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‘The Hand of Age Upon Me’: George MacDonald and the Restoration of Home in Lilith

Joshua T. Rawleigh

Lilith (1895), the last major work of George MacDonald (1824–1905), is often regarded as his magnum opus. In his biography of MacDonald, William Raeper describes *Lilith* as MacDonald’s “‘Dark night of the soul”, exposing the terrible struggle between light and shade that had battled in his conscience since his earliest days’.[1] The novel has often been regarded as the culmination of MacDonald’s lifelong attempt to articulate a theology of death. In *Lilith*, he approaches death from a more personal angle than in his other novels, a perspective that emerged from personal tragedy and his ongoing struggle against age. *Lilith*’s solution to death is “home”, characterised by the restoration of a corrupted world and corrupted relationships. Home is where the family is intact and where the individual’s teleological desires are met. The reconciliation of the first family and Mr. Vane’s journey throughout the novel as well as its treatment of death and the afterlife reveal MacDonald’s anticipation of his own death as a spiritual homecoming.

MacDonald’s narratives often come from his own past, particularly the places he has visited, so that, as Timothy Youngs argues, these ‘multiple shapes are intrinsic to the telling’ of his tales.[2] MacDonald weaves these “shapes” from a complex mixture of his upbringing in Aberdeenshire, his life in England, his travels to America and North Africa, and his final years in Italy. Added to this is his confounding insistence on orthodox theology, while holding heterodox positions. The key to unraveling these paradoxical foundations to MacDonald’s works is the life of the man himself. MacDonald drew from his own life with an uncommon poignancy, so that places visited by the author would appear in his novels decades later in striking detail. *Robert Falconer*, for example, tells how the eponymous character sneaks out of his grandmother’s house to practice his fiddle at the old, family thread factory. The path described is identical to

[1] William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Herts, 1987), 364.

[2] Timothy Youngs, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the fin de siècle* (Liverpool, 2013), 142.

the route from MacDonald's grandmother's home in Huntly on the corner of Church St. and Duke St. to the old MacDonald family factory.[3] Indeed Falconer's Rothieden is a stand-in for Huntly. The Boar's Head in Rothieden is the Gordon Arms of Huntly (named because the Gordon clan's sigil is a boar's head), while the school Robert Falconer and Shargar attend corresponds to the nonconformist school attended by MacDonald. Through an awareness of the autobiographical elements of novels such as *Robert Falconer*, one can functionally create a short self-guided tour of the author's hometown.

In 1891, when MacDonald was just beginning work on *Lilith,* he returned to Huntly. His letters from this trip illustrate his renewed fascination with his ancestral home. He writes with wonder at the sight of the Scottish countryside after visiting his familial cemetery, saying 'I see the country more beautiful than I used to see it. The air is delicious, and full of sweet odours, mostly white clover, and there is over it much sky'.[4] The feeling he conveys is of delight in returning to his boyhood home. MacDonald goes on in the letter to say that this delight in the Scottish countryside fills him with the 'hope of the glory of God', and the final renewed creation.[5] Nostalgia for his Scottish home drives MacDonald to hope in God rather than to wistfulness. The settings of his novels, particularly his fantasies, often direct the reader to a renewed image of a landscape that closely resembles his childhood view of Scotland.

Writing from Bordighera, MacDonald fondly inscribes *Lilith* with images of the Scottish landscape renewed. Initially, however, the other world of *Lilith* is barren to varying degrees. Vane's first entry point into the Region of the Seven Dimensions is the countryside, with Adam's and Eve's solitary cottage, reminiscent of 'The Farm', MacDonald's boyhood home. The plant life around the cottage includes heather and thistles, quintessential Scottish botany, even though at this point the landscape is relatively desolate. As Vane moves away from the cottage, he enters completely barren lands: '[a]s I walked, my feet lost the heather, and trod a bare spongy soil, something like dry, powdery peat.'[6] The reason for this barrenness is a lack of water. Mara explains to Vane how Lilith gathered the waters of the land, though she could 'not hold more than half of it, and the instant she was gone, what she had not yet taken fled away underground, leaving the country as dry and dusty as her own heart' (*Lilith*,

[3] George MacDonald, *Robert Falconer* (Whitethorn, CA., 1998), 87.

[4] Glenn Edward Sadler (ed.), *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI., 1994), 344.

[5] Ibid., 344.

[6] George MacDonald, *Lilith* (Grand Rapids, MI., 2000), 48. Further citation given in text.

75). Before Lilith steals the water, the land is a verdant, Eden-like paradise, known as 'the Land of Waters' (*Lilith*, 75). Lilith's theft is akin to Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. Both actions corrupt not only humanity, but creation as well. The desolate industrialised Bulika is the culmination of this broken creation, with its miserable, selfish people and exhausted land. It is reminiscent of Gwyntystorm from *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), where the people, full of greed, continued to mine for gold, until at last, '[o]ne day at noon, when life was at its highest, the whole city fell with a roaring crash. The cries of men and the shrieks of women went up with its dust, and then there was a great silence'.[7] Unlike with Gwyntystorm, Bulika and its surrounding country retain redemptive hope because of the water that waits beneath the earth. In the end, this water bursts, turning the desert into thriving hills of vegetation with a clear blue lake and rivers, just like in *The Princess and the Goblin*, when the subterranean waters wash the goblins and misshapen creatures out of the tunnels, cleansing the kingdom of their corruption.[8] When Vane first 'wakes' from the House of the Dead, he sees:

> The whole expanse where, with hot, aching feet, I had crossed and recrossed the deep-scorched channels and ravines of the dry river-bed, was alive with streams, with torrents, with pools—"a river deep and wide!" […] I stood a moment gazing, and my heart began to exult: my life was not all a failure! (*Lilith*, 232–3)

Vane's jubilation echoes something of MacDonald's catharsis in seeing the country around Huntly as an old man. For both, viewing the landscape as it ought to be led to a moment of ontological completion, or wholeness of spiritual being. As Raeper reminds us, the reader of *Lilith* ought to remember that though MacDonald, as 'the Sage of Bordighera' in the Italian countryside, may seem distant from young Scottish boy gallivanting around Huntly, he still draws inspiration from his childhood landscape.[9] MacDonald keeps the image of Scotland in his mind, using it as a sign of restoration and wholeness.

