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Rooted in all its Story, More is Meant than Meets the Ear: A Study of the Relational and the Revelational Nature of George MacDonald's Mythopoeic Art

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Work in Progress

North Wind *publishes scholarship on MacDonald that represents work that is in progress. Below is an excerpt from Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson's dissertation for a PhD from St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, September 2010. We include the table of contents for the entire dissertation, the complete Works Cited for the dissertation, and have placed all notes as endnotes in the excerpt.*

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Abstract

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

standard MacDonald texts, as does the textual engagement with Matthew Arnold and F.D. Maurice. These close readings, informed by the established context, demonstrate MacDonald's emergence, practice, and intent as a mythopoeic writer. . . .

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Prologue

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

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

The committee was gathered to ensure remembrance.

In full, the list is as follows:

President: The Prime Minister, Rt. Hon J Ramsay MacDonald LLD (first Labour Prime Minister, then serving his first term; born in Lossiemouth – named his son after MacDonald's Lossiemouth protagonist Malcolm).
Vice Presidents: J.M. Bulloch, LLD (literary and theatre critic, and a historian noted for work on the Gordons of Strathbogie); Prebendary Wilson Carlisle DD (founder of the Church of England's socially-concerned 'Church Army'); Hon. Stephen Coleridge (author, lawyer, and cofounder of NSPCC);

Mary Davies (renowned singer, founding president of the Welsh Folk Song Society, and wife of MacDonald's secretary W.C. Davies); A. Ruth Fry (writer and Quaker peace activist); John Galsworthy (Nobel Prize novelist and playwright); Robert F. Horton (theologian, historian, and literary critic); L. P. Jacks (philosophy and theology professor); John Kelman, O.B.E. (minister, literary critic, theologian); Coulson Kernahan (novelist, poet); A.S. Peake (biblical scholar); W.E. Orchard (theologian, Presbyterian minister turned Catholic priest); Ernest Rhys (novelist, essayist, playwright, founder of Everyman's Library); George Russell (Irish critic, painter, poet); Clement Shorter (journalist, editor of *London Illustrated News*, founder of *Sketch* and *Tattler*); Bishop Edward S. Talbot (historian, bishop of Southwark, Winchester, Rochester); Katherine Tynan (Irish novelist and poet); W.B. Yeats (poet).
Chairman: G.K. Chesterton (author, literary critic).
Vice–Chairman: Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson (actor, artist, theatre-producer).
Additional committee members: Sir James M. Barrie (author of *Peter Pan*); A. Violet Cavendish Bentinck (philanthropist, patron of the arts, aunt of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother);[1] Joseph King (writer, Member of Parliament); Rev. E. P. Powell (author); Sir Leonard Powell (Justice of the Peace); Jane Cobden Unwin (one of London's first elected female politicians, activist, wife of publisher Thomas Fisher whose company, after merging with Ruskin's, published *Lord of the Rings*).
Honourable Secretaries: Greville MacDonald (doctor, author, MacDonald's eldest son); A.S. Watt, CBE (literary agent, son of A.P. Watt, Britain's first literary agent.) [2]

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

Part One

AN EXAMINATION OF *MYTHOPOESIS*

"Thinkest thou," says Carlyle in "Past and Present," "there were no poets till Dan Chaucer? No heart burning with a thought which it could not hold, and had no word for; and needed to shape and coin a word for – what thou callest a metaphor, trope, or the like? For every word we have there was such a man and poet. The coldest word was once a glowing new metaphor and bold questionable originality." […] But while the imagination of man has thus the divine function of putting thought into form, it has a duty altogether human, which is paramount to that function – the duty, namely, which springs from his immediate relation to the Father, that of following and finding out the divine imagination in whose image it was made. To do this, the man must watch its signs, its manifestations. He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the works of His hands.

"The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture"
(published in 1867, 1882, 1893; delivered as a lecture repeatedly)

