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From Child to Childlike: The Cycle of Education in Novalis and George MacDonald

Chad Schrock

George MacDonald does not leave the question of primary influence to our imagination. Before we even reach the first page of his first novel, *Phantastes*, we find a three-paragraph quotation in German from Novalis (1772-1801), the German Romantic. MacDonald translated Novalis's *Spiritual Songs* while a pastor, an act that may have precipitated his acrimonious expulsion from the church on the basis of, among other things, taint by German theology. Despite this traumatic personal episode, MacDonald kept near the front of his mind these *Spiritual Songs*, and his translations of Novalis's *Hymns for the Night*, persistently tweaking them over many years and trying to disseminate their ideas more effectively in England. Within MacDonald's original work, he probably quotes more from Novalis than from any other source, several of which we will examine in the following pages. While the literary evidence may indicate that Novalis was a primary literary influence on MacDonald, the influence was also spiritual and deeply personal, as MacDonald demonstrates in his "Essays on Some of the Forms of Literature":

Next to possessing a true, wise and victorious friend seated by your fireside, it is blessed to have the spirit of such a friend embodied—for spirit can assume any embodiment—on your bookshelves. . . . Surely these biographies are not merely spiritual links connecting us in the truest manner with past times and vanished minds, and thus producing strong friendships. Are they not likewise . . . letters of introduction, forwarded, but not yet followed by him whom they introduce, for whose step we listen, and whose voice we long to hear; and whom we shall yet meet somewhere in the Infinite? Shall I not one day, 'somewhere, somehow,' clasp the large hand of Novalis, and, gazing on his face, compare his features with those of Saint John? (*Dish* 229-30)

MacDonald would like to meet Novalis, in Heaven, as a friend. MacDonald forces us to meet Novalis by quoting him many times. Novalis is, therefore, the literary and personal mentor MacDonald wanted us to know he had, although of course they never met—Novalis dying twenty-three years before MacDonald was born.

This deliberate association is, on the face of it, odd: a Victorian

Scotsman's devotion to a German Romantic several generations previous. Not surprisingly, MacDonald felt Novalis's influence not at the political or social level but at the level of the heart, spirituality, or abstract truth. The two men seemed to MacDonald to share some philosophical view of the way the world works—and share it with, again oddly enough, St. John. St. John lives within hailing distance of Novalis in MacDonald's mind; where we find the one, the other may be nearby.

We find St. John in MacDonald's 1858 fantasy *Phantastes* as a babysitter. A lady-ghost in the ballad of Sir Aglovaile leaves her ghost-child in St. John's care, underneath his stained-glass window:

When the moonbeams right through the window go,
Where the twelve are standing in glorious show,

She says the rest of them do not stir,
But one comes down to play with her.

Then I can go where I list, and weep,
For good St. John my child will keep. (229-30)

St. John's chief qualification as a babysitter appears elsewhere in MacDonald; he is "the most babe-like of them all" (qtd. in Nancarrow 51). As a babe-like caretaker of children, St. John models MacDonald's own concept of education or progress: the childlike care for and guide the children, and childlikeness is the ultimate cyclical goal of education. MacDonald superimposed this educational philosophy upon John but derived it more specifically from Novalis.

Both Novalis and MacDonald visualized education and progress in the form of a cycle with three stages: childhood, learning, and childhood. The entity (person, nation, even world) begins in a child-state and passes through requisite benevolent and harrowing education in order to enter a child-like state, returning to something that resembles the original uneducated simplicity in preparation for further growth. "Every stage of education begins with childhood," says Novalis. "That is why the most educated person on earth so much resembles a child" (*Philosophical Writings* 31). MacDonald provides the necessary geometrical figure:¹

The movements of man's life are in spirals: we go back whence we came, ever returning on our former traces, only upon a higher level, on the next upward coil of the spiral, so that it is a going back and a going forward ever and both at once. . . . The heavenly children will subdue kingdoms, work righteousness,

wax valiant in fight, rout the armies of the aliens, merry of heart
 as when in the nursery of this world they fought their fancied
 frigates, and defended their toy battlements. (*Antiphon* 256)

The product of education is thus a deepening childhood; childlike qualities are both the goal of progress and its prerequisite. Childhood is power, is potency. We expend our educative energy in order to gain what we have lost through education.

Both Novalis and MacDonald believed the world, or nature, and individual humans are passing through the same cycle simultaneously. The progress of the cosmos as a whole runs parallel to that of the individual. Novalis, perhaps because of his scientific background and higher philosophical ambitions, writes more than MacDonald about the progressive cycle of history and constructs two myths of history's progress.

