

1-1-2014

Connecting Dimensions: Direction, Location, and Form in the Fantasies of George MacDonald

Daniel Creed

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind>

Recommended Citation

Creed, Daniel (2014) "Connecting Dimensions: Direction, Location, and Form in the Fantasies of George MacDonald," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*: Vol. 33, Article 1.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol33/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. It has been accepted for inclusion in North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. For more information, please contact sarah.titus@snc.edu.

Connecting Dimensions: Direction, Location, and Form in the Fantasies of George MacDonald

Daniel Creed

George MacDonald's major works of fantasy are often studied as bifurcated around a posited middle that divides the "adult" works (*Phantastes* and *Lilith*) from the "children's" works (*The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*). While this mode of inquiry into the texts has produced a fair amount of scholarship over the years, it has thus far ignored lines of investigation that allow for the works to be united around MacDonald's core ideas. This study's aim then is a drastic departure from earlier ones as it presents a unified movement within the texts.

Though scholars, no doubt influenced by Manlove's early work on MacDonald in the 1970's, have differentiated between the adult and adolescent fantasies, it is clear that this was never MacDonald's intention. In "The Fantastic Imagination," MacDonald writes "for my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five" ("Fantastic" 278). In his explanation that his stories are for all readers who are still childlike, MacDonald precedes Tolkien's explanation of the need for a reader to retain a certain sense of childlike wonder when entering the realm of fairy. As Tolkien warned against dividing the world into the "good sense (children) and bad sense (adults)" or the "Eloi and the Morlocks" (Tolkien 66-67), scholars should be reading the fairy stories of MacDonald as the kind that Tolkien says are worth reading at all, those "written for and read by adults" (67). By focusing on tropes that exist within all four novels, the illustration of the path to transcend the philosophical conscious and become one with the absolute becomes clear as the unifying property of MacDonald's fantasies.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, the author works towards the idea of the conscious moving outside itself and becoming one with an absolute through uniting the religious consciousness with the philosophical consciousness. In this way, Hegel posits a manner in which one may approach love, wisdom, harmony, and ultimately heaven. Through this absolute consciousness, one may view the end of time, the meaning of all things, the dimension(s) that exist behind and aside of all things, and find the

complete truth of existence that is the goal of phenomenology. This goal of phenomenology clearly identifies with MacDonald's own religious views of universalism.

MacDonald's idea of the universal and absolute with regards to consciousness and religion is evident in many of his unspoken sermons. In MacDonald's *Unspoken Sermons 3*, he states, "the being of which we are conscious, is not our full self; the extent of our consciousness of our self is no measure of our self; our consciousness is infinitely less than we" (37). He posits the idea of a united consciousness without calling it such because he does not see Hegel's religious consciousness as consciousness but unconsciousness. However, the move itself is the same. MacDonald is presenting the idea of a unified thinking (for Hegel philosophical) consciousness and a religious unconscious (a second conscious in Hegel) in an effort to fully understand man's place in the universe and to move towards the greater truth of existence.

MacDonald, no doubt influenced by the romantic movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, posits this move as occurring through fantasy because fantasy "gives [readers] things to think about... wake[s] things up that are in him" ("Fantastic" 279) in the same manner that Nature does for men in the "real world." MacDonald presents the idea of fantasy and the fairy tale where a man may "invent a little world of his own, with its own laws; for there is that in him which delights in calling up new forms –which is the nearest, perhaps, he can come to creation" (276) as a way to awaken the conscious and unconscious in man. In his move towards the role of creator, MacDonald provides an imagined space where the conscious and unconscious no longer suffer from fracture and are united into one and approaching the absolute.

It is this move towards unification of the conscious and unconscious, or the philosophical and the religious, which is the focus of MacDonald's eschatology. MacDonald's desire for unity can be seen in his creations of secondary worlds where ontological perceptions and metaphysical presentations work together to create new perceptions of the reader's own universe (recovery). In her article "Romanticism and the Psychology of Mythopoetic Fantasy," Naomi Wood notes that "if reality is a matter of perception, powerfully imagined narratives can open the doors of perception to new realities and renewed identities" (242), which appears as MacDonald's clear goal within his major works of fantasy. MacDonald creates the fairy tale in an effort to ascend to this new level of reality through perception, which he

does through both the liminal fantasies (*Phantastes* and *Lilith*) and secondary world fantasies (*The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*). This theme of ascension proves important to each of MacDonald's novels, in both a physical and metaphysical sense.

MacDonald's first work of fantasy, *Phantastes*, is a liminal fantasy that moves the protagonist, Anodos, from the real world into the realm of fairy through a dream narrative that causes his bedroom décor to sublimate to the realm of fairy. The novel is presented as what W.H. Auden called a "chain adventure story," which presents loosely organized stories and adventures. During the course of these adventures, Anodos journeys ever upwards both physically and metaphysically.

