputo notes how, at the delimitation of ethical responsibility

> Everything turns on a specific affirmation of the other....something that exceeds our horizon of expectations...

Here, MacDonald's receding landscapes and moveable horizons may be seen to correspond with the de-objectification of the 'other' which causes Vane to have to be "specific" in his affirmation of Lilith, rather than being able to objectify her. It also shows how desire is to be delimited rather than suppressed; freeing that which it desires from objectification – allowing the 'thing in itself' to find its true relation to God. In the process the desire can no longer 'fix' upon an object and is allowed to seek the face of God.

Again, his Christian belief may be seen to be informing MacDonald's writing, since it is taken from Jesus's delimiting of the law[294], in which the 'other' is no longer objectified. More than this, his belief involves a certain kind of interpretation of Jesus's words. We have already examined how he uses symbolic methods of communication, because that is what he notes takes place in Jesus's stories. Further, the parabolic mode of relating truth is equally important to him, since it allows the reader to reflect on and participate in the story at the level of meaning which is *specific* to him or her[295]. Here, hermeneutic thinking and practice are combined where MacDonald is most closely adopting the New

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[293] for example 1 *Corinthians* 3:19 "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God"

[294] *Matthew* 5:41-44: "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you..."

[295] Which, as we saw, has already been examined by Cynthia Marshall in her essay 'Reading "The Golden Key": Narrative strategies of Parable.' (in *For the Childlike*)

Testament writing style. This makes his writing (at its best) affirmative without being positive. It is far from the didacticism which his Victorian readers wanted, and of which his modern readers accuse him (mainly because of a misunderstanding of the nature of the Christian belief which he wanted to communicate).

Caputo further asks of this delimiting of ethics; of this non-positive affirmation (p174):

> ...why does all hell not break loose...? Thinking at the end of ethics is affirmative but without being positive. That is to say, such thinking is through and through the affirmation of something it dearly loves, yet without setting out a positive....rule governed programme....

Interestingly, Caputo relates this being positive to the idea of a gift (which in Christian thinking is known by the word *grace*). This delimiting is precisely what enables Vane to begin to be a self; to begin to experience the nature of true responsibility which goes beyond duty. Here, Caputo notes that it is what entails a taking account of the singular, and quotes Derrida, "tout autre est tout autre", (every other is wholly other) p185:

> ...the whole idea of a gift is to go beyond...what I must do...is parasitic on the idea of duty, for without duties there would be nothing to exceed...we should put an end to ethics, not in the sense of putting it off...but in the sense of delimiting it...

Here, again, is the link to questions of interpretation which seek to suppress the parables of Jesus by rationalising them so as to escape the singular interpretation: "who is my neighbour?". So when MacDonald is saying that his story has a specific meaning for a specific reader, he is seeking that relation in the interpretation of his work. And so the hermeneutics of his work cannot be separated from their Christian origin.

The form of the parable is related to the emergence of grace (or gift) in relation to the law as being that of a singular relation. And because the law is related to death in the Biblical literature; grace brings with it a new relation to death, and affects the way in which the atonement of Christ is *interpreted* by the individual. So Caputo goes on to say (p180):

> ...the singular is something for which one cannot make a substitution...I cannot ask someone else to bear my responsibility to you...or to die for me...when I am in a singular situation...I do not have it, but rather it has me....

This brings us back to the singular gaze of the Light Princess, for whom substitutionary atonement is a "wicked lie", as MacDonald puts it in *Robert Falconer*; she is 'had' by the gaze of the Prince. Rather than having him die for her, she comes by identification with

his death as a singular event in relation to her own being, to be enabled to experience her own 'death' as gift, in her mourning (of tears).

And yet it is *precisely* where she feels that she is being let off the hook of the law (by substitutionary atonement) of her being (too light) that she is caught by this singular responsibility[296]. For the Prince offers to die for her freely. That is, the gift precedes the demand of the law, as well as exceeding it[297]. Whereas for Caputo, the gift is parasitic upon ethics; here the gift strangely precedes ethics, and therefore is able to interpret even ethics (and death) as gift. This brings us to Derrida's *The Gift of Death.*

***The Gift of Death* and MacDonald's *interpretation* of Christ's atonement**

This final chapter will also serve as a conclusion to this exploration of MacDonald's understanding of Christian identity.