The first is a simple dialectic between humanity, as represented by the poet's access to the sublime, and nature. In the beginning, people and nature co-existed symbiotically. The first golden age had nature as "man's friend, consoler, priestess, and enchantress"; the end of history will be "the dream of an infinite, everlasting present," a paradisiacal relationship with nature like that golden age (*Novices* 35). MacDonald's translation of Novalis's fifth *Hymn to the Night* explains this initial vision:

In the crystal grottoes revelled a wanton folk. Rivers, trees,
 flowers, and beasts had human wits. Sweeter tasted the wine,
 poured out by youth impersonated; a god was in the grape-clusters;
 a loving, motherly goddess upgrew in the full golden sheaves;
 love's sacred carousal was a sweet worship of the fairest of the
 goddesses. Life revelled through the centuries like one
 spring-time, an ever-variegated festival of the children of heaven
 and the dwellers on the earth. All races childlike adored the
 ethereal, thousandfold flame, as the one sublimest thing in the
 world. (16)

People knew divinity and desire through nature. Nature was the thousandfold flame in which they, childlike and innocent, saw the one sublime, the ultimate poetic. This heady religious and sensual bacchanalia "was but a fancy, a horrible dream-shape," however (*Hymns* 16). Nature had stored up enmity against the perfectly happy people. Night and Death, scions of Nature, broke up the party. In the present, then, Novalis's arch-poet Klingsohr sees nature as a frequent enemy of the poetic: "There is a contrary aspect in her as in man: brute desire and numb apathy and inertia which carry on a ceaseless conflict with poesy. This mighty conflict would be a fine subject for a poem.

. . . For the historian the periods of this conflict are extremely noteworthy, their depiction a fascinating and rewarding occupation. Those are generally ages in which poets are born” (*Ofterdingen* 113). From the conflict between poetry and nature emerge poetry about the conflict and poets as battle-brawny warriors within the conflict. Nature forces us away from the sublime in order to return us to it, hardened for its defense. In fact, in the fifth *Hymn to the Night*, Novalis introduces Christ as the Messianic child, first born in “the song-favouring hut of poverty” (*Hymns* 18). Hardship trains the Christ to be Messiah and to inspire songs as he passes, including Novalis’s own.

Novalis’s second myth of progress is that of Christian history, which he adumbrates in his visionary essay “Christendom or Europe.” The first Catholic Christian times involved abundant childlikeness, peace, and deep reverence given to Mother and Child, while the religious government of Rome exercised universal rule and benevolence. Nevertheless, “for this splendid kingdom mankind was not ripe, not developed enough” (*Selected Writings* 47). The anti-poetic Protestantism penetrated and shattered this sealed kingdom, rotted at the heart with humanity’s flaw. Once the Catholic golden vision had been exposed, and forced to dissipate, religious skepticism multiplied until Novalis stood in a secular age, prophesying a second Reformation, a new resurrection, out of and because of the ruin of the old: “Genuine anarchy is the creative element of religion. Out of the annihilation of all that is positive it raises its glorious head as a new creator of worlds” (*Selected Writings* 55). A new religious Golden Age is coming.

MacDonald makes his primary claims for history’s progressive cycle in *England’s Antiphon*, a collection of English devotional poetry that includes poetry by avowed agnostics.² While Novalis’s concern is for Christendom as a religious enterprise, MacDonald examines the spiritual life of one nation, and reflects upon it this way near the end of his book:

I have thus traced—how slightly!—the course of the religious poetry of England, from simple song, lovingly regardful of sacred story and legend, through the chant of philosophy, to the full-toned lyric of adoration. I have shown how the stream sinks in the sands of an evil taste generated by the worship of power and knowledge, and that a new growth of the love of nature—beauty counteracting not contradicting science—has led it by a fair channel back to the simplicities of faith in some, and to a holy questioning in others. (331-32)

The poetry of the nation originates in childlike simplicity, wends through a false and forced dialectic between beauty and science, and empties back into

simplicity at its completion, while sceptics along the way grapple in holy earnest ways with the holy earnest mysteries, their cycle not yet complete. MacDonald, like Novalis, sees the enemies of corporate simplicity as not truly or naturally its enemies, but forced to be its provisional enemies in order that the strife of dialectic could accomplish growth, education, and eventually reconciliation.

While Novalis thrives on his historical vision of past and future Golden Age in nature and religion, MacDonald applies the cycle of childhood, learning, and childhood more frequently to the human individual. Even here, though, Novalis does not leave MacDonald without aid, providing a general *Bildungsroman* in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and a more specific, vivid symbol of the cyclical education of the individual in his fairy tale of Hyacinth and Rose Petal. Hyacinth, a young man, had fallen in love with Rose Petal, a young woman, but their happiness quickly faded when a sorcerer and a mysterious old woman planted in Hyacinth's heart an insatiable desire to find the veiled maiden, the sacred goddess Isis, the mother of all, Hyacinth's true love. When Hyacinth eventually finds Isis after arduous searching, he lifts her veil, only to see Rose Petal. Hyacinth had what he sought all along—Rose Petal's simple love for him, his simple love for her—but through his quest for the complex cosmic mysteries, he learned that he could find even those complexities where he had begun: in the simplicities of love. He had Rose Petal's love at the beginning and the end of his quest, but he knew more of that love's identity, power, and mystery at the end, when the cycle of his quest closed, but on a higher plane.

