# Identity and the Children's Literature of George MacDonald

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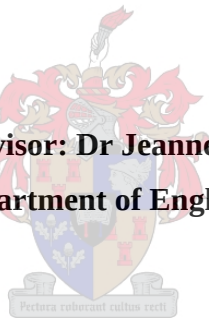
Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Stellenbosch.

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March 2015

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## ABSTRACT

The Victorian period, often heralded as the golden age of children's literature, saw both a break and a continuation with the traditions of the fairy tale genre, with many authors choosing this platform to question and subvert social and literary expectations (Honic, *Breaking the Angelic Image* 1; Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 97). George MacDonald (1824-1905), a prolific Scottish theologian, whose unspoken sermons, essays, novels, fantasies and children's fairy tales deliberately engage with such issues as gender, mortality, class, poverty and morality, was one such author (Ellison 92).

This thesis critically examines how the Victorian writer George MacDonald portrays the notion of a 'self' in terms of fixed 'character' and mutable physical appearance in his fairy tales for children. Chapter One provides a foundation for this study by studying MacDonald's literary and religious context, particularly important for this former preacher banned from his pulpit (Reis, 24). Chapter Two explores a series of examples of the interaction between characters and their physical bodies. This begins with examining portrayals of characters synonymous with their bodies, before contrasting this with characters whose bodies appear differently than their inner selves. Chapter Two finishes by observing those characters whose physical forms alter throughout the course of the tale. As these different character-body interactions are observed, a marked separation between character and body emerges.

In Chapter Three, the implications of this separation between character and body are explored. By writing such separations between the character and their body, MacDonald creates a space where further questions can be asked about our understanding of issues such as identity and mortality. Chapter Three begins with an analysis of the observations made in the first chapter, posing that MacDonald crafted characters consisting of an inner self and a physical body. This was then further explored through images of recognition in the tales, finding that characters are expected to recognize one another despite complete physical alterations; the inner self is able to know and be known. Chapter Three concludes by studying mortality in the tales, particularly MacDonald's portrayals of the possibility of life after death.

## OPSOMMING

Die Viktoriaanseperiode, wat gereeld voorgehou word as die goue era vir kinderliteratuur, het beide breuke en kontinuïteit gehad met die tradisies van die genre van sprokiesverhale. Menigte skrywers het sprokiesverhale gekies as ’n middel waardeur hulle sosiale en literêre verwagtinge kon bevraagteken en omseil (Honic, *Breaking the Angelic Image* 1; Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 97). George MacDonald (1824—1905) — 'n prolifieke Skotse teoloog, wie se onuitgesproke preke, opstelle, novelle, fantasieë en kindersprokies doelgerig kwessies soos geslag, moraliteit, klas en armoede getakel het — was een só 'n skrywer (Ellison 92).

Hierdie tesis ondersoek krities hoe die Viktoriaanse skrywer George MacDonald die idee van ‘self’ uitgebeeld het in terme van 'n vaste "karakter" en veranderbare fisiese voorkoms in sy sprokiesverhale vir kinders. Hoofstuk Een verskaf 'n fondasie vir hierdie studie deur MacDonald se literêre- en geloofskonteks te bestudeer. Hierdie is besonders belangrik, omdat hierdie gewese predikant voorheen van die kansel verban was (Reis, 24). Hoofstuk Twee ondersoek 'n reeks voorbeelde van die interaksie tussen karakters en hul fisiese gestaltes. Dit begin met 'n ondersoek van uitbeeldings waarin karakters sinoniem met hul voorkoms is. Daarna word 'n kontras getrek met karakters wie se uiterlike voorkoms verskillend is van wie hulle innerlik is. Hoofstuk Twee sluit af deur merking te maak van karakters wie se fisiese voorkoms verander deur die verloop van die verhaal. Soos hierdie verskillende interaksies tussen karakter en voorkoms ondersoek word, word 'n merkbare verdeling tussen karakter en voorkoms ontbloot. In Hoofstuk Drie word die implikasies van hierdie verdeling tussen karakter en voorkoms ondersoek. Deur so 'n verdeling tussen karakter en voorkoms uit te beeld, skep MacDonald 'n ruimte waarbinne verdere vrae gevra kan word oor hoe ons kwessies soos identiteit en moraliteit verstaan. Hoofstuk Drie begin met 'n analise van die opmerkings wat in die eerste hoofstuk gemaak is, waarin gestel word dat MacDonald sy karakters ontwerp het om te bestaan uit 'n innerlike self en 'n fisiese voorkoms. Hierdie word dan verder ondersoek deur te kyk na voorbeelde van gewaarwording in die verhale, waar daar gevind is dat daar van die karakters verwag word om mekaar te herken ten spyte van gehele fisiese veranderinge; die innerlike self kan ken en geken word. Hoofstuk Drie sluit af deur die moraliteit van die stories te bestudeer, veral MacDonald se uitbeelding van die moontlikheid van lewe na die dood.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My utmost thanks belongs first to my supervisor Jeanne Ellis, who has been a far greater supervisor than I could ever have imagined or deserved. She gave generously of her time, energy, and effort through ceaseless emails, skype calls, innumerable drafts and insightful comments. Thank you for your enduring patience, encouraging me in the dark moments, providing tough love when needed, for never giving up on my ability to complete the project, and for challenging me always. I have learned so much from our time together.

I am also grateful to the Department of English at Stellenbosch University for providing engaging and supportive atmosphere for learning. It has been a tremendous privilege to be a part of such a passionate academic community.

My thanks and love are owed to my husband, Ian. I would never have been able to accomplish this without your hand in mine each step of the way. Words will never be able to convey the depth of my gratitude. Thank you for your encouragement, the late night thesis help, for reminding me every day that I could do it, and most importantly, for sharing your life with me. I love you.

My deepest gratitude also belongs to my family. To my parents, whose love and unshakeable faith supported me during this endeavour. Thank you for every encouraging or stern phone call, for every dinner, and for your love from day one. I love you. I don't believe there is another woman as fortunate as I am in the gift of her in-laws. Jack, Nancy, thank you for listening to all the thesis rambling, for your love, encouragement, and at times, sympathy. I love you. And to my siblings, Rebecca, Sheenagh, Alistair, Andrew, and Janet. Thank you for your love, encouragement and long-suffering.

Thanks also to our wonderful friends in Canada and South Africa – my life is blessed to have you in it. Special thanks belongs to Inge Barnard, who took in her two Canadian children with

loving arms, introduced us to South African wine, and made us feel at home in beautiful South Africa, and to Wessel Venter for sharing his grasp of the Afrikaans language.

The last thanks must go to the Lord, in whom “we live and move and have our being”, for providing the grace, strength, and opportunity to embark on this study of identity.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter One:

## Portrayals of Identity in MacDonald's Fairy Tales for Children

This thesis sets out to critically examine how the Victorian writer George MacDonald portrays the notion of a 'self' in terms of fixed 'character' and mutable physical appearance in his fairy tales for children. The Victorian period, often heralded as the golden age of children's literature, saw both a break with and continuation of the traditions of the fairy tale genre, with many authors choosing this platform to question and subvert social and literary expectations (Honig, *Breaking the Angelic Image* 1; Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 97). MacDonald (1824-1905), a prolific Scottish theologian, whose unspoken sermons, essays, novels, fantasies and children's fairy tales deliberately engage with such issues as gender, mortality, class, poverty and morality, was one such author (Ellison 92). Dismissed from the pulpit for possible heresy, he sought an outlet for his religious and philosophical messages through his fiction (Greville MacDonald, 181; Watson, 33). He was at the epicentre of the Victorian literary world and had relationships, both professional and personal, with Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Mark Twain, Charles Dodgson and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Sadly, MacDonald's writing is relatively unknown to readers today, while the amount of past scholarship on his work does not reflect the profound influence of his work on the writing of C.S Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, G.K. Chesterton, J.K. Rowling and Madeline L'Engle, to name only a few (Reis, 18; Honic, 2). Despite MacDonald's fifty works of fiction for adults, he is primarily remembered today for his fantastic works for children which encapsulate the defining characteristics of the Victorian fairy tale genre, while maintaining a uniqueness all his own. He takes full advantage of the richness of character, plot and imagery afforded by the fairy tale genre and although he toys with the allegorical he persistently refuses its limitations (Dearborn, 178). Tales often previously banished to the nursery take on new possibilities and meaning for MacDonald's adult and child readers alike, particularly for the development of character identity. These new possibilities allow a display of separations between the character and his/her physical form. Little girls turn into hideous monsters, a cold North Wind is a beautiful lady, a tiny girl and a howling wolf, while princesses quite literally lose their gravity and serpents in the shape of jolly doctors attend the king. By writing such separations between characters and their bodies, MacDonald creates a space where further questions can be asked about our understanding of issues such as identity and mortality. The space left by this created separation between characters and their bodies as encountered by both other characters and the

reader leaves behind numerous questions – leading to the possibility of new interpretations of gender and mortality.

MacDonald scholarship has examined issues of identity, most notably gender and mortality, both of which are intricately involved within the tales. This thesis sets as its goal engaging with these issues through the lens of separation between character and appearance. For my primary fairy tale texts, I focus mainly on MacDonald's novels *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), *The Princess and Curdie* (1875), with the exception of shorter tales of "The Golden Key" (1867) and "The Shadows" (1864). I also use the remainder of his children's fairy tales for support, including "Cross Purposes" (1862), "The Light Princess" (1864), "The Giant's Heart" (1867), "The Carosyn"(1867) , "Little Daylight" (1871), "The Wise Woman or a Double Story"(1875) and "Photogen and Nycteris" (1882). It should be noted that due to rareness of print, I rely on electronic text versions of MacDonald's work. I will therefore reference chapters, rather than page numbers, for the ease of the reader. I will primarily consult MacDonald's essays "The Fantastic Imagination" (1882), "The Imagination; Its Function and Its Culture" (1882), "A Sketch of Individual Development", (1882) "Unspoken Sermons" (1867, 1885, and 1889), as well as various letters to and from the MacDonald family (1820-1897).

U. C. Knoepflmacher, in his illuminating 1998 work *Ventures in Childland*, begins with an insistence on the necessity of biographical context for his Victorian authors, which I find particularly compelling for examining MacDonald's work (xv). Knoepflmacher writes:

> I believe in authorial selves, and hence have no compunction in weaving some biographical strands into the textual narratives I offer. The childlands my authors construct and the child selves they choose to feature have much to do, directly or indirectly, with their early relations to their parents or siblings, their own parenting (in the case of Thackeray and MacDonald), and their avuncular interest in a special child. (xv)

MacDonald's biographical context and experience have a defining influence upon his fiction, as writers such as Knoepflmacher, Greville MacDonald and Richard Reis have noted. Indeed, the majority of recent scholarship examining his fiction and theology insists upon the necessity of understanding his context whether literary, social, or religious (see for example Raeper, 11). His encounters with mortality throughout his life through the loss of his mother, siblings and children, his love of his Scottish home, the relationship with his own children and his tempestuous religious faith served to shape the man behind the words, and are visibly and

demonstrably found within his works (Prickett, *The Victorian Fantasists*, 83). His son Ronald MacDonald recounts that,

> Once I asked him why he did not, for change and variety, write a story of mere human passion and artistic plot. He replied that he would like to write it. I asked him then further whether his highest literary quality was not in a measure injured by what must to many seem the monotony of his theme – referring to the novels alone. He admitted that this was possible; and went on to tell me that, having begun to do his work as a Congregational minister, and having been driven [...]into giving up that professional pulpit, he was no less impelled than compelled to use unceasingly the new platform whence he had found that his voice could carry so far ("George MacDonald: A Personal Memoir", 66-67).

**MacDonald's Life and Conflict with Conventional Christianity**

MacDonald was born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, on December 10th, 1824, to George MacDonald and his wife, Helen MacKay.[1] One cannot escape the echoes of Scotland resonating throughout his works in his various creations of what Knoepflmacher refers to as "childland" (xi). In a letter written to *The Spectator* in 1867, MacDonald wrote: "Surely it is one of the worst signs of a man to turn his back upon the rock from whence he was hewn" (Greville MacDonald, 38). MacDonald continued to hold steadfastly to this sentiment throughout the rest of his life, as he remained "first and foremost a Scot, and more than that, a Highlander and a Celt" (Raeper, 15). The jagged coasts, soaring heights and rolling moors are all to be found in his fiction, particularly in such works as *The Princess and the Goblin*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, "The Light Princess" and "The Golden Key".

Not only his geographical inheritance, but MacDonald's strict Scottish childhood, relationship with his father and loss of his mother, who died when he was only eight years old, had a deep impact on his work. By all accounts, MacDonald adored the mother he had lost, keeping a lock of her hair together with her wedding gift to MacDonald, and a loving letter describing George himself as a young infant. A sense of loss and childlike longing for the feminine, by times either sexual or maternal, and sometimes seemingly both, pervades many of MacDonald's books, most notably *At The Back of the North Wind*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie*, *Phantastes*, and *Lilith*. As Knoepflmacher points out,

> […] MacDonald uses the fairy-tale mode to seek compensation for early losses. Still, his own yearning for a complementary femininity stems from a sense of

[1] It must be noted at the start that the biographical context owes a great deal to the works of William Raeper, Greville MacDonald, and Rolland Hein.

> maternal deprivation that is more intensely traumatic […] MacDonald, however, prefers to locate the feminine in an anterior state of being that also brings out his fascination with death and transcendence (118).

MacDonald's loss was not limited to his mother; he also lost two brothers in childhood, before later suffering the loss of four of his own children to tuberculosis. He himself struggled with tuberculosis from a young age; Greville MacDonald notes that this constant proximity led his father to refer to consumption as "the family attendant" ( 251). It was this same disease that would eventually take Macdonald's life.

MacDonald's relationship with his father was a close, if at times strained, one. They exchanged letters during his years away at school, writing often, and MacDonald visited the farm when the opportunity arose and his pocketbook allowed. In the series of letters, MacDonald's desire to please his father is evident, often including apologies and excuses for failures, and promises for the future. The MacDonald family was considered financially secure in the relatively poor town of Huntly, where the Calvinist movement had firmly and passionately rooted. MacDonald was privileged to attend not only grammar school with many of his peers, but also to study at the University of Aberdeen, funded in part by his parents, and in part by a merit bursary. Two years into his degree in Chemistry and Physics, his funds ran out, and he spent the following year employed by a rich estate in the north of Scotland. It is still unknown exactly which estate this was, but many have speculated that it has been replicated in many of his adult works, particularly in such library scenes as found in *Phantastes* and *Lilith*. After this year of employment, he returned to Aberdeen and, in 1845, graduated with a Master's in Chemistry and Physics.

Following his graduation, MacDonald relocated to London, where he worked as a tutor for three years while trying to decide upon a career path. The sea, medicine, academia and the Church were all considered at different points. It was during this period of uncertainty that he met and began to court his future wife, Louisa Powell. Introduced to the Powell family by his close cousin, Helen MacKay, he soon became a regular favourite at the Powell house, often whiling away the evenings, he "sat and read poetry to the young ladies – Wordsworth and Tennyson and Browning's Saul and even his own," according to William Raeper (50). His relationship with Louisa quickly evolved beyond friendship, and they began a regular letter correspondence in addition to the familial visits. As their relationship progressed, MacDonald began tentatively to make plans to enrol at Highbury College in London, to pursue a divinity

degree. He outlined these plans in an undated letter to his father, who had pushed him towards ministry for years. He included the following caution, not feeling entirely at ease with his own decision: "I do not wish for you to understand me as having finally made up my mind as to the ministry. 'Tis true this feeling has been gradually gaining ground on me, and for a long time nothing has appeared to me of importance compared with that" (in MacDonald, *George MacDonald and Wife*, 108).

The uncertainty voiced in the letter to his father was one of MacDonald's many doubts related to the role of religion. He would continue to struggle with the tension between the Calvinist view of creation as a means to the Divine and the naturalist view he embraced along with his literary Romantic heroes, Coleridge, Wordsworth and their fellows (Coveney, 29; Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*,161) . This was not to be his only struggle; he wrestled with and ultimately rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment, imputed righteousness and substitutionary atonement, cornerstones of his Calvinist heritage. MacDonald's theological persuasions and philosophy prove an intricate labyrinth to traverse (Ellison, 93). This is due largely to MacDonald's self-admitted dislike of denominations and systems (Reis, 31). In an 1851 letter to his father, MacDonald wrote:

> The word doctrine, as used in the Bible, means teaching of duty, not theory. I preached a sermon about this. 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, the more impossible it is to be right. I am neither Arminian nor Calvinist. To no system would I subscribe (in MacDonald, *George MacDonald and Wife*, 155).

Despite the vague nature of his religious beliefs, the profound importance of these beliefs in his life and writing cannot be understated.

In 1848 he began his training to become a Congregational minister at Highbury Theological College. Along with his education, he began to preach in the Congregational church to gain pastoral experience and to supplement his meagre income. By this point, MacDonald considered himself emotionally ready and committed to marry Louisa, but the insistence of his own father, in addition to hers, that he be settled in his career and fully able to provide slowed their courtship. Their letters one to another served to encourage MacDonald, who was already growing depressed with his role in the pulpit and his congregation's reactions to what he (half in jest and half in despair) called his heresies. Louisa continued to be his support through this time. Raeper notes that, "[i]n a way, she was child and lover and mother all rolled into one" (69). This

combination of maternal, erotic and childlike love is something often commented upon by MacDonald scholars, and will be examined further in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The object of this blend of love, Louisa, considered him her superior in intellect and theology, signing her letters as "your child," but at the same time providing a support almost motherly to the motherless Scot, though always within a romantic context. Despite the loving support of her suitor, and her self-proclaimed inferiority with regard to many intellectual and religious matters, Louisa also grew concerned about MacDonald's questionable doctrine, though not quite in the same judgmental fear as many of his friends and family. Greville MacDonald notes that in a letter to Macdonald Louisa writes:

> I am sure that you have such a loving trust in Him and such an earnest holy love of Jesus that I could not be as afraid as you think. I am not afraid of your *heresy*. I wish I could tell you just what it was I did feel afraid of but I am sure I cannot so shall not try as it would not be what I mean (184).

Despite this "heresy", his religious ideas and beliefs provided a livelihood for a short time, until he was dismissed for unsound theology in the form of a requested resignation, following a rather unsubtle decrease of his salary. After attempts to start his own church with a group of supporters failed and he was no longer welcome in the established church, MacDonald's very personal and personalized religion then found a public outlet once again in both his fiction and non-fiction, including a series of "Unspoken Sermons," which prove extremely useful in attempts to grapple with his theology. This thesis will therefore examine those doctrines that were agreeable to his denomination, his Calvin heritage, and mainstream British Christianity, and those doctrines so disagreeable as to be labelled heresies by opponents in an effort to understand MacDonald's theology and philosophy, so central to the theoretical framework of this thesis as a conscious and deliberate part of his fiction. As Richard Reis notes,

> [i]n dealing with a less consciously didactic writer, such material would be less important for appreciating his works, but with MacDonald it is practically indispensable: MacDonald developed his views early, before the loss of his pulpit forced him to attempt their expression in fiction (29).

