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DREAM CHILDREN: THE INTERNAL QUEST

DREAM CHILDREN:  
THE INTERNAL QUEST

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ABSTRACT:

The child as a prominent figure in English literature reached its richest stage of development in the nineteenth century, particularly in the fantasy fiction of such writers as Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald. Until this time, the child was generally perceived as an essentially innocent and passive figure requiring little analysis of character or symbolic meaning. However, in the nineteenth century, a growing awareness of the child as a figure of isolation and sadness prompted many writers to embrace him as the representative individual struggling to survive in a hostile world. Such a concept proved very effective in the Victorian era in particular, in which one finds a tremendous intellectual and moral confusion. Accordingly, the thesis deals with Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking-Glass, and The Princess and the Goblin in terms of the child as surrogate wanderer in search of his proper place within the rapidly spinning world of which he is an integral part. In so doing, the paper discusses such aspects as Carroll's use of the journey through a world of inversions as the quest for self-identity, and MacDonald's concern with the passage of the human soul to complete union with God, keeping in mind that the child himself is the key to all that man will become.

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To My Husband and Our Unborn Child

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Alice! A childish story take,  
And with a gentle hand  
Lay it where Childhood's dreams are twined  
In Memory's mystic band,  
Like pilgrim's withered wreath of flowers  
Pluck'd in a far-off land.

Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

## INTRODUCTION

In Puck of Pook's Hill (1906), Kipling recounts an ancient legend of the special gift given by the fairies of Romney Marsh to the Widow Whitgift in return for her help in eluding their enemies: that in every generation there would be one of her family who could see further through a stone wall than most. Such is the gift of imagination and wonder which graces those who welcome the world of the unseen and the inexpressible, who choose to release the spirit of the eternal child within them into the realm of fantasy. Literally speaking, the word "fantasy" (or "phantasie") means a "rendering visible"<sup>1</sup>, the power to put "...that which is so mysteriously hidden from ordinary mortals into the clear light of their understanding, or at least of their partial understanding"<sup>2</sup> by articulating other-worldly concepts and visions in the metaphorical language of symbol, allegory, and dream. With a blend of the familiar and the fanciful often leading through a maze of the magical and the irrational, where the unreal is spontaneously transformed into the real, writers of fantasy struggle to express those "truths" which underlie all worlds by projecting reality into an original dimension:

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<sup>1</sup>From the Greek phantastikos, meaning "producing mental images", and phantazein, "to present to the mind".

<sup>2</sup>Lillian H. Smith, The Unreluctant Years (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 150.

...fantasy is a medium that reflects reality through unreality, that interprets life through illusion and plays with shimmering implications and urgencies over human experience and human character... It deals in prophecy; through satire, burlesque, and make-believe it assays human qualities; through poetic mirage it penetrates to the realities of the human heart...<sup>3</sup>

Critics such as G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis felt fantasy and fairytales to be "spiritual explorations" which revealed "human life as seen, or felt, or divined from the inside"<sup>4</sup>. Walter de la Mare spoke of the "compelling inward ring"<sup>5</sup> of Lewis Carroll's two Alice books, while, in The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (1976), Bruno Bettelheim defines fantasy as that which offers new dimension to the imagination of the child in particular, allowing him through the spinning of daydreams to fit unconscious content into the conscious medium. Through growing intimacy with his own fears and wishes, the child brings to light his inner struggle to overcome the chaotic irrationality of the outer world, thereby achieving a deeper comprehension of the manifold nature of existence. According to this thesis, then, fairytales and fantasy, in dealing with

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<sup>3</sup>Constantine Georgiou, Children and Their Literature (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 241.

<sup>4</sup>Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Walter de la Mare, Lewis Carroll (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1932), p. 29.

such fears as parental desertion ("Hansel and Gretel", for example), or sibling rivalry ("Cinderella"), assist the child in developing a more mature consciousness.

Yet fantasy has not always met with such approbation as an acceptable or even desirable art form; in fact, it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that fantasy achieved true respectability at all. Framing their vision with the concept that the individual begins his life as a "tabula rasa"<sup>6</sup> or "blank

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<sup>6</sup>In "Thoughts Concerning Children's Books", Only Connect: readings in children's literature, Egoff, Stubbs, and Ashley, editors (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), Penelope Mortimer states the following:

In 1693 John Locke published his Thoughts Concerning Education and invented the Child. Character, he said, came before learning...children must not merely be, they must be brought up...

(98)

It was Locke who postulated that the mind of the child was a blank page upon which lessons were to be impressed, an idea which enjoyed much popularity. Accordingly, three major adult books of rather didactic nature were pressed into use as juvenile literature in hope that their moral revelations would have a lasting fortifying effect upon their young and impressionable readers: The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), Robinson Crusoe (1719), and Gulliver's Travels (1726).

The result of the immense success of these particular volumes was an influx of such titles as A Little Book for Children, "'wherin are set down, in a plain and pleasant Way, Directions for Spelling, and other remarkable Matters'" (John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children [Great Britain: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1965], p. 30).

slate", eighteenth-century writers and critics alike decried those who stuffed "...Children's Heads with Stories of Ghosts, Fairies, Witches, and such Nonsense when they are young, and so they continue Fools all their Days"<sup>7</sup>. Nor was such disapproval a limited phenomenon, as Townsend reveals:

In Tudor and Stuart times, the literate part of the population had looked upon [fairy stories] as peasant crudities. The Puritans had objected to them because they were untrue, frivolous, and of dubious morality. To the Age of Reason they appeared uncouth and irrational  
...

...In general, anything that smacked of impossibility, absurdity, unbridled fancy was alien...<sup>8</sup>

However, as the eighteenth dissolved into the nineteenth century, the visionary cry of Romanticism grew more resonant, and imagination struggled to emerge from its long repression by reason. In an age when Gothic novelists were writing with horrific fascination of dark forests, eerie crypts, twisting caverns, and a multitude of phantasmagoria, the world of "faerie" was infused as well with rejuvenated spirit and determination to assume its rightful place in "approved" literature<sup>9</sup>. Leslie A. Fiedler speaks of this period as a

<sup>7</sup>Townsend, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup>Townsend, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup>There is as well a more practical reason for the sudden nineteenth-century proliferation of fantasy. Children provided a new and ready market in an increasingly-literate population for now-flourishing publishers: the day of the itinerant "catchpenny" and "chapbook" publisher was rapidly drawing to a close.

"New Revelation"<sup>10</sup> or "Psychic Breakthrough"<sup>11</sup>, in which man and poet alike engaged in a search for terms to define the newly-felt psychic split between body and soul, "head" and "heart", which emerged in the struggle of impulse over intelligence:

We who are its children and its heirs live in an age characterized by the consciousness of the unconscious and by a resolve to propitiate and honor that dark force, so long surrendered to the auspices of unlettered witches and shabby wizards.<sup>12</sup>

Fiedler goes on to describe how the "forbidden world of impulse and unreason"<sup>13</sup> gradually became the natural home of poets who revelled in "unheard melodies" beyond the finely-tuned human ear.

Accordingly, in 1851, Nathaniel Hawthorne felt compelled to inform his publisher that, in his forthcoming A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls (1852), he would "'aim at substituting a tone in some degree Gothic or romantic...instead of the classical coldness which is as repellant as the touch of marble'"<sup>14</sup>. Charles Dickens in 1853 defended the fairytale by citing the deep formative impact that its magic had played upon his own creative imagination, while John Ruskin not only praised fairy stories, but produced one of his own, The King of the Golden River (1851). Likewise, in 1855, William Makepeace Thackeray

<sup>10</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, No! in Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 254.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>14</sup>Townsend, pp. 91-2.

published a "fireside pantomime" entitled The Rose and the Ring and located in the mythical countries of Paflagonia and Grim Tartary. At least a portion of the attraction of such works to the Victorian public is due to their evocation of the mystical time of childhood, idealized in memory, and contrasting sharply with "'this dull, plodding, unimaginative, money-getting, money-loving nineteenth century'"<sup>15</sup>. Nonetheless, the age of fantasy had taken wing, achieving full flight between 1865 and 1883, the era in which both Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald were creating their most masterful works. Furthermore, with these developments, fantasy indeed had moved out of the larger category of fairytale and folklore into a more modern form associated with the novel itself, requiring the same rigorous critical analysis of theme and form in its ability to reach out to fundamental universal questions.

If the world of English fantasy was designed primarily for juvenile enjoyment, the child himself was no less an important personage in it. Andrew Lang, in the preface to his Violet Fairy Book (1889), has said, "he who would enter into the kingdom of Faërie should have the heart of a little child." Again, Fiedler points out that the emergence of the child as a powerful literary figure has its roots in the "new revelations" of romanticism, which sought images of impulse and natural virtue with which to express its strident war against culture. Noble savages, humble peasants, and kindly buffoons gradually gave way to a less political and more genteel symbol of protest, the child, or, as Fiedler caustically phrases it, "angels of pigmy size".

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<sup>15</sup>Townsend, p. 93.

Because of his innocent sensibilities, untainted by intellectual accoutrements, the child was thought to be closer to the essence of being, better able to perceive its truths. Thus, it is fitting that the child should be the prophetic figure bathed in the "shimmering implications and urgencies" of fantasy itself, that he should serve as the voyager who penetrates the mysteries of the human heart. Indeed, within the vigourously practical strictures of Victorian England, the child becomes a somewhat plaintive figure, mourning the loss of original innocence amid a whirling mass of doubts and anxieties engendered by the intensity of modern technological life.

The literary historian, in fact, is hard-pressed to discover a central child-figure in works produced before the eighteenth century. Chaucer's use of the child who sings "O Alma Redemptoris" in "The Prioress' Tale", or Shakespeare's depiction of the unfortunate Edward in King John, are primarily atmospheric detailing which adds lurid horror to treachery and slaughter. Until the end of the Neoclassical era, childhood was neglected in favour of the more refined conflict of rational man against an impersonal universe, with the innocent child having no place in such a schema. During the eighteenth century, children suffered from the formality and exaggerated pietism of their elders: they were dressed and treated as miniature adults, expected to be models of correct behaviour, with bodies encased in stiff clothing, minds similarly bound in codes of courtly manners. Until the latter part of the seventeenth century no books, except lesson books, were written especially for children, and very little was written about them. The period in which the child did evolve as a central figure, then, deserves closer examination.

Poets like Blake and Wordsworth wholeheartedly welcomed the child as an image of the spiritual realm in which it was nurtured, a world of peace under constant siege by the social evils of adult society. Through smiling infants and ingenuous chimney sweeps, Blake the mystic communicated with God:

Sweet babe, in thy face  
 Holy image I can trace.  
 Sweet babe, once like thee,  
 Thy maker lay and wept for me...<sup>16</sup>

For Wordsworth, as well, the sensuous period of childhood was the time in which man was closest to his divine source: "...trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home:/Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"<sup>17</sup>. The "sleep and forgetting" which follow this moment signify a spiritual death in the demise of childhood and the assumption of adult sensibilities. In the conviction that the child, because he was so close to divinity, was therefore able to perceive the deepest mysteries of the universe, writers such as Hawthorne and Twain began to explore the possibility of the child as a figure of moral doubts and uncertainty who must sift through great depths of detail as if he were piecing together a gigantic jigsaw-puzzle. Meanwhile, Dickens was further developing Blake's theme in presenting the child as the victim of aggressive adults caught upon the treadmill of the Industrial Revolution. A succession of youthful heroes such as Oliver Twist were flung about between the forces of good and evil, all

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<sup>16</sup>"Cradle Song", 1789.

<sup>17</sup>"Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", 1807.

the while maintaining a steadfast and trusting innocence. Gradually, however, Dickens' children began to demonstrate a consciousness of self and a need for self-discovery, self-identification, and self-realization, proving eventually that the sensibility of the young could be an effective gauge of adult values.

Yet it is the mythic aspect of a childhood which finds its richest wells of inspiration in the strangely-beautiful dreamworlds and wonderlands of fantasy which has retained the most dynamic impact even upon our own century. Often, in fact, the child suggests the despair of the creative artist himself at the inconsistencies and perplexities of the universe around him, while fantasy offers a cathartic release of the tensions surging within his soul. Of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, for example, it is said:

...the child, through a means of imaginative escape, becomes the critic; Alice is the most reasonable and responsible person in the book. This is meant as charmingly pathetic about her as well as satire about her elders, and there is some implication that the sane man can take no other view of the world, even for controlling it, than the child does.<sup>18</sup>

Beneath the surface of games and whimsical recitations, the struggle to achieve maturity in a bewildering, looking-glass universe takes place, while the child-figure satisfies a human need for wisdom without sacrificing innocence and spontaneity.

This thesis, then, will examine the use of the child as a symbolic and prophetic figure at the zenith of its development in the

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<sup>18</sup>William Empson, "Alice in Wonderland: The Child as Swain", The Critical Performance, S.E. Hyman, editor (New York, 1956), 136.

nineteenth century as the vessel of consciousness through which the artist might dramatize the conflicting sources of human action and emotion:

The ideal of youth as a time that should be happy remained, but the reality that childhood is a time of isolation and sadness increasingly impinged upon the consciousness of the writer and was reflected in his depiction of childhood. The vision of childhood as a time of struggle for survival in an hostile adult world, the recognition of the child as an alien, an outsider, had its inception in the nineteenth century...<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, the paper will focus upon the three major nineteenth-century works of fantasy fiction in which the child is the central narrative and thematic figure: Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and Through the Looking-Glass (1871), and George MacDonald's The Princess and the Goblin (1872). The first chapter deals with Carroll's concern for the passage of the child into a "topsy-turvy" universe of inversions and contradictions, a journey whose unifying thread is the search for self-identity, while the second centres upon MacDonald's conviction of the possibility of the human soul's ultimate unification with God, which is most fully realized in the pure and questing nature of childhood. Both sections are conceived on the assumption that the child in fantasy serves as surrogate for an increasingly bewildered, self-doubting, even skeptical, Victorian temperament flailing about for a secure terrain upon which to rest, and renew its exhausted spiritual energy.

