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# The Architectural Psyche in the Works of George MacDonald and John Ruskin

Steven Sprott

It is clear that both John Ruskin and George MacDonald took architecture seriously. MacDonald, for example, frequently uses buildings and spaces in his fiction: cottages, castles, churches, attics, cellars and lost rooms are commonplace and play important symbolic roles. Ruskin too focuses on architecture. His major architectural works were published mid-century, but he continued to contribute lectures and essays on the subject throughout his life. In a telling statement from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Ruskin writes: “I believe architecture must be the beginning of arts, and that the others must follow her in their time and order” (314).

Further, in one of his earliest published statements on architecture, he writes:

If we consider how much less the beauty and majesty of a building depend upon its pleasing certain prejudices of the eye, than upon its rousing certain trains of meditation in the mind, it will show in a moment how many intricate questions of feeling are involved in the raising of an edifice; it will convince us of the truth of a proposition, which might at first have appeared startling, that no man can be an architect, who is not a metaphysician. (*Poetry* 1)

The architect, like the metaphysician, should strive to understand the essential nature of the physical world and its connection to the human mind. MacDonald’s fiction suggests a similar understanding. His use of architecture and space reflects Ruskin’s theories, pointing to an essential relation between architecture and the human mind.

In the context of this paper, “mind” reflects the fourth entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: a “[m]ental or psychic faculty,” that is “[t]he seat of awareness, thought, volition, feeling, and memory; cognitive and emotional phenomena and powers considered as constituting a presiding influence” (*OED*). “Mind” should also suggest the deepest parts of the self, including what one may not be aware of. Although I do not wish to fully adopt a psychoanalytic perspective, “mind” for this paper echoes its meaning in psychoanalysis as a combination of conscious and unconscious aspects. This inclusive definition overlaps with other concepts such as the “psyche” or “imagination.” These words deal with mysterious and abstract phenomena

and are often ambiguous; thus, alongside his own attempts to explain the imagination, Ruskin admits that “the essence of the Imaginative faculty is utterly mysterious and inexplicable, and to be recognized in its results only” (*Modern II* 152). Likewise, I argue that we must accept an element of mystery in this definition of the mind.

Critics have touched on MacDonald’s concern with the mind. For example, Bonnie Gaarden explores parallels between the works of MacDonald and Carl Jung. Also dealing with psychoanalysis, Anita Moss evokes Gaston Bachelard’s idea of “felicitous space” to argue that MacDonald uses space to return the reader to “his or her own shelters for dreaming,” and, particularly in the case of fantasy, to “the deep springs of our imaginative reveries” (16-17). Others note MacDonald’s use of architecture in his fiction. In *The Impluse of Fantasy Literature*, Colin Manlove discusses the importance of Mr. Vane’s house in *Lilith* and the recurring spiral staircase, noting that “MacDonald found deep and sacramental meaning in spirals, stairs, heights and church-spires” (85-86). Karl Kegler suggests figurative roles for buildings in *Lilith*, reading Lilith’s Palace and Mara’s Cottage as representing qualities of their owners. In a more recent article, Catherine Persyn sees alchemical symbolism in the cathedral of *At the Back of the North Wind*. Few studies, however, focus on architecture and space directly. MacDonald criticism that considers Ruskin tends to focus on biographical events, such as Jocelyne Slepian’s reading of *Thomas Wingfold* as a response to Ruskin’s struggles with faith. Ruskin’s relationship with MacDonald is well known, but the deeper relations in their works themselves deserve attention.

## I. Gothic and Moral Architecture

Ruskin connects architecture and the human mind explicitly. In *The Stones of Venice*, he writes: architecture “approaches more to a creation of [man’s] own, born of his necessities, and expressive of his nature,” contrasting other forms of art which have no practical application and are entirely “[his] admiration of something out of himself”—architecture is closest to humanity (*Stones II* 180). Ruskin further explains this intimate relation in “The Lamp of Life”: “All objects which bear upon them the impress of the highest order of creative life . . . of the mind of man . . . become noble or ignoble in proportion to the amount of the energy of that mind which has visibly been employed upon them” (*Seven* 226). Further, “most peculiarly and imperatively does the rule hold with respect to the

creations of architecture” (226). The only “life” of this art is in what the human mind bestows, because architecture is not “composed of things pleasant in themselves” as is music or painting, made of “sweet sounds” and “fair colours” respectively (226). Moreover, the precedence of architecture arises from its universality. As Ruskin states in *The Stones of Venice*: “All men are concerned with architecture, and have at some time of their lives serious business with it” (*Stones I* 25). Ruskin views architecture as an art that affects all of humanity and which best reflects the human mind, and this is what leads him to emphasize the ability to gauge moral and religious character through architecture—an idea that forms the backbone of *The Stones of Venice*.

Although Ruskin fully realizes these ideas in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), they appear in embryo over a decade earlier in a series of essays later collected as *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837-1838). These essays explore the connections between homes, specifically cottages and villas, and their contexts, such as the surrounding environment or the character of their nation or people. In his survey of European cottages, Ruskin praises the British Westmoreland cottage—and others like it in the British Isles—as highest for their “humility,” a characteristic that he finds especially appropriate for a mountain setting and for practical utility (*Poetry* 57). He attributes this quality to the “mind of the inhabitant,” which in Britain excels in a “gentleness” and “simplicity” that the continental mind, in general, does not share (58). For Ruskin, the continental mind is “capable of deeper and finer sensations,” but it can only do justice to these abilities in grander forms of architecture, from an educated position (58). On the other hand, the common inhabitant “of Cumberland has no taste and no idea what architecture means” and thus builds better, building only to his needs (58).

Like Ruskin, MacDonald links the British cottage to particular characteristics such as “gentleness,” “humility,” and neatness (Ruskin, *Poetry* 57). Even in his fantasy worlds, which are not necessarily “British,” cottages appear in this form. In *Phantastes*, Anodos finds refuge in a cottage that is “square, with low walls, and a high pyramidal roof thatched with long reeds,” like many in the British isles (138). This cottage, like many others in MacDonald’s fiction, reflects the homeliness of its owner; yet this owner is also a figure of divine wisdom. Even her refinement surprises Anodos, who finds himself “astonished at the language in which she was able to convey” her knowledge (14). Such figures recur, such as the beautiful and divine

woman who helps Tangle in “The Golden Key” and lives “in the simplest, poorest little cottage, where she was evidently at home” (125). However, even in MacDonald’s more realistic fiction, such as with Margaret of *The Portent*, Tibbie of *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, or Grannie of *Castle Warlock*, we find a combination of wisdom and rustic homeliness alongside rough Scots. It is clear that for MacDonald the cottage succeeds, as Ruskin puts it, in “rousing certain trains of meditation in the mind” (*Poetry* 1). For both, the cottage is home to similar characteristics, but for MacDonald these extend beyond Ruskin towards an ideal that is humble as well as “capable of deeper and finer sensations” (*Poetry* 58).

