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Arthur Hughes' Illustrations for George MacDonald's *The History of Gutta Percha Willie: Parallels and Contrasts with "The Light Princess"*

John Docherty

He would allow that the algebraic symbol, which concerns only the three dimensional, has no substantial relation to the unknown quantity But the rose, when it gives some glimmer of the freedom for which a man hungers, does so because of its substantial unity with the man, each in degree being a signature of God's immanence. . . . [S]he opens her wicket into the land of poetic reality, and he, passing through and looking gratefully back, then knows her for his sister the Rose, of spiritual substance one with himself. . . . So also may we find co-substance between the stairs of a cathedral-spire and our own secret stair up to the wider vision.

Greville MacDonald, recalling his father's ideas on symbolism in *George MacDonald and His Wife* (482).

The *History of Gutta Percha Willie* (1873) is usually listed as one of three books for boys written by George MacDonald, the other two being *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1871) and *A Rough Shaking* (1891). These three, however, are supplemented by long accounts of the boyhood of the eponymous heroes in several of his Scottish novels. Conversely, *A Rough Shaking* was initially serialised in *Atalanta*, a magazine for intelligent young ladies.¹ Although *Gutta Percha Willie* "goes beyond the literal Victorian imagination to encompass the scientific and technological imagination" (Düring 10), it may perhaps not appeal to all sophisticated modern readers. "To write a work of this sort which does not adopt the form of a traditional book of instruction for children demands a measure of wonder, *and the reader too must have an aptitude for wonder*" (Düring 9, my italics). The book, however, is likely to be a favourite with those readers whom MacDonald claimed he was primarily addressing: "the childlike."²

MacDonald's illustrator for *Gutta Percha Willie*, Arthur Hughes, is perhaps best known today for some of his illustrations for *The Princess and the Goblin* and *At the Back of the North Wind*, such as those of princess Irene climbing the stairs to her grandmother's room and North Wind flying

with young Diamond, which can be said to have achieved iconic status. Hughes' identification with his author's aims in the illustrations he drew for MacDonald is acknowledged to be fully as complete as John Tenniel's in his illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books (Raeper 166; McGillis 38-40; Roberts and Wildman 26). However, it is now known that Carroll always provided detailed sketches for Tenniel to work from (Cohen and Wakeling 12). Hughes, by contrast, although deriving much of his detail directly from MacDonald's texts, seems, in his best illustrations, to have relied to a large extent upon his intuitive sympathetic understanding of MacDonald's aims.³

Gutta-Percha Willie grows up in the countryside, in the small village of Priory Leas. Well before he enters university his talents and experiences, and his inherent love for all his fellow human beings, have inspired him to train to become a country doctor. Thus he is unscathed by the negative influences to which some of MacDonald's other protagonists become vulnerable during their youth.⁴ One crucial part of Willie's inspiration comes from his father, who is doctor for the whole region around Priory Leas, with many very poor patients and no wealthy ones. His father was attracted to this work because of the exceptional opportunity it offers of a life devoted to wholly worthwhile care for others (2). The family lives in a cottage, which, with its large garden, occupies some half of the grounds of a former priory that gives the name to the village. The other half of these grounds is occupied by the cottage and garden of the village clergyman. There is a tradition that the Priory was famous for a healing spring, subsequently lost. So an attentive reader will correctly surmise that a major theme of the book will be a reawakening and reuniting of the two roles performed by the priory before it was dissolved—or perhaps before the monks fell upon dissolute ways (4). How Willie, during his boyhood at Priory Leas, integrates the practical and the spiritual in himself is the theme of Hughes' frontispiece. The inspiration for the healing spa arising out of this is described in MacDonald's final paragraph of chapter 22 and depicted in Hughes' final illustration.



WILLIE'S HORSE-SHOEING FORGE.



WILLIE'S DREAM.

Most proper names in *Gutta Percha Willie* are overtly symbolic, as, for example, that of Mr Shepherd, the village clergyman. But the symbolism in Willie's name is somewhat less overt.

When he had been at school for about three weeks, the boys called him Six-fingered Jack; but his real name was Willie—not William but Willie . . . His name in full was Willie Macmichael. It was generally pronounced Macmickle, . . . supposed to be the original form of the name, dignified in the course of time into Macmichael. (1)

The name *William* is so familiar that its 'Will-I-am' aspect is usually forgotten. The stress upon will-power lies in the first syllable, and this seems to be MacDonald's primary purpose in shortening the name. With Willie's surname, the change from "mickle" (small) to "Michael" (the name of the great archangel) is a huge step. "It was his own father, however, who gave him the name of Gutta-Percha Willie" (1):

It was not from Willie's manual abilities alone that his father had given him [this] name . . . but from the fact that his mind, once warmed to interest, could accommodate itself to the peculiarities of any science, just as the gutta-percha which is used for taking a mould fits itself to the outs and ins of any figure.⁵ (150)

Hughes' frontispiece, "Willie's Horse-shoeing forge," draws upon an episode in the book where Willie, always eager to learn a new practical skill, and with the necessary enthusiasm, persistence and love of people to enable him to inspire the relevant local craftsman to teach him the basics of their craft, has learned enough of smithing to establish a small forge. He has reached a level of competence in this craft where "his father actually trusted him to shoe his horses . . . nor did he ever find a nail of Willie's driving require to be drawn before the shoe had to be replaced by a new one" (179).

