Transfiguring Fantasy
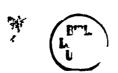## Spiritual Development in the Work of George MacDonald

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This thesis is dedicated to the children of Hackney

GEORGE MACDONALD 1824 - 1905
by John Heath-Stubbs

When the water in the basin overflows, becoming
A stream that runs through a wood: when the flowers
                                   on the carpet
Are turned into real blossoms and the trees
Are human - some seductresses and dangerous,
Some maternal and protective: when you sleep in an arbour
Observed by the bright eyes of birds, till, at midnight,
They come without faces, the dancers -
Those who in life wore masks, and now
Are condemned to be featureless; when a book in the library
Is partly in our world, and part in another;
When the librarian's ghost is a raven is Adam;
When innocence is under threat from goblin troglodytes,
From corrupt courts, from hunting white panthers;
Maternal presences are concealed
In secret drawers in unvisited turrets,
At the back of the North Wind; when a fire of roses
Purges perception, and you hold,
Among those images, an unbroken thread,
And goodness is as ordinary as having your breakfast,
As being fed a spoonful of porridge
By a woman both old and young - she is that Wisdom
Boethius knew, and Hermas.

*This poem, a gift by John Heath-Stubbs to the George MacDonald Society,
was read by the poet at the 1991 Annual General Meeting of the Society.*

ABSTRACT

This study addresses two questions. What light does the work of George MacDonald shed on the concept of 'spiritual development' and what is the pedagogical function of his fantasy? The thesis is largely concerned to clarify these conceptual issues but the reason for raising them is practical. The promotion of spiritual development in schools is a statutory requirement. The conclusions of this thesis contain implications for curricular strategies for meeting that requirement and attention will be drawn to them.

Two major claims are made. The first concerns the issue of whether a coherent spirituality necessarily depends on - and thus must be promoted within - a religious framework. The implication of MacDonald's recourse to fantasy, a discourse dispensing with traditional religious categories, to explore the theme of spiritual development is that a spiritual pedagogy does not need to be rooted in traditional religious concepts and truth-claims. The two discourses, the 'theistic' and the 'non-theistic', are compatible and complementary.

Secondly, the concept of 'transfiguring fantasy' is introduced and commended. MacDonald's transfiguring fantasy functions pedagogically, as potentially does all such unclosed fantasy, by calling in question the distinction between the narrative one reads and one's own life-story. The two realms, those of the text in one's hands and the life one is leading, elide and the task of resolving the enigmas of the fantasy becomes one with the unfinished business of making sense of one's own story.

This thesis also considers the familiar Romantic themes of nature, childhood and the imagination, which MacDonald treats with original insight. Nature is akin to fantasy in its capacity to engage and direct the attentive spirit. Childhood is the pattern of what we must become. The imagination's role is to summon us to press beyond the borders of what may be scientifically proven or rationally articulated.

Key words: spiritual development; George MacDonald; nature; childhood; imagination.

CONTENTS

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It is has been a great privilege to have been guided at every stage of this project by Dr. Tony Burgess and Dr. Janet Harland, my shrewd and kindly supervisors, as it has been to have had access to the superb resources and facilities of the London Institute of Education.

My debt of love and gratitude to my wife Pat is immeasurable. I have to thank Pat for first suggesting that I embarked on this study, still more for encouraging me to keep going when the prospect of bringing it to any kind of conclusion seemed remote. As I have to say to her about so much else, 'I could not have managed on my own'.

The debt which is hardest to quantify is to the children, to the children I came to know in my years as a schoolteacher and as a school chaplain and now to my daughter Rebecca. If the truth is that in the end the best we can do for children is to tell them stories then that is a truth those children have taught me.

ABBREVIATIONS

ALS   Autographed Letter Signed

DfEE   Department for Education and Employment

NCC   National Curriculum Council

QCA   Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

OFSTED Office for Standards in Education

SCAA   School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I shall consider the concept of 'spiritual development' in the light of the published writings of George MacDonald. The substance of this study will be an examination of two related questions. What understanding of spiritual development and its promotion emerges from MacDonald's writings and how do his fantasy writings function pedagogically? But behind those academic questions is a third and very practical question - What in practice can be done to meet the demand, which is both a statutory requirement and what many teachers see as a vocational obligation, to promote the spiritual development of their pupils? This dissertation is largely concerned to clarify the conceptual foundations of spiritual development as a dimension of education but my conclusions will, I hope, have practical pedagogical implications and something must be said about them before we are done.

I shall make two major claims. The first concerns the parallel discourses of MacDonald's work. I shall claim that MacDonald's use of contrasting discourses, the 'theistic' and the 'non-theistic', to explore the theme of human flourishing illuminates the contested issue of whether or not a traditional religious framework is required for a coherent understanding of spiritual development. I shall conclude from my reading of MacDonald that neither the religious discourse claiming to declare what has been revealed nor the discourse which dispenses with traditional religious categories is privileged in its capacity to express the spiritual. The discourses are neither incompatible nor is one to be reduced to the other. Both potentially express what lies beyond utterance, the reality which continues to beckon us beyond the penultimate stages of our spiritual journeys and which validates our attempts, in whatever provisional discourse we adopt, to allude to it.

Secondly, I shall claim that the formative function of MacDonald's 'transfiguring fantasy', as I have chosen to call it, illustrates the pedagogical potential of all such texts, those unclosed narratives which elide with the reader's own life-story and which, in that life-story, find their meaning and await their fulfilment.

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I shall further propose that our understanding of spiritual nurture is enriched by revisiting certain themes, preoccupations of the intellectual tradition to which MacDonald belonged, but which are treated by MacDonald with original insight - the themes of nature, childhood, and the imagination.

I am led to begin this study by a long-standing interest in the work of MacDonald and by mounting misgivings about what is prioritised in current educational practice. I also bring to it my own experience in education, as a school chaplain, as head of a Religious Studies department and as a school governor.

I have long felt that MacDonald is a more complex and significant figure than is suggested by the picture of him as Victorian sage and author of charming fairy tales, badly-written novels and edifying aphorisms. In particular I have wondered why, in his most memorable work, one of such deep Christian conviction should abandon the traditional Christian categories in which he elsewhere articulates his world-view.

My misgivings concern the contemporary educational climate. In this climate the fundamental principle that the goals of education are greater than can be achieved by meeting quantifiable targets, even where acknowledged in theory, is widely disregarded in practice. Today's schools both reflect and serve a competitive culture by following curricula which prioritise areas in which pupils must do well if they are to survive in it. It is an educational framework in which the penultimate aim of securing from pupils the achievement of measurable standards comes to hold precedence over the ultimate but unquantifiable objective of the formation of the whole person.[1]

The principle, threatened as it is, that education should be holistic is nevertheless enshrined in the educational legislation of England and Wales which requires schools to promote 'the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development' of their pupils. All these four categories are problematical, none more so than the first. The volume of literature devoted to the task testifies to the extreme difficulty of bringing the idea of spiritual development under any kind of conceptual control. But, all such difficulty notwithstanding, the increasing tendency

to measure educational success by more easily established criteria only makes it the more urgent that we try to make sense of the notion of spiritual development and to comply with the mandatory requirement to promote it.

My own experience as head of a school's Religious Studies department and as the school's chaplain taught me something of the complexities of the relationship of religious education and spiritual development and brought home to me that the nurture of the latter, both within the individual and within the community, is a task which is, in a phrase recurring repeatedly in this study, 'broader than religious'.

To look to the work of a minor nineteenth-century writer for light on the contemporary debate about spiritual development might seem eccentric. Four considerations suggest otherwise. The first is the fact, seldom noticed in the literature, that this debate began long before recent legislation added fuel to it. I hope that this thesis will at least show that modern anxieties about spiritual development and its promotion belong to a long history of reflection about our flourishing and what serves it.

Secondly, the one great theme of MacDonald's work is human formation.[2] His novels are all *Bildungsromane*.[3] In this respect he belongs to his time but his stance is more than an uncritical reflection of current pedagogical assumptions - often it is a challenge to them.

Thirdly, the 'unclosed' aspect of MacDonald's work which I emphasise in this study points to MacDonald's potential importance for a culture which, in George Steiner's telling phrase, is 'wary of closure' (Steiner, 1999, p. 3). We are caught up in an accelerating rate of change. We are subject to a market place - in ideas and in artefacts - which offers little but the ephemeral and disposable. We are denied the leisure in which to reflect and conclude. All these conditions, in Steiner's words, 'militate against enactments of completion and totality' (p. 3). MacDonald too distrusts closure and the deeper levels of his spirituality, for all that is dated in his more conventional pieties, are close to the spirit of our own times when at last we are learning how much must remain unresolved. The young MacDonald who in a letter to his fiancee - in an uncompleted sentence - admits that

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all his thoughts are 'unfinished, and perhaps...quite as well left so' (ALS Yale, 24th May 1847, Appendix 1), and who almost half a century later bewilders and dismays her by the open-ended narrative of *Lilith*, is a strangely modern figure.[4]

I have already alluded to the fourth and most compelling reason for claiming that MacDonald's writings deserve consideration by those concerned to conceptualise and to implement spiritual development. The reason arises from what we shall see to be the most crucial questions in the debate about spiritual development and from the contrasting genres of MacDonald's writings. Much of the argument of my thesis will turn on this point and it is important at the outset to state it with some care. To articulate the notion of spiritual development a discourse is required. We shall meet the argument that the discourse of a religious tradition making specific truth-claims is necessary if the idea of spiritual development is to be coherent. We shall also hear it said that, while there are coherent spiritualities which do not employ the discourse of a truth-claiming religious tradition, such spiritualities are incompatible with those which do.

We find that these central questions about spiritual development correspond with those posed by MacDonald's writings. The great enigma of MacDonald's work is that his spirituality is expressed in parallel discourses. The first discourse articulates an understanding of spiritual growth and nurture in the familiar terms of traditional Christian piety, albeit a piety of vigorous dissent. But we encounter a second discourse, that of the fairy tale and the fantasy, a discourse in which the same themes are explored yet which is free of traditional religious terminology.

A comparison of the nature and function of these alternative discourses enriches our reading of MacDonald. But that comparative study - and it is hard to think of any other writer whose work in this respect could be equally illuminating - also clarifies the issue of whether spiritual development is a concept meaningful only within the mainstream of a religious tradition or whether it can be understood and promoted independently of any such tradition.

Reference to the 'alternative discourses' of MacDonald's work raises the issue of the different genres of his writing, particularly of his fiction. In this thesis I shall refer, as most

commentators on MacDonald do, to his 'realistic' fiction and to his works of 'fantasy'. It is a serviceable enough distinction - clearly *Thomas Wingfold, Curate,* and *Phantastes* belong to different literary genres.

But the more one reads MacDonald the more the frontier between the realistic and the fantastic seems to fade. More about this must be said in due course but the point needs making at the start. The familiar classification of MacDonald's fiction into the realistic and the fantastic breaks down not only because Thomas Wingfold's prim parish is as much an imagined world as the enchanted forest through which Anodos wanders, not only because the realm of *faerie* has established several bridgeheads in the territory of the realistic novels, but for a reason which reflects MacDonald's pedagogical purpose and thus is central to our interest. MacDonald's work, manifestly in its 'fantastic' mode but sometimes also in its 'realistic' mode, is subversive of that very distinction between the realm of life as ordinarily experienced and what is beyond, realms transcending the domain of the commonplace and familiar. The fundamental contrast in MacDonald's work is between the 'theistic' and the 'non-theistic' discourses - not between the 'fantastic' and the 'realistic', a distinction which proves so elusive. Failure to see this has led some critics into unnecessary difficulties as, for example, they struggle to classify a work such as *At the Back of the North Wind* in which Diamond is sometimes transported to another world but in which much of the action takes place in the realistically depicted streets of London.

This thesis touches on several different fields of enquiry. Some issues arising will be primarily philosophical. Other questions will be historical. Many of our texts invite attention in the light of literary theory. We shall have to refer to Jung and Freud and to their disciples; MacDonald talks much about God and to clarify what he says is a theological task. The contrasting genres of MacDonald's work could be a case study for students of semiotics and discourse analysis. Clearly no one individual could be an expert in all the disciplines which could be deployed in this study. I shall try to maintain a sense of direction by keeping in mind that this study is primarily educational and that its purpose is to clarify something that the school down the road is being asked to do. Where it seems helpful to adventure into fields in which I claim no special competence, for example in referring to

psychoanalytical theory, I shall try to keep to the limits of what a layman can usefully say.

So far as possible a fundamental critical issue needs to be clarified before going further. It is the 'mind or text' dilemma. Am I trying to enter into the mind of a particular nineteenth-century writer and to analyse and interpret his thought? Or is my field a body of texts for the interpretation of which the author's intentions are irrelevant? The dilemma is the more sharply posed by MacDonald's work because in most of it his authorial voice is pronounced while in a minority of his writings - albeit those which the critical consensus holds to be far more important - that authorial voice is strangely silent.

The position adopted in this thesis is that, while MacDonald's mind is ultimately as inaccessible to us as another's mind must always be, his 'realistic' novels, his poetry, his sermons and essays, are nevertheless so transparent that we can speak of 'the thought' of MacDonald in discussing what those works have to say. In what follows it will be to those more transparent texts we shall turn in commenting on MacDonald's understanding of nature, the child and the imagination. But it is unwise to search for what MacDonald meant in texts where the narrative voice is that of an implied author and in which MacDonald's own didactic tones are less audible. As we read these texts we are soon conscious of the reflexive character of many of them. They are texts about reading and the task of construing them is deferred to the reader. Holding such a text I find myself standing at a mirror - just as Cosmo does in *Phantastes* and Vane in *Lilith* - not at a window.

Thus in this thesis the terms 'thought' or 'mind' on the one hand and 'text' or 'writings' on the other are used advisedly. In referring to 'the thought' of MacDonald it is assumed that in his more transparent writings we do have access to his mind on the matter under discussion. But more often the reference will simply be to 'work', 'texts' or 'writings'. This usage will leave open the question of how far those texts express the mind of an author wishing to retain control of how he is read and how far it is left to the reader to make of the text what he or she will.

There are other terms and concepts, some of which I have already used, which recur in this thesis and which call for some comment on how I intend to use them. 'Discourse analysis'

has become an important field of study. Different concepts of discourse are discussed in what is now a vast literature (Pennycock, 1994). But in this dissertation the term 'discourse' is used quite informally and untechnically - and I hope simply. 'Discourse' in these pages refers to a pattern of extended utterance with certain common characteristics. As we have seen, the most important distinction of discourse in MacDonald's work is between that which alludes to God and employs religious terminology and that which does not.

Another term which recurs is 'pedagogy'. Recently Oswyn Murray (1999) has sharply criticised the use of this word by the contributors to a volume of essays entitled 'Pedagogy and Power' (Too, Livingstone, 1999).

> The very use of the word 'pedagogy' instead of education symbolizes their
> commitment to the new conception of education, in which education is at
> the service of government and its power structures (p. 3).

No such commitment is made by my use of this word. Every model or theory of education, if it is not to remain an abstraction, must imply a teaching process and it is in that latter sense, to denote the means by which we are taught, that the word 'pedagogy' is used in this thesis.

In the chapters that follow the words 'fantasy' and 'fairy tale' recur often. These terms are not used consistently in the literature and I must indicate how I propose to use them, though heeding Tolkien's warning, '*Faerie* cannot be caught in a net of words' (1964, p. 16). I take the general term 'fantasy' to refer to the discourse which, again to quote Tolkien, treats of a 'Secondary World' (p. 45) or which, substantially and significantly, relates the disruption of the regularities of our ordinary experience. 'Fantasy' is thus a broad term. It refers to the discourse of any tale, whether briefest anecdote or extended narrative, which introduces the reader or listener to an imaginary alternative world, the world of *faerie*, or which recounts the supernatural subversion of our own. In speaking specifically of 'a fantasy', or to 'the fantasy' or 'fantasies', the intended reference is to an example, or to examples, of a narrative in this mode. Generally the reference is to the more extended and elaborate instance, or instances, of such a narrative. The 'fairy tale' too is an example of fantasy writing but typically it is a shorter and simpler story. In the popular

usage that I am content to follow the term 'fairy tale' is not of course restricted to tales in which fairies themselves appear - indeed few of them are encountered in MacDonald's own *Dealings with Fairies*.

This thesis is about 'spiritual development' and much will be said about the connotation of that term. I have less to say about the far from simple notion of 'development' itself or about theories of human development. My reticence in this respect equals that of the official documents and the bulk of the literature where we find little attempt to expound spiritual development or to trace its stages within the framework of one or another theory of human growth. This reluctance does not, however, reflect an oversight or misjudgement. Theories of human development prove inadequate as models within which to understand spiritual development not because the accounts they give of human growth are wrong but because they are necessarily partial and selective in their focus. A standard textbook on children's development defines development thus: 'The term development refers to the process by which a child or foetus, or more generally an organism (human or animal), grows and changes through its life-span' (Smith, Cowie, and Blades, 1998, pp. 6 - 7). It is taken for granted that 'life-span' means mortal life-span. It has to be said that even this assumption is inadmissible if our subject is spiritual development. But the fundamental point is that spiritual development is a dimension of every aspect of human flourishing and is not to be contained within models which centralise one aspect of development to the neglect of others.[5]

I approach this subject as much the child of a particular culture and the product of my own history as was George MacDonald. My interpretation of MacDonald and my understanding of spiritual development is shaped by the way I read the world although - such is the wheel to which one is bound - that world-view has itself in part been shaped by my earlier reading of MacDonald. There is no objective, value-free, a-theoretical approach to the task I have set myself. All the time I am making value judgements about what matters more and what matters less, a process of appraisal made according to criteria which are external to the texts and concept I am studying.

My point of departure is the 'realist' position that truth and morality are not human constructs. Certain things are true or good because they are true or good, not because human beings - or God - say they are. The propositions 'x is true', 'y is good', are descriptive statements, not expressions of endorsement or approval. Bullying is wrong not because there is a general consensus that it is wrong. It would still be wrong even if it were widely approved. This philosophical position is widely contested and held by many to be discredited but to defend it would be clearly beyond the scope of this essay. I can only assert it. Suffice it to say that I adopt this position not because I think it is philosophically verifiable - I do not understand how by argument it could be either verified or falsified - but because, in my view, the assumption of its truth alone makes sense of our experience. It is also the only assumption on which a school can be run.

A further presupposition of this study concerns the nature and the limits of what it is possible for us to know. The view of the relationship of mystery and knowledge assumed in this thesis, which it is beyond its scope to defend, is, in the memorable words of Karl Rahner, that 'the supreme act of knowledge is not the abolition or diminution of the mystery but its final assertion, its eternal and total immediacy' (1966, p. 41). Mystery is thus not the provisional and temporary character of that which has not yet yielded to reason. Again Rahner's words must be weighed. 'Mystery is not merely a way of saying that reason has not yet completed its victory. It is the goal where reason arrives when it attains its perfection by becoming love' (p. 43). We shall recall these words when, in Chapter Nine, we come to ponder the ways of MacDonald's 'Wise Woman'.

I must register at the outset my debt to a fantasy text and to a critical commentary on it which have greatly influenced my own approach to MacDonald's fantasy, which indeed first alerted me to its character as 'transfiguring fantasy'. The text is *The Tempest* and the commentary is Anne Righter's (1968). *The Tempest*, Righter observes - and her comment could as well be applied to *Phantastes* or *Lilith* - 'blurs the planes of reality which are ordinarily distinct' (p. 50). For those in Shakespeare's audience - as, we might add, for MacDonald's readers - 'their day-to-day sense of the distinctions to be drawn between things illusory and things real, (has) been shattered' (p. 46). The staged drama becomes a

bridge between the worlds just as, in *Lilith*, the strange book Mr. Vane finds in his library is half in his world, half in another. From our 'real world' we witness ship-wrecked mariners cast from their 'real world' into an alternative world in which a masque plays out, fantasy within fantasy, the traffic of yet another world. So it is in *Phantastes* with its tales within a tale. Nor is all resolved with the falling of the curtain. The effect of Prospero's Epilogue, Righter points out, is to suggest 'that the play goes on beyond the formal limits of its fifth Act, that it runs into and shares the reality of its audience' (p. 51). This too, I shall claim, is the function of MacDonald's unclosed transfiguring fantasy. Anodos's journey becomes my own.

It is interesting that *The Tempest* is the one Shakespeare play a production of which MacDonald describes. When MacDonald tells us that it was the first Shakespeare play his hero Malcolm had ever read and the one he knew best we wonder whether the author is recalling his own introduction to Shakespeare. More significant for the argument I shall develop about 'transfiguring fantasy' is MacDonald's recognition of how the staged world and the audience's world elide. 'During the whole of the first act (Malcolm) never thought either of Miranda or Florimel apart' (*The Marquis of Lossie*, p.31).[6]

My thesis falls into three sections. Part One, the first three chapters, is the foundation for what follows. In Chapter One I review the background to the introduction of the concept of spiritual development into educational legislation and comment on the contemporary debate, surveying the relevant literature. I go on to address the issue of how I relate the thought and writings of MacDonald to the concept of spiritual development. I turn in Chapter Two to a consideration of the sources and influences which went to the making of MacDonald's mind. I have chosen to do so at some length for two reasons. Firstly, I wish to challenge the commonly held view that MacDonald's mind was a world apart. This judgement, while perhaps a fair assessment of his later years, underestimates the extent to which the younger MacDonald belonged to a recognisable circle, that of the Victorian dissenter. Secondly, I am concerned to highlight the extent to which MacDonald's educational ideas were shaped by those of others. Merely to note 'influences' in general terms is to say very little. My research interest requires a more sharply focussed enquiry,

a consideration of the extent to which those whom we know meant much to MacDonald may have had a direct influence on his educational thinking. In Chapter Three I offer an overview of the different approaches which have been adopted in studying MacDonald. Published work on MacDonald is spread the length of a continuum along which the academic blends with the devotional which in its turn passes over into hagiography. The aim in this chapter is to give prior attention to literature which addresses MacDonald's work with scholarly rigour and which bears on my research questions and to identify those gaps in the literature which the present study, it is hoped, goes some way to fill.

In Part Two of the thesis I discuss three themes which are frequently encountered within the intellectual tradition to which MacDonald belongs - nature, the child, and the imagination. In addressing these subjects MacDonald joins with many other voices but the tone and emphasis of what he says are distinctly his own. In Chapter Four I discuss the view we find in MacDonald's writings that landscape is more than scenery, that there is a power in nature to shape the human spirit. I draw attention to the resonances we sense as we read MacDonald's work - and here he moves beyond Wordsworth - between the role of nature and the function of fantasy. In significant respects MacDonald's treatment of the theme of childhood is also a departure from that of his Romantic precursors. In Chapter Five I discuss MacDonald's own study of what he sees as the key stages of a child's development, his essay *A Sketch of Individual Development*. For MacDonald the image of the child serves both as a pattern for the nurture of children - 'become the child you are' - and as a vision of what in the end we must all attain to. I argue that it would be foolish in a culture as confused as our own about the significance of childhood to dismiss MacDonald's interest in the theme as a Victorian preoccupation of no contemporary relevance. MacDonald, like the Romantic writers before him, had a high view of the imagination and its role in education and in Chapter Six I discuss his essay *The Imagination: its Function and its Culture*.

Part Three of the thesis consists of three chapters in which I examine MacDonald's fantasy writing, both as commentary on the process of spiritual development and as potentially formative text. In Chapter Seven I consider the function of fantasy and review some of the

approaches proposed for formulating its pedagogical role. I introduce the concept of 'transfiguring fantasy', claiming that this concept enables us to account for the potentially formative function of MacDonald's own fantasy and to do so more accurately than other approaches allow.

MacDonald's 'transfiguring' fantasy typically relates an unfinished journey. The experience of the fantasy journey shapes the character of the one who make it. At the same time the reader who imaginatively identifies with the protagonist making the journey is himself or herself shaped by reading the text. The fantasy narrative promotes the development of which it is a parable. The world through which the protagonist moves elides with the reader's own and the task of interpreting the protagonist's strange adventures becomes one with that of the reader trying to make sense of his or her own life. The hero's journey and the quest for significance of which it is the image does not close with the final page of the text. It is always 'to be continued', to be taken up in the continuing narrative of the reader's own spiritual development.

The claim that this model makes good sense of MacDonald's fantasy can only be justified by a closer reading of the individual fantasies and fairy tales. I come immediately to that more detailed discussion in Chapter Eight. In this chapter I focus attention on three major texts, *Phantastes, The Golden Key* and *Lilith* , and comment more briefly on some of the shorter fairy tales. I show how these texts serve as commentaries on the process of spiritual development, illuminating, not least, the central issue of what is the proper discourse for a spiritual pedagogy. I then demonstrate from these examples how the model of 'transfiguring fantasy', introduced in the previous chapter, accounts for the distinctive way MacDonald's fantasy works.

This thesis necessarily isolates for separate discussion aspects of spiritual development and its promotion which properly belong together. Many of these distinct elements are united and symbolised in one strange figure who comes and goes in many guises in MacDonald's work, the mysterious 'Wise Woman'. In the one person and single purpose of this memorable woman much that is claimed in this thesis comes together and it is appropriate

to devote a separate chapter to her (Chapter Nine) before drawing this study to a conclusion.

In the Conclusion I bring together the arguments which I have advanced in this thesis. I distil from my study what I see to be the fundamental principles of spiritual development which the MacDonald's writings suggest. I reemphasise what I believe to be the significance and importance of the distinctive discourse of MacDonald's 'transfiguring fantasy' for the formulation of strategies for the promotion of spiritual development in the pluralist community of a modern state school. In these closing pages I suggest what might be some of the curricular implications of the arguments that have been developed in this study.

My argument in this thesis will be supported by frequent reference to MacDonald's writings. I append a list of his published works as Appendix 8. While I shall refer very occasionally to MacDonald's correspondence, both published and unpublished, I shall in the main look to the works he saw into print to support my argument.

Endnotes

1. McLaughlin (1996) is troubled by the notion of 'the education of the whole child'. He asks what the concept means - is the 'wholeness' sought 'comprehensiveness' or 'integration'? He suggests that, in a pluralist society where many conflicting views of life are held, the idea of a 'holistic' education is deeply problematical. To register disquiet at an educational agenda which prioritises the achievement of measurable targets in specific subjects is not to underestimate such problems but to emphasise the importance of addressing them.

2. MacDonald writes of 'that development of the character of Falconer which has chiefly attracted me to the office of his biographer' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 41). It is the same interest in how men and women become their best selves which impels MacDonald to tell all his stories.

3. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is perhaps the most famous example of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel whose central theme is the development of the hero or heroine's character.

4. Louisa MacDonald writes to Lady Mount-Temple,
   > I send you a birthday-book (*Lilith*)...When I first read it in the proof I used constantly to be longing for you to read it but as I went on I thought it so terrible that I did not want you to see it... I am writing especially to beg you to stop reading directly it hurts or vexes you. There are terrible haunting things in it (ALS Yale, October 1895).

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5. The structuralist approach to human development associated with the name of Jean Piaget (1926) concentrates on the child's perception of the world around him and on the concepts the child forms. The focus is on the child's cognitive development, an approach which cannot readily accommodate the claim that we are summoned by what lies beyond what may be rationally understood. The developmental scheme proposed by Erik Erikson (1963) takes more account of the child's social and emotional development. As the individual grows society places fresh demands on him or her. Development takes place as we assume and accomplish these successive tasks society sets us. Although this might appear a model more hospitable to notions of spiritual development the framework is still too limiting. Spiritual development no doubt unfolds as the individual responds to social challenges but, certainly as MacDonald understood these matters, we are yet more profoundly shaped by what transcends such challenges. Kohlberg (1974) set out a scheme tracing the successive stages - 'pre-conventional', 'conventional', 'post-conventional' - of the individual's moral development as he or she acquires the capacity to reason more clearly about what is right or wrong. With such a model we come still closer to what we shall see to be the nature of spiritual development but, once more, the framework is too constricting. Spiritual development is not to be reduced to a function of ethics. Nor is spiritual development to be seen, or only to be seen, as an aspect of 'faith development'. The model proposed by James Fowler (1981) of how children develop in their religious faith has been highly influential in some church circles. But a fundamental premise of the understanding of spiritual development in educational legislation has been that it is - to use a term we shall repeatedly use - 'broader than religious'. Again the proposed model, for all its value within its prescribed limits, is insufficiently accommodating. It seems improbable that we shall find a model of human development which can accommodate without loss an understanding of human growth which insists as strongly as does MacDonald that our fulfilment is to be sought as we respond to that which is 'always beyond'.

6. David Robb discusses this episode. The visit to the theatre marks a falling-out for the young marquis Malcolm and his fisherman friend 'Blue Peter' whom he has taken with him to see the production. Such worldly pursuits as play-going are unacceptable to Blue Peter's Calvinist conscience. Another parting of the ways is dramatised here. 'MacDonald rejected the Calvinist rejection of art as powerfully as he rejected Calvinist theology' (Robb, 1988, p. 288).

PART ONE

In the first part of my thesis I shall prepare the ground on which I intend to address my research questions. I trace how the concept of spiritual development has come to occupy the place it now holds in educational legislation. I consider the literature, both official and academic, which the concept has generated and I consider the methodological issues arising in attempting to relate the work of George MacDonald to the debate about spiritual development as an educational objective. I seek to 'locate' MacDonald by discussing the sources and influences which shaped his world-view and his understanding of spiritual development. I review the approaches that have previously been adopted to MacDonald. I try to show that the approach determined by the questions asked in this study offers the possibility of a fresh reading of his work, a reading which is of potential educational importance.

Chapter One

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

By law schools in England and Wales are required to promote the spiritual development of their pupils and school inspectors must report on how well they do so. This is a very recent local legislative enactment of a timeless and universal concern. A spiritual dimension to human life, however resistant to definition or measurement, has been recognised for as long as men and women have consciously reflected on their condition.[1] The determination to seek the spiritual well-being of the young antedates the trial of Socrates and the writing of the Book of Proverbs. Obvious as it is, this point needs to be made. Terence Copley, claiming that 'spiritual development has a history', remarks that his argument is not 'the final word; almost the opposite' (Copley, 2000, p. x).[2] It is fair comment. It could be supposed from much of the discussion in educational circles that interest in spiritual development was unknown before the 1944 Education Act.

The insights of historic traditions of spirituality and the reflections of individual thinkers of earlier periods have received relatively little comment in the literature. By introducing the voice of George MacDonald to this debate is not intended to make exaggerated claims for one who remains a minor figure. Nevertheless I hope that the appeal to MacDonald will illustrate how our concerns can be illuminated by the insights of others who thought about these matters long before current legislation impressed on us their importance.[3]

This chapter falls into three parts. Firstly, I comment briefly on the background to the introduction of the concept of spiritual development into educational legislation and on references to spiritual development in the National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999a, 1999b) and in the National Forum for Values in Education (QCA, 1997). I then review the scholarly literature, concentrating on contributions to the debate which focus on what will be seen to be its central issues. Finally I consider how I am to relate the work of MacDonald to the concept of spiritual development. I adopt an understanding of spiritual development which both takes account of the fact that schools reflect and serve pluralist communities and which also distinguishes the 'spiritual' from the related categories of the 'moral, social, and

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cultural', as from the 'religious'. This model will provide a provisional conceptual framework for my analysis of MacDonald's work, a model open to modification as, in this 'hermeneutic circle', my study of MacDonald feeds back into my understanding of what is meant by spiritual development.

The legislation, the National Curriculum and the National Forum

The legislation

The concept of spiritual development entered educational legislation with the 1944 Education Act. This Act imposed on Local Education Authorities the duty 'so far as their powers extend, to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community' (HMSO, 1944, Preamble, Part 2, Section 7). Priestley (1985) claims that the attempt was being made here to provide a base for 'the whole educational process' (p. 112). It was never envisioned that spiritual development would be sufficiently provided for by two lessons a week and daily worship. Moreover Priestley was able to secure the testimony of the National Society's representative at the drafting of the legislation that the reason that the word 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' was chosen was 'because it was much broader' (p. 113). Whether there is any substance to the notion of the 'spiritual' independent of a religious tradition is a crucial question in the debate about spiritual development. Those who framed the original 1944 legislation believed that there is.

The requirement that spiritual development should be promoted was retained in the 1988 Education Reform Act. The concept was regarded as uncontentious and went largely unexamined. Then came the development which ignited the current debate. Under the 1992 Education (Schools) Act, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) was required to report on pupils' spiritual development, as on their moral, social and cultural development. With spiritual development now to be inspected it suddenly became important for schools to know what in fact the concept meant.

The legislation on spiritual development was retained in the 1996 Education Act. Section 351 of the Act rules that all maintained schools provide 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum that promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of

pupils at the school and of society' and that 'prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life'.

The National Curriculum

Promulgation of the revised National Curriculum, statutory in all schools in England from September 2000, was preceded by an extended consultative process. It is interesting and instructive to trace the route by which spiritual development found the place it is now holds in the National Curriculum. A brief overview of that process is included as Appendix 2. The National Curriculum is prefaced by a statement of 'values, aims and purposes'. This statement affirms the importance of recognising 'a broad set of common values and purposes that underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools'. In a footnote schools 'planning their curriculum' are referred to 'the statement of values' of the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community which we come to below. Foremost among those common values and purposes, the prefaced statement asserts, is 'a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being of the individual' (DfEE, 1999a, p. 10).

The statement lays down two aims for the school curriculum. The first of these is that 'the school curriculum should aim to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve' (p. 11). In the exposition of this aim there is a further reference to the spiritual.

> The school curriculum should contribute to the development of pupils' sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural heritages and Britain's diverse society and of the local, national, European, Commonwealth and global dimensions of their lives (p. 11).

The second aim is that the 'the school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life' (p. 11). In expounding this aim the statement, risking tautology, immediately adds a gloss.

> The school curriculum should promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and, in particular, develop principles for distinguishing between right and wrong (p. 11).

The statement insists on the interdependence of the two aims.

> These two aims reinforce each other. The personal development of pupils,

teaching of individual subjects. How far an understanding of spiritual development informs the philosophical thrust of the National Curriculum as a whole is more questionable. The first words of the Foreword to the National Curriculum - 'The National Curriculum lies at the heart of our policies to raise standards' - suggest that it is shaped less by educational philosophy than by political policy and they kindle the fear that in striving after standards the well-being of the spirit will be lost to sight. Spiritual development is not so much written into the National Curriculum as bolted on.

In recent years a lengthy series of official and semi-official documents have attempted to clarify what constitutes spiritual development and to offer guidelines for teachers and inspectors. An overview of some of these documents is provided as Appendix 3.

The National Forum

The most ambitious attempt so far to interpret what is being asked of schools in the promotion of the spiritual development of pupils has been that undertaken by the National Forum for Values in Education set up by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, now part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 1997).

The Forum was charged, firstly, with the task of discovering whether there are any values upon which there is common agreement within society - it was not asked to consider whether these values are those on which society *ought* to agree. Secondly it was asked to consider how schools might be helped to contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The Forum's 'Statement of Values' sets out the values which it found to be generally acknowledged under four headings - the self, relationships, society and the environment. It is to this statement which the National Curriculum refers schools in the planning of their own curricula. The Forum then goes on to relate to these agreed values the four areas where development is to be promoted. Pupils develop spiritually, as they do morally, socially and culturally, by 'learning to value' themselves, relationships, society, and the environment. Crucial to the Forum's project was the decision to link development in the four areas of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development to a schedule of agreed

values, a decision challenged in a scathing attack by Adrian Thatcher (1999).

Accounts of spiritual development in the official documents and the use of the term, even when weight is given to it as in the National Curriculum, remain imprecise. Later in this chapter I shall claim that such concepts as 'spiritual' or 'spiritual development' necessarily escape definition. But what cannot be defined can still be recognised. The introduction of the term 'spiritual' into the vocabulary of educational legislation asserts the importance of an aspect of human development that schools must not ignore. And what is not to be ignored must be capable of identification. If spiritual development is to be promoted in schools and to be inspected then we are bound to seek for some clearer understanding of what this tantalisingly elusive concept is.

The literature

The difficulty of identifying what is meant by spiritual development leads some to press for the exclusion of the notion from discussion of the purposes of education. Lambourn (1996), for example, claims that nothing is said by the use of the term 'spiritual development' that is not already contained in the concept of 'personal-social development'. Nevertheless, whether gladly or grudgingly, most educationalists accept that we must work with the terminology of the legislation and a rising flood of publications witnesses to their endeavour to bring the idea of spiritual development into sharper focus.

To that literature I now turn. Because the concept of spiritual development is so broad and fluid critical assessment of the literature is difficult. Much that is written about spiritual development is thoughtful and illuminating but, in the absence of any agreement as to what spiritual development means, little of it is contestable. Mott-Thornton (1998) has proposed a theoretical framework as a map on which theories of spiritual development - any such theory - can be placed (pp. 143 -144). I do not adopt this framework because, in my view, while it helpfully identifies significant polarities of opinion, it in fact accommodates only a proportion of the many models of spiritual development on offer. For the same reason I do not offer a framework of my own. Whatever framework is promoted there will always be a remainder of models which simply will not fit, such is the resistance of the concept of

spiritual development to systematic analysis. Nevertheless we must try to be methodical.

Firstly, I consider the literature on a conceptual disagreement deeper than any difference of emphasis about how spiritual development is to be understood. This is the issue, on which I claim MacDonald's work has an important bearing, of whether a coherent spirituality can be articulated outside a truth-claiming religious tradition and, if it can, whether it is compatible with a secular spirituality which presupposes no such religious framework. Secondly, I review what has been said on the issue of whether the promotion of spiritual development is essentially the nurture of 'the inner self' or whether it is at base a much more relational and communal process. Thirdly, I single out for separate comment a number of other contributions to the discussion which, in my view, engage with it in depth. Here judgements are unavoidable about who really has significant things to say. Fourthly, I refer briefly to the views of just three of the many others who have entered the debate, three writers who echo MacDonald in emphasising the connection between spiritual development and moral awareness. Finally, I comment briefly on an approach to spiritual development which, to do it justice, would require a separate study, that which sees health education programmes as particularly well-adapted for its promotion.

Spirituality and religion

Is the concept of spiritual development meaningful and its promotion possible only within the framework of a religious tradition? This issue lies at the heart of the current debate about spiritual development. It is also the issue to which we shall constantly be drawn back as we reflect on the contrasting discourses, the theistic and the non-theistic, of MacDonald's work. Does a post-religious society, as many would hold ours to be, demand a wholly 'secular spirituality', a spirituality which dispenses entirely with religious categories and which requires no assent to the truth-claims religions make? Or does a spirituality outside such a religious framework collapse into incoherence?

The case for a 'secular spirituality' has been very powerfully argued. It is important to be clear what is meant here. When Crawford and Rossiter (1996), for example, discuss the implications for religious education of the 'secular spirituality of youth' they are acknowledging the secular preoccupations of youth culture. But they are not calling in

question the validity of a religious explanation of life. The issue for our understanding of spiritual development is not the accessibility or the lack of perceived relevance of religious claims but whether a meaningful spirituality requires the acceptance of those claims as true. John White (1994a) does not believe such claims are true. More importantly he holds that our society has tacitly abandoned belief in them. He offers an astringent appraisal of the 1994 OFSTED consultation document *Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development* (OFSTED, 1994). White finds much that is muddled in the idea of spiritual development and in the OFSTED commentary on it, particularly in the lack of clarity, as he sees it, in what is implied about the relationship of spiritual development to religious claims. In his view the one place for 'the spiritual' in education, so long as it is uncoupled from religion, is in the recognition of 'the *wonder* of it all' (White's italics). 'Our main responsibility lies,' he writes, 'with the goal of contemplation and wonder' (p. 373). This sense of wonder is encouraged by engagement with the arts and by 'first hand sensuous experience of flowers, skies, seascapes, moon, stars' (p. 374).

White (1994b) returns to these themes in his lecture *Education and Personal Well-being in a Secular Universe* in which he advocates an 'absolute embargo on the use of the terms "spiritual" or "spiritual development"' (p. 16). White urges that personal well-being be understood 'against some kind of cosmic framework' (p. 7). Education with that well-being as its goal will recall children and young people to 'a sense of wonder at the existence of things' (p. 11).

Mike Newby (1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1998) too argues for a secular understanding of spiritual development. In a predominantly non-religious culture the spiritual must be conceived in terms which make no metaphysical assumptions. There is no single 'master story'. Spiritual development is the development both of self-identity and of self-transcendence. 'The highest spiritual values belong to a category which can be called "the love of the world"'(1996a, p. 44).[6] Although our culture is no longer religious, Newby believes that the idea of spiritual development remains meaningful and important. Newby claims that the spiritually developed person may be recognised and she or he may be identified by criteria which he is bold enough to specify.[7] 'Development' is a process implying a goal and without some notion of the nature of the intended goal discussion of how it is to be attained will be futile.

A student of MacDonald will welcome Newby's stress on the importance of stories. Although presumably not listing his 'marks' of the spiritually developed person in order of importance, Newby places the capacity to respond to stories first in the schedule he proposes. 'The mature identity will have critically responded to a large repertoire of stories from many sources' (1996b, p. 102). We are shaped by story. Newby (1997) focuses on 'the development of the self as the composer of a coherent, creative and responsible life-narrative' (p. 283). It is the function of story, including - if stripped of its supernaturalist scaffolding - the Christian story, to inspire that transcendence of self. Newby invites us 'to draw from the well of mythology' (p. 287), to listen to its voices, to discover its power, to apply its values. The secularisation of transcendence represents not only a discarding of the religious framework but a new understanding of the self. The focus changes from the self as 'what I substantively am' to the self as 'what I might *become*'. In fostering that 'becoming' good stories are indispensable.

There are powerful resonances in Newby's remarks with what later will be said about 'transfiguring fantasy', about texts such as *Phantastes* or *Lilith*. These texts, in which the narrator tells how he is shaped by the experiences his tale has to tell, invite the reader, drawn into the narrative, to make sense likewise of his or her own story.[8] But there is perhaps an inconsistency in Newby's argument, the tension between his interpretation of spiritual development as a story to be enriched by stories and his insistence that we must proceed in our spiritual development towards a known goal. Does the notion of spiritual development make sense only if we have a substantive understanding of what would constitute the developed life? MacDonald's major fantasies are accounts of spiritual journeys no less purposeful that their goal, lying beyond the last page, is undisclosed.

Both White and Newby have mounted a powerful case for a wholly secular understanding of spirituality. David Carr (1995, 1996a, 1996b) by contrast claims that the idea of spiritual education makes little sense outside the framework of 'some serious tradition of spiritual reflection or enquiry' (1996a, p. 173). It is a claim that bears on the argument of this thesis that in his fantasy writing MacDonald is exploring the possibility of a spirituality independent of traditional religious models. If Carr is right MacDonald was attempting the impossible.

Carr is led to the conclusion that the effective initiation of young people into the spiritual requires their acquaintance with 'some or other substantial tradition of spiritual aspiration or enquiry' (1996a, p. 169). In a word, spiritual development must be knowledge or content based. Pupils must know the matter as well as the form of distinctively spiritual modes of experience. He sternly insists that there must be 'no promiscuous postmodern cavorting with essentially disinherited and disjointed fragments of the life of different and diverse human cultures' (1996a, p. 173).

Carr is well aware that the approach he commends is open to the criticism that it may too easily topple over into indoctrination. To meet this criticism he is careful to distinguish between the confessional and, what he is advocating, 'the rival traditions' approach. A pedagogy adopting the latter approach, far from disregarding alternative traditions, invites the pupil to attend to them seriously in the conviction that, at least standing somewhere, he or she is better placed to consider other traditions than someone simply drifting, notionally neutral but lacking any fixed points of reference (1996a, p. 174).

Andrew Wright's major study (1998) of contemporary spiritual education in England and Wales explores the issue of the alternative - and, in his view, conflicting - spiritual traditions within which a 'spiritual pedagogy' may be articulated. A strength of Wright's monograph is in its success in placing the issue in context, both in the context of more recent cultural and educational assumptions and in the context of the history of ideas. He notes the pervading sense of 'spiritual decay' which, it has been hoped, the promotion of spiritual development might arrest. He identifies a nostalgia for the progressive insights that dominated educational practice in the 1960's and the dominance of the 'anthropological' understanding of the spiritual, with its prioritising of awareness, experience, and inner feeling over the 'theological' with its reference to God and its claims that there are things to be known about him. These emphases on the subjective have deep roots, ultimately in the Romantic protest against the Enlightenment's enthronement of reason. Over against this 'romantic/post-modern tradition' there is, amongst other traditions, that of 'Trinitarian Christian spirituality'. This is a spirituality based not on a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' but on a 'hermeneutic of trust'. It is a spirituality rooted in the objectivity of the divine reality and certain very specific claims about what has been revealed as true.

Wright's claim is not the same as Carr's. He is not arguing that the romantic/post-modern tradition is incoherent or untrue. Nor for that matter is he claiming that the tradition of Trinitarian Christian spirituality is true. His simple point is that they are incompatible traditions, that any attempt to accommodate one within the other 'inevitably leads to a reductionism that operates in favour of the recipient' (p. 84). It is a conclusion which has practical implications. The reality of spiritual diversity must be recognised. Wright proposes that in schools a distinction be drawn between 'the Whole Curriculum' and 'the Basic Curriculum'. Within the former schools must nurture pupils within one particular spiritual tradition but within the latter they must be given the 'spiritual literacy' to criticise that tradition in the light of alternatives.

The pedagogical issue which Wright analyses so acutely corresponds to the critical question of how we are to engage with the contrasting discourses, the theistic and the non-theistic, in which the theme of spiritual nurture is explored in MacDonald's work. In light of reflection on that work we shall return to Wright's discussion in Chapter Eight.

Does the idea of spiritual development make any sense outside a religious tradition making specific truth-claims? An acceptance of Carr's argument that it does not would not close off the thought of MacDonald as a potential source of illumination of the concept of spiritual development. Far from it. After all the bulk of MacDonald's explicitly spiritual writings belong to an identifiable religious tradition, that of nineteenth century liberal non-conformity. From his day to ours the writings of MacDonald have been extensively quarried and anthologised for spiritually edifying material which has continued to nourish the devotional life of those within the mainstream of church life. But that paradigm of spiritual development, shaped as it is - and shaped as Carr claims it must be - within a given religious tradition, fails to accommodate what is so remarkable and distinctive in MacDonald's work, his deliberate abandonment of the language of that traditional spirituality in favour of a discourse altogether more cryptic yet singularly powerful. By the same token Wright's conclusion that the theistic and non-theistic spiritualities are incompatible is, as we shall see, challenged by the contrasting yet complementary discourses of MacDonald's work.

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Does spiritual development take place in the 'inner self' or in social relationship? To put the question in those terms is to make one of the frequent oversimplifications which bedevil the discussion of this subject. But to ask the question this way allows us to call in evidence an important series of publications, important not least because they challenge the assumptions behind it.

The view that the arena of spiritual development is the inner self is represented by the 'experientialist' approach to children's spirituality famously associated with the pioneering work of Alister Hardy. The premise of this account of spirituality is that spiritual awareness is an innate human faculty. Human beings, Hardy argued, are naturally spiritual (Hardy, 1979). The paradox and tragedy however is that in a secularised society expression of this inherent spirituality is discouraged and it is thus at risk of atrophy. Hardy's claim that children have a natural spiritual awareness is supported by a series of studies, surveyed by Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996), studies which point to the failure of cognitive development theory fully to account for what it means to be human. Hay, Nye and Murphy highlight Edward Robinson's *The Original Vision* (Robinson, 1977), a survey of moving testimonies to 'the original spiritual vision of childhood'. For Hay and his fellow authors the weakness of Robinson's approach is that it is dependent on reminiscences by adults, some very elderly.[9] A work less open to that criticism, not mentioned by Hay, Nye and Murphy, is Michael Paffard's *Inglorious Wordworths* which discusses 'transcendental experiences in childhood and adolescence' reported to the author by sixth-formers and undergraduates (Paffard, 1973).[10]

The claim that the spiritual dimension is to be sought within, that it is essentially an aspect of the individual's inward experience, is captured in the title of a book by David Hay, *Exploring Inner Space* (1987). It is an approach defended by Roger Homan (1995) who welcomes a nurturing of the spiritual which is 'inward rather than upward'.

This 'interiorist' understanding of spirituality has been trenchantly criticised by Adrian Thatcher (1993, 1996, 1999). Thatcher distrusts models of spiritual development which presuppose that 'the spiritual' is an aspect of the disengaged autonomous self and which call

for 'inwardness' in the belief that what is distinctively human lies in the hidden depths of each individual. This inward focus, he claims, is an orientation required by the dethronement since the Enlightenment of external authorities for meaning and truth. He argues that a spirituality which thus invites us to withdraw into ourselves, into some 'inner space', is deficient in its understanding of the human person, based as it is on a now discredited dualism, and that it is educationally damaging because it leads to a devaluation of the physical and material. Thatcher advocates an account of spirituality which 'replaces inwardness with between-ness' (1993, p. 213). 'Communities are the locations within which spiritual development occurs or fails to occur' (1999, p. 34). Spirituality is concerned to study and to practise 'the ways in which human beings are related to each other, to creation, and to God' (1993, p. 216). Thatcher's plea for 'spirituality without inwardness' is rooted in a theistic and specifically Christian understanding of the spiritual, as he makes clear in his criticism of the statement of values agreed by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community, whose endeavours he does not think were a serious rational undertaking (1999).

To these criticisms of Thatcher we may add those of Andrew Wright (1996) who, in a work earlier than the one discussed above, argues for a communal model of spirituality. Such a model is based on the claim that the self is constituted and formed by its communal relationships and that spiritual development is nurtured, not by the cultivation of inwardness, but by a search outwards. The spiritual quest, as much as scientific enquiry, is the quest for how things are.

John Hull (1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b) is equally critical of an understanding of spirituality which lingers on the inward. Hull (1995b) argues that it might be helpful if the framework for the discussion of the spiritual and education were grounded in the social sciences. Hull points out that we live in a money culture and that money is becoming the language of our lives. A spirituality which urges the cultivation of the inward reflects that money culture in its emphasis on the individual and individual interests. At the same time such a spirituality may react against the money culture by repudiating the material whereas a true spirituality affirms the material. Another error is to suppose that the spiritual is to do with the universal and the timeless whereas 'it is very specific to the money culture' (1995b, p. 132).

Erroneous too is the claim that spiritual development is promoted by refining our sensibilities, that it is all to do with the arts, poetry and music. Thus understood the cultivation of the spiritual becomes 'a leisure pursuit for the wealthy' (1995b, p. 132). Hull's view is that promoting spiritual development means inspiring young people 'to live in solidarity with others rather than offering them a spiritualised spirituality which will live only too easily with the selfish and individualising values of the money culture' (1995b, p. 132). It is a theme Hull returns to, arguing that insofar as the National Curriculum 'sprang from a society increasingly dedicated to the pursuit of wealth in the context of getting competitive advantage over people from other countries it is an unspiritual document' (1996a, p. 68). Hull contends that spirituality is generated by the character of society itself, especially by the character of the money-culture. He claims that we may now speak of 'the spirituality of shopping' (1996b, p. 39). The contrasts and conflicts in the contemporary understanding of the spiritual results from 'the money madness which grips us today' (1996b, p.43). 'Children and young people are educated spiritually when they are inspired to live for others (1996b, p. 43). The promotion of spiritual development thus understood is certainly not assisted by requiring school assemblies to be of a 'broadly Christian character'. Schools should instead be required 'to hold acts of collective spirituality' (1995a, p. 69).

The more recent work of educationalists in the experientialist tradition suggests that a model of spiritual education which encourages the nurture of the inward is not necessarily inimical to the relational and communal. This work claims that, on the contrary, inner spiritual awareness is essentially relational and that its nurture is vital if the individualism of contemporary culture is to be challenged. The inward-outward polarity turns out to be a false dichotomy.

Here I draw attention to a joint work by David Hay and Rebecca Nye *The Spirit of the Child* (1998). This study is based on extensive field-work, on a large-scale empirical study conducted by Rebecca Nye, scrupulous in its methodology, which investigated the nature of contemporary children's spirituality. As a result of this study it is concluded that a 'core of children's spirituality' is identifiable. The very diverse ways in which children's spirituality is manifested can be accounted for by the concept of 'relational consciousness'.

The core of children's spirituality is characterised by special forms of insight or awareness experienced by the child in certain moments or actions. These are typically associated with the child's sense of relation with others, with him or herself, and/or with the divine.

We have here a model of spirituality - not a hypothesis but an empirically demonstrated pattern - which not only takes account of all that David Hay and Alister Hardy before him have said about the natural spiritual awareness of human beings but also that recognises the essential relational dimension to that awareness. And thus a section of their study can be entitled: 'Why spirituality has political and social importance' (pp. 17-20). In commenting on Nye's research Hay observes that if 'relational consciousness' is a human predisposition it is today seriously threatened by the *mores* of an individualistic society. He argues that 'the nurturing of spirituality, and the prevention of its suppression by the individualistic assumptions of our culture is...the major task facing the British educational system' (Hay, *forthcoming*). By heeding the inward, as Hay has long urged we must, we do not, *pace* Adrian Thatcher, devalue the relational.

Is the promotion of spiritual development essentially the nurture of an inner disposition? Or is it at base the strengthening of our humanity in its relational and communal dimensions? Is it about 'me' or 'us'? It appears that the two positions need not be so starkly opposed. Such a conclusion is supported by our reading of MacDonald. A first reading of MacDonald would suggest his was a narrowly individualistic and inward understanding of the spiritual. 'By his creation then,' he said, 'each man is isolated with God' (*Unspoken Sermons, First Series*, p. 112). But at the same time for MacDonald spiritual awareness is always moral awareness. His insistence on this principle is almost obsessive. The development of the spirit entails obedience to what my neighbour today requires of me.

Transcendence and the hidden future.

I turn now to publications by two scholars whose views on spiritual development I judge to be of particular importance, Brian Hill and Kevin Mott-Thornton. I have already drawn attention to the latter's criticism of points of view with which he takes issue but his own understanding of spiritual development needs to be considered.

In a major article Hill (1989) defends the threefold thesis that the word 'spiritual' points to aspects of human nature and learning that are not subsumed by the adjectives 'moral','social' and 'cultural', that it can be unpacked in a way that is specific enough for curriculum implementation, and that the nurture of their spiritual development is essential to the education of all children. For Hill the key category is 'the transcendent'. He sees it as the distinctive capacity of human beings 'to rise above the feelings and rhythms of animal life and become conscious of personal identity' (p. 171). In developing this notion Hill is careful to avoid smuggling in any theological assumption about the transcendent or to settle for a particular understanding of the self - other than to exclude that of 'the most radical behaviourists' (p. 171).

The 'spiritual' cannot be collapsed into one or more of the other three categories with which it is linked. Hill recognises transcendence in the human capacity to empathise and 'to rise above the flow of affect' (p. 172). Imagination is another sign of the human capacity to transcend the given. Our capacity for transcendence transforms our experience of relationships and results in a sense of moral obligation. This does not mean that the spiritual can be subsumed under the moral for the spiritual means much more than the moral. It is that about us that makes possible the moral. A capacity for transcendence is reflected by our experience at times of 'oceanic feelings of awe on the one hand, or *angst* on the other' (p. 173). We experience Niebuhr's 'essential homelessness of the human spirit' (p. 174).[11] We are 'brushed by mystery' (p. 174). It is the task of religious education to enable the student to address the question of whether the human capacity for transcendence has its source in a transcendent reality but for Hill the promotion of spiritual development as a cross-curricular task does not wait upon the answer to that question.

The emphasis in Hill's thought on the place of the imagination, on the connection between the sense of the spiritual and of a sense of moral obligation, and on the experience of awe and wonder resonates powerfully with themes we shall meet in reading MacDonald.

I return now to Mott-Thornton's major study (1998) and draw attention to one strand in his wide-ranging argument. Mott-Thornton argues that to base educational policy on a non-realist account of religious claims would be to adopt a highly controversial position,

unacceptable in a pluralistic setting, about what are the criteria for distinguishing the real from the non-real. Mott-Thornton advocates a position of 'critical realism'. True statements do depict reality.

> Our experience has its origins in a metaphysical reality of which we are a part and which remains even when it is unperceived by anyone...This form of realism is not however tied to a single conception of reality because in a way that mirrors many mystical traditions, it says that our language will never allow us to encapsulate it completely (p. 156).

There is on this view 'a significantly hidden transcendent dimension' (p. 157). 'Human life is, in a very significant sense, oriented towards a future both social and individual, which is currently and importantly hidden' (p. 159). Our spiritual development is orientated towards a hidden future.

The resonances with the central themes of *The Golden Key*, of *Phantastes* and of *Lilith*, are remarkable. Students of MacDonald will find the direction of Mott-Thornton's discussion deeply fascinating, particularly as they seek to interpret the contrasting discourses of MacDonald's writing. MacDonald, it seems, remains a realist. The realism of his writing in conventional modes is that of Christian theism, albeit of a highly liberal brand. The realism of the great fantasies is, to speak anachronistically, a 'critical realism'. If 'critical realism' is the necessary philosophical framework for the promotion of spiritual development in schools serving a pluralist society then such works must be potentially a powerful pedagogical resource.[12]

Spiritual development - an ethical process.

I draw attention briefly to the studies of Rodger, Burns, and King, highlighting their work because of its insistence, which is MacDonald's too, that spiritual development is through and through an ethical process.

Alex Rodger (1996) sees spirituality as rooted in an awareness which carries with it moral demand. 'Spirituality is rooted in awareness and calls for expression in action' (p. 52). Spirituality is a disposition, an *ek-stasis*, a 'standing outside of ourselves' and the classic expression of it is in the thought of Simone Weil (Weil, 1951). Such awareness will be something more than an experience of transcendence and that 'something more' is moral.

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The experience is a *commanding* experience, an awareness of something required.

Andrew Burns (1997) and those associated with him in the 'Values and Vision' project would insist equally strongly on the moral implications of spiritual development. These implications are altogether more far-reaching than narrowly conceived concerns of private morality as the title of their project's handbook *Values and Vision - A Handbook for Spiritual Development and Global Awareness* makes clear.

Ursula King (1985) argues for 'an education towards spirituality without indoctrination or nurture into a specific religion' (p. 138). She commends 'a training in sensitivity for spiritual awareness' as something to be fostered across the whole curriculum (p. 138). At the heart of all teaching as she sees it there is the promise of liberation from self-centredness, the practice of love and care of others, and the hope of ultimate goodness and glory.

Here are three writers who would support what we shall find throughout MacDonald's work, the powerful sense that the universe of our experience makes claims on us and that our spiritual development is impossible if we seek to evade them.

