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This is (Not) a Horse: MacDonald's Theodicy in *At the Back of the North Wind*

G. St. John Stott

I

George MacDonald insisted in his essay “The Fantastic Imagination” that the meaning of a work should be evident to its readers. He did not mean by this that there was only one meaning to a text, or that the author’s intent in writing was privileged, but that if a reader could not make any sense of what was written and the author had to step in, something had gone wrong. Under such circumstances commentary was a mistake. As he noted, using a simple analogy, “[I]f I cannot draw a horse, I will not write THIS IS A HORSE under what I foolishly meant for one” (*LP* xii). We might remember this when we read in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) a conversation between what might (or might not be) two cab horses: Diamond and Ruby. It is a puzzling scene which MacDonald refuses to make clear.

Cab horse conversations can be easy to understand. In Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877), a work that was perhaps written as a response to *At the Back of the North Wind*,¹ the eponymous Beauty discusses with Captain (a former army horse) the latter’s experiences in the Crimea:

I said, ‘I have heard people talk about war as if it was a very fine thing.’

‘Ah!’ said he, ‘I should think they never saw it. No doubt it is very fine when there is no enemy, when it is just exercise and parade and sham fight. Yes, it is very fine then; but when thousands of good brave men and horses are killed or crippled for life, it has a very different look.’

‘Do you know what they fought about?’ said I.

‘No,’ he said, ‘that is more than a horse can understand, but the enemy must have been awfully wicked people, if it was right to go all that way over the sea on purpose to kill them.’ (Sewell 144)

So much for the charge of the Light Brigade, Sewell seems to say. Questions of heroism and folly should be brushed aside so that we can concentrate on

one that, for her, was more important: were the Russians really so “awfully wicked” that they needed to be killed? Readers, recognizing that they were not, would have had reason to reflect on what they had been told about the Crimea and war. Sewell’s peace witness was muted; the focus of her book was, after all, the cruelty inflicted on animals. Nevertheless the argument is clear and, if it is allowed—for the purposes of the novel—that horses *can* talk, the conversation is credible.

What, though, is one to make of the conversation between Diamond and Ruby? The former complains of what he thinks is laziness on Ruby’s part, and when Ruby offers a justification we seem to have left the real world behind. He’s an angel, he explains:

[T]here are horses in heaven for angels to ride upon, as well as other animals, lions and eagles and bulls, in more important situations. The horses the angels ride, must be angel-horses, else the angels couldn’t ride upon them. Well, I’m one of them. (NW 280)

Although, as we shall see, Ruby has an important part to play in the novel, providing as he does a powerful illustration of MacDonald’s theodicy, it is at first far from obvious that the passage should be taken seriously. At the least, we might wonder how anyone can understand what is being said. When, in an earlier scene, the narrator had attributed thoughts to Diamond, he had added the caveat: “I won’t vouch for what the old horse was thinking, for it is very difficult to find out what any old horse is thinking” (NW 147). Yet for all this difficulty in knowing what horses think, here in the stable scene, young Diamond (the cab-driver’s son, named after the horse and our witness to the conversation) apparently has no difficulty in knowing what they say.

We could of course presume that the scene was just part of a dream. Young Diamond considered this possibility himself and, after listening for a while and beginning to feel he had been dreaming, “thought he had better go back to bed” (NW 281-282; cf. 331). We should resist the temptation to agree. Although dreams are important in the novel (after all they can give access to another world—NW 261, cf. 317),² they are usually signaled as such, and when “waking” is part a dream, that is made clear. Thus we are told that Diamond “woke, not out of his dream, but into it. . .” (NW 205) and Ranald Bannerman (in MacDonald’s other children’s book from 1871) went to sleep “and seemed to wake once more; but . . . into [a] dream” (RB 7). There is no hint of this having happened in the stable scene. Neither is there any suggestion that young Diamond was walking in his sleep. Although his

mother thought that he was sleepwalking when she saw him on the stairs returning from the stable (*NW* 283; cf. 23-24), the explanation will not do. Victorians were fascinated by what might be done by those who were asleep,³ and MacDonald shared the fascination. In *David Elginbrod* (1863) Euphasia Cameron had acted as a thief under hypnotic suggestion and found herself an unwilling somnambulist (*DE* 267); some years later in *Weighed and Wanting* (1882) Mark, who “had seen his mother and father even more than usually troubled all day,” would walk in his sleep (*WW* 321). But if young Diamond had been doing the same, he would not have remembered what had happened (as he does in *NW* 284). As nineteenth-century textbooks noted, though awakened dreamers are usually able to describe what they have seen, a somnambulist “roused at the commencement or end of his walking, . . . will generally express himself unconscious of what he intended to do, or of what he had done” (Dendy 87). If he had been sleepwalking, young Diamond would probably not have been able to remember the conversation as he does.

