TIME AND TIDE:

A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF GEORGE MACDONALD

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by
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ABSTRACT

George MacDonald is known now chiefly for his fantasies and fairy tales. His poetry has been largely ignored of recent years, in part because of his mainly devotional subject-matter, but even more because of his prolix and undistinguished style. Though he was a skilful translator, and, when emotionally aroused, handled his native Scots vernacular with simplicity and grace, poems of this kind are in the minority in the MacDonald canon.

Another major objection to his poetry is that it is too uniformly optimistic to carry real conviction. But though his faith in God was in fact deep and lasting, a study of his life shows that he did indeed suffer from depression, stemming largely from his own experience of repeated illness and multiple bereavements. Believing, however, that the poet must be a channel for the voice of God, and feeling it wrong to disseminate strongly negative emotions, he expressed such emotions infrequently and obliquely.
His deepest feelings surfaced through the medium of extraordinarily vivid dreams, which show an affinity with archetypal opium dreams: understandably, in view of his medical history. In poems of oneiric origin his melancholy and morbidity find expression, all the more effective for being more obscure than is usual with MacDonald. Death, whether of the soul or the body, was his main topic, followed by Time, the two being for him virtually synonymous. Poems on these subjects, especially those in the vernacular, express a complex nature in effective literary form. Like his best prose, they belong to the genre of allegorical fantasy.

The twelve poems chosen for analysis are effective representations of his subconscious, derived from dreams, and conveyed through fantasy. In contrast to the bulk of his work, these poems express his unresolved spiritual perplexities. With the aid of many prose analogues to augment an awareness of MacDonald's rich levels of connotation, the reader may become much more aware that at least this part of his poetry has been neglected unjustly.
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<td>ABNW</td>
<td>At the Back of the North Wind</td>
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<td>Adela Cathcart</td>
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<td>ADO</td>
<td>A Dish of Orts</td>
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<td>AF</td>
<td>Alex Forbes of Howglen</td>
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<td>AQN</td>
<td>Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood</td>
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<td>PF</td>
<td>Paul Faber, Surgeon</td>
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<td>RBB</td>
<td>Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood</td>
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<td>Wd &amp; Wg</td>
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INTRODUCTION

George MacDonald was once a popular and well-known writer. In a literary career spanning the years 1855 to 1897, he published twenty-seven novels, two adult fantasies, eight children's books, three collections of short stories, two collections of essays, five books of short sermons, two books of translations, and (drawing largely from four previous collections) two volumes of Poetical Works. As well, he was a popular lecturer and occasional preacher. Critics of his time on the whole praised him both for his prose and verse, and when he died in 1905, though he had published little since 1895 and nothing since 1897, he was still considered an important writer.

From then on, however, his popularity declined, hastened perhaps because his presentation of a beneficent God and an ordered universe was difficult to accept in the shock of World War I and its aftermath, and affected also by the change in literary
tastes. For many years all that remained in print of his prose were *Phantastes* and *Sir Gibbie*, preserved in the *Everyman Library*, and some of his children's books which have never been out of print. His collected poems were last reprinted in 1911. However, he still had a small adult following, appreciative mainly of the metaphysical overtones of the fantasies and fairy tales. In 1924, the centennial of his birth, his eldest son, Greville, published the lengthy biography *George MacDonald and His Wife*.¹

It included an enthusiastic preface by G. K. Chesterton, in which he testified that MacDonald's books had made a difference to his whole existence, for he "made for himself a sort of spiritual environment, a space and transparency of mystical light" (*GMHW*, p. 12). He added, however, that appreciation of MacDonald "depends rather on a sympathy with the substance than on the first sight of the form" (*GMHW*, p. 15).

A similar point was made by C. S. Lewis, who in 1946 brought out a small anthology of selections from the novels, sermons, and poetry, ranging from a single line to a single page. As he quite frankly
said in the Preface, he made the collection "not to revive MacDonald's literary reputation but to spread his religious teaching." What he admired most was MacDonald's "holiness." He also praised MacDonald in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, with particular emphasis on the fantasies, recognizing in them, at least, literary as well as didactic merits.

Lewis, more than any other writer, is responsible for bringing MacDonald back into current public notice, and his purely literary reputation has to a certain extent revived. A few of the novels are now available in paperback reprints, as are the fantasies and the sermons, the latter slightly abridged. Robert Lee Wolff, Richard H. Reis, and Rolland Hein have written critical monographs, and MacDonald is mentioned at length in other critical works, such as C. N. Manlove's *Modern Fantasy*. Modern critics, in fact, have begun to be aware of MacDonald as a writer, whether or not they sympathize with his religious convictions.

But even if one approaches him from a purely literary point of view, it is impossible to read almost anything MacDonald wrote without becoming
aware of his beliefs, which are strongly and continually in the foreground. With such emphasis are they presented, in fact, and with such assurance, that one begins to wonder at last if they had ever been truly tested. It is at this point that an outline of his life becomes relevant, for when one learns of his poverty, persistent ill health, and multiple losses through death in his immediate family, one can never doubt his experience of suffering. The smoothness of his devotional poetry, which can seem mere facile conventionality, is certainly not the result of any superficiality in MacDonald himself. This is made abundantly clear by his history and background, as well as by the comments of those who knew him.

As a writer, his work appears to be all of one piece so far as theme and intention are concerned. What he states in the sermons he demonstrates in the novels, and what he says in the prose is echoed in the poetry. So close is the correlation between genres that, in studying a particular poem, it is of value to examine relevant passages in his prose, for by this means one often arrives at a better under-
standing of what he intends to convey. The wisdom and usefulness of this comparative approach become clear as the reader increases in sensitivity to the complex resonances of even his simpler images.

In his many novels the over-riding tone is matter-of-fact. The episodes usually depict believable commonplaces, or minor domestic drama, though occasionally varied with scenes of melodramatic improbability. Reis mentions the "authentic dialogue" and "shrewd characterization,"^3 and no critic has been unappreciative of the fine passages describing landscape and weather. But plot, setting, characterization are all subordinate to MacDonald's main intention in writing, which stands out clearly in every instance: the novels provide him with the means of sharing his religious beliefs with the largest possible audience.

Much of his prose fiction first appeared serialized in periodicals intended for general family enjoyment, sometimes specifically for Sunday reading. This in itself made directive comments by the author acceptable. It also precluded the depiction of certain scenes and emotions, but, unlike Thackeray, MacDonald never deplored these restrictions, or
indicated that they inhibited his portrayals of contemporary life. He included in his works, by preference, not only serious religious discussions among the characters, but actual sermons. A Seaboard Parish, for example, contains eight, in no way differing from those he published in the three-volume series entitled Unspoken Sermons. He was well aware that not all critics appreciated his openly didactic intentions, for he once remarked, "People find this great fault with me - that I turn my stories into sermons. They forget that I have a Master to serve first before I can wait upon the public" (GMHW, p. 375).

This is the guiding principle in all his work. Even if he had not been obliged to earn by his writing a living for himself and his large family, he would still have tried to reach the public, preaching against false doctrine and declaring always the loving intentions of God towards mankind. Driven by poverty, he wrote too much and often too quickly. But what he had to say would have been the same under any material circumstances.

He openly opposed what he was convinced were
not only gross errors in doctrine, but major drawbacks to a proper relationship with God. He had no interest in public argumentation or debate, but he never ceased showing in his writing exactly what, in his opinion, constituted the truly Christian character and outlook. The Atonement, for example, he referred to as "the doctrine of devils," and, in opposition to the Calvinist belief in the election of the few, he insisted on the universal redemption of all creation, animals included. Church-going, he felt, was of no great importance unless one could be assured of hearing right doctrine from the pulpit; it was better to stay away than to hear nonsense, lies, or slanders about God. His fictional saintly characters are frequently lower-class artisans with Boehme-like insights who have thought through their beliefs, basing their conclusions partly on scripture, but mainly on intuition guided by prayer. Nothing must come between them and God, let the neighbours think what they will.

On no other major subjects, however, did MacDonald hold comparably controversial views. He was not interested in politics, or reform, or legal
enactments. Unlike Dickens and Kingsley, for example, he never wrote novels with the intention of changing current social practises, and abuses such as poorhouses and sweat-shops. Though he implied that certain things were not right, he demanded neither legislation nor agitation, for any needed reform must, he was convinced, be brought about through individual moral enlightenment. "The only way for a man to help men is to be a true man to this neighbour and that."5 In The Vicar's Daughter, for example, Marion Clare lives by preference in a tenement house, surrounded by drunkenness, violence, vice, and filth. Through her loving interest in their welfare, and by encouraging their aesthetic and religious judgment, she raises the moral consciousness of her fellow-tenants, and improves immeasurably their understanding of life. Neither she nor anyone else in the book suggests that there is something wrong with a society which condones such slums. The only out-and-out condemnations MacDonald levels, in fact, are against men who make fortunes out of tempting their fellow-human beings to spend their wages on drink.

It is unnecessary, therefore, when considering
the works of MacDonald, to investigate the social and political scene of the last half of the century. To teach the truths he held by was his consistent aim, for by these all necessary changes would be effected. And he seems not even to be sure that social changes should be made, since all situations provide material for individual moral betterment. To be ignorant, homeless, hungry, or even mentally deficient was no great matter, so long as the heart was turned to God. In fact, to be clever, wealthy, successful, secure, made it harder to be good. One might say that MacDonald had socialistic desires only in that he usually despaired of the rich, and not for reasons of political economy at all: merely because of a lively recollection of the camel and the eye of the needle.

The realistic novels were very popular in his lifetime, but it is not they which have attracted modern critics and readers. Only when MacDonald turned to the genre developed by certain of the earlier German Romantics did his literary skill, his religious convictions, and his creative imagination combine into satisfying form. His outstanding
achievement was to keep in balance narrative strength and psychologically apt symbolism in a consistently maintained allegorical form, the whole inviting and sustaining transcendental interpretation. As Hein says,

The fantasies are not merely anecdotes and illustrations of theological ideas; at their best they are imaginative and symbolic explorations of a vision of the significance of life. 6

The fairy tales for children also have this richly satisfying multi-level concept that justifies C. S. Lewis in calling him "mythopoeic" (Preface, p. 17), and Prickett in seeing in him "one of the greatest of the period's mythmakers." 7

There is in prose then a great difference between his realistic novels and his fantasy works, for in the first he was writing for a popular market with the clear intention of not being misunderstood. His output was very uneven, but even though he recognized some of his own faults, he felt they were subordinate to his real purpose in writing novels. Speaking through a fictional character who is largely identifiable with himself he says:
I may speak long-windedly . . . what I say may fail utterly to convey what I mean; I may be actually stupid sometimes, and not have a suspicion of it; but what I mean is true . . . and when you all see it as I mean it and as you can take it, you will rejoice with a gladness you know nothing about now.8

He never felt obliged to make such a statement about the allegorical writings, and with reason.

Just as the prose can be divided into realistic and fantasy works, so can the poetry, though the division is not based entirely on the same criteria. The term "realistic" cannot here be used in precisely the same sense that it applies to the novels. There are, true enough, poems dealing with domestic episodes and every-day occurrences that obviously come under this heading, but these matters are for MacDonald of less significance than the intangible realities of his faith. I would therefore include the overtly didactic, devotional, and hortatory poems; poems in which natural descriptions are linked to religious motifs; and poems which deal with relatively superficial and easily recognizable states of mind. Poems such as these predominate, as a glance at the Tables of Contents of the Poetical Works will suggest. Random titles ("The Disciple," "The
Gospel Women," "Sympathy," "A Prayer," "Hymn for a Sick Girl") indicate the tone and intent of the generality of the work in these volumes. One of them - "Had I the Grace" - he actually described, in the novel in which it first appeared, as "concentrated essence of sermon" (AQN, p. 423). Many of these poems, it should be noted, are competent, acceptable representatives of their kind. They were, in fact, the ones most popular in his own day. He was particularly praised for his hopeful or assured statements, which were largely conveyed with unambiguous simplicity. They well convey the persona of a calm, assured, and kindly authoritative preacher, sympathetic towards the doubts and suffering of his fellow-men, and turning always to the benevolent paternal care of God.

Again, one must bear in mind the changes in popular taste in the last hundred years. For one thing, there is no longer a large and receptive audience appreciative of devotional and inspirational verse; and while MacDonald's various stylistic infelicities do not seem to have troubled his contemporaries unduly, his occasionally mawkish playfulness, his thematic predictability, and above all his tendency
to prolixity, tend to repel the modern reader. While it is abundantly clear that he is an intelligent, conscientious, and critically self-conscious writer, the fact remains that he seems now on the whole to be rather uninteresting. Fortunately, these were not the only types of poems that he wrote.

But it is necessary to say something of MacDonald's critical theories before considering the poems which belong to the category of fantasy rather than of realism. Essays on the principles behind poetic creativity, on the purpose of poetry, and what faculties of the mind are involved in its creation, were common enough in the nineteenth century. To these MacDonald added nothing, for, taken point by point, his comments on poetic theory and the nature of poetry can all be matched in earlier and contemporary writers. His originality lies in the way in which he united the points into a fairly consistent whole.

It is true that he was not a formative critical or theoretical influence, either in his own time or subsequently. Nevertheless, his theories must be considered carefully, for they provide insight into
his own choice of subject matter, and the limits he
generally set to his own literary range of mood and
emotion. It is interesting also to note how his
theories link closely with his religious views.

The main point to emerge from his theoretical
writings, apart from his sense of the divine mission
of the poet, is his conception of the Imagination,
which he sees as the direct working of God in the
channel of the receptive mind. The conscious use
of the intellect could be an actual hindrance to
the workings of the Imagination. Hence, when reason
has least control of the faculties, God has the most
power to convey truth to the passive mind. We are
least in control of our thoughts and images when
asleep: dreams therefore are the truest guides to
inner reality. Anodos, in *Phantastes*, and Mr Vane,
in *Lilith*, both enter into their dream-worlds, and
there discover the realities of their own natures
and the ultimate goal of their existence. In this
reliance on the inner truth of dreams MacDonald is
following the example of many of the German Romanti-
tics, Novalis and Hoffmann in particular.

The common source of the material in MacDonald's
prose fantasies and their poetic equivalents is the
dreaming world of the subconscious, given form and
relative coherence by the free-ranging powers of the
Imagination. While ordinary prose fiction is the
deliberate product of the conscious mind, allegori-
cal fantasy and all true poetry are quite literally
divinely inspired. Such a belief made it possible
for MacDonald to rely on images and scenes formed
in dreams and reveries; and works which derive from
these have, among other already-mentioned qualities,
a spontaneity and freedom in self-revelation unmatched
in his realistic works.

His chief self-imposed limitation of mood in
the realistic poems is his insistence that in spite
of grief, or other trials, one need only trust God,
and the harsher, starker emotions will be sublim-
ated into obedience and trust. On principle, he
deliberately refrains from dwelling on the periods
of struggle. But in the poems deriving from fantasy-
images he allows not only a sense of suffering but
of downright misery to be expressed, all the more
effective because it is obliquely presented, through
imaginative scenes and dialogues that require much
more than a literal interpretation. There existed in him, as becomes evident from reading Greville's biography, a strong innate melancholy which was continually stimulated by the circumstances of his life. Out of this melancholy came recurring questions, half-conscious rebellions, and painful acquiescences. These found expression in images and symbols that stand out significantly against the constant and—it must be emphasized—equally sincere reassurances of faith which make up the greater part of his work. The deepest emotions are usually, though not invariably, signalled by his reversion to his native Scots vernacular, which he employed with a technical skill and almost incantational fluency seldom matched in his English poems.

It is with the poems arising from his unhappier depths that I am chiefly concerned in Chapter V. These poems stand out in sharp and unexpected contrast to the bulk of his work, in which on the whole domestic sentimentality and a desire to encourage an optimistic view of all life's ills predominate. I have chosen twelve poems for extensive examination, arranged thematically rather than chronologically.
They form a series of comments on the inner life, from a shudder at social superficialities as an image of spiritual death in "A Mammon Marriage," through bitter questionings just able to allow the possibility of answer in "The Herd and the Mavis," to the expectant mournfulness of "A Sang o' Zion." What becomes increasingly clear is that while Love, Trust, Obedience, and Faith are his dominant themes on the realistic level, Time and Death are his true obsessions. Those poems which, allied to fantasy, are shaped by his subconscious, repay close study, not only for what they reveal of his complete and complex self, but because of their own intrinsic interest and quality.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

I. Life

MacDonald was born in 1824 in Huntley, Aberdeenshire. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was eight, and seven years later his father re-married. He had four full brothers, and three half-sisters. In spite of ill-health, he had good memories of his childhood.

He won a bursary to the University of Aberdeen in 1840, but lack of funds soon forced him to withdraw for a year. The summer of 1842 he spent at an unidentified castle in the north of Scotland cataloguing the library, during which time he read extensively, particularly among the German Romantics. "The library . . . added much to the material upon which his imagination worked in future years" (GMHW, p. 72).

After graduating in 1845 in Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, he spent several years in London as a private tutor. In 1848, at about the same time
that he became engaged to Louisa Powell, he started his studies at a Congregationalist divinity school. He graduated in 1850, but, owing to the first of his sessions with tuberculosis, had to postpone both parish work and marriage. He had started writing poetry at an early age, and now, while convalescing, he wrote his first long work, the verse closet drama *Within and Without*. In 1851 he married, and at once began his life as a minister at Arundel.

Although he privately published his translation of *Twelve Spiritual Songs of Novalis* at this time, he regarded the writing of verse only as a pleasant diversion, for he was in fact giving the greater part of his energy to his congregation. On the whole they were not appreciative of his efforts. In 1852 his deacons accused him in general of being "tainted with German theology," and specifically of holding liberal views on Sabbath-keeping, unorthodox doubts about Hell, and a belief in the immortality of animals. He was requested to leave, and in the summer of 1853 he moved to Manchester.

Although determined "to take no pastoral work
that would demand any temporizing with his convictions" (GMHW, p. 203), he was able to accept a number of invitations to preach and lecture; he also started, on an undenominational basis, a discussion group for young working men. With two small children to support, and with an irregular, small income, he and Louisa were often in actual want of sufficient food. According to Greville, this was a period of "unfailing hope and recurrent disappointment" (GMHW, p. 194). It was now that MacDonald began seriously to write short stories for publication.

In February, 1854, suffering from severe congestion of the lungs, he was unable to continue his public speaking, but by the fall his health had improved sufficiently that he could begin lecturing at the Ladies' College in Manchester. He was also offered a pulpit where he could preach as he wished. But now, just when his income seemed at last to be secure, he nearly died of the worst haemorrhage he had yet experienced. He was advised to take six months complete rest.

Money came to him in small amounts from friends, associates, and his father-in-law. The one hopeful
note in 1855 was that *Within and Without*, accepted at last after numerous rejections, brought him favourable critical attention, and attracted the patronage and friendship of Lady Byron.

A month after the fourth child was born, the family moved again, first to London, next to lodgings in Devonshire, and then, after MacDonald had suffered another haemorrhage, home to Huntley. Three months later, Lady Byron provided travelling expenses for MacDonald, Louisa, and Mary (aged three), the other children being left with their Powell relatives. While living in Algiers, MacDonald wrote a good deal, and just after the return to England in April 1857, *Poems* was published. It brought him praise, but little money, and again actual starvation was a possibility. At this time MacDonald wrote to his father: "If we could but get bread literally we should be content" (*GMHW*, p. 281). Fortunately, Lady Byron continued to help them.

Early in 1858, settled temporarily in Hastings, MacDonald wrote *Phantastes*, his first full-length prose work, which appeared that October. By the next year he was strong enough to return to his
very popular lecturing, and the family moved to
London. Greville says of this period now beginning:

For some years now his sole income was
derived from teaching and lecturing. Yet
whatever else he might be doing, helping
the little family over their lessons, or
fighting asthma, or upholding the wife in
her domestic difficulties, or very occas-
ionally preaching (for which henceforth
he never took any payment) . . . he was
always, always writing. (GMHW, p. 307)

More than anything, MacDonald had wanted to be
a minister with a congregation and parish to care
for. Disappointed and distressed at his failure at
Arundel, he did not relinquish his ambition to be a
preacher, but changed the means of its fulfillment.
He came to see that as a writer he could reach far
more people, in a more lasting way, than when bound
to a single parish. Moreover, in the literary life
he was free to speak as he thought on doctrinal
matters, accountable to no one.

The opinions for which he had suffered at
Arundel had become stronger, more definite, encour-
aged and strengthened by the influence of F. D.
Maurice (now a family friend) whose church they
attended. Maurice preached inclusive truths, with-
out preference for any sect, dogma, or particular devotional practise. He was concerned in this respect only with what MacDonald referred to in an early novel as "the great cathedral-church of the universe."¹ A belief in this ideal "Church of God" constitutes an unexpressed assumption behind much of MacDonald's poetry, and separates him from the better-known devotional writers of his time. Keble, for example, regarded his Christian Year as a complement to the Book of Common Prayer, and Faber composed a basic catechism for Catholics which he described as "the mysteries of the faith in easy verse."² MacDonald, on the other hand, based his writings on the eminently Mauricean tenet: "Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity."³ The nature of God, the need for perfect love and trust, and the purpose of evil, became increasingly clear to him, nor would his views alter materially in the future. His twenty-sixth novel expresses much the same beliefs as his first.

In spite of recurring bronchitis, asthma, headaches, eczema, and haemoptysis, he continued, from necessity as much as inclination, to write with
"tireless, minutely painstaking energy" (GMWH, p. 317). Between 1860 and 1869 he wrote nine novels, two children's books, a book of sermons, and a book of poems. All sold well, and he continued teaching. His greatly improved financial situation enabled him in 1867 to buy a large house ("The Retreat"): very necessary, for there were now eleven children, ranging from infancy to fifteen years of age. A well-known figure in London literary circles, he was close friends with, among others, John Ruskin, C. L. Dodgson, Norman MacLeod, and Charles Kingsley. Though he did not go out much socially, the house was constantly full of visitors, many of whom regarded him as chief confidant and advisor. His reputation was further enhanced in 1868, when the University of Aberdeen conferred on him a Doctor of Laws degree, in consideration of his "high literary eminence as a poet and an author" (GMHW, p. 385).

In 1869 MacDonald made a five-week lecture tour of Scotland, during which he spoke twenty-eight times. Immediately after, an abscess developed in his knee, and he returned home as an apparently dying invalid. His powers of recuperation must
have been tremendous, matching his will to recover, for the list of his subsequent activities between 1870 and 1879 is formidable.

In those nine years he published eight full-length novels, five children's books, England's Antiphon (an account of the course of English religious poetry), and Exotics (a collection of translations). He also prepared editions of earlier works, involving himself in "elaborate corrections and re-writing" (GMHW, p. 409). At the same time he was constantly lecturing, and from 1870 to 1874 was the editor of Good Words for the Young.

As well, in September 1872 he, Louisa, and Greville went on an American lecture tour, although he was suffering frequently from bronchitis and quite terrible attacks of asthma. He was enthusiastically received wherever he went, and was introduced to the major writers of America, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Mark Twain. The MacDonalds returned to England in May, 1873.

In 1874 Mary, the second daughter, became seriously ill with scarlet fever, which permanently
affected her lungs. Nor was MacDonald himself in good health, being, as he wrote, "more or less ill all winter." But, as always, this did not interfere more than was absolutely unavoidable with his lectures or his writing.

From the time they had moved into The Retreat the whole family had enjoyed putting on private theatricals. In 1875 Louisa insisted on starting public performances, notably of The Pilgrim's Progress, to earn enough money to take Mary abroad. In the fall she took Mary to Italy, leaving MacDonald ill in London with bronchitis and pleurisy. Fortunately, in November he was granted a Civil List Pension of £100 per annum, and was able to join her.

Mary died in April, 1878. Grief at her death, concern for Louisa's health, news of the death of his oldest friend, and accounts of Ruskin's breakdown, affected him deeply but did not interrupt his work: a serial was started that September, and a long novel came out in October. Then in February, 1879, Maurice, the ninth child, just turned fifteen, died of inflammation of the lungs following a severe haemorrhage. It was about this time of
many strong and unexpected griefs that MacDonald began to write *The Diary of an Old Soul*, an account of his spiritual difficulties and consolations.

Between 1879 and 1887 the family returned to England each summer and went back to Italy for the winter, their journeys financed partly by their dramatic productions "all over England and even in Scotland" (*GMHW*, p. 501). Although Louisa had also taken on the care of two little girls and their consumptive mother, she continued to be the prime mover in the plays. Greville writes:

Physically the work seemed too much for my sisters, and was in danger of interfering with my brothers' prospects. My sister Grace's lungs gave way, but in spite of it, she was married . . . in April 1881, and the following year her little Octavia was born. (*GMHW*, p. 503)

To anticipate: Grace died in 1884, Octavia in 1891, both of tubercular conditions.

Partly with the help of friends, the MacDonalds built a large house at Bordighera, which they named Casa Coraggio, and for some years this was their permanent home. The living room was very large, to accommodate the frequent lectures, plays, and con-
certs, not to mention Louisa's pipe organ. On some Sundays a hundred or more visitors would turn up for addresses, prayers, anthems and hymns.

In 1891 Lilia, the eldest daughter, nursed at Coraggio a friend with advanced tuberculosis. Immediately after her death, Lilia herself became ill with the same disease. MacDonald was in Scotland at the time, giving a series of forty-eight lectures in fifty-eight days, but returned to Italy in November, two weeks before her death. He once referred to tubercular disease as "the family attendant" (GMHW, fn, p. 470). One cannot help feeling at times that it was not so much waited for as actually summoned.

In 1892 MacDonald decided to give up lecturing and preaching, but he continued to write. From 1888 to 1897 he wrote five novels, a children's book, and a book of sermons, as well as arranging and revising his poetry for a two-volume edition, published in 1893. Lilith came out in 1895, and his last novel in 1897. After this he wrote little more, for his eczema had by now become "a constant torture" (GMHW, p. 558). About this time too he may have had a stroke, for he became increasingly silent and de-
pressed.
Their children were grown up, the house was too big, and in 1900 MacDonald and Louisa moved back to England permanently. Louisa died in January, 1902. After five years of almost total silence, tended by one or other of his daughters, MacDonald died on September 18, 1905. He and Louisa are buried at Bordighera.

II. Character and Works
MacDonald's prose writings reveal, among other attributes, a man very much in earnest, not self-righteous, but given to moralizing, and, although never argumentative or disputatious, constantly engaged in asserting the metaphysics of his belief. The sound of his individual voice pervades everything he wrote; except in the adult fantasies, he is constantly and openly directing the reader's judgment. In the words of his son Ronald, "There has probably never been a writer whose work was a better expression of his personal character." It is a large claim, but one can at any rate believe that he found no serious discrepancies between his father's domestic
behaviour and his literary utterances.

Even when he does not actually say "I think" or "it is my belief" or "let my readers consider," MacDonald presents everything from his own point of view, and makes extensive use of his own experiences. Greville mentions various characters in the novels who are drawn directly from life--MacDonald's father, for example, is portrayed as David Elginbrod in the novel of that name, his brother John as Ian Macruadh in What's Mine's Mine, Lady Byron as Lady Bernard in The Vicar's Daughter. Others are a thin concealment of MacDonald himself--the rector (and narrator) in Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood, for example, a book based on the year at Arundel. Greville also records throughout his biography actual places described under fictional names, and real incidents only slightly changed. Of greater relevance in a study of MacDonald's work, however, are the affinities of the man himself with the spiritual difficulties he presents, through a variety of characters, in every novel. These too, as well as people, places, and incidents, lie within his experience, and their resolution is the central theme of
each book.

The plots of his novels are often improbable in their particulars and occasionally wildly Gothic in their episodes: Lady Arctura, for example, while drugged, is chained by her wicked uncle to an ancient bed in the "lost" subterranean chapel of the castle. But while MacDonald certainly wanted to hold his readers' attention through the narrative, he pursued in each book a line usually parallel to, but occasionally intersecting, the plot, which traces the developing spiritual history of at least one of the characters. His plot, from this point of view, serves chiefly to provide for discussions of spiritual problems and assessments of various religious views. Furthermore, in every novel there is at least one character who, having already attained an ideal state of loving trust in God, serves as exemplar and guide to some of those he or she encounters. Basically, each novel is in fact a spiritual biography, some more closely related to MacDonald's actual circumstances than others, but all reflecting his own views.

The most interesting of these is Wilfred
Cumbermede. In plot, setting, and characters it has almost no counterpart in the outward actualities of MacDonald's life, but, uniquely, it is subtitled An Autobiographical Story. Greville conjectures that it was based on Ruskin's deep emotional involvement with Rose La Touche, but offers nothing by way of proof. It seems to me that, like Phantastes, it can be regarded as a transcription of experience, but where the latter shifts immediately to the level of allegorical fantasy, Wilfred Cumbermede is presented, in setting and characters at least, with conventional realism. But the book is also full of dreamily-experienced, half-understood, or perpetually mysterious episodes, usually based on something as commonplace as the sound of the wind in the trees, and there are recounted throughout dreams whose symbolism, entirely relevant to the story, is often left to the reader to decipher.

Perhaps because Wilfred himself, all through the course of the narrative, is shown in a condition of perplexity and incomprehension in the face of both external and internal events, the emotional portrait is more convincing than that of, say, Donal
Grant, with his absolute certainties and compulsive preaching. But it is Donal, not Wilfred, who is typical of the central characters in the novels, for MacDonald usually shows little interest in presenting sensitive morbidity as a state worth intensive investigation. In fact, no spiritual problem faced by a major character is presented (apart from Wildred's) except as entailing its own solution, for MacDonald himself did not want to emphasize negative aspects of life, and is at pains, as the omniscient narrator, to make sure the reader sides with the believer. Active spiritual progress, ending in joyous illumination, characterizes all the adult novels but this one. To downplay, or even suppress altogether, negative emotions, was the obligation of one who believed in the love of God, for MacDonald would consider an optimistic bias not escapist but enlightened.

Among the poems there is the same sort of division apparent as between Wilfred Cumbermede and the other novels. The greater number of the devotional verses express firm and positive beliefs; the calm, apparently effortless pronouncements seem
removed from ordinary human stress and argument, for the indications of struggle are omitted. In consequence, many of his poems are no more than statements, presenting only the conclusions of what must once have been an inner debate. Even "The Disciple" (1867), which recounts his early spiritual difficulties and trials, is prefixed with lines that leave the reader in no doubt of the outcome:

Dedication

To all who fain
Would keep the grain,
   And cast the husk away--
That it may feed
The living seed,
   And serve it with decay--
I offer this dim story
Whose clouds crack into glory.5

Often he presents a spiritual truth as self-evident fact, as in "Love is Strength" (II: 130), but more often he embodies it in a straightforward analogy. These are usually among the more convincing of his devotional poems. In the following, for example, the seasonal/spiritual analogy is effectively sustained:
Coming

When the snow is on the earth
Birds and waters cease their mirth;
When the sunlight is prevailing
Even the night-winds drop their wailing.

On the earth when deep snows lie
Still the sun is in the sky,
And when most we miss his fire
He is ever drawing nigher.

In the darkest winter day
Thou, God, art not far away;
When the nights grow colder, drearer,
Father, thou art coming nearer!

For thee coming I would watch
With my hand upon the latch--
Of the door, I mean, that faces
Out upon the eternal spaces!

(II: 131)

There are, however, some poems in which MacDonald depicts a more personal inner struggle, "Lycabas" and "The Thorn in the Flesh" being among the best examples. In these poems, employing a sustained image, he works his way to a conclusion acceptable to himself and understandable to the reader, for the transitions from one emotional state to another are recognizably delineated. The second of these is the more effective of the two:
The Thorn in the Flesh

Within my heart a worm had long been hid.
I knew it not when I went down and chid
Because some servants of my inner house
Had not, I found, of late been doing well,
But then I spied the horror hideous
Dwelling defiant in the inmost cell--
No, not the inmost, for there God did dwell!
But the small monster, softly burrowing,
Near by God's chamber had made itself a den,
And lay in it and grew, the noisome thing!
Aghast I prayed--'twas time I did pray then!
But as I prayed it seemed the loathsome shape
Grew livelier, and did so gnaw and scrape
That I grew faint. Whereon to me he said--
Some one, that is, who held my swimming head,
"Lo, I am with thee: let him do his worst;
The creature is, but not his work, accurs;
Thou hating him, he is as a thing dead."
Then I lay still, nor thought, only endured.
At last I said, "Lo, now I am unjured
A burgess of Pain's town!" The pain grew worse.
Then I cried out as if my heart would break.
But he, whom, in the fretting, sickening ache,
I had forgotten, spoke: "The law of the universe
Is this," he said: "Weakness shall be the nurse
Of strength. The help I had will serve thee too."
So I took courage and did bear anew.
At last, through bones and flesh and shrinking skin,
Lo, the thing ate his way, and light came in,
And the thing died. I knew then what it meant,
And, turning, saw the Lord on whom I leant.

(II: 94)

In one of the novels he wrote, "[One must not weaken]
by presentation, the force of a truth which, in
discovery, would have its full effect." In its
original context, the remark applies to explaining
the "hard utterances" of the Gospels, but it is
equally true of these poems. In "Coming" the reader is presented with a bare assertion; in "The Thorn in the Flesh" he is given a retrospective account of a progression of emotions, leading to a discovery.

The Diary of an Old Soul (not in the Poetical Works) is probably the best of these "questing" poems. In it MacDonald faces questions arising from bereavement, bewilderment, doubt, with a painful honesty which compels belief in the sincerity of its conclusions. Even this poem, however, suggests the openly didactic and predominantly devotional tone of the majority of the novels. But the poems which may be seen as analogous in approach to Wilfred Cumbermede, in their use of oblique statements, Romantic imagery, and suggestive allegory, are, partly by their very obscurity, of more literary interest than even those poems which record a progression of feeling. They, like Wilfred Cumbermede, are autobiographical in a sense that the loudly affirmative poems are not; like that novel, they deal with ambiguities.

Actually, even in his lifetime MacDonald's heartier exhortations to courage and trust were apt
to be resented or belittled by those who knew nothing of him personally, or did not share his faith. Ruskin, although a close friend, expressed a certain sceptical uneasiness: "It's all nonsense about Everybody turning good. No one ever turns good who isn't" (GMWH, p. 323). And in another letter, commenting on Unspoken Sermons (1868), he remarked,

If they were but true. . . . But I feel so strongly that it is only the image of your own mind that you see in the sky! (GMWH, p. 337)

Thomas G. Selby, in The Theology of Modern Fiction (1896), complained that

His optimism scarcely allows him to reckon with the terrors that sometimes run riot in the world. . . . [he] takes insufficient account of the facts of human life and character.7

And A. H. Japp, in 1892, referred to "a certain remoteness, we might almost say bloodlessness,"8 a criticism which accurately points to the real deficiency in so many of the devotional poems. Strongly assertive, they set up no arguments. Unfortunately, a series of robust affirmations, deliberately free of ordinary human qualifications and ambiguities,
tend to make their author seem shallow, even when, as with MacDonald, he is essentially complex.

Robert Lee Wolff, the least sympathetic of his modern critics, doubts altogether the validity of MacDonald's statements, claiming that he "struggled all his life . . . to present a lovable demeanor to the world," and that "the very reiteration of the assurances reveals the insecurity that underlay them" (TGK, p. 384). But this charge of hypocrisy, or at best seriously limited self-awareness, is challenged by a good deal of evidence to the contrary. One testimony describes him as "a brave, sincere and loyal man," and Greville's biography includes many tributes attesting in particular to his integrity. A typical example is that of a young man who went to him for counselling: "I saw, I felt, his holiness and nearness to God. . . . There was a humanity about him, and a searching honesty" (GMHW, pp. 537-38). He comes through as thoughtful, intelligent, and introspective, a man who believed what he said, and took infinite pains to say exactly what he meant:
The labour he always gave to making his manuscripts as truth-transparent as might be, was a matter almost of religion. (GMHW, p. 218)

"Because his religion was his life," wrote Ronald, "he could no more divide the religious from the secular than a fish separate swimming from water" (FANW, p. 112). As Winny, in The Vicar's Daughter, says of her father (i.e. MacDonald), "You all know my father and know him really, for he never wrote a word he did not believe." In context, this can most appropriately be understood as an autobiographical manifesto.

The serenity and faith, so variously, and, it must be admitted, often so facilely expressed in his writing, did not grow from naturally cheerful spirits or from ignorance of suffering. As C. S. Lewis says:

His resolute condemnations of anxiety come from one who has a right to speak; nor does their tone encourage the theory that they owe anything to the pathological wishful thinking - the spes phthisica - of the consumptive. (Preface, p. 13)

Poverty and ill-health were constant pressures in a life repeatedly beset by apparently insoluble difficulties. But from the earliest years of his married
life he held to his trust that God's loving discipline requires apparent evil to bring about everlasting good. In 1853, in the difficult period in Manchester, he wrote to his father: "We are going through the hard time now, without which never man was worth much in the world" (GMHW, p. 204); and six months later he refers to himself as "one whom the Father has been teaching through suffering to help the rest of his children" (GMHW, p. 213). Such views can be found in all his writings. In The Marquis of Lossie (1877), for example, his spokesman-character says that he has found,

from my own experience and the testimony of others, that suffering [leads] to valued good. . . . [God causes suffering] for reasons of the highest, purest and kindest import, such as when understood must be absolutely satisfactory to the sufferers themselves.\textsuperscript{12}

And in The Hope of the Gospel (1892) he writes that "sorrow is . . . but a wind blowing throughout life, to winnow and cleanse."\textsuperscript{13}

Though suffering might give rise to doubts, these were not cause for blame or remorse unless willingly acceded to, and were in fact a means of
further learning. In 1866 he wrote in a letter:

With all sorts of doubt I am familiar, and the result of them is, has been, and will be, a widening of my heart and soul and mind to greater glories of the truth—the truth that is in Jesus. . . . I cannot say I never doubt, nor until I hold the very heart of good as my very own in Him, can I wish not to doubt. For doubt is the hammer that breaks the windows clouded with human fancies, and lets in the pure light. (GMHW, pp. 373-74)

But the persistent interaction in his own life between faith and doubt is perhaps best revealed in a letter written to Louisa when she took the sick daughter to Italy, leaving him ill in London:

I have once or twice been tempted to feel abandoned—in this messy and struggling house. . . . But it is only a touch of the Valley of Humiliation—of the Hill of Difficulty. . . . I grow surer and surer. . . . I have seldom been quieter in mind than this day—but I am sometimes hard put to it with the Apollyon of unbelief. (GMHW, p. 475)

Greville comments here that some true believers in my father may get a shock from this confession. . . . But these have never touched the clue to his sufficing faith. (GMHW, pp. 475-76)

The real sin, MacDonald felt, was not in doubt
of any kind, but in egocentricity. "The false fool-self," as he calls it in "Somnium Mystici" (II: 45), is always ready to betray our ideals, and until it is destroyed, we are imprisoned by it. Pride is the chief promoter of the Self, and produces feelings which he was candid enough to recognize, as when he wrote to Louisa in 1856, "I have a cold smile deep in my heart like a moth-eaten hole, when I feel really wronged" (GMHW, p. 221). "I profoundly question the introspective diagnosis!" Greville protests in a footnote. He records this and other such indications of inner disturbance as if they were only amiable weaknesses of expression. Because of his filial regard--or, more likely, through his unwillingness to disturb an accepted image--he dismisses self-analyses that were certainly intended to be taken seriously.

So far as his writing is concerned, MacDonald usually refrained from admitting openly to negative passions. They are, that is, viewed in a character through another and better person's eyes, sometimes another character's, sometimes the author's. Only once does he demonstrate that he was entirely cap-
able of depicting a violent negative emotion, in a poem included in *Malcolm* (1875). Chanted by an old Highland piper, it is as savagely bitter, and as striking, as any execration recorded by Ian Lom MacDonald, the Gaelic bard of the seventeenth century. It has no title.

Black rise the hills round the vale of Glenco;  
Hard rise its rocks up the sides of the sky;  
Cold fall the streams from the snow on their summits;  
Bitter are the winds that search for the wanderer;  
False are the vapours that trail o'er the correi;  
Blacker than caverns that hollow the mountain,  
Harder than crystals in the rock's bosom,  
Colder than ice borne down in the torrents,  
More bitter than hail wind-swept o'er the correi,  
Falser than vapours that hide the dark precipice,  
Is the heart of the Campbell, the hell-hound Glenlyon.

Is it blood that is streaming down into the valley?  
Ha! 'tis the red-coated blood-hounds of Orange.

To hunt the red-deer, is this a fit season?  
Glenlyon, said Ian, the son of the chieftain:  
What seek ye with guns and with gillies so many?

Friends, a warm fire, good cheer, and a drink,  
Said the liar of hell, with the death in his heart.

Come home to my house—it is poor, but your own.

Cheese of the goat, and flesh of black cattle,  
And dew of the mountain to make their hearts joyful,  
They gave them in plenty, they gave them with welcome;  
And they slept on the heather, and skins of the red deer.
Och hone for the chief! God's curse on the traitors!
Och hone for the chief—the father of his people!
He is struck through the brain, and not in the battle!

Och hone for his lady! the teeth of the badgers
Have torn the bright rings from her slender fingers!
They have stripped her and shamed her in sight of her clansmen!
They have sent out her ghost to cry after her husband.

Nine men did Glenlyon slay, nine of the true hearts!
His own host he slew, the laird of Inverriggen.

Fifty they slew—the rest fled to the mountains.
In the deep snow the women and children
Fell down and slept, nor awoke in the morning.

The bard of the glen, alone among strangers,
Allister, bard of the glen and the mountain,
Sings peace to the ghost of his father's father,
Slain by the curse of Glenco, Glenlyon.

Curse on Glenlyon! His wife's fair bosom
Dry up with weeping the fates of her children!
Curse on Glenlyon! Each drop of his heart's blood
Turn to red fire and burn through his arteries!
The pale murdered faces haunt him to madness!
The shrieks of the ghosts from the mists of Glenco
Ring in his ears through the caves of perdition!
Man, woman, and child, to the last-born Campbell,
Rush howling to hell, and fall cursing Glenlyon—
The liar who drank with his host and then slew him!14

The tone of onrushing venom conveys a natural (as opposed to a Christian) passion, with a disturbing violence of rhetoric unequalled by anything else MacDonald published. It shows an unsuspected side to his nature; it is not surprising that he omitted
it from the *Poetical Works*, for it is in radical contrast to the spirit of almost everything else he wrote.

It is an outward sign of the inward conflicts that troubled him, which usually expressed themselves not in violence but in depression. For it was not so much his experience of death, his own ill health, or his poverty, which caused him the hardest struggle, but his own nature. His cousin and early friend Helen MacKay recorded that he was "often much depressed in spirits," and that when about eighteen his favourite saying was, "I wis we war a' deid!" (*GMHW*, p. 84). Greville notes that his youthful poems were expressive of "prevailing melancholy and introspection" (p. 80); and as he matured, the characteristics were controlled, rather than dissipated:

In spite of [his] delight in irresponsible gaiety and fun, it must be apparent to any careful reader of his works . . . that the atmosphere of sadness so prevalent in his youth was still often about him, yet never obscuring the snow-clad alps of his faith. (*GMHW*, p. 343)

Greville again mentions the "deeper note of sadness"
towards the end of his life, and speaks of his "heart-rending air of waiting for something" (GMHW, p. 560). But until physical ailments and illness deprived him of much of his former powers of mind and will, he consistently combatted despondency, as he advised others to do. "Go and do God's will. . . . That is the remedy to the gloomy doubts and the terrible depressions of this age," he said in one of his little talks delivered at Coraggio, about 1890 (GMHW, p. 508).

Although Greville attributes this innate melancholy about equally to his poor health and to his Celtic inheritance, it might surely also be traced in part to a conflict set up within him by the divergent characteristics of his grandmother and father, who dominated his early years. According to Greville, the former is accurately portrayed as Mrs Falconer, in Robert Falconer, and there she is a formidably unattractive character. Worshipping a vindictive and capricious God, who yet demanded perfect love and absolute obedience, she felt it her duty to keep from her grandson "every enjoyment of life which the narrowest theories as to the rule and will
of God could set down as worldly."15 Hers were "the degrading doctrines of those that cower before a God whose justice . . . consists but in the punishing of the guilty."16 MacDonald describes feelingly all that he early experienced as unlovely and later denounced as untrue, but he seems never moved by resentment or rancour; he can even call her the "noble old grandmother" (RF, p. 60). But over and over he attacks, here and in other novels, as well as in sermons, the doctrines she held, particularly of the Atonement, with her assumption of the implacable wrath of God towards those who did not accept it. In a passage Greville classes as autobiographical (GMHW, p. 85), MacDonald says:

I well remember feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was the love that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men. (Wd & Wg, p. 47)

In fact, much of his constant reiteration of the qualities of divine mercy and love can probably be traced to a desire to refute, yet again, the hideous selectivity his grandmother insisted upon:
I set to my seal that God is true— that he is light, and there is no darkness either of unfairness or selfishness or human theology in him, whatever the ministers and any others may falsely teach the people concerning him. (DG, p. 174)

C. S. Lewis writes that "On the intellectual side his history is largely a history of escape from the theology in which he had been brought up" (Preface, p. 11), and Chesterton congratulates him on his "escape from the bias of environment" (GMHW, p. 12). That he found a faith which increasingly satisfied him, one may credit in large part to the influence of his father. But before he broke away, the conflicting claims of his natural guardians must inevitably have induced much of the "atmosphere of sadness" mentioned by Greville.

Where MacDonald's father had acquired his more liberal views, Greville does not make plain. But in his integrity, and above all his loving justice, he remained MacDonald's model and ideal. "An almost perfect relationship with his father was the earthly root of all his wisdom," writes C. S. Lewis (Preface, p. 10). For a totally different interpretation, incidentally, it is interesting to read Robert Lee
Wolff, who, in *The Golden Key*, sees the darkest Freudian repressions in MacDonald's expressed regard for his father. But their genuinely fruitful relationship is convincingly described in many of the novels, *Warlock o' Glenwarlock* and *David Elginbrod* in particular, with emphasis on the transcendent effects:

The sight of human excellence awoke a faint ideal of the divine perfection. . . . the man himself was a faith-begetting presence. He was the evidence of God with them.17

As his own father had immeasurably lightened the weight of the grandmother's teachings, so he himself apparently determined to do the same for others similarly burdened.