Elsewhere Novalis suggests an alternative end to the story: "One person succeeded—he lifted the veil of the goddess at Saïs—But what did he see? He saw—wonder of wonders—himself" (*Philosophical Writings* 76). In truth, however, Novalis would not have seen these as essentially distinct endings. Discovery of the true identity of another and one's own true identity are simply two aspects of discovering God: "For the great I [God], the ordinary I and the ordinary You are only supplements. Every you is a supplement to the great I. We are not I at all—but we can and must become I. We are seeds for becoming I" (*Philosophical Writings* 127). Completing the circle is becoming I: myself, another, or God.

MacDonald prescribes his own, more overtly Christian, closed but cumulative circle for the individual thus: "Because we are the sons of God, we must become the sons of God" (*Unspoken Sermons* 124). The context of this statement explains that God's fatherhood toward us never changes, but

we must respond as children in order for him to release the benefits of his fatherhood to us. We move, in fact, from a childhood of potential, through a process of “becoming,” into a fully realized childhood. As if by the lifting of a veil, we discover what we are, what we have always been, and what we have always had.

For this cyclical process of discovery MacDonald adapts the Christian concept of resurrection. Linking education and resurrection, he writes, “Repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest, an ever-renewed awaking from the dead” (*Dish* 1). We are educated to prepare ourselves for action in the next stage of the spiral. Resurrection is thus no extraordinary thing; people experience it all the time. Yet no one knows the ultimate end of it. Anodos in *Phantastes* cannot predict what will happen to him, as he watches his own self die:

Another self seemed to arise, like a white spirit from a dead man, from the dumb and trampled self of the past. Doubtless, this self must again die and be buried, and again, from its tomb, spring a winged child; but of this my history as yet bears not the record. Self will come to life even in the slaying of self; but there is ever something deeper and stronger than it, which will emerge at last from the unknown abysses of the soul: will it be as a solemn gloom, burning with eyes? or a clear morning after the rain? or a smiling child, that finds itself nowhere, and everywhere? (290)

If education connotes resurrection, then, it is fundamentally a promise of something beyond what we can presently see or imagine in our current uneducated state. MacDonald often emphasizes what knowledge his characters are or are not ready to receive; for example, the North Wind in *At the Back of the North Wind* reshapes herself into forms appropriate to the perceptive capacity of those she visits: to Diamond, a lovely woman; but to a drunken nurse, a wolf. She is kinder to some than to others for the same reason; not everyone is ready for the same thing (37). Anodos and Vane, in *Phantastes* and *Lilith* respectively, encounter many experiences and concepts for which they are simply unequipped. In MacDonald’s descriptions of the educations of children, such as *The Princess and the Goblin*, “The Golden Key” and “The Wise Woman,” the teacher plainly and patiently whittles the lesson down to the size of her students’ minds.

Since we have not passed completely through the purgative fires of education—MacDonald characterizes even the ultimate terrors of Hell as an individual condition designed for pedagogy (*Lilith* 95-96)—the promise, not

the reality, of education's end sustains us. So, in *Phantastes*, the music in the leaves whispers, "A great good is coming—is coming—is coming to thee, Anodos" (323), and Anodos is also told, "the old woman in the cottage, with the young eyes . . . knows something, though she must not always tell it, that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress" (250). MacDonald holds in front of uneducated humanity a hope that it cannot at present understand.

Although both Novalis and MacDonald trace two separate cycles of education, one for the world and one for individual people, both men see the two cycles as fundamentally linked. In particular, they see the parties involved in the education of the other. Fittingly, since Novalis is deeply concerned with nature, he theorizes, "If God could become man, then He can also become stone, plant, animal, and element, and perhaps in this way there is a continuous redemption in Nature" (*Selected Writings* 72). Novalis is not anthropocentric, nor does he suggest that God is. If God values the incarnational stratagem of redemption so highly that He employs it with humanity, surely He would not hesitate to use it on behalf of Nature. Perhaps in imitation of this redemptive pattern, as Robert Lee Wolff notes, "in portions of his romance *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* that he did not live to complete, Novalis intended his hero to become successively a stone, a tree, a golden ram, and a human being, moving from each incarnation to the next as the result of a sacrifice" (38). The redemptions and cycles of nature and people are interdependent and interconnected. Which has precedence in Novalis' mind? He says, "Our vocation is the education of the earth" (*Philosophical Writings* 72); in other words, humans exist to teach and shape Nature, to propel it along its teleological education.