The forge has been set up in one of the places in the priory ruins where the vaulting is still intact on the ground floor and there is also an intact chimney (5). The forge itself with its chimney is off the left of Hughes' picture. He depicts the horse-shoeing area and includes details not mentioned by MacDonald. These, however, and the whole composition of his illustration, magnificently encapsulate both the material and the spiritual aspects of Willie's work. Like Hughes' final illustration facing page 202, it illustrates a maxim expressed in MacDonald's *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865):

the door into life generally opens behind us, and a hand is put forth which draws us in backwards. The sole wisdom for a man or boy who is haunted with hovering of unseen wings . . . is work The idle beat their heads against . . . walls, or mistake the entrance and go down into the dark places of the earth. (281)

There are no doors to any of Willie's workshops in the Priory ruins, and in Hughes' frontispiece the spiritual "hand" is represent by bright sunshine that floods in from the right of the picture. Willie has turned round in response to a touch on his shoulder from the huge white horse he is about shoe.⁶ Hughes could scarcely have shewn Willie already shoeing the horse. Even with a person as gentle as Willie,⁷ that would have seemed to clash with the depiction of the young child balanced on its back.

Willie has turned head and shoulders only, his limbs remain readied for work. In turning, however, he has made eye-contact with the horse. As is usual with a picture where two beings make eye-contact, this is where a viewer's eyes focus first. The horse is nuzzling Willie, and there is eye contact between the pupil of its left eye and Willie's left eye (and near physical contact between their right eyes). Willie, while affectionately responding to the animal's nuzzling, is able at the same time lovingly to focus upon the child who is balanced on the great animal's back. She is looking at Willie and his work with an expression of intense interest and a posture of total trust. The viewer thus comes quickly to realise that this eye contact together with the boy-horse one comprise the primary focus of the picture.

There is no mention in MacDonald's text of Willie's sister visiting the forge, although the child in Hughes' frontispiece can be no other than his sister Agnes. Horse and rider are brilliantly illuminated from behind and above, giving them a more-than-natural appearance. When this is considered in conjunction with the above quotation from *Alec Forbes*, published eight years previously, the question arises as to whether this horse and rider have a spiritual aspect in the picture, particularly as Willie is a 'son of Michael' and in Celtic legend the archangel Michael is usually associated with iron and with a great white horse.⁸ The horse in this picture would then parallel St Michael's steed, a visualisation of the human Spirit, and its rider the Soul, purified *per ardua ad astra*.

In the episode that follows on directly from the account of the forge (179-), Willie—already in the frontispiece having uplifted Agnes onto the magnificent [Mac]Michaelic horse—carries her up 'into the heavens' (191).

He secretly constructs a walkway for Agnes up the trunks and along the branches of tall, strongly-rooted living trees in the Priory grounds. Then he carries her up this walkway at night when she is half asleep, and she believes she must be being carried by an angel up into the sky.⁹

Responding to all this, the viewer, returning to Hughes' frontispiece, may notice that Willie's eyes, the horse's one visible (left) eye, and Agnes' fully visible left eye are all on a straight line. Recognition of this eye alignment in the frontispiece can encourage the reader to search for other significant alignments and positionings in the picture.

A state of alert readiness is indicated in the way that with boy, horse and child their left feet are all forward. Spiralling up through the centre of the picture behind Willie and the horse and rider is a flight of steps. A vertical line drawn through the horse's left foreleg continues upwards through the child's left foot, then divides partially crumbled stairs on its left from where the stairway has wholly crumbled on its right, and finally passes through the apex of the still-intact stair archway. The stairs remain in perfect condition for at least the first three steps, but are ruinous where visible above and behind the horse: in Hughes' metaphoric imagery the foundation in God is secure, but new times require a new order. Where a staircase in another part of the abbey was ruinous except near its base, Willie has already, with his carpenter-craftsman friend Mr Spelman, built a replacement wooden stair (128). In Hughes' frontispiece, however, the juxtaposition of the sunlit child with the broken stair visible through the the stair archway seems to imply that a stair is no longer needed here: light and life challenge spiritual decay and a spiritual ascent is being depicted.

The principal tool Willie had to make himself for his forge was the bellows (179). These are prominent resting on a stand at the bottom left of Hughes' illustration. The "old anvil, which he bought for a trifle from Mr Willett" the village blacksmith (179),¹⁰ is depicted in the bottom right corner of the picture. It stands upon a block which is presumably of some dense rock like basalt but which Hughes has shaded to look like a great block of iron. He is careful to depict a small area of floor in front of both the anvil and its stand and the bellows with its stand. He clearly wishes to stress that (like the feet of Willie and the horse) these tools are solidly on the ground.