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<sup>19</sup> Muriel Shine, The Fictional Children of Henry James (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), pp. 19-20.

...The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes'. For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world...

Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra

## CHAPTER ONE

### "Who in the world am I?"

More than a century has passed since the publication of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, yet the books sustain their magical hold upon reader and critic alike generations removed from the Victorian sun under which they were nurtured. Quite apart from its appeal to the scholar of theoretical mathematics, philology, symbolic logic, or Victorian social and political history, Alice has become as well "...a book of major and permanent importance in the tradition of English fiction...[and] exemplifies the profound questioning of reality which characterizes the mainstream of nineteenth-century English literature."<sup>1</sup> In accounting for the perennial popularity of a volume which has been translated into forty-seven languages, numerous stage and cinema productions, and which has inspired an abundance of philosophical discourses, the critic must acknowledge the presence in Alice of certain archetypes evoking the deeper responses of human consciousness which allow Wonderland to transcend its historical boundaries. Although the melancholic tone of Carroll's own verses laments the passing of the "golden hours" of childhood's summer, yet the words themselves achieve a sense of the timeless:

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Rackin, "Alice's Journey to the End of Night", PMLA, Vol. LXXXI, October 1966, no. 5, 313.

A tale begun in other days,  
 When summer suns were glowing—  
 A simple chime, that served to time  
 . The rhythm of our rowing—  
 Whose echoes live in memory yet,  
 Though envious years would say 'forget'.<sup>2</sup>

Alice has become more than an idyllic tale steeped in the imagination of childhood: it serves as a metaphorical search for meaning in the chaos of deepest consciousness and, quite literally, fulfils its role as the "dream-vision" pondered by Carroll in the privacy of his journals:

Query: when we are dreaming and, as so often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life? We often dream without the least suspicion of unreality: 'Sleep hath its own world', and it is often as lifelike as the other.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, as Rackin points out, Alice's designation as a "dream-vision" is not mere technical classification; rather, it is the medium through which the absurdity of man's position in an apparently meaningless world is explored:

If it were merely [technical classification], one might dismiss the work as ...simply a whimsical excursion into an amusing, childlike world that has little relevance to the central concerns

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<sup>2</sup>Preface, Through the Looking-Glass, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup>John Pudney, Lewis Carroll and his world (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 10.

of adult life...But if 'dream vision' is understood as serious thinkers (ranging from medieval poets to modern psychologists) have so often understood it, as an avenue to knowledge that is perhaps more meaningful—and frequently more horrifying—than any that the unconscious intellect can discover, then it provides an almost perfect description of the very substance of Carroll's masterpiece.<sup>4</sup>

The pervasive questions, then, which underlie the Alice books are "who is the dreamer?" and "which dream is the real?" as an integral part of the Victorian search for the origins of the self. Alice, the "dream child moving through a land/of wonders wild and new..."<sup>5</sup>, senses this necessity to turn eyes inward in order to discern the mystery of her surroundings and thereby solve the riddle of her own being:

'...How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, "Who in the world am I?" Ah, that's the great puzzle!'

(37)

Significantly, Carroll's original title for the first of his two tales, Alice's Adventures Under Ground, seems to designate most clearly the central theme which was to be perpetuated in the looking-glass inversions of the second volume: the search beneath the orderly surface of conventional rationality to profounder truths below. Thus, the curious child who "was very fond of pretending to be two people" (33) exists, like

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<sup>4</sup>Rackin, 313.

<sup>5</sup>Preface, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, p. 23.

the books in which she appears, in two worlds simultaneously: the rational and the irrational, the adult and the childish, the beautiful and the terrifying, the world awake and the world lost in dreams. Therein lies the complexity of Carroll's creation, for he has managed to capture the essence of "growing-up": the child with one foot in Eden, the other already tremulously venturing forth into the wilderness.

Alice herself is a somewhat prismatic figure. On the one hand, she serves to epitomize the image of the Victorian "enfant": pinafored, rather prim, perpetually recalling stringently-memorized lessons. Nina Auerbach speaks of Tenniel's first illustration for Through the Looking-Glass (177) as the crystallization of child-woman innocence in a world of filth and corruption:

She sits...in a snug, semi-foetal position, encircled by a protective armchair ...She seems to be a beautiful child, but the position of her head makes her look as though she had no face. She muses dreamily on the snowstorm raging outside, part of a series of circles within circles, enclosures within enclosures, suggesting the self-containment of innocence and purity.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, on the other hand, within Alice herself can be found the frightening elements of Wonderland as well: as Auerbach points out, it is her own tears in which the child nearly drowns, and her own dream which threatens to engulf her until she sweeps it with the pack of playing cards into oblivion. Indeed, in a curious play of words,

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<sup>6</sup>Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child", Victorian Studies, 17:1, September 1973, 31.

Carroll once speculated of Alice, "' I think it was about malice'"<sup>7</sup>. In this sense, the child functions as the questing individual for whom the world is neither simple nor gay, but dualistic and even terrifyingly irrational.

In this awareness of such tensions within the human consciousness, Carroll most resembles the age in which he lived. Part of the landscape of the nineteenth-century mind was a split almost schizophrenic between the "spirit" and the "flesh", a chasmic separation of the sublime and the debased. In the early years of the century, Wordsworth writes of young, eager Luke leaving the pure mountain of his shepherd father, Michael, to be lost forever in the dissolute city below, while in Thus Spake Zarathustra (1892), the German poet-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche ushers out its dying years with his hero's conviction of the necessity to "descend to the depths" in order to share the "honey of his wisdom" and know what it is to be a man again. Closer to Carroll's own milieu, the Reverend Charles Kingsley published, as a gift to his youngest child, The Water-Babies (1863), in which the bedraggled young chimney sweep, Tom, works out his own salvation by cleansing his soul of the putrid soot of London in the river of the water-babies. Their express duty is to deter Tom from the sewer mouths which have sheltered him in infancy, and assist his embarkation upon the quest for redemption.

A flawed masterpiece which often becomes entangled in its own symbolism and religious allegory, Water-Babies stands as Kingsley's most whimsical and imaginative moral tome. Yet, it also presents an

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<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Hatch, editor, "Letter to Dolly Argles, 28 November 1867", A Selection From the Letters of Lewis Carroll (The Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) to his Child Friends (London: MacMillan, 1933), pp. 48-9.

effective counterpoint to the Alice books in its cognizance of the dualistic nature of being and of the capacity of the individual to embody diametrically opposed forces. This concept emerges in Water-Babies when Tom, temporarily regressing from his cleansed state, becomes covered with prickles, while the author reminds us that "people's souls make their bodies"; Alice, meanwhile, having just been linked in a highly suggestive simile to an aggressive serpent (Chapter Five of Wonderland) finds herself in Through the Looking-Glass under even more hostile scrutiny:

...[the Unicorn's] eye happened to fall upon Alice: he turned round instantly, and stood for some time looking at her with an air of deepest disgust.

'What—~~is—~~this?' he said at last.

'This is a child!' Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her, and spreading out both in his hands towards her in an Anglo-Saxon attitude. 'We only found it to-day. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!'

'I always thought they were fabulous monsters!' said the Unicorn. 'Is it alive?'<sup>8</sup>

(286-7)

<sup>8</sup> The Unicorn has a fascinating history as a symbol, possessing both secular and religious significance. It is often used to represent chastity and is reputed to fall meekly to the ground when approached by a virgin. Analytical psychologist Carl Jung refers to the Unicorn as a phallic concept and a recognized emblem of the Christian Logos, or creative word of God. Within this context, the Unicorn becomes a crucial element in the Christian myth of the Annunciation. An old German picture popular at the end of the fifteenth century depicts this:

...the Annunciation is represented in the form of a hunt. Gabriel blows the angelic greeting on a hunting horn.

However, Kingsley and Carroll differ decisively in their use of the child-figure. Kingsley's work is a combination of adventure and fantasy doctored with a clearly moralistic tone, in which the path of the individual to redemption is carefully laid out. In this sense, the use of a child appears to be designed primarily as a device to gain the attention of a particular audience: the children of the Victorian years. Tom, then, becomes a rhetorical image used to convey one man's moral vision of catholic salvation. Alice, on the other hand, is a much more intricate symbol: hers is a twisting, torturous journey to self-recognition. In this respect, Carroll's use of the child is reminiscent of that of Freud.

It was in the child that Freud first saw the prototype of man's struggle between the dark forces of human sexuality—the deep and compelling powers hidden in the umbrageous valleys of Eros—and the invigorating forces of self-preservation. Unlike in Kingsley and other precursors of Carroll, the child is not understood as an innocent buffeted about by external winds. He is, rather, a "problem-solver", an uneasy dialectic between the conscious and the unconscious, the light and the dark sides of man. In Freud, the child faces the chaotic world of reality which holds the material for the satisfaction of his desires and the promise of a resolution to the contradiction of his in-

8(cont'd) A unicorn flees (or is blown) to the Virgin Mary, and plunges his horn into her 'lap', while God the Father blesses them from above.

("The Madonna's Conception Through the Ear", Ernest Jones, Psycho-Myth, Psycho-History [New York: Hillstone Publishing, 1974], p. 331).

The implications of this for Alice are illuminating: the Unicorn's

instinctual needs. In this sense, then, the child perceives reality as a constant series of challenges and frustrations which must be mastered in order that his passionate tensions may be relieved. And relief is sought, in the Freudian schema, by the child's wholesale reduction of the complexities of reality to the simple solutions that he has already found useful and which Freud outlines in his serial development of the child<sup>9</sup>. In a similar but much less technical and psychological way, Alice is also a "problem-solver", facing a chaos which will be resolved by the imposition, almost by sheer will alone, of her own structure upon it:

...she has reached that stage of development where the world appears completely explainable and unambiguous, that most narrow-minded, prejudiced period of life where, paradoxically, daring curiosity is wedded to uncompromising literalness and priggish, ignorant faith in the fundamental sanity of all things. With a few deft strokes, Carroll has prepared us for Alice's first major confrontation with chaos. She is ready to cope with the 'impossible' in terms of the 'possible', and we are ready to understand and laugh at her literal-minded renditions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>(cont'd) disgusted reaction upon seeing Alice for the first time seems to deny the presence in her of the childlike, virginal quality most often cited by critics. In this case, the Unicorn's propensity for immediate recognition of chastity fails, and only the child's monstrous qualities are noted. Moreover, his position as emblem of the Word of God imparts some authority to his judgment, therefore counteracting possible criticism of mere capriciousness upon the part of the author.

<sup>9</sup>the oral, anal, phallic, and genital stages of problem-solving, a detailed discussion of which may be found in Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, translated and edited by James Strachey (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), pp. 130-1.

<sup>10</sup>Rackin, 314.

Underpinning the "problem-solving" nature of the child-figure are other characteristics which both Freud and Carroll reveal. In the first place, both Alice and the Freudian juvenile are explorers. Freud, in his essay on Little Hans, calls all sexual strivings in the infant a "search for knowledge" and, indeed, the psychoanalytic understanding of man is that he is himself an infant in search of Eden, a hungry soul seeking his lost mother. So it is with Alice. She is the explorer par excellence, who explores for its own sake:

Alice enters upon her journey underground simply because she is curious: she follows the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole, 'never once considering how in the world she was to get out again' (p. 26). With the fearlessness of the innocent child, the intellectual and spiritual recklessness of a heedless scientist or saint, Alice takes her gigantic and seemingly irreversible leap into the world beneath and beyond ordinary human experience.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the infant of psychoanalysis and Alice are critics and judges of the world of events around them. Both in his neurological model of the mind and in his description of the nascent ego, Freud places the faculty of judgment in a central importance. It is by means of this that the child constructs his compromises between the materials of reality and the impulses of desire, and between the dictates of consciousness and the rages of the unconscious. Likewise, such ruminations as this reveal Alice's own powers of discrimination:

'Come, there's no use in crying like that!' said Alice to herself, rather sharply. 'I advise you to leave off this

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<sup>11</sup>Rackin, 314.

minute!' She generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people.

(32-3)

Thirdly, both are logical. For Freud, there is no better proof that the infant functions along logical premises or that he is guided by rational thoughts than the mere fact that he survives: it is a pragmatic interest in living that impels the child to sort through the hostile chaos of reality and to redeem himself in its face. What impedes the child is not want of logic or an irrationality inherent in his world, but insufficient knowledge. If a child makes a ridiculous choice or action, it is not because he lacks reason, but because his reason is overcome by lack of experience or by an overwhelming fantasy. Significantly, what prevents Alice's journey through Wonderland from lapsing into the formlessness and meaninglessness of chaos is her possession of such logic:

...Alice brings along with her a number of things from that old world above ground, the most important being her belief in the simple orderliness of the universe. For example, in the midst of her long fall she retains her old belief in regular causal relations and puts the empty marmalade jar back into a cupboard in order to avoid 'killing some body underneath,' whatever 'killing' may mean to her. She wonders, as she falls and falls, about many things—all in terms of the world she has left behind,

as if she had not really left it  
at all.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Carroll shares with Freud the belief that, as Wordsworth somewhat cryptically phrased it, "the child is father of the man". For Freud, the values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns<sup>11</sup> of the adult may all be traced back to the experiences of the child. Whether it is the unreal fantasies of the psychotic, the obsessions of the neurotic, or the dreams and acts of the normal person, each has its root in the psychological formations of the child. Man repeats endlessly the lessons taught by the child, or, to express it more ominously, man suffers endlessly the lessons the child never learned. This vital link between man and child is, of course, evident in Carroll's work as well, since Alice, as a figure in transition, continually vascillates between infancy and impending old age, even foreshadowing her own death. Several times, Carroll makes reference to the memory which Alice will retain of her adventures when she, too, has become a grown woman, and the vividness of Wonderland has faded.

