THE GRANDMOTHER MYTH: STRUCTURE AND SYMBOL

IN GEORGE MACDONALD'S CURDIE BOOKS

A Thesis

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by

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GEORGE MACDONALD CHRONOLOGY

1824  Born December 10, at Huntly, Aberdeenshire.
1832  Mother dies of tuberculosis.
1840-45 Student at Kings College, Aberdeen; spends 1842-43 term cataloging a private library in the North; M.A., April 1845.
1848-50 Theological student at Highbury College, London.
1850  Called to Arundel pastorate; severe illness begins in November.
1851  Marries Louisa Powell, March 8.
1853  Resigns from Arundel pulpit; moves to Manchester.
1855  First major work, Within and Without, published.
1858  Phantasies.
1863  David Elginbrod, a Scots novel.
1867  Dealings with the Fairies; Unspoken Sermons.
1871  At the Back of the North Wind.
1872  The Princess and the Goblin; Wilfrid Cumbermede. Sails for United States to begin lecture tour; return to England, May 1873.
1883  The Princess and Curdie.
1895  Lilith.
1905  Dies September 18.
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CHAPTER I

THE FAIRY TALE AS MYSTIC VISION

George MacDonald, a Scottish poet-philosopher and sometime minister, was a popular nineteenth-century novelist and fairy tale writer. Because of his ministerial training, his purpose, when he turned to writing, was to convey metaphysical truths. His own main truth was expressed in his final publication, *Lilith*, an adult fantasy, when he wrote that "When a man dreams his own dream, he is the sport of his dream; when Another gives it him, that Other is able to fulfill it."¹ MacDonald here touches upon a conflict each man must face in relation to his dreams, hopes, and aspirations for the present as well as for the future. When a man dreams his own dream--tries to create his own reality, superimposes his own order, or refuses to change his plans, then his dream may easily become a nightmare--even if the dream was for the good. But when a man relies on a higher power to give him his dream and to help him realize it, the dream and its outcome bode well; the nightmarish quality cannot remain. Love, death, and apparent chaos exist in the primary world, yet the chaos is only apparent, death only a step up to a new existence, love the constant which provides the order.

Two impulses dominate MacDonald's writings: the need to reaffirm that death was really only "more life"; and the desire to spread his belief in a God of love. MacDonald had great faith, yet his God was not bound by dogma, even though he himself was nominally a member of the Church of England. His conception of God is one of the threads which run through the fantasy tales, for each tale seems an attempt to explain his theological views through the use of symbol. In addition, using a symbolic form such as the fairy tale permitted MacDonald greater freedom in exploring spiritual possibilities because the fairy tale is not as strictly confined to the primary world as a realistic story is. Moreover, the fairy tale is a subtle teaching form because it operates on the subconscious to provide the reader with structures for his own fantasies, enabling him to deal with his own problems creatively.

I

George MacDonald was born on December 10, 1824, in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. He was proud of his Scottish heritage and often wore his tartan and kilt. Moreover, this pride carried over into his writing, for MacDonald's early fame was due to his novels chronicling Scottish life.


4 Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and His Wife (New York: The Dial Press, 1924), p. 19. Hereafter this book will be referred to as GM&W.

5 GM&W, pp. 76-77.
MacDonald was more than just a chronicler of Scottish tales, however, for this prolific writer produced work in nearly every genre and is credited by some with having invented at least one genre, "Romantic Theology." He was successful in his own day as a novelist and poet-philosopher, a preacher who employed literature as his pulpit when the regular pulpit was denied him. His life would appear tragic because so many of his children and his siblings died of tuberculosis at an early age; however, the many deaths which surrounded him only seemed to increase his faith that one day the partings would be over and that his family would be reunited in another life.

MacDonald's father was a tenant farmer; his mother, a member of the MacKay family which was prominent in medical and educational circles. In 1832, Mrs. MacDonald died of tuberculosis, the family scourge which carried off many members of both MacDonald's generation and the one which followed. A letter Mrs. MacDonald wrote to her mother-in-law seems of importance because of the light it sheds on Helen MacKay MacDonald's character. The letter in question concerns Baby George's weaning. Part of the letter reads:

I hope you will not be angry tho' I do not write a long letter. I am going to tell you something that will show you how little sense I have. Do you know I was almost angry on Saturday when your letter came to my dear G. about our dear little Boy--for I was very unwilling to do it--and I always thought I would have been able to give him three months at least. But O! my heart [was] very sore when I saw that you, my dear

husband, and Mrs. Ross—and indeed all the rest—were so earnest about it—that I was forced to begin that very morning. And he has not got anything from me since. But I cannot help my heart being very grieved for him yet . . .

This letter suggests a woman who was weak, perhaps, in bowing to the opinion of others on this matter, although it does not seem to merit the charge of "heartlessness" attached by Greville MacDonald to his grandmother's action. The situation is not clear, making it difficult to interpret Mrs. MacDonald's action, although it may be that she was not physically able to feed her son. It has been suggested that this event, coupled with his mother's early death, caused MacDonald a very severe trauma and that the mother figures in MacDonald's fantasy tales are attempts to resolve this early trauma. That he may be creating ideal mothers in the fairy tales is quite plausible, but to stop at this point might suggest that had MacDonald's mother lived, his fairy grandmother would never have come into existence. The weakness of character MacDonald's mother displays in the letter is of importance because it contrasts sharply with the mother figures created in the fairy tales, for each of those mothers is strong as well as loving. Moreover, it is the mothers who are most attuned to the cosmic dramas being unfolded; indeed, it is they who are the strongest symbols of Divine Order.

During his student days at King's College, Aberdeen (1840-45), MacDonald

7GM&W, p. 32.
8GM&W, p. 32.
wrote some poetry, casting himself at times in the role of Byronic hero
as he braved the elements or wandered in his tartan, an alien spirit.
Because of his temperament, MacDonald "lived in much real loneliness, his
poetic longings taking him far afield. The sea particularly called him
to share its turmoil and its peace, its mystic solace in rhythmic beat,
its kindred protest in evasion of control."\(^{10}\) His was not a complete
alienation, nor was it permanent. His later tales have an impressionistic
quality that suggests moments of unity with nature and with the force that
controls nature, indicating that MacDonald came to a resolution of this
crisis.

After receiving his M. A. in 1845, MacDonald decided to enter the min-
istry, even though he had from youth been uncomfortable with dogma and sys-
tematized religion. However, he enrolled in Highbury College, a London
Congregational theological college, where he remained from 1848 until 1850.
Although still plagued with doubts about his ability to be a good pastor,
MacDonald accepted the pastorate at Trinity Congregational Church, Arundel,
in October, 1850, and began his duties with the knowledge that he would
soon be able to marry Louisa Powell. November brought a renewal of his
recurrent lung illness, which forced him to refrain from preaching for
an extended period. In a letter to his father (November 15, 1850), Mac-
Donald expresses his frustration and hope in the face of his illness:
"It is somewhat discouraging to be thus laid aside at the beginning--but
the design of God in doing so will perhaps appear soon . . . . [and if

\(^{10}\) CMAW, p. 80.
not] There is a reason, and I at least shall be the better for it."\(^{11}\) This letter illustrates MacDonald's unwavering faith and his constant refrain: everything is working for an eventual good end.

MacDonald did not remain in Arundel long, for the leaders of that church had him ousted in 1853 because they questioned his orthodoxy. In April, 1851, MacDonald had written to his father about the people who comprised his "flock." In this letter he stated his major criticism of religion:

I firmly believe people have hitherto been a great deal too much taken up about doctrine and far too little about practice. The word doctrine, as used in the Bible, means touching of duty, not theory. . . . We are far too anxious to be definite and to have finished, well-polished, sharp-edged systems--forgetting that the more perfect a theory about the infinite, the surer it is to be wrong. . . . To no system would I subscribe."\(^{12}\)

These are strong words from a pastor, yet suggest MacDonald's mystical awareness, for like Blake, he feels constricted by system. By 1852, the people of Arundel formally charged MacDonald with unorthodoxy on two specific occasions. The first charge stated that in preaching a sermon from the text, "'He that doeth my will shall know of the doctrine' . . . he had expressed his belief that some provision was made for the heathen after death;"\(^{13}\) the second, that "he was tainted with German Theology."\(^{14}\) It is not difficult to prove MacDonald's unorthodoxy, for he records in

\(^{11}\text{GM\&W, p. 146.}\)
\(^{12}\text{GM\&W, p. 155.}\)
\(^{13}\text{GM\&W, p. 178.}\)
\(^{14}\text{GM\&W, p. 179.}\)
Weighed and Wanting (1882), that as a young child he "did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody; the kind of love I needed was the love that all men needed . . . a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men." 15 This attitude is the crux of MacDonald's theology and, as we shall see, is the most crucial theme in his fantasy tales.

MacDonald rejected most of the tenets of Calvinism, yet believed in a type of predestination, maintaining that "the smallest events are ordered for us, while yet in perfect consistency with the ordinary course of cause and effect in the world. I am strongly inclined to think that whatever has a moral effect of any kind on our minds, God manages for us—and even much more than this." 16 MacDonald's belief that God manages events is reflected in his fairy stories, for nearly every protagonist is told that he would not have experienced a certain event if it were not part of the plan for his life. In Phantastes, for example, the main character, Anodos, is told that "no one comes here but for some reason, either known to himself or to those who have charge of him," 17 by a woman who gives him shelter. MacDonald's imaginative world mirrors his conception of the real world. Both are ordered and controlled by a being or beings who seek to provide each individual with the experiences he needs in order to become good. MacDonald recognizes that there is evil in the world and that some individuals will refuse to understand the significance of

15 As quoted in GM&AW, p. 85.
these experiences—refuse to repent and be saved. In the two fairy tales dealt with here, The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie, MacDonald asserts that ultimately evil destroys itself. In addition, MacDonald suggests that the ultimate movement in our universe is towards the "great good" which lies at the heart of the hopeful message in his tales, and he gives his readers an example of evil circumstances working towards a good end in the development of the character Curdie Peterson in the two tales.

After he left Arundel, MacDonald turned to writing, his first major success a long poem, Within and Without, appearing in 1855. This was well received, as were most of his books. Following this success, he began to produce the Scottish novels upon which his nineteenth-century fame rested and the fantasy stories upon which his modern fame rests. The first of his fantasy tales was Phantastes, which appeared in 1858. This was followed by several children's tales, among them At the Back of the North Wind (1871), The Princess and the Goblin (1872), and The Princess and Curdie (1882). The first of these, At the Back of the North Wind, was MacDonald's most successful production. The Princess and the Goblin appeared at the height of his popularity (in 1872, he was asked to make a lecture tour of the United States), while The Princess and Curdie appeared as his popularity waned.

George MacDonald died in 1905.

II

To many, George MacDonald is only a footnote, a name mentioned in books on Lewis Carroll, or in connection with J.R.R. Tolkien and C. S.
Lewis, for he was a forerunner of their imaginative fictions. As his New York Times obituary indicates, he was a novelist of some repute in England and the United States, yet he is primarily known in the United States today for his fantasy tales, not his English and Scottish novels. With such masters as Dickens and Thackeray for contemporaries, it is understandable that his novels might be unknown, for MacDonald's aim was different; his was a mystic vision given its best expression in the creation of a secondary or imaginative world. MacDonald has been "rediscovered" several times because of his fantasy tales, and rightly so. Despite his tendency towards didacticism, MacDonald's fantasy tales have great charm and in his best moments strikingly convey his message of freedom, duty, and love.