In MacDonald’s fantasies, the cottage carries its deepest connection to the mind. In *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, the cottage is a place of refuge and healing. As Anodos relates inside the peninsula cottage: “A wondrous sense of refuge and repose came upon me” (*Phantastes* 138). Anita Moss notes that Anodos “invariably experiences shelter and happiness in cottages, warm, safe, enclosed spaces, usually inhabited by a strong maternal female figure” (16). Likewise, Daniel Creed connects the “healing” that Curdie receives in the urban cottage in *The Princess and Curdie* with Anodos’s experiences in the peninsula cottage, arguing that both enable “the last phase of their journeys towards the absolute” (13-14). Creed points to an important quality of divine aspiration: the cottage represents the divine guidance that leads one onto the right path. If like Gaarden, we interpret Vane’s journey as “a process of individual redemption much resembling the progress towards psychic wholeness described in Jungian psychology,” or like Manlove, see the fantasy worlds of *Phantastes* and *Lilith* as psychological spaces—fairytale in *Phantastes* being “an extension of the mind of the solitary hero” and the “landscape” in *Lilith* as “shared by all minds” and “ultimately God’s dream”—then the cottage becomes a symbol of God’s guidance (Gaarden 23; Manlove 90). When in need, He provides healing, and the natural form in which this appears to the mind of the protagonist is the cottage.

The extended role of the cottage only reaches its conclusion in *Lilith*, however. Mara’s cottage is certainly a refuge as well as a place of guidance for Mr. Vane, but it is also the setting for Lilith’s painful redemption. This is a metaphorical cleansing: a more violent version of the bath that the beautiful lady gives Tangle in her cottage in “The Golden Key” (126). Moreover, Adam lives in a cottage which he calls his “wife’s house,” and, as Manlove notes, this is the “one centre” of the story (*Lilith* 31; Manlove 88). Only through the coffin-door inside this cottage can one reach the hall

of sleepers. Whether we read these cottages as mental spaces or as symbolic steps in spiritual development, we find an image of both a powerful cleansing and a need to move beyond the cottage in order to reach higher trials or achievements. Accordingly, Tangle and Anodos must leave their cottages to complete their journeys, but in *Lilith* we also find a move to higher forms of architecture: Vane compares the hall of sleepers, a place of death and resurrection only accessible through the cottage, to a “long cathedral nave” (*Lilith* 38). MacDonald builds on Ruskin’s idea of the cottage as a valuable and affecting form of architecture which reflects the human mind, but he instills it with greater spiritual meaning—yet like Ruskin, he also recognizes a need to look beyond it.

Moving from cottages to the “higher walks of architecture,” Ruskin writes in *The Poetry of Architecture*, “We shall find a less close connexion established between the building and the soil on which it stands, or the air with which it is surrounded, but a closer connexion with the character of its inhabitant”—thus less reflection of “natural feeling” but “more with human passion” (Ruskin 89). After discussing European villas and before he could discuss anything “higher” still, Ruskin’s essays were cut short by the closure of the magazine for which they were written (Editor, *Poetry* vi-vii). Yet this idea of a deep connection to character in higher forms of architecture was to reappear in Ruskin’s major architectural works, especially *The Stones of Venice*. In the chapter “The Nature of Gothic,” Ruskin states that an architectural style is more than “external forms”; it must also have the corresponding internal “elements,” and speaking of Gothic, he states that these “elements are certain mental tendencies of the builders, legibly expressed in it” (*Stones II* 153).

Accordingly, Ruskin also argues that the highest art can only be created by the moral mind. In the second volume of *Modern Painters*, published a few years earlier, Ruskin writes that “the whole end and aim of my labour” is to show that “no supreme power of art can be attained by impious men . . . and that the neglect of art, as an interpreter of divine things, has been of evil consequence to the Christian world” (144). This does not merely reflect on painting. For Ruskin there is no difference between art and architecture; thus, in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* he writes that “the arts will never flourish until they have been primarily devoted to [religion]” (31). This is a central idea in Ruskin’s thinking. The more that architecture is a visual expression of mind and character, the more important it becomes. Ruskin’s praise of Gothic implies its moral and religious qualities.

For Ruskin, Gothic comes to represent Christian values. He gives far more of his attention to this style than any other, dedicating a large portion of the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* to defining it; yet Gothic does not simply become the most beautiful style because of the moral mindset in which it arose: Gothic inherently contributes to morality. Likewise, Ruskin's definition of architecture itself points to affect: "Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them contributes to his mental health, power and pleasure" (*Seven* 11). The influence of architecture may reach further still. In a lecture he gave in Edinburgh shortly after the publication of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin argues that the common adoption of Gothic entrances with "the pure old Gothic porch, walled in on both sides, with its pointed arch entrance and gable roof above," might provide shelter from the elements for those in the streets of Edinburgh—something that Neoclassical buildings fail to do—and we should desire this because it is consistent with the commands of God in Isaiah 58, and elsewhere in scripture, to shelter those in need (*Lectures* 29-30). For Ruskin, moral and religious minds do not merely create the most beautiful architecture; they also create the most morally affecting architecture: this is a reciprocal relation.

In MacDonald's fiction, Gothic architecture often appears specifically as refuge. We find this, for example, with the cathedral in *At the Back of the North Wind* and Westminster Abbey in *The Marquis of Lossie*, but most significantly in connection to the mad laird in *Malcolm*. MacDonald describes the mad laird himself in terms of Gothic architecture, comparing him to a crumbled chapter house: "The one pillar . . . had given way, and the downrushing ruin had so crushed and distorted it, that thenceforth until some resurrection should arrive, disorder and misshape must appear to it the law of the universe" (*Malcolm* 129). As MacDonald likens the laird's deformity to architecture, so the laird seeks architecture for his solace. Escaping from his tyrannical mother, the laird chooses a town for his refuge that MacDonald describes as a "quaint old place" which has "streets irregular and houses of much individuality" (372). This town is "humble" yet has "uncompromising gables, some with corbel steps," and sometimes "a delicious little dormer window, or a gothic doorway, sometimes with a bit of carving over it" (372-373). The laird's particular place of refuge in this town is "a little vaulted chamber in the bridge," which MacDonald calls "ancient" (400-401). These descriptions have an undeniable Gothic flavour.

An earlier refuge for the laird is a room in the Mair's house which



is not particularly Gothic. However, the laird only feels at home after having decorated it with choice elements from nature, which is itself in the spirit of Gothic architecture, the ornamentation of which is typically naturalistic. Moreover, Gothic still appears in conjunction with the Mair's themselves. Decorating their mantelpiece among more typical items of crockery is a "rarer Gothic castle, from the topmost story of whose keep bloomed a few late autumn flowers" (*Malcolm* 322). This "rarer" ornament exists in the home of some of MacDonald's "rarer," genuinely Christian characters, whose moral characters bloom like the flowers in charity and love (322).

Another of the laird's main locations of refuge is a cave that the locals name "the Baillies' Barn," which later becomes a gathering place for the revival church (*Malcolm* 284). MacDonald describes it as "not a very interesting cave to look into"; however, "the strata of which it was composed, upheaved almost to the perpendicular, shaped an opening like the half of a Gothic arch divided vertically and leaning over a little to one side" (12). The word "perpendicular" in relation to "Gothic" suggests the late medieval Perpendicular style of English Gothic (12). This is a form of Gothic that Ruskin particularly criticizes, using it to mark the corruption of the style. That MacDonald describes the cave as uninteresting and having "little to rouse any frightful fancies" echoes the relative monotony of Perpendicular and suggests that MacDonald may share Ruskin's opinion (12). Nevertheless, this cave long shelters the laird within a hidden chamber, known only to a few characters. In relation to Perpendicular, this suggests there can still be something of value in a flawed form, that even deficient architecture can provide solace. Although Ruskin might disagree in regards to Perpendicular, this idea is akin to his view that allowing imperfection in architecture creates space for individual expression: according to Ruskin, the variance that Gothic architecture allows gives the labourer who builds it "room, fuel and focus for individual fire" (*Stones I* 243).