MacDonald's main variances with Calvinism, though many, could be broken into his treatment of eternal punishment, ideas of justice and atonement, and leanings towards naturalism (Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, 160; Ellison, 93). These are all, with the possible exception of the last, almost inextricably linked for MacDonald due to his understanding of the nature of God. A

cursory look at each issue must suffice for the foundation of my study.[2] Much of MacDonald's theology seems to derive from his account of the character of God. MacDonald rejected the stern, masculine Calvinist God of judgement, turning instead to focus on God the Father, as William Gray (30), Roderick McGillis (94) and many other critics all agree. His insistence on the loving, patient and forgiving nature of a parental God must be grasped first and foremost. By emphasizing the parental relationship between God and mankind, MacDonald was able to draw a number of conclusions. Firstly, that God loved His children. Secondly, that God desired a relationship with his children (Raeper, 230). Thirdly, that hell as an everlasting punishment for punishment's sake must be completely rejected – what parent would choose to do that to their child? These conclusions in turn negated a number of crucial foundations of historical Christianity: tt dismissed the inability of the sinful to do anything towards their salvation and it led to a rejection of the necessity of Christ as a perfect atoning sacrifice for the satisfaction of a just God. These assertions then had repercussions for the traditional religious understanding of the nature and relationships of justice, punishment, atonement, mercy, love and the role of grace.

The unconditional love a parent should have for a child was, for MacDonald, a given, a starting place (Raeper, 249). This starting place was not reached without struggle, as he went out into the world and saw suffering, some of it located within his own door. It was, however, the starting point that he returned to again and again, and in many ways, was the foundation for his remarkably individual and at times mystical personal religion. It became a basis to build upon, a justification for a rejection of the sterner side of Calvinism. Having established this as the cornerstone, MacDonald then sought to approach God the Father (always this emphasis of the parental, loving nature of God) through Christ, through the Bible and through nature (Wolff 14-15; Lewis xxi).

Where MacDonald agrees with mainstream and classical Christianity is the presence of love in justice and justice in love. The marriage of these two in and with each other results in a Dantean understanding of punishment, which must result from justice as love. In a written sermon, MacDonald stated: "God is bound by his love to punish sin in order to deliver his creature; he is bound by his justice to destroy sin in his creation. Love is justice—is the fulfilling

[2] For further reading I found Robert. H. Ellison's *The Victorian Pulpit,* J. Flynn and D. Edwards' *George MacDonald in the Pulpit,* and Roland Hein's *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald* to be essential for understanding MacDonald's theology.

of the law, for God as well as for his children" (MacDonald, "Justice", n.pag.). Having portrayed punishment as motivated in love and real love as justice for both creator and created, MacDonald goes on to examine the necessary atoning portion of justification, and its intrinsic separation from punishment.

A necessary component of justice for MacDonald includes the separation of punishment and atonement. He states this separation clearly, saying: "He who commits the offence can make up for it – and he alone. One thing must surely be plain – that the punishment of the wrong-doer makes no atonement for the wrong done" ("Unspoken Sermons" n.pag.). This conclusion is consistent with Calvinism, and indeed with most mainstream interpretations of both Christianity and Judaism. Turning to the Jewish tradition, in which Christianity has its roots, one sees that the necessity of punishment for wrongdoing is not the full measure of atonement. In addition to the punishment of the guilty party, redress must be made to the wronged party. If property has been stolen, it must be paid back; if an injury has been done, it must be repaid in full (Exodus 21:24 and 22:1, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21). This is a fundamental and necessary step towards atonement and forgiveness. In the Calvinist-Christian tradition, sinners are unable to save themselves, and are utterly depraved, unable to even seek out the Christ who may save them. Rather, God has predestined the people he will call and save (Romans 8:28-30). This is likely at the crux of MacDonald's disagreement with Calvinism – rejecting a God who would choose to predestine some, while condemning others. As he wrote as a younger man, referring to his childish struggles with Calvinism, "I 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, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men" ("Weighed and Wanting" 47).

It is this understanding of love for all that prompted MacDonald's perhaps most heretical conviction, evident in his short statement that "the more we believe in God, the surer we shall be that he will spare nothing that suffering can do to deliver his child from death" (MacDonald, "Justice"). With this one sentence, its sentiment so often repeated in his sermons, MacDonald all but declares that perhaps hell is not eternal, after all; perhaps this is another, albeit more painful, way back into relationship with the Father. MacDonald thus continues to apply his understanding of the nature of God, using the analogy of the parent needing to discipline his wayward child so that he will learn. It must be emphasized that MacDonald sees the punishment as not for its own

sake, but for the sake of the child, so that he or she will learn a valuable lesson – so that his or her character will be reformed. While this concept is accepted in traditional Christianity, applying it to Hell and questioning its eternality brings MacDonald yet again extremely close to the Church's label of heresy.

MacDonald is unable and unwilling to throw out punishment entirely, however; the significant difference is how it becomes a means to an end, rather than the end in and of itself: "This is the reason of punishment; this is why justice requires that the wicked shall not go unpunished—that they, through the eye-opening power of pain, may come to see and do justice, may be brought to desire and make all possible amends, and so become just..." (*Unspoken Sermons*, n.pag.)

Punishment, now a purifying force, must be something given out of love. How can a God of love, questions MacDonald, who does not dole out punishments for the sake of punishment or from an equable sense of justice, but punishes out of love, then take that away from his creatures by giving all punishment to Christ? It is impossible. If the nature of punishment provides a good for the recipient, as MacDonald argues, then a loving Father would never seek to take that away from his child, but rather, would allow that child to go through suffering for its own good.

Because of this interpretation of the nature of justice and its relationship to punishment and atonement, MacDonald's next step leads him to deliberately reject the doctrines of imputed righteousness and substitutionary atonement. Christ did not suffer in place of the sinner; with MacDonald's understanding of justice, he must not – cannot – pay the sinner's debt to God. Christ's righteousness is not to be given to the sinner's account; the sinful child no longer hides under the mantle of a perfect saviour.[3] Referring to substitutionary atonement in a sermon, MacDonald stated:

> The device is an absurdity – a grotesquely deformed absurdity. To represent the living God as a party to such a style of action, is to veil with cruelty and hypocrisy the face whose glory can be seen only in the face of Jesus; to put a tirade of vulgar Roman legality into the mouth of the Lord God merciful and gracious, who will by no means clear the guilty. (*Unspoken Sermons*, n.pag.)

Christ's role thus becomes exemplary, rather than deliberately sacrificial. By relinquishing the role of the ultimate sacrifice, MacDonald's Christ is to take on the role of the ultimate example. In the light of this divine illustration, Jesus's followers are meant to be so overwhelmed that they

[3] "God may be able to move the man to right the wrong, but God himself cannot right it without the man." (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, n.pag.)

cannot help but follow him, his example so perfect that they cannot but desire to be like him (Ellison, 97). His followers are to have the same abhorrence and rejection of sin, desiring to purge it out of their lives even if hell is the only way to do so: "[t]he soul thus saved would rather sink into the flames of hell than steal into heaven and skulk there under the shadow of an imputed righteousness" (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, n.pag.). MacDonald sought to find and highlight what he considered the best to be found in humanity, in his God; the love of a parent for a child, the creative force and impulse, mercy, love, forgiveness coupled with justice, rather than accepting an inherent dichotomy between the two.

This overview of MacDonald's theology is necessary primarily because of the religiously and philosophically loaded issues discussed in Chapter 3. These issues can only be understood in tandem with the foundation of the impetus and intent behind MacDonald's turn from the Church as a profession to the literary world. It is obvious from his biography that religion was a large component of MacDonald's personal identity; it was his livelihood, the motivation behind his work, it was continuously on his mind as the subject of his essays, and the topic of his many conversations. Not only this, but MacDonald's religion was fundamental in his theoretical view of identity formation. Despite his "heresies", MacDonald never rejects the Christian perspective entirely; his ideas of identity are founded in the context of created and creator. Further, in addition to his fairy tales as explored later in chapter three, his sermons, letters, and essays continuously reference finding identity specifically rooted in the child-parent relationship he insists is the human relation to the divine. MacDonald's theology, as discussed above, never considers any possibility other than each person is in possession of a soul, and the choices made by each person have consequences, even if MacDonald does not profess to know the shape these consequences take. Due to these choices, the created continues to dependend on their creator not only for their existence and identity, but further, depends on their creator for salvation.

After his de facto dismissal from the Trinity Congregational Church of Arundel near London, MacDonald threw himself wholeheartedly into sharing his message through the written word. It took a few years for him to give up the desire for a formal pulpit, however, as he considered first one church then another, until he finally considered the possibility of starting his own church, and indeed, this latter was perhaps the most compelling and viable. In a letter to Louisa, he wrote: "A few young men in Manchester are wishing to meet in some room, and have me for their minister" (in MacDonald *George MacDonald and Wife*, 198). The family was then

separated for a time, while Louisa and the children remained in Arundel, and MacDonald left to seek what employment he might find elsewhere, supplemented with occasional supply preaching. It was also at this time that some of MacDonald's first writings, a collection of poems, were rejected by publishers (Greville MacDonald, 204). "Within and Without", a poem full of MacDonald's prevalent musings about mortality, was refused again by another publisher the next year. By this point in his unemployment, MacDonald's recurring respiratory issues reared their head and after consulting a physician, he was forbidden to preach or teach for a time, and so the MacDonald's remaining source of income was exhausted. The family depended on gifts from their family and patrons, and the hospitality of friends as they moved from home to home.

As the summer of 1854 drew near, MacDonald's health improved to the point that he was able to preach again, and to begin to deliver lectures on a number of subjects from theology to chemistry. The summer and fall passed quickly for the busy MacDonald family, and the opening months of 1855 found MacDonald with an offer from one of the most prestigious publishers, Longmans. And so the18th May 1855 saw the publication of *Within and Without* – MacDonald's first published work, which received much attention from critics for a first time author.

After many attempts to publish his poetry and essays, pressured by the need to support his family, MacDonald embarked on writing a novel, the literary form which was enjoying a wave of popularity in Britain at that time, in the hopes of procuring financial income (Reis, 9). For modern critics, MacDonald's realistic fiction displayed his agenda too blatantly (Reis, 10). C. S. Lewis would later write of this new endeavour that,

> A dominant form tends to attract to itself writers whose talents would have fitted them much better for work of some other kind. Thus […] in the nineteenth century a mystic and natural symbolist like George MacDonald is seduced into writing novels. (*Allegory* 232)

Despite financial need, the inspiration behind MacDonald's voice continued to be with the desire to share his 'truth'. Richard Reis agrees with Lewis's premise, but takes it a step further than Lewis, noting that:

> Most writers of fiction, perhaps, are chiefly interested in telling a good story with skill, discipline, and art – such are Jane Austen and Henry James, for example. But there are plenty of great writers, such as Dostoevsky and Shaw, to whom their private vision of Truth is primary, and who use their art as a means to expression of that end; and MacDonald belongs clearly with this group (31).

This same inspiration drove MacDonald into becoming one of the most prolific writers of his time. After forty-seven years, having written over fifty works for children and adults, MacDonald published his last work *Far Above Rubies* in 1898 before sliding slowly into silence. His later years were mixed with confusion as the once sharp mind grew foggy and dim. He eventually became unable to recognize those once close to him, friends and family, with often the only exception being Louisa, on whom he had come to depend more and more (Raeper, 388). After her death, the loneliness coupled with the now complete absence of the familiar acerbated MacDonald's slide into senility. A light touch of pneumonia in 1905 was more than his tuberculosis-weakened lungs could handle, and on eighteenth of September, MacDonald died, ending "his last vigil in a serenity of hope untouched by his great sufferings" (Greville MacDonald 545). His son records that after a funeral service in England, several months later his children met in Bordighera, where they placed MacDonald's ashes with that of his wife, "uniting them again in death as they had been inseparable in life" (192).

**MacDonald and the Victorian Literary Context**

Heralded as "arguably the greatest writer of original fairy tales during the nineteenth century" (Pennington 2), MacDonald's influence within the Victorian age was not limited to the creation of his fictional works, but extended from the man himself through his vast network of social, academic and literary relationships. After the publication of "Within and Without," MacDonald became a man at the centre of the contemporary literary sphere and remained there for most of his life. The pages of his journals and letters are full of first one famous personage then another, with Tennyson dropping in to watch the boat races, Lady Byron supporting the family and Lewis Carroll lounging on the lawn with Louisa and the children (Greville MacDonald 300, 342, 346).[4] His friendships also included such social and religious reformers as Octavia Hill, F.D Maurice and Matthew Arnold, while his circle of influence spanned the Atlantic with letter correspondence to such literary friends as Mark Twain, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Edward Eggleston.

Perhaps one of MacDonald's most famous and definitely one of the most well-documented relationships is his forty-year friendship with Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better

[4] A charming photograph of this day can be viewed at the Beineke Library at Yale University, in addition to the family album, photographed largely by Charles Dodgson.

known as Lewis Carroll. It was this same friendship that led to the publishing of arguably one of the century's most famous and enduring works, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, today known as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Wolff, 4). It is also one of the few MacDonald friendships to be well documented in both scholarship and in photographs. Dodgson's passionate pursuit of his hobby led to a number of photographs of the MacDonalds which have been preserved in the MacDonald family album. These photos offer a rare glimpse into the life of the family – both through posed photos of individuals and the family as a whole, as well as selection of pictures from the production of the play which was later to be the bread and butter of the MacDonald family, *Pilgrim's Progress*.[5]

**The Victorian Child in Social and Literary Context**

MacDonald, Carroll and their contemporaries wrote at a time of reformation for children at a literary and social level. The Victorian period held vast changes for the social realities of Victorian children. Seth Lerer argues that these literary and social changes viewed together form a more cohesive perspective: "The history of children's literature is inseparable from the history of childhood, for the child was made through texts and tales he or she studied, heard, and told back. Learning how to read is a lifetime, and life-defining, experience" (1). Before seeking to understand how children's literature evolved, one must examine, however briefly, the evolution of the Victorian child. Firstly, the nineteenth century, particularly in Britain, was a time that many contemporary scholars and critics credit with the creation of 'the Child', or childhood as separate from undeveloped adulthood: "[…] it was in the nineteenth century that childhood was invented, that childhood (in other words) came to be regarded as a distinct state of being, with its own values and culture" (MacKenzie, 64). The difficulty in exploring Victorian childhood is that there was never only one childhood, but rather, as Ginger Frost notes in her aptly titled *Victorian Childhoods*, such a wide range as to be impossible to survey within the confines of this thesis (ix).

Not only was the child emerging as something other than adult, but this notion of the child began to bridge classes. As Britain attempted to deal with the changes created by industrialization, the harsh realities for lower class children stood in stark contrast to the middle

[5] For more information about the literary inheritance resulting from the MacDonald-Dodgson friendship, see John Docherty's *The Literary Products of the Lewis Carroll-George Macdonald Friendship* (1995).

class child, for whom the majority of these fairy tales were written, as Thomas Jordan notes (65). Demands for change were made by such influential reformers as Octavia Hill and Anthony Ashley Cooper, while in the literary sphere authors such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Barrett Browning used their work to portray the plight of many street children. As David Cody notes, less than twenty per cent of the children in London had any education ("Child Labour", n.pag.). The various Factory Acts (1802, 1819 and 1833) had set the stage with educational possibilities by seeking to limit child labour time, while further labour reforms followed in the latter half of the century. Education was transformed slowly at first by the private sector in the form of churches and charities, before seeing social reform from the State, the start of which was heralded by W.E. Forster's Education Act of 1870. As literacy increased, children's literature naturally grew more accessible.

On the other hand, the middle-class child most often experienced a pleasant childhood in Victorian Britain (Jordan, 65). While not facing the dangerous work environments of poorer children, however quality of education varied from situation to situation (Frost, 49). Despite this, middle class children were generally encouraged to read, and as Zipes notes, it was these "young middle class readers, whose minds and morals [the Victorian fairy-tale writers] wanted to influence" and were the inspiration behind the quantity of fairy tales now being produced (*Victorian Fairy Tales*, xi).

In addition to these social reforms and practical changes, Victorian understanding of the child in a philosophical sense altered significantly throughout the course of the century. "Children are distinguished from ourselves less from an inferiority than by a difference in capacity," wrote Elizabeth Rigby in the 1844 June edition of *The Quarterly Review*, voicing the rational sentiment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By the mid to late nineteenth century, childhood had evolved with Romanticism, putting on the defining characteristic of innocence, leaving the pseudo-puritan ideals of a corrupt child, in his sinfulness much like his adult peers, who must be chastised and reformed , behind. Childhood gradually became something separate, something to be cherished, even venerated and emulated, not stamped out (MacLeod 139). Taking into account the wide diversity of schools, philosophies, and religions surrounding the child throughout the nineteenth century, Anna Scott MacLeod provides a summary of a general shift in the views of the child to which MacDonald evidently subscribed:

> […]children's literature made a momentous journey from eighteenth-century rationalism to nineteenth-century romanticism. When the journey was complete, the children of children's fiction, rational, sober and imperfect at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and become innocent, charming, and perfect: the rational child had become the romantic child (141).

This Romantic child is perhaps the most evident influence on MacDonald's own expectations of his audience, epitomized in his usage of "the childlike" (MacDonald, The Fantastic Imagination, n.pag.). MacDonald himself provides explicit statements describing his desired readers. One of the most thorough pieces to do this is his essay, "The Fantastic Imagination," wherein he responds to an imaginary interlocutor, who takes on the voice of the "repeated request of [his] readers" (n.pag.). His most direct and most quoted statement concerning his audience declares that, "[f]or my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five" (MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination, n.pag.). He carries this sentiment still further, saying, "[h]e who will be a man, and will not be a child, must – he cannot help himself – become a little man, that is, a dwarf. He will, however, need no consolation, for he is sure to think himself a very large creature indeed" (MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination, n.pag.). Rather than insisting on the child as a small adult, MacDonald insists that the adult who refuses the childlike is the one who is small – mere self-deluded stunted potential. And so the reader is to understand that while childishness as smallness of mind is to be spurned, the 'childlike' is something that each age of life should constantly seek. This understanding of childlike harmonizes with MacDonald's personal conceptions of God: no longer the strictly authoritarian judge, but a loving parent, who acts as father and mother to us all. If God is our father, then we must be his children; MacDonald orients his understanding of ideal childlikeness in relationship to the divine.

In this same essay, MacDonald acknowledges the familial positions of the reader with his concluding words: "[i]f any strain of my 'broken music' make a child's eyes flash, or his mother's grow for a moment dim, my labour will not have been in vain" (MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination", n.pag.). MacDonald's awareness of both the child and the parent reading together is very poignant. (The use of the term mother is not to limit the place of the fairy tale to the nursery and femininity however, as it must be remembered that male Victorian writers were in large part responsible for the popularization of the fairy tale at this time)[6].

[6] This is not to belittle the contributions of such notable female authors as Christina Rossetti to the fairy-tale discourse, but rather to refer to the sheer quantity of male writers.

If we are to understand his fairy tales to appeal to the 'childlike' in both child and adult, the importance of MacDonald's intention for the purpose of his own work simultaneously becomes clear since he insists on the presence of "Good" found in the same thing for the "mature" and "young" alike, calling to each heart and unifying humanity itself. In his 1873 editorial message "The Child and the Man," dedicating the magazine *Good Words For the Young*, MacDonald outlines the need for audience embodying that Romantic notion described by Novalis, that the Child "is father of the man" and as such, should be recognized and accepted:

> This Magazine, then, devotes itself to the literature of natural piety between the child and man and man and child. It is a periodical for the young – and even the very young will be cared for by us – but in such sort for the young that full-chorded harmony we aim at will not be struck out unless the mature can also take their places at our Round Table of GOOD THINGS. We shall speak not merely to the Child in the presence of the Man, but to the Child who is father of the Man, believing that there is one music which will thrill both together; one 'rainbow in the sky,' at which their hearts will 'leap up' together (n.pag.).