MacDonald is always a storyteller, even though the underlying structure of each tale is a philosophical truth. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the two Curdie books, The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie. The present study will focus on these twin volumes, since they are representative of MacDonald's fantasy works as a whole and, in addition, mirror the change which seems to have occurred in his perception of his mission, for the contrast in tone between the two is striking. In addition, it seems most appropriate to concentrate on these two tales since they employ the same set of major characters, thus enabling some study of MacDonald's abilities in character development.

MacDonald's greatest strength lies in his ability to evoke images with impressionistic power. The strongest of his creations is the great-great-grandmother who dominates the action in these two tales (although she perpetrates little of it). She is a mystical figure, at once so old
as to be only a thin shadow and so young that she radiates light. Her appearance changes according to her mission, just as her earlier manifestations in the other tales change their appearances. In fact, this character is MacDonald's most recurrent motif; she appears in nearly every one of the fantasy tales. It is her development and meaning which determine the course of MacDonald's achievement, for it is through this character that he reveals his conception of God.

These two tales can be referred to as fairy tales since they occur in a secondary world and display the magical traits of traditional fairy tales. Tolkien includes the MacDonald fantasies as a group among those stories which meet the criteria for fairy tales as defined in his essay "On Fairy Stories." In this essay, Tolkien defines the fairy story as "one which touches on or uses Faërie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy" (p. 10) and excludes those tales that are represented as dreams. Thus Tolkien excludes the *Alice* books and even many of the stories in such anthologies as Lang's fairy books, because they make no mention of Faërie; in essence, they are more in the

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18 In his essay "On Fairy Stories," from Tree and Leaf, reprinted in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1966), pp. 3-84, J.R.R. Tolkien describes the taller of fairy stories as a "sub-creator." This sub-creator "makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true'; it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather, art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the abortive little Secondary World from outside" (p. 37). The Secondary World exists in the tale itself, but only so long as we readers accept its reality--as long as the teller compels us to accept it as real. Primary World refers to our everyday world, as well as any thought or experience that sheds doubt on the reality of the created, Secondary World, e.g., suggesting that a story is really only a dream.
realm of the folk tale or pure fantasy.

These two books meet a further criterion mentioned by Tolkien because they are represented as true stories. As Tolkien says, the fairy story "should be presented as 'true.' . . . since the fairy-story deals with 'marvels,' it cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a figment or an illusion" (p. 14). It is thus necessary for a fairy tale writer to create a secondary world which is believable and which becomes so real to his readers that for a moment it is possible for them to accept that world as real. MacDonald's children's tales, apart from the ambiguities in At the Back of the North Wind, are all successfully presented as real events occurring in a magical realm. In the Curdie books, that realm is the kingdom governed by Princess Irene's father. It has no name because it functions as an Every-nation. This kingdom is much like one in our own world as far as institutions and morality are concerned, but the physical laws are not quite the same, for beings exist there that are not normally seen in the real world. If we, as readers, accept the premises of the fairy tale, then we can accept the fairy grandmother or Irene's great-great-grandmother as a real being in her own world, even if she is extra-human within that context.

Tolkien further states that

The magic of Faërie is not an end in itself; its virtue is in its operations; among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires. One of these desires is to survey the depths of space and time. Another is . . . to hold communion with other living things. A story may thus deal with the satisfaction of these desires, with or without the operation of either machine or magic, and in proportion as it succeeds, it will approach the quality and have the flavor of fairy-story. (13)
Fairy stories plumb the depths of time and space in a symbolic fashion, as do all MacDonald's tales. Moreover, this definition suggests that exploration of subconscious reality and thought processes is inherent in the very nature of the fairy tale. Because it employs a symbolic mode, the fairy tale provides a form through which to perceive literal events or by which to embody abstract concepts such as evil, God, or love, that otherwise might be too terrifying, unbelievable, or difficult to acknowledge. Moreover, it is a means by which to explore the unity possible between man and nature. In the fairy tale, in the mythic legend, man can be transmuted into animal; Narcissus can become a flower; the prince can become a frog and then a prince again. The fairy story is thus a medium of perception, not merely a record of perception.

Tolkien suggests that fairy stories have three faces or tendencies, the first of which is MacDonald's. The fairy tale may have

the Mystical [face] towards the Supernatural;
the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man. The essential face of Faërie is the middle one, the Magical . . . . it [fairy tale] may (but not so easily) be made a vehicle of Mystery. This at least is what George MacDonald attempted, achieving stories of great power and beauty when he succeeded, as in The Golden Key (which he called a fairy-tale); and even when he partially failed, as in Lilith (which he called a romance).19

MacDonald's realm was the mystical, as is apparent in each of his fantasy tales. Moreover, MacDonald attempted to step outside his own time into what must, for lack of a better title, be labelled cosmic time. In this attempt, he was following a further characteristic of fairy tales, for

Tolkien says that they "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (p. 32).

Like Blake, whom he read, MacDonald attempts to share a mystic vision with his readers, yet MacDonald's vision, perhaps because of the medium, seems more easily comprehensible. MacDonald's mystic vision led him to people the world with fairies and extraordinary beings, as well as to endow the "common" things of life, such as the rose or hyacinth, with a significance beyond mere beauty. It is this ability to suggest the wonder in these essential things that gives MacDonald's best passages strength. It is these passages, moreover, which, for the sensitive reader, cause roses and moonlight to take on a new meaning, a mystical significance—at least while one is under MacDonald's spell.

MacDonald's attempt appears to be not only to explain his own vision, but to remind us that there are many things in life which cannot really be explained; or which, when explained, are not to be understood because, like Curdie in the first book, we are not mature enough to comprehend their true meaning. Thus, Curdie at first does not see the little princess's grandmother, but when he permits himself to believe, she becomes visible to him. Moreover, the old Princess must appear to different men in different forms because they will only believe a certain perception of her. So it is that not all men are able to perceive truth in the same fashion, nor are all reached by the same speaker of truth at the same time. It is probable that MacDonald's acute awareness of these differences in perception caused him to write in so many different genres. He could reach some men best through his poetry, some through his novels,
some through his sermons. In the case of the Curdie books, he probably felt that fairy stories were a good medium through which to communicate his message to children.

The text which lies at the center of MacDonald's tales is found in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." MacDonald's message is that everything, even things that appear evil, is leading toward some great future good. As this text indicates, however, there are qualifications. It is for those who love God that this future good exists; those who will not repent and love God cannot rightfully expect this good to come to them. MacDonald hoped that everyone would eventually repent, and even developed a theory of spiritual evolution in which men moved from one state of being (either up or down the Chain of Being) to another until they finally repented and could move up to the highest state. For some beings, like Lina and the Uglies in The Princess and Curdie, this process involved taking a hideous form and then returning to work among men until they had learned enough to move up. Although this "evolutionary" theory is unconventional for a believing Protestant, MacDonald's belief that our universe ultimately tends towards good and is ordered by forces which, within limits, both propel beings towards that final good, yet permit them freedom of action, is not different from conventional theology. He teaches a conventional morality and emphasizes Christianity as a way of life, not merely a set of beliefs. As he had written his father (see p. 6 above), "people have hitherto been a great deal too much taken up about doctrine and far too little about practice. The word doctrine, as
used in the Bible, means touching of duty, not theory."²⁰ Curdie and Princess Irene, in the two tales, both believe in great-great-grandmother, but MacDonald says, this is not enough: they must now act on that faith.

MacDonald's view of our universe is thus different from what most of us perceive, for it is very difficult to conceive that all the evil rampant in our own world might eventually lead to good. And yet, this is what Christianity teaches. MacDonald's principle is conventionally Christian at root, even though his view of the universe and his belief in the coming good did not blind him to the pain and suffering caused by the infamous "two Englands." He was painfully aware of what poverty could mean for a family since his own family had been decimated by a tubercular disease resulting from their drafty, tiny crofters' quarters. He knew what it was to suffer, yet he never gave up hope. He described London realistically in At the Back of the North Wind, depicting its horror in almost Dickensian terms. One even suspects that his evil city, Gwyntystorm, described in The Princess and Curdie, may be a symbolic representation of the same evils he saw in both London and the manufacturing towns to the north, such as Manchester or Edinburgh. MacDonald does not gloss over the suffering in human life, even in his children's fiction. Instead, he challenges his readers to accept evil as part of the world, and to look beyond it. He teaches his readers that there is more to our world than the things we can touch or immediately see, challenging us to look beyond our five senses.

The Curdie books are at once political satire, social satire, and cos-
mic drama. They provided MacDonald with an outlet for his creativity as he developed an imaginary kingdom that mirrors the real world—for the people and politics ring true—and comments upon the limitations inherent in finite perception. Diamond's London in At the Back of the North Wind is replaced by Gwyntystorm and the goblin caves; North Wind's country by the great-grandmother's tower. Evil assumes various shapes, as does good, again mirroring real life, for it is very difficult to tell what lies beyond the outward surface. In the second of these tales, the gift to see beyond the surface is granted to Curdie, who is able to use it wisely because he has come to trust great-grandmother: it is the gift of perception.
CHAPTER II
WISE WOMEN AND GOBLINS

The Princess and the Goblin appeared in 1872, one year after MacDon-
ald's most successful children's tale, At the Back of the North Wind. One
of the major differences between these two stories is that The Princess
and the Goblin marks the first time in the longer fairy tales that Mac-
Donald does not move his characters from the real world to an imaginary
world. Instead, this story and its companion, The Princess and Curdie,
are both set entirely in a mythical kingdom. While this kingdom is not
called Faerie, it displays some of the characteristics one associates with
that realm, as internal human conflicts are externalized in the forms of
a magical great-great-grandmother and goblins. These two forces symbolize
the struggle between good and evil within an individual. In addition, one
senses that MacDonald is also dealing with the cosmic struggle between
good and evil, with the grandmother representing God in this scheme, while
the goblins represent the legions of Satan. Moreover, the grandmother oc-
cupies a "heavenly" position since her sphere in this tale is a tower,
while the goblins occupy a "fallen" position, inhabiting caves beneath
the surface of the earth. Between these two, as between heaven and hell,
lies the realm of the human beings of the tale. As usual, the realm of
the humans is the battleground, as they are caught between the two op-
posing forces.

17
The Princess and the Goblin takes place in the countryside, The Princess and Curdie in the capital city, Gwyntystorm. One suspects that there is a definite city-country tension involved in the two tales and further, that both the setting and choice of representatives for evil in each tale (goblins in one, men in the second) are related to MacDonald's emotional response to the countryside. Since MacDonald had been raised on a farm and always seemed disturbed by the sights he found within the city, one senses that he may have intended to show the dehumanizing effect of the city by depicting the men in the second book as first cousins to the goblins in the first book. Certainly, reading these books sequentially, one retains the image of the goblins while reading of the men of Gwyntystorm, finding that image intensified the closer the book comes to its climax. In both cases, the representatives of evil destroy themselves because they are self-centered, have a deformed sense of morality, and are consequently, unable to see what would really be most beneficial to their cause.