The experience of Lilith corresponds to a remarkable extent with what Derrida speaks of in *The Gift of Death.* In making much of Lilith's incapability of independent action, we can see how MacDonald seems to be addressing what Derrida notes of Patočka (*The Gift of Death,* pp5-6) in that there is, in the European understanding, a tendency to make issues of freedom and responsibility ahistorical, not acquired or conditional, so that ethics seeks to divorce itself from religious revelation. The reason for such a tendency, Derrida says, is that to acknowledge historicity would imply a certain (religious) concept of freedom, but it is also because the very notion of historicity is difficult to deal with without falling into the trap of a "totalising closure", which would ironically mark the end of history. MacDonald reveals his complex thinking on this issue, in that he seeks to deal with this difficult matter of freedom and responsibility in such a way that historicity is not rendered closed (as the end of *Lilith* attempts to show in its insistence that the narrative remains open), but that neither does such openness mean that historicity and religion is ultimately denied, for then Lilith would be capable of carrying through alone the autonomous, ethical

[296] It should be noted, then, that MacDonald

[297] Here, again, we refer back to the wrongful separation of the covenants of grace and nature, as though there were ever a time when the law preceded grace in some objective point in history. Law comes to be seen as a mediation of grace, because it is a mediation of death, rather than being necessary as a 'thing in itself'. It all depends upon how death is interpreted. And how can death be reinterpreted as a blessing? This is the important question for MacDonald.

choice which her (God-created) self wishes, but she is not. (*Lilith* p207): "I yield", said the princess...not the less, I cannot open my hand." For this same reason, within the novel, the vision of Christ and of the heavenly city is related as having meaning within history, while such meaning must yet be discovered "outside of knowledge or given norms..." It has a historicity which is (The Gift of Death, p5):

> ...made...through the very ordeal of the undecidable; to religious faith through a form of involvement with the other that is a venture into absolute risk...to the gift...

This provides a context for the importance of Hope which is introduced at the end of the novel, but towards which Vane's undecidability has been tending. But how does Lilith make this first move? How can Vane embrace death?

Derrida asks this key question (p16):

> How does one give oneself death (se donner la mort)? How does one give it oneself in the sense that putting oneself to death means dying while assuming responsibility for one's own death, committing suicide but also sacrificing oneself for another, dying for the other – perhaps giving one's life by giving oneself death....?

Between Derrida's question and Caputo's answer lies perhaps MacDonald's and Campbell's interpretation of atonement. For Caputo seems, too easily, to slide into a certain logic of singularity, which denies its own nature. He seems in danger of creating a new *method* of exceeding ethics, which cannot work without a new relation to death, since death is singular, and cannot be systematised. This, perhaps, is why he comes to the conclusion that grace (the gift) is parasitic upon ethics (the law or death). This makes death defining of life, and seems to result, as we saw, in the attitude of the old man encountered by Vane, who longs for death as a 'thing in itself', and makes all affirmation meaningless. The very affirmation which Caputo wishes to promote. For Caputo fairly easily accepts that there is no secret perhaps because he is in the process of creating an alternative secret or privileged knowledge (of non-secrecy). Whereas MacDonald speaks of the non-existence of *deliberate* or *constructed* secrets, because death is seen by him as the *revealer* of the secret, because Christ's death for him reveals the nature of death and makes death subject to grace (to the gift).

How does MacDonald address Derrida's question, which is so pertinent to any Christian theology of Christ's atonement? Central to MacDonald's story is the gaze (the gaze of Tangle upon the child; the gaze of the Princess upon the Prince). Characters in his novels begin a process of death to the primacy of a certain kind of seeing. As they die to this

primacy of logic – which is also a logic of death as a 'thing in itself'– they awaken to the sight of another reality. As the characters in *Lilith* lie down one by one in the terribly cold communal tomb, the world emerges in an apocalyptic light, in which (p243):

> ...all things interchanged a little light...the microcosm and macrocosm were at length atoned, at length in harmony!

This interchange is a continual giving and receiving of the gift of light, but is a world in which the concept of light as an abstract quality of sun or moon no longer exists (just as the sun is not needed in the apocalyptic city of *Revelation*). *Concepts* of life and death, like light and darkness, are exchanged for this continual giving. The giving and receiving are, however, unselfconscious, since they are not measuring themselves by any dualistic external standard of light as a 'thing'. Everything is finally in harmony; and it is not the repose which MacDonald wishes to avoid, but a harmony of continuity in which everything is fluid; nothing is any longer 'fixable' to entities, since things no longer conceive of their own borders, and, correspondingly, abstracts (objectification) and abstract religion no longer exist(s).