Not unexpectedly, a recurrent image in MacDonald's poetry presents God as the loving father to his obedient children, in an association that is an enlargement of the corresponding human relationship. In "Bedtime," for example, he describes the children, sent up to bed, unwillingly creeping upstairs. They fall asleep
To steal through caverns of the night
Into the morning's golden light.

The third and last stanza makes the analogy:

We, elder ones, sit up more late,
And tasks unfinished ply,
But, gently busy, watch and wait -
Dear sister, you and I,
To hear the Father, with soft tread
Coming to carry us to bed.
("Bedtime," I: 353)

Such stanzas (and there are many poems with this image) are calm and full of trust, expressive of, and expecting, a strong human love. This dependence on God-the-Father undoubtedly was the source of much of MacDonald's spiritual comfort, but it did not eradicate his depressions.

To whatever source one attributes them, they seem often, in his writings, to focus on the problem of distinguishing between material and spiritual actualities. This is more apparent in the prose than in the poetry, and comes to its most outspoken expression in *Lilith* (1893). What is real: the tangible, visible world, or the world of the imagination and the soul? Which one is the illusion? Or must one choose? In a letter written in 1889
he tries to express this ambivalence:

That existence is a splendid thing I am more and more convinced, while, at the same time, but for my hope in God, I should have no wish for its continuance, and should feel it but a phantasmagoria. (GMHW, p. 535)

These feelings concerning the unreality of life are, not unexpectedly, most apt to appear in the presence of death. Except in Lilith they are not often openly stated, but they form an unspoken undercurrent to certain poems, as will be noted later.

In the course of his life MacDonald viewed death from several very different perspectives. Primarily, of course, there was direct, personal grief, of which he had much experience. His mother died in 1832, when he was eight. His younger brother James died the next year. Alex died in 1853, his half-sister Isabella in 1855, John in 1858, followed unexpectedly a few weeks later by their father. His closest friends died comparatively young: A. J. Scott in 1866, and Greville Matheson in 1872. Of his own family, Mary died in 1878; Maurice ten months later; Grace in 1884; Lilia, Octavia (grand-
daughter, age nine) and a daughter-in-law, all in 1891. His sufferings after each death were acute, yet determinedly calmed by such reflections as he addressed to his stepmother immediately after the death of his father. "Even your sorrow is turned into joy," he wrote, "if you can say to God, 'I am willing to be sorrowful, since it is thy will'" (GMHW, p. 296). Or, as he expressed it in a poem:

But, Lord, thy child will be sad--
As sad as it pleases thee;
Will sit, not seeking to be glad,
Till thou bid sadness flee,
And, drawing near,
With thy good cheer
Awake thy life in me.
("Hard Times," I: 330)

This is his mature, consoling view, considering sorrow as a means of showing obedience to the will of God. But he regarded death in other ways, particularly when considering it in the abstract. One of these ways seems to have concerned—if not obsessed—him from an early age. As earliest revealed in Phantastes (1857), he romanticizes the idea of death, showing a preoccupation with graves reminiscent of certain early nineteenth-century German writers:
I was dead, and right content. I lay in my coffin with my hands folded in peace. The knight, and the lady I loved, wept over me... 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...19

This is more than acceptance of mortality: it is rejoicing in it. Nearly forty years later Mr Vane, in Lilith, repeats the theme, as he lies on his couch in the House of Death:

I lay at peace, full of the quietest expectation, breathing the damp odours of Earth's bountiful bosom, aware of the souls of primroses, daisies and snowdrops, patiently waiting in it for the Spring.20

Here death is a peaceful alternative to living, a state that brings unity with the rest of creation. "I rose into a single large primrose that grew by the edge of the grave," says Anodos; and when the flower began to wither, he forsook it for a cloud (Ph, p. 232).

This rejoicing in being dead as an end in itself does not come into the poems except in a very modified form. The closest is in one of the comparatively few poems that do not lead directly to
thoughts of God, in which MacDonald conveys an awareness of the physical self as a part of nature, all things united in the enriching and levelling dusk, and uncomplicated by any emotion beyond a mindless tranquillity.

Songs of the Summer Nights (III)

Alone I lie, buried amid
The long luxurious grass;
The bats flit round me, born and hid
In twilight's wavering mass.

The fir-top floats, an airy isle,
High o'er the mossy ground;
Harmonious silence breathes the while
In scent instead of sound.

The flaming rose glooms swarthy red;
The borage gleams more blue;
Dim-starred with white, a flowery bed
Glimmers the rich dusk through.

Hid in the summer grass I lie,
Lost in the great blue cave;
My body gazes at the sky,
And measures out its grave.

(I: 362)

This placid acquiescence in physical mortality is unusual. He preferred to consider death neither as something that is a happy withdrawal from existence, nor as a sorrowful means of self-discipline, but as the longed-for means of reaching the goal of life, which is eternal life in union with God. This is
the view MacDonald most often emphasizes. It was with characteristic intent that he chose for his bookplate Blake's engraving of the old bent man tottering into the rocky tomb, from which bursts up a young, ardent figure blazing with light. The motto, "Corage, God mend al," is an anagram of MacDonald's name. Death is not a Romantic respite from the pain of life, however attractive that image may be. It is the way, the door, to better life. In prose, this view of death is best presented in "The Golden Key;" one of his sonnets is perhaps the best poetic statement.

The Chrysalis

Methought I floated sightless, nor did know That I had ears until I heard the cry As of a mighty man in agony: "How long, Lord, shall I lie thus foul and slow? The arrows of thy lightning through me go, And sting and torture me--yet here I lie A shapeless mass that scarce can mould a sigh!" The darkness thinned; I saw a thing below Like sheeted corpse, a knot at head and feet. Slow clomb the sun the mountains of the dead, And looked upon the world: the silence broke! A blinding struggle! then the thunderous beat Of great exulting pinions stroke on stroke! And from that world a mighty angel fled. (I: 265)

J. R. R. Tolkien said, "Death is the theme that most
inspired George MacDonald,"21 and this is true of
the fantasies, as well as much of the poetry. Death
also frequently occurs in the novels. Many of the
heroes are deprived of the women they love through a
death which they accept fully; all (literally) are
left to say, "I wait--I wait," i.e., for their own
death. As early as 1855 MacDonald had written:

I wait, I wait, wait wondering, till the door
Of God's wide theatre be open flung
To let me in. What marvels I shall see!
The expectation fills me, like new life
Dancing through all my veins.

(W & W, I: 124)

These then are his habitual attitudes towards
death. The tone of consolation for a brief parting,
the reminder that one is journeying on to another
everlasting meeting, the longing to reach the other
side of death which is synonymous with the glory of
God, are all to be found throughout the Poetical
Works. These poems, whatever approach he is taking,
are apt to be among his better ones, for he does
not indulge in whimsical speculation, and where
domestic images are used, they are natural and in-
offensive.

The personal poems, as opposed to more general
statements such as "The Chrysalis," give on the whole an impression of emotion recollected very much in tranquillity. They are in many instances quietly effective, with undertones of sadness, controlled in expression, and sometimes achieving an unobtrusive poignancy:

O Do Not Leave Me

O do not leave me, mother, lest I weep;  
Till I forget, be near me in that chair.  
The mother's presence leads her down to sleep—
Leaves her contented there.

O do not leave me, lover, brother, friends,  
Till I am dead, and resting in my place.  
Love-compassed thus, the girl in peace ascends,  
And leaves a raptured face.

Leave me not, God, until—nay, until when?  
Not till I have with thee one heart, one mind;  
Not till the Life is Light in me, and then  
Leaving is left behind.

(I: 294)

But there is yet another group of poems concerning death which is of far more interest than those already mentioned, and certainly of greater literary value. They convey uncertainty, pessimism, even despair, in varying degrees. Sometimes expressed in a series of questions which are answered ambiguously or not at all, with non-realistic scenes
or characters, they project an unexpected intensity of emotion that is often lacking in the smoothly didactic lyrics. Moral worth in his writing mattered far more to MacDonald than literary merit, though naturally he hoped to achieve both; but some of his best poems are those in which no moral conclusions are presented, and he projects, through metaphor and allegory, long-standing melancholy doubts and passionate queries. Here are no glib-sounding answers, but scenes as dramatically conceived and as creatively imaginative as anything in his best prose fantasies. These are among the poems to be discussed in Chapter V in detail, in conjunction with others which deal with Time, for it, too, he sees as an aspect of death.

The definite, straightforward statements which make up so much of his poetry represent the side of his nature that wanted to teach, that honestly believed, that faced life with courage, energy, and determination, in spite of setbacks that might well have destroyed the integrity of a weaker or less dedicated man. But there are other poems, derived as it seems from his suffering and
faltering, and above all from the innate melancholy which he continually repressed but could not eradicate. These appear more spontaneous, and are certainly less self-conscious, than many of his better-known poems. One concludes that he is truly most poetic, and most interesting, when he is least sure of the answers.

III. Critics

During his lifetime, and immediately after his death, MacDonald was enthusiastically acclaimed by many literary critics. Because in sheer bulk his novels greatly exceeded his output in other genres, these were given the most attention; also, to judge by numbers of editions, they were most in demand. In this section, however, I shall deal only with selected comments on the poetry.

Of his first publicly recognized work, the verse-drama *Within and Without* (1855), the review in *The Scotsman* stated:

This strange and original drama is full of the most exquisite poetry sustained at the pitch of sublimity with immense yet apparently effortless power. . . . A very remarkable production of intellect and heart. . . . *(GMHW*, p. 223)
The *Athenaeum*, on the other hand, found "the whole inexpressibly painful" (Bulloch, p. 728). By 1860, according to Greville, "his poetical gifts were fully recognized by all the critics" (*GMHW*, p. 317). But this statement must be accepted with reservations, for Greville is invariably eulogistic. It is certainly true, however, that all the reviews he quotes substantiate the claim, both at this date and later, and that Bulloch, in the prefatory remarks to his *Bibliography*, mentions the immense "vogue" of MacDonald, both in England and America, in the '70's and '80's (p. 682). How much of this was owing to the qualities of his verse, how much to the popularity of his novels, and how much to the widely-acknowledged attraction of his personality in lecturing, is difficult now to determine.

In 1878 the *Scotsman* reviewer, considering "The Disciple," wrote:

He neither intellectualizes nor sentiment-alizes. The exquisite beauty of the poem will suffice to justify the claims of George MacDonald not only to a high, but to the very highest rank as a poet. (*GMHW*, p. 88)
MacDonald's sons Greville and Ronald both write as though what they say will be taken for granted, not as though they needed to persuade anyone of their father's abilities. In his essay in From a Northern Window, Ronald alludes to the "versatility of that verse, the variety of its unity, the spiritual insight, the high poetic expression and the exquisite workmanship" (p. 68); Greville, in The Reminiscences of a Specialist and in George MacDonald and His Wife, repeatedly praises the poetry as a whole, and singles out specific poems for individual laudatory comment.

Contemporary authors as well as the professional critics made their approbation public. Ruskin, for example, by enthusiastic mention in the course of a lecture, brought The Diary of an Old Soul to general notice. Originally privately printed, it was made available to the public because of the interest roused by his remarks.

In MacDonald's lifetime perhaps the most considered tribute was Sir William Geddes' article in Blackwoods in 1891. In it he mentions the unevenness of MacDonald's output, and the "signs of haste and immaturity;" but, these disposed of, he devotes
the remainder of the article to (on the whole) undiscriminating praise, saying that

in native gift of poetic insight he was born with a richer dower than has fallen to any of our age now living since Alfred Tennyson saw the light of day.22

After attributing to MacDonald an "aerial fancy . . . akin to that of the 'Comus' of Milton and The Mid-Summer Night's Dream of Shakespeare," and, more reasonably, calling Wordsworth "his great prototype" (p. 366), Geddes further claims that the poems "reveal a power largely equal to all the intellectual modulation of the human soul" (p. 370). Bulloch's suggestion that the article was written "with a view to the selection of MacDonald as Poet Laureate" (p. 736) would perhaps explain its persistent hyperbole, but the editors of Blackwoods obviously believed it would be generally acceptable to their readers.

This tone of rapturous excess increased immediately after his death. Joseph Johnson's book (1906) is described by Reis as "a largely worthless work . . . but it accurately reflects the adulation
which MacDonald received from his contemporaries" (GMacD, p. 156). Calling him "a saintly poet-preacher" with "the spirit of a sanctified Bohemian" (p. 83), Johnson affirms that "all he has done bears the hallmark and sign of genius" (p. 69). The second phrase is curiously inept. His years in Italy, his tuberculosis, and his poverty might possibly qualify MacDonald as a Bohemian in the Victorian sense (as evidenced in Trilby), but his moral views and sense of social responsibility were demonstrably high, and the idea of "art for art's sake" is completely at variance with his theories of the purposes of creativity.

Those quoted so far represent almost entirely one side of the criticism; naturally, there were those even in his lifetime who, like the Athenaeum reviewer, found fault with his verse. Contemporary or posthumous, however, the adverse criticisms have rarely been directed against his mechanical skills. That he wrote too much and with too much ease is, however, one of the standard complaints. A reviewer in The Spectator, for example, in 1893, while claiming to regard him as the successor of Donne,
Crashaw, and Vaughan (presumably as a writer of devotional verse), also regrets his diffuseness: "His great facility as a verseman has proved detrimental to his reputation as a poet" (Bulloch, p. 742).

E. C. Stedman, in *Victorian Poets* (revised 1900), had sterner strictures: "his poetry too often, when not commonplace, is vague, effeminate, or otherwise poor."24

But there are certain poems which no one seems to have criticized adversely, such as "Sir Aglovaile," "Love Me, Beloved," and "Baby." A selective examination of comments on the last mentioned will provide an excellent example of specifically laudatory contemporary criticism.

**Baby**

Where did you come from, baby dear?  
Out of the everywhere into here.

Where did you get those eyes so blue?  
Out of the sky as I came through.

What makes the light in them sparkle and spin?  
Some of the starry twinkles left in.

Where did you get that little tear?  
I found it waiting when I got here.

What makes your forehead so smooth and high?  
A soft hand stroked it as I went by.
What makes your cheek like a warm white rose?
I saw something better than any one knows.

Whence that three-cornered smile of bliss?
Three angels gave me at once a kiss.

Where did you get this pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.

Where did you get those arms and hands?
Love made itself into bonds and bands.

Feet, whence did you come, you darling things?
From the same box as the cherubs' wings.

How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me, and so I grew.

But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here.

(II: 158)

"Baby" appeared first in At the Back of the North Wind (serialized 1868-69, book form 1871). Reprinted many times in newspapers and anthologies (see Bulloch, p. 733, for a selection), it turns up as far afield as one of Egerton Ryerson's Ontario Public School Readers in 1900. In 1901 it was set to music.

Greville mentions the "oft-quoted Baby poem in which . . . older children do delight rapturously" (GMHW, p. 363), and Joseph Johnson gushes,

. . . for exquisite loveliness the now well-known "Where did you come from,
baby dear?" . . . will never be surpassed, and will always give MacDonald a place among the immortals of English song.
(GMacD, p. 134)

He then quotes Arthur Hughes (MacDonald's illustrator), who apparently exclaimed, "Was anything rarer or more beautiful or more cheerful ever done?" Geddes, in his article on MacDonald in Blackwoods, refers to it as "perhaps the best known of his productions, for the words of it have gone out and floated round the world" (p. 366). Though the modern reader may regard the poem as overly arch, as well as basically untrue, Geddes reads into it profound depths of theological implications: "these lisplings . . . touch questions that echo wide and far, even into infinity" (p. 366). Whether it was really those depths which appealed so strongly to MacDonald's public, or merely the uncomplicated emotions evoked by the domestic images, it is of course not prudent to assert, but one suspects that its popularity probably derived from its idyllic picture of mother and infant engaged in fanciful colloquy. As Ifor Evans points out,
The later nineteenth century produced a large audience for easy, intelligible verse, whose sentiment and form were made to render no difficulty in vocabulary and movement.25

The immense popularity of Felicia Hemans and Adelaide Anne Proctor may be cited as representative of public reaction to this type of verse. In their works no one has attempted to discover hidden profundities, and their attraction (apart from their devotional predilections) lay in their sentimental domesticity and comfortable morality. This is by no means to say that MacDonald was always at their level; merely that his apparently most widely-admired poem should be read as a reflection of contemporary appetite for devotional writing, rather than as representative of the best he was capable of.

At the time of the centenary of his birth (1924), the TLS pronounced that "the poet of the Poems and The Diary of an Old Soul was a true poet."26 Others also have echoed earlier adulation. Elizabeth Yates, for example, in the preface to her little book of selections from the Poetical Works, wrote:
So freshly [the poems] flowed that the beauty and wisdom contained in them are not of an order that changes with the centuries.27

G. K. Chesterton, with more discrimination but no less enthusiasm, recorded his approbation of MacDonald both in his Preface to Greville's biography, and in his 1905 obituary notice in the Daily News (Bulloch, p. 734).

Sympathy with an author's subject matter and agreement with his viewpoint will of course colour even a discriminating reader's response. C. S. Lewis, who gave MacDonald full credit for his initial enlightenment and much of his subsequent instruction in Christianity, was well aware of his own critical subjectivity. In various letters to Arthur Greeves it is interesting to trace Lewis's shift in emphasis as his religious awareness was increasingly aroused.28

On March 7, 1916, he warned Greeves that most of the poems in Phantastes are "shockingly bad, so don't TRY to appreciate them" (p. 93). But in October, 1919, he wrote: "I have been looking at MacDonald's poems in bookshops lately. . . . They look much better than I thought before" (p. 263). And by
October 10, 1929, he was writing of The Diary of an Old Soul:

He seems to know everything and I find my own experience in it constantly: as regards the literary quality, I am coming to like even his clumsiness. There is a delicious home-spun, earthy flavour about it, as in George Herbert. Indeed for me he is better than Herbert. (p. 313)

It should be noted, however, that Lewis is talking here about the serious verses which deal with adult relationships with God, not about the playful domestic trivia. In 1930 he wrote: "The faults [in MacDonald] are obvious, but somehow they don't seem to matter" (p. 345). As Helen Gardner says, "It is extremely difficult to disentangle religion and aesthetic response."29

Other modern critics, with different personal biases, do not share Lewis's indifference to the faults of MacDonald's verse. Thus Ifor Evans writes:

In his poetry one always seems to be on the threshold of great things, but his thought is ever giving way to self-caressing complacency. (English Poetry, pp. 310-11)
Even Reis, of the modern critics perhaps the most sympathetic to MacDonald as a person, finds that

Reading MacDonald's poetry is often a pleasantly musical experience in which the reader has trouble remembering or caring about what has been said. . . . The poetry is usually fluent and melodious, but [lacks] the force and distinction of his best narrative prose. . . . His lines are smooth but slack and wordy. (GMacD, pp. 23-4, 26)

Rolland Hein also qualifies his comments, feeling obliged to mention "the painfully obvious faults of prolix and facile sermonizing" (Harmony, p. xiii), and Douglas Young calls him "intellectually unexciting and somewhat pietistic, though genuine enough in feeling and sensitive in language."30 In fact, where the nineteenth-century critics of his poetry were on the whole overwhelmingly enthusiastic, those of the last forty years, unless doctrinally predisposed in his favour, give an impression of unenthusiastic judiciousness.

There are, however, aspects of his poetry which have not been adequately distinguished by any critic, and individual poems which merit close attention, particularly when read in conjunction with his
prose works. But first, his poetic output as a whole should be considered, with attention to genre and form.
CHAPTER TWO: POETICAL WORKS

I. Dating

The poems which MacDonald considered his best are collected in the Poetical Works (two volumes, 1893), arranged and revised by the author. There are unexpected omissions: The Diary of an Old Soul, probably because of its length; some of the translations from the 1876 collection, Exotics; all the poems in Phantastes, thus excluding his most popular ballad; and assorted poems from various novels.

It is difficult to date many of MacDonald's poems with accuracy. Occasionally he will himself date a poem, or mention in a letter that he has just written, or is working on, a particular piece, but the best one can do with many is to establish the terminus ad quem, based on first publication in a novel, journal, newspaper, or collection. There is, of course, no way of knowing how long a poem had been lying in his desk before it appeared in print. Occasionally, internal evidence will give the clue,
as in "My Room" (II: 13), where the setting is obviously a boarding house in which MacDonald and his wife lived when Lily was their only child. One may safely conclude that it was written in late 1852 or early 1853, though it did not appear until 1857, in Poems. Sometimes, too, Greville will be of help, as when he remarks in a footnote that "Were I a Skilful Painter" (II: 10) was written for Angela Powell, possibly even before MacDonald married her sister Louisa (GMHW, p. 106). Again, one learns from Greville that "Love Me, Beloved" was written as a wedding-present to Louisa (1851), and that she was much distressed when it appeared as one of the songs in Within and Without (1855).

From the two volumes themselves one discovers little of the dating, since the poems are not arranged chronologically within their sections; nor are the sections in any discernible order, other than starting with the three early works in blank verse. Furthermore, although a section may have the title of an earlier collection, the two may not be identical in content. "Parables," for example, in Volume II, first appeared as a section in The
Disciple and Other Poems (1867), and contained nine poems; in the Poetical Works there are thirty-two poems, the additions presumably though not necessarily written after 1867.

Nor can one, merely by examining style and technique, make any confident attempt at comparative dating. It is impossible to judge only from the final collection, for the form in which many of the poems appear in the Poetical Works frequently differs from the original published version. In an essay written in 1865 MacDonald had described revision as "the removal of everything that can interfere between the thought of the speaker and the mind of the hearer" ("On Polish," ADO, p. 184). With this in mind he prepared the two volumes, sometimes altering only the punctuation, sometimes making verbal revisions of a minor nature, and occasionally rewriting so that mood and even meaning have shifted. "The end of polish is revelation," he wrote in the same essay (ADO, p. 183), and he seems to have felt morally obliged to revise his work. "It is very troublesome," he wrote in a letter (June 15, 1892), "but one cannot let wrongness of any kind willingly pass"
Many of the poems were not improved by the alterations. Greville remarks that "the polish actually sometimes [veils] the brilliancy of the inherent light" (GMHW, p. 540). His father, he adds, knew very well that "a poet's emendations are not always satisfactory," a fact he was accustomed to enlarge upon when lecturing on Coleridge (GMHW, f.n., p. 540). "Lovers of the old [version], not always without reason, have prayed him to have done with polishing," complains Ronald (FANW, p. 66). But though MacDonald could say of the poems of one of his characters, "His demand for finish ruined many of his verses, rubbing and melting and wearing them away . . . till they were worthless,"¹ he was, it seemed, incapable of heeding his own advice in this matter.

The two volumes of the Poetical Works, by themselves, with the deliberate smoothing-out of the diction, represent his taste and judgment in 1892. When possible, it is interesting to compare the earlier and later version of a particular poem, and consider the implications of any major changes.
II. Scope

A general idea of the scope and variety, as well as the extent, of MacDonald's poetry may be obtained from a brief look at the section-headings of the two volumes of the Poetical Works.

Volume I begins with a slightly altered version of the closet-drama Within and Without (1855), written in blank verse interspersed with stanzaic songs. Then follow two narratives in blank verse, "A Hidden Life" (1857) and "A Story of the Sea-Shore" (1857), the latter having much more description and reflection than actual story. Then follows "The Disciple," thirty-two linked poems in stanzaic form describing the resolution of the author's early religious doubts (originally in The Disciple and Other Poems, 1867), after which he placed "Gospel Women," a series of sixteen individual portraits, originally appearing in Poems (1857). Then come collections of poems, sometimes though not always originally published together.

In the list below, the number of poems in each section is indicated, and when possible the date when the title for that group of poems (sometimes
fewer than here) was first used. After this I have
given a very brief indication of the types of poems
in the section. This then is the contents of the
rest of Volume I:

"A Book of Sonnets:" 14: addressed to
friends, chiefly devotional
"Organ Songs:" 46 (1867): devotional, oc-
casional
"Violin Songs:" 30 (1867): love, religion,
nature, prayers
"Songs of the Days and Nights:" 32 (1867):
devotional, linked with nature
"A Book of Dreams:" 12 (1857): devotional, fantasy
"Roadside Poems:" 17 (1867): devotional,
domestic, anecdotal
"To and Of Friends:" 11 sonnets

Volume II contains no poems of a length to compare
with "A Hidden Life." The section headings are as
follows:

"Parables:" 32 (1867): fantasies, alleg-
ories
"Ballads:" 6 (1867): Oriental, English,
and Scottish settings
"Minor Ditties:" 13: miscellaneous, moral
and devotional
"Poems for Children:" 22 (1867): domestic
morality, devotional, narrative
"A Threefold Cord:" 150 (1883): descrip-
tive, reflective, devotional
"Scots Songs and Ballads:" 42 (1867)
"Poems to Friends:" 15

"A Threefold Cord" requires a special comment,
for not all the poems in it are by MacDonald. In 1883 a collection under this title was privately printed, with the sub-title Poems by Three Friends. These three were George MacDonald, his brother John (d. 1858), and his close friend Greville Matheson (d. 1872). Since they were writing on similar themes, being in accord in matters of religion and attitudes towards nature, and were also apparently trying to write in a common style, it is not possible, on the evidence of the poems alone, to determine authorship. With some omissions and revisions the collection appears, without any comment, in the Poetical Works. Slightly less than half are in fact by MacDonald. Fortunately, a volume marked by MacDonald himself, ascribing authorship of many of them, is now in King's College Library, Aberdeen. Furthermore, some of the poems were published separately, signed by MacDonald (e.g., "They Were All Looking for a King"), and those poems which were included in the novel, Robert Falconer, he specifically disclaimed in the foreword.

In the Poetical Works there are in all over four hundred poems, the exact number depending on whether one counts singly or collectively the parts under a
general title which, while obviously connected, can also stand alone. "Picture Songs" (I: 343), for example, obviously form a cycle, but the fourth section had appeared first by itself in Adela Cathcart (1864).

The titles of the sections indicate to a limited extent the variety to be found in his work, but a consideration of the poems according first to mode and then to form will make clearer his versatility and conscious craftsmanship. As will be seen, whatever critical objections may legitimately be levelled against him, carelessness and monotony of form are not among them.

III. Genres

Although there is considerable overlapping, the poems may be broadly categorized as dramatic, narrative, and lyric. Initially, the first mode would seem to be represented only by Within and Without, but in fact dramatic dialogue is used in other poems, though in much briefer compass and without a continuous narrative. Of this sort is "Willie's Question," where rubrics tell us "Willie speaks" (in six quat-
rains), then "The Father answers" (in three quatrains), and so on, in speeches of various length, to the end of the thirty exchanges. MacDonald makes an attempt here at realistic transcription that falls very flat indeed, as one exchange will sufficiently indicate:

The Father speaks

Think: is there nothing, great or small, You ought to go and do?

Willie answers

Let me think:--I ought to feed My rabbits. I went away In such a hurry this morning! Indeed They've not had enough to-day! ("Willie's Question," II: 169)

Equally dramatic in form, but less typographically differentiated, are the poems consisting of a series of questions and answers, the speakers being designated within the dialogue:

"Traveller, what lies over the hill? Traveller, tell to me: Tip-toe-high on the window sill Over I cannot see."

"My child, a valley green lies there, Lovely with trees, and shy; And a tiny brook that says, 'Take care, Or I'll drown you by and by!'

"And what comes next?"--"A little town. . . ." ("Tell Me," II: 73)
So the poem starts, realistically, but it rapidly becomes recognizable as an allegory of life. The child is told he must keep his eyes on "a stair up into the sky," and is assured at the close that "a way-faring man with wounded hands" will carry him up the stair.

The form gives a certain liveliness to what is essentially a descriptive and reflective poem. It is certainly superior to the banalities of "Willie's Question," for, generally speaking, the further MacDonald gets from domestic realism the more effective he becomes. Two fantasy-dialogues, for example, "The Herd and the Mavis" (II: 407) and "The Home of Death" (II: 409), have a dramatic tension and a psychological plausibility lacking in the earlier dialogue poems, largely because they make no attempt whatever at superficial realism.

Under the heading of narrative one could include poems which are merely anecdotal, such as "The Sheep and the Goat" (I: 416) and "The Wakeful Sleeper" (I: 418), in which MacDonald draws moral conclusions from small episodes. But there are also those which have a strong plot line. Apart from "A Story of the
Sea-Shore" (I: 171), the narrative poems are swift-moving, with a variety of backgrounds. Some, such as "The Old Garden" (II: 237), are more thoughtful than others; a few, such as "the Homeless Ghost" (II: 103), are written in a deliberately opulent style. The best, however, are in standard ballad form, in traditional style, drawing largely from folk-tales of the supernatural. "The Dead Hand" (II: 123), "Hallowe'en" (II: 393), and "The Mermaid" (II: 378) are excellent examples, the last being particularly successful in echoing the authentic ballad-tone:

Quhat's that, and that, far oot i' the gray,
The laich mune bobbin afore?
It's the bonny sea-maidens at their play--
Haud awa, king's son, frae the shore.

And ever and aye, i' the mirk or the mune,
Whan the win' blew saft frae the sea,
The sad shore up and the sad shore doon
By the lanely rock paced he.

But never again on the sand to play
Cam the maids o' the merry, cauld sea;
He heard them lauch far oot i' the bay,
But hert-alane gaed he.

("The Mermaid," II: 378)

(See pp. 408-11 for a glossary of Scots words.)

The greater number of his poems, however, may
be called *lyric*, mainly comprising poems that are meditative, descriptive, devotional, personal, and religious. It might well be argued, however, that the last-mentioned need not be given a separate listing. As Ronald pointed out, when himself attempting to establish possible categories:

Should I, for practical purposes, begin with a division of his religious verse from his profane, it might be fairly advanced against me that George MacDonald wrote few stanzas and barely a single complete poem which was not of some religious significance. *(FANW*, pp. 104-05)

One might equally claim that all his poems, not just the lyrics, are didactic, though in varying degrees, ranging from open moralizing and direct preaching—sometimes earnest, sometimes playful—to half-veiled symbolism and allegory.

The purely meditative poems are on the whole thematically interesting. In the best of them, the thought is conveyed through a continuous strong image that simultaneously develops and enlarges on the initial picture, and widens the scope of the thought which it embodies. "Lycabas," for example (II: 95), identifies the months of the year with wolves harry-
ing a shepherd and killing his lambs, leaving him desolate and wounded. By the end of the poem it is clear that this is one of MacDonald's favourite themes in a new guise: all adversity, and all seeming evil, come from God, as a means of driving us to Him. Similarly "Light" (I: 272) and "The Clock of the Universe" (II: 91) are meditations on themes expressed through developed, single images.

Others of the meditative poems present domestic or at least commonplace scenes on which the poet comments, widening the application:

My child is lying on my knees;
The signs of heaven she reads:
My face is all the heaven she sees,
Is all the heaven she needs.

Lo! Lord, I sit in thy wide space,
My child upon my knee;
She looketh up unto my face,
And I look up to thee.

Within and Without, I: 85

There is also a small class of poem which deals with abstractions presented directly, without sustained imagery or analogy:
To My Lord and Master

Imagination cannot rise above thee;  
Near and afar I see thee, and I love thee;  
My misery away from me I thrust it,  
For thy perfection I behold, and trust it.  
(II: 139)

In poems such as these it is very much the preacher who is speaking, which is perhaps one reason why they were originally among his most popular poems. Such straightforward, didactic, and hortatory lyrics would probably appeal least to the modern reader:

Better to be a little wise  
Than in knowledge to abound;  
Better to teach a child than toil  
To fill perfection's round.

Better to sit at some man's feet  
Than thrill a listening state;  
Better suspect that thou art proud  
Than be sure that thou art great.  
("Better Things," I: 403)

Preferable to these blunt statements are the little pictures, often presented with delicacy and brevity, which carry their message by evoking the answering imagination:
A Baby-Sermon

The lightning and thunder
They go and they come;
But the stars and the stillness
Are always at home.
(II: 160)

A distinction can be recognized between the personal and devotional poems, and the objectively-expressed religious poems. Any stanza of "The Disciple" would serve as an example of the first:

Lord, is it true? Oh, vision high!
The clouds of heaven dispart;
An opening depth of loving sky
Looks down into my heart!
(Section viii, I: 196)

The whole of The Diary of an Old Soul belongs to this level of spiritual autobiography, in which he is dealing at length with his own doubts and discoveries, believing that readers will see in them reflections of themselves. In the religious poems, however, he is presenting an objective picture, drawing attention to something that exists outside his own immediate situation, attempting to make fresh what is already known, rather than presenting a personal experience:
Mary, to thee the heart was given
For infant hand to hold,
And clasped thus, an eternal heaven,
The great earth in its fold.
("The Mother Mary," Section i, I: 221)

For MacDonald, all material objects point beyond themselves, and hence very few of his poems are entirely or merely descriptive. Usually, physical landscape is directly associated with its maker, or with human emotion, or both. There are many examples in his work, but two excerpts from "Songs of the Days and Nights" (thirty-two poems in all) will serve to exemplify the point:

The earth is black and cold and hard;
Thin films of dry white ice,
Across the rugged wheel-tracks barred,
The children's feet entice.

Dark flows the stream, as if it mourned
The winter in the land;
With idle icicles adorned,
That mill-wheel soon will stand.

But friends, to say 'tis cold, and part,
Is to let in the cold;
We'll make a summer of the heart,
And laugh at winter old.
("Songs of the Winter Days,"
Section i, I: 368)

The night is damp and warm and still,
And soft with summer dreams;
The buds are bursting at their will,
And shy the half moon gleams.
Lord, make me more a child, and more,
Till Time his own end bring,
And out of every winter sore
I pass into thy spring.
("Songs of the Spring Nights,"
Section iv, I: 377)

Of the three main genres--narrative, dramatic, and lyric--the last is the one he turned to most often. Enough instances have been given to indicate that he shaped the lyric to many purposes. A more complete picture of his handling of all three genres will emerge as some of his various verse forms are described and assessed.

IV. Verse Forms

Much praised in his own day for the technical aspects of his poetry, MacDonald made use of a great variety of verse forms, as even a rapid glance through the volumes of the Poetical Works will indicate. As illustrations of his versatility, it is interesting to note some of these forms and measures.

He uses most often a stanzaic form. Although he resorts repeatedly to the four-line stanza, he is by no means limited to it; stanzas may be found
ranging from two to twelve lines each, with many
variations in rhyme scheme and metre, some apparently
original. He does not handle all the stanzacic var-
iations equally well, the exigencies of the chosen
pattern sometimes forcing him into an unattractive
redundancy or infelicitous rhyme:

Far parted,
Dull-hearted,
We wander, sleep-walking,
Mere shadows, dim-stalking:
Orphans we roam,
Far from home.

Oh new man,
Sole human,
God's son, and our brother,
Give each to the other--
No one left out
In cold doubt!
("A Song Prayer," I: 354)

More usually, however, he controls the shifting rhy-
thms well, both within and beyond the initial stan-
za:

Dejection

O Father, I am in the dark,
My soul is heavy-bowed:
I send my prayer up like a lark,
Up through my vapoury shroud,
To find thee,
And remind thee
I am thy child, and thou my father,
Though round me death itself should gather.
Lay thy loved hand upon my head,
   Let thy heart beat in mine;
One thought from thee, when all seems dead,
   Will make the darkness shine
   About me
   And throughout me!
And should again the dull night gather,
I'll cry again, Thou art my father.

(II: 142)

His blank verse is well adapted to description
and narrative, restrained where, in view of his pro-
lixities elsewhere, one might well expect verbal
excess:

A little boy, who watched a cow near by
Gather her milk where alms of clover-fields
Lay scattered on the sides of silent roads,
All sudden saw, nor knew whence she had come,
A lady, veiled, alone, and very still,
Seated upon a grave. Long time she sat
And moved not, weeping sore, the watcher said--
Though how she knew she wept were hard to tell.
At length, slow-leaning on her elbow down,
She hid her face a while in the short grass,
And pulled a something small from off the mound--
A blade of grass it must have been, he thought,
For nothing else was there, not even a daisy--
And put it in a letter. Then she rose,
And glided silent forth, over the wall,
Where the two steps on this side and on that
Shorten the path from westward to the church.--
The clang of hoofs and sound of light, swift wheels
Arose and died upon the listener's ear.

(Concluding lines, "A Hidden Life," I: 168)

In four other narratives, all written before the
early 1860's, he used blank verse with considerable
ability, and did not use it again.

Some forms, however, he returned to repeatedly. Over the years he wrote many sonnets, mainly Italian, with variations in the sestet. Some are not particularly interesting in themselves—"To Aubrey de Vere," for example (I: 264)—but the mastery of the form is constant, and where the subject is appropriate to the form, the result is effective, for he brings the sonnet syntactically and thematically to a strong conclusion:

The Sweeper of the Floor

Methought that in a solemn church I stood, Its marble acres, worn with knees and feet, Lay spread from door to door, from street to street. Midway the form hung high upon the rood Of him who gave his life to be our good; Beyond, priests flitted, bowed, and murmured meet, Among the candles shining still and sweet. Men came and went, and worshipped as they could— And still their dust a woman with her broom, Bow'd to her work, kept sweeping to the door. Then saw I, slow through all the pillared gloom, Across the church a silent figure come: "Daughter," it said, "thou sweepest well my floor!" It is the Lord! I cried, and saw no more. (I: 266)

Other traditional forms he utilizes occasionally, but not repeatedly, as if, having shown his mastery, he felt no interest in continuing with them. Only
once, for example, does he use terza rima at any length, in "Somnium Mystici" (II: 45), even though in *England's Antiphon* (1874) he had described it as "the finest form of continuous rhyme in any language." Similarly, in *The Diary of an Old Soul* he rings changes on the standard rime royale, using eighteen variations, usually with admirable adaptation of rhyme to thought, then abandons the form. He used ottava rima in "Love's Ordeal," any stanza of which demonstrates his smooth cadences, and the steady flow of narrative:

"Hear'st thou the baying of my hounds?" said he; "Draw back the lattice bar and let them in." From a rent cloud the moonlight, ghostily, Slid clearer to the floor, as, gauntly thin, She opening, they leaped through with bound so free, Then shook the rain-drops from their shaggy skin. The maiden closed the shower-bespattered glass, Whose spotted shadow through the room did pass. (*Love's Ordeal,* II: 26)

Besides following these traditional English patterns, MacDonald, like many of his contemporaries (Coventry Patmore, Austin Dobson, Swinburne, Andrew Lang, for example), utilizes early French verse forms. Largely stimulated by Théodore de Banville's book on prosody, which appeared in 1872, a fashion came
in of writing in such forms as the ballade, rondeau, rondeau, villanelle, and triolet. For most English writers the interest lay in the forms themselves, and their imitations were on the whole playful demonstrations of verbal skill. Ifor Evans points out that "theme . . . was frequently merely the material for technical virtuosity" (English Poetry, p. 292), a statement with which readers of the above-mentioned practitioners would not disagree.

MacDonald's interest is reflected in his novel Home Again (1887), in which he includes an episode turning on "those old French rimes that have come into fashion of late" (p. 85). The hero, Walter, after reading "several ancient volumes, among the rest Clement Marot,"

was in delight with the variety of dainty modes in which, by shape and sound, a very pretty French something was carved out of nothing at all. Their fantastic surprises, the ring of their bell-like returns upon themselves, their music of triangle and cymbal, gave him quite a new pleasure. In some of them poetry seemed to approach the nearest possible to bird-song--to unconscious seeming through most conscious art. . . . (HA, pp. 85-6)

A faint condescension towards airy foreign nonsense
is discernible here, which perhaps explains why Mac-
Donald made no translations from French, nor, except
in one revealing instance, imitated neo-Parnassian
choice of subject-matter. Walter writes a facile
triolet to attract a shallow girl:

Oh, why is the moon
Awake when thou sleepest?
To the nightingale's tune,
Why is the moon
Making a noon,
When night is the deepest?
Why is the moon
Awake when thou sleepest?

(HA, p. 86)

The poem was not included in the Poetical Works,
for in fact it was written only to expose the art-
ificiality of a particular relationship; MacDonald
saw no value in superficial love poems. He did in-
clude, however, poems in the French forms which deal
with exactly those subjects that he chose to write
upon in other modes. In these he does not give an
impression that he is primarily concerned with ad-
roit manipulation; unlike most contemporary practi-
tioners, he cared more for what he was saying than
for a strict adherence to the rules. He never, for
example, mastered the particular art of shifting the
stresses and meanings, and breaking in unexpected places the repeated lines, nor would his comparative failure trouble him. "Nothing," he says in Guild Court, "in which the art is uppermost is worth the art expended upon it."  

In the following "Triolet," for example, he has a sight rhyme (lines 1 and 3), an inversion that at first glance suggests a grammatical ambiguity (line 5), and a repetition that is introduced as an interjection, rather than being syntactically part of the other lines (line 4). Also, the shift in meaning from line 1 to line 2, in the word "men," is awkward.

Triolet

Oh that men would praise the Lord
   For his goodness unto men!
Forth he sends his saving word,
   --Oh that men would praise the Lord!--
And from shades of death abhorred
   Lifts them up to light again:
Oh that men would praise the Lord
   For his goodness unto men!

(II: 140)

The brevity of the triolet and rondel probably formed part of their attraction, for he wrote many other short, though not necessarily epigrammatic, poems,
usually quatrains or distichs. These, however, primarily reflect the influence of Goethe, who wrote many such brief, metaphorical statements:

Thy Heart

Make not of thy heart a casket,  
Opening seldom, quick to close;  
But of bread a wide-mouthed basket,  
Or a cup that overflows.  

(II: 218)

In one instance he reduced the distich to its ultimate compression. First appearing in the short story "The Wow o' Rivven" (1864), it later became the coda of A Threefold Cord:

The Shortest and Sweetest of Songs

Come  
Home.  

(II: 362)

So far I have considered a selection of the regular stanzaic forms, both traditional and devised, that MacDonald used. There is, however, a much freer form to which he returned many times, namely, the irregular short ode, of no set length, in which rhyme occurs as the rhythm and sense suggest. The line length is at least visually variable, though it may
be in some poems lengthened uniformly into pentameter by due attention to pauses, as Coleridge had described in his comments on the metre of "Christabel."

The form was by no means a novelty in English. Milton and Drummond of Hawthornden, to mention only two earlier poets, had employed it with considerable skill and success. Probably, however, Wordsworth's ode, "Intimations of Immortality," was the chief inducement to later nineteenth-century poets to try the form. It is likely, too, that MacDonald had encountered the work of Coventry Patmore, who, praising Wordsworth and imitating Coleridge, had written in 1857 that all that was required for a successful irregular ode was "sufficient motive power of passionate thought." 6 His own Nine Odes appeared in 1868, To the Unknown Eros in 1877, and had more than adequately demonstrated how effectively irregular stresses and pauses could convey a depth of sentiment and reflection. As well, some of the German poets MacDonald so much admired would have influenced him in this choice of form. Among others, Heine (e.g., "Nordseebilder"), Mörike (e.g., "Lied vom Winde"), and Novalis (e.g., "Die Musik"), had written irreg-
ular odes very much of the type MacDonald produced, and, in fact, he included in an early novel his translation of one of Heine's odes.

He never equalled in grave pathos and compression Patmore's "The Azalia" or "The Toys." Nevertheless, he wrote odes which unite structure and rhythm with the images and development of thought, either in formal and abstract seriousness, or in more colloquially emotive language. The following extracts will illustrate his skill, though it should be noted that a short quotation cannot convey the changes of pace that enliven the whole poem. In the first extract he is addressing Light:

Thou art the joy of age:  
Thy sun is dear when long the shadow falls.  
Forth to its friendliness the old man crawls,  
And, like the bird hung out in his poor cage  
To gather song from radiance, in his chair  
Sits by the door; and sitteth there  
His soul within him, like a child that lies  
Half dreaming, with half-open eyes,  
At close of a long afternoon in summer—  
High ruins round him, ancient ruins, where  
The raven is almost the only comer—  
Half dreams, half broods, in wonderment  
At thy celestial ascent  
Through rifted loop to light upon the gold  
That waves its bloom in some high airy rent:  
So dreams the old man's soul, that is not old,  
But sleepy mid the ruins that infold.  
("Light," I: 275)
In the next, he is describing a picture and its effect on the viewer:

But why is the moon so bare, up there?
And why is she so white?
And why does the moon so stare, up there—
Strangely stare, out of the night?
Why stand up the poplars
That still way?
And why do those two of them
Start astray?
And out of the black why hangs the gray?
Why does it hang down so, I say,
Over that house, like a fringed pall
Where the dead goes by in a funeral?
Soul of mine,
Thou the reason canst divine. . . .
("The Haunted House," II: 203)

"A Cry," one of his most interesting odes, which describes his view of himself as a poet, is quoted in full in the next chapter.

There are found in his works many verse forms, usually well adapted to the thought the lines contain. In his choice of form, as in all the technical aspects of his work, his discrimination and craftsmanship are evident. These qualities are also to be found in his numerous translations.

V. Translations

When MacDonald was cataloguing a private library
in the summer of 1842, he discovered "a whole nest
of the German classics. . . . Happening to be a
tolerable reader of German, I found in these volumes
a mine of wealth inexhaustible."7 Though his indebt-
edness to the novellen of E. T. A. Hoffmann and
Novalis is clearly seen in the prose fantasies, his
earlier interest was in the German Romantic poets.
"The mystic pietism [of Novalis] . . . had gripped
my father's imagination in, I think, his student
days," writes Greville (GMHW, p. 159). It is not
unexpected then that in 1851, while at Arundel, to
give pleasure to his friends who did not read
German, he translated and had privately printed
Twelve of the Spiritual Songs of Novalis. He enjoyed
the work, and continued translating—Goethe, Schil-
ler, Heine, Uhland, among others.

In 1876 he published Exotics, with the sub-title
A Translation (in verse) of the Spiritual Songs of
Novalis, the Hymn Book of Luther, and Other Poems
from the German and Italian. In 1897 a reprint of
Exotics, with some additions, appeared under the
title Rampolli: Growths from a Long-Planted Root.
Some of the translations had been included in var-
ious novels, and a few were reprinted in the Poetical Works, not always mentioning the original author. As with almost everything else he wrote in verse, he made many alterations over the years, often not for the better.