MacDonald's first mention of the direction of Anodos' journey comes in the naming of his protagonist. While early scholars often translated Anodos as "pathless," later ones have noted that it also means upwards, a meaning that MacDonald himself will directly acknowledge as the correct one in *Lilith* (examined later within this study). Anodos' upwards journey begins as he "thought it high time to get up; and, springing from bed... dressed in haste" (*Phantastes* 49). MacDonald's use of wording here is both pertinent and precise, as the passage consistently focuses Anodos' (and thus the reader's) gaze upwards. Anodos hears "motion above," "look[s] up," and notices the "top" of a great tree within his bedroom (49). The rhetorical move to force the gaze upwards locates the divine in the realm of fairy (as it has been traditional to imagine a heaven above and a hell below) and presents this incursion of the fairy realm in the bedroom as a moment where both protagonist and reader approach the sublime.

Anodos' journey takes him South first before he maintains a mostly Eastward trajectory en route (unknowingly) to the fairy palace that becomes one of the central images of the novel. Anodos' initial impression and movement towards the fairy palace comes as he sees "on a broad lawn, which *rose* from the water's edge with a long green slope to a clear elevation from which the trees receded on all sides, a stately palace glimmering ghostly in the moonshine" (128; italics mine). Anodos, who has been drifting along in a boat, scrambles on shore and "goes [went] *up* the *ascent* towards the palace" (128; italics mine) finding that it stands on "a great platform of marble, with an *ascent*, by broad *stairs* of the same all round it" (128; italics mine). Anodos has traveled up through multiple regions and levels of the country to reach this point, becoming something of a better man as he attains new heights.

Anodos' ascent can be seen as metaphysical and physical by referencing MacDonald's own words to his wife during a holiday in Switzerland in 1865, when he spent all his time climbing mountains and inside steeples. He writes "I am sure the only cure for you and me and all of us is getting up, up—into the divine air" (*George MacDonald* 348-349). MacDonald sees physical height as placing him closer to God in this world, and Anodos' journey upwards to the palace is the same. For, though Anodos will falter and fall within the text, his movements upwards show that he reaches areas that are metaphysically (and for MacDonald physically) closer to the absolute as he moves towards the palace in the hopes of attaining both the philosophical and religious conscious required to attain an understanding of the larger truth.

The palace of fairy itself marks one of MacDonald's replayed images: the labyrinth castle, palace, or great house, and the location that allows Anodos access to other dimensions of existence. When Anodos enters the palace, he wanders through multiple corridors before arriving at "The Chamber of Sir Anodos" (130), where he rests his first night. While the palace is large enough that he spends days wandering around in it, rarely coming to the same place twice, he is drawn to two distinct locations: the chamber of statues and the library.

During his stay within the palace, Anodos often wanders throughout the castle discovering new locations and halls. He tells readers "on an evening, I went wandering through one lighted arcade and corridor after another" and arrived, at length, "through a door that closed behind me, in another vast hall within the palace (174). The expanse of the palace and of the hall is important in that it presents readers with a specific scale that feels both grand and imposing, but it also creates a sense of endless space and locations that are not necessarily actually enclosed within the palace itself. This is evident when the door closes behind Anodos (174) as he enters the great hall. It seems that this door, which will make an appearance of a kind in *Lilith* as well, is a symbolic entrance to another realm. In this great hall, which is lined with "several pairs of pillars" (174) on each side, Anodos is subject to dreaming within the dream. He "acts out whole dramas," "walk[s] through the whole epic of a tale," and sometimes "sings a song" (175) in this space.

While the intricacies and labyrinth like qualities of the palace have led many critics to approach the palace as symbolic of the mind, the fact that Anodos is able to move between multiple realms within the space

complicates this idea. The palace serves as a sort of dimensional portal where other realms and ways of lives are accessible, if only in fleeting glances. As Gunther notes in “The Multiple Realm of George MacDonald’s *Phantastes*,” the central chapters in *Phantastes* (the chapters on the palace and library) “postulate multiple worlds radiating out from the sacred center and all, of necessity, interconnected, whether individuals within individual realms can recognize these connections or not” (175). Anodos explains this by proclaiming, “the community of the center of all creation suggests an interradiating connection and dependence on the parts” (139), while positioning the chamber of dancers in the middle of the fairy palace in which Anodos is resting. The door that shuts itself behind him when he enters, the statues that allude to stories and figures that appear in shadow and cease their dancing when Anodos enters, and the fountain at the center of the entrance hall are each evidence that he is seeing into other realms, spaces, or dimensions as opposed to his own conscious and unconscious mind.

Anodos is expelled from the palace in a moment that owes much to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in the Bible. Inasmuch as man finds himself “fallen” from paradise, unable to reenter, Anodos looks back to find that “no door, no palace was to be seen” (187) when he walks outside and finds himself on the precipice of a “great hole in the ground” (187). What follows is a chapter of *carabasis* and then one of rebirth through submersion in water and another journey by boat. Anodos, who has fallen asleep in the boat, is awakened floating near an island that has but one cottage, and within it resides the matronly woman that will guide the final steps in his journey to the absolute.

As Anodos walks towards the cottage, MacDonald makes note that the cottage is Anodos’ own discovery. For, “there was no path to a door, nor, indeed, was there any track worn by footsteps on the island” (202). He describes the cottage in terms that echo all the important moments of his journey. The cottage “*rises*” out of the turf, it has a “pyramidal roof,” and Anodos goes “*up*” to the door in the side facing him (202; italics mine). Thus, MacDonald again places the view of the reader angling upwards towards both a location above Anodos and a greater being in MacDonald’s metaphysical structure, as both reader and narrator enter the cottage to find the wise woman that will serve as savior and guide for the remainder of Anodos’ journey.

