

769

FEMALE DEMONS IN THE FANTASIES OF GEORGE MACDONALD

FEMALE DEMONS  
IN THE FANTASIES OF  
GEORGE MACDONALD

By

Sheila Letitia Pepper, B.A., B.L.S.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September 1980

MASTER OF ARTS (1980)  
(ENGLISH)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: Female Demons in the Fantasies of George MacDonald.

AUTHOR: Sheila Letitia Pepper, B.A. (McMaster), B.L.S. (Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Joseph Sigman

NUMBER OF PAGES: V, 80.

### ABSTRACT

The thesis analyses several female characters in the fantasies of George MacDonald, using the concept of Jungian archetypes as a basis for study and comparison. Various similarities and contrasts between individual figures are developed first among those representing the "good" aspect of the Feminine and then the "evil". Some attempt is made to link the techniques used in the fantasy characterizations with those used by MacDonald in his "realistic" novels.



## CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION	p. 1
II	THE DREAM AS METAPHOR	p. 12
III	THE GOOD DEMON	p. 23
IV	THE EVIL DEMON	p. 54
V	CONCLUSION	p. 72

I would like to thank Professor Joseph Sigman of the English Department, McMaster University for his intelligent interest and guidance. I would also like to thank Bonnie Quan for her very patient assistance in preparing this final typescript.

ABBREVIATIONS

L.-----	<u>Lilith</u>
M.-----	<u>Malcolm</u>
ML.-----	<u>The Marquis of Lossie</u>
NW.-----	<u>At the Back of the North Wind</u>
PC.-----	<u>The Princess and Curdie</u>
PG.-----	<u>The Princess and the Goblin</u>
Ph.-----	<u>Phantastes</u>

Since I will be quoting from these works extensively, page references will be incorporated within the body of the text using the above abbreviations.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

While many would consider the biographical facts of an author's life to be irrelevant to an appreciation of his work, a brief sketch of George MacDonald's life may be appropriate since he and his work are so inextricably linked in the eyes of many readers. MacDonald was born in 1824 in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, the son of a poor farmer of "good family."<sup>1</sup> His mother died when he was eight and, although his father remarried (and most happily) seven years later, MacDonald was raised in a predominantly male household during much of his adolescence. As we shall see, a great deal has been made of this fact by one school of criticism.

After taking an M.A. degree in 1845, MacDonald studied divinity at Highbury College in London. Following a very brief period of preaching, he was forced to leave his first (and only official) pastorate at Arundel because he had expressed belief in the possibility that the heathen were not necessarily excluded forever from Heaven, as well as a "hope that the lower animals too would be sharers in the better life to come."<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, MacDonald relied entirely on the proceeds from his literary output supplemented all his life by donations from wealthier well-wishers. His

---

<sup>1</sup>All biographical material is taken from:  
Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and His Wife  
(London: Allen & Unwin, 1924).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 177-8.

long and happy marriage to Louisa Powell was plagued by his own ill-health as well as the tubercular death of several of his children.

MacDonald's literary career spanned some forty-five years and ranged from Within and Without, published in 1855, but probably written around 1850-51, to Salted With Fire, published in 1897. During this period he produced fifty-two books: twenty-five novels, three prose fantasies, eight tales and allegories for children, five collections of sermons, three collections of literary and miscellaneous critical essays, three collections of short stories, and five volumes of verse largely collected from his prose works.<sup>3</sup>

Any writer of such prolific and varied output must inevitably be better at some works than at others and must, also inevitably, awaken a wide range of critical response. One has only to think of MacDonald's contemporary Dickens to cite an author whose total output is of uneven quality, and whom widely differing schools of criticism have "discovered" through the years. A brief investigation of the various critical approaches to MacDonald may set the stage for, and in a sense justify, my own approach.

Critics contemporary with MacDonald would seem to have concentrated primarily on his "realistic" novels as fictionalized treatments of religious beliefs. At MacDonald's death in 1905, W. Garrett Horder stated unequivocally that David Elginbrod, Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer were

---

<sup>3</sup>John Malcolm Bulloch, "A Bibliography of George MacDonald", Aberdeen University Library Bulletin, V (1925), 681.

"the three stories by which he will be longest remembered...These three books had an immense influence on the religious thinking of that time."<sup>4</sup> In 1906, although Louise Collier Willcox was to declare MacDonald a "prophet" and a "seer" with "poetic and prophetic insight into life and character",<sup>5</sup> she made no mention of Phantastes and Lilith, which would seem his most "poetic" adult works, but concentrated instead on the Scottish novels.

This early and fairly "Victorian" type of study has now been all but forgotten. Modern literary tastes now find the realistic novels to be tedious, pedantic, stilted and contrived. Especially unattractive to modern taste is a too frequent tendency in them to preach: Greville MacDonald admitted this tendency although he obviously found it laudable that his father

would sometimes, as if showman or chorus, take possession of his stage and stop the play's action to explain its characters' relation to Time and Eternity, or even to reproach his audience for their misplaced sympathies.<sup>6</sup>

Current literary fashion would now agree with C.S. Lewis' assessment:

Necessity made MacDonald a novelist, but few of his novels are good and none is very good.<sup>7</sup>

Today the longer prose fantasies, Phantastes and Lilith, as well as the fairy-tales for children are generally recognized as MacDonald's most

<sup>4</sup>W. Garrett Horder, "George MacDonald: A Nineteenth Century Seer", Review of Reviews, 32 (1905), 359.

<sup>5</sup>Louise Collier Willcox, "A Neglected Novelist", North American Review, 183 (1906), 394.

<sup>6</sup>Greville MacDonald, 375.

<sup>7</sup>C.S. Lewis, Introduction to George MacDonald: An Anthology (London: Bles, 1946), p.17.

enduring works.

Although most critics now concentrate on the fantasies, three fairly distinct schools of study have emerged: one which applies a predominantly Freudian analysis, another concentrating on a Jungian interpretation, and a third taking a more general view and utilizing various critical techniques as they seem most appropriate. This last approach is exemplified by Richard Reis and, by its very general nature, does not allow for succinct summarization of its conclusions.

Robert Lee Wolff in his study, The Golden Key, is the most articulate of the Freudian school. His rigorous Freudian interpretation hinges on MacDonald's male-dominated upbringing. He sees as particularly damning, Greville MacDonald's admission that his father had kept for many years a letter from his mother to his grandmother dealing with George's early weaning. Wolff's analysis may best be summarized in his own words:

We know that being weaned is a universal human experience, and we think we know something of its importance. Of George MacDonald we know that all his life he preserved the record of his weaning as his most precious and secret possession. He longed for a mother, and repressed the longing. He felt rebellion against his father, whom he also loved dearly, and this gave him deep feelings of guilt...These circumstances underlie the development of his fiction and help account for its main features as we have come to know them.<sup>8</sup>

Despite evidence to the contrary, Wolff persists in regarding MacDonald as a frustrated and inhibited man whose frequent use of sexual symbolism is both unintentional and revealing. Wolff's preoccupation with

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert Lee Wolff, The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p.372.

Freudianism has led him to see everywhere in MacDonald's fiction instances of an Oedipal complex. He also believes that MacDonald felt a deep need to vicariously atone for his resentment of his father by placing his heroes in positions where they might serve the Father figure. The appearance of the "Fairy Grandmother" to Anodos in Phantastes is seized upon as evidence of an Oedipal syndrome linked to the famous "weaning" letter. Richard Reis, whose approach to MacDonald is far more general than either strictly Freudian or strictly Jungian, dismisses Wolff's analysis in this way:

The psychoanalysis is interesting and even almost convincing, but the Oedipal interpretation is quite irrelevant to the appreciation of Phantastes as literature.<sup>9</sup>

Another quite simple explanation of the appearance of the "weaning" letter in George MacDonald's desk is also possible. Might not he have treasured this letter as the only scrap of his mother's writing that fell into his hands? I cannot, of course, prove that this was so, but have not literary theories been based on flimsier "evidence"?

On the whole, I would reject Wolff's Freudian analysis not on Reis' basis of irrelevance, but on that of being applied too exclusively.

Sexual motifs are indeed readily apparent everywhere in MacDonald, but I cannot believe that the author was completely unconscious of their use.

This is also Reis' view:

He repeatedly deals...with sex in symbolical or allegorical terms, but he does so in such a manner that no reader can doubt his consciousness of what he was doing...In MacDonald's fictional

---

<sup>9</sup>Richard H. Reis, George MacDonald (New York: Twayne, 1972), p.88.



treatments of sexual motifs, he deliberately disguised his dramatizations of sexuality in deference to the prudery of the time.<sup>10</sup>

Nancy-Lou Patterson has, I think very ably, gauged the real nature of Wolff's response to MacDonald:

As far as it is possible to determine, the author...detests MacDonald as a man, disagrees wholeheartedly with his theology, finds most of his writings execrable, and applies to the subject of his book-length and exhaustive study the very yardstick that C.S. Lewis called least suitable: Freudian analysis.<sup>11</sup>

While MacDonald's contemporaries concentrated on his realistic fiction and employed traditional criteria, and moderns like Wolff employ an exclusively Freudian outlook; generalists like Reis use a variety of approaches and it is this method which appears to me to be most sensible. However, although I would like to leave the way open for using a variety of critical techniques, I find the application of Jungian theory, which characterizes yet another type of critical response to MacDonald, to be the most consistently useful. While Freudian analysts would deal with the psyche of the individual, Jungian theory postulates a group of eternal archetypes existing in the "collective unconscious" of all men. For my purposes I have found Erich Neumann's The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype to be a very useful summary of this aspect of Jungian theory, as well as an analysis of the appearance of archetypes throughout the literature of all ages and all

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 44-5.

<sup>11</sup>Nancy-Lou Patterson, "Archetypes of the Mother in the Fantasies of George MacDonald", Mythcon Proceedings, 1 (1970), 14.

cultures. The essence of Neumann's position maintains that the psyche of a healthy individual consists of a perfect balance of conscious and unconscious elements. In both sexes "the active ego consciousness is characterized by a male symbolism, the unconscious as a whole by a female symbolism"<sup>12</sup>

It is only necessary to quote at length from MacDonald's own non-fiction to suggest that this masculine-feminine, conscious-unconscious theory was not far from his own view. He may not have articulated it exactly as later analysts would, but he is certainly not far off. In "A Sketch of Individual Development", MacDonald speaks of a boy's maturation as a movement away from the feminine toward the masculine:

The old heaven, the face and will of his mother, recede farther and farther; a world of men, which he foolishly thinks a nobler as it is a larger world, draws him, claims him. More or less he yields. The example and influence of such as seem to him more than his mother like himself, grow strong upon him.<sup>13</sup>

Later this tendency toward the masculine will crystallize in the triumph of reality or "science" over fantasy or "poetry":

The youth gazes on the face of Science, cold, clear, beautiful; then, turning, looks for his friend - but, alas! Poetry has fled.<sup>14</sup>

Later still, romantic love may put him back in touch with this visionary

<sup>12</sup>Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p.28.

<sup>13</sup>George MacDonald, "A Sketch of Individual Development", in his A Dish of Orts (London: Sampson Low Marston, 1893), p.47.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 51.

realm, if only briefly:

With this love in his heart, a man puts on at least the vision robes of the seer, if not the singing robes of the poet.<sup>15</sup>

This view of the feminine as being somehow closer to sensitivity and imagination is enforced in MacDonald's fiction whenever he finds occasion to comment on the behaviour of men as opposed to that of women. In Phantastes a story read by Anodos in the Fairy Palace deals with another world:

The men alone have arms; the women have only wings. Resplendent wings are they, wherein they can shroud themselves from head to foot in a panoply of glistering glory. By these wings alone, it may frequently be judged in what seasons, and under what aspects, they were born.<sup>16</sup>

This same people has a peculiar relationship to the sea:

The sea is like a sea of death, ready to engulf and never to reveal: a visible shadow of oblivion. Yet the women sport in its waters like gorgeous sea-birds. The men more rarely enter them.<sup>17</sup>

In Lilith, Adam implies that women are somehow closer to the good eternal sleep:

Men are not coming home fast: women are coming faster.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>16</sup> George MacDonald, Phantastes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p.85.

<sup>17</sup> George MacDonald, Phantastes, p.86.

<sup>18</sup> George MacDonald, Lilith, p.399.

MacDonald's views gain theological significance in his belief that this creative subconscious is somehow God's writing paper rather than the individual's own creative faculty; that if one could only penetrate to this part of one's self, one would be somehow closer to God's truth and beauty:

The man has but to light the lamp within the form: his imagination is the light, it is not the form.<sup>19</sup>

Although MacDonald did not of course have access to modern psychiatric terms, his concepts often seem startlingly current. In fact, although the following passage deals with the loss of insight of an individual, is it not very close to the Jungian concept of a general human memory lying forgotten and concealed at the bottom of each of our consciousnesses?

...so in the dawn of consciousness...each succeeding consciousness dims - often obliterates - that which went before, and with regard to our past as well as our future, imagination and faith must step into the place vacated of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

I would hope by now to have suggested the relevance of using Jung's theory of archetypes to better understand the symbolism of MacDonald's fiction. My own primary interest is in the female archetype which divides into two basic sets of figures: the protector or "Mother" and the transformer or "Anima". Each of these will be seen to have both "good" and "evil" manifestations. I see these archetypes occurring repeatedly in the demonic figures of MacDonald's fantasies. For my purposes, I am using the word

---

<sup>19</sup>George MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture", in his A Dish of Orts (London: Sampson Low Marston, 1893), p.5.

<sup>20</sup>George MacDonald, "A Sketch of Individual Development", p.43.