I

MacDonald often employed a setting reminiscent of the Highlands in his native Scotland, as if it were a more noble or more enchanted place than any other on earth. "The Carasoyn," for example, is an autobiographical fairy tale concerning a MacDonald-like character named Colin who leaves his native Scottish hills to study in the city. He later travels to Devonshire with his wife, a changeling named Fairy, only to be plagued by the same tribe of Scottish fairies from whom he had won his wife, for
they had been banished from their homeland.¹ The *Curdie* books both employ a Scotland-like setting, for the kingdom ruled by Princess Irene’s father is very hilly, much like MacDonald’s beloved Scotland. In fact, the ac-
tion of *The Princess and the Goblin* takes place on one of these “Scottish”
mountains, for Princess Irene, the heroine of the tale, resides in a farm-
house-castle half-way up one of the mountains in the kingdom.

At the opening of the story, the little princess is nearly nine years old, but has never seen a night sky because the area is supposedly infested with goblins who are enemies of the “sun” people, and particularly of the royal family. This enmity is only natural, for MacDonald here employs familiar light-good, dark-evil correspondences and the goblins are inhab-
itants of the darkness while the royal family lives in the light. One day
Princess Irene becomes so depressed that she thinks it might be nice to
“go out and get thoroughly wet, and catch a particularly nice cold.”²
This is a self-destructive attitude, and since to yield to self-destruction
would be to bend to the evil nature within herself (i.e., become a goblin),
the author presents an alternative, setting up the good vs. evil tension
in the tale. Instead of going out to catch cold, the little princess finds
an old wormeaten stairway, which she climbs until she reaches three doors.
Behind one of the doors, the princess finds an old lady sitting at a spin-
ning wheel. The old woman comforts the little girl and tells her that she

¹*In The Complete Fairy Tales of George MacDonald* (New York: Schocken
Books, 1977), pp. 122-66. Other tales with a Scotland-like setting in-
clude “The Shadows,” “Little Daylight,” “Cross Purposes,” and *Lilith.*
Moreover, MacDonald wrote several Scottish romances.

p. 16. All further references to this book in this chapter will be made
within the text.
also is a Princess Irene; moreover, she is the little princess's great-great-grandmother. The great-grandmother explains that she has been watching over the little princess for a long time, but has never before felt it necessary to make her presence known. The old Princess dries Irene's tears, tells her that she will see her again, then sends her back to her nursery, suggesting that yes, she should tell her nurse exactly what took place. Irene tells her nurse, Lootie, all that happened to her that afternoon, but predictably, the nurse does not believe a word.

Belief and trust are both important themes in these tales, for each of the child heroes experiences unbelief. When the princess tells Lootie and Curdie, a young miner, about her great-great-grandmother, she is not believed; when Curdie later tries to warn the soldiers guarding Princess Irene about the goblins, he is not believed. Still, both have told the truth. Moreover, the old Princess requires belief, as a god does, even though she may not always show herself to the one seeking her. It is the princess's belief in her grandmother that allows her to see the old-young grandmother in her more beautiful forms, and it is her belief that enables her to use the magic thread later given her by grandmother to save her from danger.

In conjunction with trust, honesty is presented as a primary good. As we have seen, one may not always be believed when he or she tells the truth, yet one is still taught that telling the truth, not telling lies, is the preferred behavior. This is especially true for children, and it is undoubtedly confusing when a child first realizes that what he has been taught and what is the practice in the world are two different things. Irene discovers this fact whenever she mentions her great-grandmother,
and finally rebels, telling her nurse that "When I tell you the truth, Lootie ... you say to me 'Don't tell stories': it seems I must tell stories before you will believe me" (p. 170).

Several days after her first visit with the great-great-grandmother, the princess and Lootie spend a particularly beautiful day climbing the mountain. Suddenly, Lootie realizes that it is nearly dark and panicks, afraid that she will lose her job if the king discovers that she and the princess were out after dark, since the first rule of the house is never to let the princess out at night (for fear of goblins). Lootie and the princess rush down the mountain, yet Lootie becomes so frightened that she loses the way. Finally, they hear a voice singing "Ring! dod! bang!/ Go the hammers' clang" (p. 38), then find that the voice belongs to a young miner, Curdie Peterson. He agrees to escort the two down the mountain. The princess promises Curdie a kiss as his reward, but Lootie whisks her into the farmhouse-castle so quickly that she is unable, at that point, to keep her promise. Lootie is angered at her own negligence, deciding that her carelessness has doubled the danger, because she feels she must protect the princess from both the goblins and Curdie. Since both Curdie and Irene are on the edge of adolescence, one can assume that Lootie feared her ward might fall in love with a commoner.

Curdie returns home but does not mention his adventure for fear the nurse might get into trouble. He then goes to bed, but is awakened during the night by strange noises, which he discovers issue from goblins who have congregated under his window. Curdie assumes that their appearance may have something to do with the princess, so he decides to watch them whenever he has a chance, to see if they are plotting against her. The
next evening Curdie remains in the mine after everyone has left, with the excuse that he is trying to earn extra money to buy his mother a present, but his real motive is to spy on the goblins secretly. This is only the first of several evenings spent spying on the goblins, for Curdie is quite successful in gathering information.

The first night, Curdie works in a part of the mine where goblin tapping had been heard, but where the miners were no longer digging. While taking his supper break, Curdie discovers that he is just on the other side of the rock wall from a goblin home. Since the goblins are moving, Curdie loosens enough stones to permit him access to the goblin "house" and enable him to follow the goblins wherever they go. While he is listening to the goblins, he learns two things: that the goblins are preparing some evil against the miners and that the goblins have one weak point in their rock-hard bodies--their feet. The miners had known that goblin heads and upper bodies were rock-hard, and that their picks were of no use against them, so the miners had assumed that the goblin bodies were universally hard, making them physically invincible. Curdie discovers that they are vulnerable, just as human beings are. This point of vulnerability is a carry-over from the time when these goblins were men. MacDonald here suggests that evil always has a vulnerable spot, just as do the humans who fight it. In terms of his "evolutionary" scheme, this point of humanity indicates that the goblins have not yet become irrevocably unrepentant, although it suggests that they have almost completed the task of hardening themselves against God. The miners had found one useful weapon in their fight against the goblins--rhymes. The goblins were unable to make rhymes, perhaps because they were far removed from all emotion except hate (as sug-
gested by their hard physique and their speech). Moreover, they became so irritated upon hearing rhymes that they would flee. The miners, on the other hand, prided themselves on their ability to make rhymes, suggesting that they were more free in acknowledging and expressing their emotions. Curdie's information gives the miners a permanent weapon against the goblins. After breaking a hole in the wall, Curdie follows two of the goblins to the council hall, where he learns more of their plans. Curdie discovers that they have two plans for taking "a thorough revenge" (p. 66) on the people who live in the sun. He is unable to learn the nature of the first plan, but does learn that the second, or contingency plan, is to inundate the mine with water.

The princess, meanwhile, spends a good deal of time playing on the mountain, yet she does not forget that she still owes Curdie a kiss. This promised kiss is a debt Irene owes to one who is "below her station." Lootie suggests that such a promise does not matter; such a debt need not be repaid. The nurse's attitude is a typical one,\(^3\) for she does not recognize Curdie as a human being; he is only a miner boy. In the same way, workers or "the poor" have often been referred to en masse, or in terms of machinery or animals. In the princess's rejection of Lootie's counsel on this matter, MacDonald reaffirms his contention that there should be no barriers between human beings.

When the king visits, the little princess tells him about her great-grandmother. He responds with a look she cannot understand, causing her

\(^3\) Wolff (p. 168) says that Lootie's attitude is typical of the servant class at the time and that MacDonald may be striking out against that attitude here.
to conclude that "it must all be a dream" (p. 76). At that moment a white pigeon appears; the princess apparently concludes that her grandmother has sent it, for she immediately asks her father to go with her to find her grandmother. One must assume that the old woman sent the pigeon to counteract the influence of the king, for he does not really know what he believes about the reality of the grandmother (as we learn in the sequel). Like most little girls, the princess believes her father to be more knowledgeable than anyone in the world. Thus, she doubts her great-grandmother's existence because he doubts it. The grandmother has had to make contact to protect her charge, for if the princess stops believing, the magic will not work and grandmother's plan to save her from the goblins will be of no avail. Similarly, gods or kings must make contact with their people for order to be maintained.

The king has also heard that the princess and Lootie were out late one evening; he talks to Irene about it, then scolds Lootie. Before he leaves that evening, the king sets a guard to watch for the goblins. His reaction is that of any good father who seeks to protect his child from harm, yet in the end, the child must act to protect herself or she will never grow. In this respect, then, MacDonald's tale depicts the maturing of a child, as he further suggests in a later chapter, "Irene behaves like a Princess." In that chapter, the little princess finally takes responsibility for her actions and also asserts her ability, or right, to be believed even though she is only nine. Indeed, the servants are all surprised at her action, yet they cannot argue its correctness. Irene is no longer a baby; she is a rational creature who needs to prove her ability to cope with the situations one faces in life. She has a good deal of testing to
go through before she reaches this plateau, however.

Several weeks after her father's visit, Princess Irene pricks her thumb on a brooch. Her hand swells and she experiences a great deal of pain, so she is put to bed very early. During the night she awakens and, following the moonlight, once again finds herself in her great-grandmother's presence. When the princess asks why she could not find her grandmother once before when she went looking for her, the old woman answers, "you would have found me sooner if you hadn't come to think I was a dream. I will give you one reason though why you couldn't find me. I didn't want you to find me" (p. 81). Why hadn't the old Princess let Irene see her? One finds that this situation occurs several times in the course of these tales, for example, in the interim period between the last battle and the destruction of Gwyntystorm at the end of The Princess and Curdie. The old Princess often gives comfort and aid, but seldom concrete advice; she does not directly meddle in human affairs in The Princess and the Goblin. Once again, this action seems parent-like, as if the old Princess occasionally withheld her presence from the seeker because she knew that in the end, it would not be in her charge's best interests to see her. Rather, her charges, if they are to mature spiritually as well as psychologically and physically, must have their faith tested. If the charge continues to seek the grandmother, even after failing to find her, her faith, at least theoretically, will be strengthened.

Great-great-grandmother examines Irene's swelled thumb, then takes her into the bedroom. Once there, grandmother opens a small casket filled with an ointment that smells of roses and lilies, then rubs some of the ointment on Irene's hand, curing her. The two go to sleep, but not before
grandmother says, "The only question is whether you will believe I am anywhere—whether you will believe I am anything but a dream. You may be sure I will do all I can to help you to come. But it will rest with yourself, after all. On the night of next Friday, you must come to me" (p. 86). This episode strengthens the suggestion that the old woman is the god of this universe. She has the ability to heal, as a god does; the twin association of roses and lilies recalls their use in Christian symbolism; and she requires faith even though she knows it will be difficult to believe in her when one is out of her presence. Moreover, the old Princess has the ability to work on the human mind either to permit herself to be seen or not to be seen. This also works in the reverse: the human can refuse to acknowledge that he sees or has seen the Princess.

