

Patrick Maiwald

The Journey  
in George MacDonald's Fantastic Fiction

SALS

Studien zur anglistischen  
Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft

Heinz Bergner, Raimund Borgmeier,  
Matthias Hutz, Eckart Voigts-Virchow (Hg.)

Band 34

Patrick Maiwald

**The Journey  
in George MacDonald's  
Fantastic Fiction**

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

**Maiwald, Patrick:** The Journey in George MacDonald's

Fantastic Fiction / Patrick Maiwald. -

Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008

(Studien zur anglistischen Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft, Vol. 34)

ISBN 978-3-86821-067-5

Cover Illustration: Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life: Youth*, 1842

Cover Design: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008

ISBN 978-3-86821-067-5

No part of this book, covered by the copyright hereon,  
may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means  
without prior permission of the publisher.

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503 / 9943344, Fax: 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: [wvt@wvttrier.de](mailto:wvt@wvttrier.de)

Analysis is well, as death is well.

– George MacDonald (*Sermons*, Third Series, “The Truth”)



## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude those who have in any way contributed to this study, be it directly or indirectly: To Prof. Dr. Raimund Borgmeier for his help and support; to Dr. Christian Kölzer for inspiration and practical help; and to the rest of the 'old team' in Gießen – Karin Oehlbach, Dr. Imke Neumann, Chunky Liston, Sonja Peacock and Simone Handrick-Denison. It was a pleasure working with you.

Special thanks to Prof. Dr. Ulrich Horstmann for sparking in me the love of literature.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my wife Verena for her love, patience and support, as well as my parents, without whose help this publication would not have been possible.





## Table of Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>2.</b>	<b>Contexts</b>	3
2.1	The Journey as a Literary Motif	3
2.2.	A Survey of George MacDonald’s Fantastic Fiction	5
2.3.	George Mac Donald’s Philosophy	8
2.3.1	Symbolism and Neoplatonism	8
2.3.2	Implications for His Fiction	13
<b>3.</b>	<b><i>Phantastes</i> (1858)</b>	21
3.1	What’s in a Name: On the Protagonist and His Telling Name	22
3.2	The Nature of the Journey	24
3.3	Awaking to Sub-consciousness: The First Half of the Journey	29
3.4	The White Palace	36
3.5	Towards Conscious Death: The Second Half of the Journey	39
3.6	Conclusion	47
<b>4.</b>	<b>The Shorter Fairy Tales</b>	51
4.1	“Cross Purposes” (1862)	53
4.1.1	Chapter 2: Alice Sets Out	54
4.1.2	Chapter 3: Richard Sets Out	57

4.1.3	Chapter 4: Towards a Shared Path	58
4.1.4	The Surprise Ending	62
4.2	“The Shadows” (1864)	64
4.2.1	The Connection with Dreams	64
4.2.2	The Connection with Death	66
4.2.3	The Problem of Purpose	67
4.2.4	Conclusion	68
4.3	“The Golden Key” (1867)	69
4.3.1	The Introduction of the Protagonists and Their Meeting	71
4.3.2	The Journey through the Sea of Shadows and the Separation	76
4.3.3	Through the Elements: Tangle’s Path	77
4.3.4	Mossy’s Path and the Reunion	81
4.3.5	Conclusion	82
<b>5.</b>	<b><i>At the Back of the North Wind (1868-69; 1871)</i></b>	<b>87</b>
5.1	The Nightly Excursions	91
5.2	The Journey to the Back of the North Wind	94
5.3	“Diamond’s Dream”	98
5.4	Diamond’s Last Journey	101
5.5	Conclusion	104

<b>6.</b>	<b><i>Lilith</i> (1895)</b>	106
6.1	The Title Character	110
6.2	The Call and the Refusal	111
6.3	The First Journey to Bulika	115
6.4	The Second Journey to Bulika	122
6.5	The Third Journey and the Renewal	125
6.6	Conclusion	129
<b>7.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	132
<b>8.</b>	<b>Bibliography</b>	139
8.1	Abbreviations	139
8.2	Primary Sources	139
8.3	Other Primary Works of Interest	140
8.4	Secondary Sources	142