Besides, the circumstances of the conversation force us to question the idea that Diamond was asleep. He was in the stable because, he thought, he had been called there by the North Wind.

‘Dear North Wind,’ said Diamond, ‘I want so much to go to you, but I can’t tell where.’

‘Come here, Diamond,’ was all her answer.

Diamond opened the door, and went out of the room, and down the stair and into the yard. His little heart was in a flutter, for he had long given up all thought of seeing her again. Neither now was he to see her. When he got out, a great puff of wind came against him, and in obedience to it he turned his back, and went as it blew.

It blew him right up to the stable-door, and went on blowing.

‘She wants me to go into the stable,’ said Diamond to himself. (*NW* 266)

That should give us pause. Although North Wind can “get into our dreams—yes, and blow in them” (*NW* 258), at least once MacDonald allows us no alternative to thinking that young Diamond journeyed awake. On his first adventure, he had asked North Wind to let him get down to help a young girl (Nanny) who is being buffeted by the wind’s passing,⁴ and when the girl asked him where he had come from he said that he had been on the back of North Wind. When he meets the girl again, by daylight, she recognizes him—and concludes that when he was talking of “North Wind” he must have been

talking of his father's horse:

She made him a pretty courtesy . . . but with a bewildered stare. She thought first: 'Then he was on the back of the North Wind after all!' but, looking up at the sound of the horse's feet on the paved crossing, she changed her idea, saying to herself, 'North Wind is his father's horse! That's the secret of it! Why couldn't he say so?' (*NW* 49)

Unless we presume that Diamond walked in his sleep the eight-miles from Chiswick to Charing Cross, we have to assume that—within the story—his adventures with North Wind could be real, and as much part of the story as any other waking event.

II

What, then, are we to make of Ruby? Presumably, just as we cannot explain away his conversation with old Diamond, so we cannot dismiss his self-identification as fantasy. Possibly he was having fun with his stable companion in claiming to *be* (or have been) an angel in heaven—this is a point I return to in my conclusion—but he should certainly be thought angelic. MacDonald thought of an angel as someone (or something) “with something special to say or do” (*NW* 305), and that description fits Ruby perfectly.

Usually, to be sure, MacDonald thought of angels as men and women “whose face, whose hands” minister to others (*RF* 220): we might remember here Mary Marston, in the 1881 novel named after her, who is “a heavenly messenger” to her friend (*MM* 174), or such characters as Margaret Elginbrod (*DE* 386-87), or Mary St. John (*RF* 268). But others could also be counted as angels: children—such as Harry in *David Elginbrod*, who “began to look to [Euphra] like an angel of forgiveness come to live a boy's life, that he might do an angel's work” (*DE* 315); or, what is of more concern here, animals—as in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), where Annie falls “fast asleep, guarded by God's angel, the cat” (*AF* 25).

This might seem strange company for Ruby, even when we remember the cat. The others help people. Sometimes they do so through what they say, even though they risk misunderstanding and—if a child—being dismissed as “God's baby” (*NW* 163; cf. *RS* 298: “one of God's innocents”)⁵ and thought simple-minded.⁶ As MacDonald would note of the hero of *Sir Gibbie* (1879),

Many of those that knew the boy, regarded him as a sort of

idiot, drawing the conclusion from Gibbie's practical honesty and his too evident love for his kind: it was incredible that a child should be poor, unselfish, loving, and *not* deficient in intellect! (*SG* 28)

However, MacDonald thought that "genius" was a fitting term for those possessing such "ignorance and . . . wisdom" (*EL* 145): their innocence held the potential for Socratic questioning ("the boy . . . gradually educating the man without either of them knowing it" – *WW* 344-45; cf. 193, 346), and they enjoyed "a kind of heavenly common sense, equally at home in the truths of divine relation, and the facts of the human struggle with nature and her forces" (*ML* 235; cf. *NW* 186).

