

1-1-2003

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### Recommended Citation

Persyn, Catherine (2003) "A Person's Name and a Person's Self, or: Just Who is North Wind," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*: Vol. 22 , Article 8.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol22/iss1/8>

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## A Person's Name and a Person's Self, or: Just *Who* is North Wind

Catherine Persyn

*"Do you know to whom you are speaking?"*

*"No," said Diamond.*

*And indeed he did not. For to know a person's name is not always to know the person's self.*

*(At the Back of the North Wind 9)*

*"Then would you mind telling me now, ma'am, for I feel very confused about it—are you the Lady of the Silver Moon?"*

*(The Princess and Curdie 208)*

**F**or reasons falling outside the scope of this paper, MacDonald chose not to have the character of North Wind appear under her true colours, as may be gathered in retrospect from the very first chapter, with Diamond's admission that he does not know to whom he is speaking, and the narrator's eloquent comment. The Victorian theme of assumed identities,<sup>1</sup> and of just how true to reality appearances can be—"What if I should look ugly without being bad?" (14)—, is very much present in this opening scene with the emphasised (if theoretical) possibility of the mysterious visitor being an impostor: "I love your mother, Diamond." "How was it you did not know my name, then, ma'am? [. . .]" "[. . .] I knew your name quite well but I wanted to hear what you would say for it" (13). It is at the least disingenuous thus to "lay traps for a body" (298) as Nanny would say. And what on earth can a person in her right mind mean by inciting a child to disobey his parents? Were it not for other, more positive signs, the scene could be perceived as slightly disquieting.

Of the many names and faces belonging to North Wind, there is one which, once intuited, seems so obvious that, as always in such cases, one may well reproach oneself with not having had before eyes to see and ears to hear but "it's the w'y wi' a' the best things! They're sae plain whan ye get a grip o' them, 'at ye canna un'erstan' hoo ye never thought o' them afore" (*Castle* 147). For while being an image of God and of his Providence, of beneficial Adversity and of Death, Diamond's great friend is also, more secretly, what

Gutta-Percha Willie, like Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy," calls the sun of the night: "Oh, how lovely [the moon] was!—so calm! so all alone in the midst of the great blue ocean! the sun of the night!" (108). Most daringly where concealment is of the essence, this identity is in fact as good as revealed on more than one occasion: "her face looked out of the midst [of her hair] like a moon out of a cloud" (12); "[Diamond] found himself in a cloud of North Wind's hair, with her beautiful face, set in it like a moon, bending over him" (101); "she melted away till all that was left was a pale face, like the moon in the morning" (108).

But in accordance with the paradoxical logic of Poe's "Purloined Letter" (safest from inquisitive eyes when flaunted) those explicit comparisons turn out to be the best possible camouflage. [end of page 60]

## 1. The Lady of the Silver Moon

### 1.1 North Wind's Characteristic Features Accounted for

There can be sundry reasons or non-reasons for a character's shrinking and expanding, witness Carroll's *Alice*. In a fantastic book like *At the Back of the North Wind*, it can be perceived as pertaining to the genre, and thus dismissed without further ado in spite of the warning issued by North Wind herself: "a fairy can't grow big and little at will, though the nursery-tales do say so: they don't know better" (57). Philosophical readers may see it as a lesson in relativity, a reminder that size belongs with appearances and not with essence. It is a recurring MacDonald theme—"How can such a very little creature as you grant or refuse anything?" "Is that all the philosophy you have gained in one-and-twenty years?" said she. "Form is much, but size is nothing. It is a mere matter of relation" (*Phantastes* 5-6)—voiced here by a momentarily diminutive North Wind—"If there's one thing makes me more angry than another it is the way you humans judge things by their size. I am quite as respectable now as I shall be [. . .] when I take an East Indiaman by the royals" (61). But whatever purpose it may serve, there is little doubt that North Wind's changing size—"Must you see me every size that can be measured before you know me?" (58)—is to be ascribed to her lunar identity. For this intriguing character can equally be: *Girl*<sup>2</sup>—"The next instant a young girl glided across the bed [. . .] 'Do you think I care about how big or how little I am?' [. . .] 'But you are not big enough to take care of me. I think you are only Miss North Wind'" (32); or *Blossoming Woman*—"North Wind was now tall as a full-grown girl" (34); "the tall gracious lady" (78); or *Exhausted*

