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## Images of Creation

Kathy Triggs

Much has been written of MacDonald as a maker of myths, of symbolic images, particularly with reference to *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, and the children's stories. The novels, too, though in a subtly different fashion, show MacDonald's mythopoeic vision. Where in the fantasies he engages directly with the other world, the world of the spirit, in the novels he shows the influence of that world on the kingdom of men. As in the real world the influence of the Spirit is largely unseen, so in the novels MacDonald expresses this influence through metaphor and image. It is there to be found by those who will take the trouble to look. To investigate exactly how he does this, I want to consider the novel *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, to look at the way the plot coheres, and, most particularly, at the images which he uses to unify the action and to emphasise his theme.

First, a little information about the background to the novel. *Paul Faber* was written in 1877, the year that the MacDonalds left The Retreat, their house on the Thames, and began spending their winters in Italy. Mary, their second daughter was ill, and Louisa took her to the Riviera in the autumn. George was left to supervise the removal of furniture and to finish his novel; but he fell ill with pleurisy. He needed to sell this novel to pay outstanding debts and to buy his ticket to the Riviera, but his publisher, Strahan, who was having his own financial difficulties, at first refused it. Eventually he bought the copyright for about half the usual amount—£400 (this is equivalent to about £12,000 today). But it seems that Strahan could not afford the publishing costs, and sold the copyright to Hurst & Blackett, who brought out the book in 1879.

Some of all this is carried into the novel: its heroine suffers from pleurisy, and the right attitude to financial difficulties features largely in the first half. MacDonald also included some problems from the past. The little town of Glaston, where the action is set, is based on [end of page 22] Arundel; and, in the shabby treatment of the minister Walter Drake by his deacons, the author is remembering his own expulsion from the pulpit of Trinity Chapel.

The basis to the images in this novel is a concept unexpressed by MacDonald himself, but familiar to medieval students and readers of C.S.

Lewis as the Great Chain of Being—the picture of a hierarchical and ordered universe. The Great Chain stretches from God at its summit to the forces of primeval chaos and uncreation at its foot. Between, each in its proper place, is ranged the whole of the created order, from hell and the demons up through the natural world, plants, animals and mankind, to the angelic beings that see God and enjoy him forever. In this Chain Man has a special place (I say Man rather than Woman or Humanity because the medieval world-view was male-dominated. The male human was higher in the Chain than the female human. MacDonald did not share this view, as we shall see later). Man is a microcosm, a “mirrored universe”<sup>1</sup> of the whole. What goes on outside him, down to the-very elements of which the universe is formed, is reflected and repeated in his body and soul. As C.S. Lewis says in his admirable book *The Discarded Image*,

Every mode of being in the whole universe contributes to him; he is a cross-section of being.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that man represents, or contains within himself, the lower creation, was particularly important to George MacDonald, as we shall see.

Creation was not, for MacDonald, quite the static concept he found in his medieval studies. In *Paul Faber* he shows how the Chain can be broken, the hierarchy upset and turned upside-down by human idolatry. He addresses himself to two consequences of this idolatry: first, that our perception of good and evil becomes faulty, so that we find an ambiguity in the moral orientation of most created things; and second, that we are out of tune with the created order. We ought to respect, love and care for the beasts, as their superiors. We are their stewards, their representatives, before God; but too often the beast in our soul takes over, with disastrous results. To set things right it is needful for men and women to know their Creator as their Father with a loving involvement in their predicament. In demonstrating his characters’ growing awareness of their Creator MacDonald explores various images of Creation: the Garden of Eden; plants [23] and growth; water; and the banishing of the monsters of chaos. He shows his protagonists and his readers the means by which Creation is perfected—that is, through suffering, through revelation, and through forgiveness. MacDonald ends his work with the quintessential act of creation—the birth of a baby. So at the end we have a new beginning.