Anodos describes the woman in paradoxical terms. Her face is “older than any countenance [he] had ever looked upon” (202) and yet her eyes are “absolutely young—those of a woman five-and-twenty, large, and of a clear

gray” (203). In this way the woman epitomizes both beauty and wisdom, and Anodos at once feels a “sense of refuge and repose” (203) in her presence. That he describes himself as “feeling like a boy,” and “laying his head upon her bosom,” while she hugs him saying “poor child, poor child,” (203) presents her as a matron figure, though her age positions her more as a long dead relative than his actual mother. She “sings in ancient tunes” and “sitting down by the blaze, [draws] her wheel near her, and [begins] to spin” (208). MacDonald’s clue to the reader that she is otherwise than another human being within the realm of fairy comes from the initial lack of footsteps in the turf that leads to her home. She has either always been within the cottage or is never within the cottage that Anodos can see from the outside.

In explaining the four doors of the cottage and the purpose of each, the wise woman tells Anodos that he “will not see what he expects” (209) when he exits through the door which he had used to enter the cottage. Anodos’ exit through the door transports him to another dimension, as he walks through a door of the cottage that becomes a door on his father’s property from his past and is forced to relive painful experiences from his childhood. That she knows what he will experience behind each door and how to heal his spiritual and emotional wounds shows that the wise woman is a being that has already merged with the absolute and has an absolute knowledge. While many scholars have seen her as a representation of Christ based on her stigmata (the mark she tells Anodos to look for is on the palm of her hand), she is not merely an allegorical character of Christ but a representation of Hegel’s absolute conscious. She has so merged with the absolute of the Christian mythos that MacDonald was schooled in that she presents his wounds as her own stigmata; her physicality portraying the connection of the philosophical and religious conscious.

Anodos’ journey will be complete when he willingly sacrifices himself within the realm of fairy and awakens in his own body and bedroom (where the trip began in the second chapter), a new man, and experiences becoming in his own world. Anodos explains that he has “become once again conscious of a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life” (268) as he awakens in the real world again, and though he has not “found his ideal,” he has indeed “lost his shadow” (271). Psychoanalytic critics have often interpreted this lost shadow as the loss of the Freudian ego, but it begs for a more thorough explanation. What Anodos has shed within the adventures of the novel are the barriers that lie between him and the absolute. When he says that he awaits the day that he will find the red mark of the wise woman on

the door of his tomb, he does so in the hopes that in doing so he will become privy to the knowledge that the wise woman had that was “too good to be told” (272); his merger with the absolute complete as he sheds the bodily form and becomes a being of pure conscious.

This theme of becoming in a Hegelian sense continues in MacDonald’s second major work of fantasy, *The Princess and the Goblin*. The novel centers around two separate, but linked stories: the Princess and the grandmother and Curdie among the goblins. At the onset of the novel the Princess is just eight years old, and she is the focus of a plan hatched by the goblins to kidnap her and trade her for some benefit to themselves. However simplistic the storyline seems to an adult reader, the themes and images of the work are no less adult, and indeed not very different, from those of *Phantastes*.

The novel has long been seen as a children’s novel that belongs to a different tradition (Children’s fairy tale), and has been examined through a scholarly lens, primarily by Colin Manlove. In his examination of *The Princess and the Goblin*, Manlove argues that the mode of the fairy tale appeals to MacDonald when he “writes for children” due to “its total distinctions of good from bad” (4). He bases this idea on the bifurcated geography and characters that he sees as pure mirrors and oppositions of one another throughout the text. In doing so, Manlove often makes small mistakes in his examination of the text. He argues that the princess is the only character to penetrate all three regions of the text: under the mountain, the house, and the “attic” where the grandmother resides (6). However, Curdie experiences each of these regions as well, spending at least as much time below ground with the goblins as the princess spends in the attic with the grandmother. This leads him, in part, to determine that “The Princess and the Goblin is about being, not becoming” because he sees the only change within the novel as occurring in the countenance of the grandmother, “who changes from old to young woman” (7), which ignores the spiritual evolution that interested MacDonald.

Like the reader’s introduction to Anodos early within *Phantastes*, MacDonald presents the princess Irene as a being that will move upwards. He tells readers that she was born in a “palace built upon one of the mountains” and that it was “grand and beautiful” (*Goblin* 1). However, she is “sent soon after her birth. . . to be brought up by country people in a large house, half castle, half farmhouse, on the side of another mountain, about half-way between its base and its peak” (1). By transporting young Irene (a distinction

that becomes more important later in the novel) to a house that is only half palace and located physically lower than the castle of her birth, MacDonald shows that while young Irene is born to a certain amount of privilege, that privilege does not extend to her spiritual evolution. She must begin in a neutral state, halfway between the summit of the mountain and the base, obviously implying that she has been born with the cleanliness of soul and free will that a universalist like MacDonald would have believed in. Since she begins in a somewhat lower place, her room is decorated in such a way that her gaze is often forced upwards in the same manner as Anodos' in *Phantastes*.