The Friday finally comes, causing the little princess great excitement. At late twilight, however, she sees a cat-like goblin creature which so frightens her that she rushes outside and up the mountain instead of up the stair to her grandmother's room. The little princess does not yet have enough faith. The grandmother, like God, does not stop trying to reach the little princess, however. As soon as the little princess becomes lost, she notices "a great silvery globe . . . hanging in the air" (p. 98), which is, of course, her great-grandmother's globe, for light is one of her symbols. Irene follows the light to her great-grandmother's chambers. The princess discovers her great-grandmother in her bedroom, where she has prepared a fire for her. This is no ordinary fire, as the princess finds "that what she had taken for a huge bouquet of red roses on a low stand against the wall was in fact a fire which burned in the shapes of the loveliest and reddest roses, glowing gorgeously between
the heads and wings of two cherubs of shining silver" (p. 101). The old
woman looks twenty-three this evening, dressed in a pale blue dress. Again,
her ability to change her shape or appearance suggests her god-like charac-
ter as well as attesting to her magical nature, for in this tale she seems
more magical than mystical. The little princess is quite muddy and stains
the grandmother's dress, yet it does not remain muddy, for she passes one
of her fire roses over her dress and the stains disappear. The old woman
gives the princess a ring which is attached to a special thread that she
has been spinning, instructing the princess to put the ring under her pil-
low and follow the thread whenever she is in danger. The thread and ring
are talismans, as in every good fairy tale, yet they are also links to the
controlling figure of this universe. They are gifts of faith.

Curdie, meanwhile, has remained vigilant in the mines. One night he
finds that the goblin creatures have moved his pick, causing him to lose
his way and bringing him to the goblin palace. Curdie listens to the gob-
lins' conversation for a time, then falls into the apartment and is even-
tually captured and imprisoned in a crevice in the wall. While a prisoner,
Curdie makes up several rhymes to torment his goblin captors. These rhymes
so infuriate the goblins that they reveal the fact that they are cannibals.
The goblin queen at first expresses the desire to eat Curdie, but then
decides that instead, he should be fed to their "pets," weird and wonder-
ful creatures, so that she can watch the fun as they destroy the invader.

The next morning, Irene becomes frightened, puts her fire-opal ring
under her pillow and begins to follow the thread just as her grandmother
had told her to do. It leads her to the caves and up to the very hole
where Curdie is imprisoned, although it takes her a good deal of time to
discover and free Curdie. The two follow the thread out of the mountain despite Curdie's incredulity. When they get out of the mountain, the princess tries to make Curdie believe her story, but he cannot see the thread. She tells him, "Then you must believe without seeing" (p. 151), which echoes John 20:29: "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Curdie has not seen the old Princess, and he will not see her until he begins to believe that she exists. His inability to see is illustrated when, after climbing out of the mountain, Curdie and Irene follow the thread up to the grandmother's bedroom. Princess Irene converses with the old woman; Curdie only sees "a tub, and a heap of straw, and a withered apple, and a ray of sunlight" (p. 155). Like Lootie or the king, Curdie would not believe that he saw the old Princess even if she permitted him to, for his heart is not yet right. Curdie thinks that the little princess is playing a game with him, becomes miffed, and leaves.

Things soon come to a head as Curdie, hurrying to the farmhouse to warn the soldiers that the goblins mean to kidnap the princess and marry her to the goblin prince, is wounded with an arrow, then turns feverish, for his warning is not believed. At length, the old grandmother rubs some of her ointment on his wound, curing him just in time to lead the fight against the goblins who have come to capture the princess. The goblins are routed, but the princess is nowhere to be found. Just as Curdie has determined to follow them into their caves, he feels the touch of Irene's thread and follows it to his own house, where the princess had been led at the first sign of danger.

The next day the king arrives to find that his daughter is missing
and his household is in chaos. Meanwhile, the miners, alerted by Curdie about the pending inundation, shore up the weak places in the mine in an effort to stave off disaster. In the evening they return home, noting that a violent storm has been raging all day. This storm continues, making it impossible for Peter and Curdie to take the little princess home. By the time they return her to the farmhouse-castle the next morning, everyone is grieving for her. The king, therefore, is overjoyed to have his daughter returned safely. The princess tells her father of the promised kiss and so is finally able to redeem her debt. That evening a feast is held in celebration, but it is interrupted by the princess who, following her thread, warns the household of danger. The goblins had set the waters free, but since the miners had strengthened the weak places, the water had nowhere to go except through the hole in the castle basement. The household is able to flee safely, but not so the goblins, all of whom are drowned. The princess and her father leave for the capital, while Curdie, although offered a position by the king, stays home with his mother and father.

The tale ends happily, for right has triumphed and peace returned to the mountain. The grandmother, whose name "Irene" means "peace," is watching over all.

II

In The Princess and the Goblin, MacDonald's most significant figure makes her debut as a central character; this is, of course, the grandmother, the old woman with the spinning wheel or spindle—the ultimate wise woman. In Phantastes, the wise woman assumes several forms, yet as in "The Cara-
soyn," "The Golden Key," and these two Curdie books, she is most striking when portrayed as a grandmother. The old Princess or great-great-grandmother in the Curdie books is another manifestation of the fairy grandmother, or if one wishes (and most do), the fairy godmother. But to suggest that the fairy grandmother is simply the fairy godmother with a new appellation is to miss her significance in MacDonald's scheme of the universe. MacDonald had early said that he did not want to believe in a God who would not love everyone (see p. 7 above). What better image to convey his conception of God than to create a kingdom (universe) where the overseer is female? His universe is superficially conventional, for its major symbols are those of hearth and home, suggesting the all-important Victorian family as well as the religious concept of the cosmic family. Thus he emphasizes the conventional family--God and his children--while at the same time suggesting what had (has) to be a great heresy: God the Mother, not God the Father. Supposedly, the maternal image seemed to do away with the Judge or Jehovah, the God of Wrath, but, we find later, not completely, for just as fathers must punish naughty children, just as gods must punish evil beings, mothers must sometimes punish their children.

In the MacDonald scheme, the old Princess is suggestive of the Christian God, yet in the first book, the identification is vague. She has the controlling power of a god, the ordering impulse of a given universe or kingdom. In The Princess and the Goblin, MacDonald portrays her as a benevolent old woman with magical powers who is able to be both old and young, always loving and kind, for in this tale, he emphasizes the great love of God. The old Princess's powers are not weakened by unbelief for she can appear to the little princess at the same time that she hides her-
self from Curdie. Her character "makes" these tales, yet it is the most problematic to deal with. She is, perhaps, necessarily vague; if MacDonald were attempting to embody God in this figure, he could not so define her as to limit the omnipotence or spirituality of the being he was representing. Moreover, MacDonald synthesizes folk tale elements and "pagan" tradition with Christian elements to create this complex being. After reading the Curdie books, one has an idea how the grandmother works, but her complete role is not clear. She has existed for some time, yet she says she is still growing. In The Princess and the Goblin, the great-grandmother is primarily a goddess of hearth and home, a representative of love almost exclusively. In the second tale, The Princess and Curdie, her function changes—she becomes a judge.

As the "god" of this universe, grandmother is also a mystical being, difficult to believe in, yet demanding faith. In addition, she manifests herself in different forms, from the withered old shadow self that Curdie first sees to the beauty dressed in a pale blue gown seated behind her spinning wheel which rotates in a blaze of blue lights (reminding one of Ezekiel), yet she is also capable of remaining unseen, as the little princess discovers the first time she takes Curdie to see her great-grandmother: he sees only straw, an apple, and a shaft of sunlight. He is not yet ready to see and believe. He is not yet ready for a mystical vision.

The great-great-grandmother, or old Princess Irene, is representative of the typical, ideal MacDonald woman. She is tall, has smooth, white skin, wise eyes, and very long, loosely fixed hair; her clothing is simple, yet beautiful; her beauty is natural. Moreover, she represents a com-
plexity of symbols, including both mother earth, who provides comfort and healing, and father sky, who provides spiritual lessons. Grandmother is magical and mysterious, always wise, always expecting the best of her children. On the simplest level, she symbolizes mother love, or more broadly, parental love, for like a good parent, she guides her children toward maturity, enabling them to learn to make decisions and to act upon those decisions. She also protects her children. The princess first meets grandmother during a moment of gloom when she thinks about doing a destructive, rather than a constructive thing; similarly, the parent attempts to channel the child's energies toward constructive, not destructive behavior. Grandmother can heal a spindle prick or an arrow wound with a magic ointment; mother can make pain disappear with a kiss. Grandmother is not over-protective, however. The little princess must suffer injustice; Curdie must suffer pain and imprisonment, for it is only through these trials that the children are able to mature. Successfully overcoming one obstacle gives the child confidence and assurance. One sees this process at work in Princess Irene's case, for in a chapter already alluded to, "Irene behaves like a Princess," the nine-year-old girl asserts a mature feeling, that adherence to truth has greater priority than obedience, or "respect for elders." In other words, she maintains that truth is not the perquisite of adulthood, but that a child may be as correct as an adult; more importantly, however, the little princess learns that she can assert herself without being domineering or unkind. In fact, it is partially this ability which permits one to be a princess in the MacDonald scheme.
As the little princess grows to know her great-great-grandmother, and to believe more certainly in her existence, the old woman's physical appearance changes. The first time Princess Irene meets her grandmother in *The Princess and the Goblin*, she perceives a "very old lady who sat spinning" and who spoke with an "old and rather shaky voice" (p. 19). The grandmother's appearance is never completely that of an old woman, however, for her hair "hung loose far down and all over her back" (p. 19) like a young girl's, even though it is white. Her face, also, is very smooth and white skinned, displaying no age spots; still, "her eyes looked so wise that you could not have helped seeing she must be very old" (p. 19). Moreover, when she stands, the little princess is surprised "to see how straight and tall she was, for, although she was so old, she didn't stoop a bit" (p. 20). She is an old-young figure, a characterization which fits in interestingly with her dominant symbol, the moon or globe.

In some respects, the great-grandmother is a moon goddess, for she seems to wax and wane according to the amount of belief a character shows in her, even though in reality she remains constant in power. Moreover, she works at her spinning only so long as the moon shines upon her wheel (p. 83), suggesting that she draws magical power from the moon. In respect to her own globe-moon, which is able to shine through the solid walls of her tower, the grandmother tells the little princess that "if that light were to go out you would fancy yourself lying in a bare garret, on a heap of old straw, and would not see one of the pleasant things round about you all the time" (p. 85). The light of the globe seems to be the light of inspiration, perhaps even that of poetic or creative imagination.
The association between grandmother and the moon is strengthened by references to her hair, which is called white or silver, but always moon-light colored. One such description occurs during Irene's second interview with the grandmother. The second time Irene sees her grandmother, she finds her appearance much like that of the first interview, for she wears the same "black dress with the white lace, and her silvery hair mingling with the moonlight, so that you could not have told which was which" (p. 81). One suspects that MacDonald here is calling upon the traditional moon-female association, as he does in two fairy tales, "Little Daylight," and "The Day Boy and the Night Girl." In fact, the moon-mother association holds true for most of his tales, for his moon-goddess is the mother of light, mother of artistic creativity, mother of human feelings.

When Curdie and the princess reach grandmother's rooms after making their way out of the mines, the princess finds grandmother in her bedroom. This time, Irene sees her grandmother "dressed in white . . . and looking if possible more lovely than ever" (p. 153). After Curdie has made his exit (without seeing grandmother), the old Princess tells Irene that once again she had kept herself from being seen, explaining in a play on an old cliché: "Seeing is not believing--it is only seeing" (p. 156). Once again MacDonald reminds us that Christianity teaches faith first. The old Princess then makes a rather odd statement, saying that "If I had been [in the workroom], Curdie would have seen me well enough" (p. 157). One immediately wonders if this statement suggests that the grandmother's powers are not as strong as we had been led to believe, or if it is an allusion to some property of the three rooms themselves. We are told that grandmother only stays in her workroom while the moon is
shining, but we are not told why. As suggested above, the old Princess may in fact draw energy from the moon, yet this would seem to weaken her god-like role. In fact, it seems that MacDonald was purposely ambiguous on this point; the old Princess's character and meaning are suggested, but not fully drawn in The Princess and the Goblin.