Beyond their understanding of the child as a multi-level, dynamic symbol, Freud and Carroll share many other similarities in their work. Most of these are self-evident and need not be analyzed in detail here. They include such things as the dream as a meaningful act of man's life, a "royal road", as it were, to Truth; the use of "parapraxes" (slips of the pen and tongue, etc.,) to show hidden meanings or make allusion to other than evident meanings; the use of an underground world (Wonderland, Looking-Glass land, or the Unconscious) as a sub-

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<sup>12</sup>Rackin, 314.

or inversion of the surface world (reality or Consciousness); and, finally, the conviction that this underground world, although irrational, has a logic of its own, and a logic that is intimate with truth.

These ideas shared by Carroll and Freud were not, however, born in an intellectual vacuum but, rather, were the products of an increasing probing analytic impulse generated within the nineteenth century itself. As early as 1877, Darwin had published the first objective, detailed study of a child's behaviour based upon the precept that the development of the brain depended directly upon impressions received in youth. Meanwhile, James Sully, a British psychologist, had written:

To treat the child's mind as merely a harbourer of fancies, as completely subject to the illusive spell of its bright imagery, would be the grossest injustice...the really intelligent children... are dispassionate and shrewd inquirers into the make of the actual world while ardently engaged in fashioning a brighter one...<sup>13</sup>

What Carroll explored through the fantasy realm of literature Freud translated into the healing powers of psychoanalysis: the tradition which was nurtured in the self-contained world of the imagination emerged later as a practical and therapeutic force. In the interim, it was enough that creative genius should embrace the child as a universal symbol of the swirling atmosphere of ideas around him.

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<sup>13</sup>Shine, p. 19.

i. "Curiouser and curiouser!"

Lewis Carroll's fame as a "nonsense writer" is by now so firmly established that it is practically impossible to persuade anyone that the truth might be otherwise. Strictly speaking, the term "nonsense" is commonly, if somewhat erroneously, applied to anything that fails to make sense: that is, anything that does not adhere to ordinary principles of logic, language, or behaviour. Yet, it seems far more plausible that Carroll, who as Charles Lutwidge Dodgson achieved a reputation as that "drab exponent of dilemmas and determinants"<sup>14</sup>, should maintain his adherence to the "rules" even in flights of fancy and, indeed, it is in such adherence that the curiosities of Wonderland attain much of their artistry. For it is the realm of the "absurd" rather than the "nonsensical" that Carroll most readily inhabits, creating characters who persistently bend, shape, and twist reality into "perverse" idioms normally quite sane. Such is the substance of dreams, that crucial test of "reality" in which the smooth, rounded edges crumble away to reveal the precious ore at its centre:

...[Carroll's] underlying message is concerned...with the bounds of sense and the limitations of reason. The form of the message is that of a sottisier: a horrendous catalog of philosophical blunders, logical fallacies, conceptual confusions, and linguistic breakdowns, which not only entertain but persistently

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Heath, The Philosopher's Alice (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 3.

tease the reader, compelling him to ask himself, 'What has gone wrong here? Why won't this do?' and to find that it is not always perfectly easy to supply the answer.<sup>15</sup>

For Carroll, the "liberating" world of the imagination found in Wonderland exposes the full viciousness as well as the incongruent beauty of the unconscious values of humankind, while the little girl Alice functions as the mind driven nearly insane by its confrontation with "...the dark forces and mysterious taboos of language and thought"<sup>16</sup> found there<sup>17</sup>.

Let us take the advice of the King of Hearts, then, and "begin at the beginning", when Alice first tumbles down the rabbit-hole. Through a number of strategic atmospheric details, Carroll nudges open the door to "dreamland": a book whose words have blurred into meaninglessness, a hot, sleepy day, and a pastoral setting by a riverbank. The first indication that the spell has begun to take hold is Alice's calm acceptance of the fussing, muttering White Rabbit who scurries past:

There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!' (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural)...

(25-6)

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<sup>15</sup>Heath, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>17</sup>Harry Levin, in "Wonderland Revisited", Kenyon Review, XXVII:4, Autumn 1965, quotes Marcel Duchamp, cubist and realist, on the subject of nonsense: "It's not easy to be nonsensical because nonsensical things

Only when the Rabbit extracts a watch from his waist-coat pocket does she begin to reflect upon the oddity of the situation and feel her first compulsion to yield to the urges of curiosity. Carroll's use of time here as the compelling factor in Alice's entrance to Wonderland is significant, since it implies the magnetic force of temporal progression as an irresistible and inevitable entity:

In another moment down went Alice after  
the Rabbit , never once considering how  
in the world she was to get out again.

(26)

In this pull of "time passing" we find the first of many hints that the book is essentially about the process of "growing-up", while two subsequent references to possible death indicate its ultimate finale: Alice, as mentioned before, replaces a jar of marmalade on the shelf lest it drop and kill somebody, and then muses:

'...after such a fall as this, I shall  
think nothing of tumbling down stairs!  
How brave they'll all think me at home!  
Why, I wouldn't say anything about it,  
even if I fell off the top of the house!

...

(27)

Even the concept of "falling"<sup>18</sup> has significance in this context in its evocation of the myth of the expulsion of first man and woman from Paradise; in Alice's case, it refers to the decline from the state of childhood Grace inherent in assuming one's rightful place in the exter-

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<sup>17</sup>(cont'd) so often turn out to make sense", 611.

<sup>18</sup>Harry Levin also speaks of "falling" as the pre-condition of knowledge insofar as it precedes the moment of birth and the tumultuous emergence of the child from the sheltered womb into an outer world of exploding sensations.

nal universe, a loss which the child eternally laments:

How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway...

(30)

Indeed, Alice soon finds herself losing all sense not only of "where" she is, but "who" and "why" she is. Like Henry James' "Maisie"<sup>19</sup>, the child stands before a stretching hallway of locked doors within which she has no right to assume the validity of her old above-ground logic:

For, you see, so many out of the way things had happened lately that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible.

(30)

Forced to discard her by-now "false" notions of size and rules of behaviour, Alice meets head-on the first of many challenges to her self-identity. Somehow recognizing the connection between "laws" and "survival" when she recalls,

...little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them...

(31),

Alice nonetheless plunges ahead, inviting the completion of the linear progression of time towards death which she has already discerned:

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<sup>19</sup> "Everything had something behind it: life was like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors." (What Maisie Knew [Great Britain: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1897], p. 35).

'...for it might end, you know,' said Alice to herself, 'in my going out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?'

(32)

Although many critics of Alice insist upon seeing its heroine as a passive and demure figure, it is in fact she who directs the changes in her own size, recalling the Freudian idea of the child in constant search for new knowledge: "Alice had got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen, that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way" (33). Her compulsion to stretch the dimensions of reality is matched only by Wonderland's capacity to accommodate her; she is, in effect, testing the limitations of the world, struggling to find her proper position within its bounds: thus, "'Who in the world am I?'" Only in the final courtroom scene does she change her size without wishing to, but, of course, by then she has begun to understand the construction of Wonderland and therefore has little need to perform a conscious test of its proportions.

Until that point is reached, however, Alice persists in her pre-occupation with death and, by implication, "growing-up". The numerous death-jokes interspersed throughout the text attest not only to Alice's sometimes grim sense of humour, but also to the fragility of the dreamworld in which she is a visitor. Again and again, savage "Darwinian ditties", such as "How doth the little crocodile" (38), "Fury said to a mouse" (51), or "The Lobster Quadrille" (134), assert the presence of death even within the Garden's confines. Even Alice's encounters with mice and puppies carry an air of the sinister. Despite

the obvious discomfort of her swimming companion, Alice doggedly exhorts the cat Dinah's mousing ability until, not surprisingly, she is left bewildered and alone again. Such predatory attitudes foreshadow the final banquet of Through the Looking-Glass, in which the food comes gruesomely alive and begins to eat the guests. Indeed, most of Wonderland's creatures live in constant jeopardy of being eaten or beheaded.

As James R. Kincaid has pointed out<sup>20</sup>, Alice carries with her an implicit belief in linear progressions and completions. Perhaps in this propensity she merely reflects the notoriety of the child in confronting rather than sublimating basic issues of life and death. However, Kincaid also shrewdly reflects that Alice's pre-occupation with death signifies as well her validity as representative of a humanity mourning its fate even while it presses eagerly towards it. Each man wants to grow up, but also fears the moment of leaving the parent's secure breast:

We are but older children, dear,  
Who fret to find our bedtime near.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is clearly an ambivalent statement upon the nature of "reality" and the conflict of the adult and child worlds. On the one hand, it accepts the viability of Time as a governing factor in existence, yet, on the other, it seeks its denial in favour of the "golden afternoons" of childhood, in which Time is a friend. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mad tea-party sequence. As Kincaid says:

<sup>20</sup>"Alice's Invasion of Wonderland", PMLA 88:1, January 1973.

<sup>21</sup>Preface, Through the Looking-Glass, p. 173.

...[the grand comic trio] found there symbolized a dedication to pure joy as well as an ability to defend the comic life. They instinctively recognize Alice as an enemy and ridicule her most elementary concerns. When she worries about the time they are wasting in unanswerable riddles, the Hatter responds, 'If you knew Time as well as I do... you wouldn't talk about wasting it. It's him.' Alice's prudence and desire for order are blasted again and again, but here, as elsewhere, she is ineducable, and she disrupts the comic joy with her linear perspective of finality.<sup>22</sup>

The sequence itself is structured around a preoccupation with Time and the destruction of its proprieties: watches which tell the day of the month but not the hour, watches made for dipping in tea, and abstract entities which assume human dimension. To Alice, of course, neither the words nor the concepts possess any recognizable shape: "The Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English" (97). The Hatter, meanwhile, manages both to explode convention and to dissolve the strictures placed upon existence by the measured hours of Time's passing:

'Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o'clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you'd only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling!...'

(98)

And,

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<sup>22</sup>Kincaid, 97.

'Well, I'd hardly finished the first verse' said the Hatter, 'when the Queen bawled out "He's murdering the time!"<sup>23</sup> Off with his head!"'

'How dreadfully savage!' exclaimed Alice.

'And ever since that,' the Hatter went on in a mournful tone, 'he won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now.'

(99)

Such assaults upon Alice's "sanity" underscore the concept that, with the dissolution of Time, not only has the March Hare gone mad, but the entire world is now entrapped within a lunatic circle of dirty tea-cups and empty plates where neither temporal nor linear progression have any relevance. The only pattern left is the consistency of chaos, while Time and Space lapse into Alice's by now thoroughly-befuddled memory. Elsewhere, she laments, "'It's really dreadful...the way all the creatures argue. It's enough to drive one crazy!'" (81). Alice's assumptions indeed have no place in Wonderland, as shown by her exit from the tea party: "...neither of the others took the least notice of her going, though she looked back once or twice, half hoping that they would call after her..."(103).

This revelation of Time as a "malleable, even recalcitrant"<sup>24</sup> figure casts into such doubt the conventional view of its "orderly, autonomous"<sup>25</sup><sup>nature</sup> that there is no alternative left but the admission of

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<sup>23</sup>"Murdering the time": mangling the song's meter.

<sup>24</sup>Rackin, 320.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 320.

madness. Rackin says:

[This subversion] finally puts Time in its proper place—another arbitrary, changeable artifact that has no claim to absolute validity, no binding claim, in fact, to existence. Since Time is now like a person, a kind of ill-behaved child created by man, there is the unavoidable danger that he will rebel and refuse to be consistent... that is, it is always teatime. Time is thus frozen, and one of ~~the~~ most important concepts of human experience is laughed out of existence.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that Wonderland's inhabitants do not consider their convictions as anything but normal is an essential aspect of the chaos found there: the truest principle is that which destroys all principles, anarchy, as shown by the child's encounter with the Chesire Cat:

'But I don't want to go among mad people,' Alice remarked.

'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat: 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'

'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.

'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.'

(89)

The destruction of Time, then, is but another concession to Wonderland's insanity and an important revelation of the book's organic meaning: functioning by personal whim, Wonderland allows domination by an arbitrary will such as we find in the Queen of Hearts. By this, Carroll suggests that order is, after all, only relative: in a world

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<sup>26</sup>Rackin, 320.

of madness, one is expected to act like a madman. Alice's first reaction is, like the reader's own, to laugh, but, like the laughter of a madman, it soon transforms itself into deadly seriousness: "Alice thought the whole thing very absurd, but they all looked so grave that she did not dare to laugh..."(50). Meanwhile, her own growing fascination with Wonderland's eccentricities discloses Alice's absorption in the question of sanity and insanity in relationship to not only her psychological, but her physiological transformations as well. Like the convoluted songs and poems found throughout the text, Alice finds herself quite literally stretched out of proportion to her "human" context. Yet:

'It was much pleasanter at home', thought poor Alice, 'when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit hole—and yet—and yet—it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life!...'

(58)

Here we find in Alice the same curiosity, the same sense of wonder, which marked the questioning nature of the nineteenth century itself, wherein the historian finds "...an enormous heightening of intellectual self-consciousness—a wholesale re-examination of the pre-suppositions of social thought. 'Seeing through'—probing in depth—these are the hallmarks..."<sup>27</sup>. Hers is the introspective nature of the scientist or philosopher searching not for an accommodating structure of meaning, but for an unambiguous sense of order. Thus, Alice's "identity crisis", wherein mercurial physical transformations ally with those within the child's mind, produces a new sense of what is "real":

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<sup>27</sup>H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 16.

'I'm sure I'm not Ada,' she said,  
 'for her hair goes in such long  
 ringlets, and mine doesn't go in  
 ringlets at all; and I'm sure I  
 can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts  
 of things, and she, oh, she knows  
 such a very little! Besides, she's  
 she, and I'm I, and—oh dear, how  
 puzzling it all is!'

'...No, I've made up my mind about  
 it: if I'm Mabel, I'll stay down  
 here. It'll be no use their putting  
 their heads down and saying "Come  
 up again, dear!" I shall only look  
 up and say, "Who am I, then? Tell  
 me that first, and then, if I like  
 being that person, I'll come up: if  
 not, I'll stay down here till I'm  
 somebody else"—but, oh dear!' cried  
 Alice, with a sudden burst of tears,  
 'I do wish they would put their heads  
 down! I am so very tired of being all  
 alone here!'