Thus, another value that Ruskin connects to Gothic is the "individual value of every soul" (*Stones I* 243). Beyond the freedom that Gothic gives the labourer, the building itself can express this value. In the first volume of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin interprets the grouped shaft of Gothic architecture metaphorically, finding Christian values in its very structure: "all its members, how many soever, have each individual work to do, and a separate rib of arch or roof to carry: and thus the great Christian truth of distinct services of the individual soul is typified in the Christian shaft" (99-100). In contrast, the Egyptian shaft which is not "grouped" in the same



sense reflects slavery: “the old Egyptian servitude of the multitudes” (99-100). In this reed-like grouping the individual parts do not have their own tasks, but rather all “sustain a single mass” (99-100). Although some of what may be termed “Gothic” does not have such complex grouped shafts, it is yet the architectural school whose development naturally resulted in these arrangements. It is fitting therefore that MacDonald places the laird in refuge associated with a style that suggests individual worth. MacDonald makes it clear that the laird has value despite his defects; he requires acceptance perhaps more than anything.

MacDonald’s statement that the Baillie’s Barn is not conducive to “frightful fancies” echoes yet another attribute that Ruskin associates with Gothic (*Malcolm* 12). In the “Lamp of Power,” Ruskin writes “that the reality of [architecture’s] works, and the use and influence they have in the daily life of men . . . require of it that it should express a kind of human sympathy, by a measure of darkness as great as there is in human life”—in other words “some equivalent expression for the trouble and wrath of life, for its sorrow and its mystery: and this it can only give by depth or diffusion of gloom, by the frown upon its front, and the shadow of its recess” (*Seven* 126). This does not necessarily mean that fear or “gloom” are necessary; much of the architecture Ruskin admires is far from being frightening (126). For example, the Venetian Torcello cathedral is “fair and bright,” full of the sober hope that its exiled builders were in need of (*Stones II* 18). But as Ruskin states, both Italian and Northern Gothic “are noble in their place” (*Stones I* 171). Northern Gothic reflects “a mountain flank tormented by the north wind, and withering into grisly furrows of alternate chasm and crag,” and is thus appropriate for its context (171).

A similar fearfulness and “gloom” in architecture appears in MacDonald’s fiction, especially in *At the Back of the North Wind* (Ruskin, *Seven* 126). The Gothic cathedral acts as refuge for Diamond during the storm; North Wind specifically leaves him here in her absence. Diamond, who has never seen a cathedral, is initially “struck with a kind of terror” (*At the Back* 98). The building arises “before him with an awful reality” (98). From his age and social situation, Diamond likely has few preconceived notions about such buildings; his reaction is unprejudiced. Only once inside does he find some recognition in the figures of the stained glass window. The cathedral, with North Wind “roaring” around it through the night, is indeed like Ruskin’s “mountain flank tormented by the north wind,” and MacDonald portrays it as powerfully affecting (*Stones I* 171; *At the Back* 102).

In the *Marquis of Lossie*, Malcolm and Joseph Mair also experience a similar building for the first time: Westminster Abbey in London. They too are initially ignorant of its purpose; however, their response is not one of fear but awe. Malcolm's point of reference is the coastline: "What a mercy it maun be" he says, "to ken 'at there is sic a cave howkit oot o' the din, 'at [the Londoner] can gang intill an 'say his prayers intill" (*Marquis* 28). The Abbey is to them a spiritual refuge from the tumult of the city, one that is comparable to nature. As MacDonald shows, the two Scarnose fishermen are very familiar with danger and sublimity from their life on the sea; for them the affect of the cathedral is matured into awe. On the other hand, Diamond experiences the sublime as fear because he is unused to danger and mystery and arrives at the cathedral in the dark. Nonetheless, both of these grand Gothic edifices are naturally affecting for the human mind.

Both cases reflect qualities of Ruskin's Northern Gothic. In this there is sublimity which points to something divine: "there is a sublimity in darkness which there is not in light" (*Stones II* 176). The "awful reality" with which the cathedral confronts Diamond suggests this, filling "emptiness with grandeur" (*At the Back* 98). Its "grey towers . . . blotted out each its own shape of sky and stars"; it appears as substantial darkness (98). This accords with Ruskin's emphasis on naturalistic ornamentation in Gothic. Since nature is God's creation, Gothic edifices therefore reflect the mind of the divine Creator. Thus, a building such as Lilith's palace naturally cannot be Gothic. This palace reflects Lilith's hubris and separation from God—as Karl Kegler shows—and Vane finds that it was "of a style strange to [him], but [that it] suggested Indian origin" (Kegler 40-41; *Lilith* 151).

Great Gothic structures are sources of refuge for MacDonald, but they differ from others, such as the cottage, by their solemnity and solitude. The cottage gives the homely comfort of a loving host, the cathedral an overpowering spiritual communion: two sides of God that, as noted earlier, find their consummation in the house of Adam and Eve in *Lilith*. MacDonald's use of Gothic suggests that this architecture carries a complex significance for the minds of his characters, whether they are conscious of it or not. It shows, as Ruskin believes, "what fellowship there is between [Gothic] and our Northern hearts" (*Stones II* 153).

## II. Architectural Spirit

Ruskin's idea of the "Gothic spirit" or "Gothic mind" shows a more essential connection to the individual (*Stones II* 181). For Ruskin, the

“strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit is its greatness” (181). The very fact that Northern Gothic is “rude and wild” is cause for our “profoundest reverence” because it thus reflects the natural climate and character of the people (155-157). Although they can be abused, Ruskin argues that qualities such as “disquietude” are valuable because they refuse to be pacified; they cause the artist to strive (181). MacDonald’s characters often reflect something like this “Gothic spirit” (Ruskin 181). For example, Malcolm, in his desire to rebuild the old Colonsay castle, gleefully imagines the “blusterin’ blap o’ the win’ about the turrets, as ye stude at yer window on a winter’s day, luikin oot ower the gurlly twist o’ the watters, the air fu’ o’ flichterin snaw, the clouds a mile thick abune yer heid” (*Malcolm* 241). Cosmo from *Castle Warlock* also expresses feverish love for the wild natural forces of his homeland. Yet the characters and architecture of MacDonald’s novels do not entirely reflect Ruskin’s idea, and this difference is significant.

Ruskin’s Gothic spirit also involves a “love of variety” (*Stones II* 175). In this we find something akin to *horror vacui*—the “restlessness of the dreaming mind, that wanders hither and thither among the niches . . . yet is not satisfied, nor shall be satisfied” (181). We also find this in the characteristic of “redundance” in architecture, which involves “the accumulation of ornament” that arises both from an acceptance of work by “the inferior rank” as well as from “a profound sympathy with the fullness and wealth of the material universe” (207). Thus Ruskin states of ornament: “You cannot have too much if it is good” (*Stones I* 257). This characteristic may therefore be good or bad, and its good is partly in that it provides freedom of expression for the “inferior rank” (*Stones II* 207). Ruskin here suggests that a less developed mind has a greater tendency to fill blank space.