"demon" in its mythological sense of a supernatural being whose nature lies between that of gods and men.<sup>21</sup> A strict interpretation of this definition will narrow the range of characters to be studied.

Two very relevant articles are already available, applying these concepts to certain of MacDonald's works. Joseph Sigman touches on the female figures in Phantastes,<sup>22</sup> while Nancy-Lou Patterson examines At the Back of the North Wind and the "Princess" books, focusing on "the manner in which MacDonald achieves the intense air of numinousness which characterizes the North Wind and the elder Irene".<sup>23</sup> Naturally, I am heavily indebted to the Sigman and Patterson studies. My own contribution will be, I hope, in providing a broader range of relationships between the various female figures in the fantasies as well as linking them up in some way with the characterizations of women common in the "realistic" fiction. In order to touch briefly on different types of fantasy, I have chosen to deal with the adult romances, Phantastes and Lilith, and some of the children's tales, At the Back of the North Wind and the "Princess" books. I will also take into account two of the Scottish novels, Malcolm and The Marquis of Lossie, as being fairly representative of the realistic fiction, but also containing a female figure whom I consider to be a demonic archetype

---

<sup>21</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, ed. Sir James A.H. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888-1933) III, 184.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Sigman, "Death's Ecstasies: Transformation and Rebirth in George MacDonald's Phantastes", English Studies in Canada, II, 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 203-226.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy-Lou Patterson, p.15.

displaced from the fantasies (Barbara Catanach). Since it seems fairly important to establish the use of dream sequence as a link with the subconscious in most of the works with which I will be dealing, I will outline in a brief chapter the relevance of the dream state to a study of the archetype. Two longer chapters will be devoted to the good and evil figures respectively, before some final conclusions are drawn.

One final caveat: in dealing with MacDonald's works it is important not to fall into what I consider to be Robert Lee Wolff's persistent error; i.e. applying one form of criticism too rigidly and exclusively. While the use of Jungian archetypes seems eminently sensible as a touchstone for much of MacDonald's symbolism, it must never be forgotten that MacDonald was both a learned and a Christian writer, writing before the jargon of psychoanalysis was developed. He cannot, therefore, be expected to fall too conveniently and completely into any niche created by modern analytical criticism.

CHAPTER II

## THE DREAM AS METAPHOR

The dream sequence has been used for centuries as a device whereby the author may present allegorical and fantastic episodes not readily acceptable to the reader in ordinary narrative. A real dream is episodic, non-logical, vivid and, as such, becomes the perfect vehicle for expressing fictional concepts. The fictional dreamer need take no responsibility for these images and the real author is not constrained to place them in any realistic framework. The dream has become a vehicle for allegory and satire because, as well as being a very convenient tool, it has come to be traditionally recognized as an important instrument of revelation. Although modern psychiatry would link the dream to the subconscious desires and/or conflicts of the dreamer, tradition has, throughout the history of civilized man, regarded the dream as an important manifestation of Truth. Like Jacob's dream, this truth may need some interpretation, but it is nevertheless considered to be a real factor.

MacDonald, in his repeated references to the imagination, seems to describe a state very close to that which modern psychiatry calls the "sub-conscious". For MacDonald, this faculty of imagination is the hidden and forgotten realm of God's Truth. The dream, then, as he uses it to reveal and penetrate this state, must have for him a special and specific meaning. This premise can at least be illustrated in the fantasies. In these, he often uses the dream sequence to represent an initiation or "coming-of-age" of the main character. This initiation is not into the outer world of

social laws and "reality", but into the inner realm of the subconscious. As his characters become more and more attuned to the conventions and moralities of this inner world, they are in fact becoming closer and closer to MacDonald's conception of union with God.

It is my belief that Phantastes and Lilith, at least, are essentially dream narratives in which MacDonald uses the dream sequence to illustrate Anodos' and Vane's growing awareness of God's reality. As we shall see, the other fantasies employ dream allusions in even more complex and unusual manners. Sigman and Wolff have in different ways treated Phantastes as a dream, and it is, I think, the appropriate way to deal with the book. MacDonald's dreamer does not, of course, simply fall asleep, then awake; his progress is so subtly made that the reader is eventually confused by the states of sleeping and waking. It is not even apparent for some time that MacDonald wishes us to believe the entire sequence to be a dream. As is common with most dream literature, characters act with no readily discernible motive and episodes are linked only tenuously.

In fact, in a blend of symbol and romance evocative of the mediaeval progress tale, MacDonald is detailing the spiritual growth of a youth who is at a very crucial stage in his life. Various clues point to this as a climactic time. At the beginning of the book Anodos is twenty-one and his twenty-one day stay in Fairyland is believed by Sigman to signal a spiritual as well as a chronological maturity. Anodos' doubts and conflicts are really all self-generated, of the sort that adolescents face as they mature mentally and spiritually. He is facing, in his own words, a struggle with "the self which had fooled me so long". (Ph., 176) Various dream characters



aid him in his development, but for a long time he seems stubbornly unable to accept either their advice or their protection. In common with most adolescents, he seems constitutionally incapable of obeying rules or orders. The sexual traumas and distractions which are part and parcel of maturing are also given full play.

Throughout all these adventures, both sexual and heroic, MacDonald's primary aim is to put his hero in touch with the inner reserves of imagination (or the subconscious as we would call it) which will put him at one with God. Anodos' own innate sense of wonder is eventually clouded by the "Shadow" who causes him to see what was wonderful as merely mundane. It is as though the cynicism of age has stripped youth of its joy. Anodos' inner tensions and inability to accept his own imaginative qualities may be symbolized by the fact that for some time he does not dream in Fairyland. It is only as his self-awareness and insight into the world around him progress that he is able to dream until at last, imprisoned in the tower with his dread "Shadow", he receives consolation from his fantasies. Significantly he becomes free in these dreams and roams in visions until at last he sees himself returned to his sisters and his home. If the dream is an emblem of truth, the dream-within-a-dream must signify another level of meaning. It is only after Anodos has dreamed within the tower that he is freed. It would seem, though, as if the power to escape had always been his, had he only recognized it:

Hardly knowing what I did, I opened the door.  
Why had I not done so before? I do not know. (Ph., 163)

It is as though some inhibition has been lifted which had caused him to

suppress certain aspects of his personality. He has been given again the gift of wonder and joy which allows him to penetrate into the reality of life untouched by the cloud of cynicism. The heightened sensuality and spirituality he achieves allow him to see through the hideous religious trappings which dupe even the worthy knight. Anodos' death in revealing this false religion is, as it were, yet another dream-within-a-dream. Death puts him into the deepest state of oneness with God and with all nature:

Now that I lay in her bosom, the whole earth, and each of her many births, was as a body to me, at my will. I seemed to feel the great heart of the mother beating into mine, and feeding me with her own life, her own essential being and nature. (Ph., 178)

He has dreamed his way to God's reality and his re-awakening in our world comes as a profound disappointment. MacDonald has, throughout Anodos' entire dream adventure, put his character into a situation in which the use of archetypal figures is most appropriate. These are the people of our dreams, as well as our subconscious. Now, in his climactic image of death, he has focused on one of the prime facets of the Feminine - the earth as mother of us all, protecting and nourishing. Death has become an absorption into the feminine subconscious and it is with deep regret that Anodos awakens to reality. The masculine consciousness is now a state only to be endured until a final death will deliver him back to the longed-for mother.

Auden, Reis and Wolff have all made much of differences in structure between Phantastes and Lilith, written almost forty years later.

In W.H. Auden's view:

If Lilith is a more satisfactory book than Phantastes one reason is that its allegorical structure is much tighter: there seems to be no particular reason, one feels, why Anodos should have just the number of adventures which he does have - they could equally be more or less - but Mr. Vane's experiences and his spiritual education exactly coincide.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Vane's initial entrance into Fairyland is not accomplished through a sleep sequence, but rather by means of a mirror, "a tall mirror with a dusty face, old-fashioned and rather narrow - in appearance an ordinary glass". (L., 192) The significance of mirrors in fantasy literature might become the subject of a very long digression. A time-honoured device for a transition into a dream world, one of its most famous uses was by MacDonald's friend Lewis Carroll in Through the Looking Glass. It should be remembered, though, that MacDonald himself had already used a mirror in a similar way in his "Cosmo von Wehrstahl" episode in Phantastes.

Whereas Anodos' sojourn in Fairyland consisted of a single uninterrupted interval, Vane makes five trips back and forth between the "real" and "other" world. Nevertheless it is eventually evident that he too is dreaming. In fact, Vane finally becomes completely confused between dream and reality:

Had I come to myself out of a vision? - or lost myself by going back to one? Which was the real - what I now saw, or what I had just ceased to see? Could both be real, interpenetrating yet unmingling? (L., 217)

---

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Auden, Introduction to The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald, ed. Anne Freemantle (New York: Noonday Press, 1954), p.vi.

The repetition of Vane's progress over the geography of his Fairyland, while it serves to reinforce this geography in our memories, adds a nightmare-like quality to the story. Contrary to the episodic nature of Anodos' progress, Vane's experiences resemble those horrifying dreams we all have at one time or another - where we are forced to relive over and over the same scenes and are just as helpless each time to avert catastrophe. The progress of Anodos and Vane is similar, but there are ambiguities in the later work not found in Phantastes. Once again, dreaming-within-the-dream has a peculiar significance, for it is only by willingly lying down to sleep the sleep of death in Adam's house that Vane will find life.

Vane's final waking into our world is, like Anodos', full of regret and longing, but his reorientation into reality is neither as profound nor as certain of eventual bliss, as is Anodos'. Vane's ultimate confusion suggests dimensions not present in the earlier work:

Can it be that that last waking also was in the  
 dream? that I am still in the chamber of death,  
 asleep and dreaming, not yet ripe enough to wake?  
 Or can it be that I did not go to sleep outright  
 and heartily, and so have come awake too soon? (L., 419)

MacDonald closes his novel, as he has Phantastes, with a line from

Novalis:

Our life is no dream, but it should and will  
 perhaps become one.

While these words stand as an effective summary of the plot and meaning of Lilith, we are haunted by Vane's own wistful feeling:

I wait; asleep or awake, I wait. (L., 420)

Phantastes and Lilith, both "romances" aimed at adult readers, are

complex and disturbing studies of death as rebirth, explored through the machinery of dream symbolism. At the Back of the North Wind, designed for a much younger audience, explores in simpler language what is essentially the same theme. The more obvious hints of sexuality and violence would be inappropriate here, and there is really no need for Diamond to undergo the sort of spiritual transformation experienced by Anodos and Vane. He is already almost too good to be true:

Little Diamond, the child-hero, is so very good and innocent that most worldly folk think him absent-minded or even feeble-minded.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Diamond's adventures with North Wind become a progress through a dream-world toward the ultimate goal of death. Wolff is, I think, correct here in his assessment of the dream nature of this world, as well as MacDonald's skill in the transitions made:

With equal matter-of-factness, and no change of pace, MacDonald narrates the events that take place in both worlds; so that the dream world seems a natural extension of the real world. He does not tell us that Diamond is dreaming whenever he sees North Wind, whether by night or by day. We are here not dealing with an explicit transfer from the world of reality to the world of dreams...[it is] as if falling asleep, almost without warning, we pass from one world to the other, and at times the two worlds are fused. No doubt this is one of the reasons why the book gives children the shivers.<sup>3</sup>

Two serious differences, beyond his perfection, set Diamond apart from Anodos and Vane: Diamond is not the narrator, a fact which allows us to be shown the reactions of other characters to his adventures, and Diamond actually does achieve the goal of death. We know that others view

---

<sup>2</sup>Richard H. Reis, p.82.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Lee Wolff, p.148.

Diamond's various trips with North Wind as illnesses of varying intensities, the most serious being that which coincides with Diamond's first journey to "the country at the back of the North Wind." His final journey, then, results in death, and it is only the narrator who believes more hopefully:

They thought he was dead. I knew that he had gone to the back of the north wind. (NW., 292)

In all three stories repeated and very explicit references are made to the dream as manifestation of truth. Anodos' horror at finding himself back among men is assuaged by the memory of his dream:

For, in truth, that I should be able if only to think such things as I had been thinking, was an unspeakable delight. An hour of such peace made the turmoil of a life-time worth striving through. (Ph., 180)

North Wind declares the dream as also occasionally a prophetic experience:

The people who think lies, and do lies, are very likely to dream lies. But the people who love what is true will surely now and then dream true things. (NW., 286)

In Lilith Adam promises Vane, "When you are quite dead, you will dream no false dream." (L., 403)

The Princess books would seem to bear little relation to the dream sequences already outlined. There are of course a few "dream" elements as, for instance, little Irene's disquieting habit of awakening in a different room from that in which she fell asleep. However, MacDonald's use of the dream metaphor in these two stories is far more subtle than it has been up to now. The "dream" has become a derisive term for what the real world, in the person of Curdie, believes the princess's experiences with Queen Irene to be. In The Princess and the Goblin Curdie has at first not achieved

enough insight to share in the princess's vision. As Queen Irene explains, "Curdie is not yet able to believe some things. Seeing is not believing - it is only seeing." (PG., 418) At the conclusion of The Princess and the Goblin Curdie has come to believe in all that little Irene does, but by the beginning of the sequel, The Princess and Curdie, he has retrogressed into a more worldly state:

But as Curdie grew older, he doubted more and more whether Irene had not been talking of some dream she had taken for reality: he had heard it said that children could not always distinguish betwixt dreams and actual events. (PC., 473)

Curdie is, of course, at the crux of the dilemma of all MacDonald's fantasy heroes - how to distinguish between dream and reality. At this point Curdie is completely in error. In fact, Curdie "was getting rather stupid - one of the chief signs of which was that he believed less and less of things he had never seen." (PC., 473) By the end of the second Princess book, the inability of the people of Gwyntystorm to distinguish between greed and material comfort and the old true "dream" has led to the destruction of their city and their own extinction!

