TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF GEORGE MACDONALD:

A STUDY OF SYMBOLISM IN THE FANTASY WORKS

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c. 1978 Margaret R. Parsons
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TEXTUAL ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the text of this thesis I have used acronyms or abbreviations for the titles of the fantasies of George MacDonald.

AC  Adela Cathcart ("A Child's Holiday," "The Shadows," "The Castle")

BNW  At the Back of the North Wind

Lil  Lilith

Ph  Phantastes

P&C  The Princess and Curdie

P&G  The Princess and the Goblin

LP  The Lost Princess

LPOT  The Light Princess and Other Tales of Fantasy


There is no standard edition of MacDonald's complete works. The editions used in this thesis are listed in the Bibliography.
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INTRODUCTION

I

Allegory and fantasy with a moral purpose are literary forms so closely related as to be practically synonymous; the basic intention of both is to instruct by means of a narrative whose underlying purpose can be identified, or at least sensed, by the average reader. The author provides for the reader what Angus Fletcher calls "signposts"; these state the aim of the work, sometimes by direct explanatory comment, but more usually in the form of symbols. These symbols deliberately draw attention to the secondary meanings, give continual "object lessons," and make clear the ultimate, larger truths the author is attempting to communicate.¹

The nature of the symbols depends partly on whether the didactic or fantastical aspect of the work is foremost, but even more, it depends on the author's ability and background, and the bent of his predilections. Whatever his approach, the author must so integrate his symbols into the work that the reader's interest in the narrative is maintained; at the same time he must, within a believable, consistent framework, suggest far more than is actually stated. In addition, the reader should share certain basic premises with the allegorist, in order to appreciate his work fully. A non-Christian reader, for example, is not likely to feel empathy with an essentially Christian
author.

In an allegory where the theme visibly dominates the narrative, as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the symbols are clear-cut and readily-comprehended. In fantasy, though, where the narrative is dominant, the symbols may not be immediately recognized as symbols. As the reader’s imagination seizes on the story itself, the ramifications of meaning will gradually rise through the narrative by means of an increasingly-clear suggestiveness, and give import to what at first might seem only an exercise of the unfettered imagination.

To clarify further, one might note a distinction between "mimetic" and "didactic" writing. As Gunnar Urang points out in *Shadows of Heaven*, the first type is concerned with story as an imitation of outward reality, with the emphasis on plot and characterization. The reader's sole question is, "How will it turn out?" The second type is concerned with the thought or idea behind the story, and the reader's question then is, "What is the point?"

Some writers feel that the "didactic" work has more value than the "mimetic," as a reflection of life and its purpose, particularly when it is based on a form with a long tradition of connotations, and when it relates to the childhood of the individual, or the traditional accumulations of the group. Louis MacNeice says:

Contrary to what many people say even now, a fairy story, at least of the classical folk variety, is a much more solid affair than the average naturalistic novel, whose roots go little deeper than a gossip column.
Likewise, George MacDonald, with whose fantasies this thesis is concerned, writes in his essay on "The Imagination":

> We dare to claim for the true, childlike, humble imagination, such an inward oneness with the laws of the universe that it possesses in itself an insight into the very nature of things.\(^4\)

When the author's "true . . . imagination" works skilfully to combine allegory and fantasy, then the reader realizes very early the presence of symbolism. He may temporarily discount it, for the sake of the fantasy itself, or he may explore it, for the sake of the continuing allegory, but he finds it difficult to ignore it, let alone to be totally unaware of it. It is, as MacDonald says in *Donal Grant*, "the cupboard behind the curtain of the story."\(^5\)

Even a child may wonder, for example, about the recurring presence of the guiding thread in *The Princess and the Goblin*: his wonder may not formulate itself into a question for some time, but he realizes at least that there is a question that can be asked, and that it must be capable of being answered. This in itself MacDonald finds valuable, for "things that cannot be explained so widen the horizon around us! open to us fresh regions for question and answer, for possibility and delight!"\(^6\) Through his questionings, however vague, the child is ". . . lifted, floated, drifted on towards the face of the awful mirror in which he must encounter his first foe—must front himself."\(^7\)

In his allegorical fantasies MacDonald was the first English writer to appeal to and develop a sense of "holiness" (to use C. S. Lewis's word\(^8\)) at the sub-conscious level, without any intrusive
preaching. But the reader of MacDonald, and particularly of *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, will miss much—though never the overall intent—unless he has some groundwork in symbolism, not necessarily or specifically Christian, though such knowledge will be of help. One can say of MacDonald what Graham Hough says of Spenser:

> . . . an object perceived is taken as a revelation of some super-sensible reality not previously apprehended. . . . symbolism . . . is compatible only with some kind of belief in the supernatural, or at least some kind of idealism. ⁹

The reader soon notes that MacDonald's symbols are both recurrent and consistent. Having their roots (as we shall see) in folk tale, myth, religion, and tradition, and also being of a kind employed by earlier great allegorists, they are, to the average reader, symbols of far-reaching suggestiveness and power, on both the conscious and the subliminal levels. MacDonald himself was very much aware of these levels of reaction and understanding. His son Greville writes:

> Once, forty years ago, I held conversation with my father on the laws of symbolism. He would allow that the algebraic symbol, which concerns only the three-dimensional, has no substantial relation to the unknown quantity; nor the "tree where it falleth" to the man unredeemed, the comparison being false. But the rose, when it gives some glimmer of the freedom for which a man hungers, does so because of its substantial unity with the man, each in degree being a signature of God's immanence. To a spiritual pilgrim the flower no longer seems a mere pretty design on the veil, "the cloak and cloud that shadows me from Thee"; for see! she opens her wicket into the land of poetic reality, and he, passing through and looking gratefully back, then
knows her for his sister the Rose, or spiritual substance one with himself. So may even a gem, giving from its heart reflections of heavenly glory, awaken like memory in ourselves and send our eyes upwards. So also may we find co-substance between the stairs of a cathedral-spire and our own "secret stair" up to the wider vision—the faculty of defying the "plumbline of gravity" being the common and imaginative heritage.10

II

In retrospect, MacDonald's chosen form of instructive communication seems almost inevitable, as a brief consideration of his early life will show. He came from a family whose Calvinism was rigidly enforced by an inflexible grandmother, obsessed with the doctrine of the all-but-implacable wrath of God; her influence was the more strongly felt, since MacDonald's own mother died when he was very young. C. S. Lewis writes of MacDonald that "on the intellectual side his history is largely a history of escape from the theology in which he had been brought up."11 His short period as an ordained minister ended when his congregation rejected him for his alleged "unorthodoxy," leaving him with no means of supporting his wife and children. Born in poverty, he passed most of his life in uncertain financial circumstances, suffered ill health all his life, and endured many deaths in his close-knit family.

These apparent checks and trials, however, were for him out-weighed by the influence of a just, kind, and loving father, an excellent education, and a catholic taste in literature which he had ample opportunity to indulge. Above all, he had the energy
and strength of hope to cast off spiritual despair, finding in the writings of the mystics a trust in God's mercy and—what most appealed to him—the concept of universal salvation through the loving fatherhood of God. His principal grief on being dismissed by his parish was that he could no longer teach at large what he felt with all his being were necessary truths; his main desire in life was to communicate to others his own love and longing for God, and his perfect trust in Him, as revealed through Christ. When he discovered that there was to be found in writing a ministry that could carry influence far beyond the bounds of one small community, he was well content to make writing his life's work.

He felt that in his own father he had experienced the earthly counterpart of the everlasting, never-changing love of God for mankind. From the close-knit unity of his own family and their mutual love he came to believe that there was a pattern in the universe, and a Maker of the pattern. From this Maker, if a person would give up his Selfhood, would come, through the natural world, a sense of being at home, even as he travelled through time to his ultimate joy in the reality of Eternity. He conveys a particular attitude towards life, expressive of a totally Christian outlook; he finds, through the workings of the imagination on ordinary objects, the basis of his belief in the supernatural, and he raises a desire for death—"good death," that is not annihilation but more life. To enquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination," MacDonald writes in "The Imagination." "... [true art makes] common things disclose the wonderful that
[is] in them," he says in "The Shadows" (AC, p. 183).

Whether writing novels or fantasies, his intention is always the same: to awaken a spiritual response in his reader. "A wise imagination . . . is the presence of the spirit of God." Through the products of his imagination, he wanted to communicate the idea, and the force, of that presence. Nor did he feel that the form of allegory was anything but an asset: "... a good parable is plainer than the plainest words," he states in *Adela Cathcart* (p. 250).

Although MacNeice remarks on MacDonald's "prolific invention of symbols" to embody his "passionately spiritual attitude to the universe," his skill involved not so much invention as intelligent use of symbols already established. Certainly his exceptionally wide reading gave him an ample range and variety to draw upon.

At some point in his life, before his marriage, he had access to a large private library, of which he was the cataloguer. Here he made the most of his opportunities to increase the scope of his already large range of reading; all his life the passion for books never left him. A list of some of his favorite authors shows something of the breadth of his reading: early patristic writings, particularly Augustine and Jerome; early English romances; Chaucer; Malory; Dante; Paracelsus and other mediaeval alchemists; William Law; Jacob Boehme; Jeremy Taylor; Shakespeare; Ossian; Bunyan; Spenser; Blake; Milton; Francis Quarles; George Herbert; Henry Vaughan; Wordsworth; Fairy and Folk Tales (Grimm, Dasent, Andersen); Novalis; de la Motte Fouqué; E.T.A. Hoffmann; Carlyle;
Tennyson; Lewis Carroll; John Ruskin; Matthew Arnold; Robert Browning; S. T. Coleridge; and above all, the Bible, with particular emphasis on the Gospels and the Apocrypha.  

Although short, and very selective, this list demonstrates several of his preferences: first, an interest in mystical Christian writers; secondly, an attraction to writers employing symbolism, emblems, and allegory; thirdly, an enjoyment of folk tale, fairy tale, and myth. One might sum up by saying he had always a deep interest, a profound concern, with those works which relate to the soul and its Maker, whether the author made his assertions directly or obliquely, through the intellect or through the imagination. His own purpose in writing was to enlighten others through his personal experience and observations: he wrote nothing but what he had found to be true. MacNeice in fact claims that "Phantastes and Lilith . . . are the parable equivalents of . . . intimate journals . . . ."  

With the exception of At the Back of the North Wind, all of MacDonald's stories take place in a Fairy Land filled with strange dreams and stories and adventures. The reader comes gradually to realize that Fairy Land is only another name for the regions of the soul where will and circumstance and choice unite to promote, or degrade, the living spirit. In the words of C. N. Manlove, "All MacDonald's fairy tales are set in landscapes which are symbols of mind, and are concerned with mental perception." It was by no chance that MacDonald's first prose statement of the purpose of life (1858) was entitled Phantastes, A Faerie Romance.
Into this Fairy Land he introduces, broadly speaking, three types of characters who represent, though not necessarily in a realistic mode, those found in this world. There are first those who, true and right in themselves through instinctive self-discipline, honesty of will, and humility of outlook, trust and obey rightful authority: such are Irene, Mossy and Tangle, Colin, Diamond. Secondly, there are those whose glimmerings of or longings for truth are gradually (or swiftly) brought to full conscious realization of the nature of Love and the value of Selflessness: such are Curdie, Anodos, Mr. Vane; as well, there are those whose redemption is much more difficult, since there seems little or nothing of good to work on, such as Rosamund, and Lilith. Thirdly, there are also those who seem like brutes that perish, worshipping Mammon in his various forms, such as Agnes, and the people of Gwyntystorm. However, even those of the third sort, who, in the scope of the actual books, are not redeemed, may eventually change, for MacDonald could not believe that God would allow any of his creations to perish utterly.

There is not one of his books, for either children or adults, which does not show the upward course of at least one of his characters. In the words of Richard H. Reis, "His characteristic plot-myth. . . . represents . . . the individual's journey towards God." 20

III

MacDonald understood the purpose and method of allegory too well to let himself be led into the mere recounting of strange and
magical adventures for their own sakes, though admittedly "The Giant's Heart" comes close to it. Even descriptions of landscape, in which he delighted, are part of the allegory, since, "the forms of Nature are the representations of human thought in virtue of their being the embodiment of God's thought. As such, therefore, they can be read and used to any depth, shallow or profound." He held with Novalis that "the world is a universal metaphor of the spirit--a symbolic picture of the latter" (Schriften, II, 600#349).

We find, as might be expected, that the symbols MacDonald incorporates into his allegories are of two types: there are those which are capable of very broad interpretation, and those which have limited connotations. An understanding of the first type is essential to the meaning of the book or story as a whole; a recognition of the second type is interesting and illuminating in a specific place, but is not necessarily of prime importance in the deeper understanding of the work. Both types, moreover, may require added clarification from comments in MacDonald's other books and poems, in order to become clear in their fantasy setting; and both types can be enlarged by reference to other authors who employed them. A few examples will make this point clearer.

In the Curdie books, the Grandmother's pigeons are usually never more than birds who live like ordinary birds under her protection, and with their eggs provide her with food. They are also her messengers—which is ordinary enough—and her obedient servants in battle—which is not. But in one of his poems MacDonald writes of "white doves, like the thoughts of a lady";
and in the essay "Individual Development" he refers to the "silver dove of life." In *Lilith* he equates doves with prayers, and, widening the scope, reminds us that Dante calls angels (whose name means "messengers") "the birds of God." This brings us back to a throw-away phrase in the story, where the Grandmother says of her wounded pigeon, "I will mend the little angel" (*P&C*, p. 41).

Grandmother's pigeons do not need this added significance in the story, but certainly the episodes involving them gain immeasurably through the symbolic potentialities of apparently simple scenes. As the reader broadens his perceptions in the matter of the pigeons, he will arrive at the image of the Holy Spirit descending in the shape of a dove, and by so doing be able the better to understand why Curdie's redemption is begun when he wounds the pigeon and is sorry.

Another very broad symbol which affects the structure of many of the stories is the journey. No device is so simple, so natural, and so universal as this, to indicate, by means of literal travel and adventure, the experiences of the soul on its road to salvation or ruin. MacDonald uses the journey in several ways: simply as a necessary part of the actual plot, as in *The Princess and Curdie*; as a symbol of Man's passage through Time, as in "The Golden Key"; and as an allegory of spiritual progress, as in *Phantastes*. He also uses the image of the journey to refer to the reader himself: "When the pilgrim of truth comes on his journey to the region of the parable," he writes in *Unspoken Sermons*, "he finds its interpretation. It is not a fruit or a
jewel to be stored, but a well springing by the wayside."  

No other symbol in his books could be described as so essentially structural as the journey, though one cannot help noting in the same context his fondness for symbolic antithesis, particularly in setting. Desert and forest, cottage and castle, attics and cellars, mountain tops and caverns, dry rocks and springing fountains: all figure vitally in the plots, and bear as well an essential meaning under the surface of the story. On consideration, one finds that antithesis is MacDonald's most obvious method of showing the polarity (real or apparent) between Good and Evil. With it runs a delight in paradox; he often throws in, almost at random, remarks that can be provocative of a good deal of thought, e.g., "The more doors you go out of, the farther you get in," and "Home is ever so far away in the palm of your hand" (Lil, p. 194 & p. 225).

Another notable symbol is that of the parts of a large house. For example, Reis suggests that the cellars, living quarters, and attics of The Princess and the Goblin represent the sub-conscious, the conscious, and the ideal of the human soul. The cellars are full of dark, where evil can enter unseen, as the goblins do; ordinary life goes on in the living quarters; and the supra-natural Grandmother inhabits the attics.  

Stairs too have a profound significance for MacDonald, showing the need to keep climbing above the every-day materialistic levels of life; he also stresses that the earnest seeker will always, sooner or later, find the necessary stairs. These appear most obviously in "The Golden Key,"
"Cross Purposes," the Curdie books, and Lilith, and, among the novels, particularly in Donal Grant. Doors also are significant in what might be termed his domiciliary symbolism, as entrances to the sub-conscious, or the crossing of a threshold into a new kind of life.

Other recurring symbols which might be briefly alluded to are shadows, or The Shadow, as the consciousness of Self, Evil incarnate, or an unsubstantial image of reality (in the Platonic sense); eyes, as the mirrors of the soul, or of heaven; dreams, as the echoes of thoughts and truths too deep for conscious recognition (he is very fond of recounting these); and flowing hair, as the epitome of womanhood.

But these symbols are not the main ones. The symbols which link book to book, thought to thought, and culminate in a final unified concept of all he believed and wished to convey, are found in two groups.

The first group involves the four Elements—Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. In this MacDonald was not original by any means, even in his own century. The Romantics, both German and English, had relied heavily on the traditional associations of the four. Novalis and E.T.A. Hoffmann, Friedrich de la Motte Fouque, William Blake and S. T. Coleridge, among others, had already demonstrated what could be accomplished by involving traditional Elemental symbolism with fantasy narrative. These symbols in the main were rooted in the past, in works ranging from the Bible to
Alchemical treatises, as well as in folk lore and tradition. Small wonder that MacDonald made extensive and effective use of them.

The other major symbol concerns the Wise Woman figure, who appears in his major fantasies. She differs somewhat from book to book, appearing in different forms and with different names, but essentially she is one person. She is moreover closely linked with the Elements. The latter have within themselves two aspects: Earth is the source of growth, and the place of corruption; Air in itself sustains breath, but as a tempest it destroys; Fire both warms and burns; Water is essential to all life, but it also drowns. In the same way, the Wise Woman is seen as a preserver and a destroyer. She is the Earth Mother, North Wind, Mother of Lights, the Baptizer into new life: all the benign aspects of the Elements are embodied in her, though she is herself greater than the totality of the four. But she also appears to some as terrifying, destructive, cruel. Those who experience her loving goodness render back to her loving obedience; those who are unable to avoid her stern discipline, and her harsh treatment, regard her with fear and repugnance. How can these two disparate sets of characteristics be reconciled into one person? For that she is one person, we are left in no doubt. We are now confronted by the question of the difference between real, and apparent, Evil. Is there, in fact, real evil at all? And if so, what is its purpose?

There is an unavoidable ambiguity in any discussion of Evil, for it can be regarded in several ways: what is Evil in itself may ultimately have a far from evil effect, and, in fact, unknown
to itself, may exist simply to produce a good effect by means of an apparently unlikely agent. The Elements possess in themselves both Good and Evil qualities. The Evil Woman—who will be discussed in the first section of Chapter II—is in herself unequivocally evil, but not to the lasting detriment of those who meet her: rather in fact to their ultimate good. She is linked with the evil aspects of the Elements. The Wise Woman, on the other hand, who is linked with their good aspects, can seem evil, while being in fact good; she is ambivalent only in that her intentions are often mistaken or misunderstood. Like the Elements, through which she works, she is an expression of the visible world of God; but so, paradoxically, is the Evil Woman.

As will be shown, both the Elements and the Wise Woman link the primary narrative level of the stories and the allegorical interpretation. Chapter I of this thesis will deal with the dual nature of the Elements, in tradition and in MacDonald's works. To him, they are potent forces both of creation and of destruction. Chapter II will deal first, briefly, with the purely negative figure of the Wise Woman, whose appearance, actions, purpose, and then identity will be discussed. Having completed these two chapters, I shall discuss MacDonald's interpretation of the meaning of Good and Evil in the Universe.
CHAPTER I: THE ELEMENTS

1. Background

This chapter will discuss MacDonald's allegorical use of the Elements in his works of fantasy; but I would like first to consider briefly the origin of Alchemy, since that study is based on the theory of the four Elements. Carried out over centuries, it is one of the main sources for the ideas and symbols concerning the nature of each Element.

Aristotle had stated that the basis of all substances was Prime Matter, which had been divided into four general Elements—Earth, Air, Fire and Water—essential to life and all material objects. According to him, this Prime Matter had been used by God in the creation of the world (De Caelo, I, 2).¹

Alchemy started in Hellenistic Alexandria in Egypt, probably about the fourth century, with experiments directed towards the re-conversion of the Elements back into Prime Matter. After some centuries, the pagan search turned into a thoroughly Christianized discipline; and in its highest form became a life-long pursuit of the way to perfect the individual human soul. Wolfram von Eschenbach (? - 1420) in fact equated this search with the quest for the Holy Grail.

This so-called Great Work of the Alchemists (or Magnum Opus) consisted of a lengthy series of operations on the four Elements,
intended to produce Prime Matter in a form usually referred to as the "philosopher's stone"; once found, the true searchers—the Adepts—would then achieve "the rare gift of divine Wisdom."^{2}

In the Middle Ages, however, popular superstition insisted that the only purpose of Alchemy was, with the aid of the Devil, to transmute base metals into gold; and certainly there were many who had only this mercenary goal in mind. Therefore, to baffle the curious and hold back the greedy, the Adepts developed a complex system of symbolism in their instructive writings. These symbols related equally to chemical substances and to abstract ideas, for chemistry, philosophy, and mysticism were to the true Adept completely intermingled.

Confusion in Alchemical treatises was deliberate and elaborate. Many different names, images and emblematic pictures could indicate the same object; and the various possible combinations of symbols to describe, verbally and graphically, the chemical process, were, to the uninitiated, a chaos of perpetually shifting permutations. Multiple ambiguities and deliberate vagueness were the outstanding characteristics of all Alchemical treatises. For example, the retort, used to contain the initial ingredients, was called (among other names) "the philosopher's egg . . . the sphere, prison, nuptial chamber, sepulchre, vial, cucurbit-gourd, chicken-house, womb, belly of the mother, mortar or sieve" (Caron & Hutin, p. 64). Pictorially it could be represented as any of these. As another example, Mercury (the substance) was considered the universal solvent, which, by "killing" imperfect metals, released the "breath"
or "spirit" of the true metal. But the substance was also related by name to Mercury (the planet) and to Mercury (the messenger of the gods). Pictorially, its action as solvent might be represented (to choose one picture among many) as an armoured man wearing a winged cap transfixing with a sword a crowned king. Verbally, it was called—again, this is a selection—"the key," "the air," "the Fool," "the Serpent," "the wind," "the fountain of youth," "the pilgrim," "the blessed water," "the torch," "alabaster," "the wolf" (Caron & Hutin, p. 160).

There are many other symbols, representing objects and processes, but these two examples suggest how the deliberately obscure terminology produced allegorical writing and emblematic art, which eventually would describe solely mystical concepts. In his Signatura Rerum, Jacob Boehme used the symbolism of Alchemy to transmit his message about how to conduct the spiritual Magnum Opus through contemplation. Dante also seems to have drawn from Alchemy as well as the Bible for his pictures and images. MacDonald had read both Boehme and Dante.

The continuity of the study of Alchemy from pagan through Christian times is perhaps one reason for the persisting power of its images, which hark back, in all probability, to the earliest ideas of similarities between the material world and the invisible world of the spirit. It is interesting to note that "Jung discovered an unexpected affinity between individual dream-symbolism and mediaeval alchemy"; since MacDonald was fond of recounting dreams, in both novels and fantasies, was familiar with the language of
Alchemy, and was steeped in the Bible, it is no wonder that Alchemical symbols are frequent in his works.

Even the titles (italics mine) of various Alchemical treatises strongly suggest some of MacDonald's favourite images: "The Stairway of the Sages," "The Great Mirror of the World," "Light Emerging of itself from Shadows," "Entry Opened to the Closed Palace," "The Aquarium of the Sages" (Caron & Hutin, pp. 151-52). Even more notable are certain symbols (or, at weakest, suggestive hints) that bear in his works the same significance that the Adepts gave them. For example, near the outset of the Magnum Opus, the substances in the retort turned black, a stage referred to as "the raven": this indicated to the Adept that he had rightly begun the transformation, and was on the true path (Caron & Hutin, p. 157). In Lilith, it is Mr. Raven who shows Mr. Vane the way into the country where his redemption will begin. Again, mercury can be referred to as "the wolf," since it drives out impurities; and Rosamund, in The Lost Princess, is chased by wolves to the house of the Wise Woman, her pride and self-sufficiency driven out by her fear.  

