



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 1
Issue 2

Article 5

January 1971

Three Good Mothers: Galadriel, Psyche, and Sybil Coningsby

Laura A. Ruskin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythpro>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ruskin, Laura A. (1971) "Three Good Mothers: Galadriel, Psyche, and Sybil Coningsby," *Mythcon Proceedings*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythpro/vol1/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythcon Proceedings by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

SWOSUTM

Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

Examines the imagery and functions of the Mother archetype in world mythology and the characters of Tolkien's Galadriel, Lewis's Psyche, and Williams's Sybil.

Keywords

Anima in fantasy; Jungian analysis of fantasy; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Psyche; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Galadriel; Williams, Charles—Characters—Sybil Coningsby

There will come a time when every culture, every institution, every nation, the human race, all biological life, is extinct, and every one of us is still alive. Immortality is promised to us, not to these generalities. It was not for societies or states that Christ died, but for men.

Lewis also said that neither the individual nor the community, as popular thought understands them, can inherit eternal life: neither the natural self, nor the collective mass, but a new creature. In "The World's Last Night" he reminded modern Christians that man, though longer-lived than men, is equally mortal. And what death is to each man, the Second Coming is to the whole human race.

In an interview a few months before his death, Lewis' tone was rather merry about the matter:

We have, of course, the assurance of the New Testament regarding events to come. I find it difficult to keep from laughing when I find people worrying about future destruction of one kind or other. Didn't they know they were going to die anyway? Apparently not. My wife once asked a young woman friend whether she had ever thought of death, and she replied, "By the time I reach that age science will have done something about it."

Then Lewis concluded the interview with these last words about how to live:

The world might stop in ten minutes; meanwhile, we are to go on doing our duty. The great thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years.

So much for Lewis' intellectual and imaginative concepts of death. Let us conclude by reviewing his most significant personal encounters with death, including his own.

First came the loss of his mother in 1908 when he was only nine years old. His damaging struggle with that loss is referred to in both Surprised by Joy and The Magician's Nephew.

Second was the death of his dearest friend Charles Williams in 1945. His view of death and his view of Williams were incompatible, he said, and so his view of death had to change some.

Third, the death of his wife Joy in 1960 produced his candored and shocking anatomy of bereavement, A Grief Observed. In the midst of his wrenching grief he had a strange moment one night which he could not describe--which was like a friendly chuckle beside a man who believes he is isolated in the dark. It made him vividly aware in his desolation that any mortal at any time may be utterly mistaken about his true situation. He referred twice to that impression which is like a chuckle in the darkness, hinting that some shattering and disarming simplicity is the real answer to our mutability and grievous mortality.

A little later he once received a brief sense of Joy's presence, which was surprisingly business-like, with a sense of extreme and cheerful intimacy. It led him to the idea that the dead are perhaps brisk, intense, wide-awake and, above all, solid. "Utterly reliable. Firm. There is no nonsense about the dead," he speculated.

Even at this time Lewis' own death was impending. He had kidney disease (as well as osteoporosis) and was not strong enough for the recommended surgery. As he wrote to his "American lady" five months before his death,

Think of yourself just as a seed patiently waiting in the earth; waiting to come up a flower in the Gardener's good time, up into the real world, the real waking. I suppose our whole present life, looked back on from there, will seem only a drowsy half-waking. We are here in the land of dreams. But cock-crow is coming. It is nearer now than when I began this letter.

Three weeks later, Lewis had a severe heart attack; he went into coma and received the rite of Extreme Unction. He was unexpectedly revived, and two months later, when his mind had cleared, he wrote to a friend in a sisterhood, "Ought one to honour Lazarus rather than Stephen as the protomartyr? To be brought back and have all one's dying to do again was rather hard." (Reader of his poetry know how skillfully he expressed this in what was probably his last poem, "Stephen to Lazarus.") His letter continued. When you die, and if 'prison visiting' is allowed, come down and look me up in Purgatory. It is all rather fun--solemn fun--isn't it?"

As his brother Warren Lewis tells it, Jack faced the prospect bravely and calmly. Only once did he show any regret or reluctance; when he had to decline a certain lecture invitation that he would have enjoyed, his face grew sad; he paused, then said simply, "Send them a very polite refusal."

He died of a stroke on November 22, 1963, alone in his room.