MacDonald's expressed priority is the opposite. "The world exists for our education," he declares. "It is the nursery of God's children, served by troubled slaves, troubled because the children are themselves slaves—children, but not good children. Beyond its own will or knowledge, the whole creation works for the development of the children of God into the sons of God" (*Second Series* 136).³ The world's vocation is our education. It tends us; its troubles are not intrinsic but originate with us, prompted by our failed identity. Creation serves a purpose it cannot understand; MacDonald leaves room for its education and redemption here and elsewhere, but we and it are to act as if we are its primary reason for existence. In *The Princess and Curdie*, MacDonald suggests that the miners are the children of the mountain, receiving her gifts (13). It may be that humanity is meant to

become children of parents God and Nature. We embrace our identities inherited from them both.

In this case, the boundary between humanity and nature blurs. Lilith must recognize her true identity as an inlet of the everlasting ocean flowing into her forever, never ebbing (217). Novalis, for his part, complains, “I do not know why people always talk of humanity as something separate. Are not animals, plants, and stones, stars, and breezes also portions of humanity?” (qtd. in Wolff 38) The relationships and resemblances between people and nature are genetic. Novalis and MacDonald derive this mystical evolution from Jacob Boehme and Swedenborg, which organizing principle Wolff describes thus: “The order of creation ascended from minerals through plants through animals to man, each evolving upward into the next category, and man himself destined to evolve toward God,” and excerpts Novalis’s poem on the subject, *Es färbte sich die Wiese grün*: “The formless dust becomes a bush / The tree takes on the likeness of a beast / The beast itself will become a man . . . / and in sum I saw that now on earth / Human Beings will turn to Gods” (37-38). Wolff also cites several instances of evolution in MacDonald: the fish-to-aëranth evolution in “The Golden Key,” the Beech’s prophecy in *Phantastes* that trees will become people, and MacDonald’s earliest published poem, “A Hidden Life” (138, 54, 38-39). MacDonald does not see those evolutionary stages as discrete, however; he refers frequently to humans in animal terms, as if their evolution were not yet complete. A girl turns into a wolf in “The Grey Wolf,” the witch Watho in “The Day Boy and the Night Girl” has a wolf inside her who makes her cruel, Wilfrid Cumbermede declares that “all the wild beast in my nature was roused” (487), and MacDonald the critic says of satire, “Its very language is that of the half-brute from which it is well-named” (*Antiphon* 125).

Humanity retains these sometimes vestigial, sometimes essential characteristics of its evolutionary development *within the human spirit*. According to the Raven in *Lilith*, “Everyone, as you ought to know, has a beast-self—and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent-self too—which it takes a deal of crushing to kill! In truth, he has also a tree-self and a crystal-self, and I don’t know how many selves more—all to get into harmony. You can tell what sort a man is by his creature that comes oftenest to the front” (28). Part of our evolutionary education, then, is to learn how to harmonize the clamouring influences of our spiritual genetics. Choosing our own correct shape from among the possible shapes our own souls offer to us, the proper raw material, the most suitable childhood, is the

way we advance. Choosing an improper identity, the “false self” of *Phantastes* that may be only a stage of evolution we have outgrown and should reject, results in devolution. Curdie in *The Princess and Curdie* meets a grotesquery of former humans that have devolved into a hodgepodge of animal features. These beasts, inevitably, are ready to be reborn into humans. They have learned. Curdie takes the paw of beast Lina and feels the hand of a child; Great-Great-Grandmother tells him, “That paw in your hand now might almost teach you the whole science of natural history—the heavenly sort, I mean” (103). Lina had moved from child to beast to child again, presumably wiser for the journey, in contrast to the humans Curdie meets who extend to him hands in which the paws and hoofs and scaly bellies of devolution await a bursting forth, a parodic resurrection, from the human cocoon.

The cycle from childhood through education to childhood exists; humanity and creation walk through it hand-in-hand. Something within childhood itself must be worth its status as the end of all history. Some essential attributes we can recognize in our own children must, extrapolated and expanded, form an apocalyptic destination for ourselves and all existence.