In the old Princess's bedroom, Irene finds another rose-fire, but this time it is made "of red roses mingled with white" (p. 153). She is not to touch this fire for the old Princess had earlier told her that she has not yet reached a state in which the fire would not hurt her. Instead, she is led to a bath. When she looks into the bath, Irene sees "no bottom, but the stars shining miles away, as it seemed, in a great blue gulf" (p. 158). The descriptions of the bath suggest the cosmos or whatever infinity would be like if one could see it; indeed, in this book, the grandmother's bedroom is the home of magic and mystery. It is significant that the grandmother is dressed in white that evening, for she is about to perform Irene's "baptism." Irene is put into the bath and finds that "When she opened her eyes, she saw nothing but a strange lovely blue over and beneath and all about her. . . . And from somewhere came the voice of the lady, singing a strange and sweet song, of which she could distinguish every word; but of the sense she had only a feeling--no understanding" (p. 158). Princess Irene's bath seems to be a baptism into the old Princess's fold, for in adults at least, baptism in the church is an outward profession of faith. Thus, Irene's bath accompanies her strengthened belief in great-great-grandmother, and she finds that "When she stood up on the floor she felt as if she had been made over again" (p. 159).
At the end of the tale, Curdie and his parents walk home from the now-flooded castle guided by a light from great-grandmother’s tower. Great-grandmother’s omnipresence and vigilance add to the serenity of the tale, for one is certain that she is watching over the kingdom and that all will be well. Thus, MacDonald, through the use of this symbol, reasserts his belief that God is also ever vigilant and that eventually all things will turn out for the good. Great-great-grandmother is successful against her enemies, just as a god, or a human being for that matter, can be successful against his enemies, even if some of them are parts of himself.

The evil antagonists in the tale, the goblins, provide a fitting contrast to the old Princess and her associates, because they are motivated by greed and hatred, while her motivating forces are love and selflessness. Moreover, the religious allegory is strengthened by setting the goblins in opposition to the old Princess—the kingdom of darkness vs. the kingdom of light—since goblins, like witches and trolls, have long been considered associates of the devil. In fact, one of Curdie’s rhymes suggests that the goblins have a major spiritual problem:

Once there was a goblin
Living in a hole;
Busy he was cobblin'
A shoe without a sole.

By came a birdie;
"Goblin, what do you do?"
"Cobble at a sturdie
Upper leather shoe."

"What's the good o' that sir?"
Said the little bird.
"Why it's very pat, sir--
Plain without a word.
"Where 'tis all a hole, sir,  
Never can be holes;  
Why should their shoes have soles, sir,  
When they've got no souls?" (pp. 130-31)

Why indeed? This is, perhaps, the crux of the difference in tone between The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie, for even though the goblins are degenerated from a humanoid stock, they are presumed to be un-human whereas the villains in the later book are completely human. The goblins do not have souls. Thus, while they act much like human beings, for they have a court, a king and queen, a strong family structure, there is no horror at their destruction, no anger at Curdie for stomping their feet or removing her Majesty's shoe to reveal--horror of horrors--toes! The goblins are not to be sympathized with. MacDonald is successful in keeping his readers from sympathizing with the goblins in this tale because his treatment of them constantly reinforces the difference between them and human beings, reiterates their greed and propensity for hate, and portrays them as perpetrators of cruel and inhuman acts, as the allusion to their cannibalism suggests. Even though they are given some human characteristics, enough distance is maintained to mitigate the horror one might otherwise feel at their destruction. In addition, there is very little graphic depiction of violence in this tale, nor do we actually see the goblins' destruction. Instead, MacDonald alludes to violent acts, but unlike his technique in the second tale, he lets allusions suffice in most cases.

The goblins are, of course, the main antagonists of The Princess and the Goblin, as the title might suggest. MacDonald obviously knew his legends, for his goblins, although endowed with characteristics of his
own creation, are very similar to the goblins of folklore. In fact, in the major compendium on fairyland inhabitants, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*, Katharine Briggs mentions MacDonald twice in connection with goblins. These goblins have their own history and their own character, for they are reputed to have gone underground to escape undue taxation or some other form of obedience to the king. The goblins are swayed by their passion for revenge and their desire for violence (which, we find, is a contrast in attitude with Curdie's forces, although it is the same attitude shown by the Gwyntystorm butchers). Their rule, again like that of Gwyntystorm, is "Look out for number One," à la Tom Wolfe's "Me Generation."

Richard Reis, in *George MacDonald*, writes that in *The Princess and the Goblin* MacDonald draws an "analogy between a many-chambered building and the mind, complete with deep cellar levels and unexplored chambers." In effect, there are three kingdoms involved in the action of this tale—the upper rooms of the castle inhabited by the old Princess, the land governed by Princess Irene's father, and the goblin caves. Reis further suggests that this analogy between building and mind contains the "Freudian" elements to be found in MacDonald's pre-Freudian tale, beginning thus: "The Freudian hierarchy of ego (the Princess), super ego (the Fairy Grandmother in the attic), and id (the Goblins in the basement) is obvious enough; and their presence reflects MacDonald's independent discovery of these phenomena." This is, without doubt, true, yet it is possible to see in Freud's great revelation only a restatement of a conflict

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6 Reis, p. 81.
chronicled time and again. Religions that contain a good being, an evil being, and created "middle" beings in their myth suggest this same schema. The good being, whether it be God, Allah, Vishnu, or the Fairy Grandmother, is roughly correspondent to Freud's super ego--conscience, reason, constructive emotion. The evil being, Satan, Siva, or goblins, corresponds to the id--animistic traits, unreasonableness, sadism, destructive emotion. In between is the developing personality or the human being attempting to find a resolution and to integrate these two parts of his being. In this tale, the little princess is the developing personality or universal symbol, as Curdie is in the second tale, and it is she who achieves a measure of maturity by the end of this tale. One must wonder if she achieves integration, however, for the id representatives, in good Victorian fashion, are destroyed.

We are told that although the goblins had changed in appearance during their years underground, "The goblins themselves were not so far removed from the human"; moreover, "as they grew misshapen in body they had grown in knowledge and cleverness, and now were able to do things no mortal could see the possibility of. . . . their great delight was in every way they could think of to annoy the people who lived in the open-air storey above them. They had enough of affection left for each other to preserve them from being absolutely cruel for cruelty's sake to those that came in their way; but still they so heartily cherished the ancestral grudge . . . that they sought every opportunity of tormenting them" (p. 14). In this statement, we can see that MacDonald, even though employing the goblins as his representatives of evil, holds out hope for their eventual salvation. They retain a little human feeling, so theoret-
ically, it would be possible for God still to speak to them. More importantly, this spark of humanity suggests that they still might be able to repent of their evil ways, an action necessary for participation in the great good to come.

Besides being vengeful, however, the goblins are a proud people. On his first night as a spy, Curdie overhears a goblin and his father discussing their strengths and weaknesses as a race. The older of the two says, "The goblin's glory is his head" (p. 53), but because it is rock hard, not because it enables him to outwit his enemies, for the goblins underestimate Curdie and the miners just as the miners and the king's men underestimate the goblins. Because of prejudice, neither has an accurate picture of the other. For example, the goblins do not understand the nature of shoes. The goblin son moves the discussion from his sensitive feet to the queen's rock shoes and his desire for a pair to protect his own feet. His parents dissuade him from this desire, however, by suggesting that their present king's first wife (a sun-person) died in childbirth "because she wore shoes" (p. 54), then that all human beings wear shoes because "They can't bear the sight of their own feet without them" (p. 53)—that they are horrified at and ashamed of their toes.

Any reader can see the absurdity of this thinking—most human beings wear shoes to protect their feet—yet it is one of the goblins' limitations that they cannot see beyond their prejudice and pride to make use of a potentially important weapon. In another episode, Curdie fashions a rhyme dealing with shoes and toes in an attempt to discredit the goblin queen and thus remove a strong leader from the goblin camp. He sings,
Go to bed,
Goblin, do.
Help the queen
Take off her shoe.

If you do,
It will disclose
A horrid set
Of sprouting toes. (p. 132)

This rhyme is successful because it causes the king to question his wife, but he is really unable to do anything for fear of the queen's rock "slippers." Since the goblins are only sensitive in their feet, it is of importance that one of them should have hard shoes to protect her feet, especially since Curdie is aware that he can disable them by stomping on their feet. One would think that after their first encounter with the young miner's stamping shoes, the goblins would all arm themselves with rock shoes and thus become invincible. Instead, they conclude that it is a mark of the queen's pride that she wears rock shoes and are thus blinded by jealousy to the potential good wearing shoes might bring. In fact, once the king learns that his wife has toes, he forbids her to have a replacement rock shoe made, condemning her instead to wearing one rock shoe and one leather one. This has grave consequences for the goblins when they battle Curdie and the king's soldiers, for the queen is deprived of her invulnerability and the goblins of one of their great weapons, leaving them vulnerable to the hard-soled shoes of the "sun" people.

The goblins are grotesques, mimicking human actions, for they have their own king and their own family structure, yet it is an unholy structure. Moreover, their bodies are as misshapen as their morals. They are physically deformed, mirroring their spiritual and moral deformity.
The goblin queen, for example, the most violent of all the goblins and the most proud, has toes, an oddity for a goblin, yet giving her a deformity within deformity. Moreover, "her eyes, instead of being horizontal, were set up like two perpendicular eggs, one on the broad, the other on the small end" (p. 122). For MacDonald, this would be the worst defect of all, mirroring all sorts of evil, since he employed the eye as the "light of the soul," even to the extent of having the eyes of a particularly good person give off light. Indeed, in Curdie and his father's mystical experience in the mine, the two are drawn to the inner cave by the light from the old Princess's eyes.

The goblins are part of MacDonald's satiric arsenal, yet it is not quite certain what the primary world analog is, perhaps because satire is not as crucial an aim in this tale as it is in the second. As we find in The Princess and Curdie, the king is a mirror for Established order, of England's ruling class, which needed to be reawakened to the needs and nature of its people. In addition, The Princess and the Goblin is a further MacDonald attempt to show that right will triumph. The goblins, as evil, seem invincible, yet even they have an Achilles heel. Thus, at the end of this tale, good is victorious, as we could sense it would be throughout the tale. MacDonald has shown us the God of love; it remains for him to develop another picture of God in The Princess and Curdie.
CHAPTER III

JEREMIAH AT GWYNTYSTORM

At the end of The Princess and the Goblin, MacDonald writes: "The rest of the history of The Princess and Curdie must be kept for another volume" (p. 207). The tone of this second volume, The Princess and Curdie, is much more serious and gloomy than that of the other tale. Gone is the lightness of Curdie's early anti-goblin rhymes; gone is the playfulness of Anodos's fairy great-grandmother. Instead, the tone is almost deadly, as if MacDonald were suddenly so oppressed by the apparent evil of the world that even he could no longer be assured all situations were leading toward his beloved "greater good." Because the tone is so serious, or perhaps because the story is more strictly allegorical, it almost appears as if MacDonald has decided it is time to "grow up" even in the fantasy tales. The Princess and Curdie is a more realistic tale than The Princess and the Goblin; events and characters more closely resemble what one finds in the "real" world. Moreover, this second Curdie book shows a more socially and politically aware MacDonald than the first, a biting satire condemning the "logic" practiced by the world, which to him, was illogical. While attempting to convey his mystic vision, MacDonald employs satire within his fairy tale to create a "savage"\footnote{Wolff, p. 177.} indictment of
humanity. Together these tales present an interesting contrast, for one
is full of the early MacDonald lightheartedness while the other is grim.
The Princess and the Goblin ends on the relatively happy note one expects
in a fairy tale--great-grandmother controls the mountain, the goblins
are no longer a threat, the princess is saved, and peace reigns. In
contrast, The Princess and Curdie lacks a happy ending. At the end of
The Princess and Curdie, justice is served, or is it retribution? One
cannot be certain, for the grandmother's role in the end is ambiguous.