It is difficult to determine whether MacDonald holds the same idea of inferiority; he at least is little affected by class prejudice. Nonetheless, if as Ruskin suggests there is a tendency towards *horror vacui* in Gothic, much of the architecture in MacDonald’s novels distinguishes itself from this. We find good examples in MacDonald’s castles from *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, *Donal Grant*, and other works. Jennifer Koopman rightly reads Morven Castle from *Donal Grant* as a reflection of Lord Morven’s bankrupt character, “heavily fortified” as a reflection of Morven’s “secretive” lifestyle, but the simple solidity of this structure is also part of a greater trend in MacDonald’s work (203). Lossie house in *Malcolm* is “a genuine old Scottish dwelling,” with “something of the air of a French chateau, only it looked stronger and far grimmer”; it even has a “somewhat war-like expression” (MacDonald 46). In

*Castle Warlock*, MacDonald writes of the castle: “There was hardly anything that could be called beauty about the building—strength and gloom were its main characteristics” (40). Such buildings are typically old, likely dating to the Middle Ages, and express a sort of Scottish Gothic—a more humble and severe variety of the style which reflects the nature of its inhabitants. Ruskin himself notes that many buildings may have a certain “degree of *Gothicness*,” but few if any buildings can be entirely Gothic (*Stones II* 152). Thus, MacDonald expresses a kind of Scottish spirit as a specification of Ruskin’s Gothic.

MacDonald uses the family houses in *Malcolm* and *Castle Warlock* to contrast a robust, religious Scottish character with aristocratic pride. Near the beginning of *Malcolm*, MacDonald describes the “repose” of the “oldest part” of the house, which the townspeople believe was once “a monastery” (46). “Carved around some of the windows, in ancient characters, were Scripture texts and antique proverbs” (46). Yet he notes that these carvings contrast the “everlasting excitement” of “heraldic zoology” surrounding the “hall-door,” which is part of the less ancient portion of the house (46). This heraldry reflects the Lossie family pride which at the time of the story overshadows religious sentiment—Malcolm himself being the exception. MacDonald further expresses this vanity through the interior of the dining hall, extravagantly decorated with “pictures of ladies and gentlemen” and with a ceiling that “rose” and gave “the dim show of a sky” (107). This latter element echoes Ruskin’s ideas on frivolous decoration, including “ceilings like skies” that “have sometimes a certain luxury and pleasurable in places meant for idleness, and are innocent enough as long as they are regarded as mere toys” (*Seven* 71). MacDonald’s descriptions suggest that Lossie House is divided like the marquis himself, who spends much of his time in England and prefers the polished English language to Scots—a common theme for MacDonald.

This split reflects a national difference which arises elsewhere. In *Castle Warlock*, MacDonald describes the castle as “like the hard-featured face of a Scotch matron, suggesting no end of story, of life, of character: she holds a defensive if not defiant face to the world, but within she is warm, tending carefully the fires of life” (1). In a similar comparison between building and person, Ruskin describes a villa with an especially English nature in *The Poetry of Architecture*, calling it “a humorist, an odd, twisted, independent being, with a great deal of mixed, obstinate, and occasionally absurd originality” which “corresponds with points of English character”

(156). These characters are of course generalizations. Castle Warlock, like much of Lossie House, also reflects the religious nature of characters such as Malcolm or Cosmo and his father (*Castle* 1). These characters are more accepting of uncertainty and more stable than Ruskin's "Gothic spirit" and its "love of *Change*" implies (*Stones II* 181).

MacDonald explores this difference in greater depth by specifically using these buildings to explore the interaction of characters from each nation. Castle Warlock contrasts the humble but firm character of its Scottish inhabitants with that of the English visitors. Joan initially expresses contempt for the Warlock castle, because it is out of line with her ideas, just as Cosmo, who MacDonald portrays as greatly attached to his native home, is initially incomprehensible to her. A similar clash of character occurs in *The Marquis of Lossie* between Malcolm and Clementina; Malcolm appears at first harsh and unreasonable before Clementina comes to understand him. Yet despite these conflicts, Joan and Clementina eventually come to understand the Scottish character that they originally found blunt and unrefined, and choose to live in the ancient family homes of their new Scottish husbands. This symbolizes the union of Scottish and English natures—at least a particular Scottish nature with a particular English nature.

This development reflects Ruskin's belief that despite the strong relation between architecture and national character, one can come to understand and love architecture that contrasts with their background. In the "Lamp of Obedience," Ruskin compares architectural style to language, arguing that correct principles must first be taught; then once the style is mastered the student may take liberties (*Seven* 316). First "our sight" has to become "accustomed" to it (316). Ruskin himself had to acclimatize to certain architecture. In *The Stones of Venice*, he even tells how his perception of his beloved Northern Gothic changed after he had learned to appreciate Italian forms (*Stones I* 171). Since architecture reflects the mind, to understand architecture is to understand in some way the people associated with it. Thus, the marrying of an English woman to a Scotch native, which occurs in both *Castle Warlock* and *The Marquis of Lossie*, involves a correspondent acceptance of the architecture.

The Scottish edifices in MacDonald's work also reflect his concern with age in architecture and its connection to an ancestral past. This is another important facet of architectural spirit that Ruskin greatly values. He writes that a building's "greatest glory" is "in its Age": "that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, which we feel

in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity” (*Seven* 284). This character gives architecture its “language and life”; because of this, it has more tell us and affects us deeper (285). This is one of the reasons that Ruskin so highly condemns restoration as “the most total destruction which a building can suffer” (296). Even after Ruskin’s lectures in Edinburgh, which effected some changes in the city, Gothic architecture was rarely adopted in nineteenth-century Scotland (Howard 130-134). Thus, it is likely that this style would have been an emblem of age and of the past in Scotland more so than in England.

In many cases, architecture “washed by the passing waves of humanity” strongly influences MacDonald’s characters (Ruskin, *Seven* 284). For example, Annie in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* naturally loves the old local castle. This ruined building, which is so terrifying for the London educated and anglicised Kate, is a regular haunt for Annie. She seems to blend in with it, “a dusky yet radiant creature” and “a lovely earth-stained ghost” (*Alec* 233). Similarly, to Cosmo in *Castle Warlock*, “[t]he whole surrounding” of his home castle “had to him a sacred look, such as Jerusalem, the temple, and its vessels bore to the Jews” and his “dream of life was to live all his days in the house of his forefathers” (40). By contrast, Joan “could not love her castle as [Cosmo] did his, for she had no such father in it”—she does not have familial associations like Cosmo’s (148).

MacDonald even implies a metaphysical element to the quality of age. After escaping from the Maid of the Alder-tree in *Phantastes*, Anodos finds lodging in a woodman’s house. The woodman’s family strikes him as so normal and human that they nearly extinguish his belief in Fairy Land; yet the youngest daughter is an exception. One look at this girl and Anodos “believed in Fairy Land again” (*Phantastes* 53). Her room looks out on the enchanted forest, and her mother tells Anodos that creatures from the forest often enter there. Only in this room does Anodos note that he “could see that part of the house had been erected against the remains of some old castle or abbey, or other great building” (53). Thus, MacDonald specifically links age in architecture to the idea of Faerie—a meaningful idea involving transcendence from ordinary reality. Anodos’s own house, like that of Mr. Vane in *Lilith*, is also old and associated with his ancestors. The journeys of Anodos and Vane into their respective fantasy world starts and ends in their old family homes—in a sense the journey does not escape these buildings. If we interpret the journeys of Anodos and Vane as internal, or related to their own imaginations, then the aged house with its rich associations of ancestral

past is something that permits the journey.

For Malcolm and Cosmo, ancestral architecture inspires the dream of re-building or bringing new life to these buildings. Although Ruskin disdains restoration, he admits that “[a]nother spirit may be given by another time, and it is then a new building” (*Seven* 297). The desires of Malcolm and Cosmo seem to reflect such a “spirit” (297), but for MacDonald, the most important aspect is the connection between the two meanings of “house”: architectural house and ancestral house. Malcolm illustrates this best since he is at first completely ignorant of his ancestry. Before receiving any hints as to his origin, he shows a great desire to revive Colonsay Castle. After restoring himself as the rightful heir and marquis, Malcolm sets about “rebuilding the ancient Castle of Colonsay”; both senses of “house” rise together (*Marquis* 381).