MacDonald first describes young Irene in terms that hint at her divine heritage and illustrate her gaze as being consistently upwards. He depicts her with “eyes like two bits of night *sky*, each with a *star* dissolved in blue” (2; italics mine) in an obvious reference to the divine spirit that resides within her. The presence of the divine light that exists within her eyes presents her with an immediate connection to the absolute (at least in Earthly terms), but it is in the next line that he presents her view as always upwards. MacDonald writes “those eyes you would have thought must have known they came from there, so often were they turned *up* in that direction” (2; italics mine). Her gaze is so often focused upwards that though she is not allowed out after dark due to a fear that she would be kidnapped by the goblins that lived under the mountain, “the ceiling of her nursery was blue, with stars in it, as like the *sky* as they could make it (2; italics mine) so that her gaze shifts ever upwards. Though this could arguably be seen as presenting the Victorian convention of focusing the gaze upwards towards heaven to resist the sexual impulse, the fact that young Irene is eight, and not yet driven by a hormonal desire for sex, complicates that idea and forces the interpretation that she is gazing heavenward for other reasons. Like Anodos, the gaze of young Irene being ever upwards foreshadows her movement “upwards and towards the center” of all things; a place where she can commune with the absolute.

In her first action within the text, the young Irene begins her ascent towards the heavens. Longing to go outside, but forced to stay in due to inclement weather, Irene uses her first unobserved moment to head to the “foot of a curious old stair” in the corner of her bedroom (7). As she reaches the stairs, “up and up she ran” (8) “until she came to the top of a third flight” (8) which she runs around in until she is lost, at last finding another flight of stairs that ascend once more. Thus, while she lives on the ground floor of the house, the young Irene ascends a total of four flights of stairs and has been

lost in a myriad of corridors and doors in her first free action within the text. While she has been in search of nothing more than adventure and, after she has become lost, a way back down to her nursery, the young Irene has moved closer to the presence of the divine as Anodos has done when he climbs towards the island cottage; the symmetry of the two journeys opens up the question of whether they are not in fact in the same physical or metaphysical space.

Like Anodos' mention that the grass outside the island cottage looks as though no one has trodden upon it, the young Irene's initial staircase in the bedroom "looked as if never anyone had set foot upon it (7). The similarity of their entrances is striking. The fact that neither entrance seems to have been used before presents them as possibly the same, but continued examination of the two scenes creates further parallels. When young Irene ascends the fourth set of stairs, "she found herself in a little square place, with three doors, two opposite each other and one opposite the top of the stair" (9). MacDonald doesn't seem to be using the same design by accident. The four-sided cottage of Anodos in *Phantastes* has a door in each wall, and here the young Irene sees doors in each of the three walls, and since she has entered a door to gain access to the fourth staircase, she is faced with the same scene as Anodos, if not the same choices. MacDonald seems to present each space as one created solely for the protagonist of the works they occur within, and while some scholars see these spaces as the minds of the two characters, they may be a shared space that exists both within and outside of each character.

If the cottage of Anodos and the attic space of both young and old Irene are seen as occupying the same space, then they are not merely physical representations of the consciousnesses of the protagonists within the texts; they are an area that exists at the center of all things. This space is occupied by a wise old woman in both texts who acts as a "female personification of divine wisdom (gnosis)" that allows the characters a summation of the quest of all men, the union of the soul with the divine (Hayward 28). As much as this is a goal of Christianity for MacDonald, to unite the consciousnesses in an effort to become the absolute conscious and have the knowledge that the woman/women of the cottage(s) clearly exhibit, it is also the ultimate goal of the Hegelian dialectic.

The knowledge of the great grandmother in *The Princess and the Goblin* is as great as her reach within the text. Young Irene remarks that she doesn't understand how she could see the light of her great-grandmother's room outside through the walls, and the grandmother explains that when

she chooses she can move the light beyond any obstacle. Her reach and knowledge is well beyond that of the other humans within the text in the same way that the old woman within *Phantastes* knows the trials that Anodos will incur before he goes through the four doors of the cottage.

Like Anodos' experiences in the cottage, the young Irene returns multiple times to her great-grandmother and is healed in a progressive manner from any manner of ills. As Anodos exits the four doors of the cottage (returning thrice for healing from the wise woman (marking four encounters)), the young Irene has four encounters with her great-grandmother within the text of *The Princess and the Goblin*. In each instance, she is cleansed of dirt and/or a pain. In the first journey, the young Irene's face is dirty from crying and crawling the last flight of steps on all fours and her grandmother washes her face with water from "a little silver basin" (13). In her second encounter, Irene's hand has been injured and the grandmother rubs an ointment that smells of "roses and lilies" (89) on the injury which "drive[s] away pain and heat" (89) at each touch. During this second encounter, having healed the young Irene, she also washes her feet before inviting her into her bed. In her third encounter, young Irene's dress is cleansed by a rose from the fire and she is shown a large oval tub of silver" (115) in which she can see all the universe but no bottom. In the last encounter, Irene is immersed within the oval tub and cleansed all over in a baptismal moment (189) that heals the young Irene's "hands hurt with stones" and "nine bruises" (188) incurred during the rescue of Curdie.