The Princess and Curdie is a strange book. It begins with a creation
story and ends with a last judgment. At the opening of the tale, the in-
habitants of Gwyntystorm (the capital of the kingdom) are depicted as
greedy, materialistic and hostile, particularly toward strangers, prob-
able because they are strangers to their own neighbors. In fact, one
senses that most Gwyntystormians are strangers to themselves. Gwyntystorm
is saved from its own evil nature for a time at the close of the tale, but
its salvation is not permanent because the majority of its inhabitants do
not change their attitudes. Instead, the change comes from without: the
king decrees that they must love their neighbors or else. When the
king's influence is removed, the old attitudes reassert themselves. The
brief plot outline which follows will provide a framework for analysis
of major episodes and themes.

The Princess and Curdie opens a year after the end of The Princess
and the Goblin. Curdie has begun to take on the worldly characteristics
of a miner, refusing to believe in things he cannot see and touch. One
day he shoots a pigeon, realizes that it may belong to Princess Irene's
great-great-grandmother and begins his journey from common man to "prince."
Curdie goes to the farmhouse-castle to tell grandmother (in whom he now believes) that he has shot her bird and to assuage the guilt he feels at his action. Grandmother forgives him. A few days later, Curdie and his father encounter the old Princess in the mine and are told she has a mission for Curdie. The next night, Curdie goes to grandmother's rooms and is told to thrust his hands into a rose-fire she has burning. By doing so, Curdie shows that he trusts great-grandmother; as a reward for his trust, he is given a gift of perception. The fire has enabled him to touch another person's hand and determine what sort of beast he is—in practice, whether he is trustworthy.

The following day Curdie starts his journey toward the capital city, Gwyntystorm, with no real idea what his mission involves. Along the way he is given a companion, Lina, an ugly "doggie" who was once a beautiful woman. Lina proves a good protector and defeats forty-nine beasts like herself (who were once human) that later become Curdie's "army." Upon reaching the capital, Curdie and Lina are imprisoned by the townspeople because they are strangers. As Curdie and Lina learn, Gwyntystormians are hostile to anyone who comes from a different area or who has a different set of attitudes than they. When imprisoned, Curdie retains his mattock and is able to dig his way into what proves to be the palace cellar. Curdie finds Princess Irene and learns that her father is gravely ill. Moreover, Curdie discovers that the king is being poisoned by his advisers and physician and that they plan a coup. His mission becomes clear—he is to rid the kingdom of the evil men in the court.

Curdie discovers that the poison is delivered each evening by the
royal physician. With Lina's help, Curdie is able to keep the doctor from further poisoning the king. As the king gains strength, his advisers decide to take more drastic measures to gain the throne. Before they can act, however, Curdie, Lina, and the Forty-nine drive the servants from the palace and imprison the king's councillors. The king issues new decrees in Gwyntystorm proclaiming that inhospitable behavior will be punished. These decrees anger the inhabitants of Gwyntystorm who conclude that the king has joined the devil (as they call Curdie) and is no longer fit to rule. Meanwhile, an army from the neighboring kingdom advances on Gwyntystorm, which the inhabitants and royal servants welcome, hoping that together they can depose the king. Curdie decides to attack this combined force, but the king is still too weak to lead Curdie's "army." The night before the battle, the king is healed by the old Princess and the next morning he leads his forces--Curdie, Lina, Princess Irene, an old Colonel, two servants, and the Forty-nine--into battle. The king's small force is bolstered by hundreds of birds and later joined in victory by Curdie's father, Peter, who had come to the city under the old Princess's influence. Victors and vanquished march into the city where the king passes judgment on his people, sending his seven councillors into exile on the backs of beasts. At their victory feast, the king and company discover that the old Princess had been with them for some time, disguised as one of the servants. Curdie and the princess later marry, but have no children. During their reign Gwyntystorm is reformed, but after their deaths, the city reverts to its evil ways and is destroyed.
The beginning of The Princess and Curdie is "a rhapsody on the glories of the mountains and the mines"\textsuperscript{2} describing the great and mysterious forces which create these marvels. More important, the introductory chapter presents a parable dealing with both politics and economics: "There were people in the country who, when it [silver] came into their hands, degraded it by locking it up in a chest, and then it grew diseased and was called mammon, and bred all sorts of quarrels; but when first it left the king's hands it never made any but friends."\textsuperscript{3} MacDonald is probably criticizing English industrialists here and reminding us of certain scripture passages such as Matt. 6:24 or the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). MacDonald speaks both literally and figuratively: literally, in that money or "precious metals" promote strife and bad feeling; figuratively, in that the silver represents the several gifts God gives people for their good, but which through pride or greed cause more enmity and strife than good.

One sees the thesis underlying this tale by coupling the above statement with one which follows shortly after:

\begin{quote}
There is this difference between the growth of some human beings and that of others: in the one case it is a continuous dying, in the other a continuous resurrection. One of the latter sort comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true the moment it comes before him; one of the former class grows
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{2}Wolff, p. 170.

more and more afraid of being taken in, so afraid of it that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner. (pp. 18-19)

One should strive to be the man in continuous resurrection because his world is alive and he is open to all the possibilities for magic and beauty in the world. In the course of the tale, this contrast is embodied in the conflict between great-grandmother’s forces and the inhabitants of Gwyntystorm. Moreover, this definition is reflected by the two windows Curdie sees on his way to Irene’s grandmother with the pigeon. The first window faces east and, as it is twilight, is already nearly devoid of light. It stands “dreary and old, growing brown, and looking as if it were thinking about the day that was just gone” (pp. 24-25). The second window faces west “and in that window shone all that was left of the sunset, just a few ashes, with here and there a little touch of warmth; it was nearly as sad as the east, only there was one difference—it was very plainly thinking of tomorrow” (p. 25). The difference here is in part that between optimist and pessimist, but also between the man of faith and the cynic. The window is thus both personification of and metaphor for two opposing, yet nearly simultaneous human experiences, for each represents a human mood—hopefulness and despair/depression. The east-west positions also provide a familiar contrast, as the east represents the past and the west represents the future. Moreover, the metaphor suggests death and resurrection, the hope of “more life” to follow.

Curdie’s shooting of the white pigeon is a definite turning point in his life, for its aftermath represents his real “conversion” or acceptance of belief in the fairy grandmother’s existence. At one level, the reali-
zation that he has nearly killed teaches Curdie compassion; at another, Curdie finds faith in God—here represented by the fairy grandmother. The situation leading to Curdie's action is typical of human development, for at roughly age thirteen, he has reached adolescence and is subject to peer pressure. In this case, the pressure to conform derives from the miners, earthbound and cynical, definitely the first type of man MacDonald mentions, those associated with the eastern window. Curdie can remain a miner and look out the eastern window, or he can be a prince and look out the western window; or he can be of use to no one; he can be Judas or he can be Peter. By comparison, the little princess's struggle to believe in great-grandmother the year before seems insignificant, yet there was a time when her faith wavered as well. She, too, had to repent her small unbelief in order to fulfill grandmother's plans.

Although of some significance since it occurs just after an epiphany: "For a moment he [Curdie] became so one with the bird that he seemed to feel both its bill and its feathers, as the one adjusted the other to fly again, and his heart swelled with the pleasure of its involuntary sympathy" (p. 18), the thoughtless act of shooting the pigeon is not of importance in itself. Rather, as in Irene's case, it is Curdie's reaction to the experience which will determine the course of the tale. His immediate reaction is to run to his prey "with a gush of pride at his skill, and pleasure at his success" (p. 19). He is proud of his skill as a hunter. Probably no one would blame him if he carried the pigeon home for supper, but this cannot be. Curdie realizes that he has nearly destroyed beauty—the pigeon is a beautiful thing, belonging, perhaps, to Princess Irene's great-grandmother. This thought horrifies him since there is some indi-
cation that grandmother may assume the form of one of her pigeons upon occasion (e.g., at the end of *The Princess and the Goblin*). Thus, Curdie turns from the uncaring insensitivity of common men and, like the prince—or Christian—he is, feels remorse at his action because he is one of those earthly inhabitants whose sensitivity is strong (witness the epi-
phanal moment of unity with a creature of nature), and whose love for all things is, in consequence, strong—just as one might imagine MacDonald's own sensitivity and love to have been a mirror of his concept of God.

At the opening of *The Princess and Curdie*, grandmother appears to Curdie as a very thin, old, old woman, almost a shadow, seated beside an enormous spinning wheel. His vision of her is a direct contrast with Irene's first sight of her. In Curdie's case, the old-young figure has chosen to hide her beauty and present only her aged characteristics. In the latter stages of the interview, it is strongly suggested that the old Princess appears thus to Curdie because his faith is not yet strong enough to accept her other forms. It may also be that Curdie's errand has prompted this form, since he has nearly fatally wounded one of her pigeons—for no good reason. Here the old woman is suggestive of the suffering servant, so empathizing with her injured pigeon that she, too, shows the strain of injury. This association is strengthened in a passage suggestive of Jenny in "The Carasym": the old woman's "little hands were just like the grey claws of a hen, scratching at a thread, which to Curdie was of course invisible across the moonlight" (p. 28). This image further suggests the picture of Christ looking down on Jerusalem and weeping as he expresses his desire to gather the people under his care as the hen does her chicks (Luke 13:34), and indeed, the grandmother has many "chicks"
to care for.

When Curdie repents, the old woman tells him that she is glad he shot her bird (p. 31) since his reaction to the shooting has brought him closer to her. Curdie finds this remark difficult to understand, but is reminded that all his actions have moral consequences. Curdie offers to destroy his bow and arrows as proof of his repentance, but the old woman stops him, saying that there are some things that might need to have these tools used against them (p. 32). The old woman, here called "The mistress of the silver moon," warns Curdie that "whoever does not mean good is always in danger of harm," then says, "But I try to give everybody fair play; and those that are in the wrong are in far more need of it always than those who are in the right. . . . It is very dangerous to do things you don't know about" (p. 29). Her statement is reminiscent of Christ's reply to the Pharisees: "They that be whole need not a physician. . . . I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:12-13). This passage, it seems, is MacDonald's text for these tales, coupled with others which foretell the destruction that will befall those who do not repent. At the end of Curdie's first interview with the fairy grandmother, she reveals herself to him in another of her forms: "she stood before him a tall, strong woman--plainly very old, but as grand as she was old" (p. 33).