Having established the unity of the childlike in seeking that "one music", MacDonald is able to avoid the trap of relativism by insisting that, while he accepts 'higher' or 'other' readings into his own writing, there are, however, readings that are false – a reflection of the heart of the reader rather than the heart of his work: "If he be not a true man, he will draw evil out of the best; we need not mind how he treats any work of art! If he be a true man, he will imagine true things: what matter whether I meant them or not?" (MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination", n.pag.) This same insistence on more meanings beyond his own is found in MacDonald's claim that imagination or creation mimics the Divine. One of the chief differences between human creation and that of the Divine, argues MacDonald, is our human limitations. Humanity creates limited work where meaning must and should exceed the intention of the author, whereas the Divine has in mind and deliberately holds the whole of potentiality within his work: "while God's work cannot mean more than he meant, man's must mean more than he meant" ( n.pag.). MacDonald's doctrine dismissed *creatio ex nihilo*, as Raeper succinctly notes, but instead insisted that "[m]en and women were born out of the heart of God" (243). Thus, the relationship of conscious knowledge and truth alters for MacDonald: "A man may well himself discover truth in what he wrote; for he was dealing all the time with things that came from thoughts beyond his own" ("The Fantastic Imagination", n.pag.).

Despite insisting on the necessity of meaning within the fairy tale, MacDonald is very firm in saying that fairy tales in general, and his in particular, are not – and should not be –

allegories. A fairy-tale may have "allegory in it, but it is not an allegory" (MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination", n.pag.). Still further, he claims that a strict allegory in the hands of any but the truest artist will be "a weariness to the spirit" ("The Fantastic Imagination", n.pag.). Greville MacDonald argues that his father deliberately chose to engage with such intricate religious and philosophical issues, and in so doing sustained the tension between allegory and nonsense because of his understanding of the child. According to Knoepflmacher, this interpretation suggests that "[c]hildren […] want to confront 'the unknown' without having it explicitly codified or explained," and that "[a]s a result MacDonald's handling of complexities he neither simplifies nor overtly allegorizes seems ideally suited to their intuitive natures" (*Ventures*, 147). He explains that MacDonald believed that children were able to hold allegory and nonsense in balance because of their "multiple perspectives" and their ability to "yok[e] of irreconcilables" (147-148). This understanding of the child allowed him to bring his philosophy to those readers that would best understand him, while the genre itself, as we have previously uncovered, allowed child and adult reader alike to explore and to delight in the fairy land between borders (Prickett, 17).

Returning to the more general literary sphere in which MacDonald's fairy tales emerged, children's literature was a developing market, with more books aimed toward that audience than ever before (Coveney, ix; MacKenzie, 83). As Lerer notes, "[f]or a long time, what was *not* literature was the ephemeral, the popular, the feminine, the childish" (7). The nineteenth century gradually left this sentiment behind. MacDonald's fairy tales for children were published as the field of children's literature began to develop at an advanced; as it did so, the variety of genres blossomed, from instructional moral tales, animal stories, the newly born Nonsense, to Fantasy, the primary focus of this thesis.

Most scholars credit the etymology of the fairy tale to Madame D'Aulnoy in seventeenth-century France ("*conte de fees*"), although fairy tales themselves predate the term (Craig, 287). Like modern fantasy, fairy tales were not always for children, but rather went through periods in different countries as adult fiction, as in the French salons with their salacious and often political tales, and the nursery, as was the case for most British fairy tales. Even those written for children were not limited to the more sanitized versions of fairy tales, as popularized by Perrault and prevalent today, but were often exposed to darker tales – with the caveat that good and bad were

always clearly defined, and each met their appropriate end, a caveat that MacDonald's works always fulfil.

Especially noteworthy for the undertaking of this thesis is the freedom afforded by the possibilities intrinsic to the genre. Admittedly, MacDonald's choice to write within the fairy tale genre was in part due to the nature of demand. On the other hand, however, was the preacher without a pulpit seeking a forum for his often subversive message, and he, like many of his colleagues, found rich opportunity in fairy land.

Many critics writing on the Victorian fairy tale note that it was the fantastic that was most often written, and more easily received, to question religious and social conventions (see for example Jack Zipes, Roderick McGillis, and U.C. Knoepflmacher). The unreality of fairy-land provides a safe haven for the existence of things that don't exist in life, standing in contrast to the order of reality. Alice's fall down the rabbit hole to an upside down wonderland provides a perfect image of the new possibilities of fairy-land: previously a source of placid social norms, fairy tale genre inverted and subverted the every-day world. According to Jack Zipes, MacDonald, Oscar Wilde, L. Frank Baum and their contemporaries

> were the ones who used the fairy tale as a radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with the general discourse on manners, mores, and norms in society, and they commented on this by altering the specific discourse on civilization in the fairy-tale genre. No longer was the fairy tale to be like the mirror, mirror on the wall reflecting the cosmetic bourgeois standards of beauty and virtue which appeared to be unadulterated and pure. The fairy tale and the mirror cracked into sharp-edged, radical parts by the end of the nineteenth century. (*Art of Subversion*, 99)

Specifically to MacDonald, many of the identity questions asked by the creation of his characters can only be portrayed and understood specifically within the realm of the fairy tale. Rosemary Jackson explores the possibilities of the genre in her 1981 *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, writing that,

> […]each fantastic text functions differently, depending upon its particular historical placing, and its different ideological, political and economic determinants, but the most subversive fantasies are those which attempt to transform the relations of the imaginary and the symbolic. They try to set up possibilities for radical cultural transformation by making fluid the relations between these realms, suggesting, or projecting, the dissolution of the symbolic through violent reversal or rejection of the process of the subject's formation (91).

This "most subversive" type of fantasy, wherein a certain fluidity is achieved allowing for new possibilities, is exactly where MacDonald's work falls, as Jack Zipes has noted (*Art of Subversion*, 101). That same fluidity is found between the "real" and the "fantastic" realms in MacDonald's work, accompanied by an almost facetious textual awareness. An example of this conscious narrative is found in both the beginning of both *The Wise Woman* and *The Golden Key*, as MacDonald gently pokes fun at the customs of the real world before allowing his protagonists to enter fully into fairy land. (MacDonald, *The Golden Key* Ch. 1, and *The Wise Woman*, Ch. 1)

Zipes comments that specific to MacDonald, however, is the observable shift between his works of fiction for adults and his works for children. Zipes argues that the views MacDonald expresses in his realistic fiction were regulated according to convention, both literary and social, but that fantasy, particularly his fantasy for children, allowed him to engage with personal and social issues at a much deeper level (*Art of Subversion*, 103). Zipes writes that "in particular the fairy tale nurtured his religious mysticism and fundamental beliefs in the dignity of men and women whose mutual needs and talents could only be developed in a community that was not based on exploitation and profit-making" (103). This "radicalism and innovation" noted by Zipes, is perhaps never more obvious than in the portrayals of identity explored shortly.

The existence of these real issues within the non-reality of the fairy tale was the heart of the fairy tale itself for MacDonald, who insisted on the pairing between beauty and meaning as fundamental to the genre. Recalling his 1882 essay "The Fantastic Imagination", he responds to an imaginary interlocutor saying that,

> It [the fairy tale] cannot help having some meaning; if it have proportion and harmony it has vitality, and vitality is truth. The beauty may be plainer in it than the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairy tale would give no delight. Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another" (MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination", n.pag.).

Here MacDonald walks the line between absolutism and relativism. Truth is a necessity within the fairy tale; it is the source of vitality and beauty. Far from insisting on the presence of only one possible truth, however, MacDonald allows for multiple meanings upon multiple readings,

while denying the emptiness of relativism as he continues with his essay. Roderick McGillis ties this same desire for meaning to statements from the characters themselves in his essay "Queering the Fairy-Tale". He observes what could be understood as a starting place of Socratic ignorance that the characters admit to a lack of knowledge, which allows them to continue to question their way past the stereotypes and false knowledge they were equipped with into the happily ever after of the tale. McGillis writes that,

> In the "Golden Key," we hear the words "I do not know" or "I know nothing" several times, and they locate the positions of both characters and reader. The literary fairy tale is a form in which not knowing is not the same as not appreciating or even understanding. We understand such stories as open-ended, as encouragements to the reader to question the world about him or her and to challenge the manner in which meaning impinges upon us (McGillis, "Queering the Fairy-Tale", 97).

These statements observed by McGillis are not isolated to the Golden Key, but are found within each and every tale. Each protagonist begins without some vital piece of knowledge, which does result in this same questioning to which McGillis refers.

Specific to the focus of this thesis, due to the nature of fantastic literature MacDonald was able to portray concretely through various modes the abstract separation argued in following chapters, found examples such as the inner hands of the citizens of Gwyntystorm to the shifting appearances of such wise women from *North Wind*, the Princess Books, and *The Wise Woman*. This understanding of character and self portrayed questions the abstract possibility of this occurring in the real world by presenting physical manifestation of separation within the tale. It is through such a separation that I am convinced there is room for the kind of questions asked by MacDonald scholars about identity, mortality, society, and self.

**Establishing Terms of Identity**

When dealing with such a complex issue as identity, there are a number of terms which need to be defined. To begin, I will use the term 'self' as rudimentarily as possible, having found that the Oxford English Dictionary definition of self coheres most closely with MacDonald's usage, as "a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection." I aim to stay almost entirely with this definition, adding only that as the thesis progresses on a journey of exploration of MacDonald's representation of the 'self,' that the

term will eventually be used to refer to the character, irrespective of, while related to, the character's physical body. Use of the word 'character' will refer to a person within the narrative. I also take for granted a continuation of 'self' throughout the course of the story, despite the problematic presence of both time and change as outlined in the contrary arguments of such philosophers as Heraclitus and David Hume, as MacDonald treats his characters as recognizably continuous throughout each tale (Curtis, and Noonan, "Identity").

In addition to self, I often refer to the separation caused by the character-appearance relationship. By this I mean simply the relationship of any given character to his or her physical appearance or body. I start with the term 'kinetic' from the Greek *kinetikos* (*κινητικός*) – "to move." This term will be used to describe the relationship between the character and his/her appearance and to denote those instances where a character's appearance alters or moves from one state to another throughout the course of the narrative. Within the kinetic sphere, there are two more definitions to be found. The first is needed for those instances where the character's appearance changes, but not because of any deliberate act on the part of the character to affect his or her appearance. I have defined two separate descriptors to alternately emphasize different aspects of the same relationship: the term'transformed' and the second 'receptive'. Both terms will be used to refer to kinetic changes within the character-appearance relationship where the character him/herself is not the wilful cause of the change. Use of the term 'transformed', however, will be used to highlight the actual state of transformation, while 'receptive' will be used to underscore the deliberate act of another character or force upon the changing, most often in the form of a spell or curse within the tale. Finding a term for a description of the second aspect of the kinetic self was very difficult, as I was looking for a word that would include a cyclic understanding of change generating from and being received by the same character. 'Auto-transformative' was the term closest to what was needed: literally a changing of form – those kinetic instances where the character changing is simultaneously the source and recipient of change. This character both causes the change and receives its effects, in contrast to those individuals who are changed by an independent and separate agent. Its opposite, 'static', is defined for the purpose of this thesis, from the Greek *statikos* (*στατικός*) – causing to stand (as in, to stand still), and therefore will describe those situations where a character's physical body remains relatively unchanged throughout the course of the tales.

The term 'form' has two separate meanings within this thesis. The first and simpler usage refers to the physical and visible manifestation of the object or person being discussed. The second use has its roots in Platonic philosophy and is "in metaphysics, especially Plato's and Aristotle's, the structure or essence of a thing as contrasted with its matter" (Jeffrey, "Form"). When this secondary meaning is used, I will capitalise the word to refer to the Platonic Form. MacDonald is faithful, in some instances, to this Platonic understanding of the term, but also, upon occasion, appropriates it for his own use to refer to the 'essential' nature of an individual self, rather than a 'species or thing'.

As MacDonald's own branch of mystic Platonism has already been discussed by such authorities as Stephen Prickett and William Gray, this thesis will limit itself to observing the basic Platonic elements as effects his fairy tales. As in many fairy tales, MacDonald underscores the need for a Socratic beginning: one must put aside false knowledge and embrace awareness of ignorance as a desirable starting point to the pursuit truth. MacDonald's protagonists in particular start the tale believing the world and themselves to be one way, only to discover, often through a painful journey, that the world and they are not as might appear (for example, Curdie, the Light Princess, Rosamund, Nycteris and Photogen). MacDonald's work is further filled with Platonic imagery, particularly from the famous "Cave Allegory." Images of the cave appear from the shadows and forms found in "The Shadows" to the winding ascension of Mossy and Tangle from "The Golden Key". As evident from his theology, MacDonald, like Plato, explores again and again the meaning and ways of paternal relationships. Elements of Platonism are also found in instances of recognition and recollection within MacDonald's work. Once the element of ignorance is understood and established, the character begins the journey to recognition of that which he already knows.

**Overview of Thesis**

Chapter 2 will open with an examination of the varying degrees of separation and space between the character and the character's appearance, primarily using the full length texts of the Princess books, and *At the Back of the North Wind*, in addition to "The Shadows" and "The Golden Key" to gather instances of character presentation and portrayal. It will primarily concern itself with presenting various examples of the character-appearance relationship. This chapter relies heavily upon a close reading of the texts, and will involve extensive plot summary to bring out certain

aspects of the narratives in preparation for the following chapters. The exploration of character portrayal unearths two kinds of character-appearance relation: first, a static relationship, when the character's appearance remains the same, and the second, kinetic, when the character's appearance alters significantly within the course of the tale.

The third chapter aims to draw conclusions from these observations for the understanding of MacDonald's portrayal of identity: what unifying characteristics can be seen through the divisive groups of character/appearance relations? The simplistic categories arrived at in Chapter 2 will be used as a stepping stone for the complex findings uncovered by their use. Found in these portrayals is an inherent separation of an imperishable self, and a perishable form. This inner and outer self must be grounded in its informing philosophic and religious schools, including Platonism, Romanticism, and the Judeo-Christian religions. The chapter will then move on to investigate precisely what these findings will entail for each self. The understanding of the self as separated and to some extent divided has inescapable and complex ramifications for both identity and mortality.

## Chapter Two:

## Portrayals of Character Appearance in MacDonald's Fairy Tales

In this chapter, I set out to explore the various interrelations between characters and their appearance, whether these are portrayed as two indivisible components, or as separate but related components, or as two entirely unrelated parts of the self. In contrast to an understanding of the self as physical and unified in one indivisible being, MacDonald's writing presents his readers with multiple demonstrations of varying degrees of separation between an essential self and a physical body. The interaction between the two can fulfil the reader's expectations in one instance, completely subvert them in another, or even fluctuate back and forth throughout the course of the plot. My aim here is to identify the different instances of interplay between a character's essential self and his/her physical appearance or body, and to consider the questions that arise from such portrayals in relation to MacDonald's overarching notion of the self, as presented in the tales and explored in his religious and philosophical context explored in the first chapter.

In MacDonald's fantasy work for children, and often also in his fantasies for adults, the changing relationships between characters and their appearance are portrayed in three ways: those characters whose appearance fulfils reader expectation, those whose appearance overturns expectation, and those characters whose appearance alters. I have grouped characters according to these categories, not as a rigid system or as an end in itself, but rather as a useful framing device for further exploration of identity that will be utilized further in the third chapter. This chapter therefore examines character types according to these groups, beginning with the most simple and finishing with the most complex configurations. This involves a certain level plot summary, as there are particular elements within the narratives I need to highlight for further reference. After identifying a number of examples, I explore the presence and implications of each type within the tales. Due to the complex nature of the last group examined where the character's appearance is kinetic, and the repetitive characteristics of MacDonald's wise women, noted by Lochead, I have chosen to focus particularly on one character to serve as a pattern for the others (2).

**Portrayals of Stable and Consistent Character Appearance**

The more simple relationship is the one in which the character's appearance fulfils fairy tale conventions for that specific character type and remains constant throughout the course of the tale, falling within the range of static character appearance. At its most basic level, a story must have a protagonist and an antagonist, causing some degree of conflict. Jack Zipes notes that the fairy tale must begin with conflict in order to prompt change, because "[f]airy tales are informed by a human disposition to action – to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we also try to change and make ourselves fit for the world" (*Irresistible Fairy Tale* 2). Protagonists within a fairy tale typically take one of the following roles: princess, prince, king, queen or questing/troubled/adventurous/curious boy/girl. Vladimir Propp fully explores these roles in his 1928 work *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*. In contrast to Propp's one hero,MacDonald created most often a pair of protagonists, male and female, as Jack Zipes notes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (105).

Max Luthi in his 1987 work *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* discusses the necessity of the hero's deficiency (137), which often is caused by or the source of the conflict at the heart of the plot. Despite this deficiency, it is generally expected within the genre that the protagonist, however lacking in other areas, should be of mild to excessive good looks. An unattractive hero/heroine is unthinkable. He or she could be forgiven any number of vices (excessive curiosity, bad manners, selfishness, helplessness, amongst others), but never that ultimate sin of plainness. Goodness continues to be associated with beauty. As Diamond remarks in *At the Back of the North Wind*: "But what's beautiful can't be bad" (20).Where contrasting examples are found, MacDonald often subverts expectations to highlight or underscore a particular nuance of the story. In fairy tales, ill-looking heroines are transformed during the course of the story, for example in Cinderella through the intervention of her benevolent godmother, or in MacDonald's own "Little Daylight".

On the other hand, the antagonist has a few more possibilities: the wicked witch, the stepmother, the neglected princess, an ogre, sickness, time or any other personified element, as noted by Max Luthi in (134-135). Expectations for the antagonist include the demand for absence of beauty to the point of ugliness, except when the appearance of beauty is used to deceive the protagonist into a potentially fatal error.

MacDonald's fulfilment of these conventions are typically written in such a way as to leave it primarily to the imagination of the reader and therefore necessarily consistent with fairy tale convention through reader expectations. One such character who receives a deliberate lack of description is the young hero of *At the Back of the North Wind.* Young Diamond, as he is called to distinguish him from his namesake Old Diamond the coach horse, is introduced without description; his only qualifier in the opening paragraph is an action, namely that he went to the back of the North Wind. In contrast to Diamond's lack of an introductory description, the house and living arrangements receive much longer descriptions, as we are told of his bedroom above Old Diamond's stall, where he sleeps "in the heart of the hay" (13). In fact, while his home receives almost three pages of description, all the reader is given about Diamond himself is that he wears a nightgown, as did the majority of his social counterparts at that time.

The title character of "The Light Princess" is another primary character who receives relatively little description. What description she does receive aside from a perfunctory "lovely" is almost exclusively action based concerning her lack of gravity ("The Light Princess", Ch. 2, n.pag.). Scattered throughout the course of the tale are references to her golden hair, her plump but tall frame, and her sweet smile, with the rest left to the imagination (MacDonald, Ch. 5, 6, 9, n.pag.). A similar lack of description marks the prince, save for the description of his disguise as the princess' shoeblack, the king and the queen. The antagonist of the *Light Princess,* on the other hand, is described easily five times more than the princess is. The reader is told at her start of the story that she

> […] was a sour, spiteful creature. The wrinkles of contempt crossed the wrinkles of peevishness, and made her face as full of wrinkles as a pat of butter[…] She looked very odd, too. Her forehead was as large as all the rest of her face, and projected over it like a precipice. When she was angry, her little eyes flashed blue. When she hated anybody, they shone yellow and green. What they looked like when she loved anybody, I do not know; for I never heard of her loving anybody but herself, and I do not think she could have managed that if she had not somehow got used to herself ("The Light Princess", Ch. 2, n.pag.).