These two tools in their corner positions call to mind two of the four traditional Elements (states of matter): Earth and Air. A third, Fire, is almost palpably present with the forging fire, even though this and its chimney are off the left of the picture. Material evidence for it is present in slag that has

flowed under the bellows and solidified (become Earth there). Contrasting Fire is present in the brilliant sunlight streaming in from the right hand side of the picture. Water, however, is absent from the picture, although recently present in the left corners when the slag was molten and when there was fluid in the retort on a shelf at the top left. This retort, which has presumably come from Willie's chemistry laboratory in another part of the Priory ruins, symbolises all four Elements. Fluid (Water) in a retort, heated by Fire, distills off a gas (Air) which condenses in droplets (guttas), which in this case will have been collected in the stone vessel (Earth) standing beneath the retort. Willie has probably used the retort to distil off water from the Priory spring and retain the iron-rich solute (Earth) for some of his chemistry experiments described on page 178.¹¹ Water is by far the most pervasive of the Four Elements in MacDonald's story, as is demonstrated in Michael Düring's paper "Waterwheels, Healing Springs and Baptismal Water in *Gutta Percha Willie: The Working Genius*." Its lack of prominence in Hughes' frontispiece seems to be intentional and is counterbalanced by its prominence in Hughes' final illustration. This stress upon the traditional elements in Hughes' frontispiece relates to his depiction of the spiritual qualities existing within Willie, allegorised as described above.

Behind and above Agnes the wall is covered with ivy. Hughes depicts the ivy growing on both sides of the intact archway that opens onto the stair, although less vigorous to the left of the arch, further away from the light streaming in from the right. It is most luxuriant in the top right corner of the illustration, thus contrasting with the slag, cold and congealed, in the bottom left corner. Given the very striking symbolism of the objects depicted in three corners of the picture it is at first surprising that something equally significant is not depicted in the top right corner: perhaps a bird on its nest with its young amongst the ivy.¹² The right hand side of Hughes' *Gutta Percha Willie* frontispiece, however, appears to have been trimmed off. The most conspicuous figure in the frontispiece, the huge white horse, is unexpectedly and inartistically truncated, as also is the anvil with its block in front of the horse (more details below). Close examination of the present top right corner, moreover, reveals one open rose blossom seen in profile. This rose is not a chance effect arising from depiction of bright light reflected off ivy leaves.

The presence of this rose permits recognition of a yet deeper symbolism associated with the four-elements symbolism. On the lower left, outside the frame of the picture, Willie, with the aid of Fire and Air, has

wrought upon iron (Earth) to make it malleable to his purpose. On the right is the anvil he uses in fashioning this iron into shoes for his father's horses.¹³ Above on the left is some of the chemical apparatus by which he analyses the water of the healing spring and, through his university studies, can comprehend its healing properties and will come to use it for the benefit of his fellow men. At the top right, God's ivy can feed on the decaying mortar of the wall and help build it up into a soil that can nourish roses, high signature of His immanence (*see epigraph*).

Hughes had already supplied many of his finest illustrations for other works by MacDonald that were initially serialised in *Good Words for the Young*, so he ought to have known the size and shape of illustration required for his *Gutta Percha Willie* illustrations. Around this time he was producing illustrations of extremely high quality at an astonishing rate. William Rossetti recalls that, for his sister's *Sing Song* (1872), "Dalzeils asked [Hughes] to furnish ten designs a week: he furnished twenty the first time (208)." So, even had Hughes believed a frontispiece could be larger than other illustrations, he would presumably, if asked, have produced a second at a reduced width. The Dalziels, likewise, could easily have replaced any engraved blocks of wrong size, "before the sixties had elapsed [they] were photographing drawings on to wood" (Muir xv). Close inspection reveals that their signature also has been truncated on the frontispiece. So the picture must have been trimmed, by the publisher or printer, at the electrotype stage.

Damage to the frontispiece is not restricted to the loss of a centimetre or so from the right margin. From its first reproduction on page 424 of the 1872 number of *Good Words for the Young*,¹⁴ there has been a horizontal line right across the picture passing through Willie's elbow.¹⁵ Such lines are frequent in electrotype prints with dark backgrounds in magazines of the period, often closely spaced in one illustration, but they are much less prominent than this one. The tight deadlines for periodicals would not normally have permitted replacement of flawed or damaged electrotypes, but it is surprising that the electrotype for "Willie's horse-shoeing forge" was not replaced for the book edition of the story. The illustration, however, has always been reproduced in this mutilated form.

All of the Hughes illustrations for *Gutta-Percha Willie* in *Good Words* are of similar format and size, varying by less than seven millimetres each way, and they are unchanged in size in the subsequent book editions. Puzzlingly, however, the first illustration in *Good Words* is not by Hughes but by F.A. Fraser, and is appreciably wider there than all the succeeding Hughes

illustrations. It too, however, was cut to a similar size to the other illustrations when the story was published by Henry King in 1873,¹⁶ and, as with Hughes' frontispiece, this involved serious mutilation. Part of a cat on the left, and part of Willie himself on the right, were cut off.