Right at the outset of the novel we are introduced to the young doctor, Paul Faber, as an apocalyptic figure. Taking a short cut home on horseback, he leaps the hedge into the lane right in front of the Rector’s carriage:

“Upon my word [says the Rector], when you came over the hedge there, I took you for Death in the Revelations, that had tired out his own and changed horses with t’other one.”<sup>3</sup>

The reference is to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Revelations ch.6). Death rides a pale horse, Faber’s is red. The Biblical character of the red horse is, in fact, Strife. We have a clue here to the character of Faber, whose proud atheism leads him into contention with the Christians of Glaston. But is Faber good or bad? Is he angel or devil? The idea of an atheist hero would be anathema to many of MacDonald’s readers, and in the book he is regarded with some horror by the local community. Nevertheless, he is accepted in social circles for his undoubted good manners and good works. Wingfold, the Anglican curate, is his friend. But to Walter Drake, the Nonconformist minister, he is an object of suspicion; and to Drake’s daughter Dorothy he is a sort of demon, “as it were the apostle of a kakangel [an evil gospel], the prophet of a doctrine that was evil . . .”<sup>4</sup> MacDonald emphasises the ambiguity of Faber’s position in order to raise the question, Can anything be both good and bad at the same time? Faber and his wife will both have to face this question, but meanwhile MacDonald alerts his reader to the issue and involves her (or him) directly in the situation.

Curate Thomas Wingfold is aware of our faulty human judgement, and shows in the first of his three sermons (all very germane to the themes of the novel) how even money can appear to us either as a blessing or a curse, as angel or demon. And it is, says Wingfold, our idolatry that confuses us. Money can be

an angel of mercy, whose wings ore full of balms and dews and refreshings; but when you lay hold of him, pluck his pinions, pen **[24]** him in a yard, and fall down and worship him—then, with the blessed vengeance of his master, he deals plague and confusion and terror, to stay the idolatry.<sup>5</sup>

Attempt to elevate anything from its rightful place in the Chain and it becomes a demon. Its worshippers, too, slide lower down the scale.

Paul Faber and Juliet Meredith are guilty of such idolatry. Paul, we know, has abandoned all belief in God. So what does he worship? Could it be Juliet? After he has treated her for pleurisy he thinks of her as Venus:

it seemed to Paul . . . as if . . . the sweet exhaustion that followed had from the lady’s brain wandered out over Nature herself, as she sank, a lovelier Katadyomene, into the hushed sea of pain-won repose.<sup>6</sup>

“Katadyomene” is Greek for “sinking,” and refers to Venus. Usually the goddess is thought of as “Anadyomene,” rising from the sea at her birth. Juliet is, on the occasion of her sickness, Venus sinking into the sea. However, even Juliet-as-Venus is not the true object of Paul’s idolatry. His worship is focussed on something lower than Love: it is on,

the shadow that ever haunts the steps of the angel, Love,  
the shadow whose name is Beneficence . . . Oh, the bliss  
of knowing oneself the source of well-being, the stay and  
protector, the comfort and life, to such a woman! of wrapping  
her round in days of peace, instead of anxiety and pain and  
labour! But ever the thought of her looking up to him as the  
source of her freedom, was present through it all.<sup>7</sup>

He is in love with the image of himself as a benefactor. He is a slave to his own debased ideal. He imagines himself as a creator and Juliet as his creation. She is like a beautiful statue: he is the Pygmalion who calls her to life.<sup>8</sup> Like Milton’s Satan, he would dethrone God and rule in his place.

And he succeeds. As their relationship progresses Juliet comes to see in Paul what a Christian sees in Christ. After her first blood-transfusion she has a momentary vision of the doctor’s face as “the face of the Saviour.”<sup>9</sup> Later, MacDonald tells us,

She felt herself no whit worthy of him. She believed herself not for a moment comparable to him! Such a man would bear with her weaknesses, love her love, and forgive her sins! If he took her God from her, he must take his place and be a God-like man to her!<sup>10</sup>

So Juliet worships Paul, and Paul worships himself. Yet Paul is blind to his own idolatry, and thinks that he is ready to worship Juliet. This **[25]** strange inconsistency stems, MacDonald tells us, from a piece of typical masculine self-deception:

The notion men have of their worth, and of claims founded thereon, is amazing; most amazing of all is what a man will set up to himself as the standard of the woman he will marry. What the woman may have a right to claim, never enters his thought. He never doubts the right or righteousness of aspiring to wed a woman between whose nature and his lies a gulf, wide as between an angel praising God, and a devil taking refuge from him in a swine. Never a shadow of compunction crosses the leprous soul, as he stretches forth his arms to enfold the clean

woman!<sup>11</sup>

Notice the mention of angel and devil once again. It reminds us of Wingfold's sermon, and of faulty human judgement. In self-judgement men (and women too!) are most at fault.