Spiritual health

The fact that spiritual development should be promoted across the whole curriculum does not alter the fact that it establishes a bridgehead more readily in some areas of the curriculum than others. It is increasingly recognised - and that recognition is reflected in a growing literature - that an advantageous curricular base for spiritual development is provided, in schools which offer it, in a health education programme. The premise of this approach is twofold. Health is understood, firstly, as much more than freedom from illness and injury. It is our total well-being. But, secondly, health is as much a social as an individual goal - schools must be healthy communities. The integration of the spiritual dimension into health programmes is a subject for a separate dissertation. All that can be suggested here is that the suitability of such programmes as a base for spiritual nurture is enhanced as those programmes themselves become increasingly cross-curricular (Bensley, 1991; Seaward, 1991; Diaz, 1993).

My brief survey of the background to the present debate about spiritual development and my review of the documents, commentaries, and literature the debate has generated have not succeeded in capturing and containing the concept. We are no nearer to a definition of 'spiritual development' and in a moment I shall claim that this is no reason for dismay. What has emerged is a number of key issues. Two of these I have underlined. The first is whether there can be a substantial spirituality outside a given spiritual tradition with its own received and shared discourse. The second question is whether the promotion of spiritual development is fundamentally the cultivation of a state of inward awareness or whether it is essentially much more 'outward', much more communal and relational, in its reference. I hope to show that these issues are focussed by one's reading of MacDonald. More boldly, I shall claim that they are in some measure resolved by that reading.

Towards an analytical framework

I turn now to the issue of how to relate the writings of MacDonald to the concept of 'spiritual development'. My project necessarily entails the familiar 'hermeneutic circle' in which theory and field of investigation are open to mutual modification. The theoretical model provides the framework within which the field is studied but in the course of that study it becomes apparent that the original model needs to be modified. I join the search for a coherent understanding of the concept of 'spiritual development', for an analytical framework which both takes account of the fact that schools reflect and serve pluralist communities and also distinguishes the 'spiritual' from the related categories of the 'moral, social, and cultural', as indeed from the religious. That paradigm, if it emerges, provides the conceptual framework for an analysis of MacDonald's work, eliminating from the enquiry strategies of spiritual development inappropriate for state schools where many world-views are represented and entitled to respect. But at the same time my study of MacDonald enriches my understanding of what is meant by spiritual development. The paradigm is thus itself reshaped by what I learn from MacDonald, from a study which, nevertheless, would have had little coherence without the structure provided by that provisional model.

Where do I join this circle? In principle I could begin with MacDonald and attempt to trace

the strands of his thought about spiritual development and to weave those strands into some kind of pattern. Of course I could not do this without some idea of what it is I am looking for, some prior notion of what constitutes spiritual development, presuppositions themselves moulded in part by my earlier reading of MacDonald. Nevertheless I could start by trying to establish MacDonald's mind on the matter. I would then use that model as a framework for understanding spiritual development and its promotion in state schools. But the constraints of state schooling in a pluralist society would require extensive revision of a a framework fashioned in this way. I would be obliged to return to MacDonald with a much modified model of spiritual development and to read him more selectively.

My proposal is to step on to the carousel by adopting a philosophically coherent account of the concept of 'spiritual development', if such can be found, and to use that as the framework for my reading of MacDonald. That reading will constitute the 'fieldwork' for this project. It is an extensive field but no part of it can be excluded from consideration. The paradigm of spiritual development adopted will serve as a control, filtering out and retaining, from the torrent of text about the nurture of the spirit pouring from MacDonald's pen, what might inform and serve the promotion of spiritual development in our common schools. The model will thus permit some initial purchase on the bewildering multiplicity of diverse material to be studied. But that model is not set in stone. Our investigation, which that provisional conceptual framework has facilitated, may well show its need of redrafting.

An understanding of spiritual development which commends itself for our purposes is to be found in Jack Priestley's 1996 Hockerill Lecture (Priestley, 1996). This lecture is important for at least four reasons. It sets out powerfully the educational argument for taking spiritual development seriously. It addresses the linguistic and epistemological problems which have dogged the debate over the term 'spiritual'. It profiles the character of spiritual development so that it may be recognised. And it proposes a philosophical foundation for the model of spiritual development it commends.

Priestley argues that we have confused education with curriculum and that in concentrating on the latter there is serious loss. Education, for Priestley, is 'reflective learning leading to the growth of wisdom'.[13] The getting of wisdom is an active process; it is to become

something and it is all to do with spiritual growth. Curriculum by contrast is that of which we are the passive recipients It is that which stands outside, waiting to be given. It is something to be 'delivered'.

Priestley addresses the linguistic and epistemological difficulties involved in discussing spiritual development. From those difficulties it is all to easily concluded that the concept is meaningless and that what it so vaguely alludes to is sufficiently contained in the more readily defined categories of the moral, the social, the cultural, and the religious. This conclusion, Priestley holds, can only be maintained by capitulating to a positivist understanding of knowledge. The claim that only statements which are either analytic or empirically verifiable are meaningful may no longer be defended by professional philosophers but it lingers on in the popular assumption that only what can be defined or proved makes sense. This assumption dominates most of the business done in school classrooms and laboratories. And much of the time, no doubt, it should. But there are other ways of knowing. Priestley argues that the attempt to provide a systematic logical analysis of the 'spiritual' is bound to fail because it is operating within an inappropriate epistemological framework. We must refuse to define what we mean by the spiritual, not as a way of escape, but as a matter of principle.

> The answer to *Language, Truth and Logic* cannot be language, truth and more logic. The answer to language, truth and logic is language, truth and poetry or art or music or narrative or metaphor.

The author of *Phantastes* would have agreed.

What cannot be defined can nevertheless be described. Priestley offers six aspects of 'the spiritual as it most affects curriculum matters'. It is *broader than the religious*. Priestley reminds us of the historical background to the introduction of the phrase 'spiritual development' into the 1944 act, and the concern that there is a vital dimension to education which is not the monopoly of church schools or of the religious studies department. The spiritual is *dynamic*. Images of the spirit are those of wind, fire, running water. That fundamental sense of something always in motion is lost by definition.[14] The spiritual concerns *being and becoming*, as indeed does the whole educational process, a principle which is lost sight of the more that schooling is limited to the learning of data to be stored

in the memory and to be retrieved under examination. The spiritual is to do with the *other-worldly*. Priestley is not here encouraging hallucinations about 'a happy land, far far away' but urging that there should be a place in the curriculum for the envisioning of 'utopias', visions of this world made better which arouse moral courage. The spirit is *communal.* Spiritual development is more than individual development. The context in which we continue to use the term 'spiritual' is society. The promotion of spiritual development in schools demands deep reflection on what kind of communities we seek to build, both within the school and in society at large. The spirit is *holistic*. It is all-embracing. If spiritual development is to be taken seriously in the curriculum then there needs to be an overall theoretical framework within which attention can be given to it in individual subject areas.

Priestley proposes a philosophical foundation for understanding spiritual development. He argues that 'a metaphysical base is needed' and that such a base is available in A. N. Whitehead's philosophy of education (Whitehead, 1950). Whitehead argued that the world is not 'made up of bits of stuff with attributes'. The world is a living organism in a constant state of change, growing and decaying like any organism. The world is not 'a thing' but 'a process'. Priestley argues that it is only from such a metaphysical base that we can talk about the spiritual at all. Whitehead's understanding of how things are requires that we think only in terms of fluid metaphors. We must think no longer of 'fields of knowledge' but of 'streams of knowledge'. Priestley also emphasises what Whitehead sees as the central notion of 'rhythm' in education. The important point, Priestley contends, is that 'one cannot arrest rhythm in order to analyse it'. The educational process is characterised by 'radical incompleteness' - the quest is never finished.[15]

Whitehead's educational thought is through and through utopian. The logic of a philosophy of process for education is that its sights are always on the future. Change is not an option. It is our moral choice whether that change is for the better or the worse. Priestley quotes the Whiteheadian educationalist Dwayne Heubner (1965),

> Education is the lure of the transcendent. That which we seem is not what we are for we can always be other. Education is the openness to a future that is beyond all futures (p. 463).

The resonances with MacDonald's understanding of spiritual development as a journey

made in response to the beckoning of what is always beyond are multiple and powerful.[16]

Here then is a framework for analysing the implications of MacDonald's work for an understanding of spiritual development. But it would be wholly opposed both to the theme and the spirit of this enquiry if that framework were used inflexibly. It is not to be imposed as a rigid template on every page of MacDonald's work nor will it obtrude on every page of this study. It will serve as a frame of reference, there in mind as we read MacDonald and always open to modification or extension in the light of what that reading reveals. How helpful it will prove only that reading will show.

Endnotes

1. Attempts have been made to identify precise criteria by which spiritual well-being may be accurately measured. The 'Spiritual Well-being Scale' developed and promoted by Paloutzian and Ellison is the outcome of rigorous empirical research and of sophisticated statistical analysis of the kind comprehensible only to specialists. Whether spiritual development can be calibrated so precisely is debatable (Ellison, 1983).

2. Copley traces the historical links in the tradition of spiritual development 'through the Arnold dynasty and their marriages, through the Arnold cult among later head teachers, and by a different sort of family tree from Rugby school alumni including the Temples, father and son, and personal encounters between leading figures in the story such as William Temple and Rudolf Otto' (Copley, 2000, p. 109). Copley also discerns strong roots of how spiritual development has been understood in the thought of Coleridge (pp. 114 - 116).

3. There have been some, a few, who have 'returned to ancient springs'. Jerome W. Berryman (1997) draws on the writings of the mediaeval theologian Richard of St. Victor to distinguish 'the knowing of the spirit by contemplation' from other ways of knowing. Berryman illustrates 'the knowing of the spirit' by considering the dynamics of play and the concept of 'flow', the liberating sense of one's activity being a continuing current no longer requiring conscious studied attentiveness. Kelvin Ravenscroft (1996) explores the relationship between religious education and spiritual education in the light of the life and work of the Polish-Jewish educationalist Janusz Korczak who ran a children's home in Warsaw and who perished with those children in the Treblinka death camp. Ravenscroft commends the value of what he calls 'biographical philosophy', an approach in which the lives of such figures as Korczak are studied and the spirituality of those lives articulated. Robin Minney (1991) reminds us of Schleiermacher's affirmation of feeling, intuition and openness to mystery, and he emphasises the abiding importance of Rudolf Otto's identification of the 'numinous' in his classic work *The Idea of the Holy* (Otto, 1950).

4. The sentence survives unaltered from the QCA's original proposed statement of 'values, aims and purposes' (QCA, 1999a, pp. 54 - 56) where it does not refer directly to 'the personal development of pupils, spiritually, morally, socially and culturally'. Perhaps its survival into the preamble of the revised National Curriculum is evidence of lazy redrafting. Be that as it may, we have to weigh its force and its unfortunate implications here in its final context.

5. For example, 'Information and communication technology provides opportunities to promote spiritual development through helping pupils to discuss how the limitations of ICT make us more aware of what makes us human (for example, 'can computers create?) and helping pupils to recognise their own, and others' creativity and imagination' (DfEE, 1999c, p. 8). These suggestions about how spiritual development can be promoted in separate subjects seem locked into an understanding of spiritual development as essentially an *inward* process. We are told, for example, that English provides opportunities to promote spiritual development 'through helping pupils represent and reflect on their own and others' inner life in drama and discussion of texts and ideas' (DfEE, 1999e, p. 8).

6. Newby acknowledges his debt here to the work of Paddy Walsh (Walsh 1993, pp. 102 - 117).

7. Newby claims that there are ten marks of the spiritually developed person:
      i. Evaluating stories.
      ii. Listening to wisdom
      iii. Appraising effects
      iv. Reflecting on the future
      v. Finding happiness in that of others
      vi. Independence of material wealth
      vii. Wariness of 'external' goods
      viii. Living with uncertainty
      ix. Self-control
      x. Strength

8. Mott-Thornton argues that Newby's non-realist approach to spirituality, advocated in the interests of impartiality, in fact embodies a secularism hostile to rational and acceptable religious views and thus is 'distinctly partial'. In my view this criticism is unfair, but, even if accepted, it would not lessen the importance of what Newby has to say about the importance of 'story' in promoting spiritual development (Mott-Thornton, 1998, pp. 83 - 88).

9. Hay, Nye and Murphy do not refer to Robinson's later study *Living the Questions* (1978). The focus of this study is less on discrete spiritual 'experiences', more on spiritual *growth*. Robinson draws attention to 'the sense of incompleteness' to which his interlocutors testify. The resonances between these personal stories and the understanding emerging from MacDonald of spiritual development as an essentially unclosed journey are powerful.

10. See also Paffard's *The Unattended Moment* (1976) in which he discusses experiences of the transcendent recorded in autobiographies

11. Niebuhr (1941), Vol.1, p. 14.

12. How spiritual development is to be understood and promoted in state schools is inevitably a political issue. Mott-Thornton rejects the ideal of common state schooling. He argues for a conservative tradition of 'civic pluralism' which denies that the state has any right to determine the nature of the values promoted by its schools. From his conservative perspective 'democratically elected governments acting enterprisingly and with good intentions on behalf of society are likely to do more harm than good' (Mott-Thornton, 1998, pp. 165 - 194). A discussion of these controversial issues is beyond the scope of this study.

13. Unfortunately the published text of this important lecture lacks page numbers.

14. The legitimacy of research into something so elusive as spiritual development is perhaps strengthened as we recognise that in the natural sciences, so long supposed to be about things that stayed still while we looked at them, it is acknowledged that fundamental reality is far less static and determinate. The scientific model is no longer of a Newtonian universe in which everything behaves predictably. The fact that 'spiritual development' escapes definition no more disqualifies it from serious investigation than any other phenomenon observable only by the difference it makes.

15. There is much in Whitehead to encourage Priestley in his opposition to an understanding of the curriculum as a body of material to be 'delivered'. Whitehead writes, 'It must never be forgotten that education is not a process of packing articles in a trunk' (Whitehead, 1950, p. 51).

16. Another philosophical framework which emphasises process rather than a determined goal is advocated by Richard Rorty. 'A historicist and nominalist culture of the sort I envisage would settle instead for narratives which connect the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other. More important it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisioning of still further utopias, as an endless process...' Rorty is envisioning a 'postmetaphysical culture' but the resonances with MacDonald are none the less very strong (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi; cited by Erricker, Clive and Jane, 1999 pp. 135 - 136).

Chapter Two

LOCATING MACDONALD

George MacDonald was born in Huntly in Aberdenshire in 1824.[1] He was the child of a happy home but of an unhappy church and school. As we shall see his experience of the fiercely Calvinistic 'Missionar Kirk', so dubbed in mockery of its view of all outside its membership as brands to be plucked from the burning, and his encounter with the Shorter Catechism, taught by the tawse, fuelled in MacDonald a lifelong abhorrence of sectarianism of any sort.

The cost of conscience was exacted early. MacDonald came to London, trained for the Congregational ministry at Highbury College, and was appointed to the pastorate of a church in Arundel. From its pulpit MacDonald suggested that heathen might not be damned everlastingly. His congregation was scandalised, his deacons seeking to starve their young minister into orthodoxy by reducing his stipend. MacDonald tightened his belt and continued to preach what he believed. But less than three years later he was forced to resign his pastorate. Thereafter MacDonald lived - and supported a family of eventually eleven children - by what he wrote. There are sufficient hints in his letters in the early years, his pencil trailing weakly across the page, of how desperate was the struggle to survive.

The MacDonalds lived a nomadic existence. There was a succession of homes in Britain and in later years annual journeys to Italy in quest of health. In his day MacDonald came to be honoured on both sides of the Atlantic as something of a sage and his prolific writings were much anthologised and extensively quarried for edifying quotations. But after his death in 1905 his reputation suffered almost total eclipse.

We cannot attempt to tell more of MacDonald's life-story, fascinating as it is. (A summary chronology of MacDonald's life is appended as Appendix 7). Nor can we try to account for all the factors which contributed to what Glenn Sadler has called MacDonald's 'cosmic vision'[2] and which shaped his understanding of the growth and nurture of the human spirit. With my research questions in mind, the balance and emphasis of this chapter will instead

reflect three primary concerns. Firstly, I hope to show that MacDonald was not the lonely figure he has sometimes been made out to have been. I question the view that, 'MacDonald lived a life of almost total isolation from his intellectual and social milieu' (Manlove, 1982, p. 56). I claim that, on the contrary, the position he occupied was not a solitary one and that it can be located with some precision. Secondly, I seek to draw attention to the resonances between MacDonald's understanding of spiritual formation and that of those he looked to. Thirdly, I shall illustrate how salient features of MacDonald's fantasy, determinative of its formative function, are present in the work of writers we know to have been important for him. The shape of this chapter also reflects a wish to redress certain critical imbalances. I attempt to do justice in particular to Jean Paul and to A. J. Scott, the nature and extent of whose influence on MacDonald's understanding of human flourishing has not perhaps been fully appreciated.

I comment firstly on MacDonald's 'Scottish inheritance', on the continuing importance for him of his upbringing at home, at school and at university, and on the abiding influence, however profoundly he reacted against it, of the peculiar pietism of the 'Missonar Kirk' of his childhood. I note, secondly and briefly, MacDonald's debt to the English Romantic writers and especially to Wordsworth and Coleridge. More will be said about MacDonald's use of their legacy in later chapters. I turn, thirdly, to the German writers Boehme, Jean Paul and Novalis, figures who fascinated MacDonald and features of whose work anticipated his own. Fourthly, I discuss the sway over MacDonald of his 'mentors' - the first famous, the second forgotten - F. D. Maurice and A. J. Scott. Finally I draw the strands together as I suggest where MacDonald is to be located on the complex map of ascendant ideas and unexamined assumptions characteristic of the early Victorian period when he was making up his mind.

The Scottish inheritance

Home

MacDonald's mother died while he was still very young. Some scholars have made much of her 'heartless decision', as Greville MacDonald describes it to suddenly cease breast-feeding her baby (Wolff, 1961; Holbrook, 1989; John, 1991).[3] Later it will be suggested

that attempts to decode MacDonald's fantasies in Freudian terms lay more weight on this episode than it can carry. MacDonald is perhaps recalling his mother in the early pages of *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* where the young story-teller speaks of the beauty and selflessness of his mother but also owns to not sorrowing long for her loss (p. 9). MacDonald's formidable grandmother was a powerful presence in the family. MacDonald was to repudiate the harsh Calvinism she espoused, that of the 'Missionar' church, without losing his affection for her memory. MacDonald's later relationship with his step-mother seems to have been warm, affectionate, and uncomplicated but his devotion - it is not too strong a word - was to his father. He writes to his wife,

> O that fine old man, my father! He is the man to tell anything to. So open
> and wise and humble and kind - God bless him! (ALS Yale, undated, cited
> in Sadler, 1994, p. 91)

MacDonald's conviction that all things ultimately are benevolently ordered was a projection on to a transcendent backcloth of what he experienced in his own family. 'As a child,' he writes, 'I could bear great pain when my father was leaning over me, or had his arm about me: how much nearer my soul cannot thy hands come!' (*Unspoken Sermons, First Series*, p. 185) The universe, he inferred, must be at least as loving as his home.

> Yet most I thank thee, not for any deed,
> But for the sense thy living self did breed
> Of fatherhood still at the great world's core
> (From the dedicatory verses to *A Hidden Life* 'To my father').[4]

Church

If we are to trace to its roots the recognition in MacDonald's work that a traditional religious discourse is not essential for articulating the spiritual dimension of life, that indeed it can inhibit spiritual growth, we must go back to the church of his childhood. MacDonald's life's work is both a visceral reaction and a sustained intellectual protest against the frame of mind and spirit which he encountered in the unbending dogmatism of that 'Missionar Kirk'.[5] The 'Missionar Kirk' had broken away from 'the Anti-burgher church' that had itself seceded from the established Presbyterian church. The details of these schisms within schisms need not detain us. What is important to register is that the 'Missionar Kirk' adhered to the Westminster Confession[6] as the basis of its belief. So did the churches from which it had separated but the 'Missionars', it seems, held to the faith

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of their Calvinist fathers even more tenaciously.[7]

We have MacDonald's word for it that already as a child he is questioning the received orthodoxy of his church.

> I well remember as child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was the love that all men need, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men (*Weighed and Wanting*, p. 20). [8]

MacDonald's early repudiation of the Calvinism of the 'Missionar Kirk' is of fundamental importance in forming his understanding of spiritual development. The picture emerging of this troubled young man is of one who already is asking the questions others do not and who, most importantly, is asking them on moral grounds. Already MacDonald is sensing that religious propositions, however hallowed, are not inviolable. They are open to scrutiny and challenge. In seeking to locate MacDonald we have already identified something about him which is not to alter. He will not accept any account of the human condition, its origin, its nature, its destiny, which is morally suspect.

School

MacDonald did not attend the parish school of Huntly but the newer of the two schools in the town to which most of the Missionars' children went. The syllabus included Greek, Latin and Mathematics. The Shorter Catechism was taught on Saturday mornings, the pupils being detained on Saturday afternoons if they failed to learn it properly. MacDonald encountered two masters in his time at the school. The first, a teacher whose brutal use of the tawse was exceptional even by the stern standards of Scottish schooling of the time, was Colin Stewart, after whose likeness the terrible Murdoch Mallinson of *Alec Forbes* is drawn. Stewart's contrasting successor was Alexander Millar, a humane and learned man. Raeper (1987) is confident that the teacher who inspired the young Ranald Bannerman with a love of English literature is modelled on Millar (p. 31). Of the writers Ranald's teacher introduces to him the three to whom he owes the most are 'Milton and Bacon and Shakspere (*sic*)'(*Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood*, p. 103). If it is indeed MacDonald speaking for himself through the hero of his story then the association of these three particular names is interesting. The names of Milton and Shakespeare are to be expected

but perhaps not Bacon's. Is MacDonald suggesting that for him Bacon is as significant a writer? Several quotations from Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*[9] appear as epigraphs in *David Elginbrod* (pp. 36, 56, 105, 134), a novel that touches directly on educational methods, and in the same novel there is a reference in the text to 'the true Baconian method' (p. 193). We may surmise that it was from Millar in his Huntly schoolroom that MacDonald learned, in the words of Bacon he will often quote, that 'wonder is the seed of knowledge'.[10]

University

In 1840, at the age of fifteen, MacDonald entered Aberdeen University. The curriculum for the first two years required the study of the Greek and Latin classics and Mathematics. Students could elect from a wider range of subjects in the third and fourth years and MacDonald chose to study Chemistry under the noted William Gregory.

As a student MacDonald attached himself to the Blackfriars Congregational Church. The minister of the church was Dr. George Kennedy, a charismatic and irascible young man of uncompromising Calvinist orthodoxy who had attracted a huge following. MacDonald taught in Kennedy's enormous Sunday school but that good work was to come to an abrupt end. MacDonald and his fellow-teachers were deemed to have displayed 'Morisonian leanings' and were summarily dismissed. The history of the civil war that broke out in 1844 within Scottish congregationalism over the universalism taught by James Morison does not concern us. What is important is to note how for MacDonald the cost of conscience is exacted early - he is not yet twenty-one. David Robb (1986) has persuasively argued for the significance and importance of this experience in MacDonald's own spiritual development. Already as a child MacDonald may have had misgivings about the adequacy of any propositional religious orthodoxy to tell the whole story of our nature and destiny. Now he is forced to heed those misgivings. Here, I suggest, rather than with the expulsion from his Arundel pastorate seven years later, about which there was a certain inevitability, is the parting of the ways.

MacDonald never forgot that he was a Scot and nor must we. In seeking to 'locate'

MacDonald we must take account of the nurture of his home and what he made of it. We must register just how deeply MacDonald reacted against the intransigent dogmatism of his own church and notice the extremes of good and bad he experienced in his Scottish schooling. We must take account of the fact that at university, as well as the Classics, MacDonald had studied Chemistry under one of the finest teachers of his day. We must weigh the significance of his dismissal from the Blackfriars Sunday School for his suspect views. His was a wide and diverse range of learning experience, at home and at church, at school and at university, and in his own undirected reading. To which we must add all that he absorbed in his excursions into the lowland countryside. Many influences, sometimes conflicting, had already been at work fashioning the particular disposition of MacDonald's mind before, at the age of twenty, he graduated and moved to London. These experiences attuned him to welcome some ideas and to reject others, and led him to interpret those ideas he did embrace in the light of a world view that was already taking shape. MacDonald's debt to others is considerable but his own vision is anything but derivative.[11]

German influences

MacDonald's reading extended far beyond the English literary canon[12] and in seeking the sources of MacDonald's educational thought and the inspiration of his fantasy we must turn to three German writers. MacDonald had made himself a German scholar at a time when few in Britain were conversant with the German language or with German literature. The roots of his imaginative vision are deep in the sub-soil of German Romanticism and mysticism, the texts of which he had studied for himself. The German writers within this tradition to whom we shall have most occasion to refer are Boehme, Jean Paul and Novalis.

Boehme

There is a growing recognition of the influence on MacDonald of the great Protestant mystic Jakob Boehme (1575 - 1624). The godly bailiff David Elginbrod, whose curious name provides the title of the novel, has in his possession a first edition of Boehme's *The Aurora* on the title page of which is written the name 'Martin Elginbrod'. The work of the cobbler Boehme is mentioned to make the point that spiritual wisdom is not the preserve of the scholarly, a truth glowingly demonstrated by the saintly character of David Elginbrod himself - widely seen as a portrait of the author's own father. In Chapter Nine I shall return

to Boehme and to the possibility that his 'Noble Virgin of Divine Wisdom' contributed to the MacDonald's image of 'the Wise Woman'.[13]

Jean Paul [14]

To read Jean Paul, it has been said, 'is to encounter one of the strangest and most powerful imaginations among German writers' (Smeed, 1966, p.15). It was during his time as a student at Highbury College that MacDonald first came across his writings and their impact on him was immediate and powerful. He writes in excitement to his wife,

> Such pieces to read to you. One of Tennyson's Poems - and the other a translation from Jean Paul Richter. Oh! Oh! Oh! The last is - I hardly know what to call it - They were both to me worth hundreds of sermons - of some kinds at least (ALS Yale, undated).[15]

After this first intoxicating encounter with him MacDonald went on to read Jean Paul in the original German and he refers to him sufficiently often to show that this eccentric spirit remained a significant influence. Some allusions to him, for example two light asides in *Alec Forbes* (pp. 209, 217), hold little interest for us; other references arrest attention. MacDonald praises Jean Paul's power to convey a child's delight in nature (*Robert Falconer*, p. 108). Consider too the comment of Ranald Bannerman whose story is generally recognised as containing autobiographical material: 'Years after, when I was a young man, I read Jean Paul's terrible dream that there was no God' (*Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood*, p. 36).[16] We have further evidence in *Mary Marston* of how that extraordinary passage impressed MacDonald. The genial but rootless Godfrey Wardour reads it aloud to his young cousin Letty and her friend Mary, a reading which leaves the two young women deeply disturbed (pp. 22 - 23). We can only speculate how far MacDonald himself continued to be privately troubled by this passage, notwithstanding the robust faith he publicly affirmed so unwaveringly.

The extent of Jean Paul's influence on MacDonald has yet to be fully explored and others must take up that task.[17] Here I draw attention, firstly, to aspects of Jean Paul's approach to education which are reflected in MacDonald's work. Secondly, I suggest that MacDonald's recourse to an alternative discourse to voice what mattered to him most may owe something to Jean Paul's narrative style with its bold inventive symbolism. Thirdly, I

raise the possibility that MacDonald's exploration in fantasy of how the margins dissolve between the different domains of our experience, waking or sleeping, the actual or the imagined, owes much to Jean Paul.

The primary theme of Jean Paul's early novel *Die Unsichtbare Loge* (1793), with which he established his fame as a writer, is education and the achievement of harmony and happiness. The epigraph to the chapter in *David Elginbrod* (ii, ch.II) relating how Hugh Sutherland begins the education of the young Harry Arnold, is taken from this novel. It is a defence of the importance of play in a child's upbringing.

> Spielender Unterricht heisst nicht dem Kinde Anstrengungen ersparen, sondern eine Leidenschaft in ihm erwecken, welche ihm die stärksten aufnötigt und erleichtert.

MacDonald adds his own somewhat laboured translation.

> It is not the intention of sportive instruction that the child should be spared effort. Or delivered from it; but that thereby a passion should be wakened in him, which shall both necessitate and facilitate the strongest exertion.

Play is not a break from learning but a way of learning, a principle Sutherland will apply as he takes the washed-out Harry in hand. 'We're going to begin with a holiday instead of ending with one' (*David Elginbrod*, p. 94).[18]

Jean Paul's views on education are set out most fully in his *Levana oder Erziehungslehre* (*Levana or The Doctrine of Education*)[19] , a work inspired by his reading of Rousseau's *Emile*. This long rich work forbids summary. All that we can do is to note some of the resonances between Jean Paul's view of what he describes as 'geistige Erziehung' (p. 129), or 'spiritual education', and the same theme in MacDonald's work. Jean Paul has a high estimate of childhood. 'Nie kann ein Kind für zu unschuldig und gut gehalten werden' (*Never can a child be thought of as too innocent or good*) (p. 114). He stresses the immediacy of the child's experience, the child's lack of any sense of the passing of time within which to interpret his or her experience. 'Das Kind, wie das Tier, kennt nur reinsten Schmerz; nämlich einen ohne Vergangenheit und Zukunft' (*The child, like the animal, knows only the purest sorrow without past or future*) (p.151). MacDonald will speak of this condition of childhood as 'The continuous *now* of childhood' (*Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood*, p. 78). For Jean Paul the first three years of the child's life are all-important.

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These should be years of serene joy. The fundamental distinction Jean Paul draws is between *Freudigkeit* and *Genuss* - between 'joy' and mere sensual 'pleasure'. The task of education is to foster the former - above all, as we have seen, by play. 'Das Spiel ist die erste Poesie des Menschen' (*Play is the first poetry of the human being*) (p. 165). Kettelkamp (1941) has argued that Jean Paul stands as a pioneer in giving play this significant position (p. 6). Simple toys which allow scope for the child's imagination should be provided. Children are to be encouraged to dance and to sing. 'Der Tanz kann nicht fruh genug kommen' (*Dancing cannot start too soon*) (p. 194). 'Der Jubel nicht ein Renner sondern ein Tanzer wird' (*Joy is not a runner but a dancer)* (p. 192). 'In der Kindheit der Völker war das Reden Singen; dies werde für die Kindheit der Einzelwesen wiederholt' (*In the childhood of nations speaking was singing; let this be repeated in the childhood of the individual*) (pp. 197-198). MacDonald, as we shall see, has a similar understanding of poetry as the mother-tongue of childhood.

Levana is a glorious work, teeming with the witty, the whimsical, and the teasing ('children need only learn seven languages') and the present writer regrets not having encountered it sooner.[20] 'Back of it,' writes Kettelkamp (1941), 'appears a philosophy of kindness and love which makes it unique' (p. 5). Clearly MacDonald was fascinated by Jean Paul and succeeding chapters will show that MacDonald must be located in the current of educational thought to which Levana belongs, of which indeed it is in some respects the source.

But MacDonald's debt to Jean Paul is still more fundamental. Extended passages in Jean Paul, as in MacDonald, invite us to reflect that the frontier between the world we experience in our dreams and that which we inhabit in our waking hours can no longer be sharply drawn. We can no longer be assured that the former is a realm of illusion and the latter the only real world. In repeated sequences in Jean Paul's novels the two domains overlap and merge and, as with MacDonald, our reading of these passages challenges our own certainty about where we ourselves are. Waking from the dream in which his beloved Beata has appeared to him Gustav rises and grasps the 'real' Beata's hand. His question is ours, 'In welcher Welt sind wir?' (*What world are we in?*) (*Die Unsichtbare Loge*, p. 225) Jean Paul - always a powerful presence on his own pages - makes his intention clear to

challenge our unexamined assumptions about the status of our dreams by declaring at the outset of this passage. 'Ich werde den Traum und sein Ende sogleich erzählen, wenn ich dem Leser die Person gezeigt habe, die den Traum zugleich verlängerte und endigte' (*I will recount both the dream and its ending by showing to the reader the one who prolonged as well as ended the dream*) (p. 223).

One remarkable passage vividly illustrates MacDonald's recognition of how in Jean Paul the multiple imaginative realms of writer, protagonist and reader overlap. MacDonald's *Essay on some of the Forms of Literature* is a review of a book in which critical assessments of a number of writers are discussed. MacDonald points out that he is thus reviewing a review of reviews. He is reminded, he tells us, of Schoppe, the satiric chorus in Jean Paul's *Titan*, who appears at a masked ball carrying a mechanical model of a masked ball with a mirror behind it.

> The court simulates reality. The masks are a multiform mockery at their own unreality, and as such are regarded by Schoppe, who takes them off with the utmost ridicule in his masked puppet show, which, with its reflection in the mirror, is again indefinitely multiplied in the many-sided reflector of Schoppe's, or of Richter's, or of the reader's imagination. (*Orts*, p. 218).

MacDonald's own 'transfiguring fantasy' will similarly challenge and subvert distinctions between appearance and reality that we had supposed to be stable.

One epigraph from Jean Paul to a chapter of *Phantastes* is particularly telling .

> Ja, es wird zwar ein andres Zeitalter kommen, wo es Licht wird, und wo der Mensch aus erhabnen Träumen erwacht, und die Träume - wieder findet, weil er nichts verlor als der Schlaf (*Hesperus*, epigraph to *Phantastes* ch. 18).

MacDonald adds his own loose verse translation, but it is the substance of what Jean Paul is saying which is so interesting. More exactly translated the text reads,

> Yes, surely another age is coming when there will be light and when man will wake from his sublime dreams and will find those dreams again because he has lost nothing except sleep.

The words anticipate those of Novalis, so important to MacDonald, 'Unser Leben ist kein Traum, aber es soll und wird vielleicht einer werden' (*Our life is no dream, but it ought to become one and perhaps will*), and are a commentary on them.[21] The experience of the

alternative world, of the dream, of the fantasy, elides with that of our waking world and there awaits its fulfilment.

The influence of Novalis has long been recognised in MacDonald's evocation of the fluidity of the frontiers between waking and dreaming, between appearance and reality, between the imagined world and the world of experience. That influence is not in question but Jean Paul has equal claim to have shaped MacDonald's vision of how the different worlds we inhabit interpenetrate.[22]

Novalis [23]

In the preface to his early publication, *Twelve of the Spiritual Songs of Novalis* (1851), MacDonald expresses the hope of one day publishing a complete translation of Novalis's works. This ambition was not to be fulfilled but MacDonald subsequently published extended versions of his translation (*Exotics*, 1873,1876; *Rampolli*, 1897) and the influence of Novalis remained important.[24] Characteristically, MacDonald looks forward to meeting him,

> Shall I not one day, 'somewhere, somehow,' clasp the large hand of
> Novalis, and gazing on his face, compare his features with those of Saint
> John? (*Orts*, p. 230).

MacDonald prefaces *Phantastes* with two extended quotations from Novalis.. Here MacDonald is giving his readers, at least those who read German for the text is left untranslated, an indication of how the fantasy which follows functions. It is in the tradition of the *Märchen*. It functions, with its ceaseless fluidity of context, like a dream. It is at one with 'die wahre Poesie' - true poetry - in working on us only indirectly as music does, as indeed does nature herself. The haunting Novalis words, anticipated as we have suggested by Jean Paul, stand at the head of the closing chapter of *Phantastes*, 'Unser leben ist kein Traum, aber es soll und wird viellicht einer werden.' With these same words MacDonald will conclude his second great fantasy *Lilith*, written thirty-seven years later.

MacDonald is too much the scientist by training for there to be found in him the intense opposition to the *Aufklärung* we meet in Novalis and the other German Romantics. But he

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shares with Novalis the Romantic conviction that the heart has its reasons, that thought does not have a privileged access to truth above that afforded by feeling. He learns too from Novalis, as from Jean Paul, that the lines we draw between the different modes of our experience are artificial. Our mundane experience is disturbed by our dreams and by the hints they afford us of alternative modes of perception and of realms beyond that of our waking world. MacDonald responds to the summons of Novalis to step across these borders and he invites his readers to accompany him. With his vision of realms the spirit is heir to Novalis captured MacDonald's imagination at that stage in his own intellectual development when he had only recently broken free from the Calvinism of his youth and was searching for a more spacious spirituality and to that vision he remained faithful to the end.

But I wish to claim that MacDonald's debt to the German visionary is deeper still. The aspect of the Novalis texts to which MacDonald owes most is that they are unclosed. Novalis eschews endings. His characteristic genre is *Das Fragment*.

The unclosed character of the typical Novalis text (together with those of Hölderlin) has been discussed by Alice Kuzniar (1987) in a perceptive study which, while not referring to MacDonald, helps us to see why he was so drawn to Novalis. Her observations on the non-closure of the German Romantic's narrative could be equally applied to the MacDonald fantasies which also postpone final resolution.

> Non-closure, here signifying repeated open-endedness and a constant prying
> ajar of enclosed structures, implies a criticism of integral systems, a
> questioning of monadic totalities and ultimacies (p. 4).

Whether Novalis's avoidance of endings implies an absolute refusal on his part of all 'ultimacies', as Kuzniar claims, is a question which must be left to Novalis specialists.[25] MacDonald of course emphatically affirms the ultimate and lives in the hope of it but, with Novalis, he does certainly reject the 'enclosed structures', the 'integral systems' and the 'monadic totalities' - whether of the Westminster Shorter Catechism or of any other.

With unclosed texts, whether Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* or MacDonald's *Phantastes*, meaning is always deferred and thus 'reception becomes all important' (p. 132).

The significance of the abandonment of the ending in Novalis is not artistic failure. As Kuzniar observes,

> (Novalis) leaves the fragment not to be completed but to be extended and extrapolated upon by the reader (p. 7).

> The Romantic text is open-ended because its significance never resides within itself but is always displaced onto its various receptions (p. 125).

The two parts of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the Novalis text underlying *Phantastes*, are entitled *Die Erwartung* and *Die Erfüllung* - 'The Expectation' and 'The Fulfilment'. But *Erfüllung* is always beyond. Thus Novalis must leave that second part of his story unfinished. Fulfilment is not attained within the bounds of the narrative. That narrative is a fragment, a fragment only to be understood and resolved by the reader in his or her own continuing and unclosed history.

The first part of Novalis's narrative has embedded in it dreams and fairy tales and the relationship of these to the text in which they are set, Kuzniar argues, serves to reinforce our sense of resolution being held in abeyance. So too, we might suggest, is the connection of the inset tales in *Phantastes* to the text which frames them. Kuzniar's comments on Novalis can be applied to MacDonald. The effect of the inlaid tales is a 'continually projecting (of) the ultimate *Erfüllung* into the future' (p. 116).

MacDonald's debt to Novalis for the imagery of his fantasy is generally recognised. Less recognised is the extent to which his unclosed fantasy - by deferring to the reader the task of making sense of it all - *functions* in the same way as that of Novalis .[26]

The English Romantics[27]

The extent of MacDonald's debt to the English Romantic writers, especially to Coleridge and Wordsworth, will be apparent in Chapters Four, Five and Six where we consider his treatment of the great Romantic themes of nature, the child, and the imagination and I defer to those chapters further comment on them. Suffice it here to say that MacDonald believed that what was granted to the English Romantic poets was, as he put it, 'the new vision'. That is the title of the chapter in which he turns to the Romantics in his survey of English religious poetry, *England's Antiphon* (ch. 21). *England's Antiphon* is testimony to the

extent of his reading across the whole canon of English literature as are the allusions to writers of every period in his fiction. But for MacDonald the Romantic movement was a new dawn - he chooses William Blake's *Daybreak* as the first example to give of a poem expressing its vision - and the sway of the Romantics over remained uniquely commanding. Their appeal for him, as one who had to escape his own captivity, was that they were free spirits. Coleridge, in owning to his debt to such visionaries as Fox, Boehme and Law, comments, 'the writings of these mystics acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system' (Coleridge, 1965, p. 83). MacDonald too refused such incarceration.

Mentors

The two men whom MacDonald himself acknowledged as most influential on him, after his own father, were Frederick Denison Maurice and Alexander John Scott. Once more the focus of this project will determine the direction of our enquiry. In what respects is the educational outlook of these two remarkable minds reflected in MacDonald's work?

F. D. Maurice

It is not hard to see why MacDonald was so deeply attracted by F. D. Maurice. They had both distanced themselves from the narrow Calvinism they had encountered when young and both subsequently paid dearly for the liberality of their views. Maurice's father, a Unitarian minister, remained a prophet of reason and tolerance but his mother and sisters had introduced into the home the unbending and censorious evangelicalism to which they had been converted. Much in the way MacDonald was to renounce the Calvinism of the 'Missionar Kirk', Maurice rejected this harsh faith for a kindlier understanding of the character of God and his dealings with humanity, albeit an understanding more nuanced than that of the Unitarianism of his father. Both MacDonald and Maurice were driven from the posts they held on the grounds of teaching the heresy, as it was held to be, of universalism. In May 1853 MacDonald resigned the pulpit of his first and only pastorate and, later in the same year, following the publication of his *Theological Essays*, Maurice was dismissed from his professorial chair at King's College.

Maurice was a kindred spirit whom MacDonald held in the highest esteem. His debt to him as a teacher, he claimed, was one of 'honour and love'.[28] He named one of his sons after him [29] and dedicated a volume of his sermons to him (*The Miracles of our Lord,* 1870). He addressed an adulatory poem to him[30] and, in the character of Robert Falconer, introduced him into the pages of his fiction (MacDonald, Greville, 1924, pp. 397 - 398; Wolff, 1977, pp. 299 - 307). MacDonald became the friend of Maurice, nineteen years his senior, but he never ceased to be his disciple. Such too was his relationship with A. J. Scott, that of disciple as well as friend.

The influence of Maurice on MacDonald, as on many others, was as much in the sway of his gentle, humble, open-hearted character as in the impact of his writings. But from those writings, in which he returns repeatedly to educational issues, we may surmise that Maurice contributed powerfully to the shaping of MacDonald's own mind on those matters.

In his major study of F. D. Maurice's educational theory Peter Jackson (1982) has shown how Maurice 'offered an idealist alternative to utilitarianism which was propounded throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century when "the dead hand of utilitarianism" chilled educational theory and practice' (p. 13). Maurice regarded the learner's development as the first concern of the educator, an objective far above the utilitarian aim to impart useful knowledge. Education is the entitlement of all human beings and consists in 'the development of what is essentially human' about them. That development can only be fully realised as our common humanity is recognised. This commonality of mankind is fundamental.

The philosophical foundation of this conviction is a Christian idealism, a faith in the wholeness and ultimate coherence of what can appear so fragmented, 'the idea of a unity which lies beneath all other unity, of a love which is the ground of all other love' (*The Kingdom of Christ*, ii, p. 379). 'There must be a moral or spiritual constitution for mankind,' Maurice argues, a fundamental existent relationship which is prior to every diverse religious expression of it (i. p. 230). This unity is basic to the human condition and our institutions must reflect it and inculcate consciousness of it. Schooling must be founded on the principle that there is 'a universal bond' by which we are connected with each other

and its chief aim must be the development of the human person into membership of that community. The ultimate ground of Maurice's educational theory was the belief, which MacDonald shared and for which like Maurice he suffered, that all alike are children of God and our brothers and sisters.

Maurice distinguished between what was commonly called knowledge, the knowledge which a utilitarian pedagogy inculcated, and 'knowledge proper', the latter being the proper concern of the educator. 'True knowledge' is knowledge of reality, of the eternal moral and spiritual order, rather than familiarity with appearances. That order is on Maurice's idealist assumptions as fundamental to the universe as an organic whole as is its scientific regularity.[31]

Maurice believed that human beings possess 'spiritual faculties', the capacity to reach beyond what is to be grasped by the senses or to be understood by the reason. The educator's task is, 'to teach the reality of a spiritual world, which is as much cognizable by man's spirit as the outward world is by the eye...this assertion is the very ground upon which I have placed the necessity of Education' (*Lectures on Education*, 1839; cited by Jackson, 1982, p. 42). It is a statement of purpose which MacDonald would wholly endorse.

MacDonald found in Maurice the same sense he himself cherished of 'fatherhood still at the great world's core'. The two-fold source of this conviction, for Maurice as for MacDonald, was the experience of a human father's love and reflection on the teaching of Jesus. For the modern mind the image of 'fatherhood' is doubly problematic. The image is unwelcome in a culture seeking to decontaminate language of its sexist symbols and to rid society of patriarchal structures. And what such a symbol claims in terms of an overarching providence will be widely doubted at the close of a century that has shown little evidence of it.

In two respects MacDonald is less vulnerable to these criticisms than is Maurice. To be sure, where MacDonald writes in traditional terms, he is through and through Maurician in his emphasis on 'fatherhood' at the heart of all things. But in his fantasies he offers less

patriarchal symbols, notably that of 'the Wise Woman', for the purpose of good he affirms. Moreover MacDonald acknowledges more soberly than Maurice the shadow side of human experience, conceding that the assumption on which we foster spiritual development, that our faith in the coming good is well-founded, is ultimately beyond proof.

A. J. Scott

A. J. Scott was the first principal of Owens College in Manchester.[32] Scott is such a forgotten figure that a brief outline of his career is perhaps in place. This is included as Appendix 4.

'Is it not a great thing to me,' MacDonald asked his father, 'to have the man whose intellect and wisdom I most respect in the world for my friend?'(ALS Yale (undated), cited in MacDonald, Greville, 1924, p 249.) MacDonald writes in similar vein to his wife,

> How delightful it is to hear Mr. Scott talk, so gently, so strangely - confirming so purely whatever I said - and making it stronger with things I had not thought of - And he told me of his own trials...(he) was most brotherly and simple and human to me - and therefore divine. (ALS Yale, 4th / 5th July, 1853.)

The measure of MacDonald's admiration of A. J. Scott is indicated by an extraordinary tribute which almost embarrasses by its extravagance. MacDonald writes of the ages-long process from the moment when what was to be the earth split off from the sun 'to the time when Alexander John Scott worshipped (God) from its face' (*Unspoken Sermons, First Series*, p. 29). A. J. Scott, it seems, represents for MacDonald the apex of evolutionary development. MacDonald's novel *Robert Falconer* is dedicated to Scott in similarly fulsome terms:

> To the memory of the man who stands highest in the oratory of my memory,
> Alexander John Scott, I, daring, presume to dedicate this book.

The first of the MacDonald children, Lilia Scott MacDonald, was named after him. The dedicatory poem to MacDonald's *Organ Songs* honours Scott as 'Truth's herald' amid a bedlam of raucous and discordant voices:

> Thy voice, Truth's herald, walking the untuned roar,
> Calm and distinct, powerful and sweet and fine:
> I loved and listened, listened and loved more (*Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 272).

Later in the same volume he pays tribute to Scott's intellectual and moral authority in

similarly glowing terms:

> I see thee far before me on thy way
> Up the great peaks, and striding stronger still
> Thy intellect unrivalled in its sway (*Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 280).

For MacDonald, Scott was simply the greatest man he had ever known (Johnson, 1906, p. 64).[33]

We need to pause on A. J. Scott. Scott's influence on MacDonald exceeded that of any other individual, not least in shaping his mind on those matters which most concern us.

Central to Scott's thought is the notion that all reality is one and that there is an essential underlying affinity between the human spirit and all there is. 'There is an inward correspondence between humanity as God means it and the entire reality of things' (Scott, 1848, p. 19).

> Be assured, there is a harmony in all truth, a mutual dependence. All its lines converge. There is a point, in which meeting, they lean upon one another; and he that will try to do without any of them will find that the rest must suffer (Scott, 1841, p. 336).

Scott distances himself on the one hand from those who hold that natural and material phenomena can be 'adequately and rightly apprehended apart from things divine' (1848, pp. 38-39) and on the other hand from those who regard the realm of the spirit as a loftier sphere removed from the things we see and touch. Education aspires to this holistic insight, 'till at length all things wherever they are found, all events, whether of history or experience, of mind or matter, shall at once conspire to form one stupendous miracle, and cease to be such' (1848, p. 42). It follows that the resources for the nurture of the spirit in this holistic sense are always immediately to hand.

> 'Our object...will be to keep the argumentative and speculative faculty in contact with the realities of matter. He who does not find the world of ethical science in the nursery, the parlour and the workshop, need look for it nowhere. For him indeed to whom it is not exhibited in his own breast, it is everywhere invisible' (Scott, 1849, p. 61).

'The mind,' Scott teaches, 'would be every where at home' (1849, p. 22). Scott appeals here to Novalis and to a maxim that MacDonald himself will invoke (*Orts*, p. 211), that the basic impulse to philosophy is *Heimweh*, homesickness (1849, p. 22; 1848, p. 37).[34]

The barriers to our apprehension of this foundational coherence are moral. Our refusal to obey the truth we know means that the truth we do not know remains beyond us. The insistence that the spiritual can never be uncoupled from the moral is fundamental to MacDonald's own understanding of spiritual development. A key text for Scott - one of the two texts that will be inscribed on the headstone above his grave - becomes a constant refrain in MacDonald's writing, 'He who is willing to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine' (1848, p. 20).[35]

Such an understanding of the nature of things cannot be imparted as information. It can only be 'caught' from those who already have themselves reached such an understanding. Those who are in touch with how things in truth are, they are the true teachers. 'The existence of such men is communicative' (1851, p. 233). 'The moral character is greatly formed, no doubt, by what others have taught; but far more by what they have been' (1849, p. 4). Learning depends on 'the living contact of spirit with spirit' (1849, pp. 6-7). Scott affirmed the authority of the individual 'spiritual conscience' and taught that, while it was not an infallible guide, any attempt to elevate the authority of Church, sacraments, priest or Bible above that of conscience was idolatrous. He emphasised the humanity and the universal fatherhood of God, the sacredness of creation, the dynamic spontaneity and unpredictability of the Spirit.

These themes are taken up by MacDonald and become central strands of his theology. The present essay is not a theological study however and we cannot pursue them further. Our concern is less in tracing how Scott's influence shaped MacDonald's opinions on particular issues than in revealing the extent to which A. J. Scott moulds the whole cast of MacDonald's mind. If MacDonald exercised the freedom to question, even to question the necessity of any received religious discourse for articulating the spiritual - and I shall argue that such is indeed the implication of MacDonald's recourse to fantasy - then it was above all this 'thin, black-complexioned, vehement man' (Froude, J. A., Vol. II, pp. 176 -177) who granted him this freedom.

Summary

MacDonald's place in the history of ideas can be provisionally identified. He belongs to that powerful movement of dissent which in the early nineteenth century initially called in question the Calvinist orthodoxy of the Scots kirk but which went on to challenge narrow dogmatism wherever it manifested itself, a movement amounting to a new reformation in Scotland.[36]

Those who, like MacDonald and A. J. Scott, moved south of the Scottish border were quickly drawn into circles of like-minded liberal spirits among whom F. D. Maurice, close friend to both of them, was to become the most famous. Such minds were open to new ideas from any source. They read voluminously. A. J. Scott's breadth of reading in several languages and his power of recall were awesome to his students. They were quickly receptive to the Romantic spirit. MacDonald recognised and embraced in both the German and English Romantic writers an understanding of reality, profoundly religious in its belief in the eternal divine spirit, but far removed in temper and tenet from the censorious orthodoxy of the Calvinism of the church of his childhood. Romanticism appealed to MacDonald not because of any rejection on his part of the place of reason or of scientific enquiry. He was not in full flight from the Enlightenment - there was too much of the Scottish scientist left in him.[37] Romanticism offered MacDonald a sense of wonder and mystery and the awareness that truth cannot be confined to creeds or communicated in propositions. He learned from Coleridge and from the German Romantics, as from the mysticism of Boehme, that truth is apprehended as a poem, as a piece of music, as a dream. The strange texts of Jean Paul and Novalis, challenging the conventional distinction between the imagined world of the narrative and the life-story of the reader, had their part in shaping those fantasies whose 'transfiguring' potential will occupy us in later chapters.

Members of the liberal circle in which MacDonald must be located were united in their fervent conviction of the importance of education. F. D. Maurice famously, Scott - alas - far less famously, were both important educational theorists and personally active in pioneering educational projects. MacDonald belongs to their company. He is one with them in resisting the reduction of education to the delivery of useful knowledge, the utilitarian

pedagogy that prevailed until the revival of idealism as a significant educational philosophy later in the century (Gordon and White, 1979). MacDonald's life's work is a ceaseless exploration of how what is essentially ineffable is to be communicated. To be sure MacDonald's teaching frequently turns into preaching and when it does so it largely passes out of the remit of this enquiry but he also recognises - and here lies his importance for schools in which there is rightly no place for sermons - that there are other and better ways to address and nurture the human spirit. In this respect too MacDonald remains within the fellowship of Maurice and Scott. Neither of them turned to fantasy as MacDonald did but both insisted that the task of teaching was not to dispel mystery but to invite the student to embrace it. It is not surprising that the lectures of both Scott and Maurice left their audiences baffled as well as stirred.

MacDonald is not after all a solitary figure. There is a place for him on the intellectual map of his time. He is to be located within a most honourable tradition, that of the Victorian *dissenter.*

Endnotes

1. Bill Raeper's *George MacDonald* (1987a) is the most substantial modern biography we have of MacDonald.

2. *The Cosmic Vision* is the title of Glenn Edward Sadler's unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Aberdeen, 1966). This first reference to his work allows me to underline the note of gratitude to him I register in my Acknowledgements for the 'critical friendship' he has shown me in preparing my thesis.

3. MacDonald, Greville, 1924, p. 32.

4. MacDonald implies that 'motherhood' too is at the heart of things. The young Ranald Bannerman will not be reproached for mourning too briefly for his human mother for she will one day reassure him that God was 'mothering' him all the time (*Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood,* p. 10). For Annie Forbes her fierce aunt 'did not dawn upon (her) as an embodiment of the maternity of the universe' (*Alec Forbes,* p. 5).

5. 'With Calvinist passion he consistently repudiates Calvinist doctrine' (Walker, 1996, p. 179).

6. The Westminster Confession, the definitive statement of Presbyterian doctrine, was approved by Parliament in 1648. It is an exposition of the leading articles of the Christian faith, emphasising the Calvinist doctrine of election and the identity of the Christian Sunday with the Jewish Sabbath.

7. 'These Independents went commonly by the name of Missionars in all that district; a name arising apparently from the fact that they were the first in the neighbourhood to advocate the sending of missionaries to the heathen. The epithet was, however, always used with a considerable admixture of contempt' (*Alec Forbes,* p. 110). MacDonald recognised that his own loathing of the Missionars' theology

was fuelled by a deep inner anger and he prayed to be delivered from it. 'Lord Christ! Not alone from the pains of hell, or of conscience - not alone from the outer darkness of self and all that is mean and poor and low do we fly to thee; but from the anger that arises within us at the wretched words spoken in thy name...' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 92). Although MacDonald so vehemently denounced the censorious dogmatism of the Missionars he acknowledged their sincerity and their solicitude for each other (*Alec Forbes*, p. 243; pp. 382 - 383). Robert Bruce was not a typical Missionar. A full account of the historical background to the formation of the 'Missionar Kirk' is given in Robert Troup's *The Missionar Kirk of Huntly* (Troup, 1901).

8. The passage is quoted in Greville's biography of his father (MacDonald, Greville, 1924, p. 85). Robb observes that Greville was 'completely untroubled by theoretical problems arising from the fictionality of the narrator's voice' but he goes on to make the claim that few would challenge that when the narrator of a MacDonald novel addresses the reader directly we can be sure that it is MacDonald speaking for himself. There is no question of an 'implied author' (Robb, 1986, p. 4).

9. MacDonald seems to have used the version Bacon wrote in English, first published in 1605, rather than the expanded Latin version which forms one the parts of *The Great Instauration* first published in 1620 (Zagorin, 1998, pp. 57 - 68).

10. 'Wonder is the seed of knowledge.' It is perhaps worth noting that Bacon's comment, which MacDonald so eagerly seizes on, is in parenthesis and an aside in an argument which, taken as a whole, MacDonald would have had far less sympathy with. Bacon is arguing that we should 'make application of our knowledge to give ourselves repose and contentment' (Bacon, pp. 177 - 178). MacDonald as we shall see in Chapter Six argues that, on the contrary, 'repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest...'

11. On coming to London and before entering Highbury College MacDonald worked for a time as a private tutor. The direction in which his mind is moving at this time is clear from a long letter he writes to his father. 'I would rather be of no sect than a sectarian which I fear most good men are in a greater or less degree...I must think for myself on this subject and make up my own mind.' His experience thus far of English church life is unhappy. 'I do not know much (of the churches in England), but what I do know tends to chill my heart' (ALS Yale, 12th January, 1847).

12. For example, a full account of the literary influences on MacDonald would need to measure the immense importance of Dante for him. This task has been taken up by the Italian MacDonald scholar George Spina (1990).

13. Dale J. Nelson draws attention to fleeting references to Boehme in MacDonald and discusses what he sees as similarities in their thinking. He claims that Boehme's distinctive vision of the 'Virgin Sophia' is not found in MacDonald's work, failing to recognise the possibility that it contributed to MacDonald's image of 'the Wise Woman' (Nelson, 1989, p 34). A scholar who has studied MacDonald's debt to Boehme at greater depth is Deirdre Hayward (1994, 1996, 1999). She recognises that MacDonald's great-great grandmother figure, the Wise Woman, reflects aspects of Boehme's Virgin Sophia (1994) and suggests that the narrative structure of *Lilith* corresponds to Boehme's complex theological scheme (1999).

14. Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763 - 1825) adopted the pen-name 'Jean Paul' in honour of Jean Jaques Rousseau.

15. MacDonald's later allusions to Jean Paul in his correspondence suggest how the latter's ideas become part of his mental furniture. MacDonald writes to Ruskin on the death of Rose La Touche. 'Richter says that it is only in God that two souls meet'(ALS Yale, 30ᵗʰ May 1875).

16. The reference is to Jean Paul's *Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebaüde herab, dass kein Gott sei (Speech of the Dead Christ from the Universe that There is No God)* in *Siebenkäs*. Paul, Jean, 1982, Bd. 1, pp. 641 - 645.

17. William Webb provides a biographical sketch of Jean Paul and comments briefly on a number of citations from his work, or allusions to it, in MacDonald's writings. His article does not claim to do more than draw attention to an influence on MacDonald which has been generally overlooked (Webb, 1995).

18. In *Mary Marston* we hear that Letty's lessons from her cousin Godfrey need an injection of play. 'Many a matter over which grown people look important, long-faced, and consequential, is folly compared with the merest child's frolic, in relation to the true affairs of existence' (p. 93).

19. The first edition was published in 1807. The edition to which I have had access to is that of 1814 and my page references are to that edition.