An offshoot of what one might call the basic—i.e., mediaeval—images of Alchemy was developed by Paracelsus (1493-1541), who took from Arabic writings the idea of races of intermediate creatures, between men and angels, who inhabited the Elements: gnomes lived in Earth, sylphs in Air, salamanders in Fire, and sprites in Water. This fancy he systematized and further extended from its sources by mingling with it old Teutonic legends. His whole concept was taken over and popularized by the Rosicrucians in the seventeenth century.
No use was made of these Elemental creatures in fictional prose, however, until the time of the early German Romantics. In particular, MacDonald was familiar with (and openly imitative of) the works of Novalis (1772-1801), Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843), and E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822). (Note for example the statements from Novalis' *Schriften*, vol. II [ed. Tieck and Von Schlegel], that MacDonald uses as an epigraph to *Phantastes*: "Pure poetry can at best have an allegorical meaning in general. . . . In a genuine Märchen, everything must be wonderful, mysterious, and coherent.") They developed the allegorical Märchen, combining these latter alchemical notions and the fairy tale, to produce strange and fascinating stories in which the world of mortals and the world of Elementals can both co-exist independently and also mingle. De la Motte Fouqué, in *Undine* (1811), describes the Elementals thus:

There are wonderful beings in the elements which almost appear like mortals. . . . Wonderful salamanders glitter and sport in the flames; lean and malicious gnomes dwell deep within the earth; spirits, belonging to the air, wander through the forests, and a vast family of water-sprites live in the lakes, and streams, and brooks. . . . But there is one evil peculiar to us. . . . We have . . . no souls; the element moves us, and it is often obedient to us while we live, though it scatters us to dust when we die.

Reis feels that MacDonald "borrowed the whole idea [of the symbolic significance of the Elements] from the esoteric mysticism of Jacob Boehme," but this claim underplays MacDonald's enthusiasm for and indebtedness to the above-mentioned Romantics, and ignores the importance of his frequently expressed delight in the poten-
tialities of the fairy-tale form. For example, in the essay "The Fantastic Imagination" he writes:

A fairy tale cannot help having some meaning. . . . 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. . . . The greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended. . . . If the reader be a true man, he will imagine true things. . . . The tale is there, not to hide, but to show. 9

The fairy tale form then seemed to MacDonald the best for expressing the truths of the human soul, and within that form he indicated to the perceptive reader an explanation, an interpretation, of the paradoxes of life. This he did largely through Elemental symbols and images familiar to him from his extensive reading. His most commonly used symbols in the fantasies relate to the traditional and accreted qualities of the four Elements; but the pervasive image is that of the Wise Woman, who is herself the controller of the Elements. To find and obey her is to be on "the path to the stars." The spiritual development of his central characters is related directly to the Wise—and to the Evil—Woman, and through her, to the Elements. A consideration of the Elements themselves is therefore of help in understanding MacDonald's intent.

The rest of this chapter will deal with each of the Elements in turn. The emphasis in the section on Earth is more on the creatures of Earth than on its physical properties, though it concerns both. The section on Air deals only briefly with its Elementals, and is more concerned with Air in the form of Wind, and with the Moon and the Rainbow. Fire involves no Elementals
at all, but concentrates chiefly on its purifying properties. Water is regarded mainly as a cleansing and baptismal Element, with little emphasis on its destructive powers, and none on its Elementals. Each Element is considered first for its negative, or destructive, aspects, then for its positive, or creative and redemptive, powers.

2. Earth

In Alchemy, Earth is regarded as the Great Mother, or womb, of all growing things—not only of the trees and plants and creatures on its surface but also of the jewels and metals in its mines and secret caverns. The latter are no less living than the former. As his first task the Adept was instructed to visit the bowels of the earth (Caron & Hutin, p. 137) and find the raw, imperfect material for his subsequent work on the Magnum Opus. But by going into the mines he would inevitably encounter various dangers, most often (in popular belief by the fifteenth century) in the form of Earth Elementals; amongst them, the womb of the Earth Mother could well become one's grave, the place of physical decay. But these Elementals must be encountered: literally, one must have dealings with them (i.e., locate your materials) before advancing on "the path to the stars."

In Teutonic mythology, which, as noted earlier, Paracelsus grafted onto Alchemical beliefs, these inhabitants of Earth are mischievous kobolds, always ready to trick mankind, to jeer at their greed and gullibility, and to mock their desire for the mineral riches of the earth, whose beauty of gem and ore are
wasted on themselves. Any apparent desire to please or co-operate with other beings is most profoundly to be mistrusted. The source of life could also be the place of death. Allegorically, kobolds represent what the individual must openly meet and overcome before spiritual understanding can begin; and it is in this sense that MacDonald introduces them.

(i)

In several of MacDonald's fantasies he presents the kobolds in traditional fashion as rude, ugly, perverse and malicious. Phantastes, his first work in this genre, provides an excellent example. Not all the Earth Elementals in this book, however, are of the kobold variety, and in order to maintain continuity, and to indicate better the relationship between the story and the allegory, I shall deal first with the beguiling Maid of the Alder, who, taking the form of the White Lady whom Anodos loves, seduces him in her grotto.

To describe the Maid as Anodos sees her for the first time from the back, MacDonald uses adjectives and images that suggest death, burial, decay. The Maid is like "an open coffin set up on one end . . . as if made of decaying bark" (Ph, p. 56). Her lovely grotto seems a "sepulchral cave" (Ph, p. 57). She is a "living, walking sepulchre" (Ph, p. 57). Anodos barely escapes with his life. Nor does he risk merely physical death; by following the Alder Maid, through lust, he risks moral and spiritual destruction.

After this voluntary sin, he encounters the traditional type of Earth Elemental. Ejected from the Fairy Palace, he enters "...
a great hole in the earth . . . [with] a sort of natural staircase descending spirally into its abyss" (Ph, pp. 149-50), from which he presently emerges into an underground country, the region of the kobolds:

From behind a rock a peal of harsh grating laughter, full of evil humour, rang through my ears . . . I saw a queer, goblin creature with a great head and ridiculous features, just such as those described in German histories and travels, as Kobolds. "What do you want with me?" I said. He pointed at me . . . and answered, "He! he! he! what do you want here?" . . . Thereupon arose, on all sides, the most terrific uproar of laughter, from voices like those of children in volume, but scrawny and harsh as those of decrepit age. . . . The whole pandemonium of fairy devils . . . seemed to have assembled about me. (Ph, pp. 151-52)

The last sentence, with its Miltonic echo, suggests that it is Hell itself Anodos has entered: a hell which he has discovered as a result of his own behaviour, and entered of his own volition.

The kobolds mock his love for his White Lady "with travestied gestures," and finally seize him, shouting up into his face:

"You shan't have her; you shan't have her; he! he! he! She's for a better man; how he'll kiss her! how he'll kiss her!"

The galvanic torrent of this battery of malevolence stung to life within me a spark of nobleness, and I said aloud, "Well, if he is a better man, let him have her."

They instantly let go their hold of me, and fell back a step or two, with a whole broadside of grunts and humphs, as of unexpected and disappointed approbation. I made a step or two forward, and a lane was instantly opened for me through the midst of the grinning little antics, who bowed most politely to me on every side as I passed. (Ph, p. 153)
This episode shows Anodos that by standing up to his tormenters—goblins, or jealous thoughts—he can, unexpectedly, free himself from their power. He learns that only when he relinquishes Self, and is willing to give up the White Lady for a better man, is he able to control baser desires.

This lesson is exemplified immediately when, still underground, he meets a plain old woman who greets him with "a crash of laughter, more discordant and deriding than any I had yet heard" (Ph, p. 155). She suddenly becomes as beautiful as the Alder Maid once seemed, and begs him to stay with her, but this time he resists temptation, and draws back. "Again the infernal laugh grated upon my ears; again the rocks closed in around me, and the ugly woman looked at me with wicked, mocking hazel eyes" (Ph, p. 156). She does not attempt any further enchantments: he will not fall prey twice to the same temptation. Left to wander in this place of "sad sepulchral illumination" (Ph, p. 156), with loving thoughts of the White Lady, he is, unfortunately, still proud that it had been his songs that had awakened her. At this point MacDonald makes entirely clear the correspondence between the externalized Earth Elementals and the subjective internal emotion: Anodos comments, "For so the goblin Selfishness would reward the angel of Love" (Ph, p. 157).

Earth Elementals are in these episodes equated with the sins of the flesh and the spirit, both deriving from pride. The Alder Maid represents that sexuality without love which opens the way to further selfishness disguised as love. The underground sequence demonstrates that Anodos cannot escape the misery of his own
egocentricity and acquisitiveness until he is almost forced into responding, from his better side, with a sudden generosity and candour—what he refers to in the passage above as "a spark of nobleness." One might almost complain that MacDonald is too explicit, momentarily wrenching his reader, in the last quoted sentence, out of the narrative, and forcing him to note the allegorical significance of the kobolds and the old woman.

In The Princess and the Goblin, on the other hand, without diluting his allegorical intent, MacDonald incorporates the underground creatures completely into the tale, even supplying them with a logical history, as an explanation for their presence in the country:

... in these subterranean caverns... lived a strange race of beings, called by some gnomes, by some kobolds, by some goblins. There was a legend current in the country, that at one time they lived above ground, and were very like other people. But from some fancied injustice they had all disappeared from the face of the country... they never came out but at night. ... They were now, not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous, or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form. ... And as they grew misshapen in body, they had grown in knowledge and cleverness... but as they grew in cunning, they grew in mischief, and their great delight was in every way... to annoy the people who lived in the open-air-storey above them. (P&G, pp. 11-13)

Their outward shape—as often happens in MacDonald—is a counterpart of their inner character.

Their queen is described with some humour:

Her nose was certainly broader at the
end than its extreme length, and her eyes,
instead of being horizontal, were set up like
two perpendicular eggs. . . . Her mouth was
no bigger than a small button-hole until she
laughed, when it stretched from ear to ear. (P&G, p. 177)

The cobs, as the local people called them, owned household animals,
once ordinary beasts above ground; but

in the course of time, all had undergone even
greater changes than had passed upon their
owners. . . . what increased the gruesomeness
tenfold, was that, from constant domestic . . .
association with the goblins, their countenances
had grown in grotesque resemblance to the human. (P&G, pp. 131-32

These goblins, like the creatures in Phantastes, jeer, mock,
torrent, and are full of malice and cunning. Unlike the Fairy Land
goblins, however, they are routed not by any sudden self-knowledge
and illuminating honour on the part of the hero, but by rhyming
songs, however crudely made, which they cannot bear.

The chief defense against them was verse. . . .
I suspect they could not make any themselves,
and that was why they disliked it so much. At
all events, those who were most afraid of them
were those who could neither make verses them­selves, nor remember the verses that other
people made for them; while those who were never
afraid were those who could make verses for
themselves. (P&G, pp. 67-68)

What is the power of the true poet? And is it really poetry
that is meant? The child will not think to ask in such terms, but
he may with profit wonder at the effect of the verse, as MacDonald
undoubtedly intended that he should. But the adult reader--if, as
in Phantastes, he has made the equation between goblins and uncon-
scious evil desires, hidden from light in the "earthy" part of our-
selves—will probably have an answer.

In the end, the goblins are almost all destroyed by the water
which they themselves had diverted underground. However, those
who survived the flood

... grew milder in character. ... 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. (P&G, p. 308)

The significance of this death and regeneration through flood will
be apparent when we come to deal with the dual aspects of Water, in
the appropriate section of this chapter.

But this suggested regeneration, or at least modification, comes
after the action of the story is over. The goblins as seen in The
Princess and the Goblin are full of evil, their single redeeming
feature being a natural loyalty to each other. Their dwelling places
in the heart of the mountain are places of eternal darkness; their
torches smokily reveal unappreciated beauties of stone and jewel,
but only hideousness in the goblins themselves. By fighting them,
standing up to them, with moral and physical courage, and by boldly
relying on his creative imagination in his songs, Curdie is without
fear for himself, and ventures nightly further and further into
their territory. Even when a prisoner, he does not lose hope.
Irene, guided and strengthened in spirit by her thread, shudders at
the sight of the sleeping king and queen, but she too is able to pass
them steadily. Earlier she had screamed and fled at the sight of
one of the cobs' creatures; but her faith in and obedience to her Grandmother lead her, and with her, Curdie, out of the depths of the mountain to the light of day.

The goblins play a small part in *Phantastes*, but a significant one. By exerting his will, Anodos begins to divert his mind from his own self-centred love-longing to unselfish thought for the Lady's good; the episode is important only in terms of his dawning spiritual development, as is his rejection of the temporarily beautiful Earth Woman. In contrast, the goblins in *The Princess and the Goblin* are an integral part of the plot throughout, without whom there would be no story at all. But they also, as already noted, have a more-than-literal significance. They cause Curdie, Irene (and to a minor extent Lootie, the nurse, as well as Curdie's parents) to show their true natures. They are indeed the traditional creatures of Earth, with no good feature or quality; before they invade the upper world they make speeches (in Chapter IX) which recall, much simplified of course, the council of Satan and his leaders in Hell when plotting against Heaven. The equation of the underground world with Pandemonium, in *Phantastes*, also made us see the goblins as a type of devil.

The house which the goblins invade in *The Princess and the Goblin* has four levels: the cellars, the ground-floor living quarters, the first and second floors consisting of empty rooms, and finally the high tower in which lives the Grandmother. The goblins swarm in from the cellar to the ground floor, and are defeated. I think the goblins in this work stand for the
external powers of darkness and evil. The good characters do not encounter them because of sin in themselves (as does Anodos) but simply because they are there, present in the world, to be encountered. Nothing whatever in the book suggests that there is—as there is with Anodos—an inner, bosom goblin, so to speak, that invites the appearance of the evil Elementals. Simply, there is evil in the world, and it must be fought; with the help of the Grandmother and her lamp (of which more in the next chapter) it can be overcome.

Earth Elementals also are mentioned, though with somewhat different connotations, in "The Shadows." Here we are shown the connection between a weakened physical frame and a corresponding inability to cope with the evil that is always ready to manifest itself. It is illness, not a flaw in character, that gives life to them; but, like those in Phantastes, they are an externalized state of mind. They lack individuality, because the emphasis is on their allegorical significance.

... old Ralph was taken dreadfully ill; and while hovering between life and death, [the fairies] carried him off, and crowned him King of Fairy-land... it was no wonder, considering the state of his health... that all the gnomes and goblins, and ugly, cruel things that live in the holes and corners of the [Fairy] kingdom, should take advantage of his condition, and run quite wild, playing him... all sorts of tricks; crowding about his throne, climbing up the steps, and actually scrambling and quarreling like mice about his ears and eyes, so that he could see and think of nothing else. (AC, p. 173)

The Fairy Kingdom would seem to be here the Imagination, and the "goblins" creations of the sick Fancy, when "reason topplies on her
throne." We are never really allowed to forget that Ralph is always physically present in the sick-room. This is unique in MacDonald: Anodos is actually absent, and missed by his sisters, for twenty-one days; Curdie lives his every-day life in the country of the goblins; Alice and Richard, the children in "Cross Purposes," are really absent from their village, but not missed because of a magical "wrinkle in time."13

No more of the traditional goblin-Elementals appear in MacDonald's fantasy stories. In Lilith the "Earth dwellers" take nightmare forms; the kobold-type is too close to being amusing to fit in here; something with no connotations of antics and comical distortions is required by the plot and the mood of the book. "The Bad Burrow" (Chapter X) describes these hideous creatures rising from the bare soil of the Other World:

To my dismay it gave a momentary heave under me; then presently I saw what seemed the ripple of an earthquake running on before me, shadowy in the low moon. . . . a single wave rose up and came slowly toward me. A yard or two away it burst, and from it, with a scramble and a bound, issued an animal like a tiger. About his mouth and ears hung clots of mould, and his eyes winked and flamed as he rushed at me. . . . I stood fascinated. . . . He turned his head to the ground and plunged into it. . . . a step or two from me, the head of a worm began to come slowly out of the earth, as big as that of a polar bear . . . with a white mane to its red neck. . . . All the night through . . . hideous creatures, no two alike, threatened me. (Lil, pp. 228-29)

Mr. Vane has crossed the Bad Burrows with rebellion in him, and so sees the creatures. Spiritually unawakened, morally weak, but not
actively sinning, he is protected from his folly—though he does not know it—by the moon. The creatures are potential, rather than actual, menaces, whether considered literally or allegorically.

A beautiful woman shape next appears, walking across the "restless soil," trying to wrap the white mist around her like a garment. This is a premonition of the evil he will later meet in the person of Lilith; we are given an emblematic representation of her nature. The serpent, an earth-symbol, stands for primal evil; the spirit as a bat connotes blindness, witchcraft, hell. The mist-garment is the "innocence" with which she covers, for a time, her true evil from Mr. Vane's gaze.

Suddenly pressing both hands on her heart, she fell to the ground. . . . she began to writhe in such torture that I stood aghast. . . . her legs, hurrying from her body, sped away serpents. From her shoulders fled her arms as in terror, serpents also. Then something flew up from her like a bat, and when I looked again, she was gone. The ground rose like the sea in a storm. (Li1, p. 230)

Lilith's affinity with Earth is reiterated towards the end of the book when, defeated, she is carried across the Bad Burrow; her presence makes the "seemingly solid earth to heave and boil."

. . . the whole dread brood of the hellish nest was commoved. Monsters uprose on all sides. . . . Long-billed heads, horribly jawed faces, knotty tentacles innumerable, went out after Lilith. . . . She lay in an agony of fear. . . . Whether the hideous things even saw the children, I doubt; certainly not one of them touched a child . . . . (Li1, p. 382)
The final horror on this occasion is "a long neck, on the top of which, like the blossom of some Stygian lily, sat what seemed the head of a corpse, its mouth half-open, and full of canine teeth" (Lil, p. 383). This living corpse which threatens her is a representation of Lilith's own being: evil within is evil without. Mr. Vane sees these creatures, but is sufficiently redeemed that they cannot menace him. The Little Ones, ignorant and totally innocent, pass unscathed. Mr. Vane says of them, "Incapacity to see was their safety. What they could nowise be aware of, could not hurt them" (Lil, p. 382).

Even apart from these symbolic representations of her nature, Lilith herself is presented as a creature of Earth, and death, at enmity with Water, and life. She sucks Mr. Vane's blood, and then claims that "a great white leech" attacked him; she herself is draining him of his life (Lil, p. 283). Even so the White Snake of Darkness, in "The Light Princess," drains the living waters from the lake, "like a huge leech, sucking at the stone" (LPOT, p. 48).

Both Lilith and the Snake are related to Earth also in their chosen dwellings, places of darkness, where their power is strongest. The White Snake does its work in a cavern, deep under the bottom of the lake. Lilith's palace has more than a suggestion of a subterranean dwelling, full of labyrinthine gloom that calls to mind the perpetual night of the goblins under the mountain in The Princess and the Goblin. Mr. Vane says of it:

I followed . . . through many passages, and was at last shown into a room so large and so dark
that its walls were invisible. . . . The roof was the long half of an ellipsoid. . . . Blackness mingled with form, silence and undefined motion possessed the wide space. (*Lil*, p. 303 & p. 309)

There is a sense of impending horror latent in the dark. Later Mr. Vane sees in this room various scenes from the past, all including the eidolon of Lilith; when Adam appears, it vanishes, and her real body falls with a shriek to the floor. In terror Mr. Vane leaves her: "I knew that in the black ellipsoid I had been in the brain of the princess!" (*Lil*, p. 313).

The equation between the dark Earth-type dwelling and the evil memories of its ruler is made with deliberate precision; this is by no means the first time MacDonald has used a place to represent the inhabitants.¹⁴ In *The Princess and the Goblin*, the stony caverns and endless night of the under-mountain realm where the goblins live suggest their unfailing malice and hard-heartedness. "It was all dark and always dark," says MacDonald, with obvious double intent (*P&G*, p. 171). In Gwyntystorm, when Curdie is made a prisoner, he is taken through "a low-browed door in a great, dull, heavy-looking building. . . . The place within was dark as night" (*P&C*, p. 157). He is kicked downstairs into a gloomy windowless dungeon, floored with rock and half-filled with rubbish, a place that images the cold-hearted, cruel, dark natures of the citizens of the city. Degenerating humanity dwells, spiritually speaking, in "the cave of their finitude,"¹⁵ or in what Mr. Vane refers to as "the dark of thy own unconscious self" (*Lil*, p. 420).

The Earth is, in several senses, the lowest of the four
Elements. Literally, it can be mined to great depths; figuratively, the deeper one goes, the further one is separated from God and Light. Imaginatively, it produces the strongest and the most malicious Elementals, whose realm is a place of constant danger to the intruder. When one enters the Earth, one is approaching the traditional location of Hell, not only as formalized by Dante, but as found in various mythologies, including the Scandinavian. 16

MacDonald's concept of Earth derives not only from a combination of Alchemical and folklore, but also from the Bible. 17 Here the two-fold nature of the Element is clearly shown. It is a prison, a habitation enforced, a grave; but it is also the place of birth, the source of our physical being. A few quotations will amply demonstrate the first aspect. "The earth with its bars was about me forever," says Jonah (Jonah 2:6). Job speaks of "the land of darkness and the shadow of death ... without any order, and where the light is as darkness" (Job 10:21-22). Describing evil men he says:

They were driven forth ... to dwell in the cliffs of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks. Among the bushes they brayed; under the nettles they were gathered together ... they were viler than the earth. ... they mar my path ... in the desolation they rolled themselves upon me ... I went mourning without the sun. (Job 30:5-28)

This might almost be a description of the goblins surrounding Anodos, blocking his path and yelling their mockeries at him.

Man himself is formed "of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7), and hence is mortal, subject to death, and in death laid in the
Earth to decay and vanish. For him, living, it is a sort of prefigureation of the darkness and mockery of Hell, inhabited by deformed parodies of nobler forms; dying, he enters its sepulchre.

But this is not MacDonald's final view of the apparently negative side of Earth. Where Jacob Boehme, whose works so attracted MacDonald, saw the world as divided between Yes and No, with no link or reconciliation possible between the two eternal opposites, MacDonald did not believe in any such unalterable dichotomy. Good must come, though often involuntarily, even out of evil. An example of this is to be found in the goblins who "sting" Anodos into a nobility which, without their active malice, might not have emerged. Even more important, evil possesses in itself the possibility of deliberate good: one can cite Curdie's grotesque creatures, formerly goblin animals, who come to help him in Gwyntystorm. Or again, what appears to be frightful may in reality be full of a growing, innocent goodness, as is Lina, in The Princess and Curdie, who, utterly hideous, has the hidden hand of a child. How truly one views evil depends on the goodness of one's own nature, just as how much something evil can affect one depends on the amount of corresponding evil in one's self. In fact, evil is sometimes only in the eye of the beholder, even in the depths of the mind. As the Grandmother says, when she appears out of the black silence to Curdie and his father as a miracle of beauty and emerald light:

... 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. (P&C, p. 77)

The Little Ones, as noted earlier, are oblivious to the earth-monsters all about them; innocence protects them even from the sight of evil.

MacDonald then presents Earth and the Elementals in a traditional way, but he does not accept the view that the evil inherent in them exists independently. It must be there, he says, for a good reason and a good purpose, since it is subject to God.

(ii)

Earth has also another aspect: it is not only a place of trial, the means of incarnation into sin, and a receptacle of corruption. It is, paradoxically, the birth place of immortality; it is the Element through which natural death becomes supernatural and eternal life. The first Adam, made of Earth, is given over to the worms of mortal corruption; but that is only his beginning. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body . . . the first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from Heaven" (1 Cor. 15:44-47). MacDonald emblemsizes the idea in Lilith, when, after a storm, Mr. Raven, in his bird form, walks over the grass.