The situation in *Castle Warlock* is similar. Cosmo’s home parallels the family poverty. In a dream, Cosmo sees his castle in ruin, “a half-shapeless ruin of roofless walls, haggard and hollow and gray and desolate”—the “dead home of his fathers”—but then comes “a strain of music” and the house resurrects, “growing out of the earth like a plant” and surpassing the old building (MacDonald 196). This progression foreshadows the restoration of the Warlock family in both livelihood and posterity which comes to pass through the union of Cosmo and Joan. Like Malcolm, Cosmo seems to naturally associate his historic castle with the spirit of his family. Cosmo too expresses the wish to revive the building itself, though we do not get to witness it. Thus, for Malcolm and Cosmo, the wish to revive the building is also a wish to revive the character or spirit of their families. The goals of these characters are much like Ruskin’s own for *The Stones of Venice*: to revive the spirit of a people and its architecture together.

Malcolm and Cosmo’s impulse to revive their ancestral architecture is part of a larger tendency among MacDonald’s characters to build from a young age—a sort of architectural impulse. At the same time, this is a reflection of the nature of children. For example, Alec’s love of building manifests during winter in the creation of an elaborate “snow hut” (*Alec* 79). As a child, Cosmo finds building with snow “an endless delight” and although it is not exactly architectural, Robert Falconer’s delight in building his kite is similar (*Castle* 82). MacDonald makes the imaginative faculty itself architectural. He calls Cosmo’s constructive imagining “castle building”—a phrase that appears for a similar purpose in many of his works (*Castle* 30). For Cosmo, at least, this is not merely figurative language: one



of Cosmo's "castles" involves forming "a great palace" in his mind, "built on the tree-tops of a forest ages old" (30). Another, and one of his "fondest," is making "the house of his fathers beautiful" (41). MacDonald considers architecture and the imagination to be naturally linked.

Ruskin advocates a similar intrinsic impulse. In one of his Edinburgh lectures, he points to childhood imagination as evidence of architectural legitimacy: "What do you see your children doing, obeying their own natural and true instincts? What are your daughters drawing upon their cardboard screens as soon as they can use a pencil?"; they do not draw "Parthenon fronts I think, but the ruins of Melrose Abbey, or Linlithgow Palace, or Lochleven Castle" (*Lectures* 30). For Ruskin, the instinct for beauty and affect appears to be innate: "their own pure Scotch hearts leading them straight to the right things" (30). This, he believes, is something we should strive to regain as adults, instead of relying on popular opinion or authorities on taste. Thus, in *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin emphasizes the importance of casting off the accretions of prejudicial taste and accepting what one honestly likes—"[trusting] that you have been so created as to enjoy what is fitting for you" and being willing "to be pleased" (*Stones I* 45). He calls this "the child's spirit" (45). In Ruskin's view such natural taste and creative impulse in the Scottish—and probably many other European people—emerges in the form of Gothic.

Ruskin also links this healthy creativity to religious character. In *The Stones of Venice* he writes that Christian Romanesque architecture was "dependent for all its power on the vigor and freshness of the religion which animated it," and as later occurred with Gothic, the loss of religion marked the decline of vivacity, creativity, and purity (*Stones I* 16). The "corruption of all architecture, especially ecclesiastical, corresponded with, and marked the state of religion over all Europe" (23). This link between architecture and religion is the root of the whole work. Ruskin affirms this link in the third volume of *Modern Painters* with the idea of the "honest use of the imagination" in the "faithful pursuit of the ideal" (49). He opposes this to the "abuse of the imagination," which is to create believed insincerities or to live fully in one's own imagination at the expense of the outer world (49). This abuse often means "creating, for mere pleasure, false images, where it is its duty to create true ones" (50). This duty stems from the idea that the creative imagination is a subordinate form of God's creative powers, and should be used with respect to God's will.

This sheds light on Ruskin's hatred of restoration as well as his

ideas on honesty in architecture. Ruskin often argues against deception in architecture, especially in “The Lamp of Truth” (*Seven* 44). He condemns architecture that appears to be something it is not—painted marble, for example. MacDonald echoes this in *Castle Warlock* with the garden-house on Joan’s property. This is the location of an atrocity performed by her father which MacDonald only hints at, and as her father masks this truth, so the style of the building too is dishonest: “it would have been impossible to tell the purpose” of it, “for it was the product of a time when everything was made to look like something else” (*Castle* 183). Like Lilith’s palace, which also reflects this idea, the architecture is a reflection of the immoral mind associated with it.

The architectural impulse MacDonald expresses through Alec, Cosmo, and others is not always positive. MacDonald represents the struggle with Ruskin’s idea of the “abuse of the imagination” through Cosmo’s attachment to his family house (*Modern III* 49). This is the central conflict of *Castle Warlock*, and likely the reason that the castle provided the novel’s second and more enduring title. For Cosmo, this home “was almost a part of himself—an extension of his body” (*Castle* 242). When poverty threatens him with the loss of this building, Cosmo finds himself unable to mentally renounce it despite his faith and his trust in God’s providence. His attachment pushes him from God. MacDonald outlines the conflict:

His truth and humility and love had not yet reached to the quickening of the idea of the old house with the feeling that God was in it with him, giving it to him. Not yet possessing therefore the soul of the house, its greatest bliss, which nothing could take from him, he naturally could not be content to part with it. (242)

At the same time, Cosmo struggles to lose his dream of reviving his home, and MacDonald links the central conflict to his idea of “castle building” (30). The narrator of *Castle Warlock* tells us that “[w]hen a man comes to trust in God thoroughly, he shrinks from castle-building, lest his faintest fancy should run counter to that loveliest Will” (30).

This does not amount to a renunciation of imagination on the whole, but rather a renunciation of the self as willing imaginer—“castles” may still arise by way of God’s will in us (*Castle* 30). As the schoolmaster in *The Marquis of Lossie* tells Clementina: “I used to build many castles, not without a beauty of their own—that was when I had less understanding: now I leave them to God to build for me” (305). Thus, it is only when Cosmo finally relinquishes his castle mentally that he discovers the hidden treasure

that restores it to him, and God's greater will replaces his "castle-building" (*Castle* 30). As the narrator tells us, "To be lord of space, a man must be free of all bonds to place" (276). For both Ruskin and MacDonald, we should always value the spirit of God over the spirit of our ancestors, our Northern "Gothic spirit," our Scottish spirit, or any other (*Stones II* 181).

### III. Symbols and Spatial Meaning

Both Ruskin and MacDonald emphasize the symbolic meanings inherent in architecture. Ruskin sees this in even the basic elements of a building. For example, the common structural pillar reflects a universal principle "equally true in morals and mathematics, that the strength of materials, or of men, or of minds, is always most available when it is applied as closely as possible to a single point"—by its nature it is symbolic (*Stones I* 73). Ruskin also notes that Gothic tends to set squares "obliquely," such as in the "cruciform outline of the load of the shaft" in a grouped pillar, which reflects the central symbol of Christianity (93-94). There is also the "idea of unity of fellowship in going up to worship, which is suggested by the vast single entrance" of a church (177); the worth of the individual in grouped shafts discussed in the first section of this paper; as well as the symbolic "alternation of shade with light" in ornamentation (256). This latter takes many forms and is something we always enjoy, although the "true meaning may never occur to us"—namely its symbolic meanings in "the opposition of good and evil . . . the alternation of labor with rest, the mingling of life with death . . . and the falling and rising of night and day" (256). These are only a few examples of Ruskin's need to "metaphysically justify" his arguments on architecture (294). Whether one recognizes it, symbolic meaning is ubiquitous and inescapable in buildings.