20. The affinities between Jean Paul's educational thought and MacDonald's are too many to register fully here. The separate extended study this subject deserves would need to consider such of Jean Paul's ideas as these: Children must be told when they have done wrong but should never be made to feel ashamed. Education must above all rest on a relationship of trust and love between child and parent or teacher. Love will call forth love and render specific prescriptions such as the Ten Commandments superfluous. Children need a sense of belonging to a family, a family that embraces not only parents and siblings but animals and plants too. And stories are important - so long as they do not teach a moral.

21. This aphorism, so important for MacDonald, is the eighty-third of the 'Fragmente vermischten Inhalts' in the edition of Novalis's work published in Berlin by Schlegel and Tieck in 1802 (*Novalis Schriften*, Eds., Mahl, Samuel, Schulz, Bd. 5, p. 216).

22. There are other themes which a comparative study of the thought of MacDonald and Jean Paul could well investigate. Both writers are preoccupied with nature of the self, its denial and its fulfilment, a subject clearly relating to that of spiritual development. It is a theme central to *Phantastes* and highlighted, albeit enigmatically, by a citation from Jean Paul standing as an epigraph to a chapter. 'Niemand hat meine Gestalt als der Ich' Here MacDonald adds a literal translation, 'No one has my form but the I' (*Titan*, epigraph to *Phantastes*, ch. 22).

23. Novalis is the pen-name of Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg (1772 - 1801).

24. The narrator of *The Seaboard Parish*, who has translated one of Novalis's hymns, has to explain to his daughter that Novalis did not belong to any section of the church nor was there any reason why he should have done (pp. 460 - 461).

25. Kuzniar acknowledges that there are scholars who have claimed that Novalis 'anticipated a culmination of salvation history'. Her own view is that he 'categorically rejects teleological beliefs' (Kuzniar, 1987, pp. 76, 82).

26. Constraints of space forbid a discussion of other allusions to Novalis. A series of Novalis epigraphs in *David Elginbrod* express convictions MacDonald made his own. 'Wo keine Gotter sind, walten Gespenster'

(*Where there are no gods, ghosts rule*) (p. 321). 'Ein Charakter ist ein vollkommen gebildeter Wille' (*A character is a perfectly formed will*) (p. 321). A quotation from Novalis is placed beneath the significant chapter-heading in *David Elginbrod* 'A New Guide'. 'Das Denken ist nur eim Traum des Fühlens, ein erstorbenes Fühlen, ein blass-graues, schwaches Leben.' (*Thinking is only a dream of feeling; a dead feeling: a pale-grey feeble life*) (p. 384). MacDonald has learned from Novalis that the heart too has its reasons and often better ones. Novalis's thoughts about women which provide two epigraphs (pp. 401, 407) cannot detain us. When we come to discuss MacDonald's understanding of childhood we shall notice further affinities with Novalis.

27. It is not within the remit of this study to attempt the impossible by trying to define 'Romanticism'. Isaiah Berlin's famous 1965 Mellon lectures now published (1999), claiming that Romanticism was a vehement reaction to the Enlightenment, have been criticised as 'overstated' and 'unreliable' (Gay, 1999). Be that as it may, Berlin's account approaches the heart of MacDonald's fantasy. 'The point of (Romanticism) is...to break down the barrier between illusion and reality, between dreams and waking, between night and day, between the conscious and the unconscious, in order to produce a sense of the absolutely unbarred universe, of the wall-less universe, and of perpetual change, perpetual transformation' (p. 14).

28. Letter of MacDonald to Mrs. A. J. Scott of 3rd November 1869 (MacDonald, Greville, p. 400).

29. Maurice MacDonald, 1864 - 1879.

30. 'A Thanksgiving for F. D. Maurice' (*Poetical Works*, Vol I, p. 442).

31. In a glowing passage, indirectly alluding to the German idealists, Maurice writes of this knowledge.
    The philosophers of the continent tell you that there is that in man which stretches after
    the infinite, which will be content with nothing less than the knowledge of that which
    is subject to no accidents, defined by no human conditions. We say this stretching out has
    not been in vain, this longing has been met, we say we can tell you those realities which
    correspond to this demand of the human spirit, we can introduce you into a region as
    exactly answering to all the capacities of your inward being as this outward world to your
    capacities of seeing and hearing (*Lectures on Education*, p. 150; quoted by Jackson,
    1982, p. 43).

32. Owens College, which was eventually to evolve into Manchester University, had its precursor in the Manchester College of Arts and Science. The ethos which Owens College inherited and which was maintained and promoted under Scott was that of the late eighteenth-century dissenting academies, dedicated to the encouragement of free enquiry and to the application of learning to social ends. The educational philosophy of these institutions revived ideas originally associated with the name of Francis Bacon and widely propagated during the Commonwealth period. As early as 1850 MacDonald's father had drawn his son's attention to the founding of Owen's College and to the fact that it imposed no religious tests. (ALS Yale, 19th March, 1850).

33. We find such homage excessive but MacDonald was not alone in lavishing it. 'I allow that my friend Mr. Scott is somewhat obscure,' writes James Dunn, 'but 'tis the obscurity which proceeds from depth and not from muddiness; believe me he is a sublime man' (quoted in Scott, 1866, p. xvii). Carlyle speaks of him as 'one of the gentlest, kindliest, best-bred of men' (A. Carlyle, Ed., *New Letters of T. Carlyle*, Vol. I, 1904, p. 118; quoted by Newell, 1981, p. 193). A Congregational minister and a former student of Scott, James Baldwin Brown, writes of him, 'I find none so full of light as this teacher' (Brown, E. B., *In Memoriam:*

James Baldwin Brown, 1884, pp. 16-17; quoted by Newell, 1983, p 23). A critic who recognised MacDonald's debt to Scott concludes, 'The world does not know what it owes to him' (Garrett Horder, W., 'George MacDonald: A Nineteenth Century Seer' *Review of Reviews* 32 (1905): p. 359; quoted by Newell, 1981, p. 431).

34. Novalis. 'Fragmente vermischten Inhalts', 28. *Novalis Schriften*, Eds., Mahl, Samuel, Schulz, Bd. 5., 1988, p. 207.

35. Scott is buried at Clarens, Switzerland. The wording of the Johannine text as inscribed is: 'If any man will to do *the* will, he shall know of the doctrine ' (John ch. 7: v.17). I draw attention by my italics to the alteration in the Biblical text, replacing 'his will' by 'the will'. We can only speculate whether this alteration was deliberate and, if so, what was intended by it. The text is a refrain throughout MacDonald's work. A paraphrase of the text in 'the old Scots tongue' captures the force of it for MacDonald: 'Gien ony man be wullin to dee His wull, he'll ken whether what I tell him comes frae God, or whether I say't only oot o' my ain head' (*Salted with Fire*, p. 316).

36. The most notable figure in this movement was Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788 - 1870). Like MacDonald Erskine repudiated Calvinism for a kindlier estimate of the ways of God (Raeper, 1987a, pp. 240 - 242).

37. Mr. Stoddart, the organist, has a work-room for book-binding, metal-work and carpentry, as well a separate chemical laboratory. These reflect his 'theories of education'. 'I think a man has to educate himself into harmony. Therefore he must open every possible window by which the influences of the All may come in upon him. I do not think any man complete without a perfect development of his mechanical faculties, for instance, and I encourage them to develop themselves into such windows' (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, p. 145).

Chapter Three

APPROACHING MACDONALD

In this thesis we are studying the bearing of MacDonald's writings on the issue of spiritual development and its promotion. It is a specific approach, an interrogation of his work which asks some questions but not others and approached in this way, as succeeding chapters will show, MacDonald's work yields insights of educational importance. Other approaches to his work cannot however be disregarded and it is the purpose of this chapter to review them. Some of these approaches complement that adopted in these pages and assist our own enquiry. But as we shall see the concerns which have determined the direction of this study lead into territory not widely explored in the literature.

That literature confronts us with a bewildering variety of approaches reflecting both the volume and the diversity of genre of MacDonald's work as well as a gamut of academic interests. Some kind of structure must be imposed on this medley of material, however artificial that structure is, and however uneasily some of the contributions to the literature sit within it.

I note then, firstly, the work of scholars of acknowledged standing in the field of MacDonald studies, whose critical assessment of MacDonald's writing carries particular weight. Five of these - Wolff, Hein, Reiss, Robb and Raeper - have written major full-length studies of MacDonald which discuss both his fantasy and his realistic fiction. Three others, Manlove, Prickett and McGillis, focus primarily, though not exclusively, on MacDonald's fantasy. Secondly, I illustrate from a range of studies how students of MacDonald have adopted different approaches in their quest for interpretative frameworks for understanding his fantasy. Prominent among them have been approaches employing psycho-analytical tools. Thirdly, I single out a number of studies of individual fairy tales or fantasies which are important for the support they offer for lines of thought developed later in this thesis. Finally, I note briefly some of the many publications with a narrower focus. These include studies which are primarily biographical in their approach, those which seek

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to identify significant influences on MacDonald and to trace sources of his ideas and imagery, those which make connections between MacDonald and other writers, and those which discuss particular titles or topics often overlooked by MacDonald critics.

The major commentators

The modern era of MacDonald studies has been overshadowed by the controversial work which inaugurated it, Robert Lee Wolff's *The Golden Key* (1961). Richard Reiss (1992) has declared his opinion that Wolff's book is 'as fatuous and pernicious a work as has ever been published by a doctrinaire fanatic' (p. 21).[1] Wolff offers a Freudian interpretation of much of MacDonald's work, claiming that in his obsessive longing for his lost mother and his confused feelings about his father we have the key to many of his books. The evidence, which Wolff says 'we shall find invaluable at every turn' (p. 13), is a letter which Greville MacDonald tells us was found among his father's effects. In it MacDonald's mother, who died when George was only eight years old, tells how she yielded to family pressure and abruptly ceased breast-feeding her baby (MacDonald, Greville, 1924, pp. 32 -33). This one letter is the charter of the 'quest for the breast' school of MacDonald studies of which Wolff is the founding father. The letter sets Wolff hunting for Freudian symbols. References to moss in *The Golden Key* are allusions to pubic hair, and so on.

Much of this is rather silly but the opprobrium visited on Wolff's book is nevertheless undeserved. Wolff's pioneering study of the sources of MacDonald's fantasy in German Romanticism and his perceptive discussion of *Phantastes* (despite some Freudian speculation) - to mention but two examples of the distinction of his criticism - are contributions of lasting importance to MacDonald scholarship. Wolff is not wholly wedded to Freud as is clear from his later work *Gains and Losses* (1977), a study of fictional treatments of nineteenth century religious controversies. Here Wolff comments helpfully on a number of MacDonald's novels (as well as on scores by other writers) without searching them for Freudian sub-plots.

The premise of Rolland Hein's *The Harmony Within* (1982) is that 'the symbolic terrain of (MacDonald's) imaginative prose is shaped by his theological convictions, and hence by his

understanding of the Bible'. Hein adds, 'MacDonald was a devout and careful student of the Christian scriptures, and his imagination, consciously and unconsciously, was shaped by them' (p. xvi). Hein's exposition exemplifies a frequently adopted approach to MacDonald in which the critical is in tension with the devotional. Such an approach permits sensitive reflection on the texts but only within the parameters of its confessional presuppositions. Hein's view is that for MacDonald creating literary myths was 'the happiest method of imaginatively exploring and communicating his deeply held religious convictions' (p. 155). We shall have reason to ask whether the matter is as simple as that, whether a function of the fantasy is not rather to surrender to the reader the right to say what the text in his or her hands means.

Richard H. Reiss (1988, 1992) recognises the pedagogical drive in MacDonald's work. For Reiss the central theme of MacDonald's fantasies is 'spiritual education' (1988, pp. 125 - 132). He notes how the imagery of the fantasies can operate on a level which differs from what we may surmise MacDonald had in mind. In two respects in particular the present study will support and develop Reiss's approach. Reiss recognises the open-endedness of the 'eastward journey' explored in the fantasies. Of *Lilith* he writes, 'There is no apotheosis - only an awaiting, a partial arrival at wherever Mr. Vane is destined to go' (1988, p. 102). The argument of this study will be that Mr. Vane's destiny is for the reader to discover in his or her own spiritual journey. My thesis will also endorse Reiss's recognition that 'there is something fundamentally human and independent of mere religious doctrine in the mysterious process of growth, education, maturation and general individual progress' (1988, p. 136). MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales, *pace* Hein, are not dramatizing a given body of non-negotiable doctrine and the spirituality explored in them is not dependent on confessional truth-claims. Reiss argues that MacDonald had, so to speak, 'two muses' (1988, p. 137). Reiss recognises the complementarity of the two discourses in articulating the spiritual. It is not the case that the first muse is always needed to provide sub-titles for the allusive and enigmatic images of the second. This too is a view advocated in this thesis.

David Robb has deeply enriched our understanding of MacDonald (1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1990a, 1990b). He has added to our knowledge of MacDonald's early life, making

us more alert to the bearing on his writings of his Scottish heritage. Robb has shown us how strongly MacDonald's work is impressed by memory, by his memory both of the place and the period of his childhood and of his own inner imaginative world when young. He has put right an injustice by reclaiming MacDonald's fiction, especially the Scottish novels, as literature deserving critical attention.[2] But from the perspective of this project Robb's account of MacDonald's fantasy is equally important, not least his recognition that the frontier between the fantasy and the 'realistic' fiction is not at all as clear as is usually made out. Robb stresses the open-endedness both of *Phantastes* and *Lilith*. He recognises the crucial significance of 'the narratives within the narrative' in *Phantastes* and the formative potential of the process of reading, not least of that which takes place as I turn the pages of the copy in my hands. Moreover in his analysis of *Lilith* and of MacDonald's courageous, if ultimately unresolved, engagement with the themes of the self and of evil, death and hell, Robb emphasises, perhaps more powerfully than any other commentator, the intensity and urgency of the moral struggle which spiritual development entails.

The early death of Bill Raeper (1987a, 1987b, 1992) was a bitter loss to a wider world than that of MacDonald scholarship but in that small circle he is sorely missed. Raeper's *George MacDonald* (1987a) is the one authoritative full-length critical biography we have of MacDonald. Greville MacDonald's *George MacDonald and his Wife* remains indispensable but is flawed both by its filial piety and by its frequently inaccurate transcription of letters cited (MacDonald, Greville, 1924). Raeper's comments on particular texts are often illuminated by the biographical context he supplies. His use of Jungian categories is restrained and judicious. His discussion of *Phantastes* (ch. 16) and of *Lilith* (ch. 32) is particularly pertinent for our purposes. Here Raeper draws attention both to the self-referential features of these texts and to what I shall claim is at the heart of MacDonald's understanding of spiritual development, the belief that it is always an unclosed process.

Three scholars have made a special study of fantasy literature in general and MacDonald's fantasy in particular. A strength of their work lies in their ability to relate MacDonald's fantasy both to its literary antecedents and to its wider literary context.

Colin Manlove has criticised MacDonald's fantasy in a series of important studies (1970, 1975, 1982, 1983, 1990, 1999). In our last chapter we took issue with his claim that MacDonald was an intellectually isolated figure. Manlove also detects in MacDonald a deep and unresolved tension between his mystical and involuntarist sense that to find one's true self one must surrender to the 'unconscious tide of the universe' and his stern and, as Manlove would have it, obsessive insistence that we can and must freely choose to do the next thing to be done (1975, pp. 60 - 70).[3] He finds too in MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies a conflict between the chaos welling up in them from the unconscious which they express and explore and MacDonald's own uneasy and typically Victorian sense that he must impose some meaning on them. In *Phantastes*, for example, Manlove detects a failure of nerve as MacDonald seeks to retain intellectual control over a work best left to obey its own imaginative currents. 'It is almost as if he first imagined *Phantastes* and then applied his intellect to it' (1975, p. 77). The position taken here on this issue is that at least in the more successful of MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales - including *Phantastes* - the author has 'let go' and allowed the inner dynamic of the narrative its own autonomy.[4]

Stephen Prickett's studies of MacDonald (1976, 1979, 1990, 1991, 1992) are informed both by his extensive reading in the field of fantasy literature and by an understanding of the roots in Romanticism, both English and German, of MacDonald's work. The importance of Prickett's work for us rests in his interest in how fantasy functions. In his *Victorian Fantasy* (1979) he shows how in MacDonald's work images are never *merely* symbols. This or that object in a MacDonald fairy tale or fantasy may well stand for one or many things but typically it will at the same time partake of and convey what it symbolises. Prickett draws our attention to a conversation Greville MacDonald records as having held with his father about the nature of symbols. The rose, his father told him, has a '*substantial* relation' (the italics are Greville's) to what it symbolises (MacDonald, Greville, 1924, p. 482; Prickett, 1979, pp. 176 - 177). Prickett also comments on the purpose of MacDonald's technique of juxtaposing in his fantasy one world and another world. The function of the return from the *faerie* realm to the 'real' world is to transform one's perception of it. Any work of art has the potential to reveal to us our own world in a new light but whereas the realistic novel must remain at one remove from spiritual realities a

work of fantasy can shew them more directly. Prickett's comments thus far are helpful enough but in my judgement he achieves something of a critical breakthrough in a later article (1990) by inviting us to compare and contrast the function of MacDonald's *Phantastes* with that of the typical German *Bildungsroman*. In the latter the protagonist's formation is completed within the narrative but in the former that formative process is unconcluded. What I shall maintain - and it will be a central claim of this thesis - is, as I see it, an implication of Prickett's argument. It is that the unconcluded process of the protagonist's formation in such a fantasy as *Phantastes* is not simply abandoned but is to be taken up and continued in the narrative of the reader's own life.

Roderick McGillis (1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1990, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1997) has written widely on MacDonald's fantasy - though not only on his fantasy - and my debt to his insights will be apparent. I welcome McGillis's comments on the role and the methods of the Wise Woman as teacher. She teaches 'feelingly and imaginatively...by raising questions which she refuses to answer' (1985, p. 147). She seeks 'the reconciliation of opposites'. She is the minister of the elusive 'poetic truth' which the 'unified mind' perceives in the apparently paradoxical (1985, *passim*). McGillis's work on both *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, emphasising their open-endedness, their 'eschatological drive', and their engagement of the reader in the process they describe, will support the claim of this thesis that those works are both commentaries on spiritual development and themselves formative texts (1990, 1992a). McGillis also argues that there is a 'femininity' to these texts, that in them we encounter an economy 'presided over by the feminine spirit of love, mystery and generosity' (1990, p. 54). We shall also take account of McGillis's view, not widely shared, that there is a structural pattern to *Phantastes* (1992a). McGillis is also a lone voice in having discussed MacDonald's treatment of the theme of childhood (McGillis, 1991), a theme to which we return in Chapter Five. Equally relevant to my research interest is McGillis's discussion of the language of *At the Back of the North Wind*. That language is poetic and 'poetry truly never ends' (1992b, p. 146). McGillis comments on the idea of the endless story in MacDonald, a concept which we shall see to be fundamental to his notion of spiritual development. 'The reader supplies the sense of an ending if he participates in the action of the poetic language' (1992b, p. 147). McGillis returns to *At the Back of the*

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North Wind in a recent article which makes this same crucially important point.

> Here there are no endings, only beginnings. Or if endings do occur, they are "endless endings" such as we have in the last chapter of *Lilith*. The end of the fiction that is *At the Back of the North Wind* is the beginning of Diamond's new life *and the beginning of the reader's search for understanding* (1997, p. 7).

The italics are my own.

MacDonald's fantasy - the quest for an interpretative framework

The list of publications about MacDonald's fantasy is in part a record of the quest for a clear conceptual structure which will enable us to construe what in his work is often so cryptic. Two approaches have dominated this search, the psycho-analytical and the theological. A number of critics, most notably Jack Zipes, advocate a third approach, suggesting that MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales should be understood as works of social criticism. There is a lack of feminist criticism of MacDonald's work but one important essay adopting this approach needs to be noted. The fact that such differing frameworks have been proposed alerts us to the need for caution. To attempt to decode such material with the assistance of conceptual constructs external to the texts themselves is perhaps already to misunderstand it.

The psycho-analytical framework

The view that MacDonald's fantasy is in some sense an exploration or expression of the unconscious leads to the adoption of psycho-analytical categories to interpret it. We have seen how Wolff tries to make sense of much of MacDonald's work by interpreting it in Freudian terms. Holbrook (1989) offers a post-Freudian analysis of *Phantastes* seeing it as a portrayal of the quest for 'ecstatic primary love', for a psychic rebirth, to recover the primal bliss enjoyed at the mother's breast. Holbrook, like Wolff, makes much of MacDonald's mother suddenly ceasing to breast-feed her little son. Thus the melancholy of so much of MacDonald's writing is a mourning over this primal loss. MacDonald is committed to a life-long quest to be reunited with his mother. The evidence for this hypothesis is the ubiquity, according to Holbrook, of the breast-symbol. The trees, the roses, the moon, and so on, all are to be interpreted this way because the author is consumed by a longing to be once again an infant at the breast. The circularity of the

argument is manifest. The theory is used to explain the significance of the evidence from which 'evidence' the theory is postulated.

Knoepflmacher (1998) has recently argued that MacDonald belongs to a group of four writers (the others being Ruskin, Thackeray and Carroll) who 'created constructions of childhood that were shaped by their common longing for a lost feminine complement' (p. xi). It will come as no surprise that the evidence for the search for 'the elusive female essence' in *Phantastes* is the letter alluding to MacDonald's sudden weaning of which Wolff makes so much. Similarly the swirling locks of North Wind's hair enfolding Diamond 'has much to do with the stubborn desire of Helen MacDonald's son to recover the irrecoverable' (p. 241). Knoepflmacher's chapters on MacDonald are weighty essays but too much of the weight of them rests on the weak support of this single letter.

Naomi Wood (1993) deplores the extent to which Wolff's work has been dismissed by most MacDonald scholars, work which she acknowledges to have provided 'a ground work and impetus for (her)' (p. 118). She holds that 'masochistic and sadistic images abound in MacDonald's work' (p. 112) and that in particular *At the Back of the North Wind* provides repeated evidence of adult satisfaction being found in a child's pain. Overstatements abound in Wood's article -'Throughout his work MacDonald describes punishments lovingly' (p. 117) - but it is not for that reason to be brushed aside. There certainly are disturbing passages in MacDonald's work - notoriously that describing Thomas Wingfold's whipping of his son (*There and Back*, pp. 229 - 230). MacDonald was not the only Victorian moralist in whom the influence of repressed impulses may sometimes be suspected. Nevertheless his writing is not troubled by them to the extent to which Wood claims.

In a particularly sensitive discussion of *Little Daylight*, the tale told by Mr. Raymond in *At the Back of the North Wind*, Adrian Gunther (1995) uses Freudian insights as one of a number of approaches to draw out the implications of what is one of MacDonald's most pleasing shorter fairy tales.[5] Gunther reminds us that in its original context this is a tale told in a children's hospital - it is a story told for its power to heal. It is, Gunther claims, an account of a process by which what is divided in an individual's experience, the conscious

'daylight' realm and the unconscious 'nighttime' realm, is reconciled, a process which however remains unconcluded. The fairy tale, as is the human flourishing of which it is the parable, is open-ended. The sense of a benign destiny is powerful but any happy ending for the prince and the princess is beyond the last page of the story as it is for the reader for whom each day is, thus far, the last page of his or her story.[6]

MacDonald's fantasy is interpreted more often in Jungian than in Freudian terms. Manlove, Reiss and Raeper all suggest, although assuming rather than arguing the case, that Jungian categories such as 'the collective unconscious', the 'anima', or 'archetypes' are helpful for interpreting the fantasies and fairy tales.[7] But the most thorough-going attempt to interpret MacDonald's work within a Jungian framework has been that of Edmund Cusick (1998, 1990). Cusick mounts a strong case for holding that a Jungian approach, which seeks the greater universal truth rather than explanations of the psychic condition of the individual, is far better adapted to interpret MacDonald's work than that of Freud. Cusick's argument is persuasive, if only because both MacDonald and Jung postulate a transcendent realm. Less persuasive is the implication that MacDonald's fantasy alone makes sense on the basis of such a psycho-analytical reading of the text.

Joseph Sigman (1976) interprets *Phantastes* in terms of Jungian psychology as developed by Freud's disciple, Erich Neumann. Sigman emphasises the significance of the female characters in *Phantastes*, pointing out how they seem to 'coalesce', how some appear as if they were both Anodos's beloved and his mother. We meet 'the archetype of the feminine', symbol of nature and the unconscious, and we meet her in both her negative and positive aspects, as 'terrible mother' and 'Wise Woman'. The quest is for psychic wholeness, for the new self that comes into existence between the conscious and the unconscious as the result of the individuation process. Sigman (1992) again uses a Jungian framework in his discussion of the *Princess* books, the second of which, he claims, shows us MacDonald 'at the height of his powers' (p.193). For us the interest of this later study lies in Sigman's argument that the central theme of the *Princess* books is how Curdie develops.

Max Keith Sutton (1984) proposes a 'Kohutian analysis'[8] of *Phantastes* by which Anodos's journey can be read 'as a symbolic "working through" of the disorders of a narcissistic personality' (p. 13). Such disorders need to be relived 'in the new context of the maturing psyche' (p. 14). The language by which this process is described is again largely Jungian. Anodos's journey corresponds to the process of individuation.

We must reopen the question of how necessary or helpful it is to approach MacDonald's work within a psycho-analytical framework, whether Freudian, Jungian, or any other, when we come in Chapter Seven to consider the function of his fantasy.

The theological framework

We have already seen this framework applied in Hein's work. It is commonly and more crudely used in expositions of MacDonald where the scholarly yields to pietistic. For example, Lesley Willis (1985) discusses the transformation of Irene in *The Princess and the Goblin*. This change, the author claims, reflects and represents an individual's discovery for himself or herself of 'the fundamental principles of Christianity' (p. 33). It is the interpretation which once justified the widespread disbursement of the *Princess* books as Sunday School prizes, but it is a reading which drains the story of its mystery.

Keith Wilson's study of *Phantastes* (1981) is a more sophisticated piece of work than that of Willis but it too interprets the fantasy within a conventional religious framework. For Willis MacDonald's *Unspoken Sermons*, and especially his sermon entitled 'The Truth', provide 'a map' which enables *Phantastes* to be read clearly (*Unspoken Sermons, Third Series*). 'With "The Truth" as the key, *Phantastes* becomes the most carefully embodied and consistently developed allegory' (p. 152). It is, Wilson claims, 'as decipherable as *The Pilgrim's Progress*' (p. 152). The problem with such a reading is that a fantasy which can only be understood in the light of a sermon is essentially dispensable.

The most substantial recent attempt to expound MacDonald's work within a theological framework is Lucy Dearborn's doctoral thesis *Prophet or heretic: a study of the theology of George MacDonald* (1994). A strength of this study is its thorough consideration of the

role of the imagination in MacDonald's work.[9] But this is not the central focus of the thesis. Dearborn is primarily concerned to show that MacDonald 'for the most part remains true to Scriptural revelation' (Summary of the Thesis). A passing comment indicates the stance of her study. MacDonald, Dearborn warns us, 'seems...to contradict Scripture with regard to purgatory' (p. 221). The value of this scholarly dissertation, as with all scholarship, cannot be uncoupled from its presuppositions. The difficulty with Dearborn's argument is that its basic assumption would seem to run counter to the conviction undergirding all MacDonald's work that no theological system is inviolate or non-negotiable.

The social-critical framework

Jack Zipes (1979, 1988, 1991, 1999) argues that MacDonald's fantasy is about social injustice and the need for social change. Fairy tales are far from being a-political, concerned only with 'timeless truth'. For example the depiction of the corruption of Gwyntystorm in *The Princess and Curdie* is a picture of what MacDonald deplored in nineteenth-century England. Zipes finds in MacDonald's work the first hint of the conscious social protest which will more strongly inform the fantasy of Kingsley and Morris. Zipes recognises the 'utopian' dimension to much fantasy writing and certainly to MacDonald's. It is an approach to MacDonald, manifestly a writer with a high eschatology, which we shall need to consider more closely when in Chapter Seven we examine how his fantasy functions.

Kath Filmer (1991) does not refer to the work of Zipes but her penetrating discussion of *Lilith*, which she sees as 'a work of incisive social and cultural criticism' (p. 101), is worth noting at this point. Her discussion is valuable for its balance. She discerns in *Lilith* a biting attack on a greedy and exploitative society but recognises too MacDonald's stress on the need for individual change, for that personal 'dying to self' which Vane seeks to evade but must finally undergo. Her discussion also illustrates how Jungian categories can be illuminating, for example in elucidating the symbol of 'the Shadow' in *Lilith*, if these categories are not seen as solving all the problems a complex text presents.[10]

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The feminist framework

Judith John (1991) offers a feminist reading of MacDonald's fantasy grandmothers. They

are among MacDonald's powerful women 'who did not often let the masculine order interfere with their ability to love and guide their children' (p. 28). To be sure generally MacDonald conforms to Victorian assumptions about the mutual roles of man and woman but he can challenge these assumptions. John sees MacDonald's account of Irene's privileged relationship with her grandmother in the *Princess* stories and of Tangle's relationship with the old woman in *The Golden Key* as 'the author's attempt to enter into a female bonding ritual that makes him unique in his time and important in our time' (p. 31). An interpretative framework is here being brought to the texts. It is not to question the premises of such a framework to ask how readily it could accommodate some of the material which Judith John excludes from it.

The function and the discourse of fantasy

A number of contributions to the literature adopt a perspective on the function of MacDonald's fantasy close to that which I shall be proposing (Marshall, 1989; Howard, 1989; Muirhead, 1992; Gunther, 1994, 1995). The value of these studies as scholarly support for the claims of this thesis will be better appreciated if discussion of them is deferred until later. Each of them advances an argument which I wholly endorse but which I shall suggest can be taken a stage further once MacDonald's fantasy is recognised as 'transfiguring'. The focus of these studies is on the 'self-referential' character of MacDonald's fantasy, on how it functions as commentary on the reader's own dilemma in construing it. In Chapter Seven I shall comment more fully on these studies and on how their argument can be extended to support the claim of this thesis that the reader's spiritual development is promoted as he or she takes up the unclosed narrative of the fantasy in his or her own life-story.

I shall also defer comment on Cynthia Marshall's brilliant study of *The Day Boy and the Night Girl* (1988) to Chapter Seven. This essay shows how MacDonald's fairy tale serves as a commentary on the parallel realms of the imagination and the reason. Thus it bears closely on the question to which this study repeatedly returns - By which discourse is spiritual development to be promoted?

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Miscellaneous studies

There remains a range of publications which can only be noted very briefly. These include studies which are primarily biographical in their approach, those which seek to identify significant influences on MacDonald and to trace sources of his ideas and imagery, those which make connections between MacDonald and other writers, and those which discuss particular themes or texts often overlooked by MacDonald critics.

Biographical studies

Biographical investigation, particularly of MacDonald's family background and early years, is an approach which can help us understand the influences which shaped his pedagogical views. Here is an area where the specialist studies published in *North Wind*, the journal of the George MacDonald Society, prove helpful. These include Edward Troup's study (1982) of MacDonald's boyhood in Huntly, Robb's enquiry (1986) into MacDonald's association with the Blackfriars Congregational Chapel in Edinburgh and his discussion (1990b) of MacDonald's 'Scottish heritage', and Raeper's cool re-evaluation of MacDonald's much-discussed 'missing year' (Raeper, 1987b).[11]

Sources and influences

A number of scholars have drawn attention to sources of inspiration for MacDonald which, they claim, have been overlooked or insufficiently considered. Dale Nelson (1989) and Deirdre Hayward (1994), as we have seen, have commented on MacDonald's debt to Jacob Boehme. Rankin (1989) conjectures, entirely speculatively, that MacDonald was influenced by the Swiss writer Jeremias Gotthelf whose many novels were characterised by a vivid portrayal of landscape and rural worthies, by dialogue in sometimes impenetrable dialect, and by sustained and insistent didactic commentary. F. Hal Broome (1990) has urged that a field rarely considered as influential on MacDonald should be taken far more seriously in appraising his work, that of current scientific theory. Stephen Prickett (1991) has also drawn attention to MacDonald's extensive but inconspicuous use of contemporary scientific theory.

Dante's influence on MacDonald has always been apparent but the Italian scholar Giorgio

Spina (1990) is the first to have discussed it in depth. Swedenborgian influences on the structure and thought of *Lilith* are examined by Adelheid Kegler (1995). Kegler's claim - and it is too much to claim - is that the multiple influences discernible in *Lilith*, such as those of Plotinus, Boehme, Blake and Coleridge, 'are all filtered through a screen of Swedenborgianism' (p. 30). William Webb (1995) calls attention to MacDonald's 'truly personal feeling for Jean Paul'. Bergman (1997) rightly reminds us of the influence of Fouqué on MacDonald and in particular of the significance for him of Fouqué's *Undine* (1811).[12] Bergman argues that the importance of *Undine* for MacDonald is in its combination of two elements: the merging of reality and imagination and the acknowledgement of a blissful other world only accessible through death. The conventional happy ending in this world is eschewed. The resolution of contradictions is transcendental.

Still more sharply focussed studies investigate possible sources for the imagery of particular texts. Kirstin Jeffrey (1997) discusses the evidence in *The Golden Key* for the influence of Bunyan on MacDonald.. For Celia Anderson (1992) the major source of inspiration for *The Golden Key* is Milton's *Comus*. Lesley Smith (1992), less plausibly, claims that Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind* has 'many links with the prophet Daniel, and the sacrificial victim demanded by much Old Testament prophecy' (p. 161). A more useful study of the sources of *At the Back of the North Wind* is Raeper's discussion of MacDonald's debt to James Hogg and the Scottish folk tradition (1992).

Comparative studies

By far the most elaborate comparison of MacDonald's work with that of another writer is Doherty's monumental study of the 'literary products' of the friendship of MacDonald with Lewis Carroll (1997). Doherty traces a myriad of a reciprocating influences and allusions in the structure, themes, and imagery of the writings of the two friends. Doherty's immense labours deserve an extended and detailed consideration far beyond the scope of this study. One's initial response is suggest that it is one thing to highlight illuminating correspondences or contrasts between texts and another to claim that such relationships are constructed intentionally.

Of the briefer comparative studies the most important for our purposes are those of Bruce

Edwards (1983) and John Pennington (1989, 1992, 1997). Edwards's essay on the 'rhetoric of fantasy criticism' is a study of C. S. Lewis's response to MacDonald and William Morris. This paper is to be welcomed for its endorsement of Lewis's insistence that the critic must recognise and respond to the essential 'quiddity' of the literary artifact. Pennington traces links to and from MacDonald. He is bold enough to propose that MacDonald had a significant influence on T. S. Eliot, an influence which, he claims, clarifies many of Eliot's images and themes (1989). Another comparative study by Pennington discusses the 'metafictions of Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald'. He recognises how in the imaginative writings of both there is a studied reflexivity, a drawing of our attention as readers to the text itself which disturbs our assumptions about what is fictional and what is real (1992). He modestly sub-titles his recent comparative study of the fairy tales of MacDonald and John Ruskin as 'introductory speculations' but, speculative or not, they constitute a strong critical case for seeing MacDonald's fairy tales as more subtle and more powerful than those of Ruskin (1997).[13]

Themes and texts

Here we draw attention to studies identifying distinctive features and themes in MacDonald's work and to those more sharply focussed on particular texts.

Michael Mendelson (1985, 1992) is interested in the structural features of MacDonald's fantasy - as we must be too, for we shall argue later that the presence or absence of a structure to MacDonald's fantasy has an important bearing on how that fantasy functions formatively. In his first article Mendelson draws attention to the patterns to be seen in Lilith. In his later essay, a consideration of the evolution of MacDonald's 'fairy canon' as a whole, the structuralist approach, particularly in his discussion of the 'scaffolding' of The Golden Key, is again used delicately

John Pennington (1994) coins the phrase 'muscular spirituality' to describe what he proposes as the interpretative key for MacDonald's Curdie books, as he calls them. He suggests that MacDonald 'poeticizes' Kingsley's 'muscular Christianity', advocating a muscularity requiring strength of spirit rather than strength of body. Irene and Curdie must

be transformed into 'muscularly equipped Christians'. Pennington's choice to refer to what are usually called the *Princess* books as 'the *Curdie* books' is an indication of his perspective. It is interesting to reflect what the feminist critic Judith John might make of this.

Karen Michalson's *Victorian Fantasy Literature* (1990) insists that fantasy must be read within its historical context. Her sub-title *Literary battles with Church and Empire* encapsulates her view that the genre is fundamentally confrontational. MacDonald does not take on the empire but, in her view, he does attack the church. *Phantastes* conveys MacDonald's 'radical discontent with the tendency of practising Calvinists and other Protestants to systematize and restrict the life of the spirit' (p. 92).

Dieter Petzold (1995) studies a crowded field, that inhabited by the beasts and monsters of MacDonald's fantasy. Petzold's original approach is productive and perceptive, not least because he includes in his inquiry, 'the beast within'.

The numerous recent studies of individual texts, some of which have not received scholarly attention previously, show how wide-ranging MacDonald studies have become. Some examples, relevant to our own enquiry may be mentioned. Rebecca Ankeny (1994), in an article closely related to the concerns of this thesis, considers the teacher-pupil relationship in *Mary Marston*. Ankeny sees in Mary Marston someone 'who reads and teaches as if both activities were interpersonal relationships governed by courtesy and concern for human dignity' (p. 237). Bearing still more closely on the direction of my own argument is Ankeny's recognition of how MacDonald brings 'music and language together' (p. 235). Adrian Gunther's examination (1996) of the fantasy elements in *Castle Warlock* provides further evidence of how misleading is the conventional distinction between the fantastic and the realistic in MacDonald's work. MacDonald's Scottish novel *Robert Falconer* is now receiving more critical attention, most notably in the work of Deirdre Hayward (1996) who points out how this novel 'loosens the conceptual limits of "true" and "false"'.[14] Nancy Mellon (1996) takes seriously the possibility that *Adela Cathcart* is truly an exploration of the therapeutic potential of fairy tales rather than an artificial framework allowing MacDonald to publish or republish a random assortment of tales.

Summary

It is only relatively recently that the scholarly literature has begun to recognise that MacDonald wrote novels and essays, sermons and poetry, as well as the imaginative works in fantasy vein for which he is famous. Moreover there have been few studies attempting to relate the different genres of his writing and to build bridges between them. More fundamentally, there has been little consideration of how satisfactory that familiar classification of MacDonald's work by its different genres really is. I am claiming in this study that the fundamental distinction is not between the contrasting genres but between the contrasting discourses, between the discourse which adverts directly to God and to the claims, however liberally interpreted, of the Christian faith and to the discourse which does not. It is this distinction which bears most closely on the storm-centre of the debate about spiritual development.

Little of the literature directly addresses the educational aspects of MacDonald's work, whether to explore the educational ideas we find in his writings or to consider the educational potential of those texts themselves. Nor do the themes which I shall claim to be important as we analyse the pedagogy of his work - the Romantic themes of nature, the child, the imagination - receive much critical attention.

In these respects I hope that this dissertation will redress imbalances. That said, my debt to much of the literature surveyed in this chapter will be apparent. We shall return to the studies which emphasise the self-referentiality of MacDonald's fantasy texts, studies which alert us to the extent to which the texts we read are about the process of reading itself. We shall come back too to those which show how MacDonald's fantasy subverts the artificial distinctions we draw between the imagined and the empirical. Above all this thesis will highlight and endorse the critical judgement of scholars who point to the unclosed character of MacDonald's fantasy. In developing and commending my own understanding of MacDonald's fantasy as 'transfiguring' I am, I believe, submitting to the logical current of their reading of those texts.

Endnotes

1. In a letter to Arthur Greeves (8th May 1961) C. S. Lewis was no less scathing. '...some American has written a ghastly psychological study of him, trying to prove that he had an incestuous love for his mother, couldn't bear his father, hated the human race, and delighted in cruelty' (Hooper, p. 556).

2. The modern disparagement of MacDonald's 'realistic' novels in large measure reflects the weight of Lewis's judgement on them - 'few of (them) are good and none is very good'. (Lewis, 1946, p. 17). That MacDonald had to spend so much time on them was, Lewis tells Greeves, 'a loss as irreparable as the early death of Keats' (Hooper, p. 402).

3. MacDonald can certainly suggest an understanding of providence that leaves little space for choice. He speaks of 'the infinite Truth, the Love of the universe' shaping people and which 'supports them beyond their consciousness, coming to them like sleep from the roots of their being and having nothing to do with their opinions and beliefs' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 91). The tension in MacDonald's thought is rooted in the immemorial paradox of affirming both the sovereignty of God, or any determinist world-view, and free-will. It is a paradox which we can scarcely expect MacDonald to have resolved. It will be necessary to return to this issue in Chapter Six.

4. Muirhead (1992) challenges Manlove's criticisms. He argues for 'the underlying unity of *Phantastes*' and claims that 'the inconsistencies and conflicts of MacDonald's theory of fantasy as expounded in the exploratory essays in *A Dish of Orts* are carried over into a fairy story and are themselves explored as a work of the imagination' (p.47).

5. Gunther tells us that she 'cannot help but see this story as profoundly Buddhist' (p. 113). The enlightenment which frees the princess from the endlessly repeated cycle of 'living' and 'dying' as the moon waxes and wanes is the exercise of compassion.

6. Some recent treatments of MacDonald's fantasy take account of developments in Freudian theory which have taken place since Wolff's book was published. William Gray (1996) calls on the work of Julia Kristeva to guide his reading of *Phantastes*. For example, we have Anodos's horror at the sudden change of the Alder-maiden into an open coffin. The 'obvious' Freudian reading is that this 'expresses a horror and disgust of the vagina both as a displaced anus and as the site of castration' (p. 883). In the light of Kristeva's work on depression and melancholia this scene, Gray claims, can be seen as the mourning of 'the depressed narcissist' for the 'Thing', 'the centre of attraction and repulsion' (p. 883). Another post-Freudian student of fantasy is Rosemary Jackson (1981, 1986). The MacDonald text to which she gives closest attention is *Lilith*. She notes how in 'the house of death' Mother Eve becomes Vane's own mother and how, as he lies there beside her, there follows 'an almost farcical scene of fantasized incest' (p. 50). His ejection from the house of death is a 'symbolic castration'. In an endnote we are again referred to the letter about MacDonald's early weaning.

7. A further illustration of how the familiar Jungian categories have come to be accepted uncritically is Joyce's Hines's *George MacDonald as a Mythopoeist* (1986). Her discussion of how 'the archetypal and the allegorical aspects constantly interweave' in MacDonald's fantasy is helpful but the validity of the Jungian framework is simply taken for granted. Similarly Nancy-Lou Patterson (1992) confidently asserts that the meaning of *The Princess and the Goblin* is 'the meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Demeter-Kore myth', an assertion only possible by uncritical reliance on Jung's interpretation of the myth

8. The work of Heinz Kohut (1971, 1977) focuses on the disorders of the narcissistic personality and the need for 'mirroring' and the discovery of one's 'personal history'.

9. In a separate and later article (1997) Dearborn discusses how MacDonald' tale *Photogen and Nycteris* presents the imagination as a bridge to meaning and truth.

10. A number of studies consider the social criticism contained in individual texts. A Waller Hastings (1992) discusses what he sees as the social commentary contained in *Cross Purposes*. Adelheid Kegler (1993) considers this same subject of MacDonald's social ethics in the light of the neglected text *Weighed and Wanting*.

11. The 'missing year' was in fact a matter of months, the summer months of 1842 which are unaccounted for in Greville MacDonald's biography of his father (MacDonald, Greville, pp. 72 - 73).

12. Friedrich Heinrich Karl, Baron de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843).

13. Other comparative studies include Gary Wolfe's discussion (1974) of the influence of MacDonald on David Lindsay (best known for his *Voyage to Arcturus*), Cordelia Sherman's article (1992) comparing MacDonald's fantasy worlds with those of Ursula K. LeGuin, and Adeheld Kegler's discussion (1991) of the Neoplatonic tradition in the work of MacDonald and Emily Bronte. In a major study Catherine Durie (1990) investigates with proper scholarly rigor what has been often asserted but little researched, C. S. Lewis's debt to MacDonald. Frank Riga (1992), again comparing MacDonald and Lewis, discusses their use of Platonic imagery, in particular the cave imagery of *The Republic*.

14. See also the studies calling for a re-appreciation of *Robert Falconer* by Ann Boaden (1981) and Peter Rutter (1995).

PART TWO

The second part of my thesis focusses on MacDonald's treatment of the familiar Romantic themes of nature, childhood and the imagination. Familiar as they are, I hope to show that MacDonald thought for himself about these topics and that what is distinctive in his ideas informs his understanding of spiritual education. Nature is akin to fantasy in its capacity to engage and direct the attentive spirit. Childhood is the pattern of what we must become. In our quest for the meaning of things the imagination's unsettling role is to summon us to press beyond the borders of the proven. MacDonald's original mind on these matters suggests principles and strategies for the promotion of spiritual development in schools today.

Chapter Four

NATURE

Nature is a powerful presence in MacDonald's work, encountered in many moods but always as a force for good. Yet, with the exception of one essay, MacDonald does not offer anything approaching a considered analysis of the role of nature. Here, as elsewhere in this study, we are tracing patterns in the texts of one who was not a systematic thinker. The approach adopted in this chapter is to draw attention to the dominant themes which become apparent as we read the texts rather than to claim that those texts reflect a thoroughly thought-out philosophy of nature.

I begin this chapter with a reminder of the recovered sense of the pedagogical potential of nature which we find in current educational debate. Secondly, turning to MacDonald, I discuss the one essay, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, in which he addresses the theme of nature directly. Thirdly, I consider some of the aspects of nature and its formative function that we find in MacDonald's 'realistic' novels and in his poetry. Fourthly, we come to what is most original and suggestive in MacDonald's account of nature, the association of nature with fantasy. Fifthly, I comment briefly on a topic on which MacDonald famously had strong and controversial views, the animal kingdom. Finally, we must summarise some of the implications for the promotion of spiritual development which emerge from reflecting on the theme of nature in MacDonald's work.

Nature rediscovered

Evidence of a recovered sense of the importance of nature for spiritual development is found in the statements of the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community (QCA, 1997) to which we referred in Chapter One. Pupils develop spiritually, it is asserted, as they do morally, socially and culturally, by learning to value themselves, their relationships, society, and the environment. The Forum affirms, 'We value the environment, both natural and shaped by humanity, as the basis of life and a source of wonder and inspiration.' Pupils develop spiritually, the Forum proposes, by learning to value the

environment in this way. The philosophical soundness of basing a pedagogy on values agreed by consensus may be debatable - Adrian Thatcher (1999), as we saw, regards it as hopelessly misconceived. What is beyond dispute is that the Forum has recognised the current mood, the strength of the contemporary tide of opinion that we ignore the world about us at our peril.

The emphasis on 'learning to wonder', for the Forum one among other ways in which we develop spiritually, has the powerful support of John White (1995a, 1995b). We have seen how White, despite his distaste for the idea of 'spiritual development', is willing to admit the concept, if it is uncoupled from religion, and how he sees the place for the 'spiritual' to be in the recognition of 'the wonder of it all'. Human flourishing, he holds, still needs to be understood against some kind of cosmic framework. We enjoy the sensation of the wind and the sun on our bodies. We sense an attachment to nature as our dwelling place. We delight in the beauty of the natural world, such delight yielding at times to the sense of the sublime. We still wonder at the very existence of it all. Awareness of a cosmic framework to our existence calls for an ethical response, for a respect for the natural world, for the desire to safeguard it from abuse and depredation, to preserve the wilderness, to save endangered species. It is White's 'ungrounded intuition' that such values are 'ineliminable features of our well-being' and that we have good reason to bring up children to adhere to them. Although the vocabulary of the 'spiritual', in White's view, stops us thinking clearly, under the law as it stands we have to find work for it and this is to be found, he suggests, in alluding to 'the cosmic shudder' we feel from time to time in contemplating the universe.

In the light of this return to nature in the modern educational debate a discussion of the 'pedagogy of nature' in MacDonald's work is timely.[1]

'Wordsworth's Poetry'

MacDonald's view of nature is deeply influenced by his reading of Wordsworth. That influence is not to be underestimated but we shall see how MacDonald insists that the experience of nature itself should precede exposure to other people's published opinions about it. MacDonald himself was a child roaming the hills above Huntly long before he

encountered Wordsworth and his view of nature and its place in spiritual development is in important respects his own and to be studied on its own merits.

MacDonald's lecture *Wordsworth's Poetry* (*Orts*, pp. 245 - 263) may not greatly advance our critical appreciation of Wordsworth but it does throw light on MacDonald's perception of how nature fashions us.[2] MacDonald is drawn by what he sees as the 'Christian Pantheism' of Wordsworth.[3] Whether or not it is accurate or helpful to describe Wordsworth as a pantheist - Christian or otherwise - our interest must be in what the term means for MacDonald.[4] For him Christian pantheism is 'the belief that God is in everything and showing himself in everything' (p. 246). Not only is God there to be seen in nature, he also intends to be seen. To Wordsworth, MacDonald claims, nature is 'a world of teaching'. That teaching is given progressively, nature engaging with the human spirit at successively higher levels. Nature begins by providing what MacDonald calls 'amusement'. Wordsworth, for example, is finding 'amusement' in nature when he picks a daisy and toys with different ideas of what the flower resembles. His delight in the daffodils is a response to nature at a higher level. Nature's gift is now 'joy'. The experience is intense but it is not yet the vehicle of any further meaning or lesson. A child's immediate and unreflecting joy in nature is at this level.

At a still higher level nature may yield lessons we choose to find there. Such lessons may not be given by nature but, once learned, wherever learned, nature may be seen to illustrate them. MacDonald takes as an example Wordsworth's observation that the play of shadows on a lawn

> ...an apt emblem yields
> Of Wordlings revelling in the fields
> Of strenuous idleness   (*Poems of Sentiment and Reflection*, XXX).

To modern taste such imposition of meaning seems contrived and certainly in both Wordsworth and MacDonald the use of nature as a pretext for moralising leads to some of their less attractive writing. MacDonald, for example, is instructed by pollards 'on the ground that they yield not a jot to the adversity of their circumstances' (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, p. 8).

MacDonald finds in Wordsworth two further levels at which nature teaches us. An experience in nature may suddenly awaken the perception of some vital truth. The disclosure of the truth is both unsought and immediate. Wordsworth's sonnet *Composed during a Storm* records the experience of someone in distress wandering out in the storm. The clouds part unexpectedly. There is the glimpse of a clear sky and at once the wanderer is aware of the unseen 'providential goodness ever nigh'.

The loftiest level at which nature affects the human heart and mind, the level of its most sustained influence, is reached when nature forms in us a lasting disposition open to unbidden insights and perceptions and, above all, conscious of what is required of us. At this stage nature's work is, in a sense, done. Nature, while never ceasing to delight, is no longer needed to teach. What is lost are the moments of intense, even ecstatic awareness, 'the hour of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower'; what is gained is 'the philosophic mind' (*Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*). The unforgettable images are Wordsworth's but MacDonald's view of the matter is the same. He recognises what lies at the heart of Wordsworth's belief about the authority of nature, that its claim on us is through and through *moral*, that the work of nature is, finally, not to refine one's sensibility, but to arouse one's conscience. MacDonald's experience too was of the 'love of Nature leading to love of man'. MacDonald's first comment in expounding the ninth of Wordsworth's *Evening Voluntaries* is that the scene 'moves in (the poet) the sense of responsibility' (p. 255).[5]

It is surprising that MacDonald's lecture does not offer any commentary on what are so important for Wordsworth, those 'unattended moments' in which the poet is overtaken by an overwhelming sense of the transcendent. These 'spots of time', as Wordsworth calls them, are marked as much by fear as by joy. We think of the famous episodes of snaring, boating and skating in *The Prelude*. Glimpsing the break in the clouds, described in the sonnet MacDonald discusses, with its reassuring reminder of a benevolent providence, is an experience of nature in far too tame a mood to be compared with those terrifying moments visited on the young Wordsworth.

The general tenor of MacDonald's treatment of nature corresponds to that which he identifies in Wordsworth though, as we shall see, there are significant differences in MacDonald's approach, above all in the affinity he identifies between the role of nature and that of fantasy.

Nature in MacDonald's novels and poetry

Nature engages with us in many moods and its repertoire of teaching methods is extensive. Nature can be an unfelt influence, the landscape of someone's life absorbed as gently and unconsciously as one draws breath but profoundly shaping the growth of the spirit. Such is the experience of Ranald Bannerman growing up on his father's farm (*Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood*, ch. 9) or of Annie Anderson, enjoying her affectionate rapport with the animals dear to her (*Alec Forbes*, ch. 5). It was MacDonald's own experience if we may regard *A Hidden Life* as in measure autobiographical.

> The earth was fair - he knew not it was fair;
> His heart was glad - he knew not it was glad (*Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 136).

An individual may live for a long time, surrounded by nature and absorbing its influence, without attending to it. Perception of nature as beneficent power may be a gradually dawning awareness. Such was the experience of Alec Forbes, drifting down the Glamour in *The Bonnie Annie*:

> He began to be aware of a certain stillness pervading the universe like a law;
> a stillness ever being broken by the cries of eager men, yet ever closing with
> a gentleness not to be repelled, seeking to infold and to penetrate with its
> own healing the minds of the noisy children of earth (*Alec Forbes*, p. 140).

This, MacDonald tells us, is only the beginning of his awareness. Nature has not yet taken hold of him and he is soon distracted, caught up in a succession of wayward adventures. Much later, nature will claim his attention more deeply and, together with the fidelity of those who love him, begin to effect his restoration.

> Alec lingered behind. An unknown emotion drew his heart towards the
> earth ... A wide stillness and peace, as of a heart at rest, filled space, and
> lying upon the human souls with a persistent quietness that might be felt,
> made them know what *might* be theirs... All was marvel (p. 220).

The tale of Alec Forbes's spiritual development is the story of how nature conspires with

those who hold him dear to bring him to his senses. MacDonald pictures nature, together with those who never despaired of him, rejoicing at his home-coming. A lark is within earshot 'pouring down a vocal summer of jubilant melody' (p. 374). Nature, cooperating with the love of family and friends, is seen by MacDonald to work for our healing.

For MacDonald, as for Wordsworth, nature has many faces. The fundamental polarity, examined so acutely in *The Prelude*, is between nature in her tender, gentle, unassertive mode and nature as an overwhelming and awesome presence. Wordsworth recalls that he was, 'Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear' (*The Prelude* I, 306). MacDonald records those more fearful encounters, meetings in nature with something beyond nature. Robert Falconer, gazing into the sky, feels 'a kind of bodily fear lest he should fall off the face of the round earth into the abyss' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 123). In *Wilfred Cumbermede* the young hero, sent to Switzerland for schooling, describes at length an experience among the mountains similar to those moments of transcendent awareness Wordsworth recalls in *The Prelude* and in the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*.

> Nature was a power upon me. I was filled with the vague recognition of a present soul in nature - with a sense of the humanity everywhere diffused through her and operating on ours (pp. 131 - 132).

The language is close to that of the famous lines from *Tintern Abbey*,

> ...a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns...

If nature is formative it is so not by assertion but by interrogation and allusion. In his discussion of Browning's poem *Christmas Eve* (*Orts*, pp. 195 - 217) MacDonald quotes his beloved Novalis, 'Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, ein Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein.' (*Philosophy is really homesickness, an impulse to be at home everywhere*) (p. 211). The individual's life is ruled by 'a continual attempt to find his place...he wants to know where he is, and where he ought to be and can be' (p. 211). The lifelong quest, amongst all that is alienating, is to belong. Nature itself is too full of contradictions to allay his homesickness. 'Everywhere Nature herself is putting strange questions to him' (p. 211). Nature, according to MacDonald, does not itself offer that vantage point from which all contradictions can be seen to be resolved. Nature does not satisfy our search but intensifies

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it, holding out to us the presentiment of meaning yet to be disclosed.

> There must be truth in the scent of that pinewood: someone must mean it.
> There must be a glory in those heavens that depends not upon our
> imagination: some power greater than they must dwell in them. Some spirit
> must move in that wind that haunts us with a kind of human sorrow; some
> soul must look up to us from the eye of that starry flower (*Robert Falconer*,
> p. 123).

Hugh Sutherland gives a posy of primroses to Margaret Elginbrod. These, says Margaret,
'look at me as if they said, "We ken - we ken a' aboot it"' (*David Elginbrod*, p. 34).

In the early poetic drama *Within and Without* the monk Julian is heard meditating,

> All beauty wears to me a doubtful look;
> A meaning on the face of the high hills
> Whose utterance I cannot comprehend.
> A something is behind them: that is God (*Within and Without*, p. 15).

The conventional conclusion, perilously close to bathos, is not of course nature's answer.
Nature only asks the questions, even if our need for answers is so overwhelming that we
construe those questions as assertions.

> O Soul of Nature, if thou art not, if
> There dwelt not in thy thought the primrose flower
> Before it blew on any bank of spring,
> Then all is untruth, unreality,
> And we are wretched things... (*Within and Without*, p. 227).

Nature does not answer the questions it poses or satisfy the longings it awakens but to the
sensitive and imaginative spirit nature holds the promise that the search for meaning is
justified and that those longings will be assuaged. The wind blowing on Helen Lingard's
cheek,

> seemed to bring to her a vague promise, almost a precognition, of peace -
> which, however, only set her longing after something - she knew not what -
> something of which she only knew it would fill the longing the wind had
> brought her (*Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, p. 160).

If nature is so important for our development it is essential that nothing is allowed to
obstruct its influence - not even a good book. Poetry can illuminate our experience of
nature but that experience must come first. These themes are explored in the early chapters
of *David Elginbrod*. Margaret Elginbrod is already at home in the great forests around her

father's cottage and deeply attuned to their life and beauty when Hugh Sutherland gives her a copy of Wordsworth's poetry. She finds in Wordsworth a friend.

> Not only did he sympathise with her in her love of nature, putting many vague feelings into thoughts and many thoughts into words for her, but he introduced nature to her in many altogether new aspects, and taught her to regard it in ways which had hitherto been unknown to her. Not only was the pinewood now dearer to her than before, but its mystery seemed more sacred, and, at the same time, more likely to be one day solved (p. 40).

The pale young Harry Arnold to whom Hugh Sutherland is appointed as tutor is, by contrast to Margaret Elginbrod, so immured in his father's library that the first task is to make him put away his books and get him out of doors. Harry's father is anxious that Hugh may be intending to make 'a muscular Christian' of his boy. This is no part of Hugh's plan although for the time being he proposes to dispense with school-books. His education must be 'spielender Unterricht', education through play. So they set out, even though it is raining, the child so weak that at first Hugh must carry him on his back. Harry talks to the boy about the rain and about the germination of seeds. Together they shelter in a barn where they build a cave among the bales of straw in which Harry tells the boy story after story.