A child begins with a natural array of good qualities. Neither Novalis nor MacDonald adheres in a strict sense to the Christian doctrine of innate depravity; we are certainly not completely fallen. Childhood is good, not nasty or cruel. Both men wrote several *Bildungsromanen* which describe as a matter of course the characteristics necessary for their heroes’ education—“Hyacinth and Rose Petal” and Heinrich von *Ofterdingen* for Novalis; *Phantastes*, *Lilith*, most of his score of Scottish novels, and numerous fairy tales for MacDonald—that not coincidentally are the ideal characteristics of a child. What makes a child good is, ironically, how its childhood promotes receptivity to the educational process, echoing Novalis’s “Every stage of education begins with childhood.” Childhood means that the child may grow.⁴ Although elsewhere he claims, “I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five” (*Dish* 317), MacDonald writes some books which can be described as behavioral prescriptions for children: *The Princess and the Goblin*, “The Wise Woman,” and *At the Back of the North Wind*. In *The Princess and the Goblin* MacDonald defines the proper actions and attitudes of a princess, but a princess, as MacDonald describes her, seems nothing more than a very good child, a heightened idealization of childhood, what every child is supposed to

be and what MacDonald hopes his girl audience of any social stratum will emulate.

Novalis and MacDonald chiefly agree on what a child should be. The first and most important characteristic is love. Novalis gives his definition of childhood in one of his fragmentary jottings: “Theory of humanity. *A child is love that has become visible*” (*Philosophical Writings* 123). All else is what a child does; love is what a child is. MacDonald concurs with the attribute: “Lootie had very foolish notions concerning the dignity of a princess, not understanding that the truest princess is just the one who loves all her brothers and sisters best” (*Goblin* 254). In both *The Princess and the Goblin* and “The Wise Woman” children are not supposed to pluck flowers, but should instead enjoy by viewing, and thereby demonstrate a rudimentary awareness of the health and welfare of another.

Akin to love is wonder, a joy in creation, in the possibilities built by child-imaginings upon the foundation of sense experience. “The fresh gaze of the child is more brimming with emotion than the intuition of the most determined seer,” writes Novalis (*Philosophical Writings* 67), and elsewhere: “Nothing holds greater lure for children than fire and water; every stream promises to carry them into the flowery distance, into places more beautiful than home” (*Novices* 107). Wonder is the explosion of new meaning into the mind, only possible to the naively expectant child. The advantages of wonder for education are obvious; the child seeks by love of creation to know it and revel in it, to consummate knowledge with more knowledge of increasing depth and intimacy. In fairy-land, says MacDonald, adults become like children—that is the advantage of fairy-land—“who, being in a chronic condition of wonder, [are] surprised at nothing” (*Phantastes* 36). Everything is new. The fairies in “The Carasoyne” blindfold a child and steal him, lying all the way about the exotic landscapes they are passing through in order to keep him moving and content. MacDonald assures us the child would have been marveling either way, whether blindfolded or seeing, whether lied to or told the truth (*Light Princess* 257). The fairies do not need to lie to the child to keep him interested. Reality is wonderful enough.

That child could immerse himself in wonder despite a blindfold because what he knows of reality has always been wild, fresh, and new. From that foundational knowledge the child can extend faith and belief that what is unseen is just as marvellous as his view. So Novalis comments, in the context of education theory, “It is assumed that the *child* (subject) has belief—the absolute *acceptance* of a *principle that awakens activity*”

(*Philosophical Writings* 123). Belief promotes education because it enables the child to act upon knowledge given but not proven. MacDonald demonstrates this extensively in *The Princess and the Goblin*, of which David Robb says a major theme is “the question of belief and its difficulty” (*God’s Fiction* 120). Princess Irene does not have to learn the same lesson twice. Now that she knows her grandmother will wipe her tears, she will return like “a good child” (23). Now that she knows she may trust her grandmother, she does, even when she does not feel as though her grandmother exists, and even when her grandmother’s thread seems to lead her away from safety, into the goblin kingdom. Irene, when she does not feel belief, is likely to act upon her belief anyway, on what she has known, even if she does not see it now. It is a relief to know, while reading *The Princess and the Goblin*, that in contrast to the bumbling protagonists of *Phantastes* and *Lilith* this heroine will make the right decision because she is a good child, a proper princess.

The child loves, wonders, believes, and is faithful to what those actions gain. In the early days of Christendom, writes Novalis in “Christianity and Europe,” “Childlike faith bound men to their pronouncements” (*Selected Writings* 45). What they believed they did not desert. MacDonald typically insists upon obedience to one’s word and to others, and he does not spare his audiences of children. Real princesses do as they are told even when they are inclined not to (*Goblin* 22) and cannot tell a lie (*Goblin* 34); they do as they promise, unless they discover it is wrong (*Goblin* 295). Belief implies perseverance.

Such an irreproachable being as the child may therefore enter difficult or seemingly compromising situations and emerge unsoiled, innocent. Novalis has faith enough in the childlike to expose them to the most bewildering of physical mysteries. Currently and regrettably, he says, we are apt “to be ashamed of open nature and to endow it with a dark, ghostly force through making sensuous beings secret and hidden. This urge is assuredly Romantic—but not favorable to childlike innocence and transparency. This is particularly noticeable in sexual relations” (*Philosophical Writings* 154). MacDonald is more reticent, but still places his innocent children in the middle of situations that might intimidate adults. Innocence permits the baby in *At the Back of the North Wind* to crow and laugh in the middle of the family’s financial trouble; no one believes this to be incongruous (156-57).