## 1. Introduction

George MacDonald (1824-1905) is one of those writers who seem not yet to have found their proper place in the history of English literature. While many works on 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature do not even mention his name, various scholars praise him as one of the greatest and most influential writers of his time<sup>1</sup>. MacDonald's literary merit is most often measured by his influence on other writers. His talent was greatly appreciated by many of his contemporaries, including Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain, John Ruskin<sup>2</sup> and H. G. Wells,<sup>3</sup> and his works are known to have exerted considerable influence on writers of fantastic fiction such as C. S. Lewis<sup>4</sup> as well as his Oxford circle of friends known as the Inklings (most notable among these are J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Williams),<sup>5</sup> or Madeleine L'Engle, the American writer of children's books.<sup>6</sup>

Two years prior to MacDonald's death, David Patrick judged him to be "an original writer of delicate imagination and profound suggestiveness".<sup>7</sup> Although nowadays largely regarded as a 'minor' author of the Victorian period, there have always also been those to whom MacDonald's significance could hardly be overstated: Roger Green claims that he was "one of the strangest" as well as "one of the greatest" of storytellers,<sup>8</sup> and John Clute and John Grant call MacDonald "a landmark figure of pre-genre fantasy".<sup>9</sup>

The highly contrary assessments of this Scottish writer in part result from the eclectic nature of his writings. MacDonald is the author of more than two dozen realistic novels, several children's books, short stories and fairy tales of varying length, two fantasy romances for adults, and several volumes of poetry, as well as non-fiction such as theological writings and essays on literary and philosophical topics. His prose fiction is usually divided up into 'realistic' and

---

1 Cf. Prickett 1979: 10. – N.B.: All primary sources as well as all fictional and nonfictional texts by MacDonald are quoted in the footnotes according to the year of their first publication, whereas with all secondary sources, the year indicated is that of the edition consulted.

2 Wolfe 1985: 239.

3 Horsman 1990: 253.

4 Filmer-Davies 2000: 285-286; Pesch 2001: 43; Marshall 1991: 1.

5 Wilson 1981: 141.

6 Cf. Clute/Grant 1997: 575, sv. "L'Engle, Madeleine".

7 Patrick 1903: 607, sv. "George MacDonald".

8 Green 1965: 31-32; cf. Robb 1985: 35 for more on the history of the reception of MacDonald's works.

9 Clute/Grant 1997: 605, sv. "MacDonald, George".

'fantastic' parts,<sup>10</sup> the latter of which is diminutive in terms of quantity but immense in terms of importance and influence.

The aim of this study is to elicit characteristic traits of the motif of the journey within selected examples of the 'fantastic' part of MacDonald's works in a chronological order; the list of selected works begins with his first prose work, *Phantastes* (1858), and continues with three shorter fairy tales from the 1860s. According to the nature of these tales, the examination of them will be comparatively brief, which is why they are grouped together in chapter 4. Next, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) will serve as an example of a full-length children's book, and the last work to be examined is *Lilith* (1895), which is often considered by scholars to be MacDonald's ultimate "masterpiece".<sup>11</sup> The two 'faerie romances' *Phantastes* and *Lilith* will be dealt with most extensively, since the motif of the journey plays the most important role in them.

Before the actual examination of the texts begins in chapter 3, the next chapter, entitled "Contexts", will present brief overviews of the general significance of the motif of the journey (2.1) as well as of MacDonald's fantastic fiction (2.2) and his symbolist view of the world (2.3), all of which are helpful for a better understanding of the functions of the journey motif in his tales. The examinations of the individual tales in chapters 3 to 6 are further subdivided according to different principles, depending on the nature of the work in question. In most cases, as e.g. with "Cross Purposes", the journeys that the text deals with are subdivided into several parts, but in some cases, as with "The Shadows", it has appeared more sensible to use the subchapters to highlight different aspects of the journey motif as used throughout the tale.

---

10 The boundaries between the two are not always clear-cut: Some novels, e.g. *The Portent* (1864) or *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891), as well as the children's fantasy *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) actually combine realistic and fantastic elements (cf. Robb 1989: 111).

11 E.g. Raeper 1987: 364.