But a woman, to MacDonald's mind, in spite of faulty judgement, is still likely to be man's superior in the moral and spiritual realm. The last to be created, according to Genesis, she is for MacDonald "the live concentration, the perfect outcome of the vast and poetic show of nature,"<sup>12</sup> and worthy of man's reverence. She is above him in the Great Chain. A worshipping reverence towards her is not idolatry, so long as it is qualified with a recognition of the overwhelming claim of God himself. Paul would be better in the long run if he did at this stage truly idolise Juliet, for his love would then lead him out of himself. Their love could be a force for salvation—but only under the directing power of the holy Love Himself. MacDonald has this to say about the power of human love:

It must be to any man a terrible thing to find himself in wild pain, with no God of whom to entreat that his soul may not faint within him; but, to a man who can think as well as feel, it were a more terrible thing still, to find himself afloat on the tide of a lovely passion, with no God to whom to cry, accountable to himself for that which he has made. Will any man who has ever cast more than a glance into the mysteries of his being, dare think himself sufficient to the ruling of his nature? And if he rule it not, what shall he be but the sport of the demons that will ride its tempests, that will torment its ocean? What help then is there? What high-hearted man could consent to be possessed and sweetly ruled by [even] the loveliest of angels? . . . Come thou, holy Love, father of my spirit, nearer to the unknown, deeper me than my consciousness is to its known self, possess me utterly, for thou art more me than I am myself. Rule thou. Then first I rule . . . . Folded in thy calm I shall love, and not die.<sup>13</sup> **[26]**

Note the references to the tide and the ocean in this passage. It occurs just after the allusion to Juliet Katadyomene. MacDonald uses the imagery to link Juliet with Venus, Venus with the sea (this a standard classical image), and the sea with earthly love. Later he will use the image of the sea for Divine Love, in accordance with his view that, after all, earthly love is but an aspect of the Divine. And once again we have angels and demons. They

are so frequently mentioned together in this novel, and each time MacDonald is pointing out the difficulty for humans, aided only with human reason and emotions, to distinguish between the two.

The possibility for movement upwards or downwards was an essential ingredient to MacDonald's concept of the spiritual hierarchy. If the soul can degrade itself by worshipping other created things, and so convert them and itself to demons, it also has enormous potential for growth, for upward development. It is part of the nature of the Chain, that if its balance can be broken, it can also be restored, and more than restored. The soul can rise up to angelic heights. In fact the Chain can become a stairway by which we mount to God.

The idea of evolution falls in naturally with this way of thinking and MacDonald, unlike so many of his contemporaries, had no problem in reconciling evolutionary theories with his own faith. If spiritual evolution is at the root of much of our Christian experience, what is more likely than that the physical world should match it?

Faber, however, approaches evolution from a purely physical point of view and, lacking the spiritual dimension, feels himself at odds with Nature. He needs to see that men and women must be in harmony with the rest of creation. They must not seek to conquer or dominate nature, but to control it as God's representatives on earth. We are answerable to God for the beasts, and to the beasts for the way we represent God to them. And to be good stewards we need first to control the beasts in our souls. Wingfold makes this clear in his second sermon—a most important piece, coming exactly in the middle of the novel, and taking up its key images. Faber's assistant has been experimenting on a live dog. Wingfold preaches against cruelty to animals, basing his argument on the place of animals in God's [27] creation, and believing "with St Paul, that they need and have the salvation of Christ as well as we."<sup>14</sup> He reads to his congregation John Donne's poem:

Man is a lump where all beasts kneaded be;  
Wisdom makes him an ark where all agree;  
The fool, in whom these beasts do live at jar,  
Is sport to others, and a theatre;  
Nor scapes he so, but is himself their prey;  
All which was man in him, is eat away;  
And now his beasts on one another feed.  
Yet couple in anger, and new monsters breed.  
How happy's he which hath due place assigned

To his beasts, and disaforested his mind!  
Empaled himself to keep them out, not in;  
Can sow, and dares trust corn where they have been;  
Can use his horse, goat, wolf, and every beast,  
And is not ass himself to all the rest I  
Else man not only is the herd of swine,  
But he's those devils too which did incline  
Them to a headlong rage, and made them worse;  
For man can add weight to heaven's heaviest curse.<sup>15</sup>

Here MacDonald gives us an important source for his ideas, in the very novel in which he is working them out. The beasts are symbols of our elemental, primitive urges. If we let them rule us, our humanity will be eaten up and the beasts will become, first monsters, then devils. We shall have moved downwards in the hierarchy.