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[7] George MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* (Project Gutenberg) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/709/709-h/709-h.htm> [accessed 1 October 2017].

[8] George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (Philadelphia, 1907), 297–300.

[9] William Raeper, 'Diamond and Kilmeny: MacDonald, Hogg, and the Scottish Folk Tradition', in *For the Childlike*, ed. Roderick McGillis (London, 1992), 133–45, (143).

For MacDonald, returning to Scotland was returning home, as it naturally evoked his boyhood memories, but also because it meant returning to the land of his family. MacDonald describes the Drumblade churchyard in Huntly as 'where the bodies of all my people are laid'.[10] MacDonald attaches himself to these dead family members, creating a sense of communion that suggests he and they will one day reunite. Their bodies, now residing in the hills and fens of Scotland, are tied to its landscape and bring MacDonald with them because of a natural communion. He finds solace and redemption in the promise of a restored landscape where his family lies sleeping. Like Vane lying down to join his family in the crypt beneath the sprawling heather fields, MacDonald anticipates joining his family amassed around Huntly, as his sleep with them will lead to restoration of their familial ties. They shall all be perfectly united in death. As he says in the same letter, 'I get little bits of dreamy pleasure sometimes, but none without the future to set things right. "What is it all for?" I should constantly be saying with Tolstoi, but for the hope of the glory of God'.[11] The scene as he sees it, though idyllic, awaits a future completion, 'the hope of the glory of God', that will see the restoration home. His final visit to Huntly spurred his contemplation of death, restoration, family, and landscape all together. The spectre of Scotland as his home and the home of his ancestors haunts the pages of *Lilith*.

What ties MacDonald's family to the landscape of Scotland is death. MacDonald believes that death will reunite him with all who have died, particularly those whom he loves. In his essay 'Defining Death as "More Life": Unpublished Letters by George MacDonald', Sadler writes that, '[i]n MacDonald's case, however, the topic of death cannot be avoided; it is both of literary and biographical importance in understanding his life and works'.[12] In terms of the literary, both MacDonald's fantasy and romances deal with the author's view of death, though for the purposes of this paper, the fantasy best illuminates the author's attitudes on mortality. Sadler notes that 'MacDonald is at his best when he is seeing death through the eyes of a child'.[13] Child death or death seen by children is the most common way MacDonald uses death in his fantasy. He applies the childlikeness that MacDonald championed in his essay 'The Fantastic Imagination' to death in order to give death the severity and

[10] Sadler, *An Expression of Character,* 344.

[11] Ibid., 344.

[12] Glenn Edward Sadler, 'Defining Death as "More Life": Unpublished Letters by George MacDonald', *North Wind* 3 (1984), 4–18, (6).

[13] Ibid., 4.

hopefulness he believes it deserve.[14] In his 'Unspoken Sermons', MacDonald argues that when Christ says, '[e]xcept ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven', he refers to essential quality of God that is most commonly reflected in children.[15] This quality is the innate simplicity and hopefulness one finds in children.[16] By linking death to children who exhibit this quality, MacDonald shows death at its most severe, removing something good from the world, and its most redemptive, because it unites the child to God from whom its childlikeness comes.[17] Death, though painful, only leads to more life for the childlike.

Childlikeness is a quality that, while most naturally found in children, can be found in adults as well. When heroic adults die in MacDonald's fantasies, they are those that exhibit childlikeness. The childlike adult who dies enters into more life, just like Vane at the end of *Lilith.* MacDonald poignantly phrases this in *The Golden Key* (1867), where Mossy, who, at the end of his long journey, is an aged and dying, though he retains his childlike heart, converses about death with the Old Man of the Sea. The Old Man of the Sea asks him if death is good: "'It is good," said Mossy. "It is better than life." "No," said the Old Man: "it is only more life.""[18] Though published thirty years prior to *Lilith*, *The Golden Key* articulates the same perspective on death. Death is only more life for the childlike Mossy, just as it is for Vane at the end of his journey.

MacDonald's treatment of death was uncommon for Victorian authors, who preferred to sentimentalise child death. The most famous example of this treatment of child death is that of little Nell in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840). Dickens paints the scene with infamously sentimental imagery:

> She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death.[19]

Nell, until the point where she drifts into a pre-death sleep, encourages those

[14] George MacDonald, 'The Fantastic Imagination', in *The Light Princess and Other Stories* (London, 1891), 3.
[15] George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* (Memphis, TN, 2012), 14.
[16] Ibid., 16.
[17] Ibid., 16.
[18] George MacDonald, 'The Golden Key', in *The Golden Key and Other Stories* (Grand Rapids, MI., 2000), 32.
[19] Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841; repr. London, 2000), 538.

around her to live good lives. It is a long scene, where the family grieves, but comes to terms with her death. Such was common in the Victorian cult of the child, a nineteenth-century movement that viewed children as models of purity and innocence that were to be guarded, protected, and admired, but not treated seriously.[20] Nell's death is an idealised death, sanitised of reality. Nell's family can gather around her, shed a few tears, and then go forward to heed her final words that spur them on to live morally.