Much like "The Light Princess", the king and queen of "Little Daylight" as found within the *North Wind* receive little description, while, in contrast, the titular protagonist, due to the source of her magical affliction, receives pages of description as a character whose appearance alters, as discussed later in the section on the kinetic category. The prince and witch/swamp fairy receive equally little description as the princess's parents.

It is interesting to observe that these protagonists, particularly within the longer tales, typically fulfil reader expectations. In addition to Diamond and the Light Princess, another protagonist in this category is Curdie from *The Princess and the Goblins*, a mining boy who looks like a mining boy, as the reader meets him, fresh from having rescued Princess Irene and her nurse from the goblins:

> The boy was dressed in a miner's dress, with a curious cap on his head. He was a very nice-looking boy, with eyes as dark as the mines in which he worked and as sparkling as the crystals in their rocks. He was about twelve years old. His face was almost too pale for beauty, which came of his being so little in the open air and the sunlight—for even vegetables grown in the dark are white; but he looked happy, merry indeed—perhaps at the thought of having routed the goblins; and his bearing as he stood before them had nothing clownish or rude about it (Ch. 6, n.pag.).

In addition to the majority of his protagonists, MacDonald's secondary characters, when they are given any description at all, fall into this category as well, which makes sense as they often serve to fulfil a role in forwarding the plot of the story, rather than being characters in their own right. Examples include Lootie, the nursemaid, from *The Princess and the Goblins*, the guards in *The Princess and Curdie* and the cabbies from *At The Back of the North Wind*.[7]

These instances of characterisation have clear implications for an understanding of how the self is conceived when an appearance consistent with fairy tale conventions is the only interaction of character and appearance. Firstly, there is no separation between the essential or interior self and outward appearance; interior qualities are exteriorised to form a cohesive whole. Each character is precisely as he/she appears and the character visibly embodies the essential self. While this does not necessarily lead to one-dimensional characters, especially with such examples as Diamond, Irene, Curdie and the Light Princess (the protagonists of the longer works whose appearance is consistent with fairy tale convention), the presence of this type exclusively would result in the loss of plot depth as well as character depth. Characters' interaction would rely on the reading of physical appearance or surface alone as sufficient, rather than demanding a more in-depth knowledge of the other as a complex being, as definitively illustrated by Curdie's interaction with Great-Grandmother in *The Princess and Curdie*, discussed below. Instead, when juxtaposed with the discrepant and kinetic types which are defined below, these types in which

[7] The previously discussed characters, both primary and secondary, were chosen as samples to illuminate types of characters often mimicked in other tales. Other similar examples of appearance consistent with reader expectation are found in the characters of Princess Rosamund in *The Wise Woman*, Ralph Rinkelmann in *The Shadows*, Mossy and Tangle in *The Golden Key*, and Alice and Richard in *Cross Purposes*.

exterior appearance mirrors interior self provide a contrast, for instance where appearance is sometimes inconsistent with convention and sometimes changing and shifting within the story (in other words, kinetic).

Despite the necessary fulfilment of certain tropes and character types, fairy tales by definition require the questioning, reversal or subversion of experience. A fairy tale where absolutely nothing outside of the reader's experience occurs would not deserve the label of fairy tale – it would be, like most of MacDonald's work, a realistic fiction. MacDonald describes these necessary subversions in a number of his works, including a very facetious opening narration at the beginning of "The Wise Woman". The beginning of *The Golden Key* provides a more tangible, if less humorous, example: "In Fairyland it is quite different. Things that look real in this country look very thin indeed in Fairyland, while some of the things that here cannot stand still for a moment, will not move there. So it was not in the least absurd of the old lady to tell her nephew such things about the golden key" (Ch.1, n.pag.). Fantastic creatures, such as the fairy tale's namesake, must exist; laws of nature must be broken, imaginary lands explored and impossibilities realized in order for the fairy tale to be a fairy tale. Despite the manner in which the previously discussed examples comfortably fulfil the reader's expectations, there is an overlaying expectation – that the unexpected is expected – and it is within the unexpected that the second portrayal of the essential self-appearance relationship falls.

**Portrayals of Stable but Discrepant Character Appearance**

The second type refers to those instances where the appearance of a given character stands in opposition to preconceived expectations of that character due to its place within the genre, and I therefore use the term 'discrepant' for them. MacDonald takes the character types and expectations discussed above and turns them inside out, most often displaying their polar opposites. The examples are rather fewer than would be anticipated; more common are those characters who are either altered to a different state by means of magic, or taken from a discrepant state to their true form, which will be discussed in the following section on kinetic character examples. The most illuminating set of discrepant examples lie within MacDonald's *The Princess and Curdie*, which follows upon the heels of *The Princess and the Goblin*. The first book sees Curdie, directed by a mysterious and borderline omniscient Great-Grandmother in whom he will not believe, rescue the Princess from the goblins. In the sequel, the royal family

and the kingdom itself face a different threat, this time from within. The king has taken the princess back to the court of Gwyntystorm, where he grows ill from poison at the hands of his butler and doctor. In the meantime, Curdie is fighting his own battle against his own nature, culminating in his shooting of a white pigeon purely for the sake of killing, an act which leads him into Great Grandmother's open arms. There, he is armed with a gift which only comes after he puts his arms in purifying rose-fire. Great Grandmother, who suffers with Curdie through his burning, tells him, with tears still on her face, that the gift of the fire is one of insight because, although his hands are no longer rough miner's hands but "white and smooth" like her own, the change has more to do with what his hands are now able to do (Ch.8, n.pag). This gift provides Curdie with the ability to feel the "inner hand" of the other characters he encounters, exposing a new level of insight into the widening separation between interior self and appearance (Ch.8, n.pag). No longer dependent on relying on stereotypical expectations of appearance, Curdie's new ability provides the most overt example of the separation between essence and appearance; the reader is now told not only how others look but how their true, essential selves differ from this physical self. Great Grandmother explains this separation to Curdie, saying:

> Now listen. Since it is always what they do, whether in their minds or their bodies, that makes men go down to be less than men, that is, beasts, the change always comes first in their hands – and first of all in the inside hands, to which the outside ones are but as the gloves. They do not know it of course; for a beast does not know that he is a beast, and the nearer a man gets to being a beast the less he knows it. Neither can their best friends, or their worst enemies indeed, see any difference in their hands, for they only see the living gloves of them […] Now here is what the rose-fire had done for you: it has made your hands so knowing and wise, it has brought your real hands so near the outside of your flesh gloves, that you will henceforth be able to know at once the hand of a man who is growing into a beast; nay, more – you will at once feel the foot of the beast he is growing, just as if there were no glove made like a man's hand between you and it(Ch. 8, n.pag.).

A separation is clearly created here – the man and his appearance are not the same; he is other than he appears. However, Great Grandmother emphasises that it is only Curdie who will be able to sense this; the man himself does not know, nor his dearest friends or greatest enemies.

One example of the discrepancy between an essential nature and physical appearance found by means of Curdie's fire hands is in the character of Lina in *The Princess and Curdie*. The disturbing appearance of Lina remains the same throughout the course of the tale, despite the narrator articulating a hope for change in the future:

> From somewhere behind Curdie, crept forward the same hideous animal which had fawned at his feet at the door, and which, without his knowing it, had followed him every step up the dove tower. She ran to the princess, and lay down flat at her feet, looking up at her with an expression so pitiful that in Curdie's heart it overcame all the ludicrousness of her horrible mass of incongruities. She had a very short body, and very long legs made like an elephant's, so that in lying down, she kneeled with both pairs. Her tail, which dragged on the floor behind her, was twice as long and quite as thick as her body. Her head was something between that of a polar bear and a snake. Her eyes were dark green, with a yellow light in them. Her under teeth came up like a fringe of icicles, only very white, outside of her upper lip. Her throat looked as if the hair had been plucked off. It showed a skin white and smooth (Ch. 8, n.pag.).

This is a fearsome description indeed, made even more striking by the contrast to follow. When Curdie holds her paw with his fire-purified hands, he is shocked to find that within the ugliness of the Lina before his eyes lies a child, pure, soft, and innocent: "The green eyes stared at him with their yellow light, and the mouth was turned up toward him with its constant half grin; but here was the child's hand! If he could but pull the child out of the beast!" (Ch. 8, n.pag.). This discontinuity between appearance and reality is echoed in Curdie's mother, whose outer "horny, cracked, rheumatic old hand, with its big joints and its short nails all worn down to the quick" feels to Curdie just as the white, smooth and beautiful hands of the Great Grandmother feel (Ch.9, n.pag.).

An interesting set of counterpoints to this child trapped in the beast and lady's hands hiding within the hands of the washerwoman are the beasts trapped inside men, found in the citizens of Gwyntystorm, whom Curdie encounters later. While the degenerate nature of the first citizens encountered such as the wicked baker and angry barber can be seen without Curdie's magical hands, the residents of the king's household met later demonstrate the greatest discrepancy and deceit. His first meeting is with the menservants, who have so gorged themselves on the king's food and ale that Curdie is able to grasp their hands where they lie passed out in the hall, identifying "two ox hoofs, three pig hoofs, one concerning which he could not be sure whether it was the hoof of a donkey or a pony, and one dog's paw" (Ch. 18, n.pag.). Curdie and Lina continue to wander through the castle in search of the princess and the king. As they draw closer to the heart of the castle – the king's chamber – the contrast between appearance and reality continues to grow stark. The royal doctor provides an excellent example because he is someone entrusted with the wellbeing of the heart and head of the kingdom, and, Irene tells Curdie, is "'[o]h, such a dear, good, kind gentleman! […] He speaks so softly, and is

so sorry for his dear king! He will be here presently, and you shall see for yourself. You will like him very much'" (Ch. 19, n.pag.). Irene's description illustrates the utterly convincing and, in this case, deceitful nature of a discrepant interior self-appearance relationship. The doctor comes into the room and immediately trips upon Lina, who lies guarding the door. When Curdie helps him up, he is immediately repulsed, "for what he held was not even a foot: it was the belly of a creeping thing. He managed, however, to hold both his peace and his grasp, and pulled the doctor roughly on his legs – such as they were" (Ch. 19, n.pag.).

It is interesting to note a warning included here with the apparent hierarchy of morals. A definite set of values is portrayed and one can move along the spectrum up towards 'good things' or down to 'bad things', which, in the examples above, take the form of a romanticized and innocent child at the one extreme and a deceptive serpent on the other. However, despite this apparently inherent 'knowledge of good and evil', there is a sense in which the protagonist and reader are commanded to reserve judgement. The protagonist and the reader must recognize their own lack of omniscience and omnipresence. This warning allows MacDonald to warn of premature judgement on the part of a fallible protagonist and reader. Even Curdie, gifted with his fire hands and able to feel a person's inner hands, is extremely limited to that one point in time, much as the reader must and can only read one sentence at time as it unfolds. Grandmother gently admonishes Curdie with the metaphor of two men – one descending and one ascending the same hill. When they meet on the same path, an observer is unable to distinguish which is which. Curdie must not presume to know more than he does; his knowledge of one person at one point does not necessarily indicate their past or their future. Built into these assumed inherent values is also the understanding that just as outer bodies may change so can the inner self. Moreover, people can deliberately choose to change, the source of which is "what they do, whether in their minds or their bodies" (Ch. 8, n.pag.).

Another discrepant example is found in the character of Agnes from "The Wise Woman" or "A Double Story". Agnes is first described in a parallel to Princess Rosamund, but the reader is soon told of the worm in her smile that was growing in her inner self, despite her comely exterior. Agnes is confronted with herself after three days within the hollow mirror sphere, where she sees an ugly naked child who mirrors outwardly what Agnes was on the inside, and whom Agnes hates with her whole heart: "The moment that she hated her, it flashed upon her with a

sickening disgust that the child was not another, but her Self, her Somebody, and that she was now shut up with her for ever, and ever[…]" (n.pag.).

The very idea of a discrepant relationship between the character's essential self and the character's appearance as shown by the previously listed examples further implies at least the possibility of a separation between these two dimensions – the character's physical self does not directly correspond with the nature of his/her inner self. Admittedly, there is a sense in which neither consistent appearance or discrepant appearance are truly static. The very nature of life necessitates growth and change – from an infant to a child, to an adult, to an old man/woman, only to pass away – as can be seen in those characters that grow up through the course of their stories, such as the Light Princess or little Daylight. How much of a cyclical change is seen through the progression of human life? How different is a newborn, with its downy hair, soft skeleton, unformed muscles, toothless gums, short limbs and lack of coordination from a fully grown adult, with thick hair, hard skeleton and defined muscles capable of a huge range of motion. Perhaps an exception to this is found in the early demise of the child Diamond, whose death will be covered in detail in Chapter 4, and characters like him who are not given the opportunity to grow and change, but are frozen in a state of arrested development.

Up to this point, it could be argued that the separation between inner and outer selves is not necessitated by characterisation, but could perhaps just be the way things are in the fairyland where things are not as they should be. There is no objective reason why a princess cannot look like a tired old woman, or why a witch cannot look beautiful, despite the reader's expectations of beauty, even though the existence of both consistent and discrepant within a tale naturally raises questions. With the emergence of the kinetic types, however, the ultimate question of space between outer body and inner nature is answered.

**Portrayals of Changing Appearance in MacDonald's Wise Women**

What I term the kinetic type can be separated into two groups: the first type and more familiar type has the character's outer appearance alter in response to external stimuli, most often in the case of a spell. Examples of this type abound in MacDonald's work, finding their origins in the much earlier works of his fairy tale predecessors. The only exception to these two groupings is found in a set of characters often not considered characters at all: the shadow people of *The Shadows*, whose kinetic forms are entirely in keeping with their nature. Perhaps the most

illustrative example of this type is found in "Little Daylight", the story told within the narrative framework of the *North Wind* and somewhat predictably based upon the tale of Sleeping Beauty. The spell placed upon Little Daylight, much like that on the Light Princess, affects her physical form. Unlike the Light Princess, who remains lovely in form despite her lack of both emotional and physical gravity, this curse causes Daylight to be as lovely as can be at one stage of the moon, while the waning of the moon finds her "withered and worn […] like an old woman exhausted with suffering ("Little Daylight", n.pag.).

The second type of kinetic, those examples where the character who is changed is also the cause or source of the change, is almost exclusively also the cause behind the first type. It is the wicked counterparts of Great Grandmother, after all, that enchant the princess to her aesthetic detriment. More common to MacDonald than these wicked witches are what Marion Lochead calls "MacDonald's queen-goddess-mother figures" (2). Included within this type are the North Wind, in *At the Back of the North Wind*, and the Wise Woman, in "The Wise Woman," and Princess Irene the elder, also known as Great-Grandmother, who appears in both *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*, both of which titles could as easily refer to Great Grandmother as to her namesake, the young Princess Irene.

Without question the most explored of the "queen-goddess-mother" types, whose appearance is found within the kinetic character-appearance interaction, is the Great-Grandmother of many names and even more faces, found in both *The Princess and Curdie* and *The Princess and the Goblin*. This character is described in more detail than either of the title characters, and arguably more than any other character within MacDonald's works for children. I take her as a case study of appearance from her entrance to exit in detail throughout both books, both for the depth of description, as well as the manner in which Grandmother serves as a pattern for other similar, well-intentioned, maternal and wise female characters for MacDonald, such as North Wind and Grandmother from "The Golden Key" . She provides a paradigm of the kinetic examples where the subject is the source of her own transformation, and also becomes a source of clarity for the two previous types with the powers she is willing to share as well as the explicit explanations she provides about herself and the nature of identity.

Examined alongside Great-Grandmother are the characters who interact with her. This is necessary because these characters provide context for these encounters, but more importantly, due to the nature of the kinetic, are key to understanding how kinetic types can be known. Great

Grandmother is seen differently by different characters; she is also seen differently by the same character at different stages. This section also receives the greatest amount of attention because in learning about Great-Grandmother, one learns more of the characters, both of discrepant and consistent appearance, who view her. Thus by interacting with Great Grandmother through the eyes of such characters as Irene, Curdie, and the miners, one learns about not only Great Grandmother, but how one can view other characters in relation to this kinetic type.

The reader first meets Great Grandmother in *The Princess and the Goblin*, when the young Princess Irene loses herself in the castle. At the top of steep stairs and alone in the tower, she sees a very old woman, at work at a spinning wheel:

> Perhaps you will wonder how the princess could tell that the old lady was an old lady, when I inform you that not only was she beautiful, but her skin was smooth and white. I will tell you more. Her hair was combed back from her forehead and face, and hung loose far down and all over her back. That is not much like an old lady – is it? Ah! but it was white almost as snow. And although her face was so smooth, her eyes looked so wise that you could not have helped seeing she must be old. The princess, though she could not have told you why, did think her very old indeed—quite fifty, she said to herself. But she was rather older than that, as you shall hear (Ch. 3, n.pag.).

Irene is invited to enter and there she embarks on the first of many conversations with this lady. During the course of this conversation, the reader learns that Great Grandmother stands strong and tall like a much younger woman despite being more than one hundred years old. We are also told that the princess is named after her Great Grandmother, also a princess. After this scene, Irene leaves and tells other people about the grand old lady living at the top of the tower, but is not believed, except perhaps by her father. She tries to find her way back to Great Grandmother, but is unable to find her. After failed attempts, Irene injures her hand and is between waking and dreaming when she next finds Great Grandmother – her appearance the same as when first encountered. This time, Great Grandmother takes care of the hurt hand and allows Irene to stay the night. The third meeting takes place after Irene has had an alarming encounter with a creature of the goblins. Great Grandmother's appearance is now so altered that the maternal intimacy accomplished last time between the little princess and her grandmother has vanished:

> Her grandmother was dressed in the loveliest pale blue velvet, over which her hair, no longer white, but of a rich golden colour, streamed like a cataract, here falling in dull gathered heaps, there rushing away in smooth shining falls. And ever as she looked, the hair seemed pouring down from her head and vanishing in a golden mist ere it reached the floor. It flowed from under the edge of a circle of

> shining silver, set with alternated pearls and opals[…h]er face was that of a woman of three-and-twenty (Ch. 15, n.pag.).

Grandmother is now so lovely that Irene, after doing wrong by not immediately running to her maternal protector, does not dare to draw near to her for fear of making her dirty like herself. Grandmother then insists on embracing Irene and when her dress has been made muddy magically cleans it with a burning rose from her fireplace. Unafraid of the burning rose, Irene asks to be made clean. Grandmother refuses, wanting the state of the princess and her garments to bear witness to her fearful flight from the goblin to the pragmatic and sceptical household, but does offer the princess a bath in her silver basin any time she wants.

After this, there are whole chapters where Grandmother does not appear, but the reader is left with the feeling that she is never far away from Irene or the doings of the castle, with her lamp of the moon lighting even the night. Her presence continues on the edges of the narrative. An example of such is found in chapter twenty-one where Curdie is trapped underground by the goblins and Irene rescues him without knowing of his plight with the help of her magic ring, a gift from Grandmother. This ring is attached to a thread so slight as to be almost invisible, but will always lead back to Grandmother, albeit not always along the shortest or most straight-forward path. A grateful Irene brings the admittedly confused and doubtful Curdie, unable to see the string or believe in this Great-Great-Great-Grandmother but equally unable to account for his rescue, to the tower, in the hopes that he will see and believe. Irene sees her grandmother in white, even more lovely than previous time, while Curdie, on the other hand, sees nothing:

> ‘Make a bow to my grandmother, Curdie,’ she said.
> ‘I don’t see any grandmother,’ answered Curdie rather gruffly.
> ‘Don’t see my grandmother, when I’m sitting in her lap?’ exclaimed the princess.
> ‘No, I don’t,’ reiterated Curdie, in an offended tone (Ch. 22, n.pag.).