The use of dream machinery would not be appropriate in his realistic novels, but there are occasional passages which attest to MacDonald's continued fascination with the dream state. To cite only one example, the Scottish twilight is likened to a dream:

It was two days after the longest day of the year, when there is no night in those regions, only a long twilight, in which many dream and do not know it. (ML., 273)

The various dream-states or fairylands in the fantasies resemble one another in certain conventions. Richard Reis has summarized the similarities

in this way:

The settings of MacDonald's imaginative works are, in summary, quite consistently characterized by a few attributes: his worlds are unlike our everyday world, with different natural laws; these resemble the "laws" of dreams; and they include such reiterated symbolic motifs as the Wasteland, the uncharted mansion, the library, the network of underground caves and tunnels.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the latter three conventions at least have found their way into Malcolm and The Marquis of Lossie. Other conventions might also be noted: the association of flowers with fairies, the tacit implication that animals have souls (one even appears as an angel in North Wind!), and the predictable unpredictability of fairies:

Fairies are fond of doing odd things. Indeed, however they may dissemble, the night is always their day. And so it is with all who have fairy blood in them. (NW., 218)

"The night is always their day" is a fundamental precept that must never be forgotten, for, no matter how convincing MacDonald's fairylands become, they are in truth dream worlds and for this reason must be peopled with dream characters.

W.H. Auden recognized and commented on the limitations of working within this framework:

In comparison with his colleague, the novelist of our social waking life, the novelist of dream life is freer in his choice of events but more restricted in his choice of characters, for the latter must all be variations on a few "archetypes", The Wise Old Man, the Wise Old Woman, the Harlot-Witch, the Child-bride, the Shadow-Self, etc., and it is no easy matter to present these types in unique and personal figures.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard H. Reis, p.105.

<sup>5</sup> W.H. Auden, pp. vi-vii.



MacDonald, working within a Christian context, and viewing the dream state as indicative of fundamental truths, must strive to be particularly adept at evoking the figures who dwell within us all. It is in this context, that the following chapters will deal with some of the feminine archetypes in the fantasies and will, tentatively at least, contrast MacDonald's treatment of them, with that of the "realistic" women in the Malcolm books.

CHAPTER III

THE GOOD DEMON

In the context of this study, we must understand the word "demon" to be used not in its more usual meaning of "an evil spirit", but in its older mythological sense of "a supernatural being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men".<sup>1</sup> This definition would seem to me to describe exactly several female figures, both good and evil, ~~which~~ *whom* MacDonald has created in his fantasies. Since I will be using the concept of Jungian archetypes as a device for analyzing these figures, a fuller exploration of the archetype would seem appropriate at this point.

Erich Neumann, repeating and interpreting Jung, distinguishes two separate characters of the Feminine; these he designates the "Elementary" or "Great Mother", and the "Transformative" or "Anima". These are the good manifestations of the Feminine principle. Care must be taken by the layman not to interpret too literally any of these words:

"Mother" in this connection does not refer merely to a relationship of filiation but also to a complex psychic situation of the ego, and similarly the term "Great" expresses the symbolic character of superiority that the archetypal figure possesses in comparison with everything human and with created nature in general.<sup>2</sup>

This "elementary" aspect of the Feminine is primarily seen as both

<sup>1</sup>Oxford English Dictionary, ed. Sir James A.H. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888-1933) III, 184.

<sup>2</sup>Erich Neumann, p.11.

generative and protective. Consequently genital and sexual images are essential attributes: the womb and womb-shaped objects, the mouth and all other orifices of the body, hair as it commonly distinguishes the female from the male. As mother of us all this elementary aspect of the Feminine is also symbolized by earth and vegetation images, as well as by shapes that protect and contain: the tree of life and all crops, round pots, cave-like dwellings. This aspect includes in its number the Wise Woman, the goddess Demeter and the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus. The second aspect of the Feminine is the "Transformative" or "Anima". She is the inspiration that draws man on to artistic and intellectual achievements and, as such, she is characterized by youth and beauty. She is the Muse, Sophia, and the Virgin Mary (this time in her representation as perpetual virgin).

By its very nature, such a literary archetype is ineligible for subjection to the same critical criteria that determine the success of an ordinary characterization. Such symbols must be universal enough to arouse the appropriate responses in all readers. Consequently, it would be folly for an author to invest them with too much depth of emotion or individual personality. The archetype must be not a memorable individual, but an evocative allusion.

Necessarily, then, as Auden has pointed out, "It is no easy matter to present these types in unique and personal figures!"<sup>3</sup> Is it even necessary to do so? Has MacDonald succeeded in their use and is there any change or development in this type of figure as found in his fiction?

---

<sup>3</sup>W.H. Auden, p.vii.

The most logical method of answering these questions is to take the works in chronological order.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, I will deal with the female figures in Phantastes (1858), followed in order by those in At the Back of the North Wind (1868-69), The Princess and the Goblin (1870), The Princess and Curdie (1877) and finally Lilith (1895). Malcolm (1871) and The Marquis of Lossie (1876) appeared mid-way through MacDonald's career, but their characters are of more conventional construction and will be dealt with separately.

In Phantastes MacDonald presents us with a large and varied cast of female characters. The young narrator's first introduction to the population of Fairyland is in the person of "a tiny woman-form, as perfect in shape as if she had been a small Greek statuette roused to life and motion." (Ph., 16) In a moment, this doll-like figure grows to become:

a tall, gracious lady, with pale face and large blue eyes. Her dark hair flowed behind, wavy but uncurled, down to her waist, and against it her form stood clear in its robe of white. (Ph., 17)

She has now become what we will soon recognize as the quintessential good female demon. Demon or human, MacDonald's virtuous women are almost always physically described in certain terms. They are usually pale with blue or gray eyes. The repeated emphasis on a pale complexion may be meant to emphasize purity, or it may simply be compliance with a very common Victorian literary convention. For many authors of that era, "pale" was regarded as virtually a synonym for "beautiful". More important for

---

<sup>4</sup>All publication dates are taken from:

John Malcolm Bulloch, "A Bibliography of George MacDonald", Aberdeen University Library Bulletin, V(1925), 679-747.

our purposes, is the description of the fairy's hair which is thick and long, and beautiful in a natural manner. Neumann equates the hair of the "Great Mother" with the vegetation symbolism associated with her as earth-mother;<sup>5</sup> and we will soon learn to recognize the growth of abundant tresses to be an indication that the owner has supernatural powers. Her white robe is not only indicative of purity, but is, as well, a further suggestion that Anodos' Fairy Grandmother has been set outside the rules of Time and Age. She is already two hundred and thirty-seven years old (Ph., 17), but is obviously young and beautiful enough to appeal to Anodos. Her dress is "classic" enough to seem not unfashionable in any century:

[It] was of a kind that could never grow old-fashioned, because it was simply natural. (Ph., 16-7)

Even her voice, which is "low" and "sweet", carries with it this suggestion of Eternity;

a voice that strangely recalled a sensation of twilight, and reedy river banks, and a low wind. (Ph., 17)

She is, in short, the eternal female--beautiful, bewitching, mysterious.

Anodos' Fairy Grandmother is in fact a very ambiguous figure.

Sigman has already noted many of the sexual and incestuous allusions with which MacDonald has tinged this first meeting: the penetrating of the barred labyrinthine desk from which the fairy emerges; the warnings that "a man must not fall in love with his grandmother" (Ph., 18), that to touch her would bring him harm. That voice reminiscent of "reedy river banks" hints, too, at possible mysteries and entanglements.

---

<sup>5</sup>Erich Neumann, p.40.

Nor are we really sure why the fairy sends Anodos on his traumatic trip into fairyland. Does she mean him harm or only good? When she identifies herself as his "Fairy Grandmother", she recalls the fairy godmothers of children's stories, but she is still at this time a figure far more mysterious and complicated than these usually are.

The Beech Maiden, with whom Anodos spends his first night in fairyland, has no such ambiguous overtones; she obviously means the hero only good. Her form, of course, causes some perplexity. Again we must look to Neumann for some explanation of the presence of tree-as-maiden:

As fruit-bearing tree of life [the tree] is female: it bears, transforms, nourishes; its leaves, branches, twigs are "contained" in it and dependent on it.<sup>6</sup>

This, then, is the basic archetypal concept, but MacDonald has chosen a beech tree in particular, probably because mythologically the beech was linked to the dryades, the Greek wood nymphs. The oracles of Zeus at Dodona were also said to be delivered through the medium of the sacred beech and oak, and the leaves of the beech were believed in ancient times to be medicinal.<sup>7</sup> The legends surrounding the beech, then, provide an excellent example of the way in which an archetype crops up in legend and literature. MacDonald's use of the beech would seem almost inevitable in this light, and her warning against the Alder takes on the importance of an oracle. The wreath of "hair" or leaves, which she gives Anodos becomes a potent charm. In the Beech Maiden MacDonald has created a strangely powerful figure with whom we feel surprisingly great empathy. Her plaintive cry, "I may love him,

---

<sup>6</sup>Erich Neumann, pp.48-9.

<sup>7</sup>Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, ed. Maria Leach (New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1972), p.130.

I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech-tree" (Ph., 38), and her longing to be part of the world of men haunts Anodos long after the magic of a fairy night is over.

While the Fairy Grandmother's maternal qualities were really downplayed, the Beech Maiden's motherly qualities are concretely presented. In her arms, Anodos dreams of "wandering in childhood through sunny spring forests" (Ph., 40) and her kiss is the healing kiss of a mother:

"Why, you baby!" said she, and kissed me with  
the sweetest kiss of winds and odours. There  
was a cool faithfulness in the kiss that revived  
my heart wonderfully. (Ph., 39)

Her qualities, however, are not entirely motherly; the encounter with her becomes the prototype of the forbidden and regretted liaison between unsuitable partners. In fact, although MacDonald's verses in Phantastes are often uninspiring, the Beech Maiden's "song" is both simple and effective:

I saw thee ne'er before;  
I see thee never more;  
But love, and help, and pain, beautiful one,  
Have made thee mine, till all my years are done. (Ph., 39)

When Anodos betrays the "cool faithfulness" of the Beech, he commits a particularly cruel indiscretion.

Up to this point, Anodos' encounters have been with the women of fairyland as they appear primarily in their "elementary" character. In the Marble Lady we see the most definite portrayal of the "Anima". Her first appeal is to the imaginative qualities which lie dormant within Anodos himself. Her face is "more near the face that had been born with [him] in [his] soul, than anything [he] had seen before in nature or art." (Ph., 44-5)

The bas-relief illustrating the legend of Pygmalion on the walls of the cave in

which Anodos finds her and the association with the Orpheus legend as Anodos frees her through song, reinforces this impression of artistic inspiration. Sigman's article explores at length the significance of the Marble Lady as the unattainable ideal. As such, she places Anodos in an insoluble dilemma:

Either he can destroy himself in a search for the Marble Lady or else he can learn to accept the inevitable alienation from his ideal that earthly life requires.<sup>8</sup>

As interesting as is the characterization of the Marble Lady, she does not fall clearly within the scope of a study of demonic figures. Beyond the very symbolic sense in which she "enchants" Anodos, she is not really enchanter, but enchanted. She has no supernatural powers for good or evil, as have the Fairy Grandmother and the Beech-Maiden, but seems instead to be actually in the power of both the Fairy Queen (who never appears) and of Anodos himself.

It is necessary for clarification of a point I will make later about another character to refer to one peculiar group of associations made with the Marble Lady. Sigman points out that, through a curious reference to the version of the Pygmalion legend in which the statue actually draws her life from the artist<sup>9</sup>, MacDonald introduces a brief hint of vampirism. Anodos' own song<sup>10</sup> reinforces this conclusion. This theme will surface again and again in later works, most notably in Lilith.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Sigman, p.209.

<sup>9</sup>Joseph Sigman, p.210.

<sup>10</sup>"Yea, I am dead; for thou has drawn  
My life all downward unto thee" (Ph., 47)



In the Wise Woman who lives on the island, MacDonald puts his hero at last in contact with a female figure of unalloyed goodness with no ambiguous overtones. She is the complete "Great Mother" for whom Anodos feels no incestuous longing, but only trust and gratitude. A quite lengthy quote from the text must be included, since MacDonald has provided many details in her initial description which identify her as an archetype:

Over the fire hung a little pot, and over the pot bent a woman-face, the most wonderful, I thought, that I had ever beheld. For it was older than any countenance I had ever looked upon. There was not a spot in which a wrinkle could lie, where a wrinkle lay not. And the skin was ancient and brown, like old parchment. The woman's form was tall and spare: and when she stood up to welcome me, I saw that she was straight as an arrow...But the moment I saw her eyes, I no longer wondered at her voice: they were absolutely young - those of a woman of five-and-twenty, large, and of a clear gray. Wrinkles had beset them all about; the eyelids themselves were old, and heavy, and worn; but the eyes were very incarnations of soft light. (Ph., 130)

It would be difficult to describe any figure with which any reader could instinctively associate more comfort and safety. The very fact that the first object Anodos notices is a pot is significant. Neumann has noted that there is "fundamental symbolic and sociological significance" in the pot. "It is one of the original symbols of womanhood."<sup>11</sup> This significance derives both from its shape (round, containing, protecting) and from its association with the functions of cooking and nourishing.

The Wise Woman's great age, on which MacDonald lays such heavy stress not only makes of her a natural object for veneration and trust, but also implies that she has probably lived beyond the normal span of human life.