Contrast this to the way MacDonald treats child death. His most complete treatment is in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), which tells the story of a boy named Diamond, whose adventures with the mysterious lady, North Wind, precipitate his death. MacDonald's depiction of Diamond's death is abrupt, despite it being foreshadowed throughout the novel. Diamond's tutor, who is also the narrator, comes to Mr. Raymond's house for his usual lesson with Diamond, only to discover the house in mourning. Mrs. Raymond tells him that they discovered Diamond's body on the floor of the attic room that morning. The tutor goes up alone to the tower and finds '[a] lovely figure, as white and almost as clear as alabaster'.[21] The family has no consolation and no final words with the child. He is simply, and terribly, dead. Nevertheless, MacDonald ends the novel hopefully: 'I saw at once how it was. They thought he was dead. I knew that he had gone to the back of the north wind'.[22] This statement contains the essential thrust of MacDonald's novel: death begets life. With Little Nell, Dickens dwells on the painful, yet beautiful act of death for the child. For MacDonald, the death itself matters little, because it is merely a passage into more life. The preceding novel prepares you for this life through death, creating a more hopeful, though more horrific, scene.

Both *The Golden Key* and *At the Back of the North Wind* demonstrate the way that MacDonald, even from earlier in his career, dealt with death in his works. In broaching death from the perspective of a child, MacDonald attempts to capture the divine perspective on mortality. Thus, while both Mossy and Diamond are children, they demonstrate adult maturity. Mossy has the appearance of an old man, while Diamond often takes on a parental role to his younger siblings, as well as other children like the drunken cabman's

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[20] Kimberly Reynolds, 'Perceptions of Childhood', *The British Library*, 2014 https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/perceptions-of-childhood; Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford and New York, 2009).

[21] George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind,* (New York, 2001), 346.

[22] Ibid., 346.

baby.[23] In *Lilith*, Lona exemplifies this same balance of childlikeness and adult characteristics. Lona is the eldest of the Little Ones, who acts as a mother to the other children, yet she maintains the innocence and simplicity that defines the childlike.

In nurturing the Little Ones and leading them to Bulika, Lona exemplifies the union of maturity and childlikeness MacDonald treasures. Because of this ability to perfectly exemplify this union, her sudden death at her mother's hands is tragic on multiple levels. First, the reader sees her death as the death of a child. As she embraces Lilith she cries 'Mother! Mother', which she then repeats as she lays dying (*Lilith*, 184–5). Vane cradles her body, forgetting his rage at Lilith and saying, 'love of the child was stronger than hate of the mother' (*Lilith*, 184). MacDonald then shows the Little Ones grieving her as their mother when Vane brings them her body. Vane notes that their grief is different than his own, though no less tragic:

> [T]he tender hopelessness of the smile with which they received it [Lona's body], made my heart swell with pity in the midst of its own desolation. In vain were their sobs over their mother-queen, in vain they sought to entice from her some recognition of their love. (*Lilith*, 186)

MacDonald uses the Lona's double role as child-mother to deepen the grief over her death. However, the narrative is always moving beyond death toward restoration. In *Lilith*, the children soon become distracted when they see Lilith herself and the narrative focus moves to her and her journey to redemption (*Lilith*, 187). Lona's death becomes a secondary point by which MacDonald brings about Lilith's spiritual healing. In her attempt to convict and change Lilith, Mara mentions Lona's murder, but otherwise the focus is on Lilith (*Lilith*, 199). As with Diamond's death, MacDonald does not dwell on the tragedy of death, but emphasises it as part of a redemptive narrative.

Nevertheless, there is a difference in the way MacDonald approaches death in his earlier works, and the way in which he approaches death in *Lilith*. He pays death considerably more attention in *Lilith* than he does in his other works. Rather than death being an important but non-dominant theme, death characterises the central points of *Lilith*. More importantly, however, MacDonald struggles with death in *Lilith* in a way he does not in his other fantasies. In *At the Back of the North Wind*, death is seen through

[23] Ibid., 146–147, 169–171.

the eyes of three characters: Diamond, who joyfully embraces it as it leads him to the country at the back of the north wind, North Wind herself, who understands it as a part of the 'far-off song' that she must obey, and the tutor, who accepts Diamond's death immediately.[24] The tutor, as narrator, shapes the reader's approach to death, relating Diamond's adventures rather than struggling with his death, which he leaves 'for each philosophical reader to do after his own fashion'.[25] Diamond has told him of all his journeys, including his journey to the Elysium shadow of the country at the back of the north wind. Therefore, when the tutor notes that Diamond has gone to the actual country at the back of the north wind, he is assenting to death as an ultimate, though bittersweet, good.