In the Preface to Rampolli he outlines his principles of translation. They are not wholly original, being in fact largely a brief re-statement of the major points made by Alexander Fraser Tytler in his Essay on the Principles of Translation (1790). They are, however, so much the expression of his own common sense and experience that he might well list them as his own:

I have endeavoured, first of all, to give the spirit of the poetry.
Next, I have sought to retain each individual meaning that goes to form the matter of a poem.
Third, I have aimed at preserving the peculiar mode, the aroma of the poet's style, so far as I could do it without offence to the translating English.
Fourth, both rhythm and rime being essential elements of every poem in which they are used, I have sought to respect them rigorously.
Fifth, spirit, matter, and form truly represented, the more literal the translation the more satisfactory will be the result.8
He goes on to say that "a perfect translation from one language to another cannot be effected. One is tempted even to say that in the whole range of speech there is no such thing as a synonym" (p. vi).

This is all eminently sensible, but, just as his own principles of original poetry proved in some ways inadequate (as will be discussed in the next chapter), so he finds it impossible to fulfill all of his stated objectives. It is doubtful indeed if anyone could. That he succeeds in the first and third of his intentions is an achievement in itself, and a testimonial to his skill. Reis in fact remarks that "his renderings of Novalis . . . are possibly the best in English" (GMacD, p. 27). With most of the authors he translated, he reproduced the original metre and rhyme scheme, and, equally important, worked with a lively feeling for the connotations, as well as for the denotations, of the words. "It is often curious," a character in Adela Cathcart remarks, "how a literal rendering, even when it gives quite the meaning, will not do, because of the different ranks of the two works in their respective languages," and he goes on to explain why, in context, "tryst" is a
better word for Erwartung than the literal "expectation" (AC, p. 214).

Examples will illustrate the extent as well as some of the limitations of his skill. The following is the last stanza of one of Novalis' Hymns:

Die Lieb' ist frei gegeben,
Und keine Trennung mehr.
Es wogt das volle Leben
Wie ein unendlich Meer.
Nur Eine Nacht der Wonne--
Ein ewiges Gedicht--
Und unser aller Sonne
Ist Gottes Angesicht. 9

The translation is taken from the third of MacDonald's four versions of the poem:

Lost, lost are all our losses!
Love is for ever free!
The full life heaves and tosses
Like an unbounded sea!
One live, eternal story!
One poem high and broad!
And sun of all our glory
The countenance of God!
("From Novalis," II: 324)

Here spirit, rhythm, rhyme scheme, and style are indeed emulated, but literal translation it is not. A certain amount of unavoidable padding obscures the direct fluidity of the original, simply because of the natures of the individual languages, partic-
ularly the number of light unaccented syllables in the German. Thus "wogt" in line 3 becomes "heaves and tosses," and "ewiges" in line 6 becomes "high and broad," in order to make up the three required syllables. (On the other hand, one might argue that "wogen" means both to heave and to toss, and that anything eternal (ewig) is high and broad.) And so far as meaning is concerned, there is no basis for "Nacht der Wonne" to become a "live, eternal story," other than by association with "Gedicht" in the next line. He seems to have felt this himself, for in the revision made for Rampolli (p. 14) he improves it to "All night! all blissful leisure! / One jubilating ode!"

But on the whole it does give a true impression of the original, even if at times it fails, inevitably, to be an exact rendering. Really distressing, however, because entirely needless, is the wordiness of his version of an unrhymed irregular ode of Heine's, the section of his Nordseebilder entitled "Frieden." "Das Meer war still," for example, becomes "The sea was very still and gray." A little further on, Heine thus describes his vision of Christ walking the waves:
Und als ein Herz in der Brust
Trug er die Sonne
Die rote, flammende Sonne.

For this passage MacDonald wrote:

And for a heart, oh, wonder meet!
In his breast the sun did throb and beat;
In his breast, for a heart to the only One,
Shone the red, the flaming sun.

(AC, p. 212)

Apart from the unfortunate decision to use rhyme, these lines demonstrate his two main weaknesses as a translator: prolixity by choice, and deliberate mistranslation when he feels called upon to improve on his original.

A minor fault might also be mentioned here, simply because it is one into which he does not often stray, his ear usually being sensitive to the suggestiveness of sound; but occasionally there is a lapse not in meaning but in style. In his version of Schiller's "The Diver," for example, he conveys tone, form, and sense very well, producing a smooth rendition of the original narrative. However, the reader is abruptly startled by the Byronic rhyme, more ingenious than poetic:
And bared its teeth with cruel sheen a
Terrible shark, the sea's hyena.
(II: 298)

It is true that Schiller had rhymed Zähne with
Hyäne, but MacDonald's effect is by no means similar.

Apart from "Peace," MacDonald's translations of
Heine's short lyrics are among his best. It should
be noted that he ignores the satirical, mocking,
bitter poems, for he felt that such moods were not
the material of poetry ("Browning's 'Christmas Eve',"
ADO, p. 196). But other poems were highly congenial
to him. Heine's preoccupations with parting, dreams,
his images of the grave and of the conscious dead--
these last particularly when used as metaphors of
emotional suffering—all appealed to MacDonald's
own Romantically melancholy strain.

It is interesting to compare the first published
version of a specific poem with the German original,
and then to look at his later revision:

I dreamt of the daughter of a king,
With a cheek white, wet, and chill;
Under the limes we sat murmuring,
And holding each other so still!
"Oh! not thy father's sceptre of gold,  
   Nor yet his shining throne,  
   Nor his diamond crown that glitters cold,—  
   'Tis yourself I want, my own!"

"Oh! that is too good," she answered me,  
   "I lie in the grave all day;  
   And only at night I come to thee,  
   For I cannot keep away." (AC, p. 140)

This is pleasantly easy, with no obviously make-weight words. It is in fact an entirely acceptable poem in its own right. Heine's original reads:

Mir träumte von einem Königkind,  
Mit nassen, blassen Wangen;  
Wir sassen unter der grünen Lind',  
Und hielten uns lieb umfangen.

"Ich will nicht deines Vaters Thron,  
Und nicht sein Zepter von Golde,  
Ich will nicht seine demantene Kron',  
Ich will dich selber, du Holde."

Das kann nicht sein, sprach sie zu mir,  
Ich liege ja im Grabe,  
Und nur des Nachts komm' ich zu dir,  
Weil ich so lieb dich habe.  
(Werke, p. 81)

Only in the last stanza has MacDonald altered the meaning, but he does it logically, and poetically. Unfortunately some years later he made another translation, for inclusion in Rampolli, in which he unwisely reproduced Heine's feminine endings, to the
I dreamt of the daughter of a king,
With white cheeks tear-bewetted;
We sat 'neath the lime-trees leavy ring,
In love's embraces netted.

"I would not have thy father's throne,
His crown or his golden sceptre;
I want my lovely princess alone--
From Fate that so long hath kept her."

"That cannot be," she said to me;
"I lie in the grave uncheerly;
And only at night I come to thee,
Because I love thee so dearly."
(Rampolli, p. 84)

MacDonald was a craftsman never completely satisfied
with his work, unwilling in fact to leave well enough
alone, but here, in lines 7 and 8, he has made a
change of a kind so far not exemplified. It is of a
nature so drastic as to require an explanation other
than purely literary, which, fortunately, is suggested
by his biography. As will be further shown in a
later chapter, his own losses through death are more
than once reflected in the revisions made in the
early 1890's for the Poetical Works. The final ver-
sion of the Heine poem has, I feel, reference to his
favourite daughter, Lily, who had died in his arms
in November, 1891.
It is easy to dwell at some length on his faults, but his virtues as a translator should not be overlooked. He was a careful worker, as shown in correspondence during the 1850's with his close friend Greville Matheson, to whom he made progress reports on his translations. He sent Matheson various versions as he worked them out, inviting comment, and their discussions on individual words or phrases show an admirably serious attention to detail, and a determination to find the most appropriate equivalents. There may be occasional infelicities, but each of the changes from the original German, each re-arrangement of thought, even the particular associations of individual words, has been considered carefully. It is his judgment one must fault at times, not his lack of attention or unawareness of difficulties. Perhaps only someone who has attempted translations can appreciate the difficulties of combining form, rhyme, and meaning, and embodying them in verses that are not only an accurate reproduction of the original version, but also good English poetry. That MacDonald often "adapted from" rather than "translated" is not surprising, nor, really,
blameworthy, and most often, when one does not make a detailed comparison with the original, the results are entirely satisfactory. One wonders rather why "Night lay upon my eyelids" (AC, pp. 210-11) and "The shapes of the days forgotten" (AC, pp. 208-09), for example, are not included in the Poetical Works.

But though the intrinsic value of the translations is worthy of note, it is not perhaps so important as the effect the poets he translated had on his own poetry. Through them he was introduced to verse forms into which he might not otherwise have thought to venture. Some of his own hymn-like poems, for example, resemble those of Novalis or Luther in form as well as content. In fact, without prior information, it would be impossible at times to say what is original MacDonald and what is translation. Another influence, in addition to Goethe's, is that of Uhland, from whom he may well have learned the effective use of the closed rhyming couplet, which he employed to such excellent effect in "Sir Aglovaile" (Ph, p. 166).

Perhaps the best stylistic model, however, was provided by Heine, in whom he found the air of fated
melancholy and doom, the falling elegiac cadence, and in particular the art of unanswerable questioning, all of which he employed most effectively in some of the best of his later poems, as well as several very agreeable earlier ones:

Winter Song

They were parted then at last?
Was it duty, or force, or fate?
Or did a worldly blast
Blow to the meeting gate?

An old, short story is this!
A glance, a trembling, a sigh,
A gaze in the eyes, a kiss—
Why will it not go by?

(I: 342)

This is unmistakably in the mood and style of Heine.

Among the best of his derivative lyrics is the little cycle he calls "Picture Songs." Lines in the third section ("Maiden, maiden! I am falling / Dead at thy door") recall many passages of similar extravagant despair in Heine, but even more, one notes the tone of sadness common to both, expressed in natural image or single metaphor. The following comprise the first and last of the four sections:
A pale green sky is gleaming;  
The steely stars are few;  
The moorland pond is steaming  
    A mist of gray and blue.

Along the pathway lonely  
    My horse is walking slow;  
Three living creatures only,  
    He, I, and a home-bound crow!

The moon is hardly shaping  
    Her circle in the fog;  
A dumb stream is escaping  
    Its prison in the bog.

But in my heart are ringing  
    Tones of a lofty song;  
A voice that I know, is singing,  
    And my heart all night must long.

The waters are rising and flowing  
    Over the weedy stone--;  
Over and over it going:  
    It is never gone.

So joy on joy may go sweeping  
    Over the head of pain--;  
Over and over it leaping:  
    It will rise again.

("Picture Songs," i: I: 342  
iv: AC version, p. 208)

What is unusual here is that the tone of lingering  
**Sehnsucht** (intense longing, or yearning) is linked  
to the natural images only, and not raised through  
further analogy to any transcendant devotion to God.
This of itself separates the cycle from much of the rest of MacDonald's work, and links it more closely to Heine.

A dream mood, an emphasis on suffering and death, and simplicity of expression, certainly suggest MacDonald's German reading. But as well as in translations, and in such obviously related lyrics as "Picture Songs," these characteristics are also present in some of the poems written in the Scots vernacular. In order to understand the importance of these, however, it is necessary to consider first the significance of MacDonald's use of two languages.

VI. Scots Vernacular

For the last few hundred years, Scots poets have had to make a conscious decision as to what language they will write in. There are four choices: Scots vernacular; standard but acquired English; a blend of the two, i.e. what Douglas Young describes as "standard English with an infusion of conventional Scotticisms" (Scottish Poetry, p. 236); or a rather uneasy shifting from one language to the other in the same poem, in the manner of "Tam O'Shanter," in
which Burns reserves the English for the reflective portions of the work, and presents the narrative in Scots.

By the end of the eighteenth century, according to David Daiches, "the vernacular had established itself as a vehicle only for exercise in the mock-antique or for humorous or convivial or skittish or condescending verses;"¹³ a totally serious writer therefore, desiring a large readership, would feel himself almost forced into English, with all the difficulties attendant on using an acquired mode of expression. Young disparages equally all the choices, claiming that "Scots were enfeebled in their grip of Lallans and Gaelic without gaining any compensating power of utterance in standard English." His further gloomy allusion to the "impotence of poetry in Victorian Scotland, in any medium at all" (Scottish Poetry, p. 236), is surely an exaggeration. It is true, however, that Burns and lesser poets who continued popular in the nineteenth century were privileged chiefly by reason of their inclusion in song books (e.g., "Auld Robin Gray," "There's Nae Luck about the House").
In the second part of the century there were several writers who, at least from time to time, made the attempt to write seriously, for a British audience, in the language natural to them, rather than in English. But there seems always to be a self-consciousness, a sense of being not in the mid-stream but at the end of a line. Robert Louis Stevenson, perhaps the most competent technically, is also among the first to voice a lament which becomes increasingly familiar in Scots writers up to Hugh MacDiarmid. In the Preface to Underwoods (1887), a collection of poems divided into English and Scots sections, he writes of the latter:

Let the precisians call my speech that of the Lothians. And if it be not pure, alas! what matters it? The day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten; and Burns's Ayrshire, and Dr Macdonald's [sic] Aberdeen-awa', and Scott's brave metropolitan utterance will be all equally the ghosts of speech. Till then I would love to have my hour as a native Maker, and be read by my own countryfolk in our own dying language: an ambition surely rather of the heart than of the head, so restricted as it is in prospect of endurance, so parochial in bounds of space. 14

Stevenson handles the traditional verse-letter form
with great ease, employing it for conversation, description, and satire with equal facility. Far different from MacDonald, he regards himself and life with self-conscious and humorous irony, urbanely declining to go below the acutely observed surface of this world. But MacDonald's expressed feelings for the language went far deeper than Stevenson's, and his use of it was much more than a demonstration of nostalgic versatility.

It is true that from time to time he seems to adopt an English attitude towards the Scots vernacular; he was, after all, writing chiefly with English readers in mind. "I will not offend fastidious ears with any syllable of my rougher tongue," he wrote on the second page of Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood (1871), and later, of a ballad he had included, he says,

I am not going to spoil it by turning it out of its natural clothes into finer garments to which it was not born--I mean by translating it from Scotch into English.15

Even in Alec Forbes he refers editorially to "the slough of the vernacular" and "the abyss of [the]
mother-tongue," though here he may be obliquely attributing the phrases to the Anglicized mother in the story, rather than identifying himself with the readers.

In Donal Grant, however, he prefigures Stevenson in the tone of regret mingled with a recognized expediency:

... he could not see that anything was gained, while much was lost, by the gradual decay of sound Scotch in the country, and the replacing of it with a mere bastard English. But it was worth while to be able to speak good modern English; and he saw it was of no use to attempt withstanding the tide of growth. ... (DG, p. 21)

MacDonald wrote several short stories in the vernacular, which he subsequently incorporated into novels; otherwise, he used it only in dialogue. It is notable that where his English dialogue is frequently stilted, verbose, and sometimes unlikely, his Scots is almost invariably to the point, and marked by strong natural speech-rhythms. An excellent example is provided by Donal Grant, who for the greater part of Sir Gibbie speaks broad Scots, and is an interesting character. In its sequel, however,
he speaks "educated" English, and far too often becomes a long-winded impediment to the story.

Some found even this amount of the vernacular in his Scottish novels objectionable, one contemporary critic complaining of his "mania for making every one go out of their way to discourse in the very broadest Scotch."17 His American (pirate) publishers regularly modified or completely anglicized the dialogue (Bulloch, p. 683). But, justified artistically in his usage by the settings and characters of the novels, MacDonald naturally continued with it in the interests of realism.

Also, in spite of occasional deprecating remarks, he did feel very strongly the claims of his first language, partly for its associations with his childhood and youth, and partly for its nationalistic associations. As he wrote in a unique outburst:

But whether by ingle-neuk
On a creepie ye sookit yer thumb,
Dreamin, an' watchin the blue peat-reek
Wamle oot up the muckle lum,

Or yer wee feet sank i' the fur
Afore a bleezin hearth,
Wi' the curtains drawn, shuttin oot the toon--Aberdeen, Auld Reekie, or Perth,
It's a naething, nor here nor there;
Leal Scots are a' ane thegither!
Ilk ane has a hame, an' it's a' the same
Whether in clover or heather!

An' the hert aye turns to the hame—
That's whaur oor ain folk wins. . . .
("Hame," II: 413)

He also had an interest in the historical roots of
the language. He claimed, for example, that Beowulf
was "written in undeniable Scotch,"\(^{18}\) and asked rhe-
torically, "Had not Scotland a living literature, and
that a high one, when England could produce none, or
next to none—I mean in the fifteenth century?" (AF,
p. 107). Also, he frequently praised the Border bal-
lads, and credited Burns with teaching "not a little
the capabilities of his own language." Although he
termed "the Lowland Scotch . . . dry and gnarled,"
he immediately added

. . . the man who loves the antique speech,
or even the mere patois, of his childhood,
and knows how to use it, possesses therein
a certain kind of power over the hearts of
men, which the most refined and perfect of
languages cannot give, inasmuch as it has
travelled farther from the original sources
of laughter and tears.\(^{19}\)

In the novels some characters speak Scots, some
English. Roderick McGillis puts a high-minded inter-
pretation on this distinction of languages:

Dialect in the novels is, in itself, a means of communication, suggesting a purity of feeling associated with the pastoral virtues; in short, it is a language closer to the source of language, closer to nature, and ultimately closer to God. ("The Abyss," p. 45)

He points out that it is the language of deep feeling, and refers specifically to Alec Forbes, in which Alec tells Annie the story of his travels in book English, but speaks of his inner experiences, his dreams, his emotions, in Scots.

But it is surely just as likely that the depth of emotion—as well as the convincing verisimilitude—in the Scots dialogue comes from the fact that MacDonald felt at ease writing in it. His English characters and his Anglicized Scots speak a language that, however familiar it had become to him, was not his own mother-tongue. He himself spoke to the end of his life with a strong accent (Bulloch, p. 740), and it is not surprising that he could most convincingly convey the speech, and hence the emotions, of characters who spoke in the same way. McGillis is entirely correct in his conclusions only if one is considering
characters such as Annie Anderson and David Elginbrod. It must be pointed out that there is more than one highly disagreeable character, such as Annie's dishonest guardian, and at least one entirely wicked one, Babie Catanach, who use the vernacular just as consistently and vigorously as do the admirable characters.

One curious incident concerning Donal Grant is also of interest in this context. Having acquired English, he speaks it to Ginevra as a sign of respect, then turns to Fergus, his rival, and as a sign of contempt addresses him in the broad Scots both had spoken in their earlier years (Sir G, pp. 358-61).

It is true, however, that in his choice of languages something more than realism is involved, particularly in the poetry. To begin with, prose realism and poetic realism are not synonymous. The former aims at presenting recognizable scenes and characters firmly rooted in a material, external world, speaking in the authentic language of their condition. Poetic realism, for MacDonald, is synonymous with spiritual fact, or Truth, this latter
being one criterion by which poetry is judged. (This is discussed more fully in Chapter III.) When he writes that "it is easier to speak the truth in a patois, for it lies nearer to the simple realities than a more conventional speech" (AF, p. 107), MacDonald is bestowing the highest possible praise on the use of the vernacular, and inviting his readers to recognize the authenticity of the emotions presented in it. "To a poet especially it is an inestimable advantage to employ such a language for his purposes" (AF, p. 149). In the person of Donal Grant he describes the nature of the essential dichotomy:

He would use his mother-tongue in private for the high uses of life and spirit—for devotion and verse; would talk to his God and Saviour in the sacred mother-tongue, and write at least his songs in it; but would speak as good English as he could . . . doing his best to keep from mixing the two, and spoiling both. (DG, p. 22)

The easiest way to indicate some of the more obvious differences between his English and his Scottish poems is to read two on the same subject. Fortunately there is an instance where the one is actually a direct transcription of the other, though
which came first in actual composition would be impossible to say. The English version (of which the following stanzas are excerpts) is called "Zacchaeus."

The dwarfed Zacchaeus climbed a tree,
    His humble stature set him high;
The Lord the little man did see
    Who sought the great man passing by.

Up to the tree he came, and stopped:
    "To-day," he said, "with thee I bide."
A spirit-shaken fruit he dropped,
    Ripe for the Master, at his side.

Outspoke the man, in Truth's own might:
    "Lord, half my goods I give the poor;
If one I've taken more than right
    With four I make atonement sure!"

"Salvation here is entered in;
    This man indeed is Abraham's son!"
Said he who came the lost to win--
    And saved the lost whom he had won.
("Zacchaeus," I: 434)

The Scots version is called "The Coorse Cratur."
The stanzas corresponding to the above section are as follows:

The wee bit son o' man Zacchay
    To see the Maister seekit;
He speilt the fig-tree, bauld an' shy,
    An' sae his shortness ekit.

...
"Come doun, Zacchay; bestir yersel;  
    This nicht I want a lodgin."
Like a ripe aipple 'maist he fell,  
    Nor needit ony nudgin.

Up spak Zacchay, his hert ableeze:  
    "Half mine, the puir, Lord, hae it;  
Gien ought I've taen by ony lees,  
    Foursauld again I pay it!"

Then Jesus said, "This is the man!  
    His hoose I'm here to save it;  
He's ane o' Abraham's ain clan,  
    An' siclike has behavit!"

("The Coorse Cratur," II: 402)

Both poems are closely based on Luke 19: 1-10,  
but there the similarity ends. There is a briskness  
and a latent glint of humour in the second, as well  
as a keener visualization of the scene: "spirit-  
shaken fruit" becomes "like a ripe aipple," for ex-  
ample; "in Truth's own might" becomes "his hert  
ableeze." Also, the versification, with the double  
end-beat in the alternate rhyme lines, imparts a  
vigour lacking in the regular English lines. When  
one compares this poem with the final version of  
Heine's "Königskind," one sees how much the success  
of its stanza-form owes to the evocative and natural  
cadences of the vernacular.

Whether MacDonald, like his own Donal Grant,
wrote his first poems in Scots is a question which
cannot be answered, but his earliest poems extant
(provided by Greville) are in imitative and stilted
English. His first published work, **Within and Without**, is thoroughly English in language and concept,
and "A Hidden Life" (1857), though largely autobi-
ographical and completely Scottish in setting and
characters, is also presented in formal literary
English. But poems in Scots recur in the novels,
from 1864 (**The Portent**) on to 1893 (**Heather and
Snow**). Some were included in **The Disciple and Other
Poems** (1867), and a section of the **Poetical Works**, entitled "Scots Songs and Ballads," contains thirty-
eight poems.

These Scots poems fall into several categories.
Among others, there are ballads in the traditional
style (e.g. "The Yerl o' Waterydeck"), a few humor-
ous and mildly satiric poems (e.g. "The Waesome
Carl"), five so-called "Godly Ballants," several
songs (e.g. "When Andrew frae Strathbogie Cam"), and
some assorted distichs and quatrains. Not so easy
to label are those, essentially meditative, in which
an inner argument is externalized in a scene sug-
gesting dream, fantasy, or reverie (e.g. "Time and Tide"). These last are among the poems to which extended reference will be made in the last chapter.

When Ronald refers to "the slight difference between two modern variants of an immemorial tongue" (FANW, p. 105), and denies that there is any "categorical distinction" between the Scots and the English poems, his claim is easily refuted not only by MacDonald's own dicta, but by a comparative reading of the poems. The differences disclosed are more profoundly significant than philology alone would explain. Ifor Evans touches on this:

[His] Scots songs and ballads . . . have heartiness and rollicking movement seldom discoverable in his English verse. Like Stevenson, he seems, in his own tongue, to penetrate to some parts of his nature, humorous, satiric, which he can never release in English. (English Poetry, p. 310)

Humour and satire are certainly to be found, but they are not the only, or the most important, aspects of his nature to be revealed: the language releases usually concealed, or at least confined, emotions.

To sum up: the language of childhood is, according to MacDonald, the best mode of expression,
because it lies closest to the soul's realities. The poet who can use it is privileged, for it is the natural language of the two greatest modes of human expression, prayer and poetry. In consideration of these statements, a reader of MacDonald should regard attentively any poems couched in that language, as likely to reveal significant insights into his poetic and personal identity.

This is not to claim that all the Scots poems are closer to his inner life than any of his English poems, but to point out that the former are more likely to present his basic preoccupations. The use of the vernacular signals at least the possibility of a deep-rooted emotional complexity in a given poem.

VII. MacDonald's Reading

One further point should be made, so far mentioned only occasionally in passing. MacDonald's reading was remarkably wide and deep, as both Ronald and Greville attest, and as is obvious from the quotations and literary discussions scattered through his novels and essays. One finally feels
that he had read anything available, from the volumes of the Early English Text Society as they were issued, all the major and minor poets in German and English, and the mystics in both languages, to the best of current literature. A list of the authors he shows himself familiar with would occupy many lines, but Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Herbert, and Wordsworth would seem to be his most admired English authors, and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" his favourite poem. It is safe to say that if a book were of literary or spiritual value, he had in all probability read it. Ruskin, in 1865, wrote to him:

... if I had a son, I would rather he took lessons in literary taste under you than under any person I know, for you would make him more than a scholar, a living and thoughtful reader. (GMHW, p. 356)

This wide reading had an effect on his own writing. It is more often recognized in his fantasies, where it is clear how much he learned from the examples of Tieck, Fouqué, Hoffmann, and Novalis about the structure and mood of the Kunstmärchen (literary folk or fairy tale). The influence of
poets is more often to be seen in his style. His own style was not exceptionally distinctive— one recognizes his work more by its subject matter than by his mode of expression—and he had few notable mannerisms. He is, therefore, peculiarly vulnerable to the stylistic influence of poets he admired, and echoes of Tennyson, Milton, Herbert, and Wordsworth are among those most easily picked up.

Some at least of these must be deliberate, as in such Miltonic opening lines as "When I look back upon my life nigh spent" ("A Prayer," I: 321), and "Lawrence, what though the world be growing dark" ("To One Threatened with Blindness," I: 263). And he must surely have been aware of the Tennysonian reverberations in

I think that nothing made is lost;
That not a moon has ever shone,
That not a cloud my eyes hath crossed
But to my soul is gone.
("A Prayer for the Past," I: 283)

The conclusion of "A Hidden Life" (see above, Chapter One) certainly evokes the last few lines of the "Morte d'Arthur," both in its syntax and in its suggestion of sound gradually fading away to leave
a blank stage with one helpless observer.

Herbert, too, is often, one feels, in the author's immediate background of awareness, as in the image in "The Sweeper of the Floor" and in the form of "Dejection" (for both, see Chapter One). Sometimes MacDonald will imitate him even more openly:

Hope and Patience

An unborn bird lies crumpled and curled,
A-dreaming of the world.
Round it, for castle-wall, a shell
Is guarding it well.

Hope is the bird with its dim sensations;
The shell that keeps it alive is Patience.

(II: 138)

Occasionally he breaks into a metaphysical image, as in "Years are Christ's napkins to wipe off the tears," though not usually with conspicuous success, for such images seem deliberately conceived and grafted onto poems rather than proceeding naturally from them.

Basically, MacDonald writes on three stylistic levels, the most unattractive being that of colloquial familiarity, and one can partly excuse even such poems on the grounds that they occur in the
section "For Children."

My little dog, who blessed you
With such white toothy-pegs?
("Dr Doddridge's Dog," II: 182)

'Tis the nest of all the kisses,
With the mother kiss-bird sitting
All through Christmas, never flitting...
There's another on chin-chinnie!
Now its off, and lights on Minnie!
There's another on nose-nosey!
There's another on lip-rosy!
And the kissy-bird is hatching
Hundreds more for only catching.
("The Mistletoe," II: 152)

Totally different are his formal poems, such as "Light," with its archaisms and outworn solemnities:

First-born of the creating Voice!
Minister of God's spirit, who wast sent
Waiting upon him first, what time he went
Moving about mid the tumultuous noise
Of each unpiloted element
Upon the face of the void formless deep!
("Light," I: 272)

I have not, in the last few pages, been giving a very favourable impression of his poetry, but actually there are poems well worth attention, though often lost in the sheer bulk of his work. These are written in what might be termed his middle style,
neither mawkish nor elaborate. Consider this, for example:

O night, send up the harvest moon
   To walk about the fields,
And make of midnight magic noon
   On lonely tarns and wealds.

In golden ranks, with golden crowns,
   All in the yellow land,
Old solemn kings in rustling gowns,
   The shocks moon-charmed stand.
("Songs of the Autumn Nights," I: 366)

His best devotional poems are the simplest, in that "language of ordinary speech" advocated by Wordsworth, such as "Babe Jesus lay in Mary's lap" ("A Christmas Carol," I: 299), or this:

Up and Down

The sun is gone down
   And the moon's in the sky
But the sun will come up
   And the moon be laid by.

The flower is asleep,
   But it is not dead,
When the morning shines
   It will lift its head.

When winter comes
   It will die! No, no,
It will only hide
   From the frost and snow.
Sure is the summer,
Sure is the sun;
The night and the winter
Away they run.

(II: 159)

In such poems he is following his own dictum: "Simplicity is the end of all Polish, as of all Art, Culture, Morals, Religion, and Life" ("On Polish," ADO, p. 192). When, in this style, he deals with the least consoling aspects of death, or considers Time, and in particular when he does so in the Scots vernacular, he produces some of his most interesting work.
CHAPTER THREE: POETIC THEORIES

I. The Nature of Poetry

Like many other writers of the nineteenth century, MacDonald was interested in theories concerning both the origin, nature, and function of poetry, as well as in the character of the poet. Some of his conclusions can readily be found in earlier and contemporary writers, for he did not consider originality a virtue in itself. Nor was he concerned on the whole with analysing other works on poetic theory. He wished in fact only to make clear his own views. These are contained in two non-fiction works, England's Antiphon and A Dish of Orts, and in scattered comments throughout the novels and sermons. Holding that "no man is capable of seeing for himself the whole of any truth" ("The Imagination," ADO, p. 22), he was by no means satisfied that he had thoroughly explored the topics he introduced. In the Preface to A Dish of Orts he describes even those formal literary essays as "but fragmentary presentments of larger med-
itation" (p. v). But while it is true that he does not develop any sustained intellectual system, one can, by assembling the "fragments," make a fairly complete picture of his ideas. Reis finds these to be "sometimes striking, often profound, usually logical, and almost always interesting in themselves, quite aside from how they are embodied" (GMacD, p. 31). Parts of this evaluation are, as will be seen, questionable to a greater or lesser degree, depending partly on the congruence of the viewpoint of the reader with that of MacDonald. What is undeniable, however, is MacDonald's long-lasting involvement with the principal literary interests and speculations of his era.

It should be here noted that in this section I make no attempt at a comprehensive survey of nineteenth century critical writing. I merely intend, in the course of outlining MacDonald's views, to indicate through selected comparisons his indebtedness or resemblance to, or divergence from, some of the other commentators on poetic theory.

England's Antiphon (1874) is an attempt to trace the course of English religious poetry, and covers
(sometimes very sketchily) material from the thirteenth century to Tennyson. Predictably, MacDonald tends to judge the poets in the light of his own beliefs. What he approves of, he praises enthusiastically, and frequently with insight, and is cautious in expressing adverse criticism. Mingled with the specific conclusions on individual poets are more generalized comments on poetry itself.

_A Dish of Orts_ is a collection of nine essays originally published or delivered as lectures between 1853 and 1893, mainly on literary topics, e.g., "The Imagination," "Polish," "Wordsworth's Poetry."

These essays contain his lengthiest discussions of poetic creativity. Although they were written in different contexts for different audiences, in the interests of coherence it is useful to consider them and _England's Antiphon_ as a roughly unified series of statements, along with related comments in the other works. As was noted earlier, MacDonald did not materially alter any of his views in the course of his forty years as a writer, even though in the process of argument he may occasionally contradict himself.
The first point to be considered is his definition of poetry. There are, he asserts, two essential ingredients, the first of which is Truth, or Revelation (EA, p. 174). By Truth he means, as soon becomes clear, a recognition of God's relationship with man, and of man's relationship with God and his fellow-man. Nor is it enough for a poet simply to make statements about these: he must directly teach to his readers basic truths, conveyed in such a way that they will appeal to the ear, to the imagination, and to the soul—not, be it noted, to the intellect, for MacDonald feels that discussion and formal logic have no place in poetry:

Argumentation cannot of course naturally belong to the region of poetry. . . . People cannot think and sing: they can only feel and sing. (EA, p. 105 & p. 110)

Satire too has no place in true poetry, since it is "only the active form of negation:"

The right effort of the teacher is to give the positive—to present, as he may, the vision of reality, for the perception of which, and not for the discovery of falsehood, is man created. (EA, p. 171)
Surely if a man would help his fellow-men, he can do so more effectually by exhibiting truth than exposing error, by unveiling beauty than a critical dissection of deformity. ("Browning's 'Christmas Eve'," ADO, p. 196)

Poetry is the perfect vehicle for Truth, and Truth is "a very different thing from fact:"

... it is the loving contact of the soul with spiritual fact, vital and potent. It does its work in the soul independently of all faculty or qualification there for setting it forth or defending it. Truth in the inward parts is a power, not an opinion.¹

Poetry must be judged primarily by this criterion. As Donal Grant puts it:

"... the verra essence o' poetry is trowth, an' as sune's a word's no true, it's no poetry, though it may hae on the cast claes o' 't." (Sir G, p. 359)

Poetry, because it sets forth Truth, can therefore in its essence become the basis of all human principles. As the Vicar (MacDonald himself, thinly disguised) says to his daughter:

"I would make that liking of yours [for poetry] the foundation of all your work . . . . I think poetry the grandest thing God has given us."²
Elsewhere, poetry is seen not only as the gift of God to men, but also as an act of God. But where men use words as their medium, God uses as his medium the visible creation:

This world is . . . an expression of the thought, the feeling, the heart of God himself. ("Wordsworth's Poetry," ADO, p. 246)

The close relationship between God and poetry, referred to more than once, is perhaps most succinctly expressed in Paul Faber, when an atheistic doctor asks, "Suppose there be no God, what then?" And the young woman answers, "Then, I grant you, there could be no poetry" (PF, p. 104).

Just as true poetry derives from God, so also does the capacity to understand it. In that sense the poet and his reader are both divinely inspired to an apprehension of Grace, and are both acknowledging the real Creator. Asked what is meant by "good" poetry, a young woman answers:

"I think I know good poetry by what it does to me. . . . Sometimes . . . it makes me feel as if my heart were too big for my body; sometimes as if all the grand things in heaven and earth were trying to get into
me at once; sometimes as if I had discovered something nobody else knew; sometimes as if—no, not as if, for then I must go and pray to God."3

Truth, poetry, and appreciation, all come through the feelings, and their common origin is God. Though he investigates it in other contexts, here at least MacDonald ignores the significance of language as the medium that transmits the emotion from God to poet to reader.

Since the basis of all his poetic theory is theological, he neither debates nor more deeply analyses his own definition of Truth and its source, or his interpretation of its purpose. Either one accepts his initial premise, and hence may agree with the conclusions drawn from it, or one disagrees entirely from the start. If one cannot accept his theocentric interpretation of life, and the concomitant didacticism, then his definition of Truth has little validity as a criterion of poetry.

Other writers had also selected Truth as a chief characteristic of poetry, but with a different connotation. Keats linked it with beauty, Leigh Hunt with beauty and power. Wordsworth had referred
to "truth which is its own testimony," and Ruskin in 1856 had claimed that "Nothing [could] be good, or useful, or ultimately pleasurable, which was untrue." But whether or not their "truth" is closely synonymous with what Coleridge referred to as "verisimilitude"—that is, accuracy in description of emotions and objects, and universal applicability—MacDonald's Truth quite clearly and consistently refers to man's recognition of his loving obligation to his Creator.

Not even in devotional writers, where one might expect agreement, is MacDonald's concept of poetic Truth duplicated. Keble, for example, makes it equivalent to sincerity and accuracy of transcription of natural feelings, and would, furthermore, limit his requirements to the "Christian lyrist" (italics mine), apparently allowing other rules for secular poets. But MacDonald does not make any distinction between sacred and secular poetry. Indeed there can be no division, all poetry being for him, by definition, sacred. In this too he would seem to stand alone, for even Newman's insistence on "correct moral perception . . . [without which] there will be no
poetry, 7 is by no means the same as MacDonald's view that all real poetry, irrespective of subject matter, will inevitably express that Truth which comes from and leads to an awareness of God.

His definition of Truth is consistent with his belief and practise, and seems at first a reasonable criterion for defining poetry; but it is not particularly satisfactory if one starts not with the principle of Truth but with poetry itself, when it will readily be seen that there do exist types and categories of undeniable poetry which are outside his definition. But his second requisite of poetry—Music—being aesthetic, is one that would attract more general consent.

Music is in fact (as he points out) the characteristic first noticed in poetry. For this reason, he at times places it even before Truth in the appreciation of a poem:

The heart of poetry is indeed truth, but its garments are music, and the garments come first in the process of revelation. The music of a poem is its meaning in sound as distinguished from word—its meaning in solution, as it were; uncrystallized by articulation. The music goes before the fuller revelation, preparing
its way. The sound of a verse is the harbinger of the truth contained therein. (EA, pp. 174-75)

Music as the harbinger of meaning is sufficiently important to him that he repeats the point several times, with several variations. Here he begins to give the language and form the recognition which he later develops into a theory of the indissoluble link between sound and meaning:

[A spell is required] to produce the right mood for receiving and reflecting a matter as it really is. Every true poem carries this spell with it in its own music, which it sends out before it as a harbinger ... to prepare a harbour or lodging for it. But then it needs a quiet mood first of all, to let this music be listened to. (AQN, p. 183)

And again, in his essay "On Polish" he writes that

... the true music of a sentence, belonging as it does to the essence of the thought itself, is the herald which goes before to prepare the mind for the following thought. ... For complete utterance, music itself in its right proportions, sometimes clear and strong, as in rhymed harmonies, sometimes veiled and dim, as in the prose compositions of the masters of speech, is as necessary as correctness of logic, and common sense in construction. (ADO, p. 188 & p. 185)
The Music, however, does not control the thought, for it is the essential Truth which produces the Music, so that even inferior authors can on occasion do their part nearly as well as the great masters of poetry. Here he seems to suggest the Carlylean sentiment that if one is divinely inspired, then the form will take care of itself:

[They utter] a music of marvellous and individual sweetness, which no mere musical care could secure, but which springs essentially from music in the thought gathering to itself musical words in melodious division, and thus fashioning for itself a fitting body. (EA, pp. 146-47)

This essential relationship between poetry and music is often referred to in the novels, as in Robert Falconer:

"[Poetry] opens my een like music to something I never saw afore." (RF, p. 242)

A sweet tone is . . . a messenger of God; and a right harmony and sequence of such tones is a little gospel. (RF, p. 289)

Music . . . is poetry in solution, and generates that infinite atmosphere, common to both musician and poet, which the latter fills with shining worlds. (RF, p. 113)
Almost every writer on poetic theory includes Music as one of the important attributes, and sees it as a natural corollary of the meaning. "The harmony of the verse," wrote Newman, "is but the echo of the inward music which the thoughts of the poet breathe" (ECE, p. 252). "All inmost things," according to Carlyle, "... are melodious... See deep enough, and you see musically." He goes on to quote Coleridge as saying that "whenever you find a sentence musically worded... there is something deep and good in the meaning too" (ECE, p. 269). And Shelley, lifting the matter to a higher and still vaguer level, wrote that "[Poems are] the echo of the eternal music." 

Music, with other writers as with MacDonald, would seem to be a quality which cannot be deliberately induced, other than as the by-product of intense thought and feeling. With MacDonald the emphasis is in fact all on the latter. "The best way with music... is not to bring the forces of our intellect to bear upon it, but to be still and let it work on that part of us for whose sake it exists" ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, pp. 321-22). This
applies to the music of words as well as to the harmony of notes.

The main similarity between words and music, as MacDonald sees it, is that both can convey emotion alone, apart from any specific meaning. Neither should or indeed can be irrevocably linked to a single meaning. A sonata rouses in different auditors "related, if not identical, feelings, but probably not one common thought" ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, p. 318). Why then do we expect words to be limited by definite meanings, tied, as it were, to a single thought?

Words are live things that may be variously employed to various ends. . . . They have length, and breadth, and outline: have they nothing to do with depth? Have they only to describe, never to impress? Has nothing any claim to their use but the definite? . . . That may be strong in colour which has no definite outline. . . . The greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended. ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, pp. 318-19)

This passage, in which he shows clearly the importance he places on connotations, and the allowance he makes for individual emotional reactions rather than superficial stock responses, has significance when one is
examining his own poems.

To take an example: MacDonald's favourite parable was that of the Prodigal Son. "I will arise and go to my Father," he quotes repeatedly, in fiction and non-fiction prose. The Father is always loving, always forgiving, always inviting the return to his arms, in that home where everything is safe and loving, overflowing with true joy, with perfect trust and harmony between the forgiver and the forgiven. (This is a paraphrase of passages too many to cite.) The child will be made happy and good, if he will only return, for "the child-relation is the one eternal, ever enduring, never changing relation" (HoftheG, p. 161). We are called to the home which is the heart of the world, and of the universe. With this in mind, consider again the distich already quoted:

Come
Home.

Perhaps one needs to know MacDonald's personal and rich connotations for both words in order to appreciate why he called it "The Shortest and Sweetest of Songs." Whether a poem justifies its existence,
when the onus of interpretation is so completely put
on the reader, is another question.

The necessity of understanding MacDonald's deli-
cicate gradations of meaning is particularly evident
when reading poems involving dream-visions, or poems
of the imagination. With these, a consideration of
related prose passages, as well as of other poems,
helps to establish or clarify the meaning, particu-
larly in relation to his recurrent images. But that
he anticipated the inevitability of a certain degree
of private interpretation on the part of the reader
is shown by his comment, "I doubt if even the poet
ever works just what he means on the mind of his
fellow" (Wd & Wg, p. 213).

But Music is the key to a poem, for it will
lead us in and plunge us beneath its surface. To
be appreciated best, the Music must actually be heard,
and hence poetry is essentially an oral art:

A poem is a thing not for the understanding
or heart only, but likewise for the ear;
or, rather, for the understanding and
heart through the ear. The best poem is
best set forth when best read. ("Browning's
'Christmas Eve,'" ADO, p. 216)

In view of this, it is not surprising that so many
of the novels contain scenes of reading aloud, or reciting to one's self or to others. In *The Marquis of Lossie*, for example, Malcolm reads a poem aloud

... in order that he might get all the good of its outside as well as inside—its sounds as well as thought, the one being the ethereal body of the other. *(M of L, p. 200)*

The idea is carried further into metaphysics when he presently remarks that poetry should be "the informin' harmony o' [the] bein'" of a beautiful woman *(M of L, p. 205)*.

A poem then is seen as expressing Truth through the medium of a Music that is born of the words that convey that Truth. Though usually MacDonald states that Truth is paramount, yet he shows plainly that the two qualities are in fact indivisible, and since neither can exist without the other, his unstated conclusion would seem to be that the absence of one is a sure indication of the absence of the other. Perhaps this is a clue to his constant revisions of his own poems in the interests of smoothness.

MacDonald had no particular claim in most of his individual statements to originality; only the
way he combined the statements, and the theological emphasis that lay behind the whole theory, are his own. But he had given a good deal of thought to the matter. The fact that, in addition to the essays, he refers so often in the novels to aspects of poetic theory, gives an indication of the interest it held for him.

Before turning to his remarks on the nature of the Poet, it is interesting to note the way in which these two attributes are not only illustrated but shown in action in his fictional writings. In the novels, poetry is introduced naturally: that is, someone in the book is a poet, who recites or reads or allows to be read what purport to be his own compositions. The poem can be assumed to show the character of the writer (Mr Cupples, in Alec Forbes, for example, whose verses indicate a sensitivity concealed at first by his rough, blunt speech); or, by their reaction to the verse, the poem shows the character of the reader or auditor (Mrs Cathcart, in Adela Cathcart, by every critical comment shows her philistine materialism). But it is to the fantasies one looks for a demonstration of the meta-
physical power of poetry that bears out MacDonald's theories concerning poetic inspiration and influence.

Basically, poetry has three functions, all magical, and all capable of allegorical interpretation. It can, at least temporarily, control evil: Curdie drives away the goblins by singing his improvised rhymes (*The Princess and the Goblin*); Mr Raven forces Lilith to reveal herself, much against her will, and temporarily subdues her by the incantation of his verse (*Lilith*). Then, by making the hearer reflect, poetry can raise him spiritually: through the Wise Woman's song-chant Rosamond is forced to consider her own failings and their undoubted consequence (*A Lost Princess*); Curdie is strengthened for his mission by the Grandmother's song because it is "so beautiful and true and lovely."\(^{10}\) Lastly, poetry imparts life and soul: Anodos brings the invisible statue to view, then to life, by the power of his song; and later, the girl's song breaks open his prison-tower, and frees him from his Shadow (*Phantastes*).

It will be noted that the Music here is actual melody, not a literary quality of the verses. In
fact, in Curdie's songs there is very little verbal music, they being on the whole nonsense rhymes strung together to vex the goblins, who hate poetry because "they can't sing themselves . . . and they don't like other people to sing"\textsuperscript{11}--a statement with profound implications, in MacDonald. The Truth for them is simply in the existence of a rhythm and order that is opposed to the discordant violence of their natural dispositions. In the other examples cited, however, the Truth is in the content of the poem, which, conveying a moral or spiritual fact, is indeed indivisible from the Music.

II. The Nature of the Poet

MacDonald's definition of the poetic nature is the logical sequence to his conclusions concerning the general characteristics of poetry. Here too he is in agreement with many other writers who deal with the Poet in the abstract, such as Wordsworth, who describes him as being like other men, only

endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness . . . a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than . . . common among
mankind; ... [he] rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life. ... (ECE, p. 14)

MacDonald's definition of a Poet is more inclusive than this, for he believes, with Carlyle, that a man may be a poet in character and understanding without necessarily giving proof of it in verse. Given his own views, MacDonald may well have arrived at this independently: or he may even have drawn it from Wordsworth's "The Excursion:"

Oh! many are the Poets that are sown By Nature; men endowed with higher gifts, The vision and the faculty divine; Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse. (ll. 77-80)

The gift of such a man is expressed entirely in his way of life. Greville writes:

... [M]y father used to say that all men are poets; for, though perhaps they cannot write poetry, they can listen to it, hunger for it and love it. So that a poet is just more of a man than most. (GMHW, p. 541)

The MacRuadh in What's Mine's Mine, and the elder Cosmo in Warlock o' Glenwarlock, are examples of such beneficent and affective minds. Such are chiefly
limited, as compared to a creative poet, in that they influence only the people whom they know. Such men intuitively understand poetry—as David Elginbrod does, though largely uneducated—but they do not write it, and in fact true reader and true poet have everything in common except the faculty for expression.