(37-9)

Immediately following this reflection, Alice finds herself shrinking so rapidly that she nearly disappears altogether, and is, of course, immensely relieved afterwards "...to find herself still in existence" (39). Fearful that the next transformation will prove less benign, the child then determines a plan to regain her foothold upon more secure terrain: re-assume her proper size, and find her way into the sheltering garden.

However, the ensuing chapter seems to portend even more calamities for Alice. After narrowly escaping an "enormous" puppy<sup>28</sup>, she then encounters the Caterpillar whose hookah and mysterious countenance intimate most disturbingly the dream-like and hallucinogenic quality of Wonderland itself. Both his self-assurance and his verbal reticence

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<sup>28</sup> The pup's aggressiveness and Alice's terror evoke a Cerberus-like reminder of the hellish aspects of Wonderland.

indicate Alice's own demotion to a position of less intellectual and philosophical stature in a grander scheme of existence: "'Who are You?'", he demands condescendingly. Her response, meanwhile, is one of extreme politeness, despite her obvious confusion at his improprieties and at the import of his question. In an attempt to regain some sense of internal balance, she reverts again to that system of logic and rules which had accompanied her in her fall. As Rackin shows, Alice's response fulfils an important function:

[it is]...another example of her attempt to find an order underground that somehow corresponds to the order of her previous life. Certainly in that life it is sometimes the most impolite, imperious people who command the most respect and obedience, and to a child under the domination of inscrutable adults such a paradox may appear to be orderly and right.<sup>29</sup>

The nonchalant attitude of the Caterpillar, meanwhile, reveals again Wonderland's normal status as a world of transformations. Like the adult state-of-being into which she is about to step, Wonderland is by nature metamorphic, intellectually impenetrable, and ultimately uncontrollable:

'I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.'

'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar.

'I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly,' Alice replied very politely, 'for I can't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.'

'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar.

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<sup>29</sup>Rackin, 317.

'Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; 'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis—— you will some day, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?'

(67-8)

By the conclusion of this conversation, Alice has made an important transition in understanding the intrinsic character of Wonderland, and is able to accept without question such curiosities as the Caterpillar's clairvoyance.

The second half of Chapter Five, in which Alice meets the Pigeon, makes another incisive comment about Alice's departure from childhood and reveals Carroll's own mythic awareness. Having suffered through yet another barrage of physical transformations, the child now finds herself stretched into serpentine dimension, the incongruent element in an Edenic setting. She zigzags in and out among the tree leaves, and inspires terror in the unsuspecting creatures around her:

'Serpent!' screamed the Pigeon.

'I'm not a serpent!' said Alice indignantly. 'Let me alone!'

...

'And just as I'd taken the highest tree in the wood,' continued the Pigeon, raising its voice to a shriek, 'and just as I was thinking I should be free of them at last, they must needs come wriggling down from the sky! Ugh, Serpent!'

'But I'm not a serpent, I tell you!' said Alice. 'I'm a—I'm a—'

'Well! What are you?' said the Pigeon. 'I can see you're trying to invent some thing!'

(75-6)

In the Pigeon's assertion that it does not matter whether Alice is a little girl or a serpent, since both eat eggs, we find disturbing intimations of the child's increasingly rapid transfer to the world of the corrupt adult. In this dark sense, Alice has already grown up, has already thrown her childish "innocence" into an ironic perspective. The following chapter, in which babies "snorting like steam engines"(86) turn into pigs, confirms this narrative direction and sends Alice on her way through the Mad Tea-Party to the even "madder" Croquet-Ground.

It is typical of Wonderland that Alice's arrival at last in the cloistered garden should be met by the incongruous sight of pure white flowers being painted red. Also typical are the humanized playing cards who inhabit it and who bicker among themselves in the manner of their real-life counterparts. Here again, another intellectual conviction, the belief in essential differences of speech and rational faculties between animate and inanimate objects, has been obliterated. Yet, Carroll's greatest achievement in this sequence is his portrayal of the Queen of Hearts herself, whom he felt should be seen as "a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion—a blind and aimless Fury"<sup>30</sup>. In The Annotated Alice, Martin Gardner adds that the Queen's incessant orders for beheadings have presented much consternation for modern critics of children's literature who abhor the presence of any violence (especially that with Freudian undertones) in juvenile fiction. Nonetheless, the Queen's portraiture

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<sup>30</sup>Lewis Carroll, "Alice on the Stage", The Theatre, April 1887.

is in keeping with the many other "death-jokes" found throughout the book, and serves to emphasize the irrational nature of the dreamworld in which she reigns. When asked by the Queen to identify herself, Alice finds she must take assurance in the fact that "'...they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!'" (108). Her derisive laughter at the Queen's arbitrary judgments, her instinctive protection of the unfortunate gardeners, and her spirited resistance to senseless questions all signal Alice's nervous acknowledgement of the chaos which threatens now to come crashing down around her ears:

Alice has many reasons for such subversive thoughts. She has certainly been cheated: the Queen's Croquet-Ground—with its painted flowers, its exasperating and insane game, its wild and dangerous creatures, is that same 'beautiful garden' she has been seeking from the outset. Perhaps it is the realization that her arduous journey beneath the grounds of her old, dull, constricted world of rote lessons and unexplainable, arbitrary adult rules has brought her, not to 'those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains' (p. 30), but to a chaotic place of madness ruled by a furious Queen who orders executions with almost every breath—perhaps it is the realization of all this that encourages Alice to begin her rebellion.<sup>31</sup>

The garden itself functions as the centre of meaning in Wonderland. Just as it has been the focus of Alice's quest all along, so does it generate meaning for the rest of this dreamworld. As Rackin points out, the fact that they are court cards and hearts has no small significance in explaining their central position in the narrative. It

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<sup>31</sup>Rackin, 322...

is, therefore, essential that Alice decipher their insane game if she is to comprehend at all the substance of Wonderland and, by implication, her own role within its confines. Soon coming to the conclusion that "it was a very difficult game indeed" (112), Alice struggles with a growing sense of uneasiness that she will be the next to succumb to the Queen's passionate dictum. As if to seek "safety in numbers", Alice turns first to the Cheshire Cat in an attempt to confirm her own grounds of judgment:

'I don't think they play at all fairly', Alice began, in rather a complaining tone, 'and they all quarrel so dreadfully one can't hear oneself speak—and they don't seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them—and you've no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive...

(113)

Receiving no solace from the Cat, she then turns to the Duchess, whose only response is mockery of the child's compelling need to uncover Wonderland's "rules": "'Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it'" (120). Finally, she attaches herself to the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, who seem to offer appropriate sympathy: "'It's all about as curious as it can be'" (138), says the Gryphon, while the Mock Turtle affirms, "'...it sounds uncommon nonsense'" (139) and, "'It's by far the most confusing thing I ever heard!'" (140). Yet, even their solicitude is rather overdone and somewhat suspect, as the Mock Turtle's voice "choked with sobs" (141) hints. Finally, Alice becomes fully aware of what her journey has cost her:

'...it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.'

(138)

Accordingly, she is then thrust into the ultimate test of Wonderland's values: the trial sequence. Rackin recognizes that, at this point, Alice must retaliate or surrender herself to madness: "...order, as Alice once knew it, is now so hopelessly snarled that she must, in literal self-defense, take that inevitable leap back to her own insane, illusory, but livable world of arbitrary logic and convention."<sup>32</sup> Yet, Alice's double awareness that, although she cannot go back, she must, projects that same sense of Freudian duality found in the dichotomy of Eros and Thanatos. She is, in effect, performing the brilliant dialectic of dream and wakefulness which characterizes the process of psychoanalysis itself, "...a kind of catharsis of what can never be truly purged but what must, for sanity's sake, be periodically purged in jest, fantasy, or dream"<sup>33</sup>.

Able now to identify her surroundings more readily and to label important courtroom proceedings, Alice grows (~~in~~ both the literal and figurative sense) increasingly aware of the meaninglessness of the trial itself: verdict first, evidence later; jurors forgetful of their own names; and "trumped-up evidence". Even Alice's body reflects the processes of her mind: musing on the stupidity of both the jurymen and the witnesses, she clumsily overturns their stand and, while the tiny creatures sprawl at her feet, thinks knowingly that "'...it would be quite as much use in the trial one way up as the other'" (154-5). Rather than the dwarfed, puzzled, even petulant child of his previous drawings,

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<sup>32</sup>Rackin, 324.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 325.

Tenniel's illustrations for this chapter portray a full-sized, confident Alice with a clutter of very innocuous-looking creatures about her. Finally, the thoughts which have been racing through her head come to the surface, emerging in a violent outburst to explode and disintegrate her underground adventure: "'Who cares for you?' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'" (161), meaning, of course, "nothing but a pack of lies". Having exorcised the demons of irrationality, Alice is now free to re-assume her proper place in the universe.

Or is she? After all, the nature of Alice's dream itself begs the question, "is she able to deny the undersurface of her own consciousness? Or must she acknowledge that fact that, once, initiated, she must complete the process begun with her tumble down the Rabbit hole?". Having wound her way through the tunnel and into the garden, and having discovered it to be imperfect and completely unlike the womb-like protection of childhood's cloak, Alice must now accept her role as a human being and make her way through a new and tangled universe. This she will do in Through the Looking-Glass.

ii. To the Eighth Square

"I have...a floating idea of writing a sort of sequel," Carroll wrote to Macmillan's a few months after the publication of Wonderland. But, once again envisaging an illustrated book, he did not begin to write the second volume until after he had cajoled the reluctant Tenniel to once more take on the task. Since Carroll had complained that, of the ninety-two drawings in Wonderland, he had liked only one, the artist was understandably hesitant to put up with "that conceited old Don"<sup>34</sup> again. Indeed, the official publishing-house history states that "there never was an author more elaborately careful than Lewis Carroll for the details of production, or one that can have more sorely tried the patience of his publisher."<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, suitable arrangements were made, and, in January 1871, Carroll received the printers' galley proofs of Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There, noting, "'The volume has cost me, I think, more trouble than the first, and ought to be equal to it in every way."<sup>36</sup>

Superficially at least, the books resemble each other closely: Alice meets a succession of fantastic creatures culminating in an elaborate dénouement. Yet, Wonderland has always been the more popular book, its dream-like flow captivating readers less entranced with

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<sup>34</sup>Pudney, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-7.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

Looking-Glass' more contrived structure. However, the two books must really be read as an organic piece of writing if one is to comprehend the full impact of the author's treatment of the "loss of childhood" motif, since their differences are essential thematic elements designed to portray Alice at divergent stages in her life. Each of the books comprises twelve chapters, and each conflates the dream vision with the imaginary journey towards the self. Yet Alice is, in fact, more self-conscious on her first voyage; by the second, she is more concerned with the world around her. Here there is a very precise structure for her to unravel: the chess game, in which Alice, as a pawn, is required to work her way methodically through each of the seven squares preceding the eighth and final one, where she herself will become Queen at last. In this way, the chess game functions effectively as a metaphor for growing-up. Alice's goals are now much clearer: to dominate Looking-Glass land and leave behind her the gentle days of childhood. Instead of the bewildering changes of size found in Wonderland, Alice has now to contend with equally dizzying changes of place as she comes to terms with the world of "grown-ups".

Most notable of Looking-Glass is its sense of direction, whereas "...except for her disappointed wish to arrive at the garden—her earlier wanderings, through cavernous passages and quasi-Elysian fields, had no set destination".<sup>37</sup> Rather than being impelled by the Rabbit's passing to tumble into Wonderland, Alice now wills her projection into the fascinating world beyond her mantel-piece with the magical dictum, "'Let's pretend'":

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<sup>37</sup>Levin, 607.

And here I wish I could tell you half the things Alice used to say, beginning with her favourite phrase 'Let's pretend.' She had had quite a long argument with her sister only the day before—all because Alice had begun with 'Let's pretend we're kings and queens;' and her sister, who liked being very exact, had argued that they couldn't, because there were only two of them, and Alice had been reduced at last to say 'Well, you can be one of them, then, and I'll be all the rest.'

(179-80)

Even the first words of Chapter One, "One thing was certain...", suggest this switch in attention between the two books, while the black and white kittens pre-figure the use of contrasting chess-pieces in directing the action of Looking Glass' participatory characters.

More important, though, is the goal itself, which is intrinsically linked with the theme of age and death, a motif stressed in the two poems framing the Looking-Glass. Winter, the fading of happy summer dreams, a phantom Alice drifting through the memory, intimate the author's sadness at the inevitable departure of his child-friends.

Alice herself picks up the thread as she muses to Kitty:

'Do you hear the snow against the windowpanes, Kitty? How nice and soft it sounds! Just as if some one was kissing the window all over outside. I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says "go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again"....'

(179)

Instead of the bright summer's day which had introduced Wonderland,

Carroll here uses a contrasting indoor, mid-winter setting to open his sequel, indicating that Alice is now ready to undertake that most serious of challenges: the mastery of the garden, and the attainment of maturity. There is, therefore, more than mock aggression in her voice when she shouts suddenly, "'Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyaena, and you're a bone!'" (180).

Alice's entrance to the garden is achieved more easily this time, and is met by a scene similar to that which she had left behind her in Wonderland, allowing speculation that she is merely continuing a dream already begun earlier. Instead of playing-cards, she finds tiny chessmen, the knights, rooks, and pawns paying court this time to Kings and Queens of both colours. However, in a curious role-reversal, it is now Alice's will which shatters all sense of order as she sends the miniature pieces flying about the room. Naturally, they are terrified, as if an unseen force were toying with their lives at its fancy: "'The horror of that moment...I shall never, never forget!'" says the King. Such hints of the macabre are picked up again <sup>in</sup> "Jabberwocky", as Alice notes:

'Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are! However, somebody killed something: that's clear, at any rate—'

(197)

And, in the Garden of Live Flowers, even Alice's own death is foreshadowed:

'There's one other flower in the garden that can move about like you,' said the Rose. 'I wonder how you do it—.'