Contrast this acceptance to Vane in *Lilith*, who is also the narrator, but battles against accepting death. Vane tells the reader, rather robotically, that 'My father died when I was yet a child, my mother followed him within a year' (*Lilith*, 5). Vane's indifference at the death of his parents may be excused as perspective on a past tragedy, from which he has healed, yet it reveals his apathy regarding death. When he enters the Region of the Seven Dimensions, he immediately argues with the sexton, Adam. What begins as a mere intellectual exercise for Vane, discussing the ability of objects to occupy the same space, soon dissolves into anger when Adam counters all of Vane's points. The crux of their debate, both here and throughout the novel, is Vane's question '[b]ut how was life to be lived in a world of which I had all the laws to learn?' (*Lilith*, 23). When Vane arrives at Adam and Eve's cottage, the coffin door, along with the gaunt yet lifelike features of his hosts disturb him. They invite him to "sleep", but tell him that in so doing he will not be able to wake himself. Upon debating this point and seeing the House of the Dead beyond the coffin door, his soul grows 'silent with dread' (*Lilith*, 32). He understands that the sleep offered by his host is death, and though they insist this death will bring him into greater life, he flees. As he says, 'I began to conclude that the self-styled sexton was in truth an insane parson: the whole thing was too mad!' (*Lilith*, 35). The underlying theme of the ensuing narrative is Vane's struggle to accept the sexton's thesis: 'you will be dead as long as you refuse to die' (*Lilith*, 157).

Vane, unlike most of MacDonald's protagonists, struggles to accept the goodness of death. When reflecting on a poem George MacDonald wrote to a bereaved friend, his son Greville MacDonald notes that:

[24] MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind*, 75.
[25] Ibid., 317.

> If anyone interested as well in my father's character as in his work——— and few men, it will be allowed, have closer agreement with theirs than his— will turn from this, one of his very early utterances on death, to *Lilith*, almost his latest, he will see how little the quality and substance of the poet's outlook changed, although he gained so much in extent of vision.[26]

Nevertheless, Greville later says that a 'note of present sadness echoes throughout [*Lilith*]' not present in his other fantasies, 'a note, however, in no way out of harmony with the far-calling chimes of an unfathomable faith'.[27] This sadness manifests itself in Vane's inability to immediately accept death as an ultimate good.

If we accept Greville's analysis of his father's work as having a such a close arrangement with his life, we must look for the source of this 'present sadness'. The first place to look are his major publications in the decade prior to *Lilith*: *The Tragedie of Hamlet - with a study of the text of the Folio of 1623* (1885) and *A Year's Diary of an Old Soul* (1880). Five years prior to writing the first draft of *Lilith*, MacDonald annotated the First Folio edition of *Hamlet*. What first appears an insignificant work as far as influencing *Lilith*, has bearing on the theme of death in *Lilith*. It is no accident that Greville compares the two as the highest examples of his father's critical and fantastic works.[28] An example of the influence is in 'The Cemetery' where Vane comments on how 'all were alike in the brotherhood of death' (*Lilith*, 33), echoing Hamlet's contemplation of the commonality of death for all humanity '[d]ost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th' earth?'.[29] Certainly, Vane contains something of Hamlet's foolishness and misery, and in *Hamlet*, one see the tragedy of a man wrestling to accept the reality of death, just like in the character of Vane.

A Year's Diary of an Old Soul, written a full decade before *Lilith's* first draft, makes more substantial thematic contributions to *Lilith*. The first lines of the September 22nd entry: '[d]eath haunts our souls with dissolution's strife; | Soaks them with unrest; makes our every breath | A throe, not action', demonstrates the recognition of death's pain often lacking in MacDonald's works. From there, though, the poem quickly turns to describe '[l]ife everywhere, perfect,

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[26] Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, The Complete and Original Works of George MacDonald, 51 (Whitethorn, CA., 1998), 403.

[27] Ibid., 549.

[28] Ibid., 547.

[29] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark* (New York, 1896), 150.

and always life, | Is sole redemption from this haunting death'.[30] September 23 begins with 'God, thou from death dost lift me. As I rise, | Its Lethe from my garment drips and flows', demonstrating the hopeful process of death to life that characterises MacDonald's eschatology.[31] It ends with the speaker submitting to God and finding total restoration in Him: 'Where thou art God in every wind that blows, | And self alone, and ever, softly dies, | There shall my being blossom, and I know it fair'.[32] These entries for September 22nd and 23rd could be used as thematic summaries for *Lilith,* as they transform death from something fearful into something comforting.

Yet these references in MacDonald's other works only reveal the wider literary framework in which he wrote *Lilith*. They do not tell why MacDonald's final fantasy contains a 'present sadness' in dealing with death. Greville dwells more on *Lilith* in his biography than almost any other work (both *Alec Forbes* and *Robert Falconer* are comparable). He explains his reasoning for this by saying:

> I lay all this stress upon the importance of *Lilith* because I am writing my father's life: for it was not only the majestic thought of his old age, but portion also of the suffering that, mercifully near the end, led him up to his long and last vigil.[33]

These two prongs of old age and increased sorrow most impacted the thematic thrust of *Lilith*, differentiating it from MacDonald's earlier works.

That MacDonald struggled with various health complications, which grew in aggravation in his old age is well known. For example, the MacDonald family's exile into Italy occurred largely because of their patriarch's declining health in the much colder London weather. According to Greville, his father struggled with chronic eczema, bronchitis, and asthma, all of which plagued him even after the family retreated to Bordighera.[34] Old age exasperated MacDonald's conditions, and led to the development of new ones. In his letters from the period around *Lilith*'s publication, he described the increased weariness and loss of memory that had begun to plague him. In a letter to J. S. Blackie, he

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[30] George MacDonald, *A Book of Strife in the Form of the Diary of an Old Soul* (Bibliotheca Virtual Universal, 2008) <http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/167438.pdf> [accessed 3 October 2017].

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 555.