"You will wet your feet!" I cried.
"And mire my beak," he answered, immediately plunging it deep in the sod, and drawing out a great wriggling red worm. He threw back his
head, and tossed it in the air. It spread great wings, gorgeous in red and black, and soared aloft. (Lil, p. 201)

Since there is an ancient and widely used symbol of the butterfly as psyche, the soul, there can be no doubt here of MacDonald's intentions, particularly when taken in conjunction with the passage quoted earlier from "The Bad Burrows." "The sepulchre was always the only resurrection house!" he writes in Donal Grant (p. 729). 19

Moreover, Earth puts forth in itself good things here and now. Flowers and jewels are the natural children of the Earth, the first looking up to Light and God, and rejoicing, the second ready to flash into splendour in the darkest and most hidden parts of the mine. In fact MacDonald joins the two, speaking of "flowers that came from the dark earth like the exhaled spirits of its hidden jewels" (DG, p. 239). In The Princess and the Goblin he describes a primrose as "opening an eye of light in the blind earth" (p. 167). Trees too share in the goodness of creation: the Alder Maid in Phantastes is evil, it is true, but the Beech is loving and maternal; the Ash is a murderous earth-stalking demon, but the four Oaks hold and keep safe the cottage in the forest. Anodos chose to go with the Alder, and so left himself unguarded against the Ash; but good is always about him, to become his refuge when he turns to it.

Death itself is good, when the emphasis is not on the decay of the body but on the repose of the spirit. Anodos, having reached the end of his spiritual journey, says:
I was dead, and right content. . . . My spirit rejoiced . . . satisfied in still contemplation and spiritual consciousness . . . . Never tired child lay down in his white bed . . . with a more luxurious satisfaction of repose than I knew, when I felt the coffin settle on the firm earth, and heard the sound of falling mould upon its lid. (Ph, pp. 230-31)

Mr. Vane has a similar experience:

I was intensely blessed. . . . I lay at peace, full of the quietest expectation, breathing the damp odours of Earth's bountiful bosom. . . . time had nothing to do with me; I was in the land of thought . . . in the heart of God. (Lil, pp. 400-01)

Earth, as stated earlier, is the basest of the Elements, with the greatest potentialities for real evil, both in tradition and in MacDonald's works; Man, a Self brimming over with original sin, corrupt and mortal, is part of its hidden secretions and darkness. But through the powers of darkness Man can understand and confront the evil in himself, and having overcome it, see the true beauty of Earth, find that it is his Mother, and that its dark places are also manifestations of God. "Those who work well in the depths more easily understand the heights, for indeed in their true nature they are one and the same" (P&C, p. 30).

This essential ambiguity and paradox are found in the other Elements as well.

3. **Air**

Considered as an Element, Earth, as we have just seen, is ambiguous in its connotations. It can be either a place of decay and
death, mockery and maliciousness, or it can be the final resting place of man's mortality, the womb of true life. The light in which we see it depends on our own moral state; and if we view it rightly, then we know that, as from dead seeds come trees, grass and flowers, so from the dead Self comes the immortal soul.

There is a similar, though much simpler, ambiguity concerning the Element of Air, both traditionally and in MacDonald; but chiefly it is seen as a life-giving power. We are made of Earth, but Air is necessary to our breathing life; hence, we, and all growing things of nature, have an affinity with this Element. Earth gives us form, but Air gives us motion. It is seen, in contrast to the confines of Earth, as a free, wide space, close to the influences of God. Perhaps the best description MacDonald gives of this limitless loveliness is in *The Princess and Curdie*, when he is talking about mountains:

> They are portions of the heart of the earth that have escaped from the dungeon down below, and rushed up and out . . . with a sudden heavenward shoot, into the wind, and the cold, and the star-shine . . . and the great sun, their grandfather, up there in the sky; and their little old cold aunt, the moon, that comes wandering about the house at night; and everlasting stillness, except for the wind that turns the rocks and caverns into a roaring organ for the young archangels that are studying how to let out the pent-up praises of their hearts. (pp. 9-11)

As this passage suggests, it is Air as wind that chiefly concerns MacDonald.

(i)

In Alchemy, wind (via the bellows) had the practical function
of keeping the fire at the necessary even heat during the prolonged process of making the philosopher's stone. From this stone came spiritual wisdom; therefore, iconographically, the operation of the bellows could be represented by the face of God blowing on, and fecundating, the Tree of Knowledge, also known as the Philosophic Tree. Wisdom comes from the breath of God acting on the human soul, even as life came from the breath of God on the human body (Gen. 2:7).

The Alchemical image reminds us of Biblical references to the wind, where it is most often seen, in the words of Alexander Cruden, as a symbol of "the powerful operations of God's spirit, quickening or reviving the heart toward God." Sometimes the wind itself is the spirit of God, as in the description of Pentecost: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind" (Acts 2:2). Usually, however, it is referred to in analogy:

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. (John, 3:8)

MacDonald loved the wind and air in any form: still freshness, scarcely perceptible breeze, or raging gale. He seldom sees in it, or uses it as, a symbol of anything evil. "Cool," "healing," "calming," "kind," "blessed," "pleasant," he calls it. "I am sure the only cure for you and me and all of us is getting up, up—into the divine air!" he writes in a letter (GMHW, p. 349). "An ocean for angelic sport," he calls it in Guild Court; and in The Elect Lady he remarks, "Never a wind wakes of a sudden, but it talks to
me about God." In Phantastes Anodos remarks on the "purity of the air" in the Fairy palace, where his Shadow ceases to trouble him (Ph, p. 91); and later he says, "My soul was like a summer evening . . . [when] the wind of the twilight has begun to blow . . . . I breathed the clear mountain air of the land of Death" (Ph, p. 230).

When, after his dream of the country at the back of the North Wind, Diamond "protested that there was no wind there at all," the narrator adds, "I fancy he missed it. At all events, we could not do without wind. It all depends on how big our lungs are whether the wind is too strong for us or not" (BNW, p. 123).

Although the wind is not always gentle, it need not be feared in its more violent forms. For example, when North Wind carries Diamond into the heart of the storm, the clouds burst into a fresh jubilation of thunderous light. . . . the winds were writhing around him like a storm of serpents. For they were in the midst of the clouds and mists, and they of course took the shapes of the wind . . . he saw the grey and black wind tossing and raving most madly all about him. (BNW, pp. 80-81)

Neither Diamond nor North Wind are themselves affected by the storm, she because she is its source, he because, in the protection of her arm, he is "nestling in its very core and formative centre" (BNW, p. 82).

The strong wind can also cleanse—sometimes by force, it is true, but always for a good purpose. As MacDonald says in Paul Faber: "If the wind was rough, there was none the less life in it: the breath of God, it was rough to blow the faults from him" (p. 214).

The wind can also speak sternly. In The Princess and Curdie,
after Curdie shoots the pigeon, "the wind gave a howl and then lay down again" (P&C, p. 27). He is, as it were, rebuked by the Hound of Heaven. In this instance, the undeniably frightening power of the wind is good, for it makes Curdie go to the Grandmother for forgiveness.

But Air (or wind) as a purely negative or evil Element is also presented. In Lilith, for example, the wind of the Other World becomes an emanation of the Shadow—that is, unmixed evil—itself. An "unwholesome, inhospitable" wind (Lil, p. 295) blows perpetually through Bulika. When Mr. Vane first sees the Shadow there, "that instant the wind found me and blew through me: I shuddered from head to foot, and my heart went from wall to wall of my bosom" (Lil, p. 295). The cold wind is always a sign of evil. It sets the shapes moving in the Evil Forest; during the furious night battle, "skeletons and phantoms fought in wildest confusion. . . . wind-blown misty battle-horses raged and ravened" (Lil, p. 233). Lilith herself, who has given her soul to the Shadow, is also associated with a cold wind in a manner that recalls St. Paul's reference to "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of darkness" (Eph. 2:2):

Came a cold wind with a burning sting—and
Lilith was upon me . . . with her teeth she
pulled from my shoulder the cloak . . . and
fixed them in my flesh. (Lil, p. 364)

Mr. Vane is usually aware of the wind as cold and forbidding, and is vulnerable to its effects when he is following his own will, or is being directly disobedient. When he yields to authority, or
is innocent in intent, the wind becomes a promise of hope.

Wind, then, is, like Earth, ambivalent. It can be a gentle breeze, connoting love, and growth, and life, as well as a strong power suggesting strength, purity, redemption through welcome force or wholesome fear; but it is also a sign of unmitigated evil, giving warning of the moral state of the one who generates or who feels it.

(ii)

As well as thinking of Air in terms of wind, MacDonald brought into some of his stories the inhabitants of Air, which later Alchemical writers had hypothesized. Traditionally, they are not evil or dangerous; they can rarely be viewed by human beings, and their power is less than that of gnomes, salamanders, or water sprites. In using these figures, however, MacDonald draws from more than Alchemical sources. Folk and fairy tales, both traditional and literary, provided him with fairies, as the term is commonly understood in children's literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

First, and most easily dismissed, are the light-hearted, sentimentalized flower-fairies that mar Chapter III of Phantastes with their petty chatter and puns. They are, one might say, unworthy descendants of Peaseblossom and Cobweb, just as the Fairy Queen in "Cross Purposes" is a faint shadow of Titania. They have no real reason for existence, either in the literal story or in the allegory. Similar, but of a much lower sort, are the fairies in "The Carasoyn," full not of mischief but of active malice; they steal children, and
are treacherous, deceitful, and vain. They are more in the popular Scottish countryside tradition of folk lore, and their Queen suggests the Fairy Queen in the ballad of "Tam Linn." They are essential to the story, for they provide a testing ground for Colin and give him a reason for seeking the Wise Woman. But allegorically they are of no interest.

Of a different sort are the denizens of the fairy palace in Chapter IX of Phantastes: "faint, gracious forms" (Ph, p. 92) never plainly visible, for a reason that Anodos has given earlier, one closely related to his spiritual journey: "Since my visit to the Church of Darkness [i.e., the house of the Ogress] my power of seeing the fairies of the higher orders had gradually diminished, until it had almost ceased" (Ph, p. 86). The intention is plain: spirits of Air, being pure, are almost beyond the vision of deliberate disobedience. With their books, their music, their magic bath, these fairies seem to represent the highest powers of the imagination, from whose pleasures Anodos is exiled by his selfish acquisitiveness.

The most developed account of an air-spirit, however, occurs in "The Golden Key." It guides and protects the child Tangle when, tormented by fairies rather of the "Carasoyn" sort, she runs away into the forest:

It was a curious creature, made like a fish, but covered, instead of scales, with feathers of all colours, sparkling like those of a humming bird. It had fins, not wings, and swam through the air as a fish does through water. Its head was like the head of a small owl. (LPOT, p. 215)

After rescuing her from the tree-trap, it leads her to the Grand-
mother's cottage, where "it swam straight to the pot and into the boiling water, where it lay quiet" (LPOT, p. 215). Then, "nicely cooked" and skinned, it becomes Tangle's supper. As soon as she eats its flesh, she understands the speech not only of animals, but of insects, trees, and flowers. The Grandmother says:

"You do not like to eat the messenger that brought you home. But it is the kindest return you can make. ... In Fairyland ... the ambition of the animals is to be eaten by the people; for that is their highest end in that condition. But they are not therefore destroyed. Out of that pot comes something more than the dead fish, you will see." (LPOT, p. 218)

Then the Grandmother takes the lid off the pot:

A lovely little creature in human shape, with large white wings, rose out of it, and flew round and round the roof of the cottage; then dropped, fluttering, and nestled in the lap of the lady. (LPOT, p. 219)

She sends it away. Then Tangle is washed clean in a deep tank filled with water, adjoining the cottage, by many such fishes. When later she is unwilling to leave the cottage with Mossy, another child similarly fetched by an air-fish, the Grandmother tells her:

"I am sorry to lose you, but it will be the best thing for you. Even the fishes, you see, have to go into the pot, and then out into the dark." (LPOT, p. 222)

Much later, when Tangle has lost Mossy, and is afraid to go into the mountain, she recognizes the "beautiful little creature with wings standing beside her, waiting."
"I know you," said Tangle. "You are my fish."
"Yes. But I am a fish no longer. I am an a'ranth now."
"What is that?" asked Tangle.
"What you see I am," answered the shape. "And I am come to lead you through the mountain."

... the moment his white wings moved, they began to throw off a continuous shower of sparks of all colours, which lighted up the passage before them. (LPOT, p. 228)

It takes her to the sea-shore, then vanishes. Here she finds the Old Man of the Sea, or Death, from whom, we learn, come the air-fishes in their original form.

I have quoted in some detail, as this is one of the stories which best shows MacDonald's blending of symbols. Seemingly inconsequential, these symbols have many associations, relevant both to the meaning and to the unity of the story.

As an inhabitant of Air, the fish-creature is (like the traditional Elementals) helpful and good. Because it is wise enough to be gladly obedient to the Grandmother, it is moving through an evolution of its own to something yet higher; for MacDonald, like Boehme and Novalis, felt that everything in creation was in a state of flux, moving up or down on the moral scale, with the outward form reflecting the inner soul. Wings, in Alchemy, are always a sign of a volatile substance, i.e., something that rises and overcomes the wingless, or fixed, or earth-bound substance: so the air-fish, with the owl-head of wisdom, can break the tree that imprisons Tangle, freeing her from the power of Earth. As an a'ranth it fulfills its task, in a radiant miniature human form (much as the
Egyptians represented the soul or kā as a small human figure with arms upraised, then again disappears into its Element. Nor must we forget that the fish is an ancient Christian symbol for Christ. Raising the literal to an allegorical level, then, Tangle is led to the place of her teaching by a spiritual vessel or carrier (Grandmother calls the fish a "messenger," which is the literal meaning of "angel") of the Holy Spirit, which, by destroying itself to nourish her, itself rises to higher potentialities. The conversation which Mossy has with the Old Man of the Sea is simply a repetition, in plainer form, of what the air-fish, through its death and metamorphosis, has already demonstrated. He lies down in a bath, as the air-fish had laid itself in the Grandmother's pot. The Old Man presently says to him:

"Get up and look at yourself in the water . . . . You have tasted of death now . . . . Is it good?"
"It is good," said Mossy. "It is better than life."
"No," said the Old Man: "it is only more life." (LPOT, p. 238)

Exactly what this form of Air Elemental represents is not clear, though much is suggested. One thing is clear, however: the fish and Tangle are obviously linked in their destinies, for the fish-form cannot be changed until Tangle eats it, and Tangle is afraid to go down to the Old Man of the Sea until the aëranth guides her. It seems to suggest the double of her own soul, the part of her that acts under heavenly guidance without her conscious volition, which she trusts.
On the whole, Air creatures are good; but there are two curious exceptions. The first occurs in The Princess and Curdie. A large number of apparent birds settle around Curdie at sunset as he rests on the blasted heath. At first he enjoys their singing, though he doubts "every now and then whether they could really be birds, and the sleepier he got, the more he imagined them something else" (P&C, pp. 122-23). They attack him as he sleeps, and had it not been for Lina, would have killed him. We are left to assume that the birds are demons with power to destroy those not protected by the Grandmother; many others, we are told, had perished on the heath or been changed for life. The other exception to the goodness of winged creatures is the "evil creatures of the air" in The Lost Princess, which at night "came flying and howling about the cottage." Only the Wise Woman's golden fir-cone in the fire bars their way in by the chimney. "This it was which had kept the horrible birds—some say they have a claw at the tip of every wing feather—from tearing the poor naughty princess to pieces and gobbling her up" (LP, p. 37).

With these exceptions, however, MacDonald does not equate anything living in Air with evil; and it is to be noted that in The Princess and Curdie and The Lost Princess these evil creatures belong not only to Air but also to Darkness, appearing only as sunset deepens into night.

(iii)

Finally, there are three non-living creations which find their
place in Air: the Sun, the Moon, and the Rainbow. It is necessary to remark of the Sun only that it is an emblem of God. I shall make brief mention of the Moon, reserving further comment for the chapter on the Wise Woman; it and the Rainbow have considerable significance.

The Moon is a strange force in MacDonald, an almost-human presence, driving away evil, as in Lilith, where the horrible inhabitants of the slough are powerless in her light, and seeming to cool Irene's inflamed hand in The Princess and the Goblin. True, she is an object of terror to Rosamund, in The Lost Princess; she imagines "that the moon was slowly coming nearer and nearer down the sky, to take her and freeze her to death in her arms" (LP, p. 24). The Wise Woman in the same story sings a song using the Moon as a symbol of a Self who has driven away all life, who cannot die.

She is all alone
Like a dog-picked bone,
The poor old crone!
She fain would groan,
But she cannot find the breath.
She once had a fire,
But she built it no higher,
And only sat nigher
Till she saw it expire;
And now she is cold as death. (LP, p. 16)

Small wonder Rosamund is driven to seek refuge in the Wise Woman's cottage!

But, as always in MacDonald, "Good people see good things; bad people, bad things" (BNW, p. 44), while they are all looking at the same thing. The retrograde rush of the Moon, which kills Mr. Vane's horse by leaving it in the dark (Lil, p. 333), is obviously the sym-
bol of his Pride going before a Fall—and Fall here can be both literal and theological. That it leaves him alone, to face the evil night, is entirely the result of his own disobedience, not of its malevolence.

But most often the Moon is recognized as a power for good, a clean, pure, potent thing in itself. The lamp of the Grandmother in the Curdie books, called by Irene her "moon," curbs the active malice of the goblins, is a sign of the Grandmother's presence in the tower after the flood, leads Curdie to seek her, and lights her whole room: in fact, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the light of the actual moon from the light of her lamp.

The second object of the Air to be considered is the Rainbow. In the Bible, it is a sign of God's forgiveness, and His promise never again to destroy mankind in anger. In Alchemy, just before the end of the second major stage of the Magnum Opus, when, "within the belly of the wind," i.e., the athanor, as the outer fire is slowly intensified, a great number of beautiful colours appear, corresponding to a stage known as the Peacock's Tail: it precedes by only one further stage the sought-for Ultimate Perfection.27 It "contains within itself all colours" (Caron & Hutin, p. 72), and is sometimes pictorially represented as a rainbow. According to Jung, "[It] denotes the spring, the renewal of life."28

In "The Golden Key" the Rainbow is of deepest significance. Mossy's aunt tells him, at the beginning of the story, that "if he could reach the place where the end of the rainbow stands he would find there a golden key" (LPOT, p. 210-11). "Perhaps it is the
rainbow's egg," says Mossy. "Perhaps it comes tumbling down the
rainbow from the sky" (LPOT, p. 211). Presently he sees the end
of the rainbow, far among the trees:

It was a grand sight, burning away there in
silence, with its gorgeous, its lovely, its
delicate colours, each distinct, all combining
... he could not tell how high the crown of
the arch must reach. ... in each of the
colours, which was as large as the column of
a church, he could faintly see beautiful forms
slowly ascending as if by the steps of a
winding stair. (LPOT, pp. 211-12)

He finds the key, "bright as gold could be ... and set with
sapphires" (LPOT, p. 213). His whole life must be a search, in
company with Tangle, for the key-hole which it fits. They cross the
great plain, filled with large shadows from the country above them
which they cannot see. Later, after losing Tangle, Mossy has
another glimpse of the rainbow, finally reaching a hall, "one mass
of shining stones of every colour that light can show"; and here
sits Tangle. As darkness falls, light gleams through the seven
pillars in the middle, each one a colour of the rainbow, and
through an eighth pillar which is "of the same new colour that he
had seen in the rainbow when he saw it first in the fairy forest."

He opens the sapphire-ringed keyhole, and he and Tangle "climbed out
of the earth; and, still climbing, rose above it. They were in the
rainbow. ... Stairs beside stairs wound up together, and beauti-
ful beings of all ages climbed along with them. They knew they
were going up to the country whence the shadows fall" (LPOT, pp. 239-40).

Air, here, in the form of a rainbow column, is the "Path to the
Stars" of the Adepts, a Jacob's ladder from the wilderness of the world to heaven, the Ladder of Perfection of the mystics. This remarkable parable could well be explored in depth at considerable length for both Alchemical and Biblical significances and connotations: it represents MacDonald's most effective, and most exalted, use of the Element of Air.

4. Fire

Fire, in its natural, or every-day, existence, has three observable functions. It can warm and comfort; it can be a refining agent; and it can be a totally destructive force. It moves upward, as if it were reaching towards the greater fire of the Sun; it is variable in appearance, without changing its nature; moreover, fire may be kindled from fire any number of times, without diminishing the original fire. Perhaps it was because of these latter qualities that Heraclitus of Ephesus held that Fire alone was the principle of all things, and that in the Bible Fire is often used as a symbol of some aspect of God. Alchemically, in its every-day connotation, it is essential to the completion of the Magnum Opus, requiring careful and prayerful tending and guarding: failure to attain the ultimate goal was most frequently attributed to a neglect of the heating apparatus of the Athenor, and a resulting failure of the "secret fire" inside the hermetically sealed vessel, or Egg. The sword was a symbol of Fire, and "the sick king cured by fire" indicated prime matter undergoing planetary influences (Caron & Hutin, p. 139).
More will be said later of this "inner fire," and of the symbols it encompassed.

I shall deal first, however, with Fire as represented in the Bible, where it is rarely referred to on the "every-day" level, but rather indicates the presence of God, His wrath, His approbation, or His glory. Examples are numerous.

Fire shows His presence: God speaks to Moses from a bush which burns but is not consumed (Exod. 3:2); a pillar of fire guides the Israelites by night (Exod. 13:21); God makes "his ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4). It shows His wrath: an angel with a flaming sword bars Adam and Eve from Eden (Gen. 3:24); Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by "fire from heaven" (Gen. 19:24); "the devil . . . was cast into a lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10); Dives suffers the torments of fire (Luke 16:24). It shows His approbation: "The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed Elijah's burnt sacrifice" (I Kings 18:38). And it shows His glory: "[God's] eyes were as a flame of fire . . . and his feet . . . as if they burned in a furnace . . . his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (Rev. 1:14-16).

Another property of fire in the Bible (which relates also to the Alchemical use, and hence its symbolism) is its refining, or purifying, powers: "He is like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:2); "Behold, I [God] have refined thee . . . I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10); "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Cor. 3:13). Isaiah's lips are touched by one of the seraphim with a live coal from the altar, and he is
told, "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isa. 6:6); and in Revelation salvation is compared to "gold tried in the fire" (3:18). This is the purgatorial, as distinct from the infernal, Fire.

Although the Bible was MacDonald's main authority for his dealings with Fire in the fantasies, Dante also influenced his comments, via the plots and characters, on Fire's divine purpose, as distinguished from its practical. In Dante we find the accepted theological view of three types of Fire carefully distinguished. Thus, in the Inferno the spirits suffering the wrath of God in the torments of fire exist in eternal, fixed, unchanging agony. Full of hatred and resentment against God and their own kind, they are perpetually damned in the fire kindled by their own unforgivable, because unrepented, sins. They burn, but are not consumed. In the Purgatorio, the spirits also suffer greatly; but they willingly embrace the flames that purge and cleanse them of their sins. They want to be refined and purified; they see their fire as a blessing which enables them to enter Paradise. In the Paradiso Fire is the glory of God, "the Pure Spark . . . of burning love" (Para. XXVIII). Dante sees a river of light, in which he bathes his eyes, then views a splendour of radiance, a blazing white rose, the petals made of the saints in heaven, with a heart of gold. Lastly he looks at the centre, God himself, a "living light," in three united spheres: "The third seemed flame/ Breathed equally from each of the first pair" (Para. XXXIII).

MacDonald also distinguishes amongst various types of Fire,
though there is for him no Fire of wrath; it is all the Fire of Love and Glory, variously felt according to the nature of the one experiencing its power. He rarely mentions Fire simply as a part of a description of a room: even in the most ordinary context, a description of Fire is almost invariably followed by a comment or phrase or episode indicating the fire's significance, not just in terms of warmth and homeliness, but of love, charity, life. This is true even in the contemporary novels, e.g., "A fire burned in the antique grate, and was a soul to the chamber." When Diamond (in *At the Back of the North Wind*) makes toast and sweeps the hearth, the act does not simply provide us with a vignette of domesticity, but illustrates his sacramental forgetfulness of Self in doing small, helpful tasks, for which he gains from his mother the praise which he values but has not been seeking. This the author immediately points out:

Could Diamond have had greater praise or greater pleasure? . . . . Our own praises poison our selves . . . till they . . . become like great toadstools. But the praises of father or mother do our selves good, and comfort them and make them beautiful. (*BNW*, p. 163)

Although there is no peculiarly symbolic or supernatural quality in the scene, there is a moral import in Diamond's only described dealing with Fire.