A few days later, J.B. Phillips, the famous Bible translator, was watching television and not thinking at all about C.S. Lewis. (Phillips emphatically describes himself as an incredulous and unsuperstitious man.) But he suddenly discovered C.S. Lewis, whom he had only met once in his life, sitting in a chair a few feet away. Lewis spoke to Phillips. He was ruddier in complexion than ever, and glowing with health--"Large as life and twice as natural." Needless to say, Phillips was amazed.

A week later Phillips was in bed reading at night and Lewis appeared again, even more rosiely radiant than before, and repeated the same few words. And if Phillips' story is true, these are Lewis' final, most authoritative words to us about death. He came back twice to say simply, "It's not so hard as you think, you know."

THREE GOOD MOTHERS: GALADRIEL, PSYCHE, & SYBIL CONINGSBY

by J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, Guy Davenport,
Helen, Diner, Gracia Fay Ellwood, Norma Lorre Goodrich, and Carl C. Jung.
recorded

by Laura A. Ruskin

Three wise and queenly ladies smile at us from the pages of LOTR, Till We Have Faces, and The Greater Trumps. Galadriel, Psyche and Sybil all share one of the deepest archetypes of the human race. To analyze these ideal figures, we propose to tell who they are, and partly what, and if possible, why.

Lady Galadriel from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings rules the Galadrim, the elves of Lorien, with Celeborn as her consort. She possesses great power. Nenia, one of the Three Elven Rings, is hers. The band thereof is of mithril or adamant; the frosty white stone seems to capture the light of Earendil, the Evening Star. She is beautiful and ageless. Robed simply in white, she appears like the moon with clouds all about.

Galadriel can hear beyond earshot and see all of Sauron's thoughts concerning elves, while preventing the Dark Lord from knowing her mind. With her water-mirror, she can see images of past, present and future events, though she cannot certainly tell which is what.(1)

She provides all comfort and sustenance for the Ring company during their stay in Lorien, and equips them for their further journey.

Galadriel is tempted to accept the One Ring and use its power to correct evils.

"And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!" (2)

She overcomes the temptation and chooses instead to diminish and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.

Having chosen to pass out of the world, Galadriel gives the future to the Ring Company. She gives Frodo a talisman, a phial of liquid light to protect him from the terrors of Mordor. To Aragorn she gives a protecting sheath for his sword Anduril, and

also his foretold name, Elessar or Elfstone, in the form of an emerald brooch. Wearing it, Aragorn seems to become young again. To Legolas she gives a Galadrim bow, as much better than his old one as Lorien is better than Mirkwood.

For Sam, gardener and lover of trees, she has a box of earth from Lorien, seeded with such trees as should keep a breath of Lorien's summer wherever it falls. Indeed, the Lorien earth, planted in the Shire, brings forth a marvelous mallorn-tree.

But the summer of Lorien was past, never to return. When peace had come to Middle-Earth, Galadriel embarked with her people on the Last Ship bound for the Uttermost West.

Psyche of Lewis' Till We Have Faces also knows the sorrow of parting from a well-beloved place to embark upon a perilous journey.

Born Princess Istra of Glome, Psyche has such beauty of form and innocence of soul that her people think her a goddess incarnate. When the harvest fails, the people murmur that Ungit, their mother-goddess, is angry and withholds the grain from Glome.

When famine brings sickness, Psyche goes among the people trying to help them. They believe she has the royal "touch of healing," that same gift by which Aragorn saves Faramir in Tolkien's Return of the King. This in turn confirms the general belief that Psyche is not human. They believe that Ungit is jealous of Psyche's beauty and for it has cursed Glome. The Priest of Ungit demands that Psyche be sacrificed to the Son of Ungit, the Beast who lives on the Mountain.

On the Mountain, Psyche found that the dreaded Beast was none but the very god of Love, who took her into his world and made for her a palace, insisting only that she never look upon his face. All this Psyche joyously tells her sister Orual, who has come to rescue her.

Orual cannot see the palace or believe Psyche's story. She insists that Psyche look at her husband, thinking that Psyche would see a bandit or gypsy and be cured of the madness about palaces where none could be seen. She used their sisterly aff-

ection as a weapon against Psyche's better self. The gentle Psyche, out of her love for Orual, disobeys her husband's command and looks at him while he sleeps. In that instant her world is shattered. She is driven weeping from the house of the god to wander homeless over the earth, lamenting her lost happiness. The god reveals himself to Orual.

Orual in later years, now a queen, finds a small shrine where people come to worship Psyche and remember her tragedy. After that, Orual has dreams in which terrible things happen to her. In her last dream, she sees that her suffering has helped Psyche to perform several mysterious tasks. At last, Psyche and Orual come together. They share the secret of Beauty which Psyche brought back from the Queen of Shadows, and Orual becomes Psyche.