MacDonald illustrates this principle at various places in the story by using animals as symbols for his main characters. Paul in his human pride is represented by his great red horse Ruber. Red is the colour of strife, of blood, of humanity. The very name Adam means "red clay." Faber's pride is injured after Juliet has confessed her past love-affair to him, and he rides Ruber desperately and wildly. He has a bad fall, the horse is killed, and he himself seriously injured. His lower nature leads to his downfall. When he recovers he has only his small black horse, Niger. The black horse of the Apocalypse bears the rider representing Hunger. We shall see that with his pride gone, Faber is left with a deep hunger for righteousness. In contrast, Helen Wingfold's control over her nature is shown by the two tiny ponies, Zephyr and Zoe ("wind" and "life"), which draw her carriage. She has a perfect intuitive control over them, and she can use them to bring joy to others. She gives all the local children rides, [28] and while giving Juliet a lift, takes the opportunity to offer friendship and encouragement. As for Juliet herself, she, after her confession and rejection by Paul, flees from Faber's door in much the same way as the dog had rushed in pain and terror from that very door. As the dog found cruelty from a self-styled 'gentleman', so Juliet meets with cruelty masquerading as honour from her husband. Our hero and heroine are down to the level of the horse and the dog, and Juliet in particular is to encounter yet lower forms of life within her own soul.

Except the living Father [sums up Wingfold] have brought  
order, harmony, a world, out of his chaos, a man is but a cage of  
unclean beasts, with no one to rule them . . . .<sup>16</sup>



With Creation such an important theme we may expect, and find, echoes of Adam's story. When Juliet sings, her voice "seemed to wrap itself round [Faber's] heart like a serpent of saddest splendour."<sup>17</sup> She herself is "bitten by the serpent of truth"<sup>18</sup> when Wingfold preaches his third sermon; and when she is rejected by Paul she feels as if "she had carried the snake so long harmless in her bosom only to let it at last creep from her lips into her husbands's [sic] ear, sting the vital core of her universe, and blast it for ever!"<sup>19</sup> In these references to the serpent MacDonald once again draws attention to the seeming confusion between good and evil. To Juliet who has long practised deceit the truth brings evil consequences—yet this is necessary to start the sinner on the long road to restoration. We have here a re-statement of the old idea of "felix peccatum Adae"—evil was in some sense necessary to man's perfection—it was all part of the plan.

Eden was the archetypal garden. Gardens, too, were considered sacred to Venus, and we have already noticed the link between Venus and Juliet. Paul first makes love to Juliet in a garden. And when the married Juliet finds the bloom gone from her love for Paul, MacDonald describes this in terms of a garden within the temple of love:

The passion of love is but the vestibule . . . to the temple of love. A garden lies between the [vestibule] and the [sanctuary]. They that will enter the sanctuary must walk through the garden. But some start to see the roses already withering, sit down aid weep and watch their decay, until at length the aged flowers hang drooping all around them, and lo! their hearts are withered also, and when they rise they turn their backs on the holy of holies, and their feet towards the sate.<sup>20</sup> [29]

The novel abounds in plant imagery. Everywhere we find references to roots, to sprouting, to growth. Faber has "an aversion seemingly deep-rooted"<sup>21</sup> to imaginative poetry. His scientific research is to discover the "blind law which lies at the root of life."<sup>22</sup> Juliet has been "sown in weakness"<sup>23</sup>; she is to Paul "the lovely phenomenon into which had flowered invisible Nature's bud of shapeless protoplasm"<sup>24</sup>; she is "the rose-heart" who will not "open its leaves to him"<sup>25</sup> (and this is another link with Venus, for the rose was in medieval and renaissance literature a symbol of earthly love). These apparently random images, scattered throughout the work, show how ingrained the concept of plant growth is to MacDonald's thinking.