At the beginning of their mystical experience in the mine, Curdie and his father, Peter, notice a pale green light issuing from one of the corridors. They follow the light deep into the mine when suddenly, "the greenness melted away, and in a moment or two, instead of the star, a dark, dark and yet luminous face was looking at them with living eyes."
And Curdie felt a great awe swell up in his heart, for he thought he had seen those eyes before" (p. 47). Curdie and Peter have met the old Princess in still another of her forms: the twenty-five-year-old Lady of Light or Lady of the Emeralds. This is a transfiguration scene, for the old woman shows herself to the two miners in her most powerful and beautiful form. When she returns from a short test of their faith, her presence causes the pitch-dark cavern to blaze "with lights innumerable, and gorgeous, yet soft and interfused" (p. 52). The two miners are awed, but no longer fearful, "for the woman that was old yet young was a joy to see, and filled their hearts with reverent delight" (p. 52). In this encounter with the miners, grandmother is again suggestive of God, as she says, "I am poor as well as rich. . . . I, too, work for my bread, and I show myself no favor when I pay myself my own wages. Last night . . . I heard all that you said to each other. I am always about" (pp. 52-53). In fact, she is not only omnipresent, but omnipotent, for in continuing their discussion, the "old" woman tells Peter that he is poor because she kept him poor, and further, that this "has done well for both you and me, my friend. Things come to the poor that can't get in at the door of the rich. . . . It is a great privilege to be poor" (p. 53). The Princess kept Peter poor because he would not have been as good a man had he been rich; for his potential to be realized most fully and usefully, he had to remain a poor man.

One final interchange is of philosophical importance. Curdie wishes to ask some questions, but is afraid because he has been told that "nobody must ask the king questions" (p. 53). One wonders if "king" here is a slip, for although its allegorical implication is clear, the term does not
fit the situation since Curdie is speaking with the old Princess. However, one might argue, perhaps in one of her forms the Princess is a "king."
The old Princess replies, "The king never made that law. . . . You may ask me as many as you please—that is, so long as they are sensible. Only I may take a few thousand years to answer some of them. But that's nothing. Of all things time is the cheapest" (p. 54). Clearly, this is something that one might expect a god to say, not a man, for to man, with his ever-present sense of finite time, time is not counted cheap. The implications here are important, for MacDonald is at once attacking a stumbling block of religion and asserting the freedom of both God and man to act in their own spheres. In addition, the very fact that Curdie had to ask if he could ask questions reinforces the difference between his faith and Princess Irene's. The little princess began to ask questions immediately because she felt comfortable with "grandmother" immediately. Curdie came to grandmother under different circumstances and thus lacks the immediate comfortableness with her. Instead, he has to work harder at building his faith and his relationship with grandmother.

Curdie's question deals with the old woman's many names. She is the Lady of the Silver Moon, Old Mother Wotherwop, Princess Irene's great-great-grandmother, the Lady of Light, an old witch, the Lady of Emeralds. Appropriately, the title of this chapter is, "What Is in a Name?" The old-young woman replies to Curdie's description of her appearance by breaking a gem from the floor, a feat which Curdie says no one else could have performed. She then says that she has more than twenty other names, "not one of them a false one" (p. 54), possibly suggesting that MacDonald thought that God too could have other forms and other names. Expanding
on this statement, the old Princess reasserts the idea first proposed by Anodos's great-grandmother, as she says, "Shapes are only dresses, Curdie, and dresses are only names. That which is inside is the same all the time" (p. 54). This idea becomes important as Curdie's story progresses, for he is not only called upon to distinguish between inner and outer form, but given the ability to do so. The old Princess continues, as North Wind did in explaining how she could appear as a wolf to the evil nurse: "It is one thing the shape I choose to put on, and quite another the shape that foolish talk and nursery tale may please to put upon me. Also, it is one thing what you or your father may think about me, and quite another what a foolish or bad man may see in me" (p. 55). MacDonald here suggests that not only may God be known to different people by different names, yet still retain his essential goodness, but that it is the character of the individual being which determines that individual's reaction to God.

Shape-shifting, an element of folklore, is an integral part of MacDonald's depiction of his concept of God since men commonly see only evidences of God, not God himself. The old Princess tells Curdie that she cannot give him a sign to indicate her presence immediately, because that would "be but to know the sign of me--not to know me myself" (p. 57); no faith would be required. In fact, she tells Curdie, it would be as wrong for her to give him a sign as for her to give him an emerald to make an idol since he still would not know her. After leading the two out of the cave, the old Princess tests Curdie by appearing at the side of the road in the guise of an old beggar woman. This time, Curdie is not deceived.
The third time Curdie sees the old Princess, he enters her workroom but is shocked because upon opening the door he "saw no room there. . . . There was the great sky, and the stars, and beneath he could see nothing—only darkness! But what was that in the sky, straight in front of him? A great wheel of fire, turning and turning, and flashing out blue lights!" (p. 63). As Curdie turns to leave, he hears grandmother's voice call him to enter, but whether she is old or young he cannot tell; the wheel distorts his perception. The spinning wheel is a tool of magic, for it sings to Curdie like an aeolian harp and even causes him to act as an aeolian harp himself, for he repeats the song of the spinning wheel without knowing it. The room is also magical, for once Curdie passes the wheel, he finds the "room was so large that, looking back, he could scarcely see the end at which he entered; but the other was only a few yards from him—and there he saw another wonder: on a huge hearth a great fire was burning, and the fire was a huge heap of roses" (p. 66). This is the same fire with which the old Princess had cleaned the mud off her dress, a purifying fire, but it has a new purifying purpose here. Grandmother tells Curdie to thrust his hands into the fire. He complies, although fearful, withstands the pain, and then finds upon removing them from the fire "that all that was gone of them was the rough hard skin" (p. 67). Curdie has received a gift through this trial, however: he is able to perceive the beast which lies beneath the surface of each individual. Curdie's gift enables him to tell which men are to be trusted because he can touch a hand and see below the surface to their innermost being. In fact, this gift also applies to creatures on their way back up the ladder of being, for when Curdie takes Lina's paw, he finds that
he is holding the hand of a child (p. 73). MacDonald thus suggests that the man in continuous resurrection is given greater perception than common man.

The people whom Curdie meets on his journey and the inhabitants of Gwyntystorm are much like the goblins, and he treats them as such: "When they got so rude as nearly to make him [Curdie] angry, he would treat them as he used to treat the goblins, and sing his own songs to keep out their foolish noises" (p. 81). They also remind one of the goblins which beset Anodos on his subterranean journey, for they mock Curdie in the same way. It is no wonder, then, that Curdie should be fearful of the creature which follows him onto a heath—who seems to come out of the sun itself—until he finds it is Lina. Curdie is still not certain of the Princess, however; his faith needs another test. Lina's looks are too horrible for him to trust completely until she has proven her worth, even though Curdie has felt the hand of a child beneath her paw. Curdie does not yet trust the gift of perception he has been given. After he learns to trust Lina, Curdie learns to trust his gift.

Gwyntystorm stands on a rock in the middle of a river; its foundations, however, are not sound. The king's palace overlooks the city, but like so many things in Gwyntystorm, it is decaying:

the fortifications had long been neglected, for the whole country was now under one king, and all men said there was no more need for weapons or walls. No man pretended to love his neighbor, but every one said he knew that peace and quiet behaviour was the best thing for himself, and that, he said, was quite as useful, and a great deal more reasonable." (p. 94)

More reasonable, perhaps, but only because such behavior makes no real de-
mands on the individual. Gwyntystorm is a city in disrepair, reflecting a decaying society filled with apathy and pettiness. Even its defences are decaying, "But everybody in the city regarded these signs of decay as the best proof of the prosperity of the place. Commerce and self-interest, they said, had got the better of violence, and the troubles of the past were helmed in the riches that flowed in at their open gates" (p. 95). This passage perhaps reflects MacDonald's perception of England's danger at this time, complacency and apathy. Moreover, MacDonald suggests that England's morality was no longer based on concern for the good of all, but on concern for self; morality was only a rite.

Upon entering the city, Curdie notices "an unfriendliness" in the stares of the city dwellers "which he did not like" (p. 95). In fact, Gwyntystormians are hostile to strangers. Curdie also finds that the men of Gwyntystorm do not listen to reason, when he encounters a baker who has tripped and bruised his head for the third time in a week. The baker, like most Gwyntystormians, blames the king; Curdie logically points out that the fault really lies with the baker, whose "head won't take care of the baker's feet" (p. 97). The illogic in the baker's reasoning is only too apparent. Curdie does his best to solve the problem by smashing the stone, but this only creates a new problem because a barber's window is broken. The barber's response to Curdie's explanation bears remembering for its relevance to the end of the book: "What do you go breaking the rock for--the very rock upon which the city stands?" (p. 98). His statement has very literal meaning, for it is by mining through this rock that Gwyntystorm is later destroyed. It has another significance also: in effect, the barber is asking, "Where
do you get off upsetting the order of this city by helping someone else?"
We find that the rule of the city is neither cooperation nor caring for
one's neighbor when the barber answers Curdie's reproach at his uncaring
attitude toward the baker: "What's that to me? This is a free city.
Every man here takes care of himself, and the king takes care of us all"
(p. 98). One wonders how these people can so confidently expect the
king to care for them when they show neither courtesy nor kindness to
each other.

The palace is no better than the city. In fact, Curdie finds it in
a state of anarchy; the servants are surly, become drunken on their master's
wine, and steal his possessions. In addition, the king is slowly being
poisoned by his own councillors who have taken advantage of an illness,
prolonged it, and plan to usurp the rule of the kingdom. The poison in
the capital city has spread to the palace. In fact, the king's illness
was initially the result of the king's despair over the evil in his king-
dom. His response to the evil, however, is wrong, for it permits the evil
already in evidence to gain strength; instead of acting to correct the
evil (as MacDonald preaches), the king had given in to it. The king is
a victim of his own lack of faith. He did not believe in the old Princess
as a young man, even though he had heard of great-grandmother when he was
a child. These childhood memories come to the king as he begins to recover
from his illness and poisoning. One day the king tells the children:

    I am compelled to believe many things I could
not and do not yet understand--things I used
to hear, and sometimes see, as often as I vis-
itad my mother's home. Once, for instance, I
heard my mother say to her father--speaking of
me--"He is a good, honest boy, but he will be
an old man before he understands'; and my grand-
father answered, 'Keep up your heart, child; my
mother will look after him.' . . . By degrees,
because I could not understand them [their words],
I gave up thinking of them. And indeed I had
almost forgotten them, when you, my child, talk-
ing that day about the Queen Irene and her pigeons
. . . brought them all back to my mind in a
vague mass. (p. 167)

The king has repented his unbelief and the old Princess can now work her
magic to make him well. The night before the last battle, Curdie awakens
to find the king lying in the midst of "a fire of glowing, flaming roses,
red and white" (p. 201), attended by the old Princess. Through this "sacri-
ifice," the king is cured and brought to the side of good.