The symmetry presented by MacDonald in the episodes with the wise woman in these two texts works to cement the idea that the two are designed to be read as presenting the same message, albeit in different manners. Both the wise woman of the cottage and the great-grandmother have a presence that is at once ancient and youthful, both exist within an area that features exactly four doors, and each provides the spiritual and physical healing needed to the protagonist, as well as advice on future events, that allows them to continue through their journeys. In this way, the women of both texts become one woman, a "female countenance of God who can mediate between God and man to bring about at-one-ment with God" (Hayward 30). In becoming one with both God and their own ability to reason, the young Irene and Anodos both experience a brief connection to the absolute that will be finalized upon their death. Each protagonist experiences a becoming in Hegelian terms that prepares him or her for the ultimate unification of the absolute conscious, if not through his dialectic. This theme continues with

the protagonist Curdie in *The Princess and Curdie*. Though MacDonald once again sets young Irene's title in that of the book, the second (and final) novel in the *Princess* series is really about Curdie's ascent as opposed to young Irene's.

As *The Princess and Curdie* opens, MacDonald tell readers that Curdie and his family "lived in a cottage built on the mountain" (Curdie 11), immediately placing them above both regular citizens and readers. What follows is a seven page description of mountains as escapees "from the dungeon down below," "rushing up and out" of the earth with a "heavenward shot" (11-12) that places them squarely in the aforementioned tradition of MacDonald seeing height as both spiritually and physically closer to God.

MacDonald's personification of nature in the mountain owes much to the Romantic tradition that grew as a wave from multiple sources within the early nineteenth century in Europe. Among those sources was the German tradition, of which Macdonald was well versed. Having translated passages of Novalis (as evidenced by the use of quotations from his work to head chapters in *Phantastes*), there is little doubt that Macdonald would also be well versed in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. Nowhere is this more evident than in Macdonald's beautiful and awful description of mountains in chapter one of the Curdie novel.

MacDonald depicts mountains as rising to meet the "great sun, their grandfather" and "their little cold aunt, the moon, that comes wandering about the house at night" (12). The mountains are still and quiet except for the wind roaring through caverns that he portrays as an organ for young archangels studying how to "let out the pent up praises of their hearts" (12). He describes the mountain as having both a "body" and "heart" (13) and being "the heart of the earth" (13) in passages that echo a Romantic poet's view of nature as evidence of God's majesty. In addition to forcing the reader's gaze upwards towards the heavens, Macdonald gives the mountains and their caverns a function that actively serves God, giving them a sense of agency and life that reinforces his established metaphysical belief system.

This metaphysical scale of height relating to divinity is accurately portrayed in Curdie's initial actions within the novel (alike both Anodos and young Irene in their respective texts). Though Curdie has been unable to see the great grandmother in the previous novel, when he immediately repents his attempted murder of a white pigeon in the first action of the text, his reaction is to weep with sorrow for what he has done. Yet, in his moment of self-loathing and anger, a "brightness shone all around him" (23) and he "lifted

his eyes” to see the light of the great grandmother herself calling to him. Curdie runs “full speed” (23) towards the castle, with wholesale abandon, into the former house of Young Irene and though “all he knew was that he must go up” (24), he manages to locate and ascend the four flights of stairs towards the great grandmother.

In his first true meeting with the great grandmother, young Curdie is given both a bit of healing and a task to perform. He admonishes himself for injuring the bird, but the great grandmother tell him that she will “mend the little angel” (31) that he has brought to her. She even tells Curdie that he can “ease [his] heart about the pigeon,” giving him spiritual healing in the form of forgiveness and release from guilt. The older Irene tells Curdie that he must “never laugh or make fun” (32) of her when the miners tell their stories and poke fun at those who believe in her in an echo of her warning to young Irene that she keep the presence of the great grandmother secret in the previous novel. Though it is far from being any kind of exact parallel or allegory, Curdie’s and Irene’s initial experiences with the grandmother are somewhat similar, which signifies to readers of the two texts that this novel will be about Curdie’s becoming in the same way the *The Princess and the Goblin* was about young Irene’s becoming.

In addition to his ascent up to see the great grandmother early in the text, Curdie’s mission will take him to the palace where the King and young Irene reside, but before he can get to the palace he must walk through the city of Gwyntystorm. In his passage into the city, Curdie must “*ascend* the winding road that led *up* the city” (89; italics mine), continuing to move ever upwards and focusing his gaze upon the palace of the king, which stands “*above* the city” (87; italics mine). In his climb, Curdie is becoming more than he has been thus far. Though he began his journey as a boy who had nearly killed a pigeon because he had become a lower man than he had been in the first text, Curdie’s ascent to the grandmother, his movement generally northward and upwards toward the city, and his climb up the road to the city and then to the palace show that he is rising in physically and metaphysically.

Curdie’s travels through the city are not without issue. In his first encounter with the people of the city, Curdie makes enemies of both the baker and butcher, and is then set upon by butchers and dogs as he and Lina (his companion who resembles a sort of demonic dog) make their way towards the palace. In search of rest and succor, Curdie finds the one “little thatched house that stood squeezed in between two tall gables,” (96) and is taken in by “a poor woman” who is “called a witch” by the people of the town because

she does not gossip or quarrel like the rest of the townsfolk (96).