Along with innocence comes ignorance of what befools innocence, and attending ignorance comes simplicity. Children and the childlike are inevitably simple. Miners in Novalis are generally simple, childlike, and

have access by this quality to the mysteries of the earth. The good miners in MacDonald share this trait, concentrating with single-minded determination on the few loves, trades, and purposes they know.

There are, however, bad miners in MacDonald—bad simple-minded people, bad childlike people, bad children. Novalis pays scant attention to the immature childish, but MacDonald draws a distinction between desirable and undesirable childlike qualities. MacDonald also identifies why a first stage of development and childhood might not suffice for perfection. The Lovers and the Bags in *Lilith* provide his chief case studies on the weaknesses of childhood.

When the narrator of *Lilith*, Vane, stumbles upon the Lovers, he immediately warms to this race of children who rescue him from persecution, feed him, talk to him, and wile him with winsome personalities and behavior. They do not “grow up” and remain Lovers; a good Lover stays a child not desiring to grow and progress, because the group has no concept of growth. No Lover has ever cried; no water is available. Lovers live on sweet fruit.

Should Lovers “grow up,” and some do, they become Bags, a disagreeable race of irremediably stupid giants who abuse each other and Vane while battenning themselves on foul-tasting fruits. Generally, the path from Lover through growing up to a Bag is greed. A Lover develops the taste for the fruit of the Bags and begins to eat it constantly, spurning the advice of the Lovers’ chief, Lona. Physical growth and mental and spiritual diminution follow.

Lovers are incomplete children, lacking the opportunity for education. They live in a perpetual paradise but are helpless against the craven urges that befall some of their number, and, as Vane soon learns, they would be helpless without his adult leadership when their archenemy Lilith attacks. Eternal childhood is nice as far as it can go—the Lovers are made to love and wonder and believe and learn—but little to love, wonder, believe, and learn presents itself to them, and their childhood is thus wasted. With the fruit and the antediluvian lack of water, one can scarcely escape intimations of Eden, but here is an Eden without the freshness of ever-received knowledge.

The Bags take what foul knowledge they can receive. They eat the other fruit, and know it, and love it, but it turns them more foolish than before. Bags are children whose carnal drives thwart their education. They pass through a simulation of the educational cycle—childhood, knowledge received, a level of physical maturity—but the end is far from the beginning and from glory. Greed or selfishness, according to MacDonald, renders the

educational cycle a travesty. Not surprisingly, his homiletical description of children not childlike is “a child whose mind is so brimful of worldly wisdom that the human childishness has vanished from it, as well as the divine childlikeness” (*First Series* 3). A certain kind of worldly education results in tragically stunted growth.

Since the original state of childlikeness is naturally beautiful, but, at least for MacDonald, incomplete, and since improper education results in folly and even “false selves,” the educator must choose and craft the educational program with care. Novalis and MacDonald recommend various mechanisms for growth that result in the goals they prefer.

To be educated one must open oneself to receive knowledge from those who know: teachers. Teachers and mentors appear throughout Novalis and MacDonald: instructing, scolding, correcting, approving, releasing the student when a lesson is finished. Heinrich von Ofterdingen has the poet Klingsohr and many others; the novices of Saïs have their Master; Hyacinth has the aged sorcerer and the weird old woman of the fire. Vane has the Raven; Diamond his North Wind; Irene and Curdie the great-great-grandmother; Agnes and Rosamund their wise woman; Tangle the old men of earth, sea, and fire; Alec Forbes the tutor Cupples; Thomas Wingfold the dwarf Polwarth; and on it goes. For every youth baffled by the checks and trials of education, Novalis and MacDonald generally provide a sage to lead the youth to truth. Is Vane unable to distinguish between true and false dreams in this lifetime? Is it true that when Vane is dead, the false dreams will not appear to him, and only then will he know the true absolutely? How can Vane then proceed while still alive? Raven will help him discern. Raven must provide Vane even the information of his own inability to discern.