In presenting the character of the Poet, therefore, MacDonald is actually describing, on the whole, what in his opinion every person could and should be. Carlyle also, it may be noted, did not distinguish in essence between the creative poet and the appreciative poetic nature:

A vein of Poetry exists in the hearts of all men. . . . We are all poets when we read a poem well. . . . All Poets, all men, have some touches of the Universal. . . . (ECE, p. 259)

The fact that in the novels MacDonald presented stupid, vulgar, cruel, and dishonest people, does not contradict the above view, for he believed also that if such people do not change for the better in this world, they will do so, but only through great torment, in the next.
MacDonald believed that a poet (or, more properly, a person of a poetical nature) was someone able to fulfill with loving joy his own inclination, his duty to his fellow men, and his service to God. His character would be formed early in life, partly as a gift of God, partly as a result of his natural and human environment:

The poetic influences which work on the shaping fantasy are chiefly felt in youth, and hence the predominant mode of a poet's utterance will be determined by what and where and amongst whom he was during that season. (EA, p. 103)

At this time, too, is established "that love of homeliness which is characteristic of all true poets" (EA, p. 221). He fully endorsed Wordsworth's theoretical and practical preferences for "incidents and situations from common life," in which one traces "the primary laws of our nature" (ECE, p. 4). Newman and Keble, among others, agreed with this view, and Ruskin elevated it to a gauge of innate superiority:

The higher the mind, it may be taken as a universal rule, the less it will scorn that which appears to be small and unimportant.
The operative word to MacDonald would be **appears**. "I begin to doubt whether there be the commonplace anywhere except in our own mistrusting nature," he writes in *Thomas Wingfold* (p. 209), and refers elsewhere to "Lovely, lowly, common things" (*Wild Flowers," I: 337). As Rolland Hein remarks,

> He sees a glory and a cause for wonder in all the simple, unsought feelings of man, and he is earnestly concerned that they all be related to goodness. (*Harmony*, p. xii)

But though the saving perception of the ordinary and the love for it run together, more than these are necessary to make the creative poet. As MacDonald says of one of his characters: "He had but the half the poet's inheritance—he could see: he could not say" (*RF*, p. 185). Like this same character, whose "whole mind was flooded with a sense of sunny wealth," any man of honest emotion and tender insight can feel. "Nature put into the crucible of a loving heart becomes poetry" (*Wordsworth's Poetry," *ADO*, p. 256). But the man who can actually express these feelings has his own particular reward; only he experiences "immeasurable joy." MacDonald
here in fact seems to be verging on a proto-Orwellian proposal, namely, that all poetic natures have equal joy, but creative poetic natures have more equal joy than others.

This joy has nothing to do with being published, becoming famous, or even being read. Nor does he make any distinctions between good and bad poetry, refusing altogether in this context to consider literary judgment. "To the man's self the utterance is . . . invaluable" (Th W, p. 219, italics mine). This idea, found in various novels, is of prime importance to MacDonald, though he presents it with somewhat tangled reasoning:

Any gift of the nature of poetry, however poor or small, is of value inestimable to the development of the individual, ludicrous even though it may show itself, should conceit clothe it in print. The desire of fame, so vaunted, is the ruin of the small, sometimes of the great poet.13

The poet whose poetry is little to him without an audience, must indeed, whatever his poetry may be in the judgment of any audience, be but little of a poet in himself. The poetry that is no good to the man himself, cannot be much good to anybody. (DG, p. 161)

It is a ruinous misjudgment . . . that the end of poetry is publication. Its true end
is to help first the man who makes it along the path to the truth: help for other people may or may not be in it. . . . To the man who has it, the gift is invaluable; and, in proportion as it helps him to be a better man, it is of value to the whole world. (Sir G, p. 149)

These three quotations, considered separately or in conjunction, illustrate perfectly the confusions that MacDonald was apt to create when attempting to unite an intuitive series of reflections, rather than presenting a rational and developed theory. Actually, he conveys his point more clearly, because more briefly, in an exchange between an educated lady and a plowman poet:

"What was the good of writing it, if no one was to see it?"
"The writing of it, ma'am."14

What is also clear to him is that a man should not earn his living, or attempt to, through the writing of poetry, for that would be "a misuse of his calling from Heaven" (HA, p. 243):

I would have the poet earn his bread by the sweat of his brow—with his hands feed his body, and with his heart and brain the hearts of his brothers and sisters. . . . Not a stroke of [his] pen will have to go
for dinner or a pair of shoes. Thoughts born of the heaven and the earth and the fountains of water, will spring up in [his] soul, and have time to ripen. (HA, p. 305 & p. 307)

MacDonald himself lived up to this precept, for he wrote prose to support his family, poetry to satisfy himself, and looked forward to the time—never attained—when he could devote himself to poetry alone (GMHW, pp. 468 & 518). It is a somewhat ironic comment on his theory, that he himself is now known almost entirely for a small portion of his prose output, and his poetry, which he considered expressive of the Truth of God, is read hardly at all.

Though he wrote that "[t]o imitate is to repudiate our own being" (WD & WG, p. 169), he was convinced that originality in the usual sense is also of no importance in or to a poet. Originality must lie primarily in the fact that the poet expresses only his own true self: a poem should be the natural blossom of the human heart and soul. When Donal Grant remarks, "The rose is the freedom of the rose-tree" (DG, p. 577), the statement can be understood as a botanical paraphrase of Wordsworth's psychological description of poetry as "the spontaneous over-
flow of powerful feelings" (ECE, p. 6).

For MacDonald, originality of theme is actually an impossibility, for the poet is not so much inventing (except in the Latin sense of finding out) as freeing a concept that already exists; thus he is only an agent, a transmitter, not a creator. As Wilfred Cumbermede says, "My poems were given to me rather than made by me."\(^{15}\) The point that no one ever originates an idea by his own powers is the theme of a later poem:

\begin{verbatim}
Will strongest cannot wake a song!
It is no use to strive or long
To sing with them that have a song. . . .
(HA, p. 311)
\end{verbatim}

At most, one can "make ready the place for its birth" ("The Imagination, ADO, p. 5). Or, as the earlier-mentioned plowman-poet explains it:

I write because I want to tell something that makes me glad and strong. I want to say it, and so try to say it. Things come to me in gleams and flashes, sometimes in words themselves, and I want to weave them into a melodious, harmonious whole. I was once at an oratorio, and that taught me the shape of a poem. . . . [Handel] was filled . . . with the music itself. It was crying in him to get out, and he heard it crying, and could not rest till he had let it
out; and every note that dropped from his pen was a chip struck from the granite wall between the song-birds in their prison-nest, and the air of their liberty. Creation is God's self-wrought freedom. \(\text{T}EL, \text{pp. 208-09}\)

For himself MacDonald claims an even more markedly passive receptivity:

A Cry

Lord, hear my discontent: all blank I stand, A mirror polished by thy hand; Thy sun's beams flash and flame from me-- I cannot help it: here I stand, there he! To one of them I cannot say, Go, and on yonder water play; Nor one poor ragged daisy can I fashion-- I do not make the words of this my limping passion! If I should say, Now I will think a thought, Lo, I must wait, unknowing What thought in me is growing, Until the thing to birth be brought! Nor know I then what next will come From out the gulf of silence dumb: I am the door the thing will find To pass into the general mind! I cannot say I think-- I only stand upon the thought-well's brink: From darkness to the sun the water bubbles up-- I lift it in my cup. Thou only thinkest--I am thought; Me and my thought thou thinkest. Nought Am I but as a fountain spout From which thy water welleth out. Thou art the only one, the all in all.-- Yet when my soul on thee doth call And thou dost answer out of everywhere, I in thy allness have my perfect share.

(II: 214)
It is one of the stumbling-blocks in the way of outlining his theories, that he is apparently able to hold views which, if not mutually exclusive, are to a certain extent contradictory. Elsewhere he had written that the true creative poet "isolates and re-presents" the meanings he recognizes in the physical world, so that the readers see not what nature shows to [them], but what nature has shown to him, determined by his nature and choice. With it is mingled therefore so much of his own individuality, manifested both in this choice and certain modifications determined by his way of working, that you have not only a representation of an aspect of nature, as far as that may be with limited powers and materials, but a revelation of the man's own mind and nature. (TSP, p. 197)

That he believes this last statement is shown in his comments on specific poets scattered through the novels, and in parts of England's Antiphon. Even more significantly for the student of his works, he believes the principle in reverse: "When we have known and talked with the poet, we understand his poetry far better" ("Wordsworth's Poetry," ADO, p. 256).

On the whole, in the theoretical statements
at least, he prefers to think of the poet as a "mirror," who will see things as much more than themselves, and will trust in what his words mean, rather than in what they say, as did Rob of the Angels in his stories of heavenly visitants (WMM, p. 206). For the true poet—and the true reader—is one whose heart, not merely his eye, mirrors what he sees—one who not merely beholds the outward show of things, but catches a glimpse of the soul that looks out of them, whose garment and revelation they are. (WMM, p. 8)

It is this "glimpse of the soul" which counts, beyond personality, or narrow hope of originality; for much of the strength of poetry lies, MacDonald feels, in the recognition of the fact that "he is a poor poet . . . who does not know there are better things than poetry" (HA, pp. 108-09).

What really matters in fact is that poet and reader must recognize the existence of the only perfect, truly original, creative mind. "O Lord God," says Mr Walton at the ruins of Tintagel, " . . . thou art the one poet, the one maker" (TSP, p. 363).
And since God's poetry is written not in words but in his creations, it is through a loving study of nature that we read His works: "I believe that every fact in nature is a revelation of God."16 (Here, incidentally, and in many similar comments, MacDonald's profound and acknowledged indebtedness to Boehme's De Signatura Rerum is revealed.) Hence the human poet, possessing what MacDonald refers to as "surface impressibility" (DE, p. 130), must be deeply responsive to the influence of nature. "According to what a man is capable of seeing in nature, he becomes either a man of appliance, a man of science, a mystic, or a poet" (EA, p. 264). This last is obviously best; for the poet, recognizing, understanding, and delighting in the world around him, re-creates his total experience in a way that can bring his own insight to the minds of others. Nature is his starting point and his constant reference point, for only through it can humanity be apprehended:

All that moves in the mind is symbolized in Nature. . . . the world is a sensuous analysis of humanity, and hence an inexhaustible wardrobe for the clothing of human thought. (ADO, "The Imagination," p. 9)
No thought, human or divine, can be conveyed from man to man save through the symbolism of the creation. . . . the outermost husk of creation has correspondence with the deepest things of the Creator. (US, 3rd Series, p. 31)

Again it must be stressed that there is no need here to debate the basically mystical and theological premises of MacDonald's theories; they can only be noted, and shown to fit logically (or not) with the rest of his ideas, and with his own practise.

Wordsworth had early stated that we acquire "spontaneous wisdom" from nature in order to teach us more about man (see, for example, "The Tables Turned,") or to enable us to "see into the life of things" ("Tintern Abbey"); but with MacDonald, everything must be experienced by reader and poet alike with direct reference to God:

The outflowing of spirit in nature is received by the poet, and he utters again, in his form, what God has already uttered in his. ("Wordsworth's Poetry," ADQ, p. 250)

The basis of the attraction of nature is not beauty, as such, but rather a recognition of the sympathetic understanding between man and the rest
of creation, an idea which MacDonald indicates by his choice of language to derive from St Paul:

The highest poetic feeling of which we are now conscious springs not from the beholding of perfected beauty, but from the mute sympathy which the creation with all its children manifests with us in the groaning and travelling which look for the sonship. (AC, p. 236)

Ideally, everything we see and hear should "wear the glamour of God's imagination which is at once the birth and the very truth of everything," for everything is moving upward in its reaching out towards God, in a rising scale of sentience. It is unlikely that MacDonald believed, along with Boehme and Novalis, in a literal metempsychosis from stone to tree to fish to bird to beast to man, although he certainly believed in a comparable spiritual ascent (see, for example, Lil, p. 211); but he expressed the close unity of all aspects of creation that such a belief would imply.

This unity in aspiration will help guard us against mistaking nature for an end in itself; the things of nature exist "only for the sake of what they say to us" (WMM, p. 294). "The essential de-
light of this world seems to me to lie in the expectation of a better" (Wd & Wg, p. 623). However much we learn to love nature, we must not love it disproportionately:

... if we were right with God, we could see the earth vanish and never heave a sigh; God, of whom it was but a shimmering reflection, would still be ours! (WMM, p. 237)

Greville quotes his father as saying that the poet can translate the words of nature "so that all who are not over-fed with self-esteem can understand" (GMHW, p. 541). There are, of course, some men who need no such intermediary as the poet—"More and more," says Mr Walton in The Seaboard Parish, "nature becomes to me one of God's books of poetry" (TSP, p. 141)—but most people do need the poet, either to delight them with a musical affirmation of what they already at least in part know, or to turn their thoughts the right way. Paradoxically (and illustrating yet again MacDonald's predilection for circular argument), some inkling of nature's purposes and possibilities, or at least curiosity concerning them, is needed before an understanding of poetry
can begin. Of two girls who saw only "the poor facts" of nature, MacDonald writes: "It was small wonder then that verse of any worth should be to them but sounding brass and clanging cymbals" (WMM, p. 289).

It is clear why MacDonald insists that "the calling of a poet . . . must come from heaven" (HA, p. 243), clear also why none of his central characters lacks poetic sensibilities. Not to be appreciative of poetry, not to recognize the poetry of nature, is at best to be unawakened, and at worst stubbornly and miserably turned in on Self.

If on the spiritual level every true poem is a lesson, then every true poet is a teacher. This MacDonald saw as his own chief function, feeling that through poetic teaching he fulfilled his need and his duty. But this could also occur on the direct, personal level, and many characters in the novels are shown actually instructing. Speaking through one of these MacDonald says:

I had always had an impulse to teach; not for the teaching's sake, for that, regarded as the attempt to fill skulls with knowledge, had always been to me a desolate dreariness; but the moment I saw a sign of hunger, an indication of readiness to re-
ceive, I was invariably seized with a kind of passion for giving. (AQN, p. 298)

Because in MacDonald's view the appreciation of poetry is the necessary basis of spiritual understanding, all those in the novels who teach begin by presenting to their pupil for his close attention a single poem to read and re-read until the light of its significance begins to break. Coleridge, Milton, and Wordsworth are the poets most commonly chosen. The "intensest delight" is felt in "leading a mind up to see what it was before incapable of seeing" (WMM, p. 219). These scenes of teaching illustrate at some length MacDonald's view that the basic purpose of poetry is not to give pleasure (thus opposing, among others, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Schiller, and Pater) but to impart Truth of a kind that stems from and leads back to God. As Mr Walton, reading poetry aloud to his village-parishioners, says:

I thought with myself, if I could get them to like poetry and beautiful things in words, it would not only do them good, but help them to see what is in the Bible. (AQN, p. 183)

Thus a good man learns and teaches through
other men's poetry, as well as through his own apprehensions of nature. If gifted with powers of expression, he becomes a creative poet. The false poet, on the other hand, is one who has "nothing to tell men that could make them braver, stronger, purer, more loving, less selfish" (HA, p. 226). His worship of "the imaginative intellect" will produce only an "insipid and enfeebling flow, the mere sweat of weakness under the stimulus of self-admiration" (HA, pp. 23-4). A character of this description, who had forced and displayed his own talents before he knew his own self, finally admits:

I have been but a false poet--a mask among poets, a builder with hay and stubble, babbling before I had words, singing before I had a song, without a ray of revelation from the world unseen, carving at clay instead of shaping it in the hope of marble. (HA, p. 245)

Walter's sin was his dependence on intellect, for which MacDonald had as little use as did Wordsworth, both emphasizing instead the heart and the soul. For both, "the meddling intellect" is the lowest attribute of the human mind, and can be a definite hindrance to poetry and to salvation. "We spoil count-
less precious things by intellectual greed" ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, p. 322). Both also had a high opinion of the superior spirituality of certain children and of idiots. Some of the saintly figures in MacDonald's prose, such as Steenie and Rob of the Angels, are actually mentally deficient, and others, such as Gibbie and Diamond, are considered so by impercipient neighbours.

The question of the morally depraved poet, incidentally, never comes up with MacDonald, as it does at times with other writers. Newman, for example, felt that "in proportion to the standard of a writer's moral character, will his composition vary in poetical excellence" (ECE, p. 246), and that "the poetry of a vicious mind will be inconsistent and debased." Charlotte M. Yonge, some years later, declined to allow a profane mind (as she considered Byron's) to interpret nature to her through his poetry. But MacDonald resolved the issue a priori by simply denying that such a mind could produce poetry at all.

III. Theory and Practise

There are aspects of MacDonald's poetical the-
ories which have not been touched on in the preceding sections (e.g. "poetry includes science," *ADO*, p. 256), but the outline may be sufficiently complete to make possible some comments on the applicability to his own work of the main points he raises. First to be considered are his two requisites for poetry: Truth and Music.

In his writings he repeatedly brings to the reader's attention his own constant awareness of the presence and overwhelming importance of God, to whom all emotions are almost invariably referred; his regard for Nature as a visible manifestation of God's mind; and his sense that he himself has a didactic mission to spread knowledge and awareness of God's fatherly love. If reiteration induces conviction, then certainly the reader must be convinced, if not of the Truth itself as MacDonald defines it, then at least of MacDonald's belief in it. (There is, in fact, nothing in his work or in his life to suggest the kind of semi-conscious hypocrisy which Wolff attributes to him.) In his poetry he is writing with precisely the principle in mind which he had stated was the basic essential of true poetry: his poems
spring from, and delineate, Truth.

Not many would agree with him that Music is the product of Truth. Belief, choice, or even will have surely less to do with it than ability and perseverance. Judging by his own acute attention to the sound of his lines, and his repeated revising and polishing, he was probably more aware of this fact than his critical writings indicate. But what is obvious is that, consciously and to the best of his ability, he was fulfilling his own criterion. That he did so successfully is attested to by the contemporary praise for the smooth-flowing quality of his verse.

Seldom indeed does one discover a line that is not harmonious. This is, however, chiefly in the sense that there is satisfactory elision of sounds and compliance with the demands of metre, for subtler harmonies were apt to elude him. In spite of his obvious appreciation of the union of sound, sense, and rhythm in other poets, and particularly his sensitivity to the kind of irregularities he terms "broken music," he himself rarely produced a line or passage which captures the reader through this means. Though his lines are musical, few are memorable. Occasionally
one strikes ear and imagination simultaneously (e.g., "The water mutters Spanish in its sleep," but such are unusual. What do remain in the mind are usually whole scenes, or moods, or confrontations, rather than any individual verbal felicities.

He published only one original experiment with Music, emphasizing form rather than sound. First included in At the Back of the North Wind (1870), the poem appeared in the Poetical Works (II: 191) slightly enlarged and revised, under the title "No End of No-Story." It consists of one unpunctuated sentence two hundred and thirteen lines long, which has no apparent conclusion, but simply stops. Its rambling effect—sixty lines begin with "and"—is misleading, for it is in fact a highly structured piece, with a pattern that appears to be based on that of a fugue. It begins:

There is a river
whose waters run asleep
run run ever
singing in the shallows
dumb in the hollows
sleeping so deep
and all the swallows
that dip their feathers
in the hollows
or in the shallows
are the merriest swallows
and the nests they make
with the clay they cake
with the water they shake
from their wings that rake
the water out of the shallows
or out of the hollows
will hold together
in any weather
and the swallows
are the merriest fellows
and have the merriest children. . . (ll. 1-22)
each little fellow
with a beak as yellow
as the buttercups growing
beside the flowing
of the singing river
always and ever
growing and blowing. . . (ll. 44-50)
and the wind that blows
is the life of the river
that flows forever. . . (ll. 159-161)

As in a fugue, there are subject, counter-subject,
digressions, and repetitions with tonal and modal
variations. All are developed in irregular but cyc-
lical form, so that, with recurring phrases, lines,
and groups of lines, all parts become progressively
more closely linked thematically with the central
statement. It ends with the swallows

that do not know
whence the wind doth blow
that comes from behind
a blowing wind

(11. 210-213)
The metrical, syntactical, and logical intermeshings are complete, with the allegory, by a metaphysical transposition, taking over the original literal voice of the first statement of the subject. In fact, the more closely one analyses the structure of the poem, the more amazingly, and competently, complex does it prove. Its flow suggests ripples extending from an intermittently welling centre, always covering the same territory yet constantly enlarging the scope.

It would be gratifying to say that the poem "by witchery of sound and magic of phrase . . . rouse[s] receptive mood" (HA, p. 46). Certainly in form it is highly original, fascinating even; but unfortunately it is far too long, and it is difficult to listen sufficiently to realize first what MacDonald is doing (form), and secondly what he is so indirectly conveying (theme). Diamond's mother stops reading it to him on the grounds that it is "such nonsense," 20 and the reader of the poem is more likely to agree with her than to perceive in it, as Diamond dreamily does, the river of paradise, the wind of God, and the swallow building her nest "even
[on] thine altars, O Lord of Hosts." And it is curious, in a poem which so closely follows a specific musical form, that there is so little verbal music. As is unfortunately the case with many of MacDonald's poems, it remains vaguely unsatisfactory. But as an illustration of his preoccupation with Music, and his willingness to experiment, it is unique.

MacDonald set up two criteria for poetry, and in the abstract there seems nothing wrong with them. Even in his own day, however, his definition of Truth would by many be seen as narrowly restrictive, and even wilfully blind to the existence of poetry outside its range. But, according to his own definitions, he fulfilled these criteria in his own work. Why then, broadly speaking, is it not on a higher literary level than it is? The answer to this demonstrates simultaneously some of the omissions in his theory, and the weaknesses of much of his poetry.

As mentioned earlier, he did not consider giving pleasure a primary purpose of poetry, and made no concessions to the common desire to experience such pleasure. Keble, in 1825, had written with straightforward common sense that
Those who . . . desire in earnest to do good by the poetical talent. . . . must veil, as it were, the sacredness of the subject . . . and so deceive the world of taste into devotional reading . . . or else . . . they must be content with a smaller number of readers. (ECE, p. 210)

There is nothing in MacDonald's most characteristic pieces to "deceive the world of taste." He does not reflect that when the purpose of a poem is basically didactic, those most in need of its Truth are those who must be induced to read it. Those who do find pleasure in its Truth are probably those least in need of its teaching. MacDonald's views in fact sound rather like the doctrine of the Elect, vigorously rejected in his theology, but in slight disguise resurgent in his poetics.

Certainly in his own time his poetry was widely read, but the proportion among the public who felt a personal interest in specifically Christian verses was considerably higher then than now. This limitation of subject matter is of course one of the reasons why he fails to attract modern readers. Moreover, his preoccupations with spiritual states and religious experiences, whether contemporary or drawn
from Bible narratives, precludes the presentation of characters for the sake of their human individuality. If one compares "The Widow of Nain" (I: 231) with Browning's "An Epistle of Kharshish," it is immediately obvious how much MacDonald loses, poetically speaking, by considering his characters exclusively in terms of their relationship with God.

It might be mentioned here, incidentally, with reference to the modern reader, that certain stylistic characteristics apt to jar must be accepted as common to the time at which he wrote, even when they seem excessively indulged in. He was particularly prone, for example, to inversions:

In the hot sun, for water cool
She walked in listless mood:
When back she ran, her pitcher full
Forgot behind her stood.
("The Woman of Samaria," I: 237)

He also makes use of archaic filler words: alack, hark, lo, ah (yes! or no!), methinks, and frequently employs "thou" as a form of address, with appropriate verb endings. But there is nothing, however artificial it may sound, that could not be matched in almost every other nineteenth-century poet. It is
not such practises which deter the modern reader, but a much more basic characteristic.

He does, of course, rely on a fairly narrow selection of emotions on the whole, and basically he might be said to have only one theme, but the real deficiency is a lack of intellectual intensity. It is true that Wordsworth had prized and cultivated emotions before intellect, but in spite of his rejection of the latter, in his better poems he revealed both. MacDonald deeply admired him, and certainly followed his example in wanting to raise simple anecdotes and homely feelings to transcendental levels, but one need only compare, for example, "Resolution and Independence" and "The Sheep and the Goat" (I: 416) to discern the difference in achievement. Adherence to Truth, and a smooth style, do not supply insight, or provide the variety of consistent reflection essential to mature poetry. By illustrating his own theories, he demonstrates the weakness inherent in such limited reasoning.

That he was at least partially aware of this want of intensity is shown in a small but revealing aspect of his many revisions: his preference for
the exclamation point increased, superceding previous periods, colons, or even commas. He had of course always used it in legitimate apostrophe ("O splendid bird!" "O Lilia!"), but a comparison of the early and final versions of various poems shows him very often substituting the stronger pointing in unnecessary and even irrelevant places, in an effort, I feel, to add emphasis to basically unemphatic or unpersuasive statements. (The same tendency, incidentally, begins to show in the later novels, Donal Grant being the first to demonstrate excessive liberality.) It is a conspicuously spurious device for giving a statement an appearance of intensity which internally it lacks:

A thicker night, with gathered moan!
A dull dethroned sky!
The shadows of its stars alone
Left in to know it by!
("A Book of Dreams," I: 392)

The silence of traitorous feet!
The silence of close-pent rage!
The roar, and the sudden heart-beat!
And the shot through the true heart going,
The truest heart of the age!
And the Nile serenely flowing!
("To Gordon, Leaving Khartoum," I: 444)

Another characteristic, linked with this lack
of intellectual force, which makes his poetry on the whole verbally unmemorable, is his lack of discrimination in the choice of words. Very few epithets have that inevitability combined with insight that produces the notable phrase or line. Far too often prayer is "soaring," the moon is "misty," the night wind is "drear," the morning is "fair," the blast is "roaring," and so on. His diction is in fact so often commonplace that a fresh and unexpected usage is almost startling, as when he describes a hedgehog's face as "helplessly innocent" ("A Hidden Life," I: 140), or speaks of "earnest water" ("New Year's Eve," II: 261). He does occasionally bring a poem to a most effective conclusion through just such a judicious choice, as in "He Heeded Not." Here he describes a small boy in the Manchester slums tending his drunken father in the street. He questions how the child can ignore the man's "simmering rage," and the brawling of "an aged crone, with bloated look," who stands close by. Could the boy be deaf?

Or came in force the happy law
That customed things themselves erase?
Or was he too intent for awe?
Did love take all the thinking place?
I cannot tell; I only saw
An earnest, fearless, hopeless face.
("He Heeded Not," I: 413)

The whole closely-observed scene is brought to a strong conclusion in the last three adjectives, the third unexpectedly expanding the scope of the poem to suggest the future, while re-enforcing the particular moment of encounter. The same sort of effective closure is shown in "Summer Nights," the descriptive poem quoted earlier.

MacDonald does not mention selectivity, discrimination, or perspective, either in his general remarks on poetry, or in his description of the Poet. Indeed, he does not discuss any literary abilities at all, or refer to taste or judgment, for to him spiritual awareness is mysteriously sufficient endowment for the poet: a man becomes a great poet by virtue of his goodness. If he carried his argument to its conclusion—which he does not—he would not distinguish in literary merit between, say, Adelaide Anne Proctor and Christina Rossetti, or between William Faber and Henry Vaughan. The limitations of this viewpoint are self-evident.
Also, he hampers himself by his almost total limiting of his work to positive emotions and firm conclusions. I do not mean that he should have written worldly poetry; but Arnold's comment that "Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken / From half of human fate" applies even more forcefully to MacDonald. There are, after all, emotions besides triumphant rejoicing and hortatory optimism which can be investigated from a Christian point of view. Herbert is a case in point: his works demonstrate the variation in tone, and the sense of perceptibly arriving at expansive conclusions, which are so often wanting in MacDonald.

So far as the spiritual and moral character of the Poet is concerned, he himself does—to judge by his writing and by those who knew him—largely reflect the ideals he praises, though if he ever felt he did possess such a character, he would be grateful to God, in all humility. Whether his poems benefit uniformly from the nature of their creator is quite a different matter.
IV. Fancy and Imagination

So far, in dealing with MacDonald's theories of poetry, I have said nothing about the distinction he makes between Fancy and Imagination. His interest in defining the two terms certainly originates in Coleridge, whose influence, as Prickett remarks, "underlies almost every part of his critical essays." However, though they agree entirely in one point, in making Fancy on the whole of less ultimate value to the poet and of a lower origin than Imagination, they differ significantly in certain essential parts of their definitions.

MacDonald places his emphasis exactly where one would expect in view of his ideas concerning the nature of poetry, and the character of the poet. Coleridge had identified the primary Imagination with the individual intellect as it perceives the world through the senses ("a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM"), and related the secondary Imagination to "the conscious will . . . [which] struggles to idealize and to unify." MacDonald, however, considered what he calls the Creative Imagination to be altogether the action
of something other than human which uses the human mind as its medium; it is, in short, an aspect of the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Since "[t]o inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination" ("The Imagination," ADO, p. 2), nothing enters the human mind which has not first existed in the mind of God. The poet opens himself to the influence of God's thoughts, and the sole purpose of the Imagination is to enable him to realize his apprehensions. (This is more or less what he was saying in "A Cry," quoted earlier.) The poet has no difficulty in putting shape to what he receives: "[H]e has but to light the lamp within the form; his imagination is the light, it is not the form," says MacDonald in his essay "The Imagination" (ADO, p. 5), and adds a footnote that apparently removes the poet even further from any personal decisions or indeed responsibility for his work:

We would not be understood to say that the man works consciously even in this. Oftentimes, if not always, the vision arises in the mind, thought and form together. ("The Imagination," ADO, p. 5)

Imagination, then, is to MacDonald the faculty
for embodying God's thoughts in some art form. This being so, it is obviously impossible for any artist to express more than God means him to convey. On the other hand, he may very well convey more than he himself consciously intends, since "he was dealing all the time with things that came from thoughts beyond his own" ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, p. 321). As he puts it in The Diary of an Old Soul: 23

Sometimes I say a thing I did not mean,
And lo! 'tis better, by thy ordered chance,
Than what eluded me...  
(DOS, September 10)

The poet in fact may not be sufficiently advanced, spiritually speaking, to recognize the full significance of all levels of his own work, for with God "there is layer upon layer of ascending significance" ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, p. 320). The poet is an aeolian harp for the wind of God's word to play upon; his best contribution is his willing receptivity. This image of the harp, so effectively used by Coleridge, is a favourite of MacDonald's, and can relate to the reader of the poet's works as well as to the poet himself. Interestingly in this regard,
he introduced into Donal Grant a literal wind-harp, whose random chords have the symbolic implication of enlightenment and spiritual freedom.

It seems to me that this theory of the Imagination goes far to explain the relative bloodlessness and impersonality of so much of MacDonald's verse. To let God speak through him, he must suppress, or at any rate not encourage, his own voice, and, by so doing, he leaves unspoken many of his own emotions. To re-create his experiences of human weaknesses, ambitions, negative emotions, or even to cultivate a strongly individualistic style, would make him an imperfect instrument. One might say that he would consider himself like a wind-harp that insisted on banging its frame against its support so as to obliterate the sound of the wind in its strings. This is admittedly carrying the image beyond his actual statements, but certainly not taking it beyond his implications. A determined adherence to this view of the workings of the Imagination could well explain his comparatively narrow range of emotions, and his frequent lack of stylistic distinction.

Another image which he uses in describing the
Imagination, one as popular with Romantic writers as the wind-harp, is that of the mirror. In The Diary of an Old Soul he wrote:

For our Imagination is, in small,
And with the making-difference that must be,
Mirror of God's creating mirror; all
That shows itself therein, that formeth he. . . .
(DOS, August 27)

He made this analogy (which, as M. H. Abrams shows at length, was one of the commonplaces of Romantic poetic theory) as early as Phantastes (1857):

What a strange thing a mirror is! and what a wondrous affinity exists between it and a man's imagination! For this room of mine, as I behold it in the glass, is the same, and yet not the same. . . . All its commonness has disappeared. The mirror has lifted it out of the region of fact into the realm of art; and the very representing of it to me has clothed with interest that which was otherwise hard and bare. . . . art . . . appealing to the imagination, which dwells apart, reveals Nature in some degree as she really is, and as she represents herself to the eye of the child, whose everyday life . . . meets the true import of the wonder-teeming world around him, and rejoices therein without questioning . . .
(Ph, pp. 112-13)

In "A Cry," he himself was the mirror in which God's light could reflect or refract the image, but here
the mirror is turned towards the poet, so that, not unlike the Lady of Shallott, he sees life defined by its borders. This seems not far from Coleridge's Secondary Imagination, idealizing and unifying what it apprehends. But where Coleridge sees the process as "essentially vital," the outstanding quality MacDonald finds in the gazer is his passivity. Once he looks in the mirror the world is changed for him, irrevocably, and without conscious volition on his part. Uncharacteristically, there is no mention of God in the passage quoted above, but only for reasons related to its context: it is a story read in Fairy Land, concerning an enchanted mirror. But another supernatural mirror, in Lilith, is the door into the "world of seven dimensions," and Mr Vane's experiences there lead him to the foot of the throne of God.

In two places only does MacDonald suggest that there is also an Imagination that does not originate in or lead to God, and in both he does so obliquely. In a strangely emotive chapter in Wilfred Cumbermede he describes a mechanical pendulum device which Wilfred, then a young child, is afraid to play with,
having "a dim dread of exercising power whose source and extent were not within my knowledge" (WC, p. 11). When he finally sets it swinging, it seems to him responsible for the ensuing violent wind and storm, and a galloping horseman whom he identifies with the Prince of the Power of the Air (WC, p. 26), whose approach actually does signal his moral danger and his possible destiny. Terrified, he wraps the device in the bed-clothes, but cannot stop its motion. Wolff sees in this episode nothing more than a covert description of masturbation (TGK, pp. 268-70). To me it seems rather to be a symbolic representation of the dangers of what might be termed the unhallowed Imagination, particularly when it is deliberately invoked through a desire for power; the results of such wilfullness can be both wild and wayward. MacDonald could very well have derived his metaphor of the pendulum from a sentence in E. T. A. Hoffmann, with whose works he was well acquainted:

. . . the imagination of the reader, or listener, should merely receive one or two more or less powerful impulses, and then go on swinging, pendulum-like, of its own accord.25
Much the same effect of sombre warning is given in Phantastes, when Anodos, ignoring advice and following an "irresistible desire," enters the house of the ogress. She interrupts her reading aloud of the nihilistic Book of Darkness long enough to tell him not to open a certain cupboard door.

"The prohibition . . . only increased my desire to see" (Ph, p. 69). He discloses a narrow dark passage ending in a prospect of the night sky; a dark figure presently runs down it, and emerges to lie behind him as his shadow, but partially autonomous, whose company thereafter he cannot escape. It spoils and mocks every good or beautiful person or object he sees, for it is his lower self, given life and power through his own intellectual curiosity and spiritual arrogance. "Everything, henceforward, existed for me in its relation to my attendant" (Ph, p. 72). The poet, as MacDonald has described him elsewhere, recognizes the beauty in everything in creation, for everything is a manifestation of God's loving power, but the Shadow destroys for a time even the desire so to enjoy the world. Now Anodos rejoices in his "realistic" materialism:
I now began to feel something like satisfaction in the presence of the shadow. "I need his aid to disenchant the things around me. He... shows me things in their true colour and form. ... I will not see beauty where there is none. I will dare to behold things as they are. And if I live in a waste instead of a paradise, I will live knowing where I live." (Ph, p. 75)

But MacDonald does not dwell willingly on what is wrong unless to show by contrast what is right. These two admittedly oblique references to a misuse of Imagination are not paralleled by any straightforward passages in the essays or the novels; and when he discusses the Fancy, he neither states nor implies the existence of any negative qualities that might be associated with it.

While Imagination comes from without, Fancy works from within the poet. It is the faculty which "at most embroiders the buttonholes" of the garment fashioned by Imagination ("The Fantastic Imagination," ADO, p. 315). The direct work of the poet himself, it is inferior simply because it is his own work. MacDonald drew this distinction in an early novel:

Fancy settles upon anything; half destroys its form, half beautifies it with something
that is not its own. But the true creative imagination, the form-seer, and the form-bestower, falls like the rain in the spring night, vanishing amid the roots of the trees; not settling upon them in clouds of wintry white, but breaking forth from them in clouds of summer green. (AC, p. 284)

In Sir Gibbie he makes a further, if somewhat contradictory, comparison, for there he seems to be suggesting that a man's basic nature is indeed the source not only of his fancies but of at least the quality of his "imagination:"

Imagination is a poor root, but a worthy blossom. . . . For no outcome of a man's nature is so like himself as his imaginings, except it be his fancies, indeed. Perhaps his imaginations show what he is meant to be, his fancies what he is making of himself. (Sir G, p. 211)

In the first quotation, Imagination waters the roots of the tree whose foliage is Poetry. In the second, the roots are apparently the care of the Poet (the exercise of free will, as it were), and the blossom of his tree is not Poetry but Imagination. The confusion, not untypical of MacDonald's theoretical pronouncements, is relatively minor, for one can unite the statements by considering their purport rather
than their images: in other words, by gratefully accepting what comes from God, and with the help of Fancy, we can through the power of Imagination envision the Ideal.

Elsewhere he indicates even more clearly that the Fancy, though the lesser faculty, should not be dismissed as trivial, for Fancy has its own ability to stimulate the Imagination: "Many a true thought comes out by the help of a fancy or half-playful exercise of thinking-power" (EA, p. 257). A deliberate, self-conscious playfulness is therefore not only permissible but desirable. This view explains the inclusion in the Poetical Works of such poems as "The Wind and the Moon." This is not, as one might reasonably expect, in the section entitled "Poems for Children," but in "A Threefold Cord." It begins:

Said the Wind to the Moon, "I will blow you out!
You stare
In the air
As if crying Beware,
Always looking what I am about:
I hate to be watched; I will blow you out!"
("The Wind and the Moon," II: 352)

In prose, Fancy is well illustrated by the short story "The Light Princess," which opens with a tor-
rent of puns, and, preserving throughout a tone of mildly sportive irony, is yet capable of minor didactic interpretation. It, too, is included in a work for adults. This is undoubtedly the quality commended by Jean Paul Richter, an author MacDonald admired, who termed it "spielender Unterricht," or playful instruction.26

One might sum up these definitions and explanations by saying that while Fancy is useful and desirable, Imagination is essential to the writing of poetry. The poet must abandon himself to the workings of God's intentions; the less he tries to shape for himself, the closer the images he recreates will be to God. Since we are least in conscious control of our thoughts and associations in dreams, we are when sleeping most open to the promptings of God. Dreams are therefore of the utmost significance, for they can be revelations. Some of this he expresses in a passage in The Diary of an Old Soul:

What has been, shall not only be, but is.
The hues of dreamland, strange and sweet and tender,
Are but hint-shadows of full many a splendour
Which the high Parent-love will yet unroll
Before his child's obedient, humble soul.
Ah, me, my God! in thee lies every bliss
Whose shadow men go hunting wearily amiss.
Now, ere I sleep, I wonder what I shall dream.  
Some sense of being, utter new, may come 
Into my soul while I am blind and dumb——  
With shapes and airs and scents which dark hours teem,  
Of other sort than those that haunt the day,  
Hinting at precious things, ages away  
In the long tale of us God to himself doth say.  
(DOS, April 5, 6)
CHAPTER FOUR: THE OTHER DIMENSION

I. Dreams in Prose

As Alethea Hayter points out, Romantic writers in Germany and England revered dreams not only for their moral and psychological importance, but also as aesthetic experiences of intrinsic value. They were uniquely interested ... in the manifest content, the actual happenings and appearances of dreams, as well as what these stood for.¹

It may therefore have been partly through the example of other writers—Jean Paul, Novalis, and Hoffmann in particular—that MacDonald came to include so many dreams in his novels. But even apart from their literary use, he had a lasting interest in their content and implications. Speaking in his own person, in one of his children's books, he writes:

That night [Diamond] had a very curious dream which I think my readers would like to have told them. They would, at least, if they are as fond of nice dreams as I am. (ABNW, p. 241)
And in the largely autobiographical account of childhood and adolescence, *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood*, he says, "I have a suspicion that my oldest memories are of dreams" (*RBB*, p. 4). He seems to have felt, too, that the authenticity of a dream was a matter of importance, for on one occasion he expressly informed his readers that a particular dream was not an invention:

Some of the readers of this tale will be glad to know that the passage with which it ends is a real dream; and that, with but three or four changes almost too slight to require acknowledging, I have given it word for word as the friend to whom it came set it down for me. (Prefatory Note to *There and Back*, p. v)

No one can read MacDonald's prose at any length without becoming aware of this deep and persistent interest in dreams. Sometimes, as in *What's Mine's Mine*, a character will narrate a dream for an entire chapter, interrupted occasionally by comments from his auditor(s), after which they all discuss the dream. Sometimes, as in *At the Back of the North Wind*, a whole chapter consists only of a dream, and for the rest of the book it is barely alluded to. Sometimes (this is most frequent) only a paragraph
or so is given to the dream, which may or may not be discussed by the dreamer and those, if any, who hear of it. But whenever a dream is related, no matter how casually it is introduced, or how carelessly it is dismissed, it is in some way relevant to the theme of the book, even though it may appear to be an intrusion on the plot.

Everyone who has tried to relate a dream to someone else has experienced the difficulty of turning what in its totality is indescribable into intelligible words. As MacDonald says, through a fictional character:

In telling my—neither vision nor dream nor ecstasy, I cannot help it that the forms grow so much plainer and more definite in the words than they were in the revelation. Words always give either too much or too little shape. . . . (WC, p. 484)

He had, however, a more than ordinary interest in trying to contain his dreams within the limitations of words, and to describe them as exactly as he could, for to him they were of profound personal importance. Reis remarks:

He thought that dreams may suggest to us something of the nature of the afterlife;
therefore, he apparently examined his own dreams carefully and took from them whatever peculiarities struck him. (GMacD, pp. 103-04)

Thanks to his discursive style and his preoccupation with metaphysics, one finds comments on the state of dreaming as well as on actual dreams in the majority of his novels, and occasionally in the poetry. For example, after mentioning one of Heine's "strange ghost-poems, so unreal in everything but feeling, and therefore, as dreams, so true," he writes:

They seem to me to hold the same place in literature that our dreams do in life. . . . Some dreams like these, in poetry or in sleep, arouse individual states of consciousness altogether different from any of our waking moods, and not to be recalled by any mere effort of will. All our being, for the moment, has a new and strange colouring. We have another kind of life. I think, myself, our life would be much poorer without our dreams. . . . For I believe that those new, mysterious feelings that come to us in sleep . . . are indications of wells of feeling and delight which have not yet broken out of their hiding-places in our souls. (AC, pp. 209-10)

Good dreams, moreover, are similar to other aesthetic experiences in their effects:
Some dreams, some poems, some musical phrases, some pictures, wake feelings such as one never had before, new in colour and form—spiritual sensations, as it were, hitherto unproved. (Lil, p. 198)

MacDonald believed in the truth of dreams in a variety of ways, all of which he exemplifies in his writings. As vehicles of factual disclosures that affect the plot of the enclosing novel, they are relatively unimportant. Certainly Cosmo, in Warlock o' Glenwarlock, sees the old dead Captain going through a wall, and later indeed finds a lost door where his dream had shown him one; and Robert, in Robert Falconer, dreaming of his long-absent father, rightly understands it to mean that the latter is still alive. But this type of dream is to MacDonald the least significant, the one most easily dismissed: interesting to the superficial life of the dreamer, but not relevant to his real (i.e., his spiritual) life. Through Polworth, in Thomas Wingfold, he explains where the emphasis should lie:

"Pray do not . . . imagine me a believer in dreams more than in any other source of mental impressions. If a dream reveal a principle, that principle is a revelation, and the dream is neither more nor less
valuable than a waking thought that does the same. The truth conveyed is the revelation. I do not deny that facts have been learned in dreams, but I would never call the communication of a mere fact a revelation. Truth alone, beheld as such by the soul, is worthy of the name. Facts, however, may themselves be the instruments of such revelation." (Th W, p. 173)

Even though some dreams are mere drifting fancies, MacDonald particularly warns that we should take care not to dismiss them all as such, for

... some dreams are truer than the plainest facts. Fact at best is but a garment of truth, which has ten thousand changes of raiment woven in the same loom. Let the dreamer only do the truth of his dream, and one day he will realize all that was worth realizing in it—and a great deal more and better than it contained.
(WMM, p. 46)

All good dreams come from God as a gift. Though they refer us to our own hidden depths of spiritual awareness, they yet seem to have an objective reality of their own. As the boy Harry says in David Elginbrod, "I never dream dreams; the dreams dream me" (DE, p. 368). Dreams worth remembering will not be forgotten: "When a dream does us good, we don't forget it" (WMM, p. 236). And the continuing effect of a good dream is described at the end of a later novel:
The glad thought awoke that I had the
dream—a precious thing never to be lost
while memory lasted; a thing which nothing
but its realization could ever equal in
preciousness. I rose glad and strong, to
serve with newer love, with quicker hand
and readier foot, the hearts around me.
(T & B, p. 634)

Dreams are in a sense nothing less than a manifes-
tation of the divine Imagination, as described in
the last chapter.

In a curious interior dialogue near the end of
Lilith, MacDonald, while acknowledging the psycho-
logical and physiological factors which shape the
dream, makes them only a part of what is ultimately
a spiritual experience:

In moments of doubt I cry,
"Could God Himself create such lovely
things as I dreamed?"
"Whence then came thy dream?" answers
Hope.
"Out of my dark self, into the light of
my consciousness."
"But whence first into thy dark self?"
rejoins Hope.
"My brain was its mother, and the fever
in my blood its father."
"Say rather," suggests Hope, "thy brain
was the violin whence it issued, and the
fever in thy blood the bow that drew it
forth.—But who made the violin? and who
guided the bow across its strings? . . .
Whence came the fantasia? and whence the
life that danced thereto?" (Lil, pp. 419-20)
Or, as he puts it less poetically elsewhere, "Dreams will do no hurt, but foster rather the ideal" (W-o'G, p. 71). This elevating of the dreamer's aspirations is much more important than the possible literal truth of dreams.