[34] Rolland Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker.* (Nashville, TN., 1994), 230.

describes it as 'the hand of age upon me', saying, 'I can work only four hours a day, cannot, only I never could, walk much, and feel tired'.[35] A year prior to this, he writes A. P. Watts, saying 'My memory plays me sad tricks now. It comes of the frosty invasion of old age – preparing me to go home, thank God. Till then I must work, and that is good'. [36] The ever-increasing scars of age were a present reminder to MacDonald of his impending death. Greville tells of a fervency that pressed upon his father as he wrote *Lilith*. He says that the first draft, written in 1890, was:

> Unlike anything else he ever did. It runs from page to page, with few breaks into new paragraphs, with little punctuation, with scarcely a word altered, and in a handwriting freer perhaps than most of his, though with the same beautiful legibility.[37]

Both MacDonald and Greville interpreted this fervency as 'a mandate direct from God', something MacDonald had never felt before in his writing.[38] As MacDonald's last major work *Lilith* contains its author's final attempt at conveying many of the themes he cultivated in his literary career, reinterpreted with the perspective of old age and an increased sense of mortality.

In the five years over which he wrote *Lilith,* MacDonald found himself increasingly compelled to confront the reality of death.[39] In almost every letter he wrote between 1890 and 1895, MacDonald discusses his longing for death. The intensity of these morbid thoughts increased substantially after the death of his daughter Lilia in 1891. By all accounts, Lilia was the child upon whom MacDonald relied upon the most, and was perhaps his favorite daughter. In a letter to his cousin Helen MacKay Powell, MacDonald says: 'I think we feel— Louisa and I at least— as if we are getting ready to go. The world is very different since Lily went, and we shall be glad when our time comes to go after our children'.[40]

While we cannot be sure the extent to which Lilia MacDonald impacted *Lilith*, her death clearly tempered the otherwise exuberant MacDonald. The general mellowing reflected in MacDonald's letter to his cousin accounts for the "present sadness" in *Lilith*. One can see Lilia appearing in the character

[35] Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 363.
[36] Ibid., 355.
[37] Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 548.
[38] Ibid., 548.
[39] Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 64.
[40] Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 350.

Lona in *Lilith*. MacDonald often brought his children into his works, such as Irene, his fourth daughter, who appears as the titular princess in *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie*. Greville MacDonald gives us little detail of Irene; therefore, it is difficult to know how much of the character is based on the child. Lilia and Lona, however, bear a remarkable resemblance. In a letter to his wife, Louisa, MacDonald, who was with his children, tells her '[t]he children are very little trouble […] Lily is just a little mother to them all- seeming to think of everyone before herself'.[41] Greville comments on the letter saying, '[h]ere let me add that this eldest sister was always the same; mothering parents, brothers and sister, guests hearty or dying, and refectory adoptions'.[42] This child-mother role is the inspiration behind Lona, who is still a child along with the other Little Ones, but also functions as their mother. Just like Lona, who loses her life for the sake of those in her care, Lilia contracted tuberculosis after trying, though ultimately failing, to nurse a friend back to health. In her illness, Greville describes her joy, and eventually how she died in her father's arms in 1891.[43]

According to Greville, at Lily's funeral:

> The tremulous subdued voices showed how deeply everyone was mourning the loss of a cherished friend, that woman who, from her very childhood, had been a mother to old and young. Her father could hardly leave the grave […] the day was terribly wet: all nature was lamenting.[44]

The picture matches MacDonald's description of Vane clutching Lona's corpse moments after she has died. Just like at Lilia's funeral, rain accompanies Vane and the Little Ones, who form a funeral party to take Lona back to Adam. The rain in *Lilith,* however, has a positive connotation, as water is linked to the healthy maturation of the Little Ones, who marvel at the 'rivers of the sky' (*Lilith*, 208). Nevertheless, the water does not reach the desert, thus their redemption is incomplete. Oddly, Adam hardly acknowledges the death of his daughter. When Vane, Mara, and the Little Ones arrive at his cottage, Adam focuses on Lilith's redemption rather than dwell on his murdered daughter. This underpins MacDonald's argument that death is simply more life. Vane demonstrates the natural human response to death, so akin to MacDonald's

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41 Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 326.
42 Ibid., 327.
43 Ibid., 526.
44 Ibid., 526.

own response to the death of Lilia. Adam, as the fully redeemed, prefigure of Christ, sees that Lilith, because she still grasps hold of her sin, is truly dead, while the selfless Lona is truly alive. He therefore turns his attention to helping Lilith. Adam fulfils his duty as sexton by tending the dead, leading them to life. When Lona wakes from death, however, Adam 'embraced Lona his child' (*Lilith*, 238). In speaking to Lona and Vane, his gaze fixates on Lona, finding joy in her resurrection. The death of Lilia was the deepest sorrow of MacDonald's old age, leaving both him and his wife longing for death. MacDonald's earthly reaction to this sorrow, incarnated in Vane, is contrasted to the everlasting hope of a heavenly father, in the character of Adam.