---

<sup>11</sup> Erich Neumann, p.133.

Her eyes, however, show her real vitality and perpetual youth - she might be twenty-five, an age for which MacDonald will show particular affection in all his works. I may be falling too easily into the trap of "over-analyzing", but it seems to me significant that MacDonald should use the word "incarnations" to describe her eyes. "Incarnation" is a rather unusual word and is used more often in connection with Jesus Incarnate, i.e. in human form. That the Wise Woman is a figure with Christian overtones has been demonstrated by Sigman. The use of the word "incarnations" here may also imply that this is a supernatural being who is only assuming human form for her own purposes.

Later the Wise Woman sits by a roaring fire (symbol not only of hearth and comfort, but also of transformation) and begins to spin:

But she gave one look upwards and smiled  
 the sweetest, most child-innocent smile;  
 then heaped fresh wood on the fire, and,  
 sitting down by the blaze, drew her wheel  
 near her, and began to spin. While she  
 spun, she murmured a low strange song, to  
 which the hum of the wheel made a kind of  
 infinite symphony. (Ph., 136)

Once again, Neumann sheds light on the symbolism of these activities:

The primordial mystery of weaving and spinning  
 has also been experienced in projection upon  
 the Great Mother who weaves the web of life  
 and spins the threads of fate.<sup>12</sup>

The woman's song is an ancient symbol of prophecy, of her contact with the world of imagination and insight.

Part of the Wise Woman's function is to help Anodos deal with the sorrows and failings of his past and it is for this reason that she sends him

---

<sup>12</sup>Erich Neumann, p.227.

through the four doors of her cottage. Later, Anodos will recall her as "the ancient woman, in the cottage that was four-square". (Ph., 182) In Sigman's view this phraseology is a direct link of the Wise Woman's cottage with the New Jerusalem of Revelation, the city that "lieth foursquare".<sup>13</sup> When, at Anodos' departure the waters rise about the Wise Woman's cottage, she reminds us too of Noah, the one righteous man who survived the flood of God's wrath.

In this context, the Wise Woman's farewell to Anodos is a message both of comfort and religious meaning;

You will come back to me some day, I know. But I beg you, for my sake, my dear child, to do one thing. In whatever sorrow you may be, however insoluble and irremediable it may appear, believe me that the old woman in the cottage, with the young eyes...knows something, though she must not always tell it, that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress. (Ph., 144)

In Phantastes MacDonald has fleshed out the bare bones of dream figures (or archetypes) with various mythological and Christian allusions. His female cast has been large and complex. In At the Back of the North Wind, however, he concentrates all demonic power in one character only - North Wind herself. Since this story is aimed at a young audience and its hero is a young boy, the relationship of Diamond and North Wind is not clouded by all the ambiguities of sexual tension and self-questioning that have plagued Anodos. MacDonald has not deemed it appropriate to include the undertones of sexuality so common in Phantastes. The only echo of a rather flirtatious attitude occurs after North Wind has shrunk to the size

---

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Sigman, p.223.

of a dragon-fly and Diamond has lost, temporarily, his awe of her:

"You darling!" said Diamond, seeing what a lovely little toy-woman she was.

"Don't be impertinent, Master Diamond," said North Wind. (NW., 54)

Here she sounds very like Anodos' Fairy Grandmother who chided Anodos for his preoccupation with size. (Ph., 17)

As has become his custom, MacDonald introduces us to North Wind by means of a lengthy and vivid description, placing her at once in an appropriate symbolic context:

Leaning over him was the large beautiful pale face of a woman. Her dark eyes looked a little angry, for they had just begun to flash; but a quivering on her sweet upper lip made her look as if she were going to cry. What was most strange was that away from her head streamed out her black hair in every direction, so that the darkness in the hay-loft looked as if it were made of her hair...her hair began to gather itself out of the darkness, and fell down all about her again, till her face looked out of the midst of it like a moon out of a cloud. From her eyes came all the light by which Diamond saw her face and her hair; and that was all he did see of her yet. (NW., 18)

MacDonald has remained true to his fairy-tale medium; he has given us an almost surrealistic vision of the manner in which a child perceives, focusing on hair and eyes.

Definite links may, of course, suggest themselves between North Wind and the good demons we have already studied. The hair has again become an important aspect of a numinous character. North Wind's hair so far resembles the protective leaves of the Beech-Maiden that she is later able to weave of it a nest for Diamond where he nestles like a small bird. (NW., 38-40). North Wind's hair, however, has become so much a part of the

elements, as to suggest that she is somehow one with nature. Eyes "flash" out of her pale face. MacDonald would seem to agree with the adage that the eyes are "the windows of the soul". Accordingly his good demons' eyes "flash" or sparkle or mourn, indicating inner vitality and emotion. Although North Wind's eyes are dark, rather than the usual blue or gray, they provide light like a lantern around her. If the darkness in the hayloft would seem to be actually made out of her hair, her eyes may be the stars. North Wind's voice is like all manner of musical instruments without any of the small faults which each instrument includes with its excellences. (NW., 58) In effect, she combines the protective and awe-inspiring qualities of the elementary aspect of the Feminine with the poetic and musical qualities of the Anima.

North Wind is in many respects, a more powerful demon than any we have met in Phantastes. She is capable of changing not only her size, as was Anodos' Fairy Grandmother, but also her shape and very identity. Among other pseudonyms, she is the "old woman that sweeps the cobwebs from the sky". (NW., 40) In a particularly interesting episode, she appears to Nanny in a dream (and there must be a great deal of significance in that!) as the mistress of the moon whose bees "gather their honey from the sun and the stars." (NW., 237) Neumann again provides some explanation of the meaning of this unusual passage. It is, after all, more usual for modern readers to associate the moon with "the man in the moon".

The beehive is an attribute of the Great Goddess as Demeter-Ceres-Spes. But the bee is also associated with the moon: the priestesses of the moon goddess were called "bees", and it was believed that all honey came from the moon, the hive whose bees were the stars.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Erich Neumann, p.267.

When Nanny loses some of North Wind's bees she is committing a far graver offense than she supposes. She has not the insight to understand the meaning of her dream, just as she cannot truly appreciate the worth of little Diamond.

At another point, North Wind becomes a cat, and then, in turn, a hunting-leopard, a jaguar, and a Bengal tiger. These are, of course, all creatures of beauty and agility, as well as terror. In addition, if one links these feline images with eyes that "flash" and glow in the dark, one is faced with another attribute of the Feminine and a further link to the imagery of the moon. The cat is a nocturnal being "with eyes that are believed to become roundest at the full moon."<sup>15</sup> In one of her guises, North Wind appears as a wolf to frighten a negligent nurse; again she is a mighty storm at sea sinking a great ship with many people on board. Neither of these activities seem to please either Diamond or herself. It is this need to manifest herself in unpopular ways that first alerts us to North Wind's ambiguous nature:

I have to shape myself various ways to various people. But the heart of me is true. People call me by dreadful names, and think they know all about me. But they don't. Sometimes they call me Bad Fortune, sometimes Evil Chance, sometimes Ruin; and they have another name for me which they think the most dreadful of all. (NW., 282)

It is this sense of the compulsion that North Wind feels that brings her beyond the fairy-tale and dream archetype into the realm of MacDonald's theological beliefs. It also illustrates the exact nature of the word "demon" as we are using it. North Wind is not herself a god,

---

<sup>15</sup>Erich Neumann, p.220.

(MacDonald has not after all feminized God) but a supernatural force who is doing someone else's work. If the name for her which is the most dreadful of all is Death, she becomes the embodiment of MacDonald's theory as to how a kind and just God can allow suffering:

I can do nothing cruel, although I often do what looks like cruel to those who do not know what I really am doing. The people they say I drown, I only carry away to...the back of the North Wind. (NW., 53)

In MacDonald's view, human suffering is only something which we cannot understand since our limited life-span prohibits mortals from understanding God's plan which must stretch throughout Eternity. The death which is Diamond's at his final journey to the back of the North Wind, makes his a happier ending, ultimately, than has been Anodos' who must return to life and wait to die again. The coldness of North Wind's hand is the coldness of Death, but, as Vane will find later in Lilith, "It was cold, but so pleasant and full of life, it was better than warm." (NW., 34) The "far-off song" that North Wind hears through all the noise of life and death (NW., 65) is the promise of the "great good [that] is coming." (Ph., 182)

Nancy-Lou Patterson has noticed that the "Great Mother" figure in MacDonald's fantasies is nearly always accompanied by some dwelling or "womb-hut", symbol of protecting and nourishing.<sup>16</sup> Sigman has linked the "ancient woman in the cottage that was four-square" (Ph., 182) with Christ and the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelations.<sup>17</sup> Through the doors of her cottage the Wise Woman has sent Anodos into the purification and peace that come with experience of guilt and atonement. North Wind, who is unusual in that she has no dwelling with which she is associated, now

---

<sup>16</sup>Nancy-Lou Patterson, p.17.

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Sigman, p.223.

actually becomes the door itself through which Diamond penetrates the country at the back of the North Wind:

"What do you want to do yourself?"

"I want to go into the country at your back."

"Then you must go through me."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean just what I say. You must walk on as if

I were an open door, and go right through me."

...Diamond walked towards her instantly. When he reached her knees, he put out his hand to lay it on her, but nothing was there save an intense cold. He walked on. Then all grew white about him; and the cold stung him like fire. He walked on still, groping through the whiteness. It thickened about him. At last, it got into his heart, and he lost all sense.

(NW., 90)

If the country at the back of the North Wind is Paradise, as would seem the case, then North Wind is even more closely associated with Jesus than the Wise Woman for she is "the way" to the country at her back. Jesus has said; "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."<sup>18</sup>

In The Princess and the Goblin and its sequel The Princess and Curdie the same major characters are present in stories that are nevertheless radically different in tone. Because the two stories are so different, some outline of the separate plots must be given in order to distinguish the stories for discussion purposes. In The Princess and the Goblin Princess Irene lives in a castle situated over a vast network of caves inhabited by goblins. The goblins are really degenerate humans who have retreated below ground in order to develop a very material culture far from the light of day. Tension between the goblins, who come above-ground only at night, and the human population has become so great that Irene is forbidden to venture

---

<sup>18</sup>John 14:6.



out-of-doors after dark. During the course of the story little Irene meets two characters: a miner-boy named Curdie and a supernatural being who identifies herself as Queen Irene, little Irene's great-great-grandmother. Eventually Irene and Curdie, lost in the labyrinth of the goblin kingdom, are led to light and safety by a thread that has been specially woven by the elder Irene. Even though Irene and Curdie now appear safe, the goblins attack and invade the castle. After their defeat the goblin kingdom is destroyed by a mighty flood.

In The Princess and Curdie, written some seven years later, Irene, Curdie and Queen Irene are still the major characters, but emphasis at first shifts to Curdie. He has lost much of the faith and belief in Queen Irene he had gained by the end of the first novel. However, after he has shot one of her pigeons, he becomes re-acquainted with the Queen, who sends him on a mission to save the princess and her father. The villains in this story are the human servants and ministers of the king who are slowly poisoning him in order to gain power. With Queen Irene's help, Curdie and the princess conquer the enemy in a battle in which they are aided by grotesque animals. Horrible vengeance is then meted out to the fallen through the agency of these same monsters. Irene and Curdie marry and rule the kingdom with honesty and integrity. However, after their deaths the people of Gwyntystorm forget their precepts and return to a materialistic outlook. They so weaken their city's foundation by digging mines that Gwyntystorm eventually sinks from the sight of man.

It is possible to see the differences of tone between the two books as some sort of darkening of MacDonald's vision. Naturally Wolff subscribes

to this view:

The Princess and Curdie, MacDonald's last sustained effort at a fairy-tale, shows him in an apocalyptic mood, striking out at what he hates, and convinced that evil triumphs in the end.<sup>19</sup>

It would seem to me, however, that the difference is more one of purpose than failure-of-vision. The Princess and the Goblin is simply (although this is never really an apt word in MacDonald!) a children's fairy-tale. Curdie, however, is a political and social satire. It is this that Reis sees as its greatest strength:

...its picture of a corrupt society is penetrating and effective. The work's chief symbolic significance lies in its implicit treatment of political and civic corruption...<sup>20</sup>

In a theological sense, the two stories may be linked by the theme of baptism, although the form of baptism is different. In The Goblin the mighty flood which destroys the evil goblins may be likened to baptism by water. This theme is particularly clear in the scene in which little Irene is plunged into a bottomless silver bath where "she felt more than happy - perfectly blissful." (PG., 420) In the sequel, however, Curdie must be purified by thrusting his arms into Queen Irene's burning roses and evil must be overcome by force of arms. The significance of the burning roses will be investigated in greater detail later; at this point it should be sufficient to say that they are linked with "baptism by fire", always a more painful ordeal than baptism by water.

---

<sup>19</sup> Robert Lee Wolff, p.176.

<sup>20</sup> Richard H. Reis, p.82.

Although the two stories are vastly different types of work, Queen Irene remains fundamentally the same. Her character as developed in Curdie is a logical extension of her appearances in The Goblin. As was North Wind, she is the only really supernatural figure present and she bears many traces of the Great Mother as we have seen her portrayed elsewhere in MacDonald. Nancy-Lou Patterson has seen Queen Irene as being primarily identifiable with the Virgin Mary, particularly as she was described in such apparitions as that of Saint Bernadette of Lourdes.<sup>21</sup> However, while Queen Irene and the Virgin Mary (as she appeared in mediaeval art and literature) have many common elements, it is far more likely that both evolved from a single archetypal root, rather than that one is a development of the other. The mediaeval conception of Mary is after all graced with many of the attributes of the Mother Goddess and she has in fact become an example of the archetype adapted to a particular cultural context. The historical Mary has through the centuries become almost lost behind the various symbolic and theological masks constructed for her.