In the world of his novels MacDonald often used dreams as a metaphor, or allegorical presentation, of a character's complex state of mind. I have chosen one particular example, in Wilfred Cumbermede, to illustrate this type of dream-disclosure, but there are many others equally expressive, and as effectively used.

Wilfred dreams of Mary, the girl he loves; she, misunderstanding his character, has rejected him. Taken in sequence, the dreams form a running commentary on one phase of Wilfred's emotional history. In the first dream, searching for his love, there named Athanasia, he follows a veiled figure (self-identified as Death) down into subterranean darkness, then through a door into brilliant light. Unveiling, the figure reveals herself as his

lost Athanasia! . . . she stepped out upon the flowing river . . . and left me alone
in the dark hollow of the earth. I broke into a convulsive weeping, and awoke. (WC, p. 341)

This accurately reflects his conscious state of paralysed misery. It also delineates the imperfect balance in his mind between his knowledge of her rejection of him, and his determined belief that she is herself as immortally faithful in her nature as his name for her suggests. She moves away on the river of time; he is left in the grave-womb. To interpret all the possible associations would, though lengthy and complex, nevertheless be highly rewarding for any serious commentator on the novel.

After hearing of her marriage to a wealthy man whom he has reason to mistrust and dislike, Wilfred dreams of her again: basically the same dream, but with hideous differences, for in showing herself weak and morally stained, she has belied her name:

Through palace and chapel and charnel house, I followed her . . . and when at last she lifted the shining veil, instead of the face of Athanasia, the bare teeth of a skull grinned at me from under a spotted shroud, through which the sunlight shone from behind, revealing all its horrors. (WC, p. 478)
Wilfred, as well as the reader, recognizes his dreams as a restatement in emblematic form of what he already knows about his relationship with Mary, and of what he is unwilling to know about himself. Though he rarely interprets his dreams explicitly, he shows his acceptance of their symbolism by repeating them in a particular context, and at the same time re-inforces our understanding of the factual level of narration, as related to his character.

By seeing that he himself is "a poor creature," at last he can forgive her. "How could I bear her one poorest service? . . . I would be a true man for her sake . . . I would once more rise and go to my Father." (WC, p. 481). Having made this decision, he finds it impossible to convey other than obliquely the change in himself:

My relation to Mary resolved and re-formed itself in my mind into something I can explain only by the following--call it dream: it was not a dream; call it vision: it was not a vision: and yet I will tell it as if it were either, being far truer than either. (WC, p. 483)

No longer disguised as the veiled Athanasia, but with her own name and her true appearance, Mary, like
Wilfred, rests on an arm of God. Though widely separated from her, Wilfred knows "that the heart of God was a bridge, along which I was crossing the unspeakable eternal gulf that divided Mary and me" (WC, p. 484). She remains unaware of him, yet he feels that she is his. Then his "old self" revives; becoming assertive, he wants to do more for her. Immediately, he wakes in anguish. But he holds to the image of the dream, and even when he hears later that she is a widow, he is able to leave the outcome of their relationship to the will of God. The book ends with the factual love-story still unresolved, neither Wilfred nor the reader knowing whether he will marry her, and neither even sure he wants to. The dream, with its revelation of their eternal relationship, succeeds as no other device could in making any human conclusion irrelevant.

But sometimes in the novels a dream is introduced for no reason essential to the plot or to the understanding of any fictional character. Arguably, the dream may be intended as a device to stimulate the reader into considering some spiritual truth suggested, even though very remotely, by the novel
as a whole. Such is John Smith's dream of a graveyard with its idealized busts (which he himself has carved) of those he loves. When the dead arise as living people, miserable, commonplace, greedy, and he feels that now he has truly lost them, a redeeming figure restores to them their ideal nobility, and they revert to marble. "I had entered the secret places of my own hidden world by the gate of sleep, and walked about them in my dream," says John Smith (AC, p. 421). It is the most personal remark he makes in the whole book, for up to this point he has been a shadowy and insistently spectatorial narrator, and nothing has suggested he is capable of such a dream, or such a reflection. It comprises the concluding pages of Adela Cathcart, but, having no contextual significance other than that of an unexpected closure, could equally have been introduced into almost any of the other novels. One might argue that MacDonald intended to provide an analogue to this novel about a sick girl who listens to a series of stories that, by stimulating her atrophied spiritual nature, improve her health: but the connection is tenuous, to say the least. The dream is told to
no one; even the dreamer is not affected by it. It is simply an imaginative assault on the emotions of the reader.

Again, in Thomas Wingfold, the tale of the Wandering Jew (a sort of dream-vision attributed to a deceased insane brother) has no distinct reference either to Polworth, who reads it aloud, or to Wingfold, who listens to it. It is introduced, rather awkwardly, as an illustration of the horrors inherent in immortality if it were to mean no more than endless human life. But though Wingfold has many spiritual problems, fear of extinction at death is not one of them. The tale is intended to stimulate the reader, not the fictional character. The interpolated chapters are well written, but one cannot help feeling that the tale was included because MacDonald happened to have it on hand.

These dreams so far mentioned are ascribed to human characters in a realistic setting, and they are plainly labelled "dreams." But Phantastes and Lilith go much further in their presentation of dream-as-allegory, for in both books the whole narrative belongs to and derives from the dream world.
These fantasies develop their plots and present individual scenes with the peculiar logic, the heightened emotions, and the distortions of natural laws which are inherent in vivid dreams:

In [Phantastes and Lilith] Fairy Land is a realm found only in the subconscious; and the texture of the tale, despite clear narrative, suggests a dream, in the way the images lunge at and fade from the eye.²

Both books can in fact be interpreted as taking place entirely in the minds—conscious and sub-conscious, waking and dreaming—of their narrators. Seen this way, the events are projections of the inner life, advancing in prolonged, sequential dream-images that only omit to mention "I slept" and "I dreamed." As a dream-fantasy, with profound paradox at its basis, Lilith in particular is brilliantly conceived. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the dialogue, especially that between Mr Vane and Mr Raven; they converse with a fascinating para-logic that suggests Alice at large in the world of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, with Boehme as her White Knight.³

All the dreams, of whatever length, are well told, and of interest in themselves. Even in the
form of interpolated narration by a character, they have the qualities of the self-contained fantasies. For W. H. Auden, MacDonald's delineation of dreams is his highest literary achievement:

His greatest gift is what we might call his dream realism, his exact and profound knowledge of dream causality, dream logic, dream exchange, dream morality . . . the illusion of participating in a real dream is perfect. [4]

But Wolff denigrates MacDonald's emphasis on dreams, and obviously sets little store by his statement that "... if it is a good dream, it must be God's" (Wd & Wq, p. 600). Wolff claims that "[d]reams offered a way of escape from life," for, although he concedes that they "enabled MacDonald to say things he could not otherwise have said," he relates their use basically to what he repeatedly terms MacDonald's escapism (TGK, pp. 372-73). He feels that MacDonald, along with certain German Romantics such as Hoffmann and Novalis, defended "poesy, imagination, and dream" against "realism and reality," and leaves no doubt as to which he prefers.

I would say, with Reis and Auden, that all the Romantic writers mentioned, and certainly MacDonald
himself, saw dreams not as a means of evading reality in its ordinary sense, but as a means of experiencing an alternative and preferable spiritual reality. Novalis, in a statement quoted by MacDonald in both Phantases and Lilith, had written: "Unser Leben ist kein Traum, aber es soll und wird vielleicht einer werden" (Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one).

This ambivalent shifting between worlds is dramatically presented at the conclusion of both fantasies. Anodos hears the old woman, whose cottage in Fairy Land lies foursquare, speaking to him in the murmurs of the beech tree on his estate, and he knows he need only have patience, for he will eventually return to the other reality. Mr Vane is in a more confused state, for he is still not sure, at the end, whether his life in this world is a dream he is experiencing while sleeping in the house of Adam, or whether his sojourn in Adam's world was all a dream he experienced while in this one, or how much may be a dream within a dream. He, too, must wait for the awakening, to know the truth. It is possible that MacDonald had in mind Grillparzer's play Der Traum, ein Leben (1834), in which the stage is bisected by a curtain at right
angles to the audience. Each side represents a different life, and is occupied alternately by the same characters. Reality is whichever side of the curtain they happen to be on. The other side, whichever it may be, is remembered only as a dream. But as Anodos says, when he feels the kiss of a long-dead ancestor, and the clasp of an unseen hand, "The veil between, though very dark, is very thin" (Ph, p. 180). The curtain, or veil, is lifted in sleep, for "the mind, in the quiescence of its consciousness . . . comes into a less disturbed contact with its origin, the heart of the creation" (WC, p. 401).

II. Dreams in Poetry and Prose

In the poetry dreams are introduced much as they are in the novels, though on the whole without the accompanying editorial commentary that makes it possible to understand MacDonald's attitude towards dreaming. There is one exception: he does not bring into poetry at all the factual dream conveying information. He does, however, make quite extensive use of the non-literal narrative, starting with his
earliest published work, *Within* and *Without*. For example, Julian says, as he writes to his wife, "I'll tell her that strange dream / I dreamed last night" (*W & W*, I: 107), and does so for the next hundred lines. But it is a slack-toned account, with little emotive persuasiveness:

And now I saw and knew the woman-shapes:
Undine clothed in spray, and heaving up
White arms of lamentation; Desdemona
In her night-robe, crimson on the left side;
Thekla in black, with resolute white face. . . . (etc)  
(*W & W*, I: 107)

Even earlier, he had written "A Dream Song" (dated 1842), but that seems more like a would-be prophetic outburst than a genuine dream (I: 344).

Of more interest in this context is the two-part sequence of twelve poems entitled "A Book of Dreams" (published 1857). One aspect of continuing significance is the distinction he makes between dream and the state which elsewhere is referred to as reverie:

Sometimes, in daylight hours, awake,
Our souls with visions teem
Which to the slumbering brain would take
The form of wondrous dream.  
(Part I, iv: I: 385)
Some dreams, in slumber's twilight, sly
Through the ivory wicket creep;
Then suddenly the inward eye
Sees them outside the sleep.

(Part II, iv: I: 396)

This state he described in The Vicar's Daughter as
"an odd kind of feeling . . . as if a dream had
wandered out of the region of sleep, and half-possessed [the] waking brain" (TVD, p. 56). Sometimes
it came of itself, as when a field of "broken rush
and reed" momentarily appeared full of gigantic
broken statues: "A host of marble Anakim / Shattered
in deadly fight" (I: 397). But it could also, ap-
parently, be induced, through deliberate fantasizing:

Once more I build a dream, awake,
Which sleeping I would dream,
Once more an unborn fancy take
And try to make it seem!
Some strange delight shall fill my breast,
Enticed from sleep's abyss,
With sense of motion, yet of rest,
Of sleep, yet waking bliss!

(Part II, vi: I: 399)

These poems are a strange mixture of subject
matter and settings. Some stem from recollections
of childhood scenes, some are romantic visions, some
originate in "very common things" such as wildflowers
and sheep-bells. One of the most effective presents
a traditional tableau from a new viewpoint:

Dreaming I slept. Three crosses stood
High in the gloomy air;
One bore a thief, and one the Good;
The other waited bare.

A soldier came up to the place,
And took me for the third. . .

"Ah me, my hands! the hammer's blow!
The nails that rend and pierce!
The shock may stun, but slow and slow,
The torture will grow fierce."

(Part I, v: I: 387)

Unfortunately the whole sequence terminates rather plaintively, with a disappointing anticlimax:

Faint and far off the stars appear;
The wind begins to weep;
'Tis night indeed, chilly and drear,
And all but me asleep!

(Part II, vi: I: 399)

From a literary standpoint these dreams are on the whole better than Julian's somewhat pretentious recollections, and yet (though the subject-matter is promising) they lack the atmosphere and the associational complexity of even the earliest prose dreams. The remarks on dreaming itself are also, compared to the prose comments, shallow, and refer only to MacDonald's own immediate techniques of inducing
reverie rather than to his philosophy of dreaming. From these poems alone one would not guess how essential to spiritual living he felt good dreams to be.

"Somnium Mystici" (in the 1867 collection) is a much more effective effort, blending the sensations and emotions of delirium, reverie, and dream into conscious longings and apparently unconscious associations. There are suggestions of Dante in its imagery and structure, an impression deliberately reinforced by the use of terza rima. It is, in a minor way, almost impressively solemn. But he deliberately shatters the mood in the last stanza, by suddenly reducing the whole dream-world to nothing more than a literary device: "Lord, I have spoken a poor parable" (II: 64). There are no such jarring elements in the prose dreams. Although they are often told with allegorical intent, they are never denied their own objective reality. Moreover, acknowledged dreams are invariably handled in the prose with more sensitivity, and better sustain a convincing atmosphere, than those in the poetry. Where the prose can be richly evocative, the poetry tends to
banality.

The dream-poems of this self-identified type also lack another attribute which contributes to the effectiveness of the prose dreams. Those in the novels are ascribed to characters whom the reader has already learned to know, and in whom he may be presumed to take an interest; they are usually intended to reveal the hidden psyche of the dreamer. But the dream poems in which MacDonald is himself the narrator are in this respect like the dream of John Smith, or the tale of the Wandering Jew, already alluded to. They are intended to induce some sort of spiritual reflection in the reader, not to increase our knowledge of the dreamer. Yet at the same time they are, on a superficial level, intensely personal. This is an uneasy combination. Lacking other data, one cannot become overly interested in the "I" of the poems, yet one is constantly made aware of his presence. The effective sections are those in which the personal account is closely related to an underlying theme. Otherwise, they are of interest chiefly for their revelation of MacDonald's unusually strong powers of visualization.
Certain distinctions in MacDonald's terminology must here be clarified further. *Imagination* comes from God to the individual, and does not depend on personal volition. *Fancy* is a deliberate, or idle, playing with ideas, images, and notions, and is under the control of the individual. *Dream* results from the operation of the unconscious, while the individual sleeps, but must also be regarded as coming from God. *Reverie* is distinguishable from dream only in that the physical senses are at least partially operative while the individual experiences what no one else is aware of. In a medical context this would be synonymous with hallucination, a word MacDonald does not use. The reverie may be deliberately induced, or it may be involuntary. In either case, the experience does not remain under the control of the individual. With MacDonald, as will be seen, a fancy could induce a state of reverie, which in turn could lapse into (or later return as) a dream.

With the dreams which are labelled as such, there is no reasonable doubt that their origin is as stated. With the type of writing which suggests dream but does not actually claim that such is its
source, there is, naturally, some difficulty in providing definite proof. There is unanimity amongst his critics that MacDonald's prose fantasies project the mood and rationale of dreams, and one can make the same judgment on certain poems, but to do so is perhaps too much a subjective reaction to be used as the sole basis of an argument. Fortunately, MacDonald was in the habit of duplicating his material, and in several telling instances poetry and prose may be cross-referenced to show that the particular image or setting is, at least once, definitely linked with a dream. These examples are of interest in themselves. More importantly, however, their existence lends valid support to the statement that certain other passages or poems, similar in mood and effect, though never positively identified as of dream origin, are in fact the product of dream or reverie, or of both.

I would like to trace several images derived from dreams through their major exemplifications, starting with one of his most pervasive obsessions, noted by all readers of the fantasies and fairy tales. This is the figure of the powerful, loving,
supernatural woman, who appears as a major character in *Phantastes*, the *Curdie* books, "The Carasoyn," "The Golden Key," *At the Back of the North Wind*, *A Lost Princess*, and *Lilith*. With the exception of North Wind, this woman is always unequivocally presented as a living entity in the stories in which she appears. But judging by her other appearances in poetry, she began as a fancy, and was developed in the course of reverie and dream.

She is first mentioned in "A Hidden Life" (1857):

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... the fancy rose
That on the other side those rampart walls,
A mighty woman sat, with waiting face,
Calm as that life whose rapt intensity
Borders on death, silent, waiting for him,
To make him grand for ever with a kiss.
("A Hidden Life," I: 159)
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In "A Book of Dreams" she is linked with reverie, which presently becomes a dream:

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Once more I build a dream, awake. . . .
A dream, indeed!--Oh, happy me
Whom Titan woman bears
Afloat upon a gentle sea
Of wandering midnight airs!
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. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
She bears me over sleeping towns,
o'er murmuring ears of corn;
o'er tops of trees, o'er billowy downs,
o'er moorland wastes forlorn.
("A Book of Dreams," Part II, vi: I: 399)

This is the verse-equivalent of a chapter in *At the Back of the North Wind*, in which North Wind carries Diamond through the night, skimming over the countryside. It is not called a dream, nor are the other episodes in the book involving North Wind. She herself, however, at one point becomes a figure of dubious reality, for Diamond sees her only after he has been to sleep, and once, on being questioned, she does not entirely deny that she may be a dream. But the poem definitely establishes her literary origin in reverie and dream, however one interprets her presence in the story.

In *What's Mine's Mine* the figure again moves from the reverie into the dream, but with a different association. Ian says:

I used to lie in bed, and imagine the earth alive and carrying me on her back, till I fell asleep longing to see the face of my nurse. Once, the fancy burned into a dream. . . . I saw the face of a woman, grand and beautiful. (WMM, pp. 235-36)
In the light of these references, I think one is quite justified in claiming, by analogy, that the Wise Woman figures originated in fancy, became part of reverie, and developed further in dreams. MacDonald would undoubtedly attribute their final metamorphosis into such memorable figures as Irene's Grandmother (in the Curdie books) to the workings of the Imagination.

I think also that one can claim a dream origin for many of the other repeated images: stairs, for example. "I have a passion for stairs," he wrote in a letter of 1885 (GMHW, p. 530), and they constantly appear, literally and allegorically significant, in the novels, fantasies, and fairy tales, as in the stair in Donal Grant's tower, the rainbow stairway at the conclusion of "The Golden Key," and the ladder-like stair to the old Grandmother's rooms in the Curdie books.

Episodes in the fantasies which lay no direct claim to being dreams can frequently be linked to specifically designated dreams related elsewhere. In Within and Without (1855), for example, the child Lily has a dream of a garden, which she tells to
her father:

It was not winter,
But some of the poor leaves were growing tired
With hanging there so long. And some of them
Gave it up quite, and so dropped down and lay
Quiet on the ground. And I was watching them.
I saw one falling—down, down—tumbling down—
Just at the earth—when suddenly it spread
Great wings and flew.—It was a butterfly,
So beautiful with wings, black, red, and white—
I thought it was a crackly, withered leaf.
Away it flew! I don't know where it went.
(W & W, I: 70)

In Greek, psyche means both "butterfly" and
"soul," and the emblematic association between the
two is traditional. In the passage above the re-
lationship is only remotely suggested. But the image
takes another form in Donal Grant, where it is pres-
ented as one of Arctura's dreams after her spiritual
enlightenment:

... a sweet child came out of a grassy
hillock by the wayside, called her mamma,
and said she was so much obliged to her
for taking her off the cold stone and making
her a butterfly; and that the little child
spread out gorgeous and great butterfly
wings and soared away up to a white cloud
... and there sat looking down on her,
and laughing merrily... (DG, p. 628)

This is somewhat sentimentalized, and light-hearted,
though with an interesting suggestion of "Piping Down
the Valleys Wild." But MacDonald's most serious, and certainly most poetically effective use of the psyche-image is in the sonnet "The Chrysalis" (quoted in Chapter One). Refined and overtly allegorized, it is still presented as a dream-vision: "Methought I floated sightless. . . ." Finally, in Lilith, he reverted to a scene more closely resembling the original dream-account, though not calling it a dream. Mr Raven, in his bird form, is walking beside Mr Vane, in the latter's garden, after a rain:

"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)

In his true form Mr Raven is Adam, who with his wife watches over the sleeping dead in the vast cemetery of the universe, until they waken for the resurrection. The scene therefore emblematically prefigures his actions at the close of Time. It is no longer given as a dream, but I think there can be little doubt that the idea is drawn from what once had been a dream.

The next example of a repeated image is chosen
first to illustrate further how a passage, at one appearance actually designated dream or reverie, can be presented in somewhat altered form without overt reference to its ultimate source. Secondly, these selections illustrate the unfortunate fact that MacDonald's ideas were so often much better than his presentation of them, particularly in poetic form. Finally, and related to this last point, these selections are intended to demonstrate how the prose can expand the limits of a poem, and, on occasion, provide a sometimes highly necessary gloss on its text. This is a point of considerable significance for the next chapter.

The basic image here is that of wolves pursuing a fleeing child. The original source is indicated by Greville:

John MacDonald's letters to his father from Moscow are brilliant, particularly one describing peasant merry-making in a village inn and a wolf-hunting expedition. It is reproduced bodily in What's Mine's Mine. (GMHW, p. 167)

John MacDonald was in Russia between 1853 and 1855; he died in 1859. MacDonald started using the wolf-hunt image in the late '60's, and last employed it
in 1891. I would conjecture that between the letter and the time of his extensive use of it, he had, if not a dream stemming from it, one (or a series) of self-induced or spontaneous reveries based on his brother's account.

The most complete version, pictorially and allegorically, is the one Greville directs attention to in *What's Mine's Mine*, in which factual narration is broken by a dream, and followed by reverie. It is impossible to say (the original letter no longer exists) whether MacDonald grafted his own dream and reverie onto the material found in the letter, or if only the reverie is his, or if both are part of the letter. This last strikes me as unlikely, though naturally one cannot exclude the possibility. It seems to me, however, in view of MacDonald's extensive use of the allegory, that he was more involved with the image than a mere reading of someone else's description would account for. Also, his own statements concerning his ability to induce reverie, which in turn could lead to dream, suggest that, impressed by a factual account, he developed it in his own way.

In the novel Ian (as John is called) and his
friends climb trees, before sunset, to await the coming of the wolf pack which has been harrying the neighbourhood. After some hours of waiting, Ian falls asleep:

Suddenly, out of the wood to my left, issued something, running fast, but with soundless feet, over the snow. I doubted in my dream, whether the object were a living thing or only a shadow. It came nearer, and I saw it was a child, a little girl, running as if for her life. She came straight to the tree I sat in, and when close to it, but without a moment's halt, looked up, and I saw a sweet little face, white with terror—which somehow seemed, however, not for herself, but for me. I called out after her to stop, and I would take her into the tree beside me, where the wolves could not reach her; but she only shook her head and ran on over the clearing into the forest. . . . at length, dark as a torrent of pitch, out of the forest flowed a multitude of obscure things—silent as shadows—and streamed away, black over the snow, in the direction the child had taken. . . . I had no choice but go down and follow, do what I could, and die with her. . . . [The wolves] were gathered round a tree . . . madly leaping against it. . . . I looked up: in the top of the tree sat the little girl, her white face looking down upon them with a smile. All the terror had vanished from it. It was still white as the snow, but like the snow was radiating a white light through the dark foliage of the fir. . . . I rushed into the heap of wolves, striking and stabbing with my hunting knife. I got to the tree, and was by her in a moment. But as I took the child in my arms I woke, and knew that it was a dream.
As Ian wakes, the real onslaught of the wolves begins, and he and his companions, from their separate trees, shoot them:

Howls of death arose. Their companions fell upon the wounded, and ate them up. The tearing and yelling at the foot of the tree was like the tumult of devils full of hate and malice and greed. Then for the first time, I thought whether such creatures might not be the open haunts of demons.

Ian's ammunition runs out, and he must wait in the tree until morning:

In the midst of the howling . . . I fell into a kind of reverie with which my dream came back and mingled. I seemed to be sitting in the tree with the little shining girl, and she was my own soul; and all the wrong things . . . I had done, with all the weaknesses and evil tendencies of my nature . . . had taken shape, and, in the persons of the howling wolves below, were besieging me, to get at me, and devour me. Suddenly my soul was gone. Above were the still, bright stars, shining unmoved; beneath white, betraying was the cold careless snow, and the howling wolves; away through the forest was fleeting, ever fleeing, my poor soul, in the likeness of a white-faced child! . . . I was alone, frightfully alone—alone as I had never been before. . . . [There was no] refuge from the desert of my lost self. . . . In agony I cried to God, with a cry of utter despair. . . . The helplessness melted away into a sense of God. . . . Wolf nor sin could touch me! I was a wide peace—my very being peace! . . . Whereas I had seemed all
alone, I was with God! . . . I lifted my eyes; morning was in the east, and the wolves were slinking away over the snow. (WMM, pp. 143-47)

Ian's mother, to whom he is telling all this, is upset because his views of God do not coincide with hers:

There was nothing [in his experience] about the atonement! She did not see it was a dream, say rather a vision, of the atonement itself. (WMM, p. 148)

This mingling of actuality, dream, reverie, allegory, and symbolism, shifting constantly from one level to another, is skillfully realized, and the central image is arrestingly clear. The motif of evil passions, both within and without the self, pursuing the soul until it finds peace with God, is given its most complete and explicit treatment here, under the image of the wolf-hunt. But there had been indications earlier than this (1876) that MacDonald had been considering the possibilities of the image.

In At the Back of the North Wind (serialized 1869), North Wind, sweeping through the streets with Diamond, runs in at the open door of a mansion. Diamond sees her turn into a huge wolf that rushes up
the stairs. Later, in her human form, she discusses the episode with Diamond, telling him she had menaced a drunken nurse who was abusing a child.

"And you frightened her?" said Diamond.
"I believe so!" answered North Wind, laughing merrily. "I flew at her throat, and she tumbled over on the floor with such a crash that they ran in. . . ."
"But didn't you frighten the little one?"
"She never saw me. The woman would not have seen me either if she had not been wicked. . . . Good people see good things, bad people, bad things. . . . I had to make myself look like a bad thing before she could see me. . . ." (ABNW, pp. 43-45)

This is the first appearance, in terms of the "wolf" image, of what MacDonald so often discusses and illustrates in his writings, namely, the problem presented by the existence of evil in a world created by a loving God. This point will be reintroduced after further passages have been considered.

The next use of the wolf-image is in another story for children, **A Lost Princess** (1875). Rosamond, a selfish, spoilt little princess, has been taken from her incompetent parents by the Wise Woman, whom she fears, but who for the readers is identified with Spenser's Una, or Heavenly Wisdom: "She had led such a bad life, that she did not know a good woman when
she saw her." Screaming and kicking, Rosamond is set down in the snow in the forest. Terror of approaching wolves makes her cry out for help, which is instantly given her. Later, partly redeemed, she boldly runs through the howling wolf-pack, unscathed because she is on her way to the Wise Woman's cottage.

In St George and St Michael, serialized eleven years before What's Mine's Mine was published (1886), there is a passing reference to November weather as "one of God's hounds, with which he hunts us out of the hollows of our own moods, and teaches us to sit on the arch of the cellar." But the next full exposition of the image comes in "Lycabas," a poem which, by internal evidence, was written in or immediately after 1879. (MacDonald's daughter Mary had died in April 1878, his son Maurice in February 1879; they are the "lambs" he mentions.) This poem, too, links the wolves with the passage of Time, which, as will be seen, was another of his thematic obsessions.

The poem is prefaced by a note:

Lycabas: A name of the year. Some say the word means a march of wolves, which wolves, running in single file, are the Months of the Year. Others say the word means the path of light. (II: 95)
The source of this note is not given, but certainly it forms a necessary prologue, essential to our own comprehension of the ensuing poem.

Considering the richness of the implications, the turns of thought, and the strength of the original image, as well as the additional motifs of Time and Death, it is a surprisingly ineffective poem, technically speaking. It is written in the form of an irregular ode, and the loose rhyme and intermittently bouncing metre unfortunately encourage some of MacDonald's chief poetic faults. It opens:

O ye months of the year,
Are ye a march of wolves?
Lycabas! Lycabas! twelve to growl and slay?
Men hearken at night, and lie in fear,
Some men hearken all day!

Each man is pursued, again and again, by "a gallop of wolves," and overtaken by them:

One of them hurt me sore!
Two of them hurt and tore!
Three of them made me bleed!
The fourth did a terrible deed,
Rent me the worst of the four! . . .
Lycabas, if I feared you a jot,
You, and your devils running in twelves,
Black-mouthed, hell-throated, straight-going wolves,
I would run like a wolf, I too, and howl!
He hates them because they have hunted away his
"lambs":

Many a shepherd scarce thinks of a lamb
But he hears behind it the growl of a wolf,
And behind that the wail of its dam! . . .
Oh my lambs . . .
I had no sword to bite and slay,
And the wolfy Months were on your track!

But the great Shepherd saw them coming, and rescued
them:

He has taken you home to his stronghold:
Out of the castle of Love ye look;
The castle of Love is now your home,
From the garden of Love you will never roam,
And the wolves no more shall flutter you.

Why, after all, should he fear the wolves himself?

Ye can do nothing but drive me home!
Wolves, wolves, you will lie one day--
Ye are lying even now, this very day . . .
At the feet of the Shepherd that carries the lambs!

But are they really wolves?

Black are your mouths, but your eyes are true!--
Now, now I know you!--the Shepherd's sheep-dogs! . . .
Sharp are your teeth, my wolves divine,
But loves and no hates in your deep eyes shine!
No more will I call you evil names,
No more assail you with untrue blames!
Wake me with howling, check me with biting,
Rouse up my strength for the holy fighting;
Hunt me still back, nor let me stray
Out of the infinite narrow way,
The radiant march of the Lord of Light. . . .
("Lycabas," II: 95)

The poem makes its point, and it is one worth making, but it lacks the vivid simplicity of the dream and reverie in *What's Mine's Mine*. It is in fact worth noting that in the prose fantasies, the fairy tales, and the dreams, MacDonald repeatedly creates single scenes that are visually and imaginatively arresting; they are also entirely satisfying on all levels of narrative and allegory. Such, for example, is the picture of Diamond nursing the wailing baby in the light of the street-lamp seen through a dirty window in a slum tenement; of Tangle and Mossy climbing up the winding stair to the country from whence the shadows fall; of Anodos asleep in the arms of the beech-tree that is becoming a woman. The rhythm of the sentences, the choice of words, and the restrained emotional appeal of the scenes themselves are in total accord. Well might Reis refer to the "astonishing brilliance, charm and subtlety" of the fantasies (*GMacD*, p. 76), words which equally apply to the majority of the prose dreams. Generally speaking (but with exceptions to be discussed in Chapter V),
MacDonald does not achieve the same effects in the poems. There is nothing in "Lycabas," for example, to compare with the potency of the vision of the soul as a white-faced child fleeting over the snow, pursued by wolves through the dark forest. The poem derives, to a great extent, from themes suggested by the earlier prose, though at the anagnorisis it takes a more directly Christian turn; but the further it strays from its source the less effective it becomes. (I think the mysterious beauty of the dream was lost partly in the raw immediacy of his suffering.) To demonstrate the point even more effectively, one need only consider relevant stanzas in _The Diary of an Old Soul_, privately published in 1880.

In these MacDonald has abandoned the disguise, and the complexities, of metaphor, and approaches the theme with the directness of Bunyan, but without the latter's memorable personifications of abstractions. All association with Time and Death is lost, and the flat literalness of the calling-names of the dogs adds nothing to the original image:
Lo! now thy swift dogs, over stone and bush,
After me, straying sheep, loud barking, rush.
There's Fear, and Shame, and Empty-heart, and Lack,
And Lost-love, and a thousand at their back!
I see them not, but know thou hound'st them on,
And I am lost indeed—escape is none.
See! there they come, down streaming on my track!

I rise and run, staggering—double and run.—
But whither?—whither?—whither for escape?
The sea lies all about this long-necked cape—
There come the dogs, straight for me every one—
Me, live despair, live centre of alarms!—
Ah! lo! 'twixt me and all his barking harms,
The shepherd, lo!—I run—fall folded in his arms.

There let the dogs yelp, let them growl and leap!
It is no matter—I will go to sleep.
Like a spent cloud pass pain and grief and fear;
Out from behind it unchanged love shines clear.—
Oh, save me, Christ!—I know not what I am;
I was thy stupid, self-willed, greedy lamb—
Would be thy honest and obedient sheep.

(DOS, Sept. 15, 16, 17)

This is on a level with his better devotional poetry,
but it has lost a great deal in being so far distanced
from the reverie. MacDonald never did in fact real-
ize the potentialities of his theme and image in
poetry; that remained for Francis Thompson to do, in
"The Hound of Heaven."

The image of the wolves appears for the last
time in There and Back (1891), in the form of an al-
legory that, to its advantage, reverts to the orig-
inal dream. It is close also to the related section
in *The Lost Princess*. A vicious child, hiding in the forest, is terrorized by wolves, presumably his own sins, though this we are not told. He is rescued by a woman called Sorrow, and for a while is morally improved. Owing to the exigencies of the plot of the novel (the allegory is delivered in church as a sermon, and is interrupted by the woman at whom it is directed), we do not learn what happens to him ultimately. But again, the atmosphere, the mood, and the image are those of dream, and are therefore simply, vividly, and convincingly conveyed.

So far, three points have emerged from these excerpts. The first is the general notion that the closer MacDonald stays to the mood of the original dream or reverie, the less likely he is to lapse into banalities. Secondly, his poetry dealing with dream-material can be enriched by reference to relevant prose passages, and sometimes explained by them. And thirdly, certain images can be shown, by cross-referencing, to have their origin in dream. On this basis, one may conjecture, with strong probability of accuracy, that certain other images and scenes, similar in mood and logic to dreams (particularly
those found as well in Phantastes and Lilith) also have their unstated origin in dream.

The consideration of these selections also serves to stimulate a new awareness of one of MacDonald's primary themes. It is a fundamental point of his faith that apparent evil exists only for the realization of actual good. This view he first set out in the concluding sentence of Phantastes:

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)

But sometimes, and always in poems linked in some way with dreams, he shows a lively apprehension of the existence of a kind of evil that is in itself beyond redemption. Horror of it may be intended to drive a faltering soul into the arms of God, but the evil still exists in its own right. This admittedly minor strand in the bulk of MacDonald's work, at odds with his sermons and editorial asides, was nevertheless an important aspect of his creativity. Only when he is writing from his emotional depths does the darker tone emerge.

Wolff implies, I think incorrectly, that Mac-
Donald's Christian faith became inadequate (TGK, p. 371), but this I would dispute on grounds already stated in Chapter One. What he did lose at times was his ability to subdue the strong natural melancholy of his nature, especially when family stresses and losses were weighing heavily on him. "The Apollyon of disbelief" had to be encountered many times, and not all the battles were won. The consciousness of an empty universe, and of a world full of decay and death, occasionally spilled over into his writing in the form of bitter questioning. If a character in a novel poses these questions, there is always another character to form a contrast, even if he cannot bring the questioner to a positive point of view (though he usually does). But in the poetry such emotions, when expressed, are allowed to stand, a brief record of a deeply troubled mood. The questions are usually presented in a form that suggests dream, but are not so labelled, and in this they are linked with the mode of the fantasies. Like them, they are symbolic expressions of states of mind.
III. **Nightmares and Drugs**

Good dreams are means of revelation, instruments for spiritual growth. But nightmares can be of so distressing a nature that the dreamer, on waking, can think of nothing but their terror or horror. Usually it is the conscious choice between God and Self that makes the difference between the two. The reckless dreamer may well have brought the nightmares on himself, by choosing—as did Anodos in the house of the Ogress—to meet his own Shadow, for the worst nightmares are those which, having "other foundation than the will of the eternal Builder" *(TW, p. 130)*, are deliberately encouraged.

In the novels there are some peculiarly unpleasant nightmares, some of which serve the literary purpose of delineating obliquely the past or present miseries and degradations of the dreamer. Some of them, however, are accounted for in largely physiological terms—though it must immediately be stated that if the dreamer is in himself good, and the physical state not of his own choosing, then rescue from the horrors will come within the dream. Such, for example, is the experience of the Lady Arctura in
Donal Grant, and of the old minister in Paul Faber.

In reading over the nightmares in the novels, and similar passages in the fantasies, I was struck by the number of these recurring horrors. I was also surprised, when they were reviewed, at the number of episodes involving the use of drugs. Reference to Alethea Hayter's book, Opium and the Romantic Image, made plain immediately that MacDonald's nightmares were remarkably similar to those suffered by someone who is either under the influence of opium, or enduring withdrawal symptoms. Some of her sources are clinical, most are literary, but all agree on the dominant themes that recur in such dreams, nightmares, reveries, and visions.

By the time MacDonald was writing about drugs, their effects had already been well documented, de Quincy being the English originator of their literary delineation. Others subsequently had been as romantically laudatory as de Quincy in describing the effects on the mind and the power over the visualizing imagination. The danger of such seductive accounts is, of course, that others may be induced to experiment for themselves. Apparently many did so. Of
those who were unintentionally caught in the habit, some, such as Coleridge, eventually could not control the amount required, while others, such as Wilberforce, were able to remain within rigorously self-imposed limits.

Hayter describes at length the effects of opium (usually in the form of laudanum or morphia) on the nineteenth-century creative imagination, on which, she believes, it had a profound effect. She points out the large number of people who at some time or other had been prescribed opium (ORI, p. 32), readily obtainable at the nearest chemist, and compares its use and availability to our current use of aspirin (ORI, p. 30). Habituation could start in infancy, for soothing syrups for babies and young children were sufficiently strong that unwise dosage could cause addiction, and even death, as Charlotte M. Yonge so vividly describes in The Daisy Chain; nor was their use restricted to any one class. Although no longer regarded in the nineteenth century as a total panacea for the ills of adults, as it had been in some quarters in the eighteenth century (ORI, p. 29), it was still used extensively as a cough sup-
pressant, as a soporific, and for such ailments as toothache, earache, stomach disorders, and asthma. Some doctors recommended its use in cases of tuberculosis. Hayter considers it impossible to say of anyone in the nineteenth century that he or she had never been administered some form of the drug (ORI, p. 32). This is, of course, apart from those who deliberately experimented with its effects in order to investigate the world of dreams thus opened to them, or those who became addicted as an escape from poverty, overwork, or emotional misery.

The dreams and the reveries (defined medically as waking dreams, or hallucinations) are complex and fascinating, or repetitiously boring, depending on the abilities of the conscious and sub-conscious mind of the creator-dreamer; a dull man will have dull dreams; a man with innate powers of creative imagination will have elaborately memorable dreams. But, one gathers from Hayter, in dreamers with literary abilities, no matter what their age, educational attainments, situation, health, background, or prospects, there are certain recurring images and scenes: among them, quicksands, desolate wildernesses,
harlot-ogresses, half-human statues, cyclopean temples and palaces, freezing cold, engulfing seas, watching eyes, descents into horrible subterranean regions, hideous faces, endless stairs, and, above all, death, decay, inert or animated corpses, overwhelming feelings of loneliness, exile, solitude, despair. There are also significant alterations in the perception of time and space, and symptoms of synesthesia, or confusion of the senses. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is possible to cite passages from all MacDonald's writing but the non-fiction that illustrate all the items on the list, most of them repeatedly, as well as others listed by Hayter that are not relevant here.

Descriptions of the effects of the drug can be found in nineteenth-century German and French writers, as well as English. This means, of course, that MacDonald could have learned about opium-visions and dreams from sources other than his own experience; certainly he mentions with approbation the Dreams of Jean-Paul. I am convinced, however, that his knowledge came from a more personal source. There is a feeling of authenticity, of authoritativness
about facts, in his descriptions not just of dreams but of actual opium experiences. These constitute major episodes in *Thomas Wingfold* (1876), *The Marquis of Lossie* (1877), and *Donal Grant* (1883), where the effects are alluded to in unequivocal and unadmirable terms. When, for example, Donal Grant tells the Lady Arctura that the drug (taken unwittingly) gave him "a feeling of innate faculty such as I could never have conceived of" (*DG*, p. 319), she warns him most earnestly and at some length not to be tempted to try it again. Certainly, in all such episodes, no one could ever blame MacDonald, as they had de Quincy, for arousing an unhealthy curiosity in experimenting with mind-altering drugs.

I do not think MacDonald ever deliberately took opium in any form to induce dreams and reveries, or to enhance his perceptions, or stimulate his imagination. In various novels he includes too many straightforward condemnations of the practise, and illustrations of what it does to personality and morality, to have been himself a deliberate victim. But, medically speaking, he was from childhood on an obvious candidate for prescriptions based on
opium. It would be standard practise for any doctor
to prescribe laudanum to control the recurrent cough
(both bronchial and tubercular), to help the asthma,
and to alleviate the eczema which, in his last years,
became an absolute torment. Not unnaturally, he
suffered over the years a great deal from "pain and
sleeplessness," as Louisa emphasizes in a letter in
1869 (GMHW, p. 396), and for this too laudanum would
be prescribed.

Greville does not mention pain-killers or cough-
suppressants or aids to sleep, though he does include
other details of the medical treatment in the major
illnesses, such as bleeding and poulticing. At one
point he remarks rather vaguely that his father re-
ceived "the remedies and regimen of renowned special-
ists" (GMHW, p. 556). But Greville, as a doctor,
would be particularly aware of the change in public
attitude towards the medicinal use of opium. What
had been a common household remedy during his father's
lifetime, by the 1920's had a certain opprobrium
attached to its use, and given the uncritical tone
of his biography, it is understandable that he would
omit such statements.
My own conjecture, based on probability and the evidence in the novels, is that laudanum had been prescribed for MacDonald early in life, and that, continuing in its use (always on medical advice), he had gradually realized what it could do to a receptive and imaginative mind. Whether the drug created, or merely enhanced, his strong powers of visualization, is of course impossible to say. Hayter points out, incidentally, that "the withdrawal period is the one most likely to foster literary inspiration and activity" (ORI, p. 59). I think that in later life he refused the drug as much as possible. I base this claim on his wholesale condemnation of any form of habitual use, his many warnings of the consequences of addiction, and the examples in his novels of those who have become addicts. (He is equally firm on the subject of drinking spirits.) In spite of his theoretical objections, it is more than likely that in his severe illnesses it would still be prescribed. Perhaps he came to adopt the philosophical attitude he attributes to the old sick minister in Paul Faber:
I had a strange kind of vision last night... I don't know whether the draught the doctor gave me... had anything to do with it—I thought I tasted something sleepy in it—anyhow, thought is thought, and truth is truth, whatever drug... may have been midwife to it. (PF, p. 456)

He could well have another reason for expressing uneasiness at the use of drugs. Louisa, in her earlier years at least, had urged on him homeopathic remedies; it is highly unlikely that she would approve the use of laudanum, particularly in view of the nightmares and hallucinations it would induce. This is, I think, behind her acute dislike of Lilith. MacDonald himself was convinced that he wrote it on "a mandate direct from God" (GMHW, p. 548), but Louisa strongly opposed its publication. Greville reports:

My mother... was troubled by the book's strange imagery; her distress gave my father real heartache, so that he began to question his ability to utter his last urgent message. (GMHW, p. 548)

The book is the strangest, most difficult to interpret, and most complexly fascinating of his works. Many episodes quite horribly exemplify parts
of Hayter's lists of archetypal drug-induced nightmares, as the following excerpt well illustrates. Here Mr Vane is crossing the low-lying boggy area in the Other Dimension which he calls the Bad Burrow:

... it was very cold ... suddenly the ground before me to my left began to heave, and a low wave of earth came slinking toward us. It rose higher as it drew near; out of it slouched a dreadful head with fleshy tubes for hair, and opening a great oval mouth, snapped at me ... We were almost over when ... arose 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)

I suspect that Louisa hated the nightmares induced by ill-health and analgesics, and disliked reading so many unpleasant ones linked together in so compelling a fashion. Many of them she had probably heard before, for MacDonald liked telling his dreams. Also, for some time early in their marriage, she had been jealous of his love for God, which she felt excluded her, and perhaps she disliked these private inner worlds for the same reason.

The fantasies are not labelled dreams, or linked in any way with drugs, though in my opinion they
obviously derive from both, but in the novels MacDonald openly discusses both. The most complete account of the addict is found in Thomas Wingfold. Here MacDonald describes the sensations of someone habituated to the drug since childhood. Some of the passages are worth quoting at length, for they show his assured and knowledgeable tone in relating the sensations of the addict:

Those who are acquainted with the mode of operation of the drug . . . are aware that a man may be fully under its influences without betraying to the ordinary observer that he is in a condition differing from that of other men. But, in the living dream wherein he walks, his feeling of time and space is so enlarged, or perhaps, I rather think, so subdivided to the consciousness, that everything about him seems infinite both in duration and extent; the action of a second has in it a multitudinous gradation of progress, and a line of space is marked out into millionths, of every one of which the consciousness takes note. At the same time his senses are open to every impression from things around him, only they appear to him in a strangely exalted metamorphosis, the reflex of his own mental exaltation either in bliss or torture, while the fancies of the man mingle with the facts thus introduced and modify and are in turn modified by them; whereby out of the chaos arises the mountain of an Earthly Paradise, whose roots are in the depths of hell; and whether the man be with the divine air and the clear rivers and the thousand-hued flowers on the top, or
down in the ice-lake with the tears frozen to hard lumps in the hollows of his eyes so that he can no more have even the poor consolation of weeping, is but the turning of a hair, so far at least as his will has to do with it. The least intrusion of anything painful, of any jar that cannot be wrought into the general harmony of the vision, will suddenly alter its character, and from the seventh heaven of speechless bliss the man may fall plumb down into gulfs of horrible and torturing, it may be loathsome imaginings. (TW, p. 129)

Heartlessly informed by the girl he loves that she is engaged to some one else, Leopold descends abruptly from his ecstasy of timeless joy:

... he found himself lying on the floor of a huge vault, whose black slabs were worn into many hollows by the bare feet of the damned as they went and came between the chambers of their torture opening off upon every side, whence issued all kinds of sickening cries, and mingled with the music to which, with whips of steel, hellish executioners urged the dance whose every motion was an agony. (TW, p. 131)

Donal Grant's experience is also worth noting, for it is involuntary, and MacDonald well describes the mind bewildered by what it has not before encountered, and for which it cannot account. Donal innocently drinks wine containing some form of drug, not identified; his host, himself an addict, likes to
"experiment" with unsuspecting guests:

Something seemed to give way in his head—as if a bubble burst in his brain; and from that moment whatever the earl said, and whatever rose in his own mind, seemed to have outward existence as well. He heard and knew the voice of his host, but seemed also in some inexplicable way, which at the time occasioned him no surprise, to see the things which had their being only in the brain of the earl. Whether he went in very deed out with him into the night, he did not know. . . . (DG, p. 297)

The next morning he remembers a journey on horseback, "through scenes of entrancing interest and variety."