None of the *Gutta Percha Willie* illustrations are captioned in *Good Words*. Only two out of the nine, moreover, have a page reference printed below, even though most are two chapters or more away from the passage they illustrate and one illustrates a passage in a previous issue of the monthly magazine. These things, along with the mutilation of the illustration destined for the frontispiece and the employment of F.A. Fraser and not Hughes for the first illustration, would seem to indicate that insufficient care was exercised by the editor of the magazine. Yet that was George MacDonald himself. He had, however, relinquished his salary after being editor for only one year, continuing thereafter on a voluntary basis and in disagreement with his publisher Alexander Strahan (Greville MacDonald 361).¹⁷ So such failings are perhaps unsurprising.

Hughes' final illustration, "Willie's Dream" (see page 52 in this article), illustrates Willie watching the unfolding of his dream as that is described on pages 201-2. Every detail of this picture is intensely dynamic. Schematically it is dominated by Fire (flame) and Water (as water and as water vapour). The floor is not earth nor stone but rushing Water, which, according to MacDonald's text, is the outflow from "a mighty golden cauldron." Behind the flowing water are the great flames, rising some halfway up the picture. Willie, crouching beside the flowing water, gazes into the white heart of this fire. Two angels fan the hot air directly above the flames. Willie, looking into the faces of the angels, "saw that one of them was his father and the other was Mr Shepherd" (202). They are flanked in the top half of the picture by what seem to be clouds of 'steam' (water vapour), vigorously spiraling up and dissolving on the left, but seemingly downwardly spiraling and condensing on the right. These clouds are apparently the equivalent of the inflow and outflow pipes of the cauldron perceived by Willie in his dream (201).¹⁸ The top of the cauldron is truncated by the frame of the picture, a way of suggesting that it passes completely into a spiritual dimension.

The huge golden vessel in the top centre of the picture is a spiritual development of Willie's small retort in the far top left of Hughes' frontispiece. Its outline reflects, with inversion, that of the stairway-arch in the same position in the frontispiece. It likewise seems to reflect and invert

the spiritual symbolism of the pointed gothic arch: that of a human striving towards heaven. The fast-flowing water, beyond the picture to the right, is described by MacDonald flowing as healing water through a hundred or more rooms each with a sleeping patient. It thus contrasts sharply with the near-worthless congealed slag that has flowed from the bottom left in the frontispiece. The vigorously active arms of the angels outspread across the centre of the picture and continuously fanning the fire contrast with the arms of the intermittently used bellows folded up at the bottom left of the frontispiece. The preternaturally awake Willie, crouched in the bottom right corner dreaming this spiritual imagery (which will be transformed into earthly reality), compares and contrasts with the anvil and its stand in the same position in the frontispiece where he labours to create basic material artefacts. In sharp contrast to the earthen floor visible in the foreground in the frontispiece, flowing water extends to the front of this picture, obliging Willie to appear to be kneeling on the picture's frame, as is wholly appropriate for a dream-vision. Most importantly, the passive child and the great white horse of the frontispiece, both patiently waiting for Willie to act and apparently representing his newly awakening spiritual qualities, contrast with the two white-clad angels in the final illustration representing the spiritual powers of Willie's father and Mr Shepherd—powers long active, but now raised to angelic heights through the ways the two men have actively taught and learnt from Willie.

Arthur Hughes' other illustrations for the story are nearly all of high quality. Stephen Wildman (in Roberts and Wildman) remarks that Hughes "clearly preferred the odder, more succinct stories, such as *The History of Gutta-Percha Willie*, where he could concentrate upon a few strong images, using dramatic chiaroscuro effects" (26). Most of the illustrations are more or less factual depictions of MacDonald's text, their quality and importance lying primarily in Hughes' choice of subjects. The illustration "Tibbie Looking on in Dismay, Said 'That's Willie Again,'" however, is charming and amusing without being very important in itself. Conversely, one of Willie's three technological projects initially used for wholly spiritual ends—his great kite—is not illustrated, perhaps because it draws too heavily on young Robert's great kite, the "Dragon" ("Draigon"), in *Robert Falconer* (ch.19, 144 to ch.23, 177).



TIBBIE, LOOKING ON IN DISMAY, SAID, "THAT'S WILLIE AGAIN."

In Hughes illustration in chapter four, "Willie sat down with the baby on his knees, and she stopped crying" (facing page 34 in the Blackie edition), an unexpected detail is the representation of a boy climbing a tree that is embroidered on an easy chair. Willie had at that time learnt only basic knitting and sewing, so this is not his embroidery. He holds the baby in one arm and the baby's bottle in his other hand. As his hands are directly below the hands of the climbing boy in the embroidery there is little doubt Hughes is contrasting the two activities, but to what purpose is not obvious. Willie is naturally "very proud" to be made "night-nurse" for the baby (35). But he would probably have been nearly as proud in mastering tree-climbing skills, and he doubtless learnt those just as early in life, to judge by his total familiarity with tree climbing when older, as described in chapter 20. In none of the other illustrations, however, until the last, does Hughes appear to be making any comment of his own upon MacDonald's text.



“WILLIE SAT DOWN WITH THE BABY ON HIS KNEES, AND SHE STOPED CRYING.”