Queen Irene has many characteristics in common with other demonic figures. Like Anodos' Fairy Grandmother and North Wind, she is capable of changing her appearance at will. This is, of course, a fairly basic attribute of the Mother Goddess. Like the Wise Woman in Phantastes great age is one of her most comforting characteristics, imparting a sense both of wisdom and security. For little Irene "her eyes looked so wise that you could not have helped seeing she must be old". (PG., 308) For Curdie she becomes "plainly very old, but as grand as she [is] old." (PC., 486) At

---

<sup>21</sup>Nancy-Lou Patterson, p.15.

heart, though, she is "a woman of three-and-twenty" (PG., 375), her perpetual youth signifying eternal innocence and placing her in the age-bracket of which MacDonald was so fond.

Again, like North Wind, her appearance in various guises causes her to be misunderstood by many. For some she is

Old Mother Wotherwop...a withered old woman, so old  
and so withered that she [is] as thin as a sieve  
with a lamp behind it...never seen except at night,  
and when something terrible [has] taken place, or  
[is] going to take place. (PC., 491)

Though it is not as expressly stated as it was in North Wind, the implication is there that she is somehow compelled to assume these unpopular guises in order to accomplish her task. True believers, however, will always be able to penetrate to her essential being:

But those who know me well, know me whatever new  
dress or shape or name I may be in. (PC., 501)

As Patterson has stated, Queen Irene's hair is as essential an indication of her numinousness as was North Wind's. In this respect MacDonald has given Irene an added fillip since the changing appearance of her hair serves as a barometer to the viewer's degree of belief in her. Thus as little Irene learns to trust more and more in the power and goodness of her grandmother, she sees the Queen's hair as first "white as snow" (PG., 308), then shining "like silver" (PG., 310) and finally "a rich golden colour." (PG., 375) Similarly in the second book, Curdie imagines that Queen Irene's hair changes from grey to gold as he regains his faith in her. Significantly, the Queen's hair streams "like a cataract, here falling in dull gathered heaps, there rushing away in smooth shining falls." (PG., 375) The repeated association of her hair with water is another link

with the theme of baptism by water, which I have already mentioned.

Thus far Queen Irene has exhibited traits making of her a character almost interchangeable with other fairy creatures we have seen. She is associated very closely, however, with several symbols which are so emphasized as to distinguish her clearly. These include the spinning wheel, the rose, the moon, the pigeon, and the jewel, and must be explored at some length in order to make a clearer assessment of Irene's significance.

We have, of course, already seen a good demonic figure at work spinning. The Wise Woman in Phantastes spins during Anodos' sojourn in her four-square house, and during his dramatic passages through her four doors. Neumann has associated spinning and weaving with the Great Mother who weaves the web of Fate and, in the context of Phantastes, this would seem a sufficient interpretation. However, Queen Irene seems at first to spend all her time spinning and, as was not the case with the Wise Woman, the actual result of her effort is emphasized. The thread Queen Irene spins for her granddaughter is magically enclosed in a ring, ready for use when needed. It is by means of following this thread that the princess first locates Curdie in the goblin kingdom and then leads him to safety. A note on the goblin kingdom should be interjected at this point. The goblin dwellings are repeatedly referred to as "caverns" and the cave, by virtue of its womb-like shape, is traditionally an attribute of the Great Mother. However, since the goblin caves are all completely underground, they actually take on the character of an underground labyrinth, and this is a completely different matter. The labyrinth is traditionally associated with the underworld, as well as the negative aspects of the unconscious.

An obvious parallel may be drawn between Irene and Curdie's story and the Ariadne-Theseus legend. The dread minotaur with its bull-like head suspended on a human body has been transformed into the goblin who is itself a perverted human. It must be repeated, however, that in MacDonald's version of the story particular emphasis is placed on the magic thread which leads the children to safety. Curdie, in his early cynicism, cannot at first even see the thread. It is only as his faith in Queen Irene's reality and power grows that he can at last see and feel it. Moreover, it requires a great deal of faith on little Irene's part to follow the thread into what seems certain danger. If the minotaur-goblins represent the "annihilating influence of the grave"<sup>22</sup>, then only the thread of faith has rescued Curdie and the princess. In The Princess and the Goblin, then, Queen Irene's spinning produces a thread which proves ultimately to be the gift of faith.

In The Princess and Curdie, Queen Irene is again busily at work, but the emphasis seems to have shifted. Her spinning-wheel is now a teaching medium, recalling to Curdie certain childhood lessons:

...his mother's spinning-wheel had been his governess long ago and still taught him things. It was the spinning-wheel that first taught him to make verses, and to sing, and to think whether all was right within him. (PC., 479-480)

In an almost direct quotation from The Gospel According to St. John<sup>23</sup>, MacDonald compares the music of Queen Irene's wheel to "the music of an Aeolian harp blown upon by the wind that bloweth where it listeth." (PC., 508) "Wind" is a traditional metaphor for "spirit" and, in a Biblical context,

<sup>22</sup> Erich Neumann, p.174.

<sup>23</sup> John 3:8.

for the "Spirit of God." North Wind herself may thus be seen to have become an emblem for the Spirit of God by virtue of her name. Now Irene teaches Curdie to distinguish right from wrong and to appreciate the beauties of song by the sound of a wheel that recalls God's Spirit. The spinning-wheel, as tutor, is augmented by the burning roses whose flames so purify Curdie's hands that he can feel the type of creature a person really is through his hand-clasp. In this book, then, Queen Irene's gift would seem to be wisdom, so that after reading both books one must connect her with both faith and wisdom.

I have very briefly linked Irene's burning roses with the gift of wisdom. The rose, however, is a symbol of almost infinite possibility. For centuries the rose has been a particularly European symbol, as, for example, in the "War of the Roses", so named for the white rose of York and the red of Lancaster. It seems probable that this type of use of the rose-as-symbol stems from earlier archetypal and mythological connotations. All flowers are the property of the Great Mother, but the rose has achieved particular prominence. Among the ancient Romans it was linked with Venus, goddess of love, and was the symbol for victory, pride and triumphant love. Christianity adopted this association and expanded it to illustrate a Christian theme. According to St. Ambrose the rose grew in Paradise without thorns. After the fall of man it took thorns upon itself in order to remind man of his sins and his fall from grace, while its beauty and fragrance could continue to remind him of Paradise. For this reason, the Virgin Mary came to be known as a "rose without thorns" because she was

exempt from original sin.<sup>24</sup>

Queen Irene's roses are unique in that they are both red and burning. In The Goblin, where purification was primarily by water, Queen Irene felt her roses to be too powerful for the princess. In Curdie, however, both Curdie and the princess's father are healed and purified by the roses' flames. If the rose is love and Queen Irene is equated with the Spirit of God, then the agony that Curdie and the King must undergo to achieve salvation would appear to be somehow mitigated by divine love. In other words, baptism by fire is an ordeal that must hurt in order to heal. This interpretation echoes North Wind's explanation that her "cruelty" only seems cruel because mortals cannot understand it completely.

Although it is not brought to our attention quite so often as her roses, Queen Irene's lamp is another very interesting feature of her characterization. This lamp, which serves as a signal to the initiated, is a "great globe of light, shining like the purest silver." (PG., 456) We are so far meant to identify this lamp with the moon, that one of the later chapter headings refers to the queen as "Mistress of the Silver Moon". (PC., 478) We have already noted the unusual episode in North Wind where North Wind appears to Nanny in a dream as mistress of the moon. The moon, it must be remembered, is an essential attribute of the Feminine by virtue of its shape (round, containing) and its association with the dark mysteries of night. For the Romantics, the moon was to become a symbol for the Imagination. In this context Irene's guiding "globe of light" might be

---

<sup>24</sup>George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.20.



interpreted as the feminine creative faculty leading the faithful through the darkness of materiality and disbelief.

Another feature linking Queen Irene to the feminine archetype is her flock of "pigeons". Almost any reader who has completed both tales is left with the impression that these white birds are in fact doves and not pigeons. There is reason to believe that MacDonald's generation would have used the terms "pigeon" and "dove" almost interchangeably.<sup>25</sup> As the Great Mother is associated with all flowers, so she is associated with all birds as being emblematic of fertility. The bird has also come to signify "transcendence", as a concrete symbol for the ability of the spirit to soar above earthly constraints.<sup>26</sup> Once again, as the rose has gathered to itself peculiar significance, so too has the dove. It was linked to the Great Love Goddess of Asia Minor, India, Crete and Greece.<sup>27</sup> Christianity has adopted it as a symbol not only for purity and peace, but more particularly for the Holy Ghost.

Queen Irene's doves recall to us in their beauty obvious parallels with the doves of the love goddess, but it is not difficult to see in them Christian meaning as well. For example, after the great flood has destroyed the goblin realms one of these white birds descends "with outstretched wings, [making] one circle round the king and Curdie and the princess". (PG., 456)

---

<sup>25</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. (1910), XXVII, 595.

<sup>26</sup> It will be noted that MacDonald seems to be using aspects of both the elementary and transformative character in Irene.

<sup>27</sup> Erich Neumann, p.141n.

Surely MacDonald intends to suggest echoes of the dove which descended to Noah after that other flood in order to signify God's pledge of peace. In the sequel, the Queen's doves accompany her into battle and help her to conquer the enemies of Curdie and the princess. In a story, one of whose themes is baptism by fire, it is appropriate that symbols of the Holy Ghost should actually do battle for the children of righteousness.

Unlike the other fairy women we have studied whose dress was characterized by spartan simplicity, Queen Irene appears wearing a variety of precious gems. In various episodes she is adorned with pearls, opals, diamonds, rubies and emeralds. It is possible, of course, that much of this flash and glitter is designed to appeal to a youthful audience, but there may be some deeper meaning. According to Jungian theory stones appear as frequent images of the Self "because they are complete - i.e. unchanging and lasting".<sup>28</sup> The mathematical symmetry of precious gems would suggest a comforting spirit of order even in the natural world. This type of meaning would seem to bear little relation to Queen Irene were it not for the fact that she appears in all these glittering jewels only after Irene, and later Curdie, has truly begun to believe in her. It may be applying too analytical an emphasis to suggest that the gems imply that only the faithful can discover their true selves - the selves that God sees.

Whatever the reader's personal feelings about some of the implications of the symbols associated with Queen Irene, it would be difficult to deny that she is a very complex and absorbing demon. Building

---

<sup>28</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, "The Process of Individuation", in Carl G. Jung, ed., Man and His Symbols (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp.158-229.

on the common elements of the archetype MacDonald has made of her what I consider to be his most unique demonic creation to this point.

MacDonald's last fantasy, Lilith, witnesses a return to the type of large female cast we found in Phantastes. All evil forces are concentrated in the Lilith of the title and in a vague male being called the "Shadow". (The "Shadow" here has a different meaning than did Anodos'). The female forces for "good", however, are shared among three primary characters: the Eve of Genesis; Lona, a child-like figure; and Mara, a mysterious woman of the desert.

Since MacDonald deals here with a more overtly Christian theme, Eve, Mara and Lona have necessarily less of the fairy-tale about them than had North Wind or Queen Irene. They do not spin or wear jewels, or change into tiny fairy women. They are still "pale" and wear white robes, but MacDonald seems to find it more necessary to tell us what we are to make of this, rather than to suggest it. Eve, like earlier fairy heroines, is dressed in white, but it is her eyes, more particularly than her hair which signify her supernatural powers. All of MacDonald's heroines are possessed of eyes that bear witness to their vitality and goodness, but Eve's are the most splendid of all:

The life of her face and her whole person was gathered and concentrated in her eyes, where it became light. It might have been coming death that made her face luminous, but the eyes had life in them for a nation - large, and dark with a darkness ever deepening as I gazed. A whole night-heaven lay condensed in each pupil; all the stars were in its blackness, and flashed; while round it for a horizon lay coiled an iris of the eternal twilight. What any eye is, God only knows: her eyes must have been coming direct out of his own! the still face might be a primeval perfection; the live eyes were a continuous creation.

(L., 209)

Where MacDonald would never have been so direct before, he is now telling us that Eve, with her penetrating eyes, is a direct link to God. Later Eve's loveliness is said to "flash ...like that of Beatrice in the white rose of the redeemed." (L., 212-3) An earlier MacDonald would, I think, have only suggested the parallel. Eve really remains for us only a cipher; she is totally good, but remains relatively impersonal. Vane is never alone with her and, consequently, we are given no real flavour of her personality. Eve remains an awe-inspiring and distant figure; for all her beauty, her gaze can hurt:

Her beauty was overpowering; I was glad when  
she turned it from me. (L., 213)

Lona, Lilith's daughter and Vane's child-bride, is a step-sister of the Marble Lady. She is not really an enchantress, but seems like Vane to be at the mercy of powers greater than herself. Although it is she with whom Vane wishes to live in eternity, few of the sexual images that characterized other figures are associated with her:

I hardly remembered my mother, but in my mind's  
eye she now looked like Lona; and if I imagined  
sister or child, invariably she had the face of  
Lona! (L., 346)

Lona, who has "become almost a woman, but not one beauty of childhood [has] she outgrown" (L., 346), would seem to embody perfect innocence.