INTRODUCTION

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

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

In the same vein, C.S. Lewis called MacDonald "the greatest genius of [mythmaking] whom I know," and designated him his "spiritual master." (*Anthology* xviii) Madeleine L'Engle credited him with not only shaping but also saving her understanding of God and her ability to be an artist. (L'Engle 145-156) W.H. Auden wrote: "George MacDonald is pre-eminently a mythopoeic writer," and that able to "project his inner life into images, beings, landscapes which are valid for all, he is one of the most remarkable writers of the nineteenth century." (478) As such authors discuss the nature of MacDonald's writing they use variations of an unusual word: *Mythopoesis*. It is this gift of "Mythopoesis" for which they most revere MacDonald, regarding him a master of the art. But the word is difficult and problematic because it is elusive. Completely unfamiliar to many, it is also often misconstrued by those who do use it. That it was so intentionally applied to MacDonald by men who revered the concept – "it may even be one of the greatest arts," says Lewis (*Anthology* xviii) – compels careful examination of what these writers meant, and why MacDonald in particular evoked such distinction. From its inception such examination reveals that to understand this Storyteller for storytellers it must be recognized that he is a storyteller *of* storytellers: essentially and intentionally MacDonald is not a solitary voice. The endeavour to understand the concept of Mythopoesis as used by those who first coupled it with MacDonald (Chapter One), and the contemplation of how he comes to be a mythopoeic writer, evokes new considerations and reconsiderations of MacDonald himself. A careful reading of the discussions out of which came Tolkien and Lewis' use of the word *mythopoeic* not only redresses superficial definitions – and misapplications – but also presents a methodological challenge to established study and interpretation. Contrary to such methodologies as employed by New Critics, exploration of the concept demands that the significance of relationships be taken into account – not just the relationships that occur within a given text, but, according to

MacDonald, the relationships out of which that text has grown: both literary and biographical.

MacDonald scholarship has rarely not engaged with MacDonald's biography, yet the amount of primary research conducted upon that biography has been limited – and as a result, some of the various biographic points that have informed critical readings deserve more extensive or even renewed examination.[3] It is pertinent to acknowledge that MacDonald's own academic mentors had some strong opinions about the benefits that can arise from the interdisciplinary engagement of biography with literary study. That a text did not stand independent of the human from whose lived experience that text was issued was an integral aspect of their own literary critique, and thus of how they taught. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, these men were atypically interdisciplinary in their approach. The potential of conversation between author and reader was central to their understanding of how to critique a text, and became paramount in understanding MacDonald's own apprehension and practice of literature, and essentially, of Mythopoesis. Their emphases resonate with an assertion by philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, that art is "inextricably embedded in the fabric of human intention." (3) MacDonald's mentors A.J. Scott and F.D. Maurice suggest that preferential status should not be given to a work in and of itself, even if that is where the would-be critic may begin. They are interested in a piece of writing as a piece of – to use Tolkien's term – *sub-creation*. As such they believe that both its conception and inception should also be taken into account. For them this is a theological perspective: to know something of the author, and of how a piece of work came about, is to understand that piece of work better – just as for them to know something of God, and of the creation of the world, is to understand Creation better, and, vice-versa. While they did not believe that pursuing critical study in this manner could lead to full revelation (as indicated even in their delight at the ever-unfolding geological and evolutionary discoveries of their day), they did firmly believe that the effort was worthwhile and likely to be enlightening. While the methodology of these men is quite different from that practiced throughout the century that followed, it is of some interest that it was with these convictions that they founded the very discipline of English Literature (as detailed in Chapter Three). For that alone their methodology merits some consideration. It is admittedly a methodology that fell out of fashion, and yet in the wake of newer and various methods of reading text, it is a methodology certain aspects of which are beginning to be reconsidered as viable. Despite its apparent contradictions with certain tenets of New Criticism, the practice of "biographical criticism" has never completely disappeared from literary study – in particular pockets, such as those of Dickens and Whitman studies, it has maintained acceptability. In Jackson J. Benson's "Steinbeck: A Defense

of Biographical Criticism" (1989) he describes the form as a "recognition of 'otherness' – that there is an author who is different in personality and background from the reader […] a discovery that puts a burden on us to reach out to recognize that uniqueness before we can fully comprehend an author's writings." (108) In *The New Biographical Criticism* (2004) George Hoffman concurs, arguing that it might "be time to reconsider the biographical dimension" – as distinct from psychoanalytic criticism. (1) While recognizing that pitfalls do exist, Hoffman calls for a "renewal" of the methodology: "We have heard much, as students and literary scholars over the last half-century, on the abuses of biography; all too little has been said on the subject of its uses." (2) Hoffman, a Renaissance scholar and an executive committee member of the MLA, discusses the critical risks of sidestepping an author's life, and the benefits of "casting a wider net over the general conditions of life in the author's time." (3)

Such an approach does not disavow the value of "close readings" as advocated by New Criticism in regards to the recognition and discussion of such devices as theme, pattern, rhetoric, symbolism, irony, imagery – as already indicated, close attention to such internal characteristics of a text was even encouraged by MacDonald's literary mentors Scott and Maurice. But contrary to the later New Critics, these men taught that although this aspect of "close reading" was a primary action, its value did not outweigh that of the above mentioned "biographical criticism," nor of familiarity with other works by the author. They did consider a text a unified whole, but one that, like a human, could be even better understood for knowing its external relationships; they did not view any work as self-contained: both the words on the page as well as the contexts that produced and surrounded them were important. Thus their response to what the New Critics would call "intentional fallacy" did differ: while they did not believe that one could infallibly declare the intent of an author, they did think it of considerable importance to attempt to understand the intentions of an author. For them, engaging with a text meant engaging with a communication by another human, and they believed it worthwhile to endeavour to understand that other human as best as possible – while ever aware that misconceptions were always possible. In light of this perception of a text as communication, they also believed the affective capability of a text to be worth consideration; a communication necessarily invited a response. This was tightly tied to their theological understanding of Revelation and the invitation of reception. Yet they did not believe that one "correct" reading of a text was possible, for the humans engaging with a text, attempting to critique it, necessarily brought different sets of tools and experiences to the page. For MacDonald and his mentors the engagement of each reader with the writing of the author could enable new truths to come forth – as such a text would always mean more