MacDonald expresses something similar through his metaphoric use of space, which is generally consistent throughout his work. One of the most obvious examples is the attic space or garret room. In *Malcolm*, the narrator says, "I find no part of an ancient house so full of interest as the garret-region" (203); here there is the "sense of lofty loneliness" and the "proximity to things aerial—doves and martins, vanes and gilded balls and lightning-conductors, the waves of the sea of wind, breaking on the chimney for rocks, and the crashing roll of the thunder—is in harmony with the highest spiritual instincts" (203). MacDonald often places his protagonists in attic rooms that foreshadow their upward progression towards God. The lower regions contrast the upper. In the same novel, MacDonald writes: "The cellars are

the metaphysics, the garrets the poetry of the house” (203). Such spaces continually appear with a similar symbolic purpose, such as in *The Princess and the Goblin* with Grandmother Irene’s room being high in the castle and the goblins’ entrance being through the cellar.

These spaces fit into a system of verticality that critics have well noted. Daniel Creed, pointing to one of MacDonald’s letters on mountain climbing, writes: “MacDonald sees physical height as placing him closer to God in this world”; Creed calls this his “metaphysical scale of height relating to divinity” (4; 11). Likewise, in regards to the intricate tree-house that Willie builds his sister in *Gutta-Percha Willie*, Michael Düring argues that “[b]y realizing his sister’s dream of a bird’s existence, through this heavenward-seeking architecture of treehouse and stairways, [Willie] accomplishes Novalis’s ideal of *Erhebung* (of potentising to a different metaphysical level)” (17). As the narrator in *Donal Grant* tells us: “We are like barometers, only work [sic] the other way; the higher we go, the higher goes our mercury” (MacDonald 256). Although this vertical metaphor is a greater focus for MacDonald, Ruskin finds his own version in “the divisions of a wall” (*Stones I* 281). As we move up from the base to the cornice, we find the wall better suits ornament, “as, in all well-conducted lives, the hard work, and roughing, and gaining strength come first” and “the honor [sic] or decoration in certain intervals [comes] during their course, but most of all in their close” (281). Thus, as we move up the wall we progress symbolically in time as well as glory.

MacDonald’s consistent use of the spiral staircase clearly relates to this vertical metaphor and shows that like Ruskin, MacDonald sees symbolic meaning in structural elements. Critics have thoroughly documented this symbol. Daniel Boice reads Morven Castle in *Donal Grant* as “the labyrinth of the world” and the huge spiral stair within as what “makes possible the ascent of the human being to heaven” (36). Colin Manlove notes how, in *Lilith*, Mr. Vane “must ascend a spiral staircase” to reach the inter-world mirror in his garret (86). This symbol implies development. As Manlove writes: “Life is circular, but for MacDonald as for Blake, in spiral form” (84). We progress by returning to where we started from but on a higher level. For MacDonald, this progression is spiritual. Thus, Malcolm’s first excursion to the “attic regions” of Lossie House is up a spiral stair, and he seems to emerge into a new atmosphere involving a “ghostly feeling” and the “sense of lonely sleepwalking” (*Malcolm* 144). MacDonald often describes similar sensations along with these symbolic spaces and staircases, suggesting that

they reflect the spiritual plane and affect our minds in consistent ways.

Yet MacDonald takes these metaphors further, linking the upper regions directly to the mind. In *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, Annie, afraid of rats, keeps the door of her garret room a crack open to allow the cat to enter at its will. MacDonald makes this room a symbol for the mind and the door a symbol for one's internal connection to God: "There are ways of keeping the door of the mind also, ready as it is to fall to, ajar for the cat" (*Alec* 25). The personal room often stands in for the personal mind in MacDonald's work. Accordingly, Mr. Cupples lives in a garret room with a door opening to the roof inside his closet. He is not aware of this until Alec reveals it. After Alec takes refuge from his pursuers through this door, MacDonald writes that "[a]bove him the stars shone dim in the light of the moon, which cast opal tints all around her on the white clouds; and beneath him was a terrible dark abyss, full of raging men, dimly lighted with lamps" (302). Metaphorically, this door is Cupples's unacknowledged connection to God—that which lifts him into the upper regions above the "terrible dark abyss"—and is likely the root of his poetic inspiration (302). This circumstance reflects the symbiotic relationship between Cupples and Alec: without Alec, Cupples would not have come to understand his own connection to God, and without the support of Cupples, Alec could not have reached his final understanding of God.

MacDonald uses a similar idea in *Robert Falconer*: the door from Robert's house to Miss St. John's room in the adjacent house is the "door of his paradise" where he can approach God through the music of her piano (165). MacDonald compares this to the human soul: everyone in "the house of his own soul has such a door into the infinite beauty" (160). When his grandmother walls up this door between the houses, Robert is "driven inwards—into his garret, into his soul" (165). Robert has to find his "paradise" in other ways, ultimately in himself: for all her effort, his grandmother cannot wall up the door within (165). Whether we read the personal room as the mind or soul, the metaphor remains the same: within the self there is a connection to the divine. This idea is prominent throughout MacDonald's work. Thus, Vane's own comparison between his garret and his brain is not merely circumstantial: "If I know nothing of my own garret . . . what is there to secure me against my own brain? Can I tell what it is even now generating?" (*Lilith* 16).

With the labyrinth space, MacDonald suggests a complexity to the mind that blurs this distinction between the self and the divine—that which is beyond the self. One such labyrinthine space is the palace in

*Phantastes*. Anodos himself suggests the link between his mind and the palace while pacing one of the halls in search of inner inspiration: “lonely as there I walked, as lonely trod my soul up and down the halls of the brain” (*Phantastes* 117). On the other hand, Creed argues that linking the palace to the mind does not adequately explain the seemingly “multiple realms within the space”; it is rather a “sort of dimensional portal” to “other realms” (4-5). These interpretations, however, do not need to be mutually exclusive. Together, they become a powerful image of the mind’s intrinsic and complex link to things beyond it. Anodos’s personal room, which for the only time in fairyland reappears within this palace, is the known and familiar portion of himself which opens into the complexity of the greater self—the palace itself—where the self and the beyond are barely distinguishable. As Anodos tells us, this palace is “so extensive and complicated” that despite his long stay he does “not succeed in mastering the inner topography” (*Phantastes* 69).

This reflects other spaces such as the labyrinthine Hilton Hall in *The Portent*. Duncan, like Anodos, connects his mind to this space and its sense of mystery: “A faded moonbeam fell on the floor, and filled the place with an ancient dream-light, which wrought strangely on my brain, and filled it, as if it, too, were but a deserted, sleepy house, haunted by old dreams and memories” (MacDonald 48). Likewise, in *Donal Grant*, in regards to their search for the castle’s lost room, Donal tells Arctura, “I feel almost as if I were trying to understand a human creature. A house is so like a human mind, which gradually disentangles and explains itself as you go on to know it” (262). These spaces symbolize yet another metaphorical theme that MacDonald explores throughout his career; this is the uncertain limits of the self, which culminates in the figure of Mr. Vane: “I did not know myself, did not know what I was, had no grounds to determine that I was one and not another” (*Lilith* 13).