The king's servants have quite a different fate. Curdie gives a
message to one of the chambermaids (who is really the old Princess) pre-
dicting punishment for the servants' evil ways. The chambermaid warns
the servants that "if you do not repent of your bad ways, you are all
going to be punished—all turned out of the palace together" (p. 164).
Her message angers her fellow servants, yet she continues, "The person
who told me to tell you said the servants of this house had to repent of
thieving, and lying, and unkindness, and drinking; and they will be made
to repent of them one way, if they don't do it of themselves another"
(p. 165). MacDonald clearly hoped that everyone would be made to repent,
and thought that one of those ways might involve his "evolutionary" theory.
In this theory, one would spend time as a creature, like Lina, until he
was able to work his way back up the chain of being. Before Curdie at-
tacks the servants, he sends the chambermaid to give her fellow servants
still another warning, using words which echo Revelation (22:12, 20):
"Say the messenger sent you. . . . I will be with you very soon" (p. 174).
The girl relays the message, but it too is unheeded. Curdie gives the servants one more chance to repent when he enters the room, but only a page joins him. The butler and cook attack Curdie and are repulsed. Then the "vengeance," as MacDonald calls it, begins in earnest. Lina and the Forty-nine chase and torment the servants until all are driven out of the palace. The darkness they are driven out into is quite appropriate since it parallels the scriptural warning that some "shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 9:12). True to the gospel concept of God, MacDonald's judge (here, Curdie) provides plenty of time for men to repent, as the servants are given several opportunities, but only one is saved.

After the last battle and judgment on Gwentystorm, a new court is formed. Curdie and Irene later marry, but die childless. At the end of the tale, the old Princess "disappears." The kingdom reverts to its evil ways, elects a greedy, evil man king, and literally destroys itself by mining out the ore which comprises its foundations. Some attribute this abrupt ending to slipshod artistry on MacDonald's part, while others suggest it is evidence that in his final years, MacDonald gave up, that he no longer felt evil would inevitably be conquered by good. However, the destruction of Gwentystorm is not inconsistent with his view of Christianity; moreover, if one can view this tale as a creation-to-judgment story, roughly parallel to the story contained within the Old and New Testaments, then one finds that the inhabitants of the city, not the grandmother, have failed. If the Christian God is omnipotent, then

4 Wolff, pp. 176-77.
He should be able to force all men to repent and be saved. We are told, however, that God gave men free will, and that it must be the individual's decision to repent or not to repent. This repentance-grace theme is shown several times in *The Princess and Curdie*, as first Curdie, then other characters repent of not trying to do good and believe in the old Princess. Still other characters, for example, the royal servants or men of Gwyntystorm, do not repent. Each receives a just punishment. In the same way, God has shown man that if he repents and believes, salvation will be forthcoming (e.g., John 3:16-21); if he does not, then any punishment he receives is his own responsibility. MacDonald, as much as he hoped that everyone would be saved, still recognized that this could not be. C. S. Lewis writes that MacDonald "hopes . . . that all men will be saved; but that is because he hopes that all will repent. He knows (none better) that even omnipotence cannot save the unconverted."5 One can argue theological points forever; however, if one accepts MacDonald's belief in the basic Christian teaching concerning repentance and grace, regardless of the other trappings added by men, then the end of *The Princess and Curdie* depicts a spiritual reality, and is thus not a failure.

Gwyntystorm and the later Bulika (in *Lilith*) are both filled with selfish men. At the end of *The Princess and Curdie*, Gwyntystorm takes its place with Sodom and Gomorrah. Several questions arise. Why do Irene and Curdie have no children? Why does the old Princess not save Gwyntystorm? Surely, one imagines, it would be well within her power—or would it? Why were Lot and his family not enough to save the aforementioned

two cities? Grandmother functions as the Christian God, complete with His manifestations as Jehovah, an aspect of God MacDonald had previously rejected. MacDonald's use of violence in this book seems uncharacteristic, yet he very easily told of the destruction of the goblins at the end of the earlier Curdie book. Indeed, the men and women of Gwyntystorm are on a level with the goblins--they are humans so caught up by their own material needs and desires that they consciously burrow through the very pillars which hold up their city. Moreover, if one recalls a statement made about the goblins in The Princess and the Goblin: "They had enough of affection left for each other to preserve them from being absolutely cruel for cruelty's sake to those that came in their way" (p. 14), one finds that the men of Gwyntystorm are worse than the goblins, for they do not have this mellowing affection. The destruction of Gwyntystorm is a natural result of its people's inability to believe in the power for good represented by the old Princess or to recognize the danger inherent in the path they have chosen. The fault lies with man--free man, who can choose to see or choose to be blind to the truth, MacDonald says. It is thus possible to suggest that Gwyntystorm functions on several allegorical levels: as Gwyntystorm, a city of evil people who destroy themselves by their own blindness; as London or any other major metropolitan area of the time, where poverty and great riches exist simultaneously, producing misery and the threat of anarchy because the society is feeding on itself; or ultimately, it can function as a type for the world as a whole, filled with men who cannot see others cry, who blithely destroy all that touches them--in the name of almighty Progress, not realizing that they are also destroying the very foundations of life.
CHAPTER IV

THE GRANDMOTHER AND THE ROSE

In assessing MacDonald's artistry, one is continually drawn to his philosophical views, since they repeatedly resurface as each major symbol or image recalls the larger, cosmic drama underlying the tales. His stage is the universe; his theme, good vs. evil. The symbols are familiar, a fairy godmother turned grandmother, a purifying fire, an Armageddon. The fire is made of roses, suggesting, perhaps, the Rose of Sharon, a messianic figure and name for Christ. Moreover, the fire is used to give Curdie a gift of perception, just as the Apostles were given gifts by the Holy Spirit, appearing in tongues of flame, on the day known as Pentecost (Acts 2). Armageddon is to be the last battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, but not the final destruction, for the Judgment follows. This sequence is paralleled by the closing chapters of both Curdie books. In the first, the goblins are routed in battle, then destroy themselves by trying to drown the mine. In the second, the king, Curdie, two Princesses, and forty-nine beasts defeat two armies, yet the punishment of the people of Gwyntystorm does not occur until much later. The people are given an opportunity to repent after the battle, but they refuse. In the end, their fate is the same as that of the goblins, as they undermine their own city in an effort to satisfy their greed by obtaining the gems which lie beneath the surface of the city. It is poetic

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justice that this mining should be the cause of Gwytystorm's fall since one of the first people Curdie met there chided him for breaking a stone, asking how he dared to strike the rock on which the city was built. The Gwytystormian was, in a literal sense, correct, but the real rock upon which the city stood was brotherhood. MacDonald says that brotherhood, unselfishness, and hospitality are the real rocks upon which a city stands; Gwytystorm had been chipping away at these rocks for a number of years.

Perhaps MacDonald knew that even his satire upon the logic which ruled both the goblins and Gwytystormians might not lead his readers to understand their own faults, yet his condemnation of such thinking is clear. Of more importance is his creation of the two kingdoms in the former tale, for the anti-kingdom of the cobs is a good contrast to the rule one would expect from the king or princess, yet it mirrors quite well the actual state of the kingdom. There are some hints that MacDonald is thinking of the state of England in these tales, but the correspondences are not always clear. The goblins are overcome by their greed and seek to destroy the sun-people and/or to force them to live as goblins so that they can fulfill their own materialistic aims. Likewise, the men and women of Gwytystorm are so caught up in seeking their own material comforts that they have forgotten that hospitality to strangers or sharing material goods with those who are less fortunate are what perpetuate a society. Since MacDonald had lived in the factory towns in northern England and had been active in movements to better conditions there, he had a great dislike for the dehumanizing effects of the city, as suggested in this excerpt from a letter describing Edinburgh in 1855: "oh filth! . . . and squalid figures . . . crowded abominable dwellings. Some of the dark
closes and entries look most infernal, and in the dim light you could see something swarming, children or grown people perhaps, almost falling away from the outlined definiteness of the human."¹ MacDonald describes the result of enclosure and the industrial revolution. In the tales, MacDonald reminds the manufacturers and others of the higher classes that their cities and countries are being undermined and that if they do not repent of their selfishness, their fate will be the same as Gwyntystorm's.

Still another criticism seems directed at Queen Victoria herself. Princess Irene's father, who becomes so despondent over his people's actions that he takes to his bed in sickness, then is effectively isolated from his people by his royal advisers, seems a good representative of the late Victoria who isolated herself after her beloved Albert's death. She kept herself from her people at a time when they needed her, for her poor were in worse trouble than ever, while her court was beginning to follow the Crown Prince on the merry road to dissipation. MacDonald could thus fault his own people for not sharing their goods with each other; instead, some of those with wealth acted as if they had never heard the word "brother."

Both the Queen and Irene's father appeared indifferent to their people, and in both cases the kingdoms were endangered by neglect; little leadership was provided by the rightful ruler, for neither was able to do his duty. This inability to perform one's duty is high on MacDonald's list of worst evils. Illustrative of this fact is the old Princess's comment to Curdie that whoever is not trying always to do good runs the risk of

¹GMÆW, p. 229.
doing harm. Irene's father is guilty of this sin because he did not act to rid his realm of the evil. Moreover, the king did not believe strongly enough in the old Princess to have faith that the evil in his kingdom could be defeated and succumbed to it. There is also an echo here of Christ's comment that anyone who is "lukewarm" about following his teaching is no better than the man who flatly rejects it (Rev. 3:15, 16); the king is no better than a Gwyntystormian at first. His repentance permits him to help defeat evil.

At the end of The Princess and Curdie, we are told that the people called Curdie, Prince Conrad (able, brave, wise counsellor), the diminutive of which is Curt or Kurt. By the end of the tale, Curdie has attained the qualities associated with the longer form of the name, but only through the trials he has undergone. Thus, Curdie is a good representation of the Christian on earth, one who experiences faith, drifts away, then really begins to understand what his experience entails, although the realization is never complete, as MacDonald demonstrates. It is as Paul said, on earth we can only know a little about the infinite (I Cor. 13:9-12); MacDonald also says we must act on the little we know, for in this way alone can we begin to understand more--our hope of participating in the greater good to come lies in action. Part of MacDonald's intent then, may have been to aid other men in recognizing their visions and to encourage them to act on whatever counsel may be provided.

What does MacDonald's belief that good will triumph entail? First and foremost, it entails belief in an order in the universe, a guiding force which, within certain ranges of latitude, permits human beings freedom of choice. If one chooses wrongly, he must suffer whatever consequences
that choice may bring, just as one will enjoy whatever consequences might result from a right choice. One needs also to accept responsibility for one's action. The most difficult part is the need then to wait for the next step (choice) and to have the patience and faith to let things happen, not immediately to take control of the situation and then try to rectify any mistake that might subsequently occur, since this impulse to take control can be as destructive as the original wrong choice. In fact, rushing to rectify a wrong choice may only compound the error and lead to greater suffering than would otherwise have been necessary. Curdie is able to achieve his successes as easily as he does because he has some of this patience, but he does not have as much as the little princess so he must suffer a bit more than she.

George MacDonald was a dreamer, a poet, a prophet, and a mystic. His great achievement was his ability to convey the essence of his mystical vision in a series of fantasy tales. It may be instructive to think of MacDonald's tales in terms of the half-remembered songs which appear in several of his tales, or in terms of one of the incidents in The Princess and Curdie. The first time Curdie sees great-grandmother, she tells him to listen to the spinning wheel. Unbeknownst to him, the whole time he listens, he is repeating the song the spinning wheel seems to be telling him. When the wheel stops, however, he cannot remember the words, nor is he aware that he has been repeating the words—he only knows that he is different, that he has had a vision. In one respect, Curdie is in this instance the poet of inspiration, played upon like the aeolian harp; he also resembles a prophet in that he is given the words to say in much
the same manner as one might expect a prophet to receive his inspiration. MacDonald probably viewed his own function as a writer in much the same way—he was a tool through which metaphysical truth could be relayed. As such, his tales are meant to communicate a vision artfully, and inasmuch as they do this, they succeed.
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