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Mr. Vane's Confessions: The Unexpected Play of Augustine in *Lilith's* Bibliographic Vision

Michael Wayne Wilhelm

Lilith's large, meandering library has always been full of surprises. Tropes from its potent collection are continually spilling out into its protagonist's vision in fantastical augmented form. This activity is obvious from the outset. Mr. Vane confesses in *Lilith's* opening chapter to having been reading Charles Darwin (MacDonald, *Lilith* 6). At the end of his career, Darwin had famously published a 326-page treatise on earthworms. Seeded with these images, Vane's vision generates worms that magically become butterflies (20) and nocturnal worm monsters that terrorize a desolate dry basin (48-49). In addition to Darwin, Vane has also been reading James Clerk Maxwell (6), who was known for publishing, as a 14-year-old prodigy, a treatise on ovals and ellipses. Seeded with these images, Vane's vision is haunted by a menacing leopardess with dark oval spots lurking in a palace with striking elliptical features surrounding a black ellipsoid hall (125).

The library is *Lilith's* generative feature. Its books supply Vane's imagination with tropes that constitute and shape his vision. The library's curator, Mr. Raven, is a shapeshifting guide who is continually at work to awaken and transform Vane's maldeveloped imagination. His intervention deploys malleable images, themes, and vignettes from a generous assortment of works which includes names such as Dante, Shakespeare, Swift, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Milton, and Keats. Thus, *Lilith* is a bibliographic vision, and there is a playful purpose to the haunting.

This list of authors will come as no surprise to *Lilith* readers. It is part of the canon of great literature dear to George MacDonald, and these authors' works are introduced, either explicitly or implicitly, throughout the novel. But who would have ever expected Mr. Raven to pull Augustine from *Lilith's* enchanted library? MacDonald, after all, was never a fan of theology books; he believed that "theologians have done more to hide the Gospel of Christ than any of its adversaries" (MacDonald, "The Last Farthing" 259). His poet-pastor's heart was better suited for great works of literature, and he was much more at home with the words of Christ in the Gospels than with secondhand words of theologians. He says, "To know Christ is an infinitely higher thing than to know all theology, all that is said about his person, or babbled about his work" (MacDonald, "The Voice of Job" 350). Furthermore, Augustine is never mentioned by name in all of MacDonald's writings. Despite these

reservations, there is compelling evidence that the *Confessions* provides important tropes that contribute to the shape and function of *Lilith*'s bibliographic vision. Most noticeable is Augustine's treatment of evil, his allegorical treatment of the Hexameron, and his conversion induced by the words of Ponticianus.

Preliminary Comparisons

Courtney Salvey should be credited as the first to give serious attention to Augustine's influence in *Lilith*. Pointing to his theological training at Highbury along with Edward Pusey's widely available 1838 translation of the *Confessions*, Salvey contends that MacDonald's familiarity with Augustine can be safely assumed (17). Latin was part of the curriculum at Highbury, so considering MacDonald's proclivity for language acquisition, he probably spent time reading the *Confessions* in its original language.¹ Additionally, he might have sampled the 1631 William Watts translation sometime during his boyhood years in Huntley. These details are speculative, of course, but the base assumption offered by Salvey is sound. MacDonald's education would have been unable to avoid an encounter with the *Confessions*.

This would not be all bad for MacDonald. While he may give a cold shoulder to most theology books, there are things he would appreciate about the *Confessions*, like Augustine's humility and candor. The *Confessions* is not a cold treatise attempting to explain God into abstraction. Instead, it is an honest first-person account of an individual wrestling with sin and finding grace from a God who is intimately near. This would appeal to MacDonald. Even more, MacDonald cherished imaginative works that revealed the inner life of the mind. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Novalis, *The Faerie Queene* by Spenser, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and the works of Dante rank among his favorites. The *Confessions*, similarly, takes an imaginative approach to the life of the mind. In Book XIII, Augustine's compelling testimony uses the six-day creation story from Genesis (i.e., the Hexameron) to give an allegorical account of the ongoing conversion happening through the story of the Church. Augustine's allegorical treatment of the Hexameron becomes an important trope in *Lilith*, as will soon become evident.

It is doubtful anyone has poured through the *Lilith* texts more than Elizabeth McDonald Weinrich, having assisted Rolland Hein with the tedious work of publishing the A-F manuscripts. She says, "*Lilith* deals

largely with submission and repentance through imaginative processes” (viii). Repentance is a central theme in the writings of MacDonald and becomes a passionate subject in the late stages of his writing career leading up to the composition of *Lilith*.² *Confessions* and *Lilith* pair nicely around this theme, especially as repentance is actualized, as suggested by Weinrich, “through imaginative processes.” The *Confessions*, like *Lilith*, is a testimony of repentance in its full metanoic sense: “to be reformed by the renewal of your minds,” as Augustine says (XIII.14).

This renewal of the mind is a journey of reintegration. *Lilith* and the *Confessions* share this distinct motif. Augustine repeatedly identifies disintegration as the primary consequence of his unregenerate self. He says, “I was at odds with myself, and fragmenting myself” (VIII.10).³ Notice how Augustine’s account of his disintegration sounds like a well-crafted prologue to *Lilith*:

I will try now to give a coherent account of my disintegrated self, for when I turned away from you, the one God, and pursued a multitude of things, I went to pieces. There was a time in adolescence when I was afire to take my fill of hell. I boldly thrust out rank, luxuriant growth in various furtive love affairs; my beauty wasted away and I rotted in your sight, intent on pleasing myself and winning favor in the eyes of men. (II.1)

It is fascinating how this remark accounts for the contrasexual voice of *Lilith*’s protagonist (i.e., both Vane and the projection of his ruined imagination symbolized in *Lilith*). Is it possible that this trope from Augustine is intended by MacDonald? Maybe. Book II turns out to be a significant field of allusions found in *Lilith*.

Whatever the case, Vane similarly discovers in his third trip into the region of the seven dimensions a mindscape that has become a centrifugal disaster.⁴ His mind is so fragmented that he is unable to recognize the bizarre contents of his own imagination. Witnessing *Lilith*’s early stages of repentance, he reports “forms to belong to dreams which had once been mine, but refused to be recalled” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 203). Once again, Augustine’s words aptly describe Vane’s dilemma. Augustine says, “I conjured up material forms in my imagination... I persisted in walking after things that had no existence either in you or in me or in any creature,

ideas not created for me by your truth but invented in material shape by my own vanity" (IV.26). The many chimerical selves of Vane's ruined imagination must come to a point of rest.⁵

For this reason, Colin Manlove has described *Lilith* as "a centripetal vision" (86). Vane's fourth trip into the region of the seven dimensions is exactly that—a fantastical "seek-gather-and-recover" mission.⁶ Lilith, Lona, and the Little Ones all must gather with Vane for sacred rest in Adam and Eve's chamber, signifying a divinely bestowed gestation anticipating a new creation. Thinking of repentance imaginatively as new creation is the basis of Augustine's allegorical treatment of the Hexameron, and this is giving shape to Vane's vision.⁷

The renewal of the mind experienced by both Augustine and Vane is catalyzed by books. Augustine says, "The immense spaces of my memory harbor . . . those things which I received through a liberal education and have not yet forgotten; they are stored away in some remote inner place, which yet is not really a place at all" (X.9). As a student at Carthage, he recalls reading a philosophy book titled *Hortensius* by Cicero. He says, "The book changed my way of feeling and the character of my prayers to you, O Lord, for under its influence my petitions and desires altered" (III.7). To be clear, the book did not bring about Augustine's conversion. That would come some years later. But Cicero's *Hortensius* played an important role in Augustine's early stages of repentance as it seemed to awaken him from aimless hedonism. Nonetheless, Augustine's new quest for meaning remained confounded by Manichaeistic dualism, as he found it to be the only way possible to understand the ontology of good and evil. Augustine says, "My heart passionately cried out against all my phantoms, and with this one blow I sought to beat away from the eye of my mind all that unclean troop which buzzed around it. And lo, being scarce put off, in the twinkling of an eye they gathered again thick about me . . ." (Pusey VII.1).⁸ Augustine was delivered from this handicap by the books of the Platonists, dislodging his imagination from dualism and preparing him for the hope of the Gospel (VII.13). These books play an important preconversion role in Augustine's repentance in much the same way *Phantastes* worked in the preconversion repentance of C. S. Lewis (Lewis 175). It is fascinating and significant that MacDonald shares with Augustine this affinity for Neoplatonic thought, though it seems impossible to verify whether or not MacDonald ever read Plotinus.