...'Is she like me?' Alice asked eagerly, for the thought crossed her mind, 'There's another little girl in the garden, somewhere!'

'Well, she has the same awkward shape as you', the Rose said: 'but she's redder and her petals are shorter, I think'.

'They're done up close, like a dahlia,' said the Tiger-lily: 'not tumbled about, like yours.'

'But that's not your fault,' the Rose added kindly. 'You're beginning to fade, you know—and then one can't help one's petals getting a little untidy.'

(204)

In Looking-Glass land, the "death jokes" not only originate from Alice, they are directed at her in cruel mockery of her rapid transition from child-to womanhood. Yet, Alice moves eagerly on, as shown by her readiness to be associated with the Red Queen:

'I think I'll go and meet her' said Alice, for, though the flowers were interesting enough, she felt that it would be far grander to have a talk with a real Queen.

(205)

This figure has an important function in Through the Looking-Glass, for she, more than any other character Alice will meet, provides a model for what the child herself will become. Of her, Carroll writes:

The Red Queen I pictured as a Fury, but of another type; her passion must be cold and calm; she must be formal and strict, yet not unkindly; pedantic to the tenth degree, the concentrated essence of all governesses.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>"Alice on the Stage".

"The concentrated essence of all governesses" denotes a figure exceedingly "rational", linguistically and semantically self-confident, inundated with rules, all qualities which Alice herself has periodically displayed in Wonderland. In fact, the Red Queen is also the only character truly capable of inspiring respect in Alice:

[She]...explained, as well as she could, that she had lost her way.

'I don't know what you mean by your way', said the Queen: 'all the ways about here belong to me —but why did you come out here at all?' she added in a kinder tone. 'Curtsey while you're thinking what to say. It saves time.'

Alice wondered a little at this, but she was too much in awe of the Queen to disbelieve it. 'I'll try it when I go home,' she thought to herself, 'the next time I'm a little late for dinner.'

(206)

Yet another interesting point about the Red Queen is that she belongs to a group of strong characters in the Alice books who share one essential characteristic: they are all female. The explanations for this are many and varied, ranging from the fact that Carroll himself came from a large family of women who nursed him until the day he died, to a patriotic acknowledgment of Victoria's domination of the era (if the latter is true, then Carroll has succeeded in making several clever jokes at the unwitting Queen's expense). However, the most tantalizing explanation is linked to the quest motif itself: the endless search for the lost mother in a vast wilderness outside the womb (the garden, the cave, the breast, etc.,). Such a solution may

help to decipher the Queen's somewhat cryptic remark, "'I've seen gardens, compared with which this would be a wilderness'" (206). Alice is still in the wilderness, after all, still in search of some sort of salvation. Like a young Adam, she surveys the universe before her with a sweeping if unpractised eye:

For some minutes Alice stood without speaking, looking out in all directions over the country—and a most curious country it was. There were a number of tiny little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground between was divided up into squares by a number of little green hedges, that reached from brook to brook.

'I declare it's marked out just like a large chess board!' Alice said at last...

'...It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—all over the world—if this is the world, at all, you know...'

(207-8)

Looking-Glass land is founded on consistency and predictability, as Levin points out:

[W]hat is happening has happened before and will happen again, at predictable intervals as long as folklore persists. Tweedledum and Tweedledee will fight; the Lion and the Unicorn will be drummed out of town; Humpty Dumpty will fall from his wall and, though not reconstructed by all the King's horses or men, will somehow be enabled to re-enact the performance.<sup>39</sup>

Yet its references and resemblances to the real Victorian society in which Carroll lived and which the real little girl Alice was about to

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<sup>39</sup> Levin, 607.

enter invoke for the reader a vivid sense of the tremendous state of flux which marked the period. Tenniel's illustrations frequently caricature contemporary political figures like Gladstone, the Earl of Derby, or Disraeli, while the author intermittently locates Alice in the midst of a technology which would have been greatly misplaced in Wonderland, but which has great relevance to a figure coming to terms with society. In parody of an upper-class "Grand Tour", Alice herself makes a "grand survey" of the countryside upon a puffing monster of a train which pulses to the rhythm of the great Victorian working chant, "'...his time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!'" (217). Meanwhile, in echo of the utilitarian concept of economy, purpose, and direction, the crusty gentleman sitting opposite the little girl admonishes, "'So young a child...ought to know which way she's going, even if she doesn't know her own name!'" (218). Flooded by a torrent of "musts" and "don'ts", Alice angrily objects, "'I don't belong to this railway journey at all—I was in a wood just now—and I wish I could get back there!'" (219). Yet, before she is able to flee, she is subjected to one of many aural assaults<sup>40</sup> found throughout the book: "a shrill scream from the engine" (220) which causes everyone to jump in alarm. Immediately following this is another reference to death (223), recalling the candle flame which explodes into oblivion.

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<sup>40</sup> Shrill noises frequently appear in Looking-Glass: for example, while conversing with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Alice hears the puffing of a large steam engine (237) in the wood behind her, which turns out to be merely the Red King's snoring. Later, the White Queen's screams appear exactly like "the whistle of a steam engine" (249) and, still later, the drums which march the Lion and the Unicorn out of town deafen Alice with their ringing until in terror "she dropped to her knees, and put her hands over her ears, vainly trying to shut out the dreadful uproar" (291).

Meanwhile, the Gnat enquires of Alice, "'I suppose you don't want to lose your name?'" (224), to which she replies anxiously, "'No, indeed ...'". Such details indicate Carroll's concern for the individual struggling to maintain both sanity and a sense of identity amid the banging, clanging, mechanized world around him, while the Red Queen expresses the frustration inherent in the attempt:

'Now here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.'

(210)

Appropriately, the passages following deal with the melancholic possibility of losing oneself completely in the "wood of no names".

Alice's sojourn in this cool, shaded forest of nameless objects appeals to the sensitive reader as the most profound episode in the book. Levin calls it "...truly that selva oscura where the straight way is lost in that forest of symbols whose meanings have been forgotten in that limbo of silence which prompts a cosmic shudder... 'the blank between meaning and  naming'"<sup>41</sup>. Just as she ponders whether she has become Ada or Mabel or Mary Ann in Wonderland, so in Looking-Glass does Alice search for identifying labels of the self:

'...I wonder what'll become of my name when I go in? I shouldn't like to lose it at all—because they'd have to give me another, and it would be almost certain to be an ugly one. But then the fun would be, trying to find the creature that had got my old name!...'

(225)

Yet the essential difference between the two episodes is that, in the

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<sup>41</sup>Levin, 598-9.

wood, the true meaning of Alice's role as a member of humanity becomes clear: she exists as a symbol-manipulating creature in a world which by itself has no "finger-posts" of meaning. To Alice, the wood is cool and restful, the Fawn a gentle comrade, until the light of the open field immediately tears asunder the bonds of the soul which have momentarily united them:

...here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arm. 'I'm a Fawn!' it cried out in a voice of delight. 'And, dear me! you're a human child!' A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed.

(227)

This compulsion to place tags upon objects and to correlate thing with name is itself a philosophic insight into the process of growing-up.

As Levin says:

...childhood has the faculty of communicating with nature spontaneously. Adulthood, on the other hand, superimposes its order...<sup>42</sup>

In keeping with this insight, Carroll reveals as well the ultimate shortcomings of the human ability to use language as a means of investing near primeval "chaos" with meaning. As one of the most vociferous inhabitants of this inverted world where creatures speak like men, Humpty Dumpty even attacks the smug linguistic certainties of Alice herself. In this sense, he perpetuates the Caterpillar's role in Wonderland and rejects the child's self-assured proclivity to labels:

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<sup>42</sup>Levin, 599.

'It's very provoking,' Humpty Dumpty said after a long silence, looking away from Alice as he spoke, 'to be called an egg,—very!'

'I said you looked like an egg, Sir,' Alice gently explained...

'Some people,' said Humpty Dumpty, looking away from her as usual, 'have no more sense than a baby!'

(262)

He also recognizes the ominous implications of Alice's journey:

'Seven years and six months', Humpty Dumpty repeated thoughtfully. 'An uncomfortable sort of age. Now, if you'd asked my advice, I'd have said "Leave off at seven"—but it's too late now.'

'I never ask advice about growing,' Alice said indignantly... 'one can't help growing older.'

'One can't, perhaps,' said Humpty Dumpty; 'but two can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven.'

(266)

Yet, the child is supremely unaffected by the remarks of her inquisitor, although she listens with careful attention both to his discourse upon the relativity of language (269-70) and to his erudite rendition of the significance of "Jabberwocky". Humpty Dumpty's inspired performance not only illustrates the static nature of language as Alice knows it, but also discloses the presumed "mental precision"<sup>43</sup> of all humans:

'I shouldn't know you again if we did meet,' Humpty Dumpty replied in a discontented tone, giving her one of his fingers to shake: 'You're so exactly like other people.'

(276)

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<sup>43</sup>Kincaid, 95.

In this sense, he subverts Alice's values and, in so doing, reveals the person she is about to become: "...of all the unsatisfactory people I ever met—" (276), she says scornfully, and walks away in disgust towards the eighth square.

If the sections on language are the most profound in Through the Looking-Glass, then the chapter on the White Knight is surely the most poignant. Many scholars have surmised that this gentle figure is, in fact, a caricature of Carroll himself, and that this strategically placed section (just before Alice's leap into the eighth square) serves as his farewell to the little girl who was now becoming a woman, the farewell which, like "the shadow of a sigh...trembles through the story"<sup>44</sup>. They make the connection with good reason, for Carroll indeed had, like the knight, "shaggy hair, mild blue eyes, a kind and gentle face"<sup>45</sup>, was fond of inventing gadgets, and possessed a mind which functioned best "when it saw things in topsy-turvy fashion"<sup>46</sup>. Of all the characters in either book, he is the one most truly solicitous of Alice, and it is their encounter which she will remember most clearly in later years, perhaps because it most symbolizes the childhood she has left behind her and which has in turn become the dream:

...all this she took in like a picture,  
as, with one hand shading her eyes, she  
leant against a tree, watching the strange  
pair, and listening, in a half dream, to  
the melancholy music of the song...<sup>47</sup>

(307)

True to form, the knight is Alice's rescuer, sweeping her away from

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<sup>44</sup>Preface, Through the Looking-Glass, p. 174.

<sup>45</sup>Martin Gardner, The Annotated Alice (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 296.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>47</sup>Significantly, "An Aged Aged Man".

the Lion/Unicorn fracas and setting her aright as she prepares to leave his world forever. His bumbling, stumbling nature mirrors the inappropriateness of childhood for Alice's life at this point, yet, understandably, he is somewhat saddened by her inability to grasp the import of this last farewell:

'You've only a few yards to go,' he said, 'down the hill and over that little brook, and then you'll be a Queen—But you'll stay and see me off first?' he added as Alice turned with an eager look in the direction to which he pointed. 'I shan't be long. You'll wait and wave your handkerchief when I get to that turn in the road! I think it'll encourage me, you see.'

'Of course I'll wait,' said Alice: 'and thank you very much for coming so far—and for the song—I liked it very much.'

'I hope so,' the Knight said doubtfully: 'but you didn't cry so much as I thought you would.'

(313-4)

After watching the Knight disappear from sight, she turns readily, even thoughtlessly, to run down the hill, over the brook, into the eighth square and womanhood, as he had shown her. Like the dream-rushes in Chapter Five, all that Alice has been in the past has already begun to fade in the harsher glow of what she has now become:

Even real scented rushes, you know, last only a very little while—and these, being dream-rushes, melted away almost like snow, as they lay in heaps at her feet—but Alice hardly noticed this, there were so many other curious things to think about.

(257)

Finally, we come to the meaning of the Looking-Glass itself,

where all asymmetrical objects "go the other way", or reverse from left to right, and so on. Such reversals recur throughout the book: Tweedledum and Tweedledee are mirror-image twins, while the White Knight squeezes a right foot into a left shoe. To approach the Red Queen, Alice travels backwards, while the King has two messengers, "one to come, and one to go" (280). Yet, the mirror motif is also used as a symbol for narcissism (absorption in the self) and, in this sense, functions as a crucial device in Alice's search for identity. This she recognizes when she climbs behind the glass where no one else can get at her. However, inversion is also a technique used in dreaming, whereby things become their opposites, allowing the dreamer to push through into the unconscious. In this, Looking-Glass most clearly resembles Wonderland, not only in fulfilling Carroll's curiosity in the dream-vision, but also in exploring his own notion of the nature of human consciousness:

I have supposed a Human being to be capable of various physical states with varying degrees of consciousness, as follows:

- (a) the ordinary state, with no consciousness of the presence of Fairies;
- (b) the 'eerie' state, in which, while conscious of actual surroundings, he is also conscious of the presence of Fairies;
- (c) a form of trance, in which, while unconscious of actual surroundings, and apparently asleep, he (i.e., his immaterial essence) migrates to other scenes, in the actual world, or in Fairyland, and is conscious of the presence of Fairies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Pudney, p. 116.

In exploring the realm of the Unconscious in this manner, Carroll leaps through the time-locked, space-bound barriers of "reality", melting through the looking-glass into the domain where "truth" is subverted, dissected, purged, and laughed out of existence. Yet, it is in this very journey that he manages to extract a greater "truth" from within the chaos which surrounds him. In this sense, Carroll, like the child of which he writes, leaps across the brook into knowledge, and thereby "renders visible" the mysteries of his universe.

. . .

'Now, Kitty, let's consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear, and you should not go on licking your paw like that...'