MacDonald takes from Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* the principle that education begins in wonder.

> All knowledge and wonder (which is the seed of knowledge) is an impression of pleasure in itself (*David Elginbrod*, epigraph to Chapter Four).

But that sense of wonder can be extinguished. MacDonald was concerned in his day, as he might have been in ours, by 'the increase of examinations'. Children, he urges, 'should not have too many books to read, or too much of early lessoning' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 122).[6] Information can cloud insight. Young Cosmo wonders at the mountain stream.

> Always when he grew weary, or when things about him put on a too ordinary look, he would seek this endless water. Let the aspect of this be what it might, it seemed still inspired and sent forth by some essential mystery, some endless possibility (*Castle Warlock*, p. 5).

But then he is taught how it all works - he learns about the mechanical cycle of stream and sea and sky. And Cosmo 'became aware that he had lost the stream of his childhood'. It has

been 'deflowered of its mystery' (p. 6).

But some never have the chance to sense that mystery. The sway of landscape is not universally benign. MacDonald warned of the damaging consequences of urbanisation and industrialisation. He was sickened by what he saw done to people by Manchester's pollution when he moved there from Arundel.

> Tis a poor drizzly morning, dark and sad.
> The cloud has fallen and filled with fold on fold
> The chimneyed city; and the smoke is caught,
> And spreads diluted in the cloud, and sinks,
> A black precipitate, on miry streets,
> And faces gray glide through the darkened fog.
> (*A Manchester Poem, Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 422).

A passing comment in the late novel *Home Again* repeats this protest against the damage done to the human spirit by a landscape blighted by industry.

> The day would reveal a river stained with loathsome refuse, and rich gardens on hillsides mantled in sooty smoke and evil-smelling vapours, sent up from a valley where men, like gnomes, toiled and caused to toil too eagerly...Oh for an invasion of indignant ghosts to drive from the old places the generation that dishonours the ancient earth! (*Home Again*, pp. 13 - 14)

The victims are 'gnomes'- and we recall the gnomes of the *Princess* stories. Beneath the earth they are deprived of air and light. Those who thus languish far from the 'upper air', whether by choice or misfortune, are much to be pitied.[7]

Nature and fantasy

Nature for MacDonald is instructive but not didactic; it does not force its truth on us. Thus it is akin to fantasy. Here MacDonald offers a perspective on nature which is altogether his own.[8] The landscape we inhabit, like the landscape we enter in reading a fairy tale, is charged with meaning, not one single meaning imposed by its creator, but whatever meaning it holds for each of us. The idea of nature as a book was of course a Victorian commonplace - Prickett (1986) reminds us of John Keble's lines,

> There is a book who runs may read,
> Which heavenly truth imparts
> (*The Christian Year, Septuagesima Sunday*).

The interest of MacDonald's use of the familiar metaphor is in the kind of book he implies nature is.

In his essay *The Fantastic Imagination* (*A Dish of Orts*, pp. 313 - 322), which we shall consider more fully in Chapter Seven, MacDonald offers some justification for his writing of fairy tales. One of the claims he makes is that nature's role and that of the fairy tale are alike. Nature, like the fairy tale, awakens us, arouses our perceptions. But that perception is not of some one thing so that if nature moves two people differently one at least must be mistaken. The function of nature is 'to work in us such moods in which thoughts of high import arise' (p. 319). Nature, as does fantasy, as also does music, rouses 'the something deeper than the understanding' (p. 320). 'A fairy tale, a sonata, a gathering storm' (p. 319) - the meaning of them is not to be explained intellectually but is that which is aroused in the heart of the reader, the listener, the wanderer on the hillside.

MacDonald's association of the natural world with the alternative world of the fairy story is original, bold, and extraordinarily suggestive. It is possible to take a paragraph from MacDonald's commentary on the fairy tale and, without modification or qualification, apply it to nature.

> It cannot help having some meaning; if it have proportion and harmony it has vitality, and vitality is truth. The beauty may be plainer in it than the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairy tale would give no delight. Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another (p. 316).

We do not misinterpret MacDonald if in that passage we substitute the word 'nature' for 'fairy tale'. Nature, like fantasy, is a text to be read and, as with fantasy, its meaning will be determined by the reader.

Both the world of nature and the world of *faerie* must be explored by exercise of the imagination. In his essay *The Imagination: its Function and its Culture* (*Orts*, pp.1 - 42) MacDonald distinguishes between nature as a field for scientific investigation and nature as explored by the poets. For the scientist as much as for the poet nature yields its secrets only to those who approach it with imagination. 'Wonder' - once more MacDonald uses

Bacon's words to drive the point home - 'is the seed of knowledge' (p. 15). Only by the exercise of a far-seeing imagination can the scientist recognise the direction in which he must pursue his research.

We shall return to this essay and to the role of the imagination in Chapter Six. Meanwhile we do well to reflect a little further on the association in MacDonald's thought between nature and fantasy. As we do so, we have in mind, what we have adopted as a framework for our discussion, the account of spiritual development offered by Jack Priestley.

The discourse of nature, as that of fantasy, is 'broader than religious'. To interpret it theistically is possible and legitimate, as it is to interpret fantasy in this way. But such an interpretation is a construction placed on nature - as on a fairy tale. Neither a 'pedagogy of nature' nor a 'pedagogy of fantasy' requires a traditional religious framework for its articulation, though such a framework is not of course to be excluded. The discourse of nature is 'dynamic' - the features of natural landscape, the wind in the trees, the river running between the hills, are also the images of fantasy and neither in nature nor in fantasy can these moving, flowing, growing things be arrested and defined. 'They must be assessed,' as Priestley says, 'by their consequences.' Nature invites us, as does such a text as *Phantastes*, to enter a world of 'being and becoming'. Nature, still more manifestly than fantasy, is no finished artefact. To observe the countryside is not to contemplate a Chinese vase. It follows that the role of nature pedagogically, as that of fantasy, is not to fashion a finished product but to promote a journey that is essentially open-ended.

Priestley, we recall, goes on to describe the 'other-wordly', 'communal', and 'holistic' aspects of spiritual development and in Chapter Eight I shall explore how these categories too help us to see the formative potential of fantasy. It would be contrived, as it would certainly labour the point, to try to link nature with fantasy under those headings. But what is already clear is how close is the connection from MacDonald's perspective between nature and fantasy. The two realms are mutually interpretative. The same literacy which allows us to respond to fantasy and to be open to what it teaches us alerts us also to nature and makes us susceptible to its formative power over us.

Nature is mysterious and elusive, betraying different dispositions - sometimes comforting, sometimes terrifying, sometimes indifferent. Nature perplexes us with questions, yet presents us with images which invite meaningful construction. Nature shapes those who acknowledge and accept its formative role. Such is the image of nature emerging from MacDonald's writings. And that image is inescapably anthropomorphic - it is as if we were describing someone.

In a remarkable series of chapters in one of his more successful novels *What's Mine's Mine* MacDonald obeys the logic of this anthropomorphising of nature and the consequence is a highly significant connection that has been little discussed by MacDonald critics.[9] The figure so protective of its identity and yet so engaged with humanity's fortunes and so concerned for its flourishing is, it seems, none other than 'the Wise Woman', the mysterious grandmother figure whom we meet in MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies. Nature, it seems, is but one more of the Wise Woman's many guises. Much more will be said about her in Chapter Nine. Here it is sufficient to notice how by invoking this figure the connection between nature and fantasy in their formative roles is established still more firmly.

The details of the plot need not detain us. Suffice it to say that the setting is Scotland and all turns on the contrast and conflict between, on the one side, a clan-chief and his brother, the noble but impoverished Alister and Ian, and, on the other, the rich but boorish owner of 'New House' who has designs on the clan's ancient patrimony. The latter has two daughters. While the father remains obdurate they, although woefully small-minded, are open to the 'spiritual development' which here as in every MacDonald novel is the central theme of the narrative.

These girls are bored with talk about nature - or, as MacDonald has it, they 'appeared unaware of the least expression on the face of their grandmother' (p. 207). They are bound to receive 'some good from the aspect of things' (p. 207) because 'Grannie's hidden, and therefore irresistible power was in operation' (p. 207) but even nature's most magnificent manifestations 'were to them poor facts, no vaguest embodiment of truths eternal' (p. 207).

The brothers have to explain to them.

> 'We mean by nature every visitation of the outside world through our senses... But that is not all. We mean the things themselves only for the sake of what they say to us. As our sense of smell brings us news of fields far off, so those fields, or even the smell only that comes from them, tells us of things, meanings, thoughts, intentions beyond them, and embodied in them' (p. 211).

For Alister nature's influence is at once God's and also - for it seems the discourses are complementary - the Wise Woman's.

> 'God is the only real person, being in himself, and without help from anybody; and so we talk even of the world which is but his living garment, as if that were a person; and we call it *she* as if it were a woman, because so many of God's loveliest influences come to us through her. She always seems to me a beautiful old grandmother' (p. 212).

Nature, like the Wise Woman of the fantasies and fairy tales, is encountered in many moods. *What's Mine's Mine* recounts how Ian rescues Christina who is at risk of being swept away by a sudden and terrible flood. The chapter (ch. 30), recounting what is a familiar turn of events in a MacDonald novel, is entitled 'Granny Angry', an infelicitous title to be sure, but again it demonstrates the correspondence between the formative role of nature and the pedagogical procedures of the fantasy grandmother. Both, it seems, must sometimes adopt stern measures.

This part of MacDonald's novel is an extended reflection on nature, no less interesting that the conversations in which much of it is couched are somewhat implausible. Ian offers a more carefully qualified account of 'pantheism' than we have in the essay on Wordsworth's poetry, clearly a pantheism MacDonald himself is happy to affirm.

> 'There! That is what I was afraid of!' cried Mercy: 'you are pantheists!'...
> 'Yes,' answered Ian. 'If to believe that not a lily can grow, not a sparrow fall to the ground without our Father, be pantheism, Alister and I are pantheists. If by pantheism you mean anything that would not fit with that, we are not pantheists.' (p. 215)

To the bemusement of the sisters the brothers converse about the understanding of nature found in Keats, Shelley and, again, Wordsworth. Ian illustrates Chaucer's feelings about flowers by quoting him at length. Dante too is brought into the frame. Much of this

material, for all its intrinsic interest, need not detain us. But two further points bearing on our enquiry need noting. First, Ian claims that nature stirs our affections. 'How can I call my feeling for (the flowers) anything but love?' (p. 219). Secondly, there is practical advice. Nature shapes the one who is alone with her.

> 'Make yourself alone in one of Nature's withdrawing-rooms, and seat yourself in one of Grannie's own chairs...No book, mind!...Sit down and be lonely. Look out on the loneliness, the wide world round you, and the great vault over you, with the lonely sun in the middle of it; fold your hands in your lap and be still. Do not try to think of anything. Do not try to call up any feeling or sensation; just be still. By and by, it may be, you will begin to know something of Nature...' (p. 220).

The goal of this process, so exactly analysed, is that, 'as Henry Vaughan says, some veil be broken in you' (p. 220). Nature and what we shall call 'transfiguring fantasy' work to the same end.

Mercy takes to heart what Ian has told her and to test the truth of it she wanders high into the hills to be alone with nature. There, in the words of the title to the chapter (32), 'Mercy calls on Granny'. Again the title is infelicitous but the account of what she experiences is one of the most powerful passages in MacDonald's fiction. The sequence of sensations Mercy feels is registered with an insight and acuity as remarkable in its way as comparable passages from *The Prelude*. There is, first, a sense of release and exhilaration. But that initial delight fades, yielding to a feeling of 'loneliness absolute' as she becomes aware of her isolation. Not only is she alone in that vast landscape - she is conscious of an inner alienation, a sense of separation from the heart of things. That loneliness yields in its turn to terror - Mercy is possessed in the great silence of the hills by a sense of being *hunted*. But at the same time it comes home to her that 'there must be some refuge' (p. 250), that alienation is not inevitable or final. Finally these successive waves of feeling, each yielding to the next, are overtaken by the overpowering conviction that 'something was required of her'. And all is for her final good though Mercy does not understand this. 'She did not suspect that her grandmother had been doing anything for her' (p. 251).

These passages repay close attention. In the theistic discourse of this 'realistic' novel nature is described as the channel of the divine influence. It is a discourse MacDonald himself

consistently uses with integrity, conviction and eloquence. But there is a deep tension in the text with an alternative non-theistic discourse. Nature is also 'the beautiful old grandmother'. The reader may well reflect that the discourse which thus speaks of her, irrespective of authorial intention, has its own authenticity, that it is not necessarily a secondary discourse reliant for its significance on the primary theistic discourse. That possibility will be still more strongly impressed on us by the texts we shall consider in Chapter Nine in which the activities of 'the beautiful old grandmother' are described without reference back to the God of Christian theism.[10]

The animal kingdom

George MacDonald famously believed that 'the beasts, poor things, have a half-sleeping, half-waking human soul in them' (*The Marquis of Lossie*, p. 88), an unorthodox opinion which shocked members of his congregation at Arundel (MacDonald, Greville, 1934, p. 177). It is no part of my remit either to challenge or to advocate this opinion but it needs noting that it is a viewpoint which, granted his presuppositions, MacDonald defended both rigorously and persuasively.[11] His sermon 'The Groans of the Inarticulate', put in the mouth of Thomas Wingfold, is an argument to be reckoned with (*Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, pp. 224 -237). What must be stressed here is the coherence of this notion, eccentric as it must seem, with MacDonald's 'communal' understanding of spiritual development, to use again one of the terms of our Priestley paradigm. Animals share life with us and thus have claims on us. 'We have duties towards them, owe them friendliness, tenderness' (p. 229). Spiritual growth on this view is impossible if the 'moral considerabilty' of animals is disregarded.[12]

Summary

It is a fundamental principle of the 'pedagogy of the spirit' found in MacDonald's work that we are taught by nature. There is an inalienable affinity between the human spirit and the natural order. For MacDonald that affinity is rooted in the dependence of the human spirit and the natural world on God, but recognition of the fact of that affinity does not depend on a theistic account of its source. Experience of nature is thus essential for the development of the spirit. Nothing, not even the best of literature that has nature as its theme, can serve as substitute for the direct unmediated encounter with nature. Nature

teaches, not by what it tells us but by what it asks us, by the questions it poses. Nature stirs in an individual a sense of wonder and a longing to understand, to make sense of it all. At the same time nature awakens in us the presentiment that there is meaning to be found, and the assuagement of our longings, in that - whether or not we name it God - which transcends nature and of which nature is the reflection.

We can lead a child to nature, removing the obstacles which impede access to it, but we cannot prescribe what nature must mean to him or her. Nature is more than a field for scientific investigation, more than material assembled for a laboratory bench. It is - and here is MacDonald's great insight - nearer to a fairy tale and must be construed imaginatively if its meaning, what it means for me, if not for you, is to be apprehended. The realms of nature and of *faerie* are akin and to find one's way in one is to have a sense of direction in the other.

Nature appeals to the conscience and imposes moral demands. It shapes our spiritual development in so far as we reflect from our experience of nature on what we are to be and to do. MacDonald's vision of the natural order, including the animal kingdom, is through and through ethical. But here as elsewhere the moral is rooted in the spiritual, in the character of our disposition to nature, in how seriously and sensitively we are aware of it.

Endnotes

1. The National Curriculum is accompanied by booklets for individual subjects, each of which includes suggestions on how spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can be promoted in that subject. The booklet on Geography makes this suggestion: 'Geography provides opportunities to promote spiritual development through helping pupils to reflect on their experiences, such as a visit to an imposing natural landscape, or to respond to dramatic environments, both physical and human, such as photographs of the world from space' (DfEE, 1999d, p. 8). Which is all well and good - though such necessarily controlled encounters with nature hardly allow for what Wordsworth called nature's 'severer interventions' (*The Prelude*, Book I, 355).

2. In a footnote we are told that the lecture was 'delivered extempore at Manchester' and from the Preface we learn that it was one of two pieces 'caught in the net of the ready-writer'. MacDonald adds in his Preface that all the essays in *Orts*, the extempore pieces included, 'are the results of by no means trifling labour' (p. v) and so we may take it that the lecture, although not delivered from a prepared text, offers what are his considered reflections on Wordsworth's understanding of the role of nature in our development.

3. Hugh Sutherland thinks Margaret Elginbrod might enjoy Wordsworth, especially his 'smaller pieces', but 'the element of Christian Pantheism, which is their soul (was) beyond his comprehension, almost perception, as yet' (*David Elginbrod*, p. 34).

4. The history of Wordsworth's religious opinions continues to be disputed, both what he believed as the years passed and how far the creed to which he assented mattered to him. M. H. Abrams (1971), for example, has argued that for Wordsworth, as for many Romantic writers, God really has very little to do even if out of courtesy he is allowed some part in the proceedings about which the poet writes. Wordsworth's great theme, Abrams claims, is the marriage of mind and nature and the effect of his whole poetic project is to reconceptualise the traditional Christian themes in secular terms. This reading of Wordsworth has recently been challenged by R. L. Brett (1997). Brett insists that in Wordsworth's poetry, as in Coleridge's, references to God are 'more than perfunctory'. Wordsworth sees nature as an 'agency of a spiritual power which animates all things and unites the mind of man with the universe' (p. 24). So far from the divine having no part in the marriage of mind and nature it is only in the mind of a supreme being, who speaks to us in the language of nature, that mind and nature are brought together.

5. As William Walsh (1959) has noted,

> Wordsworth is not dealing merely with the elaboration of a primitive into a sophisticated structure, but with the unfolding of human powers which make moral discernment and decision (and moral disaster) possible (p. 32).

6. The reason that children brought up in towns are less responsive to nature than country children - apart from the obvious fact that they see less of nature - is that they have 'too many books and pictures'. The time for them is later - after they have experienced nature first-hand (*Robert Falconer*, p. 109).

7. MacDonald's anger at what men do to their natural home breaks through in *Malcolm*.

> May the ghosts of the men who mar the earth, turning her sweet rivers into channels of filth, and her living air into irrespirable vapours and pestilences, haunt the desolations they have made, until they loathe the work of their hands, and turn from themselves with divine repudiation (p. 344).

8. There are, to be sure, hints of the idea in Novalis. 'Die Stein- und Pflanzennatur trägt mehr das Gepräge der Phantasie.' (The nature of rock and plants has more of the aura of fantasy.) (*Novalis Schriften*, Eds., Mahl, Samuel, Schulz, Bd. 5, p. 221).

9. For C. S. Lewis *What's Mine's Mine* was 'the very best of the novels'. He tells his friend Arthur Greeves, 'I would put it immediately below *Phantastes*, *Lilith*, the Fairy Tales, and *The Diary of an Old Soul*' (17th January 1931, Hooper, 1979, p. 403).

10. The personalising of nature and the association of nature's role with that of the Wise Woman are anticipated in a powerful passage in one of MacDonald's early novels.

> But now she herself appeared to him (Hugh Sutherland) - the grand, pure, tender mother, ancient in years, yet ever young; appeared to him, not in the mirror of a man's words, but bending over him from the fathomless bosom of the sky, from the outspread arms of the forest-trees, from the silent judgement of the everlasting hills... (*David Elginbrod*, p. 402).

11. That defence, to be sure, is at times sentimental and cloying - at least to modern taste. One thinks of Clare Skymer - a kind of infant Francis - in *A Rough Shaking* (1891) and his relationships with animals.

More persuasive is the study of the great stag Ruadh in *What's Mine's Mine*. When the stag is wantonly slaughtered 'Rob of the Angels' prays 'God rest his soul!'. To which his clan chief responds, 'Amen!... but say rather, "God give him room to run"' (p. 186). Richard Heywood, before battle, thinks of his horse Lady. 'Come, Lady, all is well now. Let us go. And good will come of it to thee also, for how should the Father think of His sparrows and forget His mares? Doubtless there are of thy kind in heaven, else how should the apostle have seen them there?' (*St. George and St. Michael*, p. 378).

12. The notion of the 'moral considerability' of animals and, on his view, their wide range of moral entitlements, is discussed by Mark Bernstein (Bernstein, 1999).

Chapter Five

BECOMING A CHILD

George MacDonald believed that, 'it is better to be a child in a green field than a knight of many orders in a state ceremonial' (*Orts*, p. 226). In this chapter I shall explore the bearing of this high estimate of childhood on spiritual education. I shall argue that in two respects MacDonald moved beyond the sources which influenced him and that in both respects his original insights have important pedagogical implications. First, MacDonald sees childhood not so much as a stage in life to be left behind but as a condition to which to aspire. Secondly, he regards poetry as the native language of childhood, the mother-tongue we must relearn if through neglect we have forgotten it.

Four preliminary observations need to be made. Firstly, my primary interest is in the image of childhood as it is received and reshaped in MacDonald's work, not in how MacDonald himself dealt with actual children, whether the eleven of his own or other people's.[1]

Secondly, MacDonald is well aware of the world of difference between the 'childlike child' and the children we normally meet.[2] He recognised that few actual children conform to type and in both his novels and his fairy tales we meet children who are little brats. We recall the repellent Victoria, the 'Vixen' of *There and Back*, the two spoiled little girls whose education is the theme of *The Wise Woman*, and the embarrassingly named Buffy-Bob and Tricksey-Wee in *The Giant's Heart*, whom Wolff describes as 'vicious little sadists, and liars too' (pp. 124 - 125). The ideal child is not be confused with the empirical child. Indeed, as we shall see, it is precisely because of the difference between them that the figure of the ideal child has its imaginative power and its place in a pedagogy that seeks to nurture the spiritual development of real children.

> The childish is but the shadow of the childlike, and shadows are little like the things from which they fall. But to what save the heavenly shall the earthly appeal in its sore need, its widowhood, its orphanage? With what shall the childish take refuge but the childlike? (*What's Mine's Mine*, p. 178)

Thirdly, we have to take account of what makes the theme of this chapter deeply problematic but also the more deserving of inclusion. Our culture is confused about childhood and is crying for light from any source on its significance. Such is our bewilderment it would be foolish to dismiss MacDonald's interest in the theme as a characteristic Victorian preoccupation of no contemporary relevance.[3]

Fourthly, a study of the theme of childhood in MacDonald's writing raises acutely the issue of whether talk about the spiritual is possible other than in terms of a religious discourse. The categories of much of MacDonald's reflection about childhood are specifically Christian. It will be necessary in this chapter to consider texts which at first reading would seem to be more relevant to church than common school but I hope that consideration of them will be more than a devotional detour from the central concerns of this project.

The main themes of this chapter will be the image and language of childhood. But before turning to these themes as they are touched on across the wide range of MacDonald's writing it will be helpful to first take note of the one ordered account MacDonald gives us of the development of the human individual.

'A Sketch of Individual Development'

In his essay *A Sketch of Individual Development* (*Orts*, 1882) MacDonald offers, what he provides nowhere else, something approaching a systematic overview of his understanding of a child's development.

MacDonald describes four stages in human development. The first, which follows our 'first birth', is beyond recall but not beyond the power of the imagination to envision. It is a period of 'negative faith' in which the child is aware of an enfolding love.

> The sky over him is his mother's face; the earth that nourishes him is his mother's bosom...Her face is God, her bosom nature, her arms are providence - all love - one love - to him an undivided bliss (p. 44).

The second stage, following a 'second birth', marks the passage from consciousness to self-consciousness. The child is aware of a world that is not his mother. That world neither

loves nor serves him. It is a world which in its many manifestations may frustrate his desires. The child recognises in this 'world-not-his-mother' a will that is not his own and which conflicts with his own.

> Thereupon begins the strife without which there never was, and, I presume never can be, any growth, any progress (p. 46).

There follows the 'third birth' and the third stage of the child's development which sees the dawn of 'conscience', though only later he will recognise it as such. The child's conscience 'sides with his mother' (p. 46) and offers to the child the possibility of obedience or resistance. Should the child resist, conscience will pronounce its judgement.

> The power above him has drawn nearer, and the deepest within him has declared itself on the side of the highest without him. At one and the same moment, the heaven of his childhood has, as it were, receded and come nigher (pp. 46 - 47).

The child is now conscious of himself and responsible for his actions.

There is now the possibility, not realised in every individual and only then realised when the individual is no longer a child, of 'the fourth birth' and that stage of moral maturity when the individual heeds conscience and obeys it come what may.

> When the man listening to his conscience, wills and does the right, irrespective of inclination as of consequence, then is the man free, the universe open before him. He is born from above. (p. 48).

The language is that of John's gospel.[4] Again we are recalled to the issue of how far MacDonald's understanding of spiritual development necessarily requires the Christian conceptual framework within which he articulates it. The implication of MacDonald's recourse elsewhere to a non-theistic discourse to speak of the same process suggests that the New Testament imagery is not indispensable.

The outline of individual development sketched by MacDonald lays stress on the child's contribution to his own growth, 'of taking a share in his own making' (p. 48). The deeper, and some would claim unresolved, tension in MacDonald's thought between the autonomy of the individual, that we become what we choose, and the inexorability of providence, that we become what we are made for, is not addressed in an essay in which the emphasis is on the individual's responsibility to determine what manner of person he or she will be.

As we would expect MacDonald emphasises the role of nature in the shaping of the individual's development. Initially the child's delight in nature is unreflecting, though far from passive as he is driven to explore the world that lies beyond the far bank of the river or over the brow of the hill. He is touched by what later he will call beauty but the time comes when it does not satisfy him. 'Dissatisfied with his emotions he desires a deeper waking, longs for a greater beauty' (p. 49). The echoes of Wordsworth are audible and it is Wordsworth, the Wordsworth who proclaimed the 'Love of Nature leading to Love of Man', who continues to guide MacDonald.

> Nor is it an ideal of Nature alone that is forming within him. A far more precious thing, a human ideal namely, is in his soul, gathering to itself shape and consistency (p. 49).

Nature exerts a moral authority on the child who begins to entertain all manner of high ideals of what he will be, 'a champion to the weak...a merciless foe to every oppressor of his kind' (p. 50). Nature's lessons are no less valuable because the child's idealism, not yet matched by his moral strength, will be tested and found wanting.[5]

The image of childhood

MacDonald's image of childhood is fashioned from material from two sources, the literary and the biblical. His literary debt is primarily to Wordsworth and to Henry Vaughan. But he is also fascinated by the strange sayings of Jesus about children and, more speculatively, by the idea of the continuing childhood of Jesus. From his original reflection on these sources there emerges the concept of childhood as that to which we aspire, as the goal of our spiritual development.

The Romantic image of childhood

To set MacDonald's view of the child in context it will be helpful to recall briefly the significance of the child for the Romantic mind. The prominence of the child in the work of the Romantic writers is an expression of their protest against the enthronement of reason as the sovereign human faculty. The Enlightenment had acknowledged no bounds to what reason and scientific investigation might demonstrate and allowed no other means by which knowledge might be gained. The Romantic movement repudiated this hegemony of reason, claiming that truth is to be discerned imaginatively, by the sensitive spirit and by heightened

feeling. The child's perceptions - instinctive, immediate, intuitive - are sensitive to truth beyond the reach of cold unfeeling adult rationalism. Long before the Romantic period poets had contemplated childhood with affection and nostalgia but with the Romantic movement this minor literary tradition becomes a major theme in a great cause. The child is now seen as the representative of an alternative mode of awareness, challenging the dominant orthodoxy about ways of knowing and proclaimed with prophetic urgency and passion (Coveney, 1967).

For Blake, who as a child saw angels sitting in a tree in his garden, 'this world is one continued vision of fancy or imagination'[6] and to this world the innocent and unclouded eye of childhood has unique access. The child has the capacity for uninhibited joy, for intense and immediate delight in nature, for sympathy with all created things. This original innocent vision is threatened both inwardly by the onset of the passions and outwardly by the crushing weight of society's institutions, not least church and school.

Coleridge's revolt against the intellectualism of the eighteenth century is no less fundamental. Spiritual reality is spiritually discerned. That reality is an organic whole and the intellect, which can have purchase only over what is partial and fragmented, cannot grasp it. But the child, such as his own son Hartley who is 'a spirit that dances on an aspen leaf', apprehends intuitively and imaginatively what is beyond reason to possess. It is the task of education to maintain and foster the child's spontaneous joy in existence and the capacity for wonder. The tragedy is that children are 'be-schoolmastered, be-tutored, be-lectured, anything but educated.'[7]

The classic Romantic accounts of childhood are the first two books of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and his *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. Wordsworth discerns different levels to a child's response to nature. In the first two books of *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes the long periods when the child among the lakes and hills absorbs the influence of nature as gently and unconsciously as he draws breath. But, as we have seen, he also records those other times when suddenly nature is an overwhelming force, when the child is intensely aware of nature as a transcendent presence and power. MacDonald, as we shall shortly see, can describe both levels of response.

Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* reflects on the intensity of the child's experience, investing what is commonplace to the tired adult eye with 'the glory and the freshness of the dream'. The ode famously affirms that 'our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting'. The child contemplates all about him in the lingering light of the heaven from which he comes. The last of that celestial light swiftly fades and we are left to make our way in mere daylight. We look back on our childhood with a profound sense of loss, a loss assuaged only by memory and mature reflection. The memory is not so much of the joys of childhood, but of the questions which disturbed those joys, troubling our delight with intimations of transcendence. The mature reflection is that - while the vision is fled forever and childhood beyond recovery - what then was known, the affinity of creature with creation, must always be. In this faith 'the philosophic mind' takes its rest.

On at least three occasions MacDonald discusses these claims of the *Immortality Ode*. His profound admiration for the greater poet does not deter him from advancing an estimate of childhood at some points radically different from Wordsworth's. The first discussion of the ode is found in *The Seaboard Parish* (1868) in a conversation between the narrator, Mr Walton, and the doctor, Turner. (Students of MacDonald must be grateful to Roderick McGillis (1991) who alerts us to this passage in what is a rarely-read minor novel.) Turner remarks, 'It is as I get older that I understand what Wordsworth says about childhood. It is indeed a mercy that we are not born grown men, with what we consider our wits about us' (p. 312). Walton agrees but claims, not that it is the legacy of a previous existence which is ours in infancy but rather conscience which is understood as a 'high clear air of moral well-being' (p. 313). To which, as we grow older, we look back with longing.

A little later in the same novel (in a passage which McGillis does not discuss) Walton, now accompanied by his daughter Wynnie, and Turner are again in conversation. Walton recites Vaughan's *The Retreat* and invites Turner to compare it with Wordsworth's ode. The implications of such a comparison are not explored at this point in the novel. Walton however turns to his daughter suggesting that she is old enough to have lost something of the sense of the sublime in nature that she must once have had. Wynnie replies that only her dreams recall such a time. Her father's response is in effect a reflection by MacDonald on the importance of dreams and of the significance of what is remembered, if only in those

dreams, of earliest childhood. Such memories are promises. Dreams of a lost childhood are as the memory of Eden to Adam and Eve, a reminder of 'that childhood of obedience which is the only paradise of humanity' (p. 336) and it is that childhood after which we are all blindly longing.

The affinities of Vaughan's *The Retreat* with   Wordsworth's ode, unexplored in the novel, are discussed by MacDonald in his chapter on Henry Vaughan in *England's Antiphon* (1868). MacDonald notes that Vaughan, like Wordsworth, believes 'that we are haunted by dim memories of a former state' (p. 255). For all MacDonald's readiness to entertain the unorthodox this is a view for which he has little sympathy. We come from God and 'bring from him conscience and a thousand godlike gifts' (p. 255). As we have seen, 'conscience' for MacDonald is our moral awareness and it entirely characteristic of MacDonald to affirm the moral sensibility of the child rather than to pursue the mystical and speculative notions of previous existence.

MacDonald does not concern himself about the possibility of a past life. His philosophy and his faith are wholly orientated on what is to be and in his view nothing good can be irretrievably lost, least of all childhood. For all MacDonald's admiration of Wordsworth's ode there is at this point a fundamental difference in the disposition of the two writers. The melancholy undertones of the great ode, its brooding nostalgia, are born of a deep sense of loss. For all the exultant mood of the closing stanzas there is the recognition that it is only in embers that anything lives. Childhood in Wordsworth is recollected. For MacDonald childhood is what is promised. Where Wordsworth is solaced by memory MacDonald is upheld by hope. To be sure there is much nostalgic writing in MacDonald but the nostalgia always yields to the hope. Childhood is not a lost estate to be mourned but a condition to which we must aspire.

MacDonald finds in Vaughan what is missing in Wordsworth, the hope that childhood is not lost for good.

> Vaughan will be a child again. For the movements of a man's life are in
> spirals: we go back whence we came, ever returning on our former traces,
> only upon a higher level, on the next upward coil of the spiral, so that it is
> a going back and a going forward ever and both at once. Life is, as it were,

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a constant repentance, or thinking of it again: the childhood of the kingdom takes the place of the childhood of the brain, but comprises all that was lovely in the former delight (p. 256).

To measure MacDonald's debt to the German Romantics for his understanding of childhood would need a more detailed study than is possible here. In calling attention in Chapter Two to MacDonald's underestimated debt to Jean Paul, especially to his educational thinking, we saw something of the latter's high estimate of childhood. We can only speculate on how far MacDonald's view of childhood was equally influenced by the Novalis. Certainly some of the *Fragments* anticipate what MacDonald will claim about them.

Ein Kind ist eine sichtbar gewordene Liebe.
(*A child is a love become visible.*)
(*Novalis Schriften*, Eds., Mahl, Samuel, Schulz, Bd. 5, p. 222).

Der erste Mensch ist der erste Geisterseher. Ihm erscheint alles als Geist. Was sind Kinder anders, als erste Menschen? Der frische Blick des Kindes ist überschwenglicher, als die Ahndung des entschiedensten Sehers
(*The first human being is the first visionary. To him all appears as spirit. What are children other than the first human beings? The fresh vision of the child is more overwhelming than the perception of the most determined prophet.*)(*ibid.* p. 269).

Wo Kinder sind, da ist ein goldenes Zeitalter.(*Where there are children, there is a golden age.*)(*ibid.*, p. 271).

MacDonald is thus mining rich seams in his treatment of the theme of childhood. MacDonald uses all the familiar Romantic motifs - the child's capacity to perceive things hidden to the adult view, her attunement to nature, the freshness of her vision. We immediately recognise these themes if we glance briefly at some of MacDonald's 'romantic children'.

In Chapter Four we discussed the young Wilfred Cumbermede's intense experience of nature. Another 'feeling child' is Annie Anderson, one of MacDonald's more successful studies. Annie lives in the 'continual now' of her young life. 'The future was not: the present was - and full of delights' (*Alec Forbes*, p. 11). Annie notices how 'the butterflies died of old age and delight' (p. 141). She has a Franciscan relationship with the farmyard

animals. She is innocent of the cynicism that imputes 'cupboard-love' to the creatures when she calls them. 'She loved *them* and that was enough for her' (p. 11). 'Her only instructor had been Nature, with her whole staff, including the sun, moon and wind; the grass the corn, Brownie the cow, and her own faithful subject Dowie' (p. 29). We can account for the child's intimacy with nature, MacDonald suggests, in one of those occasional but highly significant passages which are a bridge between his 'realistic' fiction and his fantasy, once we see that,

> all the powers that vivify nature must be children...all the fairies and gnomes and goblins, yes, the great giants too, are only different sizes, shapes, and characters of children (p. 79).

Annie Anderson's affectionate rapport with the animals dear to her are of nature in her kinder manifestation. The young Sir Gibbie's experience on the mountain top is of an encounter with nature of a different order.

> He sat down on the topmost point; and slowly, in the silence and the loneliness, from the unknown fountains of eternal consciousness, the heart of the child filled (*Sir Gibbie*, p. 80).

Is such a passage, celebrating a child's heightened awareness in the presence of nature simply a conventional set-piece following what already was something of a formula for those who succeeded and echoed the first generation of Romantic writers, Wordsworth in particular?[8] The criticism is difficult to sustain. MacDonald's whole description of Gibbie's experience of the mountains has a freshness and power all the more striking in an author whose prose is too often laboured and mechanical. The author is perhaps recalling, as he does in *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* and in his descriptions of the young Cosmo in *Castle Warlock*, the child who once had the freedom of the hills above Huntly.[9] (The portrayal of the young Gibbie is remarkable too for its powerful Christian imagery, imagery calling for separate consideration which I defer to my next section.)

Another child who, like Annie Forbes, has something in common with the fairies is Mattie the strange eight-year-old daughter of the atheist bookseller Mr.Kitely in *Guild Court* .

> You could have fancied her one of the time-belated good people who, leaving the green forest rings, had wandered into the city and become a Christian at a hundred years of age (p. 27).

Mattie lives with her father in a dank and dark cul-de-sac but her inner vision is of a brighter, better world. Mattie must be mentioned if only to acknowledge that not all the children MacDonald writes about are as attractive and as credible as Annie Forbes. Mattie dies a beautiful death -'Yes, I thought so. I'm dead. And it *is* so nice!' (p. 138) - but as a character she is far from convincingly realised and it is unlikely that as many wept at her passing as at the death of Little Nell.[10]

Sometimes it is an unnamed child met only in passing who reminds the adult of a truer perspective on life. The disconsolate country parson Walton, new to his parish, meets a boy whose innocent remarks recall him to what matters and what does not and the parson continues his parish round with a spring in his step (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, pp. 27 - 28). Another troubled clergyman is Thomas Wingfold. Looking back later on a period of doubt and mental turmoil,

> He remembered how once a hawthorn-bud set him weeping; and how once, as he went miserable to church, a child looked up in his face and smiled, and how in the strength of that smile he had walked boldly to the lectern (*Thomas Wingfold Curate*, p. 59).

Here then are some of the long succession of MacDonald's children who, like Wordsworth's, are in tune with nature, who speak from the heart, whose simplicity puts them in direct touch with truth lost to the adult mind. If not merely stereotypes - Annie and Gibbie at least are original creations - they none the less replicate with greater or less success the model of the 'Wordsworthian child'.

What must occupy us however is not MacDonald's success or failure in portraying the child but how the image of the child functions in his understanding of how our humanity is to enriched and to be fulfilled. Our interest is less in his studies of children - still less in how he brought up his own children - than in his thoughts about childhood. Here I claim that MacDonald is not derivative. His image of childhood is his own and it will prove of importance as we try to relate his thought to the central concerns of this study. Childhood is that to which we aspire. The contemplation of childhood should not condemn us to nostalgia; rather, it must promote expectation and purpose, a sense of moral and spiritual direction. Childhood inspires a 'pedagogy of hope'. That this is the core of his thought

about childhood will become still clearer as we turn to the second major source of his reflections about childhood.

The child Christ and the Christlike child

I turn to the biblical sources of MacDonald's concept of childhood. In doing so I do not overlook the fact that only a minority in the common school where spiritual development is to be promoted will acknowledge their authority.

MacDonald returns to the *Immortality Ode* and Vaughan's *The Retreat* in his last collection of sermons *The Hope of the Gospel*. Here MacDonald claims that the pattern of childhood as a condition to which we aspire is seen in the figure of Jesus who, MacDonald claims, 'has never lost his childhood' (p. 55). Nor has Jesus lost the child's vision. Wordsworth and Vaughan recall the child's intense awareness of the world around him, perceiving in nature 'the shadows of eternity'. Such recollections yield faint hints of 'how his father's house and the things in it always looked, and must still look to the Lord. With him there is no fading into the light of common day' (p. 55). The child who sees a stream 'in celestial light', MacDonald implies, sees truly. It is we, deceived by familiar appearances, for whom that stream is unremarkable, who are misled. The loss diminishes our humanity and puts us at odds with our environment.

> 'To cease to wonder is to fall plumb-down from the childlike to the commonplace...Our nature cannot be at home among things that are not wonderful to us' (p. 57).

MacDonald claims that Jesus retains this child's-eye-view. Most of us, fearful of the shades of Renan and Mrs. Alexander, will be deeply distrustful of the invocation of Jesus the model child. But we are once again bound to enquire whether MacDonald's essential insights necessarily depend on the particular Christian metaphysical framework he employs. That MacDonald himself accepted this framework is not in question but the fact that the framework proves dispensable for what he most wants to say - *Lilith* (1895) is published only three years after *The Hope of the Gospel* - allows us to ask whether MacDonald's recognition of the quality of the child's awareness and his capacity to wonder cannot be disengaged from the Christian theology of the incarnation which MacDonald uses in its support.

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The question of whether a concept of childhood articulated in the language of Christian theology can be recast without loss in other and more widely acceptable terms arises crucially when we turn to MacDonald's treatment of the theme of suffering in childhood. We have met too many 'ministering children' in Victorian children's literature and have waited for our edification by too many of their sickbeds and deathbeds not to approach this theme without trepidation (Lerner, 1997). For example, it is almost impossible for the modern reader to be other than appalled by MacDonald's account of how the murderous schoolmaster Murdoch Malison in *Alec Forbes* is brought to repentance by the refusal of the little Andrew Truffey, whom he has left crippled by his blows, to harbour any sense of rancour (p. 132). Mercifully it is a theme which MacDonald can treat more sensitively. In the same novel his account of what the orphan Annie Anderson endures at the hands of her callous Aunt Margaret and then in the household of the odious Robert Bruce is altogether more sympathetic. MacDonald, distressed by the story he is telling, observes, if unpersuasively, that 'little children suffer too, though the gift of forgetfulness does for them what the gift of faith does for their parents' (p. 63).

MacDonald's boldest attempt to win some possibility of meaning from the enigma of suffering in childhood is found in the novel *Sir Gibbie*. A measure of MacDonald's struggle to make sense of his theme is the appearance of the manuscript of the novel. MacDonald was rarely satisfied with the first draft of what he wrote but in writing *Sir Gibbie*, so it would seem from the repeated erasures and rewriting, the labour of finding words for what is beyond speech all but defeats him.[11] Gibbie is a child of the slums and gutters of a great city. His father is a drunken and impoverished cobbler. Gibbie has no power of speech and his silence is emblematic of the his uncomplaining acceptance of the ills he suffers. Like Diamond in *The Back of the North Wind*, like Clare Skymer in *A Rough Shaking*, like Mark Raymount in *Weighed and Wanting*[12], Gibbie is the Christlike child.

MacDonald speaks of the 'luminosity' (p. 2) of this gentle silent child. In drawing his character MacDonald, as if now aware of the implausibility of the child who does no wrong, goes to some lengths to defend the portrait he is giving us. 'I admit the child a rarity, but a rarity in the right direction.' 'There is more love in the world than anything else,' MacDonald argues, 'but the best love and the individual in whom love is supreme are the

rarest of all things' (p. 48). The figure of Gibbie is drawn with care. We take his story seriously, even when, unjustly accused of stealing food, Gibbie is lashed with a whip and the two strokes leave the form a cross on his back. Gibbie flees from the city to the hills and finds refuge with a shepherd and his wife. The wife wonders who this silent wounded child might be.

> Could it be that the Lord was still, child and man, suffering for his race...wandering, enduring, beaten, blessing still? accepting the evil, slaying it, and returning none? his patience the one rock where the evil word finds no echo; his heart the one gulf into which the dead-sea wave rushes with no recoil... the one abyss of destroying love (p.138).

The final six words are written, almost as an afterthought, in the margin of a manuscript repeatedly scored and written across. Something more is being claimed here than that the notion, that MacDonald more than once entertains, that every child comes to us as Jesus born anew. That notion is explored most famously, if not wholly successfully, in *The Gifts of the Child Christ*.[13] Here MacDonald goes further and implies that the pain of the suffering child has atoning value.

The possibility that innocent suffering can be 'redemptive', insofar as it is a theological question, lies outside the scope of this study. What does again arise, however, is the question whether a claim is being made that can be expressed other than in those traditional Christian categories. A brief but penetrating study by Alice Byrne (1995) suggests that perhaps it can. She draws our attention to the repeated appearance of 'the child saviour' in literature and to the depictions of the child as a symbol of personal and communal renewal.[14] Byrnes interprets the role of these child-saviour figures within a Jungian framework, but there is much in her treatment which is imaginatively suggestive without the adopting of the whole Jungian system. Notions of 'atonement' and 'redemption' are metaphors whose power does not immediately drain away once they are relocated outside their usual theological setting .

'The Child in the Midst'

MacDonald's *The Child in the Midst*, the first of his *Unspoken Sermons*, has received little critical attention. Probably the sermon has been studiously avoided rather than overlooked

for it certainly presents problems.

There is the question of genre. How are we to understand the teasing title of the collection of pieces of which - surely not insignificantly - *The Child in the Midst* is the first? A sermon, whether or not delivered, implies a congregation. Who constitutes that implied congregation? Does the term 'unspoken' suggest that these are MacDonald's personal and private reflections too speculative or unorthodox for him to proclaim from a public pulpit? Yet he has them published.

There are indications in the manuscript of the first volume that the sermons were in fact originally, or on occasions, preached.[15] It seems likely that they represent the kind of material MacDonald used in speaking to the small groups, such as at the home of the Cowper-Temples[16], who were drawn to hear what he had to say as his reputation as a writer of edifying poetry and fiction grew. It is best to see them as MacDonald's reflections on biblical themes (each starts from a biblical text) unconstrained by any denominational or confessional restraints.

But much more problematical is the direction in which MacDonald's interpretation of his text (Mark ch. 9, vv. 33-37) takes him. MacDonald draws a sharp distinction between the child, any child, and the 'childlike child' and, he claims, it is the latter whom Jesus sets among his disciples.

> One of the saddest and not least common sights in the world is the face of
> a child whose mind is so brimful of worldly wisdom that the human
> childishness has vanished from it, as well as the divine childlikeness. For the
> childlike is the divine (p. 3).

MacDonald is at pains to insist that it is precisely those children in whom the image of childhood has been disfigured who have the greatest claim to be loved and served. But he nevertheless maintains that 'the child in the midst', the child that is the pattern of what the adult must become, was 'the childlike child', childlike in nature, and indeed in appearance, 'a child that looked childlike because it was childlike' (p. 5). The wedge could not be driven more deeply between the empirical child and symbolic child, between the normal child and the normative child.

MacDonald is well aware that his train of thought will encounter resistance but he presses on. He argues that, had the point of the story been to teach the lesson, an essential lesson as MacDonald insists, of service to humanity then any child, however unappealing, could have been set in the midst of the disciples. MacDonald claims, however, that something more is intended here. 'The lesson will be found to lie not in the *humanity*, but in the *childhood* of the child' (p. 6).

Childhood must be measured by what it is meant to be, no matter how rarely - there are very few Sir Gibbies - the reality approximates to the image. MacDonald argues that childlikeness is the essential character of what we are both destined - and must aspire - to become. The logic of this thought leads him to make a still bolder claim:

> To receive a child in the name of Jesus is to receive Jesus; to receive Jesus is to receive God; therefore to receive the child is to receive God himself (p. 14).

MacDonald remains aware of the objections that he must know are raised by talk of the 'divinely childlike' and by the claim that it is a childlike child, not any child, that is set at the centre of the disciples. The direction of his argument is not entirely clear but he seems to be saying that such an exalted estimate of the ideal child - so far from detaching us from the world of ordinary and frequently unappealing children - makes us love them more, as indeed it kindles in us a keener empathy for all our kind.

> When we receive the child in the name of Christ, the very childhood that we receive in our arms is humanity. We love its humanity in its childhood, for childhood is the deepest heart humanity - its divine heart; and so in the name of the child we receive all humanity. Therefore, although the lesson is not about humanity, but about childhood, it returns upon our race, and we receive our race with wider arms and deeper heart (p. 16).

MacDonald asks 'when is the child the ideal child in our eyes and to our hearts?' His answer is that the child is most truly a child 'when his heart is absorbed in loving'. The essential character of childlikeness is love.

MacDonald's argument in the sermon rests as squarely on his philosophical idealism as on his Christian theism. The concept of 'the ideal child' is not a problem for MacDonald. For the modern mind, still more presumably for the post-modern mind, such a notion, together

with the larger claims of nineteenth century idealism, are almost inaccessible. If we find MacDonald's line of argument in *The Child in the Midst* unpersuasive, indeed uncongenial, it is possible that our antipathy is as much towards the idealism as to the theism. To appreciate MacDonald there has to be, philosophically as well as religiously, 'a suspension of disbelief'.

At this point it will be helpful to gather to try to gather the threads of MacDonald's treatment of the image of childhood. As so often we are trying to do for MacDonald what he himself does not attempt, to systematise what in his own thought and work remain as suggestive insights. MacDonald seems to be saying at least three things. First, there are - to use a term uncharacteristic of MacDonald himself - certain essential 'virtues' of childhood, exemplified if not in the benighted lives of so many empirical children then in the child of the poets and the Christlike child. These virtues include a sense of the transcendent, an attunement both with nature and the nature of things, a sharp awareness of what is other and what is beyond. Secondly, MacDonald holds that these virtues are not transient characteristics, features of a passing phase of life. They belong to our fulfilled humanity, to our well-being at any age.[17] In this sense childhood becomes a continuing moral and spiritual goal. Thirdly, there are the pedagogical implications. The essential childhood of children must be nurtured. It is to be gathered up, contained, and carried forward into later life, although its full realisation - and this is the mainspring of MacDonald's understanding of our spiritual growth - is 'always beyond', always beyond the approximate expressions of childhood we presently attain. And if 'the childhood of the child' is thwarted or lost then the task of spiritual education becomes the long and painful quest for its recovery.

The language of childhood

Diamond and his mother, in *At the Back of the North Wind*, find a little book buried in the sand at the seaside where the child is recuperating from illness. Diamond's mother reads from the book. What the child hears is a rhyming sequence that runs on for over five pages of the novel. At least these verses are what he 'thought afterwards that he had heard'- or possibly he may have been 'only dreaming better ones'.

I know a river
whose waters run asleep
run, run ever
singing in the shallows
dumb in the hollows
sleeping so deep
and all the swallows
that dip their feathers
in the hollows
or in the shallows
are the merriest swallows of all...

And so on and on for over two hundred lines. The poem evokes the constantly moving river, changing yet stable. Its movement is unending. As such it is a parable of life's story as MacDonald understands it. For MacDonald our story's 'end', as much in the sense of that story's purpose as its conclusion, is always ahead, always beyond. The discourse of the poem is musical and dreamlike. The poem speaks to the child in his own language, expressing what cannot be put in prose or contained in propositions (pp. 133 - 144).

When Peter the miner's son in *The Princess and the Goblin* encounters the goblins he sings verses to them and they flee in terror. Again it seems the lines could run on for ever.

One two-
Hit and hew!
Three, four-
Blast and bore!
Five, six-
There's a fix!...(p. 53).

Such poetry as Diamond lights upon and Peter sings is of course doggerel but that is beside the point. For MacDonald poetry is our primal speech. Like music and like our dreams, poetry is multi-layered, elevating and can bear many meanings. Prose, by contrast, is inexpressive, levelling and earth-bound. Children are born as poets but they have to learn prose. Becoming a child means relearning one's first language.[18]

Roderick McGillis (1991, 1992b) discusses the significance of such passages and the poetic language of MacDonald's children - and of all children - in two of the most important articles in the literature.

> The language of poetry aspires to the condition of music because music communicates immediately and feelingly (1991, p. 163).

> We keep returning to poetry and its way of communicating. In fact it is not too much to say that the meaning of *At the Back of the North Wind* is simply the importance of poetry as a way of knowing (1992b, p. 155).

The whole thrust of MacDonald's work, that which drives him to press beyond the limits of 'realistic' fiction into the realm of *faerie,* is the quest for a discourse in which the spiritual can be articulated. And that discourse, the language of poetry, of music, of dreams, turns out to be the mother-tongue of childhood.

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Summary

For MacDonald the image of the child is a complex construction bringing together a range of component features. Some are qualities of actual children; some are characteristics of children as poets see them; some are suggested by scenes and words from the Gospels. The child sees things as for the first time and so sees them as they always are. The child is attuned to nature and instructed by her, both by her quiet unacknowledged presence and by her overpowering disclosures. The child is vulnerable to suffering but that suffering can be turned to good. Childhood implies fatherhood and motherhood and a relationship of dependence, trust and love. The image of the 'childlike child' serves both as a pattern in spiritual development of children - become the child you are - and as a vision of what in the end we must all attain to.

Staying a child means continuing to speak and to hear the language of childhood. Becoming a child, if childhood has been lost, means relearning one's mother-tongue. The discourse by which the spiritual is expressed and apprehended is not that of prose or proposition. It is the language of songs and stories, of music and of dreams.

> And with the dragon, afar into the past, flew the childhood of Robert Falconer...And never more, save in twilight dreams, did he lay hold on his childhood again. But he knew better and better, as the years rolled on, that he approached a deeper and holier childhood, of which that had been but the feeble and necessarily vanishing type (*Robert Falconer*, p. 153).

> There is a childhood into which we have to grow, just as there is a childhood we must leave behind; a childlikeness which is the highest aim of humanity, and a childishness from which but few of those who are counted

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the wisest among men, have freed themselves in their imagined progress towards the reality of things (*David Elginbrod*, p. 29).

By the way, I do not think any man is compelled to bid goodbye to childhood (*David Elginbrod*, p. 32).

But he in whom the child's heart has not died,
Hath grown a man's heart, loveth yet the past;
Believes in all its beauty...
Far in the future lies his refuge...
And in the future he overtakes the past,
Which was a prophecy of times to come:
There lie great flashing stars, the same that shone
In childhood's laughing heaven; there lies the wonder
In which the sun went down and moon arose
(*Within and Without*, III, 10).

Something more will be said about the pedagogical implications of such an understanding of childhood in the concluding chapter. Meanwhile our reading of MacDonald leaves us with the reflection that the conservation of childhood is no more a romantic indulgence than the provision of computers.[19]

Endnotes

1. Whether George MacDonald successfully promoted the spiritual development of his own children is an interesting theme which I shall not pursue. Greville MacDonald claimed that his father 'did not altogether understand children'. He refers to the sometimes severe corporal punishment he received and admits that he was 'truly afraid' of his father (MacDonald, Greville, 1932, pp. 11 - 44). On the other hand Greville's own educational writings emphasize the very themes we find in his father's work. In a long-forgotten book *The Child's Inheritance* he writes passionately on the vital importance of the nurture of the imagination in promoting higher than utilitarian goals in education (MacDonald, Greville, 1910, pp.114 - 144). Greville published articles entitled *The Fairy Tale in Education* (1913) and *The Spirit of Play* (1923). The principles he commends in these pages he first learned in his own home and from his own upbringing.

2. So was Novalis. 'Nicht alle Kinder sind Kinder.' (*Not all children are children.*) (*Novalis Schriften*, Eds., Mahl, Samuel, Schulz, Bd. 5, p. 230).

3. Interest in the cultural history of how childhood has been perceived was sparked off by Philippe Ariès classic study *L'Enfant et la vie familiale dans l'ancien régime*, published in English in 1962 under the title *Centuries of Childhood* (Ariès, 1962). Ariès claimed that there was no concept of childhood before about the seventeenth century. Moreover such was the incidence of child mortality that parents could not afford to invest the emotional attachment in their children that we take for granted today. Ariès's work was enormously influential and his views were for a time the received orthodoxy. However his work, both his methodology and conclusions, has been criticized, notably by Linda Pollock (1983, 1987). There is now an immense literature about how childhood been understood at different periods and in different social and cultural contexts. Social commentators seeking to make sense of contemporary attitudes to children draw attention to a crisis in our perception of childhood. Concern for the rights of the child and for the protection

of children from exploitation and abuse is intense. At the same time children are increasingly and relentlessly exposed to commercial and social - not to speak of educational - pressures. A transformation in our understanding of childhood is to be seen in the visual history of childhood, in the changes in the ways in which children have been depicted in paintings, illustrations, and photography, and in how those images have been perceived. Higonnet (1998) concludes from her recent fascinating study of this history that what is taking place in western culture is nothing less than a 'reinvention of childhood' (p. 193).

4. John ch. 3, vv. 1 - 9.

5. MacDonald extends his sketch of his subject's development beyond childhood, though it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss what MacDonald has to say about those subsequent influences and choices - the competing claims of poetry and science, the first experience of romantic love, the experience of disillusionment, even of despair, and the renewal of hope.

6. Letter to Dr.Trussler, 23rd August 1799, cited by Coveney (1957), p. 55.

7. The quotations are from an article in the *Friend* of 3rd August 1809, cited by Coveney (1967, pp. 87 - 88).

8. Stephen Gill has recently drawn attention to the 'ubiquity' of Wordsworth in Victorian culture (Gill, 1998).

9. Sir Edward Troup noted some of the allusions to MacDonald's boyhood in his writings in a talk originally given in 1924 at an event marking the centenary of his birth (Troup, 1982).

10. Perhaps more were moved by the the passing of Molly in *St George and St. Michael*, 'I am quite well - quite -' (p.165), or by the cry of the starved child Moxy embracing death in a cellar, 'Mother, you *may* put me in the hole' (*Weighed and Wanting*, p. 259). Two other impossibly good children are the brothers Andrew and Sandy Ingram in *The Elect Lady*.

11. The manuscript of *Sir Gibbie* is the property of the Gordon Boys' School, Huntly, Aberdeenshire.

12. Mark is 'a Christ-child, if ever child might bear the name' (*Weighed and Wanting*, p. 365).

13. The same theme is explored in the early tale *Birth, Death, and Dreaming*, included in both editions of *Adela Cathcart*:

> The boy said ... with a heavenly smile, 'I am the child Jesus'
> 'The Child Jesus!' said the dreamer, astonished. 'Thou art like any other child.'
> 'No, do not say so, returned the boy; but say, *Any other child is like me* '
> (p. 93).

See also *Within and Without* in which Julian sees the new-born child as one 'come as a little Christ from heaven to earth' (p. 114).

14. Byrnes mentions such obvious candidates from Victorian fiction for the role of 'child saviour' as Eppie from *Silas Marner*, Little Nell from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Tiny Tim from *A Christmas Carol*. But she also instances more feisty figures - Heidi, Rebecca of Sunnybrook farm, and Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, who 'fulfils the redemptive mission of the child saviour' (p. 29).

15. The manuscript of *Unspoken Sermons (First Series)* is held by the National Library of Scotland

16. From 1874 until 1888, the year of his death, religious conferences were held at the invitation of William Cowper-Temple (Lord Mount-Temple) at his home, Broadlands. MacDonald was a regular speaker

(Raeper, 1987, p. 338).

17. MacDonald populates his pages with portraits of childlike adults. The cobbler Andrew Comin, in *Donal Grant* aspires to childhood - 'We'll all be young there, lass! (p. 28). The librarian Peter Simon in *Castle Warlock* - symbolically it was on a Christmas Eve that, as an infant, he had been found abandoned on the streets - is regarded by most people as 'no a'thegither there' (p. 57). 'Rob of the Angels' is another such. 'In a lowland parish he would have been regarded as little better than a gifted idiot; in the mountains he was looked upon as a seer' (*What's Mine's Mine*, p. 140).