Vane's mind, likewise, is renewed by books, but not in the straightforward way of Augustine's autobiography. Instead, Vane exists in MacDonald's fictional world and is subject to a fantastical vision. The vision literally begins and ends in a library, providing an easy clue that his experiences in the region of the seven dimensions should be understood as a bibliographic vision. Dante, for example, is conspicuously mentioned among a list of science writers in the opening chapter, erupting into a meaning-rich array of images from the *Commedia* throughout the rest of the novel (MacDonald, *Lilith* 6). In fact, an entire superstructure emerges informed by Dante that guides all the many elements of Vane's vision to the Gate of Purgatory like an inevitable glacier.⁹ Shakespeare, likewise, is mentioned by Vane (85) and soon after generates a vision of a skeleton couple—the “Lord and Lady of Cokayne”—playing the part of characters from a Shakespearean tragedy (89-93). Milton and others similarly appear throughout the vision as books are continually at work, coming and growing. Occasionally, as is the case with Dante and Shakespeare, books are introduced explicitly. Most of the time, however, their introductions are cloaked with vexing subtlety (Augustine's *Confessions* especially so).

The Lord and Lady of Cokayne episode brings attention to the role of theatrical tragedies with the repentance of both Vane and Augustine. Augustine is critical of his attraction to them. He says, “I was held spellbound by theatrical shows full of images that mirrored my own wretched plight and further fueled the fire within me” (III.2). This, as it turns out, is the very reason MacDonald chooses to deploy them. The unrepentant Vane is in need of a mirror. The skeletonized Lord and Lady of Cokayne tragedy is animated by *Othello* and *Hamlet*, and the tragedy, like those experienced by Augustine, mirrors Vane's wretched plight that burns within him (MacDonald, *Lilith* 91-92; Wilhelm, “Library and Ellipsoids” 5). The forlorn Lady of Cokayne is the emanation of Desdemona and Ophelia, doomed lovers who were both victims of abandonment. Vane, in this way, has been estranged from his imagination, personified in Lilith (this can be regarded as the central plot of *Lilith*). In other words, the bifurcation of his soul is a tragedy. Like the skeleton husband, Hamlet, and Othello, Vane's abandonment has brought his partner to ruin. Augustine goes on to say, “My love for tragic scenes sprang from no inclination to be more deeply wounded by them, for I had no desire to undergo myself the woes

I liked to watch" (III.2). This callousness is shared by Vane who watches the tragedy puzzled and spellbound, oblivious to his connection to the vision. While Augustine blames theatrical shows for his moral decline, MacDonald uses them to serve the moral good. Vane is on a journey of self-discovery. He will soon accept the tragedy for the mirror that it is, leading to Vane's reconciliation with his scorned imagination.

Finally, both Vane and Augustine must contend with persistent erotic images. They continue to haunt Augustine even after his conversion. He says, "Yet in my memory, of which I have spoken at length, sexual images survive, because they were imprinted there by former habit" (X.41). In Augustine's case, these images were received into memory during his preconversion years while frequenting the brothels of Carthage. Vane, likewise, has sexual images lodged in his memory. When first sighted, Lilith appears as a beautiful but proud apparition struggling in vain to cover herself with a garment of mist (MacDonald, *Lilith* 50). It is implied that the elusive mist is all she is wearing. Augustine would call this fleeting wardrobe "the fog of lust" (II.2),¹⁰ a trope that is probably intended here by MacDonald. Lust is definitely in the air. This ultimately leads to Vane's seduction in his third trip in the region of the seven dimensions.¹¹

The seductive images of Vane's mindscape have a connection with some extraordinary works of visual art from the period. The only non-traditional myths suggested in *Lilith* are the names Astarte (the white leopardess) and Lilith (the evil princess/spotted leopardess), the leopardess pair. The demonic Lilith is Adam's first wife according to Kabbalic lore, and Astarte is a Syrophenician goddess. But Lilith's Kabbalic backstory, while contributing narrative details to Vane's vision, appears to come into play as a contingency.

What is important to notice is that, by no mere coincidence, these two unusual outliers are the subjects of two of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's most famous paintings, *Lady Lilith* and *Astarte Syriaca*. Rossetti and MacDonald happened to be good acquaintances.¹² Rossetti was a tortured soul, and MacDonald was especially fond of redeeming sons of perdition like his artist friend.¹³ Thus, the names Lilith and Astarte in *Lilith* may be a tribute to Rossetti while at the same time putting the decadent *Lady Lilith* image into play. The fact that MacDonald chose to leave a single occurrence of the otherwise unnecessary name Astarte in the final published version of *Lilith* is conspicuous, and seems to have little purpose other than bringing attention to the paintings

(MacDonald, *Lilith* 79).¹⁴ All said, Lilith does not show up in Vane's vision because MacDonald had a profeminist interest in arcane goddess legends; Lilith shows up in Vane's vision because she is a mesmerizing image from Victorian popular culture.¹⁵ In this way, *Lilith* can be considered an extraordinary work of cultural apologetics.

MacDonald then proceeds to use this prominent cultural artifact (*Lady Lilith*) and her Kabbalic legend backstory creatively for his express purposes. He does something similar (though less seriously) in his famous serialized children's book, *At the Back of the North Wind*, where images of apostles from a church-stained glass window come to life in a young boy's dream.¹⁶ In this same way, it is easy to imagine the saucy *Lady Lilith* painting coming to life in Vane's vision. Like her art gallery antecedent, she is a sexualized temptress. But like most apparitions in the region of the seven dimensions, Lilith is not a static image. She is an evolving composite of images from the art gallery along with a train of femme fatale images from the books in Vane's enchanted library (Wilhelm, "Library and Ellipsoids" 6-7).

Rossetti's treatment of the Lilith myth through this painting and its accompanying sonnet, "Body's Beauty," generated a fin de siècle interest in the subject. It became the subject of numerous newspaper articles, other paintings, and at least three books. Most shocking was the painting titled *Lilith* by John Collier. In 1887, this strikingly tall sex symbol, wearing nothing more than a few coils of a hellish snake, was being displayed in London's Grosvenor Gallery.¹⁷ As one might expect, it was causing quite a stir. It is a spectacular lifelike achievement, though not all the reviews were positive. Some, like the reviewers at *The Spectator*, compared Collier's skillful objectification of the female body to the work of a taxidermist, complaining "that painting of the nude which strives to realise only the superficial aspect of the body, and that in a realistic manner, must be bad art, and—in the old sense of the word—indecent" ("Art" 831). The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* called the painting "repulsive, if not vulgar... not only nude, but rude" ("Grosvenor Gallery" 5). Despite the censure from prudish critics, Collier's *Lilith* quickly became lodged in the imagination of popular culture and has remained there ever since.

It is fair to say MacDonald would have been familiar with the 1887 Collier painting, not just because of the commotion it created, but also because of its connection to his friend's masterpiece (Raeper 166).¹⁸ As Lilith, the novel's strikingly tall namesake, "[throws] off her garments, and [stands] white in the dazed moon" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 111), it is easy to suppose she is receiving imagery from the Collier painting. Like the correspondent from the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* once said, "Nobody can possibly forget [Collier's *Lilith*], or get it easily out of his mental vision" ("Grosvenor Gallery" 5).

This might be exactly what MacDonald wants readers to know about Mr. Vane. His mental vision has been stained by erotic images, not least this famous painting by Collier. To be clear, the pornographic nature of Vane's image does not have its source in the female body. It becomes pornographic to Vane only inasmuch as the female body is being objectified in his imagination. (This is very Augustinian, as will soon become evident.). The neglect of the imagination has been Vane's problem all along. It is important to consider *Lilith* as a contrasexual vision, and Lilith, its antagonist, is the chief projection of Vane's ruined imagination. Like Augustine's dilemma, erotic images continue to persist, long after their reception into memory.