(343-4)

When Alice wonders whether the dream has been her own or that of the Red King, she makes an important transition between the self-assured little girl that she was at the beginning of Wonderland and the rather more mythical representative of humanity she has become by the end of Looking-Glass. The question by itself poses the problem of meaning and perception in an essentially meaningless world: from what source is "reality" projected? Is it imposed upon the external universe from within the mind, or without? Is Alice capable of sifting through the chaos to find its core of meaning, or is she merely part of a

larger dream which envelops her in a vagarious cloud? Here is the central question of the Alice books in a form only superficially altered: "'Who in the world am I?'". In an anarchy of meaninglessness, this becomes the crucial basis of self-preservation, while Alice, in seeking to dispel the hallucinogenic haze of Wonderland, seeks also to confirm her own place within its chaotic glory. Hers is a poetic madness which leads to the vision of absurdity, hovers upon the brink of complete perception, and then retreats from the blinding light of its revelations. Yet, once felt, its terror is never again completely sublimated, because the universe of dreams floats with incessant rhythm beneath the surface of rationality. In this, Alice is truly a child of her century.

The child is not meant to die,  
but to be forever freshborn.

George MacDonald, The Princess and Curdie

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Light of the Soul

Although the Alice books mark the true beginning of the Victorian marriage between the child and fantasy, Carroll's literary career began to flounder within the somewhat more imposing shadow of one of his most intimate friends: poet, essayist, novelist, and allegorist, George MacDonald (1824-1905). During the period between 1851 and 1897, this Congregational Minister turned author penned over fifty books which in their turn excited both raging critical controversy and widespread public acclaim. Counting among his friends Ruskin, Kingsley, Thackeray, Leigh Hunt, Leslie Stephen, Matthew Arnold, Charles Dickens, and numerous others, MacDonald was exposed on all fronts to the plethora of intellectual activity which flourished during the waning years of the last century. The "Christ-like countenance"<sup>1</sup> cited by one reporter during his triumphant 1872 American lecture tour reflects the conviction of his devotees that MacDonald was, in fact, a contemporary "prophet and seer and saint"<sup>2</sup>, while G.K. Chesterton in 1924 eulogized him as "'St. Francis of Aberdeen', who had accomplished a 'miracle of the imagination'"<sup>3</sup>. Later writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and, in particular, C.S. Lewis echo Chesterton's

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Lee Wolff, The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

evaluation, while W.H. Auden adds his own commendation:

George MacDonald is pre-eminently a mythopoeic writer...In his power... to project his inner life into images, events, beings, landscapes, which are valid for all, he is one of the most remarkable writers of the nineteenth century: The Princess and the Goblins [sic] is, in my opinion, the only English children's book in the same class as the Alice books, and Lilith is equal if not superior to the best of Poe...<sup>4</sup>

Yet, as MacDonald's youthful élan departed, so too did his mesmeric appeal steadily disintegrate until, in 1905, at the age of eighty-one, he could reflect dismally only upon the infertile, silent stretch of years which concluded the once remarkable career. Plagued by a succession of family tragedies and the sometimes quixotic nature of critics, he lapsed into a sepulchral anticipation of death which was fulfilled before the year was out.

Nonetheless, MacDonald's literary reputation has begun at last to emerge from its long eclipse during the early decades of the twentieth century. However, rather than his poetry, essays, criticism, "closet drama", translation, and editing, or rather than the several volumes of sermons, the sentimental short stories, and the twenty-nine conventional novels, it is the "imaginative" stories of George MacDonald which promise the achievement of lasting permanence. Indeed, most contemporary critics acknowledge that his finest works are the symbolic fantasies<sup>5</sup> written especially for adults, in which he adapts many fairy-tale conventions to more mature sensibilities. As a means of express-

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<sup>4</sup>Wolff, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>Phantastes (1858), Adela Cathcart (1864), The Portent (1864), and Lilith (1895).

ing the fundamental questions of human existence, MacDonald's use of metaphysical, religious, and psychological symbolism has met with considerable favour in the twentieth century. As Richard H. Reis points out:

Even when MacDonald neglects the symbolic suggestiveness which was his major gift, he displays one of the most fecund visionary faculties in literature. He was endlessly capable of inventing worlds of excitement, charm, and beauty, and of reminding many readers of the tantalizing, unrecapturable aura of lovely dreams.<sup>6</sup>

G.S. Lewis laments that MacDonald had in fact been born in the wrong age<sup>7</sup>, wherein Victorian prudery and conventionality may have forced some of his more unorthodox ideas to flee into the relative obscurity of fantasy's dreamworld. In this, MacDonald, like Carroll before him, predates the more consciously-psychoanalytic writers of the twentieth century as he recognizes the value of fantasy as a revelation of myth, symbol, and archetype.

For MacDonald, these are primary concerns, since he tries deliberately and conscientiously to inculcate in his readers his own religious message. Despite such "limited" intentions, however, he succeeds as well in attaining a more universal significance in his works. As Reis shows, "...if in one sense [MacDonald's] muse was mythic-archetypal-symbolic, it was, in another way, deliberately didactic and thus 'allegorical' in purpose if not in achievement."<sup>8</sup> Yet, in the best of his fantasies, neither the symbolism nor the didacticism

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<sup>6</sup>Richard H. Reis, George MacDonald (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

work at cross-purposes to each other, but, instead, manage to insinuate the author's concept into his reader's mind through a subtle and artistic blend of the mystical and the meliorative. The reason for this lies in MacDonald's pre-occupation with an "otherworldly" or enlightened existence transcending that of earth: thus, fantasy serves for him as a dramatization of the abstract and general qualities of his philosophy, and as a revelation of the way to a spiritual salvation beyond the limits of the terrestrial. One has only to perceive the salient features of this philosophy in order to comprehend the manner in which MacDonald the myth-maker succeeds in breaking out of the temporal bonds within which he fashions them. His religious and psychological insights, in fact, speak to a time later than his own, ensuring his literary importance and diminishing actual artistic merit to a lesser stature.

MacDonald is generally described as a "mystic" writer, and rightly so, because of his concern for what is often called the moment of "mystic consciousness", or that instant of "ecstatic insight into and identification with God which all true mystics report"<sup>9</sup>. "Ecstasy", of course, means to "stand outside of oneself"<sup>10</sup>, as MacDonald perceives:

'I crept into the bosom of God, and along a great cloudy peace, which I could not understand, for it did not yet enter into me. At length I came to the heart of God, and through that my journey lay. The moment I entered it, the great peace appeared to enter mine, and I began to understand it ... I had left myself behind in the heart of God, and now I was pure essence, fit to rejoice in the essential.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Reis, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>From the Greek exstasis, from existanai, "to derange", from ex, "out" + histanai, "to cause to stand".

<sup>11</sup>Reis, p. 40, underlining mine.

According to this, the central problem of existence lies in the struggle to gain the insight and knowledge which God has secreted in the world for man to discover. Here the problem of consciousness and the unconscious becomes crucial to the understanding of MacDonald's concept of the individual personality, since the unexplored regions of the mind serve as the source of a truth which is, in essence, God's, and which ultimately reveals the way to spiritual fulfillment:

'If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our own imagination, we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of a decay which could never feel—only declare—a slow return towards primeval chaos. But the Maker is our light.'<sup>12</sup>

And,

'...God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness...'<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the dwelling-place of God is the unconscious, wherein all truths originate as the creative works of the Maker of the Universe, since He creates all.

MacDonald's understanding of this "unconscious" realm does, however, deserve clarification. The mind itself appears as a labyrinthine "house of many chambers"<sup>14</sup> whose hidden passageways and shaded garrets

<sup>12</sup>MacDonald, as quoted in Reis, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Here MacDonald echoes John Keats, who postulates as early as 1818 that the mind is a "large Mansion of Many Apartments" (Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818) containing first, the "Infant or Thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think"; secondly,

harbour unexplored enigmas:

'Then in all houses, there are places we know nothing about as yet, or have but a vague idea or feeling of their existence—just as in our own selves, who carry in us deeper mysteries far than any we can suspect in another.'<sup>15</sup>

Connected to this is the idea of the creative imagination which, in attempting to give form to thought much as the architect endeavours to chart the dimensions of a building, itself performs a creative act in imitation of God's original edification of the universe. Yet, since all creative acts stem from God,

'...It is better to keep the word creation for that calling out of nothing which is the imagination of God ...The imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God. Everything of man must have been of God first...'<sup>16</sup>

Thus, only when the imaginative faculty is taken from the individual and given back again into the hands of God (here the meaning of "ecstasy" becomes clearer) does true revelation occur, and man see "into the heart of things". The conscious intellect, then, is that which backs away in objective protest from the glory that is God's, rejecting the divine "unreason" ("unreasonable" because it defies analysis) of the universe,

<sup>14</sup>(cont'd) the "Chamber of Maiden Thought", wherein the intoxicating light of being sharpens "one's vision into the heart and nature of Man" and we "feel the 'burden of the Mystery'", and, thirdly, the "Chamber of Life" itself. Like Wordsworth, Keats expresses the poetic necessity of "seeing into the heart of things" and turning more readily to the "inner life", as he himself attempts to do in "Ode to Psyche".

<sup>15</sup>MacDonald, as quoted in Reis, pp. 41 2.

<sup>16</sup>MacDonald, as quoted in C.P. Manlove, "George MacDonald's Fairy Tales: Their Roots in MacDonald's Thought", Studies in Scottish Literature VIII:2, October 1970, 99.

performing a "backward undoing of the tapestry web of God's science"<sup>17</sup>, while the unconscious is that which welcomes its twisting threads:

'...no one loves because he sees why, but because he loves. No human reason can be given for the highest necessity of divinely-created existence. For reasons are always from above downward.'<sup>18</sup>

At this point, the role of dreams in its connection to the unconscious becomes an essential factor in MacDonald's philosophy, for those "truths" which reject dissection and classification by rational means (and these truths are, of course, "the highest", because they are God's and are therefore unknown to man) must by necessity appear chaotic and connectionless, like the dream itself. In this sense, the dream functions, for MacDonald as for Freud, as a pathway to the unconscious and therefore to God. Within the dream itself are contained intimations of that "truer world", to which He holds the key:

'All dreams are not false; 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 on 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...'

'...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 place in our souls...'<sup>19</sup>

The mystical union between God and man while in the dream-state therefore allows the only true artistic creation to occur, a creation which

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<sup>17</sup>MacDonald, as quoted in Manlove, 99.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>19</sup>MacDonald, as quoted in Reis, p. 43.



biotic relationship between perceiver and object:

'...the appearances of nature are the truths of nature, far deeper than any scientific discoveries in and concerning them. The show of things is that for which God cares most...What they say to the childlike soul is the truest thing to be gathered of them. To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it—just as to know Christ is an infinitely higher thing than to know all theology, all that is said about His person, or babbled about His work.'<sup>23</sup>

Only the child retains that primal innocence necessary for such an involuntary, passive response to nature; only he declines to question or dissect that which appears before him in all its splendour. As Wolff demonstrates, in all of MacDonald's novels, not only the obvious Christ-children, but the more human children as well, are kind and warm, an interpretation which he shares with many of his Victorian contemporaries. Certainly his concentration upon the child-figure represents more than a passing bond between himself and his close friend Carroll. As MacDonald himself writes, "'He who will be a man and will not be a child, must—he cannot help himself—become a little man, a dwarf.'"<sup>24</sup>

However, it must be remembered as well that the child who participates in the divine vision allows himself to be enveloped within the clouds of the unconscious, as MacDonald has shown. Therefore, the "dream-child", as he would conceive it, functions, like Alice, as the mythical wanderer through the chaos of night, seeking the Ariadnian

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<sup>22</sup>(cont'd)

Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I  
now can see no more.

<sup>23</sup>Manlove, 98.

<sup>24</sup>Wolff, p. 315.

thread which will lead him back to the luminous centre of the maze. Only the child, in fact, is truly capable of existence within two worlds simultaneously, that of the conscious and the unconscious, awaiting the mystical beckoning which summons again the divine unity of the womb. Most of MacDonald's children, moreover, are motherless, and appear to be engaged also in the eternal search for the lost mother which, according to psychoanalysis, all individuals in search of themselves undergo<sup>25</sup>.

Taking the child as his mythical wanderer, MacDonald then proposes a scheme of spiritual development whereby the individual achieves that essential moment of mystical ecstasy and enlightenment (in its most literal sense, the instant when man is uplifted and surrounded<sup>ed</sup> by the brilliance of God). In fact, the author's delineation of the nascent consciousness of the child<sup>26</sup> corresponds to his outline of the "mystic way" itself: (1) Awakening (consciousness of the outer world in the child); (2) Self-Knowledge or Purgation (self-consciousness); (3) Illumination (revelation of the existence of a "will" higher than his own, and opposed to his own desires); (4) Surrender; and (5), Union (the birth in the child himself of this same will) , or the moment of complete identification with God<sup>27</sup>. From the instant of birth, the

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<sup>25</sup> Wolff postulates that MacDonald's inclination towards portraying motherless children derives from the early death of his own mother, Helen MacKay MacDonald. Enclosed in a drawer of MacDonald's desk was a letter in which his mother lamented having weaned the child too soon, an act she feared "he has not forgot". The author's novels, says Wolff, continually display a yearning for this lost mother-figure.

<sup>26</sup> Found in "A sketch of Individual Development", to which Reis refers, and of which I have unfortunately been unable to obtain a copy.

<sup>27</sup> Reis describes this process according to Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism.

soul assumes a journey, outward bound towards its home, in search of spiritual fulfillment. The passage from the world into which he is born and the world in which he becomes truly alive MacDonald sees as a transition between the waking world and the world of dreams. In terms of the child, the journey is a search for reversion to the initial contact with the divine with which he is imbued at birth. In this sense, then, all men are children if they engage in this quest for the divine, and the child and his journey become a metaphor for the process of life which eternally seeks its source. With this in mind, then, we will examine The Princess and the Goblin within the context of the individual seeking his enlightenment and, ultimately, his salvation.