As well, MacDonald makes thorough use of Fire as a symbol, to convey some of his deeply-felt convictions. One type of Fire we never find in his writings, however, for he disagrees with the Bible and Dante, and cannot accept the doctrine of an eternal state
of Hell. He was a Universalist in his beliefs, and insisted that all men will ultimately be redeemed. Never is anyone tortured for the sake of the pain itself; there is no unending retribution for sin.

But Fire as a cleansing, refining, and sacrificial agent or power he introduces with great effect. It "punishes," but only in the sense that a child is "punished" by laying its hand on a hot stove; or as a doctor "punishes" a patient by removing a cancer. Spiritual abscesses, diseased and crippled character-traits, evil propensities, may be so deeply ingrained that they must be burnt away, a caustic, drastic, agonizing cure, sometimes operating against the will of the being so dealt with, as may be seen in an examination of the end of Lilith. Sometimes, however, although the cure is felt as an agony physically, it is accepted, as an act of obedience; and because its higher purpose is recognized, even if not at the time understood (as with Curdie, and the King, in The Princess and Curdie) it can be endured to the limits of its necessity. This willing endurance is like that in Dante, where the souls in Purgatory rejoice in the prospect of ultimate cleansing and embrace their flame, while those in Hell shrink from their pain and long unceasingly but unrepentantly for a moment's respite.

As soon as Fire is seen in this fashion as purgative, not punitive, it becomes redemptive: there is a time-limit to suffering; the blemishes of the soul, which are the fuel of the fire, are burnt away, forever gone, and the soul is ready for its eternity of joy, or its present moment of service. Fire, once the soul's
torment, is now its Element, the visible form of the blaze of triumph and glory that is God's. To be touched by Fire is to receive something from the Godhead; to be that Fire is to be like the burning but unconsumed bush, namely, a strong receptacle, channel, mirror, or sharer, all in one, of God himself.

But before proceeding with a discussion of MacDonald's use of Fire, it is necessary to consider the Rose as a symbol, for he links the two, particularly in the Curdie books. The Bible, Alchemy, and the writings of Dante are all involved in MacDonald's imagery. The Bible refers only twice to the rose: in an allusion to the day of the return of the ransomed of the Lord, ("the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" [Isa. 35:1]); and in The Song of Solomon ("I am the rose of Sharon" [Song. Sol. 2:1], says the Bridegroom). These words were, from the time of the early Fathers, held to be a prophetic allegory of Christ and the Church. Venus herself was often pictured naked (white) and sprinkled with roses (red), thus mingling the secular and religious connotations. (See Illustration III).

The Rose was also employed as a symbol in Alchemy. Inside the hermetically sealed vessel, or Philosophic Egg, the "inner fire," stimulated by the ordinary fire, produces two principles, one solar, hot, and male, the other lunar, cold, and female. After various processes the Red King appears out of the womb of his mother-sister, the White Rose, "in a state of perfect fixation and fixed perfection which is known as the Red Rose." The union of these two produces the ultimate perfection, the Philosopher's Stone.
A fire of red roses, or red and white mingled, such as we find in the Curdie books, suggests the penultimate stage of the alchemical process through which perfection is attained. But MacDonald sets the fire between silver andirons in cherub form, and thus adds further connotations to the Rose image. Ezekiel's actual cherubim, in the Bible, appear "like burning coals of fire" (Ezek. I:13); they lead him to his vision of the person of God. Moreover, two golden cherubim were placed at the ends of the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25:18). This, in the temple of Solomon, honoured by sacrifices, was set in the Holy of Holies, which was filled with the glory of the Lord (I Kings 8:6). The Grandmother's rose-fire then identifies her room as the Temple of God. When the King is laid among the burning roses, in his palace in Gwyntystorm, the place where he suffers is called the "altar-table," and he is referred to as the "living sacrifice" (P&C, p. 295).

Dante gives the highest emblematic connotation to the Rose. In the Earthly Paradise the lady who dances as leader around the Gryphon's car is "now white, now red" (Purg. XXXIX). Dorothy Sayers explains that "white and red are the colours which Dante assigns to the Old and New Testaments respectively. . . . They are also the colours of righteousness and love. But they are most especially the colours of the Sacrament itself—the Flesh and the Blood." MacDonald probably had this in mind when he made the Grandmother's fire red and white roses.

This Fire as a refining, purifying agent is the predominant Element in the Curdie books. Having considered the implications
of the images, we can appreciate the significance of the Grandmother's fire:

Irene . . . saw that what she had taken for a huge bouquet of red roses on a low stand against the wall, was in fact a fire which burned in the shapes of the loveliest and reddest roses, glowing gorgeously between the heads and wings of two cherubs of shining silver. And when she came nearer, she found that the smell of roses with which the room was filled, came from the fire-roses on the hearth. (P&G, p. 145)

The Grandmother, soiled by embracing the very bedraggled Irene, cleanses her own dress with a single rose, passing it three times over her front; but she must refuse Irene's desire to be similarly cleansed. Though Irene herself would not be able to endure what we eventually surmise to be an intimate realization of the full glory of God, she is yet given a ball of thread purified in the fire, to guide her; and of the ring which the Grandmother gives her, the nurse later says it glows "just like a fiery rose!" (P&G, p. 163).

For Irene the fire is a comforting delight; wholly innocent, loving, and obedient, she need not—in fact must not—be touched by it. But Curdie is far different, and in any case must be prepared for an active destiny. Originally unable to see the Grandmother at all, he is at last driven by his own sense of alienation, or sin, to look for her. On his first visit he finds only a barren room; but on his next visit, at last started on his spiritual path, he opens the Grandmother's door to see "the great sky and the stars," and straight in front of him "a great wheel of fire, turn-
ing and turning, and flashing out blue lights." (One is again reminded of the preliminaries to Ezekiel's vision of God.) When he is inside he sees the huge fire of roses. Now no longer merely a wonderful appurtenance of the Grandmother's room, as it was for Irene, Fire becomes for Curdie active as a refining agent. The Grandmother tells Curdie he must pass a trial that "needs only trust and obedience." Curdie answers, "If you think me fit, command me."

"It will hurt you terribly, Curdie, but that will be all; no real hurt, but much real good will come to you from it. . . . Go and thrust both your hands into that fire," she said. . . . Curdie dared not stop to think. It was much too terrible to think about. He rushed to the fire, and thrust both his hands right into the middle of the heap of flaming roses, and his arms halfway up to the elbows. And it did hurt! But he did not draw them back. He held the pain as if it were a thing that would kill him if he let it go - as indeed it would have done. He was in terrible fear lest it should conquer him. But when it had risen to the pitch that he thought he could bear it no longer, it began to fall again. (P&C, pp. 93-94)

When he took his hands out, at the Grandmother's order, he found "they were white and smooth like the princess's" (p. 94); "his touch had been glorified by her fire" (p. 319). His obedience and suffering confer on him the gift of knowing whether people are on the upward path to being better men, or on the downward path to being beasts. Their hands will be, to his touch, either human or bestial. "According then to your knowledge of that beast, will be your knowledge of the man you have to do with" (P&C, p. 99). Now he is ready for his open fight against evil.

Curdie is not the only character to be so purified. Much later,
in Gwyntystorm, the old, sick king is cleansed and rejuvenated by the Grandmother. 36

A long and broad marble table . . . had been drawn into the middle of [the room], and thereon burned a great fire . . . of glowing, flaming roses, red and white. In the midst of the roses lay the King, moaning, but motionless. Every rose that fell from the table to the floor, someone, whom Curdie could not plainly see for the brightness, lifted and laid burning upon the King's face, until at length his face too was covered with the live roses, and he lay all within the fire, moaning still, with now and then a shuddering sob. . . . And the glow of the red fire died away, and the glow of the white fire grew grey . . . and on the table all was black - except the face of the King, which shone from under the burnt roses like a diamond in the ashes of a furnace. . . . [The Grandmother] stooped over the table-altar, put her mighty arms under the living sacrifice, lifted the King, as if he were but a little child . . . and laid him in his bed. (P&C, pp. 294-96)

The next morning "the King opened his eyes, and the soul of perfect health shone out of them" (P&C, p. 297).

Near the end of the book, Curdie witnesses the apotheosis of Lina, the beast who had once been a woman, and who has been, inwardly, becoming a little child:

Before the hearth stood the princess [i.e., the Grandmother] . . . with Lina a little behind her, slowly wagging her tail, and looking like a beast of prey that can hardly so long restrain itself from springing as to be sure of its victim. The Queen was casting roses, more and more roses, upon the fire. At last she turned and said, "Now, Lina!" - and Lina dashed burrowing into the fire. There went up a black smoke and a dust, and Lina was never more seen in the palace. (P&C, p. 319)
One remembers that the passageway to the Earthly Paradise in Dante's *Purgatorio* is through fire hotter than molten glass (*Purg. XXVII*).

Fire then is the chief Elemental symbol in the *Curdie* books.

It is also used in other works, though not in the same way or to the same extent. In *The Lost Princess* the apparently ordinary, domestic fire in the Wise Woman's cottage is protective: it keeps the "creatures of the air" from getting down the chimney and "tearing the poor naughty princess to pieces" (*LP*, p. 37). In *Phantastes* the fire keeps the Wise Woman safe from the powers of Chaos. "It is always day here," she tells Anodos, "so long as I keep my fire burning" (*Ph*, p. 172).

The other major work in which Fire plays an important, though comparatively brief, part, is *Lilith*, where it is first seen as the instrument of Lilith's torture. Near the end of the novel, still unrepentant, she is taken to the house of Mara. When she insists on doing as her Self pleases, Mara answers, "I am sorry: you must suffer." The central part of the passage demonstrates not only the horror of Fire when resisted, but its significance when acting as a punitive agent.

I saw the worm-thing come creeping out [of the fire], white-hot, vivid as incandescent silver, the live heart of essential fire. . . . Slowly, very slowly, it crept along [Lilith's] robe until it reached her bosom. . . . The creature had passed in by the centre of the black spot [on her side] and was piercing through the joints and marrow to the thoughts and intents of the heart. The princess gave one writhing, contorted shudder, and I knew the worm was in her secret chamber.

"She is seeing herself!" said Mara. . . . "You cannot go near her. . . . She is far
away from us, afar in the hell of her self-consciousness. The central fire of the universe is radiating into her the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge of what she was. . . . She knows that she is herself the fire in which she is burning, but she does not know that the Light of Life is the heart of that fire. Her torment is that she is what she is. Do not fear for her; she is not forsaken. No gentler way to help her was left. . . ."

The soul of Lilith lay naked to the torture of pure interpenetrating inward light. (Lil, pp. 372, 373, 374)

Where Curdie and the old King willingly accept the fire, it is purgatorial, and bearable; Lilith, a rebellious prisoner, suffers the fires of Hell. But the passage shows the difference between MacDonald's fire and that of Dante and the Bible: theirs is endless punishment, MacDonald's is necessary teaching, prolonged only so long as Lilith is defiant. MacDonald puts the matter even more plainly in one of his Unspoken Sermons:

The fire of God, which is His essential being, His love, His creative power, is a fire unlike its earthly symbol in this, that it is only at a distance it burns - that the further from Him, it burns the worse. (p. 67)

Earth is dark, devious, and has its goblins; Air, though less capable of maleficence, is violent and stormy, and has its evil birds; but Fire, in MacDonald, can never be, or more than momentar­ily seem, anything but good. The pain it causes is immediately shown to be good. Earth and Air are also good, as we have seen, but they are presented with deliberate ambiguity; Fire may be agonizing, but we are never left in any doubt that its purpose is not only good and wholesome, but holy.
5. Water

Earth, Air, and Fire, as we have seen, are ambivalent in themselves, and in the case of the first two, as symbols; the fourth Element, Water, has much the same natural ambiguity. Literally, without water we die, and with too much, we drown; symbolically, water can represent the essence of spiritual life, or the uncontrolled power of chaos.

As might be expected, MacDonald makes extensive use of the symbolical implications of Water; but he also expresses his joy in it as a natural phenomenon not only in most of the fantasies but in all the novels I have read. The sheer physical delight in rivers and streams and springs in particular—living water, and its everlasting voices—breaks out again and again, and may be represented by a quotation from Unspoken Sermons:

... water comes bubbling fresh from the imagination of the living God, rushing from under the great white throne of the glacier. The very thought of it makes one gasp with an elemental joy no metaphysician can analyse. The water itself, that dances and sings and slakes the wonderful thirst... this lovely thing itself, whose very wetness is a delight to every inch of the human body in its embrace—this live thing, which, if I might, I would have running through my room, yea, babbling along my table—this water is its own self its own truth, and is therein a truth of God. (p. 81)

We realize that when Colin, in "The Carasoyn," made a channel so that the burn ran through the centre of the earth-floored cottage, he was fulfilling one of MacDonald's daydreams. Even the most unallegorical water, flowing beside him in natural beauty, he anthro-
pomorphizes into a companion with living, if incomprehensible, speech. Perhaps this feeling that water is living is the reason that he brings into his stories no Water Elementals.

If water is a friend in its ordinary state, it rapidly becomes, in the fantasies, a guide and philosopher as well. By it Anodos is led into Fairy Land, and when he stays with it, all goes well with him. When he reaches the river he feels "a gush of joy" to hear it "singing . . . amongst new rocks, over which it made new cataracts of watery melodies" (Ph, p. 81). To rescue Curdie, Irene follows her thread along a stream "which jabbered and prattled down the hill" (P&G, p. 197). The Princess in "The Light Princess" (LPOT) cannot get enough of swimming. North Wind, in the quiet moonlight, carries Diamond along the course of a stream. The instances could be multiplied, for there are carefully observed and lyrical descriptions everywhere in MacDonald's works. Many of these have no secondary meaning. It is when MacDonald makes use of Water allegorically that we must pay close attention, for it is of vital importance to the understanding of many of his scenes.

(i)

Allegorically, Water may traditionally be regarded in a variety of ways. First, it can be seen as pure Chaos, a symbol for confusion and disorder; then, it can be regarded as a symbol for life itself, both physical and spiritual; thirdly, it can also be considered as a means of purification and baptism. But there is a fourth, highly negative way of considering it, namely, by viewing
the results of a lack of water. Since this notion ties in with the idea of Water as a symbol of life, the Waste Land connotations will be considered along with the life-giving properties.

All these aspects of Water are to be found in the Bible, and a brief look at selected passages bears out this statement. First, the sea is a symbol of chaos, out of which the spirit of God brought order (Gen. 1:2). It is used as a synonym for dangers, sorrows, temptations, and miseries. In the Psalms we find: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul" (Ps. 69:1); "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42:7). Leviathan is the embodiment of these waters; and when he is swallowed up, Jonah says, "Out of the belly of hell cried I . . . the waters compassed me about, even to the soul" (Jonah 2:2, 3, 5). "Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off" (Lam. 3:54). St. John is thinking of water in these terms in Revelation, when he writes, "And there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1). One might also consider under this heading water as punishment, as in the story of the Flood, or the drowning of the Egyptians.

There is no doubt about God's control of the powers of the sea. "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou breakest the heads of the dragons in the waters" (Ps. 74:13). And in Luke, Christ rebukes the storm and it subsides: "He commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him" (Luke 8:25).

But Water is more than a chaos that is wielded as punishment, or that must be controlled. The waters are seen as something that consciously rejoice in God in themselves, as when the floods are
called upon to clap their hands (Ps. 98:8), or as something that can be taken objectively as an emblem for the longing of the soul for God. "O God . . . my soul thirsteth for thee . . . in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1). Those who love and obey God are compared to "a watered garden . . . a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa. 58:11). God himself is "the fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13). ". . . the river of God . . . is full of water" (Ps. 65:9). "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life" (Rev. 21:6).

Water in the Old Testament is sprinkled on objects to be sanctified for purposes of purification; this practice leads directly to the use of water in baptism. "I . . . baptise you with water unto repentance," says John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11); and Christ himself was baptized. To be baptized is to be immersed in the "well of living waters" (Song. Sol. 4:15) and be made clean. In the conversation with the woman of Samaria, Christ says: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; [it] shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

Living water marks the beginning and the end of the journey of Mankind: four rivers ran out of Eden, and "a pure river of water, clear as crystal," proceeds out of the throne of God (Rev. 22:1). Casting about for a comparison, St. John says God's voice is "as the sound of many waters" (Rev. 11:15). If Water is life itself, with the deepest spiritual implications, then it is lack of this water which makes the spirit as stony and dead as the desert.
Barren land and death are equated (2 Kings 2:21). It is by no mere pretty turn of fancy that Dante makes the Earthly Paradise a place of rivers and fountains, or that Hell is totally dry.

In Alchemy, Water has many of the same connotations as in the Bible. Ultimately sublimated, it becomes "the Fountain of Youth, the Elixir of Life and the Key to Immortality. . . . it would also rejuvenate and finally transmute the human body into an incorruptible 'body of light.'"\(^\text{38}\) The sick King is frequently pictured rising, hands pressed together, as from a large bath that resembles a baptismal font; and the union of the Red King and the White Queen always takes place in water. In fact one treatise on Alchemy is entitled *Aquarium of the Sages* (Caron & Hutin, p. 152); and one of the names of Mercury, who brings form or system to the Magnum Opus, is "the blessed water."

This complex of symbols is important to bear in mind when dealing with MacDonald and Water, as, in one context or other, he makes use of them all.

(ii)

The chaotic and destructive aspects of Water usually refer in the Bible to a spiritual state; in Alchemy we do not see these aspects at all. In MacDonald, there are only a few examples of Water's destructive powers. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, Curdie, during a tremendous storm, finds his mother and Irene entirely happy together in the wretched, fireless, clay-floored cottage, which is completely safe, "for a huge rock against which it was built . . .
protected it both from the blasts and the waters" (P&G, p. 228).

We already know enough about Curdie's parents not to be surprised that their house is like that of the wise man "which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24). To make the analogy perfectly clear, Curdie's mother talks to Irene about her "inner house."

Later the storm-swollen waters burst into the great castle-farmhouse, having first flooded the goblin territory:

... dead goblins were tossing about in the current ... They had been caught in their own snare ... For days and days the water continued to rush from the doors and windows of the king's house, and a few goblin bodies were swept out into the road. (P&G, p. 304 & p. 307)

But while from the goblins' point of view this is destructive, from the people's it is cleansing, though uncontrolled.

At the end of the sequel (The Princess and Curdie), Gwyntystorm is destroyed. The city originally had been built upon rock, but, in their greed for gold, the people had chipped away the upholding pillars, until

One day at noon ... the whole city fell with a roaring crash ... Where the mighty rock once towered, crowded with homes and crowned with a palace, now rushes and raves a stone-obstructed rapid of the river. (P&C, p. 320)

The city actually becomes what its citizens, spiritually speaking, were.

In Phantastes, after pride and selfishness have for the moment
overwhelmed Anodos, he emerges from a rocky passage; what he sees in
the landscape is an outer image of his inner self:

I stood on the shore of a wintry sea. . . .
It was bare, and waste, and gray. Hundreds of
hopeless waves rushed constantly shoreward,
falling exhausted upon a beach of great loose
stones. . . . The dismal day [was] more dismal
even than the tomb I had left. . . . the sound
of the waves grew louder and yet more despairing
. . . an icy storm . . . tore the waters into
spray . . . and flung the billows in raving
heaps upon the desolate shore. . . . I followed
[a low platform of rock] . . . out into the
tumbling chaos. . . . I stood one moment and
gazed into the heaving abyss beneath me; then
plunged headlong into the mounting wave below.
(Ph, pp. 159-60)

The chaos of the sea is the accurate externalization of the chaos
of mind which leads Anodos to attempted suicide.

Nor is all water what it appears to be. In Lilith, Mr. Vane
bathes in the crystal-clear water in Lilith's palace. "It looked
a thing celestial. I plunged in" (Lil, p. 304). It has however a
strange odour, which makes him wonder if it is enchanted. Then he
remembers there is no drop of water in the city; he remembers the
crushed paw of the leopardess, from which blood had poured continu­
owsly "in a small torrent. . . . I sprang from the bath. What had
I been bathing in? . . . But what matter whence it flowed? was not
the water sweet?" (Lil, p. 304). Mr. Vane is still very much under
Lilith's influence, still fancies he loves her. "Stolen waters are
sweet" (Prov. 9:17). But since Mr. Vane is not really evil so much
as foolish and self-deceiving, he does not re-enter the bath, and
so escapes its probable ill effects.
Later, however, when he wilfully forgets Mr. Raven's orders, and obeys Lilith, he suffers the destructive force of the Element he unlawfully bathed in. At Lilith's desire, he climbs a tree to pluck her a flower.

When my head rose above the branches near the top ... that instant I found myself drenched from head to foot. The next, as if plunged in a stormy water, I was flung about wildly, and felt myself sinking. Tossed up and down, tossed this way and tossed that way, rolled over and over, checked, rolled the other way and tossed up again, I was sinking lower and lower. (Lil, p. 314)

When he climbs the tree, he enables her to follow him into the world of his "ordinary" life: his sin of disobedience brings further danger to those he loves in the "other dimension." This passage is also a fair description of his emotional state while under the influence of Lilith.

We have just considered one aspect of Water, as chaos, or punishment: that is, its uncontrolled, overwhelming power. Some unchecked impulse, some definite disobedience, some inherent fault in character, sets the waters free; there is, quite literally, too much of a good thing. But the second, and more important, negative aspect of the Element, is its lack altogether. The Waste Land is caused by a drought; if all natural waters are dried up, then stony barrenness results. A place with little or no water is dead, unchanging—characteristics which MacDonald ascribes not only to physical locations but to people as well, though of course in human terms.

Curdie's experience on the "great desolate heath" directly
equates the dry country with dryness of spirit:

... this was a part of the country very hard to get through. Nobody lived there, though many had tried to build in it. ... And that old hawthorn might have been enough for a warning—it looked so like a human being dried up and distorted with age and suffering, with cares instead of loves, and things instead of thoughts. Both it and the heath ... were so withered that it was impossible to say whether they were alive or not. (P&C, pp. 116-17)

When Curdie reaches Gwyntystorm, he finds it beautifully situated on a great rock in a river, in the midst of a fertile country; but the city itself is made of stone, and the inhabitants are hostile, self-seeking, and cold-hearted. The lower parts of the castle itself are "dirty and disorderly," its sculleries full of "filth and disorder" (P&C, p. 180). Washing seems to be unheard of. The king tells him that the people are wicked:

There was a general decay of truth and right principle. ... The main cause of his illness was the despondency with which the degeneration of his people affected him. (P&C, pp. 227-28)

The whole impression of the city is—in spite of its location—that of a place of terrible dryness, inhabited chiefly by totally depraved citizens. The hardness of the pavements is equalled only by the hardness of their hearts.

So, too, in "The Light Princess." Here Water is equated with a feeling for humanity, or even the ability to react emotionally. The Princess, by a wicked spell, has been deprived of her gravity; as a result, she is also deprived of natural feeling. She laughs
constantly, but cannot cry. The lake by the palace is the only place where she approaches being human: "... the passion of her life was to get into the water, and she was always the better behaved and the more beautiful the more she had of it" (LPOT, p. 33). Her two physicians

... argued that, if water of external origin and application could be so efficacious, water from a deeper source might work a perfect cure; in short, that if [she] could by any means be made to cry, she might recover her lost gravity. (LPOT, p. 34)

To spite the Princess, the witch begins to drain the lake; as the lake dries, the Princess herself wastes away, "sinking as it sank, withering as it dried. ... she felt as if the lake were her soul, drying up within her, first to mud, then to madness and death" (LPOT, p. 50). A prince can, by dying, save the lake; at the last moment she realizes he matters more to her than the water does, and saves his life. A reaction immediately follows:

The princess burst into a passion of tears, and fell on the floor. There she lay for an hour, and her tears never ceased. All the pent-up crying of her life was spent now. And a rain came on. ... The sun shone all the time. ... The palace was in the heart of a rainbow. ... The torrents poured from the mountains like molten gold. ... But the princess did not heed the lake. She lay on the floor and wept. And this rain within doors was far more wonderful than the rain out of doors. (LPOT, p. 61)

This story is found originally in Adela Cathcart. After it has been read aloud, there is a discussion among the characters of its meaning.
"I think the moral is," said the doctor, "that no girl is worth anything till she has cried a little..."
"I think there is a great deal of meaning in it, to those who can see through its fairy-gates," [said the curate.] (AC, p. 98)

As rain is to the country, so tears are to the individual. Without water, the country becomes a waste; without tears, the individual does not grow spiritually. Both of these ideas are suggested in "The Light Princess," but with playfulness and light irony and many amusing episodes; in Lilith they find full serious expression. In this novel they are conveyed with a profundity and intensity that merit extended consideration.