So, too, as long as the Princess's sight in 'The Light Princess' remains fixed upon the water as an external necessity, she cannot actually perceive it as gift; it is not related *to* her, but exists *for* her. As such, it *cannot be received as a gift.* Here, MacDonald is speaking of the false appropriation of the atonement, of the death of Christ. When conceived of in the abstract, it has not the quality of the gift; it does not speak of grace, it is rendered meaningless. The true meaning of sacrifice, therefore, only emerges as excess, as a true gift, through a seeing of the utter uniqueness of the one giving by the one being given the gift.

But, back to Derrida's question, how may death, in its utter uniqueness, be given by one to another? Only if we explain uniqueness or identity in a paradoxical fashion as that which is only unique when shared. This idea that individuality involves not the setting up, but the breaking down, of the borders of selves or bodies is one which has already been touched upon in the chapter on Graham Ward's thinking about the meaning of the absent body of Christ. It is true also in relation to the 'borders' of fairyland, and is seen in the sexual and paradoxical seeking of identity through the breaking down of the division between male and female in sexual intercourse (which MacDonald hints at constantly in his fiction). Christ's is a body which *comes to precede* creation universally through its

absence or death (the gift of death), as it exceeds and recreates creation in its re-informing of creation with its own unique and universal identity - I AM; (the gift of life). That which is unique must also become that which is universal, otherwise it cannot be unique either. For the exceeding of life comes only through the universality of such a death. For if God's death in Christ is not universal, then resurrection cannot precede, inform and delimit death itself with this new meaning or grace[298]. This may be why MacDonald and Campbell both insist that Christ's atonement has universal implications, and is not merely an abstract event to be appropriated by the 'elect'.

How does one give it to oneself, while assuming responsibility? Only in that, like the exceeding of sexuality and polarity, the 'other' for whom one is responsible is *also* oneself, by virtue of that universal body of Christ, which links one to another. Not a general principle of connectedness, but only true inasmuch as this does not become a general principle, but remains aware that I AM precedes IT IS. Once the Princess's eyes are fixed upon the Prince, she forgets the gift as an it, and only then is she able to fully receive "it", without ever understanding that she is receiving. In fact, her receiving is already ready being transformed into a giving back of love, even in the instant that it is received, since it is love's nature to love back again, to enjoy giving more than receiving. Love requires endless movement, characterised by harmony and not by repose, as MacDonald puts it.

And because of this, the source cannot be located to an *it*, having no beginning and no end in a reciprocity which must continually exceed itself, or die (which perhaps is seen in the death in life of Lilith, where such reciprocity is denied). Love and symbolic understanding are related in this, then: that we partake in a sense of meaningfulness of which we can have no prior concept. Just as grace cannot be fitted into a theological framework which takes some other starting point prior to grace. Or which, if it does, concedes the death of that framework as a 'good' thing, being a hoped-for end or delimiting of the dead life of the 'it' in exchange for the unique and excessive life of I AM.

[298] With the life which, as MacDonald notes, is treated as 'life at all' in the New Testament.

The gift is always hidden in this experience of being in the presence of one who exceeds us and who gives to us, by drawing from us a preceding love of which we have not been previously aware as a 'thing in itself'. Christ individually communicates God's preceding and universal love. Identity then becomes alive through the giving of love or gazing upon an 'other', rather than through self-reflection. It emerges in the movement or tension of love, and its related metaphoric or symbolic language. Identity exceeds death as it is commonly presented, since it already experiences and reinterprets death in the giving of its own life; a giving which is the manifestation of life. And so identity - I AM - exceeds death because it is not defined by death but by the life which gives itself endlessly, being completely itself only in the activity of selflessness and limitlessness[299].

Derrida quotes Patocka (*The Gift of Death*, p25):

> In the final analysis the soul (in the Christian mystery) is not a relation to an object, however elevated (such as the Platonic Good)...but to a person who fixes it in his gaze...as for knowing what this person is, such a question has not yet received an adequate thematic development within the perspective of Christianity.