18. 'My own conviction is, that the poetry is far the deepest in us, and that the prose is only the broken-down poetry; and likewise to this our lives correspond' (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, p. 92).

19. Brenda Lealman is one of the few educationalists to press for this 'conservation of childhood'. The language in which she does so, in its 'holistic' and 'other-worldly' emphasis, resonates with that of MacDonald. 'By allowing the child to remain within the adult we liberate the adult's - our - spirituality. So the child as adult can go on discovering shells that sing and looking out to sea with anticipation: of the whole that is not yet, but is still to be' (Lealman, 1996, p. 28).

Chapter Six

THE IMAGINATION

> I have come very strongly to believe that it is the cultivation of the imagination which should be the chief aim of education and in which our present systems of education most conspicuously fail (Warnock, 1976, p. 9).

In recent years Mary Warnock's disquiet has come to be widely shared. There is growing concern that school curricula do not sufficiently encourage the exercise of the imagination and that its use is being curbed by the prioritising of the delivery of content and the testing of how well that content is remembered. The redressing of this educational imbalance is seen as one of the tasks which a 'pedagogy of the spirit' should address. The concern is reflected in the official or quasi-official documents. For example, the nurture of the imagination is highlighted by the National Forum for Values in Education in its draft guidance on spiritual development and its promotion. Pupils who are developing spiritually, the Forum declares, will be 'creative and imaginative in a constant search for answers, including answers to life's fundamental questions'. They will 'exercise imagination and intuition - in creative pursuits, and in forming theories in their academic life' (QCA, 1997).

The Forum is here using the term 'imagination' loosely, simply linking it to a cluster of associated concepts, 'creativity' and 'intuition' among them, all of which remain undefined. But if the use of the imagination is so vital for our flourishing a more substantial understanding of its nature and function is needed. Here MacDonald will help us. In the last two chapters we considered MacDonald's engagement with the subjects of nature and the child. We saw how MacDonald's interpretation of those two great Romantic themes is more than a weak echo of earlier powerful voices. So it will be with his treatment of this further major Romantic motif. MacDonald's high estimate of the imagination and its central importance for our formation is no doubt an inherited conviction but it is expressed with insights of his own. MacDonald's distinctive emphasis will become apparent as we come shortly to his essay *The Imagination: its Function and its Culture* (1867), a discussion of which will occupy most of this chapter.

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To explore fully the sources of MacDonald's concept of the imagination would require a recapitulation of the whole history of reflection on human creativity.[1] Such a discussion is clearly beyond the scope of this study. However we do need to highlight two ideas - and a deep tension - we find in MacDonald's work which are rooted in that long and complex history. First, we shall meet in MacDonald the view that the imagination is creative.[2] Secondly, we shall find MacDonald maintaining that the imagination has the power to reach beyond what can be rationally grasped or articulated.[3] In both respects MacDonald is within the mainstream of an intellectual tradition. The tension in his thinking is also inherited, the tension between a view of the imagination as creative and an understanding of the imagination as simply a perceptive faculty. As we shall see this tension reflects a very old conflict and one so far unresolved.[4]

'The Imagination: its Function and its Culture'

As we study MacDonald's essay *The Imagination: its Function and its Culture* it soon becomes apparent how MacDonald's understanding of the imagination has been shaped by the tradition to which we have alluded. We shall not try to trace the ancestry of MacDonald's ideas further but highlight what is distinctive in MacDonald's approach and what is the bearing of his argument on the main concerns of this study.

The importance of this essay for our purposes is plain from its subtitle. MacDonald's interest is in how the imagination operates and how it is to be nurtured. MacDonald's point of departure and the theme to which he repeatedly returns is the role of the imagination in education. He begins by stating what he believes to be the fundamental purpose of education.

> Repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future (*Orts*, p. 1).

This statement is of the first importance. It affirms what will be the premise of his subsequent exposition of the role of the imagination, an understanding of education as a continuing and essentially unclosed process. Our attention is arrested by the resonance of the language of this statement - 'an ever renewed awaking from the dead' - with that of MacDonald's fantasy. As I hope will become clear in Part III of my thesis, what

MacDonald affirms here about the purpose of education generally could stand as a succinct description of the function of his fantasy. The purpose of fantasy is not to console, not to reassure by happy endings, but to invite and encourage a continuing quest to make sense of one's own life-story of which the fantasy, with all its unresolved enigmas, is the parable.

MacDonald distances himself from those for whom the primary task of education is the imparting of knowledge. If the only business of education is to provide information then the imagination has no role; indeed it is a threat to education so understood and must be suppressed. MacDonald disputes with imaginary interlocutors who argue, 'Are there not facts?...Why forsake them for fancies?' (p. 2) His opponents here are those within the Enlightenment tradition for whom fairy tales and all such imaginative conceits subvert the work of education which, they claim, must rest on reason.

MacDonald repudiates the charge that a high view of the imagination entails a contempt of facts. He maintains that 'to inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination' (p. 2). The imagination 'is aroused by facts, is nourished by facts' (p. 2) and from those facts seeks the laws which account for them. Nowhere does MacDonald reject what he learned as a student in the chemistry laboratory of a Scottish university. Science however offers only one account of how things are.

The imagination, MacDonald proposes, is 'that faculty which gives form to thought' (p. 2), calling into being what is then capable of being expressed. The imagination is the creative faculty, that in us which corresponds most closely to the divine.[5]

> The imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God (p. 3).
>
> As the thoughts move in the mind of a man, so move the worlds of men and women in the mind of God.... We are the offspring of his imagination. Man is but a thought of God (p. 4).

The imagination is a creative faculty but only in a secondary sense. Neither our thoughts nor the forms in which they are capable of expression are our original creation. The forms by which we express our thoughts are those of nature. But it is not the case that the imagination invests those forms with significance; the work of the imagination is to perceive and recognise the meaning already inherent in those forms. The world is

> an inexhaustible storehouse of forms...The man has but to light the lamp
> within the form: his imagination is the light, it is not the form (p. 5).

This perceptive role of the imagination is seen in the work of the poet. The achievement of the poetic imagination is to illuminate the forms, to make apparent the meaning latent in them, whether in natural forms or in human artefacts.

Equally important is the role of the imagination in the fashioning of language, particularly of the language of the inner world of our feelings. We struggle to express what is in our heart and mind until at last we recognise something in nature which resonates with that within us which must be named. We seize upon it as the symbol of what we wish to express and find that the symbol is recognised and understood. 'All words...are of the imagination, are originally poetic words' (p. 9). MacDonald insists on the primacy of poetry over prose in the language of common speech as much as in literature.

All that moves in the mind has its external analogue in nature which serves as 'an inexhaustible wardrobe for the clothing of human thought' (p. 9). It is thus required of us that we attend closely to the natural world. The imaginative contemplation of nature will lead us to recognise the submission and hope of the snowdrop. MacDonald will return to the response of the imagination to nature but before doing so he is anxious to emphasise the equally important role of the imagination in scientific enquiry. The imagination is privileged over the intellect in scientific enquiry. 'In finding out the works of God the Intellect must labour, workman-like, under the direction of the architect Imagination' (p. 11). To be sure the imagination yields to the intellect in the study of the 'ascertained' but in adventuring into unexplored territory the imagination advances first. MacDonald stresses that there is nothing 'fanciful or riotous' in the imagination's work in the service of science. The material which the imagination surveys is what is there; in the theistic language of his essay, it is 'the work of God'. Science advances by observation and experiment but it is the imagination which conceives both of the hypothesis and of the experiments appropriate to test it. 'We yield you your facts,' says MacDonald. 'The laws we claim for the prophetic imagination' (p. 12).[6]

MacDonald claims for the imagination 'an inward oneness with the laws of the universe'

and thus 'an insight into the very nature of things' (pp. 12, 13). We recall that the end of education, on MacDonald's view is 'a ceaseless questioning'. Here once again MacDonald acknowledges his debt to Bacon for whom 'a prudent question is the half of knowledge' (p. 13). The imagination asks those questions which will illuminate the territory which, following some way behind, the intellect will study. MacDonald quotes a still more influential mentor, his beloved Novalis. 'The imagination is the stuff of the intellect' (p. 14).

MacDonald compares and contrasts the poetic and the scientific imagination pointing to their mutual influence. He reminds us that Coleridge has said that 'no one but a poet will make any further *great* studies in mathematics' (p. 15). He cites yet again his favourite text from Bacon. 'Wonder' - which, MacDonald adds, is 'that faculty of the mind especially attendant on the child-like imagination' - is 'the seed of knowledge' (p. 15). The scientific imagination stands in need of the poetic imagination to envision the whole when presented with no more than shards and fragments. On the other hand it is when the poetic imagination is 'dashed with the imagination of the man of science' (p. 15) that the 'prophecy of the flower in the leaf' is revealed to Goethe (p. 15).

History too must be studied imaginatively if its laws are to be discovered. Thus Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution* is at once 'a true picture, a philosophical revelation, a noble poem' (p. 16). MacDonald holds that all that we experience is morally ordered but that it requires an unclouded imagination to perceive this. He instances Shakespeare's historical plays in which the hero at the point of death will deliver a 'prophetic' commentary on his times. 'Such prophecy is the perfect working of the historical imagination' (p. 17).

MacDonald now returns to the subject of imagination and nature. In doing so he is addressing a tension in his thought which extends far beyond the pages of the essay I am discussing. MacDonald believes on the one hand that significance in nature is there to be discovered. The meaning is already written into the forms of nature. The imagination is thus less of a creative faculty, more akin to a facility in reading. On the other hand, as we have seen, MacDonald has a high view of the imagination as an active power; the imagination does indeed in some sense create.

He reiterates the idealist position that the forms of nature are approximate representations of mental conditions. That they have 'form' is by virtue of human thought, which in its turn reflects the thought of God. The forms of nature can thus be 'read' and the task of the imagination is interpretative. The imagination perceives 'the human meaning of the snowdrop' (p. 19) but such is 'the harmony of the whole' (p. 18) that all of nature becomes an open book and much more is to be discerned, not least the moral order which, MacDonald holds, is inherent in all that is.

The logic of the argument leads to the conclusion that, however vast is the territory the imagination may explore, the individual is perhaps better described as 'the *Trouvère*, the *Finder*' rather than 'the *Poet*, the *Maker*' (p. 20).

It is a conclusion that MacDonald does not altogether welcome in that it now becomes very difficult to rescue for the imagination any truly creative role. MacDonald argues that the creative role of the imagination is exercised when it presents us 'with new thought-forms - new, that is as revelations of thought' (p. 20). The imagination does not create the material that goes to make these forms but rather it

> takes forms already existing and gathers them about a thought so much higher than they, that it can group and subordinate and harmonize them into a whole which shall represent, unveil that thought (p. 20).

The exposition is laboured and unclear and it is uncertain how far there is retained for the imagination any independent capacity to originate.

He illustrates the imagination at work by quoting Tennyson's *Bugle Song*. The material - the images of the flowers, of the woods, of the spring - is the common stock from which poets have repeatedly drawn. What is original and creative is that Tennyson has not drawn the familiar contrast between nature as everlasting and the evanescence of humanity - Tennyson has boldly asserted the exact opposite, the eternal is not in nature but in humanity.

> Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
> And grow for ever and for ever.

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The creative imagination operates 'in choosing, gathering, and vitally combining' (p. 22) the given material. What is original, it seems, is the new idea or, as MacDonald prefers to call it, 'a new and wider revelation' (p. 22). The use of this term shows that MacDonald has not yet resolved the dilemma of according to the imagination a truly creative capacity without compromising the principle that all that is and all that is thought originate in the mind of God. MacDonald insists that an individual's new thoughts are indeed creative but that, emerging as they do unbidden from 'the unconscious portion of his nature' (p. 24), they have their source 'in that chamber of our being' (p. 25) where God dwells. If this is how the imagination works we can understand how it is that 'there is always more in a work of art' (p. 25) than the artist himself perceives in fashioning it.

The imagination is creative but God thought of it all first. Clearly MacDonald has not succeeded in reconciling the conflicting principles. MacDonald is attempting to accommodate within an idealist philosophical framework an understanding of the imagination to which that framework is fundamentally inhospitable. But the fault-line in his thought, if that is what it is, does not rob it of interest and value. Greater philosophers than MacDonald have failed to reconcile the paradoxes of divine sovereignty - or, if we prefer, of determinacy - and free-will. The tension in MacDonald's thought, were we to trace it to its source, is embedded in that immemorial enigma.[7]

MacDonald goes on to address the criticism that it is the imagination which leads to those 'wild fancies and vague reveries' (p. 25) in which, much to their harm, young people indulge. His response is to claim that far greater evil would follow from the absence of the imagination. MacDonald reminds us of the educational reasons which, as he urged at the outset of his discussion, make the role of the imagination so important. If the imagination is crushed, however wayward its early manifestations, all that you have left to nourish the young are facts.

> Whoever would have his children avoid this arid region will do well to allow no teacher to approach them - not even of mathematics - who has no imagination (p. 27).

MacDonald's strongest plea for the imagination to be encouraged, a passage in his

argument which is at once passionate, eloquent and persuasive, is in the context of cultural assumptions the modern reader will find absurd and deplorable. MacDonald vigorously rebuts the objection that for most girls at least an active imagination is a danger. The imagination is dangerous - so it is claimed - because, given a free rein, it will distract them from their domestic duties. 'Are they not more likely to exercise it in building castles in the air to the neglect of houses on earth?' (p. 27). MacDonald rejects this argument - without, alas, challenging its presuppositions.

MacDonald's reply reflects a conviction that is foundational to all his thought, shaping his view of the imagination as of almost everything else. His reply is not to object to the servitude Victorian women suffer but to imply that a sense of frustration and of unfulfilment is an inescapable condition of being human. It is the lot of men and women alike whatever their station. We are never satisfied nor in a sense should we be. We are made for more than what we are and the imagination which stirs our discontent teaches us it must be so.

> ...it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully; undefined, yet vivid visions of *something beyond*, something which eyes have not seen, nor ear heard, have far more influence than any logical sequences whereby the same things may be demonstrated by the intellect (p. 28).

The italics are mine. Spiritual development as MacDonald understands it always orientated towards that 'something beyond'.

To illustrate the danger of attempting to repress the imagination. MacDonald, the Shakespearean scholar, contrasts the characters of Macbeth and his wife. Macbeth hesitates to commit the crime he contemplates because his imagination is active enough to alert him of its consequences. Lady Macbeth, possessing less imagination and repressing the little she has, urges him to the deed. But she discovers that the power of the imagination can be contained only for so long. Sooner or later it will rise and turn on the one who attempts to suppress it. Beyond her power to control, her imagination exacts its revenge on her so that she dares not sleep without a light by her bed.

'The end of the imagination is *harmony*' (p. 35) Here the italics are MacDonald's. The nurture of the imagination promotes our growth towards that end, that unity, in which all

the diverse and discrete entities we experience cohere. But it is characteristic of MacDonald to insist that that progress, so far from removing the individual from the demands of ordinary life, sends him back into the daily round with a heightened sense of the duties which even the most humdrum existence imposes. 'A right imagination...will therefore send the man forth from its loftiest representations to do the commonest duty of the most wearisome calling in a hearty and hopeful spirit' (p. 35).

MacDonald now turns to the question of how the imagination should be nurtured. The relevance of what he has to say to the contemporary search for strategies for promoting spiritual development will be apparent.

The imagination is cultivated, MacDonald affirms, 'by ordering our life towards harmony with its ideal in the mind of God' (p. 36). How then is this lofty principle to be implemented? 'The whole is comprised in two words,' MacDonald asserts, 'food and exercise' (p. 36).

The food MacDonald recommends is nature and literature. In observing nature, whether on 'country rambles' or 'city walks', the child is to exercise his or her imagination in the two ways we have seen to be central to MacDonald's understanding of the imagination's role. He or she is to be encouraged, first, 'to put things together' (p. 37), to perceive the underlying harmony behind all that appears as discrete and separate, and, secondly, to speculate as to what lies beyond the horizon of what is apparent to the senses.

The imagination is best nurtured by nature but not every child grows up among Wordsworth's lakes and mountains. If association with nature is not possible we always have recourse to books. MacDonald memorably observes, 'A gathered mountain of misplaced worships would be swept into the sea by the study of one good book' (p. 40). The importance of the good book is not only that it contains the 'results' of the imagination, recording the imagination's discoveries, but also that it also admits the reader into the 'workshop' of the imagination where the imaginative process can be seen taking place.

Good books which are vital for cultivating the imagination, not because they are satisfying, but precisely because they are *unsatisfying*, because such books leave the reader with a hunger for that 'something more' which impels spiritual growth. Once more what is said about the imagination reinforces the importance of fantasy, that order of writing which, because of its essentially unclosed but expectant character, leaves the reader eager for what lies beyond the last page of the narrative, for the sequel which can only be discovered in the continuing narrative of the reader's own story.

MacDonald emphasises the role of the teacher in guiding the reader. The teacher is responsible for showing what is worth the reader's attention but she must remain reticent in what she herself says. The teacher seeks to nurture the imagination's determination always to go beyond. The imagination never allows us to suppose that we have arrived. The end of education, as MacDonald declared at the outset, is 'a noble unrest' (p. 40).

In the end it is all child's play - than which nothing is more serious. It is all a game of hide-and-seek and it is the imagination which allows us to take part.

> 'The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the King is to find it out,' says Solomon. 'As if,' remarks Bacon on the passage, 'according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide his works, to the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's playfellows in that game' (p. 41; citing Bacon, p. 220).

Summary

> In the history of the world the imagination has been oftener right than the intellect, and the things in which it has been right are of much greater importance; only wherever the Pegasus has shown the way through the bog, the pack-horse which followed has got the praise of discovery; while many of the blunders made by the latter are attributed to the former (*Castle Warlock*, p. 46).

MacDonald's exposition of the role of the imagination, diffuse as it is, is built on a firm premise declared at the outset about the purpose of education. The end of education is not 'repose' but 'a noble unrest'. It is a philosophy of education which does not readily accommodate concepts of the quantifiable, notions of 'attainment' and 'targets' and the rest. It is, to be anachronistic, a Whiteheadian model of education to which the principle of

'radical incompleteness' is fundamental. Within such a framework - the conceptual model which we adopted for this study - the imagination readily assumes the primary role MacDonald assigns to it. Spiritual development, understood within our paradigm as a process, goes with the grain of this understanding of the total educational project and, informed by MacDonald's thinking, we can begin to draw some conclusions about the role of the imagination in its promotion.

The fundamental principle, from which flows all that MacDonald has to say about it, is that the imagination's essential task is to press beyond the limits of what has been ascertained. Its role is deeply unsettling. It is there to trouble us, to forbid us any sense of security or satisfaction in the place we are. The imagination is ceaselessly impelling us to venture beyond the boundaries of what we have so far experienced or have come to understand. It reaches beyond the range of the intellect, not to deliver answers beyond the intellect's grasp but to raise new questions.

Thus, the imagination enables spiritual development by making us question. It is essentially interrogative and exploratory. It asks why such and such should be so, seeking to account for the raw data of the experienced world both without and within. It searches out those regularities which constitute scientific laws but its driving ambition, that which makes it the indispensable agent of spiritual development, is always to reach beyond such penultimate descriptions of localised areas of experience towards a more all-embracing understanding of how and why things are. The imagination's quest for significance is essentially a quest for coherence. Our experience is of the contradictory and the unreconciled, of the fractured and fragmented. Spiritual development is holistic and is promoted by the imagination's search for harmony.

The imagination serves spiritual development by its interrogative attention to nature. The imagination searches the natural world for meaning. MacDonald holds that such meaning is in some sense already 'written into' nature and thus that it is a kind of imaginative literacy which enables us to trace its lessons. We perceive the meanings, the 'forms', inherent in nature. The philosophical assumptions underlying this view are debatable. It is not necessary

to defend the idealist assumption that God thought of it all first. The realist view, that truth and meaning are not human constructs, is perhaps less negotiable if MacDonald's insights are to be accepted. Be that as it may, what can be distilled from MacDonald's view of the imaginative response to nature is that our development spiritually is fostered not merely by taking passive pleasure in its charms or even by being awed by its sublimities. What matters much more for our spiritual development is that we search for its significance, recognising that it is in the search, not in the discovery which will always be deferred, that our development takes place.

The imagination promotes spiritual development by denying us contentment - by forbidding us 'repose'. The imagination forbids us to rest at any point on our spiritual journey. We are always haunted but never misled by the sense of 'something beyond'.

These observations about the role of the imagination lead naturally into what will occupy us extensively in the next and final part of our thesis, the character and function of MacDonald's fantasy. All fantasy is of course an imaginative construct and is to be imaginatively apprehended. But in what we shall see to be the function of MacDonald's fantasy the role of the imagination is distinct and critical. The major fantasies and fairy tales, such texts as *The Golden Key*, *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, are narratives of unclosed journeys. As we shall see, they are profoundly unsettling texts, raising hermeneutical problems which reflect the reader's own dilemmas as he or she seeks to interpret their own life story. The quest, purposeful but unclosed, which is the theme of these narratives, can be seen as symbolising - and eliding with - the journey we all must undertake if we respond imaginatively to the experiences and enigmas which confront us.

It only needs adding - although to fail to do so would be about as serious a misunderstanding of MacDonald as we could make - that the imagination promotes our spiritual development by alerting us to our moral obligations, by alerting us to the next thing that must be done.

Endnotes

1. One of the merit's of Dearborn's study of MacDonald's theology is the prominence she gives to the role of the imagination, a treatment, which includes a panoramic review, of the classical, biblical and philosophical sources of MacDonald's understanding of the imagination (Dearborn, 1994).

2. For Hume (1888) the imagination creates mental images, inferring from individual and discrete sense impressions that objects have a continued substantial existence apart from my perception of them. 'The imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue when even its object fails it, and, like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse' (p. 198). For Kant (1952), the 'transcendental' imagination does more, enabling us to go beyond the chaotic and unrelated data of sensation, serving as a bridge between such bare sensation and intelligible thought. A life that was no more than a sequence of disconnected sensations would be meaningless. The transcendental imagination allows us to envisage the world as bearing certain forms. 'It is productive and exerting an activity of its own' (p. 240). Schelling, from whom Coleridge draws deeply, allows to the imagination a still greater creative capacity. His is the thorough-going idealist position that the imagination constitutes the world as it really is. 'In Schelling the same imagination which creates the poem or the statue also creates the world' (Warnock, 1976, p. 71). The intricacies of these arguments cannot detain us. We simply note the deep roots of MacDonald's belief that the imagination has the capacity to create.

3. Again the notion is not new. Kant (1952) accepts the traditional distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, claiming that in the presence of the sublime we excited to awe and the mind yields to the imagination as we stretch towards what we cannot comprehend (pp. 245 - 246). For Schelling, according to Mary Warnock (1976), the imagination's striving for what is beyond our intellectual comprehension is accompanied by a deep nostalgia, a pervasive sense of loss and longing, a *Sehnsucht*, the wistful awareness that if only - if only - we could grasp what we touch we would be altogether changed. 'The role of the imagination here is to lead us beyond what is present to our senses towards the realization that there is something *signified* by the things before us, something which we can grasp in a way, but cannot express' (p. 61).

4. The tension is present in the cross-currents of ideas in Coleridge's own mind. Coleridge has left us with countless scattered observations about the imagination. The chapter (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817, ch. 13) in which he makes his famous distinction between the 'primary' and the 'secondary' imagination seems at first reading to provide a much to be welcomed systematic summary of his understanding of the subject but the fact Coleridge's argument at this point continues to be so much discussed suggests that here as elsewhere he has not made himself entirely clear. Coleridge claims that the primary imagination is the perceptive faculty, the 'living power and prime agent of all human perception'. Less clear is the sense in which he regarded the imagination as a creative faculty. Coleridge famously asserts that the same primary imagination is 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM'. But in what sense, if at all, is a 'repetition' of creation itself creative?

5. 'The flower expressed what God was thinking of when he made it...' (*Heather and Snow*, p. 114).

6. The hero of *There and Back* has to learn that there is more to be apprehended than can be found out by reason. '...the imagination, without which no discovery of any grandeur is made even in the realms of science, dwells in the halls of aspiration, outlook, desire, and hope, and round the windows and filling the air of these, hung the dry dust-cloud of Richard's negation' (p. 277).

7. The troubled earl asks young Donal Grant, 'Do you believe there is such a thing as free will?' The conversation which follows is probably MacDonald's fullest consideration of the question. The issue is not to be resolved by philosophical reflection, only by 'doing the thing required'. The passage contains one of MacDonald's most memorable observations - 'The rose is the freedom of the rose tree' (*Donal Grant*, pp. 289 - 295).

PART THREE

Earlier chapters of this thesis have shown how MacDonald's insights about the education of the human spirit illuminate the whole range of his work. The focus of the final part of this study will be on MacDonald's fantasy. Not only are these writings his greatest literary achievement; they also contain his most searching commentary on the process of spiritual development as well as themselves functioning as potentially formative texts. The central argument of these closing chapters will be that MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies function as 'transfiguring fantasy'. Their unclosed narratives merge with the reader's own story and in that ongoing story - that of the reader's own spiritual development - the promise of meaning and fulfilment is held out. I shall claim that the distinctive discourse of MacDonald's transfiguring fantasy is significant and important for the formulation of strategies for the promotion of spiritual development in the pluralist community of a modern school.

Chapter Seven

TRANSFIGURING FANTASY

I begin this chapter by reconsidering the far from straightforward distinction between the realistic and the fantastic in MacDonald's work. I comment, secondly, on the exacting task of classifying fantasy and consider how MacDonald's fantasy is to be categorized. I turn, thirdly, to the function of fantasy and discuss three ways in which fantasy has been seen to serve human flourishing - fantasy as 'didactic', 'therapeutic' or 'utopian' - and I comment on how far MacDonald's fantasy functions in each of these ways. I then come to the central proposal of this chapter and indeed of this study as a whole. I consider what I have termed 'transfiguring fantasy' and I make the claim that it is this model which best accounts for how MacDonald's fantasy functions. Finally, I shall add some comments on what MacDonald himself had to say about fairy tales, comments which, for reasons which will become clear, need only be brief. Lack of space forbids even a sketch-history of the telling and the retelling, the writing and the rewriting, of fantasies and fairy tales. Suffice it to say that in choosing to write such work MacDonald adopted a medium which was, and remains to this day, a contentious genre. It is a tribute to the power of fantasy that it has so often been feared. (Appendix 5 provides a brief overview of the hostility at different periods aroused by fantasy).

Realism and fantasy

The distinction between MacDonald's realistic fiction and his fantasy might seem self-evident. Yet as we have seen this distinction, so apparently obvious and assumed without question by most MacDonald critics, proves difficult to define.

It needs to be noted how often we sense a fading of the frontier between the realistic and the fantastic as we read MacDonald's fiction. Much in the so-called realistic fiction is of course implausible. The inundations, for example, which occur in *Alec Forbes*, *Sir Gibbie*, or *What's Mine's Mine* are as impossibly rapid as those which take place in *The Mill on the Floss*.[1] But the stability of the realistic framework of MacDonald's apparently

conventionally realistic novels is threatened not only by accounts of the implausible. It is in more subtle and interesting ways that the familiar critical categories seem less secure.[2]

The best of MacDonald's fiction is found in his Scottish novels. It could be claimed that these novels, with their colourful characters, their strange goings-on and their arcane dialect[3], transport the reader to an alternative world as much as do his fairy tales. As MacDonald was surely well aware, for most of his English readers Scotland was not very far from fairyland.[4]

MacDonald's 'realistic fiction', whether set in Scotland or south of the border, is at times somehow transmuted so that the reader senses that he or she has been carried unawares into a different realm.

> Donal saw a window open to the ground and went to it. Beyond lay a more fairy-like garden than he had ever dreamed of... He stepped out of the window, drawn as by the enchantment of one of childhood's dreams... (Hollyhocks) received him like stately dames of faerie... The grass fondled his feet like the lap of an old nurse... The lady of the garden descending to meet him! - not ancient, but young like its flowers, light-footed and full of life (*Donal Grant*, pp. 94 - 95).

The whole passage from which this brief extract is taken is somehow disorientating. It is as if a border has been crossed. Like Anodos, we have stepped unwittingly into fairyland.[5]

Sometimes we encounter in the realistic fiction, even in the English novels, a character who seems to have crossed that frontier in the opposite direction. We are told that Barbara Wylder in *There and Back* comes from New Zealand but she appears to be from an altogether more magical realm. She wanders the countryside at night to 'weave the travels of the planets into the steady history of the motionless stars'(p. 82). Certainly she enchants the hero of the tale, the young Richard Lestrange. He asks,

> Was she one of the wild bewildering creatures of ancient lonely belief, that are the souls of the loveliest things...Was she salamander or sylph, naiad or undine, oread or dryad? (p. 129).[6]

A very different figure who seems to have wandered here from fairyland is the misshapen dwarf Polwarth in *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, who leads Juliet almost to believe 'the ancient

rumours of other races than those of mankind, that shared the earth with them' (p. 387).

Edmund Cusick (1988) has called our attention to how in all of MacDonald's work of whatever genre the fantastic elements cluster around a number of 'fantasy complexes'. He identifies three of these for detailed discussion: leopards, wolves and angels. It is not necessary to endorse all Cusick's Jungian analysis of these symbols to take the important point he is making, that 'fantastical' elements are to be found throughout MacDonald's work.

There is a still more significant respect in which a distinctive feature of MacDonald's fantasy characterises his supposedly more realistic fiction. We have seen how the pattern of 'non-closure', which MacDonald found in Novalis, is critically important for the pedagogical function of his own fantasy. That pattern is not confined to those of MacDonald's narratives which have always been classified as fairy tales or fantasies. In 1860 the final instalment of *The Portent* was published in *Cornhill Magazine* and here readers are left to make what they will of an unclosed text. The protagonist of the narrative, Duncan Campbell, does not know whether the woman he loves, Lady Alice, is alive or dead. His last words are 'I wait - I wait'. When in 1864 MacDonald came to publish *The Portent* as a book it was twice the length and supplied with a happy ending. Rebecca Ankeny's comparative study (1998) of the two versions is aptly entitled *Endings and Meanings*. She recognises that the happy ending reassures us as readers 'in the narratives we make of our lives' that portents are not always and inexorably fulfilled. However she does not consider how the closure of the text in its revised form forecloses the reader's continuing engagement with it and the tale's formative potential.

Another 'unclosed' fiction is *The Flight of the Shadow*. The bleak landscape of this late tale anticipates the wildernesses of *Lilith* and the character Lady Cairnedge is a chilling sketch of that of Lilith herself. The last chapter of this one-volume novel is entitled *The End of the First Volume* and its closing words are 'John and I are waiting' (p. 337). Similarly the title of the final chapter of *Mary Marston* is *The End of the Beginning*. Other novels which hold narrative closure in abeyance, if less markedly, are *Robert Falconer*, *Donal Grant*, and

Wilfred Cumbermede. Towards the close of *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, MacDonald comments on the tale he is telling, 'The true story has no end - no end' (p. 513). This observation echoes the 'ending' of *The Wise Woman*, 'If you think (the story) is not finished - I never knew a story that was' (p. 222), and recalls Cosmo's comment on his poetry in *Castle Warlock*, 'to him the end of things never came; nothing that had an end was worth employing his art upon (p. 327). The implication of MacDonald's realistic fiction, as of his fantasy, is that 'we know nothing about the ends of things - only the beginnings' (*Weighed and Wanting*, p. 284).

The frontier between the fantastic and the familiar in MacDonald's fiction, it seems, is not so clear as first appears. Thus much of what will be said in the rest of this thesis about texts which all agree are fantasy writings might well be applied to the apparently realistic works. I shall be arguing that the importance of MacDonald's fantasy lies in its 'transfiguring' potential. Our spiritual development is nurtured by fantasy as we seek to make sense of it in our own life-stories with which that fantasy elides. By highlighting how precarious is the distinction between the realistic and the fantastic in MacDonald's more conventional fiction I am not modifying this claim but suggesting the possibility that this apparently more realistic writing can sometimes function in the same way. As David Robb has concluded,

> MacDonald, we are told, was forced by economic necessity to produce the sort of fiction which would sell: he was either blind to, or ignored, the aesthetic difficulties involved. I think that the truth was quite different, and that what seem at first glance, to be realistic novels are designed as subversive attempts to alter our sense of reality and of ourselves (Robb, 1985, p. 36).[7]

The forms of fantasy

Attempts to categorise fantasy are necessarily rough and ready. The broad classification proposed by Sheila Egoff (1988) will prove helpful as a framework for considering the forms of MacDonald's fantasy.

Egoff first draws attention to the deep roots of fantasy in 'myth', 'legend' and 'folklore', material retold for generations by word of mouth before ever being put in writing.[8] Egoff prefers to reserve the term 'fantasy' (applying the term more narrowly than I have chosen

to) for written fantasy. 'Fantasists shape their stories through artifice' (p. 4). The matter of such fantasy, its employment of the marvellous, has much in common with that handed down by oral tradition but it is the narrator's private vision we are now invited to share, not 'the public dream' (p. 4). Egoff distinguishes a series of sub-genres of fantasy, two of which, the literary fairy tale and epic fantasy, remain close to the source of fantasy in material originally handed down orally. The literary fairy tale imitates the traditional form but the substance of the tale is imbued with the author's individuality. The epic fantasy, conceived on a grander scale, relates closely to the legend and its great theme is the unending conflict between good and evil.

Turning to MacDonald, the title *Dealings with Fairies* and the subtitle of *Phantastes, A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*, indicate that, in these works at least, he is adopting the form of the literary fairy tale. Not all of MacDonald's fantasy, however, can be so readily placed in this category. Indeed *Phantastes* itself in its complexity, in its intense moral seriousness, in its haunting numinous quality (which made such an impact on C. S. Lewis[9]) is something more than most fairy tales. *Lilith* is conceived on so large a scale, in the dimensions of the moral and spiritual struggle it explores if not in its actual length, that it is more epic fantasy than fairy tale. Again, the two *Princess* books are not easily contained within the category of the fairy tale. Taken together, and above all taking into account the terrifying conclusion of *The Princess and Curdie*, they have an epic quality. Moreover within MacDonald's non-realistic fiction there are differences of degree in the extent to which fantasy dominates. Apart from the character of North Wind herself and the adventures Diamond experiences in her company much of *At the Back of the North Wind* is realistic in its treatment of its themes and characters.

Using Egoff's classification I suggest that the literary fairy tale and the epic fantasy may be seen as the two poles between which all MacDonald's fantasy is to be located. A work such as *The Golden Key* would be an example of the first category, *Lilith* of the second. But the works which fall between these two poles are on a continuum and any attempt to categorise them more exactly would be artificial and contribute little to our appreciation of them.

The function of fantasy

If the reading or hearing of fantasies and fairy tales is indeed educationally beneficial how is that benefit effected? In brief, how do these stories work for our good?[10] The quest is not for some all-embracing hermeneutic of fantasy. Nor can we be drawn at this point into discussing how fairy tales can be used in the classroom, a question that has generated its own extensive literature.[11] Our interest is in the potential of MacDonald's fantasy, and of fantasy like it, to promote spiritual development. We shall be better placed to do so if first we take note of some different accounts of how fantasy has been held to serve human well-being and consider how adequately these approaches capture the particular character of MacDonald's fantasy. The classification I propose can be sketched only with a very broad brush but I hope that the distinctions suggested will at least allow an orderly discussion.[12]

Didactic fantasy

What is taught by 'didactic fantasy' are messages the author intends or, as is more often the case with traditional tales where all traces of authorship are lost, messages deemed correct by the storyteller. The function of didactic fantasy is to teach a lesson and, as we saw in Chapter Three, there are those who, with varying degrees of sophistication, interpret MacDonald's fantasy in this way.

Maria Tatar (1992) has drawn attention to the way in which cultures and what she describes as 'interpretive communities' condition the way in which fantasy is read. The *Volksmärchen*, the orally-transmitted folk tale, often underwent a transformation when it came to be published. The original tale was frequently laced with much scatological and bawdy detail. The story might well make some moral point but the purpose of the story was as much to entertain as to instruct. Unfortunately the story finds its way into print at a period in history when there is growing market for books for children designed for their moral improvement. Pressure from the 'interpretive community' of parents demanding what is edifying means that the old story has to be sanitised, drained of its rude drollery and made to conform to the model of the exemplary or cautionary tale. Tatar devotes a whole chapter to what she describes as 'the pedagogy of fear in fairy tales' (pp. 22-50). The original folk version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, for example, is a racy story rich in earthy detail. It

becomes in Perrault's *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* and in Grimms' *Rotkäppchen,* what many a traditional tale thus refashioned becomes, a tale told to warn the young child of the perils of disobedience.[13]

The modern reader is likely to deplore this conscription of the fairy tale for purposes which seem contrary to its essential character. But what is taking place here is a process which inevitably occurs when a text is interpreted within a particular 'interpretive community' and of course there is nowhere else, no culturally unconditioned location, where that notional 'essential character' of a text can be identified. The employment of fairy tales for didactic purposes in the later Victorian period may well have been crude and clumsy. But we all belong to one 'interpretive community' or another and that community will shape our reading of the texts we take up and retell.

My purpose is to enquire whether MacDonald's fantasy can aid the promotion of spiritual development. To declare this aim is to recognise that I too am approaching fantasy as a member of an 'interpretive community', that of the adult educationalist. This is a highly specific community and far narrower than that of the company at the fireside where young and old alike once enjoyed far-fetched tales without worrying too much about what they meant. As a member of that community, still more as the writer of this thesis, I am as much interested in the pedagogical potential of fantasy as a Victorian parent. There is more in this study about the formative character of fairy tales than about what fun they are. Is this project then leading towards the rehabilitation of the didactic fairy tale?

Apart from that possibility, that to explore the educational potential of fantasy is implicitly to accept it as a didactic genre, there are also lingering misgivings about MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales themselves. Many readers of MacDonald turn in relief from his 'realistic' novels to his fantasy, glad of the respite from the incessant moralising, welcoming the freedom to make their own response to a narrative which does not impose its meaning. But some critics contend that that freedom is more apparent than real. Manlove (1975) finds deep fault-lines in the structure of MacDonald's fantasy. MacDonald, in Manlove's view, cannot finally let his work go. He remains the Victorian moralist who has to retain

intellectual control. Meaning is still imposed on the narrative for the readers to take or leave rather than what has to be constructed by them. On this view MacDonald's fantasy, as much as the rest of his fiction, is essentially didactic. If that were so its potential usefulness in any programme of spiritual development would be limited. At best it would serve as a quarry for material, whimsical and fey, to illustrate the messages asserted more plainly in the rest of his writing.

This study will escape the charge that it restores to favour the didactic fairy tale if it succeeds in defending two autonomies - that of the text and that of the reader. There can be no finally authoritative reading of the text, neither the author's nor of the interpretive community's. All readings are provisional and subject to revision in the light of subsequent rereading. The autonomy of the reader precludes anyone else exercising pedagogical control over what he or she elicits from the fantasy or fairy tale. We shall continue to contend that such narratives as MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales are valuable pedagogical material. But I hope that nothing in this study contests the reader's freedom to make of them what she will - though that freedom is always subject, according to MacDonald, to the inexorable principle that 'the laws of the spirit of man must hold, alike in this world and in any world he may invent' (*A Dish of Orts*, p. 316).

Therapeutic fantasy

In using the term 'therapeutic fantasy' I refer to fantasy understood as promoting health and psychological well-being. Thus understood, the dominant interpretative paradigms for explaining the function of fantasy have been those of the Freudian and the Jungian psycho-analytical schools.

The most influential study of fantasy to rely on the insights of the Freudian school of psychology is Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976). Bettelheim concentrates on the value of fairy tales in the bringing up of children. The fairy tale touches the inner life of the child, reaching more deeply and proving more enriching than any other reading material. It acknowledges the shadow side of existence, the dark within. By inviting the child to identify imaginatively with the protagonists of its narrative in their struggle to overcome evil

the fairy tale enables the child to address and to begin to resolve the turmoil of menacing and potentially destructive subconscious pressures. Willhauck (1991) neatly summarises Bettelheim's understanding of how fantasy functions. 'When the demons are dealt with or tamed in a story, the children can find hope for taming their own demons' (p. 168). In relying heavily on the concepts of Freudian psychology in interpreting the fairy tale Bettelheim's book, as Tartar observes, 'captures more accurately than any other volume what our own culture has wanted to find in fairy tales' (1992, p. xvii). Thus Hansel and Gretel become clients 'in need of therapeutic intervention that will turn them from helpless creatures into self-sufficient adults' (p. xviii). Understood in this way it follows that the fairy tale must have a happy ending.[14]

Here then is one compelling account of how fantasy serves spiritual development. Jack Zipes, whose exposition of the fairy tale as utopian tract we come to shortly, has subjected Bettelheim's approach to searching criticism (Zipes, 1979, pp. 160 - 182). Zipes draws attention to what he sees as the fundamental inconsistencies in Bettelheim's methodology. The child, according to Bettelheim, must be allowed to make his or her own response to the fairy tale. For the therapeutic function of the fairy tale to be effective there must be no adult intervention. But Bettelheim's Freudian orthodoxy requires that the child's understanding of the fairy tale must conform to the predetermined Freudian reading the fairy tale requires.

I have already drawn attention to some of the Freudian approaches to MacDonald and noted how, at least in the less reconstructed of them (the 'quest for the breast' criticism), the prioritising of theory leads to predetermined conclusions. Much of Zipes's criticism of Bettelheim could be applied to the thorough-going Freudian readings of MacDonald's work proposed by Wolff (1961), Holbrook (1983,1984), or Knoepflmacher (1998). But we also saw in Chapter Three that there are less fundamentalist Freudian readings of MacDonald's fantasy. I have particularly highlighted Adrian Gunther's sensitive discussion of *Little Daylight* in which recourse to Freud is only one of a number of critical approaches adopted. Gunther reminds us that, in its original context in *At the Back of the North Wind*, this is a tale told in a children's hospital. It is a story told for its power to heal, an account of a

process by which what is divided in an individual's experience, the conscious 'daylight' realm and the unconscious 'nighttime' realm, are reconciled. But that process - and here is the crucial point to which we shortly return - remains unconcluded. Gunther's use of a Freudian approach, not as the master key but as one hermeneutic tool among others, is exemplary (Gunther, 1995).

The leading Jungian critic of the fairy tale is Marie-Louise von Franz (1995, 1996, 1997). Von Franz sees fairy tales as 'the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes' and claims that they 'represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest and most concise form' (1996, p. 1).This estimate of the importance of fairy tales rests on the acceptance of the fundamental Jungian psychological concepts - 'the collective unconscious', 'the archetype', the *animus* and *anima*, the process of 'individuation', among them. Von Franz insists that if the home of the 'archetype' is the collective *unconscious* then it is absurd to attempt to exhibit it. Its content is not to be captured in intellectual terms. So it is with the fairy tale. 'The fairy tale itself is its own best explanation' (p. 1).

Von Franz is well aware of the paradox of maintaining in a succession of books about them that such tales best speak for themselves. Her response to that criticism is to argue that the interpreter, schooled in the skills of Jungian analysis, acts as a facilitator enabling the reader to bring to the surface what for him or her is the buried significance of the story much as the analyst helps the subject to make sense of his or her dreams (Von Franz, 1996, pp. 37 - 39).

My earlier discussion of different approaches to MacDonald's work illustrated how the Jungian model proves more helpful in interpreting MacDonald's fantasy than the Freudian. I particularly emphasised what Edmund Cusick (1988) has recognised, that a conceptual framework of universal truth is more hospitable to MacDonald's insights than that of individual neurosis. We recall some of the major Jungian emphases. The immense importance attached to symbol and myth and their potential to contribute to the process of human flourishing; the fact that we are more than bodies at the mercy of physical impulses;

the role of religious imagery not to assert doctrine but to invoke dimensions of the self and its destiny; the notion of the 'shadow' representing the hidden and repressed aspects of the personality that must be recognised accepted and integrated; the whole notion of human development as a continuing process; the close association between the symbols of fantasy and the matter of dreams - all these Jungian insights add to our understanding of the fantasy's potential to nurture spiritual development and resonate powerfully with the reading of MacDonald to which we are being drawn in this study.

But reservations remain. As with Freudian interpretations, the Jungian reading of fairy tales ceases to be persuasive when too much is claimed for it, when every detail of a story has to be expounded within the categories endorsed by the one controlling 'interpretive community'. Jungian analysis, although more useful a tool than the Freudian, remains one hermeneutic instrument among many.

The question of whether the function of MacDonald's fantasy is in some sense therapeutic sends us back to what is often dismissed as one of MacDonald's less successful publications, the early novel, *Adela Cathcart*.

Adela Cathcart is mysteriously ill. The new young doctor Henry Armstrong believes that her illness is rooted in deep discontent, a malaise of the mind and spirit that has led to her physical symptoms and which might prove fatal. His opinion about such sufferers is that 'without good spiritual food to keep the spiritual senses healthy and true, they cannot see the things about them as they really are' (p. 59). His diagnosis is that her sickness is spiritual. Her spiritual constitution is naturally strong but she has been 'fed on slops', her 'theological nourishment' having been 'no better than husks'. The treatment he recommends is that she should be told stories. She will 'relish' such stories and they will prove to be 'nourishment of the spiritual life' (p. 75). Most of the tales told to her by different members of the circle, gathering night by night over the Christmas holiday in her father's home, are fairy tales and they have the therapeutic effect the doctor predicted.

The plot of *Adela Cathcart* allows MacDonald to include a string of fairy tales, parables

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and poems, some of which had already appeared in periodicals. The story-line is hardly persuasive and might be seen merely as an artificial literary device permitting MacDonald to bundle together for publication an ill-related assortment of occasional pieces lying on his desk. But however flawed *Adela Cathcart* is as a novel, this criticism fails to take account of the observations MacDonald introduces into the conversation of his characters about human ills and the healing potential of fairy tales. 'All our ailments,' MacDonald has one of his characters say, 'have a moral cause' (p. 74). MacDonald refutes the suggestion that any individual illness is always the consequence of the sufferer's wrongdoing. But he does claim that 'the operation of mind on body is far more immediate' than we have assumed and that what is medicine for the mind may be beneficial for the body too. If for MacDonald fairy tales have healing properties it is because 'even if wholly fictitious, a good story is wholly true' (p. 85) and because 'all true things tend to healing' (p. 60). We meet too the suggestion that the function of fantasy is akin to that of music for 'harmony and health are all one' (p. 53).

MacDonald certainly recognises the therapeutic potential of fantasy. Had the theme of MacDonald's *Adela Cathcart*, that fantasy is for our healing, been no more than a thread to tie a few stories together he would hardly have dedicated the novel to 'John Rutherford Russell, physician to the Homoeopathic Hospital'.[15] But to recognise MacDonald's high view of the healing properties of a good story does not mean that we must take 'the therapeutic fairy tale' as the controlling model by which we interpret all his fantasy, still less that we should insist on trying to decode his fantasy in terms of a particular psychological school, whether Freudian, Jungian, or any other.[16]

Utopian fantasy

Fantasy and fairy-tales are often characterised as timeless and ahistorical, as exercising a universal appeal. The circumstances of their composition on this view do not matter. This view is challenged by Jack Zipes (1979, 1983, 1988, 1995, 1999, 2000) who insists that the writing of fairy tales is part of a social process reflecting continuing conflicts in society over power and social relations. Such tales, Zipes claims, are ideological constructs shaped by existing social patterns but also by the longing that those patterns might be changed.

They contain 'the wish-fulfilment and utopian projection of the people' (Zipes, 1979, p. 6), the aspiration for a better life. Thus they demand a political understanding.

Zipes recognises that the fairy tale can be drained of its subversive dynamic. He sees this happening in the emergence of the literary fairy tale, a process in which educated writers appropriated the oral folk tale and converted it into a commentary and tract on contemporary morals and manners. Once potentially the source of inspiration for radical social change the fairy tale is now used to reinforce the ideology and to serve the socialising objectives of the privileged elite. Originally socially subversive, it has now become the instrument of social control. The utopian fairy tale is reduced to the didactic fairy tale.

Not all fairy tales, however, were turned into tools for teaching the young to conform. Zipes argues that the German Romantics 'seized upon the fairy tale to convey their visions of a new social order' (1979, p. 54). The vision of such tales is not escapist, however fine the border line may be between an escapism which encourages flight from the existing order and a utopianism which summons the reader to transform it. Zipes notes certain characteristics of the German Romantic fairy tale, characteristics at once recognisable in such a tale as *Phantastes*. 'One is taken aback by the formlessness, apparent lack of design, and open-endedness of the Romantic fairy tale. Perhaps one should say "challenged"' (p. 60). Zipes says of such tales 'The boundlessness of (their) form and the open problematic endings suggest possibilities for human emancipation which could be *realized*' (Zipes's italics) (p. 61).

We have seen the writer within this tradition who most influenced MacDonald was Novalis. Zipes argues that in the fairy tales of Novalis the features of the imagined idealised world are intended to delineate 'the possible *historical* dimensions of the real world' (again, the emphasis is Zipes's) (p. 75). In this sense Novalis's affirmation that history must become a fairy tale is as down-to-earth a claim as the words that meant so much to MacDonald, 'Unser Leben ist kein Traum aber es soll und wird vielleicht einer werden'. (*Our life is no dream but it ought to become one and perhaps will.*)

Zipes's understanding of the fairy tale as essentially a utopian tract owes much to his

reading of Bloch's seminal work *Das Prinzip Hofnung* (*The Principle of Hope*, 1995). Bloch's Marxist faith was that human beings could shape their destiny to conform to their deepest longings and needs. Zipes quotes a passage from *The Principle of Hope* in which the vision of the coming good is invoked in the imagery by which MacDonald too spoke of the best which is to be '...something comes into being in the world that shines into everyone's childhood and where no one has yet been - home' (Zipes, 1979, p. 129). Bloch often refers to fairy tales. Zipes, while sharply critical of Bloch's failure, as he sees it, to recognise the cultural conservatism of many tales in which roles may be reversed without any shift of oppressive structures, nevertheless claims that he 'sheds light on the utopian function of fairy tales in a manner unsurpassed by contemporary commentators' (p. 137). His great insight, according to Zipes, is to identify a deep sense of unrest at the heart of the fairy tale. The experienced conditions of the protagonist, typically the underdog, are intolerable and must be changed. Zipes finds much that resonates with Bloch's utopianism in a writer of a very different political and religious persuasion, J. R. Tolkien. Fairy tales are serious stories for Tolkien because, in his view, they are told and heard in a shared longing that they will come true. 'There is the primal desire at the heart of *Faerie*: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder' (Tolkien, 1964, p. 19). For both Bloch, the Marxist, and Tolkien, the Christian, fantasy 'is informed by a chiliastic perspective of a redeemed humanity' (Zipes, 1979, p. 146).

MacDonald is a writer whom Zipes discusses. He claims that MacDonald's fantasy is about social injustice and the need for social change. For example, the depiction of the corruption of Gwyntystorm in *The Princess and Curdie* is a picture of what MacDonald deplored in nineteenth-century England. Zipes finds in MacDonald's work the first hint of the conscious social protest which will more strongly inform the fantasy of Charles Kingsley and William Morris. MacDonald, he contends, 'made a major effort to expand the discourse of fairy tales' (Zipes, 1983, p. 111). Or as he has recently argued, 'MacDonald often turned the world upside down and inside out in his fairy tales to demonstrate that society as it existed was based on false and artificial values' (Zipes, 1999, p. 125).

The importance of Jack Zipes's achievement in alerting us to the social and political context of the composition, transmission, and use of fairy tales cannot be overstated. He has made

us think again about MacDonald's work. He forbids us either to elevate MacDonald's fantasy above history or to suggest that the development of the spirit described and fostered by his fantasy is 'the flight of the alone to the alone'. Nevertheless I would claim that his representation of MacDonald as a writer of utopian fantasy needs to be qualified.

MacDonald is certainly a utopian in the sense that he is inspired by a vision of the coming good. And most certainly he is driven by that 'deep sense of unrest'. His determining disposition is hope and to that extent a utopian paradigm clearly accommodates his major fantasy writing. Whether that fantasy, as well as summoning the individual to undertake his or her spiritual journey in hope, is also socially subversive is more questionable. There is much in MacDonald's work about the lives subject to poverty and about those, such as Robert Falconer, who seek to alleviate their circumstances - MacDonald remains the disciple as well as the friend of Maurice and Scott - but there is less about the social structures which perpetuate such conditions.[17] Zipes sees corruption of Gwyntystorm as emblematic of social conditions MacDonald is challenging but it is a more natural reading of the grim ending of that tale to see the destruction of the city, on which such high hopes had been set, as MacDonald's warning that all our penultimate social utopias have the sentence of death written across them. The end is always beyond. Thus Zipes's conclusion from the open-endedness of MacDonald fantasies, that they 'suggest possibilities for human emancipation which could be realized', is a misreading of MacDonald insofar as it brings within immediate reach what, in MacDonald's vision, remains deferred.

Transfiguring fantasy

It seems that the models of how fantasy functions so far considered, illuminating as they are in many respects, do not adequately account for the particular power of MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales. I now propose an alternative model. I have coined the term 'transfiguring fantasy' to call attention to what, in my judgement, constitutes the distinctive pedagogical function of MacDonald's writing in this vein.

I take the New Testament story of the Transfiguration (Mark ch. 9 vv. 2-8 and parallels) as a paradigm of the 'transfiguring fantasy' I am discussing. The story relates the witness

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by three privileged disciples of the metamorphosis of Jesus of Nazareth. The vision fades and the witnesses return to the world as ordinarily experienced. But the story is not of their return journey across a frontier which remains in place once they are back. The story - and to call it 'fantasy' is to make no claim about what may or may not have been behind the story historically - is of the dissolution of that frontier. Nothing is any longer as it once seemed. What it all means is not explained but has to be discovered both by those witnesses in their own story, a story which is the continuation of the 'transfiguring fantasy' in which they have participated, *and also by the reader* for whom also the familiar boundaries between the apparent and the transcendent have been subverted by his or her imaginative engagement in the story.

The term 'transfiguring fantasy', is open to the criticism that it defaults to the discourse of Christian piety and that therefore it is wrong to introduce it into the vocabulary of spiritual pedagogy which we have insisted is 'broader than religious'. It is however precisely because of its religious resonances that this term is to be preferred over such a phrase as, say, 'transforming fantasy'. Religious imagery retains its evocative power and for that reason is to be welcomed even if its referential character is in question as Mike Newby, a scholar wholly committed to a secular understanding of spirituality, has argued (1997).[18]

The claim that fantasy transfigures is not merely that it returns the reader to the real world with a quickened understanding of its character and its demands. On that view all that would be required for the appreciation of the fairy tale or fantasy would be a momentary 'suspension of disbelief'. 'Fantasy,' Egoff argues,'is not meant to keep us in a never-land of the unreal but to return us to reality with a fresh vision of our own world and ourselves' (1988, p. 15) or, as Michael Green has it,'children need to be able to go into their inner worlds...and to be able to come back again' (1996, p. 20). But something more disturbing is being suggested by transfiguring fantasy. It is that such fantasy subverts the very distinction between the real and the unreal that previously had seemed to serve us well. Transfiguring fantasy, as I shall continue to use the term, acts as a solvent of what had seemed the fixed and impermeable frontiers between the imagined world, that of the fantasy or fairy tale, and the world of the reader or hearer. It follows that the reader's imaginative

engagement in the story does not abruptly cease with its last line. The world of the narrative has elided with the reader's own and he or she must pick up its thread and obey its demands in the continuing narrative of his or her own life-story. The story is open-ended, not merely in the trivial sense that it is open to speculation what will happen next to the *dramatis personae*, but for the far more serious reason that the story leaves unfinished business which I, the reader, must take up.

I have suggested in Chapter Two that behind the fantasy of MacDonald lies the work of Novalis in which an intense sense of *Erwartung* (*expectation*) is complemented by the promise of *Erfüllung* (*fulfilment*) but which defers that fulfilment beyond the last line of the unclosed narrative. The hermeneutic task of making sense of the text one has been reading is caught up into the task of seeking the fulfilment of the story one goes on to live.

A number of important studies of MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies support an interpretation of their function along these lines but, in my view, do not always follow through the logic of the argument they develop. In a study resistant to summary Cynthia Marshall (1989) reflects on the problematic features of *The Golden Key*. For our purpose the importance of her article is the suggestion that the key to the narrative's meaning is found 'through a kind of narrative self-referentiality ' (p. 24). Our search for the story's meaning is a quest like that of the characters. Marshall refers to 'the drawing of the reader into the process of the story' (p. 24). The key in the story does not symbolise a solution of the tale's enigmas, only the continuing quest for that solution. The journey, for Tangle at least, seems endlessly and needlessly prolonged. Mossy's relatively simpler journey corresponds to the simpler, perhaps simplistic, interpretations of the story. But the focus remains on Tangle's more arduous path which is ours too as we seek to make sense of her journey.

This line of interpretation is to be welcomed but it can be taken further. The protagonist's quest for meaning is a commentary on, and merges with, my search as reader for the significance of the story, not only of the story I am reading but the story - my story - which will continue when I have put the book down.[19]

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The title of an article by Howard (1989), *In Search of Spiritual Maturity - George MacDonald's Phantastes*, promises a reading of the text relating closely to our research questions. So it transpires. Howard looks first at 'the tales within a tale' in *Phantastes*, two stories interposed in the narrative which for some readers threaten its integrity. Howard makes the telling point that by inserting the tales into his narrative MacDonald is offering a paradigm 'illustrating the powerful and beneficial influence that imagination can wield over the inner life of the reader' (p. 281). Anodos is absorbed in the stories he reads and he learns from them. 'Whatever text he might chose to read...he finds himself actively participating in it until the story becomes his' (p. 280). So too he is caught up in, and will learn from, his experiences in fairy land - as indeed we the readers of MacDonald's story are drawn into it and by our imaginative participation profit from it. The stories teach the same lesson that Anodos must learn in his journey and which we the readers learn as we journey with him. 'That lesson is love...caritas, the self-sacrificing love that Christ manifested toward man and which every spiritual wayfarer should strive to emulate' (p. 282).

The importance of Howard's discussion is not so much in her interpretation of the Christian 'moral' of *Phantastes*, as she sees it, as in the attention given to the stories within the story. I find myself not only reading the stories Anodos reads but reflecting with him on the process of reading, on how the text engages him and transforms him, a reflection which not only implicitly directs my own reading of the text in my hands but also - again taking the argument a stage further - challenges me to make sense of my own life-story.