A student implies a teacher, obviously, but less obvious is the role of guide. A guide is generally sent by a sage to point the learner toward truth. In Klingsohr’s fairy tale, Novalis describes the father and Ginnistan creating a snake out of a magnetized iron rod; the snake guides Ginnistan to her father the moon: “The little serpent faithful stayed / And pointed to the north; / And so they followed unafraid / The guide that led them forth” (*Ofterdingen* 128). From this sole serpent of Novalis MacDonald teases many guides into being, most obviously the serpent leading Tangle to the land from which the shadows fall. The childlike Old Man of the Fire, who is probably God and whose scenes MacDonald explicitly furnishes with Novalis’s imagination (“Golden Key” 206), draws a line in the sand, speaks a snake out of an egg, then lets him grow to fill the line and undulate off in a straight path without

turning. “‘Follow that serpent,’ said the child. ‘He will lead you the right way’” (“Golden Key” 208). But there are other guides: the wind in *North Wind*, Jenny the hen in “The Carasoy,” fishes and aëranths in “The Golden Key,” the stream in *Phantastes*, the path in “Cross Purposes” that points the way to where it cannot go, the fire-fly light in *Lilith*. Anodos takes it as his custom in Fairy-land to follow whatever moves, anywhere; movement appears to be the thing. If one sees movement and believes it to imply a benevolent intent, one may follow in peace.

Novalis and MacDonald agree that art is the proper curriculum of education. Within their stories of human education and growth, Novalis and MacDonald embed songs and stories, tales-within-tales, and lyrics within lyrical prose. Novalis’s Ofterdingen learns from pictures, a variety of fairy-stories, and songs, but occasionally songs in the book are contextless and thus not clearly for Ofterdingen’s benefit, particularly the Astralis poem beginning Part II, as if we are to understand as readers that the song is meant for our benefit, and if the song, then the book we read. Many critics have linked MacDonald’s emphasis on poetry as means to truth with Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.⁵ One does not learn without receptivity to art. MacDonald also calls attention to art’s benefit for his reader by including selections unnecessary to the story, most notably his array of chapter epigrams in *Phantastes*, virtually a suggested reading-list for the sympathetic reader.

Art is an exuberant path to revelation, linked closely with wonder, but within that art lurks the more unfriendly lesson of pain or death. Surprisingly the pedagogical use of suffering is perhaps one of the concepts that attracted MacDonald to Novalis at the beginning. Novalis’s famed *Hymns to the Night* chronicle his grateful worship of the bleak emotions overwhelming him after the death of his betrothed Sophie. If Sophie had not died, Novalis would not be a writer of power; what he learned through her disaster gave him “a new, unfathomable world” of insight (*Hymns* 12). MacDonald, patient universalist though he probably was,⁶ possessed a harsh Scottish Calvinist perception of Divine chastising. The individual may not “deserve” the chastisement in any conventional sense. Sophy in “The Gifts of the Child Christ” begs God for chastisement and receives it, though clearly she is the sole angelic, or childlike, soul in the story. Then again, perhaps the individual does deserve retribution. MacDonald warns:

Lest it should be possible that any unchildlike soul might, in arrogance and ignorance, think to stand upon his rights *against* God, and demand of him this or that after the will of the flesh. . . .

He has a claim on God, then, a divine claim, for any pain, want, disappointment, or misery, that would help to show him to himself as the fool he is; he has a claim to be punished to the last scorpion. (*Second Series* 193)

Art crafts meaning from the universe. Within that art, pain and death, or suffering in general, forces people to face harsh truths they might otherwise escape. Hope, then, functions as a lifeline in pain, bracing the sufferer or the confused with ultimate teleological truth. Novalis, as mentioned earlier, places his narration of *The Novices of Saïs* in a time-between-times. The child-teacher has come and gone, and Saïs awaits his return. The novices learn in the interim, fed on old tales and promises. The hermit sage tells Ofterdingen that one should “piece history together out of hope and memories,” learning “the hidden interlinking of the past and the future” through the sympathy or correspondence of past event with event not yet occurred (83). In several places, Novalis declares that fact, or rather, the fact of a Messianic life, is prophecy. MacDonald closes his two fantasy novels with prophecies of a great waking to come.

So appear the approved teachers; so appears the recommended curriculum. Left is the crafted pedagogical strategy: what, in fact, the teacher demands of the student. Here again, Novalis and MacDonald agree. Knowledge inevitably comes via ethics, a faithful obedience to a higher moral code one may not understand at present. Belief and obedience precede understanding as a gate precedes access to an unvisited destination of which one has been told: “The *theory of the self* and the *history of mankind*—or nature and art—are united in a higher (moral theory of education)—and *mutually perfected*. Through morality nature and art each arm the other into the infinite” (*Philosophical Writings* 123). MacDonald riddles his sermons and novels with insistence on the priority of obedience: “The man who does not think right, is unable because he has not been walking right; only when he begins to do the thing he knows, does he begin to be able to think aright; then God comes to him in a new and higher way” (*Second Series* 262). In “The Wise Woman,” the title character eaves her house after carefully instructing her pupil how to behave in her absence. Only if the child obeys will the child’s situation improve. The only way, then, to escape an unpleasant position we are in is “to do the work of it so well that we grow fit for a better” (71).