Miss Sybil Coningsby of Charles Williams' Greater Trumps is the sixtyish spinster sister of Lothair Coningsby, a Warden in Lunacy. Sybil lives a plain and homely life of one nice day after another--apparently. Actually she battles herself constantly but never lets the war show. Her life is a closed circle of one stock response to everything, to wit, adoration--apparently. Actually she has had her spiritual crucifixions. She is maddeningly unflappable, standing tranquilly in the middle of utter chaos and facing with a good-humored smile whatever comes to hand. In short, she is the very model of a proper English maiden aunt (she is aunt to Nancy, Lothair's young daughter)--apparently. Actually she is the very model of the Fool of the Tarots. She has found her desire and stands within it, possessing it perfectly. Everything is complete for her in the moment. She can read the future exactly but is unwilling to pry secrets from something as nice as the universe.

The tale of Sybil's exploits in the Storm of the Tarots ranks with the deeds of Gandalf in Moria or even of any ordinary housewife on any ordinary day. Who comforts Nancy, whose lover Henry has just tried to kill Lothair with Tarot magic? Who rescues Aaron from the trap of despair? Who fetches Lothair her brother out of the attack of the Cups and Staffs? Restores Joanna's lost child? At last transforms all into perfection and hope? The plain and incredible, beautiful and terrible Sybil Coningsby, who always manages to be in the right place at the right time.

We have mapped the stars and now shall try to discern the constellations. In that trove of ancient symbols we shall seek the images that fit our ladies.

Our consciousness forms only a thin skin over the world of our emotions. Beneath that walled city, our reason, lies the fecund earth. In the earth is moisture. In its darkness things grow and rot. From the earth comes all the food as well as the dangers. Out of dark Mother Earth comes life; back to a dark tomb go the remains of life, to rest in the earth and await resurrection.

Beneath this rich soil is the central abyss of waters which Carl Jung calls the collective unconscious. This primary sea, this broth of creation without beginning or end, is the Mother of All Things. Men name her Nu or Nammu or Vac. She is the Mouth from which comes the Creative Word; the Holy Grail; the Womb of Life. The waters of this abyss churn constantly, yet it rests forever at the center of things. The churning of these waters creates the World-Egg, as the churning of milk produces a lump of golden butter. Draw a circle and make dot in the center of it, and you have made the Mandala--the picture of the universe. This is the God whose periphery is nowhere, whose center is everywhere.

As the Fool stands surrounded by the dancing golden images, Vac exists surrounded by pictures of all creation. These pictures are not perfect Platonic idea-forms but the embryonic prototypes of all things. Here exist the Archetypes, the trans-human images that people every myth. Here are the Wise Old Man, the Good Mother, the Hero and the Dragon and all the rest. Each image takes on whatever name and persona each particular culture requires it to have. The Dragon may be Tiamat, Ouroborous, Fafner or Smaug. The Good Mother may take the form of Isis the Queen of Heaven, Our Lady Mary, or Galadriel. Each of these has distinctive characteristics, but we inherit the common center of creative and nourishing Maternity. (3)

We have named Vac and Good Mother, and Earth Mother as well. Here among the Archetypes we may stumble upon Great Mother called World Soul, Weeping Mother or Wandering Isis, and Virgin Mother. To say that all of these are more or less Vac is to state the obvious. To say that the Mothers partake not only of the watery abyss but also coinhere in each other is to reach past reason.

So we will content ourselves with puzzling out which lady is which Mother, or if more than one lady personifies the same Mother.

Not too many people ever see the Mothers. Only the genius and the simple man seem able to do so, so close are wisdom and folly. Goethe saw the Mothers existing in the underworld, holding all knowledge and personifying a realm of Platonic ideas. (4)

Half a world away from Goethe's Germany, the ancient Huichol Indians of Mexico also know of the Mothers. We stamp and ascend from the abyss of waters to stand in the company of a band of Huichol pilgrims. They have been traveling through the desert, following the ancient path to their first home, Virikuta.

In Virikuta dwells Our Elder Brother Wawa-Tzaree, the sacred peyote through which the Huichol find their true life. Every year they go to Virikuta on the fifth level to gather peyote.

On their way they come to a place called Kati-Mati-Ieri, where springs flow in the parched desert. The Huechol call this place Where-Our-Mother-Is.