MacDonald presents the woman of the cottage, Derba, as a “wise old woman” who lives with her granddaughter in a seeming parallel to the young and old Irene characters from the previous novel. Though this pair is very poor, they prove to be a good judge of character, and Darba determines that Curdie and Lina are safe when she notes how they “behaved to each other” and decides that they should be asked inside her small cottage (97).

Though this cottage is not specifically noted as belonging to Curdie, nor is it without multiple occupants or untrodden grass in front of it, the fact that no other person in town talks to or visits the cottage is a signal to readers that it is somehow connected to the attic of the grandmother in *The Princess and The Goblin* and the island cottage of *Phantastes*. Like these two previously discussed cottages, the cottage of Derba presents with multiple doors, though not until later in the text. In the first scene of the cottage, MacDonald tells readers that Derba was upset because the men of the town had “fastened up *the door* (italics mine)” (100) to the cottage, but later in the text, MacDonald writes that Derba is “roused by the vain entreaties at the doors on each side of her cottage” (174). Though the editorial oversight here is bothersome, it is perhaps an important moment in understanding what MacDonald is attempting to do with the cottage scene.

That MacDonald changes the cottage form having one door to an imagined four (one door per side of the cottage, and assumes that the cottage is four-sided and not itself a pyramid or sphere) immediately recollects the previous images of the meeting spaces where the protagonists of earlier works have been allowed to see into other dimensions and connect with the center. This connection of the symbol is important because the cottage often serves much the same purpose within this text. Curdie initially comes to the cottage in need and is cared for and given rest and food such as is available in a moment of sacrifice made by a poor woman. This echoes the healing woman of the island cottage of Anodos and the healing offered by the great-grandmother in the attic space to young Irene. And though they have called her a “witch” for much of their lives, the townsfolk of Gwyntystorm will come to Derba in need later within the work, where they will be granted admission and given such comforts as are available. She is a woman that comforts all who come to her, and her cottage of four doors is a place that connects to God in deed, if not physically. That it also exists on the higher plane of the town below the palace is also of great importance as well, for it shows that Derba, while not an incarnation of the great grandmother herself,

is a messenger and agent of the MacDonald's view of the Christian God.

In a bit of a parody on his own work, the cottage of Derba serves as a sort of dimensional portal for Curdie and Lina within the text. Though Curdie is not transported by traversing a door or through a bath within the cottage, it is by exiting and giving himself up to those who have surrounded the cottage that he first gains access to the palace. In addition, Lina is given access to leave the cottage when the men remove the fasteners of the door (which stops Curdie from making a new hole in Derba's home) and she escapes immediate harm by engaging the men head on and then using their stunned reaction to bound away. The cottage serves as a place where each of them are allowed to heal and become whole, to plan, and to traverse obstacles that had previously stood before them in the same way that the other protagonists of MacDonald's novels have done before them. For each protagonist, this moment of leaving the cottage/the attic/Derba's hut is a moment that enables them to begin the last phase of their journeys towards the absolute, thanks in part to the guidance offered by the wise women they meet there and elsewhere.

Though the great-grandmother's presence was limited to the attic in *The Princess and the Goblin*, in *The Princess and Curdie* she moves freely within the world. In his full-length study on the two novels, Manlove postulates that this shows that the world itself has evolved; it is "no longer merely natural, it has become supernatural too" (*Princess* 21). In this examination he illustrates that the world itself has become uncertain because the great grandmother moves within it and because Curdie's animals are "on loan from purgatory" (21). Though Manlove's notation that the great grandmother moves in the world in a different manner than she did within the first novel is admirable, his theory of the world changing is complicated by ideas from Tolkien's "On Fairy Stories" and the novel itself.

In "On Fairy stories," Tolkien notes that one signifier of fantasy is the idea of the moveable human heart; a piece of the divine that is placed in an object and moves within the story. That the great grandmother does not appear at any time within the text apart from Curdie illustrates that she is connected to him. As he progresses through his adventures, meeting the wise old woman in the mines under the mountain, as a housemaid in the King's palace who helps nurse the king back to health, and on the battlefield in the service of protecting the king, Curdie is the only commonality.

Based on her actions within the first novel, had the world become supernatural as Manlove postulates, then it would make more sense that

the great grandmother would have come to the aid of young Irene when her father was poisoned and her own life endangered by the presence of men who sought power for themselves in his palace. As his only heir, young Irene would have been next in line for the throne, and thus, would have been the next logical target of the murderous plot. Since the great grandmother had told young Irene that she will always be there to help her in times of need, she would certainly have come to her aid had she been able to freely move within a supernatural world. That she sends Curdie instead, and moves with him within the text, illustrates that the world has not become supernatural as Manlove suspects.

Additionally, within the text of the novel, readers are told that the animals that accompany Curdie (apart from Lina) live within “a forest,” (*Curdie* 84) and Curdie equates them with the creatures he had seen in service of the goblins in the first text. This clearly shows that the world itself has not changed so much as Curdie’s response and perception of it has altered through his belief in the great grandmother; a stand-in for the absolute. It is not the world’s evolution or devolution that interests MacDonald, but Curdie’s.