MacDonald's fantasies have been described as examples of 'meta-fiction'. Meta-fiction is 'self-conscious' fiction, 'drawing attention to its status as artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (Waugh, 1984, p. 2) In an important study Muirhead (1992) makes sensitive use of this concept in his discussion of *Phantastes* which, like Marshall, he sees as a 'self-referential' work. Muirhead traces the change in the disposition of the narrator Anodos. Initially he surrenders to the drift of events. Subsequently he becomes more pro-active. 'This change,' Muirhead suggests, 'reflects *and to some extent nurtures* a similar change which has already begun to occur in the reader'

(p. 38). (The italics are mine.) Muirhead is referring to the way the story constrains the reader to rouse himself from a passive unreflecting surrender to the current of the fantasy and to make some effort to decode it. But again I would wish to extend the argument. The reader is drawn into an interpretative quest not only to make sense of the protagonist's story but to reflect on his or her own.

Adrian Gunther's studies of MacDonald's fantasy (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996) imply that they function in this way. Gunther (1994) argues that in *Phantastes* we do not have two worlds but multiple worlds which invade each other. She emphasises how elusive and unstable are the language and the imagery of the narrative describing Anodos's journey - indeed how, in attempting to describe such a journey, language necessarily fails. Gunther recognises the self-reflexive quality of this open-ended text. We are reading a text about reading and what reading can do, not least about the act of reading I am engaged in here and now with this text held in my hands. But again the unstated corollary follows, that that interpretative process must be taken up into the task of making sense of the 'text' of my own life.

I have already referred to Adrian Gunther's admirably balanced reading of *Little Daylight* (1995) in which Freudian insights are welcomed but not to the exclusion of other interpretative approaches. Gunther recognises that the therapeutic process, of which this charming fairy tale is the parable, is open-ended. 'The ending is a beginning,' she writes, 'a new stage in the process, a new birth' (p. 116). The sense of a benign destiny is powerful but any happy ending for the prince and the princess is beyond the last page of the story. But that happy ending - to pursue the implication of Gunther's argument - is also for the reader beyond what is, thus far, the last page of his or her own story. The function of 'transfiguring fantasy' is to urge the reader to seek for the tale's resolution in the unfolding narrative of his or her own life.

Stephen Prickett's invitation to see MacDonald fantasies as an original refashioning of the German *Bildungsroman* (Prickett, 1990) is an approach to MacDonald's writing close to that suggested by the concept of 'transfiguring fantasy'. The *Bildungsroman* does not only describe the formation of its protagonists; it seeks also the formation of the reader. Placed

in a realistic setting the conclusion of the typical *Bildungsroman* is portentous and implausible. MacDonald's achievement in relocating the narrative in an alternative world, yet in a world whose boundary with this one is blurred and permeable, is to free the tale of its didactic simplicities and to enhance its moral power. The implication of Prickett's suggestive argument is that the formative process, unconcluded for the protagonist in his story, continues in that of the reader.

The use of the term 'transfiguring fantasy' calls attention to how MacDonald's fantasy functions as potentially formative narrative. His transfiguring fantasy dissolves the barriers between worlds in which the daily business of life is played out and worlds entered imaginatively. Above all it subverts the distinction between the worlds of narrative and reader. The unclosed narrative I read merges with my own story and my spiritual development is shaped as I live out the continuation of that narrative, with all its unresolved enigmas and unfulfilled demands, in the turning pages of the tale my life is telling.

'The Fantastic Imagination'

George MacDonald himself discloses little of what motivated him to turn to fantasy, to abandon in his tales in this mode the discourse which it might be supposed would allow him to speak more plainly of what mattered most to him. He was repeatedly requested to explain his fairy tales but, at least in print, no such explanation was forthcoming until late in his career he was persuaded to add an explanatory preface to the American edition of his 'so-called Fairy Tales'. It is with this essay, *The Fantastic Imagination,* he concludes his *A Dish of Orts.*

What emerges most powerfully from this essay was MacDonald's extreme reluctance to yield to the pressure to explain his fairy tales. He tells his readers that if they wish to know what a fairy tale is they should read *Undine.* He insists that, however fantastic the events and characters of an invented world may be, there must be an inner consistency to its natural laws as there is to our own. It is otherwise with the moral law.

> The laws of the spirit of man must hold alike in this world and in any world
> he may invent...In physical things a man may invent; in moral things he must
> obey (*A Dish of Orts,* p. 316).

MacDonald has an imaginary interlocutor pressing him to say whether a fairy tale must have a meaning. His response is that a fairy tale must mean many things. 'One will read one meaning in it, another will read another' (p. 316). It is there 'not so much to convey a meaning but to wake a meaning' (p. 317). As such it is not an allegory, a form which for MacDonald is 'a weariness to the spirit'.

Fairy tales work on us like nature and like music.

> A fairytale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away... The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way' (p. 319).

Fairy tales must speak for themselves or not at all. MacDonald is impatient with the demand that he reduce to a series of propositions what a propositional discourse can never encompass.

> I say again, if I cannot draw a horse, I will not write THIS IS A HORSE under what I foolishly meant for one... So long as I think my dog can bark, I will not sit up to bark for him (p. 321).

MacDonald leaves it to labourers such as the present writer to analyse how his fantasy functions and how it shapes us.

> If a writer's aim be logical conviction, he must spare no logical pains, not merely to be understood, but to escape being misunderstood; where his object is to move by suggestion, to cause to imagine, then let him assail the soul of his reader as the wind assails an aeolian harp. If there be music in my reader, I would gladly wake it. Let fairy tale of mine go for a firefly that now flashes, now is dark, but may flash again. Caught in a hand which does not love its kind it will turn to an insignificant ugly thing, that can neither flash nor fly (p. 321).

Summary

We recall the primary questions prompting this study. What understanding of spiritual development and its promotion emerges from MacDonald's writings and how do his fantasy writings function pedagogically? Earlier chapters have shown how MacDonald's original reflection on themes which had preoccupied the Romantic writers shaped his understanding of spiritual development and what fosters it. We are taught by nature. Childhood is a condition to which we must aspire. The imagination denies us rest, ceaselessly impelling us to reach beyond our grasp. The one great theme of all MacDonald's work is, to use

Priestley's phrase, our 'being and becoming'. Nearly everything he writes is commentary on this process. We have seen how in the non-theistic discourse of his fantasy, as much as in the theistic discourse of his realistic fiction, his major interest remains spiritual development and what fosters it. For the educationalist, however, seeking to formulate a 'spiritual pedagogy' an equally significant aspect of MacDonald's fantasy, as this chapter has sought to show, is that it itself promotes the process it illuminates. Moreover it does so in a manner not to be fully accounted for by the more familiar descriptions of how fantasy functions. MacDonald's fantasy is transfiguring. It subverts the distinctions by which we ordinarily order and contain our experience, above all the boundary between the texts we read and the lives we lead. Our spiritual development is promoted as we work out the sequel and discover the meaningful pattern of the unclosed narrative we put down in the lives we take up.

This claim can only be supported by reference to specific examples of MacDonald's unclosed fantasy. How MacDonald's fantasy serves, not only as commentary on the process of spiritual development, but also as transfiguring fantasy will be illustrated by the texts we discuss in the next two chapters.

Endnotes

1. Jennifer Wallace, noting how the waters rise so impossibly rapidly in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, draws attention to the extent to which fantastic elements invade purportedly realistic writing and to the demands which this threatened breakdown of familiar critical categories places on a reader.

> If an author has provided certain factual details in order to ground his or her story in some identifiable world, then we expect those details to connect logically and for the world to make sense. If they do not, we perhaps feel cheated and we become confused about the nature of the representation. Is this realistic fiction? Or is it fantasy? How reliable is the author in whom we have put our imaginative trust? (Wallace, 1998)

2. See Francis Russell Hart's discussion of the mingling of the realistic and the fantastic in MacDonald's fiction. 'For all their rich regional particularity, MacDonald's 'novels' are actually theological romances, where the fantastic and the normal, the ideal and the real, are separated only by semivisible and shifting boundaries' (1978, pp. 100 - 109).

3. The significance of MacDonald's recourse to dialect in his novels is discussed by McGillis (1981). He argues that the dialect itself, quite apart from what is uttered by it, is 'a means of communication, suggesting a purity of feeling associated with pastoral virtues; in short it is a language closer to the source of language, closer to nature, and ultimately closer to God' (p. 45).

4. Scotland was 'a little out of the world'. The comment is Boswell's friend Zélide's and is cited by Karl Miller in a review of a recent biography of Boswell by Peter Martin. Martin emphasises the sheer weirdness of the world, as it seemed to them, which Johnson and Boswell passed through on their journey towards the Hebrides. It was 'a journey from neo-classic lucidity to the sublime and obscure regions at the edges of the planet' (Miller, 1999, p. 3). This sense to the English mind of Scotland as an outlandish region would not have been lost by MacDonald's time.

5. C. S. Lewis noticed how fairy tale elements invade MacDonald's 'realistic' novels. He instances 'the terror of the trees and the wind at the beginning of *W. Cumbermede* (sic) or the lovely journey "up Daurside" in Sir Gibbie' (Letter to Arthur Greeves, 13 May 1946, Hooper, p. 507).

6. The description is strikingly reminiscent of the picture we have of the young Rose La Touche from her mother's letters to the MacDonalds. She writes to Louisa, 'I wish Mr. MacDonald could see her home-life - he would put her in a book' (ALS, Yale, undated). Perhaps he did.

7. Robb has also pointed out, in a study commended and discussed by Prickett, that a number of elements in MacDonald's fiction, both in his fantasy and his conventional novels, which strike the modern reader as 'unrealistic' would not have been so regarded by his first readers (Robb, 1987: Prickett, 1991).

8. Myths reflect pre-literate humanity's attempt to account for what exists and what is experienced - daylight is provided by Apollo's fiery chariot, our mortality is punishment for Adam's primal disobedience. Legends are less supernatural. However much embellished by the marvellous they purport to relate historical events. They narrate the exploits of the hero and their purpose, from one generation to the next, is to constantly renew the community's shared recollection of the hero around whose memory its unity is maintained. Folktales, unlike legends, do not belong to a particular culture. They are 'nomadic' (Northrop Frye, 1976, p. 9; Warner, 1994, p. xvii), appearing in different versions at widely removed times and places. Such tales carry their uncomplicated moral messages but their first purpose is to entertain. The folktale's apparent simplicity often masks subtle and penetrating psychological observation. For Zipes the one 'constant' in the 'oral wonder tale', a characteristic passed on to the literary fairy tale, is *transformation*. Such tales express and respond to the 'hope for change' deeply embedded in the peasant society where these tales were told (Zipes, 2000, xvii).

9. 'It was as though the voice which had called me from the world's end was speaking at my side' (Lewis, 1959, p.145).

10. Of course not everyone agrees that fairy tales do you good. Objections to fairy tales as appropriate educational material focus on two characteristics frequently encountered in them. First, many tales, notably those published by the Grimm brothers, contain much that is cruel and violent and frightening. Secondly, too many of the adult female figures in fairy tales are malice personified. The former objection can be countered, perhaps rather too readily, by the argument that by imaginative engagement with the dimension of evil between the secure covers of a book the child is strengthened to deal with that same dimension - which is both inescapable and often much worse - in 'the real world'. Kimberley Reynolds (1997) argues that children 'need to be scared'. Zipes (1988) probing more deeply, invites us to reflect that these tales of the horrifying abuse children suffer were certainly told by adults and that possibly they were told *for* adults. Fairy tales represent the adult's attempt to resolve ambivalent feelings towards children, notably the guilt and shame of having abused or abandoned them. The latter objection, that the 'wicked stepmother', for example, is a harmful stereotype is not easily answered - particularly if, as Maria Tatar (1992) claims, the 'stepmother' is in fact the all-powerful and always present *mother*. Tatar herself calls for 'new cultural

stories' (p. 228) less linked to the cultural patterns and assumptions reflected in the stories as they have come down to us.

11. Jack Zipes, whose studies of the socio-historical roots of fairy tales have so enriched our understanding of the genre, has himself taken fairy tales into the classroom. His belief in the pedagogical potential of the use of stories in school, fairy tales among them, is affirmed in the title of his account of his work in this field, *Creative Storytelling: Building Community, Changing Lives* (Zipes, 1995).

12. The difficulty in classifying fantasy, whether by criteria of what fantasy is about, or what it is for, or for whom it is written, is illustrated in Colin Manlove's latest study (Manlove, 1999). His 'natural groupings' providing the themes of his successive chapters are 'secondary world fantasy', 'metaphysical fantasy', 'emotive fantasy', 'comic fantasy', 'subversive fantasy' and 'children's fantasy'. Manlove acknowledges that the groups overlap and that some works belong to more than one of them. It is interesting that the one chapter in which Manlove does *not* refer to MacDonald is that dealing with 'subversive fantasy' - the category of fantasy in which Zipes would wish to place MacDonald's work.

13. Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé; avec des Moralitez* was published in Paris in 1697. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published the first of the many editions of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* between 1812 and 1815.

14. The deep fault-lines in Bettelheim's methodology are still more apparent in that of some of his disciples. Purcell-Gates (1989) entitles her study of the use fairy tales in a literacy centre *Fairy Tales in the Clinic: Children Seek Their Own Meaning* but it becomes clear that 'their own meaning' is that which Bettelheim has already asserted to be the message that fairy tales convey. The illogicality of inviting the child to discover for himself or herself meanings over which the adult retains control is still more apparent - though not to the author - in Debra Danielwitz's *Once upon a time... The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Danilewitz, 1991).

15. Russell was one of the three founders of *The British Journal of Homoeopathy*. MacDonald met with others interested in homoeopathy in Russell's Leamington home. Russell died in 1853 while MacDonald was still writing *Adela Cathcart* (Mellon, 1996, pp. 26 - 27).

16. The psycho-therapeutic use of fairy tales is illustrated and discussed in a fascinating work by three Danish scholars, *Symbols of the Soul: Therapy and Guidance through Fairy Tales* in which it is boldly claimed that fairy tales 'have healing power' (Brun, Pedersen, Runberg, 1993, p. 3). The inspiration behind this work is the psychiatrist Murray Cox whose remarkable use of Shakespeare texts in Broadmoor is testimony to the healing potential of great literature (Cox, 1992).

17. A reading of MacDonald's novels can leave us in little doubt that his view of the social order was deeply conservative. 'The wider and more impassable the distinctions of rank...the easier the oneness of the race to assert itself in the offering and acceptance of devoted service. There is more of the genuine human in the relationship between some men and their servants, than between those men and their sons'. (*Malcolm*, p. 91). See also *The Vicar's Daughter*, pp. 156 - 172, where MacDonald has his characters discuss at length what rich and poor should expect of each other without calling in question their respective stations in society.

18. Another religious term offering a powerful conceptual purchase on fantasy is 'sacrament'. For MacDonald a book, any book, is 'a kind of sacrament - an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace' (*The Portent*, pp. 81 - 82). The image is particularly suggestive in considering how fantasy

functions. Fantasy is 'sacramental'. The act of reading is a 'reception'. In reading fantasy what is received are the 'accidents' of the story. The 'substance', the meaning, eludes definition but is nevertheless effective. Fantasy is 'a means of grace' making possible a transcendence of self. The use of this imagery suggests that there are limits to our freedom to make what we will of fantasy. Authorial intention does not determine what the text will mean for us but it will exclude readings which are morally inconsistent with it. The sacramental analogy offers a further consideration. There are the warnings in the web of metaphor of sacramental discourse about not receiving 'worthily'. If the fantasy makes no difference to me perhaps I have not read it properly. That fairy tales have a sacramental character has been recognised by Murray Cox whose advocacy of their therapeutic potential I noted earlier (endnote 16). 'Sacraments and fairy tales together form a ferment of ideas and associations, a dialectic demanding discussion' (Brud, Pedesen, Runberg, 1993, p. vii). I hope that my discussion of MacDonald's fantasy is a partial response to that demand.

19. Throughout her paper Marshall attempts to relate her searching analysis to the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew ch. 20, vv. 1 -16). I do not find that these references illuminate her argument. Marshall's understanding of this parable and of the New Testament parables generally would not be supported by most biblical scholars. The connection between the parable and the fantasy is contrived - it is hard to see the parable as in any sense a source of the fantasy - and the important points Marshall makes are only confused by the suggestion.

Chapter Eight

THE 'ENDLESS ENDING'

MacDonald's fantasy writings are reflections on spiritual development. But they are also themselves potentially formative texts, vehicles for promoting the process on which they are commentaries. They are both imaginative accounts of how individuals progress and themselves educative in their potential to foster in the reader the growth in spirit which they portray. Thus we have two aspects of MacDonald's fantasy to consider, the interpretative and the functional and the purpose of this chapter is to discuss both. I attempt both to illustrate how the fairy tales and fantasies describe the process of spiritual development and also to offer evidence from those texts for the claim made in the last chapter that MacDonald's fantasy nurtures what it describes, that its pedagogical role is best understood when it is seen as 'transfiguring fantasy'.

It will not be possible to comment on all of MacDonald's fantasy writing. My argument, will substantially rest on my exposition of *Phantastes*. While there are new insights and emphases in MacDonald's later fantasy, as I hope my discussion will show, most of what has to be said about the bearing of his fantasy on our understanding of spiritual development and its promotion is already implied by this remarkable early work. (Elements of *Phantastes* are anticipated by a still earlier text, *The Singer*. This largely overlooked fragment is briefly considered in Appendix 6.)

Having considered *Phantastes* I shall turn to *The Golden Key*, the most finished of MacDonald's shorter fairy tales. I then comment on *Lilith*, written nearly four decades after *Phantastes*. Finally I add some briefer remarks on some of MacDonald's other fairy tales. There is no space for a detailed critical analysis of the fantasy texts which follow *Phantastes*. My intention is to consider how far those later works endorse *Phantastes* in what they imply about spiritual development and to register the extent to which they too can be characterised as 'transfiguring fantasty'. I defer to the next chapter a discussion of a figure who first appears in *Phantastes* and next in *The Golden Key*, the richly suggestive figure of 'the Wise Woman'.

Phantastes

The process of spiritual development in Phantastes

The approach to spiritual development which we have adopted to guide our reading of MacDonald is that proposed by Jack Priestley in his 1996 Hockerill Lecture.

It will be recalled that Priestley describes 'six aspects of the spiritual as it most affects curriculum matters'. He claims that the spiritual is 'broader than the religious', that it is 'dynamic', and that it concerns our 'being and becoming'. The spiritual is, on his view, 'otherworldly', 'communal' and 'holistic'. This description will prove helpful in seeking to identify what *Phantastes* suggests about the nurture of the spirit. At the same time we shall find that there are aspects of spiritual development implied by the narrative of *Phantastes* which Priestley does not emphasise. We shall thus have reason, as we anticipated might be the case, to extend the model he proposes. The exercise - again this has to be stressed - is not a quest for a definition but for a stronger conceptual purchase on elusive material. The text of *Phantastes* itself acknowledges the impossibility of defining what it describes, a process which draws us into 'that region of phantasy where all is intensely vivid, but nothing clearly defined' (*Phantastes*, ii. p. 52).

The spiritual, Priestley claims, firstly, is 'broader than the religious'. *Phantastes* dispenses altogether with religious terminology in its exploration of the spiritual journey. What is so remarkable about *Phantastes*, as about MacDonald's later fantasy, is that it is the work of someone who, for all his distance from the narrow dogmatism in which he was schooled, will continue elsewhere to describe the spiritual journey in traditional Christian terms. The same writer who eschews the Christian vocabulary in the two profound works which embrace his literary career is the one for whom page after page written during the intervening years serves as a pulpit from which to proclaim a faith couched in familiar Christian categories.

Andrew Wright (1998) has argued, in what we have seen is one of the most substantial contributions to the debate on spiritual development, that the two forms of spirituality, that which seeks 'the emancipation of the individual from any limiting meta-narrative' and that

of 'Christian spirituality grounded in the objective reality of the Trinitarian God', are incompatible. Wright argues that any attempt to accommodate either of these traditions within the structure of the other 'inevitably leads to a reductionism that operates in favour of the recipient' (pp. 83 - 84).

While in *Phantastes* there is certainly an overarching moral order there is no theological meta-narrative and the hints of such a meta-narrative in *Lilith* are perhaps no more than slips of the pen. But - again the point must be stressed - everything which MacDonald wrote apart from his fantasy is informed by an explicit theistic realism.

Let us for the moment accept the Wright dichotomy. The question then posed by the text of *Phantastes* is whether the form of spirituality it explores is primary, the universal experience of the spiritually attentive individual. In which case the spirituality of the novels, the poems, the *Unspoken Sermons*, must be understood as a culturally relative expression of that primary underlying spirituality, a spirituality having no need of the terms of any received religious discourse. Or alternatively is the reductionism - which Wright insists is inevitable - operating in the opposite direction? Is it the spirituality of MacDonald's 'realistic' writing, emphatically proclaiming, however idiosyncratically, the truth of a revealed faith, which is to be seen as primary? If so, *Phantastes* and the rest of MacDonald's writings in that genre are presumably to be read simply as imaginative essays on themes more authoritatively expressed in traditional religious categories.

MacDonald, as we have seen, was himself reticent about his reasons for adopting the mode of fantasy. He bequeaths us the texts, those which speak of the good we must seek in theistic terms and those, such as *Phantastes*, where word of our destiny is carried by the wind in the leaves of a beech tree, and we must come to our own conclusions about the contrast between the discourses regardless of authorial intention. The logic of Andrew Wright's argument is that, as a vehicle for articulating the spiritual, one or other discourse must have the last word.

Unless, that is, the last word belongs to neither discourse.

Here I draw attention to a passage in *Phantastes* which has a critically important bearing on this issue. Anodos in his wanderings comes to a marble palace which contains a great library - an episode to which we shall return later. There he reflects on the process of reading.

> I was trying to find the root of a manifestation, the spiritual truth whence a material vision sprang; or to combine two propositions, both apparently true, either at once or in different remembered moods and to find the point in which their invisibly converging lines would unite in one, revealing a truth higher than either and differing from both; though so far from being opposed to either that it was that whence each derived its life and power (i. pp. 178, 179).[1]

The issue is the relationship of the alternative discourses and what is affirmed by them. The inference I draw from this passage is that neither the language of faith claiming to declare what has been revealed nor that of a discourse dispensing with traditional religious categories is privileged in its capacity to express the spiritual dimension of human experience. The discourses are neither incompatible nor is one to be reduced to the other. Both are vehicles to express what ultimately lies beyond utterance, that reality which continues to beckon the individual beyond whatever stage of the spiritual journey he or she has attained and which validates our attempts, in whatever discourse we adopt, to allude to it.[2] The spiritual is indeed 'broader than the religious'.

Priestley argues, secondly, that 'the most obvious characteristic of the spirit is that it is dynamic'. He reminds us of the traditional images of the spirit - wind, fire, water - which cannot be arrested without ceasing to be themselves. Just as the wind cannot be caught in a net so neither can the spiritual life of an individual - or of a school - be captured by a web of words. In the terms of the opening epigraph from Novalis, there to alert us to how the text is to be read, the narrative of *Phantastes* is 'ein Traumbild ohne Zusammenhang' (*a disconnected dream-picture*). *Phantastes* has a shifting, fluid, unstable, dream-like quality, a quality recognised, if overstated, by Raeper (1987) who claims that the book 'might almost qualify as a stream of consciousness (or rather unconsciousness) novel' (p. 145). The text is a skein of images, very much those which Priestley suggests evoke the dynamic nature of the spirit's development.

Consider such a passage as that which describes the field in fairyland where Anodos finds himself at the start of his adventures,

> ...the grass blades and daisies seemed to wave in a tiny breeze that followed the water's flow; while under the rivulet they bent and swayed with every motion of the changeful current, as if they were about to dissolve with it, and, forsaking their fixed form, become as fluent as the waters (i. p.14).

The images blend and merge, nothing stays as it first appears, the supposedly fixed boundaries between one thing and another prove evanescent. This early passage anticipates the fluid nature of *Phantastes* as a whole, a tale which unfolds less as an ordered plot, more as sequence of eliding scenes, one scene dissolving mysteriously into the next, the logic of their succession eluding both protagonist and reader.

If *Phantastes* is a reflection on spiritual development the implications of its dynamic imagery and of its shifting and apparently randomly ordered scenes are important. First is a point as obvious as it is rarely made. It is that most people's lives are more like that of Anodos than that, say, of the hero or heroine of one of MacDonald's apparently realistic novels. For most of us the trajectory of our inner formation is no more the flight of an arrow than is the succession of the outward accidents of our lives. Our search for a pattern is as baffling as that of Anodos. Secondly, there is the principle which Priestley stresses, that spiritual development cannot be defined. A sharply demarcated pattern for spiritual development is as impossible to construct as a model made of water. Thirdly, the dynamic images of *Phantastes*, images suggestive of dissolving, melting, merging, support the understanding of spiritual development reflected by the story of Anodos as a whole. Spiritual growth is a growth in awareness that the apparently fixed and permanent boundaries to our experience are less substantial than they seem.

Closely related to the dynamic character of spiritual development as Priestley understands it is its focus on 'being and becoming'. Priestley observes that the primary concern of the school in thrall to curriculum requirements is the increase of knowledge. The pupil is there to learn. This, for Priestley, is too narrow a view of the human person and too partial a picture of the educational task. 'The language of education is concerned not just with learning but also with being and becoming'.

So too is the language of *Phantastes*. For McGillis (1990) the theme of both *Phantastes* and *Lilith* is 'a quest for continuous becoming' (p. 31). Adrian Gunther (1994) writes - and the italics are hers, 'All is in the process of *becoming*' (p. 178). That process may, for a time, be a deterioration, even though on MacDonald's view, no individual will finally forfeit the promised good. We see that process, including its reversals and set-backs, in the journey of Anodos with which the reader is invited to identify. 'The basic challenge offered individuals on their life's journeys is to glimpse the sacred process underlying the forms of the adventures that befall them' (p. 177). Thus spiritual development is not an attainment, a high plateau of well-being to which individually or communally we finally arrive. It is always, always, beyond.

Priestley argues, fourthly, that spiritual development must be 'other-worldly'. He deplores the absence from current curricula of 'any concern for what we might term "utopias"'. He laments the fact that 'we have lost our dreams'. Spiritual education, he argues, must seek to repair this loss by inviting us to 'look beyond', to strive for what is not yet. Here Priestley identifies a perspective on spiritual development which is fundamental to MacDonald's vision of the human good and which takes us to the heart of *Phantastes*.

The final collection of MacDonald's sermons, published towards the end of his literary career, was entitled *The Hope of the Gospel* (1892). If we are seeking a single category which can be seen as coordinating MacDonald's vision, underpinning the vast and diverse range of his work, it is that of hope. Roderick McGillis (1990) speaks of the 'eschatological drive' moving in all MacDonald's writing. The promotion of spiritual development according to MacDonald, if rarely expressed so richly as in the dense and subtle texture of *Phantastes*, is always a 'pedagogy of hope'.

Phantastes is suffused with a sense of expectation.

> Yet somehow the whole environment seemed only asleep, and to wear even in sleep an air of expectation. The trees seemed all to have an air of conscious mystery, as if they said to themselves, 'We could an' if we would' (i. pp.19, 20).

Anodos, despite the wrong turns he takes, perseveres in hope. 'Once more I comforted

myself with hope and went on' (i. p.21). The beech tree seems to bear 'the aspect of one who is quite content, but waiting for something' (i. p. 63).

The account of spiritual development we have in *Phantastes* is through and through utopian. Yet little can be said about what constitutes the longed-for utopia. The language of the lowlands of our ordinary experience cannot describe what in his novels MacDonald refers to simply as the 'high countries'.[3] We cannot yet know what it is that beckons us other than that it constitutes our final good. We live in the faith, a faith-claim for the present beyond proof or disproof, that it is no illusion.

The 'ancient dame' in the cottage - she is MacDonald's 'Wise Woman' and the subject of our next chapter - 'knows something, though she must not always tell it, that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress' (ii. p. 115). Anodos will recall this assurance when he has returned to his everyday life. 'I often think of the wise woman in the cottage, and of her solemn assurance that she knew something too good to be told' (ii. p. 215).

The journey of Anodos and of the spiritual quest of which it is the parable is a journey towards sunrise. The sense of a goal which remains undisclosed is contained in a simple telling exchange.

> 'In what direction are you going?' asked the old man.
> 'Eastward,' I replied; nor could I have given him a more definite answer (i.
> p. 17).

Anodos is Everyman whose spiritual path is directed by the intuition that all will at last make sense and by the belief, for the present necessarily unverifiable, that that intuition is to be trusted.

> ...of one thing we may be sure, that this feeling is no cheat; for there is no
> cheating in nature and the simple unsought feelings of the soul (i. p. 155).

This is the premise, unverifiable as it is, on which spiritual development is to be understood and fostered.

As *Phantastes* closes (insofar as it closes at all) the voice in the leaves of the beech tree

promises 'A great good is coming - is coming - is coming to thee, Anodos.' And Anodos responds,

> Yet I know that good is coming to me - that good is always coming; though
> few have at all times the courage and simplicity to believe it (ii. 216-17).

Nearly forty years later, towards the conclusion of *Lilith*, MacDonald will affirm the same hope of the coming undisclosed good.

> Something more than the sun, greater than the light is coming, is coming -
> none the less surely coming that it is long upon the road (p. 339).

Throughout *Phantastes* as through all his work MacDonald maintains his reticence about what answers to this ineradicable *Sehnsucht*, the 'indescribable longing for something, they know not what' (i. p. 191). This much may perhaps be said, that the supreme image of it is 'home' and that the heart of it is relational.

> Many a wrong, and its curing song;
> Many a road and many an inn;
> Room to roam, but only one home
> For all the world to win (i. p. 167).

For once MacDonald's verse is artless and unlaboured.

The heart of it is relational. Anodos dreams, 'of restored friendships; of revived embraces; of love which said it had never died; of faces that had vanished long ago..., of pardons implored and granted...' (ii. p. 78). Thus the coming good is the fulfilment of the self that will be gained only by the transcendence of the self. But even here MacDonald characteristically forbids the inference the last word has been said.

> Self will come to life in the slaying of the self; but there is ever something
> deeper and stronger than it, which will emerge at last from the unknown
> abysses of the soul... (ii. p. 169).

Here we have to modify Priestley's account of spiritual development, valuable as that model is. Priestley maintains that the curriculum must be relevant to 'the concept of a developed human being'. In earlier periods we had the image of 'the renaissance Man' or 'the Christian Gentleman'. Our own changed educational world must still have its 'philosophical ideal', he argues. A reading of *Phantastes*, however, warns against the attempt to offer more than a sketch, and an impressionistic sketch at that, of the developed

person. Such a picture must necessarily be unfinished because the one it depicts always aspires to what always remains beyond.

That to which spiritual development aspires is 'relational', or, taking up the fifth of Priestley's claims, 'communal'. A pedagogy of the spirit entails more than the nurture of the spirituality of the individual. To be sure Anodos's journey in the land of *faerie* is a solitary path. His meetings, however intense or formative, are fleeting encounters. Nevertheless the spiritual process which the narrative explores is not 'the flight of the alone to the alone'; it is rather the finding of one's place within a larger whole, the overcoming of isolation and alienation to become part of what MacDonald describes as 'the community of the centre'. 'The community of the centre of all creation suggests an interradiating connexion and dependence of all the parts' (i. p. 181). As McGillis (1992a) observes, 'Only by breaking of the circles of selfhood can we enter centres of community' (p. 53).

The process of spiritual development, the shattering of those 'circles of selfhood', involves intense conflict, a conflict graphically portrayed in *Phantastes*. MacDonald was a typical Victorian in his stress on the urgency and intensity of the moral struggle in which human beings must engage. That battle for the spirit's allegiance is waged in fairyland too. There good and evil are the same as in our own world and the entail of moral choices just as inexorable. So Anodos through his disobedience is found by his 'shadow'. The consequences of the attendance on him of his shadow are devastating. Flowers die where the shadow falls (i. p. 135). The glory of things fades - the wonderful gives way to the commonplace (i. pp. 137-38). Relationships are soured - former friends are perceived as untrustworthy. Most damaging is the fact that Anodos begins to accept his dark companion, to welcome his shadow's power to disenchant. The destructive capacity of the shadow is portrayed in the account of Anodos's encounter with the little girl with the crystal globe. Anodos, invaded by his shadow -'for the shadow was in my heart as well as at my heels' (i. p. 150) - seeks to touch and then to possess the child's globe. It shatters into fragments.

Spiritual development goes against opposing currents and its promotion will encounter resistance. This is not an incidental aspect of spiritual development but one of the first

things to be said about it. Priestley himself stresses that spiritual wickedness is still to be found in high places. But his account of spiritual development could be extended and strengthened at this point to take full account of the pedagogical implications of a truth which *Phantastes*, and all MacDonald's fantasy, brings home to us so powerfully. It is a point to which we must return.

Priestley's plea, finally, that spiritual development should be 'holistic' reflects his dismay that the educational project, as he sees it, has been reduced to the study of compartmentalised subjects. Educational targets, he fears, are understood and pursued solely as standards to be attained in separate subjects with little consideration given to what it means to be an educated person. McGillis's reflections on the idea of 'the community of the centre', central as he sees it to both structure and theme of *Phantastes*, are illuminating. McGillis (1992a) points out that we have in the narrative an abundance of 'images of enclosure' He instances 'mirrors, lakes, reflections, Shadow, globes, circles'. 'All such centres must be shattered in order that a larger community of the centre be revealed' (p. 53). There are implications here for spiritual development and its nurture. Human wholeness, it seems, is attained only as artificial territorial demarcations - such as are hallowed by school timetables - are no longer seen as sacrosanct and the frontiers between the domains of our experience thrown open. It is wholly typical of MacDonald that the 'larger community' he envisions includes the fauna - and indeed the flora - of the natural world. The flowers and their indwelling fairy presences, the trees, beneficent like the beech or malevolent like the ash or alder, the animals with their distinct personalities - Anodos is in a realm where the border between their lives and his has dissolved. Anodos tells us, 'I was brought into far more complete relationship with the things around me' (i. pp. 72 - 73). And soon he is describing the conversations of the birds and the squirrels, the character of the chattering mice, the taciturn mole, and the phlegmatic hedgehog. Fey and fanciful all this may sound but the implications of such Franciscan principles for the promotion of spiritual development within the curriculum are far-reaching.

Jack Priestley's account of the distinctive aspects of spiritual development has proved a helpful framework for our discussion of the journey of Anodos and what it suggests about

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the spiritual dimension of human experience, although we have seen that his account does at points invite modification. But *Phantastes* does not only trace the path of spiritual development. It is itself an example of formative narrative, narrative with the potential to promote the process it explores. It is, in the term I have coined, an example of 'transfiguring fantasy'.

Phantastes as transfiguring fantasy

A question on which scholars take differing views is whether or not *Phantastes* has any kind of structure. The approach usually taken to this question is to inspect the internal form of the text and to ask whether there is any pattern to it.[4] In this study we will not take sides in this debate, but not because it is unimportant. On the contrary the structure to *Phantastes* must matter to us. It is rather that the approach we are adopting to MacDonald's fantasy suggests that the issue of the structure of *Phantastes* - or of any of his fantasies - is not to be resolved by surveying how its text is internally organised. I take the theme of *Phantastes* to be that of spiritual development, that of Anodos and of the reader too. But in this self-reflexive text pattern and theme cannot be considered apart. Thus to ask whether the book has a plan is to enquire whether life has a purpose. Ultimately - to use the adverb advisedly - the issue of whether or not there is a structure to *Phantastes* can only be resolved in the on-going story of the reader's own life. For the most important feature of the structure of *Phantastes* is that it is an unclosed text. Its finished pattern can only become apparent with the fulfilment of its narrative and the quest for that fulfilment, lying beyond the last line of its last page, is deferred to the reader.

Phantastes has the capacity to function in this way as 'transfiguring fantasy' because it is an unclosed narrative and because the text operates on multiple levels. In the library in the marble palace Anodos tells how he is drawn into an account of 'a world that is not like ours' (i. p. 180). He is stirred by intimations of other worlds and of the possibility of our connecting with them. 'Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship. The community of the centre of all creation suggests an interradiating connexion and dependence of the parts' (i. p. 181). He alludes to 'mysterious revelations of other connexions with the worlds around us' (i. p. 182). The suggestion is of many realms which overlap or interpenetrate, a multiplicity of worlds eliding with each other. Gunther (1994)

writes of the pervading sense of mystery suffusing *Phantastes*, of how 'worlds merge, space shifts, linear time ceases and words fail to convey what is happening' (p. 178).

The fascinating question is what happens to us as readers when we are drawn into such a many-layered text. In claiming that *Phantastes* is an example of 'transfiguring fantasy' we are suggesting that our experience as readers not only corresponds to that of Anodos - it merges with it.

Anodos repeatedly describes how he is caught up into the stories he hears or reads. The marble lady whom Anodos wakened tells him a 'strange tale'.

> It was a tale which brings back a feeling as of snows and tempests; torrents and water-sprites; lovers parted for long, and meeting at last; with a gorgeous summer night to close up the whole. I listened till she and I were blended with the tale; till she and I were the whole history (i. p. 102).

The worlds elide - the world of Anodos the listener, the world of the marble lady who is telling the story, and the world of the lovers who lose and find each other.

Anodos is aware that his own wandering in *faerie* is itself a 'story'. Anodos, enchanted by the song in the leaves and branches of the beech tree, is reluctant to continue his journey but, he says, 'My unfinished story urged me on' (i. p. 69). The realm of his own story blends and merges with that of the stories he imaginatively enters.

To return to the books among which Anodos browses in the library of the marble palace. Anodos describes his experience of the stories he reads there.

> If the book was one of travels, I found myself the traveller...I walked, I discovered, I fought, I suffered, I rejoiced in my success. Was it history? I was the chief actor therein...With fiction it was the same. Mine was the whole story. For I took the place of the character who was most like myself, and his story was mine (i. p. 179).

Anodos relates to us two of the stories he reads in the library. He describes the power of the first of these stories.

> But see the power of this book, that, while recounting what I can recall of its contents, I write as I myself had visited the far-off planet, learned its ways and appearances, and conversed with its men and women (i. p.192).

The story of Cosmo von Wehrstahl is the critical centre of the *Phantastes*. Anodos's

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imaginative identification with Cosmo - 'Of course, while I read it, I was Cosmo, and his history was mine' (i. 198) - is of crucial importance for his own development. Cosmo's story, eliding with his own, is formative for his own moral and spiritual progress.

So the shifting unstable dimensions of *Phantastes* are reflected in the eliding realms of the stories within the story, in the overlapping and interpenetrating worlds of the narrator and of the protagonists of the narratives. As we have seen, this much has been well noted by several scholars (Marshall, 1989; Howard, 1989; Muirhead, 1992; Gunther, 1994, 1995). But to register the distinctive character of *Phantastes* as transfiguring fantasy we must extend their argument. We must follow through the implications of what they have identified as the self-reflexive nature of the text. For this story of multiple realms and of a one who moves imaginatively between them is contained in the book I am holding in my hands. All is a commentary on the process in which I myself am engaged as I turn its pages. The story of Anodos merges with my own just as the stories within the story merged with his.

But that story does not end. On the last page of *Phantastes* Anodos looks ahead in hope.

> Yet I know that good is coming to me - that good is always coming; though few have at all times the courage and simplicity to believe it (ii. 217).

It now falls to the reader to supply an ending to the story which has become his. Anodos is challenged to make sense of a succession of enigmatic encounters. The reader, identifying with Anodos, is caught up in this interpretative task. As the worlds of protagonist and reader merge that undertaking becomes part of the latter's continuing concern to trace some pattern and purpose in his or her own story. Anodos asks, 'Could I translate the experience of my travels there into common life?' (ii. 213) The reader who has journeyed with Anodos must ask exactly the same question. MacDonald has understood the significance of the unclosed narrative of Novalis. The disposition of the reader, as for Anodos, at the point where the latter's story passes over into his or hers, is of *Erwartung*, of expectation. *Erfüllung*, fulfilment, is deferred. The last page of *Phantastes* looks ahead to the undisclosed coming good, the pursuit of which, most of all by attending to what must be done next, is the task that the reader must take up in his or her own continuing story.

Such is the role of 'transfiguring fantasy' in promoting spiritual development.

The dimensions of spiritual development illustrated in *Phantastes* are explored in MacDonald's later fantasy, fantasy which can also be seen as 'transfiguring' in its educative potential. We must now consider, if more briefly, some of this later work.[5]

The Golden Key

The Golden Key is probably MacDonald's most popular fairy tale. In it the lightness of touch which so often deserted MacDonald in his realistic novels is assured. It is a haunting tale, leaving much unanswered, but luminous with hope. Like *Phantastes*, *The Golden Key* is both a commentary on the process of spiritual development and itself a potentially formative text. Its discourse is wholly non-theistic with all that implies, as in *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, for the pedagogical issue of which should be the terms in which a spirituality should be expressed. Again we are led to conclude that the spiritual is, in Priestley's terms, 'broader than the religious' and that it can be articulated in an autonomous discourse independent of that of a religious tradition.

The distinctive tenor of the tale is swiftly established. The story begins with a boy listening to his great-aunt's stories. She tells him the tale of a golden key at the foot of the rainbow. The narrative of the *The Golden Key* is of what unfolds in the realm which this story within a story invokes. The frontier with *faerie* runs close to where the boy lives and, by implication, to where we the readers live. The frontier with this secondary world is near and easily crossed. And it is important that, imaginatively identifying with the protagonists of the story, we do cross it for beyond that border the misconceptions we are prone in our day-to-day world are corrected.

> Things that look real in this country look very thin indeed in Fairyland,
> while some of the things that here cannot stand still for a moment, will not
> move there (p. 124).

As in *Phantastes* the 'dynamic' imagery reflects the themes, such themes as the permeability of the artificial frontiers between what appears and what is, the instability of what is ordinarily experienced, the provisional nature of what we suppose secure, the promise of

meaning and fulfilment only in what is always beyond. Thus the images are of what is insubstantial but elemental, of fire, of air, of water. All is seen as through the rainbow which itself comes and goes. 'The forms appeared irregularly - now one, now many, now several now none' (p. 126).

The Golden Key, short story though it is, succeeds in conveying the sense of spiritual development as a lifelong journey, summoning us through death and beyond. The journey, in Priestley's terms, is 'holistic'. The children sense a kinship with all about them. They derive 'endless amusement from the talk of the animals' (p. 144). Indeed their journey leads them into a still more inclusive relationship with the world about them. We read that when Mossy entered fairyland, 'The trees welcomed him. The bushes made way for him' (p. 125).

The travels of the children, again interpreting them within Priestley's framework, both explore the 'being or becoming' of the children and are 'other-worldly' in their orientation. As in many a fairy tale the narrative concerns a quest. The goal of the quest is not disclosed. The key which Mossy finds is the promise of a lock and of a door, and of whatever lies beyond, but neither to the protagonists nor to the reader is what is promised made plain. The implication is that it must always be so. What most matters is what is least capable of being told. Truth cannot be imparted like information but can only be discovered.

> 'And what is the key for?' the boy would ask. 'What is the key of? What will it open?'
> 'That nobody knows,' his aunt would reply. 'He has to find that out'
> (p. 123).

Truth cannot be told but stories can be and it is the stories which guide our quest and nurture our spiritual growth. Those stories will be troubled, as are our own life-stories, with much that is bewildering and contradictory. The meaning of all that is enigmatic in the overlapping narratives of what we read and what from day to day we experience is not disclosed but promised. Meanwhile we have the 'hints and guesses'.

Tangle meets a child, who it transpires is 'the Old Man of the Fire', playing with an assortment of balls of various sizes and colours, arranging them into cryptic patterns.

And now Tangle felt that there must be something in her knowledge which

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was not in her understanding. For she knew there must be an infinite meaning in the change and sequence and individual forms of the figures into which the child arranges the balls, as well as in the varied harmonies of their colours, but what it all meant she could not tell (p. 160).

But Tangle presses on in hope. All that can be said of the undisclosed goal is that it is the country 'whence the shadows fall' (p. 164 *et passim*). As she perseveres 'she (feels) the good coming all the time' (p. 154).

Like *Phantastes, The Golden Key* is open-ended. The narrative ceases before the children's journey is done. Our last glimpse of them ascending stairs within a rainbow.

> They knew that they were going up to the country whence the shadows fall. And by this time I think they must have got there (p. 169).

Here the story of Mossy and Tangle elides with the reader's own unfinished narrative. *The Golden Key* echoes and endorses what *Phantastes* implies about spiritual development. It is a process in which the individual responds to the beckoning beyond. That goal is not named, still less mapped. But the individual is not left disorientated. There is a sense of 'the magnetic east', which provides a bearing for pursuing the spiritual path. The promotion of spiritual development is the nurture of that awareness by stories of those who cross the borders of what is ordinarily experienced and whose future and fulfilment become the reader's own.

Lilith[6]

I shall call attention to three elements of spiritual development explored in *Phantastes* and consider how they are treated in *Lilith*. In the terms of the approach adopted from Jack Priestley, these perspectives invite us to see that spiritual development as 'broader than religious', 'other worldly' and 'communal'.[7] My intention is not to expound all that *Lilith* suggests about spiritual development but to highlight how the text bears on the crucial issue of what is the proper discourse its articulation and to show how Lilith portrays spiritual development as determined by hope and as essentially relational. I shall then discuss how *Lilith*, like *Phantastes*, functions as transfiguring fantasy, a text with the potential to promote the same process of spiritual development which it describes.[8]

The process of spiritual development in Lilith

Lilith is an account of a spiritual journey in which, as in *Phantastes*, the familiar language of Christian spirituality is abandoned and an alternative non-theistic discourse adopted.[9] *Lilith*, more than any other work of MacDonald, directly addresses the limitations of language. Vane admits to the inadequacy of his account of his experiences.

> I begin indeed to fear that I have undertaken an impossibility, undertaken to tell what I cannot tell because no speech at my command will fit the forms in my mind...As I often as I try to fit the reality with nearer words, I find myself in danger of losing the things themselves (p. 12).[10]

Lilith is the product of 'a constant struggle to say what cannot be said' (p. 60). The narrator is referring to the obvious difficulty of articulating in the language fashioned for our day-to-day world the experience of a 'secondary' world. But more is implied. The implication is not that traditional religious categories - the lines we know so well - represent more readily the lofty topics addressed. What is acknowledged in *Lilith*, MacDonald's last great work, is the limitation of any discourse, theistic or non-theistic, to voice those perceptions and aspirations which we call spiritual.

Little can be said. We cannot know for sure. Towards the end of the fantasy Vane lies down to sleep in 'the house of death'. There he sleeps and dreams and in his dream he has a vision of humanity resurrected and creation renewed.In his dream he talks with Adam and much of their conversation centres on Vane's uncertainty - and ours - about the truth of such a dream. Adam's response is that there can for the present be no such certainty. 'Be content not to know surely' (p. 325). Truth cannot be known beyond peradventure.

> 'The truth of things lies at once hid and revealed in their seeming'.
> 'How can that be, father?' I said...
> He was gone; in my ears was nought but the sounding-silence of the swift-flowing waters (p. 326).

This exchange is part of what amounts to an extended philosophical reflection on the trustworthiness of what we perceive, whether awake or dreaming, and on the nature and status of what purport to be truth-claims. Perhaps the exchange is the nearest we have to a summary statement of what MacDonald's thought about the matter - if we may for a moment seek the mind of the author behind the text. The truth about what is of ultimate

significance or value cannot be known or expressed directly but only in the 'seeming', only by analogy. Truth claims couched in religious terminology - or for that matter in technical philosophical language - are subject to exactly the same limits as truth told in fantasy or fairy tale. All such statements, unless trivial or self-evident, disclose as well as reveal.

Does a coherent spirituality require the framework of a truth-claiming religion? Is a spiritual discourse which eschews such claims compatible with one that affirms them? These many years later *Lilith*, it seems, leads us to the same conclusion as did *Phantastes*. The last word, as we have said, belongs to neither discourse. In that sense spiritual development is indeed 'broader than religious'.

Spiritual development is 'other-worldly'. The journey undertaken by Vane, like that of Anodos, does not conclude with his arrival at a final destination. The process of spiritual development of which the narrative is a parable is towards a goal which is always beyond. As in *Phantastes* so in *Lilith* the protagonist is haunted by the rumour of a coming good. What is rumoured is not to be named, still less to be apprehended, but it arouses a longing which drives Vane to press ahead with his journey. Vane tells us, 'I want to find my way to a place I have heard of, but whose name I have not yet learned' (p. 99). He travels 'hungering after he knew not what' (p. 201). The image of the coming good is 'home'. 'The only place, if you do but find it, where you may go out and in both, is home' (p. 15). 'Home is ever so far away in the palm of your hand' (p. 59). One of the most telling connections with *Phantastes* is the repetition in *Lilith* of the haunting lines,

> Many a wrong, and its curing song;
> Many a road and many an inn;
> Room to roam, but only one home
> For all the world to win (p. 316).

In the closing chapters of *Lilith* themes which have run as threads through the fantasy are drawn together. The titles of these successive chapters - *I Sleep the Sleep, The Dreams that Came, The Waking, The Journey Home, The City , The 'Endless Ending'* - recapitulate recurring images of the novel. Then in the final pages the rumour of the good that is to be grows from a whisper to an triumphant cry of hope.

Something more than the sun, greater than the light, is coming, is coming -

none the less surely coming that it is long on the road! (p. 339)

...all the night long the morning is at hand (p. 332).

All that I wanted and knew not, must be on its way to me (p. 347).

Vane ascends a stairway of huge stones into a cloud. There he is taken by the hand through 'a little door with a golden lock' where he finds himself alone in his library (p. 348). This, however, is not the end of his story or of ours.[11] 'I wait; asleep or awake, I wait' (p. 351). The last line of *Lilith* is the text of Novalis by now so familiar to us, 'Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one' (p. 351). In that hope the process of spiritual development is sustained.

Spiritual development is 'communal' or 'relational' (the latter term is perhaps to be preferred). The self is found in loss of self, in relationship with others. Mendelson (1985) notes, 'The hero, by entering into the mirror's image, is initiating the principal Romantic quest: the search for the true self' (p. 200). Vane embarks on that quest lacking any sense of identity. 'Then I understood that I did not know myself, did not know what I was, had no grounds to determine that I was one and not another' (p. 14). Vane's spiritual journey - and by implication our own - is a quest for identity. He is told, as is the reader who identifies with him, 'You are beginning to become an individual' (p. 25). The process entails much that is painful not least the forfeiting of false ideas of one's own supposed wisdom. 'The business of the universe,' Vane is told, the reader is told, ' is to make such a fool of you that you will know yourself for one, and so begin to be wise' (p. 32).

Vane lacks a sense of self or, more precisely, he does not know which of his many selves is his true identity. Again Mr. Raven interprets his plight to him.

> Everyone, as you ought to know, has a beast-self - and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay and a creeping serpent-self too - which takes a deal of crushing to kill! (p. 37)

These and the many more selves besides must be brought into harmony so that the individual becomes at last one person. The goal, in Jungian terms, is 'individuation'.

Ultimately the self is discovered and fulfilled by a dying to self.

> I saw now that a man alone is but a being that may become a man - that he is but a need, and therefore a possibility...no atmosphere will comfort or nourish his life, less divine than that offered by other souls; nowhere but in other lives can he breathe. Only by the reflex of other lives can he ripen his speciality, develop the idea of himself, the individuality that distinguished him from every other (pp. 139 - 140).

Vane must come at last to the House of Death, there to sleep, there to awake. The underlying principle is the paradox is that we die to live. In *Lilith* this claim is not primarily an affirmation about physical death and the hope of life beyond it - though it is that. It is more fundamentally a principle about the human condition and individual identity. Our fulfilment as human individuals is found in relationship, in the 'dying to self' which alone frees the channels for our own flourishing. It is a bedrock principle of spiritual development. Nowhere but in other lives can I breathe.

Thus the process which is to be promoted is not to be understood as the fine-tuning of some private faculty or disposition. Spiritual development in MacDonald's work, whether in his realistic fiction or his fantasy, is little advanced by closing one's eyes and contemplating. There is always something to be done.

Vane seeks the raven's advice.

> 'How am I to begin that where everything is so strange?'
> 'By doing something.'
> 'What?'
> 'Anything; and the sooner you begin the better!' (p. 13)

The process of our spiritual development requires that we contend with all that opposes it. As in *Phantastes* so in *Lilith*, he or she who journeys towards their destined good must confront 'the Shadow'. Again the image invites - but does not require - consideration within a Jungian framework. Evil is incalculably powerful and malignant, seeking to possess the individual. 'Then I knew that I had run away from a shadow that wanted to be me and wasn't' (p. 261). It seeks to possess and also to condemn. 'I seemed to pass through him, but I think now that he passed through me: for a moment I was as one of the damned' (p 309). And yet - MacDonald's understanding of evil is Augustinian - evil has no substantial existence.[12] It is wholly parasitical on the good it seeks to destroy. The Shadow in *Lilith* is

a two-dimensional figure. Thus when it turns on Vane he sees only 'a sharp upright line' - but its effect on him is fearful (p. 163). Vane is aware of the presence of the Shadow at the last battle for the soul of Lilith.

> ...a horrible Nothingness, a Negative positive infolded her; the border of its being that was yet no being, touched me... It was not the absence of everything I felt, but the presence of Nothing (p. 283).

The measure of the Shadow's total mastery and subjection of Lilith is the latter's illusion that she is a free spirit. 'I will do as my Self pleases - as my Self desires' The truth is otherwise. 'You will do as the shadow overshadowing yourself inclines you' (p. 277).

Even if the gothic and cabalistic images of the Shadow and of Lilith herself are to be jettisoned - and with them, most would contend, the biblical imagery of a personal devil - there remains something symbolised surviving the demise of the symbols, a factor largely ignored in the debate about spiritual development. That factor is the fierce resistance which the promotion of spiritual development will meet. Whatever metaphysical account we give of the matter, wickedness is to be reckoned with. Bullying takes place even in postmodern playgrounds. This is not the place to dwell on the currents in contemporary culture which militate against the spiritual well-being of the young. But those seeking to promote spiritual development must recognise the extent to which the process they encourage goes against the stream.[13] As I suggested in commenting on *Phantastes*, it is an important respect in which Jack Priestley's account of spiritual development, valuable as it has proved as a framework for this study, perhaps leaves more to be said.

Lilith as transfiguring fantasy

There is much in *Lilith* about doors between the worlds. 'There are more worlds and more doors to them, than you will think of in many years' (p. 52). It seems that once opened these doors are not readily shut. The worlds of *faerie* are not closed off from our own world and our experience of their merging with ours transforms our perception of appearance and reality. The experience is deeply subversive, calling in question all we supposed secure, above all the sense of who we are.

When later Vane returns from a further visit to this world bordering on his own he poses the fundamental question.

> Had I come to myself out of a vision? - or lost myself by going back to one?
> Which was the real - what I now saw, or what I had just ceased to see?
> Could both be real, interpenetrating yet unmingling? (p. 46).

It is a question for the reader too who from the outset is invited to identify with the protagonist and to engage with in the task of interpreting what takes place. Vane addresses the reader directly. 'I beg the reader to aid me in the endeavour to make myself intelligible' (p. 12). As in *Phantastes* and *The Golden Key* I am drawn into a story which merges with my own. As Raeper (1987) observes, 'MacDonald expects his readers to identify themselves with Vane and so become heroes of their own tale' (p. 369).

The uncertainty of the border between appearance and reality is explored in *Lilith* by the repeated and subtle use of the related images, deployed so often by MacDonald, of sleeping, dreaming, dying, and waking. Sleeping is the image of the dying that has to be done if the individual is to live, whether in dying at the end of life or in dying to self demanded here and now. The rich and recurring image of the dream properly requires a separate extended study. I take it to be MacDonald's preferred symbol for all that imaginatively expresses that which answers to the human desire for fulfilment.[14] Dreams, like poetry, music, or painting, evoke what is beyond the power of the rational mind to express.

> Some dreams, some poems, some musical phrases, some pictures, wake feelings such as one never had before, new in colour and form - spiritual sensations, as it were, hitherto unproved... (some of the poetry) affected me in similar fashion - as with the aroma of an idea, rousing in me a great longing to know what the poem or poems might, even yet in their mutilation, hold or suggest (p. 18).

The foundation text for MacDonald, words with which *Phantastes* concluded as now does *Lilith*, is the Novalis saying 'unser Leben ist kein Traum aber es soll und wird vielleicht einer werden'. The dream, at least the good dream - 'the dream best dreamed is the likest to the waking truth' (p. 324) - is no hallucination but a promise. 'If that waking was itself but a dream, surely it was a dream of a better waking yet to come, and I have not been the sport of a false vision' (p. 349). Spiritual development and its promotion must proceed on the assumption that the dream does not mislead. We accept that the claim that the vision is no chimera is beyond verification or falsification. But we order our common life, including that of our schools, on the basis that it is not a delusion.

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One further symbol needs to be noted. *Lilith* opens in a library where one set of shelves are not what they seem. They are shallow, holding only the backs of books. This set of shelves is in reality a door and it is by passing through this door out of the library that Vane's adventures in *faerie* begin. Thus all that follows, as in *Phantastes*, can be taken as a commentary on the function of reading. The imagery is still more sharply focussed by the symbol of a book lying along, and projecting from, the top of one of the rows of these 'sham backs'. To make possible the illusion the book has been cut across diagonally - one half is in the library and, we have to suppose, the other half in whatever world this strange door leads into (pp. 4 - 7).

The book, not least the text of *Lilith* I hold in my hands, is the bridge between the worlds. Crossing it I step into an unfinished story which, as I identify with its protagonist, blends with my own and whose continuance is now determined by what I make of it in the on-going narrative of my own life.[15]

Other fairy tales

Phantastes, *The Golden Key*, and *Lilith* constitute MacDonald's most accomplished fantasy writing. I have tried to make clear how they serve both as commentaries on spiritual development and as potentially educative texts. I have sought to show how they function as 'transfiguring fantasy', inviting the reader to identify imaginatively with the protagonist in an arduous journey whose ending - the 'endless ending' - the reader must strive for in his or her continuing life-story.

I conclude this chapter by calling attention to four of MacDonald's shorter fairy tales which can be read as reflections, if in a minor key, of the theme of spiritual development, its discourse, its nature and its nurture.

Cross Purposes

Cross Purposes, the first of MacDonald's shorter fairy tales to be published, contains much of interest for us. MacDonald's work, his 'realistic' fiction as much as his fantasy writing, constantly raises the question whether the boundaries we accept as immoveable and impenetrable really exist at all. His fiction is a gallery of characters who come to discover

that the religious and social frontiers within which they have been spending their unexamined lives are no more than lines on a map and that for their flourishing and fulfilment they must ignore them. The corresponding claim in his fantasy writing, a claim asserted in this very early work, is that the border between the domain of our lives as ordinarily experienced and the domain of *faerie* is uncertain - indeed that the two worlds elide. 'No mortal can tell where Fairy-land begins and where it ends' (p. 265).