Ministry could be by deeds as well as words, of course. Gibbie had a "passion and power for rendering help" (*SG* 38). So had the eponymous hero of *Robert Falconer* (1868):

Dr. Anderson . . . went home—cogitating much. This boy, this cousin of his, made a vortex of good about him into which whoever came near it was drawn. He seemed at the same time quite unaware of anything worthy in his conduct. The good he did sprung from some inward necessity, with just enough in it of the salt of choice to keep it from losing its savour. (*RF* 209-210)

And so had young Diamond, who in the way he helped others was "as much one of God's messengers as if he had been an angel with a flaming sword, going out to fight the devil" (*NW* 155; cf. 197-98).⁷ Annie's cat is an angel of this kind, delivering the child from her terror of the rats that are in her room.

'O God, tak care o' me frae the rottans.'

There was no need to send an angel from heaven in answer to this little one's prayer: the cat would do. Annie heard a scratch and a mew at the door. The rats made one frantic scramble and were still.

'It's pussy!' she cried, recovering the voice for joy that had failed her for fear.

Fortified by her arrival, and still more by the feeling that she was a divine messenger sent to succour her because she had prayed, she sprang out of bed, darted across the room, and opened the door to let her in. A few moments and she was fast asleep, guarded by God's angel, the cat, for whose entrance she took good care ever after to leave the door ajar. (*AF* 25)

Ruby, however, is not this kind of angel. Mr Raymond (his master) had left him with Joseph (old Diamond's master, young Diamond's father) so that he would get exercise while he was abroad—and with the expectation that the extra income she would bring would pay for Nanny's upkeep if Joseph took her into her family. But the loan of the horse was also a test: before further helping him and his family Mr Raymond wanted find out how much Joseph really cares for horses, and how much he will care for Nanny. Ruby is doing his master's business when he deliberately strains her ankle so that he cannot be worked, thereby bringing suffering to Joseph's family. Or as he explains, when he describes his role, he must grow fat so that Joseph might grow lean (*NW* 281). *This* is his angel's role.

III

Healing and hurting are linked in the novel, of course. MacDonald believed that suffering was what—more than anything else—turned men and women to God. He thought of suffering as an act of grace that could bring a man or woman opportunities for reflection and redemption. In this he was faithful to his Reformed heritage, which, as Amanda Porterfield has noted, “Urged attention to God’s strategic purpose in administering suffering as means of teaching, testing, and drawing men and women toward him” (Porterfield 101). Change might be brief or long-delayed,⁸ our sufferings might only “keep us in some measure from putting our trust in that which is weak and bad, even when they do but little to make us trust in God” (*GC* 367; cf. *WW* 31), but all the same suffering makes change possible. As MacDonald will reflect in *Mary Marston*, “clouds give foothold to the shining angels” (*MM* 93).

We see this most clearly (if not exclusively) in the way that Nanny's sickness allows her to redefine herself during and after a stay in hospital. The contrast with Jo, the crossing sweeper in *Bleak House* (1853), is obvious and no doubt deliberate. Jo infects those who help him; Nanny is brought to health by their actions. Both children had know the insecurity of life on the streets (Nanny, like Jo, is always being told to “move on”—*NW* 42), but the crisis of sickness has different outcomes in the two cases. When Jo is discharged from hospital he is told to “Hook it!” and warned not to be seen within forty miles of London (Dickens 634); Nanny, taken into Joseph's family at young Diamond's suggestion (*NW* 249-51), is given the chance to break with her past and take up a new life.⁹

However, if angels can help us respond to the problems of life, they

can also precipitate those problems; Ruby's mission is to bring the clouds as well as the comfort, to scourge as well as bless. "We shall all have to thank God for the whip of scorpions which, if needful, will do its part to drive us into the kingdom of heaven," MacDonald had reflected in 1864 in *Adela Cathcart* (AC 403), and he would not have doubted that when Ruby's motives were understood he would be thanked for acting as he did. In short, he was like North Wind,¹⁰ who frightens a nurse "that was calling a child bad names, and telling her she was wicked" so that she would be turned away, and have time to reflect (NW 34), and breaks a few toys in old Goody's shop, so that she could get her priorities right ("she's thinking too much of her new stock. Two or three will do"—NW 84). As her "dreadful names" show (Bad Fortune, Evil Chance, Ruin and, by implication, Death—NW 320), North Wind can be fearsome as well as beautiful, and (like Shelley's "Wild Spirit") be both "Destroyer and Preserver" (Shelley 412). Some readers have emphasized just one of these qualities, and thought of North Wind as either beautiful and beneficent or, like Lilith, an archetype of the "terrible mother"—"the blood stained goddess of death, plague, famine, [and] flood" (Neumann 40), but she both scourges and comforts. Earlier authors had seen significance in the blowing of the wind;¹¹ MacDonald simply went further than most in recognizing that God was at work in breezes and storms and all the circumstances of life.