The problem is yet more complicated. Augustine says, "So strongly does the illusory image in my mind affect my body that these unreal figments influence me in sleep in a way that the reality could never do while I am awake" (X.41). Augustine, the determined Christian convert that he has now become, realizes that he may have gained some control over erotic images during waking hours, but he has no such control during sleep. And the images, when unsupervised, are still capable of mischief. This is a hint that the subterranean images might not be as harmless during the daytime hours as one might expect. Vane's vision reveals this same dilemma. As the images received in his waking world remain erotic in his memory, they rise up to wreak havoc in his dreamworld. And likewise, their appearance in the dream alerts Vane to their ubiquitous nature.¹⁹ The riot of Vane's disintegrated soul cannot be quelled until this controlling symbol of his ruined imagination is first addressed. Regarding this aspect of metanoia, MacDonald's novel supersedes Augustine's work.

Augustine and the Problem of Evil

Vane's dilemma regarding Lilith highlights the problem of evil. Salvey's essay on MacDonald's treatment of evil in *Phantastes* and *Lilith* is essential for any serious study of *Lilith*. She says, "Through the Augustinian conception of evil and the goodness of the universe, *Phantastes* and *Lilith* point to a reconciliation of materialism and idealism, the kind of breakdown of binaries which MacDonald celebrated" (Salvey 33). Just as Augustine's mind was freed from the binaries of Manichaeism, so Vane and Lilith are in need of similar reconciliation. MacDonald has already suggested this through the Shakespearean tragedy. So what did Augustine come to believe about evil? Wrestling with this question in his *Confessions*, he says, "Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good" (VII.18). Augustine's conclusion shows the influence of Plotinus, who contends that evil is not a substance (*Enneads* I.8.3). Thus, Augustine confesses to God:

But, unknown to me, you soothed my head and closed my eyes so they should not look upon *vain phantoms*, and I became drowsy and slept away my madness. I awoke in you and saw that you were infinite, but not in the way I had supposed . . . I looked at other things too and saw that they owe their being to you. I saw that all finite things are in you, not as though you were a place that contained them, but in a different matter. They are in you because you hold all things in your truth as though they were in your hand, and all things are true in so far as they have their being. Falsehood is nothing but the supposed existence of something which has no being. (VII.14-15)

This passage describes with surprising accuracy Vane's final entry into the region on the seven dimensions (chapters XLII-XLVI). The sacred rest, "sleeping away the madness of vain phantoms," is a trope used by MacDonald as he finally brings Vane and Lilith to Adam's couch (MacDonald, *Lilith* 229), and the new awakening is reminiscent of Vane's glorious morning with Lona in his final visit in the region of the seven dimensions (237). This non-being view of evil mentioned by Augustine becomes a distinct feature of MacDonald's treatment of evil and can be noticed woven throughout his writings.²⁰ While it is possible

MacDonald read Plotinus, it is not necessary to believe he did. There seems to be little about MacDonald's Neoplatonism that is not available through Augustine's *Confessions*.

To understand how MacDonald deploys Augustine to reconcile Vane's dilemma with Lilith, it is helpful to consider how MacDonald uses the non-substance imagery of evil in his earlier work, *Phantastes*. Herein, Anodos first and famously encounters evil in the form of a terrible Ash-ogre:

I saw the strangest figure; vague, shadowy, almost transparent, in the central parts, and gradually deepening in substance towards the outside, until it ended in extremities capable of casting such a shadow as fell from the hand, through the awful fingers of which I now saw the moon. The hand was uplifted in the attitude of a paw about to strike its prey . . . it was horrible. (MacDonald, *Phantastes* 27)

This description is admittedly complex, probably receiving some of its Neoplatonism via Milton. The Ash-ogre, known by its horrible hand, activates the fear of death. It is the threat of what might be undone. In this way fear and evil are closely linked, having power but no substance. Like a cancer, it is the undoing of real things that are inherently good.²¹ The central parts of the Ash-ogre are "vague, shadowy, [and] almost transparent . . . and gradually deepening towards the outside" (27). Here MacDonald emphasizes the paradox of evil, where something—*that is really nothing*—manifests as a real phenomenon in the real world as a parasitical hollowing agency. In a similar way, the evil Alder-maiden is a veneer of "beautifully moulded features . . . to conceal her hollow deformity . . ." (47). This all tracks nicely with Augustine.

Comparing *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, Salvey says, "*Lilith*, contains MacDonald's clearer theodicy, his explanation of evil in the universe" (24). Her observation is sound, as this theme is especially clear and pervasive in *Lilith*. Most recognizable are the images as they relate to the Shadow and Lilith. The childlike Odu describes evil as a Shadow, "with no thick to him" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 187). It is a hollowing agency with no substance, so its power rests in its ability to ruin, deceive, and intimidate. Lilith herself is described as "what God could not have created. She had usurped beyond her share in self-creation, and her part had undone His! She saw now what she had made, and behold, it was not good!" (206) Vane senses near Lilith, "A horrible Nothingness, a Negation positive . . . the presence of Nothing" (204). The evil that has infected Lilith is

symbolized throughout as a cancerous black spot on her side, eating away at her substance (50, 54, 87, 149). She, like the Alder-maiden of *Phantastes*, is becoming hollow. Adam tells Lilith the spot will not leave her “until it hath eaten to thy heart, and thy beauty hath flowed from thee through the open wound!” (149).

Admittedly, these examples from *Phantastes* and *Lilith* do little more than reveal the Neoplatonic view of evil MacDonald shared with Augustine. But *Lilith* shows more. A passage of significance relating to *Lilith* comes from Book II of the *Confessions*:

Was I, in truth a prisoner, trying to simulate a crippled sort of freedom, attempting a shady parody of omnipotence by getting away with something forbidden? How like that servant of yours who fled from his Lord and hid in the shadows! What rottenness, what a misshapen life! Rather a hideous pit of death!

To do what was wrong simply because it was wrong—could I have found pleasure in that? (II.6)

This passage looking back on the stolen pears has remarkable connections to *Lilith's* spotted leopardess. Rather than stealing pears, she spends her nights stealing infant children (MacDonald, *Lilith* 115), “getting away with something forbidden.” She limps on three legs because of a wounded paw (113), thus simulating, as Augustine says, “a crippled sort of freedom” (II.6). Vane discovers her state of bondage in Lilith's palace: “a cage, in which couched, its head on its paws, a huge leopardess, chained by a steel collar, with its mouth muzzled and its paws muffled” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 125). She was thus, as Augustine says, “in truth a prisoner” (II.6).

Another detail comes into better focus in the Pine-Coffin translation of this passage: “Here was the slave who ran away from his master and chased a shadow instead!” (Pine-Coffin II.6). This is precisely what the spotted leopardess does. As Vane walks down a moonlit street in Bulika, he spies on the other side of the street a shadow, shaped like a man. Close behind is the spotted leopardess, who “followed so close at his heels as to seem the white shadow of his blackness” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 119). MacDonald goes to great lengths to describe the choreography of this scene, signaling its importance. Altogether, the import from Augustine in this episode is undeniable.

So, what does this mean? Little does Vane realize—and little does Lilith want to admit—that his imagination has been slave to his Nothingness. The shadow on the other side of the street belongs to Vane, and

so long as his imagination continues to pursue his shadow (his Nothingness), her spots of non-being will multiply and grow. In other words, this arrangement is killing his imagination. And as Lady Mara says, whoever the Shadow kills “never knows she is dead, but lives to do his will, and thinks she is doing her own” (215). Thus, the spotted leopardess is the symbol of Vane’s lust, and MacDonald, via Augustine, has just exposed the evil of its operation.²² So long as Vane insists on the evil of turning away from the light, his imagination is enslaved to the Nothingness, leaving Vane with a barren mindscape.²³ Vane’s tyrannical imagination has become enslaved by every thought it has ever enslaved. Adam tells Lilith, “Thou art the slave of sin” (149). Therefore, the lust symbolized in Lilith should not be limited to the subcategory of sexual lust. Vane’s lust includes the entire domain of his misdirected desires. Augustine says, “I inquired then what villainy might be, but I found no substance, only the perversity of a will twisted away from you, God, the supreme substance, toward the depths—a will that throws away its life within and swells with vanity abroad” (VII.16). The malignancy associated with the Collier painting, or any other image in Vane’s memory, is not generated from the muse or any other part of God’s creation. It is the foul fruit of Vane’s “perverse will twisted away from God.” Thus, Lilith’s condition is Vane’s dilemma—his imagination is a slave of sin.