In keeping with the confusion MacDonald is presenting between good and evil, plants can be an image of vice or virtue. He makes this clear

through Polwarth, the deformed dwarf who is a spiritual giant, when he encounters Juliet in the garden of the Old House. He deliberately digs there, though his bodily weakness and asthmatic condition make it a trial for him, in order that he may meet her and engage her in conversation.

“I have sometimes wondered [he says to her] whether the troubles without end that some people seem born to . . . may not be as subsoil ploughs, tearing deep into the family mould, that the seeds of the lost virtues of their race may in them be once more brought within reach of sun and air and dew.”<sup>26</sup>

However,

Polwarth’s idea turned itself round in Juliet’s mind, and grew clearer, but assumed reference to weeds only, and not flowers. She thought how that fault of hers had, like the seed of a poison-plant, been buried for years, unknown to one alive, and forgotten almost by herself . . . ; and now here it was at the surface again in all its horror and old reality! nor that merely, for it had blossomed, and borne its rightful fruit of dismay—an evil pod, filled with a sickening juice, and swarming with gray flies.

Polwarth’s natural readiness to understand the image in its good sense helps Juliet to perceive the awful truth of her own nature.

Water is essential for growth, for fertility and life; and we have here yet another strand of connected imagery. And again we are faced with an ambiguity: is it an agent of death or life? Mr Drake the minister (note [30] the appropriateness of his name) lives near the River Lythe and is aware of its symbolic significance:

It was a tidal river, with many changes. Now it flowed with a full, calm current, conquering the tide, like life sweeping death with it down into the bosom of the eternal. Now it seemed to stand still, as if aghast at the inroad of the awful thing; and then the minister, would bethink himself that it was the tide of the eternal rising in the narrow earthly channel: men, he said to himself, called it *death*, because they did not know what it was, or the loveliness of its quickening energy. It fails on their sense by the might of its grand excess, and they call it by the name of its opposite.<sup>27</sup>

Here we have the Divine reality, the life that is eternal because it is Love, whose image underlies the marine image of earthly love.

Drake's foster-daughter provides another link between water and love in her names, Amanda and Ducky. She loves water, and the first time we meet her she is splashing in puddles. Her affinity with water proves a danger to her when she is out with the Drakes helping the people of Glaston during the flooding of the Lythe. Ducky is swept into a deep water-filled pit, and only saved by the heroic efforts of Mr. Drake. The child is the key to Faber's salvation, for as the doctor is tending her he recognises her as his illegitimate daughter. He is thus brought face to face with his own sinful past, and forced to recognise that his own moral state is worse than his wife's.

The pond in the garden of the Old House is of great significance. Thought by the locals to be bottomless and haunted, Juliet turns to it with ideas of suicide when she flees from Paul. She is saved by Dorothy Drake and kept hidden in the Old House. But after a time Dorothy comes to feel that she can help Juliet no longer, and that she needs the surer, stronger ministry of the Polwarths. The problem is to get her to them, for she despises their deformity. Here the pond comes into the action in a dramatic way. As the rain falls and the floods rise, Juliet dreams about the pond. In her dream,

Her very being recoiled from the horrible depth of the motionless pool in which, as she now seemed to know, lived one of the loathsome creatures of the semi-chaotic era of the world, which had survived its kind as well as its coevals, and was ages older than the human race. The pool appeared—but not as she had known it, for it boiled and heaved, bubbled and rose. From its lowest depths it was moved [31] to meet and receive her! Coil upon coil it lifted itself into the air, towering like a waterspout, then stretched out a long, writhing, shivering neck to take her from the invisible arms that bore her to her doom. The neck shot out a head, and the head shot out the tongue of a water-snake. She shrieked and woke, bathed in terror.<sup>28</sup>

Awake, she sees the pond rising, already halfway to the House. She flees from it, arriving at the Polwarth's cottage soaking wet. This incident marks the entrance of the spiritual world into Juliet's life. Hitherto she has resisted it. We know that the monster of chaos in her dream is a projection of her own sin and guilt, for MacDonald has already given us a clue to this. Just before she confesses to Paul, the author tells us that

that shape she knew of, lying at the bottom of the darkest pool of the stagnant Past, had been stung into life by a wind of words

that swept through Nestley chapel, had stretched up a hideous neck and threatening head from the deep, and was staring at her with sodden eyes.<sup>29</sup>

Her own sin and guilt are the means whereby the divine element enters her soul. She is not yet consciously ready to accept it, and hence the water takes on the characteristics of the monster, and she cannot distinguish between the two. She has a long way to go yet, but at least she has entered the sanctuary, the refuge of the Polwarths' cottage. Evil, when perceived aright, can be a force for good. Only when they are recognised for what they are can the monsters of chaos be banished.