There is one Hughes illustration in *Good Words for the Young* (321) that was not retained in the book editions. This depicts Willie’s grandmother coming to live with the family, as described on page 130 in the Blackie edition. Willie watches on the left as a man who is presumably Willie’s father lifts the grandmother down from the coach. (This man, however, looks appreciably younger than Mr. MacMichael as depicted with Willie and his water wheel in chapter 10). The primary importance, for the story, of Willie’s grandmother coming to stay with them is the discussion between her and Willie described in chapter 18. An illustration of that event, however would have been unsuitable because too similar to the Fraser illustration of Willie’s talk with Mrs. Wilson. There seem to be other good reasons why this Hughes illustration was not reused. Unlike all the other illustrations, the background, is only lightly sketched in (i.e. is without chiaroscuro). Yet even so this background, the coach and horses, crowds the picture.¹⁹ More important still, the picture is unbalanced, with the darker front figures crowded to the left.

When Hughes’ frontispiece was placed where intended in the first book edition, if the illustration of Willie’s grandmother had been retained, the central illustration of the nine would have been of Willie with his waterwheel.

“On the grass, beside the ruins, in the moonlight, Willie told his father all about it.”²⁰ That illustration is placed between the two chapters primarily devoted to a lyrical description of what comes of Willie’s desire “just to see what Madame Night was thinking about—how she looked and what she was doing” (97). She is the most majestic yet most frequently ignored of all the everyday marvels of Nature. The illustration is exactly in the centre of the story and lives up to its position.



“ON THE GRASS, BESIDE THE RUINS, IN THE MOONLIGHT,
WILLIE TOLD HIS FATHER ALL ABOUT IT.”

Subtleties equivalent to those in Hughes’ *Gutta Percha Willie* frontispiece and final illustration are already present in some of the illustrations he created for MacDonald’s story “The Light Princess” ten years earlier. Lewis Carroll saw these illustrations when visiting MacDonald in July 1862 (Raepfer 173). But although “The Light Princess” was one of the stories included in *Adela Cathcart*, published in 1864, the illustrations were not published until they appeared in *Dealings with the Fairies* in 1867. The subtleties in these earlier Hughes illustrations are often in striking contrast to his *Gutta Percha Willie* illustrations, introducing unsettling elements into the

story as or more often than they exalt the spiritual.

Hughes' name is given equal prominence with that of MacDonald on the cover of the first edition of *Dealings with the Fairies*. The title page carries the quotation "Where more is meant than meets the ear,"²¹ so Hughes could feel that for him the same applied to "the eye," giving him licence to include covert imagery in his illustrations. In contrast to the framed rectangles of the text pages in this edition, Hughes illustrations are almost square, and in most he exploits the claustrophobic potential of this format. In the 1969 Farrar edition of the story, illustrated by Maurice Sendak, text and illustrations are of equal dimensions and none of the power of the latter is achieved through claustrophobia.²² These contrasting Sendak illustrations often parallel or reflect elements of Hughes illustrations quite closely and so are of great help in understanding what Hughes himself was attempting to achieve. Where both artists illustrate the same text passages, therefore, the Sendak illustrations will be considered here along with those of Hughes.

Hughes' "Light Princess" frontispiece depicts the witch's cursing of the infant princess at her baptism. Here claustrophobia is achieved primarily by the crowding of eight figures around the font. The pirouetting of Makemnoit while she chants her spell, holding her stick like a wand in her outstretched right hand, ensures, however, there is amply room for her in the centre of the picture and for her black cat behind her (not mentioned here by MacDonald). She is dressed in black, with a witch's hat, but this hat is ornamented in a most un-witchlike way. As a modern witch, her gown is fashionable and she carries a handbag. She stands out from the crowd, not only because of the space she has given herself, but because Hughes has detailed her far more sharply. Her expression of intense malice contrasts with the apathetic or pompously empty expressions worn by most of the characters, and the cat's expression shows that it trusts her to achieve something interesting. The king's expression, and the backward tilting of his head, does indicate slight surprise. But only the officiating priest, in his expression and in his withdrawing gesture, shows any sign of the "shudder that went through the whole of them" (7).



THE CHRISTENING

Sendak emphasizes his own relationship to—but also his conscious detachment from—Hughes' illustration primarily by transposing the cat to the opposite corner of his picture. His illustration is far less crowded than Hughes': there are five and a half fewer figures, and all are very awake and aware. The "portrait" format permits him to show much more of the vaulting of the royal chapel. This dispels any sense of claustrophobia, but creates an intense feeling of disorientation because the vaults are depicted in the style of M.C. Escher. Sendak's Makemnoit is conventionally witch-like only in her inwardly focused malevolent glare. She has just finished her gyrations, and nurse, baby, and priest are all aware of the bewitchment. The priest is holding in his fear, but the baby, some six months old, is gazing out of the picture at the reader with delighted anticipation. The cat in the vaulting seems to gaze both at the characters below and at the reader, who is thus drawn more intensely into the picture. The creature is of enormous size, and no longer black as in Hughes' illustration. Only its head seems to have materialised, as if it were related to the Cheshire Cat of MacDonald's friend Lewis Carroll. It is utterly unexpected, and as hyper-real-unreal as the vaulted bays.