As one would expect, the early stage of Vane’s repentance comes face to face with this dilemma. A new will is emerging in Vane’s imagination with a desire to be free from the “chain and steel collar” of sin (MacDonald, *Lilith* 125). Augustine reports something similar in the *Confessions*:

A new will had begun to emerge in me, the will to worship you disinterestedly and enjoy you, O God, our only sure felicity; but it was not yet capable of surmounting that earlier will strengthened by inveterate custom. And so the two wills fought it out—the old and the new, the one carnal, the other spiritual—and in their struggle tore my soul apart. (VIII.10)

Vane experiences these “two wills fighting it out” as a vision of two fighting cats: Lady Mara’s white leopardess and the sin-bidden spotted leopardess.

What a sight it was—now the one, now the other uppermost, both too intent for any noise beyond a low growl, a whimpered cry, or a snarl of hate—followed by a quicker scrambling of claws, as each,

worrying and pushing and dragging, struggled for foothold on the pavement! The spotted leopardess was larger than the white, and I was anxious for my friend; but I soon saw that, though neither stronger nor more active, the white leopardess had the greater endurance. (MacDonald, *Lilith* 135)

This spectacle pairs nicely with Augustine's remarks. The older will is naturally larger than the new will, having enjoyed favored status for so long. And for this same reason, the older will would appear "stronger and more active." Augustine says, "The force of habit that fought against me had grown fiercer by my own doing, because I had come willingly to this point where I now wished not to be" (VIII.11).

The new will, however, is said to have more endurance. This, admittedly, is a puzzling observation by Mr. Vane. But it is important to know that he has already had an up-close encounter with the white leopardess:

I was wakened by something leaping upon me, and licking my face with the rough tongue of a feline animal. "It is the white leopardess!" I thought. "She is come to suck my blood!—and why should she not have it?—it would cost me more to defend than to yield it!" So I lay still, expecting a shoot of pain. But the pang did not arrive; a pleasant warmth instead began to diffuse itself through me. Stretched at my back, she lay as close to me as she could lie, the heat of her body slowly penetrating mine, and her breath, which had nothing of the wild beast in it, swathing my head and face in a genial atmosphere. A full conviction that her intention toward me was good, gained possession of me. I turned like a sleepy boy, threw my arm over her, and sank into profound unconsciousness. (MacDonald, *Lilith* 124)

Much to Vane's surprise, the white leopardess has not come to suck his blood. His errant assumption is informed by Augustine's view of evil. Since evil has no life of its own, it must steal life from things with real existence. In an earlier soliloquy, Vane says, "I began to learn that it was impossible to live for oneself even, save in the presence of others—then, alas, fearfully possible! evil was only through good! selfishness but a parasite on the tree of life!" (83). This parasitic aspect of evil has been on full display in Lilith's many shapeshifting forms (including the spotted leopardess). She is a leech and a vampiress. "Vilest of God's creatures," says Mr. Raven, "she lives by the blood and lives and souls of men. She consumes and slays, but is powerless to destroy as to create" (148).

But the white leopardess is not parasitic like the spotted leopardess. She is a vision of a new will infused with divine love that is self-giving. Augustine best summarizes Vane's vision of the fighting beasts when he says, "I was quite sure that surrendering myself to your love would be better than succumbing to my lust, but while the former course commended itself and was beginning to conquer, the latter charmed and chained me" (VIII.12). For this reason, the struggle is intense. A new will being infused with divine love is being bullied by an old will entrenched in parasitic habits. But as Augustine has learned from the Platonists, "I saw that the indestructible must be superior to what can be destroyed" (VII.6). The white leopardess, no doubt, has greater endurance. As Saint Paul has said, love "endureth all things" (*English Revised Version*, 1 Cor. 13:7).

Augustine's Treatment of the Hexameron

Allusions to the *Confessions* are scattered throughout *Lilith*, and Book II, as shown, provides an abundance of material.²⁴ But there is more in play that informs the superstructure of the novel. As mentioned, Augustine's autobiography crescendos into an allegorical treatment of the Hexameron in Book XIII, and MacDonald borrows heavily from this material to inform Vane's mindscape. This, in fact, is some of the most convincing evidence of Augustine's role in Vane's bibliographic vision. Augustine uses the six-day creation account from Genesis to describe his inner mindscape. He says, "We ourselves, who in respect of our souls are also your spiritual creatures, were once turned away from you who are our Light . . ." (XIII.2). The creation of the individual soul, according to Augustine, can be understood as a microcosm of universal creation. Those acquainted with MacDonald can see how this scheme would arouse his interest.

Describing the impotent conditions of his parched mental terrain, Augustine says, "My soul is like an arid land before you, for as it cannot illumine itself from its own resources, neither can it slake its thirst from itself" (XIII.16). This is a fitting description of the region of the seven dimensions. Water is strangely scarce. However, Lady Mara tells Vane the name of the country was once "*The Land of Waters*; for the dry channels, of which you have crossed so many, were then overflowing with live torrents" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 75). The "dry channels" is a pervasive motif in Vane's vision, mentioned no less than eighteen times.²⁵ *Lilith's* plot has much to do with rehydrating the channels of this barren wasteland.

The “channels” motif can be found in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Introducing his allegorical exposition of the Hexameron, he says,

The [Creation] account left by Moses, whom you chose to pass it on to us, is like a spring which is all the more copious because it flows in a confined space. Its waters are carried by a maze of channels over a wider area than could be reached by any single stream drawing its water from the same source and flowing through many different places. (Pine-Coffin XII.27)

Augustine is using this imagery of water channels to describe the multilevel aspect of meaning found in sacred texts. Pushing back against those who would insist on only one narrow interpretation of a given scripture, he says, “A great variety of interpretations, many of them legitimate, confronts our exploring minds as we search among these words to discover your will” (XII.33). Apparently, the *Confessions* is a defense of Augustine’s orthodoxy, so he lays out the rationale behind his biblical hermeneutic that must have come into question. Augustine says, “Provided, therefore, that each person tries to ascertain in the holy scriptures the meaning the author intended, what harm is there if a reader holds an opinion which you, the light of all truthful minds, show to be true, even though it is not what was intended by the author, who himself meant something true, but not exactly that?” (XII.27).

Those familiar with MacDonald’s writings will find this argument familiar. It is at the heart of his popular essay, “The Fantastic Imagination.” The essay is a short, succinct treatise debunking the notion that his fairy stories should adhere to rigid standards of allegory. Like Augustine, he pushes back against those who insist on rigid one-to-one correspondence of meaning for symbols and myth-narratives. MacDonald says, “It is very seldom indeed that they carry the exact meaning of any user of them! And if they can be so used as to convey definite meaning, it does not follow that they ought never to carry anything else. Words are live things that may be variously employed to various ends” (“Fantastic Imagination” 318). Like Augustine, MacDonald contends that a text should not merely assign a particular meaning. Instead, it should have the capacity to hold manifold levels of meaning.

Augustine summarizes his defense by saying, “Finally I would hope to have written in such a way that if anyone else had in the light of truth seen some other valid meaning, that too should not be excluded, but present itself as a possible way of understanding in what I had said” (XII.36). MacDonald, likewise, says, “The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself” (“Fantastic Imagination” 319).²⁶ MacDonald’s essay is outstanding, but it is definitely not original. It borrows heavily from Book XII of Augustine’s *Confessions*, providing further evidence that MacDonald took the book seriously. This also bolsters the case for Augustine’s “channels” of manifold meaning as a prevalent trope in *Lilith*.

Why is the recurring motif of dry channels important to Vane’s vision? Because Lilith, the epicenter of Vane’s lust, has stolen the waters of his imagination (*Lilith* 75). So long as Vane’s imagination is a slave to his shadow, his mindscape is barren. His imagination is dried up. He is losing the capacity for meaning, thus casting him into a wasteland of nihilism. This is the tragic consequence of his lust. Strangely, the drought has its strongest effect on the Little Ones. The Little Ones of Vane’s vision, like the other inhabitants of the region of the seven dimensions, are informed by multiple sources. Among these, a cardinal antecedent comes from Augustine and his allegorical treatment of the Hexameron. He says, “I take the reproduction of human kind to refer to the thoughts which our minds conceive” (Pine-Coffin XIII.24).²⁷ The Little Ones, thus, are the innocent and underdeveloped thoughts born into Vane’s mindscape. MacDonald is suggesting that Vane’s thoughts with the most potential are being stunted from a lack of imagination. Vane’s lust has robbed them of proper nourishment. The ones that grow do so unwholesomely, either becoming greedy and glutinous (i.e., Bad Giants of the forest), or by being recruited to serve Vane’s bewitching lust (i.e., Bad Giants of Bulika).²⁸

Their eating preferences have special significance. When they first encounter Vane, they are relieved to discover that he likes their apples. “‘He likes our apples! He likes our apples! He’s a good giant! He’s a good giant!’ cried many little voices” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 56). This is a trope imported from Augustine. He says the fruit of the little ones is “works of mercy,” and the nourishment is “joy” (XIII.25-26). The Bad Giants, on the other hand, are notoriously merciless and joyless. They are cruel and prefer their large bitter produce to the

Little One's delicious little fruits. Augustine says, "Only those who find this food delicious are nourished by it; people whose god is their belly do not enjoy it" (XIII.26). Here MacDonald offers a social critique, while at the same time assigning allegorical meaning to Vane's mindscape. Both Augustine and MacDonald agree that greed and gluttony are aberrations that extinguish joy.