MacDonald saw death as a vehicle for returning to the family he had lost, not only children, but the rest of those he loves. He notes in a letter to a friend that, '[w]e shall get home to our father & elder brother before very long— at least we shall somehow get a little nearer to them'.[45] MacDonald describes death as a homecoming, resulting in his reunion with family and friends. Accompanying the view of death as returning home in MacDonald's letters is a renewed sense of the fatherhood of God. His use of familial language for God increases drastically beginning in 1894. In a letter to J. S. Blake, MacDonald combines a familial understanding of God with this imagery of going home: '[m]ay the loving Father be near you and may you know it and be perfectly at peace all the way into the home country, and to the palace home of the living one—the life of our life'.[46]

Lilith echoes MacDonald's desire for familial restoration as a sign of the world's complete redemption. In *Lilith,* the family of Adam is broken. Lilith, the first wife of Adam, is alienated from the family by her false sense of autonomy. MacDonald incorporates elements of the Lilith of Jewish mythology, who refused to submit to Adam and was therefore banished from paradise.[47] Similarly, MacDonald's Lilith refuses to submit to Adam, demonstrating her rejection of family for the sake of individuality. To be a wife is to become one with a husband, and therefore to sacrifice part of one's self. As Adam says, Lilith 'counted it slavery to be one with me' (*Lilith*, 147). Her pride takes her further, viewing herself as God-like for giving birth and demanding that Adam worship and submit to her. Adam refuses, saying, 'I would but love and honor, never obey and worship her' (*Lilith*, 147-148). She

[45] Sadler, *An Expression of Character*, 360.

[46] Ibid., 362.

[47] Jeffrey M. Hoffeld, 'Adam's Two Wives', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 26.10 (June 1968), 430–40, (344).

delights in her own freedom above all else: 'I defy that Power to unmake me from a free woman […] You shall not compel me to anything against my will' (*Lilith*, 200). Besides rejecting the accepted norm of a submissive wife, Lilith also scorns motherhood by abandoning her child and then living in fear of her. This fear leads her to slaughter the children of Bulika, echoing the original vampiric Lilith who feasts on the flesh of children.[48] Lilith's rejection of motherhood culminates in the murder of her daughter Lona. By killing Lona, Lilith not only refuses to participate in the primordial family, but violates it.

MacDonald continues Lilith's story directing her from what seems the most despondent path toward redemption and eventual reacceptance into the family of Adam. Mara is the first to accept Lilith into the family, pushing her toward redemption even though it is a costly process that demands total surrender. Lilith and Mara battle over the nature of free will and servitude until Mara finally strips Lilith of her view of power and individualism, saying, '[t]here is no slave but the creature that wills against its creator […] She alone is free who would make free; she loves not freedom who would enslave: she is herself a slave' (*Lilith*, 200). She then forces Lilith to see 'the good she is not, the evil she is', so that '[s]he knows that she is herself the fire in which she is burning' (*Lilith*, 202). When Lilith finally admits defeat, but cannot open her hand, Mara brings her to Adam, because '[y]ou [Lilith] have harmed him worst of the created, therefore he best of created can help you' (*Lilith*, 207). Lilith requires forgiveness and help from Adam before she is able to release her own guilt and reenter the first family.

When Lilith, Mara, Vane, and the Little Ones reach the House of Death, Adam and Eve have been expecting them. Adam has prepared a bed for Lilith to sleep on, but Eve is hesitant to trust her. Eve calls Lilith '[t]he mortal foe of my children' and warns Mara to '[t]rust her not hastily […] She has deceived a multitude' (*Lilith*, 213). On a simple level, Lilith is Eve's rival for the affections of Adam and therefore her natural enemy. The deeper conflict, however, is that Eve is the paradigm for motherhood. She is the mother of all humanity, whereas Lilith is the enemy of humanity, but particularly children. The war between the two women makes Eve hesitate to forgive Lilith's repeated infanticide. Nevertheless, Lilith's repentance is changing her, so that Lilith's first thought when the Shadow comes to the house is to protect the Little Ones, asking if they are in the house where they cannot be hurt. Lilith's mothering instinct is returning, a portent of her final redemption and restoration into the divine

[48] W. M. S. Russell and Katharine M. Briggs, 'The Legends of Lilith and of the Wandering Jew in Nineteenth-Century Literature', *Folklore*, 92.2 (1981), 132–3.

family. Eve recognises this, so that the moment Lilith enquires about the safety of the children, 'the heart of Eve began to love her' (*Lilith*, 215). Eve forgives the evil Lilith does against the children, telling Lilith that all the harm she has caused does nothing except to speed them on to God. Even in slaying Lona, Lilith has 'but sent [her] into the loveliest sleep' (*Lilith*, 215). Eve promises that death will reconcile Lona and Lilith, a promise fulfilled when Lona 'wakes' and sees her mother lying next to where she lay. Lona kisses Lilith, which Adam promises 'will draw her homeward' (*Lilith*, 240). This moment is the fulfilment of Lona's attempt at Bulika to love her mother, a moment interrupted by murder. Lona, though, has already forgiven her mother and the final kiss is the sign of the restoration of the mother-daughter relationship.

The final member of the first family to be reconciled with Lilith is Adam. While Eve expresses hostility toward Lilith when Vane and Mara bring her to the House of Death, Adam is enthusiastic for the 'long waited' reconciliation, much like MacDonald himself (*Lilith*, 213). He insists that she humble herself before God by releasing her hand. In the end, Lilith is unable to open her hand, despite trying with her utmost effort. She beseeches Adam to bring a sword to 'divide whatever was not one and divisible' (*Lilith*, 218). Adam brings the sword and cuts off Lilith's hand, immediately causing her to sleep. In her last act, Lilith submits herself to Adam, recognising her inability to redeem herself. By allowing Adam to sever her last tumor of sin, Lilith willfully puts herself under Adam's headship restoring the relationship and undoing her original sin of defying Adam.