### i. The Silver Globe

MacDonald felt The Princess and the Goblin (1872) to be the "most complete thing I have done"<sup>28</sup>, and, indeed, it has enjoyed the greatest popularity of all of his volumes, even into the twentieth century. As Reis points out, neither the plot nor the incidents bear any striking characteristics, but "the image of the castle with underground chambers and with a holy force in the attic stays with the reader"<sup>29</sup>. Knowing as we do the importance of the many chambered edifice in MacDonald's thought, it becomes clear that The Princess and the Goblin was intended to be a poetic exploration of the phenomena upon which he speculates in the essays and sermons, and which he tries unsuccessfully to portray in the realistic novels. Setting and character are transformed in fantasy to symbol and metaphor, compelling the reader to turn inward himself in search of new "realities" he may discern there. Coincidental with the publication of Through the Looking-Glass, the first, and best, of the two Princess books contains all that is most commanding in MacDonald's works, since it deals with the search of the soul for that communion with God with which its author is most concerned.

The opening setting of the story is immediately suggestive of a rarefied, trans-material realm:

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<sup>28</sup>Wolff, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup>Reis, p. 81.

There was once a little princess whose father was king over a great country full of mountains and valleys. His palace was built upon one of the mountains, and was very grand and beautiful.

(11)

Irene, however, lives half-way down the mountain, and must turn her eyes, "like two bits of night sky" (12), towards its subliminal peaks in order to escape the subversive, subterranean world of the goblins beneath its base. In this way, MacDonald establishes Irene as the human factor in a conceptual schema designed to illustrate the battling forces within the soul struggling to be born. Irene, like the ego itself, is caught between the sustaining powers of the super-ego (the mountain) and the incendiary ones of the id (the caverns), or, in MacDonald's terminology, Irene is the soul wavering half-way between heaven and hell. The mountain peak, of course, as the point of contact between heaven and earth, functions as the navel of the earth itself, the place where creation has its origin, while the caverns and their inhabitants signify the unconscious as it was defined in our discussion of the Alice books, the realm where purer "truths" become deformed, ugly, and contorted when forced beneath the surface of consciousness:

Those who had caught sight of any of them said that they had greatly altered in the course of generations; and no wonder, seeing they lived away from the sun, in cold and wet and dark places. They were now, not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous, or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form. There was no invention, they said, of the most lawless imagination expressed by pen or pencil, that could surpass the extravagance of their appearance.

(13-14)

The analogy is carried further when MacDonald introduces the castle itself, whose meandering passageways Irene will traverse in search of her lost identity (Chapter Two). In traditional symbolic language<sup>30</sup>, the house carries not only an overall significance, but also particular associations with each of its component parts. The house as a home, for example, arouses associations with both the human body and human thought<sup>31</sup> (just as MacDonald surmises). In dreams, the image of the house is employed as a representation of different layers of the psyche:

The outside of the house signifies the outward appearance of Man: his personality or his mask. The various floors are related to the vertical and spatial symbols. The roof and upper floor correspond to the head and mind, as well as to the conscious exercise of self control. Similarly, the basement corresponds to the unconscious and the instincts.<sup>32</sup>

Linked to this is <sup>the</sup>the concept of the labyrinth as "the loss of <sub>the</sub>spirit

<sup>30</sup> I have gleaned much of the following information from J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

<sup>31</sup> In The Poetics of Space (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), Gaston Bachelard proposes:

...Up near the roof all our thoughts are clear. In the attic it is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework. Here we participate in the carpenter's solid geometry.

As for the cellar, we shall no doubt find uses for it. But it is first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths.

<sup>32</sup>Cirlot, p. 153.

in the process of creation"<sup>33</sup> (including the Fall), and the "consequent need to seek out the way through the 'Centre' back to the spirit"<sup>34</sup>. Thus, to wend one's way through the labyrinth of the house is to search for the nucleus of being, or what MacDonald calls "the bosom of God", through the corridors of the unconscious to the sanctuaries of the inner soul. Moreover, MacDonald is careful to distinguish between being lost (a merely material and spatial condition) and losing oneself: "...she had lost herself long ago (at the Fall?). It doesn't follow that she was lost, because she had lost herself, though" (17, parentheses mine).

The chapter itself bears considerable resemblance to "Down the Rabbit-Hole" in Wonderland. Irene finds herself drowsy, bored, and wishing for any kind of change for its own sake. Like Alice, curiosity compels her to set forth on her exploration: "she had once before been up six steps, and that was sufficient reason, in such a day, for trying to find out what was at the top of it" (16). Also like Alice, she immediately finds herself in a long, dark, silent passageway lined with forbidding doors, whose impenetrable facade inevitably produces tears of anguish and frustration. Yet, when she finally discovers a stairway, she determines, despite her fear and the fact that they will carry her up instead of down, to ascend and fulfil her curiosity. Irene, in fact, has reached that initial stage of "awakening" in the process of mystic conversion, signified by the child's desire to escape the dream-like mist which gently shrouds her mountain. Accordingly, she soon

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<sup>33</sup> Cirlot, p. 173.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

finds that the crooning hum of the spinning wheel has replaced the fading memory of the rain she has left behind her, offering greater enrichment, as MacDonald's simile suggests:

It was more like the hum of a very happy  
bee that had found a rich well of honey  
in some globular flower, than anything  
else I can think of at this moment.

(18)

Irene's first encounter with the grandmother contains one of many decidedly religious overtones in the book. After struggling through a very dirty, very narrow opening, crouched down "like a four-legged creature" (17), she emerges in the simple silver beauty of the attic room to undergo a baptismal ceremony:

'Why, what have you been doing with your eyes, child?' asked the old lady.

'Crying,' answered the princess.

'Why, child?'

'Because I couldn't find my way down again.'

'But you could find your way up.'

'Not at first—not for a long time.'

'But your face is streaked like the back of a zebra. Hadn't you a handkerchief to wipe your eyes with?'

'No.'

'Then why didn't you come to me to wipe them for you?'

'Please, I didn't know you were here. I will next time.'

'There's a good child!' said the old lady.

Then she stopped her wheel, and rose, and, going out of the room, returned with a little

silver basin and a soft white towel,  
with which she washed and wiped the  
bright little face...

(20)

These curative and purifying powers of the grandmother function as an important regenerative force throughout the story, as is seen when the fire of roses first appears (Chapter Fifteen). When we note that the rose itself is a symbol of consummate perfection and the mystic centre of the heart, and that fire denotes a spiritual energy whose aim is the destruction of evil, then a rose-fire "glowing gorgeously between the heads and wings of two cherubs of shining silver" (101) assumes a great significance indeed. The serenity which Irene feels when in the presence of this fire is the insularity of the "enlightened" when in the "bosom" of his God:

...The child sat gazing, now at the rose fire, now at the starry walls, now at the silver light; and a great quietness grew in her heart...How this was she could not tell—she only knew there was no fear in her, and everything was so right and safe that it could not get in.

(105),

while her momentary glimpse into the parted clouds at the "starry herds, flashing gloriously in the dark blue" (105) allows an epiphany-like entrance into the secrets of the universe. Thus, in a mere three chapters, MacDonald has managed to reveal his story's spiritual centre, from which his characters derive their own creative energy, and to which they all inevitably return.

This is borne out in the discussion about names in Chapter Three. Upon learning that the grandmother shares her own name, Irene is dismayed in the best tradition of Alice herself:

'That's my name!' cried the princess.

'I know that. I let you have mine. I haven't got your name. You've got mine.'

'How can that be?' asked the princess, bewildered. 'I've always had my name.'

(21)

Yet, it is explained to Irene, as it is later explained to Gurdie and his father (in The Princess and Gurdie, Chapter Seven), that, after all, "'Shapes are only dresses...and dresses are only names. That which is inside is the same all the time...'" (The Princess and Gurdie, 54) and, "'A name is one of those things one can give away and keep all the same'" (21). Here MacDonald implies that, in essence, names are like facts which, as we have already seen, exist as "'...but a garment of truth, which has ten thousand changes of raiment woven on the same loom...'", and which reflect the human proclivity for chiselling into manageable morsels the dimensions of the universe around him. As MacDonald shows, the truest "reality" exists in the dream, or the grandmother's chamber, or even in the silver globe. Meanwhile, it is enough that Irene commences her journey beyond the superficial confines of identity to the truer self beneath, now revealed as contained within the grandmother's orb. As Irene says, "'I went upstairs, and I lost myself, and if I hadn't found the beautiful lady, I should never have found myself'" (26).

Irene's concern with losing herself and retracing her way to the grandmother's tower surfaces many times throughout the story and in fact becomes the essential unifying thematic link between character and episode. In Chapter Five, the child finds that she cannot again make her way up the stair, and that "...[s]he was lost once more" (32).

She discovers as well that "[s]omething made it even worse to bear this time, and it was no wonder that she cried again" (32). Having once seen the Centre, Irene seeks to re-create and rediscover its womb-like encirclement of the soul, and so "'creep along a great cloudy peace'" like the true convert. However, before she is able to attain this state, she must go through the stages subsequent to awakening, the first of which is "self-knowledge". In order to accomplish this, Irene must undertake the journey through the self which lies within both the soaring heights of the mountain and the torturous depths of the caverns, within the grandmother's aerie and the goblins' "subnatural" crypts. In this, she also performs that crucial fusion of the conscious and the unconscious realms of being, essential to the comprehension of the mythical union between man and his God. Irene's task, then, is to traverse the steps of the "mystical way" central to MacDonald's thought, and surrender in a final moment of illumination to blissful slumber within the arms of her Creator.

The child's initial encounter with the subterranean realm of the goblins occurs during her walk with Lootie. To this point, she is unaware of the diabolical sub-culture which undercuts existence within the sheltered castle, since the servants have taken great care to preserve her innocence. Thus, "...Irene was not in the least frightened, not knowing anything to be frightened at " (36). But as night shadows grow longer, so does terror mount, until both nurse and charge lapse into the wild confusion of lost souls. In this passage, Lootie uses language as if it were a talisman ensuring their inviolability to the goblins, almost as if by denying their existence, she also denies to them existence:

'Who's that laughing at me?' said the princess, trying to keep in her sobs, and running too fast for her grazed knees.

'Nobody, child,' said the nurse, almost angrily.

But that instant there came a burst of coarse tittering from somewhere near, and a hoarse indistinct voice that seemed to say: 'Lies! lies! lies!'

(37)

With the same conviction, she responds to Curdie's song as if it were an incantation:

'I wish you would hold your noise,' said the nurse rudely, for the very word goblin at such a time and in such a place made her tremble. It would bring the goblins upon them to a certainty, she thought, to defy them in that way.

(38-9)

The song itself, on the other hand, serves truly to drive away the goblins who scutter angrily around them, proving that it is content rather than form which signifies true meaning. Curdie's song succeeds because it contains the purity of music, or rather, art, belonging to the virtues of the tower and therefore to God. Lootie's protestations fail because they, like names, are mere vestments of ratiocination.

In the chapter following, Curdie explores the mines themselves and, in the process, reveals many of the pertinent characteristics of the darker side of human existence as represented by the goblins. For example, "...you could not tell night from day down there, except from feeling tired and sleepy; for no light of the sun ever came into those gloomy regions" (49). Darwinian elements creep into the narrative as

well when MacDonald describes the goblins' one point of weakness, their tender feet:

One of the miners, indeed, who had had more schooling than the rest, was wont to argue that such must have been the primordial condition of humanity, and that education and handicraft had developed both toes and fingers—with which proposition Curdie had once heard his father sarcastically agree, alleging in support of it the probability that babies' gloves were a traditional remnant of the old state of things...

(58)

The significance of this in terms of Irene's quest is the display of those qualities which undermine the "enlightened" state of those who commune with God, and of the nature of the tangled underbrush through which she must travel in order to truly purge herself. In other words, Irene must first be unclean in order to fully participate in the joy of baptism. Psychoanalytically speaking, the "primordial condition of humanity" represented by the goblins corresponds to the dark forces of the id, wherein the raging desires of self-gratification are constantly at war with the substantive forces of the ego and the super-ego. So it is with the surging flood of the goblins as it threatens to collapse the foundations of the castle above. Such distinctions, moreover, apply even to their "domesticated" animals:

But what increased the gruesomeness tenfold was that, from constant domestic, or indeed rather family association with the goblins, their countenances had grown in grotesque resemblance to the human. No one understands animals who does not see that every one of them, even amongst the fishes, it may be with a dimness and vagueness infinitely remote, yet shadows the human: in the case of these the human resemblance

had greatly increased: while their owners had sunk towards them, they had risen towards their owners.

(93)

Always the artist of shifting palette, MacDonald then composes a contrasting scene of grace, light, and beauty: Irene's reunion with her father. Symbolically, of course, the father signifies god-like authority, "the world of moral commandments and prohibitions restraining the forces of the instincts and subversion"<sup>35</sup>—in other words, the transcendent super-ego. Accordingly, "[s]o long a period of fine weather had indeed never been known upon that mountain" (72), the king arrives upon a hero's glittering steed, flashing in the sun's radiance, bearing with him peace and harmony, Irene is "nowhere so happy as in his arms" (73), and even the "wild mountain" mingles with the "civilized garden" of roses and lilies. His is the power of omniscience: he knows about Irene's nocturnal wanderings upon the mountainside, although it appears as if no one has told him. He is also the guardian, leaving behind him six attendants to ensure the safekeeping of his child. Yet this brief interlude reveals as well an important fact about the adult figures in Irene's life: like her father, none has visited the grandmother's tower, none possesses that ability of the child to "see into the heart":

'I should like you to take me to see my great old grandmother.'

The king looked grave and said: 'What does my little daughter mean?'

'I mean the Queen Irene that lives up in the tower—the very old lady, you

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<sup>35</sup> Cirilot, p. 102.

know, with the long hair of silver.'

The king only gazed at his little princess with a look which she could not understand.

'She's got her crown in her bedroom,' she went on; 'but I've not been in there yet. You know she's there, don't you?'

'No,' said the king, very quietly.