Juliet sees how, in the lives of the Polwarths, pain and suffering become redeeming powers, forces for good in the world. Uncle and niece have a pity for humanity, born out of their own sufferings, akin to that which Wingfold demands of us for the animals. The "two crushed and rumpled little angels"<sup>30</sup> care for their fellows as they are to care for the beasts. In their cottage we are at a higher level. But the great redemptive sacrifice of Christ must inform and infuse and uphold all relationships, between creature and creature or between the Creator and his created. And so, at the centre of Wingfold's sermon and therefore at the very heart of the novel, we find the crucified Christ. MacDonald, through Wingfold, describes the vivisector, about to demonstrate on a wired-down beast to a class of students: [32]

picture to yourselves such a one, so busied, suddenly raising his eyes and seeing the eyes that see him! the eyes of him who, when he hung upon the cross, knew that he suffered for the whole creation of his father, to lift it out of darkness into light, out of wallowing chaos into order and peace! Those eyes watching him, that pierced hand soothing his victim, would not the knife fall from his hand, in the divine paralysis that shoots from the heart and conscience? Ah me! to have those eyes upon me in *any* wrongdoing!<sup>31</sup>

Suffering lies at the heart of the cosmos, at the heart of the creative process. It is this that lifts the beast to the human, the human to the angelic, banishes sin and guilt to the uncreated depths. Juliet is not at this point ready to understand Christ's suffering, but it is efficacious to her through the sufferings of her hosts. They follow the divine pattern.

Wingfold's third sermon is on the theme of secrecy and openness. He talks of untruth, falsity, appearance, contrasting these with truth and honesty; and by his imagery links them to the theme of creation:

“Is not this a strange drift of men,” said the curate, “to hide what is, under the veil of what is not? to seek refuge in lies, as if that which if not, could be an armour of adamant? to run from the daylight for safety, deeper into the cave? In the cave house the creatures of the night—the tigers and hyaenas, the serpent and the old dragon of the dark; in the light are true men and women, and the clear-eyed angels . . . .

“God hides nothing. His very work from the beginning is *revelation*—a casting aside of veil after veil, a showing unto men of truth after truth. On and on, from fact to fact divine he advances, until at length in his Son Jesus he unveils his very face. Then begins a fresh unveiling, for the very work of the Father is the work the Son himself has to do—to reveal. His life was the unveiling of himself, and the unveiling of the Son is still going on, and is that for the sake of which the world exists. When he is unveiled, that is, when we know the Son, we shall know the Father also. The whole of creation, its growth, its history, the gathering total of human existence, is an unveiling of the Father. He is the life, the eternal life, the *Only* . . . .”<sup>32</sup>

By thus linking revelation with creation MacDonald brings the leitmotif of honesty into line with his overall theme of the creative process from chaos to cosmos. Honesty is man’s proper response to God’s creative revealing as well as the share he takes in forwarding the work. Juliet gets an inkling of this from the sermon, and her conscience begins to tell her that she [33] has no right to keep her guilty secret from her husband.

From the beginning of the novel MacDonald has explored varying concepts of honesty, and what is truly involved in being honest. Walter Drake is scrupulous in financial matters. He is tormented by his poverty because it is “a dismay, a horror to him to have an account rendered which he could not settle.”<sup>33</sup> He has to learn through severe spiritual struggle that this form of honesty has led him all unwitting into idolatry, into the worship of Mammon. Only when he has realised and repented is he fit to play a part in the salvation of the Fabers, through his building projects.