The dialogue continues, with Irene pointing to what she sees – a blue bed, the fire of roses a beautiful light – while Curdie’s response indicates not only a different experience, but also hurt that the Princess would toy with him. Irene, who with her child-like faith sees Great-Grandmother from the beginning, continues to be more perceptive than Curdie is, because he not only cannot see Great-Grandmother, but also cannot fathom a world in which Irene could see something other than what he is able to see. Instead of this grand room Curdie says:

> ‘I see a big, bare, garret-room – like the one in mother’s cottage, only big enough to take the cottage itself in, and leave a good margin all round[…]

> I see a tub, and a heap of musty straw, and a withered apple, and a ray of sunlight coming through a hole in the middle of the roof and shining on your head, and making all the place look a curious dusky brown, I think you had better drop it, princess, and go down to the nursery, like a good girl' (Ch. 22,n.pag.)

Irene's innocent faith is called into question again with this final patronizing dismissal, as both characters leave what should have been the joyous occasion of Curdie's rescue: Curdie hurt and angered by his wounded pride, as he believes the princess to be making sport at his expense, and Irene hurt by her new friend's lack of faith, and the insult paid to her dearly beloved grandmother. Unlike Curdie, Irene is able to accept that Curdie sees what he sees without the suspicion of deceit. Irene immediately turns to her Grandmother and asks why Curdie was unable to see her. Like Irene's nurse Lottie, Curdie will not allow himself to believe what is before his eyes. Again, Irene accepts Grandmother's reply in faith, but thinks more highly of Curdie than her nurse.

> 'You are right. Curdie is much further on than Lootie, and you will see what will come of it. But in the meantime you must be content, I say, to be misunderstood for a while. We are all very anxious to be understood, and it is very hard not to be. But there is one thing much more necessary […] To understand other people' (Ch. 22, n.pag.).

This cryptic judgment of Curdie as "further on" than the disbelieving Lootie becomes clearer throughout the progression of the text, particularly in the sequel, but what I wish to focus on here is the desire of the princess to be understood and to be known. Grandmother insists on the importance of turning away from one's self towards others, having demonstrated her own knowledge of Curdie's heart and disbelief. This is the last direct appearance of Grandmother in *The Princess and the Goblin*, although she is referred to throughout the rest of the tale.

After this last exchange, Curdie goes home and talks over his misadventure with his mother and father, trying to make some sense of why the princess would lie. His mother gently reproves him with questions that culminate in a possibility unconsidered by Curdie: "'Perhaps some people can see things other people can't see, Curdie,' said his mother very gravely. 'I think I will tell you something I saw myself once – only Perhaps You won't believe me either!'" (Ch. 23, n.pag.). She then goes on to tell a story where she, too, was once trapped by goblins, but was saved by a white pigeon, which the reader is to assume also comes from Great-Grandmother, although neither Curdie nor his parents can draw this conclusion yet. Time passes quietly for a chapter or two, while Curdie finds out the goblins' plans to kidnap Irene and marry her to the goblin prince. Should that plan fail, the goblins would then drown the king's palace, a plan

which Curdie, with the help of the returned king, the king's men and, of course, Irene's Great-Grandmother, thwarts, and the story is drawn to a close until the next book.

A blend of repentance and despair from Curdie brings Great-Grandmother onto the scene for the first time in *The Princess and Curdie* in the form of a shock to Curdie's very sense of identity. Prior to her appearance, MacDonald writes that Curdie had "at this time [grown] faster in body than in mind – with the usual consequence, that he was getting rather stupid" (Ch. 1, n.pag.). This stupidity had engrained in his mind that Irene had deceived him, and there was no possibility of Great-Grandmother's existence. The narration continues with an even stronger criticism of Curdie; neither of his parents found joy in him, longing instead for the days when he was a child. MacDonald uses this opportunity to describe instead what should be at the heart of Curdie – that the inner self should contain an aspect of the childlike nature so prized by MacDonald, who writes that "[t]he boy should enclose and keep, as his life, the old child at the heart of him, and never let it go[…] The child is not meant to die, but to be forever fresh born" (Ch. 1, n.pag.). Presumably if Curdie's heart had protected his childlikeness, he, like Irene, would have been able to see Great-Grandmother at the conclusion of *The Princess and the Goblin*.

Instead, this change for the worse in Curdie's mind and heart leads him to a moment of despair: Curdie, eager to try his new bow and arrow, shoots down a pigeon for the joy of killing, despite a moment of empathy with the bird in the rapture of its flight. After the bird is brought down and he holds its limp body, Curdie is confronted with the state of his own heart and brought to question the separation between the boy he was and the boy he desired to be. Instead of being a saviour of life, as he was to the princess in the past book, he is now a person who enjoys being the cause of destruction and death (Ch. 2, n.pag.).

Despite the fervour of this conviction, a paragraph later finds Curdie, through the catalyst of hopelessness and guilt, about to throw away the cause of shame and shield himself in anger. Aid appears in the form of Grandmother's light; the bird flutters, still alive in his arms. With the return of hope and the promise of help, Curdie puts aside past failure and runs to the palace and Grandmother enters the scene again:

> Her grey hair mixed with the moonlight so that he could not tell where the one began and the other ended. Her crooked back bent forward over her chest, her shoulders nearly swallowed up her head between them, and her two little hands were just like the grey claws of a hen, scratching at the thread, which to Curdie

> was of course invisible across the moonlight. Indeed Curdie laughed within himself, just a little, at the sight; and when he thought of how the princess used to talk about her huge, great, old grandmother, he laughed more. But that moment the little lady leaned forward into the moonlight, and Curdie caught a glimpse of her eyes, and all the laugh went out of him (Ch. 3, n.pag.).

This bent grey lady with the shrivelled hands is a far cry from Irene's beautiful Great-Grandmother of the golden hair. Her eyes are the one thing that even hint at the woman met in past encounters. Grandmother drapes the bird across her chest and heals it, and by so doing seems to heal Curdie; he repents of his wickedness after her spinning sings wisdom into him (Ch. 3, n.pag). After this, she has only one request of Curdie, namely that when he hears the local people telling tall tales about her in the shape of an interfering old woman, he is not to believe them, for to believe in that woman would be to show a lack of belief in who she actually is. He promises, and this conversation ends in a transformation before Curdie's eyes, rather than from scene to scene as in the first book:

> As she spoke she held out her hand to him, and when he took it she made use of his to help herself up from her stool, and – when or how it came about, Curdie could not tell – the same instant she stood before him a tall, strong woman – plainly very old, but as grand as she was old, and only rather severe-looking. Every trace of the decrepitude and witheredness she showed as she hovered like a film about her wheel, had vanished. Her hair was very white, but it hung about her head in great plenty, and shone like silver in the moonlight. Straight as a pillar she stood before the astonished boy[...] 'Oh, now I can never forget you!' cried Curdie. 'I see now what you really are!' (Ch.3, n.pag.)

Curdie's declaration that he will never forget her proves untrue, but unearths two overarching themes for both *The Princess and Curdie* and *The Princess and the Goblin*; the first, the manner in which identities are formed despite physical alterations, and secondly, the important role recognition plays in identity. The next chapter opens with Curdie talking over the whole incident with his mother and father, as they sit on the mountainside after their supper. After he has described all he has seen, Mr. and Mrs Peterson believe him but remind him gently of what he thought he saw when he was first introduced to Grandmother. Curdie remarks to his parents, who throughout the tale act as moral markers for their child, that the thing his mind is struggling most to accept is how she changed before his eyes. After declaring that if Grandmother looked one way, she was that way, Mrs. Peterson, in perfect humility delivers a homely example that serves both to encourage and gently rebuke:

> 'it is not for me to say whether you were dreaming or not if you are doubtful of it yourself; but it doesn't make me think I am dreaming when in the summer I hold

> in my hand the bunch of sweet peas that make my heart glad with their colour and scent, and remember the dry, withered-looking little thing I dibbled into the hole in the same spot in the spring. I only think how wonderful and lovely it all is. It seems just as full of reason as it is of wonder. How it is done I can't tell, only there it is!' (Ch. 3, n.pag.).

It is noteworthy that even through the humble voice of the miner's wife MacDonald is seeking to marry emotive wonder, sensual experience and reason, a synergy that fascinated him as evidenced in his fiction and non-fiction, and which I explore more fully in Chapter 3. Mrs. Peterson's speech provides further insight into the kinetic figure of Great Grandmother. There is an ability to know something, without knowing how precisely it can be, in the same way that Curdie and Irene are able to see Great Grandmother, and know her for herself without knowing how (*The Princess and the Goblin*, Ch.15 ,n.pag., and *The Princess and Curdie*, Ch.6 ,n.pag.). Mrs. Peterson also provides an accessible example of physical alteration comparing Curdie's interaction with Great-Grandmother to her plant blooming in the spring; despite the vast change in its appearance it remains the same plant.

The next report of Great Grandmother is from miners who claim to have seen her, in a shape far different to those encountered thus far by Curdie and Irene. They describe a meddling old crone through tales heard from wives, mothers and grandmothers. They acknowledge her ability to alter her physical appearance, saying that "she could take any shape she liked," but that these appearances are merely deceptive, because "in reality she was a withered old woman, so old and so withered that she was as thin as a sieve with a lamp behind it" (Ch. 5, n.pag.). Their perspective associates Great-Grandmother with fear; they had never seen her except when "something terrible had taken place, or was going to take place – such as the falling in of the roof of a mine, or the breaking out of water in it" (Ch.5, n.pag.). One miner is able to see her in a form closer to that seen by Irene, as a beautiful young woman, but he then contrasts the maternal and caring Great-Grandmother by saying that this was the "most dangerous of all, for she struck every man who looked upon her stone-blind" (Ch.5, n.pag.).

In addition these loathsome descriptions including stories of poisoned wells and blindness, there is only one positive account – one miner who counters that he had heard the allegedly-poisoned well actually healed rather than harmed. Curdie's father,Peter Peterson, quietly challenges the miners, about why they assumed she was truly ugly, rather than beautiful, if she could change her shape. The jeering response of the miners – that "an old woman might be very glad to make herself look like a young one, but who ever heard of a young and beautiful one

making herself look old and ugly?" – illustrates a striking contrast to Mrs. Peterson's acceptance of truths she cannot understand in the previous chapter, as well as a pattern for conclusions about the woman's character and inner nature (Ch. 5, n.pag.). Mr. Peterson continues the dialogue, seeking to gently lead the men to a more truthful perspective concerning Great-Grandmother, concluding with a story about a drunk man so terrified by her that he never drank again.

Their next encounter with the princess (a title it must be remembered that Great Grandmother, like her namesake, owns) is another transformative one. Curdie and Peter see a great green light, and follow it. MacDonald describes the last as "like a large star, with a point of darker colour yet brighter radiance in the heart of it, whence the rest of the light shot out in rays that faded toward the ends until they vanished" (Ch. 6, n.pag.). They follow this star through twists and turns until they are in a new, unfamiliar place to Peter but known to Curdie, where the light turns into two eyes which Curdie recognizes as belonging to the elder Princess Irene. Her beauty and grandeur receive a full paragraph of description, as the narrator explains she is completely unlike the old lady Curdie has met before, but he is somehow still able to recognize her. They then have a brief dialogue concerning Curdie's previous experience of that place with the goblins, and Irene reveals, by leaving the room, that she is the source of the great light filling it at that time. In the darkness that follows, the narrator gives Irene extremely descriptive new names of "the Mother of Light" and "the Lady of Light" (Ch. 7, n.pag.). Her very absence, and the accompanying absence of light as the miner's lamps grow dim and die, illuminate the "half doubts and dreads" of both Curdie and Peter, but also firmly establish the need for faith and courage in the face of absolute darkness. When she returns, filling the cavern with light, she addresses Peter first, telling him that she has long known him, and that his family has royal blood (Ch.7, n.pag.). Then she allows Curdie to ask a series of questions, which establish further the multifaceted nature of both her physical appearance and inner nature. He learns that she is worn thin with oldness while also young and stronger than "twenty men", is the mother of light and also that woman the miners refer to as old mother Wotherop, as well as Irene's great, great grandmother (Ch.7, n.pag.). Curdie expresses his confusion and the Princess answers in a dialogue absolutely fundamental to our understanding of the separation of self and appearance or physical self as highlighted most particularly by the kinetic empowered relationship. Curdie begins by stating the difference he has observed, saying "'Look at what you were like last night, and what I see you now!'" to which Great Grandmother responds that 'Shapes are only dresses,

Curdie, and dresses are only names. That which is inside is the same all the time'" (Ch. 7, n.pag.). Great-Grandmother is utilizing the same language used to later describe the hands felt by Curdie's rose-hands. The inner self is to the physical self as the body is to clothes; the difference between the discrepant examples and the kinetic example of Great-Grandmother is that she has more than one dress she may chose to wear. Curdie then seeks to clarify the truth of what he has seen; is it entirely projection, or does Great-Grandmother's appearance convey any truth of who she is? Great Grandmother responds that not only are these appearances true, they are insufficient in number and ability to convey the full truth: "'It would want thousands more to speak the truth, Curdie; and then they could not'" (Ch.7, n.pag.).

Grandmother then addresses the idea of projection, explaining a delicate balancing between projection and graspable reality. She warns Curdie that there is

> 'a point I must not let you mistake about. 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. For instance, if a thief were to come in here just now, he would think he saw the demon of the mine, all in green flames, come to protect her treasure, and would run like a hunted wild goat. I should be all the same, but his evil eyes would see me as I was not.'
> 'I think I understand,' said Curdie. (Ch. 7., n.pag).

Great-Grandmother's explanation outlines the possibility for projection and reality existing within the same scene. The thief can view her as the demon of the mine, despite her remaining the same. It remains unclear precisely how this misperception occurs, but it is hinted that the thief's "evil eyes", like Curdie's disbelieving heart of the first book, stand in the way of his viewing the truth (Ch.7, n.pag.).

This discussion on the truth of self is quickly followed by a dialogue concerning knowledge and recognition, as discussed in the following chapter. Specifically, Curdie questions even the possibility of recognizing another person if their outer self changes as easily as a dress or a name, which, despite a very impractical answer, results in Curdie's recognition of the princess immediately, this time as an old woman in a red cloak, whom Peter fails to recognize (Ch. 7, n.pag).

The next appearance of the princess has Curdie at first confused as to which version of herself he is seeing, because of the flashing of her spinning wheel, the same wheel that spun truths into him after the near death of her pigeon. When he comes closer, he sees that the princess is "fairer than when he saw her last, [and] a little younger still" (Ch. 8, n.pag.). It is at

this meeting that the princess asks him to undergo a second trial. At her request, Curdie plunges his hand into Great-Grandmother's rose fire, through which he receives the power to tell the true "inner hands", as discussed in the second category earlier (Ch. 8, n.pag.).

The next encounter with Grandmother actually goes without recognition by either Curdie or the reader, and it is not discovered until the last chapters. Hindsight proves her to be a housemaid who receives almost no description except being called a girl and pretty prophetess (Ch. 23, n.pag., Ch. 24., n.pag.). Great grandmother remains in this shape for most of the remaining story, as she speaks the truth and is persecuted by the rest of the household for doing so, until their punishment and expulsion.

Chapter 31 sees the return of Grandmother healing the poisoned king, in the form most often encountered by the reader. Curdie is at first unable "see for the brightness," as she lays the purifying fire roses upon the king, weeping along with his pain. After the rose fire burns itself out except for its light within the king, Curdie sees the truth: "[…] no longer dazzled, [he] saw and knew the old princess. The room was lighted with the splendour of her face, of her blue eyes, of her sapphire crown. Her golden hair went streaming out from her through the air till it went off in mist and light. She was large and strong as a Titaness" (Ch. 31, n.pag.).

When Curdie awakes, he finds the housemaid still guarding the king, with the smell of roses associated with Great Grandmother in the air, and the little company begins preparations to fight the disloyal subjects and the invading foreign kingdom. Grandmother, in the form of the housemaid, indicates her bravery through her willingness to fight, and the reader sees her on the back of a tall red horse, where she then sits outside of the battle with young Irene, who notes that pigeons attacking the enemy seem to be following her orders. When the enemy realize this, they attack the housemaid until she is saved by Peter the miner. After the battle is won, the reader is told of Peter's recognition of the Princess in contrast to Curdie's lack of it. Peter concludes his story to Curdie, saying "'And so there I was, in the nick of time to save the two princesses!' (Ch. 34, n.pag.). Curdie, still unable to see Great-Grandmother in the form of the house maid, corrects his father, saying: "'The two princesses, Father! The one on the great red horse was the housemaid,' said Curdie […]" (Ch. 34, n.pag.). Even Curdie, who is given the largest number of interaction with Great-Grandmother, again fails to recognize her. He does not possess enough childlikeness to recognize her always; his knowledge is still imperfect.

The ultimate display of recognition and final transformation of Great Grandmother follows shortly afterwards, as she transforms from the humble housemaid into the beautiful princess, after gently rebuking Curdie, saying "'Did I not tell you, Curdie, that it might be you would not know me when next you saw me?'" (Ch. 34, n.pag.). She continues to act the part of the housemaid, serving the greatly reduced court clothed in her "royal purple, with a crown of diamond and rubies" (Ch. 34, n.pag.). Her servitude stands in contrast to her greatness; not only is she clothed in rich clothing and jewels, but all, including the king, kneel in submission before her.

After this scene of recognition, where Great-Grandmother in all her majesty takes on the role of a servant, she receives no description, but the reader is told that she was never very long absent, although not always found when sought. Queen Irene, as the reader learns she must be called in this last page, makes her last appearance in the healing of Lina, who disappears into her rose-fire and is not seen again.

**Projection and Perception of Appearance**

Before continuing on to examine kinetic appearances of antagonists in contrast to the wise female figures explored through Great-Grandmother above, I wish to further clarify an issue mentioned briefly, found in Chapter 7 of *The Princess and Curdie*, namely the projection of the thief in the mine (n.pag.). Great-Grandmother denied that the thief's projection of "the demon of the mine" as Great-Grandmother negated the possibility of knowing her truly. This is a point of such importance to MacDonald's portrayal of identity that it cannot be based on Great-Grandmother's word, but must be explored through a further example. If all appearance is entirely relative and dependent on the viewer, nothing can be definitively learned about the essential self. Looking at the other tales, therefore, demonstrates support for the idea pictured in *The Princess and Curdie*; seeing something aside from the truth is a reflection of a character's inadequacies. In addition to the thief, examples of this Curdie himself in *The Princess and the Goblin*, include the miners in *The Princess and Curdie* discussed above, and the wicked nurse in *At the Back of the North Wind* (Ch.3 n.pag.). The coexistence of projection and actual knowledge is further supported in "The Golden Key" by Mossy's and Tangle's encounters with the Old Man of the Sea on the quest to find the land from whence the shadows fall. Reading through this example illustrates MacDonald's ability to hold two possibly opposing ideas in tension; the appearance of the characters such as the Old Men and the aerenth both alter and Mossy and

Tangle's perspectives change as Mossy and Tangle journey to their ultimate destination, the land from whence the shadows fall. MacDonald demands neither one nor the other, but embraces the presence of projection and attainable knowledge of reality within his tales.