It is important to note here, that while there is certainly a gendered power struggle between Adam and Lilith, the wider family dynamic, not just the gendered ones, requires submission. Vane's submission to Adam and Lilith's to Eve demonstrate that the familial life is one of submission. Yet even in this familial act of submitting to Adam, Lilith is truly submitting to God. Adam is merely an intermediary figure between the two. The vehicle for Lilith's humility before God. This is the same sort of submission that Vane must perform in choosing to lie in the Hall of the Dead. The restoration is that of a reciprocated helper, not an oppressed slave. Throughout his works, much of MacDonald's theology, relies on submission; Lilith's submission to Adam is a further demonstration of the concept that submission, or deference to others, is generally good, found in biblical passages such as I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 that assert the need for all Christians to submit to one another. In MacDonald's wider work, the act of submission is always championed as the highest expression of Christian devotion. For example, in *The Princess and*

Curdie, Curdie submits to the will of the old Princess Irene, leaving his family to go to Gwyntystorm. In *At the Back of the North Wind,* North Wind regularly rebukes Diamond, and he accepts her rebukes with humility. Individualism for the sake of individualism is never a quality praised in MacDonald's works, but humility expressed in submission always is. By Lilith's finally accepting life through death, the family at the center of the novel is reconciled creating a sense of domestic restoration.

Throughout *Lilith*, MacDonald introduces the symbolism of domestic elements to reiterate his emphasis on home and its restoration. The initial setting of the novel is Vane's ancestral house, though Vane has little emotional connection to it. Vane only describes the library and a few odd corridors. This detachment is indicative of Vane's disconnect from his family. From his first entrance to Adam and Eve's home, however, Vane feels a connection to it. He has an element of dread, but because of the warmth that oddly resonates from the chilling, yet beautiful, figure or Eve, he is comforted (*Lilith*, 28). When Vane visits Mara's home, it is dark and foreboding, yet provides a shelter from the creatures that roam the wood at night (*Lilith*, 73). Still, the shelter of home can be abused, as shown when Vane visits Lilith's palace in Bulika. The palace is more enthralling than the other shelters he visits, but there is danger in it. Vane comes to the palace after wandering the wilderness searching for Lilith, with whom he has grown enchanted. Rather than bring him the rest he expected, the palace brings him anxiety, for he knows its mistress' evil. What ought to have been comforting, brings him dread.

Another homely symbol is food. In the cottage, Adam and Eve offer him food and drink, specifically bread and wine. This relates to both the simple meals shared by families as well as the Eucharist. The first aspect of this, the simple meal shared by families, is found at pivotal points throughout the novel, particularly when Vane meets new characters. The Little Ones are impressed when Vane eats their good fruit as opposed to the Giants' coarse apples. The Little Ones reward him by feeding him for the duration of his internment (*Lilith*, 56). When Vane meets Mara, she feeds him with dry bread and water, which Vane describes as a feast, though he recognises its simplicity (*Lilith*, 78). These examples of rustic, homey meals contrast with the seductive feast Lilith offers Vane, but which 'may not have been quite innocent' (*Lilith*, 132). Indeed, the food and drink are drugged, allowing Lilith to drink Vane's blood while he sleeps. This act contrasts the "true blood" found in the Eucharist and the life given by those who offer it to Vane. The emphasis on Eucharistic meals reveals that this is not merely an earthly family, but the heavenly family

of the Church. Adam offers this meal to all who enter his home, but the meal is only a preparation for sleep.

The most common image MacDonald uses for death is sleep. This comparison has its origin in the New Testament, where both Christ and St. Paul refer to death as sleep to convey that death is not a finality.[49] Vane initially confuses death and sleep when Adam invites him to spend the night in his cottage and is horrified to learn that Adam and Eve expect him to die. In MacDonald's understanding of mortality, death, like sleep renews wearied bodies, imparting them with new life. MacDonald pushes this relationship further by relating sleep/death to the domestic life of the family of God, the most consistent conceit in *Lilith*. Restful sleep in *Lilith* comes when the sleeper is in a place of safety, under the care of the sleeper's spiritual family. Even when sleep and death are not synonymous in *Lilith*, it begets life. When Vane visits Mara, he sleeps and awakes refreshed. In his sleep, he dreams that he sleeps next to his mother and father in the chamber of death, showing that this sleep is a precursor of the death to come (*Lilith*, 78). This restful sleep contrasts with the sleep Vane receives in the palace of Bulika. When he sleeps from Lilith's drug imbued wine, he does not rest. Though her bed is much softer than the hard slabs he was offered by Adam, and the sheets are thicker than the thin blanket Mara gives him, he awakes more exhausted than when he lay down. Lilith's mimicry of these domestic elements demonstrates the extent of her corruption. She twists the signs of the heavenly family to abuse Vane.

In offering these domestic elements of shelter, food, and sleep to Vane, the primordial family demonstrates an outward reaching element, which culminates in their adoption of Vane. Vane begins the narrative as a lonely individual, an orphan from childhood who has just come into his inheritance, reminiscent of Anodos from *Phantastes* (1858).[50] Vane returns to his familial home, a place that is strange and distant from him, in order to begin his post-university life. He has no friends or family so he is as he says, 'as much alone in the world as a man might find himself' (*Lilith*, 5). Vane describes himself as being 'given to study', later clarifying that 'I had loved my Arab mare and my books more, I fear, than live man or woman' (*Lilith*, 5, 55). During his adventures, however, Vane becomes conscious of this loneliness so that he recognises:

[49] John 11.11–14 and I Thessalonians 4.15–17.

[50] *Phantastes and Lilith* bookend MacDonald's career and are often linked together due to their shared dream-like style, protagonist-narrator, and thematic parallels.