As noted, Ruby shares North Wind's duality. He first brings Joseph's family to the point of poverty so that the man's priorities can become clear. Joseph resents this: he complains that "he was rather worse off with Ruby and Nanny than he had been before," and feels that although Nanny was a great help in the house he would rather let her and Ruby go (NW 272-73), for once the rent is paid there is very little for food. The family is hungry, and he was "very gloomy—so gloomy that he had actually been cross to his wife" (NW 275), and when Mr Raymond returns he is bitter. Ruby has "brought me to beggary almost," he insists (NW 288). But when it is clear to Mr Raymond that Joseph had stood the test (NW 291) the motivation of Ruby changes, and he works quickly and willingly as a cab horse, allowing old Diamond to rest (NW 292). By the time that Joseph and his wife are ready to move to Mr Raymond's house in Kent "they felt so peaceful and happy that they judged all the trouble they had gone through well worth enduring" (NW 293).

IV

Of the two roles it is the first that concerns me here for it is this that

brings us to the heart of MacDonald's theodicy. It is a problematic heart. The lessons that a person needs to learn can only be taught by events that affect others as well. There is always collateral damage when people are scourged. Joseph's family suffer, even though only he was being tested. Joseph's wife sees the advantages of accepting Mr Raymond's offer; it is Joseph who is suspicious and resentful.

‘I don't see it,’ answered her husband. ‘Mr. Raymond is a gentleman of property, and I don't discover any much good in helping him to save a little more. He won't easily get one to make such a bargain, and I don't mean he shall get me. It would be a loss rather than a gain—I do think—at least if I took less work out of our own horse.’ (*NW* 253)

Yet even though it is Joseph who needs to learn the truth of the matter, his wife and family suffer as well.

It is the same with North Wind. People not targeted by her are affected by her actions. When she sinks a ship that belonged to Mr. Coleman, she forces him to rethink his life:

[H]e [had] speculated a great deal more than was right, and it was time he should be pulled up. It is a hard thing for a rich man to grow poor; but it is an awful thing for him to grow dishonest, and some kinds of speculation lead a man deep into dishonesty before he thinks what he is about. (*NW* 110)

One of the survivors was Mr Evans, a young man who had wanted to marry Miss Coleman but had put other things first. Time cast away on a desert island allowed him to sort out his priorities. Both men suffered, but both became better as a result. With hindsight they would agree with MacDonald that “what men call [a misfortune] is merely the shadow-side of a good” (*CW* 173).

However, though we can see that for Coleman and Evans there is mercy and love in the way that God “rides upon the storm,” and that, as William Cowper's hymn continues, though “The bud may have a bitter taste, / . . . sweet will be the flower” (Cowper 56-57)—what of the suffering of others? Even if we agree that the will of God is evident in the loss of the ship, and the chastening of a foolish young man, there is still the problem the suffering of the other investors who suffered loss, and of the other passengers, those on the ship who did not escape (*NW* 111). Why should they die, so that two men might come to their senses? Death, after all, is not what precipitates change here, though it is the agent of change in other novels.¹²

Lives did not have to be lost to secure the reformation of either man.

MacDonald would not have doubted that what happened was providential. In a novel published in 1868 (the year of the serialization of *At the Back of the North Wind*), a minister and his wife had grappled with the tragedy of loss at sea when they talked of shipwreck and human attempts at rescue:

‘But God may not mean to save them.’

‘He may mean them to be drowned—we do not know. But we know that we must try our little salvation, for it will never interfere with God’s great and good and perfect will. Ours will be foiled if he sees that best.’ (*SP* 507)

Presumably, therefore, though Mr Coleman’s ship sank to correct his pride, it was additionally God’s “great and good and perfect will” that most of those aboard died when it went down.