As a conduit to the divine, Curdie’s interactions with the great grandmother are different from those of Anodos and young Irene (from *Phantastes* and *The Princess and The Goblin* respectively), but she is still present only in times of sorest need. As noted earlier, when Curdie comes to her first, he is in need of healing himself, but her further appearances each serve to help others, as opposed to Curdie himself. In the mines, the great grandmother appears to Curdie and Peter so that Peter will know why Curdie must leave his home and to ease Peter’s mind about his son’s mission. In the second, as a housemaid in the king’s palace, she is responsible for helping to cleanse the king of the poison through the rose fire of the first novel, and her appearance on the battlefield helps not only Curdie, but young Irene and her father the king as well. What MacDonald has effectively done in the novel is to present Curdie as a symbol of sacrifice, for though he is often in danger himself, it is a lesser servant of the great grandmother (Lina and/or Derba) that helps him when he is in need. The great-grandmother’s presence is restricted to helping others when Curdie encounters them. Curdie’s growth is through his behavior as the moveable human heart, which is evidence of his becoming and his movement towards an ultimate unification with the divine.

Curdie’s growth within the text mirrors and echoes the growth of the protagonists of the previous two works as he works to become one with

the absolute. However, MacDonald becomes more direct in this third novel by having Curdie become the moveable human heart of the divine in a clear attempt to physically illustrate the metaphysical becoming of the absolute conscious. Curdie's move ever upwards and towards the center of the kingdom is an echo of each character's move upwards from a lower position to a higher elevation physically and spiritually in attainment of a conscious that unites both reason and spirituality to become absolute. It is through Anodos' sacrifice of self in the dream, the young Irene's offer of sacrifice for Curdie when venturing into the mine, and Curdie's repeated sacrifices within his own novel that MacDonald shows his main characters ascending ever towards the divine, where each comes as close as one can while still alive. This final step in attaining the absolute conscious cannot occur before death and one-ness with God for MacDonald, thus Anodos, young Irene, and Curdie all remain somewhat clueless at the end of the text; a condition that MacDonald alters with his protagonist Mr. Vane in *Lilith*.

Lilith opens in a similar way to the other novels in this study, with MacDonald focusing on uniting the ideas of physical realities and metaphysical abstractions and forcing the upward gaze of his protagonist. The protagonist of the novel, Mr. Vane, tells readers that he "was constantly seeing . . . strange analogies . . . between physical and metaphysical facts [and] . . . physical hypotheses and suggestions glimmering out of the metaphysical dreams" (*Lilith*, ch.1). MacDonald has Mr. Vane explain the facts of his own creations within the texts of his fantasies here, by forcing the connection between physical realities of space and height to metaphysical ideas. This basic idea highlights the importance of the forced upward gaze and action of the protagonists in each of these four novels.

As Mr. Vane begins describing his initial actions within the text (after giving a basic description of the library), he mentions that he "rose" to look out the window at "the feathering *top* of the fountain column" (*italics mine*). Later in the action of the story, Mr. Vane follows the man he will come to know as Mr. Raven up two flights of stairs, "through passage after passage," (*Lilith*, ch. 2) and ultimately up a winding staircase that leads him to "'the main garret, with huge beams and rafters'" (*Lilith*, ch.2) overhead. This upward gaze and movement written by MacDonald forces the contemplation of higher orders and realms than those his protagonists occupy, alluding to the ascent as central idea in MacDonald's fantasies.

This idea is picked up by Michael Mendelson in his article "George Macdonald's *Lilith* and the Conventions of Ascent," where he states "Lilith

is fundamentally a romance of ascent” (198) that is “based on the structure of Christian allegory in which the journey’s goal is the return of mankind to its ultimate source in the creator” (198). While Mendelson posits that the idea of staircases is allegorical to the human mind (based on a letter MacDonald writes to his son), it may also be the ascent to a more divine level based on the letters about his vacation climbing mountains. Regardless of the interpretation, the garret that lies at the top of multiple staircases serves as an important space in three of the four novels examined in this study, and alludes to the cottage in *Phantastes* as well.

The connection between *Phantastes* and *Lilith* is made by MacDonald himself through the portrait of “that Sir Upward who portrait hangs there among the books” (*Lilith*, ch.2). MacDonald is playing on the translation of Anodos (the protagonist of *Phantastes*) to “upwards,” and the protagonist of *Lilith*, Mr. Vane, soon finds that ““Old Sir Up’ard”” had been a friend of Mr. Raven’s many years prior. Mr. Raven had been the librarian of Mr. Vane’s great-grandfather, and had known Sir Upwards himself in a time before “printing was invented” (*Lilith*, ch.5). That the portrait of Sir Upwards (Anodos) hangs on the wall as the only decoration of the library is evidence that he is probably a progenitor of Mr. Vane’s family, and his relationship with Mr. Raven, which seems to be a family trait, connects each member of the family to one another. Through the connections of the family members, the connection of their places of residence can be established as well.

Anodos tells readers that the cottage he enters shows no signs of having been entered previously in much the same way that Mr. Vane exclaims, upon reaching the garret that “the wide expanse of garret was my own, and unexplored!” (*Lilith*, ch. 2) The correlation of locations to the other novels through direct and indirect allusion foreshadows the events that are to come for readers of MacDonald’s fiction since each has acted as a dimensional portal to a different level of being, and this is the case for Mr. Vane. Within the chamber he locates the mirror that pulls him into other realms.