than an author intended, but that did not therefore render the declaration of intent by the author invaluable.

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

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

MacDonald explains elsewhere that with his own art he hopes not to show readers what they already know, nor indeed what they want to know, but instead to "wake them up." His work is endlessly explicitly pointing his readers to the other artists who have shaped his own work, and to whom he is responding. For MacDonald this is not an issue of "genetic fallacy," but rather an invitation to his reader to enter the conversation that he is having in response to certain artists with whom he himself has engaged. In this sense, he almost renders it impossible to conduct the type of exclusive "close reading" that only considers one of his works within itself, for he continuously drives the reader *out* with his frequent quotations and naming of other artists – even in his fantasy. As Mr. Raven croaks in exasperation to Mr. Vane, who eventually learns to stop considering only *his* interpretation of events, and begins to engage with the voices of others: "A book is a door in, and therefore a door out." (*Lilith* 25) MacDonald explains that a book draws the reader into a world envisioned by another so that the reader may be better prepared, for having related with the communications of that author, to venture out into yet other worlds. MacDonald repeatedly attempts to show that no book can exist (or come into existence) in isolation from others. And to be able to explore adequately the mythopoeic art that so many writers attribute to MacDonald, writers who claim that their own literary output –

their artistic action – has been affected by that mythopoeic art, this thesis likewise chooses venture "out."

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

In the process, this thesis takes a direction antithetical to the recently published (2000) critique of Cambridge author and critic David Holbrook. Holbrook's *A Study of George MacDonald and the Image of Woman* proposes that MacDonald's writing evolved from his private inner world. Considering the corpus largely "morbid," Holbrook explains that the manner in which MacDonald "deal[s] with universal questions" arises from a life-long effort to resolve identity issues induced by premature weaning and his mother's early death. (2, 4, 6, ff) Holbrook's work follows a methodological tradition in MacDonald scholarship commenced by Robert Lee Wolff in the 1970s. Wolff's popular critical study *The Golden Key* reads MacDonald through a Freudian lens, resulting in such conclusions as: "MacDonald, unable to resolve his Oedipal wishes, nurtured a life-long fantasy of sleeping with his mother." (47) Wolff's was the prime critical text for some years, and ensuing studies built upon and responded to it. Richard Reis' more extensive *George MacDonald*, published in 1972, was highly complementary of Wolff. Reis' later edition (1989) retracts some of his initial enthusiasm, and focuses on Jungian readings. This then remained the dominant approach in MacDonald studies for a considerable period of time. MacDonald garnered the interest of Jungian and generally psychoanalytic critics in particular because of his intriguing use of symbols and his attention to the feminine and to dreams; however the biblical parallels to those symbols, feminine aspects, and dreams were not addressed. Like Wolff, Reis and others did not interact with most of MacDonald's non-fiction – his sermons, his poetry, his own literary studies – and thus did not interact with explicit discussions of theological and biblical imagery (which need not have eschewed other readings, yet did invite integrative consideration). In some circles MacDonald became an anti-church, even anti-Christian icon. In 1987 William Raeper incurred new discussion with an important biography that considered MacDonald's faith a significant aspect of his life and work, although Raeper remained prominently Jungian in his theological assessment and literary criticism.[4] The same year David Robb, while arguing that MacDonald's Scottish context must be better understood, proclaimed that MacDonald: "had that sturdy Calvinist belief in the distance between God and man – and between God and man's

imagination." (*GMD* 99) Despite subsequent (and quite varied) efforts to address this standard inattention to or misunderstanding of the expression of MacDonald's faith in his work, perhaps most notably by Rolland Hein and Stephen Prickett, it has remained far too easy for the literary critic to ignore how central that faith is to every genre of MacDonald's writing. Yet when a methodology akin to that encouraged by MacDonald and his mentors is employed that centrality becomes unavoidable. During the writing of this thesis a book marking a new turning point in MacDonald criticism was published: Kerry Dearborn's thorough study of MacDonald's theology, *Baptized Imagination*. Her book demands that any further publication on MacDonald at least reconsider the standard assumptions about his theology. This thesis aspires to similarly invoke a reconsideration of some standard assumptions in the literary criticism of MacDonald scholarship. It is hoped that the introduction of new material to the dialogue will both enable re-evaluations and synergistically evoke new ones.[5]