(75-6)

Even Curdie, who is older and more "practical" than Irene, has difficulty in believing in the grandmother's existence. Only Joan, his mother, has also experienced the embracing rays of the silver globe, sustaining her memory of its appearance as moral fortification, and prompting speculation that perhaps the female (as the womb and nurture of existence) alone possesses the mystical comprehension of the universe essential to the process of spiritual enlightenment. As the king laments, "'She has not invited me, you know...'" (76).

The grandmother herself is a highly mosaic symbol, representing ubiquity, antiquity, youth, omniscience, timelessness, and, most importantly, faith. This last quality becomes most crucial during Irene's journey through the goblin-caves, as only the grandmother's delicate, invisible thread ties her to the world of light and safety above. Like Theseus lost in the maze, Irene must trust in Ariadne if she is to discern her way to its centre. Faith is also connected with belief in the implausible and the seemingly unattainable. Irene sees the grandmother's tower for what it truly is, not for what it appears to be, although Curdie would surely argue otherwise. Irene's singular ability to perceive the grandmother suggests again that it is the child who possesses

the gift of "seeing further through a wall than most" because, as MacDonald says, he is closest to God, and therefore:

'People must believe what they can,  
and those who believe more must not  
be hard upon those who believe less.  
I doubt if you would have believed  
it all yourself if you hadn't seen  
some of it.'

(153-4)

The child's faith is such that, even when he is not consciously aware of its existence, as when Irene forgets the source of her glowing opal ring, he remembers within his heart:

The moment she came to herself, she  
remembered something she had never  
thought of again—what her grand-  
mother told her to do when she was  
frightened.

(134)

As a test of her faith, and, more importantly, as a crucial leg in her journey towards the final stage of "enlightenment", Irene must sojourn for a time in the "sub-human" realm of the goblins. As we have seen, MacDonald has carefully laid out the different strata of the human personality as the cellar, the house proper, and the garret or tower. Therefore, Irene must have explored all three before she can know herself, and then proceed through "illumination", "surrender", at last to "union". The scene is set: the absence of the father or regulating super-ego and the ignorance of the household allow Irene to embark upon her path unhindered:

'My precious darling princess! Where  
have you been? What has happened to  
you? We've all been crying our eyes  
out, and searching the house from top  
to bottom for you.'

'Not quite from the top,' thought Irene to herself; and she might have added, 'not quite to the bottom', perhaps, if she had known all.

(111),

while the chapter-title itself, "Irene's Clue", indicates a mystery to be unravelled. The grandmother's thread, then, is also the "golden key" which unlocks the internal, eternal treasure of the soul.

In order to show the full significance of Irene's descent into the goblin abyss, several descriptive details must be pieced together. First, we find the morning fresh and rejuvenating:

...Irene soon discovered that it was her own thread she saw shining before her in the light of the morning. It was leading her she knew not whither; but she had never in her life been out before sunrise, and everything was so fresh and cool and lively and full of something coming, that she felt too happy to be afraid of anything.

(136)

The path, which is "like a companion to her" (136), leads Irene gradually away from this edenic splendour into a "rougher and steeper" (136) wilderness alien and claustrophobic to the little girl. Yet Irene is compelled to follow her tiny string of gossamer and enter the cave:

A shudder ran through her from head to foot when she found that the thread was actually taking her into the hole out of which the stream ran. It ran out babbling joyously, but she had to go in.

(137)

As before, "right into the hole" (137) she goes, to be met before long by the complete darkness of the unconscious. Yet, as Irene's discomfort is magnified, her faith increases, as if by recalling the grandmother, she cloaks herself against disaster:

...as she went farther and farther into the darkness of the great hollow mountain, she kept thinking more and more about her grandmother, and all that she had said to her, and how kind she had been, and how beautiful she was, and all about her lovely room, and the fire of roses, and the great lamp that sent its light through stone walls. And she became more and more sure that the thread could not have gone there of itself, and that her grandmother must have sent it.

(137)

This is Irene's ultimate test of faith, which "...trie[s] her dreadfully when the path [goes] down very steep..." (137). Yet, her acceptance of the grandmother's will represents the beginning of that moment of illumination or recognition of a Will stronger than one's own, intrinsic to union with one's God. Therefore, she must penetrate even further, as the thread dictates she will.

"[O]ften feeling as if she were only walking in the story of a dream" (137), Irene persists until, at last, she comes to the impermeable stone wall of a desolate cavern. Here the child undergoes a profound sense of isolation, fearing even that her grandmother has forsaken her<sup>36</sup>, "...had brought her into a horrible cavern, and there left her!" (138). Appropriately, a nightmare vision descends upon her in which the terror is more grotesque than ever imagination has created it, though it is real because it is experienced:

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<sup>36</sup> Symbolically, Irene's mother has deserted her: Irene is, in fact, searching for the lost mother, like the Freudian infant. An interesting note is Lottie's assertion on page 113 that Irene's ring had once belonged to her real mother.

'When shall I wake?' she said to herself in agony, but the same moment knew it was no dream. She threw herself upon the heap, and began to cry ...Forwards [the thread] led her hand up to the heap of stones—backwards it seemed nowhere.

(138-9)

Irene's salvation lies, as ever, in the delicate thread which binds her to the grandmother's loft. Having felt the madness of isolation, even if only for a brief instant, Irene is ready to undergo surrender and thus achieve redemption and union:

Her fear vanished; once more she was certain her grandmother's thread could not have brought her there just to leave her there; and she began to throw away the stones...

(140)

And,

Another thing which helped to keep up her courage was that, as often as she uncovered a turn of the thread, instead of lying loose upon the stones, it tightened up; this made her sure that her grandmother was at the end of it some where.

(141)

Thus, Irene finds it difficult to accept Curdie's own lack of faith after the trial of endurance she has just completed. He, in turn, does not believe because he does not see; Irene believes because she feels:

'Then what can be the matter with your finger? I feel it perfectly. To be sure it is very thin, and in the sunlight looks just like the thread of a spider, though there are many of them twisted together to make it—but for all that I can't think why you shouldn't feel it as well as I do.'

(149)

Having completed her journey, Irene is now prepared for her final ceremony of baptism, in which she will undergo purgation of all that is unpure, the remnants of the goblin-kingdom:

She was so draggled with the stream,  
and dirty with creeping through narrow  
places, that if she had seen the re-  
flection without knowing it was a re-  
flection, she would have taken herself  
for some gipsy child whose face was  
washed and hair combed about once in  
a month.

(157)

Accordingly, Irene is trustingly enfolded in the grandmother's bosom, and sinks into the "blue gulf of shining stars" to be healed. Here is the moment of complete identification with God, as the child lies suspended in a nirvana-like slumber. All external reality vanishes: only the complete and enlightened self remains:

...instead of being afraid, she felt more  
than happy—perfectly blissful. And from  
somewhere came the voice of the lady,  
singing a strange sweet song, of which  
she could distinguish every word; but  
of the sense she had only a feeling—  
no understanding...It vanished, like  
the poetry in a dream, as fast as it came.  
In after years, however, she would some-  
times fancy that snatches of melody sud-  
denly rising in her brain must be little  
phrases and fragments of the air of that  
song; and the very fancy would make her  
happier, and abler to do her duty.

(158)

Such "profound slumber" (182) ensures not only the safekeeping of Irene, but also the fortification of the castle itself. Having felt the curative touch of the grandmother's hands, Curdie is also able to prevent the boiling goblin-floods from submerging the house in their

diabolical waters. Instead, their hellish snare is turned back upon themselves, sweeping the creatures into oblivion. Amid the raging tempest on the mountain, Irene rests serenely and happily, encircled by her memory of the soothing waters of the grandmother's bath, and happy in the newly-found completion of her soul, while, in an understated metaphor, MacDonald again delivers the central concern of his story:

'I never had such fun!' said the princess, her eyes twinkling and her pretty teeth shining. 'How nice it must be to live in a cottage on the mountain!'

'It all depends on what kind your inside house is,' said the mother.

'I know what you mean,' said Irene. 'That's the kind of thing my grandmother says.'

(194-5)

The silver globe, then, is the Maker, who is light, as MacDonald expresses it, while The Princess and the Goblin reflects that rejection of "primeval chaos" essential to the understanding of God's universe. The way to truth lies through the dreamworld of the unconscious, as shown by Irene's journey through the different spheres of the human mind, while the retention of such truth lies in the joyful surrender to and communion with the encircling warmth of creation. Yet, by the time he came to write The Princess and Curdie ten years later, MacDonald's convictions had undergone a serious deterioration. In this sequel, the child as the soul seeking redemption is overshadowed by the author's apocalyptic view of a corrupt and disintegrating society as found in Gwyntystorm, while the simple poetic beauty of the first volume gives way to a more cynical view of existence. Curdie, for example, is

"...gradually changing into a common-place man" (17), heedless of the "upper world" of butterflies, flowers, brooks, and clouds. MacDonald's idealistic perception of childhood's glory is replaced by the disillusioned conviction of its passing, and images of gloom and death pervade the narrative. Although the grandmother is still an important figure, Irene herself has become a young woman, Curdie's parents have grown older, and the king himself lies dying in an isolated chamber. The book ends in a disturbing fashion: despite the promise of rebirth offered by the marriage of Irene and Curdie, the kingdom rapidly sinks into decay and explodes Armageddon-like into dust again. MacDonald's vision has dichotomized and he is less convinced of the supremacy of imagination and faith in face of the "dwarves" men have become:

There is this difference between the growth of some human beings and that of others: in the one case it is a continuous dying, in the other a continuous resurrection. One of the latter sort comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true the moment it comes before him; one of the former class grows more and more afraid of being taken in, so afraid of it that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner: to be sure of a thing with him is to have it between his teeth.

(17-18)

Yet, it is the joyful sense of rejuvenation found in The Princess and the Goblin that is best remembered of MacDonald, since it speaks to man of a lyrical beauty which, though it may lie just beyond the periphery of his vision, exists still if only he will seek it. In this sense, MacDonald is a poet in the fullest meaning of the word.



## CONCLUSION

The Victorian epoch, stretching from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, has elicited many and conflicting responses from those who reflect upon its characteristics from a twentieth-century perspective shaded by its own complexities and insecurities. For some, the period has assumed the rosy glow of "la belle époque" of crystal palaces and solid, triumphant commercialism, while for others, it stands as a constricting world of puritanical hatreds and monumental self-deceptions in men who saw themselves not as despotic industrialists, but as figures of well-meaning patriarchal authority and wisdom. However, at the risk of over-simplification, it must also be acknowledged that many contemporaries of the age found it marked with a "sad intensity"<sup>1</sup> and an "'ennui and depression'"<sup>2</sup>, as noted by Matthew Arnold in his 1856 inaugural lecture at Oxford. In 1860, a country doctor decried the mounting social pressures which threatened to crush his patients:

'The craving lust for gold, the restless goading of ambition, and the insatiable yearnings for display, these march hand in hand with an unscrupulous and reckless luxury and with new, artificial and intolerable anxieties, in the wear and tear of which the human machine prematurely breaks down.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Eugen Weber, Europe Since 1715: A Modern History (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), p. 633.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Arnold, as quoted in Weber, p. 633.

<sup>3</sup>Weber, p. 633.



the confusion and helplessness felt by their contemporaries in ascertaining the true nature of "reality" itself. Earlier in this paper, it was stated that Alice reflects the same man's inability to control an essentially irrational, inconsistent, and perplexing universe; the same can be said of Irene, for both she and Alice encounter through fantasy hitherto unfelt dimensions of experience which, it is revealed, themselves contain a "logic intimate with truth". For Carroll, this "logic" is the intrinsic meaninglessness of the universe in terms of man's arbitrary efforts to categorize it and as represented by the inversions of Wonderland itself, while MacDonald reveals that all truths are God's, and therefore lie beyond man's comprehension or manipulative powers. Both Carroll and MacDonald perceive that the world of the "conscious" human being is conceived upon artificial and unreal assumptions, where "words are like garments" which cloak a truer reality beneath. In this recognition, these writers reveal as well a general characteristic of their own age, also noted by Matthew Arnold: its "'want of independence of mind, the shutting [its eyes] and professing to believe what [it does] not, the running blindly in herds, for fear of some obscure danger and horror if [one goes] alone...'"<sup>8</sup>.

The approach of Carroll and MacDonald to these problems is, however, extended in radically different directions according to the individual concerns of each writer. Carroll is very much rooted in Victorian society itself, expressing its nuances through political and intellectual satire which plays upon current intellectual beliefs. Alice's quest, therefore, becomes very real indeed in terms of the indi-

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<sup>8</sup>Matthew Arnold, as quoted in Weber, p. 634.

vidual reaching out towards the world, and the books themselves remain as valuable artifacts of their century. In contrast, MacDonald's attention is concentrated upon the spiritual universe and therefore more readily breaks through the limitations of historical reality. Although Irene's quest is essentially the same as that of Alice, its culmination lies not in ultimate individual control of outer chaos, but in the subsumption of the singular soul within the larger realm of divinity. However, in their awareness of the conflict between the "dark forces" of unconscious meaning and <sup>the</sup> brighter surface of conventional and conscious "truth", Carroll and MacDonald also allow for the resultant confusion of belief in the individual beset by a swelling tide of new and even hostile concepts. Like an infant whose lungs burst with the burning newness of oxygen, or whose eyes clamp shut against the blinding colours of a strange world, this individual struggles to come to terms with the universe lest it destroy him first. If this lost figure is childlike in his seeming helplessness in the face of the greater strength of the rushing world about him, then it is fitting that the child himself should spring forth through the imaginative "escape" of fantasy to become the surrogate wanderer in a "...land / Of wonders wild and new...". It has been said that Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass are not children's books at all, but works whose words are those of children and meanings those of men; the same can be asserted of The Princess and the Goblin, for all three works ultimately deal with the search of the questing human soul for its final and secure resting-place. The child represents all that is most helpless in man, but he also offers the greatest promise of fulfillment and rejuvenation of spirit essential to the restoration of original Grace. In this, he is the future of all men.

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