MacDonald tackles the reader's understanding of age and mortality as first Tangle, then Mossy meet the various old men of "The Golden Key". The first Old Man the children encounter is one of the few portrayals of appearance appears at first to be straddling the divide between static and kinetic. The reader is not specifically told if his appearance changes or if, in a relativistic twist almost unheard for MacDonald, he only appears differently to each child. The latter alternative would have large ramifications for our dealings with identity as an instance in which an entirely false appearance was all that the protagonist encountered. This possible anomaly is explained by the different ways the two children encounter him. Further consideration exposes the difference between the two protagonists: Tangle, who is wandering alone without the golden key, first encounters the Old Man of the Sea as an old man with long white hair. It is only after her purifying bath, echoing baptism, that she is able to see him as he truly is; "grand man, with a majestic and beautiful face, waiting for her" (Dearborn, 124; "The Golden Key", n.pag.). Mossy, on the other hand, experiences him as he is from the beginning, surprising the man, who does not know how Mossy sees his other form. As the Old Man helps Mossy into the same bath Tangle took for seven days, he sees that "one of his hands Mossy did not open. 'What have you in that hand?' he asked. Mossy opened his hand, and there lay the golden key. 'Ah!' said the old man, 'that accounts for your knowing me' ("The Golden Key", n.pag.). After each has their bath, Mossy and Tangle see the same appearance of the Old Man of the Sea, before seeing the Old Man of the Earth, "a youth of marvellous beauty", and the oldest man of them all, the Old Man of Fire, who is a "little naked child". The brief moment of questioning knowledge in the presence of projection ends quickly, as in this example, like Great-Grandmother's explanation, it is Tangle's lack, like Curdie's failure to maintain his childlikeness, that causes her to see the Old Man's appearance other than the truth.

**Changing Appearance in Powerful Antagonists**

Returning to the main consideration of kinetic appearance portrayals, an interesting counterpoint to the benevolent maternity of such kinetic characters as Great-Grandmother and the North Wind is found in the witches of the shorter tales, such as Makemnoit of "The Light Princess" and

Watho of "Photogen and Nycteris". Watho in particular illustrates the dark side of the kinetic exceptionally well, as her first description is not of her physical appearance, but rather of her inner state: "Her name was Watho, and she had a wolf in her mind. She cared for nothing in itself – only for knowing it. She was not naturally cruel, but the wolf had made her cruel" (Ch. 1, n.pag.). In contrast, her physical appearance is described as "tall and graceful, with a white skin, red hair, and black eyes, which had a red fire in them. She was straight and strong" (Ch. 1, n.pag.). Her control over both inner and outer self does not seem as strong as Great-Grandmother, with her choice of "shape" dresses (The Princess and Curdie, Ch. 7, n.pag.). Instead, the wolf in Watho's mind affects the behaviour of the inner and outer self, as "now and then [she] would fall bent together, shudder, and sit for a moment with her head turned over her shoulder, as if the wolf had got out of her mind onto her back (Ch.1., n.pag.).

Watho's further physical transformation does not occur until the end of the tale. This transformation takes place in conditions contrasting the past experience with Great-Grandmother. After the kidnapped children, Photogen and Nycteris, make good their escape, Watho discovers them with her telescope and runs to her rooms, where she "anointed herself from top to toe with a certain ointment; shook down her long red hair and tied it around her waist; then began to dance, whirling around and around faster and faster, growing angrier and angrier, until she was foaming at the mouth with fury" (Ch. 9, n.pag.). Her alteration does not take place as easily as changing a "dress" does for Great Grandmother, but instead involves and ointment and a rage-filled dance. While Watho is behind the decision to change, she does so with the aid of something outside herself.

In her new form, Watho as a "tremendous wolf" chases after the escaping children to kill them (Ch. 19, n.pag.). Photogen shoots the wolf, but when he removes his arrow "[t]here lay – no wolf, but Watho, with her hair tied around her waist!" In another contrast to Great-Grandmother, Watho's physical transformation is limited to physically embodying the creature who has taken over her mind. In this sense, however, she supports Great-Grandmother's claim that these shapes convey a partial truth about the character's identity.

In addition to the above discussed examples, MacDonald's fantasy works for children are filled with other examples of characters whose altered appearance supersedes the mode of disguise common to other fairy tales. What can be learned from these different appearance portrayals is that, firstly, a separation is created between the character's essential self and his/her

outer body. In the first set of static appearance portrayals, this separation was the least pronounced in cases where fairy tale conventions were not challenged. The second portrayal of character appearance, however, presents the first challenge to a unified understanding of the self and the body. If a character's appearance is different from the inner nature of that character, as in such examples as those encountered by Curdie's rose-hands in *The Princess and Curdie* portray, then there is a marked separation between a character's "inner self", and outer body (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie*, Ch.7, n.pag.) The kinetic appearance portrayals only serve to definitively confirm this separation. With this third type, the kinetic, the question of the existence of an essential self separate from the physical body is finally laid to rest. As is seen by the examples discussed in this chapter, characters actually change their outer form – outside of mere projection – while remaining the same inner person, excluding the possibility of identity wholly tied to appearance. Having established the separation between self and the body – or their existence as two separate entities, the next step is to examine their relationship, and the extent of the separation in the following chapter.

# Chapter 3

## An Exploration of MacDonald's Defining Notion of Character and Identity: Imperishable Selves in Perishable Forms

The previous chapter set out to identify and explicate the various forms in which interactions between a character's interior or essential self and his/her exterior appearance are portrayed in a number of MacDonald stories. This was done in order to establish a foundation for my exploration of the notion of an imperishable self in a perishable form that is central to his portrayal of identity. Therefore, this chapter begins by proposing that MacDonald depicts each character as composed of a body and soul. The second half of the chapter focuses on how this understanding of identity is then reflected in his depictions of mortality within the tales. This begins with a brief contextual review of MacDonald's religious and philosophical convictions regarding death as exhibited in his non-fiction writing, particularly his essays, sermons and personal letters. These convictions are considered against the backdrop of MacDonald's biographical context outlined in the first chapter, particularly as the presence of death in his own life motivated the creation of the fairy tales themselves, as noted by Knoepflmacher, "longing, prompted by personal circumstances […] was embodied in the fantasies and fairy tales these men created" (*Ventures*, xi). This chapter will be based primarily upon my reading of characters in the Princess books and in *North Wind*, but I will also refer to characters from other fairy tales, including "The Golden Key" and *Photogen and Nycteris.*

The division of character into perishable form and imperishable self is most explicitly found in the kinetic type, where the character retains an unchanging essential self despite transformations in physical appearance. Moreover, MacDonald's use of metaphor confirms this separation as he compares bodies to various pieces of clothing, such as a dress or a glove, as found in both *The Princess and Curdie* and *At the Back of the North Wind*. Were these the only details given to the reader, the distinction between the two might be easily blurred, as clothing is usually cut to follow the lines of the form such as the five fingers of the gloves and the two legs of the pants, and one could therefore reasonably assume that while the self is distinct from the body, the one is reflected, however imperfectly, in the other. If only the kinetic portrayals were considered, this ambiguous relationship might remain unresolved, as, by and large, the kinetic characters' changes of appearance do not reflect a disharmony between a true self and the

physical body, but rather illustrate multiple manifestations of facets of the essential self, with examples such as the North Wind, Great-Grandmother and Watho coming to mind. If one were to examine only the consistent examples in which interior self and exterior form coincide, one might even conclude that, while separate, the self and the body must exist as indistinguishable for all practical purposes. With the presence of those examples in which interior self and exterior form are discrepant, however, this possibility is excluded because they demonstrate a separation and relative independence between the essential self and the body.

Rather than defining the self, this separation leads to more questions. If there is an aspect of the self other than the body portrayed through MacDonald's characters, several questions emerge about the nature of each of these aspects and their relationship with each other. A natural starting place is found in the question of their interdependence. The possibility of a body without an interior self seems inconceivable to MacDonald, even to the point where, in contrast to his contemporaries who wrote animal characters without souls in keeping with religious thinking at the time, he was reprimanded for entertaining the possibility of eternal life for animals in addition to possible salvation for "the heathen" (MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons, "Life"; Reis, 24). The same holds true for the body, because, during the lives presented in his tales, even the most ethereal characters' selves are shown to require physical form, as in the case of North Wind. Even the Shadows, from the work of the same name, who ought to be defined by absence, are seen to have some sort of form by King Ralph. Moreover, MacDonald's personal fascination with death and the afterlife, which also emerges in his works for children with the death of various antagonists and of such characters as Diamond, Princess Irene and Curdie, adds to the complexity of this relationship between self and body. The representation of life after death allows MacDonald to explore a self separate from its previous physical form, while he also pauses at the border between life and death. Unlike many of his predecessors, Macdonald does not limit himself to the death of the antagonist at the happily-ever-after ending of each tale. Instead, he includes the deaths of protagonists and antagonists alike, which he moreover extends to a portrayal of the near dying of characters such as Little Daylight, the North Wind, the prince from *The Light Princess*, Ralph Rinkelmann, the king from the Curdie books, and a host of other characters.

It now remains to explore the relationship between the two. Instances of altering appearance and stable interior character suggest a further challenge to an understanding of a

unified essential self and body. If one aspect of the self (inner or outer) can experience growth or change while the other remains unchanged, as indicated by each discrepancy and kinetic example, space is formed between the two (at least partially unrelated) entities. What is the nature of this space? Can only the body alter? Or can this more mysterious version of self alter as well? And does change in one result in any change to the other? The most easily observable changes are the changes in the description of the body. In addition to the kinetic characters whose magical alterations were discussed in the previous chapter, (Great Grandmother and North Wind, for example), MacDonald's other protagonists also age, physically alter due to spells, a life changing event such as serious illness, or a change in nature. Moreover, characters, most often throughout the progression of the tale, are able to change their inner selves or natures, like Great Grandmother, who ties the change of the self loosely to the body, which she explains to Curdie in *the Princess and Curdie* as follows: "Since it is always what they do, whether in their minds or their bodies, that makes men go down to be less than men, that is, beasts, the change always comes first in their hands – and first of all in the inside hands, to which the outside ones are but as the gloves" (MacDonald, Ch. 8). So it is confirmed that the body affects the inner self. The greatly discussed evil townspeople and king's court of the same book continue to illustrate this reaction as their evil physical deeds affect their hidden inner self.

The entirety of the *Wise Woman* or *A Double Story* concerns itself with the alteration of the inner self, both of Rosamund and Agnes, as the Wise Woman takes it upon herself to help these two wayward children towards goodness with varying degrees of success. The journey of the two protagonists illustrates the manner in which the body can affect the self, and the inverse of this relationship -- how the condition of the self impacts the condition of the body. The reader watches Rosamund, whose appearance is rapidly being spoilt by the rot of her inner nature at the beginning, transform to something almost unrecognizable by the end of her inner reformation. Agnes, on the other hand, is so self-satisfied with her own actions and appearance that something begins to rot within her. When confronted by this inner ugliness, unlike Rosamund, Agnes is unable to put that self behind her and work towards something better, as Rosamund learns to do by the end of the tale. As a result, Rosamund grows outwardly more beautiful, while Agnes deviates in the opposite direction.

The character of Lina in *The Princess and Curdie* is the ultimate example of the cause and effect relationship between the inner self and outer body. She demonstrates both the self

affecting the body and the actions of the body affecting the self. Lina's actions cause her to become "less than men", a transformation that started inwardly but eventually turns her outer appearance into the frightening monster with icicle teeth found in *The Princess and Curdie* (MacDonald, Ch. 8). The reader is led to believe that she begins undergoing a transformation of the inner self, for when Curdie touches her hand with his fire hands he finds the soft hand of a child. This changing back and forth leaves the reader (and protagonists) with hope that not everything is in a fixed state - there is hope for those who desire it. This idea recalls the catalyst of MacDonald's abandonment of Calvinism; predestination was one of his greatest issues with Calvinism.

This thesis argues that, based upon the examples of different character portrayals, MacDonald subtly crafted characters whose relationship with and to their bodies strongly implies the existence of a self in addition to a physical form within his fairy tales for children. The developing complexity from static to kinetic character-appearance portrayals demands the possibility of this binary self, while MacDonald's other works reinforce not only the theoretical possibility, but its presence within his works.

Jack Zipes wrote that Macdonald and his contemporaries used the fairy tale genre as a "radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with the general discourse" (*Art of Subversion*, 100). In a similar manner, I aim to scrutinize this theory of an imperishable character paired with a perishable form against the interactions found in the tales. The previous chapter concluded by asking about the role of recognition within the tale: how does one then recognize or get to know anyone, if the physical alters? If the characters are more than their physical bodies, this will manifest itself in the presence and expectation of recognition between characters despite altering physical realities.

**The Test of Recognition**

While yoking understanding of self with recognition of others provides an excellent test of my theory, it must be noted that it is a pairing owed to MacDonald himself. Like many other issues explored in his work, the importance of self-realization through recognition of and by others is highlighted by his interest in death. Death was a subject continuously on MacDonald's mind, found in virtually all his writing, and it serves to compound his views on recognition. When responding to questions about physical resurrection after death, he simultaneously confirmed his

belief of a self more than its body or form as referred to here, and emphasized the importance of recognition:

> It is to me a matter of positively no interest whether or not, in any sense, the matter of our bodies shall be raised from the earth. It is enough that we shall possess forms capable of revealing ourselves and of bringing us into contact with God's other works; forms in which the idea, so blurred and broken in these, shall be carried out – remaining so like, that friends shall doubt not a moment of the identity, becoming so unlike, that the tears of recognition shall be all for the joy of the gain and the gratitude of the loss (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, "The Resurrection", n.pag.).

MacDonald here, as he so often does in his nonfiction works, goes beyond the meaning of his imaginary interlocutor and highlights what he believes to be the true heart of the matter. Physical resurrection is not the issue for Macdonald. What matters is that the post-resurrection forms will reveal the self and put it into relation with both the divine and creation. The similarity between that form and the "broken, blurred" ones of the present life will be only for the sake of recognition and joy. MacDonald continues to clarify the importance of this recognition further, as he denies completely an afterlife devoid of recognition by others or unawareness of one's past:

> Such a shadowy resumption of life I should count unworthy of the name of resurrection. Then indeed would the grave be victorious, not alone over the body, not alone over all which made the life of this world precious and by which we arose towards the divine – but so far victorious over the soul that henceforth it should be blind and deaf to what in virtue of the loveliest memories would have added a new song to the praises of the Father, a new glow to the love that had wanted but that to make it perfect (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, "The Resurrection", n.pag.).

MacDonald here emphasizes precisely the importance of this recognition I am trying to convey. Not only is recognition more important than physical resurrection, but it is actually a necessary component of life. It would not be resurrection without a more complete sense of recognition: more complete than what can be hoped for in this life or, for the sake of the thesis focus, found within the mortal characters created in the tales. Recognition (of both others and memories of the self) is a component of completed perfection. The tying of recognition to perfection is demonstrated within the tales as characters gain a greater sense of recognition of others as they undergo a purifying journey of loss and gain, with examples such as that of Curdie in *The Princess and Curdie*, discussed below. MacDonald also maintains that there is a life after the grave where some essential aspect of the self, which in this quotation he terms the "soul", remain

despite either the lack or the presence of the body. The claim of an imperishable inner self, or, at least, a self wholly independent of an outer body or form, is tested by searching for the recognition, as demanded by MacDonald's theology, to be also mirrored in his fiction. Is recognition possible – and expected – between characters despite a complete change in their forms? If it is possible, and any given character can be expected to know another on such a level that they are recognizable despite all physical evidence to the contrary, this lends credence to the existence of a separate inner self as one that is able to know and be known outside the material world of the fairy tale.

Most exchanges concerning recognition portrayed in the tales involve an interaction between a kinetic character and a static character due to their respective natures; the static character either succeeds or fails to recognize the kinetic character, while the kinetic character is always able to recognize the static character. The most frank dialogue about recognition and knowledge between two characters is found in the *Princess and Curdie*, after Curdie has made Great Grandmother's acquaintance upon multiple occasions and in her many different shapes, as examined in the previous chapter. When a character undergoes as many physical transformations as Great Grandmother does – from old crone, to wicked witch, beautiful maiden, and housemaid to recall only a few – confusion and a lack of recognition could be reasonably expected. In MacDonald's tales, however, the difference lies in the presence of expectation in addition to confusion in such scenes; while confused, the protagonist is expected to know the character, despite the complete alteration of the physical. Despite failures along the way, she/he must learn to recognize people and things despite their appearance, not because of it, whether it is given to them by magical help, as with Curdie's rose hands given by Great Grandmother, or learned throughout the course of an arduous journey, as Mossy and Tangle discover in "The Golden Key". For example, a dialogue about recognition takes place in *The Princess and Curdie*, while Curdie and his father are lost underneath the mountain, with their miner's lamps about to die. The two men see a brilliant green light, which they walk towards, until it turns into a face whose eyes Curdie recognizes:

> 'I see you know me, Curdie,' said a voice. 'If your eyes are you, ma'am, then I know you,' said Curdie. 'But I never saw your face before.' 'Yes, you have seen it, Curdie,' said the voice. And with that, the darkness of its complexion melted away, and down the face dawned out the form that belonged to it [...] She looked about five-and-twenty years old. And for the difference, Curdie knew somehow or other, he could not have told how, that the face before him was that of the old

> princess, Irene's great-great-grandmother (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie*, Ch.6).

Great Grandmother identifies Curdie's new knowledge before Curdie is aware of it himself. Despite two appearance changes in one short scene, Curdie is now able to recognize Great Grandmother. The ending of this quotation indicates a growing knowledge even from the beginning of the scene; Curdie progresses from a vague familiarity with the light to knowing Great Grandmother despite empirical evidence to the contrary. He also is aware of what he does not know; he knows that he knows her, but not how he knows it. He has come a long way in humility and awareness from the boy who previously thought (just a few chapters ago) that sight and knowledge were synonymous – that having seen the princess once, he would know her next time (Macdonald, Ch. 3). Apparently, Curdie is aware of his capacity for confusion, because he then asks for her real name, the better to identify her properly. The dialogue continues, with Great Grandmother saying, "'I could give you twenty names to call me, Curdie, and not one of them would be a false one. What does it matter how many names if the person is one?'", to which Curdie responds, demonstrating his desire for a deeper knowledge, 'Ah! But it is not names only, ma'am. Look at what you were like last night, and what I see you now!'"(Ch. 6). Curdie acknowledges the truth of her claiming multiple names, but refuses to be satisfied with a hermeneutic discussion on nomenclature. Instead, he draws a parallel from her changing names to her changing forms; the heart of this dialogue is Curdie's desire to know more of Great-Grandmother than just her name or shape. The dialogue then continues with Grandmother drawing an allegory from shapes being to the person much as clothes are to the body, as referenced in the last chapter (Ch. 7). Grandmother's allegory and Curdie's responding question highlight a key aspect of the relationship between altering physical shapes and "truth" for kinetic characters such as Great-Grandmother. Not only can each different shape convey a truth about "that which is inside", a thousand different physical portrayals would still fail to convey the entire truth; it is in this incompleteness that imperfect knowledge of one another lies.