Faber makes a great thing of his honesty in being an atheist, and Wingfold agrees that an honest disbelief is better than a dishonest belief. In their discussions he is concerned not with winning the argument but with expressing his opinions honestly. He prizes the doctor’s honesty, though his

wife wonders how honest he really is:

I do not for a moment imagine him consciously dishonest [says Helen], but he makes too much show of his honesty for me. I cannot help feeling that he is selfish—and can a selfish man be honest?<sup>34</sup>

Faber's selfishness and dishonesty in the past were evident in his relationship with the woman who bore him a baby girl. This is brought home to him by the discovery that his child is none other than Amanda. Walter Drake, when he is informed of Amanda's parentage, still refers to Faber as "the honest man every body knew him to be"—but

the word *honest* was to Faber like a blow. He had come to the painful conclusion that he was neither honest man nor gentleman.<sup>35</sup>

He realises at last his ideal, of which honour composed so large a part, is just an empty idol:

The notion that men call their honour is the shadow of righteousness, the shape that is where the light is not, the devil that dresses as nearly in angel-fashion as he can, but is none the less for that a sneak and a coward.<sup>36</sup>

In the anguish of humiliation and loss his perceptions are being set right. He can now see the devil, the idol, for what it really is. And now he sees his reception of Juliet's confession in the light of Drake's reception of his. He is heartily ashamed. Drake understands that **[34]**

to preach, as it was commonly understood, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins to such a man, would be useless: he would rather believe in a God who would punish them, than in one who would pass them by. To be told he was forgiven, would but rouse in him contemptuous indignation. "What is that to me?" he would return. "I remain what I am."<sup>37</sup>

The divine forgiveness must be overwhelming, transcending our human concepts, to satisfy such a hunger for righteousness as Faber is beginning to feel.

From such thoughts there comes to Drake a vision of Divine, transcendent Love. In this experience of God MacDonald brings us at last to the very top of the Chain. Holy Love is not self-contained, but relates to the created order:

And therewith I knew that, for all the rest of the creation of God, I needed but the hearing of the ears or the seeing of

the eyes to love each and every one, in his or her degree; whereupon such a perfection of bliss awoke in me, that it seemed as if the fire of the divine sacrifice had at length seized upon my soul, and I was dying of absolute glory—which is love and love only.<sup>38</sup>

Drake's vision passes in an instant from heaven to hell:

Now was there the absolute blackness of darkness, the positive negation of bliss, the recoil of the self to devour itself, and for ever. The consciousness of being was intense, but in all the universe was there nothing to enter that being, and make it other than an absolute loneliness. It was, and for ever, a loveless, careless, hopeless monotony of self-knowing—a hell with but one demon, and no fire to make it cry: my self was the hell, my known self the demon of it.<sup>39</sup>

The ambiguity between good and evil in the created world, which MacDonald has emphasised throughout the novel, falls away at this point, with the illumination of Faber and Drake. Evil and good can sometimes be so close as to appear indistinguishable, but for all that there is an eternal difference between them; and that difference depends on the self—whether it chooses to go out in Love towards others, to the Creator and his cosmos, or to turn inwards in self-worship, with a rejection of all that is without.

The way is now clear, the characters prepared, for the last act in the drama, the quintessential act of creation, the birth of Juliet's and Paul's **[35]** baby. Water symbolism is important here, significant as a source of life. Polwarth proposes that the pool in the Old House garden be connected by a tunnel to the River Lythe, so that it can be emptied. The work is carefully timed so that Faber can be invited to witness the draining of the pool, ostensibly to look for his wife's body, but in reality so that he might be at hand during the birth of his child, in case of emergency. So while Juliet is enduring the pangs of labour, Paul is seated near the mouth of the tunnel, listening to the sounds of the excavation work and waiting for the rush of water from the womb-like pond. Paul is, in symbol, attending the birth. Though he does not know it, he is also waiting upon his own and Juliet's spiritual rebirth. The baby is born, Juliet needs a second blood transfusion, and once more Faber saves her life with his blood. Through the sacrificial act comes recognition and reconciliation.