Through the study of this new material, this thesis concludes that the word *mythopoeic* is in fact applicable not only to MacDonald's work but also to his intent. Persistently MacDonald argues that writing is born out of the relationships from which the author has grown; that identity is forged in the community of one's upbringing, whether that be in reaction, response, or both. He is consistently insistent that if one desires to delve more deeply into a work of literature, turning to the author him or herself will better enable a cohesive reading; it will more fully reveal his or her intent. MacDonald's own declared aim as a literary critic is to better facilitate the relationship "betwixt my readers and the writers from whom I have quoted." (*Antiphon* 12) He spent the greater portion of his adult life giving lectures of literary criticism, and while newspaper reports are all that remain of these lectures, there are rich critical essays and novels full of both explicit and implicit critique. In considering him as he demands that others be considered, MacDonald's emergence – and practice – as a mythopoeic writer is revealed. Two inextricable threads become apparent in such critique: 1) for MacDonald identity is formed through relationship, and 2) transformation occurs as a result of relationship. Thus the pursuit of MacDonald's identity as a mythopoeic writer demands a more careful consideration of his proclaimed identity as a Celt and as a Scot than previously endeavoured – posing a challenge to Robb's declaration that: "the advocacy and discipleship of Christian Romantics like Lewis and Tolkien, has hindered the reassessment of MacDonald's Scottish writing." (*GMD* 131) It demands a reevaluation of MacDonald's relationship with his family and his church – of how his writing is a response that rises out of these, rather than, as has so often been asserted, a reaction against them. So too must be considered more closely certain literary and personal relationships, relationships that consolidate the character

and passions of MacDonald and restore his identity as a literature professor rather than the current prevailing image of a failed-minister-turned-writer. As this is done it will become clear how new information can inform critical readings both of this highly relational storyteller and of the "mythopoeic" stories he told.

In exploring MacDonald's identity as a mythopoeic writer, this thesis is divided into three parts: the first addresses the mythopoeic concept, the second explores personal relationships that shaped and confirmed MacDonald's relational and storied worldview, and the third examines two of MacDonald's more widely recognized texts in which are clearly evidenced his mythopoeic practice and intent. Not only is entirely new material considered throughout, leading to conclusions quite contrary to some standard positions in MacDonald scholarship, but vistas are opened up for further study to ensue. It is suggested that taking MacDonald's Christian worldview into account can lend considerable insight into MacDonald's work. Previous critical opinion has held that in academic study MacDonald's spiritual life can (even should) be separated from his literary life. Roderick McGillis articulates this as a division into material for the academic and material for "the nonacademic reader (or for the academic reader who craves new and intriguing information about MacDonald the spiritual figure)." ("What's Missing" 286) This thesis argues that to attempt such division can hinder accurate scholarship. Consideration of the definition, development, and expression of Mythopoesis in the writing of MacDonald, supports MacDonald's declaration that his prime intent in writing is to "wake up" his readers to the proffered revelation of the Divine Imagination. MacDonald believes that an understanding of the intrinsically relational God cannot be grasped outside of a relational hermeneutic; that a list of dry propositions would never be able to convey what the fullness of poesis could.[6] As his storytelling is specifically discussed, it is revealed how remarkably – and intentionally – *de*pendent it is. For MacDonald story *necessarily* begets story. The rejection by the Futurists of "everything consecrated by time" but a few years after his death would have been anathema to him.[7] MacDonald does not promote stagnation in tradition but rather an intentional relationship, a conversation, with it; his writing invites a continually renewed perception informed by the past. In acknowledging the formative importance of relationships both literary and personal, MacDonald seeks to demonstrate that the engagement of particularities can reveal the transformative possibilities of universal truths.

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

immersed himself. . .