If Eve is the awe-inspiring and beautiful presence of God, and Lona is perfect innocence, then "Mara, Mother of Sorrow" (L., 373) is mercy and repentance. She is easily the most interesting and fully developed good demon in Lilith. Her supernatural powers are centred in two symbols: her huge white cat, Astarte, and the veil she must wear to conceal her

glorious beauty. Some of the implications of cat imagery have already been explored in connection with North Wind. While North Wind, however, appeared only momentarily in cat-form, Mara's cat is given some prominence here. Astarte is noted especially for the constant vigilance with which she stalks Lilith in her panther-like manifestation, and for the steady endurance which allows her to gain mastery over a larger adversary. Both of these qualities are of course very Christian virtues. Mara's other symbol, the veil, is also given great play. The veil is a very traditional symbol for the concealment of "certain aspects of the truth or deity".<sup>29</sup> In a Christian context, it is said that Moses' face shone so brightly after his descent from Mount Sinai that he was forced to cover his face with a veil since his people could not bear his splendour. Mara's shrouded beauty suggests that she too has had some sort of direct contact with God and is thus a fit intermediary between God and man. It is in fact she who ultimately tortures Lilith into capitulating to God's will. This benign torture recalls the "cruelty" which North Wind must practice in order to accomplish her task. It must also be remembered that many fear Mara as the dread "Cat-Woman", misunderstanding her true nature. The sterner side of Mara is softened by her weeping; she is as beautiful as Eve, but more softly and tenderly so:

She reminded me not a little of the sexton's wife, although the one looked as if she had not wept for thousands of years, and the other as if she wept constantly behind the wrappings of her beautiful head. (L., 259)

---

<sup>29</sup> C.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage. 2d ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1973), p.359.

If Eve and Mara are different aspects of the Great Mother, then Lona is the inspiring Anima; just as for Anodos these same roles were played by the Wise Woman and the Beech-Maiden as Mother, and the Marble Lady as Anima. This use of a larger cast is a reversal of the trend to concentrate all supernatural powers in one character such as North Wind or Queen Irene. It is possible to see this reversal as another proof that MacDonald had become a prey to pessimism. One might ask whether he now found it necessary to employ three good demons in order to conquer one evil one. It is far more probable that this change can be accounted for by recalling the fact that we are shifting between adult and children's fantasy and back again. In North Wind and Queen Irene, MacDonald has given us figures entirely suited to interaction with child-heroes. Although they exhibit traces of the Anima, they are primarily Mother figures. Anodos and Vane, however, are both adult heroes with whom it is appropriate that a wide range of figures should react in all the relationships open to adults. The roles of mother, lover, and sister cannot be satisfactorily sustained by one figure. Eve, Lona and Mara may not be individually as interesting as North Wind or Queen Irene, but together they equal a cast that is "realistic" within the parameters of adult fantasy.

We have by now grown to recognize and admire the manner in which MacDonald has taken the archetypal figure and embroidered it with the theological and mythological allusions which suit his purposes. The techniques necessary to conjure for the reader the image of an archetype are much the same as those involved in caricature. The figures in MacDonald's fantasies are larger than life; they speak in proverbs and

prophecies; they exhibit one or two striking character traits only. This technique works admirably.

This sort of treatment is not, however, appropriate for establishing character in realistic fiction. It is MacDonald's inability to capture the art of realistic character depiction which accounts for much of the tedium of the Scottish novels for the modern reader. In Malcolm and The Marquis of Lossie, the blind piper Duncan MacPhail, with his peculiar dialect and dreadful habit of referring to himself as "she", is enough to make even the most sympathetic reader cringe whenever he appears.

Where the fantasies had large and complex female casts, the fiction novels show really very few women in any depth. This is, after all, a man's world of activity. Only two female figures of goodness are shown us with any regularity: Miss Horn and Clementina. Malcolm's half-sister Florimel is transformed from an ignorant but well-meaning girl to a proud and haughty hypocrite. Her somewhat too miraculous final repentance is not enough to bring her to the side of the angels. Miss Horn almost works, simply because we see so little of her. She is meant to be the prototype of the bluff old maid whose gruff exterior hides a warm heart. Unfortunately, her oft-repeated "It's a God's mercy I hae no feelins'" (M., 3), which is meant to be an ironic clue to her character, is repeated once too often for effect.

It is, however, in sketching the motivations of Clementina that MacDonald fails most miserably. At our first introduction to her, she is chastising Malcolm for cruelty to his animal and we are meant to feel that she is most unfair in judging Malcolm without having all the evidence or

background. Really, though, Malcolm's behaviour would make it hard for anyone not to misjudge him. Later her scholarship in philosophy and ethics under the tutorship of a raw young fisherman seems highly improbable. Part of this is, of course, the fault of MacDonald's theme. While he would ostensibly be saying that a person's inner worth should outweigh all considerations of rank, his heart does not really seem to be in it. We know all along that Malcolm, the humble fisherman, is really a marquis.

Even given this sociological slip, we could understand Clementina's love more easily were Malcolm not such a disgustingly pure preacher. He seems to have become the vehicle whereby MacDonald can "take possession of the stage."

Clementina's own internal dialogues touching upon Malcolm's religious beliefs and her own unwilling interest in them are laboured:

If what he says be true! - It opens another and higher life. - What a man he is! and so young! - Has he not convicted me of feebleness and folly, and made me ashamed of myself? - What better thing could man or woman do for another than lower her in her own haughty eyes, and give her a chance of becoming such as she had but dreamed of the shadow of? (ML., 196)

It is far more likely that a real woman would find Clementina's gentle hint that Malcolm is "a little long-winded" (ML., 197) to be a grave understatement.

MacDonald cannot be entirely blamed for this treatment of the feelings of the heroine since it falls within the boundaries of Victorian convention. However, the predilection his characters show for preaching, as well as their habit of speaking in clichés, makes his realistic characters far less interesting and memorable figures.



CHAPTER IV

## THE EVIL DEMON

Lurking in the "collective unconscious" are aspects of the Feminine which can pervert and annihilate. As it is necessary for the balanced psyche to recognize and deal with the unconscious, it is also necessary to guard against too much infatuation with it. According to Jung, the active consciousness shows regression to immaturity and fear of reality when it seeks to sink too deeply into the numbing and comforting protection of the unconscious.

In archetypal terms, the "Good Mother" and the "Anima" are opposed by the "Terrible Mother" and the "Enchantress" who are, as it were, their own mirror images soured by self-serving venom:

...the Archetypal Feminine is not only a giver and protector of life but, as container, also holds fast and takes back; she is the goddess of life and death at once.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as the "Good Mother" is characterized by images of both protection and generation, particularly the womb and womb-shaped objects, the "Terrible Mother" is characterized by images of death and devouring - the threatening maw and hideous sexuality of Kali. As the "Good Mother" is the earth that bears fruit, the "Terrible Mother" is the earth that is our grave and the tree that becomes our casket. So, too, as the Anima leads man to heights of inspiration and progress, the Enchantress lures man to evil with a beauty that is false. As the Anima is chaste, beautiful and young, the Enchantress, behind her lovely façade, is promiscuous, ugly and

---

<sup>1</sup>Erich Neumann, p.45.

old.

In Phantastes the hero Anodos encounters one example of each of these figures, and it is a symptom of his psychic immaturity that he is initially unable to tell the evil from the good, the false from the true. The Ogress, who functions as the "Terrible Mother", lives in a dwelling that seems at first glance to be an example of the protective hut common to the "Good Mother". It will be remembered that the "woman with fairy blood" lived in a hut set amid oaks, "so built that the stems of four great trees formed its corners, while their branches met and intertwined over its roof, heaping a great cloud of leaves over it, up towards the heavens". (Ph., 22) The visual image projected is of a veritable church of nature. Moreover, the Oak, which has already been designated a 'trustworthy' tree, was first sacred to the Druids and later absorbed into Christianity as an emblem for Jesus and Mary.<sup>2</sup> The symmetry of the four-walled building was later repeated in the "four-square" hut of the Wise Woman, the significance of which we have already seen.

MacDonald, while maintaining a deceptive resemblance, has provided a few clues to the real nature of the place. The ogress lives in a "long, low hut, built with one end against a single tall cypress, which rose like a spire to the building". (Ph., 62) This dwelling is not only asymmetrical, but also nestles against the cypress, a tree which has always symbolized death<sup>3</sup>, and which now suggests a phallic (and thus disturbingly male) visual image. The "little half-open door" and lack of windows, its dimness

---

<sup>2</sup>George Ferguson, p.18.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 15.

and the "lamp burning with a dim, reddish flame" (Ph., 62) all suggest claustrophobic enclosure.

The ogress herself is very quietly frightening:

...her face was sallow and slightly forbidding. Her forehead was high, and her black eyes repressedly quiet. (Ph., 63)

In contrast, then, with the woman of virtue, whose complexion is always pale, the ogress is "sallow" and her eyes, which should be the sparkling witnesses of her soul, are "quiet", blank as death. At last, unfortunately too late, her mouth "full of long, white, shining teeth" (Ph., 64) identifies her to Anodos as the ogress.

Her doctrine is the very antithesis of MacDonald's own:

So, then, as darkness had no beginning, neither will it ever have an end. So, then, is it eternal. The negation of aught else, is its affirmation. Where the light cannot come, there abideth the darkness. (Ph., 62)

If God is the light,<sup>4</sup> then the ogress is effectively linked to the powers of darkness; the shadow she sets loose on Anodos is both the wilfulness and cynicism of one who rejects God and His simple joy in beauty.

As the ogress is the dark side of the Wise Woman, the Alder Maiden is the false and alluring alter-ego of the Marble Lady. Her depiction is much more frankly horrible and disgusting, both to Anodos and to the reader, because of the personal and sexual relationship she has with the hero. Much of the self-loathing and blame Anodos feels attaches to the fact that his fall was not without ample warning. The daughter of the "woman with fairy blood" has been very explicit: "The Alder will smother you with her web of hair, if you let her near you at night." (Ph., 21) Anodos has also

---

<sup>4</sup>John I:4.

read the story of Sir Percivale of the "roasty armour" who has been beguiled by the "damosel of the Alder-tree...with her fair words and false countenance". (Ph., 25) It is this disappointment in self which is at the root of so much of the bitterness attached to the Alder Maiden episode.

This "walking Death" (Ph., 54) first appears to Anodos in the guise of the Marble Lady, a "form of perfect loveliness" who seems "as if the light of the rose-lamp shone through her...such a delicate shade of pink seemed to shadow what in itself must be a marbly whiteness of hue." (Ph., 53) Unfortunately, would he but notice, her eyes are also shaded with the same pink - she has neither the paleness of virtue nor the lively eyes of the true soul. She, too, would seem to dwell in a cave, that eternal symbol of the female protective womb; but, whereas the Marble Lady lay in a clean shelter, "all the angles rounded away with rich moss, and every ledge and projection crowded with lovely ferns" (Ph., 43), the Alder's cave is "festooned and draperied with all kinds of green that cling to shady rocks". (Ph., 53) MacDonald has, while maintaining the semblance of beauty for his hero, suggested most skillfully and subtly the slime and weeds of stagnant pools.

This tinge of unhealthiness culminates in the Alder Maiden's unchaste behaviour, her sexual aggression toward Anodos setting off faint alarms even while he is most enchanted:

Yet, if I would have confessed it, there was something either in the sound of the voice, although it seemed sweetness itself, or else in this yielding which awaited no gradation of gentle approaches, that did not vibrate harmoniously with the beat of my inward music. (Ph., 51)

That Anodos succumbs to sexual union with the Alder is an inference that

most readers now make, despite Anodos' declaration: "What followed I cannot clearly remember" (Ph., 53). With hind-sight, it seems just as obvious that his memory lapse concerning the Beech Maiden ("I know nothing more that passed" Ph., 40) masks a similar episode. The Beech, however, has never played him false. In fact, the theft of the wreath of her hair-leaves by the Alder Maiden symbolizes a sexual betrayal on his part that only heightens Anodos' shame.

In the morning, the Alder has lost the last shred of her femininity. She is now an "it", a "horrible object":

It looked like an open coffin set up on one end; only that the part for the head and neck was defined from the shoulder-part. In fact, it was a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree. It had arms, which were only slightly seamed, down from the shoulder-blade by the elbow, as if the bark had healed again from the cut of a knife. But the arms moved, and the hands and fingers were tearing asunder a long silky tress of hair. The thing turned round - it had for a face and front those of my enchantress, but now of a pale greenish hue in the light of the morning, and with dead lustreless eyes. (Ph., 53-4)

In her greenish complexion and dead eyes, the Alder is now the complete antithesis of a true MacDonald heroine. She now combines elements of both "Enchantress" and the "Terrible Mother" and has become the grave itself, the swallowing and burying aspect of the Feminine. Her ultimate sin lies in betraying Anodos, after she has seduced him, to the dread Ash-demon. It is tempting to believe that MacDonald was aware that in Norse mythology the first man and woman were made from the Ash and the Alder trees.<sup>5</sup> If he did know the legend, the Ash and the Alder may be

---

<sup>5</sup> Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, ed. Maria Leach (New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1972), p.34.

meant to suggest some insane perversion of the Adam and Eve figures. At any rate, the Alder who feeds upon the love of men is definitely the perversion of the Marble Lady about whom we have already noticed a slight suggestion of vampirism. The Alder is, as well, so closely associated with the Ash that she must be tainted with the hint of vampirism on his account, for Anodos has already said of him that the Ash recalled to mind "what [he] had heard of vampires." (Ph., 36) Consequently, then, the Alder is by association a vampire and the vampire is the perfect antithesis of the Anima. As the Anima leads man on to discover finer moral and intellectual qualities within himself, the vampire feeds upon and destroys his vitality. It is a symptom of Anodos' moral and psychic illness at this point that, although he now recognizes the Alder for "a living, walking sepulchre, faithless, deluding, traitorous" (Ph., 55), he yet feels that she is beautiful. It is only through the aid of the Wise Woman and a noble renunciation of the Marble Lady in favour of "a better man" that he can face and overcome this flaw in himself.