In Lilith we are constantly aware of the barrenness of the Other Dimension, and from the start it is constantly, though variously, related to the spiritual condition of the inhabitants of the country, and of Mr. Vane. Mr. Raven's cottage, surrounded by "a rocky moorland covered with dry plants and mosses" (Lil, p. 207), is in the centre, at first view, of a churchyard. "Wherever the dreary wind swept, there was the raven's cemetery! He was sexton of all he surveyed!... I stood in the burial ground of the universe" (Lil, p. 208). The echo of Cowper's "Solitude of Alexander Selkirk" is no accident: the whole first stanza could be imagined as spoken by Death, as Mr. Vane then conceives it.

Sign of presence, human or animal, was none... When I reached the plain, I found it... of rock, here flat and channeled, there humped and pinnacled - evidently the wide bed of a vanished river, scored by innumerable water-runs, without a trace of moisture in them... The air... was silent as death. (Lil, pp. 231-32)
When he lies down, however, he hears beneath him "the sounds of rushing streams" (Lil, p. 235). Later, Mr. Vane learns from Mara the reason for the dryness of the country:

. . . the wicked princess [Lilith] gathered up in her lap what she could of the water over the whole country, closed it in an egg, and carried it away. Her lap, however, would not hold more than half of it; and the instant she was gone, what she had not yet taken fled away underground, leaving the country as dry and dusty as her own heart. Were it not for the waters under it, every living thing would long ago have perished from it. For where no water is, no rain falls; and where no rain falls, no springs rise. (Lil, p. 254)

Through the Little Ones, the importance of tears is made clear. These children, who have never seen or known tears, are, Mr. Vane finds, "full of wisdom and empty of knowledge" (Lil, p. 247). They have a fear of growing, and turning into the fungoid giants; hence, the best of them remain perpetually children, and, with the exception of Lona, childish. Mara says of them:

"When they are thirsty enough, they will have water, and when they have water, they will grow. To grow, they must have water. And, beneath, it is flowing still." (Lil, p. 255)

Later, Mr. Raven reproaches Mr. Vane for not realizing the connection between water, and tears, and spiritual growth. The opening speaker is Mr. Raven:

"They were . . . afraid of growing."
"But surely I had no power to make them grow!"
"You might have removed some of the hindrances to their growing!"
"What are they? . . . I did think perhaps it was the want of water!"
"Of course it is! They have none to cry with!"
"I would gladly have kept them from requiring any for that purpose!"
"... Why, Mr. Vane, but for the weeping in it, your world would never have become worth saving! ... You ought to have given the Little Ones water!" (Lil, pp. 316-17)

Far worse off than the Little Ones, however, are the inhabitants of Bulika, Lilith's city. Though the Little Ones are in a state of arrested development, the citizens of Bulika are self-satisfied, treacherous, violent, and proud. Nothing grows in the city: there is no harvest, material or spiritual. When Mr. Vane approaches the city he sees "no water, no flowers, no sign of animals..." (Lil, p. 293) and asks himself if he has come upon a dead city. The Little Ones see it as "only a great mass of rock" (Lil, p. 351), and find the inhabitants as hostile as their walls. Bulika, like Gwyntystorm, is an outward expression of the inner hardness and sterility of its citizens. Barren heath, waste land, dry places, stony cities, symbolize a state of mind, a condition of heart, a spiritual death.

The regeneration of the Waste Land is brought about through the advent of water; the regeneration of the wicked—or the growth of the immature—starts with their tears. The Little Ones begin to mature when they become capable of tears; and Lilith, finally admitting she is the slave of Hell, shows her changed nature when "the fiery-cold misery went out of her eyes, and their fountains filled" (Lil, p. 378). "Are the rivers the glad of the princess?" asks one of the children (Lil, p. 380). Another remarks on how dirty Lilith's
robes are; Mara answers, "Those rivers are so clean that they make the whole world clean" (Lil, p. 380).

The rivers from within are like the underground waters in the barren lands which spring up after Mr. Vane buries Lilith's severed hand.

What a sight rose to my eyes! ... [it] was alive with streams, with torrents, with still pools. ... How the moon flashed on the water! ... And a great jubilant song arose from its bosom, the song of new-born liberty. ... my heart also began to exult. ... I had helped to set this river free! — My dead were not lost! ... at last I should hold them! Wherefore else did the floods clap their hands? (Lil, pp. 402-03)

As Adam had said earlier, lest perhaps the reader not fully realize the relationship between place and soul, "A desert, wide and dreary, parts him who lies down to die from him who lies down to live" (Lil, p. 399). Mr. Vane at last finds the perfect peace of desired death: "I was a peaceful ocean upon which the ground-swell of a living joy was continuously lifting new waves" (Lil, p. 412). When, near the end of the book, Mr. Vane sees with his "mind's eye only," the throne of the Ancient of Days, he notes: "Over and under and between those steps issued, plenteously, unceasingly new-born, the river of the waters of life" (Lil, p. 418).

(iii)

Drinking and bathing are not far apart in their implications, for both make the spirit grow; but the first is like a ritual, the second a sacrament. The first we see in MacDonald only a few times,
the best example perhaps being the episode in *Lilith* where the Little Ones drink water for the first time in their lives in the house of Mara. "It makes me so strong," one of them says (*Lil*, p. 381).

The bath appears symbolically in many of MacDonald's stories. In *Phantastes*, for example, when Anodos reaches the Fairy Palace, he plunges into a huge basin of "radiant water. . . . It clothed me as with a new sense and its object in one. The waters . . . seemed to enter and revive my heart" (*Ph*, pp. 91-92). After his bath he is able, though faintly, to see the forms of the inhabitants of the palace; the gloom cast on him by the Ogress in her Church of Darkness is somewhat dissipated. Also, bathing daily in the fairy bath, he is little troubled by his demon Shadow. It is his baptism into the hope of one day losing his Shadow altogether. Perhaps, as implied by juxtaposition of incidents, it is because of his bathing that he is able to stand up to the Earth Elementals and to resist the wiles of the Old Woman. Much later, when he is dead in Fairy Land, he compares his soul to "a motionless lake, that received all things and gave nothing back" (*Ph*, p. 231); he lies as it were not only in, but as a part of, the full baptism he needs before returning to the natural world.

In *The Lost Princess*, Rosamund looks in the Wise Woman's mirror, and sees herself for the first time as she really is: "a very dirty little animal" (*LP*, p. 41). She hurries to a well to wash, after which for a little while she improves; but the effects do not last. The implication is that we cannot clean (or baptize) our selves.

But in one of her trials, in the Wise Woman's "mood chamber,"
she meets a beautiful child (actually the Wise Woman) with a little snow-white winged pony, called Peggy. Rosamund, rough with the pony, is furious when it knocks her flat. Suddenly however she repents, seeing herself as she is. "I am made horrid, and I shall be horrid: and I hate myself" (LP, p. 123). This is her turning point: she is ready for her real baptism into a new way of life. The pony, ridden by the child, at that moment rises above her head in a great bound, and alights on the other side of her. This may not seem at first glance like a baptism, until one connects the name of the pony with its root-meaning: means *fountain*, and Rosamund has been under it.

In The Princess and the Goblin the Grandmother tells Irene to look into her large silver bath; she comes back saying that she has seen in it "the sky and the moon and the stars" (P&G, p. 149). Later, having proved herself by freeing Curdie, she is placed in the bath by the Grandmother:

> When she opened her eyes, she saw nothing but a strange lovely blue over and beneath and all about her. . . . she seemed utterly alone. But instead of being afraid, she felt more than happy - perfectly blissful. . . . When she stood up on the floor, she felt as if she had been made over again. (P&G, pp. 230, 232)

The last phrase suggests conversion, being "born again." The implications of the bath are here extended beyond the initial connotations of ritual baptism, and made into a conscious spiritual experience.

In "The Golden Key" there are two baptismal episodes, with dissimilar functions. Grandmother carries the very dirty Tangle to
a deep tank in her cottage. "It was filled with beautiful clear water, in which swam a multitude of . . . fishes" (LPOT, p. 217).
The wise fishes wash her quite clean, then bear her up to the arms of the lady; she gives the child a new dress like her own. This completes her baptism into life; we are told that "having once been in her grandmother's pond, she must be clean and tidy ever after" (LPOT, p. 220). Mossy, because he has the Golden Key, needs no initial bath, though he too is given new clothes.

For Tangle—unlike Irene, whom we do not see except as a child—there is also a second baptism, this time into the new life, misnamed Death. At the end of her journey (which is the course of her life) across the plain, when she is old and tired and has lost Mossy, her aðránth leads her to the Old Man of the Sea. He tells her she must lie in a bath:

No sooner was she undressed and lying in the bath than she began to feel as if the water were sinking into her. . . . She felt the good coming all the time. And she grew happier and more hopeful than she had been since she lost Mossy. (LPOT, p. 231).

At last she is called and rises out of the bath. "All the fatigue and aching of her long journey had vanished" (LPOT, p. 231). Now also she has spiritual insight, and sees the Old Man of the Sea, Death, as he truly is, not as old and white-haired, but as "a grand man, with a majestic and beautiful face" (LPOT, p. 231). He sends her down a dark winding stair, and yet she can see: "For after being in that bath, people's eyes always give out a light they can see by" (LPOT, p. 232). Her body has changed, as she realizes in
the underground river: she has not breathed once since her bath in the cave.

Mossy, too, must lie down in this bath; he is glad to do so, being very old and his feet very weary. But presently he finds that he no longer aches. The significance of the bath is explained to him:

"Get up and look at yourself in the water," [said the Old Man.]

[Mossy] rose and looked at himself in the water, and there was not a grey 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. Your feet will make no holes in the water now." (LPOT, pp. 237-38)

This purifying, sanctifying, rejuvenating power represents the ultimate aspect of Water: it prepares one for the last stage of the journey to Heaven.

(iv)

On the whole, Water in MacDonald is less ambiguous than are the other three Elements. He concentrates almost entirely on its spiritually regenerative and baptismal aspects, both by direct description of its effects, and by heavily emphasized accounts of the results of its absence. Tears baptize the heart; water baptizes the body and spirit. Physical lack of water produces a waste land; metaphysical lack prevents moral and spiritual growth. "Sweet water is the primordial principle of nature," says Boehme; "[it] is the nucleus
and the heart of everything."\textsuperscript{40} MacDonald repeatedly demonstrates his acceptance of this view. As he says in his poem, "Drawing Water":

\begin{quote}
Water all has still a savour
Of the primal well of life!\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}
1. **The False Woman**

There is, as we have seen, an ambiguity in the concept of each of the Elements. This ambiguity is in part inherent in the physical properties of the Elements themselves, and in part the result of the clusters of associations and symbols that have become related to them. Many of these symbols are of great antiquity and ubiquity. They are archetypal, in the Jungian sense, belonging to the "collective unconscious" of humanity, and hence of basic importance in the interpretation of the human psyche.

In Jung's interpretation, however, good and evil co-exist, and must continue to do so in a sort of balance. "How can I live with my Shadow?" is the question he would have us ask. MacDonald's question is, "How can I get rid of my Shadow?" The first question postulates a balance between two forces: the second expresses a belief in the transcendant power of Good.

Evil does exist: and MacDonald is attempting as plainly as possible to show its purpose and its relationship with Good. In his treatment of the Elements, he brings out again and again several points: inherently, there is absolute Evil, there is apparent Evil, and there is Good. But so far as the individual is concerned, even absolute Evil, if rightly accepted, may act for Good. In order to convey this belief even more strongly than he
does through his Elemental symbols, he brings into many of his fantasy stories another archetype, of long history and with great influence: The Wise Woman. She embodies, in ways to be noted presently, the various powers of the Elements, rules them, and simultaneously suggests something far beyond their scope.

Each of the Elements has both positive and negative qualities, contained within the one form. The Woman figure, also ambiguous, is divided into two separate types of being: the Wise Woman and the Evil Woman. The role of the latter, with one exception, is relatively minor in the plot; she is notable chiefly for what she symbolizes. This Evil Woman occurs in three forms. There are, first of all, the witches; then there are the wicked women of supernatural origin, either succubus or ogress. Finally, there is Lilith, one of MacDonald's most telling creations.

(i)

The witches who appear are confined to those stories most like traditional fairy stories, namely "The Light Princess," "Little Daylight," and "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" (LPOT). They are malignant in disposition, and motivated to do evil simply from a desire to spoil or meddle with other people's pleasure, and not for any particular gain to themselves. They would be entirely at home in a tale from the collection of the brothers Grimm. Their function in the stories is to cast a spell or create a situation which ultimately causes their own deaths or discomfiture and allows the lovers to "live happily ever after." Allegorically, they are of little importance, and need not be considered here.
There are, however, purely evil figures that are not cast in immediately recognizable form. Such are the Alder Maid, the Ogress, and the Old Woman Underground, in *Phantastes*. Chronologically in the story they appear in this order, but I shall mention the last one first, as she is of very minor significance.

After he passes the goblins, the Old Woman appears underground and mocks Anodos. At first ugly, she suddenly shifts into something lovely in an effort to test him further. His lesson already learned, he is tempted by neither lust nor curiosity, and continues on his way. She becomes ugly again, and, moved apparently only by a passive malice, she bursts into "shriek upon shriek of laughter" *(Ph, p. 156)*. She is in a way his own comment on his previous behavior, a personification of his disillusionment with his own character.

The Alder Maid, the first of the Evil Women he encounters, takes the form of the White Lady whom he is seeking. When, having seduced and despoiled him, she allows him to see her true form, she shows herself to be like an "open coffin set up on end . . . with dead lustreless eyes" *(Ph, p. 56)*. Beautiful from the front, from the back she is hollow. The farm-wife later explains to Anodos:

... she loves the love of any man; and when she finds one in her power, her desire to bewitch him and gain his love . . . makes her very lovely - with a self-destructive beauty . . . for it is that which is constantly wearing her away within. *(Ph, p. 59)*

She is a sort of walking parable of Lust.

But Anodos encounters in visible form not only the sins of the flesh, but also those of the intellect. These are embodied in the
Ogress. Her house is

... a long, low hut, built with one end
against a single tall cypress, which rose
like a spire ... [there was] a lamp burn­
ing ... and the head of a woman, bent
downwards, as if reading by its light. (Ph, p. 67)

The woman herself is sallow, "slightly forbidding," with black eyes;
her book, from which she reads aloud, might be called the Bible of
Nihilism, for it celebrates the eternal power of Darkness. Here
Anodos is claimed by his Shadow when he opens a door which discloses
a claustrophobic corridor of Hell. Unlike the Alder, the Ogress has
no interest in charming Anodos, or even attracting him; she is in
fact totally indifferent to his history and his fate. Unemotionally,
she explains to him what had happened when he opened the door.

"Everybody's shadow is ranging up and down
looking for him. ... Yours has found you,
as every person's is almost certain to do
who looks into that closet, especially after
meeting one in the forest, whom I dare say you
have met."
Here ... [she] looked full at me: her
mouth was full of long, white, shining teeth;
and I knew I was in the house of the ogre. (Ph, p. 70)

Traditionally, ogres eat human flesh; but this one is not in any
way a physical menace. The danger from her is much subtler, because
it is intellectual. Here the victim delivers himself to a spiritual
devourer; she has no need to seek him out, as did the Alder Maid.

The barrow-like hut, later referred to as the Church of Darkness,
its spire formed by a tree associated with death, the reading from
the Bible of the Dark, the inrushing Shadow, and above all the Kali-
like face of the Ogress, all make an eikon of waiting, inevitable
doom. The moment seems frozen in time. The Ogress has no individu­
ality, any more than the primal Darkness which she reads about:
she simply exists, as what awaits those who deliberately allow
themselves to be fascinated by Evil. She is much more dangerous
than the Alder Maid, and the effects of visiting her cottage are
of far more spiritual danger than those of following the Alder Maid
to her grotto. From her remarks we gather, however, that egocentri­
city and intellectual doubt follow closely on the indulgence of lust.

These three creatures are in a way a parody of the Wise Woman
as we shall presently find her. The Old Woman merely mocks Anodos.
The Alder Maid is a sort of Circe, who transforms natural human love
into obsessive selfish desire. In the house of the Ogress the worst
misfortune befalls Anodos, when he becomes aware of his conscious
Self, which ruins every simple pleasure, destroys beauty in and for
others, and gives him a distorted, cynical view of the world. Like
the Wise Woman, the Ogress shows him the life of the universe, and
provides him with a philosophy, but it is one of nihilism and
despair. Where the Wise Woman lovingly comforts and strengthens
him, both the Ogress and the Alder Maid are totally indifferent
to his future.

An interesting point about these women is that they are among
the few creatures in MacDonald which are seen as lastingly evil,
with no possibility of changing. But since they are really
externalizations of stages in the spiritual fall of Anodos,
their presence does not contradict MacDonald's essential interpre­
tation of life, namely, that everything is capable of redemption. They remain negative principles, rather than evil beings.

Lilith, on the other hand, is a full-size psychological portrait of a woman apparently totally evil, who can ultimately, by rather drastic means, be brought to give up her pride, her insolent pleasure in Self, and to accept Good. While the story of Mr. Vane, the narrator, is central to the book, Lilith's name is used for the title. Her history is fact is so closely woven into his, that she might in many ways be considered an aspect of himself. She is what his soul might become. The difference between them is that, having deliberately given herself to the Shadow, Lilith's evil is overt, while Mr. Vane has only reached the point of unthinking wilful action and occasional disobedience. That she is indeed meant to be seen as his anima becomes, I think, convincingly clear in the light of a quotation from Shakespeare's "Rape of Lucrece":

(The italics are mine).

Besides, his soul's fair temple is defaced;
To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares,
To ask the spotted princess how she fares. (11. 719-21)

The "fair temple" in Shakespeare refers to "the besmirched soul." This phrase, "the spotted princess," is twice applied to Lilith, and much is made of the dark spot on her side, and the spots on the leopardess into whom she changes (e.g., Lil, p. 311). Adam warns her that the spot "will not leave thee until it hath eaten to thy heart, and thy beauty hath flowed from thee through the open wound" (Lil, p. 324).
Lilith was mentioned in the Talmud as the evil first wife of Adam; never having eaten the apple, she was free from involuntary death. She hates the descendants of Eve, most particularly the children, on whom she preys like a vampire. In MacDonald, she herself has one daughter who, according to ancient prophecy, will be the cause of her mother's death. Adam explains to Mr. Vane that Lilith had wanted only one thing, power, and that when their child was born she had required that Adam worship her, as the creator of life.

Her evil and power are greater than those of the Earth Woman, or the Alder Maid, or the Ogress, though she has the qualities of the last two: but she has a consistent history and an individuality that the others lack. First described in her palace in terms that recall Keats's "Lamia" (Lil, p. 305), she is felt as an oppressive weight on the chest when she sucks blood, like a nightmare succubus. She is like the daughter of the horse-leech, crying, "Give, give" (Prov. 30:15). She has made the country dry, she has corrupted the citizens of Bulika, and she would kill all the Little Ones. She is the figure present in the Evil Forest, at the Bad Burrows; she can appear—and see—where she will. Although she claims to be "Queen of Hell, and mistress of the worlds" (Lil, p. 377), Mr. Vane at last sees her as Life in Death (Lil, p. 322), a "conscious corpse" (Lil, p. 378). She takes everything, but her hand is irrevocably clamped on Nothing: that is all she is rich in. Long ago, we are told, she made the Shadow her slave, but now she is his, and fears him. Endless life awaits her: "I am not yet ripe, and have lived thousands of your years" (Lil, p. 305).
"Vilest of God's creatures," says Adam, "she lives by the blood and lives and souls of men. . . . She consumes and slays, but is powerless to destroy as to create" (Lil, p. 323). Her constant insistence is on her right to be what she is:

"I will be myself, and not another. . . . I will do as my Self pleases - as my Self desires! . . . My own thought of myself is me. . . . I am what I am; no one can take from me my self." (Lil, p. 371)

Since only God can say, "I am," she is claiming divinity as well as autonomy.

It is small wonder that only the tortures in Mara's house can subdue her, for they are created from her own evil nature. "She knows that she is herself the fire in which she is burning. . . . Her torment is that she is what she is" (Lil, p. 373). Her inheritance is "existent Nothing," and she cannot give it up.

It is only when she sees before her, in visible shape, the image of what God meant her to be, beside the image of what she has become, that she feels self-loathing. Then comes remorse, and finally true sorrow. At last she weeps, and her tears are the saving water of redemption. As she weeps, the rain falls. The metaphorical Waste Land of her soul and the actual Waste Land of the Other Dimension, both of which had by her will been made sterile, are able to grow green again.

(ii)

These four evil creatures embody in themselves all the evil
qualities of the Elements. The Alder Maid is connected with Earth, in her sepulchral grotto, as are of course the Goblins and the mocking Old Woman. The Ogress in her Church of Darkness is both Earth (grave, darkness, nihilism, despair) and Air (her cottage opens into infinite and terrifying space). A woman tells Mr. Vane that Lilith "had powers over the air and the water as well as the earth—and she believed, over the fire too" (Lil, p. 297). The Alder Maid can change her appearance to that of a beautiful woman, the Old Woman can be momentarily beautiful: the Ogress is unchanging, for she is temptation to the intellect, not to the senses. Lilith has as full a range of metamorphoses as North Wind. Some of her appearances, of course, are not of her real self, but of her simulacra, or "fetch," as in the strange scene in the Bad Burrows when her limbs speed away as serpents. Here she is definitely linked with Earth in its malign aspect, as also when she claims to have seen a white leech—which is in fact herself. She also becomes a large spotted leopardess, in which shape she seizes children. When she rises, wounded, from this shape, she walks away "with the gait of a Hecate" (Lil, p. 311). And like Hela, another Queen of the Underworld, she is "half corpse, half woman."

Lilith is governed by the Shadow, who is the Prince of the powers of air and darkness; she can close up the waters; her inner fire is a torture to her. In her we see, therefore, all the evil aspects of the four Elements, and the end of them all is death by corruption. When she curses it is by Samoil, whom I take to be Sammael, the charnel-house angel of death in Arabic lore. She is the essence and
epitome of all the dark aspects of the three lower Elements—Earth, Air, Water—and is tortured by the fourth—Fire. She stands, until her redemption, for physical death, decay, corruption, intoxication with evil, the power of Evil: she hates the Water of Life, and fears the Fire of God. She is what any lost soul may become; she is the negative potential inherent in every living being, and is seen as the ultimate distortion of everything good.

2. The Wise Woman


I am not here referring to MacDonald's good women, who are entirely human: Darba, in The Princess and Curdie, Joan, in The Princess and the Goblin, Martha, in At the Back of the North Wind, and the farm-wife, in Phantastes. These figures are presented as the highest type of woman in ordinary, every-day life, helping and maternal, but they are not different in kind from the chief characters. I refer rather to the figure of a powerful, mysterious woman, who loves and guides the protagonist in the crises of his life; she had been present in MacDonald's writings almost from the start. She shows herself in two major roles: that of mother, and of teacher.

The motherliness is stressed over and over again by MacDonald. Numerous statements condense to, 'I felt like a child in her arms,' or 'Her motherly, tender care enfolded me.' It is an ever-constant
factor, partly because all the characters who deal with her (with
the exception of Curdie and Diamond) have either lost their mothers
(Anodos, Irene, Tangle, Mossy, Colin, Mr. Vane) or have very bad
ones (Rosamund, Agnes). Mainly, however, this quality is emphasized
because MacDonald considered parental, but particularly maternal,
love, as the highest form that mutual love could have in this world;
and those who go to the Wise Woman are her children, whether they
go willingly or not.

The other immediately noticeable characteristic is that each
of the Wise Women tries to teach those who come to her something
about themselves and about their relationship to other people. She
tries to show them the right way of thinking about life, and hence
the right way to live.