The Little Ones have other curious characteristics. They are loving, playful, and simple-minded. They are also known for a few surprises. When they migrate with Vane out of the bushes to the forest, much to Vane's astonishment, they suddenly appear as birds:

"Ah," said one of the wildest, "but we were not birds then! We were run-creatures, not fly-creatures! We had our hide-places in the bushes then; but when we came to no-bushes, only trees, we had to build nests! When we built nests, we grew birds, and when we were birds, we had to do birds! (MacDonald, *Lilith* 164).

Augustine gives meaning to this unusual transformation:

On the other hand, what disadvantage was it to your little ones that they were much more slow-minded than I? They did not forsake you, but stayed safely in the nest of your Church to grow their plumage and strengthen the wings of their charity on the wholesome nourishment of the faith. (IV.31)

Augustine is reflecting back on his liberal learning that once inflated him with selfish ambition and vain conceit. At that time, he looked down on the little ones of the church with condescension. He says, "I did not guard my strength by approaching you, but left you and set out for a distant land to squander it there on the quest for meretricious gratifications" (IV.30). Vane's folly leading into the Little One's bird-transformation scene tracks closely with Augustine's remarks. Intoxicated with pride over his new mental powers, he presumptuously hijacks the sexton's horse (as Augustine would say, "setting out for a distant land . . . for meretricious gratifications"), leading to another painful humiliation. Once again, he ends up a prisoner of the Bad Giants in need of the Little One's assistance (MacDonald, *Lilith* 161-2). Augustine has provided the perfect imagery to describe Vane's condition and remediation. Much to his surprise, he is learning that humble, God-loving thoughts nourished on faith are nested in a place safely *above* him, and are destined for even higher things in the

future if they receive proper nourishment. As Christ has said, "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted." (Matt. 23:12).

The bird trope from Augustine shows that much of Vane's repentance has to do with relinquishing pride. So altogether, the renewal of Vane's disintegrated mindscape must put to rest both his lust and his pride.²⁹ As John's epistle says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John 2:16). Augustine addresses these three capital vices from John's epistle in his allegorical exposition of the Hexameron:

Restrain yourselves from the monstrous savagery of pride, from the luxurious inertia of self-indulgence, and from sham pretension to knowledge, so that wild beasts may be gentle, domestic animals responsive, and snakes harmless. These animals symbolize the impulses of the soul (XIII.21)

The wayward impulses of the soul are symbolized by Augustine as wild beasts. They must become gentle, responsive, and harmless. MacDonald makes hearty use of this trope in the region of the seven dimensions. As Vane begins reviving Lilith's emaciated corpse by the hot stream, a convoy of animals led by a large snake move past him in a straight line (MacDonald, *Lilith* 98). Most are species of large animals, but in miniature form. Vane is puzzled at their appearance. "Where were the creatures going? What drew them? Was this an exodus, or a morning habit?" (98). The feral animals pay no notice of Vane and are therefore of no use to him. The next time the animals appear, they have changed. They are carrying the newly emboldened Little Ones as they have come to rescue Vane from his embarrassing second captivity with the Bad Giants. As Vane and his curious company of insurrectionists gather in the forest, he gives this careful description of the animals:

They had already, she said, in exploring the forest, made acquaintance with the animals in it, and with most of them personally. Knowing therefore how strong as well as wise and docile some of them were, and how swift as well as manageable many others, they now set themselves to secure their aid against the giants, and with loving, playful approaches, had soon made more than friends of most of them, from the first addressing horse or elephant as Brother or Sister Elephant, Brother or Sister Horse, until before long they had an individual name for each. It was some little time longer before they said Brother or

Sister Bear, but that came next, and the other day she had heard one little fellow cry, “Ah, Sister Serpent!” to a snake that bit him as he played with it too roughly. (MacDonald, *Lilith* 167)

These “impulses of the soul,” as Augustine calls them, now appear to Vane as being “strong... wise... docile... swift... and manageable.” A little child can play with a serpent, and when handled too roughly, the creature merely nips the child harmlessly. Augustine reiterates, “The snakes will be good, not dangerous and liable to hurt people but astute and wary” (XIII.21). This scene is bustling with Augustine’s Hexameron imagery. The impulses of the soul have not only become gentle, responsive, and harmless—they are now, as Augustine says, “servants of reason” (XIII.21).³⁰ This is an important change taking place in the renewal of Vane’s mind. His humble thoughts are now acquiring the capacity for reason, and his impulses are surrendering to their service. They will soon storm the gates of Bulika together to capture its evil princess.

The campaign, for the most part, is successful. Bulika is sacked and Lilith is captured by Vane and his company of insurrectionists. She is taken to Mara’s cottage for a night of repentance, then the entourage heads off to Adam’s house for their assigned rest to complete the centripetal action of the fourth trip into the region of the seven dimensions. On the way to Adam’s house, they pass through the dry shallow basin of the bad burrow, stirring up the awful nest of monsters:

Monsters uprose on all sides, every neck at full length, every beak and claw outstretched, every mouth agape. Long-billed heads, horribly jawed faces, knotty tentacles innumerable, went out after Lilith. She lay in an agony of fear, nor dared stir a finger. Whether the hideous things even saw the children, I doubt; certainly not one of them touched a child; not one loathly member passed the live rampart of her body-guard, to lay hold of [Lilith]. (MacDonald, *Lilith* 211)

The monsters of the bad burrow described by Vane is another trope borrowed from Augustine:

My mind passed in review disgusting, hideous forms, distortions of the natural order, certainly, but forms nonetheless. I dubbed “formless” not something that really lacked all form, but what had a kind of form from which, if it were to appear, my gaze would turn away as from something weird and grotesque, and liable to upset weak human sensibility very badly. (XII.6)

Augustine describes the aberrations as psychological phantasms. They highlight another aspect of his Neoplatonism: evil cannot create, but only corrode or deform. The phantasms, “distortions of the natural order,” are a showcase of the latter. They first appear in chapter X of *Lilith*, terrorizing Vane’s mindscape, masquerading as real threats with substance so long as Lilith reigns in Bulika as a slave to sin.³¹ But now, as the initial stages of repentance have been accepted by Lilith at Mara’s cottage, Vane discovers that the aberrations are invisible to the Little Ones (MacDonald, *Lilith* 211). The “horrid brood” continues to inhabit Vane’s memory, even after the bad burrow is finally flooded in the closing chapters. But in this fifth and final trip into the region of the seven dimensions, the hideous things lay dormant beneath the crystalline waters. Vane says, “So long as exist men and women of unwholesome mind, that lake will still be peopled with loathsomeness” (244). It is assumed that the monsters will resume their threatening activity if Vane neglects his imagination and allows it to dry up again. The renewal of his mind will be a lifelong endeavor requiring constant humility, nurture, and vigilance.