The Mothers give precious water to the Huichol as they journey to Virikuta, just as Galadriel nourished the Ring Company. The sacred water of the Mothers blesses the pilgrims and bestows gifts and all good things, even as the Lady of the Golden Wood blessed Frodo with a phial of liquid light. As from the springs come good things growing and an end to barrenness, so from the Lady's hand comes the box of Lorien earth. Out of the springs of water come comfort and healing. The Huichol carry the sacred water with them; it is Utu-Anaka, who walks with Our Grandfather Tati-Waree the fire. With the sacred water they bless the fire. They take it with them to Virikuta, even as Frodo carried the Glass of Galadriel into Mordor.

So Galadriel is one of the Mothers. Which one? She can see the dark, but the dark cannot see her. In her watery mirror, the circle of Okeanos, she sees all men's doings. She protects, nourishes and gives good gifts. She wears the evening star on her finger. Once full of beauty, she is diminishing and will soon disappear from the world. At the end she appears as if robed in clouds--Mother Moon.

For the moon sees the dark and the world below her. Her power moves the deep sea. She outshines the evening star, and inexorably wanes from her full splendor to a pale crescent, then disappears.

Moon Mother has other names such as Good Mother, White Mother and Ishtar. The belt of Ishtar was the starry Zodiac. Galadriel gave belts to Boromir, Pippin and Merry. Pure, silvery and pale as milk is Ishtar--Moon--Galadriel.

Names of other goddesses link closely with Ishtar: Astarte, Ashtoreth, Isis and Istra--Psyche's given name.

Psyche, however, in Greek means soul. This suggests that she is not simply the Moon Mother but a more developed and individually human image.

The Mother called World Soul or Anima Mundi is the twenty-first of the Greater Trumps of the Tarot. Her element is the ever-fugitive Mercury. She dances in the mandala, guarded by the Four Genii of the corners of the world. Her pale beauty shows her connection with the original Moon Mother, but she has gained human form and personality. World Soul is a young girl who has replaced Galadriel's nostalgia with hope, her magic with spiritual strength. World Soul is capable of real inner growth and change. In fact, she is capable of making a dreadful mistake and suffering for it, thus becoming the Weeping Mother Isis, the Mater Dolorosa.

"A lamentation...the voice of Rachel, weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not." (5)

Indeed, Psyche went weeping for her children that were not; the children she would have borne for the god, but now could not; the motherhood that through her disobedience was denied her; the promise unfulfilled.

Psyche, however, in gaining personality, has also gained the hope of salvation, of an end to wandering and weeping. The hope she wins for herself, she can bestow on a world of Oruals. Psyche can make mistakes, but she can also grow spiritually. The two are face and arms of the same denier. In her ordeals she changes from innocent girl to scapegoat to bride to outcast and at last to goddess.

Immortality is Galadriel's birthright. She cannot hope to grow. Like the moon the Lady of the Wood must wax and wane. As she says of herself, she will remain Galadriel. Not quite human, she seems "present and yet remote."

Psyche, in becoming a goddess--or fulfilling the divinity always present within her--becomes not less human, but more truly so.

"She was the old Psyche still; a thousand times more her very self than she had been before the Offering. For all that had then but flashed out in a glance or a gesture was now wholly present." (6)

Galadriel gives talismans--objects. Hers is a fruiting that was once but will be no more. To the weary, Psyche gives her promise--the words "You also are Psyche." Her fruition is eternally in the future; motherhood not yet but surely to be.

In her very innocence, that image whose name is Psyche or Eve or Pandora or Snow White shows youthful folly. She accepts apples from snakes and wicked stepmothers, opens boxes she knows she should not open and lights lights she has been warned not to light. No one has ever made clear the reasons for this gullibility. (7) No man can reckon the Fool.

Like young Psyche, the mature Sybil Coningsby has something of the Fool in her nature. Outwardly irresponsible, as when she chats with old and Joanna on the road to Aaron's house (they do believe every witch who comes to cackle at the door), Sybil knows just what she is doing. She possesses an inner equilibrium which others envy. "Sybil always seemed to have nice days," thought Lothair Coningsby (8).

As the personality of Psyche developed from that of Galadriel in the direction of humanity, Sybil's developed as a fully human and complete form of Psyche. Sybil can manage without the external marks of divinity, the matchless physical beauty and eternal youth of Psyche or Galadriel. Sybil's loveliness shines out through her good nature. Her agelessness of spirit shows only in that life line of her hand which seems to go on forever.