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CHAPTER ONE

*Mythopoesis***:**
A Relational Means of Revelation

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

Introduction
      In 1946 C.S. Lewis officially added his voice to the long stream of literary artists who give accolade to the work of George MacDonald. Lewis Carroll, John Ruskin, H.G. Wells, Frances Hodgson Burnett, James Barrie, W.B. Yeats, and G.K. Chesterton preceded him – T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Hans Urs von Balthasaar, Madeleine L'Engle, Ursula Le Guin, Maurice Sendak, Frederick Buechner, Sally Vickers, and Jeffrey Overstreet number among those who would – and continue to – follow. Although general consciousness of the works of MacDonald may have waxed and waned (and waxes yet again) according to the tastes of the reading public, his *influence* upon a tradition of literature has not: many who have not nor ever will read MacDonald, voraciously read books intrinsically shaped by his vision. In the introduction to his homage *Anthology* Lewis tried to explain to his readers just why it is that MacDonald excelled – in Lewis' opinion, was "the greatest genius" – in what "may even be one of the greatest arts": Mythopoesis. (*Anthology* xviii) Lewis was expanding on what he had learned from Owen Barfield and J.R.R. Tolkien, informed by years of academic and enthusiastic conversation on the topic.
      The written and verbal discussions Tolkien and Lewis held about this 'great art' reintroduced it to the public consciousness – and in the process they identified MacDonald as a prime practitioner. Yet despite the significance of the concept to these scholars and creators of Story, they inked the term *mythopoeic* sparingly for they considered few works deserving of its application. Close consideration of what exactly they intend when honouring MacDonald with the term illumines the work of MacDonald itself. It also results in a critique that directly challenges many long-held assumptions in MacDonald scholarship. Establishing the signification of Mythopoesis for writers and literary critics such as Tolkien and Lewis also has wider implications as use of the term increases in the general field of

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

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

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

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

Tolkien and Lewis' own discussions and writings, but into those of Owen Barfield. Barfield's work is foundational, a significant influence on their comprehension of myth, language, and the *mythopoeic*. I have treated this with considerable detail in a chapter of Hart and Khovacs' *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology* (Baylor Press, 2007), and thus in this thesis give only an overview of the discussion. The overview will serve as lens through which may be viewed a specific and developed focus on the pre-eminent Mythopoesis of the predecessor of these Oxford critics and Story-crafters: George MacDonald.

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

      Barfield points out that previously "the general relation between language and myth" was "almost unfathomable," as is made clear by the very definition of the Greek *mutho*s – also translated as 'word.' (83) He elucidates by explaining that the word 'poetry' is from the Greek 'to make.' He repeats Sidney's sixteenth-century exposition of a poet as "a maker." Rather than being someone who "merely follows nature," the poet brings forth new forms "such as never were in Nature," borrowing from nothing in physical existence, but ranging "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be." (189) It is *because* the poet has contemplated the "Ideas" behind Nature that he thus "delivers forth, as he hath imagined them" – a concept resonant in Tolkien's defining poem, "Mythopoeia": "We make still by the laws in which we're made." (190; 85) During the seventeenth-century that

ranging "into the divine consideration" came to be understood as 'invention.' From the Latin *invenire*, "to find," it was a word "implying that something had been found in Nature which had not *yet* been imitated by man." At the same time another word appeared: 'creating' – "if poets could indeed spin their poetry entirely out of themselves, they were as '*creating* gods.'"[4] (190) With this development Barfield reminds his readers of Joseph Addison's words: "This Talent of affecting the Imagination … has something in it like Creation: it bestows a kind of Existence, and draws up to the reader's view several objects which are not to be found in Being. It makes additions to Nature, and gives greater variety to God's works." (190) Tolkien would later call the application of such a word to human activities "sub-creating," a response to the invitation to assist "in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation." ("On Fairy Stories" 73) Barfield claims that up until the seventeenth-century the word 'inspiration' implied the understanding that "poets and prophets" were "direct mouthpieces of superior beings – beings such as the Muses." (190) For Tolkien this concept maintained potency even in the twentieth-century: engaging with the Muse was engaging with Divine Inspiration. For him the distinction between the 'inspiration' and the modern conception of 'invention' (as opposed to the initial understanding, explained by Barfield) was immediately relevant to his own greatest work, for though he knew he was writing fiction, he says that he "had a sense of recording what was already 'there' … not of 'inventing.'" (*Tolkien Letters* 131) Interestingly, MacDonald maintains much the same in his experience of writing his epic, *Lilith*.

These discussions by Barfield convinced both Tolkien and Lewis that myth has a central place in language, literature, and the history of thought. For Lewis, it was such a significant shift in worldview that it led to his becoming a theist – and further conversation with Tolkien proved metaphor and myth so inextricable from theological understanding that Lewis felt compelled to accept Christianity. Tolkien had argued with Lewis that "not only the abstract thoughts of men but also his imaginative inventions must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of original truth." (qtd *Inklings* 43) This meant that sub-creating was actually a fulfilment of God's purpose, because, wrote Tolkien, humans "make still by the laws in which we're made." ("Mythopoeia" 97) Pagan myths must therefore have "something of the truth in them." (qtd *Inklings* 43) It was agreed that a myth is "a story out of which ever varying meanings will grow for different [recipients] in different ages" – a declaration which indicates a multi-dimensional understanding of truth. (*CSL Letters* 271) Tolkien explained to Lewis that the uniqueness of the *Christian* myth is that God as Author had used images that were precise in location, in history, and in consequence: the old myth of a dying god had become fact. But, as Lewis