In *Lilith’s* penultimate chapter, the Little Ones are taken away by a luminous company of heavenly hosts. The archangel presiding over the activity makes this curious pronouncement about the Little Ones:

“Ah!” said the mighty angel, continuing his descent to meet us who were now almost at the gate and within hearing of his words, “this is well! these are soldiers to take heaven itself by storm!—I hear of a horde of black bats on the frontiers: these will make short work with such!” (249)

The Little Ones “taking heaven by storm” is yet another trope from the *Confessions*. Augustine says, “The untaught are rising up and taking heaven by storm . . .” (VIII.8). The evil horde, likewise, receives import from the *Confessions*. Augustine calls them, “Those so-called powers of darkness, whom they always postulate as a horde deployed in opposition to [God]” (VII.3). This trope comes from an earlier section of the *Confessions* (Book VII), where Augustine’s ontology is being transformed by Neoplatonism. Augustine uses the “horde” imagery dismissively, realizing that the dualism implied is a chimera. MacDonald picks up on this, and calls the horde “black bats.” The Shadow in this final section of *Lilith* is referred to as a “black bat” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 241), indicating that this horde on the frontiers of Vane’s renewing mindscape is, likewise, nothing more than a flock of shadows. Augustine allegorizes the shadow-horde in his treatment of the Hexameron:

Then you gathered the great horde of unbelievers into a cohesive mass, which would throw into relief the zealous efforts of the faithful who were to bear fruit for you in works of mercy, even to the point of distributing their worldly goods to the poor and so winning wealth in heaven. (XIII.34)

MacDonald's deployment of this shadow-horde imagery from the Hexameron is faithful to Augustine's Neoplatonism. Therefore, the great angel's forecast is correct: the Little Ones will make short work with them.

All said, Augustine's allegorical treatment of the Hexameron is a cardinal antecedent informing *Lilith's* mindscape. The waters, the Little Ones, the animals, and the monsters all take important cues from Augustine, allegorizing Vane's repentance. This leaves Lilith, the tyrannous symbol of Vane's ruined imagination, the last image to consider.

Augustine's Conversion and Lilith's Repentance

The reintegration and renewal of Vane's riotous mindscape will not be complete so long as Vane is mesmerized by Lilith. She is the epicenter of his lust, the dynamic construct of his sin-bidden imagination. Vane's bewitchment has allowed Lilith to steal and hoard the manifold waters of meaning from his imagination, stifling the wholesome development of his thoughts. The many images informing this symbol must lose their hold on Vane. Or perhaps better said, Vane must lose his hold on them.

Does this require Lilith's annihilation? Must she be erased from memory? That would seem impossible. This dynamic image exists in Vane's memory and cannot simply cease to exist there. Augustine recognizes this aspect of memory in Book X of his *Confessions*:

Now I arrive in the fields and vast mansions of memory, where are treasured innumerable images brought in there from objects of every conceivable kind perceived by the senses. There too are hidden away the modified images we produce when by our thinking we magnify or diminish or in any way alter the information our senses have reported. There too is everything else that has been consigned and stowed away, and not yet engulfed and buried in oblivion. Sojourning there I command something I want to present itself, and immediately certain things emerge, while others have to be pursued for some time and dug out from remote crannies. Others again come tumbling out in disorderly profusion. (X.12)

Whether received through contact with material things, through liberal education, or through emotional engagement with existing images (*Confessions* X.26), Augustine realizes that memories cannot simply be “buried in oblivion.” Many, like Lilith’s kind, are prone to come “tumbling out in disorderly profusion.” Vane’s imagination is in need of metanoia—a new way of interacting with his memories. Lilith must repent.

Lilith’s repentance is heavily indebted to Book VIII of the *Confessions*. Nearing the hour of his conversion, Augustine recalls a visit from a companion named Ponticianus. Ponticianus tells Augustine and his friend Alypius a story of how two of his comrades were converted while reading the Life of St. Antony:

Ponticianus went on with his story; but, Lord, even while he spoke you were wrenching me back toward myself, and pulling me round from that standpoint behind my back which I had taken to avoid looking at myself. You set me down before my face, forcing me to mark how despicable I was, how misshapen and begrimed, filthy and festering. I saw and shuddered. If I tried to turn my gaze away, he went on relentlessly telling his tale, and you set me before myself once more, thrusting me into my sight that I might perceive my sin and hate it. I had been aware of it all along, but I had been glossing over it, suppressing it and forgetting. (VIII.7)

This scene from Augustine’s spiritual autobiography—being turned around and “set down before his face”—becomes a predominant trope throughout *Lilith*. Vane, like Augustine, must get a good look at himself. This is why the mirror is a fitting gateway into the region of the seven dimensions. The mirror is especially important for the centrifugal discovery of the third trip into the region, and the centripetal recovery of the fourth trip, as they involve moral assessment and moral remediation, respectively. Like Augustine, Vane must be turned around and set down before his face.

This imagery is especially important to Lilith, the tyrannical projection of Vane’s ruined imagination. She experiences her first attempted intervention in Vane’s library immediately following his seduction. As Lilith lurks in Vane’s house, undetected as a bedraggled Persian cat, the librarian (now revealed as Adam) exposes her in poetic verse. Adam’s reading is interrupted by feline howls and wails, as his exposé proves unbearable for Lilith (MacDonald, *Lilith* 145-147). Nevertheless, it is just as Augustine has said: “he went on

relentlessly telling his tale." He set Lilith before herself, "thrusting her into her sight that she might perceive her sin and hate it" (VIII.7).

Admittedly, this intervention scene receives much of its import from Keats's *Lamia*, where the philosopher, Apollonius, exposes the subcreature Lamia as a "foul dream" (line 271). But unlike Lamia, Lilith is not being assaulted with cold philosophy. Instead, she is exposed with the heat of poetic verse.³² And unlike Lamia, Lilith is not annihilated. With "tender beseeching," Adam says, "hear me, and repent, and He who made thee will cleanse thee!" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 149). Lilith must be cleansed because (in the words of Augustine) she has become "begrimed, filthy and festering" (VIII.7). In this, MacDonald, via Augustine, is finishing what Keats started. While the evil activity and deformed phantasms generated from Vane's ruined imagination must be put to rest, his imagination must be redeemed. It is an inescapable part of Vane. Deliverance from his indwelling badness—*not the erasure of memories or the annihilation of his imaginative faculty*—is the cure. This, in MacDonald's view, is true repentance. Three years before publishing *Lilith*, MacDonald introduced this Augustinian insight in his treatise titled *The Hope of the Gospel*:

It is the indwelling badness, ready to produce bad actions, that we need to be delivered from... It is the evil in our being—no essential part of it, thank God!—the miserable fact that the very child of God does not care for his father and will not obey him, causing us to desire wrongly, act wrongly, or, where we try not to act wrongly, yet making it impossible for us not to feel wrongly—this is what he came to deliver us from;—not the things we have done, but the possibility of doing such things any more. (10)

Adam says, "The evil thou meditatest... thou shalt never compass, Lilith, for Good and not Evil is the Universe" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 149). His remark underscores Augustine's Neoplatonism that has been in play throughout the vision. Lilith, likewise, must be turned around and set down before her face.

There's no scene more famous in all of *Lilith* than the princess's frightening night of repentance at Mara's cottage (Chapter XXXIX). As the hour of reckoning approaches, Vane describes the frightening suspense. He says, "Something seemed going on in the house—something silent, something terrible, something they were not to know . . . Terror . . . Fearsome waiting . . . Something terrible was on its way! . . . A dread

sense of judgment was upon me” (197-198). Vane’s disclosure reveals his connection to Lilith’s judgment. Change, no matter how promising, is a fearful proposition. As Augustine says, “The prospect of being freed from all these encumbrances frightened me as much as the encumbrances themselves ought to have done” (VIII.5). Vane’s sense of dread is taking this cue from Augustine.

The intervention anticipated by Vane is conducted by Mara and has five principal movements. First, Lilith’s self-deception is revealed by confession. She is laid on a wooden settle by the hearth for Mara’s interrogation. Vane watches in suspense. “Will you turn away from the wicked things you have been doing so long?” asks Mara. “I will not,” Lilith says. “I will be myself and not another!” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 199). Lilith categorically denies any wrongdoing. Fear and pride have entombed Vane’s ruined imagination. Lilith’s state of denial is best explained by Augustine. He says,

People love truth in such a way that those who love something else wish to regard what they love as truth and, since they would not want to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are wrong... for while the soul cannot hide from truth, truth hides from the soul. (X.34)

Having received this stubborn denial, Mara declares that Lilith is a slave to the Shadow. “Every life, every will, every heart that came within your ken, you have sought to subdue: you are the slave of every slave you have made—such a slave that you do not know it!—See your own self!” (MacDonald, *Lilith* 200).