In one figure, the Alder Maiden has been made to stand as both a specific threatening character in a specific tale and an archetypal figure of devouring sexuality and unchasteness. As well, with her paper-thin facade of beauty, she may be seen as a political and social satire on sham values. Any number of other significances may be read into this one figure.

At the Back of the North Wind and the two Princess books contain no evil female characters of truly demonic proportions. We are given glimpses of a few human women: the negligent nurse and the drunkenly

cruel Old Sal in North Wind, the proud Lootie and wicked servants in the Princess books. The Queen of the Goblins is interesting with her cement shoes which hide six toes on each foot, but her power lies only in her shoes and she does not appear to stand for much more than pride and lack of imagination. Lina, the misshapen beast with "the soft, neat little hand of a child" (PC., 513), would seem to have fallen to her present condition through evil deeds, but is now only a force for good. She now slides "through the servants like a shapeless terror through a guilty mind". (PC., 566)

It is in Lilith that we are given the ultimate embodiment of an evil demonic force in female form. As Queen Irene combined both elementary and transformative aspects, Lilith is alternately "Terrible Mother" and "Enchantress". A recounting of the Lilith myth provides useful background to MacDonald's adaptation of the legend. According to apocryphal Jewish lore, Lilith was Adam's first true wife, created not from his rib, but like him from the dust. Considering herself to be his equal, she refused to submit to him and left him. Thereafter God gave Adam a second wife created from his own flesh. Eve, the second wife, was duly submissive (up to a point!) and, after the Fall, bore Adam's children. However, Lilith, who had never eaten of the forbidden fruit, was not visited with the mortality that was the punishment for Adam and Eve's transgression:

...she became an immortal spirit, the perpetual enemy of the children of Eve...During the Middle Ages, Lilith became a demon of folklore, changed from an enemy of children to a woman who appeared to men in their sleep and seduced them.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Richard H. Reis, p.99.

MacDonald has, of course, capitalized on both the enemy-of-children and succuba faces of Lilith. She was for him a ready-made figure who combined all the elements of Biblical warning and fairy-tale witch. Whether or not the entire folklore tradition is relevant to an examination of MacDonald's Lilith, it is important to know that she was regarded as a sort of failed version of Eve. As the Ash and the Alder might be construed as perversions of the Adam and Eve figures, Lilith is yet another link to Eve.

Lilith's extraordinary ability to change her shape at will is another instance of the common demonic tradition. In fact, she appears to Vane in so many disguises that she seems at first to be a veritable host of demonic figures. MacDonald may have meant it as a clue to her eventual defeat that when Vane encounters her in the form of a living corpse, she has for some time been unable to change her form. The "enchantment" which Lilith blames for this failure of her powers is really the influence of Good in her life. Throughout all her changes, our only signal to her real identity is often the dark spot in her side which symbolizes the essential evil at her core. This evil has finally so diseased her being that she herself cannot cast it out, but must instead ask Adam to cut it off with her hand. Lilith's most insidious trick is to appear in the guise of a good and a very beautiful woman, "but with such a pride at once and misery on her countenance" (L., 230) that Vane can hardly believe what he sees. Her eyes are "dead" and, although her long hair shines "a pale gold in the moonlight" (and we have seen so many good demons with shining hair!), it only mixes with the mist. Suddenly she falls to the ground:

A moment more and her legs, hurrying from her body,



sped away serpents. From her shoulders fled her arms as in terror, serpents also. Then something flew up from her like a bat, and when I looked again, she was gone. The ground rose like the sea in a storm; terror laid hold upon me; I turned to the hills and ran. (L., 230)

Lilith is associated with a snake in another way, for Mara tells Vane that it is Lilith's anger at the people of Bulika for killing a huge snake that caused her to close off its water supply. The very image of her closing the water "in an egg" (L., 254) continues the serpent metaphor. The snake, of course, brings to mind the cunning serpent of the Garden of Evil and the temptation of forbidden knowledge. Through the centuries the snake has come to symbolize female cunning as well as the fundamental horror of the "Terrible Mother" whose cycle is self-contained. The serpent at once bears, begets and devours. Lilith herself appears in the Cabala as naked woman whose body terminates in a serpent's tail.<sup>7</sup>

The transfiguration of Lilith into a bat after her snake-limbs have fled, makes of her an object of instinctive horror, a creature of the dark and evil night. If Queen Irene's birds symbolized "transcendence", peace and purity, then Lilith as bat might signify, in her soaring escape, the elusiveness and power of evil.

In her next manifestation, she becomes Death itself, not the good Death of North Wind but a loathsome corpse:

A body it was...and no skeleton, though as nearly one as body could well be. It lay on its side, and was very cold - not cold like a stone, but cold like that which was once alive, and is alive no more. (L., 273)

Vane would seem to have come upon a figure that is very much like Anodos'

---

<sup>7</sup>Gustav Davidson, A Dictionary of Angels: Including the Fallen Angels (New York: Free Press, 1967), p.174.

Marble Lady, but Anodos' "cold lady of the lovely stone" (Ph., 47) is never so cold as Lilith. While Anodos only hints in his song of the possible draining of his vitality by the loved one, Lilith will become the true vampire of nightmare.

Vane, would he pay attention to all the signs, might be forewarned. The corpse-like body has hair "longer than itself, thick and very fine to the touch, and black as night". This, of course, may merely signify that she is a supernatural being, and she may be either good or evil. However her "beautiful yet terrible teeth, unseemly disclosed by the retracted lips" (L., 274) make her at once a grinning skeleton and a symbol of the devouring elementary character.

Vane is at first led to believe that his strength and energy are being sapped by "a great white leech". Eventually, however, he is forced to recognize Lilith's guilt:

The princess was standing above me on the bed,  
 looking out into the room, with the air of one  
 who dreamed. Her great eyes were clear and calm.  
 Her mouth wore a look of satisfied passion;  
 she wiped from it a streak of red. (1., 308-9)

That Lilith has been feeding upon Vane is obvious, but equally obvious is the suggestion of a sexual encounter. As the Alder Maiden has defiled Anodos, Lilith has now defiled Vane. Nor is Vane any the less to blame for having been taken unawares, rather than actually seduced. Vane's guilt lies in remaining fascinated by a creature he already knows to be evil:

Did I love her? I knew she was not good!  
 Did I hate her? I could not leave her. (L., 287)

As North Wind and Queen Irene have been capable of appearing in

almost any form, so too is Lilith. We have already seen her as a corpse, a dreadful combination of serpents and bat, and as a beautiful and proud woman. One of her most frequent manifestations is that of a leopard, distinguishable only by its tell-tale spots from Mara's white leopard, Astarte.

One of her most dangerous qualities is a startling ability to counterfeit the appearance of the good demon:

All at once, a radiant form stood in the centre of the darkness, flashing a splendour on every side. Over a robe of soft white, her hair streamed in a cataract, black as the marble on which it fell. Her eyes were a luminous blackness; her arms and feet like warm ivory. (L., 303)

We have here all the familiar elements: white robe, abundant tresses, pale skin, flashing eyes. When she appears in this guise, however, she is, like the Alder Maiden, too aggressive. Vane is "simultaneously attracted and repelled". (L., 303) A few moments later she dons a "silver mail... embroidered with argentine rings and discs, rectangles and lozenges" (L., 305), now a goddess of war whose armour is a curious play on the robe of feathers which her daughter Lona will wear into battle.

This seems the best place to interject a note on the peculiar geometric shapes with which MacDonald associates Lilith. Here the very specific geometric detail given for her armour lends her both a tough, metallic quality and a vague air of mysticism. During the same visit paid by Vane to Lilith's castle, MacDonald stress<sup>es</sup> the ellipse shape. The castle's entrance is "a low arch that seemed half an ellipse"; the hall is "in the form of a longish ellipse". The caged spotted leopardess has

"canoe-shaped pupils." and its spots are "oval". (L., 301) The repetition of this figure becomes even more remarkable in the description of Lilith's own bed-chamber:

The elliptical wall as well was of black marble...The roof was the long half of an ellipsoid, and the opening in it was over one of the foci of the ellipse of the floor. (L., 303)

Finally, Vane declares:

I knew that in the black ellipsoid I had been in the brain of the princess. (L., 313)

As the circle is the symbol of perfection, the ellipse implies a miscalculation. Its Greek root means an omission or defect. The Dictionary of Symbols & Imagery states that the ellipse is traditionally a very ambiguous symbol, meaning especially the Underworld or World of the Dead.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Lilith's brain is a black ellipsoid only emphasizes what is meant to be the sterility of her existence and the fundamental error on which her reasoning is based.

During the same visit, Vane comes upon her "erect...waving her lovely arms in seemingly mystic fashion" (L., 307) According to Neumann this very visual image is also significant:

The figure of the goddess with upraised arms is found almost wherever the archetypal figure of the Feminine appears.<sup>9</sup>

Lilith has here clearly become a pagan priestess, invoking the "Prince of the Power of the Air" with whom she is said to be in much favour.

---

<sup>8</sup>Ad de Vries: Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1974), p.164.

<sup>9</sup>Erich Neumann, p.115.

The corruption signified by the stain in her side has now spread to her hand where Vane spies a clumsy glove. In The Princess and Curdie Queen Irene gave Curdie the gift of wisdom in his ability to tell the real beast within the human form through the hand. This concept proves to be true for Vane as well, for he now envisions hair and claws under the glove and recognizes Lilith for the horror that she really is. Yet, even as Anodos found the betraying Alder Maiden still beautiful, Vane knows that Lilith is still so seductive that she must be resisted with all his power:

...I felt that, if I did less than loathe her,  
I should love her. (L., 307)

Lilith is an advance on the Alder Maiden figure in other ways as well. The Alder Maiden craved the love of men and their admiration reflecting her own false beauty back upon her. Lilith requires not man's admiration, but her own. In a curious act of revitalization she sits waiting in front of a mirror for her reflection to appear for "what she called thinking required a clear consciousness of herself, not as she was, but as she chose to believe herself". (L., 355) The word "eidolon" is used frequently to designate the projected image she produces. When her eidolon falls, she herself falls; she has become her own graven image.

In her rebellion against Adam and God, Lilith has become another Satan; she is now "queen of Hell". (L., 377) As such, she is also the perversion of the Virgin Mary who is often designated "Queen of Heaven".<sup>10</sup> When she is finally forced to see herself as she really is, she becomes "as a conscious corpse, whose coffin would never come to pieces, never set

---

<sup>10</sup> George Ferguson, p.56.

her free." (L., 378) Her imagery as the devouring "Terrible Mother" has turned upon herself; she has been caught in her own trap of death.

The immortality of the legendary Lilith (immortal since, unlike Adam and Eve, she has not eaten of the apple) becomes for MacDonald's Lilith a prison. She is already "dead" without truly knowing it and cannot "die into life" as Vane and Lona will. Her pride has deceived her:

No one can kill you but the Shadow; and whom  
he kills never knows she is dead, but lives  
to do his will, and thinks she is doing her own. (L., 386)

Given MacDonald's theology of belief in the "great good coming", it is inevitable that his Lilith should be redeemed. However, only the pain inflicted by Mara "Mother of Sorrow" can save her. As the mother who devours children, the first real indication of her rehabilitation is her wish that the children should be safe in Adam's house beyond the reach of the Shadow. (L., 386)

Nevertheless, as the eternal embodiment of evil, Lilith resurfaces even after she has gone to sleep in Adam's house. Her "eidolon" appears to Vane as he attempts to bury her hand and, after this attempt fails, she appears in the guise of Mara. She is as lovely as the "Mother of Sorrow", but her eyes give her away:

...great indeed was her loveliness, but those  
were not Mara's eyes! no lie could truly or  
for long imitate them! (L., 393)

Treacherous beauty has been unmasked, but one wonders whether it will not simply crop up again and again for eternity. MacDonald has left it uncertain whether this final apparition is really Lilith's own work or that of the Shadow.

As the Alder Maiden combined several types of imagery, Lilith has become at once a specific legendary figure, and an archetypal figure of both the "Terrible Mother" and the "Enchantress". MacDonald's problem has been here to invest the archetype, not only with very specific Christian imagery but also with classical imagery. Lilith has been both pagan goddess and evil enchantress. While her guilt has been great, her appeal is undeniable.

Just as Malcolm and The Marquis of Lossie yielded few examples of the good woman, these two novels reveal few evil characters of interest. Mrs. Stewart is likened to a "vampire demon" (M., 412), but any attempt to rationalize her behaviour fails. No believable reason is given for her intense hatred of her deformed son, "the mad laird", and MacDonald does not provide us with a convincing enough portrait of irrational evil to account for it on that score. Florimel, with all her vanity and faithlessness, never rises above the level of coquette. She is, in fact, intensely boring.

In Barbara Catanach, the evil midwife, however, we find a human villain who echoes the supernatural demons with which we have become familiar. The treatment MacDonald gives her causes Reis to declare:

...there is an evil old midwife named Barbara Catanach who, although perfectly and gratuitously evil, somehow lodges in the memory like an echo of the legendary witches of childhood...Barbara Catanach is, indeed, an illustration of the fact that MacDonald's gift, a very great one, is ideally suited to fantasy but disastrously misplaced in the novel.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>

Richard H. Reis, p.71.