This should not be misunderstood. Although North Wind acts as a scourge to change behavior (becoming ugly to make ugly things beautiful—*NW* 17), when she brings death she brings a blessing: Death is “a shining one,” “The mother of our youth!” (*PW* 1:266), and the dead wake up “to a better sunshine than ours!” (*TB* 266). As MacDonald would write to Lady Mount-Temple after the loss of her husband,

there is a comfort coming that will content you. When it comes, perhaps you will say to yourself: ‘If I had known it was anything like this, it would have made me happy even then when I missed and wanted him.’ (Letter of 9 December 1888, quoted Sadler 14)

MacDonald knew that the doctrine was a hard one, and in *At the Back of the North Wind* was honest enough to show that North Wind was troubled by her mission:

I will tell you how I am able to bear it, Diamond: I am always hearing, through every noise, through all the noise I am making myself even, the sound of a far-off song. I do not exactly know where it is, or what it means; and I don’t hear much of it, only the odour of its music, as it were, flitting across the great billows of the ocean outside this air in which I make such a storm; but what I do hear is quite enough to make me able to bear the cry from the drowning ship. So it would you if you could hear it. (53)

Young Diamond is not persuaded, and wonders how the “far-away song,”

enjoyable enough when heard under other circumstances, could be a consolation on a sinking ship. It “wouldn’t do them any good,” he objects. His interlocutor cannot agree, but is as much trying to persuade herself as him. “‘It must. It must,’ said North Wind hurriedly” (*NW* 65-66); “when I do [my work] I feel all right, and when I don’t I feel all wrong” (*NW* 53).

Ruby, likewise, does his Master’s business, certain that his doing so legitimates his actions, no matter whom they effect. “‘Your master’s not mine,’ said Ruby [to old Diamond]. ‘I must attend to my own master’s interests, and eat all that is given me, and be sleek and fat as I can, and go no faster than I need’” (*NW* 277). He does not grudge Joseph’s profiting by his labor, but is not concerned to serve Joseph’s purposes.

V

Though MacDonald did not doubt that the “whip of scorpions” was sometimes necessary, and would not have expected his readers to cavil at the idea, he did not expect them to believe in angel-horses. This is not because he would have believed such creatures impossible. He fully believed that animals survived the grave:

‘Do *you* think, Mr. Gowrie,’ [Clare Skymer] rejoined, answering my unpropounded question, ‘that a God like Jesus Christ, would invent such a delight for his children as the society and love of animals, and then let death part them for ever? I don’t.’ (*RS* 23; cf. *WC* 424-25, 510; *CW* 62)

Perhaps he also believed that horses could be numbered with the hosts of heaven. However, since the angels of MacDonald’s fiction are usually ordinary men and women, it could well be that Ruby was just an ordinary horse—albeit one who half-humorously used exaggeration to focus attention on his role. After all, MacDonald believed that God works through secondary courses (“It were a sad world indeed if God’s presence were only interference, that is, miracle”—*WW* 307; cf. *NW* 234), and inasmuch as Reformed theology affirmed that “preservation, accompaniment, and direction” of divine providence affected all creation (Farley 16), he found it natural to argue that “so-called special providences are no exception to the rule—they are common to all men at all moments.” Though people are more conscious of God’s care at some times than at others, the truth was that “the whole matter is one grand providence” (*QN* 16).

Hence the renewal in the last pages of the novel of the question of North Wind’s real existence, and the possibility that young Diamond was

just dreaming. Jason Harris has viewed the ending negatively, as revealing a “skeptical irony that dips venomous doubts into the fairy tale world” (Harris 88), but I see no venom in MacDonald’s words. In *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867), the narrator thought that he has seen, “away in the distance, upon a rising ground covered with trees,” a weathercock glittering in the setting sun. He recognizes that he might be mistaken in thinking this, but feels that it would not matter if he were. “What if I found afterwards that it was only on the roof of a stable? It shone, and that was enough” (*QN* 14). MacDonald returned to this theme in *At the Back of the North Wind*. “I’m either not a dream, or there’s something better that’s not a dream, Diamond,” said North Wind. Ultimately it did not matter:¹³ maybe North Wind is real, maybe not, MacDonald seems to be saying—but whatever the case we do not have to believe in her to believe in God’s providence.

Of course, if God can work through wind and storm, without us needing to personify either, so he can work through the startling effects of light and dark without us needing to talk of “the Shadows”:

‘I made [a murderer] confess before a week was over,’ said a gloomy old Shadow. ‘. . . I could not bear to see the pitiable misery he was in. He was far happier with the rope round his neck, than he was with the purse in his pocket. I saved him from killing himself too.’

‘How did you make him confess?’

‘Only by wallowing on the wall a little.’

‘How could that make him tell?’