Rather than stopping there, however, Great Grandmother continues the conversation with the following unsolicited warning:

> 'But there is a point I must not let you mistake about. 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. For instance, if a thief were to come in here just now, he would think he saw a demon

> of the mine, all in green flames, come to protect her treasure, and would run like a hunted goat. I should be all the same, but his evil eyes would see me as I was not.'
> 'I think I understand,' said Curdie (Ch. 7).

This warning by Grandmother contains something crucial to understanding the relationship of recognition and character. The fairytale world MacDonald created allows the space to hold an absolute of identity and character projection in tension. One character can "be all the same", while another character views that same first character through the lens of him or herself in a demonstration of projection. Both the viewer and the viewed can contribute to this transaction of knowledge. Grandmother simultaneously is as she is, is seen as a demon by a thief, and is able to be recognized in a shape conveying some true aspect of her character as seen by Curdie. This conversation confirms a concept introduced in chapter two; MacDonald has created a world where the appearance of a thing does not alter its being but reflects some truth of its nature, and simultaneously the perceived appearance of the thing might say everything about the viewer and nothing of the viewed – the thief truly seeing a demon, while Grandmother remains as she is. One does not negate the possibility of the other; there is still the element of recognition. Curdie is able to definitively recognize her as being the same person he met before despite perceiving an alternate shape. The source of this knowledge and manner of gaining it proves to be more elusive, but the presence of recognition cannot be denied. Perception of Great Grandmother can be called into question, but not Great-Grandmother herself. She also verbalizes something questioned earlier – namely that shapes may alter and be exchanged, but something within remains the same, as explored in the kinetic type.

Curdie is far from true understanding of the sort desired for him by the Princess. At this point in the story, Curdie is even unaware of the extent he does not know, as evidenced by his desire for certainty:

> 'But if you want me to know you again, ma'am, for certain sure,' said Curdie, 'could you not give me some sign, or tell me something about you that never changes – or some other way to know you, or thing to know you by?'
> 'No, Curdie; that would be to keep you from knowing me'(Ch. 7).

This vocalized and blatant mistrust of the physical is something new to the narrative; not only do the external signs not convey understanding, but they can actually keep the protagonist from true knowledge. Appearances are not wholly deceptive, but are dangerous in that they can leave the protagonist satisfied with a more shallow knowledge

instead of striving for more and greater knowledge. Great Grandmother elaborates as follows on precisely why this knowledge alone cannot be satisfactory:

> 'You must know me in quite another way from that. It would not be the least use to you or me either if I were to make you know me in that way. It would be but to know the sign of Me – not to know me myself. It would be no better than if I were to take this emerald out of my crown and give it to you to take home with you, and you were to call it me, and talk to it as if it heard and saw and loved you. Much good would that do you, Curdie! No; you must do what you can to know me, and if you do, you will. You shall see me again in very different circumstances from these, and I will tell you so much, it may be in a very different shape' (Ch. 7).

Great Grandmother does not deny that recognition of the physical involves a type of knowing. The knowledge of the physical would not help Curdie or Great-Grandmother in their journey throughout *The Princess and Curdie*. Her example of an idolatrized crown illustrates the necessity of true knowledge; the crown presenting a useless and completely cold substitute for the Grandmother who knows, loves and helps Curdie. Great-Grandmother then continues to explain that knowledge is something that can be earned through commitment, work and desire. If Curdie does what he "can to know [her]", he will know her. This is not something that comes easily or naturally to all. The previous chapter has followed Curdie as he struggled to recognize Great Grandmother, while Irene's childlike faith allows Great-Grandmother to appear to her from the beginning. The above passage provides hope for such as Curdie who have encountered Great-Grandmother for the first time with blinding scepticism; he, too, can learn to know Great-Grandmother.

Much like *The Princess and Curdie*, *At the Back of the North Wind* illustrates instances of recognition between the protagonist and a kinetic character in the form of a wise, benevolent maternal person. Little Diamond is constantly rebuked for not recognizing North Wind through all her transformations. These reprimands range from teasing to serious, all most lovingly delivered. A perfect example is found shortly after Diamond has met North Wind twice. North Wind responds to Diamond saying, "'Well, really, I begin to be ashamed of you […] I wonder how long it will be before you know me; or how often I might take you in before you got sharp enough to suspect me. You are as bad as a baby that doesn't know his mother in a new bonnet'" (Ch. 9). Veiled within this playful teasing, however, is a restatement of the hope provided by Great-Grandmother to Curdie above; namely that recognition is something to achieve. The

protagonists are expected to grow in knowledge and understanding throughout the progression of their journey in the novel.

The country *At the Back of the North Wind* is a place where people do not have to speak to one another to communicate, but, as Diamond says, "'They only look at each other, and understand everything'" (Ch. 10). After Diamond's journey to the back of the North Wind, he is able to recognize the North Wind on his own, as she transforms from something like a bumble bee, to a spider, weasel, cat, leopard, jaguar, and tiger in dizzying succession before turning to the form of a tall lady that Diamond encountered first and liked best. In Diamond's case, the character must go through a journey of experience and suffering before arriving at true knowledge. For Diamond, the suffering he experiences is first empathetic; he feels pain on behalf of his father's employers, and for the worry of his family upon losing their livelihood. He is also exposed to cruelty as his family moves to London, and Diamond takes on the role of cab-driver. His ultimate suffering, an illness which eventually results in his death, is also the suffering that finally brings him to true knowledge via a journey to the country at *The Back of the North Wind*. After this journey, Diamond's innocence is augmented by an otherworldly wisdom, as is demonstrated through not only his recognition of North Wind, but also through the series of dialogues with his mother, which U.C. Knoepflmacher has described as "a Blakean dialogue between Innocence and Experience" (234). Diamond possesses a child-like faith and innocence that his mother, with all her adult experience and parental worry, cannot understand. They converse about the source of their sustenance, with Diamond's mother fearful for the future, and with Diamond believing they will be provided for. It is obvious Diamond does not understand his mother's lack of faith, and his mother mistakes Diamond's faith for foolishness and a lack of knowledge. The conversation does not fully conclude, but ends with the mother remembering a sermon, and subsiding into silence. Diamond's journey to the back of the North Wind is the narrator's justification for any superhuman characteristics on the part of Diamond — first his goodness, then his bravery, even his ability to drive the coach — so it is entirely reasonable to understand it as the source of Diamond's newfound ability to recognize North Wind despite her various reincarnations.

Much like Diamond, Ralph Rinkelmann of *The Shadows* learns only to recognize his subjects, the shadows, after a serious illness. Ralph is unaware of the shadows until his recovery, when he begins to notice such changing beings that he cannot make out their nature. It is only

once his eyes are opened that he can discern them properly. The shadows at first appear to be in a constant state of merriment, but when the king's eyes are opened, he sees them as solemn creatures compared to Puritans. This gift of sight remains for only a moment, and then Ralph is taken to the church of the shadows, where each goes before setting about his or her own work. There he questions the nature of the Shadows, in a dialogue that ends up questioning much more than the magical Shadows themselves:

> 'It is only in the twilight of the fire, or when one man or woman is alone with a single candle, or when any number of people are all feeling the same thing at once, making them one, that we show ourselves, and the truth of things.'
> 'Can that be true that loves the night?' said the king.
> 'The darkness is the nurse of light,' answered the Shadow.
> 'Can that be true which mocks at forms?' said the king.
> 'Truth rides abroad in shapeless storms,' answered the Shadow. ("The Shadows", n.pag.)

This last comment of the Shadow encapsulates the answer to the test of recognition. If truth is to be found in and despite "shapeless storms" and shape-changing characters, then what can be made of the demand for recognition between one character and another, despite the change in character appearance between one or both characters, as illustrated by the above examples? At the very least, readers can see this demand for recognition and knowledge in addition to physical recognition, as made explicit in the *Princess and Curdie*, *At the Back of the North Wind* and *the Golden Key* that the earlier theory proposed is confirmed; characters are not only separate from their bodies in some fundamental way, but they are also able to know one another, and to be known. Additionally, recalling MacDonald's philosophical and religious perspective as only serves to reinforce the portrayal of a self separate and ultimately independent of its form.

**Identity and Mortality:**

As explored previously, MacDonald considered mortality to be a large component in his own identity, as well as within his theology. The primary interest in death within the tales lies as the end of one of the character components that has been discussed; death means the end of life in the physical body. The second interest is found in the common experience that each character undergoes, even if occurring offstage of the narrative. Depictions of death within the tales also provides the opportunity of additional support to the proposed theory of character; if the texts indicate that some part of the character continues to exist after the death of the body, then the

character has proved to be more than just its physical manifestation and some degree of separation, if only posthumously, is demonstrated.

Recalling back briefly to MacDonald's biographical context, the fairy tales were written by a man who had already had a number of close, personal experiences with death which, much like his faith, had heavily impacted his writing, a fact noted by his readers. "From him I tasted Death - good death[…]", wrote C. S Lewis upon reading *Phantastes* (Lewis, *George MacDonald*, xxxiii). The constant proximity to death meant that MacDonald provides written insight into his philosophic and religious beliefs about the issue throughout his life in the form of letters, sermons, and fiction. From MacDonald's collected writings, three points on death quickly and consistently emerge.

Firstly, one gathers that death is inevitable physically. Even the advent of his marriage, and the beginning of a new life with Louisa, carried thoughts of death for MacDonald as evidenced by his wedding gift to his bride, a poem entitled "Within and Without", which ended with the picture of Louisa dead and buried. The inescapability of a physical death is also embraced throughout his work even for children, as will be explored in the examples following.

Secondly, MacDonald portrays this inevitable mortality as something good, if only the limited mortal mind-set can achieve perspective. In his 1864 work "A Hidden Life", MacDonald wrote: "I think, my both, death hath two sides to it - / One sunny and one dark; as this round earth/ Is every Day half sunny and half dark. / We on the dark side call the mystery death; / They on the other, looking down in light,/ Wait the glad birth, with other tears than ours" ("A Hidden Life", n.pag.). Those who have yet to experience the other side must see it as death, separation, and a source of tearful grief. Those who have experienced it have a more complete perspective; they are able see through the "light" past the dark side to the joyful reunion and life beyond. MacDonald returned to this idea over and over, in his essays, sermons, and fiction.

This last line leads to the third idea repeated in MacDonald's writings; death is not just an ending, it is a beginning; death is not death to all, but a rebirth into a life different than the one experienced presently. The surety of this birth was found in his faith. MacDonald maintained that God continues to be a benevolent father, who having given children to their earthly parents, would not take them away for something worse than their earthly life but rather to something better which those left behind would later join. Death is almost always spoken of in the same breath as more life by MacDonald, as further evidenced in his tales in the examples discussed

later in this chapter. One succinct example portrayed in *David Elginbrod* illustrates MacDonald's view of death:

> We are, perhaps, too much in the habit of thinking of death as the culmination of disease, which, regarded only in itself, is an evil, and a terrible evil. But I think rather of death as the first pulse of the new strength, shaking itself free from the old mouldy remnants of earth-garments, that it may begin in freedom the life that grows out of the old (Ch. 7).

MacDonald demonstrates in this quote that death is not an ending, but rather a moment of transition and a doorway into a new life.

**Death in the Tales**

With this philosophical context of MacDonald's portrayals of death briefly explored, it remains to unearth the portrayals of character death within MacDonald's fairy-tales. *At the Back of the North Wind* ends with little Diamond, one of MacDonald's most famous protagonists, dying an early death. This is not even remotely the only presentation of mortality within the tales; rather the presence of death is a constant and on-going theme within MacDonald's work. There is the near genocide at the end of *The Princess and Curdie* with the death of the kingdom of Gwyntystorm, the corpse-like appearance of the North Wind and Little Daylight, and the unsavoury end of various antagonists such as Makemnoit and Watho. These examples are found in addition to such numerous usages of death as a descriptor, including "pale as death", "cold as death", "still as death" and "quiet as death".

Rather than examine all examples of death within the tales, a few specific cases have been chosen to stand for the rest. Diamond's death provides an excellent beginning as the only example of a protagonist dying as a child within the tale. It also provides the only look into life found in and after death as demonstrated by Diamond's trips to the back of the North Wind. *The Princess and the Goblin* and its sequel, *The Princess and Curdie*, provide another set of examples, which are examined in light of the characters explored in previous chapter. The Princess books highlight characters who are either continuously dying or being brought back to life again and again. *The Golden Key*, although shorter than the previous works, is an excellent last example with its various dialogues between characters about the nature of aging and death.

**Life in Death *At the Back of the North Wind***

*At The Back of the North Wind* stands apart amidst all of MacDonald's other fairy tales for children for the fact that its protagonist dies at the conclusion of the tale. The death of Diamond dominates the conversation about death within the novel, but before the actual event, MacDonald explores the subject in a number of ways. Richard Reis considered death to be perhaps the catalyst for the creation of *North Wind*, writing that "perhaps the most remarkable thing about *At The Back of the North Wind* is that MacDonald is trying, in fact, to justify death, that most inscrutable of the ways of God, to children" (Reis, 81). Indeed, the entire plot centres around Diamond's struggle with illness, presented as a journey in the borderland between life and death (Knoepflmacher, *Ventures* 249). Each encounter with North Wind, often the result of a headache, fever or chill, leaves Diamond altered.

From the beginning, Diamond's encounters with the North Wind appear to be a study in contrast. On the one hand, Diamond views the North Wind as beautiful and good; she is constantly compared to a mother figure (Ch 1, 2). On the other hand, at a purely physical level, North Wind appears to injure Diamond, and when considering his end, it would seem he is injured to death. Her touch is compared first to "a long whistling spear of cold [which]…struck his naked little chest" (Ch. 1). This progresses with comparisons to other weapons such as a knife, before the reader is told that the "cold of her bosom […] had pierced Diamond's bones (Ch.11).

Chapter 5 brings the next brush with death, this time at the hands of the North Wind. Instead of the beautiful woman or the laughing girl with the chilling embrace, North Wind is now pictured as a destroyer to rival any antagonist in MacDonald's tales, sinking a ship carrying men and women who will drown. The cruelty of this image is not allowed to resonate long, however. The resulting dialogue between North Wind and Diamond reveals that North Wind does not enjoy this aspect of her work but that it must be done. Not only does North Wind not enjoy being the vessel of destruction, but it eventually unfolds that this is not always cruelty, but kindness in the greater order of things. Neither the reader nor Diamond are ever left to wonder about the inherent goodness of North Wind, but instead are reminded of it in each interaction. Knoepflmacher observes that "only gradually does it become apparent that MacDonald wants us to accept the North Wind as a kinder version of the Mother Goddess: the deaths she brings about

are presumably placed in the service of a recuperative order" (18). North Wind, as a wolf, scares the wicked nursemaid to save the child, and sinks the ship so that she may carry the people who drown "away to--to---to---well, the back of the North Wind" (Ch. 5). Even the very moment of their passing is accompanied by a heavenly psalm, which "swallow[s] up all their fear and pain too, and set[s] them singing it themselves with the rest" (Ch.7). None of these actions are portrayed without reason; it is not for cruelty's sake, but for something greater. In the case of the ship's passengers, the greater appears to be a higher existence of joy without pain after death. What this higher existence looks like is described when Diamond visits that same country in his later illness.

Diamond's journey to the back of the North Wind is preceded by descriptions of his developing illness including his headache, fever, and fatigue. North Wind also does not fare well throughout the journey to her back, as she cannot accompany Diamond behind herself. Instead, she grows sickly before fading away. Knoepflmacher notes that the cadaverous appearance of North Wind coupled with this fading, and Diamond's resulting dismay, carry "morbid associations[…] for the tubercular writer who wrestled with the illness that killed his mother, siblings and children" (245). With North Wind so faint, Diamond must make his way alone to the country at the back of the North Wind, just as each character must die alone. Instead of experiencing true death at this point like most who have entered that country, however, Diamond walks through the icy fire and faints, falling into the country at the last.

Having finally reached the country at the back of the North Wind, MacDonald spends surprisingly little time describing it. The country at the Back of the North Wind is one of the only glimpses MacDonald provides for his speculations about the afterlife. Diamond's "fragments of recollections" serve as a mere taste to be experienced in fullness after death (Ch. 10). Before the description, a narrative aside breaks up the flow of the plot, as the narrator is at pains to remind the reader he is telling what Diamond told him. Before delving into that description, the narrator contextually frames Diamond's experience with other two literary characters who claim to have been there, first Durante, who almost all scholars agree refers to Dante, and Kilmeny the peasant girl.

The country is first described in geographical terms as lacking a sun, but being filled with a "rayless light" in another clear reference to Revelations 21 and surrounded in a ring of ice (Ch.10, Ch. 11). The river is described next, after the brightly-coloured flowers. The river, like

the light, is also different from earthly rivers; not only does it flow over smooth grass instead of sand and stone, but it sings tunes "if not […] in people's ears, it sung tunes in their heads" (Ch. 10). Aside from a tree from whose heights one can see living loved ones, the country receives no other physical description. Instead, MacDonald turns to the alteration experienced by each character. First, a new emotional hierarchy is set in place where happiness is no longer in the ultimate place. Instead, these characters, who like Diamond, have gone through wasting illnesses or even death to reach the country, are instead "so still and quiet and patient and contented, that, as far as the mere feeling went, it was something better than mere happiness" (Ch. 10). It is also implied that Diamond would be happy in addition to this deep, still contentedness upon the eventual reunion with his family. Another aspect of this country dovetails perfectly with the elements of recognition discussed in Chapter 3. People of this country do not need to talk with one another, because they have exceed unearthly knowledge of each other (Ch. 10). An element of this afterlife is to know and be known.

The remainder of the novel is shaped by Diamond's journey to the borderland between life and death (Knoepflmacher 249). Diamond is now better, more obedient and wiser in his innocence than before. This improved Diamond is repeatedly called an angel, God's baby, or God's messenger (MacDonald, Ch. 18). The reader is also led to expect his eventual death, not only from this prolonged sickness, but also directly told by the narrator himself (Ch. 38). The question is no longer whether Diamond will die – this much is already ensured. What remains is how Diamond will act in light of this foreknowledge of the experience after death to come. Not only the reader is aware of this inevitability, however, but Diamond himself is ready to leave. He takes one final trip with North Wind and recollects with her his past near-death experience travelling to the country at her back, where his heart nearly turned to ice. When North Wind asks if he could go through again, he responds that it would be worth it, "if it was only to get another peep of the country at your back" (Ch. 37). It turns out, however, that Diamond has never truly been to the back of the North Wind, and she gently rebukes him. Diamond responds humbly, questioning his mistake, and asks: "'Haven't I, North Wind? Oh! I'm so sorry! I thought I had. What did I see then?'" to which North Wind responds that he had seen, 'Only a picture of it. The real country at my real back is ever so much more beautiful than that. You shall see it one day—perhaps before very long' (Ch. 37). What Diamond saw in his illness was only the palest taste, echoing MacDonald's Romantic impression of life as a dream of greater, more real things to

come. North Wind is also gently telling Diamond that his time is coming soon. The next chapter sees Diamond, paler still, asked by the narrator if he wasn't afraid. Far from fear, he actually enquires as to why he ought to be afraid, before saying, no, he is not afraid, merely cold and sleepy. This is the last living glimpse of Diamond the reader is given.

Remarkably, little detail is given of Diamond's death. The death itself takes place off page, and his little body is discovered after the fact, lying on the floor as if asleep (Ch. 38). Lochead observes that it is due to his very nature and actions that Diamond dies: "Diamond's death is inevitable, like the departure of Kilmeny in Hogg's poem: this world 'wasna her hame, and she couldna remain'. Diamond, too, is of the company of the holy innocents" (22). Knoepflmacher assents to the same, but says that this departure to the next life could only occur after his work is accomplished (268).