The better position, the knowledge quested for, the ending apocalypse or Golden Age—Novalis and MacDonald are both explicitly teleological,

believing that we endure education because we have something to gain. The cycle ends, the circle closes, with us on a higher plane than we began. Presumably, then, the advantages to the final stage of childlikeness do not merely include love, wonder, belief, faithfulness, innocence, and simplicity, but also other more advanced rewards for which the educated person and world have now acquired the necessary taste.

Here we have explicit acknowledgement of influence in the form of MacDonald's quotation of Novalis and subsequent commentary:

Novalis has said: "Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, ein Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein." (Philosophy is really homesickness, an impulse to be at home everywhere.) 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 reciprocity, 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 truly *can* occupy. (*Dish* 211)

What we miss on earth is home, and, in particular, the home of our personal identity. In "The Carasoy," MacDonald self-consciously models the human experience of homelessness between birth and death through the exile of the fairies, who wander until their restlessness leaves and they settle, not satisfied, to a place not their home but their doom. "Come home, come home," a bell pleads in yet another story (*Gray Wolf* 92), and the characters longingly respond. MacDonald's characters desire a place where they fit, stick into place like a key turning in a lock, relax into a habitat custom-designed. Our personal identity, Novalis and MacDonald say, is not yet formed. "We are seeds for becoming I," Novalis simultaneously warns and promises, and MacDonald echoes through the Raven to Vane, "You are but beginning to become an individual" (*Lilith* 18). MacDonald goes further, promising faces (*Lilith* 96) and access to their own true names (*Lilith* 76) to those who finish growing.

In the end, a Saviour will bring a golden age of Paradise. Novalis and MacDonald promise this: Novalis in *The Novices of Saïs*, and the twelfth *Spiritual Song*, and "Christianity and Europe."

The newborn child will be the image of his father, a new Golden Age, with dark and infinite eyes, an Age prophetic, wonder-working, miraculously healing, comforting, and kindling eternal life—a great Age of reconciliation, a Saviour who, like a good spirit, is at home among men, believed in though not seen,

visible under countless forms to believers, consumed as bread and wine, embraced as a bride, breathed as air, heard as word and song, and with heavenly delight accepted as death into the core of the subsiding body amid the supreme pangs of love.

(*Selected Writings* 58)

MacDonald joins the chorus, Novalis's color gold marking his descriptions of the coming glory. The golden cock crows; the sunlit wind pushes a wave of crimson and gold to herald that "something more than the sun, greater than the light, is coming, is coming—none the less surely coming that it is long upon the road! What matters to-day, or to-morrow, or ten thousand years to Life himself, to Love himself!" (*Lilith* 256).

So the Saviour comes, and with him a waking, in a valedictory flourish of which St. John would have been proud. MacDonald places the same teleological quotation from Novalis near the end of his two major fantasy novels; in *Lilith* it is the very last line: "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one" (264).⁷ Our life is no dream now, but someday we hope that we will wake from it into an unimaginable knowledge and bliss: "When I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom," the life which has up to now taught us and nourished us from its post of greater wisdom, "I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more" (*Lilith* 264).

Just so, our knowledge, and our authors' knowledge, of apocalypse and the future Golden Age frays to almost nothing.

Endnotes

1. Bruce Haywood has used the figure of a spiral to describe Novalis's depiction of history and the individual state (148, 151).
2. Paula Nancarrow explains that to MacDonald "even the poetry of unbelief is 'holy doubt'—part of the questioning process leading to further revelation" (43-44), a religious dialectic similar to Novalis's.
3. MacDonald continues this quotation with a possible allusion to Novalis, "Then shall the fables of a golden age, which faith invented, and unbelief threw into the past, unfold their essential reality" (136), demonstrating MacDonald's own aversion to the idealization of history while insisting, via the nomenclature of "golden age," upon some form of his mentor's prophetic vision.
4. Both men agree that the ideal child is an ideal student; both men also agree that God is childlike, "to us a God, to himself a child" (*Songs* 49), in MacDonald's translation of Novalis. Neither man bothers to speculate whether God is himself growing, involved in a higher plane of cyclical education.
5. Rolland Hein identifies the theme's ubiquity: "An invariable trait of MacDonald's

potential saints is that they have a poetic sensibility which makes them either poets themselves or lovers of poetry” (*Harmony* 169)

6. His son Greville MacDonald believed that George MacDonald wrote *Lilith* to correct his fellow universalists who let sinners off too easily:

The book 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 as the way back into the Kingdom. . . . But George MacDonald must, . . . out of love for his fellow-travellers, raise their souls from out the deadly euphoric smoke till they are able once more to cry out at the scorch of the flames. (551-52)

7. The quotation in *Phantastes*, one of the epigrams to the last chapter, is translated somewhat differently: “Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will” (319).

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