*Grandam*—”the form of a woman seated [. . .] leaning forward with her hands in her lap, [. . .] motionless with drooping arms and head. [. . .] Her face [. . .] white as the snow” (110-11)—is a personification of “the-promising waxing crescent, the fertile full face, and the sinister dark of the moon [which] are in mythic image the three guises of woman: maiden, fruitful wife, old crone” (Greene, 17).<sup>3</sup> This is wholly consistent with MacDonald’s depiction of the Moon, which—or rather ‘who’—is almost invariably anthropomorphic under his pen.

Dreaming she must be surely! [. . .] for she seemed to care about nothing—not even that she was old and worn, and withered and dying [. . .] What a strange look all the night wore while the tired old moon was thus dreaming of the time when she would come again, back through the vanishing and the darkness—a single curved thread of a baby moon, to grow and grow to a great full-grown lady moon, able to cross with fearless gaze the gulf of the vaulted heavens (*Gutta* 111).

The unpredictable lady who first pays Diamond visit after visit, and then is not heard of any more for the greater part of the book, the whimsical visitor who “always came of herself, and never when [Diamond] was looking for her, and indeed almost never when he was thinking of her” (357), is the obvious—or not so obvious—embodiment of a traditionally fickle Moon:

The moon is changeable [. . .] It might well be expected that she would shine during the night as the sun shines in the day. Sometimes it is true, she shines, as at full moon, but at other seasons her light is withdrawn and the night is left completely dark. [61] Furthermore in her time of rising she seems dependent only on her own whim. The darkness falls at the setting of the sun. Surely the moon should then rise and give us light throughout the dark hours, but she is not to be relied on. When the sun sets, the moon also may be about to set. On other nights she does not rise until the hours of darkness are almost past. And more anomalous than all else besides, at certain times her pale face may be visible hanging in the sky, at midday, her ghostly presence seeming almost a protest at the obvious and blatant light of the sun (*Harding* 65).

Typical of the character’s versatility is her first meeting with Diamond: after persuading the boy to follow her, she then seems bent on talking him out of it, only to leave him in the lurch eventually, and come back a week later, when

he is no longer expecting her. This unpredictability moreover extends to her answers and her wisdom, which, more often than not, take the opposite view from current opinion, as with: “Nobody is cold with the North Wind” (12).

Like the “night star” of the Greeks—seen both as Aphrodite the Bright Moon, and Hecate the Dark Moon—North Wind seems to possess a double nature:

“Here you are taking care of a poor little boy with one arm, and there you are sinking a ship with the other. It can’t be like you.”

“Ah! but which is me ? I can’t be two mes, you know.”

“No. Nobody can be two mes.”

“Well, which me is me?”

“Now I must think. There looks to be two.” (70).

But again like the Moon, which, contrary to appearances, is in fact “her own bright self all the time” as Gutta-Percha Willie well knows (108-14) North Wind is One and she is Love —”I could not be cruel if I would. I can do nothing cruel, although I often do what looks like cruel to those who do not know what I really am doing” (59)—the figure of eternal wisdom that sometimes “looks repellent : because it is not understood” (*Seaboard* 581).

## 1. 2. A Lunar Goddess

“Shapes are only dresses [. . .] and dresses are only names. That which is inside is the same all the time” (*Princess and Curdie* 209). On a par therefore with North Wind’s protean *appearance*—”You’ve seen me in many shapes, Diamond” (363)—is the great variety of *names* by which, just like Irene’s great-great-grandmother, she is known amongst men: another discreet but unmistakable hint to her identity, for it was precisely the distinctive feature of the moon-goddess Isis, traditionally called “the thousand-named,” “the myriad-named” (Frazer 387). Evidence of this wealth of appellations can be found in Apuleius’ *Transformations* (XL 5) or in Cornelius Agrippa’s *Occult Philosophy* (II, 215). Lest the mention of such works should appear incongruous it is worth remembering that, in essence, Diamond’s adventures have not a little in common with the former, and that a MacDonald character, *Phantastes*” Cosmo, reads Cornelius Agrippa.