Henry calls Sybil a seeress like Galadriel or the Godly Woman of Tarot Key II. This High Priestess sits enthroned between the black pillar Boaz and the white pillar Jachin from the Temple of Solomon. She is robed in blue and holds a scroll half-hidden in her heaven-tintured cloak. She is crowned with the full moon. The upturned crescent moon lies at her feet. Like the Godly Woman and Galadriel, Sybil indeed has ability to see what others cannot. She sees the Fool move among the golden figures, completing the Great Dance.

Henry also sees Sybil as maid and matron at once, a strange, maidenly mystery, the Virgin of the Zodiac. Virgo with her sheaf of wheat stands at right angles to *Anima Mundi*, to World Soul. She adds a new dimension to the image of the Good Mother. What image emerges from this new dimension?

In older days they gave the name New Moon to the first slim crescent which appeared in the west after the dark of the moon. Galadriel's moon has waned and gone dark. Her age is past. Psyche's moon is full of hope for the future. Sybil's moon is new. Her age is just beginning. Galadriel lives for the past, Psyche for the future, Sybil in and for the moment.

Galadriel expressed her motherly protection through magical talismans. Psyche spoke words of hope. Sybil takes effective action. Sybil's seeming folly on the road, for example, came from her attempt to restore old Joanna, the Weeping Mother, to sanity.

SYBIL: "Out of Egypt have I called my son. Could you search for the god and not belong to his house?"

JOANNA: "Worship me then! Worship the divine Isis!"

SYBIL: "Ah, but I've sworn only to worship the god. Let Isis forgive me, and let us look for unity together."

JOANNA: "They've parted him and torn him asunder. He was so pretty, so pretty, when he played with me, once."

SYBIL: "He will be so lovely when he is found. We'll certainly find him. Won't you come with me and look?"

JOANNA: "Alone I am and alone I go. I'm the goddess. But I will bless you. This is the blessing of Isis; go in peace." (9)

"Conversation of two aunts," said Sybil, settling herself in the car again.

Like Galadriel ageless, like Psyche human, Sybil culminates the Good Mother. Like the Fool (and Vac) she remains poised at the center of things; like the Tarot Fool she is eternally in creative motion, as the waters of the abyss ebb and surge forever.

Sybil is the Good Mother and Nancy is her spiritual child. Nancy repeats the hope and folly of Psyche; she is World Soul come anew. The power of the Fool unites Nancy and Sybil. Sybil lives in the eternal Now; Nancy is the future leaping to the measure of the Great Dance.

Though a virgin, Sybil is Nancy's spiritual mother. Sybil has passed through the trials which Nancy has yet to undergo. "From the freedom of a love more single than Nancy's she smiled at the young initiate who in untrained innocence beheld the conclusion of all initiations." (10) Sybil labors to teach Nancy that love and sanctity and universe are all one.

Sybil, this godly woman, at last shows old Joanna her lost child made whole--in the person of Nancy. Fully self-

possessed, fully personal, fully human and full of grace, Sybil is to Nancy as the Fool is to the World and as the Virgin Mary is to Messias.

A careful look at any portrayal of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, will show her feet standing on the upturned crescent moon.

So Galadriel personifies the fundamental Mother Moon of the primitive man, from whom flow blessings and good gifts. From the Moon Mother grew World Soul, or Psyche, innocent and girlish. From Psyche's disobedience came the Weeping Mother, or *Mater Dolorosa*, endlessly searching for her child. At last Psyche matures into Sybil, while Isis merely ages into the mad Joanna. Sybil personifies the Christian image of the Good Mother, the Virgin Mary. Seen from Middle-Earth far away, the Virgin appears as Elbereth, the Star of the Western Sea. "Ave Maria, thou Virgin and Mother, fondly thy children are calling to thee; Thine are the graces unclaimed by another, sinless and beautiful, Star of the Sea." (Latin hymn.) Galadriel's yearning to return to Elvenhome where Elbereth shines personifies the need of the primitive Moon Mother to grow and to become human. Psyche's wanderings and Isis' search personify the soul's difficult road to the attainment of spiritual wholeness. Sybil's repose personifies the final attainment of perfection, the union and exaltation of all the Mothers into the Mother of God.

Their purpose for being is to point out the soul's way to salvation. The journey begins in the unconscious, in the light of Mother Moon. As the person grows he or she takes on individuality, a soul or Psyche. The innocent soul learns of sorrow and pain, and wanders through a baffling world. The soul passes through many severe trials until it learns wisdom enough to adore the mystery of love. In Sybil the wandering soul finds its Omega--its home.