came eventually to argue himself, "by becoming fact it does not cease to
be myth: that is the miracle." ("Myth Become Fact" 44) This momentous
conversation inspired Tolkien's poem "Mythopoeia," a poem subtitled "from
Philomythus to Misomythus" – from lover of myths to hater of myths; it
presents Tolkien's perspective on the pre-Christian Lewis, if Lewis remained
unwilling to accept that myths contain a sense of truth. If one applies
Barfield's definition of *muthos*, Tolkien's barb goes deeper: 'lover of words'
to 'hater of words,' even 'lover of meaning' and 'hater of meaning.' (85)
Tolkien argues in his poem that a relationship with language allows humanity
to grasp better the world that it inhabits. Lewis described the conversation a
few days later to an old MacDonald-loving friend:

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

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

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

Lewis proceeded to use the word *mythopoeic* more often than
Tolkien. But – perhaps surprisingly for some critics today, and useful when
considering the work of MacDonald – Lewis is clear that the word is not
limited to the genre of Fantasy. This is made evident in Lewis' most extensive

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

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

Out of an argument shaped by the discussions of Barfield had evolved a mutual understanding of what Tolkien calls "Mythopoeia": the experience of *receiving* a "story out of which ever varying meanings will

grow." (85) Within his essay "On Fairy Tales" Tolkien seeks what he calls "a less debatable word," and chooses *Enchantment*. "Enchantment," he says, "produces a Secondary World." (43) It is a place in which transformation can occur – a transformation that does not fade upon re-entry into the Primary World, but, significantly, casts new light upon the Primary World. Thus, he indicates, it is a medium of revelation. Both Tolkien and Lewis direct their readers to the Gospel as the greatest example of Mythopoesis – a directive with which MacDonald would have readily concurred.[8]

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

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

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

For how shall two agree together what name they shall give to

> a thought or a feeling? How shall the one show the other that which is invisible? […] the man cannot look around him long without perceiving some form, aspect, or movement of nature, some relation between its forms, or between such and himself which resembles the state or motion within him. This he seizes as the symbol, as the garment or body of his invisible thought, presents it to his friend, and his friend understands him. Every word so employed with a new meaning is henceforth, in its new character, born of the spirit and not of the flesh, born of the imagination and not of the understanding, and is henceforth submitted to new laws of growth and modification. ("Imagination" 6)

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

> To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination […] We must begin with a definition of the word *imagination*, or rather some description of the faculty to which we give the name. The word itself means an *imaging* or a making of likenesses. The imagination is that faculty which gives form to thought – not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in sound, or in any mode upon which the senses can lay hold. It is, therefore, that faculty in man which is 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*.[13] ("Imagination" 3)

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

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

This he develops further in the now familiar argument that a relationship with language allows man to better grasp the world that he inhabits – and better relate with it. (Precursors of Tolkien and Lewis' discussion of a star's full identity abound.) MacDonald – a lover of science – feared that new Victorian

obsessions with science would lead to such a focus on deconstruction that an ability to see unity in things would be impeded. Emphatic that Science and Poetry are aspects of the same Holy Truth, he writes:

> that science may pull the snowdrop to shreds, but cannot find
> out the idea of suffering hope and pale confident submission,
> for the sake of which that darling of the spring looks out of
> heaven, namely, God's heart, upon us his wiser and more
> sinful children; for if there be any truth in this region of things
> acknowledged at all, it will be at the same time acknowledged
> that that region belongs to the imagination. ("Imagination" 8)

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

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

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

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

Further examination of how Tolkien and Lewis discussed and applied both the personal tutelage of Barfield and the printed tutelage of MacDonald highlights key aspects of the mythopoeic art. In their academic writings and in their lectures and tutorials, they sought to draw people back to the initial story in the texts they were studying. But they also sought to "make by the law in which they were made," and create Mythopoeisis themselves. As modelled by MacDonald, within their attempts at mythopoeic stories the role of Story itself is explicitly important. Tolkien asserts that *The Lord of the Rings* is the "practical demonstration of the view that [he had] expressed" in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," and that the epic work is a passionate argument

for the import of Story. (*Tolkien Letters* 309) Significantly, throughout the *Rings* Story is explicitly inextricable from relationships; although Lewis had argued that "the plot's the thing," in Tolkien's tale the "pattern of events" is subservient to the relationships that incur those events. Long passages are devoted to the relationships between the various characters – those historical as well as those contemporaneous. It is clear that a lover of Story will aid the 'Battle for Good' and that a hoarder of Story will hinder it – so too will a scorner of Story. As relationships develop, stories are shared and the plot moves forward; when stories are not valued, entire nations decay. In the midst of this Tolkien puts one of his strongest passions into the mouth of a spiritually, mentally, and emotionally awakened king named Théoden. Théoden is chided for not recognising the arboreal creatures called Ents: "Is it so long since you listened to tales by the fireside? There are children in your land who [would know them even from] twisted threads of stories." Théoden replies:

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

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

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

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

Tolkien's hobbit is given a commission about which MacDonald is

passionate: to share with his people Stories of the Ages – stories that will transform as they are experienced by their listeners, and which will *continue* to transform; stories with "ever varying meanings, which will grow" as the listeners travel a "road that goes ever on." (*Book I* 61)

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

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

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

Reflection upon the Balder myth that so riveted Lewis indicates that perhaps he had not yet fully processed what it was about the story that so affected him. The "pattern of events" is quite perfunctory once removed from the relational elements of the tale: a supposedly invulnerable god dies when struck by a poisoned arrow, but is expected eventually to come to life again. However, when one hears of a caring and innocent young Balder – the best-loved by men and gods alike, so loved by his mother that she engages almost all of nature in his protection – and of the jealous Loki's unprovoked contrivance to have Balder's blind twin brother accidentally kill him; when one knows of the grief and despair felt by all of Ragnarok, even its creatures, and of the traitorous Loki's deceit so that Balder cannot be released from

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

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

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

MacDonald believes that relationship intrinsically serves as a medium for eternal truths. The truths that are eternally conveyed in myth, the truths that somehow are able to speak to the needs of each new generation, require – so MacDonald believes – relationality; and not only is a relational element within a story required so that the truth be transmitted, but the story must itself be able to relate that relational truth. As Tolkien had written, there must be produced "a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside." (43) If all elements of the story are entirely foreign, it cannot have a mythopoeic effect upon the reader. The reader must be able to enter the story, to be 'inside' it, before there is a possibility of returning to their Primary World somehow transformed. The concept is one MacDonald explicitly explores in a number of different ways, both in his fantasy and in his realistic novels. In the very first novel that he writes, this concept is a clear element of intent in the story's over-all structure, as the initially pathless Anodos (his name in Greek

can mean 'without a way') leaves his Primary World and enters a mythic secondary one full of transforming adventures that result, as he returns at the story's end, in his fulfilling the second of his name's meanings: 'a way up.' The critic Prickett overlooks this central point, deciding: "Anodos at the end of his experience, instead of being better fitted for accommodation with the real world, is actually left wondering how far he is un-fitted for it." ("Fictions" 120) Yet clearly even Anodos' sisters "observe some change" in him, and as head of the home he begins "the duties of my new position, somewhat instructed, I hoped, by the adventures that had befallen me in Fairy Land." (213) Within the story itself Anodos pontificates on the vicarious educational experiences he has while reading some tales in the palace library:

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

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

The novel *Adela Cathcart* (1864) is MacDonald's most explicit exploration of the transformative nature of stories. Here the entire novel is shaped around the effort of a small community to bring healing to a young woman dangerously stricken by *ennui*; she is so disabled in her apathy that the doctors believe her life is in jeopardy. The innovative and desperate resolution is to tell stories to her, over several consecutive nights, with the hope that in the space of these stories her interest in life and living will be 'quickened' – in the very creedal sense of that word. Throughout this novel of what the narrator calls "simple stories, simply told," the community of storytellers discuss what they understand stories, parables, and fairy-tales to

be. (32) He points out to them that it is after all Christmas time, "just the time for story-telling." The 'wicked aunt' is the novel's foil and readers know she is an unhappy woman, for she does not like stories. She asks:

> So you approve of fairy-tales for children, Mr. Smith?" "Oh, not for children alone, madam; for everybody that can relish them."
> "But not at a sacred time like this?"
> And again she smiled an insinuating smile.
> "If I thought God did not approve of fairy-tales, I would never read, not to say write one,
> Sunday or Saturday. Would you, madam?"
> "I never do."
> "I feared not." (63)

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

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

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

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

The narrator then explains: "what distinguishes the *true* bard in such work is, that more is meant than meets the ear; and although I am no bard, I

should scorn to write anything that only spoke to the ear, which signifies the surface understanding."[15] At the novel's end it is agreed that the "wonderful prescription of story-telling," is indeed partly responsible for Adela's return to full health.[16] (409) She has repeatedly been caught up in the tales, forgotten about herself, and then begun to think about herself and the world in a new fashion. It is clear: not only do others claim that Macdonald's stories are transformative, Macdonald himself is certain that Story can invoke transformation.