He was so confused, so bewildered, so haunted with a kind of shadowy misery—undefined yet plainly felt, that it seemed almost as if a man might lose hold of himself so as no more to be certain he had ever possessed or could ever possess himself with confidence again. . . . Whatever it was, it had left him unhappy, almost ashamed. (DG, pp. 298-99)

The next time he dines with the earl, the experience is intensified:

. . . although he knew that he was sitting at the table . . . he could not be certain that he was not at the same time upon the side of a lonely hill . . . [with] a light glimmering faintly on the heather a little way off, which he knew for the flame that comes from the feet of the angels. . . .
He seemed to be reading the thoughts of his sheep as he had never been able to do before, yet all the time he went on talking and knew that he was talking to the earl and the lady. (DG, p. 310)

Presently he finds himself walking by the sea: "Every wave was a complex chord, with winnowed tones feathering it round. He paced up and down the sand—it seemed to him for ages" (DG, p. 311). Seeing the body of a man tossed in the waves, he decides to go in, after taking what seemed like "hours of cogitation and ratiocination:"

... he clung to his prize, and dragged it out. A moment's bewilderment, and he came to himself sitting on the sand with his arms round a tangled net lost from some fishing-boat. His delusion was gone. He was sitting in a cold wind, and wet to the skin, upon the border of a fierce stormy sea... from which he had rescued a tangled mass of net mixed with seaweed. (DG, p. 312)

There are other instances in this and other novels of such scenes, in which it becomes clear that the deliberate user of the drug risks having horrible visions, while the accidental user does not—or if he does have them, he will emerge into light.

There are, however, some prose dreams with all
the characteristics of an opium nightmare, but which
do not appear to be drug-induced. Such, for example,
is Wilfred Cumbermede's second dream of Athanasia,
or John Smith's dream of the graveyard, described
earlier. Neither dream differs in kind or intensity
from those overtly linked with opium. This is un-
doubtedly because there is no reason, either in the
development of the plot of either novel, or in the
revelation of the narrators, for them to take drugs,
medicinally or otherwise. Similarly, in poems that
are straightforwardly described as dreams, the
scenes or meditations are never identified as drug-
induced, with the single exception of the strange
chant which the earl in Donal Grant mutters in his
state of reverie. No doubt MacDonald would consider
any mention of drugs irrelevant to the serious moral
points he is making in the personal dream-poems, even
when he is describing "A host of hurrying waves /
Loosed by some witchery of the brain," apparently
about to overwhelm his father's farm ("A Book of
Dreams," Part II, ii: I: 382). I would judge this
to be exactly the kind of waking dream Hayter des-
cribes, even if gigantic tidal waves were not high
on her list of common images; but there is more objective evidence than this concerning the relationship between medicinal drug-use and actual dreams.

There are two interesting parallels between Donal Grant and "A Book of Dreams." The Lady Arctura, also a victim of the earl's experiments, describes to Donal her own drug-induced nightmares. She first found herself wandering in a barren waste-land:

I found myself in the midst of a terrible because most miserable place. It was like brick-fields, but deserted brick-fields . . . . Heaps of bricks were all about, but they were all broken, or only half burnt. For miles and miles they stretched around me. I walked and walked to get out of it. Not a soul came near me or in sight. . . .

She finally sees and enters a huge ruined church, old and ugly: "I shrunk from the look of it; it was horrible to me; I feared it, but I must go in." The central area of the floor had fallen into a great shaft of unknown depth. Decayed coffins mixed with the soft earth, and a yellow-white corpse crawled up towards her, beckoning her. "I had to go. . . . My feet sank in the mould of the ancient dead as I went. . . . Down and down I went, sinking, and
sliding with the moving heap of black mould" (pp. 493-94).

Two separate poems in "A Book of Dreams" are linked with this single nightmare. In one MacDonald describes how

Alone upon a miry road
I walked the wretched plain.

Low mounds of ruin, ugly pits,
And brick-fields scarred the globe;
Those wastes where desolation sits
Without her ancient robe.

The dreariness, the nothingness
Grew worse almost than fear. . . .

The other related poem describes "A great church in an empty square":

The door stands wide. With hideous grin,
Like dumb laugh, evil, frore,
A gulf of death, all dark within,
Hath swallowed half the floor.

Ah, some one force my feet away,
Or down I needs must go!

See, see the horrid, crumbling slope!
It breathes up damp and fust!
What man would for his lost loves grope
Amid the charnel dust!
Down, down! The coffined mould glooms high!
Methinks, with anguish dull,
I enter by the empty eye
Into a monstrous skull!

This last image he used again in Lilith, where it is made a factual part of the story. Mr Vane, coming out of a black-walled, strangely-shaped room in the palace, in which he has had strange visions, says that "in the black ellipsoid I had been in the brain of the princess" (Lil, p. 313).

After the excerpts quoted above, it may hardly be necessary to point out again that in describing dreams and nightmares the prose is more effective in every way than the poetry. Where the poem may seem stilted and contrived, the prose has the compelling earnestness of someone narrating a dream while still under its influence. The nightmares are extraordinarily chilling, an effect rarely achieved in the poetry, particularly when he is trying deliberately to convey a sense of horror. The metrics seem to get in the way of the mood, rather than enhancing it, and sometimes individual lines are overblown, with their obvious intention of making the reader's
flesh creep:

Let the corpse crush
The slimy maggot with its pulpy fingers!
(W & W, I: 92)

Hark! was that the cry of a goat,
Or the gurgle of water in a throat?
(“The Haunted House,” II: 204)

My fingers sank in pulp through pulpy skin;
My body lay death-weltered in a mash
Of slimy horrors--
(Lil, 321)

To sum up: there are certain types of dream
whose archetypal images are common to all those who
have recorded them, either while under the influence
of drugs or while in a state of withdrawal. MacDonald
invariably uses one or more of these archetypes in
the prose dreams, whether in context they result from
the use of opium, or are simple nightmares. In his
fantasies he also uses similar images and episodes,
some of which are found in one or other of the novels
as part of a nightmare or dream. Even if they cannot
be traced to similar passages, in which their origin
is clearly ascribed, they have what Hayter refers to
as "the authentic inconsequence, the lucid illogic,
which is always recognizable in true reports of
dreams" (ORI, p. 79).

The real dreams narrated in the prose are much better of their kind than the real dreams (identified as such) in the poetry. The former are in most instances well told, with vivid language and persuasive atmosphere. One readily believes in them as dreams. On the other hand, the poetic dreams are apt to be neither convincing or even, at times, particularly interesting in themselves. Most of them are not well enough written to be considered seriously as literature. For some reason MacDonald describes reverie in poetry better than he does actual dreams, as, for example, in his vision of the tidal wave overwhelming the farm (I: 382).

When the prose dreams are transmuted into episodes in the fairy tales and fantasies, and are no longer overtly linked with dreams, they are usually even more imaginatively effective than when their origin was explained. In the same way, when dream-material is presented in the poetry not as actual dream but as fantasy, with imaginative use of archetypal imagery, the result is much superior to anything in, for example, "A Book of Dreams." These poems are
among the most evocative MacDonald wrote, and are often above his usual literary standard, for they derive from profound emotional responses which he seldom expressed elsewhere.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSES OF SELECTED POEMS

I. Associations of Images

MacDonald believed that there was a profound meaning in all the phenomena of the natural world: "All matter is radiant of spiritual meaning." It follows then that even the simplest scenes and most common living things have an inherent significance, and that mere reference to their external appearance can, to those who understand it, convey an inner message. Moreover, the external appearance is also a part of the message. This conviction is explicitly stated in the majority of the novels, as well as in various essays and sermons, but takes its most imaginatively projected form in Lilith, when Mr Vane and Mr Raven are walking together in the Other Dimension:

"Some people are always at their prayers. --Look! Look! there goes one!" [said Mr Raven.]

He pointed right up into the air. A snow-white pigeon was mounting . . . the unseen spiral of an ethereal stair. . . . "I see a pigeon!" I said.

"Of course you see a pigeon," rejoined the raven, "for there is the pigeon! I see
a prayer on its way.—I wonder now what heart is that dove's mother!" . . .

"How can a pigeon be a prayer?" I said. "I understand, of course, how it should be a fit symbol or likeness for one; but a live pigeon to come out of a heart!" . . .

"When a heart is really alive, then it is able to think live things. There is one heart all whose thoughts are strong, happy creatures, and whose very dreams are lives . . . . All live things were thoughts to begin with, and are fit therefore to be used by those that think." (Lil, p. 206)

"Those that think" are the poets (in MacDonald's sense of the term), and what they say makes clear to the receptive reader just those correspondences which, at this early stage in his spiritual progress, Mr Vane finds so confusing. When, presently, Mr Raven points out a "prayer-flower," Mr Vane asks if he could not be taught to recognize one when he sees it. But Mr Raven answers, "Why know the name of a thing when the thing itself you do not know?" (Lil, p. 207).

Mr Vane is, in fact, in the half-awakened state of the two girls in What's Mine's Mine, who, because they did not love Nature as a living creature, could not understand poetry. Like Mr Vane, they needed first to teach themselves. "Whose work is it but your own to open your eyes?" asks Mr Raven (Lil, p.
207). But once the eyes are open, then the process--not so much teaching as communication--can begin; and that is what MacDonald is trying to do in much of his poetry, namely, to teach, through the disclosure of the inner significance of natural objects in God's creation.

In his plain-speaking passages he indicates clearly what the correspondence is between two co-existent realities, one an earthly fact, the other a heavenly truth. In this sense, birds do not only suggest, but actually are prayers. This type of equivalence had become so natural to MacDonald that often, in his poetry in particular, he failed to provide in the individual piece the necessary clue to his intended meaning. Thus, in reading certain poems, it is essential to our understanding that the reader know what associations the poet intends to evoke, or what precise message a certain created object is meant to convey. I have already discussed how much the apparently trite little distich "Come / Home" is enriched by consideration of the weight MacDonald assigns to each of those two words. This way of reading his poems--working with him, in fact, in
discovering what he is conveying—removes any idea that he is a shallow purveyor of conventional truisms. To understand his sometimes involuted associations, therefore, the reader should, where possible, relate a particular poem to other verses or prose passages involving similar images, and even, occasionally, consider its original setting in a novel. Ideally, of course, a poem should be able to exist more independently as a relatively autonomous work of art; but MacDonald's poetic creations are generally of a lesser order, and appreciation of even his best poems is enhanced by some sort of extended and sympathetic exegesis.

The poems to be discussed in this chapter are arranged in four groups. The first group illustrates MacDonald's strongly-held belief in the ultimate evil of concentration on Self: self-centredness he equates with self-destruction. The second poses, directly and indirectly, questions about death and bereavement, to which there is very little answer given, or only an ambiguous one. The third group deals with poems on the theme of Time. The last group consists of two poems only: the one presents MacDonald's recognition of the problem of maintaining equilibrium
while living in a fallen world; the other is a valediction to mortality. Taken in this sequence, they present a view of much of MacDonald's thought, and also, in all but three instances, demonstrate what his writing could accomplish when he trusted his subconscious promptings rather than following through with his conscious didactic intentions.

II. "Moon Song," "The Barrow," "A Mammon Marriage"

From his earliest work to his last, MacDonald shows, with all the clarity and force of which he is capable, the strength and the attraction of the positive side of existence. C. S. Lewis is not alone in his declaration that through reading MacDonald he learned to love goodness. In Phantastes and in Lilith, the beginning and the end of his prose, the distinction is drawn between the soul absorbed in Self, and the soul turned away from Self through the love of something outside itself. In the earlier work he does not specify what that "something" is, but refers to the desired end of life as "something too good to be told. . . . though few have at all times the simplicity and the courage to believe it" (Ph, pp.
236-37). But in *Lilith* Mr Vane actually approaches God: "I saw, but with my mind's eye only . . . the throne of the Ancient of Days" (*Lil*, p. 418). Whether generally or specifically indicated, however, the point is made that the initial renunciation of Self leads not to further negations but to a life of affirmation. In all his prose works, fiction or sermons, there is in fact never any final doubt as to the purpose and outcome of life.

However, in order to show how moral and spiritual darkness is naturally attractive to human nature, underlying as it does all we must combat in ourselves, MacDonald repeatedly describes scenes of unmitigated darkness and doubt. The two adult fantasies which frame his life's work present in certain episodes the best illustration of this negative absorption that reduces everything to miserable chaos. But the theme appears in other works as well, for MacDonald has much to say about the penalties overtaking those who worship Self. Nearly every novel has at least one character who is shown to live in a self-inflicted imprisonment of the spirit. MacDonald expresses this emblematically in *The Lost Princess*, when Agnes is
confined inside a mirror sphere with nothing as company but her loathly Doppelgänger, which endlessly caresses its body just as Agnes had caressed her own unlovely nature.

Lilith is another portrait of someone absorbed in her own Self. She claims to be "queen of Hell, and mistress of the worlds" (Lil, p. 377):

"I will be myself, and not another! . . . I will do as my Self pleases—as my Self desires! . . . no one can take from me my self." (Lil, p. 371)

Mr Vane, however, sees her as "a conscious corpse" (Lil, p. 378). Like a leech she absorbs from those around her physical, emotional, and spiritual power, but her hand is the symbol of her negations, for it is irrevocably clasped on Nothing. The torture she must suffer is the outcome of her own nature. It is said of her, "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).

It is clear that to assent to the dominance of Self constitutes damnation and hell. In the prose stories, however, simply because they are completed stories, no one is irrevocably lost: some sign of
their redemption is offered, even if it is little more than a bare suggestion of metempsychosis. In Lilith this belief in the universality of salvation is carried to its ultimate point, for there a hint is given that one day even the Great Shadow (Satan) will repent.  

In poems, however, the completed cycle is not always presented. In some instances only the self-absorption is shown, the nihilism, without a trace of hope. In an aside in The Vicar's Daughter, MacDonald had asked, "If there is no hope, why, upon any theory, take the trouble to say so?" (TVD, p. 175). And it was probably for this reason that neither of the two particular poems that follow was included in the Poetical Works.

These poems express, as from within, the soul of someone in a state of damnation: the first is aware of her condition, the second is not. For the sake of convenience in reference I have given them the titles they lack: "Moon Song" and "The Barrow." The first occurs in The Lost Princess (1875).
[Moon Song]

Out in the cold,
With a thin-worn fold
Of withered gold
Around her rolled,
Hangs in the air the weary moon.
She is old, old, old;
And her bones all cold,
And her tales all told,
And her things all sold,
And she has no breath to croon.

Like a castaway clout,
She is quite shut out!
She might call and shout,
But no one about
Would ever call back: 'Who's there?'
There is never a hut,
Not a door to shut,
Not a footpath or rut,
Long road or short cut,
Leading to anywhere!

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 higher
Till she saw it expire;
And now she is cold as death.

She never will smile
All the lonesome while.
Oh, the mile after mile,
And never a stile!
And never a tree or a stone!
She has not a tear!
Afar and anear
It is all so drear,
But she does not care,
Her heart is as dry as a bone.
None to come near her!
No one to cheer her!
No one to jeer her!
No one to hear her!
Not a thing to lift and hold!
She is always awake,
But her heart will not break;
She can only quake,
Shiver and shake—
The old woman is very cold.
(TLP, pp. 16-17)

To begin with, it should be noted that this particular characterization of the moon is unusual in MacDonald. In "The Wind and the Moon," for example, she is remote and regal, unaware of the storm of earth:

A matchless, wonderful, silvery light,
Radiant and lovely, the queen of the night.
("The Wind and the Moon," II: 354)

In similar vein she is described in *There and Back*:

[The moon] went walking through the unobstructed sky, mistress of the air, queen of the heavens, lady of the eyes of man. Yet was she lady only because she beheld her lord. She saw the light of his light, and told what she saw of him. (*T & B*, p. 630)

The symbolic significance, obliquely suggested here, is further extended in the exalted vision of Annie Anderson:
"The mune . . . maun be like the face o' Christ, for it gies licht and ye can luik at it notwithstanding'. The mune's jist like the sun wi' the ower-muckle taen oot o' it. Or like Moses wi' the veil ower's face. . . . " (AF, p. 251)

These are the associations that MacDonald customarily invokes in his treatment of the moon, particularly when it is considered in conjunction with any of the Wise Women. But she also has a negative aspect, revealed very occasionally in the novels, as well as in "Moon Song." In [Guild Court] MacDonald refers, in an aside, to

the killing stare of the moon, which . . . seemed to be taking her own way with [the heavens and earth] in the consciousness of irresistible power. What that way was, who can tell? The troubled brain of the maniac and the troubled conscience of the malefactor know something about it. . . . (GC, p. 222)

But even here, unpleasant though her powers are, the horror of loneliness, by implication, has a good purpose; the moon has the same function as the wolves in "Lycabas." MacDonald remarks, shortly after the above sentences,
It is to God alone that a man can flee from such terror of the unknown in the fierceness of the sea, in the ghastly eye of the moon, in the abysses of glaciers. . . .

(GC, p. 223)

In Lilith also the moon exemplifies a doctrine central to MacDonald, namely, that apparent evil is actually and ultimately good. Mr Vane is complaining that the moon is staring at him "oddly," that her look is "icy-cold." Then a savage beast emerges from, and plunges back into, the ground:

"That moon is affecting my brain," I said . . . . nor knew that she whom I distrusted was indeed my defence from the realities I took for phantoms: her light controlled the monsters. . . . (Lil, p. 229)

Only once in the novels is the moon presented in a truly unpleasant way, when MacDonald for a moment unwillingly views her in the light of modern astronomy. Here his description approaches the mood of "Moon Song:"

. . . the face of the moon is the face of a corpse-world . . . . the sadness upon it is the sadness of utter loss . . . . her light . . . . is but the reflex from a life-less mirror. . . . . she alone [of all the orbs has] no love left in her, the cold cinder of a quenched world. (St G & St M, p. 68)
But even then he adds, "Not a burnt-out cinder, though! she needs but to be cast again into the furnace of the sun," thus suggesting her ultimate purgatory-salvation.

In all these excerpts, following tradition, the moon is a woman. The Wise Women of the fantasies and fairy tales are usually associated with her, but in her benign virginal and maternal aspects; in the poem she is in the third phase of her classical cycle, the ugly, ancient, evil Hecate figure, associated with witch-craft and death.

Ignorant men cast Irene's Grandmother in this role, but that was because they were incapable of understanding her, not because she was truly malignant (P & C, Ch. V). But in "Moon Song" the moon is presented seriously in her Hecate aspect. Also, as the poem progresses, it gradually becomes clear that she must be viewed not just as Hecate herself but as an old crone who worships Hecate. She is in fact ambiguously seen, as herself, and as a follower of her Self. The significance of this last statement, and the ingenious fitness of the concept, become apparent after a closer consideration of the text.
The Lost Princess, the original setting of the poem, is a fairy-tale for children. Rosamond, the princess, is described as a "low-minded creature" (p. 14) who needs to be saved "from her hatefulness" (p. 15). The Wise Woman, dealing with Rosamond's tantrums and violence, sets her down on the moonlit heath, then, ignoring her, begins to sing:

As strange as the song was the crooning, wailing tune that the wise woman sang. At the first note, almost, you would have thought she wanted to frighten the princess, and so indeed she did. For when people will be naughty they have to be frightened, and they are not expected to like it. (TLP, p. 17)

In context, then, the song is meant ultimately to do good, though taken by itself it presents a totally negative portrait.

The poem is not complicated. Its simplicity of thought is well conveyed by the formal simplicity of its structure, and the regularly shifting metre. The dominant sound is a long O, which strengthens the effect of the poem as a lament, spoken not by, but of, the old woman-moon. Someone is looking at her, observing her, analysing her. She herself does not speak because she is unable to speak; she has become
nothing more than an eternal and fixed moan.

Everything about her is old, cold, weary, lonely, empty, withered and dry. She is barely living. No one cares for her, and she cannot weep for this or for anything. This is the anguish of the Waste Land, a barren level of hell, where nothing happens, nor ever will. Can these bones live? asks Ezekiel; and here the answer is "No." And what was her sin? What reduced her to this horrible stony despair?

She once had a fire,
But she built it no higher,
And only sat higher
Till she saw it expire;
And now she is cold as death.

First there is the remote moon, as itself, then the moon as the old woman; but the old woman represents much more than herself. She is the human soul who has refused life, refused to make use of her "one talent," whatever it was, and who has consequently made nothing. Like Lilith, she is yet another version of Coleridge's Nightmare Life-in-Death, who thickens men's blood with cold. Lilith by her nature created the flames that torment her, and the old woman inhabits the wilderness created by her own barren spirit.
No one can come near to help her, for she has no neighbours. The significance of that self-inflicted deprivation is found in another place: "This love of our neighbour is the only door out of the dungeon of self," says MacDonald (US, 1st Series, p. 214). How, without neighbours, can she love God?

The poem starts as a song to frighten the princess out of her "naughtiness." It does so by showing her the inevitable end of living in and for the Self: one cannot escape the Self. It is clear that the message falls on understanding ears. The princess, "worn out with weeping and rage," falls asleep in the Wise Woman's cottage:

She dreamed that she was the old cold woman up in the sky, with no home and no friends, and no nothing at all, not even a pocket; wandering, wandering for ever over a desert of blue sand, never to get to anywhere, and never to lie down or die. It was no use stopping to look about her, for what had she to do but for ever look about her as she went on and on and on, never seeing anything, and never expecting to see anything! (TLP, pp. 29-30)

As he phrases it elsewhere, the moon (and, temporarily, the princess) is "lost in eternity's lumber room" ("The Lost Soul," II: 36). The elaboration of the
idea of the moon as an "old woman of the roads" is carried out not really to characterize the moon at all, but to show what the human spirit, without love, will become. I called the poem, for convenience, "Moon Song." It would perhaps have been more accurate to have called it "The Waste Land." The Dolorous Stroke that creates the waste is the choice of Self over everything else.

In this poem someone outside the lost soul is describing her, someone who can pity her and call her "the poor old crone." But in "The Barrow" there is no outsider, no detachment, only a weird fragment of dream that sinks deeper and deeper into a necrophilic nightmare.

The poem appears in Donal Grant (1883). The earl, constantly under the influence of opium, and "walking in a dream" (DG, p. 379), murmurs incoherently while fumbling in the dark at the blank wall of a little room:

... this to Donal was terrible as no voice from the world of the departed could have been; this was a voice from a world of sin and suffering--a world the negation of the eternal, a world of darkness and the shadow of death. (DG, p. 378)
Presently, under the impression he is reading from a book, the earl begins to improvise:

[The Barrow]

In the heart of the dank earth-cave
Lay the king,
In the marble dome of the church so brave
The huge bells ring.
Said the worm at his side,
King-fool,
Turn to thy bride,
For the night is cool.
Wouldst thou lie like a stone till the nightless morn
Out of the dark be born?
The king through the night enorm
Heard the voice of the worm,
Like the sound of a muttered thunder low
In the realms where no feet go.
And he said, I will rise,
And will myself glad;
I will open my eyes,
And no more be sad.
For who is a god
But him who can spring
Up from the sod,
And be his own king?
I will fashion my gladness,
Dig my own despair,
And for good or badness—
Oh! folly's own care!—
While I am content,
The world shall spin round
Till its force be outspent,
And it drop
Like a top—
A top spun by a boy,
Into the old profound—
While I sit in my tent,
Sit without sound;
Still toss up my world,
See it burst and be drowned
In the blackness uncurled
From the deep hell-ground.
The dreams of a god are the worlds of his slaves!
I will be my own god,
And rule my own knaves.

(DG, pp. 380-81)

The poem begins with a situation familiar to readers of *Lilith* and *Phantastes*: the conscious dead, lying in the grave, aware of being dead, and waiting. There is a major difference in mood, however, between the fantasies and the poem, for Anodos was "right content" to be there, and Mr Vane "grew continuously more conscious of bliss." No state could be further from that of the King of the present poem. The scene is the "heart of the dank earth-cave;" the speakers are the dead man and the "worm at his side." The worm tells him to "turn to his bride," and though the King hears the voice, he does not answer it directly. Rather he addresses his own self, and says he will be a god, sustaining the world by his will, ruling the whole universe by his imagination. In the novel MacDonald says, immediately after the song,

One would have thought that the worm might again have a word to say to the buried dreamer; but no: the worm had vanished, and the dreamer had made himself a god—his own god! (DG, p. 381)
Here is one truly dead in any spiritual sense: all that survives is the babbling Ego. The church above is forgotten, with its marble dome and huge bells, which point to the worldly ostentation of death; the claustrophobic reality is here, underground. A ghost, says MacDonald, compelled by its own inadequacy of spirit, is "like a man in a miserable dream, in which he can do nothing, but in which he must stay, and go dreaming, dreaming on without hope of release" (WMM, p. 112). But in the poem the King is lower than that, for he is unaware of his own damnation. We are listening to the pretensions of a living corpse.

Various questions arise. Who is the King? Who is his bride? Is the worm his bride, perhaps? It despises him, calls him "King-fool," perhaps because it will presently devour his physical being. Though he is roused by the words, he does not really seem to hear them or answer them. Or is his bride the dream of power and sufficiency to which he turns? Do not wait for God to end all Time, says the worm; dark is the mother of Eternity; why wait for the light, to claim your own?

When Mr Vane lies down in the house of Adam to
sleep in death, he has many dreams, beautiful dreams:

I was in the land of thought--farther in, higher up than the seven dimensions, the ten senses: I think I was where I am--in the heart of God... I lay imagining what the light would be when it came... 
(Lil, pp. 400-01)

Later, still asleep, though at first deeming himself awake, he talks with Adam:

"Alas! when I but dream how am I to know it? [he asks] The dream best dreamed is the likest to the waking truth!"
[Adam answers]: "When you are quite dead, you will dream no false dream. The soul that is true can generate nothing that is not true, neither can the false enter it."
(Lil, p. 403)

But no one can entirely distinguish between the true and the false while he is not yet truly dead to Self: and the King in the poem cannot so distinguish, for his dreams are obviously false weak imaginings, though he is persuaded they are true. For him resurrection is the immediate resumption of his own will, not the final laying down of it. The world will be his plaything, his bubble, which like a cast-off toy may be lost in the darkness of the "hell-ground" in which he himself lies dreaming. The world he sees, in fact,
is no more than the product of his dream.

On first reading, the poem seems only a fantastic fragment, but actually it is much more. The moon wanders forever in a barren world of Self, the cold negation of life in the form of an old woman. The King is a parody of life, also existing only in Self, but with a difference. She has rejected everything; he would clasp and claim everything.

When a character in one of the novels has a similar dream, induced by the delirium of fever, he understands the metaphorical rebuke to his former conceit and ingratitude:

Once I was a King sitting upon a great tarnished throne, dusty and worm-eaten, in a lofty room of state, the doors standing wide, and the spiders weaving webs across them, for nobody ever came in, and no sound shook the moat-filled [sic] air: on that throne I had to sit to all eternity. . . . (HA, p. 279)

But Walter repents. Obviously the King in the poem will not, and that is the essential difference between the way each regards his dream.

Perhaps, after all, the worm is not at, but in, the side of the King, like the burning white worm which crawls into Lilith. Through the dark spot on
her side, which represents the evil in her moral nature, it enters, to torture her into repentance, (Lil, p. 372). "Self," says MacDonald, ". . . is as full of worms as it can hold, and is the damnedest friend a man can have" (DG, p. 668). And in one of his sermons he talks of those who mistake the joy of life for life itself . . . These love self, not life, and self is but the shadow of life. When it is taken for life itself, and set at the man's centre, it becomes a live death in the man, a devil he worships as his god; the worm of the death eternal he clasps to his bosom as his one joy!3

This is the point at which the poem opens. Starting with an unlikely dialogue, it ends with a megalomaniac boast of self-deification that suggests the maulerings of a backward and unpleasant child.

In Donal Grant, a character reflects that "without [God] the whole universe was but a charnel house" (DG, p. 610). The earth-cave would then be the state of mind of someone who refuses God, and the King would be not physically but spiritually dead. What then of the worm? The answer to this is I think to be found in Shakespeare. Twice in the novels (TW, p. 366; PF, p. 284), MacDonald, quoting from
Much Ado About Nothing, refers to "Don Worm, the conscience." If one takes the worm in the poem as this, then certain lines are clearer, and the King's answer to his worm becomes an even stronger principle of negation. King-fool, asks the worm, is lying in the dark like a stone all you can make of your existence? Is this how you will spend Time, until Eternity begins? Interpreted this way, the worm is uttering a reproach and a command: turn to your bride, the New Jerusalem. And the King's answer, "I will arise," suggests and avoids the resolve of the Prodigal Son. Far from adding, "and go to my Father," the King claims he himself is the Father. "I--my--my own" are recurrent words in what follows. There is no god but himself, and the voice of his conscience is like muffled thunder from a dead realm.

If the Moon is the person who, through her own withdrawal from life, is now unable to repent because of her heart of stone, the King is the person who deliberately wills not to repent. Hence he is the person who has committed one version of the unpardonable sin. The poem seems to end abruptly, almost in mid sentence. But in actual fact, everything has
been said.

There is a third poem of total negation which I would like to consider in this group: "A Mammon Marriage." Although it is as hopeless in the picture it presents as the first two, it is included in the Poetical Works. I suspect this is because of Mac-Donald's liking for the scene itself, for in a greatly expanded form it becomes the basis of a chapter in Lilith entitled "A Grotesque Tragedy."

A Mammon-Marriage

The croak of a raven hoar!
A dog's howl, kennel-tied!
Loud shuts the carriage-door:
The two are away on their ghastly ride
To Death's salt shore!

Where are the love and the grace?
The bridegroom is thirsty and cold!
The bride's skull sharpens her face!
But the coachman is driving, jubilant, bold,
The devil's pace.

The horses shivered and shook
Waiting gaunt and haggard
With sorry and evil look;
But swift as a drunken wind they staggered
'Longst Lethe brook.

Long since, they ran no more;
Heavily pulling, they died
On the sand of the hopeless shore
Where never swelled or sank a tide,
And the salt burns sore.
Flat their skeletons lie,  
White shadows on shining sand;  
The crusted reins go high  
To the crumbling coachman's bony hand  
On his knees awry.  

Side by side, jarring no more,  
Day and night side by side,  
Each by a doorless door,  
Motionless sit the bridegroom and bride  
On the Dead-Sea-shore.  

(II: 85-6)

The first paragraph of the relevant chapter in *Lilith*, and a few later excerpts, are worth quoting, for the differences are significant. This follows the scene in which Mr Vane watched the dance in the forest glade performed by skeletons in various stages of being re-clothed in flesh, the state of their bodies being indicative of the level they have reached in their moral regeneration.

I had not gone ten paces when I caught sight of a strange-looking object, and went nearer to know what it might be. I found it a mouldering carriage of ancient form, ruinous but still upright on its heavy wheels. On each side of the pole, still in its place, lay the skeleton of a horse; from their two grim white heads ascended the shrivelled reins to the hand of the skeleton-coachman seated on his tattered hammer-cloth; both doors had fallen away; within sat two skeletons, each leaning back in its corner. (*Lil*, p. 266)
This is basically the scene of the poem. The prose, however, continues with the two skeletons leaping out of the carriage "with a cracking rattle of bones" (Lil, p. 267). Their vicious dialogue establishes that in this world they had been married, come to hate and despise each other, and were divorced. My Lord (as the male is called) is not convinced that he is as he seems:

"... I am but jesting in a dream! It is of no consequence, however; dreaming or waking, all's one—all merest appearance. You can't be certain of anything, and that's as good as knowing there is nothing!" (Lil, p. 269)

Though both have forgotten their own and each other's names, they have complete recall of their grievances. Only gradually, after mutual recriminations, do they realize their situation for what it is:

"Where are we? [asks My Lord] Locality is the question! To be or not to be, is not the question!"
"We are in the other world, I presume!" [answers My Lady]
"Granted!—but in which or what sort of other world? This can't be hell!"
"It must: there's marriage in it! You and I are damned in each other." (Lil, p. 269)
Their dialogue continues along these lines, each trying to hurt feelings which no longer exist, and persisting in a malice more chilling because it is consciously enjoyed.

The situation in the poem is somewhat different. In *Lilith* the pair are dead and damned, but not eternally, for in spite of the intensity of their mutual hatred they are forced by their situation into a small measure of co-operation. Through this they will begin to enflesh themselves, and by the time they "have faces" they will be ready to leave the haunted woods.

But the poem presents a totally static picture. The bride and bridegroom are outside of Time, hopelessly and eternally dead, on the wrong side of Lethe, motionless and silent.

Each stanza has a wide range of association beyond the immediate statements. Poe's raven would be an appropriate literary association in the first stanza, for his "Nevermore" sums up the mood of the poem. Readers of *Lilith* will associate it with Mr Raven, for his croak would indeed presage spiritual disaster. The sounds of doom and finality mark the
end of one life and the beginning of another, the motto of which might be, "Truth's a brach must to kennel." The wedding is over, the journey begun; and MacDonald is using "ghastly" here with an awareness surely of the cognitive association with the German "geistlich" (spiritual).

The groom is thirsty and cold, full of lust without love. The bride's face suggests a cutting edge of fierce anticipation, but she is also becoming a literal death's head; whatever motives brought her to this marriage lead to spiritual death. The wedding drive is like a funeral procession. Neither is concerned with the other. How could there be grace, physically, socially, or theologically, in such a departure?

But who is their "jubilant, bold" coachman? The prose does not explain as much as the poem suggests. In the former, all we know of him is that he, unlike the pair, is not restored to skeletal life. But in the poem all three are crumbling. The coachman's identity is more than hinted at when we are told he drives "the devil's pace," and that his horses have an "evil look." By combining the two
versions, one can say that he drives the pair to their appointed place, then vacates the body he no longer needs. An evil spirit in a temporary habitation, he directs their destiny. "Needs must when the Devil drives" might well be a subtitle for the poem. The last stanza is a representation of eternal damnation.

But it can also be seen as more (or less, depending on the reader's preferences), for if, at the conclusion of the poem, one reconsiders the title, another interpretation is possible. The poem is, after all, included in the section of the Poetical Works entitled "Parables." A worldly marriage has taken place. The pair are setting out in their married life; it is not just the start of the wedding tour. The speaker is an onlooker at the marriage. He sees or feels the finality of the departure from the previous mode of life: an irrevocable step has been taken, and nothing but doom lies in the future. What follows is a description of the state of mind and soul of the couple as their married way of life becomes established in the world they have chosen. They resemble the men whose spirits Dante saw in Hell, although their living bodies still walked the
world. In spirit, the two are nothing but a huddle of bones, forgetful of the past because it is no longer relevant, surrounded by the salt that has lost its savour. Their social life is like Dead Sea fruit, fair without and bitter ashes within.

Certainly there are technical flaws in the poem that jar the mood, awkward phrases such as "'Longst Lethe's brook." But the picture itself is powerfully presented, a vignette as brief and as graphic as any scene in Holbein's Dance of Death.

All three poems can best be read as allegories of states of mind, exemplifying what MacDonald once wrote in a sermon: "The one thing that cannot be forgiven is the sin of choosing to be evil, of refusing deliverance" (US, 3rd Series, p. 178). In these poems he presents three images of refusal: the old, cold, lonely hag; the King and the worm in the grave; the crumbling carriage set by the bitter water. Whether they represent what he feared to find in himself, or what he saw around him, is impossible to state. But he did once remark in a sermon, "The condition of most men and women seems to me a life in death, an abode in unwhited sepulchres" (US, 2nd
Series, p. 151).

All three poems are linked with dreams, directly or indirectly. Rosamund listens to the "Moon Song," and subsequently dreams that she is herself the desolate figure. When the earl chants "The Barrow" he is in a state of drug-induced reverie. "A Mammon Marriage" is the germ of an episode in Lilith; and, as mentioned earlier, a close resemblance between a poem and a scene in a fantasy strongly suggests (though it does not in itself prove), that the two have a common dream-origin. Moreover, the characters in all three poems exist in a timeless vacuum: the past is virtually forgotten, and there is no future, because there is no possibility of change. The dark desert of the sky, the dank earth-cave, and the barren shore are eternal metaphors of despair, found and inhabited in nightmare.


MacDonald rarely presents to the reader such unmitigated darkness of soul as he does in the three poems just considered. Nor does he, in the bulk of his work, usually indicate misery, despair, or doubt,
without their corresponding positive emotions. But occasionally, and only in the poetry, his own personal sorrows find full expression, as do the questions concerning death that arise from the bereavements. The four poems now to be examined are of this type.

Because it is difficult, and at times impossible, to arrange MacDonald's poems chronologically, I shall deal with them thematically. The poems to be considered are "The Home of Death," "The Herd and the Mavis," "The Auld Fisher," and "Time and Tide."

"The Home of Death" appeared first in Sir Gibbie (1879), a novel written during that exceedingly difficult time already alluded to, when bad news of friends, family difficulties, personal ill-health, and the deaths of two of his children were dominating MacDonald's life. This novel, which began to appear in parts in the fall of 1879, "marked," according to Greville, "a renewal of my father's powers" (GMHW, p. 488). But the poem itself has a confused bitterness of tone which suggests that it was written some months earlier, during the time of his deepest grief.

The original setting of the poem is relevant to its interpretation. In the story Donal (who is
about to propose marriage to her) is leading Ginevra (who is about to refuse his proposal) down into a disused granite quarry:

When they reached the end of the cutting, Ginevra started at sight of the vast gulf, the moon showing the one wall a ghastly grey, and from the other throwing a shadow half across the bottom. But a winding road went down into it. . . . The side of the quarry was on one hand, and on the other she could see only into the gulf.

"Oh, Donal. . . . this is like a dream I once had, of going down and down a long roundabout road, inside the earth, down and down, to the heart of a place full of the dead—the ground black with death, and between horrible walls."

. . . . Presently Donal again began to sing. . . .

The poem follows, untitled. The Poetical Works version provides a title, but makes only minor changes in the text, mostly affecting punctuation.

The Home of Death

"Death, whaur do ye bide, auld Death?"
"I bide in ilka breath,"
Quo' Death;
"No i' the pyramids,
No whaur the wormie rids
'Neth coffin-lids;
I biden whaur life has been,
An' whaur's nae mair to be dune."
"Death, whaur do ye bide, auld Death?"
"Wi' the leevin, to dee 'at are laith,"
Quo' Death;
"Wi' the man an' the wife
'At loo like life,
Bot strife;
Wi' the bairns 'at hing to their mither,
Wi' a' 'at loo ane anither."

"Death, whaur do ye bide, auld Death?"
"Abune an' aboot an' aneth,"
Quo' Death;
"But o' a' the airts
An' o' a' the pairs,
In herts--
Whan the tane to the tither says, Na,
An' the north win' begins to blaw."  

(II: 409)

When Donal fell silent,

"What a terrible song, Donal!" said Gin-evra.

He made no reply, but went on, leading her down into the pit; he had been afraid she was going to draw back, and sang the first words her words suggested. . . . The aspect of the place grew frightful to her. . . . The moon seemed to look straight down upon her, asking what they were about, away from their kind, in such a place of terror. (Sir G, pp. 373-75)

It is a nightmare setting for a grim poem. But the nightmare here is not that of the previous group of poems, which represent various types of willed, stony helplessness and chosen damnation. What is shown here has nothing to do with individual choice, but
purports to state the inescapable plight of mankind.

The poem consists of a dialogue between a man, or Man, and Death. The same question is asked three times over, with a sort of weary familiarity, and answered in a series of paradoxes that begin with the first line of the poem. For how can Death be said to live? And why does he say he lives in every breath?

(1) Where does Death live? His first answer is in negatives: "I do not live in the pyramids, nor where the worm riddles the corpses. I do not stay where life has been, where no more is to be done."

(2) Where does Death live? The second stanza unexpectedly shifts the answer to another level altogether, one at first view not plain at all. "I stay with the living who are loath to die," says Death, "where man and wife love each other as life itself, without quarreling; with children who cling to their mother; with all who love one another."

(3) Where does Death live? The third stanza does not conclude, really, but by its allusiveness leaves grimly unanswered conjectures. "I live everywhere," Death says, "but of all places, I reside most in
hearts, when one denies the wish of the other, and
the north wind begins to blow."

This third stanza requires elaboration. Death
does not dwell in the obvious places (amongst silence,
decay, antiquity), but with loving families. He
lives everywhere, particularly where there is a den-
ial—but of what, is not stated. And what is the
north wind that "begins to blow?" At this point
cross-referencing becomes essential.

In the children's fantasy, At the Back of the
North Wind (1871), North Wind is a wise, loving,
powerful and mysterious embodiment of the element,
but she is also much more. When Diamond at last
begins to fear his visitant is only a dream, she
reassures him:

"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, some-
times Ruin; and they have another name for
me which they think the most dreadful of
all." (ABNW, p. 377)

At the end of the book Diamond is found on the floor
outside his room, and the narrator says, "I saw at
once how it was. They thought he was dead. I knew he had gone to the back of the north wind." (ABNW, p. 391).

Herodotus was the first to mention the association between the country at the back of the north wind, and death; his reference is the source of the allusion in MacDonald's book. "When the north wind begins to blow" would in the poem refer then to the first premonitions, or positive assurances, of death. Hearts are where Death is most at home, when "the one to the other says No." But what are the one and the other? One heart to another? The person who is about to be left, denying the approach of Death? Or the person who is about to die, denying the fact of the approach? Are they maintaining a fiction with each other, that one of them is not to die? Or is it the one person denying to himself that he will die? Who speaks the flat denial? And to whom?

None of the answers Death gives is acceptable, for after each the speaker merely repeats his original question. And who is the "auld Death" to whom he is speaking? Perhaps one of the sermons suggests his identity:
The death of not believing in God--the God revealed in Jesus--is the only death. The other is nowhere but in the fears and fancies of unbelief.\(^5\)

If this is related to the poem, then the latter is an internal argument springing from such "fears and fancies;" it is these which postulate the dialogue with some eternal entity. But the questioner, in asking such a question, is giving Death a character of his own making:

In what [Death] appears to us, it is a type of what we are without God. But there is no falsehood in it. The dust must go back to the dust. He who believes in the body more than in the soul, cleaves to this aspect of death. (MOL, pp. 130-31)

In stanza 2 of the poem, Death itself claims this identification, by showing that love of those close in family affections is as much a cleaving to mortality as love of one's own physical self. Love, when it includes fear of death for self or other, is also a home for death; those who are "loath to die" or to have others die provide the home. MacDonald is not saying human loves are wrong, but that we should be generous in letting the loved one go:
He who believes in thought, in mind, in love, in truth, can see the other side—can rejoice over the bursting shell which allows the young oak to creep from its kernel-prison. The lower is true, but the higher overcomes and absorbs it. . . . When the spirit of death is seen, the body of death vanishes from us. Death is God's angel of birth. (MOL, p. 131)

Hence, the very fact that this dialogue is being held proves the questioner wrong, from the start, in his assumption. That is the full paradox of the situation: what he questions would not exist in questionable form, if he were not asking it questions. "We who are, have nothing to do with death; our relations are alone with life" (US, 2nd Series, p. 145). The most congenial home for Death, then, is where there is a denial of eternal life:

It is the inward life of truth that conquers the outward death of appearance. . . . (MOL, p. 114)

. . . all that is not God is death. (US, 2nd Series, p. 163)

The complete acceptance of mortality as the will of God, both for one's self and for those we love, brings us to immortality. "You will be dead so long as you refuse to die," says Adam to Lilith (Lil, p.
331). And physical death, truly accepted, experienced, embraced, is not death at all:

"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."

Fear of death is universal, for it permeates everything, "abune an' aboot an' aneth," as the third stanza puts it. Those who live in the fear of annihilating Death are "at strife with immortality--bound for the dust by [their] own choice . . . " (MOL, p. 129). Thus the simple, powerful "Na" of the penultimate line is spoken really to God, for it sets one's own emotional fears against His will, when Death is immanent. The poem can be seen as a dramatic re-enactment of Carlyle's Everlasting Nay. And that is where the poem stops. The questioner has no comment on the answers he gets; but one can hardly believe he is satisfied with what he hears.

It is clear now how appropriate to the theme of the poem is its setting in the novel: a road down into a dark stony gulf, provoking recall of a night-
mare in which the ground was "black with death." The place, and the poem, are full of despair, for if true family love, man for wife, child for mother, fosters a clinging to each other's mortality, what then can be safely experienced in this world? There is no hint of an answer; the questioner is left to his own reflections, or to none. Small wonder Ginevra calls it "a terrible song." It is possible that Louisa MacDonald made the same comment.

"The Herd and the Mavis," which also appeared first in *Sir Gibbie*, resembles "The Home of Death" in that it consists almost entirely of a dialogue given without external comment. It too presents a metaphysical argument concerning death, but while the emotions of the questioner are more freely expressed and discussed, he too is left with unacceptable thoughts to digest. The difference here, however, is that he is talking to someone who is confident that God knows what he is doing, even if the questioner is not.

[The Herd and the Mavis]

What gars ye sing, said the herd laddie,
What gars ye sing sae lood?
To tice them oot o' the yerd, laddie,
The worms, for my daily food.
    An' aye he sang, an' better he sang,
    An' the worms creepit in an' oot;
    An' ane he tuik, an' twa he loot gang,
    But still he carolled stoot.

It's no for the worms, sir, said the herd,
They comena for yer sang.
Think ye sae, sir? answered the bird,
    Maybe ye're no i' the wrang.

    But aye etc.

Sing ye yoong sorrow to beguile
    Or to gie auld fear the flags?
Na, quo' the mavis; it's but to wile
    My wee things oot o' her eggs.

    An' aye etc.

The mistress is plenty for that same gear,
    Though ye sangna ear' nor late.
It's to draw the deid frae the moul' sae drear,
    An' open the kirkyard gate.

    An' aye etc.

Na, na; it's a better sang nor yer ain
    Though ye hae o' notes a feck,
   'At wad mak auld Barebanes there sae fain
    As to lift the muckle sneck!