To travel in this alternative world is to travel purposefully yet without the destination being disclosed.

> 'Where are we going?' asked Alice.
> 'Going on,' answered the fairy.
> Alice, not liking the reply, said -'I want to go home.'
> 'Good-bye, then,' answered the fairy (p. 266).

The dynamic character of the process of spiritual development is evoked by the same fluid imagery so characteristic of *Phantastes*.

> As they went on, the moon rose and threw a pale mist of light over the whole, and the diamond drops turned to half-liquid pearls, and round every tree-top was a halo of moonlight, and the water went to sleep and the flowers to dream (p. 268).

The imagery to be sure is a recycling of familiar Romantic symbols. What is important to note is how this imagery supports MacDonald's understanding of the goal of the spiritual journey as always ahead and always beckoning but of which little can said directly.

> 'Is this dreamland, then?' asked Alice.
> 'If you like,' answered the fairy.
> 'How far am I from home?'
> 'The farther you go, the nearer home you are' (p. 268).

As in the *The Golden Key* the story is of two protagonists whose journey brings them a dawning awareness of each other. 'Richard and she seemed to have grown quite man and woman in Fairyland, and the they did not want to part now' (p. 294). More is suggested here than the conventional romantic conclusion. Their development is not only their individual refinement. It is relational, entailing a transcendence of the self. As we have seen, it is a dimension of our development which MacDonald will explore more fully, particularly in *Lilith*.

The Shadows

The Shadows first appeared in *Adela Cathcart* in 1864. The primary interest of this somewhat rambling tale lies in the character of 'the Shadows' over whom one 'old Ralph Rinkelmann' is appointed king. These do not share the menacing nature of 'the Shadow', the malignant non-being we meet in *Phantastes* and *Lilith*. Their role, by contrast, is beneficent. They explain that role to their new king.

> We seldom seek to frighten anybody. We mostly want to make people silent
> and thoughtful; to awe them a little, your majesty (p. 191).

They seem to represent - if for a moment we attempt some clumsy decoding - all that *intimates.*

> It is only in the twilight of the fire, or when one man or woman is alone with
> a single candle, or when any number of people are all feeling the same thing
> at once, making them one, that we show ourselves and the truth of things
> (p. 190).

The corollary is that the Shadows are threatened by too much light. 'The use and disposition of gaslights...blind the eyes by which alone we can be perceived.' The Shadows explain that they have been 'all but banished from towns' and driven 'into villages and lonely houses, chiefly old farm-houses, out of which, even, our friends the fairies are fast disappearing' (p. 191).

No doubt the Victorian countryman's dread of recent industrial urbanisation is being voiced here. But at the same time something rather different is being claimed about the pedagogy of the spirit. It is essentially a process to be nurtured obliquely and indirectly; it is encouraged more by the 'half-light' of the fantasy that guards its secret than by the glaring 'daylight' of the propositional truth claim.

Much of *The Shadows* is given over to story-telling as the Shadows regale each other with tales of their achievement, a disastrous marriage averted, a drunkard brought to his senses, a clergyman taught to take note of other people, and the like. We are not surprised to learn that it is the children in the nursery who are most sensitive to their presence and to their music. But when the nurse brings in their tea and lights 'the odious gas' the Shadows vanish (pp. 207 - 210).

Little Daylight

Little Daylight is a self-contained fairy tale which first appeared in *At the Back of the North Wind* where its context, often overlooked, is important. It is a story told by Mr. Raymond to children in hospital. The author comments,

> I don't know how much of Mr. Raymond's story the smaller children understood; indeed I don't quite know how much there was in it to be understood, for in such a story every one has to take what he can get (p. 257).

The fact that the story is told in a hospital may lend support to the claim that the function of fairy tales is therapeutic. More important is MacDonald's disclaimer of any right to say what the story means. Meaning is in the reader's gift.

Little Daylight has attracted more scholarly attention than either *Cross Purposes* or *The Shadows*, most notably in an article by Adrian Gunther (1995) who sees it as 'the most charming and original fairy tale MacDonald ever wrote' (p. 107). Gunther notes the importance of the author's comment about how much or how little may be 'understood' of the story. 'The story's true impact will be to the subconscious or the imagination' (p. 108). She stresses the significance of the context, the hospital ward, welcoming the implication that the telling of the story is 'potentially a healing experience' (p. 108). Gunther rightly emphasises the extraordinary power of MacDonald's evocation of Princess Daylight, 'dancing to her own music', ever more lovely as the moon waxes, ever more lifeless as it wanes. She notes how MacDonald parodies and subverts the conventional fairy tale with his picture of the 'free and wild' princess who is so unlike the typical heroine waiting inertly for the prince's kiss to wake her. Gunther finds the key to the story in the Princess's need to 'awaken to the daylight', to be no longer in thrall to the illusory, merely reflected, light of the moon.

Gunther's invites us to notice how the kiss by which the Princess is at last awakened is an expression, not of romantic love, but of compassion. She sees here an almost Buddhist acceptance of suffering, of transience, of mortality. 'Only enlightenment can free us...and enlightenment depends on the exercise of compassion' (p. 113). Not that the story leaves us with any such moral or with a sense of a narrative resolved and concluded. 'In typical MacDonald fashion, the story ends with a question, not a statement, and thus avoids any

sense of resolution' (p. 116). The resolution of this 'transfiguring' tale is deferred to the reader.

The Day Boy and the Night Girl

The Day Boy and the Night Girl was the last fairy tale MacDonald wrote. Cynthia Marshall (1988) notices the ambivalence of the story's imagery. The night may be taken as conventionally symbolic of the imaginative realm of all that, half-seen and hardly understood, mysteriously fosters our growth. The light, distrusted by the romantic instinct, is the light of reason. But what is so striking in this story is that, as Marshall puts it, 'both (are) crucial for spiritual wholeness'. Marshall suggests that the story dramatizes the dilemma of a writer caught between the demands of 'rival symbolic universes', having to choose between 'the darkness of Romanticism or the light of religious orthodoxy'. In her view MacDonald demonstrates the interdependence of both.

Marshall's reflections on this haunting tale resonate with what has emerged as a central argument of this thesis, that the questions posed by the relationship in MacDonald's writing of the parallel discourses, the fantastic and the realistic, correspond to the central dilemma about spiritual development, whether or not it has to be promoted within a religious framework. Her view that in MacDonald those discourses are complementary supports the contention of this study, that the promotion of spiritual development does not require allegiance to the truth-claims of a specific religious tradition and the use of its language. We have the two discourses, the theistic and the non-theistic, and, as in *Phantastes*, we are invited to seek

> the point in which their invisibly converging lines would unite in one,
> revealing a truth higher than either and differing from both; though so far
> from being opposed to either that it was that whence each derived its life
> and power (i. pp.178, 179).

Summary

Our study of MacDonald's fantasy has illuminated two areas of the debate about spiritual development. There is, firstly, the need to give a coherent account of what spiritual development is. Secondly, there is the task of formulating strategies to help schools comply with the requirement that spiritual development be promoted.

I have adopted the account of spiritual development given by Jack Priestley as a framework for my discussion and it has proved its worth, although it has emerged that in important respects that model can be extended and strengthened.

Priestley's contention that spiritual development is 'broader than religious' raises the fundamental question of what should be the discourse within which spiritual development is to be interpreted. The implication of MacDonald's adopting an alternative discourse, of his writing fantasy free from 'God-talk, is that such a discourse can be as authentic a vehicle for voicing all that in experience and aspiration we call 'spiritual' as the familiar discourse of Christian piety. The texts treating of the one theme in such different terms show that there is no necessary incompatibility between a spirituality expressed in the concepts and categories of a religious tradition and that which follows the path of a wanderer trying to find his way through a forest in fairy land. Both point to a mystery lying beyond the mind's power to comprehend, the reality (the 'truth higher than either and differing from both') which invites us to pursue our spiritual path, however demanding, and which is its ultimate validation.

Priestley insists that spiritual development is dynamic in character, a process that cannot be arrested and distilled into a definition. We have seen how well MacDonald's fantasy expresses the meandering trajectory of the spiritual path. Its characteristically fluid images and the often apparently aimless route its protagonists follow are a true reflection of the pattern of most lives. Moreover these shifting, eliding images, so distinctive of MacDonald's fantasy, support his understanding of spiritual development as growth in a sense of transcendence, of the artificiality of many of the familiar frontiers of experience and of our need to progress beyond them.

Thus the imagery of the fantasies and the fairy tales suggests an understanding of spiritual development as a continuing process of 'being and becoming'. Two principles of pedagogical importance emerge. The path of spiritual development is not to be determined by a blue-print of what a person fully-developed spiritually would be like. Secondly, spiritual development is not an achievement, a place of arrival. In an educational culture which lays great stress on attainment in this or that subject there is pressure to quantify spiritual

development similarly. But spiritual progress defies such calibration as it escapes definition.

MacDonald's fantasy, as is all his work, is characterised by a profound *Sehnsucht*. This however is not a forlorn 'nostalgia for paradise'. It is rather a positive sense of anticipation, an eager expectation of a coming good the nature of which remains undisclosed but which always summons the attentive individual to pursue his or her spiritual path purposefully. In this sense spiritual development is 'other-worldly', as Priestley has it. All MacDonald's work is haunted by this powerful sense of 'the magnetic east' offering a sense of direction for the spiritual life. The refusal of MacDonald to attempt to delineate what it is that thus beckons us is not an imaginative failure but reflects rather the insight that spiritual development is essentially a process and that any supposed destination, however envisaged, must always be a further point of departure.

The fairy tales and fantasies we have been studying are open-ended, their conclusion lying beyond the last page. The reader's imaginative investment in these texts is not in envisioning the goal of spiritual development but in understanding the intense seriousness of the moral demands that such development entails. In Priestley's terms, spiritual development is 'communal'- though the term 'relational' is perhaps better. Individual fulfilment is only possible in relationship, in the 'dying to self' which alone sets us free to find our true selves. 'Nowhere but in other lives can I breathe.'

The intensity of the moral demands, the inexorability of the duty of doing what must be done next, above all the need to confront what can only be envisioned, however demythologised, as evil seeking to own us - all these are aspects of our formation are contemplated more seriously in MacDonald's fantasy than in the literature and the official publications about spiritual development, so many of which are woefully bland.

We have seen how the understanding of spiritual development in the fantasies and fairy tales considered in this chapter is 'holistic' in the sense that it excludes any notion of the flourishing of the individual apart from his or her relationship with others. And that understanding is still more all-embracing. There is in MacDonald fantasy, as in his realistic fiction, an attentiveness to the animal and vegetable realms. This recognition of the lifelines

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by which humanity is linked to, and sustained by, the rest of creation holds implications for spiritual development and its promotion within the curriculum requiring further study.

MacDonald's fantasy provides a powerful commentary on the process of spiritual development. But it is also itself formative in its potential capacity to promote the spiritual development which is its primary theme. It is 'transfiguring fantasy' and as such illustrates the potential value of such narrative for those seeking strategies and material for a spiritual pedagogy.

I, the reader, imaginatively identify with the protagonist of such fantasy. I enter his world and the enigmas of his unfolding story become parables of the dilemmas which face me in the narrative of my own life. As he moves within the narrative into the secondary world of *faerie* I accompany him. But his experiences there, within the pages of the book in my hands, are unresolved and unconcluded. The protagonist's story has elided with mine and the realisation and fulfilment of the promised good held out to him and the final sense of the book in my hands are for me to discover in the subsequent pages of my own life-story.

The implication of the formative potential of the fantasies and fairy tales we have studied in this chapter - as of the narratives of 'the Wise Woman' we come to in the next chapter - is not that those particular texts are necessarily to be considered as ideal classroom readers in the modern school. What emerges is the existence in such fantasy of a potential powerful resource for spiritual education yet to be fully exploited.

Endnotes

1. Roderick McGillis (1981) recognises the importance of this passage. In commenting on it he suggests that 'the idea of a third is at the very centre of (MacDonald's) art' (p. 50).

2. Nothing subversive of traditional Christian orthodoxy is being asserted here. We can only speak analogically, never univocally, of that which we call God (Baillie, pp. 107 - 118).

3. For example, Mary Marston does not waste words in pulling up a 'poor spiritual clodpole...at any word inconsistent with the holy manners of the high countries' (*Mary Marston*, p. 319). MacDonald writes to William Cowper-Temple, 'I am learning to be quiet and wait when winter blocks the way between this and the high countries' (ALS Edinburgh, 3rd April 1883).

4. For Reiss (1989) 'the looseness and unevenness of *Phantastes* must be counted as defects' (p. 94). Manlove (1975) finds *Phantastes* MacDonald's 'perhaps most disconnected' fairy tale' (p. 75). More

recently he refers to the 'unstructured narratives' of *Phantastes* and *Lilith* (1999, p. 65). Certainly on a cursory reading the narrative of Anodos's adventures in fairyland seems little more than a random sequence of adventures, an example of those *Erzählungen ohne Zusammenhang* (disconnected tales) alluded to in the quotation from Novalis which prefaces the book. For Robb, however, a closer reading reveals in *Phantastes* what he calls a 'lurking coherence' (1987a, p. 79). Robb believes that in *Phantastes* MacDonald is 'particularly subtle in a flexible evocation of dream and apparent inconsequence' (1998, p. 276). Prickett (1990) suggests that many readers will find in Phantastes 'an innate underlying unity...that belies its superficially fragmented construction' (p. 110). Rolland Hein (1982) invites us to recognise 'an underlying musical harmony' deriving from "an orchestration of themes" beneath a narrative surface bustling and incoherent' (p. 55). McGillis (1992a) seeks to identify more exactly what lends coherence to a work apparently so formless, arguing that Phantastes is a book 'that provides us with its own structural pattern' (p. 55). For McGillis 'the community of the centre as a thematic element provides a way of structuring the book' (p. 57). Doherty (1997) argues that Phantastes 'is constructed upon an incompletely developed system of triads related to the Thinking, Feelings and Will' (p. 112).

5. Probably the best-known modern fantasy in which there is a merging of the world of the protagonist with the world of a text he is reading - and, by implication, a merging with the world of the reader - is Michael Ende's *Die Unendliche Geschichte*. The title, *The Never-Ending Story*, echoes that of the last chapter of *Lilith*, *The 'Endless Ending'* (Ende, 1985). Donald Haase comments, 'The two worlds intersect when (the protagonist) Bastian enters into the reality of the fantasy realm to prevent it being lost in a void of nothingness, just as the actual reader gives life to Ende's book through an act of the imagination' (Haase, 2000). Another remarkable and important modern example of a fantasy which moves between worlds is Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy of which, at the time of writing, two volumes have been published (Pullman, 1995, 1997).

6. The problems raised by *Lilith* include the fact that we have no less than eight distinct manuscript revisions of the text. For a survey of the complex history of the text see Hein (1997a, 1997b).

7. We are being necessarily selective. To stay with our 'Priestley paradigm', in *Lilith* as in *Phantastes* the imagery is 'dynamic' with all that implies for spiritual development. Again, the goal of Vane's journey, as that of Anodos, is not the accumulation of knowledge. Their spiritual development, as is ours, is concerned instead with 'being and becoming'. *Lilith* too explores the merging of the different domains of experience and our spiritual development is 'holistic' in that it progresses across and beyond the artificial distinctions we draw between them.

8. Constraints of space forbid discussion of the structure of *Lilith*. Mendelson (1985) seeks to abstract from the book's 'vortex of symbols' its primary patterns. In structuralist terms *Lilith* is to be seen as 'a romance of ascent'. This is sensitive structuralism - exposure of the skeleton does not threaten the life of the literary organism. As with *Phantastes* the structure of the work matters. If there is a shape to the narrative then we may hope that there is a pattern to our lives - though it is only in our lives that we shall discover it.

9. In *Lilith* this alternative discourse is not maintained as consistently as in *Phantastes*. From time to time the text defaults to the overtly Christian didacticism characteristic of MacDonald's realistic writings. For example, MacDonald shoulders aside his implied author and interjects, 'With God all things are possible: He can save even the rich!' (p. 287). Such an interruption jars awkwardly and adds nothing to the narrative. MacDonald is breaking his own rule that fantasy must speak for itself. Tim Martin, aided by Gordon Reid and John Docherty, has listed scores of biblical allusions in Lilith (Martin, 1995). Most of these, however, reflect the fact that MacDonald is steeped in the Authorised Version of the bible and its imagery and turns of phrase come unbidden.

10. See also Vane's later comments:

> Here I interrupt my narrative to remark that it involves a constant struggle to say what cannot be said with even an approach to precision the things recorded being, in their nature and in that of the creatures concerned in them, so inexpressibly different from any possible events of this economy, that I can present them only by giving in the forms and language of life in this world, the modes in which they affected me - not the things themselves, but the feelings they woke in me. Even this much, however, I do with a continuous and abiding sense of failure... I am indeed often driven to set down what I know to be but a clumsy and doubtful representation of the mere feeling aimed at, none of the communicating media of this world being fit to convey it (pp. 59 - 61).

11. Mendelson, whose treatment of *Lilith* is otherwise so perceptive, sees in the conclusion of *Lilith* 'the traditional completion of the "circuitous journey" of quest romance' (Mendelson, 1985, p. 214). But the point is that the journey is *not* completed - neither Vane's nor ours.

12. For a discussion of the Augustinian understanding of evil as *privatio boni* see Hick (1966, pp. 44 - 95).

13. Nevertheless Rolland Hein remarks, 'Within (MacDonald's) system it is difficult to take evil seriously.' But for Hein the Shadow is 'a depiction of Satan'. The lack of seriousness is perhaps less in MacDonald's treatment of evil than in the allegorisation of the text (Hein, 1974, p. 224). Louis MacNeice is more respectful of the Shadow: 'There is nothing facile about (MacDonald's) morality. He sees that the problem of evil really *is* a problem' (MacNeice, 1965, p. 100).

14.   If your dreams, my child, have ever testified to you of a condition of things beyond that which you see around you; if they have been to you the hints of a wonder and glory beyond what visits you now, you must not call them silly, for they are just what the scents of paradise borne on the air were to Adam and Eve as they delved and spun, reminding them that they must aspire yet again through labour into that childhood of obedience which is the only paradise of humanity (*The Seaboard Parish*, p. 336).

15. Stephen Prickett has drawn attention to the importance of this image of the book which serves as a bridge between the worlds in a paper read to a joint conference of the George MacDonald Society and the G. K. Chesterton Society on 18th September 1999.

Chapter Nine

THE WISE WOMAN

To convey the elusive character of the spiritual MacDonald introduces into his fantasies, as indeed under other guises into his novels[1], the mysterious figure of 'the Wise Woman'. She is MacDonald's most original and important creative achievement, an estimate there will be no cause to modify as we take account of the sources MacDonald may have drawn on to depict her.

In this single figure and in the multiple facets of her dealings with those whose lives she touches much that has been claimed in this thesis about spiritual development and its promotion comes together and it is appropriate that we turn to her as this thesis draws to a conclusion. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse her role and function. We shall continue to have Priestley's description of spiritual development in mind as we watch her at work. However, rather than attempting from the outset to analyse her dealings within that framework, it will be helpful - such is the idiosyncrasy of the Wise Woman - to consider first what is implied about the nature and nurture of spiritual development in such terms as our observation of her suggest. Certain dominant themes will emerge. Having done so I shall return to Priestley's analysis and ask how far his approach to spiritual development is supported by what we learn from the Wise Woman and how far it may need to be modified or extended.

We shall to try to distil from the nature of the Wise Woman's interventions in the lives of others what is implied about the shaping of our highest good. However it is important to recognise the extent to which we go against the grain of MacDonald's fantasy in seeking to separate out in this way all that this fecund figure suggests. The spiritual can only be expressed allusively, indirectly, symbolically If the project in hand is to assist those seeking to formulate strategies to promote spiritual development a measure of systematisation is necessary. We must make more explicit the nature and the task of spiritual development implied by MacDonald's work. But this process, necessary as it is, is inescapably

reductionist. The symbol of the Wise Woman, as is the case with any of the kaleidoscope of images MacDonald uses in his fantasy writing, will always suggest more than the prosaic interpretations we place on it.

We shall concentrate attention on the works in which the Wise Woman is a leading figure: *Phantastes, At the Back of the North Wind, The Princess and the Goblin, The Princess and Curdie, The Wise Woman*.[2] Firstly, I shall comment on precursors of the Wise Woman in texts with which we know MacDonald was familiar or which we suspect he knew. Secondly, I shall suggest - with much hesitation - an interpretation of the figure of the Wise Woman. Whom or what does she stand for? There can be no one correct interpretation. Here as elsewhere in his fantasy MacDonald defers to his reader and we make of her what we will. Thirdly - and this discussion will take up most of this chapter - I shall consider in turn six aspects of spiritual development and its promotion which I identify in MacDonald's account of the Wise Woman and her ways, emphasising again that by teasing apart strands intimately and subtly woven together we diminish the total impact of this singularly disturbing figure. In conclusion I shall ask how far these elements of spiritual development and its nurture lead us to adjust Priestley's description of spiritual development, the model which, thus far, has served us well as a means of grasping this elusive notion.

There remain issues which must be left to one side. A space of twenty-five years separates the earliest and latest of the publications in which the Wise Woman appears (*Phantastes*, 1858; *The Princes and Curdie*, 1883). The question not pursued here is whether it is the same person we are talking about in texts which, apart from the two *Princess* books, are markedly different from each other. Is 'North Wind' the same figure as Irene's great-great-grandmother? Is there significant development in the manner in which MacDonald treats the Wise Woman? It has been pointed out to me by Glenn Sadler that these two issues do open up potentially interesting lines of enquiry. Dr. Sadler writes:

> There is, I have always felt, something progressive about the development of the Wise Woman figure in MacDonald. It is almost as if he is trying to define and illustrate experience as seen through the eyes of the child. Her many names would suggest that at different stages in development, the child looks differently at key questions and experiences of life (Sadler, 1998).

North Wind certainly is a more pro-active figure than Irene's great-great grandmother as

well as being a great deal more terrifying. To trace more fully how far the figure of the Wise Woman develops would be a worthwhile research topic of its own. Nevertheless a first reading suggests that what she implies about human formation in these different texts published across a quarter of a century is broadly consistent.

Sources

MacDonald's 'Wise Woman' is a unique conception. But it does not follow that she was created *ex nihilo*. She calls to mind other powerful female figures. Our interest is not in how far MacDonald may have been consciously influenced by such possible prototypes but in the extent to which they anticipate and illuminate his own account of the Wise Woman. I draw attention to three such figures, the figure of Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, Jacob Boehme's 'Sophia', and - a more familiar character - the fairy godmother of the fairy tales.

The roots in Hebrew thought of the female figure of Wisdom and the reasons for her eventual personification do not concern us. She is a go-between figure, mediating between the transcendent God and the immanent world of our own experience. She is moreover, and very remarkably, a *playful* figure.

> I (Wisdom) was by God's side, a little child (or: a master worker), delighting in God day after day, ever at play in God's presence, at play everywhere in God's world, delighting to be with the human race (Proverbs ch. 8, vv. 31 - 32). [3]

In this context where the personification of Wisdom is elaborated and sustained at some length the feminine Hebrew noun *hochmah* could quite properly be translated as 'the Wise Woman'. In a fascinating article Melchert and Proffitt (1998) have considered what the role of this figure of Wisdom in the Proverbs might suggest for spiritual education. They suggest that 'exploring biblical wisdom and the human experience of wonder illumines the teaching-learning relation and the importance of playful wonder in spiritual formation' (p. 21).The Wise Woman of Proverbs is above all a teacher and - this Melchert and Profitt do not point out - her teaching is marked by *'armeth* or 'subtilty' (Proverbs ch. 8 v. 5), certainly a characteristic of MacDonald's Wise Woman. The associations between the two figures, the biblical and MacDonald's, are multiple and fascinating, more so than a limited space allows us to explore.

In Chapter Two we drew attention to MacDonald acquaintance with the writings of the German mystical writer, Jacob Boehme. David Elginbrode has a first edition of Boehme's first work *The Aurora*. The tutor Hugh Sutherland voices what presumably was MacDonald's own estimate of Boehme. 'He was a wonderful man. Some people think he was almost inspired' (*David Elginbrode*, p. 67). A dominating figure in Boehme's strange writings, based on the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs, is that of 'The Noble Virgin of Divine Wisdom'. Boehme's work is baffling and it is very difficult to reduce to a clear outline his speculations about her but certain of her features are reflected in MacDonald's Wise Woman. She is a supremely serene figure, a symbol of the underlying coherence of a fragmentary universe; she resists the centrifugal forces which disperse and scatter; she is centripetal, drawing elements that are isolated and antagonised back into their proper concord. Boehme held that in the eternal divine nature one hidden pattern underlies all opposites and his 'Celestial Virgin', like MacDonald's Wise Woman, is at work to restore all things to their essential harmony (Weeks, 1991).

In Charles Perrault's 1697 collection *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* we first meet the figure who is to appear at decisive moments in so many fairy tales, the fairy godmother. She is a cryptic character, appearing without explanation or introduction in his *Cinderella*. Goldthwaite (1996) sees her as, by origin, a Christian figure 'peculiar to the Catholic south of Europe' (p. 54). Joyce Thomas (1989) argues that she is 'the displacement and alteration carried to the extreme' of the helpful or supernatural animal which in many tales comes to the aid of the protagonist (p. 147). Whatever her ancestry she embodies and personifies a transcendent purpose for good which can prevail over all that is mischievous and discordant. She is not the creature of stardust, flounces, and tulle of later pantomime but an altogether more serious and powerful figure. In her mysterious and elusive aspects, in her moral authority, and in her capacity to weave order and purpose out of the contradictions of the lives she touches, she is a visitor to the human stage with much in common with MacDonald's Wise Woman.

Who is the Wise Woman?

We do not know who the Wise Woman is. As the one who evokes what is beyond our

rational grasp she cannot herself be captured in a net of words. This much may be tentatively suggested, that she can be seen as a personification of all that within a spiritually and morally ordered universe, as MacDonald holds it to be, is working for the well-being of its children. The great-great-grandmother who intends the best for Irene and Curdie; the Wise Woman who strives for the moral regeneration of Princess Rosamond and the shepherd girl; North Wind who seems to act so arbitrarily and cruelly - all these, whatever resistance they encounter, are ultimately working in harmony with the total universe of our experience which is purposed for our good. Yet the Wise Woman is not to be understood as the personification of an abstraction, as the anthropomorphising of an impersonal process. She invites the reflection that the providence shaping us for our good is personal. At the same time in the use of the image of the Wise Woman there is an avoidance of any confessional claims about the origin of any such benevolent pattern inhering in the scheme of things.

So much may be said. Yet we still sense that we have touched but the outskirts of her ways.

The Wise Woman and the development of the spirit

The role of the Wise Woman is to promote the well-being of those whose lives she touches. Different elements of spiritual development and its nurture are suggested by MacDonald's account of her and - with all the risks attendant on teasing out strands skilfully interwoven - we must attempt to identify them. At least six such themes call for attention and I shall discuss them in turn.

- The spiritual is to do with the mystery that surrounds us.

- The spiritual is manifested and experienced under many names and forms.

- Spiritual development proceeds and is promoted on the assumption that the universe is coherent and purposeful but there can be no final assurance that this assumption is not mistaken.

- Spiritual development is at times painful.

- Spiritual development is never completed.

- Spiritual development is promoted by parable.

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The surrounding mystery

The Wise Woman is a deeply mysterious figure. She appears before the king, Rosamond's father, 'muffled from head to foot in a cloak of black cloth' (*The Wise Woman*, p.13). Rosamond is swept up into its folds and the Wise Woman passes like a shadow from the palace (p. 17). The darkness of North Wind's hair merges with the darkness of Diamond's hayloft (*At the Back of the North Wind*, p. 11). Princess Irene first discovers her in a room at the top of 'a curious old stair of worm-eaten oak, which looks as if never any one had set foot upon it' (*The Princess and the Goblin*, p. 9). As elsewhere in MacDonald to climb such a stair is to ascend to the unknown, in mind and spirit to explore beyond the familiar and commonplace.

There is much mystery about her age. She is 'old and yet young' (*The Princess and Curdie*, p. 67). To Curdie she is 'a small withered creature, so old that no age would have seemed too great to write under her picture'. He finds her a figure of fun until, that is, he catches a glimpse of her eyes and then all laughter goes out of him (pp. 33 - 34). The ambivalence about the Wise Woman's age reflects MacDonald's deep conviction that age, in any sense that matters, is not determined by date of birth. 'The right old age,' her great-great-grandmother tells Irene, 'means strength and beauty and mirth and courage and strong painless limbs' (*The Princess and the Goblin*, p. 159). The little girl, her lap full of flowers, becomes 'a woman perfectly beautiful, neither old nor young; for hers was the old age of everlasting youth' (*The Wise Woman*, p. 195). Wisdom is not monopolised by the elderly any more than is childhood the privileged possession of the young in years.

A similar mystery surrounds her name, a mystery inviting the reflection that names are always strange things. The old lady discloses to Irene that she too is named Irene, that she has given her own name to her. 'A name is one of those things one can give away and keep all the same' (*The Princess and the Goblin*, p. 18). To share one's name is to share one's self. (The biblical resonances - Israel wrestling with the angel at the Brook Jabbok, the theophany of the Burning Bush - are powerful.[4]) Rosamond runs screaming after the Wise Woman. 'How she wished she knew the old woman's name, that she might call after her through the moonlight!' (*The Wise Woman*, p. 27) 'Please, ma'am,' Curdie is about to ask, 'what am I to call you?' But her name is not lightly yielded. The room is at once utterly

dark and Curdie can no longer tell whether she is there (*The Princess and Curdie*, pp. 42 - 43). More must shortly be said about the multiplicity of the Wise Woman's names.

So the Wise Woman is cloaked in mystery. The sustained endeavour to give conceptual clarity to the notion of spiritual development is laudable as is the concern to provide detailed maps to guide those charged with its promotion. Both the philosophical foundations and the curriculum strategies are necessary. But what must not be lost or diminished in the quest for clarity and a sense of pedagogical direction is the continuing sense of the mystery by which we are troubled, that aspect of our condition which justifies the nurture of the spirit as a proper educational task in the first place. The interventions of the Wise Woman, visiting us from the 'nameless region beyond all categories', at once dramatise and confirm the epistemological premise of this study that the mysterious, so far from being merely the term by which we dignify what we do not yet understand, refers on the contrary to 'the primordial and permanent' (Rahner, 1966, pp. 41 - 42).

A sense of mystery is educationally important as a spur to enquiry. For McGillis (1985) MacDonald's portrayal of Irene's great-great-grandmother 'dramatizes the efficacy of mystery in teaching' (p. 147). 'The efficacy of mystery in teaching'- it is as telling a phrase as we shall encounter in the literature, one to be written across much that has been published about spiritual development in the hope of making everything clear.

Truth's 'ten thousand changes of raiment'

As we have seen it belongs to the mystery of the Wise Woman that she bears many names. She too like her granddaughter - or great-great granddaughter - is Irene. But she is also 'North Wind', 'Old Mother Wotherwop' (*The Princess and Curdie*, p. 52), 'the Mother of Light' (p. 65), 'the lady of emeralds' (p. 66), 'the Lady of the Silver Moon' (p. 70). 'What *is* in a name?' The question stands as the heading of a chapter containing one of MacDonald's most searching reflections on the identity of the mysterious grandmother figure (*The Princess and Curdie*, ch. 7). In a deep gallery of the mines Curdie, so slow to recognise the great-great-grandmother, sees her - first only her face and then her radiant form - and it seems to him 'that all the beauty of the cavern, yes, of all he knew of the whole creation, seemed gathered in one centre of harmony and loveliness in the person of

the ancient lady who stood before him' (*The Princess and Curdie*, p. 64). He learns that, although she has many names and fulfils multiple tasks, she herself is not many but one. 'I could give you twenty names more to call me, Curdie, and not one of them would be a false one. What does it matter how many names if the person is one?' (p. 71)

The Wise Woman adopts many guises. Her different names reflect her capacity to reveal herself - or to conceal herself - in many different forms. Diamond meets North Wind as a flower in the grass, as a small girl no taller than he is, as a wolf. 'I have to shape myself,' she tells Diamond, 'in various ways to various people' (*At the Back of the North Wind*, p. 363). Curdie is bewildered that Irene's great-great grandmother can appear in so many different forms. She attempts to reassure him. 'Shapes are only dresses, Curdie, and dresses are only names. That which is inside is the same all the time.' Curdie is not satisfied. 'But then how can all shapes speak the truth?' (*The Princess and Curdie*, pp. 71-2)

Curdie's question is critically important for our own enquiry. Curdie senses, as we do, that the Wise Woman's assertion that 'shapes are only dresses,' is an extremely bold claim. But how bold? The sub-title of *The Wise Woman* is 'A parable'. Is it the claim, audacious enough, that the person and work of the Wise Woman is, as it were, an extra-canonical 'parable of the Gospel'? Or is the far more radical claim being made that that Gospel, the Christian tradition itself, is also a 'dress', a sequence of images, exchangeable with any number of others? Must the spiritual and its promotion be anchored, as Carr (1995, 1996a, 1996b) has claimed, in the discourse of a specific religious tradition? Are the alternative spiritual discourses, the theistic and the non-theistic, incompatible as Wright (1998) has argued? Or does the haunting figure of the Wise Woman imply that no spiritual tradition has a primary and privileged status?

The issue of whether the compatibility of a pluralism of spiritualities is being commended here is not to be resolved by appealing to MacDonald's intentions. We have the cryptic texts and MacDonald leaves us to come to our own conclusions about them. My thesis is that in MacDonald's recourse to fantasy and in the texts which he wrote in that vein, not least in these introducing us to the Wise Woman, there is tacit recognition that traditional religious signs and symbols are not the only images by which the spiritual may be evoked.

> 'It was you, then, after all!' (Rosamond) cried in delight...
> 'It always is me, after all,' said the wise woman, smiling.
> 'And it was you all the time?'
> 'It always is me all the time.'
> 'But which is the real you?' asked Rosamond; 'this or that?'
> 'Or a thousand others?' returned the wise woman (*The Wise Woman*, pp.196 - 7).

It is a haunting exchange. We may never, it seems, speak univocally of that we long for - only analogically and that reservoir of analogy is inexhaustible.

> Fact at best is but a garment of the truth, which has ten thousand changes
> of raiment woven in the same loom (*What's Mine's Mine*, p. 29). [5]

We read about the Wise Woman in a culture that has largely abandoned traditional religious accounts of the human condition. In our contemporary schools it is perhaps only by one shaped, 'dressed', as 'the Wise Woman', by images reaching beyond the grasp of traditional religious discourse, that the possibility of the transcendent may be made known.

Curdie's question, however, must still be pressed, 'How can all the shapes speak the truth?' If, in Priestley's terms, the spiritual is 'broader than the religious' and its nurture not to be confined to the patterns of traditional religious catechesis what safeguards are there against spiritualities that are mischievous or manipulative? Is there not the danger that a spiritual pedagogy not tied to any specific religious tradition will be left defenceless against, say, eccentric 'new age' spiritualities or the claims of the cults? By what criteria is one model of spiritual development preferred to another?

To be sure there are 'false spiritualities', though for MacDonald even these will be parasitical upon the good. Evil does not subsist independently of the good. Evil is always, in the imagery of *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, 'the shadow'. A false spirituality will be the wilful and culpable misrepresentation of the Wise Woman and her ways. But Irene's grandmother does not evade Curdie's question.

> 'It is one thing the shape I choose to put on, and quite another the shape
> that foolish talk and nursery tale may please to put upon me. Also it is one
> thing what you or your father may think about me, and quite another what
> a foolish or bad man may see in me' (*The Princess and Curdie*, p. 72).

Not all the shapes speak the truth. But ultimately the criteria we must apply to judge between them are not metaphysical but moral.

The acceptance of uncertainty

In *Phantastes* and in the Princess stories the Wise Woman is encountered as an old woman sitting at a spinning wheel. In *Phantastes* the woman in the cottage sings as she spins. It is 'a low strange song to which the hum of the wheel made a kind of infinite symphony' (p. 94). In the Princess stories it is the thread she spins which saves the children from perishing beneath the mountains. The message of Wise Woman's strange song, as is the sign of her wheel and its unbroken thread, is that in the end it does all hold together beautifully. Anodos must go on alone but he has the valediction of the woman in the cottage to encourage him.

> 'In whatever sorrow you may be, however inconsolable and irremediable it may appear, believe me that the old woman in the cottage with the young eyes...knows something, though she must not always tell it, that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress' (p. 115).

Diamond asks North Wind how she can bear to contemplate the suffering she has inflicted in causing a ship to sink in the storm she caused.

> '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 odours of its music, as it were flitting across the great billows of the ocean...' (*At the Back of the North Wind*, pp. 76 - 77).

Spiritual development is the process of bringing the fragmentary and confused into some kind of concord. It is both the work of resolving the inner discords of our individual experience and also the endeavour to be part of a larger whole, to reconcile the alienation we experience and the contradictions we witness within a wider scheme of things. In Priestley's terms it is a 'holistic' process. It is the quest for a pattern, for coherence. That pattern is 'far-off', undisclosed, and far from realisation, but for our flourishing we pursue it in hope.[6]

Of course such 'cosmic optimism' may be misplaced. We cannot be finally certain that the Wise Woman exists, that the notion of a transcendent purpose is more than wishful thinking. Its existence can never be proved to those who refuse to believe in it. Princess Irene tries to convince her nurse Lootie that she has met her grandmother but the nurse will

have none of it (*The Princess and the Goblin*, pp. 25 - 31). Curdie refuses to believe in Irene's grandmother and the thread she spins. Irene takes Curdie to meet her but he does not see her. For him her room with its burning roses, its lamp, its bed with its rich counterpane, is an empty garret (pp. 225 - 230).

Irene herself wonders if her meetings with this mysterious old lady are all a dream. There can be no disputing her experience, subjectively, of such meetings for all such subjective experience is necessarily beyond verification or refutation. But whether the grandmother - North Wind, the Wise Woman - exist outside the imagination and the dreams of those who claim to have met her is another matter. There can be no conclusive certainty that she exists, only the choice whether or not to act on the assumption that she does.

> 'The only question is whether you will believe that I am anywhere - whether
> you will believe that I am anything but a dream...It will rest with yourself
> after all' (*The Princess and the Goblin*, p. 120).

Diamond is tormented by the possibility that his experience of North Wind has been a sequence of dreams, a possibility which is explored in the penultimate chapter of *At the Back of the North Wind* (ch. 36, pp. 354 - 366).

> 'How am I to know that it's not a dream?'
> 'What does it matter?' returned North Wind (p. 359).

North Wind's reply reminds us that for MacDonald the border between dreaming and waking is not sharply defined. The dream can constitute an experience of reality more substantive than that yielded by waking life. MacDonald's fantasy eats like acid into the partitions we place between the different domains of our experience, the world we approach in our dreams and the world we inhabit by daylight.

This is too fine a point for Diamond. For him it does matter that North Wind is not a dream. The pleasure of the dream cannot be taken from him but it is the substantial existence of that of which he dreams of which he seeks assurance.

> 'I'm either not a dream, or there's something better that's not a dream,'
> said North Wind (p. 360).

Again Diamond insists that it is North Wind herself he wants, again he voices his fear that she is all a dream. And North Wind 'shot herself into the air, as if uneasy because she could

not answer him' (p. 361).

> 'There are a great many things I do not understand more than you
> do...Meantime you may be hopeful, and content not to be quite sure' (p.
> 365).

We must rest content 'not to be quite sure'. The reality of the Wise Woman and of what she represents, the coherence and purpose of all that exists, is not beyond doubt. For those who question her existence nothing could count as irrefutable evidence that she is real. We shall never know whether the last long silence into which MacDonald himself finally withdrew indicates that he too eventually began to wonder whether the Wise Woman was there. What can be said is that from the spring-time of *Phantastes* to the winter of *Lilith* MacDonald is forging a discourse that eschews dogmatic claims, that leaves open the issue of what are the referents, if there be any, of the kaleidoscope of symbols he uses, but which nevertheless asserts the urgency of entering into the same journey which the protagonists of his narratives undertake. Schools charged with promoting spiritual development cannot assert with certainty that the presupposition of that exercise, the assumption that my story and the universe's do lead somewhere, is true. Indeed in Religious Education such claims will be scrutinised. Whether a curriculum for spiritual development in common schools could be implemented on the basis of a thoroughgoing secularist philosophy is a far larger question than can be addressed here. While we cannot know for sure whether there is a pattern to our story, to take seriously the figure of Wise Woman - so reticent, so elusive, yet so purposeful - is to choose to act on the assumption that there is.

Spirituality and pain

> All shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> When the tongues of flame are in-folded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one.
> (T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*)

Irene, admitted for the first time to her grandmother's bedroom, sees that what she has taken for a bouquet of red rose is in fact a fire (*The Princess and the Goblin*, p. 145). 'The fire and the rose are one.'

Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame. (*ibid.*)

Irene's grandmother tells Curdie to plunge his hands into the bowl of burning roses. He bears the terrible pain and only withdraws his hands when she tells him to do so. Then he sees 'that her face looked as if she had been weeping' (*The Princess and Curdie*, p. 89).

The symbols are archetypal and, notwithstanding the claims of Pennington (1989) to the contrary, there is little reason to suppose that the incomparably greater poet knew MacDonald's work. The resonances are not only in the imagery. Both writers are exploring the process of spiritual growth and both recognise that that process entails suffering. Both claim that such suffering is purposeful or that, by free choice, it can be welcomed as purposeful.

The purpose of spiritual education is to bring the pupil, child or adult, to the place where she will make what is true and good her own. Part of the teacher's task is to clear from the pupil's path what obstructs such development. Such stumbling-blocks may be facets of the pupil's own character. Where this is so stern measures may be required to remove from the pupil's line of sight those obstacles which impede self-awareness and a clear vision of what is true and good.

The principle that spiritual development is at times necessarily painful accounts for the Wise Woman's severe, even seemingly cruel methods. Rosamond, 'the lost princess' is lost because she is wholly self-centred. The Wise Woman is obliged to subject her to a series of terrifying experiences to shatter her self-regard, to bring her to some awareness of her moral and spiritual poverty, and to set her on the path of spiritual growth. When the Wise Woman carries Rosamond out of her father's palace the stubborn princess struggles and screams. Set down on the road she rushes at the Wise Woman only to find that the cloak that had enfolded her was 'hard as the cloak of a bronze statue' (*The Wise Woman*, p. 21). Her guide allows her to be threatened by a pack of wolves (pp. 30 - 32). Rosamond's spiritual development cannot be advanced unless she attends to the next thing to be done. The Wise Woman insists that Rosamond keeps the cottage clean to which she has taken her

and she resorts to severe measures when the princess refuses to obey. 'Until our duty becomes to us as common as breathing we are poor creatures' (p. 108).

Spiritual growth begins with awareness of oneself. The Wise Woman makes Rosamond look in a mirror which reflects her real nature. She is so shocked by what she sees that she refuses to accept that it is telling the truth and she dashes the mirror to the ground (pp. 65 - 66). Agnes, the shepherd girl, is left to herself in a strange sphere whose inner surface is without door or window or any other feature. 'She had cared for only Somebody and now she was going to have only Somebody' (p. 98). Later another child appears beside Agnes and 'there was something about the child that made her shudder'. She tugs the child's hair and bites her arm only to find that it is her own hair she is pulling, her own arm that she is biting. To her disgust she realises that 'the child was not another, but her Self, her Somebody, and that she was now shut up with her for ever and ever' (pp. 101 - 103).

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The love that shapes us, burns us. It is a theme that MacDonald addresses directly in the *Unspoken Sermons*[7] , but his depiction of the 'severe mercy' of the Wise Woman reflects an equally searching reflection on the contradictions and apparent cruelties that have their part in making us what we must become.

MacDonald recognises, as does every serious tradition of spirituality, that spiritual development is inescapably painful, 'that life has in it that spiritual quinine, precious because bitter' (*Mary Marston*, p.177). This recognition is far from conspicuous in the literature about spiritual development in schools, whether we turn to the official or semi-official commentaries on the legislation or to the academic journals. Some proposals of how spiritual development might be promoted within the curriculum - the pause for thought in the chemistry lesson, the visit to the splendid view in Geography, and the like - are hardly threatening.

To be sure the more terrifying measures that the Wise Woman, North Wind, and Irene's grandmother adopt to bring their charges to their senses are not for introduction into the timetable of the common school. But this dimension of the Wise Woman's pedagogical strategy is not to be dismissed as inadmissible to the current debate about spiritual

development. Spiritual development, using the paradigm of spiritual development we have adopted, is a factor of our *becoming*, the journey, never to be abandoned if never to be completed, towards our final good. That journey is at times painful and a portion of that pain we bring on ourselves. The point can only be made cautiously and tentatively - there can be no palliation of the irredeemably tragic - but the promotion of the spiritual requires an openness to the possibility that negative and contradictory experiences may contribute to the nurture of well-being and the educational project requires us to help pupils see that this is so.

> The one secret of life and development is not to devise and plan but to fall in with the forces at work - to do every moment's duty aright - that being the part in the process allotted to us; and let come - not what will, for there is no such thing - but what the eternal thought wills for each of us, has intended in each of us from the first. If men would but believe that they are in process of creation, and consent to be made...they would ere long find themselves able to welcome every pressure of that hand upon them, even when it was felt in pain (*Sir Gibbie*, p. 309).

The mist of unfulfilment

Towards the end of *The Princess and Curdie* Irene's great-great-grandmother exchanges the guise of a housemaid for royal robes. 'Her face was radiant with joy, the joy overshadowed by a faint mist as of unfulfilment' (p. 299). The Wise Woman's work is never done. The story with that title ends enigmatically. The first edition of *The Wise Woman* (1875) concludes with a paragraph beginning, "And that is all my double story...

The inverted commas are there at the beginning of the paragraph but there are no corresponding closing inverted commas. Possibly this is a typographic error but the story is strange enough to make one wonder. Later editions omit the inverted commas altogether and we are left with what are MacDonald's closing comments on a story that does not exactly end.

> And that is all my double story. How double it is, if you care to know, you must find out. If you think that it is not finished - I never knew a story that was. I could tell you a great deal more concerning them all, but I have already told more than is good for those who read but with their foreheads, and enough for those whom it has made look a little solemn, and sigh as they close the book (p. 222).

The narrative is unclosed as is the Wise Woman's work. Now she has entered my story, the life-story with which the unfinished tale I have been reading has merged. What she will be for me is for me to find out, though in my story too that ending is deferred, always 'beyond'. Such is the function of transfiguring fantasy.

Spirituality and the discourse of parable

MacDonald expressly rejects the suggestion that his fairy tales should be read as allegories whose meaning, settled before the text is even written, is encoded in the narrative through the use of symbols serving as little more than conventional signs.[8] All the texts we are now discussing could carry *The Wise Woman*'s sub-title '*A parable*'. The meaning of a parable is not settled in advance independently of the reader. The parable awakens in the reader her independent perception of what is true; in that sense the reader creates the parable's meaning. The truth of the parable is the truth I make my own by my imaginative engagement in it. The priority of the reader's response in the interpretation of a text belonging to this genre permits readings which must be taken seriously whether or not they were intended by the author, even though a critic may continue to claim that the gloss he or she places on the text was what the author really meant. For example, as we have seen, Judith John (1991) offers a feminist reading of MacDonald's fantasy grandmothers. The plausibility of this particular interpretation is not here the issue - the point is that the discourse of parable permits it.

Parables can be wilfully paradoxical, subverting our familiar modes of cognition, undermining rational resistance to the improbable or unverifiable. McGillis (1985) draws our attention to the extraordinary exchange between Irene and her grandmother about the ball of finely spun thread she presents to the child. This ball of thread her grandmother first burns in her fire, then shuts in her cabinet with the enigmatic comment, 'No one ever gives anything to another without keeping it.' (*The Princess and the Goblin*, pp. 154 -155). The grandmother, McGillis argues, is here teaching 'poetic truth', appealing to the imagination which - and McGillis cites Prickett (1979) - 'reaches beyond the frontiers of ratiocinative thought' (McGillis, p. 148 ; Prickett, p. 40).

The awareness of truth that transcends rational perception is awakened by parable; so also by music and song. Irene returns dirty and bedraggled from her adventure in the mountain and her grandmother gives her a bath.

> And from somewhere came the voice of the lady, singing a strange sweet song, of which she could distinguish every word; but of the sense she had only a feeling...It vanished like the poetry in a dream, as fast as it came (*The Princess and the Goblin*, p. 234) .

Curdie at last sees Irene's grandmother. Her spinning wheel appears as a great wheel of fire turning in the sky. Curdie is told to listen to the singing of the wheel and the grandmother adds her voice to its music. ('The voice that sang through it all, about that I have no words to tell.') At last she stops both her singing and the singing of the wheel and she laughs. And 'the heart of the laugh was love' (pp. 83 - 86). The power of song to affirm what is beautiful and true and good is vividly illustrated in the Princess stories by the terror it instils in those who wholly reject such values, the goblins whose realm is the unlit caverns beneath mountain. The imagery of song and music is equally rich in *At the Back of the North Wind* where, as Bill Raeper (1992) has shown, the frequent ballads reflect MacDonald's debt to the Scottish folk tradition .

The spirit, then, is not to be nurtured by the prosaic, by the propositional. We are stirred to reach beyond our rational grasp by the indirect and allusive language of the parable, just as by the power of poetry, song, and music we sense and strive for what cannot be otherwise expressed.[9]

Summary

How far does what we have learned from the Wise Woman support the approach to spiritual development we have taken from Jack Priestley's Hockerill lecture? The Wise Woman, as we have traced her ways in this chapter, offers a 'six-fold cord' to guide the process of spiritual development. Priestley describes 'six aspects of the spiritual as it most affects curriculum matters' and that analysis has provided an invaluable frame of reference for considering MacDonald's spirituality. The two approaches do not appear to correspond exactly but I suggest that, so far from conflicting, they resonate powerfully with each other. Those resonances are still more powerful if we extend the frame of reference to include

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some of Priestley's observations in the rest of his lecture of which his comments on the six aspects of the spiritual form only one section. At the same time, as we anticipated, Priestley's analysis can be extended and strengthened in the light of MacDonald's work.

I have suggested that the understandable concern to be clear about what is meant by spiritual development risks draining that process of its essential mystery. The fact that its promotion, along with other curriculum requirements, is subject to inspection means that schools seek for criteria by which they can monitor and evaluate their success in this area. But there is a dimension to the spiritual that cannot be quantified. The Wise Woman will always escape the stern figures stumbling after her with clipboards. Spiritual education is a counterbalance to all within the curriculum which would rob life of its mystery. If we fail to define the spiritual and are reduced to silence, that silence is - to quote Priestley - 'the silence of mystery...rather than the silence of meaninglessness'.

The ways of the Wise Woman show that maps may be drawn of the landscape of the spiritual life which use conventional signs other than the traditional religious ones. The Wise Woman has many names and adopts many guises. Spiritual development does not require - though neither of course does it exclude - assent to the deliverances of a particular religious tradition or the adoption of its discourse. The same fundamental point is made in Priestley's terms by the claim that 'the spiritual is broader than the religious'. It is not the case that the spiritual is merely a mood, the sentiment left when a religion is stripped of its specialised terminology and metaphysical claims. It is a dimension of our becoming which alternative discourses, complementary to those of religious traditions but with their own autonomy, can both describe and promote.

The abiding image of the Wise Woman is of the woman, so old, so young, sitting at her spinning wheel in her loft at the top of a high staircase.[10] It is not only those who have immediate dealings with her whose final well-being, it seems, hangs by the thread she spins. Those images of the spinning wheel and the thread may be interpreted in many ways. I have suggested that the controlling idea behind this imagery is that there is a pattern, as yet undisclosed, to all that is random and contradictory in human experience. All ultimately coheres. Clearly Priestley's dictum that 'the spirit is holistic' could serve as a commentary

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on the Wise Woman's work. It follows that all that compartmentalises human experience, not least in the curriculum, is hostile to her purposes of good.

There is a pattern, but spiritual development is promoted not by spelling out what that pattern is. About such matters the teacher, as is the Wise Woman herself, must be reticent. The invitation is to live as if that pattern, albeit not yet disclosed, is no chimera. That invitation stands despite the fact that there can be no conclusive certainty that the universe of our experience is meaningful. That there is any overarching order is beyond proof or disproof. The promotion of spiritual development does not depend on the certainty of such a premise being demonstrated. More importantly, the task of spiritual education cannot await such a demonstration. The total educational enterprise proceeds, not from the certainty that everything makes sense, but from the deliberate adoption of a frame of reference which allows that possibility. It is scarcely conceivable that schools should be organised on the contrary assumption, on the premise that values, spiritual or any other, can only be explained as human constructs.

The Wise Woman thus works from a metaphysical base, as Priestley insists a spiritual pedagogy must always do. For him that base is provided by Whitehead's 'process philosophy'. Whether the premise of MacDonald's work, that all ultimately serves a purpose of good, goes beyond the claims of Whitehead's metaphysic is a philosophical question outside the scope of this study but it surely does not conflict with it.

The process of spiritual development is arduous and often painful. The scene of spiritual development is not always where there is a view of a beautiful sunset. Here is an aspect of the matter on which neither the official publications nor the scholarly literature dwell. If the figure of the Wise Woman and her sometimes harsh methods are taken seriously then this omission, or at least the imbalance, needs to be addressed. The implication is certainly not that edifying ordeals be introduced into the curriculum. There is no place for a 'cold showers spirituality'. Everyday experience, not least of children and young people, already contains quite enough that is contradictory and tragic. Spiritual education does not mean facile moralising about such experience but it does require helping children to come to terms with it.

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There is that too in human nature which resists the good. There is 'the Shadow'. Perhaps at this point Priestley's model of spiritual development could be strengthened still further in the light of the spirituality of the Wise Woman. In insisting that 'the spirit is communal' Priestley calls attention to all in contemporary culture which encourages a selfish individualism. 'Spiritual wickedness in high places', he reminds us, is ever present. But Priestley does not press through the implications for spiritual pedagogy of this dimension of human experience. The point must be made carefully. It is not to recommend the maxim of the Evangelical Awakening, 'the merit of breaking a child's will betimes'.[11] It is to warn that the nurture of the spiritual will meet with fierce resistance. Account for it how we will, evil is a fact and spiritual development entails a continuing and intense struggle with it.

Priestley deplores the curriculum which prioritises the pupil's acquisition of knowledge over the kind of human being he or she is turning into. The spiritual concerns our 'being and becoming'. That too is the Wise Woman's concern. But here too, as we did in discussing *Phantastes*, we recognise a significant difference in emphasis in the spirituality of MacDonald's work. Priestley argues that a 'concept of a developed human being is needed'. To be sure there are many models offered us in MacDonald's fiction of the 'developed' person - we need think only of Robert Falconer or Mary Marston[12] - but MacDonald's spirituality is nevertheless shot through with the sense that spiritual development is essentially an unfinished process. The Wise Woman's work is never done. MacDonald's fantasy and the process of which it is the parable is unclosed. The end - the 'developed' humanity - is always beyond.

If a spirituality directed by the Wise Woman stops short of contemplating in detail the ideal of the developed individual so too it refrains from envisioning the developed society. It is wary of utopias. In both respects the implication of MacDonald's work is that the end is always beyond. Again there is a tension with the model of spirituality commended by Priestley. To be sure Priestley's insistence that the spiritual is 'other-worldly' is manifestly in full accord with the eschatological drive that is so powerful in all MacDonald's work. But, taught by the Wise Woman, we urge caution when there is the plea, as in Priestley's lecture, for the curriculum to include specific 'utopias'. We recall the 'faint mist as of unfulfilment' that overshadows her joy (*The Princess and Curdie*, p. 299). We remember

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too what happened to Gwyntystorm. The best we envision is not the best to be. Even our most splendid utopias are at best blueprints of the penultimate.

The Wise Woman moves on the permeable frontier between a world over which we have some rational control and a world beyond our intellectual capacity fully to demonstrate or explain. She teaches what cannot be told. The truth of which she is the mediatrix can only be imaginatively perceived by the insight which reaches beyond the grasp of reason. Whether or not such truth can after a fashion be asserted propositionally, it is only meaningful when I awake to it myself and make it my own. Parables, not delivering answers but posing questions, invite what they can never compel, an inner perception of what ultimately is significant. She who has ears to hear let her hear.

It is an understanding of how the spiritual is to be expressed and nurtured which Priestley endorses. He recognises that our failure to articulate the spiritual results from lurking misgivings that anything affirmed other than by systematic rational argument is vacuous. He believes that these misgivings are unfounded and deeply mischievous. As we have seen, he suggests that the answer to A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* is 'language, truth and poetry or art and music or narrative or metaphor'. This assertion might well have been a seventh - or indeed the first - of the 'aspects of the spiritual' he describes.

For all the differences of emphasis between the Wise Woman's 'six-fold cord' and Jack Priestley's 'six aspects of the spiritual', a comparison of the two models only goes to confirm the value of the 'Priestley paradigm' both as frame of reference for reading MacDonald's work and as a description of spiritual development.

Two points in conclusion. Firstly, Priestley alludes, to 'the monastic ideal of reflective learning leading to the growth of wisdom'. Priestley's stress on 'the getting of wisdom' as an imperilled educational goal alerts us to the significance invested in the title of MacDonald's grandmother figure. She is above all a *wise* woman and the path of spiritual development on which she is the guide leads to growth in wisdom.

Secondly, there is much in Priestley's lecture about the limits of language. In seeking to

express the spiritual we reach out after what lies beyond its boundaries. The activity of the spirit cannot be arrested and defined but only invoked in 'dynamic' images. Such is the imagery of the texts in which the Wise Woman appears. She is, after all, 'North *Wind*'.

Endnotes

1. In *Castle Warlock* the Wise Woman appears to the young Cosmo in his dreams. 'This woman would be now one, now another of the powers of the fire, the air, the earth, and the water, who favoured, helped and and protected him, through dangers and trials many...He was watched and loved and taught by the most gracious and graceful, the most ethereally tender and powerful of beings' (p. 35). The most remarkable example of the appearance of the Wise Woman in MacDonald's 'realistic' fiction is as a personification of nature in the fine Scottish novel *What's Mine's Mine*. I have discussed this bold recasting of the Wise Woman in Chapter Four.

2. The story has had numerous titles both as published in MacDonald's lifetime and in subsequent editions. Originally the book was serialised under the title *A Double Story. The Wise Woman: A Parable* is the title of the first one-volume edition (Shabermann, 1990, p. 55).