Lewis writes of Mythopoesis:

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

This resonates with Chesterton's description of how he saw his world with new eyes after he had been within MacDonald's *The Princess & The Goblin*; he understood better what his own world really was and how he was to live within it: "Of all the stories I have read it remains the most real, the most realistic, in the exact sense of the phrase, the most like life." ("Introduction" 9) As authors both Chesterton and Lewis were cognizant of, and even sought out, the influence of MacDonald upon their writing. They, and Tolkien as well, recognized that MacDonald was part of a lineage in which they wished to participate.[17]

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

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

This recognition of a literary lineage underscores another relational element that must be considered in order to understand Mythopoesis. In Barfield's concept of the "ancient semantic unity" of myth and language, in the concept that unity of consciousness fragmented as conceptual thinking developed, lies implicit the fact that stories that are able to move their readers or listeners back towards such unity cannot do so without hearkening to

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

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

The writers whom MacDonald references most frequently are those who also intentionally place themselves in that tradition of storied conversation, writers such as Dante, Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare. If Story is a relational medium, it is also part of a relational tradition – one that

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

MacDonald – like those he influences – argues that *creatio ex nihilo* is in the domain of the Divine Maker only[19]. Creative humans are, he writes, the *trouveres* – the finders. Through engagement with inspiration they respond to what they have found in God's creation. Thus it is that stories not only require an act of relationship to fulfil their purpose of being told – the engagement of a reader or listener – they also require relationship to enable their existence. Stories evolve from the response of the writer/teller to external forces (humans, animals, nature); a story is an expression of relationship that seeks to relate. When Lewis writes that the *mythopoeic* "goes beyond the expression of things we have already felt […] shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives," he is reiterating MacDonald: "The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is – not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself." (*Anthology* 29; "Fantastic" 196) MacDonald not only seeks to rouse this alertness; in many of his tales he explores and endeavours to show how it can happen. To do this he uses a medium that exists as a result of relating, for the purpose of relating. Admirers of MacDonald indicate that certain special stories transcend the mere glory of relational communication and offer the possibility of personal transformation to the receptive reader/listener. The expectation that relationships can transform is profoundly theological: from inception humans are told, "It is not good for man to be alone." This is the mystery of Mythopoesis.

To understand how MacDonald came to pursue Mythopoesis, to explore the adequacy of this term for what he strives to achieve, one must – just as with etymology – explore his roots. To understand from whence came his apparently unique perspectives, and perhaps more importantly his mythopoeic practice – the result of which still transforms writers and readers today – attention must turn back to the soil in which his son claims "he was

planted early." (Ronald 52) Thus may be sought a 'unified perception' of the author and his mythopoeic practice. . .

<div align="center">Endnotes</div>

<div align="center">**Prologue and Introduction**</div>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter One

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

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

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

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

5. Misinterpreting this distinction, many Lewis scholars and devotees have underestimated how thoroughly Lewis is shaped by his "spiritual mentor." Lewis' statement that MacDonald is not an author of the first order is *not* a condemnation although, unfortunately, it has incurred condemnation. (U.C. Knoepflmacher addresses this in *George MacDonald: The Complete Fairy Tales*, 1999.) For Lewis, the 'first order' writers were such as Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare; a category which excludes many very gifted writers. While Lewis did not grant MacDonald such laurelled status, he nonetheless rates MacDonald's influence upon his own life as higher than any of these. His writings teem with references to MacDonald's work, and *Phantastes* is placed as the very first on his list of books that "most shaped his philosophy of life." ("Booklists" 719) 6 Levy-Bruhl explores this when he suggests that, while a poem is untranslatable, a mythical narrative can be translated into any language. (172 ff)

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

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

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

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

11. It is difficult today to comprehend just how unusual was MacDonald's defence and theological perspective of the Imagination. Nineteenth-century perceptions were coloured by its negative representation in two key reference texts of that period: the King James Bible (i.e. Luke 1:51), and Samuel Johnson's dictionary. Johnson

describes *imagination* as a foolish, even harmful faculty, equating it with words like *caprice* and *scheme*. (116; 131)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19. An important clarification on MacDonald's understanding of creation ex nihilo is made by Dearborn, who explains that although MacDonald clearly states in "The Imagination and Its Functions" that he accepts creation as "God calling out of nothing," ("Imagination" 2-3) he does disagree with "the interpretation that God created only according to God's will, and not as an overflow of God's love. Rather, he asserted: 'This world is not merely a thing which God has made, subjecting it to laws; but it is an expression of the thought, the feeling, the heart of God himself.'" ["Wordsworth's Poetry" 246] As such, creation springs forth from God's self-giving love and is sustained by divine grace: 'Love only could have been able to create.' [Falconer 232]" (Dearborn 74-75) Thus is understood Mr. Raven's claim in Lilith : "God created me — not out of Nothing, as say the unwise, but out of His own endless glory." (147)

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