    But aye etc.

Better ye sing nor a burn i' the mune,
    Nor a wave ower san' that flows,
Nor a win' wi' the glintin' stars abune,
    An' aneth the roses in rows;

    An' aye etc.

But I'll speir ye nae mair, sir, said the herd?
    I fear what ye micht say neist.
Ye wad but won'er the mair, said the bird, 
    To see the thoughtts i' my breist.

    And aye he sang, an' better he sang,
    An' the worms creepit in an' oot;
    An' aine he tuik, an' twa he loot gang,
    But still he carolled stoot.

(Sir G, p. 207)

The poem may be loosely paraphrased as follows:
(1) "Why do you sing so loud?" asked the herdsman.  
    "To entice the worms, for my daily food." Refrain in full.
(2) "They don't come for your song, so it's not for the worms."  
    "You may not be wrong."
(3) "Do you sing to beguile sorrow, or to frighten away fear?"  
    "No, I sing to wile my young from out the eggs."
(4) "Your wife would do that, even if you never sang."  
    "It is to draw the dead from the earth, and open the gate of the churchyard."
(5, 6) "It would take a better song than yours to make Death even lift the latch. You sing better than the sounds of water, or a wind blowing between stars and roses,
(7) but, I'll ask you no more, for fear of what you might say next."  
    "You would be even more surprised
to see the thoughts in my breast." Refrain in full. The refrain, completely written out only twice, provides the background of the dialogue. The first time it gives the contrast between the bird busily choosing its worms, and the stock-still herd; the second time it emphasizes the worth of the bird's activities, and their symbolic associations.

This strange dialogue seems to ask only one simple question: Why do you sing? To which the bird gives three answers, on a rising scale of improbability, all of which the herd rejects. He ends the conversation with praise of the song, but stops his questioning for fear of even more extravagant claims. The bird indicates that he could indeed startle him further.

I shall not consider the theme at this point, for the revised version in the Poetical Works gives a totally different tone to what, originally, was a small parable of resurrection provided for a casual questioner.

Apart from a few changes in punctuation, spelling, and several words, and the addition of quotation marks, the two versions are the same to the end of
stanza 4. Then stanzas 5 and 6 are reversed in order, and a new stanza is added. The effect on the mood of the poem is startling:

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"Better ye sing nor a burn i' the mune,
Nor a wave ower san' that flows,
Nor a win' wi' the glintin stars abune,
An' aneth the roses in rows;

But a better sang it wud tak nor yer ain,
Though ye hae o' notes a feck,
To mak the auld Barebanes there sae fain
As to lift the muckle sneck!

An' ye wudna draw ae bairnie back
Frae the arms o' the bonny man
Though its minnie was greitin alas an' alack,
An' her cries to the bairnie wan!

An' I'll speir ye nae mair, sir," said the herd,
"I fear what ye micht say neist!"
"I doobt ye wud won'er, sir," said the bird,
"To see the thouchts i' my breist!"

(II: 407)

The herd's admiration for the song is now the ironic prelude to a bitter denial of the bird's last answer, not, as formerly, a piece of flattery (or perhaps true praise) as a means of ending a dialogue which the herd finds unreasonably foolish. "Your song is all very well," he says now, "but it would take something better than that to make Death even lift the latch of the graveyard gate; and you could not bring
back one child from the arms of Jesus, even if the cries of its grieving mother had reached it." Then follows the last stanza, with a change in the penultimate line. When the praise is the herd's last word, the dialogue is in tone a polite exchange. When a gibing reproach is his last word, the mood is confused, and unhappy.

The dead child is the crux of the poem, and the question that is now asked is not "What makes you sing?" but "What is the use of singing?" (Or even, by extension, "What is the use of being a poet?") The herd has a "young," or recent, sorrow, and an "auld," or long-standing, fear. He is grieving for himself, for his child, and for its mother. In Heather and Snow one of the characters always refers to Jesus as "the bonnie man;" hence, when the herd refers to his child as being "in the arms o' the bonnie man," he is trying to hold to an earlier trust in God. But his mood is bitter, skeptical, and his irony is thin disguise for his painfully rebellious indirect query: What has life to do with Death? Roses and flowing water and stars are all very well, but you'll have to do better than those to raise
the dead! But the mavis, in its quiet certitude, will not answer.

The character of the herd is plainly indicated. He is a man, neither more nor less. But the mavis is much more than a bird. He becomes more complex the more one considers his tone, actions, and words, and above all, their significance. Taking him on the so-to-speak "human" level, he shows a touch of humour (there is a nice distinction, for example, between saying "You're right," and "Maybe ye're no i' the wrang"), and even though he constantly contradicts the herd, he does it with civility. But he is still a bird, singing and pursuing his meal between comments.

However, a bird in MacDonald is a powerful symbol. It can represent, or even be, a prayer. It can also be a spiritual director; he calls a lark, for example, a "wee feathered priestie" and a "wee minor prophet" ("The Laverock," II: 396). But also, and even more importantly, a bird represents God's care for everything He has created:

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?
... ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12: 6-7)

Not [a sparrow] shall fall on the ground without your Father. (Matt. 10: 29)

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? (Luke 12: 24)

In Chapter XIII of *At the Back of the North Wind*, Diamond's mother fears they will all starve, the father being out of work. But Diamond holds up to her the example of the birds, who "take no thought for the morrow" (Matt. 6: 34), and insists that since no one is hungry at that moment, there is no need to worry. At even greater length, in his poem, "Consider the Ravens," MacDonald points out that birds do not worry about the future, but are grateful for to-day's food, joy, or whatever the gift may be:

Thy bird has pain, but has no fear
Which is the worst of any gear;
When cold and hunger and harm betide him,
He does not take them and stuff inside him. . . .
Neither jumbles God's will
With dribblets from his own still.

It is true that birds die of "cold or hunger, sick-
ness or age," but

It shall not cause me any alarm,
For neither so comes the bird to harm
Seeing our father, thou hast said,
Is by the sparrow's dying bed. . . .

It cometh therefore to this, Lord:
I have considered thy word,
And henceforth will be thy bird.

(II: 278)

Far from reaching this point, the herd cannot even
listen properly to the song of the mavis. The latter
is a wise bird; he does not try to force consolation
of any kind on the herd, but merely indicates that
he could say more than he has done.

Besides being in himself a living emblem of
God's care, the mavis is engaged in an activity that
bears an allegorical interpretation. The two speakers
are in the churchyard; when the herd refers to "auld
Barebanes there" he is surely pointing at something.
He may even be indicating the grave of his child--
though it could equally be a carving on a stone near-
by, such as MacDonald describes in one of the novels:
". . . an ancient gravestone which I knew well in a
certain Sussex churchyard, the top of it carved into
the rough resemblance of a human skeleton" (TSP, p.
62). The bird is choosing his worms, letting two go for each one he takes, not storing them up, and while he attends to his needs, he is carolling his song. I do not think it is too much to see in the last verb a suggestion of Christmas, and hence of divine birth, for the bird is saying throughout that he knows only birth. His singing and his howking the worms out are the same activity basically, for the song draws them out, brings his young to life, and will raise the dead. Birth-from-the-shell, birth-from-the-grave, birth-from-the-earth are all the products of song, says the mavis: and all, by implication, point to resurrection. This poem is, in fact, yet another version of the metamorphosis theme discussed in the last chapter. These worms, it is true, unlike those thrown up by Mr Raven, do not fly away as butterflies, but they nourish the bird who sings the song, and therefore are fulfilling their purpose. In the relevant scene from Lilith, after watching the butterfly soar aloft, Mr Raven asks:

"Where do the worms come from?" . . .
"Why, from the earth, as you have just seen!" I answered.
"Yes, last!" he replied. "But they can't have come from it first--for that will never go back to it!" he added, looking up. (Lil, p. 201)

The mavis also knows that the dead cannot come back, nor does he want them to; the herd on the other hand longs to "draw the bairnie back." The mavis makes no effort to answer the herd's charge that he cannot do so, for it is relevant to nothing that concerns him. As (like Mr Raven) he chooses his worms, so death chooses a child. The song that calls up the worms also hatches the eggs, though the mother-bird does not know it. The same song will bring another birth for the child, though neither human parent believes it, for all they want at the moment is what they had. The song of the mavis is like the creative "voice of the Lord" in the psalm, which "maketh the hinds to bring forth young" (Ps. 29: 8). It does even more, but the herd will not listen to any more; he is not ready to hear it.

There are several verbal ambiguities in the poem which increase this unfinished effect. "I doobt ye wud won'er, sir" can be Englished as "I don't think you would wonder, if . . . " or "I am
sure you would wonder, if . . . " you could see my inmost thoughts. The first suggests that the herd may some time be enlightened; the second seems like a regretful denial that he ever will. Both interpretations are possible. The original version reads, "Ye wad but won'er the mair / To see the thochts . . . . " The revision is in keeping with the unresolved questions of the rest of the poem.

The other ambiguity is in the refrain, in the line: "aye he sang, an' better he sang." This could mean that he kept singing better, i.e., he improved his song (as he does, moving from worms to the dead), or—and I think it more likely—that it was well for him to sing: he is better off than the herd.

At the end of "The Home of Death" the reader is brought up against a blank wall, over which he cannot look any further; there is no more to be said along those particular lines. But here, though the man evades further thought-provoking comment, the poem is not over, for the bird knows better than the man and points the way for the reader also to recognize what he is saying. But the interpretation can be carried a step further. The voice of the mavis is
the interior rebuke to the herd's outward grief and bitterness. The sight of the bird instigates an argument within the herd, in which what he knows with his mind is argued against by what he feels in his heart. The sight of the bird, with all its spiritual associations, reminds him that there is more to death than he is now capable of feeling.

"The Herd and the Mavis" is concerned with the frame of mind created by the death of a much-loved child, whose loss the father bitterly mourns. He wants the child to be brought back to him, to restore the past. The next poem is spoken by an old man whose only desire is to follow into death those who have gone ahead of him.

Several of MacDonald's poems are supposedly spoken by old people, e.g., "The Sang o' the Auld Fowk" (II: 414), "The Auld Man's Prayer" (II: 415); and some are specifically in his own person as he approaches old age: e.g., "To My Aging Friends" (I: 305), and "Christmas Song of the Old Children" (I: 306). He had a deep interest in this period in life even before he himself reached his fifties, and in the prose he takes obvious pleasure in cele-
brating characters illustrative of an old age full of trust in God and hopeful love, such as Andrew Comin in Donal Grant, and old Rogers in Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood. Usually, in prose or poetry, old people are as "smilin an' fain an' willin" as the old woman in the poem:

"Ye think I luik canty, my bonny man,  
Sittin watchin the last o' the sun sae gran'?  
Weel, an' I'm thinkin ye're no that wrang,  
For 'deed i' my hert there's a wordless sang!  
("Granny Canty," II: 418)"

In the next poem, MacDonald is apparently adding to the gallery:

The Auld Fisher

There was an auld fisher, he sat by the wa',  
An' luikit oot ower the sea;  
The bairnies war playin, he smil't on them a',  
But the tear stude in his e'e.

An' it's--oh to win awa, awa!  
An' it's, oh to win awa  
Whaur the bairns come hame, an' the wives they bide,  
An' God is the father o' a'!

Jocky an' Jeamy an Tammy oot there  
A' i' the boatie gaed doon;  
An' I'm ower auld to fish ony mair,  
Sae I hinna the chance to droon!

An' it's--oh to win awa, awa! etc.
An' Jeannie she grant to ease her hert,
    An' she easit hersel awa;
But I'm ower auld for the tears to stert,
    An' sae the sighs maun blaw.

    An' it's—oh to win awa, awa! etc.

Lord, steer me hame whaur my Lord has stearit,
    For I'm tired o' life's rockin sea;
An' dinna be lang, for I'm growin that fearit
    'At I'm ablin's ower auld to dee!

    An' it's—oh to win awa, awa!
    An' it's, oh to win awa
Whaur the bairns come hame, an' the wives they bide,
    An' God is the father o' a'!

(The original version, in The Marquis of Lossie [1877],
differs very little from this; the revisions are almost entirely in punctuation and spelling.)

The setting of the poem is provided in the first stanza; the other three are spoken by the old fisherman:

(1) He sits by the wall, looking out over the sea,
and watching the children play, with a smile and a tear.

(2) He looks out to sea, remembering three men (presumably his sons) whose boat was lost. He himself
is now too old to fish, and hence has no "chance" to drown.

(3) Jeannie (his wife?) grieved herself to death,
but he is too old to weep; he can only sigh.

(4) His prayer: he begs to be taken home, and soon, for he is beginning to fear he has become too old to die.

The refrain is his sigh of longing—just to get away, to where the children come home (i.e., don't drown at sea) and the wives don't leave (i.e., don't die), and God is the father of all.

On the surface, the plain sense of it is clear, though it is enriched by a recollection of the associations, mentioned earlier, of the words home, father, and child. In the short story, "The Wow o' Rivven," the friendless girl and the old man die; the last sentence of the story reads: "... and surely they found the fire burning bright, and heard friendly voices, and felt sweet lips on theirs, in the home to which they went" (AC, p. 119). This is the same note of future quasi-domestic happiness that the old fisher longs for, with the loving Father, the unchanging women, and the children who have indeed "come home." No wonder then that he has a smile for the actual children, for they could be a type of himself. But his play of life is long since over, and
now he is like a child waiting to be fetched, who begins to fear that no one is ever coming for him.7

When the old fisher wishes to go home to his wife and children, MacDonald is directing the reader's imagination towards spiritual reflection, not so much by emphasizing the religious elements as by presenting the pathos of a not uncommon human situation. But the spiritual dimension is clearly important, and appropriate to a full understanding of the scene on the shore.

The apostles were, literally, fishermen, and were told to be "fishers of men"—Jesus's designated teachers. The fisher here could represent a man who feels he is past his Christian work, too feeble to do anything but pray, like St John at the end of Revelation, "Lord Jesus, come quickly." In a detached way he loves those around him, but he is more aware of those who have gone ahead of him, and most of all desires his Father's house. Now a spectator only, neither playing nor toiling, for him life is worthless, though the final haven is sure. This is a gloss that, in view of MacDonald's predilections, would not distort the likely intentions of the poem.
But there is another way altogether of viewing the old fisher's plight, which takes it out of the realm of pathos entirely. He "sits by the wa'"--but wants the Lord to "steer [him] hame," that is, put out to sea. He is tired of "life's rocking sea" only because he is no longer on it, and now is no more than a spectator. Is he not then questioning God's will? Complaining? "I'm ower auld," he says, to fish, to weep, even to die. (The progression is interesting, from practical, to emotional, to spiritual complaints.) Viewed in this way, the fisher, with his deprecating and wry self-pity, should not be regarded sentimentally at all. What the reader can feel is a sympathetic recognition of the human failing of not trusting to God's sense of timing.

Mr Vane's dialogue with a strange old man, towards the end of Lilith, is apposite.⁸ (The mistress of the house of death is Mara, the Mother of Sorrow):

I came where sat a grayheaded man on the sand, weeping.  
"What ails you, sir?" I asked. "Are you forsaken?"  
"I weep," he answered, "because they will not let me die. I have been to the house of death, and its mistress, notwithstanding my years, refuses me . . . . "
"She refuses none whom it is lawful for her to receive," [I said]... "You have never sought death! you are much too young to desire it!"
"I fear your words indicate that, were you young again, neither would you desire it."
"Indeed, young sir, I would not!" ... "You wish to die because you do not care to live: she will not open her door to you, for no one can die who does not long to live." (Lil, p. 395)

The old fisher seems to me very similar to this old man, and both suggest those people, described in a sermon, who

cannot even cease to be, but must, at the will of [God], go on living, weary of what is not life, able to assert their relation to life only by refusing to be content with what is not life[.] (US, 2nd Series, p. 154)

The old fisher's plight, seen thus, is critical, for what on first reading seems to be a pathetic patience turns out to be a condition of spiritual weakness. That he is on the right road is indicated by the last line of the refrain, and by his prayer, "Lord, steer me hame whaur my Lord has steerit." But the last three lines of that stanza express not loving resignation so much as a reproach to God for not falling in with the fisher's decision that he ought to be
dead. The poem in fact conveys a precarious balance between the fisher's trust in God and reliance on his own judgment. MacDonald is here expressing the negative side of what he presents positively in so many novels, whose heroes are entirely content to say, "I wait--I wait." Or, as he expressed it in a little poem,

Wait, soul, for God, and thou shalt bud,  
He waits thy waiting with his weather.  
("Waiting," II: 138)

The danger of impatience is made clear enough in the words of Thomas Crann:

"There may be sic a thing as loupin' into the sea o' life oot o' the ark o' salvation; an' gin ye loup in whan he doesna call ye, or gin ye getna a grip o' his han', whan he does, ye're sure to droon . . . . "  (AF, p. 135)

Since the poem was twice set to music, as a drawing-room song, I suspect that the sentimental interpretation was the usual one; but I think MacDonald was doing more than picturing a touching old man.

This old man is presented as entirely human in his person, his words, and his circumstances, whatever interpretation one chooses to put on the poem.
as a whole. But in some earlier verses, first included in *Alec Forbes*, then revised for the *Poetical Works*, there is a very strange old man indeed. This is the 1865 version:

**Time and Tide**

As I was walkin' on the strand
I spied an auld man sit
On ane auld rock; and aye the waves
Cam washin' to its fit.
And aye his lips gaed mutterin',
And his ee was dull and blae.
As I cam near, he luik'd at me,
But this was a' his say:
"Robbie and Jeannie war twa bonnie bairns,
And they played thegither upo' the shore:
Up cam the tide 'tween the mune and the sterns,
And pairtit the twa wi' an eerie roar."

What can the auld man mean, quo' I,
Sittin' upo' the auld rock?
The tide creeps up wi' moan and cry,
And a hiss 'maist like a mock.
The words he mutters maun be the en'
O' a weary dreary sang--
A deid thing floatin' in his brain,
That the tide will no lat gang.
"Robbie and Jeannie war twa bonnie bairns,
And they played thegither upo' the shore:
Up cam the tide 'tween the mune and the sterns
And pairtit the twa wi' an eerie roar."

What pairtit them, auld man? I said;
Did the tide come up ower strang?
'Twas a braw deith for them that gaed,
Their troubles warna lang.
Or was ane ta'en, and the ither left—
Ane to sing, ane to greet?
It's sair, richt sair, to be bereft,
But the tide is at yer feet.
"Robbie and Jeannie war twa bonnie bairns,  
And they played thegither upo' the shore:  
Up cam the tide 'tween the mune and the sterns,  
And pairtit the twa wi' an eerie roar."

Maybe, quo' I, 'twas Time's gray sea,  
Whase droonin' 's waur to bide;  
But Death's a diver, seekin' ye  
Aneath its chokin' tide.  
And ye'll luik in ane anither's ee  
Triumphin' ower gray Time.  
But never a word he answered me,  
But ower wi' his dreary chime--

"Robbie and Jeannie war twa bonnie bairns,  
And they played thegither upo' the shore:  
Up cam the tide 'tween the mune and the sterns,  
And pairtit the twa wi' an eerie roar."

Maybe, auld man, said I, 'twas Change  
That crap atween the twa?  
Hech! that's a droonin' awfu' strange,  
Ane waur than ane and a'.  
He spak nae mair. I luik't and saw  
That the auld lips cudna gang.  
The tide unseen took him awa--  
Left me to end his sang:  
"Robbie and Jeannie war twa bonnie bairns,  
And they played thegither upo' the shore:  
Up cam the tide 'tween the mune and the sterns,  
And tuik them whaur pairtin' shall be no more."  
(AF, 170-71)

The poem may be summarized as follows:

(1) The narrator finds an old man sitting on a rock by the sea, muttering the refrain of a song: "Robbie and Jeannie were two children who played together on the shore, and were parted by the tide."

(2) "What can he mean?" the narrator asks himself, while the incoming tide seems to mock the old man.
"His words must be the end of a weary song, floating about his brain." Refrain in full.

(3) "What parted them, old man?" asks the narrator. "If the two went together, their separation was short. Or was one taken and the other left? It's hard to be bereaved--but the tide is at your feet." (i.e., you will die soon). Refrain in full.

(4) "Was it Time that did the drowning? But Death comes like a diver from heaven looking for you under that tide, and you'll see each other again." Refrain in full.

(5) The narrator persists: "Was it Change that parted them? That is the worst kind of drowning." But the old man spoke no more, for his lips could not move. The unseen tide (or, the tide, unseen) had taken him away, and left the narrator to repeat the old man's words. The last line of the refrain he changes to "And took them where parting shall be no more," which considerably lightens the effect of the whole poem.

In its original setting in Alec Forbes, the eccentric and alcoholic librarian, Cupples, is the author of the poem. He tells Alec:
"It winna do to gang glowerin' at rainbows. They're Bonnie things, but they're nae brig-backs. Gin ye lippen to them, ye'll be i' the water in a cat-loup." (AF, p. 169)

His own poems he describes as "broken bits" of rainbows, and affects to despise them. When Alec is moved by "Time and Tide" Cupples retorts, "A' nonsense! Moonshine and rainbows! . . . The last line's a' wrang" (AF, p. 171). The last line seems to have had too much "rainbow" promise in it for MacDonald himself, for when he came to revise the poem, he considerably altered the import of the line.

There are a good many minor, and a few major changes in the revised version. The main difference between the two lies, however, in the shift in tone, largely caused by the cumulative effect of all the revisions. The revised version needs to be quoted in full:

**Time and Tide**

As I was walkin on the strand,  
I spied ane auld man sit  
On ane auld black rock; and aye the waves  
Cam washin up its fit.  
His lips they gaed as glen they wad lilt,  
But o' liltin, wae's me, was nane!  
He spak but an overcome, dreary and dreigh,  
A burden wha's sang was gane:
"Robbie and Jeanie war twa bonnie bairns;
They playt thegither i' the gloamin's hush;
Up cam the tide and the mune and the sterns,
And pairtit the twa wi' a glint and a gush."

"What can the auld man mean," quod I,
"Sittin' o' the auld black rock?
The tide creeps up wi' a moan and a cry,
And a hiss 'maist like a mock!
The words he mutters maun be the en'
O' some weary auld-warl' sang--
A deid thing floatin' aboot in his brain,
'At the tide 'ill no lat gang!"

"Robbie and Jeanie war twa bonnie bairns;
They playt thegither i' the gloamin's hush:
Up cam the tide and the moon and the sterns,
And pairtit the twa wi' a glint and a gush."

"Hoo pairtit them, auld man" I said;
"Was't the sea cam up ower strang?
Oh, gien thegither the twa o' them gaed
Their pairtin wasna lang!
Or was ane ta'en, and the ither left--
Ane to sing, ane to greit?
It's sair, I ken, to be sae bereft--
But there's the tide at yer feet!"

"Robbie and Jeanie war twa bonnie bairns,
And they playt thegither i' the gloamin's hush:
Up came the tide and the mune and the sterns,
And pairtit the twa wi' a glint and a gush."

"Was't the sea o' space wi' its storm o' time
That wadna lat things bide?
But Death's a diver frae heavenly clime
Seekin' ye neth its tide,
And ye'll gaze again in ither's ee,
Far abune space and time!"
Never ae word he answered me,
But changed a wee his rhyme:
"Robbie and Jeanie war twa bonnie bairns,
And they playt thegither upo' the shore;
Up cam the tide and the mune and the sterns,
And pairtit the twa for evermore."
"May be, auld man, 'twas the tide o' change
That crap atween the twa?
Hech! that's a droonin fearsome strange,
Waur, waur nor ane and a'!
He said nae mair. I luikit, and saw
His lips they couldna gang:
Death, the diver, had ta'en him awa,
To gie him a new auld sang.
Robbie and Jeanie war twa bonnie bairns,
And they playt thegither upo' the shore:
Up cam the tide and the mune and the sterns,
And souft them awa throu a mirksome door!

(II: 373-75)

Some of the changes seem rather pointless. "Up cam the tide 'tween the mune and the sterns" (o.v.) becomes "Up cam the tide and the mune and the sterns" (r.v.), which in context makes it seem, rather oddly, that the moon and the stars also had a hand in parting the two. The tide that first separated them with "an eerie roar," later does so with "a glint an' a gush."
The place of their play (the shore) is changed to the time of it (the gloaming). "'Twas a braw death for them that gaed / Their troubles were na lang" (o.v.) becomes "Oh, gien thegither the twa of them gaed / Their pairtin wasna lang!" (r.v.). And so on.
There are many such divergences.

Some changes are not felicitous. For example, from the purely literary standpoint, the duplication of "Death the Diver" is unfortunate. The first time--
in the original version the only time—MacDonald introduces the image, it is effective, particularly when associated with a poem he had translated from Schiller. There, a diver, at the command of the king, plunged into the horrible depths of a whirlpool to retrieve a golden cup. MacDonald has turned this into a heavenly Diver who searches through the waters of this world to find those who are drowning in the sea of life. The golden cup would then become the "golden bowl" of Ecclesiastes. At the end of the original version, the "tide unseen" takes the old man from the rock; in the revised version, the tide has been deleted. The poem closes then with Death the Diver seizing him, apparently on dry land, to haul him off through the dark door. The confused image is not an asset to the conclusion, and the image loses by its repetition.

But other changes have a great deal of intentional and valuable significance, as in the gradually revealed character of the narrator. Originally, he makes hopeful and encouraging suggestions, and when the old man falls silent in death, the narrator picks up the refrain and ends on a positive note such as
the old man himself had not sounded. If, as seems possible, the old man is Robbie himself, then the final refrain, with its promise of no more parting, is his consolatory epitaph. But in the revised version the end is in some respects far from plain. There are no quotation marks around the last refrain: who, then, speaks it? Is it the narrator in his own mind, expressing his own chilling image of death? Or are the lines an authorial comment, distanced a little from the narrator and the old man, and identifying with both?

Throughout the original version, the narrator is optimistic, though puzzled by the old man's cryptic song; he is sympathetic, but not involved. But in the revised version he too is suffering a loss. The line which originally read, "It's sair, richt sair, to be bereft," becomes "It's sair, I ken, to be sae bereft;" and he has nothing now to say about a place "where parting shall be no more." The old man, too, is gloomier in the revised version, for he claims that Robbie and Jeannie are parted "for evermore," a fear he had not expressed in the original.

The dead child is the focal point of the re-
vised version of "The Herd and the Mavis." Similarly, the seemingly incidental interpolation of "I ken" is in fact crucial to the revised version of "Time and Tide," linking as it does the observer with the observed. It is the narrator's own bereavement which makes the dark door a fitting close to the scene, and forces the reader to consider the poem as an inner landscape of the mind of the author. Originally, the narrator is helpful and optimistic, offering every possible explanation and consolation that suggests itself. In the revised version he cannot say anything about the "heavenly clime." And what was the whole song, of which only the dreary burden is left? "Burden" here must surely be taken in both senses, as something to be borne by the person, as well as the refrain carried by the voice. At the end the burden, in both senses, is carried by no one, and the narrator is left with an empty rock, a deserted shore, oncoming night, and an unspoken lament for mortality. The poem ends with what, in another context, MacDonald calls "the desolation of redoubled silence that closes around an unanswered question" (Malcolm, p. 245).
The old man differs from the old fisher of the previous poem in one chief respect: he is not long- ing for death, but bemoaning his loss. He sits mumbling on a rock, memory almost gone, the tide mocking the shadows of his mind. Seemingly incapable of conversation, speaking nothing but his monotonous, simple, and mysterious lament, he makes a memorable picture. It is one, moreover, which awakens certain literary echoes. The children playing on the shore, for example, evoke lines in Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode;" but even more strongly, the old man suggests, though with a far different emphasis, the Leech-Gatherer in "Resolution and Independence." This is a poem, incidentally, for which MacDonald more than once expressed great admiration.

Wordsworth compares his Leech-Gatherer to a huge stone, which in turn suggests to him "a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf / Of rock or sand reposeth." He continues:

And the whole body of the man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream. . . .

Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep—in his extreme old age. . . .
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage  
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,  
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.  
(ll. 108-31, passim)

This is indeed in every respect MacDonald's old man  
as he saw him, though in character he is the reverse image; far from demonstrating the virtues named in  
Wordsworth's title, he epitomizes Despair and Acquiescence.

The questions raised by the poem and by its associations multiply the more one considers it. Even  
the title is ambiguous in its implications, for etymologically speaking time and tide are doublets, as in  
the proverb "Time and tide wait for no man," an association deliberately invoked, for in one sense it  
sums up the poem. The two meanings of tide constantly overlap in the poem. First used in its primary sense,  
referring to the action of the sea, by the close of the poem it has become "the tide of change" operating in "the sea of space with its storm of time." The tide, therefore, represents Death, Change, Time, and the literal water; but, since the word in its secondary sense means time, Death and Change are here synonymous with Time.
The tide also refers to the actions of the old man's mind, as indicated in an unusually powerful metaphor that is both startling and apt. The old man is mindlessly chanting his refrain, which the narrator compares to a piece of flotsam:

A deid thing floatin aboot in his brain
'At the tide'll no lat gang.

This is peculiarly effective as a metaphor for the repetitious lament of the old man. Resentment for his loss, which has narrowed his perceptions to this one endless moan, resembles the waves going over and over the same ground, never able to beach and get rid of their burden, but endlessly dragging it about in the obscurity of the undertow. Unlike Donal Grant, who grappled with what he took for a corpse in the incoming waves, the old man makes no effort to lay hold of and examine what troubles him.

This is in my opinion the poem of all MacDonald's which leaves the most lasting sense of a mysterious apprehension of an underlying personal emotion, obliquely conveyed. Here he is not sure of anything; all his certainties have narrowed to the awareness that separation is irremediable if one allows sorrow
such a hold as this. In the original version he can offer, in his persona as narrator, consoling remarks, but in the revised version the assurances wear very thin. The old man simply falls silent, disappears, and so does the narrator. If, as I think, they are both the voices of MacDonald's own grief, the dead thing is still being moved about by the tide of his memory. Of one thing only he seems sure at the end of the poem: to escape our present miseries, we must be taken out of Time. And "the mirksome door" does not exactly suggest a transition to the joys of heaven.

The two versions have in common their ambiguity, shown particularly in the shifts in emphasis between the pictorial and metaphysical aspects of the scene. This effect is heightened by the matter-of-fact simplicity of the ballad-style, which is maintained throughout. It is noteworthy that the inversions and awkwardnesses which mar so many of MacDonald's other poems are entirely lacking here; the mood is conveyed without verbal hindrances to the involvement of the reader.

The whole poem suggests a scene from the fan-
tasies, and in fact two such parallels to the sea-shore setting exist. In Phantastes, Anodos, having emerged at last from the subterranean passages, finds himself desolate on a stony gray shore, with a cold wind blowing from the chaotic wintry sea. He refers to himself as "a human embodiment of the nature around me" (Ph, p. 159). His miserable dialogue with himself ends when he throws himself suicidally into the waves. In "The Golden Key," Mossy also finds himself on a lonely shore, but the Old Man whom he meets is the Old Man of the Sea, a wise and kingly figure who restores Mossy's youth and directs him on his way. "The Auld Fisher" can also be seen as simply another version of the same scene, but presented in wholly realistic terms on its superficial level. The barren shore at twilight, with an old man waiting, seems then to be one of MacDonald's archetypal images, and as such in all probability derives from the same source of dream or reverie as the Wise Woman with her spinning-wheel.

All the poems in this section are in fact linked with dreams. "The Home of Death" is, in its original setting, presented as inspired by the association
between the landscape of the quarry and Ginevra's nightmare. "The Herd and the Mavis," by its theme, relates to the passages referred to earlier dealing with the psyche-image, many of which are told as dreams. "Time and Tide," and through it "The Auld Fisher," relate to fantasy.

But the poems have more than this in common. Attention was directed earlier to MacDonald's use of the vernacular as intimating depth of feeling. These poems illustrate the point well, for they originate in a kind of emotion which MacDonald rarely allowed to surface, rarely in fact admitted to exist, thinking it wrong to indulge or display it. They represent his personal descent of the spirit into the underworld of depression.

This descent can best be described in terms of Northrop Frye's analysis of the mythology of romance in *The Secular Scripture*, and by further reference to Alethea Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*. Frye states that in romance "the normal road of descent [to the world beneath this one] is through dream or something strongly suggestive of a dream atmosphere." After mentioning that, the break may
be induced at least in part by drugs (p. 102), he affirms that "The structural core [of the descent] is the individual loss or confusion or break in the continuity of identity, and this has analogies to falling asleep and entering a dream world" (Scripture, p. 104). Hayter mentions at considerable length the ways of descent (in many instances very similar to Ginevra's dark downward road littered with the dead, in Sir Gibbie), and the bizarre, or terrifying, scenes in which the dreamer is a passive observer, unable or unwilling to change his condition.

She mentions, too, the voices heard in archetypal opium dreams, which speak "with the meaningless urgency of a Delphic oracle" (ORI, p. 72). Frye refers to the wisdom which "is usually communicated in some kind of dark saying, and riddles and ciphers and oracular utterances of all kinds proliferate around the end of the descending journey" (Scripture, p. 122). But the oracle should be heeded for, according to Frye, the only way to escape from the underworld is "by a device related to the riddle, an explanation of a mystery" (Scripture, p. 130). Unfortunately, the voice provides only a cryptic suggestion of what the
riddle is, not the riddle itself. One must, in other words, ask the right questions, in order to find out what you ought to be answering.

MacDonald was not only aware of the psychology of his emotions, but expressed the problem in terms remarkably close to Hayter and Frye. In the following passage Mr Vane is complaining to Mr Raven about the conditions of his life in the Other Dimension:

"I did not come here to be asked riddles" [I said].
"No; but you came and found the riddles waiting for you! Indeed you are yourself the only riddle. What you call riddles are truths, and seem riddles because you are not true."
"Worse and worse!" I cried.
"And you must answer the riddles!" he continued. "They will go on asking themselves until you understand yourself. The universe is a riddle trying to get out, and you are holding your door hard against it."
"Will you not in pity tell me what I am to do—where I must go?"
"How should I tell your to-do, or the way to it?" . . .
"Well," I said bitterly, "I cannot help feeling hardly treated—taken from my home, abandoned in a strange world, and refused instruction as to where I am to go or what I am to do!" (Lil, p. 226)

Such also is the situation of the Man (I, the herd, the questioning voice, the old fisher) in the poems just considered. Death, the mavis, the Old Man,
cannot in fact address themselves to what he asks, for, again in the words of Frye, "To answer a question . . . is to accept the assumptions in it."\(^\text{10}\) The Man does not know there is a question he himself must answer, for all the questions he has so far asked are only his unwitting attempts to arrive at what will prove to be the riddle itself.

Frye says that in the depths of the underworld the only companion is the "demonic accuser," which is our memory:

\[\ldots\text{ it has forgotten only one thing, the original identity of what it accompanies. It conveys to us the darkest knowledge at the bottom of the world . . . the realization that only death is certain, and that nothing before or after death makes sense. (Scripture, pp. 124-25)}\]

This could be related to any of the four poems under discussion, but to "Time and Tide" in particular. The Man is puzzled, or disturbed, by the non-answers he receives: that is, he is not yet ready to re-assume his own identity. Or, in other words, he must consciously accept as reality what has brought him to this grey limbo, not blaming Fate or God or Time or Death or any other personification of his own misery.
Until he does that, he is his own prisoner, his own interlocutor, and his own barren landscape. In the words of Mr Vane, he is "but a consciousness with an outlook" (Lil, p. 261), and has no real sense of his own identity.

Hayter describes the distortions of Time experienced by those in a state of drug-induced reverie. Either it slows down, so that prolonged and varied events in the reverie actually occupy only a few minutes by the clock; or it speeds up, so that an apparent single moment spent in contemplation of a scene may take hours of clock-time. These distortions are something of which the dreamer soon becomes aware, particularly if he is using only moderate and controlled amounts of the drug. Frye also, from a different viewpoint, points out the significance of Time:

The night world progressively becomes, as we sink deeper into it, a world where everything is an object, including ourselves, and consequently mirrors and clocks take on a good deal of importance as objectifying images. (Scripture, p. 117)

The mirror convinces us of our own objective reality; the clock reminds us of our existence and location
in time. Of the two, it was Time and clocks which became the dominant image with MacDonald.

IV. "The Clock of the Universe," "Master and Boy," "Time"

The first group of poems dealt with the corruption and death of the soul. The people concerned exist in a single moment that lasts forever, in an unending hell outside of Time, where they are fixed in their static damnation. The second group of poems focussed on the suffering caused by bereavement. The speakers in these are very much aware of Time, in that it holds them prisoners of their own anguish, cut off from those they long for. But in another sense, since they are unable to feel its passage, they also are in a state of timelessness.

But almost worse than these is the state of the soul enduring a cyclical Eternity, when a dreaded moment keeps coming back, and back, always with the same expectation and revulsion. The undying Wandering Jew, in the tale already alluded to in *Thomas Wingfold*, could not escape from Time, but it was at least linear, and hence variable and unpredictable. But MacDonald has also portrayed a soul caught in
the cyclical repetition of its particular horror.

In "The Haunted House" MacDonald conceives of a kind of Time that can be compared to a recurrent musical pattern:

For, ever and always, when round the tune
Grinds in the barrel of organ-Time,
The deed is done. And it comes anon:
True to the roll of the clock-faced moon,
True to the ring of the spheric chime,
True to the cosmic rhythm and rime,
Every point, as it first fell out,
Will come and go in the fearsome bout.
("The Haunted House," II: 203)

Most of this poem deals with the ghost who inhabits a whole house as though it were his body, and is locked into a perpetual repetition of his violent deed. But at the end of the poem there is a sudden turn, and the speaker says to himself, in effect, "Thou art the man:"

Soul of mine . . .
Into thee the moon doth stare
With pallid, terror-smitten air!
Thou, and the Horror lonely-stark,
Outcast of eternal dark,
Are in nature same and one,
And thy story is not done!

True haunting is a distortion of Time. The "soul" is treading in a circle, as does everyone obsessed
by certain memories.

One of MacDonald's other images of Time has already been mentioned, in connection with "Lycabas." There the months were personified as wolves, apparently fierce but actually beneficent, driving the human soul home to God. Death must be accepted as a temporal necessity, but when all have reached "the Castle of Love," there will be no more Death or Time. When the New Jerusalem descends, Eternity has begun, "and there shall be no more death" (Rev. 21: 4). Since Time and Death cease to exist together, they can in a sense be considered as one entity.

But though MacDonald brought "Lycabas" to an acceptable conclusion, he was still attracted strongly to the metaphysics of Time, as explored through various images. One which he developed at some length turns on the notion of a "cosmic clock." The image is of course not original with him, and probably derived at least in part from Paley, whose "argument from design" he mentioned in There and Back (p. 238). I think, however, that he draws more from two fictional clocks. In Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842) we are told that in the prince's apart-
ments there stood

against the western wall a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang ... when [the hour struck] there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical. ... ll

Death himself comes to the masqued ball, and at the end stands "within the shadow of the ebony clock."

The prince and the courtiers die, "And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay." And in Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), in the section entitled "The Wanderer's Dream,"

Melmoth is about to be dropped by the devil into a fiery sea of agonized souls. He sees

a dial-plate fixed on the top of that precipice. ... in this mystic plate centuries were marked, not hours. ... His last despairing reverted glance was fixed on the clock of eternity. ... [He falls.] The burning waves boomed over his sinking head, and the clock of eternity rung out its awful chime--"Room for the soul of the Wanderer!"12

There are various mentions of a "clock" in the prose as well as in the poetry, enough to show that the image had a strong attraction for him, whatever
its source. Little Mattie, for example, compares the world to her father's watch, on the grounds that "it's always going wrong," and wishes she knew the watchmaker to set the world right (GC, p. 122). In There and Back Wingfold, trying to make Richard recognize the necessity of there being a Creator on the basis of the workings of creation, says:

"A clock may do more for us than tell the time! It may tell how fast it is going, and wake solemn thought. . . . Would you allow that thought must have preceded and occasioned its existence?" (T & B, p. 238)

A little further on MacDonald says of Richard:

What if his soul was too impatient to listen for the next tick of the clock of eternity, and was left therefore to declare there was no such clock going! (T & B, p. 256)

Again, addressing God, MacDonald writes:

Thou who mad' st the mighty clock
Of the great world go;
Mad' st its pendulum swing and rock,
Ceaseless to and fro;
Thou whose will doth push and draw
Every orb in heaven,
Help me move by higher law
In my spirit graven.

("A Prayer," I: 354)
All these various stray uses are brought together in "The Clock of the Universe" (II: 91), a poem which is essentially a meditation on Time. It begins:

A clock aeonian, steady and tall,
With its back to creation's flaming wall,
Stands at the foot of a dim, wide stair.
Swing, swang, its pendulum goes,
Swing--swang--here--there!
Its tick and its tack like the sledge-hammer blows
Of Tubal Cain, the mighty man!
But they strike on the anvil of never an ear,
On the heart of man and woman they fall,
With an echo of blessing, an echo of ban;
For each tick is a hope, each tack is a fear,
Each tick is a Where, each tack a Not here,
Each tick is a kiss, each tack is a blow,
Each tick says Why, each tack I don't know.

The hands of the clock are made like human hands:
on the metaphorical level, are human hands: but for the moment I shall try to keep to the literal level.

When the two hands meet, the clock strikes, after which they separate and "pass with awful motion /
From isle to isle of the sapphire ocean," that is, the numbers on the clock face. Stars, sun, and moon are also represented on the face.

On the peak of the clock
Stands a cock:
Tiptoe stands the cock to crow-- . . .
No one yet has heard him cry,
Nor ever will till the hour supreme
When Self on itself shall turn with a scream,
What time the hands are joined on high
In a hoping, despairing, speechless sigh,
The perfect groan-prayer of the universe
When the darkness clings and will not disperse
Though the time is come, told ages ago,
For the great white rose of the world to blow:
--Tick, tack, to the waiting cock,
Tick, tack, goes the aeon-clock!

A bear crawls around the top of the clock, a sea-
serpent lies coiled beneath, the latter living but
unbreathing (presumably painted on the clock face).

He cannot hear the roaring of the bear,

Else would he move, and none knows then
What would befall the sons of men!

The section immediately following is the climax of
the poem:

Eat up old Time, O raging Bear;
Take Bald-head, and the children spare!
Lie still, O serpent, nor let one breath
Stir thy pool and stay Time's death!
Steady, Hands! for the noon is nigh:
See the silvery ghost of the Dawning shy
Low on the floor of the level sky!
Warn for the strike, O blessed Clock;
Gather thy clarion breath, gold Cock;
Push on the month-figures, pale, weary-faced Moon;
Tick, awful Pendulum, tick amain;
And soon, oh, soon,
Lord of life, and Father of boon,
Give us our own in our arms again!

When the clock strikes, and the cock crows, the clock
will quietly fall to pieces, "And away like the mist of the morning steal." The clock face will dissolve, the bear and the serpent will be gone:

And up the stair will run as they please
The children to clasp the Father's knees.

O God, our father, Allhearts' All,
Open the doors of thy clockless Hall!

In its totality the poem presents an astonishing, and at times mysterious concept. Unfortunately, MacDonald leaves parts of it in comparative obscurity, by not making his allusions clearer. Also, the constant shifting of emphasis from literal to metaphorical to allegorical meanings is somewhat clumsily managed; it is impossible to read through the poem and keep only one level in the foreground.

The clock can be taken as a representation of the universe with its physical laws, a place where stress and counter-stress (tick--tock) must perpetually interact in a yang-yin relationship: neither is anything without the other, and both are needed to make up the whole. The sun, moon, stars, sea and islands are the world, with its serpent of evil coiled at the bottom, like Satan in Dante's Inferno.
There may also be a reference to the world-serpent Ouroboros, who by biting his own tail emblemsizes the eternal nature of the universe. Sin in the world may cause it to waken, and Time will go on; through sin we delay the millenium.

In this passage the equation of Time with Elisha is puzzling, until one remembers the old emblematic representation of Time: "Time himself is bald," says Shakespeare in *The Comedy of Errors* (Act III: Sc. 1: l. 109); and Ben Jonson refers to "that old bald cheater, Time" (*The Poetaster*, Act I: Sc. 1). In II Kings, Elisha, going up a mountain, was mocked by children crying out, Go up, thou bald head. He cursed them, and two she-bears came out of the forest and tore the children apart. MacDonald seems to have constructed a rather odd syllogism: Time is bald; Elisha is bald; therefore Elisha is Time. Such reasoning explains, but hardly justifies, the allusion in the poem. What is of importance in the reference is the cry to "spare the children." Let Time, the vindictive prophet, die, so that he, the speaker, may hold his children again. The bear on the clock-face should, I think, be taken out of its
Elisha-context whenever it is mentioned outside of this passage, and perhaps related to the verse in Isaiah: "We roar all like bears . . . we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us" (59: 11). Such roaring might well waken the serpent at the foot of the clock-face, and prolong Time.

Taking the clock-face as the universe, it is clear that the crowing of the cock and the simultaneous striking of the clock are the signs of the end of the world. This is made clear in a related passage in Lilith. Adam calls to Mr Vane in a dream:

"Hark to the golden cock! Silent and motionless for millions of years has he stood on the clock of the universe; now at last he is flapping his wings! now will he begin to crow! and at intervals will men hear him until the dawn of the day eternal."

I listened. Far away—as in the heart of an aeonian silence, I heard the clear jubilant outcry of the golden throat. It hurled defiance at death and the dark; sang infinite hope, and coming calm. It was the "expectation of the creature" finding at last a voice; the cry of a chaos that would be a kingdom! . . .

"Amen, golden cock, bird of God!" cried Adam. (Lil, p. 410)

It is a great pity MacDonald could not have conveyed
this scene as clearly and naturally in the poetry as he did in the prose, and with the same concentrated emotion. But in spite of the Rachael-like cry for his children, he has made the poem too much an exercise in contrived correspondences. Though the ideas and the images are interesting in themselves, the whole poem seems to be under the control of his Fancy, rather than his Imagination.