The next scene depicted by both artists is titled below the Hughes

illustration “Playing at Ball.” Hughes could not easily be claustrophobic here because he is depicting an outdoor ballgame. The infant princess, as the “ball,” is being projected in an upward direction by one of the two players. The ball-court is hedged, but, even allowing for the low perspective of Hughes’ illustration, it looks as if the princess will be projected above the level of the hedge-top. To judge from wind-blown clouds visible behind her she would then be in serious danger of being blown away. Hughes is depicting behaviour in total contradiction of what had been found to be essential if this were not to happen, as is emphasised in the previous pages of chapter four.



PLAYING AT BALL

MacDonald describes the Princess as “screeching with laughter” when played with in this way. Hughes, however, depicts her wearing a frightened grimace that seems a consequence of her having been propelled into the air with a racquet by a very sinister jester. He has taken literally MacDonald’s suggestion that the ballplayers “might throw her down, or knock her down . . . but couldn’t *let* her down” (15). A lady standing against the hedge, clutching the hand of a companion, likewise seems to have taken

this “might” to mean “be allowed to,” because she is apparently not scared about the blow the princess must have received, but instead scared that the infant will not be caught by the player waiting to catch her and will *fall* down. The weightlessness of the child would have been known throughout the court, yet Hughes ironically depicts the other people present as resigned or indifferent to the reckless treatment she is receiving.

Sendak, for this picture, depicts an indoor night-scene in a servants' room. It is apparently a sultry night as doors and windows are open. So an accident just like that described earlier in chapter four could easily occur, with a “frolicsome fairy wind” (12) bearing the princess out of the window. Sendak's depiction of the game is virtually the opposite of Hughes' illustration, with the propelling player, here apparently a butler, throwing the princess up, while the co-player, here a matronly lady, waits with a mop or similar implement to fish her down again. The spectators are a cat and a child, both very interested and without fear for the princess' safety. Sendak's acknowledgement to Hughes is most obvious with the boy lying on his stomach in the foreground, although, as usual, he here reverses the position of his parallel characters. The boy who is a prone spectator in Hughes' illustration is facing in the opposite direction.

The third incident depicted by both illustrators is titled “The Princess Swimming” below the Hughes' illustration. There the princess is a very beautiful sight, perfectly relaxed, swimming lazily on her back, her eyes half shut and her wet gown revealing the contours of her young breasts. In the middle distance a swan swims in the opposite direction. At the top of the picture a gibbous moon shines through thin cloud. Otherwise, however, the picture is claustrophobic in the extreme. Some distance beyond the swan, the lake is fringed by sedges and rushes of gigantic size and beyond that by sinister dark trees. Beside the swan is a clump of what seems to be tall bamboo, utterly dwarfing the swan and making it seem the size of a little duckling. Around the swimming princess, suckers from the bamboo have sent up lines of young shoots that seem likely to entrap her. Even more likely to entrap her, however, is a maze of low nets of uniform height, apparently a duck decoy, that extends towards her on the left hand side of the picture and into which she seems to be swimming. The text on page 39 describes her being able to swim and dive like a duck—and duck cannot easily avoid entrapment in complex decoys.²³ The essentially claustrophobic nature of the Light Princess' situation is very powerfully reflected in Hughes' imagery here.



THE PRINCESS SWIMMING

With Sendak’s parallel illustration the princess is sailing rather than swimming, employing her gown as a sail. She is of necessity sailing backward, but there is no indication that she is sailing towards anything dangerous. In the background, a sunny meadow slopes down from the palace to the shore of the lake, closely resembling Hughes’ background to “On the Water” (see below) except that the meadow is uneven rather than terraced. Instead of Hughes’ solitary swan under the bamboo, three large ducks swim out of scattered reeds beside the shore into clear water. There is a submerged stolon sending up a line of shoots in front of the princess, as in Hughes’ illustration, but here it belongs to a comparatively small aquatic grass, not bamboo, and could not entrap a good swimmer like the princess. This powerfully positive response to Hughes’ illustration prepares the reader for an even more powerfully positive response in Sendak’s next matching illustration.

Hughes’ illustration ironically titled “On the Water” depicts the moment in the story where, after the prince has plugged the hole in the bottom of the lake with his body, the rising waters have completely covered him except for a single tuft of his hair. The princess contemplates him from