‘He knows.’ (*LP* 117-18)

Hallucination and fear can have dramatic effects without there being Shadows to produce them. Likewise, a horse can go lame—and thereby provide a series of moral challenges to its owner—without our thinking him an angel-horse. We can take Ruby at his word or not: it does not matter.¹⁴ When Diamond cannot remember why Ruby “sprained his ankle and got fat on purpose,” his faith is simple: “It must be for some good, for Ruby’s an angel,” he tells his father (*NW* 284; cf. 61: North Wind’s work is to be kind). Whether or not we believe in angel-horses, we here have the key to MacDonald’s theodicy. Whatever happens is for good.

Endnotes

1. Though the character of Beauty was based on Sewell’s brother’s horse Bessie

(Gavin 86), MacDonald's account of a carriage horse that is sold to a London cabbie but eventually returns to the country no doubt suggested *Black Beauty's* plot. Recent scholarship has stressed the importance to Sewell's imagination of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) but, as Coleman Parsons noted over sixty years ago, there is an impressive series of parallels with MacDonald's work, and *At the Back of the North Wind* was "the most distinct single influence on [Sewell's] work" (Parsons 156). Sewell began writing *Black Beauty* in 1871 (Gavin 167); MacDonald's novel had been serialized in *Good Words for the Young* between November 1868 and October 1870.

2. In this respect the world of *At the Back of the North Wind* is different to that of *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), where a young princess's thinking that she had only dreamed of her grandmother is counted as a mistake.

3. In June 1867 *The Illustrated Police News* had told how Clara Dalrymple, a frequent sleep-walker, "rose from her bed . . . and opened the window of her bedroom, which was on the fourth storey of the house," and stepped on to a plank left by builders. Whether an actual occurrence or a reworking of the scene in Vincenzo Bellini's *La sonnambula* (1831) where Amina has walked in her sleep across the rooftops to Rudolfo's apartment, the story suggests that MacDonald's readers might have found it easy to think young Diamond troubled by somnambulism.

4. A crossing-sweeper, she had been out late "indulgin' in doorsteps and mewses" (NW 42).

5. *Innocence*, here, means an unawareness of what wickedness means (GC 271) or how to interpret the hypocrisies of every day life: cf. Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes" ("Keiserens nye Klæder," 1837), where the child's announcement that the emperor has nothing on is hailed as "the voice of innocence" (Andersen, *Danish* 167).

6. Nanny taps her forehead "in a significant manner" to show that Diamond is "not right in the head" (NW 162-63); Tommy will do the same in *A Rough Shaking* (1891) to explain Clare's actions and words (RS 132).

7. MacDonald seems to have been thinking of *Bleak House's* Mrs. Pardiggles' "overbearing sententiousness" when visiting the poor (for Dickens's character see Carré 164) when he shows how young Diamond really helps the family of the drunken cabman (NW 155-56).

8. A Shadow scared a solitary drinker but was not sure how much the man really changed. "Does he drink less, have you done him any good?" other Shadows ask. "I hope so: but I am sorry to say I can't feel sure about it" (LP 120). Though the cabbie who Diamond helps "was never quite so bad after that, . . . it was some time before he began really to reform" (NW 160).

9. The same is true of Poppie in *Guild Court: A London Story* (1868), though she moves on from street-sweeping to selling baked potatoes rather than domestic service.

10. God "makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flaming fire," MacDonald

would write (*WW* 71), remembering Heb 1:7 and rendering πνεύματα “winds,” rather than “spirits” as in the KJV.

11. In “The Wind Relates the Story of Waldemar Daae and His Daughters” (“Vinden fortæller om Valdemar Daae og hans Døttre,” 1859), the wind, though usually just an observer of events, sometimes intervenes in the story. When the boldest of three sisters went to sea disguised as a man, the wind noticed that though she was quick at her work she was not good at going aloft. “So I blew her overboard, before anyone had found out she was female; and I think that was very well done on my part” (Andersen, *Sand Hills* 183).

12. In *The Vicar’s Daughter* (1872), for example, a child’s passing has a sobering effect on its father (*VD* 234).

13. All Diamond can do is “be hopeful” and “content not to be quite sure” (*NW* 317, 322).

14. MacDonald was fully aware of the need to distinguish between a character’s belief—necessary for the story—and truth. In the earliest version of “The Giant’s Heart” there is this exchange between the tale-teller and one of his young hearers: “‘Now, you know that’s all nonsense; for little children don’t grow in gardens. *You* may believe in the radish-beds: *I* don’t,’ said one pert little puss. ‘I never said I did,’ replied I. ‘If the giant did, that’s enough for my story’” (*AC* 229).

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