The clock is the universe bound and directed by Time, and the hall in which it stands is the anteroom to Eternity. There are several curious parallels to this hall in the prose. In The Lost Princess there is a large eight-day clock in the Wise Woman's cottage, behind which is a door. This opens into a hall, lined with pictured landscapes into which the viewer may step, and find himself in the place portrayed: i.e., he steps from the timeless into the chosen time. Anodos also, in Phantastes, directed by the old Wise Woman, goes through various doors into periods of his own past life, returning each time to her cottage room, which is the unmoving centre of timelessness. The implication here is that though we think of Time as consisting of past,
present, and future, in actuality all times are Now. In the poem, however, it is not more Time the speaker wants, but the end of it, a desire represented by the stairway up to God and Eternity.

The clock must also be seen not just as an image of the universe controlled by Time, but as a representation of a man under the dominance of Time. The alternating hope and despair (the tick and the tock) make up his life, and the emphasis is on despair. "Where?—Not here." "Why?—I don't know." These have a particular poignancy in their bewildered uncertainty. The pendulum of his life swings between desperate questions on the one hand and non-answers on the other. The hands (clock) pass around the clock face, at varying distances from each other, to meet at twelve noon. When partly separated (11:15), they indicate "an empty gulf of longing embrace;" when they are as far apart as possible (11:30), "they fare / In a fear still coasting not touching Despair."

But as the hands mount towards noon, they are approaching the attitude of prayer. The hands (human) are joined, to form an eikon of the answer to the disasters of living in Time. (One is reminded of
Dürer's engraving, Hände im Gebet.) Prayer is the answer, the wordless prayer that is "a hoping, despairing, speechless sigh," the prayer raised by faith in the darkness of the soul. "Steady, Hands, for the dawn is nigh." The months are now seen as a Sisyphean wheel to be pushed by the Moon—which, "pale, weary-faced," is a displaced image of the Man, whose Hands must pray. The sapphire-blue of the clock-face-ocean will dissolve at noon, passing perhaps (though MacDonald does not say this) into the blue of the Shekinah: "the dawn of the perfect, love-potent day."

This brief commentary has not by any means dealt with all the difficulties, possibilities, and allusions in the poem, but enough has been indicated, I think, for two main points to emerge. First, the only thing that makes the inevitable suffering of the present time bearable at all (though it does not stifle longing for the dead) is the knowledge that Time will end. Secondly, the end of Time is brought about by personal redemption wrought through prayer.

Another way altogether of considering the redemption of Time is found in an odd little piece with
a metaphysical twist. It is unlike most of Mac-Donald's other poems in English.

Master and Boy

"Who is this little one lying," 
Said Time, "at my garden-gate, 
Moaning and sobbing and crying, 
Out in the cold so late?"

"They lurked until we came near, 
Master and I," the child said, 
"Then caught me, with 'Welcome, New-Year! 
Happy year! Golden-Head!'"

"See Christmas-day, my Master, 
On the meadow a mile away! 
Father Time, make me run faster! 
I'm the Shadow of Christmas-day!"

"Run, my child; still he's in sight! 
Only look well to his track; 
Little Shadow, run like the light, 
He misses you at his back!"

Old Time sat down in the sun 
On a grave-stone--his legs were numb: 
"When the boy to his master has run," 
He said, "Heaven's New Year is come." 
(II: 90)

Old Father Time sits in the sun on a grave-stone. 
Christmas has just passed by, and the New Year child, 
his shadow, is trying to catch up with him. Put 
differently: we celebrate Christ's nativity in the 
proper spirit, but by New Year have become secular 
again, and dote on the present moment. The master
gets far ahead of the boy, who should truly be as close to him as his shadow, for without the figure ahead, he would not exist. "Without a substance ... a shadow cannot be--yea, or without a light behind the substance" (Lil, p. 410).

If we celebrated the new year as the shadow cast by Christ, living the whole year in his shadow, then the millenium would come, and time would stop. And Time, who already sits on a tombstone with the premonitory numbness of approaching demise, speeds the child on his way. It is a strange concept, obscurely handled; something is really required between the fourth and fifth stanzas for clarification. But, cryptic though it is, one point emerges clearly: the desired end is the end of Time, and to achieve that, we must live in a constant awareness of Christ. It is, in fact, another version of "The Clock of the Universe," in which prayer is enjoined to the same end. And both poems are urging Time to move faster than it does, to hasten to its appointed end.

Less metaphysical, more emblematic, is the poem which follows, the most successful, I think, of the poems on Time. It is no surprise that it is writ-
ten in the vernacular, in which MacDonald is most
natural in his expressions, and strains least to convey
his images. The poem falls into a series of clearly-
realized pictures, suggestive of Blake's illustrations
for Blair's The Grave. One thinks in particular of
the one MacDonald chose for his bookplate, of the
humped old man entering the rocky tomb, to emerge
above as a radiantly angelic youth.

Time

A lang-backit, spilgie, fuistit auld carl
Gangs a' nicht rakin athort the warl
Wi' a pock on his back, luikin hungry an' lean,
His crook-fingert han' aye followin his e'en;
He gethers up a'thing that canna but fa'--
Intil his bag wi' 't, an' on, an' awa!
Soot an' snaw! soot an' snaw!--
Intil his bag wi' 't, an' on, an' awa!

But whan he comes to the wa' o' the warl,
Spangs up it, like lang-leggit spidder, the carl;
Up gangs his pock wi' him, humpit ahin,
For naething fa's oot 'at ance he pat in;
Syne he warstles doon ootside the flamin wa',
His bag 'maist the deith o'him, pangt like a ba';
Soot an' snaw! soot an' snaw!
His bag 'maist throtlin him, pangt like a ba'!

Doon he draps weary upon a laigh rock,
Flingin aside him his muckle-mou'd pock;
An' there he sits, his heid in his han',
Like a broken-hertit, despairin man;
Him an' his pock no bonny, na, na!
Him an' his pock an ugsome twa!
Soot an' snaw! soot an' snaw!
Him an' his pock an ugsome twa!
But sun's the first ray o' the sunshine bare
Lichts on the carl, what see ye there?
An angel set on eternity's brink,
Wi' e'en to gar the sun himsel blink;
By his side a glintin, glimmerin urn,
Furth frae wha's mou rins a liltin burn:--
Soot an' snaw! soot an' snaw!
The dirt o' the warl rins in glory awa!

(II: 420)

There is neither conspicuous narrator nor dialogue;
the scenes are described with detached omniscience.
(1) An ill-favoured old man, musty and lean, ranges
over the world all night. Everything perishable he
can find, he puts in his pack, and is off again.
(2) Then, like a spider, he leaps up the flaming wall
of the world, and drops outside it, his heavy pack
stuffed like a ball.
(3) He sits on a low rock, his head in his hands,
apparently broken-hearted and despairing. He and
his pack are an ugly pair.
(4) But as soon as the sunshine reaches him, he is
seen as he truly is: "an angel set on eternity's
brink," with eyes that outshine the sun. His pack
is now an urn from which runs "a liltin burn." The
soot and snow the pack contained before--the dirt of
the world's sins--are flowing away in a stream of
glory.
Before considering the import of the poem as a whole, it is necessary to make some comment on the image involved in the phrase "the flaming wall of the world." Given that in "The Clock of the Universe" we are told how the Cosmic Clock stands "with its back to Creation's flaming wall," and that it is mentioned in three of the prose works, the relationship between Time and the wall is obviously of some importance. It stems, I think, from two sources, the Bible, and Dante.

The first is of lesser immediate relevance. In a reference to the restored Jerusalem, after the Captivity, the prophet is told: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zech. 2:5). The poem then could be saying that the accumulated sins of the world will be taken away completely from the delivered city, which is a type of the redeemed world. As for the "soot and snow" that make up the "dirt of the world," the verse in Isaiah might apply which promises that "The Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion . . . by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of
burning" (Is. 4: 3-4).

Something of these verses may have been in his mind; but the main source is to be found, I think, in Dante's *Purgatorio*. This traces the ascent of Mount Purgatory. On the seventh cornice a wall of fire represents the last purgation for the soul before it enters the Earthly Paradise at the summit of the Mount. For the angel in the poem to leap the wall of fire is entirely appropriate, for naturally he has no need of any purgation. The sins he is carrying run away in living water, which again has Dantean overtones, for in the Earthly Paradise there is a fountain whose stream "blots all man's sins from memory." Spreading beyond the Earthly Paradise, it turns to the River of Time, encircling the entire created universe. This is easily related to the point MacDonald makes also in "The Clock of the Universe," namely, that it is the sins of the world which create Time. With the ascent of the Mount completed, living ceases to be a matter of sequential events, and becomes a many-dimensioned totality of apprehension, symbolized in the *Paradiso* by the multifoliate white rose. (This is the "great white
rose" he refers to in "The Clock of the Universe".)

The figure of Time as an old pedlar is also literary in its origins. In Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida Ulysses says, "Time hath, my Lord, a wallet at his back, / Wherein he puts alms for oblivion" (Act III: Sc. iii: ll. 145-46). He goes on with some cynicism, however, to suggest that it is "good deeds past which are devour'd" (l. 148).

Closer to MacDonald's intent are lines in The Faerie Queene. Mirabell, when asked why she carries "this wallet at your backe," answers, "... in this bag which I behind me don, / I put repentance for things past and gon" (FQ, VI: viii: ll. 23-4).

That the emblem appealed strongly to MacDonald is I think clear from the use he makes of it in The Elect Lady (1888). In this novel a completely human pedlar with a pack on his back suddenly appears to two children who are fighting. With a single scripture-verse he rebukes them, and as suddenly disappears. Deeply impressed, they first think he must be Christian (from The Pilgrim's Progress) with his pack on his back, but at last conclude "that the stranger was the Lord himself, and that the pack on his back was
their sins, which he was carrying away to throw out of the world" (TEL, P. 61). Later they refer to him as "the man that was going up and down the world, gathering up their sins" (TEL, p. 63).

In the poem, however, as the title indicates, the figure is not the Lord but Time. We are accustomed to seeing Time eikonographically as a bent old man, but, says MacDonald, that is because we mistake his appearance and his nature. He is not a mis-shapen scavenger, carrying everything he can grab to some sort of celestial garbage-dump. Time takes from us nothing of value, but only our sorrows and sins. Once out of our limited world, beyond the flaming wall, he waits to assume his true shape in the splendour of the rising sun of Eternity.

References to the "Castle of Love" and the "clockless hall" seem more the outcome of hope than of absolute conviction, an impression reinforced by the uncontrolled metrical quality of the verses which refer to them. The metamorphosis of the figure in "Time," on the other hand, is convincing as an expression of faith, partly because the poem does not throw up a cloud of over-emphatic verbiage.
Also, its relaxed, semi-humorous tone, unusual in MacDonald, carries more conviction than the earnest breathlessness of the close of "Lycabas" and "The Clock of Eternity."

All the poems on Time contain strongly visualized scenes, some of which are highly suggestive of dream and reverie. The Cosmic Clock, for example, not only recurs in prose and poetry, indicating its importance to MacDonald as an image, but in Lilith it is actually presented as part of a dream. "The Haunted House" was written after prolonged brooding over a picture MacDonald saw on his American lecture tour (GMHW, p. 451). "Time" has the quality of a dream, with its images melting one into the other like a series of dissolving tableaux. "Master and Boy," it is true, with the crisp energy of a Bewick wood-cut, indicates perhaps no more than a strong visualizing imagination at work.

However, a common feature of the dreamer, as described by Hayter, is his constant preoccupation with Time, in all its peculiarities, and this, certainly, MacDonald has. In Lilith in particular he plays with various concepts, especially in the
temporal relationship between the two worlds. Every twenty-four hour sequence in the Other Dimension, for example, is composed of our four seasons, each being six hours long. Yet when Mr Vane returns home, no time has passed at all.

MacDonald can play with concepts of Time with this intellectual ingenuity so long as it is a dimension of living incidental to everything else. But when he regards it as a dominating entity synonymous with Death, he investigates it with a kind of fascinated repugnance, and urges it on to its own destruction. Only when he can regard it sub specie aeternitatis can he describe it without rancour, or impatience, or an overriding awareness of suffering. The poem is not a comment on our present condition at all; there is nothing personal in it, except a happy certainty that everything is as it should be.

V. "The Lark and the Wind," "A Sang o' Zion"

Involved as we necessarily are with the tick and tack of Time, it is hard to attain even brief moments of equilibrium. "The Lark and the Wind," the next poem to be considered, suggests what can be achieved
by someone who knows what he is: a being linked by his body to a temporal world, and by his soul to a spiritual Eternity. The idea is expressed with forthright, if somewhat misleading, simplicity. The little poem, with its tight-knit rhyme and end-stopped lines, has the virtues of MacDonald's sincerest thought, and none of his stylistic vices. The most noticeable features of its structure are the parallelism and the antitheses, both of which are closely related to the theme.

The Lark and the Wind

In the air why such a ringing?
On the earth why such a droning?

In the air the lark is singing;
On the earth the wind is moaning.

"I am blest, in sunlight swinging!"
"Sad am I: the world lies groaning!"

In the sky the lark kept singing;
On the earth the wind kept moaning. (II: 88)

MacDonald's way of considering birds has already been mentioned in the comments on "The Herd and the Mavis." And of all the birds, he felt the lark to be the one most expressive of the spiritual life, for, though it nests on the ground, the high reaches
of sunny air between heaven and earth are its province. But though the lark in the poem sets the air ringing, the wind on the earth is moaning. At this point one must consider the significance of wind, for it, too, is one of MacDonald's repeated symbols.

He usually describes it with adjectives such as "healing," "calming," "kind," "blessed." It can be gentle, connoting love and spiritual growth; it can be strong, almost rough, connoting a welcome force and a cleansing purity. In The Elect Lady he writes, "Never a wind wakes of a sudden but it talks to me about God" (p. 93), and there are many Biblical precedents for this association. For example, God is seen to ride "on the wings of the wind" (Ps. 18: 10, inter alia); the operation of God as Spirit is compared to a wind which "bloweth where it listeth" (Jn 3: 8); and on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came with "a sound as of a mighty wind" (Acts 2: 2).

Why then in the poem is the wind moaning and the world groaning? Again one must look to the Bible. St Paul writes:
For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. (Romans 8: 22-3)

Thus, the whole poem can be seen as expressing a single antithesis, between the uncompleted state of a world suffering its spiritual birth-pangs, and the sunny heavens above. For the sky and the sun (with or without the lark) have always in his writing been to MacDonald a sign of God's presence. In the words of Mr Walton, in Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood:

I found that it helped to give a reality to everything that I thought about, if only I contemplated it under the high untroubled blue, with the lowly green beneath my feet, and the wind blowing on me to remind me of the Spirit that once moved on the face of the waters, bringing order out of disorder and light out of darkness. . . . (AQN, p. 246)

Or, as Mr Cupples puts it, in Alec Forbes:

"[The blue lift said] that I was a foolish man to care about the claiks and the strifes o' the warl'; for a' was quaiet aboon, whatever stramash they micht be makin' doon here i' the cellars o' the spiritual creation." (AF, p. 376)
But Mr Cupples does not always live as though this were so; and the authorial comment is that "his imagination let him see things far beyond what he could for a long time attain unto" (AF, p. 377). That is, I think, the state of mind externalized in "The Lark and the Wind."

The lark says he is blest in the sun, the wind says it is saddened by the world, but fundamentally the poem is considering neither lark nor wind. It is an eikon of a man held in a timeless moment of prayerful awareness. There is nothing unusual in MacDonald thus using natural objects, for, as he writes in The Miracles of Our Lord, "Nature is brimful of symbolic and analogical parallels to the goings and comings, the growth and the changes of the highest nature in man" (p. 92).

The soul of the man mounts like a lark. In the somewhat similar poem, "The Laverock," the lark says to the man, "Ye haena nae wings but / Come up on a prayer" (II: 398). But even while the man is lifted by his prayer, his body is fully conscious of the groanings of an earthly condition, of which he is an inescapable part. His reasonable question is,
Why the ringing and the droning together? While in his prayer he is blest, he nonetheless shares of necessity in the continuing pain of all creation. Even the wind of the Spirit, blowing between heaven and earth, must share in this pain, for "the spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8: 26).

Such a balance, achieved in this life by equal awareness of body and spirit, is precarious. One might say that it is the momentary equilibrium experienced midway between the swings of the pendulum of the Cosmic Clock. "Each tick is a hope, each tack is a fear" ("Clock of the Universe," II: 91). There is the moment of stasis, equidistant between hope and fear, but the pendulum cannot be held still. As MacDonald says in Lilith,

Ah, the two worlds! So strangely are they one,  
And yet so measurelessly wide apart!  
Oh, had I lived the bodiless alone  
And from defiling sense held safe my heart,  
Then had I scaped the canker and the smart,  
Scaped life-in-death, scaped misery's endless moan!  
(Lil, p. 322)

No end to Time is suggested in "The Lark and the Wind;" to the contrary. The last couplet repeats the second
couplet, with a small but significant variation: "is singing" becomes "kept singing;" "is moaning" becomes "kept moaning." What starts in the present progressive, as the occurrence of the moment, is made through a single adverb to continue indefinitely.

The poem shows the way to live through the emotional fluctuations engendered by a fallen world. That is to be in the state described by St Paul:

... the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8: 19-21)

The poem presents MacDonald's point unmistakably, though obliquely. It is more directly expressed in one of the novels:

The inward hush of the Resurrection, broken only by the prophetic birds, the poets of the groaning and travelling creation, held time and space as in a trance; and the centre from which radiated both the hush and the carolling expectation seemed ... to be the churchyard. (Malcolm, p. 57)

One can indeed say of MacDonald that the church-
yard is the beginning of all sorrow and of all joy. His most memorable poems spring from bereavement, and his calmest, plainest, and best devotional poems are rooted in a quiet expectation of the Last Things. For if the grave is the end of this life, it is a beginning of the next.

According to Greville, his father, "more than any other teacher of his day, insisted that hope in a personal immortality with substantial body and glorified senses lies at the very root of our religious sense and longings" (GMHW, p. 402). He goes on to mention certain "simple verses" which "enlarge one's hope in a resurrection of the body" (GMHW, p. 403).

The poem referred to appeared first in Alec Forbes (1865), where an appropriate mood is established by its setting. Annie Anderson, one of MacDonald's still, deep, loving natures, is passing the churchyard where her father lies:

She did not know her father's grave, for no stone marked the spot where he sank in the broken earthy sea. There was no church: its memory even had vanished. It seemed as if the churchyard had swallowed the church as the heavenly light shall one day swallow the sun and the moon; and the lake
of divine fire shall swallow death and hell. She lingered a little, and then set out on her slow return, often sitting down on the pebbles, sea-worn ages before the young river had begun to play with them.

Resting thus about half way home, she sang a song which she had found in her father's old song-book. (AF, p. 389)

This quietly elegiac mood leads perfectly into what follows. In the novel the verses have no title, but in the **Poetical Works** they are called "A Sang o' Zion."

Ane by ane they gang awa';
The gatherer gathers great an' sma';
Ane by ane makes ane an' a'.

Aye whan ane is ta'en frae ane,
Ane on earth is left alone,
Twa in heaven are knit again.

Whan God's haist is in or lang,
Golden-heidit, ripe, and thrang,
Syne begins a better sang.

(AF, pp. 389-90)

The dominant image is drawn from the New Testament:

The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. . . . The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. . . . then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matt. 13: 39-43)
And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice .... Thrust in thy sickle, and reap .... for the harvest of the earth is ripe. (Rev. 14: 15)

But rather than reserving the image of the harvest for the last days of the world, MacDonald relates it to individual deaths. He might, in certain periods of suffering, have accepted the popular phrase "The Grim Reaper" as a periphrasis for Death, with its implication of destruction rather than harvesting. But Death in the poem is not cutting down the doomed; he is "gathering" (a much gentler term) those ripened by life. One does not lament over a stubble field, but rejoices at the harvest.

MacDonald uses this image of the world as a corn field, the individuals as standing stalks, in other contexts also. He writes, for example:

The senses here are, I suspect, only as the husk under which is ripening the deeper, keener, better senses belonging to the next stage of our life. (DG, p. 576)

And he says of those dreaming in death on their beds in the house of Adam, that they lie with the moon's "long light slanting .... across the fallen, but still ripening sheaves of the harvest of the great
husbandman" (Lil, p. 402). That is similar to the way he uses the image in the poem.

The poem presents its theme as a sober and objective statement of fact, an incontrovertible truth, apparently not spoken by any identifiable human voice. But the title does in fact give the clue, reminding us that we are no different from the Jews in the days of the Captivity: this world is the land of our exile:

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Zion. . . . they that carried us away captive required of us a song . . . saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? (Ps. 137: 1-4)

The poem suggests what we shall sing.

In spite of the dominant harvest image, the poem conveys an impression of a lonely pilgrimage, partly through its repeated "ane"—eight times in four lines. The harvester will finally have taken one and all, but he takes them one by one. As the old cobbler says, in Donal Grant, "There's ane, an' there' a'; an' the a's ane, an' the ane's a'" (DG, p. 353).
That last line of the first stanza seems simple enough, but it is worth noting here that MacDonald is asserting a highly controversial viewpoint. A great deal of discussion took place in the nineteenth century over the pains, purpose, and duration of hell, with beliefs ranging from those of Fr. Furniss, who with appalling clarity described to young audiences the eternal tortures of damned children, to those of F. D. Maurice, who believed in purgatorial pains of a limited duration. This latter view is enlarged upon by MacDonald in various sermons and novels. The third line of the poem is therefore another statement of MacDonald's adherence to the principle of universal salvation.

But though there is no final separation into the damned and the saved, there is an inevitable temporary separation from those we love implicit in the terms of human life. This is referred to in lines 4 and 5. These are based on the verses in Matthew describing the Second Coming:

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (Matt. 24: 40-41)
But unlike the Bible, MacDonald does not suggest that the separation is permanent. In "Time and Tide" the questioner asks the old man,

... was a\'e\'n, and the ither left--
Ane to sing, ane to greet?

And adds, "It's sair, richt sair, to be bereft." But here he makes no mention of the sorrow of the one not taken. Other poems attest to the loneliness on earth, but in "A Sang o' Zion" the emphasis is entirely on the reunion in heaven: "knit" indicates bonds as personally close as any present human affections would long for. Now we sing this Song, a song of exile and partings, but when the entire harvest has been gathered in, we shall be like the elders before the throne of God, of whom it was said, "They sung a new song" (Rev. 5: 9). Though the poem begins with a somewhat mournful-sounding statement from one who has been repeatedly left, he too will be taken whenever he is "ripe." "Golden-headed" gives a double promise, referring both to the mature grain and to the golden crowns of the saints in the New Jerusalem.

The necessity for not just patient but placid
waiting is a constant theme in the novels. After the Lady Arctura dies, for example, we are told that Donal (who had married her in the last days of her mortal illness) had in his face

a calm exaltation, as of a man who had out-lived weakness and faced the eternal. . . . the man seemed full of content, not with himself, but with something he would gladly share with you. (DG, p. 775)

This is, I think, MacDonald's frame of mind, and what he intends to convey, in the poem, though there is also a note in it of melancholy resignation.

The poem would seem to have made its point successfully (and it is these lines which Greville includes in the biography), but MacDonald was dissatisfied with the 1865 version. For inclusion in the Poetical Works he made rather startling and not very successful changes, first by introducing a totally new image in Stanza 2, then by changing the order of lines, and substituting a new line, in Stanza 3.

A Sang o' Zion

Ane by ane they gang awa;
The getherer gethers grit and sma';
Ane by ane maks ane and a'!
Aye whan ane sets doon the cup
Ane ahint maun tak it up:
A' thegither they will sup!

Golden-heidit, ripe, and strang,
Shorn will be the hairst or lang:
Syne begins a better sang!

(II: 373)

The new second stanza confuses the picture, for we move now from the harvest in stanza 1 to the cup in stanza 2, and then back to the harvest in stanza 3. Lines 7 and 8 seem particularly abrupt, following line 6. Also, the cup image gives a greater impression of the isolation of the individual in this world than does the harvest-field image, with its thick-set rows of growing grain. Nor does "All together they will sup" have in it the promise of meeting in heaven that is explicit in "Two in heaven are knit again." In the Bible the joys of the kingdom of heaven are more than once compared to a wedding feast (e.g., Matt. 22: 2; Rev. 19: 9), so that "all will sup" has precedent, but there is nothing now of the joy of individual recognition. Nor does the word "shorn" suggest anything but bereavement, for it applies more aptly to the wool of sheep (loss of warmth, comfort) and to the hair of Samson (loss of
strength, power) than it does to a harvest.

Also, in the substituted middle stanza, there is a negative feeling of the inescapability of life: "One behind must pick it up." It is because of this compulsion, with its underlying feeling of unwilling obedience, that I would interpret the cup as referring to life itself, or even to the bitter draught of death. A connotation of the communion-cup might be considered a possibility, if MacDonald were not so emphatically a non-sacramentalist. It is noteworthy that in all his novels there is no scene depicting a marriage, christening, or funeral as a sacrament. For him, the Nativity is of more consequence than the Crucifixion, and though his characters frequently go to a church service, the Eucharistic celebration is never mentioned, even when the chief character is (like Thomas Wingfold, or Mr Walton) an Anglican clergyman. 18 No new spiritual dimension or extension of meaning is, therefore, added by the cup image. However, I think the revisions are a mistake in literary judgment, rather than an avowal of any change in his own beliefs. There are many allusions in other poems to hopes of future recognitions and reunions (e.g.,
"Greitna, Father," II: 421).

With the exception of "The Herd and the Mavis" and "Master and Boy," the poems on Death and Time are set in dark or enclosed places, such as the shore at twilight, the earth-cave, the hall. Everything is gray or black or (occasionally) white. Apart from the sapphire face of the Clock of the Universe, gold is the only colour mentioned, and that only three times. The complement to the depressed "shades of night" is not colour at all, but light. In the last two stanzas of "Time," for example, there is brilliant sun, and the dialogue in "The Lark and the Wind" obviously takes place outdoors on a sunny, windy day. The gloomier the theme of the poem, the darker, the more mysterious, and the more silent does the scene become. That is why it seems odd that "A Sang o' Zion" gives the effect of a muffled tread winding single file into obscurity.

The triplets, with their strong, monotonous rhymes, contribute more to this effect than do the actual words. It seems to me that the sound (even in the original version) is at odds with the sense. Obviously Greville did not read the poem this way at
all; but to me it sounds more like an echo of "all flesh is grass" than a celebration of heavenly reunion, particularly in the revised version. The end of "Time" expresses exactly what does not emerge from "A Sang o' Zion"—a sense of relief and fulfillment, a bursting out into the light. Resignation and expectation are both implicit in the "Sang:" joy is not.

Neither poem relates directly to dream, though both lark and wind appear in various fantasies and fairy tales and fanciful poems. Both poems, however, draw heavily on Biblical sources, with the full weight of Scriptural allusion and archetype reinforcing every stanza.

These twelve poems illustrate different areas of MacDonald's preoccupations: a recognition of the dangers inherent in Self-worship; helplessness, resentment, defeat in the contemplation of Death; a passionate desire for the end of Time, when there will be no more Death; a recognition of the way to balance the worlds of spirit and body; and a lonely acquiescence in the patterns of mortality. All of the poems draw their visual imagery from dreams, or
project a dream-atmosphere; all are in the mode of fantasy. Though there are a few awkwardnesses of style in some of the poems in English, there are none in those in Scots. To varying degrees, they demonstrate the Music MacDonald felt was a requisite of poetry. Some proclaim the Truth as he had defined it in his theoretical writings, though without overt didacticism. Others express another sort of personal truth, relevant to his own suffering. All of the poems persuade the reader of their emotional truth.
CONCLUSION

MacDonald was a consciously painstaking craftsman. In all his didactic poetry he took particular care to say exactly what he meant. Whether he is telling an anecdote, making an analogy, presenting a meditation, or giving direct advice, there is no mistaking the import of his moral and devotional statements.

The appeal in these poems is invariably to the simpler emotions, for he believed that "[t]he defeat of the intellect is not the object in fighting with the sword of the Spirit, but the acceptance of the heart" (AQN, p. 47). Convinced also that "the truth is not dependent upon proof for its working" (GC, p. 127), he did not even try to present persuasive arguments for his beliefs. As Hein points out, "... with characteristic humility [he engaged] none in controversy" (Harmony, p. 26). His expressed aim was, in fact, not to convert people to any particular form of belief, but to teach them confidence
in the goodness of God: "Religion is simply the way home to the father" (DG, p. 158). Nor was he interested in helping effect social changes. He saw conditions he knew were wrong (as is clear in "A Manchester Poem" and Guild Court, for example), but felt improvement must come not by agitation and legislation but by changes in individual consciences. ¹

In prose he gives the impression of setting up a direct relationship with his public, often addressing them openly ("You, my reader, may perhaps have seen. . . . "); and in the poems written in a colloquial tone one often has the impression of deliberate communication. But, whatever the devices productive of intimacy, the discourse must remain indirect, as he was well aware:

I remain concealed behind my own words. You can never look me in the eyes, though you may look me in the soul. . . . To you I am but a voice of revealing, not a form of vision; therefore I am bold behind the mask, to speak to you heart to heart. (AQN, pp. 1-2)

But for all his discursiveness, and the alleged boldness in revelation, I felt eventually that on the whole only a limited aspect of the heart was being
revealed. His poems show a cheerful, playful, hopeful, helpful, sensitive and sensible man, who reveals at times a gentle mournfulness or a plaintive nostalgia. He also shows himself to be percipient, and versatile. I am quite sure he is never insincere. I am equally sure he deliberately limited the range of emotions which he was willing to communicate.

Greville hints at characteristics in his father not represented in the writings, but he either summarily dismisses them, or denies their authenticity. MacDonald's unending struggle with innate melancholy, intensified by bad health, poverty, and multiple bereavements, Greville cannot conceal, but represents that struggle as always successful, though frequently renewed. It is true that the sermons bear no trace of it, and the novels very little. Oddly, the one book in which he ends on a note of almost savage nihilism is The Princess and Curdie. It is worth a brief consideration, for its tone is that of certain of the poems already examined in detail.

In the last chapter, the loose threads of the plot are gathered up. Under the renewed rule of the King, the Old Princess (the supernatural Wise Woman
of the story) helps reform the wicked city of Gwyntystorm. It is understood that when Curdie and Irene grow up, they will marry. That is where the story, logically and psychologically, should end. But another page follows. After the death of the King, Curdie and Irene rule wisely, but they have no children, and after their deaths the Old Princess apparently goes away. Their successor, greedy for the gold in the foundation-rock of the island-city, orders the miners to chip away at the pillars that support it:

One day at noon, when life was at its highest, the whole city fell with a roaring crash. The cries of men and the shrieks of women went up in its dust, and then there was a great silence. 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. All around spreads a wilderness of wild deer, and the very name of Gwyntystorm has ceased from the lips of men. (P & C, p. 320)

The conclusion is shocking, not so much because it is in a book for children, as because it leaves an impression of futility and desolation, of total ruin in a blank universe, that is totally at odds with the whole mood and import of the Curdie books,
not to mention the other prose works. In similar fashion, poems such as "The Herd and the Mavis" and "The Home of Death" contradict his many didactic pronouncements. It is obvious that he had experienced a far greater depth of negative emotions than he was willing to make public.

One reason for this deliberate limiting of his literary range has already been indicated. According to his theory of the Imagination, he was a channel for communicating the messages of God; he felt, therefore, that it was morally wrong to present to his readers anything that totally lacked any sign of spiritual hope. This consideration naturally inhibited public expression of personal misery, or general pessimism. There was probably also a natural reticence about such matters. But another and more complex reason is indicated in Lilith.

He was a self-conscious writer, as his polishings and revisions show, and he fully recognized the difficulty of attempting to delineate in coherent form multi-dimensional emotional experiences. His poems usually conveyed information on one plane only. Mr Vane's difficulties in describing the
Other Dimension seem to me an apt description of MacDonald's own literary problem when looking for a way to indicate what was almost too complex to express:

... it involves a constant struggle to say what cannot be said with even an approach to precision. ... I can present [the things recorded] only by giving, in the forms and languages of life in this world, the modes in which they affected me—not the things themselves, but the feelings they woke in me. Even this much, however, I do with a continuous and abiding sense of failure, finding it impossible to present more than one phase of a multitudinously complicated significance, or one concentric sphere of a graduated embodiment. ... I am indeed often driven to set down what I know to be but a clumsy and doubtful representation of the mere feeling aimed at ... with even an approach to clearness or certainty. (Lil, p. 227)

For Other Dimension, read Inner Self.

He did make an attempt, in The Diary of an Old Soul (written following the deaths of Mary and Maurice), to analyse in his usual style the spiritual difficulties stemming from emotional shocks. Hein describes it as "a sensitive and intimate presentation of the devout soul's various feelings before God" (Harmony, p. 25). But in spite of the tone of earnest
introspection, MacDonald seems, generally speaking, distanced from the reader. The reflections are there, the emotions (except in a few passages) are not. The straightforward presentation was, in fact, like Mr Vane's efforts, inadequate to convey "more than one phase of a multitudinously complicated significance."

In his first prose work, however, MacDonald had employed the mode of fantasy, in which the great archetypes of fairy tale, myth, dream, and the Bible blend with the narrative. The work progresses on several levels, its totality suggesting far more than is explicitly stated. As Mr Vane puts it, immediately following the passage from Lilith quoted above,

While without a doubt, for instance, that I was actually regarding a scene of activity, I might be, at the same moment, in my consciousness aware that I was perusing a metaphysical argument. (Lil, p. 227)

Elliot B. Gose writes as though the understanding of this genre were a modern invention:

According to the findings of twentieth-century psychoanalysis, fantasy and dream, romance and fairy tale give representation
to the otherwise hidden dynamics of mental life. ²

But MacDonald (not to mention Novalis and Hoffmann, his predecessors and models in this genre) were certainly aware on the metaphysical level of what they were accomplishing in their fantasies. Manlove refers to the settings of Lilith and Phantastes as "landscapes which are symbols of mind" (Modern Fantasy, p. 71), and Frye to Phantastes as a "psychological quest carried out in inner space" (Scripture, p. 58). Judging from his own comments, MacDonald would have accepted both concepts as accurate and not at all unfamiliar. As he said of the parables in the Bible, "The truth [in them] is what they mean, not what they say" (WMM, p. 206).

When, therefore, he experienced emotions both too complex and too intimate to be expressed in his usual style, it is not surprising that he made use of the techniques of fantasy. Here the images are drawn from his sub-conscious into his conscious mind through the medium of dreams, some of which had apparently haunted him for years. The writing of the poems may even have shown him feelings he had not
been entirely aware of, even as dreams may tell us what we know, but have not previously confronted.

But perhaps he was more conscious of his own feelings than that last statement would suggest. As early as 1865 he put a grim warning in the mouth of a character: "Haud yer een aff o' rainbows, or ye'll brak yer shins upo' gravestanes" (AF, p. 150). Or, as he put it more formally a few years later:

It seems to me sometimes . . . as if life were a conflict between the inner force of the spirit, which lies in its faith in the unseen—and the outer force of the world, which lies in the pressure of everything it has to show. (AQN, pp. 379-80)

But perhaps the most desperate statement of his awareness of the essential dichotomy in living is found in a letter he wrote in 1891 to Louisa:

"What is it all for?" I should constantly be saying with Tolstoi, but for the hope of the glory of God. . . . (GMHW, p. 520)

Though he could say it thus plainly in an intimate communication, none of the poems discussed actually goes so far as to ask, "What is it all for?" But that is certainly the meaning of most of them.

Much of what I have said about the selected
poems, here and earlier, draws on a knowledge of his life for the interpretation. When Tillyard and C. S. Lewis debated in print the validity of this approach, Lewis held that the poet's personality is an intruder in the poem, and that the "I" is exactly the same as other characters in the work, namely, a creation whose point of view the readers adopt (p. 11). Tillyard, on the other hand, held that poetry is no more than "a version of [the poet's] remarkable personality, of which another version is his life. The two versions are not the same, but they are analogous" (p. 35). I have agreed with Tillyard, for I feel that without some knowledge of MacDonald's life, any coherent interpretation of his poetry is impossible. Only an awareness of the numerous deaths in his family, for example, can explain the persistently bitter and melancholy tone of the revisions of his poems, and the constant later crucial references to "the children." Tillyard is, I think, correct when he writes:

The biography, the facts of personality, the data for the mental pattern of the man's life, may substantially help our
understanding of the mental pattern as revealed in his art. (p. 43)

This approach proves especially valid in an examination of the lesser-known works, which differ markedly from those most popular in the author's lifetime.

There has been some revival of interest in MacDonald in the last twenty years or so, and selections of his large output are again in print. But the poetry has not so far attracted any attention. This, in my opinion, is an oversight. It must be admitted that Saintsbury had a point when he complained that MacDonald was "almost to a singular extent unable to keep himself at the heights to which he would soar" (Bulloch, p. 741). But that he showed himself capable of soaring is undeniable.
NOTES

After the first reference, all citations to MacDonald's works will be given in the text. A table of abbreviated titles is included in the pre-fatory material.

INTRODUCTION

1 Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (New York: Dial Press, 1924). It will be cited hereafter in the text as GMHW, and the author referred to as Greville.


CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND


4 Ronald MacDonald, "George MacDonald: A Personal Note," in From a Northern Window, ed. Frederick Watson (London: James Nisbet & Co., Limited, 1911), p. 58; cited hereafter in the text as FANW.

5 George MacDonald, Poetical Works, 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1893), I: 188. All further citations will be identified in the text by volume and page number. When a poem is quoted in its entirety, it will be introduced by its title. When it is quoted only in part, the title will precede the volume and page number.


10 David Christie Murray, My Contemporaries in Fiction (London: Chatto & Windus, 1897), Bulloch, p. 739.


17 George MacDonald, David Elginbrod (Boston: Loring, Publisher, n.d.), p. 390.

18 C. L. Dodgson was a constant visitor when the MacDonalds were living in London, and read his own work aloud to the family. There is a curious correspondence between "Bedtime" and the poem which introduces Through the Looking Glass (1871). It is written in the same metre and verse form, and employs, but to far different effect, the same image. One stanza reads:

Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread,
With bitter tidings laden,
Shall summon to unwelcome bed
A melancholy maiden!
We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near.


19 George MacDonald, Phantastes (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., Everyman Library, 1940), pp. 230-31. All quotations are taken from this rather than the Eerdmans' edition, for which see the next entry.


CHAPTER TWO: POETICAL WORKS


2 Dr Douglas Thorpe has very kindly made available to me his copy of the ascriptions.


4 For contrast, see Robert Bridge's triolet in Short Poems, Bk. I, #16.

5 George MacDonald, Guild Court (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, [1881]), p. 188.


7 George MacDonald, The Portent (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1864), p. 83. Greville considers this passage to be autobiographical (GMHW, p. 73).


11 The Italian translations are very much in the minority in the collection, consisting of two sonnets from Petrarch and six from Milton. The comments I make on the German translations may be considered applicable also to those from the Italian.
12 Dr Thorpe has kindly allowed me to read his transcriptions from this correspondence, which he made from the collection of MacDonald's letters in the Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University.


CHAPTER THREE: POETIC THEORIES


3 George MacDonald, Mary Marston (New York: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., [1894]), p. 130.

4 William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), in English Critical Essays: Nineteenth Century,
ed. Edmund D. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 16. All quotations of criticism in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this volume, cited hereafter as ECE.


6 John Keble, "Sacred Poetry" (1825), ECE, pp. 196, 203.


8 Thomas Carlyle, "The Hero as Poet," (1840), ECE, p. 128.


11 George MacDonald, The Princess and the Goblin (London: Blackie & Son Limited, [1900]), p. 51. This, and its sequel listed above, are sometimes referred to collectively as the Curdie books.


16 George MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons: Third Series (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889),
p. 161.

17 George MacDonald, Salted with Fire (London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited, 1897), p. 47.


19 Charlotte M. Yonge, The Heir of Redclyffe, Chapter xxx.

20 George MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind (London: Blackie & Son Limited, [1900]), p. 150.


23 George MacDonald, The Diary of an Old Soul (London: Arthur C. Fifield, 1906). References will be given by date rather than by page number.


26 "It is not the intention of sportive instruction that the child should be spared effort, or delivered from it; but that thereby a passion should be awakened in him, which shall both necessitate and facilitate the strongest exertion." Quoted (also in German) as a chapter-heading in David Elginbrod, p. 100.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE OTHER DIMENSION


3 There are a significant number of parallels and correspondences between the works of MacDonald and Lewis Carroll, one of which has been dealt with by Robert Lee Wolff ("An 1862 Alice: 'Cross Purposes,' or, Which Dreamed It?* Harvard Library Bulletin, xxiii, (1975), 199-202. The literary interaction between the two men would be well worth investigating at length.


5 "I thought . . . the butterfly was the type in nature . . . of the resurrection of the human body; that its name certainly expressed the hope of the Greeks in immortality, while to us it speaks likewise of a glorified body, whereby we shall know and love each other with our eyes as well as our hearts" (AQN, p. 517).


CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSES OF SELECTED POEMS

1 George MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons [First Series] (London: Alexander Strahan, 1867), p. 239.

2 The Alder Maid, the Ash, and the Ogress in Phantastes are figures in the tradition of fairy tales, allegorically representing callous lust, spiritual corruption, and detached intellectualism; hence no suggestion of their salvation arises.


4 Describing a marriage which is failing, partly through poverty, but mainly from a lack of sympathetic communication, MacDonald writes: "Down the hill and down! To the shores of the salt sea, where the flowing life is dammed into a stagnant lake, a dead sea, growing more and more bitter with separation and lack of outlet" (Wd & Wq, p. 403).


7 Nowhere in the poetry does MacDonald write from the viewpoint of "The Blessed Damozel," and only once in the prose: "The dead must have their sorrow too, but when they find it is well with them, they can sit and wait by the mouth of the coming stream better than those can wait who see the going stream bear their loves down to the ocean of the unknown. The dead sit by the river-mouths of Time: the living mourn upon its higher banks" (MOL, p. 116).

8 Chaucer's mysterious old man, beating the earth with his stick, and crying, "Leve moder, lat me in!" is the obvious source of the scene. MacDonald quotes this and several other lines from "The Pardoner's Tale" as a chapter-heading in Phantastes.


14 *The Elect Lady*: "the flaming walls of creation" (p. 284). Paul Faber: "the flaming walls of the universe" (p. 458). Malcolm: "the dyke at the warl's end" (p. 343).


18 In *AQN* there is a brief mention of a death-bed communion, the only instance I recall in all his works.

**CONCLUSION**

1 In this respect, he and Charles Kingsley are in total contrast, as a comparison between *The Water Babies* and *At the Back of the North Wind* will show.


## GLOSSARY

### A.
- a': all
- ableeze: ablaze
- ablins: perhaps
- aboot: about
- abune: above
- ae: one
- ahin: behind
- ain: own
- airts: regions
- ance: once
- ane: one
- aneth: below
- 'at: that
- athort: across
- auld: old
- awa': away
- aye: always, continually

### B.
- bairns: children
- bauld: bold
- bide: dwell, stay
- bidena: do not dwell
- blae: livid, pale
- blow: blow
- bleezin: blazing
- bot: without
- brak: break
- braw: fine
- breist: breast
- brig: bridge
- burn: stream

### C.
- cam: came
- canty: cheerful
- carl: fellow
- cast: cast-off, faded
- cat-loup: cat-jump
- cauld: cold
- claes: clothes
- claiks: chatter
- crap: crept
- creepy: stool
- crook-fingert: crooked
- fingered
- cudna: could not

### D.
- dee: die
- deid: dead
- dinna: do not
- doun: down
- draps: drips
- dreigh: tedious, wearisome
- droon: drown
- dune: done

### E.
- ear': early
- e'e: eye
- een: eyes
- ekit: extended
- en': end
F.  
fa': fall  frae: from
fain: willing  fuistit: mouldy,usty,
feck: large amount  decaying
fit: foot  furth: forth
flegs: fears, fright
to gie the flegs: to
  frighten off, scare
  away

G.  
gaed: went  gloamin: twilight
gang: go  grat: wept
gars: makes  greet: weep
gien, gin: if  greitin: weeping
gies: gives

H.  
hae: have  hert: heart
hairst: harvest  hing: hang
hame: home  hinna: have not
haud awa': keep away  hoo: how
hech: interjection  hoose: house
heid: head
herd, herd-laddie:  herdman, herd-boy

I.  
ilka: every  intil: into
ingle-neuk: fireside  ither: other
corner

K.  
ken: know  kirkyard: churchyard

L.  
laich, laigh: low  lees: lies
laith: loath  leevin: living
lang-backit: long-  licht: light
  backed  lift: sky
lang-leggit: long-  lippen: trust
  legged  loo: love
lat.: let  loupin': jumping
lauch: laugh  luik, luikit: look, looked
leal: loyal, faithful  lum: chimney
M. mair: more minnie: mother
'maist: almost mirk: dark
maun: must moul': mould, earth
mavis: thrush muckle: big
micht: might mune: moon

N. na: no, not nicht: night
nae: no no: not
'neth: beneath nor: than

O. o': of owermuckle: excess, over-
oor: our muchness
oot: out ower's: over his
or: before oucht: anything (auht)
ower: too
owercome: refrain or burden of a song

P. pairtit: parted pangt: stuffed
pairs: parts puir: poor

Q. quhat: what quo': quoth, said

R. rids: riddles (with holes) rins: runs

S. sae: so speilt: climbed
sair: hard, grievous speir: ask
seekit: sought spidder: spider
sic: such spilgie: long and slender
sma': small sterns: stars
snaw: snow stoot: stoutly
sneck: latch stramash: disturbance,
sookit: sucked broil
spak: spoke strand: shore
spangs: leaps, stude: stood
bounds, springs sune: soon
T.  
  ta'en, taen: taken  thrang: crowded
  tane: the one  tither: the other
  teuk: took  toon: town
  tice: entice  trowth: truth
  thegither: together  twa: two
  thought: thoughts

U.  
  ugsome: ugly,
      frightful

V.  
  verra: very

W.  
  wa': wall  waur: worse
  wad: would  whase, wha's: whose
  waesome: woeful  whaur: where
  wamle: twist and  weel: well
      turn, wriggle,
      writhe
  wan: obtained,  win: obtain, arrive at
      arrived at
  war: were  win': wind
  warl: world  winna: will not
  warstles: struggles,  wow: bell
      strives
  wudna, wadna: would not

Y.  
  yerl, yird: earth,
      ground  yerl: earl
      yoong: young
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