her boat, her face resting sleepily on her right hand and exhibiting only boredom from her long wait. She half-supports herself by grasping the swan's-neck prow of the boat. Above the surface of the lake this illustration is in no way claustrophobic. Contrary to MacDonald's text (93), no mud is present. The lake appears to have refilled completely, with clear water extending to a green meadow only a short distance away that rises in low terraces to the castle beyond. Hughes can only be illustrating the instant before the princess "gave a shriek and sprang into the lake" to save the prince. Yet MacDonald describes how, for some time before this, the princess "began to feel strange," then "looked wild," then "[h]er eyes looked scared." As Roderick McGillis remarks, nothing of that is visible in her features (39). Moreover, the waters are not described as rising even to the prince's waist until the bottom of MacDonald's page 91. McGillis suggests that "[t]he code here communicates the theme of sex . . . Sex and Death. The conjunction of these is a familiar nineteenth-century concern. Here the oar and especially the swan's head and neck communicate the phallic content of the illustration" (40). Certainly, as McGillis suggests, the Princess "dominates" these images and "dominates the Prince, leaning over him." But this can only be thoughtless domination. Any conscious domination would be incompatible with the Princess' total lack of gravity. McGillis' later claim that "Hughes emphasises the erotic elements in the scene" (43) is thus questionable. Given that claim, why is Hughes' illustration, as reproduced in McGillis' paper, trimmed so that the swan's head is decapitated, depriving it of any possible phallic significance?²⁴



ON THE WATER

Sendak illustrates the moment when the water is up to the prince's neck and he is about to ask the princess to kiss him. The princess and her boat are very much closer to the viewer than in Hughes' illustration and this considerably enhances the intimacy of the scene. The illustration is devoid of direct irony. But Sendak, by fairly closely following Hughes' depiction of the princess, her boat, and the bread and wine behind her,²⁵ yet portraying the princess with an expression of deep concern and compassion, achieves extreme implied criticism of Hughes' irony. McGillis notes that Sendak, in following Hughes, even goes "so far as to place Hughes' initials on the top left of the boat's canopy" (42).²⁶ He enhances the seriousness of the moment by depicting a deep gloom under a group of trees in the background, This is in striking contrast to the bright sunlight falling upon the scene in Hughes' illustration and greatly heightens Sendak's irony. Unquestionably, as McGillis states "[w]hat Sendak celebrates is . . . the spiritual moment." (42).

Six incidents from "The Light Princess" depicted by Sendak are not illustrated by Hughes, but conversely only one depicted by Hughes is not illustrated by Sendak. That illustration is "The Prince Lost in the Forest." All the reader is told about this adventure is in two sentences. "One day he [the

prince] lost sight of his retinue in a great forest. . . . One lovely evening, after wandering about for many days he found he was approaching the outskirts of this forest; for the trees had got so thin that he could see the sunset through them; and he soon came upon a kind of heath.” (45-46.) There is nothing between these two sentences beyond an authorial comment on the advantages for princes of becoming lost in this way.



THE PRINCE LOST IN THE FOREST

Hughes depicts the prince upright on his steed blowing his hunting horn as the horse carefully makes its way amongst great tussocks of grass. The prince and his horse are illuminated from the direction in which he is riding, so he would seem to be approaching the far edge of the forest. His face nevertheless displays some concern: apparently because his horse's hooves are beginning to sink between the grass tussocks. The animal's uplifted right fore-hoof and left hind-hoof are clean, so cannot yet have sunk in mud. The left foreleg, however, is beginning to sink and the right hind leg has sunk more deeply. Beside that hind leg, two tussocks seem to have assumed the form of grotesque faces, which may reflect the prince's apprehension of small monsters seizing hold of the clogged leg.

For anyone who wanders “many days” in a forest there are potential dangers even beyond the likely ones of being trapped in pathless regions or attacked by wild beasts. MacDonald suggests that “these forests are very useful in delivering princes from their courtiers, like a sieve that keeps back the bran.” He stresses the disadvantages laboured under by princesses, “who are forced to marry before they have had a bit of fun.”(45) Hughes is debunking the fairy-tale morality here and hinting that princes in real situations of this kind may well not survive to have “a bit of fun.” In this, however, he is doing no more than reflecting MacDonald’s slightly more covert irony. His semi-covert irony in his illustrations for “The Light Princess” should not be regarded as antagonistically directed against MacDonald. His responses to his author’s aims in these, his first illustrations for MacDonald, are in perfect accord with them. This goes far to temper the suggestions made by U.C. Knoepfmacher about Hughes’ collaboration with the female writers Christina Rossetti and Jean Ingelow against MacDonald’s male chauvinism (270-338).

Endnotes

1. By the mid-nineteenth century, books for boys featuring a sensitive, caring hero were not uncommon. Claudia Nelson demonstrates that even Tom Brown, in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, learns to be a sensitive caring youth in some important respects (40-46). But *A Rough Shaking* is exceptional in its covert attacks on the extreme macho “Muscular Christianity” dominating the works of many of Thomas Hughes’ imitators (Docherty, “Fantasy” 46-48).
2. MacDonald apparently introduced this phrase in his essay “The Fantastic Imagination” (reprinted in *A Dish of Orts* (1893). The full sentence is “For my part I do not write for children but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy five” (317). In its context, this could be taken to refer merely to MacDonald’s fantasy writing. All his prose fiction, however, with the exception of the experimental romance *The Portent*, could be said to be written for the childlike. Richard Reis, arguably the most sensitive of MacDonald’s biographers, groups *Gutta Percha Willie* with MacDonald’s “conventional novels” and describes those as the works “most assured of permanent and deserved oblivion” (28). But U.C. Knoepfmacher, in some respects one of the harshest of MacDonald’s critics, goes only so far as to argue that it is “not among his most notable efforts” (128). Since MacDonald’s imaginative fantasies are undeniably his most notable fictional works, Knoepfmacher’s remark cannot be gainsaid.
3. This does not imply that Hughes always uncritically accepted MacDonald’s imagery, as will be explored below.
4. Clare Skymer, the hero of *A Rough Shaking*—although, contrary to Willie,

subjected to numerous moral and physical threats during his boyhood and youth—passes through these untainted. His adventures, moreover, though decidedly unusual, are wholly believable. That is not, however, the case with Clare's adventures from when he is shanghaied. This happens between the end of chapter 42 and the beginning of chapter 43, a traditional point of renewal (as in some versions of "Seven Ages of Man" symbolism).