3. The striking translation offered by Melchert and Proffitt appears to be their own (Melchert and Proffitt, 1998). The Hebrew (*m-s-ch-q-th*) behind their rendering 'at play' is usually translated, as in the Authorised Version, as 'rejoicing' but their translation is entirely legitimate. It is the same verb as is used in that most remarkable text, Zechariah ch. 8 v. 5, 'The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof'.

4. Genesis ch. 32, vv. 22 - 32; Exodus ch. 3, vv. 1 - 6.

5. MacDonald writes to Mrs William Cowper-Temple, 'Truth comes and goes in a thousand shapes like the sunsets and the sunrises' (ALS Edinburgh, 7th July 1878; Sadler, 1994, p. 284).

6. The work of the Wise Woman at her wheel suggests the possibility of an all-embracing *pattern*. The complementary image in MacDonald is of the summit of the mountain from which vantage-point all at last becomes clear. 'It is a climbing and a striving to reach that point of vision where the multiplex crossings and apparent intertwistings of the lines of fact and feeling and duty shall manifest themselves as a regular and symmetrical design' (*Browning's "Christmas Eve", Orts*, p. 211).

7. cf. *The Consuming Fire* in *Unspoken Sermons* (First Series, 1867).

8. There is increasing recognition that the contrast between allegory and parable, very much to the detriment of the former, has been drawn too crudely (Marshall, 1988), but there remains a profound difference between the symbol whose meaning is predetermined and the image which calls out of the reader the meaning it has for him or her.

9. MacNeice (1965) has commented elegantly on MacDonald's 'extraordinary female creatures'. 'These creatures, who are neither goddesses nor angels nor enchantresses nor fairies but something of all four, exist in a way outside normal time but slip into our time or allow us to slip into theirs, in order to do their good works' (p. 99).

10. The symbolism of attics and cellars in MacDonald's fiction hardly needs spelling-out. MacDonald interrupts the narrative of *Malcolm* to talk about his love of lofts. 'The cellars are the metaphysics, the garrets the poetry of the house' (p. 203).

11. See Paul Sangster's *Pity My Simplicity* (Sangster, 1963).

12. 'For this girl, who spent her days behind a counter, was one of the spiritual forces at work for the conservation and recovery of the universe' (*Mary Marston*, p. 133).

CONCLUSIONS

The questions with which we began were these: What understanding of spiritual development and its promotion emerges from MacDonald's writings and how do his fantasy writings function pedagogically? Behind these two questions lies a third which classroom teachers will press home. What is to be done? What strategies for the promotion of spiritual development emerge from our reading of MacDonald? This last enquiry has not been the main focus of this study, which has been primarily concerned with strengthening the conceptual grounding of the nature of spiritual development, but in summarising the arguments that have been developed I shall indicate some of the practical pedagogical implications I see arising from them. As a basis for these concluding comments it will be helpful to offer a summary response to the questions which have occupied us. That response - and the thesis which this study has defended - I would submit in these terms:

> Spiritual development is a process towards an as yet undisclosed end. All descriptions we offer of that developed state, whether in terms of individual fulfilment or of social goals, are accounts of the penultimate. We are beckoned by what is always beyond. Spiritual pedagogy assumes that the universe is coherent and purposeful but there can be no final assurance that this assumption is not mistaken. The process of spiritual development is advanced less through the nurture of inner spiritual sensibility than in relationship with others. 'Nowhere but in other lives can I breathe.' It is a process of intense moral seriousness requiring arduous engagement with what opposes it. A spiritual pedagogy does not depend on the discourse of a religious tradition for its articulation. Other stories can be told. Our flourishing is promoted by engagement with nature as with *faerie*, by the affirmation of childhood as a condition to which we must aspire, and by the nourishment and exercise of the imagination. Our spiritual development is both troubled and sustained by a sense of the ultimate mystery of things. Spiritual development is promoted by 'transfiguring fantasy', unclosed narrative which awaits its resolution and fulfilment within the reader's own life-story with which it elides.

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The process of spiritual development

The end of the spiritual journey is, as Mott-Thornton stresses, 'oriented towards a future both social and individual, which is currently and importantly hidden' (1998, p. 159). MacDonald's work is shot through by an intense longing for what lies beyond, both beyond present experience and beyond rational articulation. 'There is a reality beyond all facts of suns and systems' (*Castle Warlock*, p. 256). That reality is also beyond the capacity of language to convey.

> For such purposes it is rather music than articulation that is needful...language must rather be turned into music than logically extended (*David Elginbrod*, p. 186).

The longing for the beyond is expressed by MacDonald in temporal terms as the hope for what will be. All the main verbs in MacDonald are in the future tense. In the discourse of Christian piety Steenie yearns for the return of 'the bonny man' (*Heather and Snow*). In the language of fantasy Anodos awaits the fulfilment of the promise breathed by the beech tree, 'a great good is coming' (*Phantastes*, ii. p. 216).

Most discussion of the spiritual as a dimension of the educational agenda shies away from such eschatological language. The preferred viewpoint is to understand the nurture of the spiritual as a training in awareness of the spiritual dimension of all we experience here and now irrespective of what the future holds. The latter approach, it could be claimed, is more attentive to the spirituality of eastern cultures less wedded to a linear understanding of spiritual development and thus to be welcomed in a multi-cultural society.

We can hardly quarrel with that sentiment but there are good educational reasons for retaining the teleological understanding of spiritual development we find in the MacDonald texts. We recall the words of Dwayne Heubner (1965) which Jack Priestley drew to our attention,

> Education is the lure of the transcendent. That which we seem is not what we are for we can always be other. Education is the openness to a future that is beyond all futures (p. 463).

Children and young people are good at looking forward, a capacity on which a spiritual pedagogy must capitalise. A spiritual pedagogy shaped by the insights of MacDonald must be, unashamedly, 'a pedagogy of hope' - in Priestley's terms it will be 'other worldly'. This

will be a larger vision than of individual achievement at the expense of others. As we shall again shortly emphasise, it will be relational and holistic. Curricular strategy will encourage the envisioning of the coming good - albeit in the awareness that our best plans can only be of the penultimate. It has been claimed that there is a darker tone, an undertow of sadness, in MacDonald's later work. But it is important that we do not allow such an impression to colour our reading of his work as a whole. The discontent which forbids MacDonald to accept that our formation is ever finished is not born of sense of loss. The dominant mood of his spirituality is not nostalgia but hope. The vision that the best is yet to be always summons the attentive individual to pursue his or her spiritual path purposefully. Strategies for spiritual development must be shaped on this positive premise that, for all that threatens human flourishing, the pursuit of the good that beckons from beyond our present is not a futile quest. A characteristic of the school which takes spiritual development seriously is that it is an optimistic community.

The metaphysical premise of this 'pedagogy of hope' is there is a pattern which embraces both all we suffer and all we celebrate. This pattern is symbolised by the work of 'the Wise Woman' and by the thread she spins. By that thread hangs our well-being. But there can be no certainty that the totality of things is meaningful. We have learned from the reticence of the Wise Woman herself that such a teleology is not to be proved by argument. 'Harmony, which is beauty and law, works necessary faith in the region capable of truth. It needs the intervention of no reasoning. It is beheld' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 251). The possibility of a spiritual pedagogy does not depend the proof of its metaphysical premises. What spiritual nurture does call for is the choice to act on the assumption, beyond proof or disproof, that there is an overarching pattern to experience. It is hard to contemplate that schools could be organised on the contrary assumption, that values, 'spiritual' or any other, can only be explained as human constructs.

We recall the distrust voiced in the literature about models of spiritual development which present it as essentially the nurture of inward awareness, as a fine-tuning of an individual's inner sense of the transcendent. That distrust is deepened by our reading of MacDonald. For all his interest in individual formation, and, in the terms of his devotional writing, in each individual's unique relationship with God, it is impossible to build from the materials

of MacDonald's work a spirituality of 'the flight of the alone to the alone'. Words set in stone above the grave of A. J. Scott echo through the pages of MacDonald's work. 'He who wills to do the will of God shall know of the doctrine'. The force of this principle is not dependent on its theistic formulation. The principle is of the inexorable claims on us of our neighbour and of the next thing to be done. It is an axiom of MacDonald's understanding of human flourishing. There is no path to understanding which by-passes what is required of us. Again, the curricular implications are far-reaching. The process which is to be promoted is, in Priestley's terms 'communal' (1996); according to Hay and Nye (1998) - and in a term to be preferred - it is a growth in *relational* awareness'. Spiritual development *in* schools is a matter of the spiritual development *of* schools. Curricular strategies for spiritual development must look to the common life of the school as well as for the nurture of the individual student. 'Nowhere but in other lives can I breathe'. Indeed the implications of a spirituality informed by MacDonald's work are wider still. The vision is 'holistic', looking beyond the kinship of humanity to the mending of the torn fabric of all that is, to the recovery of a right relationship with all living things.

Thus a pedagogy informed by MacDonald's work will be concerned about the societies we shape. It will, for example, support the planned enhancement of 'citizenship education' in the new National Curriculum. A spirituality with the 'utopian' emphases we have found in MacDonald's will encourage consideration about how our life together could be better ordered. (The Secretary of State's original proposals on the proposed new foundation subject of citizenship at Key Stages 3 and 4 related citizenship only to 'the social, moral, and cultural development of pupils. 'The spiritual is prominent by its absence', comments Copley (2000, p. 82). The word is back, if carrying little weight, in the final document.)

But a caveat must be entered. The orientation of MacDonald's vision of the coming good looks beyond the models of common order which the curricular proposals see as propitious for the flourishing of citizenship. For example, if there is a spiritual dimension to learning about citizenship it will not permit us to settle for 'our economy and our democratic institutions and values' (DfEE, 1999b, p. 183), however perfected, as the goal of our quest for meaning and fulfilment. Indeed a spirituality informed by MacDonald writings will forbid us taking our rest in any model of the social order, however necessary it is to build such

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models and to try to make them work. The doom of Gwyntystorm stands as an abiding warning against seeing the achievement of social ends as the culmination of the spiritual journey.

The path of spiritual development is at times painful. Like the wood that went to the making of Robert Falconer's violin, his 'bonny lady', it seems sometimes that we must be 'tortured into shape' (*Robert Falconer*, p. 165). Here MacDonald highlights what the official literature ignores. The curricular implications of the fact that it hurts to grow are not so much that there should be increased emphasis on the physically demanding, competitive sport, 'outward bound' activities, and the like. The 'muscular spirituality' which Pennington (1994) saw as characteristic of MacDonald's work is not what is called for. But there must be a recognition that we are formed by unwelcome experiences, including our mistakes, as we come to terms with them, as well as by more positive experience. Here is something which, within a school, younger and older together can discuss and curricular strategies for spiritual development must make that kind of discussion possible.

The promotion of spiritual development will encounter resistance. In the light of MacDonald's work we recognise that, demythologise it as radically as we will, there is that which can only be described as evil, evil which seeks to destroy spiritual growth. Spiritual development must never be drained of its intense moral seriousness. Here again is an essential emphasis largely missing in the unimpassioned official publications. The demands of spiritual development arise primarily from its essential relational dimension but nothing in this study rules out the further consideration that, whatever metaphysical account we give of them, there may be spiritualities which are potentially harmful. Within the curriculum, it no doubt the task of Religious Education to 'test the spirits', to compare the claims of the spiritualities competing for our allegiance and to challenge the fallacy that it does not matter what spirituality we make our own. But there is no subject in the curriculum to which Curdie's question - ' how can all shapes speak the truth?' - is irrelevant (*The Princess and Curdie*, pp. 71-2). There is no lesson on the timetable in which this fundamental issue cannot be addressed, the issue of what makes sense of the universe of our experience and makes our common life possible and what by contrast threatens to destroy it.

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The discourses of spiritual development

How are we to speak of these things? The relevance of MacDonald's work for the contemporary debate about spiritual development does not lie only in the writer's absorption with the themes of human flourishing and what advances or impedes it. Many Victorian moralists were similarly preoccupied. The exceptional significance of MacDonald's work is that it explores the one theme of spiritual development both in a discourse which employs the familiar terms of Christian spirituality and in a discourse which dispenses with those terms. We saw in our review of a now extensive literature how the debate about spiritual formation constantly returns, first, to the question of whether or not a coherent spirituality must be rooted in a religious tradition making its own truth-claims and, secondly, to the related question of whether the alternative spiritualities, that anchored in a religious tradition and that independent of such a tradition, are compatible. It is above all on these issues that we look for light from MacDonald in whose work both spiritualities are present.

Of these two questions the second, concerning the compatibility of the alternative spiritualities, is clearly the crucial one. If the two spiritualities are indeed compatible then it follows that the framework of a religious tradition is not indispensable for a coherent model of spiritual development This study has suggested that it is not in fact necessary to choose, say, between the spirituality of *Phantastes* and that of the *Unspoken Sermons*. We saw in our survey of approaches to MacDonald's work (Chapter Three) how sometimes it has been suggested that the fairy tales and fantasies are to be read as allegories about the claims of Christian faith. It is as fundamental a mistake as can be made about MacDonald's fantasy. Not that a Christian interpretation of the fantasy writing is to be excluded. What is mistaken is to refuse to the texts their own autonomy and to refuse to the reader the freedom to make of them what he or she will.

I return to the remarkable words of Anodos which we have more than once cited. Anodos looks to reconcile apparently conflicting accounts of what is true. He seeks,

> to find the point in which their invisibly converging lines would unite in one,
> revealing a truth higher than either and differing from both; though so far
> from being opposed to either that it was that whence each derived its life

and power (*Phantastes*, i. pp. 178 - 179).

Neither the discourse of *Phantastes* nor for that of the *Unspoken Sermons* has the last word. The terms of both discourses are 'signifiers', the familiar vocabulary of the sermons as much as the strange imagery of the fairy tales. The signifiers, whether uttered from pulpits or woven into fantasies told at firesides or classrooms, allude to and draw their power from the 'the signified' but they cannot grasp it. If we wished to press the figure MacDonald uses in the above passage we could suggest that 'the invisibly converging lines' are asymtotal. Their meeting is in the infinity which is always beyond, in the reality which validates the theistic and the non-theistic discourse alike and which summons and sustains the questing spirit. Neither discourse has the advantage over the other in its power to evoke that which is beyond apprehension, yet which always invites us beyond whatever point on the spiritual path which we have reached.

Our reading of the great sweep of MacDonald's work, in which the theme of our formation is treated both in the terms of traditional Christian piety - often, as I have been concerned to stress, with unmatched spiritual insight - and in the cryptic imagery of fantasy, leads us to conclude that the two spiritual discourses are compatible. There is not a fundamental and irreconcilable tension in MacDonald's work between the texts which preach their message in the familiar Christian categories and those which eschew those categories.

The two spiritualities are compatible. It follows that for a model of spiritual development to be coherent it need not be rooted in traditional religious concepts and truth-claims. Spiritual development, to recall the first of its features identified by Priestley, is 'broader than religious'.

What should be the spiritual discourse of a school where those of different faiths - and many of no faith - teach and study together? Considerations far wider than those explored in this study, with its very specific and limited objectives, bear on that issue. How far the spirituality of a single tradition should be affirmed within its own terms in any given school is a curricular judgement which will be governed by such factors as the make-up of the school community (in staffroom as well as classroom), the wishes of parents, the school's traditional religious allegiance, if any. Equally important will be how the language of a

particular religion is seen to function as a public discourse within the school. For there are ways of articulating the spirituality of a faith tradition - at least of Christianity - as the primary spiritual discourse of a school community, particularly in school worship, which are not the imperialist exercises which, for example, Ian Markham suggests they must be (Markham, 1999). All depends on how things are done.

Here are matters for another thesis more important than this one. But the whole thrust of this study, selective as it has been in the factors it has considered, has been to advocate the relinquishing of any specific confessional account of things as the primary spiritual discourse of a school serving a pluralist community. An immediate consequence of this principle - and a telling sign of what order of spiritual discourse is seen as primary to the wider curriculum of the school - would be the adoption of John Hull's recommendation, that a school 'should be required to hold acts of collective spirituality' (Hull, 1995a, p. 69) rather than acts of Christian worship.

A school affirming a non-confessional spirituality to undergird its common life, a spirituality accessible to those of all faiths or none, is not settling for the second-best. Such a spirituality is not necessarily the secular humanist spirituality which it is claimed most schools now adopt as an alternative to a spirituality rooted in a faith tradition (Copley, 2000, pp. 130 - 143). The spirituality of MacDonald's fantasy is not avowedly theistic but neither is it a 'secular humanist spirituality'. Nor does a spirituality uncoupled from a specific religious tradition have to sink to what is often dismissed as a 'lowest common denominator' spirituality. (Is the spirituality of *King Lear* a 'lowest common denominator' spirituality?) Nor need it be the 'pick-and-mix' spirituality which trawls the traditions for the edifying and inoffensive but which in fact is a hybrid that none of those traditions would recognise or own. It seeks neither to assert nor to silence the claims of the faith traditions. Such traditions will be affirmed in the school's Religious Education syllabus and by a culture in the school which respects the observance of differing religious commitments and customs.

Nature, the child, and the imagination

We find in MacDonald's writings themes which were the shared interest of many thinkers

and writers of the mid-nineteenth century. MacDonald took up topics which were central to the broad current of ideas - if by then a somewhat slack current - flowing from the fierce headwaters of the Romantic movement. Our interest is in the place these themes have in MacDonald's educational thinking and here we find familiar topics treated with an original insight which I have highlighted. In this study three such themes have been identified - nature, childhood, and the imagination. In MacDonald's approach to all these themes we find insights relevant to a spiritual pedagogy for our own time.

In MacDonald's view we are taught by nature. MacDonald learns from Wordsworth - and from his experience of the hills above Huntly interpreted by Wordsworth - to be sensitive to nature in all its moods, whether intimate or overpowering, and to look to nature for the lessons it teaches, not least the lesson that by the love of nature we are led to love one another. These themes are commonplace sentiments, the stock-ideas of Victorians for whom Wordsworth has iconic status. The purpose of stressing MacDonald's 'Wordsworthianism' has been to point out how his belief that nature educates resonates with current perspectives on spiritual development. We have instanced in particular John White's plea that children be alerted to 'the wonder of it all' (1994, p. 373) and the concern of the National Forum for Values (QCA, 1997) that pupils be taught to 'value the environment'.

MacDonald's understanding of the pedagogical function of nature is not merely a reflection of Wordsworth's but in significant respects it is informed by his own distinct vision. MacDonald's striking insight is that nature has much in common with the fairy tale. We saw how the most remarkable connection MacDonald makes between nature and *faerie* is to depict the nature as 'the Wise Woman', the grandmother figure whose role in MacDonald's fantasy is as central as it is enigmatic and who teaches not by telling but by asking.

Such an approach to nature has important curricular implications. A spiritual pedagogy informed by MacDonald's high estimate of nature will certainly encourage taking children out of doors and welcome projects for the conservation of the environment and the like. It will urge a respect for wild-life and an attentiveness to all that is beautiful and awe-inspiring in the world about us. But if the function of nature educationally is akin to that of fantasy such objectives, admirable as they are, do not take account of all that nature can be for us.

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To engage with nature is, like Anodos, to step into an alternative world where, as in *faerie*, we encounter much that is cryptic, unsettling and sometimes threatening. Moreover, as with *faerie* so with nature, no one can claim custody of its meaning. A teacher may direct a child's attention to this creature or that feature in the natural world but he or she cannot prescribe what the child will see. Nature is charged with a mystery which the fullest of scientific explanations will never dispel. To sense that mystery, as of a strange tale yet to be explained, is to hear questions put to us about who we are, what we may hope for and what we should do. These are considerations which must be brought to bear on every aspect of the curriculum which takes pupils 'out of doors', whether literally or by reason of the material in the classroom they are studying.

A second theme prominent in the thought of those who, like MacDonald, inherit the Romantic legacy is that of childhood and in Chapter Five I analysed the complex function of the image of the child in MacDonald's work. As with the theme of nature important pedagogical implications arise from MacDonald's original reworking of familiar motifs.

We saw how MacDonald's admiration of the *Immortality Ode* does not deter him from advancing an estimate of childhood at some points radically different from Wordsworth's. Unlike Wordsworth MacDonald does not entertain the possibility of a previous incarnation. Nor does he dwell on what has been lost. He is sustained not by the memory of childhood but by the promise of childhood.

MacDonald recognises certain attributes of childhood, an acuity of awareness, a responsiveness to nature, a capacity to believe and trust and love. In some of the children in MacDonald's fiction these attributes are developed to an implausibly high degree. MacDonald would not find that criticism threatening. Childhood in his writings is an ideal. That ideal is fully realised in the figure of the Christlike child whom we meet both in some of the novels - in the person of the young Sir Gibbie for example - and in the sermon *The Child in the Midst*. It is an ideal only partially realised in the children encountered in real life as indeed in other less attractive children in MacDonald's own work. If the attributes of the ideal child are not to be found in the real life child then to that extent is the childhood of the child diminished. But MacDonald does not believe that the attributes of childhood are

condemned to fade or are beyond recovery as the individual grows. Childhood in this sense is an aspect of our fulfilled humanity and belongs to our spiritual destiny. 'I do not think any man is compelled to bid goodbye to childhood'(*David Elginbrod*, p. 32).

There are the 'virtues' of childhood and there is too the 'language' of childhood. For MacDonald poetry, which has a 'purchasing power' above that of prose to apprehend and express what is beyond, is the mother-tongue of childhood. There has been much in this study about alternative spiritual discourses and their compatibility. The implication of MacDonald's understanding of poetry as the native language of childhood is that to insist on the use of a traditional religious discourse for a spiritual pedagogy, at least with younger children, is to impose a second language. Certainly there are good educational reasons for wishing children to become literate in that second language and it is the task of Religious Education to see that they do so. But the process of spiritual development and its promotion does not require a fluency in that language and in so far as childhood is to be understood as a goal and not as a passing phase that primal language must be retained - or relearned.

The image of the child serves both as a pattern in the nurture of children - the child too must become the child he or she is - and as a model of what in the end we must all attain to. In pursuing this argument it is necessary to keep one's feet firmly on the classroom floor where in the procession from one Key Stage to the next much must be jettisoned as well as assimilated on the road to responsible adulthood. To be sure 'there is a childhood we must leave behind' (*David Elginbrod*, p. 29). MacDonald does not belong to that company of Victorians, his friend Charles Dodgson among them, who cling to childhood in fear of their adult selves or of the harsh realities of adult society. But it is also necessary to recognise with MacDonald, without surrender to nostalgia or sentiment, that there are qualities of childhood whose loss is a diminishment.

We can properly speak of 'the spirit of the child'. We recall that the book by Hay and Nye (1998) bearing that title is no flight of fancy but the result of rigorous academic research. There it is claimed,

> For many children in primary school their natural spiritual awareness undergoes a process of being orphaned (p. 156).

The authors warn that this natural spirituality is denied a home by religious institutions which have forgotten their spiritual roots, that it is disregarded by the dominant form of scientific discourse which allows no room for human subjectivity, and that it is starved by an educational culture which prioritises the achievement of measurable targets and prizes high places in performance league tables.

The promotion of spiritual development resists these pressures, demanding rather the affirmation and sustaining of childhood. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the educational implications of this perspective on childhood, calling in question as it does the prioritising in the curriculum of what is seen as necessary for success, measured in economic terms, in a competitive society. We recall a comment from another unclosed fantasy.

> 'Le petit prince avait sur les choses serieuses des idées tres différentes des idées des grandes personnes' (de Saint-Exupery, 1958, p. 49). (*On matters of consequence, the little prince had ideas which were very different from those of the grown-ups.*)

Those charged with the governance of schools intending to do more than pay lip-service to the concept of spiritual development will be wise to pause occasionally in the race to raise standards to reflect on the mystery of what it means to be a child. They will also be wise to temper their target-setting by the consideration that it is disabling to grow up too soon.

If childhood is recognised as in some sense an educational goal it follows that the relationship of child and teacher must be seen in a new light. It is an another aspect of a pedagogy of the spirit unrecognised in the official documentation. As Derek Webster (1993) has written teachers too 'are driven to quest for the meaning of their lives in an unending labyrinth' (p. 131). This shared quest requires of the adult a certain principled deference to the child. We are not ourselves in secure possession of the spiritual high-ground. Here is a consideration with important implications for the dynamic of a spiritual pedagogy - for the tone, the temper, the spiritual climate of the school community - even if those implications can hardly be reduced to specific curricular proposals.

A third theme which we are not surprised to find MacDonald addressing is that of the imagination. It is a word rarely found in the indices of modern text-books on child

development and it seems that Mary Warnock's plea in 1976 that 'the cultivation of the imagination should be the chief aim of education' (p. 9) remains unheeded.

MacDonald's treatment of the imagination is fundamental to his understanding of human formation. It is located within an educational philosophy which anticipates that of Whitehead for whom the achievement of ascertainable objectives is subordinated to the enrichment of a process, a process always characterised by radical incompleteness. Within this educational model the role of the imagination is always to reach beyond the intellect's grasp. The imagination constantly questions, advancing the process of spiritual development by forbidding us contentment with the little we know, not only of the mechanism of things but of the meaning of things. Its role is to disturb and to serve education's ultimate purpose which, in MacDonald's words, is not 'repose' but 'a noble unrest' (*Orts*, p. 1). Thus the critical role of the imagination in the spiritual journey is to spur us to what is always beyond.

Again the curricular implications are considerable. The imagination ventures into unexplored territory. Its role is vital in finding out what we do not know and to that extent it is no enemy of a curriculum which emphasises pupils' need to absorb a lot of information. But to affirm the imagination is to refuse the hegemony in the curriculum of the quantifiable and the examinable. The imagination forbids any sense of repose in the attainment of measurable targets and in this respect MacDonald's understanding of the educational role of the imagination is a challenge to contemporary curricular priorities.

It only needs to be added that the imagination promotes our spiritual development by alerting us to our moral obligations, by pointing us to the next thing to be done.

Transfiguring fantasy

Our discussion of spiritual development has assumed a conceptual model which has served us well, that of spiritual development as essentially a process towards an as yet undisclosed end. From our reading of MacDonald a corresponding metaphor emerges, that of the unclosed narrative. 'The worl' afore me's my story-buik,' says the young Donal Grant as he sets out into the world (*Donal Grant*, p. 6). An individual's spiritual development

unfolds in his or her 'life-story', a narrative which defers closure and with it knowledge of its final significance. The metaphor is of life as an enigmatic text which holds in abeyance the resolution of its riddles.

The unclosed narrative of the MacDonald fantasy or fairy tale can be seen as just such an extended metaphor. The perplexity of Anodos, of Mossy and Tangle, of Mr. Vane, as they try to make sense of what befalls them, corresponds to that of the reader searching for the sense of his or her own story. What it all means escapes the grasp of the protagonists of the narratives just as it eludes the reader. But the thrust of these tales is far from implying that there is no ultimate resolution of the mystery, of the protagonists' stories or the reader's, or that the search for it is futile. In these unclosed narratives, those we read and those we live out, the disclosure of meaning is deferred but the possibility of it, far from being denied, is promised.

But MacDonald's cryptic and unconcluded fantasy not only mirrors the process of spiritual development. The claim of this thesis has been that it has a potentially formative function, that it promotes what it pictures, that it is, in a word 'transfiguring fantasy'.

It is often maintained that fantasy functions by introducing us to an alternative imaginary world, where inner conflicts can be acted out and resolved and buried fears exhumed and exorcised, so that on returning to the real world we are better equipped to meet its challenges. Our imaginative experience of the secondary world equips us for our engagement in the primary world of real life. But we are never in doubt which world we are in.

I have argued that to understand fantasy as transfiguring is to make a somewhat different claim. It is to claim that such fantasy, of which MacDonald's imaginative accounts of alternative worlds are powerful examples, functions by calling in question the distinctions we customarily make between the worlds we move in, the most fundamental of which is that between the narrative I am reading and my own life-story. In sharing the fictional protagonist's quest to interpret the enigmas of his journey - not least that of finding himself moving between different worlds - the boundary between the two texts, the book in my

hands and the life I lead, fades. Nor is that boundary restored when I put the book down for the story I have been reading, like my own, is unclosed. The two realms elide and the task of resolving the enigmas of the fantasy becomes one with the unfinished business of making sense of my own story.

The curriculum implications of this understanding of the role of 'transfiguring fantasy' in a spiritual pedagogy reinforces the importance of all that Mike Newby has said about the indispensability of stories for spiritual development . Newby quotes MacIntyre to telling effect,

> Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted anxious stutterers in their actions as well as their words (MacIntyre, 1990, p.216, cited by Newby, 1997, p.291).

Schools must indeed be places where stories are constantly told. The more specific implication of our study is that there are some stories to be told - and, let it be stressed, to be *written* - which potentially are uniquely formative. These tales, subversive of our settled assumptions about where worlds end, have the capacity to change us for good. The English department can be a workshop where such narratives are not only read or heard but also composed, dramatised and discussed. But the wealth of story is not the monopoly of any one subject.

At this late stage a brief personal note may perhaps be allowed. For fifteen years as a boarding school chaplain I was responsible for the spiritual welfare of some five hundred young people. It fell to me to give some kind of public expression to the spirituality of that community. Daily I wondered what to say. In the light of my rereading of MacDonald I recognise that my dilemma was to know which should be the controlling discourse, the 'theistic' or the 'non-theistic', by which the spiritual life of the school should be expressed. My growing awareness, though I scarcely thought it through at the time, was that the discourses were complementary. The acts of worship I was called on to lead remained in fact broadly Christian, less because the school was a Christian foundation, still less because I felt that metaphysical truth-claims had to be periodically asserted, much more because the language was familiar and allowed common utterance of shared concerns. But at the same time I found myself on such occasions increasingly using an alternative discourse. There was more drama, open to be discussed but unburdened by commentary dictating what it must

mean. There was music and dance. Above all I heard myself telling more stories. When I was obedient to my growing appreciation of how they functioned I added nothing to them. The stories I found I most wanted to share were those which left one wondering what happened next, the stories whose sequel is absorbed into the unfinished business of one's own life. I was discovering the potential of what I now call 'transfiguring fantasy'.

We return in conclusion to the Wise Woman who figures centrally and enigmatically in many of MacDonald's finest imaginative writings. We have learned much from her. Above all she renews in us a sense of the mystery that encompasses us. The literature about spiritual development is largely intended to clarify a legislative requirement and to assist those who are required to comply with it. The aim of such literature is to banish confusion. But what is intended to banish confusion may well dispel the mystery. It needs to be stressed that any account of spiritual development which seems to have succeeded in demystifying the human condition is not to be trusted.

MacDonald himself must have the final word. His portrait of the schoolmaster, Alexander Graham, is of one who understands that the teacher's primary task is the nurture of the spirit.

> The human mind and conscience were, he said, the plains of Armageddon, where the battle of good and evil was for ever raging; and the one business of a teacher was to rouse and urge this battle by leading fresh forces of the truth into the field - forces composed as little as might be of the hireling troops of the intellect, and as much as possible of the native energies of the heart, imagination and conscience (*Malcolm*, p. 32).

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From a letter of George MacDonald to his fiancee, Louisa Powell (ALS Yale, 24 May 1847)

London, May 24, 1847.

My dear Louisa,

I should have replied to your welcome note ere now, but I wished to send you both a longer note than I have been able to write. I began a string of thinkings – not thoughts measured off in lines too, which being, like every thing else born in my brain, unfinished, and perhaps being quite as well left so, — If you don't know what _unfinished_ means, the preceding sentence will form a most appropriate illustration.

APPENDIX 2

The National Curriculum - the consultative process

The QCA's initial advice on proposed revisions to the National Curriculum, *Developing the School Curriculum* (QCA, 1998), called for 'a more explicit rationale for the school curriculum'. In its final recommendations (QCA, 1999a) it urged that such a rationale should form a statement of 'values, aims and purposes' to stand as an introduction to the revised curriculum and it submitted a draft of such an introduction. Oblique reference to the 'spiritual' and to 'spiritual development' in that statement was made within the 'two broad categories of aims' it set out, the first concerned with the learning opportunities the school curriculum should provide, the second with what the school curriculum should prepare its pupils to become.

> The school curriculum should contribute to the pupils' sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural heritages and of the local, national, European and international dimensions (p. 56).

But the school curriculum should also,

> promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and develop their knowledge and understanding of different beliefs and cultures including an appreciation of their diversity, and of their influence on individuals and on societies (p. 56).

Whether the use of the term 'spiritual' in those passages made the 'rationale' for the school curriculum 'more explicit' is doubtful. It seems unlikely that the term or the concept engaged much of the review body's attention.

The Secretary of State's proposals for revisions to the National Curriculum adopted the QCA's recommended introductory statement (QCA, 1999b). It was set out as the first of the 'consultation materials' which, together with the proposals, were sent out with a questionnaire as part of a wide consultative process (QCA, 1999c, pp. 3 - 5).

The QCA's report and recommendations following this consultation (QCA, 1999d) noted that 'the majority of respondents welcomed the Secretary of State's proposals' (p. 5). But concerns were reported about the proposed rationale. Some feared, including OFSTED, that 'the statement (was) too utilitarian, with insufficient emphasis on the central purposes

of education' (p. 6). Moreover the report drew specific attention to written submissions which called for 'more emphasis on the spiritual aspect of education' (Annex 1, p. 10).

Taking account of these submissions, the QCA recommended a revised rationale (Annex 3, Appendix 1, pp. 1 - 4). In this revised statement the emphasis on spiritual development is stronger in three respects. Firstly, spiritual development is given a more prominent place. We now have at the beginning of the statement the powerful affirmation: 'Foremost is a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being, of the individual' (QCA, 1999d, Annex 3, Appendix 1, p. 1). Secondly, the revised statement strengthens what was asserted as the second of the school curriculum's aims. This now reads: 'The school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life' (p. 2). Thirdly, and most importantly, the revised statement makes clear that the promotion of spiritual development is still a statutory requirement and that the statement will complement and not replace it.

This revised statement proposed by the QCA, with a number of minor modifications, now forms the statement of 'values, aims and purposes' which introduces the National Curriculum, statutory from September 2000.

The heightened emphasis on spiritual development in this document can only be welcomed. How far an understanding of spiritual development informs - and challenges - the philosophical thrust of the National Curriculum as a whole is another matter.

Official and semi-official documents

The National Curriculum Council proposed that spiritual development 'has to do with':

> relationships with other people, and, for believers, with God. It has to do
> with the universal search for individual identity - with our responses to
> challenging experiences, such as death, suffering, beauty, and encounters
> with good and evil. It has to do with the search for meaning and purpose in
> life and for values by which to live (NCC, 1993, p. 2)

There are, the NCC suggested, eight aspects of spiritual development: beliefs - whether or not religious; a sense of awe, wonder, and mystery; a search for meaning and purpose; self-knowledge; relationships - recognising the worth of individuals and of building relationships; creativity; feelings: a sense of being moved.

The 1993 OFSTED *Handbook for the Inspection of Schools* described the scope of spiritual development thus:

> Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which
> pupils acquire insights into their personal experience which are of enduring
> worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to
> experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of
> enduring reality. "Spiritual" is not synonymous with "religious"; all areas
> of the curriculum may contribute to pupils' spiritual development
> (OFSTED, 1993, section 5:1).

In 1994 OFSTED published a 'Framework Document' (OFSTED, 1994) which, according to Clive Erricker (1998), 'moves between being a discussion document and a directive' (p. 52). This document provided a commentary on the description of spiritual development given in the 1993 Handbook. It emphasised the major role of religious education in promoting spiritual development though stressing the deep differences in approach to the spiritual between those who do and those do not hold a religious view of life. It is thus vital 'to press towards a common currency of shared understandings' (p. 8). The commentary suggested that many will identify with the idea of 'the spiritual quest'. Spiritual development is essentially 'a *process of exploring*' (p. 9). (The emphasis is the document's.)

The commentary then turns to the inspectors' task, the formidable difficulties of which are acknowledged. The document is hesitant. 'Starting points' are offered in the hope of 'taking the discussion forward' (p. 9). Some 'points to consider' are suggested, the first of which is whether it is reasonable 'to attempt to define spiritual development in a way which is acceptable to those with a non-religious perspective and to those with religious beliefs' (p. 10). This point deserves highlighting both because it is keenly discussed in the literature and because it is an issue which is illuminated by MacDonald's recourse to different discourses, the theistic and the non-theistic, in his exploration of spiritual development.

OFSTED's 1995 guidelines on the inspection of schools advises the inspectors to ask:

> Does the school provide its pupils with knowledge and insight into values and religious beliefs and enable them to reflect on their own experience in a way which develops their self-knowledge and spiritual awareness? (OFSTED, 1995a, p. 83; 1995b, p. 89)

These guidelines include a paragraph worth quoting in full if only to illustrate how the deliverance of a committee, where many voices round a table all have to be heard, can sometimes only obfuscate.

> Effective provision for spiritual development depends on a curriculum and approaches to teaching which embody clear values and provide opportunities for pupils to gain understanding by developing a sense of curiosity through reflection on their own and other people's lives and beliefs, their environment and the human condition. It relies on teachers receiving and valuing pupils' ideas across the whole curriculum, for example, in literature, art, music, history and religious education. Acts of collective worship play a particular part. To the extent that spiritual insights imply an awareness of how pupils relate to others, there is a strong link to both moral and social development (1995a, p. 83; 1995b, p. 89).

The guidelines add that 'although religious education and spiritual development are not synonymous, religious education can make a significant contribution to spiritual development.' So inspectors must consider whether religious education encourages pupils to ask 'life's fundamental questions'(1995a, p. 84; 1995b, p. 90).

The SCAA discussion paper *Education for Adult life: the Spiritual and Moral Development of Young People* (SCAA, 1996) broadly accepts the understanding of spirituality proposed in the Authority's earlier discussion document *Spiritual and Moral Development* (SCAA, 1995). In the 1996 paper it is proposed that what constitutes

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spirituality includes:

> the essence of being human, involving the ability to surpass the boundaries
> of the physical and material;
> development of the inner life, insight and vision;
> an inclination to believe in ideals and possibilities that transcend our
> experience of the world;
> a response to God, the 'other' and 'the ultimate';
> a propensity to foster human attributes, such as love, faithfulness and
> goodness, that could not be classed as 'physical';
> the inner world of creativity and imagination;
> the quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values;
> the sense of identity and self-worth which enables us to value others (p. 6).

Essentially these and other comments contained in this paper constitute the 'feed-back' at a SCAA conference. As such they are 'wall-chart views', anthologising delegates' comments with little attempt to bring them within a coherent conceptual framework.

In OFSTED's two most recent handbooks for inspectors (for nursery and primary school inspectors and for secondary school inspectors) they are advised that they must evaluate and report on 'how well the school cultivates pupils' personal - including spiritual, moral, social and cultural - development.' The phrasing is clumsy. 'SMSC' seems to have been squeezed on board belatedly. The handbooks note that,

> The good school will ensure that the curriculum covers all key aspects of
> personal development, providing especially for **spiritual, moral, social and
> cultural development**... (the emphasis is the documents') (OFSTED,
> 1999a, p. 65; 1999b, p. 59).

The latest handbook for nursery and primary school inspectors lays more emphasis than is found in the 1995 guidelines on the need to see these aspects of development together. Inspectors are told,

> Although each aspect of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
> can be viewed separately, the provision is likely to be interconnected and
> your evaluation should reflect this (1999a, p. 71).

In both handbooks inspectors are advised to ask the same question as they were in 1995 but with one interesting difference. They must enquire,

> Does the school provide its pupils with knowledge and insight into values
> and religious beliefs and enable them to reflect on their own experience in
> a way which develops their spiritual awareness and self-knowledge?

The order of the phrases, 'spiritual awareness' and 'self-knowledge', is reversed in the 1999 text. 'Spiritual awareness'- make of it what we will - now comes first (OFSTED, 1999a, p. 71; 1999b, p. 67).

In amplifying what is being asked the latest handbooks, unlike the 1995 handbooks, do not say exactly the same to primary and nursery school inspectors as they do to the secondary school inspectors. Secondary school inspectors are still burdened with the prolix description, quoted above, of what 'effective provision for spiritual development depends on'. In referring to what pupils should be encouraged to think about, however, the description is lightened by the loss of six words ('their environment and the human condition') (OFSTED, 1999b, p. 67).

Nursery and primary school inspectors are now spared this long confused statement. What they are asked to do is simpler and more sensible. They must assess how well staff help children 'to explore the values of others' and they are to look to how well this is being done 'for example in stories, drama, art, music, history and religious education.' (If this list is in some particular order it is not to be quarrelled with - so the present study has implied.) We are never to know who words these official documents but in what is said here the sound of an individual human voice - and a wise one - breaks through. 'Good teachers use events, such as the birth of a brother or sister or the death of a pet, to help pupils reflect on who we are, why we are here and our place in the world.'

As in 1995, the handbooks advise inspectors that religious education can make a significant contribution to spiritual development. But in these latest handbooks this consideration is amplified more fully for secondary school inspectors that for nursery and primary school inspectors. Only the former are invited to consider whether in their religious education pupils are encouraged 'to consider life's fundamental questions and how religious teaching can relate to them' (OFSTED, 1999b, p. 67).

There is no apparent attempt to correlate the descriptions of spiritual development in the OFSTED handbooks with what is said about spiritual development in the new National Curriculum.

APPENDIX 4

A. J. Scott (1805 - 1866)

A. J. Scott was licensed as a minister of the Church of Scotland in 1827. Very soon his preaching began to reflect his growing doubts about such central Calvinist tenets as the doctrine of 'limited atonement'. In 1828 he accepted Edward Irving's invitation to become his assistant in his ministry in London. Scott came to believe that the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying had been restored to the church and his preaching on this theme was instrumental in an eruption of charismatic activity amongst a number of Clydeside people. Irving embraced this movement with enthusiasm but Scott later drew back, rejecting as delusory the manifestations which at the outset he had done so much to encourage. In London Scott developed what was to become a lifelong passionate concern, a burden for the plight of the poor, for the paucity of their education as much as for their material poverty. He spent the winter months preaching and teaching in the slums of Westminster. Later, together with Maurice, Kingsley and Ludlow, Scott became one of the founders of the Christian Socialist movement. In 1828 Scott became pastor of the Scottish Church in Woolwich but his refusal to sign the Westminster Confession of Faith, on the grounds that it failed to affirm the universal love of God, led to his condemnation for heresy. Thus his condemnation was on substantially the same grounds as later was the basis of the removal of F. D. Maurice from his chair at King's College and MacDonald from his pastorate at Arundel. Despite this judgement Scott continued to minister at the Woolwich Church until 1846. In 1848 Scott was appointed to the Chair of English Language and Literature at University College, London. In 1849 he was appointed joint professor of Literature and Philosophy at Bedford College where his lectures were more heavily subscribed than those of any other member of the teaching body. At this period MacDonald, a student at Highbury College, attended lectures Scott was giving in privately rented rooms. During these London years Scott developed close friendships with a range of Scottish and English theological reformers, including F. D. Maurice. In 1851 Scott became the first principal of the recently established Owens College in Manchester. Scott's home in Halliwell Lane soon became a centre for seekers after a more comprehensive spirituality as had been his London home. It was to Manchester that in 1853 MacDonald moved, first on his own but soon to be joined by his young family. Before long he was one of Scott's circle. Scott lacked the administrative ability, as indeed the health, to build up Owens College and he resigned the post of principal in 1858. He died on 12 January 1866.

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The fear of fantasy

The history of the fairy tale too long and complex for any comprehensive review of it to be possible within the limits of this project. But it is worth highlighting how, throughout that long history, fantasy has proved a contentious genre.

The origins of the fairy tale in oral tradition are beyond recovery. The literary starting-point in English is generally taken to be Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* where already we have evidence of hostility towards *faerie* and the tales that tell of it. The Wife of Bath relates a fairy tale telling of the distant days of Arthur. Since then the fairies have departed and it is the friars who have driven them out.

> For ther as wont to walken was an elf
> Ther walketh now the limitour himself.

Already the battle lines are clear. The pagan and anarchic realm of *faerie* is felt as a threat by those who regard themselves as the sole custodians of religious truth. *Faerie*, Chaucer claims, has been overthrown. The victory in fact was far from final and the two discourses, the religious and the fantastic, remained in conflict. Five hundred years later MacDonald turned to fantasy because he refused to accept this hegemony of 'the limitour' and the shackling of the exploring spirit by the bounds of a received religious tradition. In so doing he entered waters still swept by hostile currents. Avery (1990) goes as far as to claim that MacDonald was born into 'into a milieu...that had the deepest possible distrust of the imagination' (p. 126). Certainly no culture was less willing to let the imagination run riot than that of the Calvinist world of MacDonald's childhood. For those zealous to propagate the truths of revealed religion its deliverances had to be spelt out plainly, especially in any publication intended for the young or for family reading. This was the age of Mrs. Trimmer, who monitored publications for children in her magazine *The Guardian of Education*, a periodical which condemned the fantastic as an influence from which the young have to be protected.

By MacDonald's time opposition to fantasy was coming from two camps not otherwise

allied. The continuing puritan condemnation of the fanciful had been joined in concert by the Enlightenment's insistence on the factual. For those, disciples of Rousseau, persuaded of the sufficiency and sovereignty of reason fantasy is a dangerous absurdity. Instead of fairy-tales we have *The History of Sandford and Merton.*

But the fear of fantasy is perhaps more a characteristic of a certain cast of mind in every age rather than of particular eras, even if that hostility is more pronounced at some periods than at others. The clergyman Hugh Rhodes, warning parents to watch their children's reading, advised them to '...keepe them from reading of fayned fables, vayne fantasyes, and wanton stories' (cited in Darton, 1982, p. 43). He was writing in the sixteenth century but his voice is heard down to our own day. The fantastic is threatening to the puritan as to the positivist in any epoch.

APPENDIX 6

'The Singer' - An overture to *Phantastes*?

The possibility that such a text as *Phantastes* can be formative, or, as I claim, 'transfiguring', arises from its allusive language and the permeability of its different narrative domains both to each other and to the world of the reader. In these respects *Phantastes* has a precursor. In a still earlier text which has received little critical attention MacDonald had already experimented with the effects of a polysemous and multi-dimensional text in attempting to convey, albeit in a small compass, the process of spiritual development.

In the drama *Within and Without* the monk Julian is heard reading aloud a narrative entitled *The Singer* (pp. 107 - 110). It is a fragment of fantasy and MacDonald's earliest exercise in this mode. We hear how one Melchah, standing by the dead body of his son, relates his dream of a youth who, it would seem, is seeking immortality. The youth is met by 'a hundred majestic forms, as of men who had striven and conquered' one of whom asks him, 'What wouldst thou sing to us, young man?' The youth replies, 'A song which I have made for my singing.' He is then led into a cave. The imprecise sequence of what follows need not detain us. What is to be noticed is how the allusive imagery of appearances shifting and dissolving anticipates that of *Phantastes* ('I could see their faces change like waters in a windy and half-cloudy day'). In his dream Melchah seeks an explanation and is told that the young man 'desired to sing to the Immortals' and that 'no one shall sing a song who cannot be the hero of his tale - who cannot live the song that he sings'. Melchah learns that in the cave the youth 'lives in the forms of his own tale.' Michal - dreaming within his dream - dreams that he falls asleep and then wakes. On waking, he recognises the youth, emerging from the cavern, as his own son. He recognises too that at last 'he hath told his tale to the Immortals.'

Spiritual development, it seems, is learning 'to live in the forms of one's own tale' or 'learning to live the song one sings'. Narrative as imaginative construct and narrative as the turning of the daily pages of one's own life-story are not worlds apart. The latter must aspire to the former, the former must be fulfilled in the latter. But of what we are to become

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it is not possible to speak. Our flourishing, beyond the capacity of words to describe, can perhaps only be expressed by the analogy of musical harmony. I must become 'in tune' with myself, with others, and with all that is.

The fragment suggests interesting lines of thought. It could well be read in the light of what Margaret Meek has to say about the importance, in learning to read, of becoming sensitive to 'the tune on the page' (Meek, 1982, p. 22). The image is powerfully suggestive. To read fantasy, it could be argued, is not only to listen to its distinctive tune; it is also to recognise that the same tune is sometimes to be heard - and perhaps to be sung - in the humdrum events of daily life.

APPENDIX 7

A chronology of George MacDonald's life

1824 MacDonald born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire.

1832 MacDonald's mother dies.

1839 MacDonald's father marries Margaret McColl.

1840 Enters Aberdeen University.

1845 Graduates from Aberdeen University and goes to London as a tutor.

1848 Enters Highbury Theological College. Engagement to Louisa Powell.

1850 Called to the pastorate of Arundel Congregational Church.

1851 Marries Louisa Powell.

1853 Resigns from the Arundel pastorate. Moves to Manchester.

1855 MacDonald publishes his first book, *Within and Without*.

1856 Lady Byron becomes MacDonald's patron. Winters in Algiers.

1857 MacDonalds move to Hastings.

1858 *Phantastes* published. MacDonalds move to London. MacDonald accepts Chair of English Literature at Bedford College.

1867 MacDonalds move to 'The Retreat', Hammersmith.

1868 Awarded LL. D. by Aberdeen University.

1869 Lecture Tour of Scotland.

1872 Lecture tour of America.

1877 First trip to Italy. MacDonald awarded a Civil List Pension.

1880 First regular winter stay at Bordighera.

1895 *Lilith* published.

1898 MacDonald suffers a stroke and lapses into silence.

1901 George and Louisa MacDonald's Golden Wedding.

1902 Louisa dies as Bordighera.

1905 MacDonald dies at Ashstead, Surrey. He is cremated and his ashes are interred with his wife's at Bordighera.

George and Louisa MacDonald had eleven children, four of whom predeceased them.

APPENDIX 8

A list of George MacDonald's published works

The standard bibliography of MacDonald's work is that of Raphael Shaberman (1990) from which the summary details in this Appendix are drawn. We have seen how MacDonald made far-reaching changes to the text of *The Portent* as serialised in *The Cornhill Magazine* when he came to publish this story as a book. The exclusion from later editions of *Adela Cathcart* of some of the fairy tales woven into the narrative of the first edition is well-known. But little work has been done on the history of the published texts of MacDonald's work and the extent to which MacDonald may have made significant changes in the text of successive editions of other works has yet to be investigated. But what MacDonald did with the text of *The Portent* or *Adela Cathcart* was certainly not typical. Generally serialised works almost immediately appeared in book form. Many of the novels, whether or not previously serialised, were published as 'three-deckers'. In each case publication of a one-volume edition usually followed swiftly. The pace of the successive publications was such that substantial revision of a text could hardly have been possible.

The texts used in the present study are of MacDonald's work as published as books. In the list which follows the date and publisher of the first edition is noted. Many of these first editions are exceedingly scarce and in many cases later editions have been used in preparing the thesis. Where it is a later edition that has been consulted details are given in brackets.

1851 *Twelve of the Spiritual Songs of Novalis*, translation.
(Included in *Exotics: A Translation of the Spiritual Songs of Novalis, the Hymn book of Luther, and other poems from the German and the Italian*, 1876.)

1855 *Within and Without*. Brown, Green and Longman's.
(*Within and Without and The Hidden Life*, Daldy, Ibitser, 1874.)

1858 *Phantastes: a Faerie Romance for Men and Women*. Smith, Elder.
(*Works of Fancy and the Imagination*, Vols. 5, 6, Strahan & Co., 1871.)

1863 *David Elginbrod*. Hurst & Blackett.
(Hurst & Blackett, n. d.)

1864 *Adela Cathcart*. Hurst & Blackett.
(Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882.)

1864 *The Portent: a story of the inner vision of the Highlanders, commonly called The Second Sight.* Smith, Elder.
(*Works of Fancy and the Imagination,* Vol. 7, Strahan & Co , 1871.)

1865 *Alec Forbes of Howglen.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Hurst & Blackett, n. d.)

1867 *Dealings with Fairies.* Alexander Strahan.
(*Fairy Tales.* Arthur C. Fifield, 1904).

1867 *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Alexander Strahan, 1867.)

1867 *Unspoken Sermons.* Alexander Strahan.

1868 *Guild Court.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1881.)

1868 *Robert Falconer.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Hurst & Blackett, n. d.)

1868 *England's Antiphon.* Macmillan, n.d.

1868 *The Seaboard Parish.* Tinsley Brothers.
(Strahan, n. d.)

1870 *The Miracles of Our Lord.* Strahan.

1871 *At the Back of the North Wind.* Strahan.
(Strahan, n. d.)

1871 *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood.* Strahan.
(Blackie & Son, n. d.)

1871 *Works of Fancy and Imagination,* 10 vols. Strahan

1872 *Wilfred Cumbermede.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Strahan, 1873.)

1872 *The Vicar's Daughter.* Tinsley Brothers.
(Sampson Low, Marston, n. d.)

1872 *The Princess and the Goblin.* Strahan.
(Blackie & Son, n. d.)

1873 *Gutta Percha Willie, the Working Genius.* Henry S. King
(Blackie & Son, 1888.)

1875 *Malcolm.* Henry S. King
(Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, n. d.)

1875 *The Wise woman: A Parable.* Strahan.
(Cassell, n. d.)

1876 *St. George and St. Michael.* Henry S. King.
(Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883.)

1876 *Thomas Wingfold, Curate.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Chatto and Windus, 1883.)

1877 *The Marquis of Lossie.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Kegan Paul, Trench, 1884.)

1879 *Paul Faber, Surgeon.* Hurst & Blackett.
(Chatto and Windus, 1883)

1879 *Sir Gibbie.* Hurst & Blackett.
(J. M. Dent & Sons, n.d.)

1880 *A Book of Strife in the form of A Diary of an Old Soul.* Privately printed.

1881 *Mary Marston.* Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington.
(Sampson Low, Marston, n. d.)

1881 *Warlock O 'Glen Warlock: A Homely Romance.* Lothrop, Boston, USA.

1882 *Castle Warlock: A Homely Romance.* First UK edition of above
(Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883.)

1882 *Weighed and Wanting.* Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington.
(Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1883.)

1882 *Orts.* Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington.

1882 *The Gifts of the Child Christ, and Other Tales.* Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington.
(republished, with the story *Stephen Archer* now placed as the first of the tales, as *Stephen Archer* and other Tales, Edwin Dalton, 1908.)

1883 *The Princess and the Curdie.* Chatto & Windus .
(Blackie & Son, n. d.)

1883 *A Threefold Cord: Poems by Three Friends.* Privately printed.

1883 *Donal Grant.* Kegan Paul, Trench.
(Kegan Paul, Trench, 1884.)

1885 *The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke; a Study with the text of the Folio of 1623.* Longman's, Green.

1885 *Unspoken Sermons, Second Series.* Longman's, Green.

1886 *What's Mine Mine.* Kegan Paul, Trench, 3 vols.
(Kegan Paul, Trench, 1 vol., 1886.)

1887 *Home Again.* Kegan Paul, Trench.

1888 *The Elect Lady.* Kegan Paul, Trench.

1889 *Unspoken Sermons, Third Series.* Longman's, Green.

1891 *There and Back.* Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 3 vols.
(Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1 vol., 1891.)

1891 *The Flight of the Shadow.* Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner.

1892 *The Hope of the Gospel.* Ward, Lock, Bowden.

1893 *Heather and Snow: a Novel.* Chatto & Windus, 2 vols.
(Chatto & Windus, 1 vol., 1893)

1893 *The Poetical Works,* 2 vols. Chatto & Windus.

1893 *A Dish of Orts, Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespeare.* Sampson Low, Marston.

1893 *A Cabinet of Gems, extracts from Sir Philip Sidney edited by George MacDonald.* Elliott Stock.

1891 *A Rough Shaking.* Blackie & Son.

1895 *Lilith: A Romance.* Chatto & Windus.

1897 *Salted with Fire.* Hurst & Blackett.

1897 *Rampolli: Growths from a Long-planted Root, being Translations, New and Old, chiefly from the German, along with A Year's Diary of an Old Soul*
(*The Diary of an Old Soul and translations of other spiritual verse.* Arthur C. Fifield, 1905.)

1899 *Far above Rubies.* Dodd, Mead, New York.

spiritually, morally, socially and culturally, plays a significant part in their ability to learn and achieve. Development in both areas is essential to raising standards of attainment in all pupils (p. 12).

The last sentence is worrying. Something has shifted since the lofty opening to the statement of 'values, aims and purposes'. Spiritual development, it seems, has ceased to be an educational end, as has development in the other three areas. The promotion of spiritual development has now been reduced to an instrumental role, to serve as one strategy among others to achieve measurable targets. For all the welcome emphasis on spiritual development in the statement this observation suggests that, for those who framed the National Curriculum, educational priorities lie elsewhere.[4]

The statement makes clear that the aims it sets out are reflected in statutory requirements, those of section 351, quoted above, of the 1966 Education Act (p. 12).

The two handbooks on the National Curriculum, for primary teachers and for secondary teachers, offer this description of spiritual development:

> Pupils' spiritual development involves the growth of their sense of self, their unique potential, their understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and their will to achieve. As their curiosity about themselves and their place in the world increases, they try to answer for themselves some of life's fundamental questions. They develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, qualities and attitudes they need to foster their own inner lives and non-material well-being (p. 19).

The focus of this description is on the individual self and on the fostering of the inner life. We shall have reason to question the adequacy of such an understanding of spiritual development.

Opportunities to promote spiritual development, as to promote moral, social and cultural development, are seen as present in all National Curriculum subjects and accompanying subject booklets suggest examples of such opportunities.[5]

The promotion of spiritual development thus appears to have a secure place in the National Curriculum both in the statement of its overall aims and as a required element of the

pupils at the school and of society' and that 'prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life'.

The National Curriculum

Promulgation of the revised National Curriculum, statutory in all schools in England from September 2000, was preceded by an extended consultative process. It is interesting and instructive to trace the route by which spiritual development found the place it is now holds in the National Curriculum. A brief overview of that process is included as Appendix 2. The National Curriculum is prefaced by a statement of 'values, aims and purposes'. This statement affirms the importance of recognising 'a broad set of common values and purposes that underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools'. In a footnote schools 'planning their curriculum' are referred to 'the statement of values' of the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community which we come to below. Foremost among those common values and purposes, the prefaced statement asserts, is 'a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being of the individual' (DfEE, 1999a, p. 10).

The statement lays down two aims for the school curriculum. The first of these is that 'the school curriculum should aim to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve' (p. 11). In the exposition of this aim there is a further reference to the spiritual.

> The school curriculum should contribute to the development of pupils' sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural heritages and Britain's diverse society and of the local, national, European, Commonwealth and global dimensions of their lives (p. 11).

The second aim is that the 'the school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life' (p. 11). In expounding this aim the statement, risking tautology, immediately adds a gloss.

> The school curriculum should promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and, in particular, develop principles for distinguishing between right and wrong (p. 11).

The statement insists on the interdependence of the two aims.

> These two aims reinforce each other. The personal development of pupils,