I shall discuss in this section the appearance, actions, and
purpose in each story of the different Wise Women, in order to arrive
at an overall picture of the major qualities and the total concept
of the figure. Then, in the third section of this chapter, I shall
consider the clues MacDonald gives as to her true identity, as
distinct from her fictional identity in each story. This may be
accomplished by a consideration of her links with the various
Elements, as described in Chapter I.

(1)

In Phantastes the Wise Woman appears in five guises, not
necessarily the same person, but certainly all linked to each other
by characteristics which, in the other stories, unite in a single
figure. At the end of the book there is a deliberate mingling of at least two of the appearances.

She is seen first as "a tiny woman form" whose voice "recalled a sensation of twilight, and reedy river banks, and a low wind."

Then she changes to "a tall, gracious lady, with pale face and large blue eyes . . . [whose] dark hair flowed behind . . . " (Ph, pp. 3-4).

Her age, she tells Anodos, is two hundred and thirty-seven, and she is one of his great-grandmothers. He looks into her eyes and is filled with "an unknown longing. . . . I sank in their waters" (Ph, p. 5). She promises he will find his way into Fairy Land the next day, and disappears, never to be referred to again in the story.

Her appearance marks the beginning of Anodos's journey into that interior world of spiritual discovery which MacDonald calls Fairy Land.

The next figure appears in Fairy Land when Anodos comes to "a little cottage, so built that the stems of four great trees formed its corners" (Ph, p. 11). She tells Anodos she has fairy blood, and that he is safe with her, for the cottage is protected from the evil power in the forest by the guardian oaks. She directly warns him about the Ash, and obliquely about the Alder Maid. After he leaves, he does not see or think of her again.

The third figure appears in the form of the Beech Tree. The sound of her voice is like "a gentle wind amidst the leaves of a great tree" (Ph, p. 33), and her face is "lovely, and solemn from its stillness" (Ph, p. 33). Her hair is long, flowing, and dark.

She saves him from the Ash tree, who wants to bury him at its roots. But although she suggests the large, protecting, strong mother, she
differs from the basic Wise Woman type in that she is not super- but non-human, and capable of something other than maternal love: "'I fancy I feel like a woman sometimes. . . . For there is an old prophecy in our woods that one day we shall all be men and women like you.' . . . she kissed me with the sweetest kiss of winds and odours" (Ph, p. 34). She gives him some of her hair, to protect him from the Ash; in the morning, it has changed to a girdle of leaves. As he sets out at daybreak she whispers, in tree form, "I may love him, I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech tree" (Ph, p. 37). The idea that all creation is evolving upward, i.e., stone to plant to beast to bird to man, is found in Alchemy and also in the writings of Boehme, Hoffmann and Novalis; there can be devo­lution as well as evolution. The Beech Tree is obviously well on her way up: she has "the aspect of one who is quite content, but waiting for something" (Ph, p. 33). She is incidentally the only one of the Wise Woman figures who even remotely suggests a sexual interest in the protagonist: in this she is atypical.

The Wise Woman, in a character conforming to the type recognizable from the other fantasies, appears next in Phantastes as "the ancient woman in the cottage," whom Anodos encounters after his underground journey. Plunging suicidally into the "tumbling chaos" of the sea, he is rescued by a sensation of motherliness which recalls to him the Woman of the Beech, and relates her, for the reader, to the Woman whom he is about to encounter.

A blessing, like the kiss of a mother, seemed to alight on my soul. . . . I felt as if once more the great arms of the beech tree were
around me. ... The waters of themselves
lifted me, as with loving arms, to the surface.
(Ph, p. 160)

On the island, he comes to a square, low-walled cottage:

I knocked, and the sweetest voice I had ever
heard said, "Come in." ... A bright fire was
burning on the hearth. ... over the pot bent
a woman-face, the most wonderful, I thought,
that I had ever beheld. For it was older than
any countenance I had ever looked upon. ... 
The woman's form was tall and spare. ... 
The moment I saw her eyes, I no longer wondered
at her voice: they were absolutely young -
those of a woman of five-and-twenty, large,
and of a clear gray. Wrinkles had beset them
... the eyelids ... were old, and heavy, and
worn; but the eyes were the very incarnations
of soft light. ... A wondrous sense of
refuge and repose came upon me. ... I could
not help laying my head on her bosom, and
bursting into happy tears. She put her arms
round me, saying, "Poor child; poor child." ...
She [fed] me like a baby. ... then began
to sing. ... While she sung, I was in
Elysium, with the sense of a rich soul up-
holding, embracing, and overhanging mine. ... 
I felt as if she could give me everything I
wanted; as if I should never wish to leave her.
(Ph, pp. 164-71)

She spins by the fire, singing.

[She] glanced towards me, like a mother who
looks whether or not her child gives signs
of waking. ... I asked her whether it was
day yet. She answered, "It is always day
here, so long as I keep my fire burning." (Ph, p. 172)

All her songs are about the comfort, the reality, and the permanence
of Love: ". . . love, once uplifted,/ Will never more die" (Ph,
p. 174); "Be thy heart a well of love, my child,/ Flowing, and free,
and sure" (Ph, p. 179).
She begins her function as a teacher by sending him back into the past. There, Anodos relives his old mistakes, and learns the need for present strength; he also learns, yet again, the need for present obedience. But even when she must bring him back from beyond the forbidden door of the Timeless, she does not scold or condemn him, but talks "as a mother might talk to a sick and sleeping, or a dead child" (Ph, p. 182). When she tells him he must go she comforts him by saying:

In whatever sorrow you may be, however insconsolable and irremediable it may appear, believe me that the old woman in the cottage, with the young eyes ... knows something, though she must not always tell it, that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress. (Ph, p. 183)

Her final words are, "Go, my son, and do something worth doing" (Ph, p. 184). And as he begins his mature life in this world she promises him, "A great good ... is coming to thee" (Ph, p. 237). She has been both a mother and a teacher to him, but the emphasis is on the former role.

There is yet another woman in the book who can be linked with the Wise Woman: the nameless one whose globe Anodos had broken in the forest when under the darkest influence of his Shadow. At this time, he is in a tower that dissolves by moonlight, but holds him a despairing prisoner by day. She passes, and by her singing frees him. As the two talk, she helps him realize fully what he has been slowly learning from the start: that "it is by loving, and not by being loved, that one can come nearest the soul of another" (Ph,
pp. 232-33). There is little or nothing of the mother in this figure; she is almost exclusively teacher.

These five women all show various or combined aspects of the Elements. Early in the book Anodos had sighed, "Could I but see the Spirit of the Earth, as I once saw the indwelling woman of the beech-tree ... I should be content" (Ph, p. 81). Though both the woman in the oak-girt cottage and the Beech Woman are very much of Earth, they do not control it; but in the Wise Woman on the island he seems to have found the Earth Mother. This suggestion is strongly supported by the "damp earth" smell of her reviving elixir (Ph, p. 182). But she is also related to the other Elements. She feeds a Fire that controls the waters of Chaos; her boat is rainbow-coloured, and thus linked with the Aerial symbol of promise; even the Water around her island is described in maternal terms. The other women also have Elemental connotations: the fairy's voice at the start of the book sounds like a low wind; and another power of the Air, the moon, breaks the spell of Anodos's prison, and relates, as a symbol of the Female, with the globe of the woman who frees him. When, at the end of the book, Anodos lies under the shadow of a great ancient beech tree, in his own world, he hears the voice of the Wise Woman in the sound of the wind through the leaves. All five women are guises of the Wise Woman figure, linked by their Elemental associations; and the complete form of the Wise Woman, seen on the island, is shown to be a unification of the good aspects of all the Elements.
The next Wise Woman MacDonald created takes a much larger part in the plot, partly because all the attributes are collected in one person. This is the Grandmother in the *Curdie* books. Although some seven years intervened between the writing of *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*, I shall treat them as one work, since they are sequels so closely linked that a reading of the first is necessary to a proper understanding of the second.

Each of Irene's visits shows her something new about the Grandmother's appearance, surroundings and powers. When first Irene goes to the top tower rooms of the farmhouse-castle, she sees a very old lady sitting spinning. She is beautiful, straight and tall, with smooth white skin, and snow-white hair hanging loosely down her back. "Her eyes looked so wise that you could not have helped seeing she must be old" (*P&G*, p. 22). The room contains only a spinning wheel and a chair. She lives on the eggs of her multitude of pigeons.

When next Irene comes to her, weeks later, the Grandmother is spinning a magic ball of thread, which is to be Irene's guide through danger. She takes the child into a large, lofty, dome-shaped room, in the centre of which hangs a lamp that shines like moonlight. Her moon "never goes out, night or day... if any of my pigeons are out on a message, they always see my moon, and know where to fly to" (*P&G*, p. 120). When Irene sleeps in the Grandmother's bed, in her arms, she dreams of seas and moonlight and springs and trees—Water, Air, Earth.

The first encounter with the Grandmother's Fire comes a week
later. Frightened by one of the goblins' creatures, Irene rushes out on the mountain side. There the sight of a "great silvery globe" revives her courage, and enables her to see in the dark. She runs home straight to the Grandmother, and now sees the fire of roses and the sky-deep bath. The Grandmother is dressed in pale-blue velvet, and her hair, a rich golden colour, "streamed like a cataract... the hair seemed pouring down from her head, and vanishing in a golden mist ere it reached the floor" (P&G, p. 145). On it she wears a circle of shining silver, set with pearls and opals. "Her slippers glimmered with the light of the milky way... Her face was that of a woman of three-and-twenty" (P&G, p. 145).

Although Irene sees and loves the Grandmother at once, Curdie, the miner's son, is at first unable to see her at all, because of his skepticism. He is angry with Irene for taking him to the room, thinking she is making fun of him. Actually, it is the Grandmother herself who will not let herself be found; she knows that "seeing is not believing" (P&G, p. 227), and waits for the dawning of conscious need in him, before she reveals herself.

The Grandmother in the first book is more mother than teacher; since Irene is obedient and guileless, she needs only the gentlest correction, and the most loving reassurance. But if Irene is the white lamb without blemish who does not need to be prepared for her task other than by having it pointed out to her, Curdie is the young lion who must be set right and purified, to prepare him for battle. With him, therefore, the Grandmother is predominantly a teacher.
At the beginning of the second book, The Princess and Curdie, we are told that Curdie has been "going wrong" for some time. He has begun to think the Grandmother only a dream, in spite of having seen her lamp. "He believed less and less of things he had never seen. . . . he was becoming more and more a miner, and less and less a man of the upper world where the wind blew" (P&C, pp. 21-22). A loaded sentence, this. The mines were dark, and had been goblin infested: the wind is the wind of God. "He was gradually changing into a commonplace man" (P&C, p. 22).

His passive dying to things right culminates in the shooting of a white pigeon. He rushes repentantly to the tower room; and now for the first time the Grandmother is ready to show herself to him. This invisibility of the Grandmother to those not ready, or not worthy, to see her, is common also to North Wind, to the Wise Woman in The Lost Princess, and to the Wise Woman in "The Carasoyin." Also, she takes her shape according to the capacity for understanding, or the spiritual receptiveness, of those who see her.

On this first visit Curdie sees "a small, withered creature . . . very thin, like a long-legged spider" (P&C, p. 36). He is almost amused, until he catches "a glimpse of her eyes, and all the laugh went out of him" (P&C, p. 37). This "withered little atomy . . . on the other side of the moonlight" (P&C, p. 39) talks to him partly through the music of her spinning wheel, partly through direct speech, until he realizes the wrong he has been doing: "the wrong of never wanting or trying to be better" (P&C, p. 40). He accepts her lesson; and as a result, when she finally rises, she
has changed, and has become

a tall, strong woman — plainly very old, but
as grand as she was old, and only rather severe
looking. . . . 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 . . . and the wounded
bird had now spread out both its wings across
her bosom, like some great mystical ornament
of frosted silver. (P&C, p. 45)

Suddenly she and her light vanish, and he hurries away in great fear.

She is also known to the other miners, but in a very different
way, for, far behind Curdie in potentiality for higher development,
they treat her as a partially-credited figure in a folk-tale. They
call her Old Mother Wotherwop, and say she is a wicked old woman. She
is credited with poisoning wells, with being seen only before disasters,
and with striking men blind. They say she is hideous, and makes herself
beautiful; Curdie, however, tells them she is beautiful, and makes
herself ugly. This constant juggling with ideas of reality and
appearance, with true and false seeming, is associated, not
only here but in the later books, with the Wise Woman figure. Those
who love, or even respect, her, will recognize her. This is first
shown when Curdie and his father, alone in the mine, see a pale green
light which they follow deep under the mountain, until

the greenness melted away, and in a moment
or two, instead of the star, a dark, dark
and yet luminous face was looking at them
with living eyes. . . .

"I see you know me, Curdie," said a voice.
"If your eyes are you, Ma'am, then I know
you," said Curdie. (P&C, pp. 65-66)
She is dressed in pale green "over which her hair fell in cataracts of a rich golden colour" (P&C, p. 67); she is wearing a crown set with a great emerald, and her slippers are "one mass of gleaming emeralds . . . like the waving of grass in the wind and sun. She looked about five-and-twenty years old" (P&C, p. 67). Around her all the jewels of the mountain cavern flash with colours; MacDonald presently refers to her as the Mother of Light and the Lady of Light, and Curdie calls her the Lady of the Silver Moon. With each new sight of her, he is capable of learning more of her beauty and of her power, and becomes increasingly willing to obey her; and the more willing he becomes, the more beautiful she appears.

The next night he learns something too of her ability to inspire terror, for when he looks into her room he sees first only a dark sky, and then in front of him "a great wheel of fire, turning and turning, and flashing out blue lights! . . . No sooner was he in than he saw that the great revolving wheel in the sky was the princess's spinning wheel" (P&C, pp. 88-89). This one might call a suggestive abstraction of her power; and the symbol is intensified by the description of the sound of her actual wheel, which almost immediately follows:

The music of the wheel was like the music of an Aeolian harp blown upon by the wind that bloweth where it listeth. . . . Now [the sweet sounds] were gold, now silver, now grass, now palm trees, now ancient cities, now rubies, now mountain brooks, now peacock's feathers, now clouds, now snowdrops, and now mid-sea islands. (P&C, p. 90)

If a reader takes gold as the Sun (a commonplace equation), then he
finds Earth, Air, Fire and Water are all in the passage, united in a celestial song that is "beautiful and true and lovely" (P&C, p. 90): the middle adjective is significant.

The Grandmother now appears, marvellously lovely in a room whose ceiling is a golden vine hung with clusters of jewels, all lit by the Silver Moon. Now that Curdie is worthy of seeing her and her room, he receives his baptism of fire, which prepares him for his task in Gwyntystorm. She has made him consider the difference between outward appearance and inward reality, the necessity for obedience, the growth in goodness or evil that is continually taking place in every human being. "Whoever does not mean good is always in danger of harm," she says (P&C, p. 38). "When people don't care to be better they must be doing everything wrong" (P&C, p. 41). "Be true and honest and fearless, and all shall go well with you and your work" (P&C, p. 105). Where the Wise Woman in Phantastes said, Love, the Grandmother here says, Do.

There is nothing inactive or static about her. She intervenes, and moves events to the right end with the help of those who obey her. In the form of a housemaid, unrecognized by him, she helps Curdie in the palace at Gwyntystorm; the night before the battle, she reverts to her regal form and, "large and strong as a Titaness" (P&C, p. 295), rejuvenates the king; largely because of her and her pigeons, the enemy army is routed. At the feast after the battle she appears again in beauty, dressed "in royal purple, with a crown of diamonds and rubies" (P&C, p. 316); but though she is dressed as a queen, she is servant to the victors.
The last view of her is an interesting reversion to an earlier form. Lina, the beast who has been learning child-like obedience, is ready to progress. The Grandmother, again an old, grey-haired woman, directs her into the fire—this time consuming—while Curdie watches. She had told him once that "shapes are only dresses" (P&C, p. 76); this particular shape would seem to be her working dress.

All the Elements are associated with the Grandmother, through her possessions as well as by her actions: Air is represented by her pigeons and her Silver Moon; Earth by her appearance in the mine and her clothing and crown of jewels; Fire by her fire of roses; and Water by her baptismal bath. She controls all of the Elements, and is herself a unification of the good that they suggest and symbolize: in a sense, she is their collective embodiment.

(iii)

Colin's Wise Woman, in "The Carasoyn," follows the general pattern of her type, though of course in much smaller compass. She lives in a cottage "like a large beehive built of turf" (LPOT, p. 131). Bees, in Alchemical iconography, stand for wisdom: one might compare her with the Lady of the Moon in Nanny's dream (BNW), who keeps golden bees. She sits spinning by a little fire with Jenny, a hen, for helper. Unlike the other Wise Women, whose eyes are so much stressed, she is blind; but like them, her age is ambiguous, for while her face is very old, her hands are "young and long-fingered and fair" (LPOT, p. 133). While she spins the rainbow-coloured grass, her wheel tells Colin marvellous stories, "till he thought
he could sit there all his life and listen" (LPOT, p. 134). This is very like Irene's Grandmother, with her singing wheel, her pigeons, and her old-young semblances: though she does not display the latter simultaneously.

She has power over the hump-backed smith and his goblin crew, and later over the little goblin cobbler, so that they must, at her orders, help Colin. "She's always doing things for people and making my bones ache," complains the smith (LPOT, p. 138). She is able also to patronize, and to outwit, the vain and malicious fairies.

Twenty years later, in a different country, she is just the same, sitting with her spindle and distaff in the same cottage, and waited on by Jenny; but this time "where her eyes should have been, there was nothing but wrinkles." "I don't live anywhere," she tells Colin, "but those that will do as I tell them, will always find me when they want me" (LPOT, p. 155). Also, no one can find her unless he first loses himself (LPOT, p. 154): which last words, with Anodos in mind, one feels should more properly be written "his Self."

Left alone, she becomes her true shape, or perhaps merely allows Colin to see her true shape; for when, moved by foolish curiosity, he peeps into her face, he is given a salutary shock:

There, instead of wrinkled blindness, he saw a pair of flashing orbs of light, which were rather reflected on the fire than had the fire reflected on them. But the same instant the hut and all that was in it vanished, he felt the cold fog of the moor blowing upon him, and fell heavily to the earth. (LPOT, p. 156)

That is the last we see of her.
The Wise Woman in *Phantastes*, and Irene's Grandmother, are discovered entirely by what Spenser calls "heavenly Chance," but Colin's Wise Woman can be found by those who seek her out to ask for a specific favour. She has no advice to give Colin about himself (nor presumably to others who find her), or about his way of life, nothing to teach him: she simply helps him in his immediate difficulties. She is in fact closer to the Hen-wife of English folk-tales than she is to a supernatural Grandmother, and her speech is more homely, less bristling with paradox, than that of the other Women. Moreover, she shows few overtly maternal qualities. Far from taking him to her bosom, she merely remarks to Colin in a detached manner, "Well, my dear, I like you" (*LPOT*, p. 132). Her whole attitude towards Colin's problems is practical and matter-of-fact.

However, her spinning, her story-telling through the wheel, her helpfulness, her change of appearance, link her with the other Wise Women, although the reader is discouraged from speculating on her nature by the tone of the story, for it is lightly ironic, and altogether more fanciful than imaginative. But the rainbow colours of her spindle, her flashing orbs, the fire that originates in her, indicate, however briefly, the presence of the numinous, as does her control of the Earth and Air Elementals.

(iv)

Far different from her is the Grandmother in "The Golden Key," one of the most earnestly felt, and at the same time beautifully presented, of MacDonald's allegories. She is not a folk-lore, but
rather—to adopt C. S. Lewis's adjective—a "mythopoeic" figure. Her appearance, particularly in the cosmic imagery, suggests a goddess out of the Golden Age.

She is discovered by Tangle sitting in a cottage, bending over a bright fire; she is very beautiful.

She was tall and strong, with white arms and neck, and a delicate flush on her face. . . . her . . . hair had a tinge of dark green. She had not one ornament upon her, but she looked as if she had just put off quantities of diamonds and emeralds. Yet here she was in the simplest, poorest little cottage, where she was evidently at home. She was dressed in shining green. . . . barefoot. . . . Her great blue eyes looked down . . . as if all the stars in the sky were melted in them to make their brightness. (LPOT, p. 216)

Later we are told that she looked "as if the moon were melted in her eyes" (LPOT, p. 216), and then that "she smiled like the sun through a summer shower" (LPOT, p. 217).

Her cottage is "round, like a snow-hut or a wigwam. . . . it had no windows; and though it was full of doors, they all opened from the inside, and could not be seen from the outside" (LPOT, p. 221). She claims to be thousands of years old; the Old Man of the Sea (who is Death) later says that she is his daughter. She is warmly loving, and openly affectionate, like Anodos's Wise Woman. She helps prepare not only people, but the wise fish, for moving onward and upward in life: "I work all day long—that is my pleasure" (LPOT, p. 222). She knows that the Golden Key will unlock a door, but does not know what it will disclose. "I dream about it," she says, "but I know nothing" (LPOT, p. 222). There is much besides
this that she does not know, such as the name of death; this is not from ignorance, but from truer knowledge, for the main point of the story is that death is not an end, but more life. She does not instruct those who come to her so much as prepare and encourage them; she mothers Tangle, honours Mossy, and sends them both on their way. She does not lay claim to any special knowledge or insight beyond the capacity of the children she helps; but having visited her, the children are on the right path.

Air, Earth and Water are her Elements: she frees the aëranth from the form of the air fish; her greenish hair makes her kin to the Beech Woman in Phantastes; her food enables the eater to understand the language of all growing and living things; and she has a baptismal bath full of wise fish.

(v)

The Wise Woman in The Lost Princess also lives in a cottage which at times from the outside has no door. Inside, at first view, is a single bare little room, with a magic fire and a small well, scantily furnished; but there are other chambers opening from it, including a stately room with a marble floor, lined with living pictures. Like most of these cottages, it is literally much larger on the inside than it is from the outside.

The Wise Woman goes about wrapped in a black cloak, over a white gown. When she folds her cloak about her, "her shining garments vanished like the moon when a great cloud comes over her" (LP, p. 9). Anyone held under her cloak is invisible, as she can be
herself; also, if run into, the cloak feels hard as bronze or iron.

Far different from Irene, or Tangle, or even Curdie, who need only mild direction, or verbal correction, Rosamund, the spoilt princess, must have repeated, stern lessons. When the Wise Woman first takes her from the palace, the latter looks up and sees "a stern, immovable countenance, with cold eyes fixedly regarding her" (LP, p. 14). Rosamund is in terror of her, convincing her Self that the Wise Woman is an ogress who wants to eat her--this even after sleeping in her arms. "The wrong in her was this—that she had led such a bad life, that she did not know a good woman when she saw her, but took her for one like herself" (LP, p. 19). So long as she is violent and bad-tempered, the Wise Woman is forbidding, and even terrifying; when Rosamund softens temporarily, even if it is from fear, the Wise Woman kisses her and speaks kindly. She can be "awful in her sternness" (LP, p. 42); but when it is deserved, her eyes are full of love.

The Wise Woman does not always succeed. She also takes over Agnes, a shepherd's child, complacent, spoilt, and silly, whom she puts naked into a hollow sphere without doors or windows. Here she must watch her simulacra mimicking everything she does until she is sickened with herself.

You must not imagine that you are cured. That you are ashamed of yourself now is no sign that the cause for such shame has ceased. . . . Beware of yourself. (LP, p. 65)

But Agnes has not really changed, and, once away from the Wise Woman, becomes worse than before.
The Wise Woman works hard with both Agnes and Rosamund, undeterred by misplaced pity. She is insistent on the necessity for breaking the individual will. "You must not do what is wrong, however much you are inclined to do it, and you must do what is right, however much you are disinclined to do it" (LP, p. 109). She takes many forms, from a sheep to a lovely little girl; only when Rosamund at last overcomes her Self, does the Wise Woman appear in her true form: "a woman perfectly beautiful, neither old nor young; for hers was the old age of everlasting youth" (LP, p. 125). And at the end, when she opens her cloak, she is revealed in her full splendour:

> It fell to the ground, and the radiance that flashed from her robe of snowy whiteness, from her face of awful beauty, and from her eyes that shone like pools of sunlight, smote them blind. (LP, p. 140)

No other of the Wise Women is so severe, so harsh in her treatments; but then no other has had to contend with such as Rosamund and Agnes. Where Irene's Grandmother says, Do, this Wise Woman says sternly, You must do. She gives no choice or compromise: it is an absolute imperative. She requires nothing less than a total commitment. Agnes, who refuses, looks at last "white as death and mean as sin" (LP, p. 136). Rosamund, who finally obeys, is "lovelily altered" (LP, p. 139).