Derrida takes this further by suggesting that the inadequacy of this thematization comes to a question of responsibility:

...it doesn't thematize what a responsible person is, that is, what he must be...

However, perhaps the concentration of MacDonald and Campbell upon the importance of grace in the development of Christian identity takes us much further than we might think in this direction. The implications of the direction of their thought as making grace universally defining of Christian identity suggest that thematization is simply an insufficient response to this question of Christian identity. Because identity is that which exceeds thematization, being founded upon grace. In fact, we really cannot go any further than the concept of grace or the gift; it is the concept which founds all concepts; the goal and foundation of desire. It is the true soul of being human, and cannot be made subject to

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[299] Jesus's words (quoted *in Romans* 13:9): 'And if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love you neighbour as yourself."' Ie, as though he or she *were* you, because this actually tells the truth about the extent and limitlessness of identity, as it experiences limitlessness in its source. Being and doing are completely the same in this moment, and experience a moment of insight into the absolute nature of being. The moment of self-reflection, however, is significant of the unfinished nature of the activity and being. We can see, then, why McLeod Campbell brings back the emphasis of the Eastern Orthodox fathers into Western atonement theology. Eastern thinking sees that the person and work of Christ cannot be separated, identity and action are the same thing. Soteriology and Christology, when separated, bring about a neurosis in Christian identity; it no longer understands itself in relation to Christ; or its being now in relation to its future.

thematization, being the force which causes the sense of responsibility to find its goal. A deep awareness of this grace at the foundations of being is, perhaps, the reason why MacDonald is able, as Chesterton notes, to see what we might call 'ordinary' human beings as princes, princesses, kings and queens.

In fact, Derrida himself seems to come in some way to this conclusion about thematization, by emphasising the *activity* of responsibility (p26):

> Hence, the activity of responsibility...will have to decide...*before* any thematic determination....(my italics)

That activity is primarily conceived of for MacDonald by means of the idea of harmony in relation to imagination – that divine link to the grace-filled 'seeing' action of God, which is not limited, challenged or frightened by the appearance of death. Being human is to exist in creative tension between this borderless world of the imagination – MacDonald's fairyland - and all kinds of physical, ethical and geographical borders. Such a tension requires of us movement and generates, rather than satisfying, a desire for love, meaning and identity. This desire has, then, to be left to find its own goal or meaning for each of MacDonald's readers; for those in whom it is awakened by his writing. In Vane's search for identity we find many themes in common between theories of interpretation and theories which have surrounded the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Conclusion

We have examined MacDonald's treatments of ethics, symbolism and theology, and have found that they all find movement – 'true life' - only in their ultimate relation to Hope, as the journey of Vane illustrates. Such a hope is in turn related not to weakened concepts of belief in propositions; just as Derrida or Caputo find that theorising is not an adequate response to questions of meaning or identity. Rather, hope emerges on the threshold of death; in liminality; in a pushing out at the borders which would seek to limit desire to the manageable. It is not a thing which can be independently verified or proved; but can be seen to bring with it its own proof, which is the movement necessary for harmony. The experience of such a harmony, as it is communicated in the experience of love; brings which it a true sense of human identity or meaning is. This movement is, in turn, linked to desire. Such desire is not experienced in its fullness as a longing for a certain object, although it is frequently translated into that, and continually disappointed. Such disappointment in the object must therefore be reinterpreted as a disappointment of desire. This should not be read as a condemnation of desire but as a lesson that desire precedes and is greater than any object which could be simply appropriated, and therefore belongs to some realm in which it finds fulfilment in giving and receiving (as two aspects of the same act), rather than in taking, competing or appropriating.

There is a great excess in the experience which relates desire to grace, or to the gift. We cannot swell into giants in a continual reception of this excess as definitive of an identity owned by right (which perverts its nature). Neither can we continually place ourselves as givers, without finding some impossible weight of responsibility upon ourselves (which relates to the failure of forgiveness when we experience it as a burden). Identity in its fullest sense, is movement in grace. It is the endless ending of Vane; the continuing journey of Mossy and Tangle, the reciprocity of Photogen and Nycteris; the harmony towards which desire leads us, and the 'end' of education, which, like the 'end' of ethics is

> ...a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future, an urging on of the motions of life, which had better far be accelerated into fever, than retarded into lethargy....[300]