> What a hell of horror […] To wander alone, a bare existence never going out of itself, never widening its life in another life, but, bound with the cords of its poor peculiarities, lying an eternal prisoner in the dungeon of its own being! I began to learn that it was impossible to live for oneself even, save in the presence of others. (*Lilith*, 83)

Vane's quest becomes bent on curing his loneliness. When he nurses Lilith back to health, he does so because he is lonely. His thought is simply, '[p]rove what she may […] I shall at least be lonely no more' (*Lilith*, 99). Likewise, his desire to help the Little Ones derives from the familial love that they show him. He goes to find them water because he believes it will help them grow. In their company, Vane experiences his first glimpse at familial life. Though his path to help them is characterised by error, the intention is always the well-being of those he perceives as his new family. When he returns to them, this is even clearer. He becomes a father to them, just as Lona is a mother. Through Lona, he finds a companion who is equal parts sister and his 'heart's wife' (*Lilith*, 173). Together, they lead the children into battle against Lilith and the people of Bulika in order to restore the families from which the children have been stolen.

The result of this campaign is apparently disastrous, resulting from Vane starting 'the wrong way' (*Lilith*, 140). The mothers and fathers of Bulika fear Lilith more than they care about their children, and while Lilith is taken captive, the Little Ones lose Lona, their mother and leader. The selfishness Vane suggests as his motive betrays the family of the Little One's just as much as Lilith betrayed Adam. Had Vane fulfilled his promise to Adam and sought the company of the sleepers before the company of the Little Ones, rather than pursuing glory in leading the Little Ones to Bulika, he may not have brought them ruin. In the end, however, Vane humbles himself. When he returns to the House of the Dead with the repentant Lilith, he too seeks forgiveness from Adam. Adam willingly gives it before sending Vane on his mission to restore the land by burying Lilith's hand. The restoration of the land represents the restoration of the family that Vane destroyed. The Little Ones, who, like the land, were unable to grow, are now free to flourish with Vane's submission to Adam's will.

Adam said in one of his and Vane's first meetings that, 'you and I use the same words with different meaning. We are often unable to tell people what they need to know' (*Lilith*, 45). On his return to the cottage, Vane meets an old man asking for death. The man is puzzled that one as young as Vane would

also seek death. Vane adopts the language of Adam, Eve, and Mara, saying, 'I may not be old enough to desire to die but I am young enough to desire to live indeed […] For no one can die who does not long to live' (*Lilith*, 225). The man accuses him of speaking in riddles, echoing Vane's accusation to Adam of, 'Enigma treading on enigma […] I did not come here to be asked riddles' (*Lilith*, 45). Vane has adopted the 'dialect' of the first family, representing his adoption into that family. He encourages the man to eat and drink from Eve's table, though the man wanders away weeping. Vane knows that Mara will find him and he will come to the answers himself. By taking on the language of the first family, Vane shows that he is no longer a wayward observer to their saintliness, but a participant in their work. He may now live with his foster family and spread their message to others, though others may not listen. Adam tells him at the beginning of his adventure that 'you came, and found the riddles waiting for you! Indeed you are yourself the only riddle […] And you must answer the riddles!' (*Lilith*, 45). In adopting the language of Adam, Eve, and Mara, Vane demonstrates that he is of the same kind as them and can understand their world.

When Vane returns to the cottage, he is ready to be fully adopted into his new family. Though, he initially feels loneliness once more creep over him, it is vanquished by the memory of 'father Adam, mother Eve, sister Mara', who would soon usher him into life through death. He begins to see himself within the domestic roles of the first family, who then feed him and sooth him into the sleep of death (*Lilith*, 226). He lies next to Lona, 'blessed as never was man on the eve of his wedding', insinuating his marital as well as spiritual acceptance into the family (*Lilith*, 227). When he first 'wakes', the familial bonds are cemented. Eve says to him, '[w]e are mother and son', likewise Mara calls him 'brother', while Adam reclaims his role as father to both Lona and Vane (*Lilith*, 239). Vane's adoption into the first family also restores his relationship with his own family. Both his mother and father, who he did not know in 'life', sleep in the Hall of Death. When he awakes, they have already gone on before him, so that his journey to the New Jerusalem brings him closer to the restoration of his earthly family as well as the completion of his new spiritual family.

Vane's journey through the other world is a journey to find home, both the place and the people in it. In their first meeting, Adam, as the Raven, says to Vane: '[y]ou have, I fear, got into this region too soon, but none the less you must get to be at home in it' (*Lilith*, 15). The ensuing novel is a testament to that journey. The familial bonds that Vane gains characterise this home as

a place where relationships are restored. The journey home for both Vane and MacDonald, however, requires death. Both Lilith and Vane must learn this lesson, and when they do, it leads them to bliss. MacDonald expresses the same sentiments in his latter letters, and in many of his works. He notes that 'the shadows of the evening that precedes a lovelier morning are drawing around us both. But our God is in the shadow as in the shine and all is and will be well'.[51] 'The hand of age' crept upon MacDonald as he wrote Lilith: his memory grew faint, he was prone to dejection, and he incessantly feared madness.[52] Yet he held hope. 'I am happier and more hopeful, though I think I always had a large gift for hope', he wrote to his secretary, W. Carey Davies.[53] *Lilith* is the culmination of his renewed vision of Scotland, his hope in his family restored, and the belief in a greater spiritual family that awaited him upon waking from death, welcoming him home.

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[51] Sadler, *An Expression of Character,* 362.
[52] Ibid., 363; Raeper, *George MacDonald,* 388.
[53] MacDonald, *An Expression of Character*, 354.