5. An important source of inspiration for *Gutta Percha Willie* was John Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River," written in 1841 and published in 1851 (Docherty, *Water* 95-96). A central theme of Ruskin's story is that of true and false conceptions of "the water of life." His King (river god) recognises and utilises an archetype of true water-of-life in the drops of water exuded from the leaves of plants under certain climatic conditions that are aptly termed "guttas" by modern meteorologists. Hughes (see below) recognises another, less specialised, meaning of "gutta": a single drop of a particular fluid in a medicine, crucial for that medicine's efficacy.

6. Willie is loosely attaching a rope from the horse's bridle to an eyelet in the wall. This is clearly intended to steady the animal rather than to confine it.

7. Although Willie has already started college at this stage, he is still depicted by Hughes with a child's features.

8. St Michael, through his sword, is particularly associated with iron, although traditionally with meteoric iron.

9. Agnes remembers that the "angel" when carrying her back "went down very fast" (188). This suggests that at one period MacDonald, still more daringly, had described Willie constructing a "flying fox," so as to be able to bring her with him back to earth as swiftly as the flight of a bird or an angel. If so, it seems that MacDonald or his publisher subsequently decided this was too dangerous a thing to seem to encourage and cut out the rest of this allusion.

10. Willett is the perfect name for a blacksmith. But such is MacDonald's skill that none of the many names of this descriptive sort in the story are immediately obtrusive.

11. Düring plausibly suggests that "[t]he name Priory Leas seems to be a pun on "lees,"—what is left when water has *drained* away" (14, my italics).

In view of the spiritual elements in Hughes' illustration, the faint but definite lines around the vessel, wholly unlike his depiction of the surrounding ivy, may be intended to represent a spiritual radiation.

12. In *Lilith* (1895), MacDonald describes a ruined palace where, in most parts, the fabric has almost wholly been replaced by ivy full of the nests of birds with their young (85). That ivy has been described as "parasitic" (McGillis, "Femininity" 33), but this makes neither literal nor metaphoric sense. In German Romantic paintings and engravings such ivy usually symbolises new life arising from decay of the old.

13. There is perhaps a concealed spiritual metaphor here in that Willie is creating the shoes for his father's/Father's horses to move and work on the earth.

14. A new volume of *Good Words for the Young* began in November of each year, in

time for the previous twelve issues to be reissued as a bound Christmas annual. As was usual in such magazines, the serialised stories do not have frontispieces. So the illustration of “Willie’s Horse-shoeing Forge,” although clearly always intended for the frontispiece when the story was published in book form, appears in *Good Words* in chapter twenty, the only chapter where there are references to the forge.

15. The full width of the line is most clear in in this first printing, but across light parts of the illustration it is most conspicuous in later reproductions.

16. This first book edition was titled “GUTTA PERCHA WILLIE THE WORKING GENIUS,” although subsequent editors returned to the *Good Words* title. It is stated to be “Reprinted from Good Words for the Young” on page iv, and does not seem to carry any textual changes from the *Good Words* serialisation.

17. To judge from the highly complimentary comments about Strahan in *The Vicar’s Daughter* (1872), listed by Raphael Shaberman (51), the dispute between Strahan and MacDonald was perhaps not so very serious.

18. It is understandable that Willie, after all his work of conducting water from the spring through the Priory ruins, should imagine water pipes in his dream. But it is equally understandable that Hughes should feel that pipes clashed too much with the spiritual imagery. With the stress in his illustration upon the ascending and descending water vapour, and the spiritual implications underlying this, it is appropriate that it should be the narrowest in the book. This change in the height-width ratio, although small, is very effective.

19. Had the coach been properly drawn in, the picture would have been too dark, and so unsuitable for that reason.

20. After “in the moonlight” the book’s text adds “by the gurgling water.”

21. When the story was included in *Adela Cathcart*, MacDonald expounded upon this quotation at some length.

22. In several of these illustrations Sendak creates remarkable intensity by bringing the characters far closer to the viewer than is usual, but the effect is not claustrophobic.

23. The uniform height of the net, and the way reeds are visible through it, preclude it being anything other than a decoy.

24. In the original, the prow is cut off far down the neck of the swan.

25. In both Hughes’ and Sendak’s illustrations the bread looks rather more like fruit.

26. The Hughes initials are on the edge, not the top of the canopy. This is the only Sendak illustration McGillis describes in his paper.

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