So we have a new beginning, and MacDonald takes us right back to the beginning of the novel. It is spring again, as it was in Chapter 1. The

action has taken a whole year. After the reiteration of the blood transfusion we have a reiteration of imagery. Juliet is once again floating in a sea of sleep—but this time MacDonald links the image, not to Venus but to the sea of the eternal:

She was still floating in the twilight shallows of death, whether softly drifting on the ebb-tide of sleep, out into the open sea, or, on its flow, again up the river of life, he could not yet tell.<sup>40</sup>

Juliet has been seen as a rose, the flower of Venus, emblem of earthly love. Now she partakes of the nature of the white rose, the rose which Dante saw in the highest heaven, symbol of divine love:

A soft flush, all the blood she could show, tinged her cheek.  
It was Hope's own colour—the reflection of a red rose from a white.<sup>41</sup>

In the cottage at Owlkirk Juliet had thought Paul's face was the face of the Saviour. Now, in the Old House, Paul's forgiveness means Christ's forgiveness. She confuses the two, yet remains aware of their separate identities. She prays to the dimly-seen face of Paul as if to Christ, concluding,

“ . . . O my Saviour, do not look at me so, or I shall forget Paul himself, and die weeping for joy. Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Paul!”  
For Paul had gently risen from his chair, and come one step nearer—where he stood looking on her with such a smile as seldom has been upon human face—a smile of unutterable sorrow, love, repentance, **[36]** hope. She gazed, speechless now . . . . It was forgiveness and peace from the Lord of all. And had her brain been as clear as her heart, could she have taken it for less? If the sinner forgave her, what did the Perfect?<sup>42</sup>

Now that we have the right relationship between the Creator and his created, we also have the right relationship between man and beast. Paul rides his remaining horse Niger in ecstasy across the park, aware as never before of the natural world around him:

the earth sent up a savour, which like a Soft warp was crossed by a woof of sweet odours from leaf-buds and wild flowers, and spangled here and there with a silver thread of bird song—for but few of the beast-angels were awake yet. Through the fine consorting mass of silence and odour, went the soft thunder of Niger's gallop over the turf. His master's joy had overflowed into him.<sup>43</sup>



He has reconciled his lovers and re-created Paradise, but MacDonald does not leave it at that. For we are still in the real world, and ambiguity still clouds our vision. Evil must still be harnessed in the service of creation. As the author puts it,

Love, although an angel, has much to learn yet, and the demon jealousy may be one of the schoolmasters of her coming perfection.<sup>44</sup>

The reader, like Paul and Juliet, must seek to take her or his part in the creative process. Mutual honesty, mutual love, mutual forgiveness—and a coming together in suffering: these are the means God has given us whereby we can take our rightful place in the Great Chain of Being, and become sharers with him in his creative work.

#### Endnotes

1. *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, Chatto & Windus 1883. Ch. II, p. 10.
2. C.S.Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, Cambridge University Press 1967, p. 153;
3. Op. cit., ch. I, p. 3.
4. Ch. II, p. 12.
5. Ch. VII, p. 42.
6. Ch. VI, p. 34.
7. Ch. XIV, p.99.
8. Ch. VI, p. 32.
9. Ch. XI, p. 75.
10. Ch. XXVI, p. 216. [37]
11. Ch. XVII, p. 138.
12. Ch. XV, p. 105.
13. Ch. VI, p. 35.
14. Ch. XXVII, p. 226.
15. Ch. XXVII, p. 228.
16. Ch. XXVII, p. 229.
17. Ch. XX, p. 156.
18. Ch. XXXI, p. 284.
19. Ch. XXXIV, p. 319.
20. Ch. XXX, p. 263.
21. Ch. XV, p. 104.
22. Ch. XVII, p. 112.
23. Ch. XVII, p. 128.
24. Ch. XVII, p. 125.
25. Ch. XXII, p. 178.
26. Ch. XLI, p. 389.

- 27. Ch. X, pp. 58, 59.
- 28. Ch. XLIII, p. 415.
- 29. Ch. XXXIII, p. 305.
- 30. Ch. L, p. 484.
- 31. Ch. XXVII, p. 232.
- 32. Ch. XXXI, p. 280.
- 33. Ch. X, p. 63.
- 34. Ch. XXIX, p. 258.
- 35. Ch. XLVII, p. 449.
- 36. Ch. XXXIV, p. 320.
- 37. Ch. XLVII, p. 451.
- 38. Ch. XLVIII, p. 458.
- 39. Ch. XLVIII, p. 459.
- 40. Ch. LIII, p. 505.
- 41. Ch. LIII, p. 510.
- 42. Ch. LIII, p. 508.
- 43. Ch. LIV, p. 511.
- 44. Ch. LIV, p. 515. **[38]**