Mara’s rebuke initiates the second movement of the intervention. Already, “a silvery creature like a slowworm” has emerged from the shadows and disappeared into the fire (198). But now that Lilith has refused to admit her guilt, the creature re-emerges from the fire, “white-hot, vivid as incandescent silver, the live heart of essential fire” (201). The glowing creature crawls slowly across the floor, onto the settle, and then into the folds of Lilith’s robe. Despite its burning essence, Vane is surprised to see it inflicts no harm to the wooden settle nor to Lilith’s bony foot. Mara lifts the edges of Lilith’s robe, showing Vane that the creature has vanished into the black hole on Lilith’s side. Lilith gives a contorted shudder. “She is seeing herself!” says Mara... “Her torment is that she is what she is” (201).

This scene draws imagery from Augustine's ordeal with Ponticianus. Augustine says, "My conscience gnawed away at me in this fashion, and I was fiercely shamed and flung into hideous confusion" (VIII.18).³³ Like Augustine, Lilith's husk of self-denial has been breached by the gnawing light of self-knowledge. She has at last been turned around and set down before her face:

"Why did he make me such?" gasped Lilith. "I would have made myself—oh, so different! I am glad it was he that made me and not I myself! He alone is to blame for what I am! Never would I have made such a worthless thing! He meant me such that I might know it and be miserable! I will not be made any longer!" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 202)

Annihilation, however, is unlikely, and Lilith knows it. Drawing from Augustine's Neoplatonism, the Raven has already made this clear to Vane. He says, "Annihilation itself is no death to evil. Only good where evil was, is evil dead. An evil thing must live with its evil until it chooses to be good. That alone is the slaying of evil" (153).

Nevertheless, Lilith demands annihilation. She is too proud to go on living in her wretched state, and too proud to do anything about it. Mara obliges and withdraws, initiating the third movement of the intervention. Lilith is given what she has requested—an encroaching abyss of absolute Nothing. Finally facing extinction, "the princess dashed herself from the settle to the floor with an exceeding great and bitter cry. It was the recoil of Being from Annihilation" (204). Lilith learns from this encounter that she actually fears annihilation, preferring, instead, a perpetual state of self-loathing. "For pity's sake," she shrieked, "tear my heart out, but let me live!" (204).

Her wish appears to have been granted. The "perfect calm as of a summer night" vanquishes the threat of annihilation (204). But the existence that Lilith requires now carries the misery of knowing the worthless thing she has become. As Mara says, "Self-loathing is not sorrow. Yet it is good, for it marks a step in the way home..." (203). Lilith rises from the floor and stands erect, "with the air of a conqueror" (204). She believes she has won the battle and may now resume her miserable existence on her own terms. This initiates the fourth movement of Mara's intervention:

I looked, and saw: before her, cast from unseen heavenly mirror, stood the reflection of herself, and beside it a form of splendid beauty, She trembled, and sank again on the floor helpless. She knew the one what God had intended her to be, the other what she had made herself. (204)

MacDonald has ingeniously expounded the crux of Augustine's treatment of evil. Evil is not self-existent, and it cannot create. Evil can only corrupt. Not only does Lilith see the horror of her self-inflicted undoing—she sees alongside it the glorious creature she was created to be. In this fourth movement of Mara's intervention, Lilith's Creator is exonerated, and Lilith is left to her shame. The juxtaposed images have inflicted her with the deepest wound of regret.

Despite this painful knowledge, Lilith refuses the grace being offered. "I will yet be mistress of myself! I am still what I have always known myself—queen of Hell, and mistress of the worlds!" (205). She will be damned. This initiates the fifth and final movement of Mara's intervention. Lilith is at last turned over to the outer darkness that she has so stubbornly claimed. She demands existence without God. God's animating spirit withdraws, leaving only the "dregs of her dead and corrupted life" (206). She loses all awareness of other living souls, standing stiff in the center of the room like a dreadful scarecrow. Vane says, "She was in the outer darkness, we present with her who was in it! We were not in the outer darkness; had we been, we could not have been *with* her..." (206).³⁴ Vane describes her damned state with the best of Augustine's theology:

She had tried her hardest to unmake herself, and could not! she was a dead life! she could not cease! she must *be!* . . . She was what God could not have created. She had usurped beyond her share in self-creation, and her part had undone His! She saw now what she had made, and behold, it was not good!

She was as a conscious corpse, whose coffin would never come to pieces, never set her free! (206)

Her flicker of consciousness stripped of all of God's goodness proves to be unbearable. The outer darkness MacDonald has in mind is probably best described in his sermon titled "The Consuming Fire." He says it is feeling "abandoned, hanging in a ceaseless vertigo of existence upon the verge of the gulf of . . . being, without support, without refuge, without aim, without end . . . with no inbreathing of joy, with nothing to make life good" (MacDonald, "Consuming Fire" 31). Lilith's taste of this outer darkness is more than she can stand. "I

yield," she says. "I cannot hold out. I am defeated" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 207). She is at last aware of her folly. Mara, with some help from Augustine, has done her work. *Lilith* begins to accept the grace being offered and cooperates with the centripetal campaign that is already under way.

Conclusion

Lilith is a bibliographic vision of repentance in its full metanoic sense: "to be reformed by the renewal of your minds" (Augustine XIII.14, 32). To be clear, Vane's vision in the region of the seven dimensions does not complete his conversion, but only initiates the early stages of his repentance by renewing his imagination. (In this regard, the vision works on Vane much the same way *Phantastes* worked on Lewis.) Augustine's *Confessions* proves to be one of many books at work in the vision, playing a chief role in Vane's repentance. Most noticeable is Augustine's treatment of evil, his allegorical treatment of the Hexameron, and his conversion induced by the words of Ponticianus. It appears unlikely that the tropes from the *Confessions* were added to *Lilith* for aesthetics. They primarily serve a theological function, showing that *Lilith*, despite its exotic composition, should be understood as a Christian myth.³⁵

Readers new to *Lilith* should be cautioned not to hold too tightly to this import from Augustine. MacDonald has not crafted a rigid allegory. Instead, he has done something better, though admittedly more complex. He has created a stereoscopic vision pulsating with the fusion of import from manifold sources. Both Augustine and MacDonald agree that the highest forms of poetic art should not be constricted by one particular meaning. Thus, MacDonald has woven a multilevel-meaning myth that employs a panoply of multilevel-meaning texts. Individual elements are evolving composites of multiple antecedents. Narratives, likewise, receive import from multiple antecedents. On the other hand, while *Lilith* is not an allegory, its enchanted region of the seven dimensions does hold subunits of allegory. Neglecting the antecedents altogether will miss the genius and joy of the vision as MacDonald imagined it, reducing his pulsating tesseract to an odd conversation piece. Augustine's treatment of evil and repentance from his *Confessions* ranks among the most significant of *Lilith's* antecedents.

Lilith's indebtedness to the *Confessions* is evident enough. Academics and theologians will no doubt reveal loftier insights from the *Confessions* tropes found in *Lilith*, especially as they relate to the formation of the will. The pressing question that lingers is this: *why is MacDonald so coy with Augustine?* Why does an author that receives such careful attention in MacDonald's cherished late-life masterpiece never get mentioned in all of MacDonald's works and letters? Are the *Confessions* tropes in *Lilith* merely coincidental? Or are they the unintentional overflow of MacDonald's vast storehouse of memory? Did MacDonald's frustration with the Calvinism of his Nonconformist training make him reluctant to acknowledge Augustine? Or, on the other hand, might MacDonald be using the sting of subtlety to upstage the Nonconformist view of hell with the writings of Augustine? *Could MacDonald be upstaging Augustine?* These questions will likely persist as Mr. Raven's most closely guarded riddle.