NOTES

- (1) Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*, Ch. 7, Bk. II, pp. 457-472 Ballantine edition.
- (2) *op. cit.*, p. 473.
- (3) Ellwood, "On Symbols and Heroes," p. 93 in *Good News from Middle Earth*.
- (4) Helen Diner, *Mothers and Amazons*, p. 12.
- (5) Jeremiah, 31:15.
- (6) Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, p. 306 Eerdmans edition.
- (7) Guy Davenport, *LIFE*, Aug. 14, 1970, p. 13.
- (8) Williams, *the Greater Trumps*, p. 19.
- (9) *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
- (10) *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Archetypes of the Mother in the Fantasies of George MacDonald

by Nancy-Lou Patterson

The best vision-inducing art is produced by men and women who have themselves had the visionary experience.
Aldous Huxley

Few people respond mildly to the fantastic. It generally evokes either enthusiasm or detestation. The reason for this is simple: fantasy deals, often quite nakedly, with the archetypes, the basic components of the psyche which make themselves known to the conscious mind as images. C. S. Lewis has named the capacity to deal with such images in literatures "the art of myth-making."¹ He states:

What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events, which would equally delight and nourish if it had reached me by some medium which involved no words at all--say a mime, or a film.^{1A}

In fact, extremely crude works of fantasy, like comic books, film serials, and certain television programmes can exert great power despite (or even because of) their transparent obviousness. This phenomenon Northrup Frye explains in his concept of "displacement,"^{1B} stating that naturalism in story-telling displaces the archetypal contents. The term is used by Freudians to mean a transfer of imagery from a sexual (and hence forbidden) theme to a non-sexual (permissible) one, as when a Victorian novelist displaces his interest in a lady's body upwards into an impassioned description of her face. In Frye's thought, all stories are based upon mythology, that is, upon archetypes.

One reacts to these images, whether or not they are partially disguised by displacement, with vigour. They may strike one as attractive or repulsive, but the mark of a successful myth is experience of a direct and unforgettable impact. Such power exists in extreme form in the works of George MacDonald, (1824-1905) who was C. S. Lewis' spiritual mentor and who has been adulated as well by W. H. Auden. One may read in their works a record of strong, direct, personal response to MacDonald's power. A work which admirably demonstrated the opposite response is Robert L. Wolff's *The Golden Key*. As far as it is possible to determine, the author of that book 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.^{1C} He pronounces *Lilith*, for instance, "feeble, ambiguous, and inconsistent in its imagery, full of senile hatreds and resentments, and the most violent in its aggress-

It might be well to examine Wolff's commentary on one of MacDonald's least-known works, *The Wise Woman*, or as it is called in its most recent publication, *The Lost Princess*. This book may serve as an introduction to the theme of the present essay. The Wise Woman is, MacDonald tells us, a frightening figure. Her task is the spiritual healing of two little girls who are equally unpleasant and unloveable. The means the Wise Woman uses are these; for the ungovernable Princess she sets tasks of a simple nature which are increased in their difficulty as they become more frankly spiritual. We are told of the Princess's interior development as she moves from stubborn defiance to eager humility when the really difficult attempts at human relationships begin. The second child is a self-important peasant girl, and her cure (which Wolff rightly deems incomplete) consists first of leaving her alone with herself in a "blue sphere" (a striking pre-cognition of an isolation chamber) and latterly of allowing her to serve as a kitchen-maid in the King's palace. Wolff's quarrel with the book comes from his judgement about the treatment of the girls, whom he takes to be real little girls who have been kidnapped and submitted to forms of brainwashing. Yet a close reading shows that they quite openly stand for the healing of the overweening ego. The princess's experiences parallel closely what every Christian convert undergoes when once the blandishments of newness have worn off and the lifelong struggles for self-mastery begin. The peasant girl, in a theme to be repeated frequently by MacDonald, refuses to know herself, and her cure, though predicted, does not take place within the book.

In all this it is the Wise Woman who is the heroine of the piece, and at first glance she appears as an intensely ambivalent figure. She can be loving:

The moment she was asleep the wise woman came, lifted her out and laid her in her bosom; fed her with a wonderful milk which she received with out knowing it; nursed her all the night long and, just ere she awoke, laid her back in the blue sphere again.⁴

and she can be severe:

She threw her cloak open. It fell to the ground, and the radiance that flashed from her robe of snowy whiteness, from her face of awful beauty, and from her robe of snowy whiteness, from her face of awful beauty, and from her eyes that shone like pools of sunlight, smote them blind.⁵

She is, in fact, the embodiment of that feminine spiritual guide whose