She differs very much from the other Wise Women, in that she fails in reforming some of her charges: Agnes, the Shepherd's Wife, and Rosamund's parents end as they began: foolish, vain, proud, and hypocritical. But even though she has not succeeded
with them now, there is a suggestion that some day life will become so unbearable for them, that they will seek her out; and there the matter rests.

Like the other Wise Women, this one also has the Elements under her control, or associated with her; but unlike the others, she seems to have the negative as well as the positive aspects. Water is found in the foul and dangerous marshes where she sends Rosamund, not only in the pure well; the creatures of Air, the birds, and even the moon, are threatening; the hollow sphere where Agnes lies is like a grave deep in Earth; and the "pools of sunlight" in the Wise Woman's eyes (Fire) strike two of the beholders blind. She seems to several of the critics, Wolff in particular, to be outstandingly cruel; but this is to raise again the question of the difference between real, and apparent evil, the answer to which lies in a later section.

We shall return to the cottage-dwelling woman when we reach Lilith, which contains both logically and chronologically the last of MacDonald's various presentations of the Wise Woman figure. But first we need to consider North Wind, who, though she qualifies as one of the group, is somewhat different from them.

(vi)

The Wise Women so far are shown to us in a continued relationship with the chief characters, and with them only: the woman on the island with Anodos; the Grandmother with Irene and Curdie; the "Golden Key" Grandmother with Tangle and Mossy; the "Carasoyn" Wise
Woman with Colin; the Wise Woman of *The Lost Princess* with Rosamund and Agnes. The case is the same with Mara and Eve in their relationship with Mr. Vane and Lilith. The Wise Women exist, for the time of the story, to intervene in or shape the lives of the selected few. Their existence for, and relationship with, the rest of the world, is merely suggested, or else ignored entirely. But North Wind is exactly what her name says: she is, literally, the north wind that blows trees down, sweeps through London, sinks ships, tosses the flowers lightly, fills the sail of a pleasure-craft. She is "a mighty creature, with power to do that which [is] demanded of her, and [goes] far away upon many missions" (*BNW*, p. 125). Diamond sees her for no particular reason; she does not always come when wanted, and her visits are separated apparently at times by a year, or perhaps more—for the book covers at least four years. There is even a suggestion that she does not exist at all, outside of Diamond's dreams and imagination. With the other Wise Women, there is no doubt (in the stories) about their objective reality, though they may not always choose to be seen, or found.

In appearance, however, North Wind conforms to the type of Grand Woman that MacDonald is so fond of portraying. When Diamond first sees her, she appears as a "large beautiful pale face" bending over his bed.

... away from her head streamed out her black hair in every direction, so that the darkness in the hayloft looked as if it were made of her hair. ... her face looked out of the midst of it like a moon out of a cloud. From her eyes came all the light by which Diamond saw her face and hair. (*BNW*, p. 19)
She begins at once to teach him the relationship between goodness and beauty, evil and ugliness. A beautiful thing is not necessarily good; a frightening thing is not necessarily evil. He must learn to cling to what he knows to be good, however it may seem outwardly.

If you see me flapping wings like a bat's, as big as the whole sky, don't be frightened. . . . you must believe I am doing my work. Nay, Diamond, if I change into a serpent or a tiger, you must not let go your hold of me, for my hand will never change in yours if you keep a good hold. If you keep hold, you will know who I am all the time. (BNW, p. 22)

She comes for him next as a young girl, and leads him out into the road, where she becomes the size of a full-grown woman. She takes him into a house, where she becomes a huge wolf to frighten a drunken nurse; the baby does not see her. She says, "The woman would not have seen me either if she had not been wicked" (BNW, p. 44).

Later Wind and Woman are mingled completely:

Her grassy robe swept and swirled about her steps, and wherever it passed over withered leaves, they went fleeing and whirling in spirals, and running on their edges like wheels, all about her feet. (BNW, p. 43)

Another time she is a tiny creature helping a bee out of a tulip; she grows suddenly to the height of a tall lady, then shrinks again to the height of a dragon-fly: "but . . . the tiny face wore the smile of a great grand woman" (BNW, p. 69). In each case Diamond learns that, whatever her shape, she herself is the same. Even when she appears in, or rather as, a terrible storm, her voice is still loving and gentle.
She alone of the Wise Women is not autonomous. Her task one night is to sink a ship; Diamond's expressed dismay at this action brings the response, "It is rather dreadful. But it is my work. I must do it" \[BNW, p. 66\]. He learns that whatever her activities, they are the result of her obedience to "orders." She does not know how such things come to be her work, only that she must do them. "There are a great many things I don't understand more than you do," she tells Diamond \[BNW, p. 375\]. "But the heart of me is true" \[BNW, p. 377\].

Curdie is blamed for thinking the Grandmother only a dream; but with Diamond the suggestion that North Wind is a dream is always hinted at as a real possibility. She cannot, for instance, take him out with her until he has slept awhile. She herself says, towards the end of the book, that if she is a dream, there is something better that is not a dream: but this disturbs him, and she does not pursue the matter.

As well as loving Diamond, expanding his understanding, teaching him courage, she is also preparing him for death, for she is a direct link between this literal, real world and the world of the spirit or soul. When he is sick in this world, he does not know he is lying very ill; North Wind has shown him the way to the country at her back (Dante's Earthly Paradise, in fact), and there he lives for some ten days, "still and quiet and patient and contented" \[BNW, p. 122\].

Diamond's love for North Wind, and his experiences at her back, help him to become a child very much out of the ordinary. He can
see "the lovely soul of common things shining out" in the natural world, and is not put off by an unprepossessing exterior, or afraid of what might happen. He helps the drunken cabman, by nursing his baby; he rescues Nanny from the rough boys, and later sees that Jim gets to the country. He always does at once what must be done, and because of his absolute trust, everything becomes right for him. Several times we are told that his calmness, stillness, lack of fear, are the result of his relationship with North Wind.

Taught by her, Diamond lives unself-consciously in the true heart of things, doing what is at hand to be done and asking no questions about his duty. He is the perfected pupil of the Wise Woman figure, but unlike Mossy and Tangle, or Anodos, or indeed any of the "pupil" characters, who inhabit a fantasy world, he lives a perfectly ordinary existence in early nineteenth-century London. North Wind is not a figure in folk tale or myth into whose realm Diamond strays; she rather is a part of his world, and has her appointed place in it, connected only with the Element that she embodies.

North Wind has several characteristics which differentiate her from the general pattern of the Wise Women; but with Mara and Eve, in Lilith, we return to the more familiar type, such as were exemplified in the Curdie books and in "The Golden Key." The setting, however, is totally different from that of any of the other stories, being neither this world nor Fairy Land, but another dimension; it
overlaps with ours, but has its own physical laws and consequences.

We see the Wise Women figures through the eyes of Mr. Vane, the narrator. Eve, the first one he meets, is not fully in this category, in that she does not change appearance, she does not move about in the story, she has no part in the plot, as Adam has. She is simply there, a fixed point; but she is the embodiment of a single aspect of the woman-figure: The Mother. She has nothing to teach: she simply is.

Mr. Vane sees her first in the little cottage on the moorland, and does not know who she is. She comes into the room through a door shaped like a coffin lid.

She was all in white — as white as new-fallen snow; and her face was as white as her dress, but not like snow, for at once it suggested warmth. I thought her features were perfect, but her eyes made me forget them. . . . It might have been coming death that made her face luminous, but the eyes had life in them for a nation — large, and dark with a darkness ever deepening as I gazed. A whole night-heaven lay condensed in each pupil; all the stars were in its blackness, and flashed; while round it for a horizon lay coiled an iris of the eternal twilight. . . . the still face might be a primeval perfection; the live eyes were a continuous creation. (Lil, p. 209)

Her voice is low, rich and gentle. "Treasures of immortal sound seemed to lie buried in it" (Lil, p. 209). While Mr. Vane and Mr. Raven talk, she stands "moveless as a statue" (Lil, p. 210). She says very little at any time; she waits to receive the guests sent by her husband or her daughter, and most of her speech is in welcome. When the guests come to her, they have already learned all
they must, in order to waken into immortality. She gives her guests bread and wine: "anxiety and discomfort vanished; expectation took their place" (Lil, p. 211). Mr. Vane sees her and her husband "gleam out [in the dark] like spectres that waited on the dead" (Lil, p. 217).

At the end of the novel, Eve, "the mother of us all," welcomes them—Lilith, Mr. Vane, the Little Ones—to her cottage, "radiant in her beauty" (Lil, p. 323). She herself carries Lilith to the chamber of death, where, with Adam and Mara, she serves Mr. Vane on his couch. She speaks to him when he dreams he is waking, and presently she and Adam are transfigured into "the angels of the resurrection" (Lil, p. 409).

Mara, the daughter of Adam and Eve, adheres quite closely to the Wise Woman type. She lives alone in a cottage, windowless, whose door is not always visible; it is described in terms of the parable: "Its foundations stood in deep sand, but I could see that it was a rock" (Lil, p. 255). She speaks with "a sweet, mellow voice" (Lil, p. 251) that reminds Mr. Vane of Eve's. Among Wise Women figures she is unique in that she has parents, and is seen with them in a daughter relationship. What disconcerts Mr. Vane, and terrifies the Little Ones, is that her face is always muffled in her robes; they fear she may be concealing an "inconceivable monstrosity." All must come to her, sooner or later, for a night's lodging, and accept her refreshment of a dry loaf and a cup of cold water. When at last she discloses her face, she reveals it to be as beautiful as that of Eve's, but with one major distinction—her tears.

She stood in the middle of the room; her white garments lay like foamy waves at her
feet, and among them the swathings of her face: it was lovely as a night of stars. Her great gray eyes looked up to heaven; tears were flowing down her pale cheeks. . . . [she looked] as if she wept constantly behind the wrappings of her beautiful head. (Lil, p. 259)

She owns a white leopardess, which appears in Bulika from time to time to counteract the evil deeds of the Shadow and of Lilith; but while Lilith changes into the form of her own spotted leopardess, Mara is not a shape-shifter. The white leopardess is her servant, not her double.

Her task is to make people repent, and by their sorrow for sin, lead them home to the house of Adam and Eve, to sleep until they are ready for judgement. Her methods may be harsh, but as Mr. Vane says, "You may wonder at what she does, but she will always be good" (Lil, p. 366).

When Lilith is taken to Mara's cottage, the House of Bitterness, Mara talks to her gently at first, trying to make her see her Self as it really is; but only after the torment of the fiery worm does Lilith begin to feel remorse. Mara weeps to see her agony, but is inexorable in her determination that Lilith shall repent. Finally Lilith truly begins to submit, and (like Rosamund's Wise Woman), Mara begins to comfort her:

Like her mother, in whom lay the motherhood of all the world, Mara put her arms around Lilith, and kissed her on the forehead. The fiery-cold misery went out of her eyes, and their fountains filled. . . . Lilith lay and wept. The Lady of Sorrow went to the door and opened it. (Lil, p. 378)

Mara's ministrations have brought the spring of tears to Lilith; and
when Lilith weeps, the rain falls on the barren heath. Mara has regenerating powers, which, acting on the individual, are counter-pointed in the physical world. Her house is the way-station on the road to the cottage of Adam and Eve: all must stay with her a while before they can die into life. This need is highlighted by the episode with the Old Man who longs to die, but cannot. "What I said, I fear he did not heed. But Mara would find him!" says Mr. Vane (Lil, p. 396). Sooner or later indeed she must find everyone.

Water is the Element with which she is most closely connected: she weeps continually, she has put a spell on the River of Life to prevent Lilith from crossing it, she gives cold water to her guests: "as cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" (Pro. 25:25). Fire is also an Element she controls, for it is through the agony of Fire that she subdues the stubborn and brings them to repentance.

The motherly qualities of the Wise Woman figure are associated chiefly with Eve, who is the archetypal mother; Mara is tenderly maternal, but her chief function is as teacher. Through sorrow, she shows travellers the way to the cottage of Adam and Eve, and hence to the far country of the soul.

(viii)

It is clear by now that the descriptions of all the Wise Women have something in common. Their hair is frequently mentioned, their eyes are always emphasized, usually being associated with the stars, the moon, or the sun. When appearing in their true forms,
the Women are magnificently beautiful; or they show, through their eyes (like Colin's Wise Woman, or Anodos's) an amazing radiance that suggests all beauty. They can change shape, or size, or age, at will, either as a reflection of the spiritual awareness of those who encounter them, or as a means of testing their faith, or—as with North Wind—as a necessity to carrying out their duties. Sometimes an actual change does not take place, but a revelation of their power and beauty occurs, as when Mara drops the muffling cloths from her face. Whatever their appearance, however, all are simultaneously young and old, being in fact ageless.

Irene's Grandmother and North Wind are the only ones who do not live in a cottage; North Wind and Eve are the only ones without a fire; Mara and Eve and Rosamund's Wise Woman do not have a spinning wheel, of which so much is made in the other fantasies. Only Colin's Wise Woman, and North Wind, do not have a bath, or well, or drink of water, to offer: only North Wind does not give food or drink to her child. Only North Wind and Eve do not have a helper, or good "familiar": Irene's Grandmother has the pigeons; Colin's Wise Woman has Jenny, the hen; Mara has her leopardess; the "Golden Key" Grandmother has her wise fishes.

The Wise Women (Colin's excepted) are intensely motherly, but as well they are outstandingly teachers. Their lessons are not all the same, but all are on a moral level, often with religious overtones. The Wise Woman in Phantastes, in her various forms, says Love; Irene's Grandmother says Do; Colin's Wise Woman says, Try; The Wise Woman in "The Golden Key" says Trust; Rosamund's
Wise Woman, and North Wind, say Obey; and Mara says, Repent. Eve alone has no message: she waits for the perfecting of her children, and the end of Time.

3. Identities

MacDonald was chiefly concerned with conveying to his readers an essentially Christian view of life. In the fantasies (with the exception of Lilith) he does this without any mention of God; and nowhere is there any direct reference to Christ. When, however, one begins to consider the question of the identity of each of the Wise Women, one realizes how very strong are the religious implications, in symbol and in reference, in each work.

Each of the figures can be interpreted allegorically, playing a part in the representation of the spiritual life of man. Sometimes, it is possible to make a straight one-to-one equation, but rarely is this entirely satisfactory. For one thing, this method makes the actual story not more, but less, evocative; for in allegory, cloudiness and multiplicity are more effective than flat, literal statements which make the reader wonder why the author bothered to use allegory at all.

MacDonald is an excellent allegorist on the whole simply because he will not be tied down to a straightforward "identification" in any one work. The only exception is North Wind, who herself lists the names that people give her; and even here one feels a certain incompleteness in the recitation. Otherwise, the reader must take the clues provided—to a great degree through the relationship established between the Wise Women and the Elements—and
come up with a compound answer, all parts of which are partially satisfactory. One can then discover if there is a single unit which integrates these parts; then, with the totality of interpretation in mind, one is ready for the largest conclusion, namely, what the Wise Woman figure meant to MacDonald, and why he uses it so consistently as the medium of revelation for his characters.

The first of these women occurs in Phantastes, where, as we saw, she is divided into several figures: the fairy great-grandmother, the Beech Woman, the woman in the forest cottage, the woman in the island cottage (the only one actually called the Wise Woman), and the woman who sings to Anodos in his prison. Anodos, who requires physical, maternal love, has desired to see "the spirit of the Earth" (Ph, p. 81); and in the first four of these figures, he would seem to have found her. But to say that the Wise Woman is only Mother Nature, or Mother Earth, is a somewhat disappointing, because highly limiting, identification. By adding the woman who frees Anodos from the tower, however, MacDonald suggests something more extensive, not as a mere afterthought (though it occurs close to the end of the book) but as a completion of the basic purpose. This changes the allegory from a purely psychological study of the development and maturing of an Ego-ridden young man, to an account of spiritual maturation. At first glimpse the young woman seems no more than another appearance of the loving mother: the song which teaches him to open the door of his prison "soothed me like a mother's voice and hand" (Ph, p. 208). It speaks of the sun, winds, waters, trees—the Elements, in fact—then bids him go
to Mother Earth, who tends her children "as a mother hen" (Ph, p. 209). The singer leaves him. "I dared not ask her stay. Between her and me, there was a great gulf" (Ph, p. 211).

Both these underlined phrases (my italics) have direct Biblical associations. Christ, outside of Jerusalem, said: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gather­eth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). And in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Abraham says: "Between us [in heaven] and you [in hell] there is a great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:26). The Wise Woman in this form suggests something that grieves over rejected love, from whom Anodos feels himself still to be cut off.

She is not merely the Spirit of Helpful Maternity or the visible form of the Earth Mother. Her love is not mere sentiment; it is an earnest yearning to save Anodos, through teaching him first to re­ceive, and then to give, love. The woman who frees him is already enclosed not in Self, as he is, but in the very love she offers. Hence, she is as far from Anodos spiritually as Lazarus was from Dives.

In the last page of the book Anodos says:

I often think of the wise woman in the cottage, and of her solemn assurance that she knew something too good to be told. When I am oppressed by any sorrow or real perplexity, I often feel as if I had only left her cottage for a time, and would soon return out of the vision into it again. . . . [I have] the vague hope of entering her door, and being comforted by her wise tenderness. (Ph, p. 236)
Then he tells of seeing the face and eyes of the Wise Woman in the branches of the beech tree: "I fancied that the sound [of the words] reminded me of the voice of the ancient woman in the cottage that was four-square" (Ph, p. 237).

That last phrase (italics mine) bears one very strong connotation: in the description of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:16) we read: "The city lieth four-square." This would equate the cottage with the city of the New Jerusalem, and make it a symbol of timeless splendour; but even more important, the Wise Woman herself, who feels divine pity and love for Anodos, would then be the Lady of the Eternal City. The identification is here suggested by only one phrase; it will come up again, however, with increasing clarity, in others of the fantasies, to which we shall now turn.

Irene's Grandmother, in the Curdie books, is a more fully developed character than the woman (in any form) in Phantastes. The objects with which she is most closely associated epitomize her. Her Roses (Fire), her Bath (Water), her Moon (Air), and her Jewels (Earth) unify in her person symbols of all the Elements: but they also strongly convey a sense of the numinous, not only in general, but also specifically identified as Mary.

Perhaps the most significant of the objects frequently linked with her is the Moon. MacDonald calls her "the Lady of the Silver Moon" (P&C, p. 74), "the Mistress of the Silver Moon" (P&C, p. 29), and also "the Mother of Light" (P&C, p. 70), even as God is referred to in Jas. 1:17 as "the Father of lights." (This incidentally was a favourite phrase of MacDonald's in referring to God.) She is
also called "the mother of all the light that dwells in the stones of the earth" (P&C, p. 75). In the mountain Curdie and his father see her as the source of light:

... all the beauty of the cavern, yes, of all he knew of the whole creation, seemed gathered in one centre of harmony and loveliness in the person of the ancient lady who stood before him in the very summer of beauty and strength. (P&C, pp. 68-69)

Her Moon renders evil powerless, guides the lost, is the outward sign of her presence, and is the evidence of her unchanging security from danger; it never goes out, she says, by night or day.

Since antiquity, the moon has been regarded as an embodiment of the female principal. In Alchemy, the White Queen is represented as standing on, under, or with the face of, the moon. It is interesting to note how often MacDonald uses a simile or metaphor of the moon to describe the face or eyes of most of his Wise Women, or relate them in some way to the moon itself. In Christian art, the moon is the sign of Mary, who is iconographically often represented as standing on its crescent; she is traditionally identified with the woman in the book of Revelation, who is "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. 12:1). Thus, by being repeatedly associated with her own moon—as distinct from the one in the sky—the Grandmother is linked firmly with images of the Virgin. This is reinforced by episodes such as that in which Curdie sees her for the first time in full splendour: she is dressed in sapphires, even as the Virgin first appears to Dante, in the Paradiso, "all in
sapphire hue" (Canto XXIII).

Her fire also, in its form of roses, relates her to Mary, one of whose titles is Mystical Rose, or Rose of all the World. There are many representations of her surrounded by roses, even as the scent of roses is a true sign of the presence of the Grandmother.10

In still another way, her spinning wheel further links her, not so much with Mary perhaps, as with the numinous, both Christian and pagan, and not only because it sings and teaches as she turns it. When Curdie goes to her, he sees "a great wheel of fire in the sky, turning and turning" (P&C, p. 88), which, when he goes into her room, he sees to be her spinning wheel. Ezekiel's vision of the wheel which brings with it the blazing presence of God is at once suggested (Ezek. 1:15-28). One is also reminded of pictures of the Great Wheel of Life, or Fortune's Wheel; and, when she makes the guiding thread for Irene, one thinks of Clotho, in Greek myth, spinning the thread of life.

There is little to add to what has already been said about the Wise Woman in "The Carasoyn"; she belongs to folk tale rather than to myth. Apart from the "flashing orbs of light" that are her eyes (LPOT, p. 156), there is not much in the story to suggest a higher identity than she has as a figure in the plot. The Wise Woman in "The Golden Key" is also difficult to identify, other than very tentatively, for clues are lacking of the sort to be found in Phantastes and the Curdie books.

North Wind, as noted earlier, is somewhat different from the other Wise Women; and one of the ways in which she differs is that
she identifies herself, for she tells Diamond, at their first meeting, that she is "North Wind" and later, that she is a few thousand years old (BNW, p. 85). In one of the few implied references to Christ in all the fantasies, she says all her work is "managed by a baby" (BNW, p. 67). Towards the end of their association, she says to Diamond:

I don't think I am just what you fancy me to be. I have to shape myself various ways to various people. But the heart of me is true. People call me by dreadful names, and think they know all about me. But they don't. Sometimes they call me Bad Fortune, sometimes Evil Chance, sometimes Ruin; and they have another name for me which they think the most dreadful of all. (BNW, p. 377)

North Wind also can be thought of as Mary, though the point is made rather obliquely. Diamond is an unusual child, called by some "God's baby," meaning a simpleton. He does not mind the name, but rather likes it; and in the same manner that God is his father, North Wind is his mother. His human parents are called Joseph and Martha, certainly not a coincidence. One might say therefore that North Wind is Mary to his mother's Martha, and by association of names, not Mary of Bethany but the Virgin Mary.

Death, with MacDonald, is only the best beginning: our earthly life is only a journey to the real life which awaits us. With the exception of Colin's Wise Woman, all the Wise Women figures are instructing, guiding, helping on their way the travellers through life. North Wind differs in that she is preparing Diamond not for this life but for death; she is herself the gateway through which he must pass.
Though North Wind is far-ranging, the Wise Woman in *The Lost Princess* is by far the most active of any of her type. She ranges the countryside, appearing now in the palace, now in the far-distant hills. She works (as perhaps we are to imagine Irene's Grandmother working with the corrupt officials in the woods after the battle); she, more than any other of the figures, suggests Wordsworth's "stern daughter of the voice of God"—Duty: not just to oneself, but to others. North Wind never had any need to be anything but loving to Diamond, nor did Irene, Colin, Mossy and Tangle require reproof; Anodos was more in need of love than rebuke; and Curdie was taught by one sharp lesson. But Agnes and Rosamund are something quite different, the former being hypocritical and selfish, the latter rough and violent.

The Wise Woman figure has many arts and devices for morally curing those in her care, but in this book there is a limitation to her powers not seen in the other Wise Women of the other fantasies: namely, she can do nothing against the will of her children that will have a lasting effect. She can attempt to break their will by stern measures, but she cannot absolutely force them to become what they were meant to be.