Endnotes

1. The tropes, though unmistakable, do not show adherence to the Pusey or Watts translations. It seems MacDonald was engaged directly with the Latin version. His work tends to track closely with the recent translation by Maria Boulding. Therefore, her translation will be used throughout this essay unless otherwise noted.
2. In a long, affectionate letter to his father, MacDonald once said, "I look upon repentance as a work including everything else in religion." See MacDonald, *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald*, edited by Glenn Edward Sadler, Eerdmans, 1994, 18.
3. He says, "This disintegration was occurring without my consent, but what it indicated was not the presence in me of a mind belonging to some alien nature but the punishment undergone by my own" (VIII.10).
4. Like Augustine says, "The malice was loathsome, and I loved it. I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay: not with the thing for which I was falling into decay but with decay itself, for I was depraved in soul, and I leapt down from your strong support into destruction, hungering not for some

- advantage to be gained by the foul deed, but for the foulness of it" (II.4).
5. Augustine says, "Every disordered soul is its own punishment. (I.12).
 6. Augustine says, "A body gravitates to its proper place by its own weight. This weight does not necessarily drag it downward, but pulls it to the place proper to it: thus fire tends upward, a stone downward. Drawn by their weight, things seek their rightful places. If oil is poured into water, it will rise to the surface, but if water is poured onto oil it will sink below the oil: drawn by their weight, things seek their rightful places. They are not at rest as long as they are disordered, but once brought to order they find their rest" (XIII.9).
 7. The bibliographic import here, as in all of *Lilith*, is heterogeneous. Milton, especially, is an important antecedent to *Lilith's* recurring Adamic motif.
 8. This buzzing troop of unclean phantoms becomes a trope used to describe Vane's encounter in the great hall of Lilith's palace. He says, "The instant the princess entered, I heard a buzzing sound as of many low voices, and, one portion after another, the assembly began to be shiftingly illuminated, as by a ray that went travelling from spot to spot. Group after group would shine out for a space, then sink back into the general vagueness, while another part of the vast company would grow momentarily bright" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 137). Elsewhere Augustine calls the apparitions, "swarms of noisy phantasms" (VII.17).
 9. See Michael Wayne Wilhelm, "Chapter 8: *Lilith's* Dantean Homecoming Structure," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 39, 2020, <https://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol39/iss1/4>
 10. "From the mud of my fleshly desires and my erupting puberty belched out murky clouds that obscured and darkened my heart until I could not distinguish the calm light of love from the fog of lust" (Augustine II.2). This trope is likely intended, since Book II turns out to be a dense field of allusions for *Lilith*.
 11. Both Augustine and Vane introduce the Seductress of Prov. 9:16-18. Augustine says, "But I stumbled

upon that bold woman devoid of prudence in Solomon's allegory; she was sitting outside on her stool and inviting me: Come and enjoy eating bread in secret, and drink sweet, stolen water . . ." (III.6). Vane rationalizes, "But what matter whence it flowed? was not the water sweet?" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 129).

12. See Barbara Amell, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Wingfold*, no. 20, Fall 1997, 9-20.
13. MacDonald does the same for Shelley, bestowing on him the honor of being Vane's avian guide that ultimately becomes the New Adam. Jennifer Koopman has written convincingly about this Shelley connection. She says, "*Lilith's* mysterious librarian-bird raven is the final apotheosis of Shelley." See Jennifer Koopman, *Redeeming Romanticism: George MacDonald, Shelley, and Literary History*, 2006, McGill University, PhD dissertation, 238, <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/pg15bk184>.
14. Astarte is the white leopardess. The lone mention of this name in the final published version could also be a veiled tribute to the muse, Jane Morris. Barbara Amell has shown that MacDonald was a confidant and beneficiary of Morris. See Amell, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti," 19-20.
15. Barbara Amell offers outstanding research that shows that MacDonald did have interest in demonology that would enrich *Lilith's* backstory. See Barbara Amell, "Lilith Links," *Wingfold*, no. 95, Summer 2016, 18-25. For an excellent synopsis of *Lilith's* backstory, see Erika Ditzman, "The Fear and Fascination of the New Woman in George MacDonald's *Lilith*," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 38, 2019, <https://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol38/iss1/15>
16. They're known in the book as "sham apostles." See George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind*, Knopf, 2001, 85-87.
17. Mara says, "One day [the people of Bulika] found a huge snake and killed it; which so enraged [Lilith] that she declared herself their princess, and became terrible to them" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 75). This backstory is being informed by multiple sources, some shared with the Collier painting. Perhaps some of this narrative is comical import from the painting itself.
18. MacDonald was an admirer of the visual arts and was acquainted with the prominent Pre-Raphaelite artists of his time. See Helen Sutherland, "Pictures on a Page: George MacDonald and the Visual Arts,"

Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries, edited by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle, Scottish Literature International, 2013, 216-34.

19. Augustine says, "No one knows what he himself is made of, except his own spirit within him, yet there is still some part of him which remains hidden even from his own spirit; but you, Lord, know everything about a human being because you have made him" (X.5).
20. Some of his Neoplatonic thought would likewise be filtering through Spenser and Milton.
21. The Neoplatonism that MacDonald shares with Augustine is noticeable here. Pseudo-Dionysius similarly says, "evil, *qua* evil, never produces being or birth. All it can do by itself is in a limited fashion to debase and to destroy the substance of things." See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names, Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheib, Paulist, 1987, 86.
22. Considering the central role of Dante in the bibliographic vision, it is safe to say the leopardess receives meaning from Canto I of the *Inferno*, and thus its referent from Jeremiah: "Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities, every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased." (*Revised English Version*, Jer. 5:6). Vane, like Dante, has left the true path, as the leopardess watches over Bulika.
23. Augustine says, "I became to myself a land of famine" (II.18).
24. Tangled hair is another trope from this section. Augustine says, "Who can unravel this most snarled, knotty tangle? It is disgusting, and I do not want to look at it or see it" (II.18). MacDonald mingles this image with tropes from the *Inferno* (Thaïs in the Malebolge) and Rossetti's "Body's Beauty" to inform Lilith's resuscitation scene by the hot stream. She says, "My poor hair!... How is it my hair is not tangled?" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 108).
25. For example, see MacDonald, *Lilith* 51, 55, 56, 74, 75, 81, 82, 158, 159, 161, 209, 210, 222, 224, 231, 232, 235, 246.
26. Early in the novel, the raven teaches this multilevel aspect of meaning to Mr. Vane in riddle. Tossing a

worm in the air, it transforms into a beautiful flying creature. The raven-sexton says, "It is well, surely, if it be to rise higher and grow larger!" MacDonald cannot resist offering, through the raven's beak, a critique of unimaginative bible teaching and preaching. He says, "If only the rest of the clergy understood it as well!" (MacDonald, *Lilith* 21)

27. Similarly, *Lilith's* contrasexual mindscape has an interesting connection with Augustine's allegorical treatment of the Hexameron. He says, "And just as within the human soul one faculty deliberates and takes decisions, while another must be submissive and obedient, so too was woman made physically subordinate to man. Though equal to him by nature in her rational mind and intelligence, with respect to bodily sexuality she was subjected to the male, even as the impulse to action must be submissive in order to conceive from the rational mind the sagacity to act aright" (XIII.32). Bonnie Gaarden explores this Jungian archetype in her essay "Cosmic and Psychological Redemption in *Lilith*," from *Lilith in a New Light*, 111-127. See also Edmund Cusick, "George MacDonald and Jung," *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, edited by William Raeper, Edinburgh University Press, 1990, 56-86.
28. The Forest and Bulika are informed by Dante's upper and lower region of hell, respectively. Sins of incontinence versus sins of deliberation. See Wilhelm, "Chapter 8" 124.
29. Lust and pride were introduced in Lilith's first appearance in the mist (MacDonald, *Lilith* 50).
30. Augustine says, "The wild beasts in this living soul will thus become good and gentle in their conduct, as you have commanded us to be: Be gentle in all you do, and you will be loved by everyone. The domestic animals will be good too, discovering that when they have eaten they do not suffer from excess, and when they have not eaten they feel none the worse. The snakes will be good, not dangerous and liable to hurt people but astute and wary, given to exploring the nature of this world of time to whatever degree is necessary that through created things eternity may be glimpsed and understood. These animals are the servants of reason and are truly alive when they are held back from fatally dissipating themselves, and tamed to goodness" (XIII.21).
31. This entire paragraph in *Lilith* has a strong resemblance to the description of the Alder-maiden from

Phantastes. Anodos calls her a “walking Death” (MacDonald, *Phantastes* 47). It also draws imagery from Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.”

32. It is noteworthy to recall that a “poet” (Shelley) is Mr. Raven’s earliest antecedent in Vane’s vision. See Koopman 238.

33. MacDonald invokes language from Heb. 4:12.

34. Augustine says, “You were with me, but I was not with you” (X.27).

35. For an inventory of the biblical allusions in *Lilith*, see Tim Martin, “A Check List of Biblical Allusions in *Lilith*,” *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 14, 1995, <https://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol14/iss1/8/>.

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