Barbara Catanach does, in fact, run away with the novels whenever she appears. Her name is, of course, a play on words. Miss Horn calls her "that deevil Catanach (an' cat eneuch!)" (ML., 282) We have noticed MacDonald's use of cat figures for female demons, both good and evil. The most extensive treatment is the prolonged struggle between Mara's white leopard, Astarte, representing the forces of good, and Lilith as spotted leopard representing all the forces of evil. In that case, the cat has become not only an archetypal symbol of the Feminine, but also, with its claws that tear and its teeth dripping the blood of innocent children, the embodiment of evil.

North Wind herself has appeared as hunting-leopard, jaguar and Bengal tiger. In her, the cat signifies speed and agility. In The Princess and the Goblin a cat was the cause of little Irene fleeing from the safe shelter of her room. Moreover, the queen of the goblins stood, at one point, "like an infuriated cat, with her perpendicular eyes gleaming green, and her hair standing half up from her horrid head." (PG., 440)

In Malcolm the cat images the type of playful, but not altogether harmless, coquetry that Lady Florimel employs:

At the same time, as there cannot be many cats capable of understanding the agonies of the mice within reach of their waving whiskers, probably many cat-women are not quite so cruel as they seem. (M., 316)

There is no doubt, however, that Barbara Catanach is not the playful variety of cat. Miss Horn warns Malcolm, "The jaud'll be watchin' ye like a cat watchin' a mouse. I ken her! She's a cat-wuman, an I canna bide her". (M., 50) As though to obligingly fulfill this prophecy, Catanach



later sits behind Malcolm in the London church "watching him like a cat watching a mouse, or rather like a half-grown kitten watching a rat!"

(ML., 154)

MacDonald uses yet more horrible cat imagery for Catanach; for in her is revived the persistent superstitions that cats are witches' familiars and steal the breath from babies. As well as serving as midwife, Catanach earns her living by performing the offices for the dead. Miss Horn, however, "wad as sune lat a cat intill the deid-chaumer to gang loupin' ower the corp, or may be waur." (M., 5) Catanach is "the type and embodiment of the horrors that haunt the dignity of death." (M., 433)

Very little is given us of Catanach's physical features, beyond her "great round body" (M., 433) and her eyes - and these give away her demonic nature:

...neither in form, colour, motion, nor light,  
were they ugly - yet in everyone of these they  
looked wicked. (M., 286-7)

Her countenance is "pale, pulpy, evil." With her "horrible mixture" of "disgusting ingredients" (ML., 155), she becomes the archetypal witch concocting a vicious love potion, her cookery the perversion of the comforting nourishment of the Wise Woman. Even in her motivation, she is the sister of the Alder Maiden and of Lilith, for it is power she craves:

The woman's consuming ambition was to possess  
power over others - power to hurt them if she  
chose - power to pull hidden strings fastened  
to their hearts or consciences...and so reduce  
them...to the condition of being, more or less,  
her slaves. (M., 247)

In some ways, Barbara Catanach has become a more acceptable

character - more acceptable even than the hero Malcolm - simply because she is treated in this fairly simplistic fashion. Beyond her natural proclivity for evil, we learn very little of her history, tastes, or relationships. She is, in effect, an evil demon, working through the envy and greed of others rather than through magic. Her temporary victory, and eventual defeat, is just as climactic *as that of any demon.*

CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

Whether or not we choose to call them "archetypes" (and whether or not MacDonald would have admitted the term), the fact remains that in his fantasies George MacDonald used as the bases of several characters certain "dream-figures". The "dream-figures" are, as it were, basic shapes, universally recognizable, that may be dressed up for almost any role. It is because they are universally recognized as the material of our dreams and nightmares - our subconscious if you will - that these figures have become the stock cast of fairy-tales and legend. They are, in Auden's words, "the Wise Old Man, the Wise Old Woman, the Harlot-Witch, the Child-Bride, the Shadow-Self etc."

In MacDonald's fantasies these "archetypes" or "dream-figures" have, for the most part, taken on the roles of demons. In other words, they have become "supernatural beings of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men." This is, of course, true of most fairy-tale characters: the step-mother-witch is capable of poisoning Sleeping Beauty with an apple, but she cannot really murder her; the fairy godmother may send Cinderella to the ball, but she cannot fundamentally change her situation - only the prince's love (and position!) can do that. Where MacDonald has surpassed the traditional fairy-tale is in his repeated use of the fairy-tale formula to articulate his own religious beliefs. All of his fantasies are, in one way or another, a retelling of the Christian theme, although it naturally is his own particular version of the theme. His version of the theme remained remarkably consistent to the very end. Auden summarizes his

position this way:

If unorthodox on certain points - for example, he believed, like Origen, in the ultimate salvation of the Devil - he never, like many "liberals" of his day, abandoned the Christian doctrines of God, Sin and Grace for some vague emergent "force making for righteousness", or a Pelagian and secular belief in "Progress."  
Lilith is a surprisingly tough book.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in MacDonald's fantasies, we find a collection of good and evil demons battling over the souls of the mortal heroes and heroines. It must be remembered, though, that none of these figures is actually God. They may, in various emblems and allusions, stand for some aspect of God, but God himself lurks always just off stage directing the action.

MacDonald has, for the most part, succeeded admirably in adapting these stock figures to his purposes. He has invested them with so many Christian and mythological allusions that each one has become a very complex character. It is possible, I believe, to re-read the fantasies any number of times and each time to find another level of meaning. Yet the greatest success of his work is that a modern reader, unschooled in the complex world of theological symbolism with which a nineteenth-century reader would have been completely at ease, can still find something infinitely attractive in the fantasies. Since his characters are, with all their embellishments, archetypes, his stories can still be enjoyed as stories. One may only suspect that something deeper is meant.

Throughout all the battles between good and evil demons, the final goal for the hero becomes that death which is union with God. It is

---

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Auden, p.ix.

the promise of this "good death"<sup>2</sup> waiting for us all that is the source of so much of the joy in MacDonald's fantasies. This is the very heart of the message that MacDonald sought over and over to deliver - that death is only the beginning of a great bliss; that each man's story is unfinished at what we call the end. Even a Lilith or a Satan has some hope of redemption in the after-life. Thus, either directly or metaphorically, a true MacDonald hero comes to yearn for death as a cherished goal. The promise of death becomes, not a suicidal illness, but a melody that haunts and sustains through the trials of earthly existence. This is that keenest sense of "goodness ultimately triumphing" that permeates all of the works.

We have studied various MacDonald fantasy figures, using as a basis for analysis the concept of the "feminine archetype". We have seen examples of the "Great Mother" who protects and nourishes, and of the "Anima" who inspires and leads. The Wise Woman of Phantastes and Lona of Lilith might be cited as examples of these two types. Occasionally a character combines qualities of both types, as for example, in North Wind and Queen Irene. We have also seen the negative aspects of the feminine, those treacherous opposites: the "Terrible Mother" who rends and devours and the "Enchantress" who saps vitality and creative energy. These we have seen in the Ogress and the Alder Maiden of Phantastes and in Lilith herself who combines all the horror and fascination of both types. These four basic types would seem ideally suited for adaptation into the eternal conflict between Good and Evil.

The conventions which work so admirably in the fantasies prove

---

<sup>2</sup>C.S. Lewis, p.11.

useless in the realistic novels. For all his skill at bringing to life female demons, MacDonald cannot really be said to understand the human female psyche. There is, after all, no need to provide sound motivations and reasonable conduct for a demon. A demon may say "I am so tall I am above that law", (NW., 15) and she may be motivated by some "far-off song" (NW., 65) that she doesn't really understand.

An audience expects, though, that a human woman will behave in a realistic fashion and will have some believable motive for her behaviour. It is just here that MacDonald usually lets us down. His good women lack personality and seem to be enchanted with a rather unenchanted hero. The type of happy ending he provides in The Marquis of Lossie is necessary to illustrate his doctrine of Virtue triumphant, but is very unconvincing. Triumphant Virtue is always difficult to portray in an interesting and believable fashion - the reader knows in the back of his mind that too often the better man does not win. For this reason, a good demon may be much more acceptable since she is both good and physically powerful. There is a certain vicarious satisfaction in seeing North Wind terrorize the wicked nurse!

MacDonald's most memorable figure in the "Malcolm" books is Barbara Catanach, and she comes alive so vividly because MacDonald has almost lost control. He seems not to be applying the techniques of realistic characterization, but rather to be creating a "dream figure" who has wandered out of her natural territory. Barbara Catanach is certainly a close relation of the Alder Maiden and the Ogress. She lacks only the grandeur of Lilith - and that leads me to a further point that needs to be

discussed.

It is possible to postulate a certain pattern developing in the fantasies which unfriendly critics might characterize as "the waxing and waning of the forces of Good". A look at the demons we have studied in chronological order does, on the surface, show definite changes in MacDonald's treatment of them as he grew older. In Phantastes MacDonald relied on a large female cast and the good fairies Anodos met included the Wise Woman, the Beech Maiden and the Marble Lady. Each of these figures fulfilled some specific function in the hero's emotional and mental development. In North Wind and the Princess books, however, all supernatural forces were concentrated in one character per book. North Wind and Queen Irene are each so complex and allusive an identity as to suggest any number of theological and mythological meanings. In Lilith, written many years later, MacDonald returned to a larger female cast, employing Eve, Mara and Lona as individual facets of a symbolic whole. Meanwhile, on the distaff side, the crudely horrifying Alder Maiden has been transformed into the triumphant Lilith. In her is concentrated all the mythological allusion that is absent in the good demons of this last work. Where MacDonald has seemed too content to tell us what we must make of Eve and Mara, he has skilfully dramatized Lilith's power. This imbalance has the effect of pitting the rich and appealing lure of paganism against the pallid virtue of early Christianity. Christianity is nominally victorious, but the faint race memory yearns for the colour of the pagan goddess. Lilith is, after all, for all the horror of her vampirism and cruelty, a very appealing figure and her desire to be "queen of Hell and mistress of

the worlds" (L., 377) is an all too human failing. Like Vane we are tempted to feel, "I knew she was not good!...I could not leave her!" Against such an adversary, Eve and Mara seem almost overmatched. A fairer bout might have pitted Lilith against North Wind or Queen Irene.

Robert Lee Wolff would probably have seen this final imbalance between Good and Evil as proof that an old man had become cynical. However, this discrepancy in treatment can be more logically explained by a reference to the differences between child and adult fantasies. Phantastes and Lilith, separated by many years in composition, are both aimed at adult audiences and feature adult heroes for whom it is appropriate that a wide range of relationships would be developed. Though Lilith herself is appealing, MacDonald must have assumed that an adult audience would be capable of choosing Good over Evil on a purely moral basis. In North Wind and the Princess books, however, MacDonald was dealing with boy-heroes in children's fantasies. The sort of complex associations open to Anodos and Vane would be entirely inappropriate for Diamond and Curdie. Neither boy faces an evil demon, all impulses for evil being centred in either human or goblin foes. Perhaps MacDonald could not rely on a youthful audience to choose Good over an attractive Evil quite so readily. For many reasons, it would be very dangerous to rely too heavily on any "pattern" when some of the books studied are aimed at adults and some at children.

There is, too, the problem that Evil seems always so much easier to portray dramatically than Good. Reis expresses this point in this way:

If Lilith fails (I do not think it does), it is not through discouraged pessimism but with the "failure" of Milton, who, like MacDonald, portrayed willful pride



with such sympathy that he made himself, in Blake's words, "of the devil's party without knowing it."<sup>3</sup>

The final triumph of Lilith as a dramatic character is then, not the failure of an old man, but a tribute to the skill of a great but uneven writer. Lilith must stand, along with Queen Irene and North Wind, as an enduring fairy-tale figure whose image will arouse many generations.

---

<sup>3</sup>Richard H. Reis, p.102.

PRIMARY SOURCES

MacDonald, George. At the Back of the North Wind. The Princess and the Goblin. The Princess and Curdie. London: Octopus Books, 1979.

-----"The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture", in A Dish of Orts. London: Sampson Low Marston, 1893.

-----Malcolm. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truebner [1877].

-----The Marquis of Lossie. London: Kegan Paul, Trench [1892].

-----Phantastes and Lilith. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1964.

-----"A Sketch of Individual Development", in A Dish of Orts. London: Sampson Low Marston, 1893.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Auden, W.H. Introduction to The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald. Edited by Anne Freemantle. New York: Noonday Press [1954].

Bulloch, John Malcolm. "A Bibliography of George MacDonald", Aberdeen University Library Bulletin, V (1925), 679-747.

de Vries, Ad. Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1974.

Ferguson, George. Signs & Symbols in Christian Art. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend. Edited by Maria Leach. New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1972.

- Holder, W. Garrett. "George MacDonald: A Nineteenth Century Seer",  
Review of Reviews, 32 (1905), 357-362.
- Lewis, C.S. Introduction to George MacDonald: An Anthology.  
London: Bles, 1946.
- MacDonald, Greville, George MacDonald and His Wife. Introduction by G.K.  
Chesterton. London: Allen & Unwin, 1924.
- Neumann, Erich. The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype. Translated  
by Ralph Manheim. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.
- Patterson, Nancy-Lou. "Archetypes of the Mother in the Fantasies of George  
MacDonald", Mythcon Proceedings, I (1970), pp.14-20.
- Reis, Richard H. George MacDonald. New York: Twayne, 1972.
- Sigman, Joseph. "Death's Ecstasies: Transformation and Rebirth in George  
MacDonald's "Phantastes", English Studies in Canada, II, 2 (Summer 1976),  
pp. 203-226.
- von Franz, Marie-Louise. "The Process of Individuation" in Man and His  
Symbols. Edited by Carl G. Jung. New York: Doubleday, 1964.
- Willcox, Louise Collier. "A Neglected Novelist", North American Review,  
183 (1906), 394-403.
- Wolff, Robert Lee. The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald.  
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.