Unlike MacDonald, Ruskin does not interpret architectural space as actually representative of mental space. Instead, he occasionally describes architecture in terms of the body. For example, Ruskin compares the cornice to a “hand, opened to carry something above its head; as the base was considered its foot,” and the “decay of the city of Venice” to “an outwearied and aged human frame” (*Stones I* 54; *Stones II* 27). Perhaps even more frequently he compares architecture to animals. However, in some instances Ruskin relates architecture more entirely to humanity. For instance, he relates the degradation of Venice to the worshippers in Murano: “aged men and

women, wasted and fever struck . . . ghastly and settled into a gloomy animal misery”; they are like animated dead among the decaying city (*Stones II* 53). This image is more profound in that it implies a mental as well as a bodily parallel: the worshippers are decayed in both body and mind. In this way, his vision of architecture approaches MacDonald’s, though it is not nearly as metaphorically extensive.

Yet if we consider the subject of nature, MacDonald’s metaphorical vision of architecture greatly echoes Ruskin. MacDonald and Ruskin share a worldview in which nature is an expression of God. For Ruskin, architecture is of humanity, yet it should point to God by reflecting God’s natural creation. Ruskin holds that nature contains all aesthetic laws without exception: “beautiful ornament, wherever found, or however invented, is always either an intentional or unintentional copy of some constant natural form” (*Stones I* 226). In Ruskin’s view, God intends nature to uphold the human spirit, to nourish it, and thus “[t]he proudest architecture that man can build has no higher honor than to bear the image and recall the memory of that grass of the field which is, at once, the type and support of his existence” (*Stones II* 202).

Since architecture is the particular expression of the human mind, this mind does well to steep itself in God’s nature—to love God’s creation. Moreover, Ruskin believes that this is natural for us: we have a “natural tendency impressed on us by our Creator to love the forms with which the earth He gave us to tread, and out of which He formed our bodies, knit itself as it was separated from the deep” (*Stones I* 226). Thus, in the Venetian Byzantine which Ruskin views as pious and which led to Gothic, the ornamentation shows “a greater love of nature” than classical Greek architecture, because the Byzantine carvings are “more founded on realities” and show “the mind of the workmen to have been among the living herbage” (*Stones II* 133). For Ruskin, the human mind, which God modelled after his own, should ideally create something that reflects God’s natural creation. Human work is subordinate to nature; thus a building should strive to convey “man’s delight in better work than his own” (*Stones I* 44).

Many of MacDonald’s spatial metaphors also suggest the supremacy of nature. The metaphors of Mr. Cupples’s garret room or the Aeolian harp in the chapel roof in *Donal Grant*—the music of which represents divine inspiration—reach their extremity in the outside world. The spiritual element arrives from outside architecture. As the inner space reflects the human mind, the external natural world reflects God. MacDonald suggests that complexity comes from humanity; for example, in *Lossie House*, Malcolm feels “a sense



of the multitudinous and intricate, such as he had never before experienced, and such as perhaps only the works of man can produce, the intricacy of those of nature being ever veiled in the grand simplicity which springs from primal unity of purpose” (*Malcolm* 203). Naturally, therefore, the spiritual progression of many characters leads outside architecture. Cupples initially dismisses nature, telling Alec: “I’m a toon-snail. The country’s for calves and geese. It’s ower green for me. I like the gray stanes—weel biggit, to haud oot the cauld” (*Alec* 178). Yet after Cupples gives up drinking and begins to recognize his connection to God, he spends more time out in daylight and delights in the countryside, thus fulfilling the metaphor of his garret. Likewise, although the mad laird in *Malcolm* finds refuge in architecture, it is in the open air that he finds hope.

MacDonald emphasizes this idea with a meaningful lack of architecture in specific instances. In *Alec Forbes*, Annie’s father, a loving and spiritual man “who, all his life, had striven to be better,” is buried in a churchyard with “no church: its memory even had vanished. It seemed as if the churchyard had swallowed the church as the heavenly light shall one day swallow the sun and the moon” (2; 389). This image suggests the dissolution of the synthetic into the divine—God’s greater creation. For MacDonald, death is only another step towards God, and the churchyard carries the symbolism of rebirth which is all the more effective in connection with nature. Thus in *Lilith*, Mr. Raven is the sexton of a great expanse “without church or graves”: “all was a churchyard” (31). Mr. Raven’s role in the rebirth of the sleepers gives this “burial-ground of the universe” a sense of renewal through nature (32).

Diamond’s experience in the cathedral in *At the Back of the North Wind* further illuminates this symbolic absence. The cathedral’s purpose, other than to shelter Diamond and impress him with Gothic sublimity, is to teach him the limitations of religious institutions. North Wind could have brought Diamond somewhere else; she could have tested his faith on a cliff instead of the clerestory. When Diamond is alone, the false apostles show their corruption. One of these says of North Wind, “What right has she to bang at our windows as she has been doing the whole of this night?” (*At the Back* 106). However, we know that North Wind is an agent of God and allegorically reflects the deeper truths of religion. God sanctions this banging, as He does the sinking of the ship. For Catherine Persyn, the “sham apostles” are a distraction, an “occulting” that veils the alchemical light symbolism in the stained-glass window (57). Yet they also have a role in teaching Diamond

the divergence between institution and true religion, and the building, however sublime, is yet of the human plane of existence. By contrast, the country at the back of the north wind, a type of heaven, is entirely of nature.

Yet, paradoxically, MacDonald often uses the language of architecture to describe the natural world. For example, in *Malcolm*, he describes the sky as “the great vault without arch or keystone” (129), and in *Alec Forbes*, he compares the northern lights to “a row of slender organ-pipes, rolling out and in and along the sky” (83). In *Donal Grant*, MacDonald describes the avenue near the castle architecturally: “The arms of the great trees crossing made it a long aisle—its roof a broken vault of leaves, upheld by irregular pointed arches—which affected one’s imagination like an ever shifting [sic] dream of architectural suggestion” (90). His characters sometimes express nature in these terms as well. In *The Marquis of Lossie*, Blue Peter’s stifling experience of London compels him to extensively praise his home coast; here, one has the “preevilege . . . o’ haein’ ’t i’ yer pooer, ony nicht ’at ye’re no efter the fish, to stap out at yer ain door, an’ be in the mids o’ the temple! Be ’t licht or dark, be ’t foul or fair, the sea sleepin’ or ragin’, ye ha’e aye room an’ naething atween ye an’ the throne of the Almichty” (45). Peter chooses the word “temple” to capture his cherished natural world (45).

On the one hand, MacDonald’s architectural vision of nature reflects Ruskin’s idea that an architect properly draws from natural forms, consciously or not, and thus there is often a relation between nature and architecture. Appropriately, the architectural language suggests Gothic, which draws heavily on nature. In general, MacDonald’s descriptions of this kind come in the form of the encomium, usually in praise of nature’s greatest forms and affects, and are often in direct connection to God. Nonetheless, these descriptions delight in a comparison to human creations despite being descriptions of some of God’s greatest revelations to humanity—the sacramental natural world. The sense of inspiration does not seem to come only from nature; it also comes from architecture. In the creation of a building, God’s natural world inspires humanity, but in praising God’s natural world, the creations of humanity inspire the language. The relation between nature and architecture is reciprocal in the human mind.