In much the same way that Anodos returns to the cottage four times, young Irene returns to the attic four times, and Curdie has four interactions with the great grandmother within his text, Mr. Vane passes through this portal mirror to the other land on four separate occasions, facing trials each time. However, MacDonald allows Mr. Vane a fifth passage through the portal (an important moment of departure from the earlier texts and one that allows Mr. Vane to experience a portion of the absolute conscious in life)

in order to cement the idea of the unification of the conscious mind of man (reason) with the divine mind of God in an attempt to attain the absolute consciousness.

Like the other protagonists within their own respective texts, Mr. Vane has a matronly figure to follow throughout the text that gives him healing and advice within the other realm. Mr. Vane's guide is Mara (Mr. Raven's wife), "whose protective moonlight shelters him" (Mendelson 208) throughout his journey in Lilith's wicked realm. Her ability to be everywhere and to shelter and protect Mr. Vane is eerily similar to the great grandmother in the *Princess* novels and the wise old woman of the cottage in *Phantastes*, and this is clearly no accident. When she is revealed in chapter 29 to be "Eve, the mother of us all" (*Lilith*, ch. 29), the true identity of all the matrons in Macdonald's fiction is revealed and her connection to the divine in earlier texts as well as this one is explained.

When Mr. Vane awakens in the aptly titled chapter "The Waking," he has clearly done so in a realm that is farther in and higher up than any he has awakened in before. Here the raven and his wife appear to him as Adam and Eve from the Bible and Mr. Vane remarks in the next chapter "The Journey Home" "all I wanted to know and know not, must be on its way" (*Lilith*, Ch. 45). His path to the divine conscious is nearly complete and he is sharing in knowledge that needs no belief to be seen as episteme.

Perhaps misguided out of necessity in establishing fantasy as a genre worthy of study by adults (and English departments), early scholars have relegated the *Princess* novels of George MacDonald to a different level of investigation than his "adult fantasy novels" *Phantastes* and *Lilith*. In doing so, the amount of scholarly attention that his work has received as a singular corpus has been severely affected. While each novel stands on its own as a great work of fantasy, by investigating the four major works of fantasy by George MacDonald as a meta-narrative, a new clarity of purpose comes clearly into focus.

In each novel, MacDonald's narrative of becoming for the protagonist is clear from the beginning to the end of the text. Each novel begins with an upward gaze and upward movement, illustrating that while each of the protagonists begin the narrative on or below the level of readers, each protagonist will experience a becoming that allows them to ascend their current state of consciousness to prepare for a unification with the divine that results in an absolute conscious.

In the metaphysical fantasies of George MacDonald, this absolute

conscious is often present in the image of the great matron. Each of the women that take on this role are images of each other, and Eve, and through their knowledge of events that have yet to transpire are all united with God through the idea of the absolute conscious. Their existence as physical representation of the divine conscious within each text calls for a rethinking of MacDonald's meta-narrative as more than just mere "Christian allegory" (Pritchett 175). While many critics have noted that MacDonald believed that the divine mind was constantly imprinting itself on the unconscious mind of humans, Macdonald seems to be calling for a unification of the two consciousnesses in such a way that the human is cognizant of the existence of both. This would be impossible if the divine mind remained only within the unconscious, and thus MacDonald is doing more than merely restating his own religious beliefs. He is calling for a unification of conscious minds through the experience of the fantastic sublime in divine direction, location, and form.

Works Cited

- Docherty, John. "The Sources of *Phantastes*." *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*. 9 (1990): 38-53. Print.
- Gunther, Adrian. "The Multiple Realms of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*." *Studies in Scottish Literature* 29. 1 (1996): 174-90. Print.
- Hayward, Deidre. "The Mystical Sophia: More on the Great Grandmother in the *Princess Books*." *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies* 13 (1994): 29-33. Print.
- MacDonald, George. *Lilith*. Public Domain, 2013. Kindle file.
- . *Phantastes*. Paternoster: London, 2008. Print.
- . "The Fantastic Imagination." *Phantastes*. Paternoster: London, 2008: 275-281. Print.
- . *The Princess and Curdie*. Chariot Books: Elgin, 1978. Print.
- . *The Princess and The Goblin*. London: Puffin Books, 1996. Print.
- . *Unspoken Sermons I, II, and III*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004. Print.
- MacDonald, Greville. *George MacDonald and his Wife*. London: George Allen and Unwin: 1924. Print.
- Manlove, C.N.. *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*. Kent: Kent State UP, 1983. Print.
- . *Modern Fantasy Five Studies*. London: Cambridge UP, 1975. Print.
- Mendelson, Michael. "George MacDonald's *Lilith* and the Conventions of Ascent." *Studies of Scottish Literature* 20.1 (1985): 197-218. Print.
- Prickett, Stephen. *Victorian Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979. Print.

- Soto, Fernando. "Mirrors in MacDonald's *Phantastes*: A Reflexive Structure." *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*. 23 (2004): 27-47. Print.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-stories." *The Tolkien Reader*. New York: Ballantine, 1966: 3-84. Print.
- Wood, Naomi. "Romanticism and the Psychology of Mythopoetic Fantasy." *Children's Literature* 38, (2010): 241-248. Print.