The rediscovery in MacDonald's work of the foundation of life's (and interpretation's) activity as desire and as the search for harmony makes it especially valuable for those in

[300] 'The imagination: its functions and its culture', *A Dish of Orts* p1.

whom the search has been overtaken by anxiety, and where it has become too self-aware, too disconnected from the outward-tending of the desire which both initiates it and integrates it creatively with our identity as human beings. Process is important, but *Lilith* seems to be a reminder that there is no creativity in process without the continuation of desire. Perhaps, then, the "search" for meaning and identity is much better expressed as a "desire". This allows for indeterminacy, without associating it with hopelessness, or estranging it from reason. Otherwise we may be inclined to think that knowledge and wisdom are the same thing; and so be tempted to give up, or to assume success, when we have only just begun to discern the nature of this desire.

Conclusion

We have examined – in the three sections of this study – the implications and outworking of MacDonald's treatments of ethics, symbolism and theology, and have found that they all find movement – the 'true life' of which he speaks - in their relation to one other, through an ultimate relation to "Hope"[300], as the journey of Vane in *Lilith* illustrates. Such a hope is related not to weakened concepts of belief; to a prepositional faith (just as Derrida or Caputo find that the suppression of the 'religious' by the reasonable is not an adequate response to questions of meaning or identity). Rather, hope emerges on the threshold of death; in liminality; in a pushing out at the borders which – for example - would limit desire to acquisition; ethics to reasonable duty; language to the allegorical; wisdom to analogy; identity to role-playing.

Hope will not be independently verified or proved; but can be seen to bring with it its own proof, which is the movement that is necessary if harmony is not to become stasis. The experience of such a harmony – or tension, as it may be experienced - is communicated especially in the experience of desire; bringing with it an irreducible sense of identity and meaning. This movement or tension which comes about through hope is always linked to desire in MacDonald's work. It is to this end that the imagination is educated by the nature of its desire. He seeks to show that desire is not experienced in its fullness as a longing for a certain object, although it is frequently translated into that, and continually disappointed, even perverted, as *Lilith* shows. Such disappointment in the object is not, however, read by MacDonald as a condemnation of desire but as evidence that desire precedes and is greater than any object which could be simply appropriated. It belongs to a realm in which it finds fulfilment in giving and receiving (as two aspects of the same act), rather than in taking, competing or appropriating.

There is a great excess in the experience which relates desire to grace, or to the gift. We cannot swell into giants in a continual reception of this excess as definitive of an identity owned by right. Neither can we continually place ourselves as givers, without finding some impossible weight of responsibility upon ourselves, and this relates to the failure of forgiveness when we experience it as a burden. Identity in its fullest sense is movement in grace. It is the endless ending of Vane; the continuing journey of Mossy and Tangle,

[300] *Lilith*, p251.

the reciprocity of Photogen and Nycteris; the reinterpretation of the text; the harmony towards which desire leads us, and it is the 'end' of education, which, like the 'end' of ethics is

> ...a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future, an urging on of the motions of life, which had better far be accelerated into fever, than retarded into lethargy....[301]

The rediscovery in MacDonald's work of the foundation of life's (and interpretation's) activity as desire and as the search for harmony makes it especially valuable for those in whom the search has been overtaken by anxiety, and where it has become too self-aware, too disconnected from the outward-tending of the desire which both initiates it and integrates it creatively with our identity as human beings. Process is important, but *Lilith* is a reminder that there is no creativity in process without the expansion *and* proper direction of desire.

Perhaps the "search" for meaning and identity is much better expressed as a personal "desire". The interpersonal emphasis in MacDonald's thinking about theology and the nature of meaning allows for indeterminacy, without associating it with hopelessness, or estranging it from reason. The solitary, existential and lonely search of modernity is not suppressed but brought into an awareness of the relation of its own indeterminacy – its own 'freedom' – with hope (which by its nature is interpersonal). *Lilith* is a reminder, in an age of indeterminacy, that we need not assume that knowledge and wisdom are the same thing. Despair is not compulsory, neither is a "fixed repose"[302]. MacDonald's work remains relevant for, in every person, the worth and nature of the desire for identity needs to be remembered, hoped for and imaginatively rediscovered.

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[301] 'The Imagination: its functions and its culture', *A Dish of Orts* p1

[302] 'The Imagination: its functions and its culture', *A Dish of Orts*, p2

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