Ruskin expresses a parallel idea in the “Lamp of Memory” (*Seven* 268). He opens this chapter by narrating his first-hand impressions of the natural landscape near Champagnole France: “a spot which has all the solemnity, with none of the savageness, of the Alps” (268). Ruskin focuses on a particularly affecting ravine: “It would be difficult to conceive a scene less

dependent upon any other interest than that of its own secluded and serious beauty” (270). Ruskin then conducts a thought experiment in which, in his imagination, he moves the scene to America, to a forest which he imagines as wild and without any traces of humanity: now “the flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music; the hills became oppressively desolate” (270). He concludes that the natural scene “had been dyed by the deep colors of human endurance, valor, and virtue” and that the hills are made worthy of reverence through their proximity to the great architecture of humanity (271). A large amount “of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not theirs” (271). Ruskin suggests that the remembrance—conscious or unconscious—of noble architecture alters the way we experience nature. Thus, it is not only that our perceptions of nature affect our architecture, but that our architecture in turn affects our perception of nature: this is the power the mind has upon the external world.

In a similar way, the memory of Gothic architecture seems to affect MacDonald’s depictions of God’s creation. In both cases, the human mind alters what it perceives. Perhaps more than anything this suggests that there are limitations to the human mind: as we approach the idea of the divine, which nature embodies, we find ourselves falling back upon what is familiar to us. We cannot escape the human plane—at least until death. MacDonald expresses this prominently in *Lilith*. Critics have interpreted this novel and its “Endless Ending” in a wide variety of ways, from Lucas H. Harriman’s assertion that Vane’s return to his library “is meant to alert the reader to the immanence of glory within the mundane,” to Robert A. Collins’s idea that the ending “communicates an air of didactic failure on some level, though the failure is perhaps as likely to be that of its readers as of its author” (*Lilith* 307; Harriman 90-91; Collins 13). According to Richard Reis, “many readers have found this ending unsatisfactory, even perverse” (27).

In light of the psychological limitation that MacDonald and Ruskin suggest through architecture, the “Endless Ending” is appropriate (*Lilith* 307). MacDonald himself had not yet experienced union with God; he had not seen what is truly beyond death and so he could not describe it. Others arrive at similar conclusions, such as Elisabeth Robinson or Tom Shippey, who writes: “Vane represents what MacDonald takes to be the true state of all human beings: they are led on by glimpses of something they can now grasp only fitfully and uncertainly” (20). The “large book” that closes behind Vane as he is returned to his library reminds us that the vision of the heavenly city is part of MacDonald’s literary imagination (*Lilith* 305). It is the work of

the human mind, as is the country at the back of the north wind which North Wind tells Diamond is “[o]nly a picture” of the “real country” (*At the Back* 289). There may be divine inspiration in the vision, but it is filtered through the human mind.

This reciprocal relation between the human mind and the outside world points towards a metaphysical truth. In MacDonald’s fantasies, particularly those that intersect with our world, one of the first ways that MacDonald introduces the fantastical is by dissolving our understanding of space. *Lilith* explicitly considers the intricate relation between external and internal reality, suggesting it is almost impossible to distinguish. Upon first meeting Vane, Mr. Raven says: “You have not yet left your house, neither has your house left you. At the same time it cannot contain you, or you inhabit it” (*Lilith* 23). They are one and the same, and as Manlove writes: “Vane in a sense never moves from his house” (85). When Vane first enters through the mirror, Mr. Raven tells him: “All the doors you had yet seen . . . were doors in; here you came upon a door out” and yet “the more doors you go out of, the farther you get in” (*Lilith* 12). This sense of space suggests that distinctions of external and internal are illusory—that the mind is actually united with everything “outside.” Vane’s house is his personal consciousness, and everything that this space opens onto—fantasy world or the open air of earth—is the greater consciousness.

At times, MacDonald purposely inverts his usual system of metaphor to emphasize this paradoxical unity in the universe. In Diamond’s dream, the stars call him up to join them, but direct him to “what seemed the very opposite of what he wanted—a stair down into the earth” (*At the Back* 204). Diamond, who “had learned to look through the look of things,” takes the stair, which has a stream running up it, and reaches the place above the stars (204). Grisela H. Kreglinger notices this reversal in the novel. She writes that MacDonald uses “spatial symbols subversively”—down is not the “spiritual decline” it might be in an ordinary use of such spatial symbolism (Kreglinger 163). When Diamond reaches the end of the stair, an inversion occurs that echoes the gravitational shift that Dante experiences in the *Inferno* when he passes through the deepest part of hell at the centre of the earth. Naturally, Kreglinger sees the *felix culpa* motif in this, “He who wants to go up must first go down” (164). Yet it also suggests MacDonald’s idea of ultimate unity: what seems distant is in fact very close. MacDonald’s use of space is far more illusory than the *felix culpa* motif demands. Thus, we find MacDonald uniting the distant with the near in other contexts. For example, in *Alec Forbes* he

points to the similarity between the stars and the frost: the stars looked “like the essential that makes snow-flakes and icy spangles everywhere—they were so like them, only they were of fire. Even snow itself must have fire at the heart of it” (180).

Ruskin’s universe, like MacDonald’s, is unified—though not in exactly the same way. For Ruskin, “all the highest principles of art are as universal as they are majestic, and there is nothing too small to receive their influence” (*Stones II* 135). As for MacDonald, progress is the approach of the human mind towards the mind of God. Thus, for Ruskin, architecture should reflect nature as well as enliven nature through its influence; “[i]t is the centralization and protectress of this sacred influence, that Architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought” (*Seven* 271). Risking self-contradiction, Ruskin even allows that architecture at its best may at least equal the impact of nature. One of the buildings that Ruskin most admires is the Doge’s Palace of Venice, which he calls the Ducal Palace. Combining his sense of this building’s beauty with his knowledge of the many great paintings within, Ruskin writes:

Sometimes when walking at evening on the Lido, whence the great chain of the Alps, crested with silver clouds, might be seen rising above the front of the Ducal Palace, I used to feel as much awe in gazing on the building as on the hills, and could believe that God had done a greater work in breathing into the narrowness of dust the mighty spirit by whom its haughty walls had been raised, and its burning legends written, than in lifting the rocks of granite higher than the clouds of heaven, and veiling them with their various mantle of purple flower and shadowy pine. (*Stones II* 373-374)

MacDonald suggests something similar in *The Marquis of Lossie*. Peter connects Westminster Abbey to the glory of nature, but Malcolm sees beyond: “Peter said that the moment he stepped in, he heard the rush of the tide on the rocks of Scaurnose; and Malcolm declared he felt as if he had stepped out of the world into the regions of eternal silence” (28). Their profound response to the building, which initially takes away their power of speech, suggests that for MacDonald too the greatest architecture rivals the effect of nature.

For both Ruskin and MacDonald, architecture is of the human plane but might be brought at least near to the level of nature, to the divine. Architecture is to humanity as nature is to God, yet these two relations are inextricably linked since humanity is also God’s creation. The deep relation

between creator and created helps explain the inherent meanings that both MacDonald and Ruskin attribute to architecture. It also highlights the moral characteristics and the reflections of cultural spirit with which they endow architecture. MacDonald and Ruskin both use the relation between architecture and the mind to emphasize that the progression of humanity is towards unity with God. Yet MacDonald's use of space develops this idea further, suggesting that our spatial and material understanding is illusory. It may be his theology—less orthodox than Ruskin's—that leads MacDonald to this. The unity of internal and external reality resonates with MacDonald's ideas on hell and eternity: there is no hell except in suffering. Unity with God frees us from this, just as evil is the shadow that will burn away before Him. When these things pass away perhaps there will likewise be no "external" or "down" as we understand them.

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