Who is this uniquely stern Wise Woman? An interpretation that suggests itself is Wisdom—Holy Wisdom. Certain Biblical texts would bear it out, e.g., "Whoso hearkeneth unto me [wisdom] shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Prov. 1:33). "Dangers lie all round this cottage of mine," says the Wise Woman (p. 34); "but inside, it is the safest place—in fact
the only quite safe place in all the country." Later when she throws off her cloak, the radiance that flashes from her white robe, her face, and her eyes "that shone like pools of sunlight," strikes the foolish beholders blind (p. 140). "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). Her kiss is "like the rose gardens of Damascus" (p. 30). Bearing in mind the significance of roses, in and out of MacDonald, and the recollection of the blinding light on the road to Damascus, by which Saul was converted, the religious significance here cannot be ignored; the Wise Woman could be Hagia Sofia itself.

But MacDonald gives another clue, and this, when followed up, proves to be not merely a clue but a statement. When the Wise Woman first comes to the palace, to remove Rosamund from her foolish parents, MacDonald says:

... her cloak dropping open in front,
disclosed a garment made of a strange stuff,
which an old poet who knew her well has thus described:
  All lilly white, withouten spot or pride,
  That seemd like silke and silver woven neare;
  But neither silke nor silver therein did appear.
(LP, pp. 8-9)

The quotation is from Spenser's Faerie Queene; he is describing Una, at her wedding with St. George. Her parents are Adam and Eve, who have been imprisoned by a dragon. Having found her champion, she dressed him in the full armour of Christianity, as described by St. Paul. She warned him of Error, strengthened him to strangle the serpent, and brought him to the House of Holiness. When he suf-
pered penance there, she felt it with him. Spenser identifies Una with "heavenly grace" (Canto 2), with "wisedome heavenly rare" (Canto 6), but most often, and from the start, with Truth. Grace, wisdom, truth: she is all these. Without her, the Redcross Knight goes astray, and is misled into sin and error; by staying with her, obeying her, loving her, he becomes the knight of true Holiness, wedded to Truth.

This interpretation of the Wise Woman as Truth would fit all the Wise Women. It makes sense of their function and purpose, and explains their conversation and actions. And since it is supplied by MacDonald himself, the point need not be laboured. I do not mean that this is the sole interpretation of all the Wise Women, however; as MacDonald says himself, an author frequently says or implies more than he is aware of himself. But certainly it applies fully to The Lost Princess.

When we turn to his last work of fantasy, Lilith, we find something that was strongly suggested in the Curdie books, brought, in the figure of Eve, as far as MacDonald is willing to take it.

Eve's daughter, Mara, whose name means "bitterness," is the Mother of Sorrow, the Lady of Sorrow; she weeps gently and perpetually for the sins of the world. "Ask counsel of her," says Mr. Vane to the old man, "for she is true, and her wisdom is great" (Lil, p. 395). As the narrator tells us, Mara obeys the "light of the universe"; she wills with "the deeper will" which created hers (Lil, p. 372). It is necessary to visit her cottage before going to the garden-graves of Adam and Eve, in order, by repentance, to
learn one's real identity. When Mr. Vane first meets her, she asks him his name, but he cannot remember it.

"Never mind," she said; "it is not wanted. Your real name, indeed, is written on your forehead, but at present it whirls about so irregularly that nobody can read it. I will do my part to steady it. Soon it will go slower, and, I hope, settle at last." (Lil, p. 253)

The reference is to the name that God will give to each of those who reaches the City of God: a name that will be known only to that person and to its giver.

North Wind gives herself the various names by which she is known; Mr. Vane names both Mara and Eve, not merely with the names by which they are known throughout the book, but by the names which give to each her widest significance. When he wakens (or thinks he does) from sleep in the house of death, Mara kisses him on the forehead, calling him "brother," then says, "You know me now!"

"I know you!" I answered: "you are the voice that cried in the wilderness before ever the Baptist came! you are the shepherd whose wolves hunt the wandering sheep home ere the shadow rise and the night grow dark!"

"My work will one day be over," she said, "and then I shall be glad with the gladness of the great shepherd who sent me." (Lil, p. 408)

Presently, when Adam and Eve are transfigured into the angels of the resurrection, he sees Mara as "the Magdalene with them at the sepulchre" (Lil, p. 409). She has become a paradigm of all the repentant sinners of the world; no one can truly die into life without becoming acquainted with her.
Eve is the closest MacDonald comes to presenting a final vision, without her being that vision. Mr. Vane says of her, early in their acquaintance, that the splendour of her eyes sank into her countenance, and "made it flash with a loveliness like that of Beatrice in the white rose of the redeemed. Life itself, life eternal, immortal, streamed from it, an unbroken lightning" (Lil, pp. 212-13). Later, he says he "understood at last" that Mr. Raven's wife, "ministering in the house of the dead, was Eve, the mother of us all, the lady of the New Jerusalem" (Lil, p. 323). She is the "great mother" (Lil, p. 387)—not just the Earth Mother, but the "mother of all living."

She says of the Shadow, "Even now is his head under my heel" (Lil, p. 386), and by this quotation equates herself with Mary, traditionally accepted as the Lady of the New Jerusalem. The serpent which tempted Eve, and whose head she was promised should be bruised by her heel (Gen. 3:15), becomes in Revelation the beast which pursues the woman (Mary) and is bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20). Ave, the salutation by which Life came into the world, is the reverse of Eva, by whom death came. But MacDonald relates his Eve not to Mary but to Dante's Beatrice, with whom she is compared. In the Paradiso Dante, in the presence of the Mystic Rose, turns to address Beatrice, and finds she has left him; he is told to regard instead the Virgin. After this, he sees God, in symbolic geometric form. MacDonald omits Mary altogether, and makes Eve the fixed point from which one moves on to God. Mr. Vane falls back into this world, unlike Dante, at the very moment of enlightenment.
Given the titles, the references, the allusions, not only in connection with Eve and Mara but with Irene's Grandmother, I think it not unlikely that MacDonald might eventually have openly identified his Woman Figure with Mary, but for two factors. He was a Calvinist by upbringing, and F. D. Maurician Broad Church by preference and conviction: there was no place for Mary in his theology. If we call his Wise Woman figure Truth, or Peace, or Holy Wisdom, we are perhaps closer to his conscious intention; but we must not forget the names which he gives to North Wind—Bad Fortune, Evil Chance, Ruin, Death—in coming to a final assessment of his view of the workings of the universe.
CONCLUSION

As we saw in Chapter I, the Alchemist worked with the four Elements in an effort to unite them so as to form Prime Matter; this done, he possessed the Philosopher's Stone, the supreme goal of the Great Work. With this Stone, the Quintessence or sum of all the Elements, he attained perfect wisdom, and could, in theory, share in the creativity of God.

MacDonald's Wise Woman, in relation to Alchemy, can be considered in a dual light. She is, first, like the Alchemist himself, who works with raw material to produce perfection; but where his raw Elements are unconscious and inert, hers are sentient and potentially wilful beings. If he did not succeed in the Magnum Opus, the fault lay entirely in himself. If she fails, the fault lies in the human material with which she works; she cannot always force individuals to the desired perfection.

But the Wise Woman is analogous not merely to the Alchemist who works through the Elements towards his goal. His Stone, the summing-up of all the power and wisdom of the universe, transmutes what it touches. The Wise Woman, as noted in Chapter II, represents a unification of the positive qualities of the Elements; she herself, therefore, is the Stone. When the imperfect human soul is brought into contact with her, then it can be changed by a purging of its impurities; the base metal of human nature is refined into pure spiritual gold. (See Illustrations V and VI).
Usually the characters in the fantasies see the Wise Woman in, as it were, her aspect of Alchemist: she cleanses, purges, inspires, and strengthens them, so that they are ready to go on to their ultimate perfection, forever changed by her activities. Only in rare moments of vision do they see her in her aspect of Quintessence, or Grail, or Philosopher's Stone, as when the Wise Woman in *The Lost Princess* drops her cloak, or Irene's Grandmother, glorious in royal rubies, pours the red wine for Curdie. This parallel between the work of the Alchemist and the work of the Wise Woman is not far-fetched: as Jung says, in *The Psychology of the Transference*:

"Hunted for centuries and never found, the prima materia or lapis philosophorum is, as a few alchemists rightly suspected, to be discovered in man himself."  

Though both the Elements and Man have qualities of Good and Evil, they differ greatly on the allegorical level. As noted in Chapter I, for example, Earth promotes decay as well as germination, and Fire destroys as well as warms. In considering the Elements, what with them is Good and what is Evil is not really open to question until one reaches this level. With Man's nature the dichotomy becomes more complicated, for he must face the problem in the Universe—not just in the physical world—of the distinction between actual Evil, and apparent Evil; and even Good itself is not always to be recognized as such. These features of Good and Evil need to be considered separately, particularly in relation to the Wise Woman."
Good that is immediately recognized as Good offers no problems, as when Irene's Grandmother spins for her the guiding thread. But Good itself can seem to be Evil; the fact that the recipient does not recognize what happens to him as Good, does not alter the nature of that Good. When Mr. Coleman knew himself ruined, he certainly would not have felt that anything Good had been accomplished: yet the loss of his ship was to "make an honest man of him" (BNW, p. 136). When Rosamund was repeatedly nipped by the collie (LP), she did not feel it was good to suffer; yet she was all the time learning patience and obedience. Good here is ultimate, not immediate; moral, not physical. People are afflicted, in order to produce spiritual results that are in the long run pure Good. This is the kind of Good that has the appearance of Evil, and is usually found in relationship with the Wise Woman. However harsh, forbidding, even repellant she may seem, she has a Good end in view.

Evil that is immediately recognized as Evil is as straightforward as unequivocal good, as when the Ash pursues Anodos with obviously murderous intent. He is the dark embodiment of the most terrifying aspect of the Element of Earth: nothing can be urged in his favour. But consider what happens. By running from the Ash, Anodos meets the gentle and loving Woman of the Beech, who still speaks to him at the end of the story; without the Ash, he would not have met her. Similarly, by succumbing to the Alder Maid, he does evil; but he also learns what he did not know before, namely to distinguish false seeming from true appearance. Curdie, in The Princess and Curdie, is hurled into the underground cell by the
citizens of Gwyntystorm; in it he finds the only secret way to get into the palace unnoticed, and thence to Irene and the King. In *The Lost Princess*, the wolves that pursue Rosamund are just as ferocious and dangerous as she fears them to be; but because they chase her, she rushes into the arms of the Wise Woman.

To MacDonald the purpose of Evil is to help define Good, particularly if we are not very clear in ourselves about the truth and desirability of Good. Anodos sums this view up in his final comment on this world:

> What we call evil, is the only and best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good. *(Ph, p. 237)*

Not only is absolute Evil, unknowingly, and in spite of itself, working for Good: it is also working involuntarily towards its own destruction. The Alder Maid, for example, is being eaten away slowly by the hollowness in herself, and Lilith is being slowly destroyed by the ever-growing spot on her side. This is not to say that everything must ultimately become part of Good. But MacDonald seems to feel that there is infinite time to change. The Wise Woman failed with Agnes, but her last words to the child and her mother are, "When life is no longer endurable come to me" *(LP, p. 142)*.

Occasionally, lack of moral discernment causes real Good to be mistaken for real Evil, as when Mr. Vane, crossing the Bad Burrows, blames the moon for what he sees, not knowing "that she whom I distrusted was indeed my defense from the realities I took for
phantoms: her light controlled the monsters" (Lil, p. 229). With the same type of mistaken judgement, Rosamund is convinced that the Wise Woman is an ogress who will devour her, and Nycteris is terrified of the "destroying" sun (LPOT).

In the Introduction to this thesis the questions were asked, What is the difference between real, and apparent Evil? Is there real Evil at all? And what is its purpose? The answers for MacDonald to these questions have been amply documented. Evil exists for the furtherance of Good, and is allowed to act when Love will not move or reach the stubborn soul.

The Alchemist saw, in his continual assault on the raw Elements, a necessary attack on their lower natures: to burn, bury, blow, and drown were necessary functions which at each stage brought the purer parts closer to perfection. The Wise Woman, as we saw in Chapter II, also goes through these processes, working on the mixed nature of the human soul. She makes it dead to the temptations of the world, cleanses its senses, burns away impurities, and washes out the stains of mortality. Or, to express the process in positive terms, she leads her child, her pupil, to see death as a birth, she breathes spiritual life into him, she purifies his senses, and she baptizes him into immortality.

In the Wise Woman, MacDonald has chosen a figure of great strength and imaginative appeal to uphold the structure of his allegories. Identify her by what name one will, she can be recognized as the co-ordinator, the unifier of the Universe, whether we call her Peace, Love, Wisdom, Truth, Repentance, Holiness, or Mary.
This is satisfactorily expressed in *The Lost Princess*. Rosamund is bewildered by the many changes of the Wise Woman, and does not recognize her final metamorphosis:

"Where is the Wise Woman?" asked Rosamund.
"Here!" said the lady.
And Rosamund, looking again, saw the wise woman, folded as usual in her long dark cloak.
"It was you, then, after all!" she cried in delight, and knelt before her, burying her face in her garment.
"It always is me after all," said the wise woman smiling.
"And it was you all the time?"
"It always is me all the time."
"But which is the real you?" asked Rosamund.
"This or that?"
"Or a thousand others?" returned the wise woman. "But the one you have just seen is the likest to the real one that you are able to see just yet." *(LP, p. 126)*

Manlove writes that "MacDonald's supernatural agents are portrayed expressions of God's immediate purpose with creation."²

But MacDonald had a more personal, more exalted, and more loving faith than this would suggest. In "A Child's Holiday" occurs this curiously illuminating passage. Within his dream of a violent and threatening storm, the boy has a vision:

A shadowy face bent over him, when love unutterable was falling in floods, from eyes deep, and dark, and still, as the heavens that are above the clouds. Great waves of hair streamed back from the noble head. . . . The face was like his mother's and his father's . . . but far more beautiful and strong and loving. . . . With a sudden glory of gladness . . . he knew, he knew that the Lord was carrying his lamb in his bosom. *(AC, pp. 331-32)*
Here, the Wise Woman is seen not just as the epitome and controller of the traditional Elements, an agent of divine Grace allegorically visualized through her functions. Ultimately, she is God Himself, viewed in, and acting through, His own creations.
ILLUSTRATIONS
Illustration I
Illustration II
Illustration V
Illustration I

MacDonald adapted this engraving of Blake's to be his bookplate. It well sums up his attitude towards death as the beginning of true life. The motto is an anagram of his own name. (Reproduced from the fly-leaf of George MacDonald and His Wife, by Greville MacDonald).

Illustration II

The Divine Breath fecundates the Philosophic Tree: an example of Wind pictured as the visible Spirit of God. The animals represent the struggle between the fixed (wingless) and the volatile (winged) in the progress of the Magnum Opus. (Taken from Caron and Hutin, p. 134, reproduced from Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal, Editions du Seuil).

Illustration III

To the left, the Lady Alchimia appears as Iris, with the peacock of Juno. To the right she stands as Venus on her scallop shell, a white body covered with and crowned with red roses. (Taken from de Rola, Plate 61, reproduced from the 15th century ms Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Pal. lat. 1066, 230v.).

Illustration IV

"A Spanish woodcut of the late 15th century, from the Biblioteca Universitaria, Valencia. The Virgin is surrounded with roses; the Christ-child holds a rose; and the kneeling figures of the two imperia, spiritual and temporal, hold rosaries, as do the two monks above. The symbolism is of the Virgin as Rosa Mundi, Rose of the World—that is, of the created order, māyā, which flowers from its divine Centre." (Watts, Myth and Ritual in Christianity, cut and note from p. 101).

Illustration V

The Female Principle, rising from the waves, stands on the union of sun and moon (i.e., Red King and White Queen). She holds the crescent moon combined with the sun in one hand, and the chalice spurring flames in the other, with wing-like flames rising about her, out of which (her crown being its nest) rises the newborn phoenix. She is identified in the text of the picture as the child of the sun and the moon, namely, Mercurius philosophorum—
the Quintessence, or goal of the Magnum Opus. Note in this and in Illustration VI the streaming hair, so often stressed by MacDonald in his Wise Woman figure.

(Taken from de Rola, Plate 48, reproduced from Turba philosophorum, 16th century, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. lat. 7171, f. 16).

Illustration VI

This could well stand as the emblematic illustration for the thesis. The four Elements are symbolized, each in a corner of the picture: Earth, Air, Fire, Water. Set in their midst is the Siren-Goddess, destroyer and preserver. Winged, to show her spiritual transcendence (one wing black, for decay, one red, for life), and holding the chalice surmounted by a crowned serpent (water and earth, wine and sanctified flesh) she herself, crowned with a flowering circlet, unites in herself the qualities of all four Elements. She is the single perfection created from the four purified Elements. In the original the colours are green, black, white, red, and gold, the colours assumed successively during the stages of the Magnum Opus.

(Taken from de Rola, Plate 46, reproduced from Solidonius, 18th century, Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal, Paris, Ms. 973, f. 12).
NOTES

INTRODUCTION


6 Donal Grant, p. 481.

7 George MacDonald, "Individual Development," A Dish of Orts, p. 45.


10 Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and His Wife (New York: The Dial Press Inc., 1924), p. 482. All further references to this work occur in the text.


12 C. S. Lewis, Preface, Anthology, p. 21.

13 A Dish of Orts, p. 2.

14 A Dish of Orts, p. 28.
15 Varieties of Parable, p. 96.

16 Date and place have never been satisfactorily established. That the experience made a profound impression on him is shown in various novels (e.g., There and Back, Donal Grant, David Elginbrod), but most notably in Lilith, where the library is the starting and ending this-world setting for Mr. Vane's experiences.

17 Greville MacDonald, author of the so-far definitive biography, George MacDonald and His Wife, mentions his father's favourite authors and quotes from letters referring to his current reading. Also, in his own writings, MacDonald himself quotes from, refers to, or uses as chapter headings excerpts from, the authors he held in most esteem. My list is drawn from authors that appear most frequently in these sources.

18 Varieties of Parable, p. 95.


21 A Dish of Orts, p. 18.

22 Quoted by Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies, p. 68.


24 A Dish of Orts, p. 57.

25 Phantastes and Lilith are published in a one-volume paperback edition by Wm. B. Eerdmans; the present reference occurs on p. 206. All further references to Lilith are from this edition; but for Phantastes I have preferred to work with the Everyman edition. For details, see Bibliography.

26 George MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons, p. 57. All quotations from this source (originally published in three series) are taken from George MacDonald: An Anthology. Lewis does not supply original page references; all page references are therefore to his anthology.

27 Reis, George MacDonald, pp. 81-82.

28 "I have a passion for stairs." Quoted from a letter in Greville MacDonald (p. 481).

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CHAPTER I: THE ELEMENTS


2 M. Caron and S. Hutin, tr. by Helen R. Lane, The Alchemists, Evergreen Profile Book 27 (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 133. All further references to this work appear in the text.


5 For the symbolic use of wolves in MacDonald, see also the chapter entitled "The Wolves" in the novel There and Back, where they are directly equated with sins chasing the soul. See also "Lycabas" in Poetical Works, vol. 2, p. 95.


8 George MacDonald, p. 108.


10 de Rola, Alchemy, p. 10.

11 One might cite the story in Norse mythology of "The Necklace of Brisingamen," in which Freya gets from the dwarves the jewels she desires, but in so doing loses forever her beloved husband.

12 John Milton, Paradise Lost, Bks. I & II.

13 They are lured into an underground realm, where they are temporarily deceived by illusions; Richard's firm grasp on reality, and his concern for Alice, free them.

14 cf. "A house looks always so to me like a mind." Donal Grant, p. 517.


17 All citations from the Bible are to the King James version and are given in the text parenthetically.

18 "Boehme, Jakob," Encyclopaedia Britannica.

19 See MacDonald's bookplate, reproduced in the Appendix as Illustration I, for an emblematic representation of this statement.

20 See Illustration II.


24 Paul Faber, p. 214.


26 This is developed at some length, with variations, in The Princess and Curdie, where the "inside hand" shows whether a person is rising or descending on the spiritual—and hence physical—scale.

27 de Rola, Alchemy, pp. 11-12.


29 In classical myth, there is a pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow, guarded by Iris, the messenger of Juno; the symbol of Juno is the peacock.

30 cf. Prov. 9:1: "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars."

31 In addition, at the end of Lilith, a mighty rainbow spans the city of God; and in Rev. 4:3 we are told that "there was a rainbow about the throne" of God.
32 *The Elect Lady*, p. 23. See also, *inter alia*, *Castle Warlock*, *Sir Gibbie*, *Donal Grant*, where the fire, or hearth, is the physical and spiritual centre of the household.

33 This belief greatly bothered C. S. Lewis, who deduces from the words of Christ, and his own logic, that Hell must exist, and in *The Great Divorce* (where MacDonald plays Vergil to Lewis's Dante) he goes so far as to make MacDonald flatly contradict the idea of universal salvation, and say that he knows better now!

34 de Rola, Note to Plate 26. For an example of the red-and-white-rose Venus, see Illustration III in the Appendix.

35 Dorothy Sayers, Notes to *Paradiso*, pp. 305-06.

36 "The religious historian finds that [man's hope of immortality] recurs in a whole series of myths and rites . . . that . . . represent authentic archetypes of the collective unconscious. It is within this context that we should view the traditions—which also appear in certain alchemical texts—concerning fire as a means of attaining rejuvenation and immortality" (Caron and Hutin, p. 171). One might also refer to the eagle renewing its youth in the sun, and the phoenix being re-born on its pyre.


39 One should bear in mind that Alchemically speaking a child is Mercury, the catalyst and purifier; Mercury in turn is equated with Christ.

40 Quoted by Wolff, *The Golden Key*, p. 70: taken from *Aurora*.


CHAPTER II: THE WISE WOMAN


2 MacDonald quotes these lines in *Donal Grant*.

The earliest mention I have found is in "A Hidden Life" (1855):

... behind those world-enclosing hills
There sat a mighty woman, with a face
As calm as life, when its immensity
Pushes it nigh to death, waiting for him,
To make him grand forever with a kiss. (Poetical Works, vol. 1, p. 159). Here, we infer that she is Nature, in the Wordsworthian sense.

C. S. Lewis, Preface, An Anthology, p. 17.

Lifted entire from Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale," he is introduced with great effect, and with greater intelligibility than Chaucer gives him.

Wolff does not recognize the necessity of pain in the redemptive process, and vigorously accuses both Mara and Rosamund's Wise Woman (and hence their creator) of an enjoyment of sadistic cruelty.

See Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, and The White Goddess, where he deals exhaustively with this and other aspects of the Triple Goddess. A nice analogy could be worked out, if one were so inclined, between the ancient Grandmother Irene, the housemaid-manifestation, the child Irene, and Graves's crone, nymph, maiden trilogy.

BNW: "Her face looked out of the midst of [her hair] like a moon out of a cloud" (p. 19). "Her beautiful face, set in [her hair] like a moon" (p. 106). "[her] pale face, like the moon in the morning ..." (p. 114). The Lady in Nanny's dream lives in the moon (pp. 301-19), and North Wind says she herself was the lady (p. 378).

GK: "... her great blue eyes looked down ... as if all the stars of heaven were melted in them" (p. 216). "[She looked] as if the moon were melted in her eyes" (p. 216).

Ph: "Beauty ... /In a fall of torrent hair:/Thus with glory soft-abated/Shines the moon through vapoury cloud" (p. 147).

LP: Rosamund first sees the Wise Woman's cottage by moonlight.

Lil: "Even her [Eve's] hands shone ... gleaming like a moonstone" (p. 213). Mara's leopard is called Astarte; the moon paralyses the bog creatures; the moon leads Mr. Vane to bury Lilith's hand.

This is only a random selection of quotations and references, not a complete list.

See Illustration IV.

Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, Book I, Canto 12, Stanza 22.
CONCLUSION


2 Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies, p. 6.
Works by George MacDonald (Selected)


At the Back of the North Wind. London & Glasgow: Blackie & Son Ltd., n.d.


Donal Grant. New York: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1883.


There and Back. New York: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1891.


Unspoken Sermons. Unavailable. All quotations taken from C. S. Lewis's Anthology, see below.


Other Works