The most striking part of Diamond's death is not the deathbed or the grave, but rather, how the narrator questions the reality of his death saying, "They thought he was dead. I knew he had gone to the back of the north wind" (MacDonald, Ch. 38). While Diamond's loved ones *think* he has died, the narrator *knows* otherwise. This is not the ending for Diamond, but rather his first glimpse of the beautiful country at the back of the north wind. *North Wind* therefore provides the clearest example of death as an escape into something better, which Lochead argues is the "theme of much of George MacDonald's fantasy. The way may be through the death of the body, a good death leading to the eternal life" (105).

From beginning to end, *At the Back of the North Wind* clearly indicates a life found after undergoing a physical death. This is affirmed and reaffirmed by the narrator, by the North Wind, and by Diamond himself. From the death of the ship's passengers for their greater good to Diamond's journey into the real country at the back of the North Wind, death is not the end of life, but instead a gateway to more life. Not only does *North Wind* insist on life after death, but it paints a picture of what it may look like. As seen above, this picture is limited by the capacity of its viewer. After his first visit, Diamond has yet to die so he could not fully experience its beauty. It is only upon death, when he is unable to return and describe the journey to the narrator that Diamond is able to travel to the country at the back of the North Wind permanently. Further, *North Wind* demonstrates the transformative power of death, as seen in the altered Diamond who returns briefly from his glimpse at the North Wind's back, remarked on by his parents, Mr. Raymond, Nanny, and the narrator.

**Living and Dying in The Princess books:**

*The Princess and The Goblin*, unlike its sequel, explores the nature of death relatively little, instead taking on the more traditional plot of fairy tales wherein the good live and the bad die. The first book is more concerned with the escaping of death, while the second confronts death and dying from its opening. A brief exclusion from this is found in Chapter 17 as a dialogue between the younger princess Irene and her father about the source of her fire ring, which he says she received from her mother who we assume passed away before Irene could remember. In her childlike ignorance, Irene asks when she can see her mother and the king responds with tears saying not that Irene shall never see her mother, but rather, that the child will see her sometime in the future. The hope of future reunion with a departed loved one is minor indication that there will be more to existence after death. Aside from this, the tale provides little insight into the topic of death. One of the few mentions includes the death of the past goblin queen, a human who died giving birth to a goblin prince. This is told through a conversation between two goblins, and thus very little perspective is added, except to imply that this is the fate that could await Irene should she be married to the new goblin prince. Another mention is framed in saving of life, rather than avoiding death, such as Curdie, who is captured and almost eaten by goblins, but is saved by Irene.

The story ends with the death of many goblins, who have drowned as a result of their attempt to drown the miners. The goblin royal family at the heart of the plot to kidnap the princess and kill men notably are included in the goblins who die (Ch. 31). Any sense of an afterlife for the goblins, who start out as people before going underground and becoming more beastlike, is left unexplored by the tale. Some of the goblins, however, escape the flood and leave the caves beneath the mountain to live eventually amongst the people. This second chance and change of surroundings results in a physical and inner alteration for the goblins as "their skulls became softer as well as their hearts, and their feet grew harder, and by degrees they became friendly with the inhabitants of the mountain and even with the miners" (Ch. 32). MacDonald chose to end the tale on this note of apparent redemption of some goblins, before continuing with the story of *The Princess and Curdie* in the book of the same title.

In contrast to *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie* explores death and dying from beginning to end. After a glorious description of the countryside and mountains, *The*

*Princess and Curdie* opens with a brief aside about two types of people. MacDonald describes these two types, saying that "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" (Ch. 2). MacDonald then asserts that the second type grows in wisdom and faith, able to know the truth of something without doubt. The other type slides through fear into a state where he can know "nothing but his dinner: to be sure of a thing with him is to have it between his teeth" (Ch. 2). This beginning insists that the entirety of humanity must live life in some relation to death; one is either dying, or being resurrected from an inherent death. The narrative finds Curdie in this former state of dying, demonstrated in his first act of the book, using his new bow and arrow to shoot down a pigeon. The remorse which causes his heart to grow forces Curdie to confront the change that has taken place between the end of *The Princess and the Goblin* and this moment. He is no longer the boy who saved Irene and his king, but rather "he had stopped saving, and begun killing! What had he been sent into the world for? Surely not to be a death to its joy and loveliness. He had done the thing that was contrary to gladness; he was a destroyer! He was not the Curdie he had meant to be!" (Ch. 2).

In contrast to the positive view of death championed in MacDonald's nonfictional writing, this first taste of death in *The Princess and Curdie* is almost entirely negative. Death is the enemy of joy and loveliness; it is used to describe an inner decay of faith and knowledge. Death destroys the relation between oneself and the world; even the near death of a pigeon leaves Curdie questioning whether "whole world [was] going to cast him out" (Ch. 2). If the book had ended here, the nature of death within the tales would have been completely at odds with MacDonald's personal understanding of death. This ugly confrontation of death with the pigeon and dying of the self does not end here, however, but instead literally leads Curdie into the light. Curdie's eyes are filled with light from Great-Grandmother's lamp, he sees that the pigeon is not dead and runs towards light and life rather than staying in the darkness (Ch. 2). Before the pigeon is saved, Curdie undergoes one more trial -- facing Grandmother: "Curdie remembered that the stood there as a culprit, and worst of all, as one who had his confession yet to make" (Ch. 3). The very act of confession becomes a source of life and insight as Curdie confesses first to shooting the bird, but through the course of conversation comes to see that he has much more for which to be sorry. He had done the "wrong of never wanting or trying to be better" (Ch. 3). This realization brings Great-Grandmother to joy over the near death of her bird. She finds joy in

the injury for the remorse and resurrection it brings in Curdie; Curdie is no longer continuously dying, but instead growing in wisdom and goodness. The remorse is necessary for the healing of both the bird and Curdie. This change is reflected throughout the course of the story as Curdie takes on the role of rescuer and, with Grandmother's endowed authority, a judge of the king's court. This inevitably leads to tension with the beast-like characters in Gwyntystorm ending in a battle. A moment before the battle highlights the change in Curdie. The boy who was once continually dying is now very much alive as he considers his own possible death in battle. He is ready for whatever the day might bring. The narrator says of Curdie: "If he died, he died for the right, and there was a right end of it. He had no preparations to make, except for a good sleep" (Ch. 31).

The next instance of death found in *The Princess and Curdie* concerns the rejuvenation of the dying king. Curdie is woken by a light coming from the king's room. He sees the king, lying on a great table, covered in the rose-fire by the old princess. As the king burns in this refining fire, the princess shares his pain, weeping even as he suffers. After the fire burns out, the light does not go out, but rather shines instead from the face of the king. When it is finished, the old princess "stooped over the table-altar, put her mighty arms under the living sacrifice, lifted the king, as if he were but a little child, to her bosom, and laid him in his bed. Then darkness fell" (Ch. 31) There are several things of note in this brief quotation, the first of which is the description of the king as a living sacrifice. This is such an important point as to merit the title of the chapter, "The Sacrifice". Further, this is not just a sacrifice, but a living sacrifice -- not ending in death but instead resulting in more life. The death of the old dying king means life of the new healthy, strong and wise king. This sacrifice is something that comes at the hands of a third party; the king cannot sacrifice himself. Instead, the Princess first covers him with the rose fire, and afterwards, carries him at her heart to true rest.

The results of the sacrifice are evident immediately. The next morning the king's eyes are clear. He is now healthy and strong. The king's response to the events of the preceding night is perhaps most telling, and echoes strongly MacDonald's vision of death, specifically the Novalis quote he utilized so often: "Our life is no Dream, but it may and will perhaps become one" (MacDonald, *Phantastes, Good Words for the Young*, and *Lilith*) Using the imagery of waking to new knowledge, the king says "Curdie, my son, I wake from a troubled dream. A glorious torture has ended it, and I live. I know now well how things are, but you shall explain them to me as I

get on my armour. No, I need no bath. I am clean" (Ch. 32). The sacrifice provides a transition from a bad dream to a new awakening. The torture is glorified because of the change it brings about. The decay and uncleanness of long-term illness has been burned away, the restored king does not need a bath because he has been cleaned by fire more than any water could accomplish (Ch. 32).

The story then continues with the battle, in which the deaths of the king's enemies are dealt with summarily. The king's little band is quickly outnumbered, until the old princess, in the shape of the kitchen maid, wins the battle by means of a cloud of pigeons so great they block out the sun. This victory highlights a darker side of death, however, as the reader is told that "the nation was victorious, but the people were conquered." (Ch. 34). Despite the military victory, there is something more dangerous that remains to be faced in the inner decay of the king's people. The king sits on judgement on the conspirators of his poisoning. His pronouncement is made to the people, who have followed the wrongdoers and now must be ruled with "a rod of iron" (Ch. 34). Despite a brief period of peace with first the reign of the king, then of Irene and Curdie, this corruption at the heart of the people ends the tale with the death of the entire city. The greed of a king causes the city to be gradually undermined until "one day at noon, when life was at its highest, the whole city fell with a roaring crash. The cries of men and the shrieks of women went up with its dust, and then there was a great silence" (Ch. 35). The finality of it is compounded by being expressed without any hint of hope for any afterlife. This abrupt ending of all life, leading to the "very name of Gwyntystorm [ceasing] from the lips of men", is so shocking and final that it has led various scholars to conclude that MacDonald's outlook had darkened, resulting in this genocide.

Jack Zipes offers a different understanding of the depressing end of Gwyntystorm, instead saying that "there are indications that the two narratives taken as a whole expressed MacDonald's sober optimism: humanity must raise itself from a beastly state to form the utopian society and must constant exercise creative and moral powers to purse the ideal society" (110). Zipes's alternative is more consistent with both MacDonald's personal philosophy, the contrastingly positive views of death earlier in the tale. The ending as a warning, rather than a surrendering of hope fits; if the people do not pursue the ideal or the "good" as Great-Grandmother says, then they will instead go the other way, ending as seen here in death and silence (Ch. 3).

When looking at representations of death, the two separate Princess books present an almost extreme polarization. When considered together, however, there is a manner in which the first is an antidote to the second. *The Princess and the Goblin* demonstrates that death is not something to seek out, but rather to fight against, as Curdie and the king both do. The present life is of value, as seen in the beauty of the landscape, the joy of the protagonists, the wisdom of Great Grandmother, and satisfaction in fulfilment of duty of the king, Curdie, and Peter Peterson. *The Princess and Curdie*, on the other hand, takes two different views of death. Firstly, it examines the dying of the inner self, as demonstrated by the wicked citizens of Gwyntystorm. The antidote to death as an evil to be avoided as found in the first book, lies in this second view of death as a means to more life, demonstrated in the living sacrifice of the king who arises stronger and wiser than before.

**Aging and the Nature of Death in "The Golden Key"**

It remains now to briefly observe representations of death in one of MacDonald's most famous fairy-tales for children, "The Golden Key". While *At the Back of the North Wind* has the greatest portrayal of life after death, and the Princess books detail the relationship of humanity and dying, "The Golden Key" provides a direct philosophical dialogue about the nature of death itself, and in many ways articulates confirmation of the theories proposed earlier.

One interesting relationship examined repeatedly in "The Golden Key" is between aging and dying. Aging is a continuous issue in the text, portrayed in two ways. Firstly, the protagonists experience aging at a rapid rate, as exemplified by Tangle's mistaking years for mere hours or days first as she wanders lost in the woods then during her encounters with the Old Men. Mossy also ages into a weary old man as he wanders lost, looking for Tangle and the keyhole, before meeting the Old Man of the Sea. The second portrayal of age is found in the characters who are apparently even older than Mossy or Tangle: Grandmother, the Old Man of the Sea, the Old Man of the Earth, and the Old Man of Fire. Despite their age, they appear as young, beautiful, and strong. In reference to Tangle's question, Grandmother says that she appears young because she has had no time to grow old. Grandmother is "too busy for that. It is very idle to grow old" (MacDonald, "The Golden Key", n.pag.). It must be remembered that the "old" she refers to is Tangle's understanding of age, not aging itself. Grandmother is stronger, wiser, and more beautiful for the length of time she has lived; she denies the necessity of the

weakening Tangle expects, not the value of age. Robert Lee Wolff argues in *The Golden Key* (his study of George MacDonald with the same title) that this aging is instrumental to understanding MacDonald's portrayals of death (145-146). For MacDonald, he argues, the life that occurs after death is not a mere continuation of the present life, or a repetition of what has already been experienced. Instead, this life is something more than can be anticipated and completely other than our expectations, and is vividly portrayed in the series of Old Men that Mossy and Tangle both encounter. Wolff writes that,

> [m]oreover, since death, as the Old Man of the Sea declares, is simply more life, MacDonald subtly makes it a mirror-image of life rather than a mere repetition. The further one goes in life the older one gets; after death, the process is the other way, at least with regard to the climactic progression from one of the Old Men to the next. (146)

This "mirror-image" is not restricted to the Old Men, but instead is also seen in Grandmother as noted above, but also seen in Mossy and Tangle themselves, most particularly in the quotation that Wolff is referencing. They start the tale as children, but through their quest for the land from whence the shadows fall age rapidly into an old man and woman with gray hair, wrinkles, and a body full of aches. They end the tale, however, "younger and better, and stronger and wiser, than they had ever been before" (MacDonald, "The Golden Key", n.pag.). The transitional moment occurs for them both during their separate encounters with the Old Man of the Sea, who provides them with a transforming bath. Tangle experiences the bath as both a restorative for her age and aches, but it also endows her with the ability to see the Old Man of the Sea as he truly is as a grand and majestic man. Mossy, gifted with the golden key, is able to recognize the Old Man of the Sea from the beginning, but also undergoes the same bath, which takes away his pain and appearance of age. The Old Man commands Mossy, saying,

> 'Get up and look at yourself in the water.'
> He rose and looked at himself in the water, and there was not a gray hair on his head or a wrinkle on his skin.
> 'You have tasted of death now,' said the old man. 'Is it good?'
> 'It is good,' said Mossy. 'It is better than life.'
> 'No, said the old man: 'it is only more life'. (MacDonald, "The Golden Key, n.pag.)

Now that first Tangle, then Mossy, have experienced death and been resurrected by baptism in this bath, they are able to experience "more life". It is, as Wolff argues, not more of the same, but

instead more in the same way that the real country at *The Back of the North Wind* is more than the mere picture seen by Diamond in his first visit. Living long, instead of causing wrinkles and pain, now leads to strength, beauty, and wisdom, as also demonstrated by Great-Grandmother in the Princess books.

Other instances of note include the death of Tangle's mother, which allows for the creation of such circumstances that send her lost into the woods following her magical fish, a loss which reminds the reader of the loss of Irene's mother in *The Princess and the Goblin*. The fish itself also provides an interesting counterpoint to the beast-natures of Gwyntystorm. By allowing its fish body to die and be eaten only to rise out of the pot in the lovely human form of the aeranth, it fulfils the "highest end" of an animal in fairyland, and demonstrates the reverse of the citizens in *The Princess and Curdie* (MacDonald, "The Golden Key", n.pag.). Richard Reis notes this small instance illustrates both the necessity of death before more life in this "fish sacrament" eaten by Grandmother and Tangle (80).

**Concluding Character Existence and Mortality**

Character identity as composed of a self beyond the body begins to form from the examples observed in the past chapter. The relationship between stable and kinetic characters types as exemplified in *The Princess and Curdie* and *At the Back of the North Wind* provides a foundation for a portrayal of identity found in the character despite complete physical alteration. The incorporeal self, too, is observed to be capable of change as a result of the character's actions, but overall presents a continuity of recognizable character despite these changes. This is demonstrated through a series of examples where characters were expected to know one another at a deeper level than physical knowledge.

Exploring character mortality provides the final insight into MacDonald's portrayal of character identity. If death is not complete death, but rather, as MacDonald insists through the voice of the Old Man of the Sea, Great Grandmother, and North Wind, more life, the necessary continuity of character confirms a self beyond the body. Not only this, but the examples discussed above reflect MacDonald's ideas about what that future existence means for the self and its relationship with others.

## Conclusion: Character Identity through Separation of Body and Inner Self in MacDonald's Fairy Tales

Grounded in social and literary context, my thesis has explored the issue of character identity through a series of examples to uncover a separation written between a character and his/her body. MacDonald created this space using a range of characters who were either at odds with their appearance, or continuously undergoing physical change. These portrayals allowed him to question preconceived ideas regarding identity and mortality.

The thesis looked at MacDonald's portrayal of identity through an examination of the various instances of self, chiefly looking at the interactions between a character and his or her appearance. This included a brief look at reader expectation and tropes within the fairy tale genre. Several different manifestations of these interactions were observed, beginning with the consistent portrayals, where the appearance of a given character mirrored what was known of the character's role. Examples of consistent appearance portrayals included Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind*, Princess Rosamund from "The Wise Woman", and Curdie from both of the Princess books. The consistent portrayals alone did not provide any insight into separation between character and body. The second group of examples focused on characters whose appearance disguised their inner nature such as the wicked court of Gwynstorm, and Lina. These examples saw a separation begin to emerge, as an inner self was shown to be different from the external appearance. The final character-appearance interaction examined those instances where a character's physical appearance altered throughout the course of the tale. The existence of these kinetic appearances in addition to their relationships with the different protagonists established explicitly not only an inner self separated from their outer body, but an inner self able to be known by others.

The final chapter explored what had been uncovered about identity through the observations of the past chapter, beginning first with the concept of the self as separated from its outer form. Through the three different portrayals of character-appearance, a self had emerged separate from its outer form, a self which knew some level of permanence further than its body. This separation and impermanence of the outer self gradually led to a discussion about recognition and knowledge as this outer self is primarily encountered by protagonists throughout

the tales. This chapter concluded by examining instances of mortality, and its implications for this new concept of identity. This was done by looking at death in four key tales, namely *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, and "The Golden Key".

It became clear throughout the course of this study that MacDonald used his characters to create a portrayal of identity composed of an inner self and outer body. This was accomplished by the presence of both stable and kinetic character appearance, the expectation of recognition despite alteration to the physical body, and the presentation of mortality as a means to eternal life.

To some degree, this thesis was limited by the scholarship currently available. Character identity in MacDonald's fairy tales, particularly the separation of character from physical body, has received minor academic attention to date. Where identity has received the greatest recent attention is focused primarily on identity in relation to gender and to mortality, which provided a solid base for chapter three. The thesis could have offered a more complete exploration of identity if the implications of my findings for gender had been explored. This was not possible within the confines of the thesis. However, I believe that in establishing a separation of character and body, this thesis provides further support for the existing scholarly work in the arena of gender studies. My readings on gender in MacDonald's fairy tales, including Edith Honic's *Breaking the Angelic Image*, U. C. Knoefplmacher's *Ventures in Child-land*, and Jack Zipes's *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* in addition to others, all agree that MacDonald used his children's literature to question and subvert gender expectations. I believe the creation of this separation between character and their body creates a space where the questioning of traditional gender roles, as noted by scholars already, could take place. This would therefore be a possible avenue for future research.

Gender notwithstanding, MacDonald's portrayals of character expose an understanding of identity that simultaneously assimilates permanence and hope. The fairy tale genre asks its readers to suspend their disbelief and enter freely into a world where things are not as they seem. George MacDonald, through his fairy tales, demands the same suspension, and through it

highlights and emphasizes questions about the accepted relationships to the divine, relationships to the world, and to our understanding of identity.

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