All covert references point in the same direction: towards a Lunar Goddess. North Wind on her doorstep, seated as still as a statue “against the ice-front of the ridge,” veritable *Door* giving or forbidding access to a world beyond—”You must walk on as if I were an open door, and go right

through me” (110-11)—is [62] that *Jana*<sup>4</sup> or *Diana*, the triune goddess linking together the different levels of the world, and whom, as such, the Ancients represented at crossroads with her back leaning against a column. When North Wind assists Diamond’s mother at the birth of her boy—”I was with her when you were born. I saw her laugh and cry both at once. I love your mother, Diamond” (13)—she is there in her capacity as *Artemis*, the virgin goddess of childbearing. As a beautiful woman drawn by the beauty of a sleeping youth—”I like to see nice things out of my windows” (8)—North Wind is *Selene* lovingly bending over a Diamond-*Endymion* (although imperfect, this analogy is eloquent). And when she describes herself as “raging ten times worse than Mrs, Bill the blacksmith’s wife” (14), the hint is of a temperamental *Aphrodite* treating none too well her blacksmith husband *Vulcan-Hephaistos*.

Amongst North Wind’s transformations “in fun” described in chapter 11, the Leopard, Jaguar and Tiger hark back to the Lunar Goddesses’ retinues of wild animals. More generally speaking, all the animals evoked in the book are on diverse accounts closely associated with the moon. As a spinning and weaving creature the Spider is the image of the Moon weaving Time and our destiny<sup>5</sup> like the three dire Sisters—hence the importance of the weaver figure in tales, MacDonald’s included.

The Cat (nearly always connoted negatively in MacDonald’s work) and the Weasel are witch’s animals; like the Bat and the Serpent (14) they belong to the sombre side of the Moon Goddess, as confirmed by their association with *Lilith*—”her legs, hurrying from her body, sped away serpents. From her shoulders fled her arms as in terror, serpents also. Then something flew up from her like a bat” (50)—, herself most explicitly described as “[taking] a few steps with the gait of a Hecate” (214). The serpent, furthermore, has always been closely associated to the moon through its ability to change its skin. This power of self-renewal “was felt to be akin to the power of the moon which renewed itself month by month, after its apparent death” (Harding 53).

If the bunny-Rabbits in chapter 36 do not scamper away at North Wind’s approach, but on the contrary canter up to her and would fain “leap [. . .] upon her lap,” it is because they have a special kinship with that moon-lady. Not only do the individuals of that species sleep during the day and gambol at night like the Princess Daylight; not only do they suddenly appear and disappear like the moon, but they are also, on account of their well-known fecundity, a symbol of [63] [Note: images not available] ever-

resilient life, an eloquent symbol of fertility, which is governed by the moon. The historiated initial of a 12th-century Bible features four hares or rabbits attached to one another by a common ear, two by two, thus forming a Wheel of sorts. As in the case of the tail-devouring snake in another illuminated initial, the suggested meaning is eternal recurrence (see illustrations 1 and 2).

That lunar character of the rabbit does not exclude other meanings. The mention of the “rabbit-warren underneath” (361) for example, probably has a special significance, as some alchemical prints feature rabbits, one of which, half-engaged in its warren, seems to be showing the way: as suggested by the well-known injunction (*V.I.T.R.I.O.L.*), the Adept is invited to “visit the inside of the earth.”

### 1.3. Other Intimations of North Wind’s Lunar Identity

Throughout the book, MacDonald actually drops a great number of hints as to the character’s real identity. North Wind’s rather cryptic remark to Diamond— “your mother has got three windows into my dancing-room, and you have three into my garret” (6)—is one of them, for a similar image is used, this time explicitly, in a book belonging to the same period as *At the Back of the North Wind*, when young Wilfrid Cumbermede’s playmate exclaims: “Here we are in the moon’s drawing-room!” (117).

Another intimation of this identity is the use by both North Wind and the Moon of the same exclamation in the same circumstances (at some two hundred pages’ distance, however, which makes the echo barely noticeable). Both ladies (one and the same in fact) are putting up a good fight against the mists and fogs of our sublunar world. *North Wind*: “I will get rid of a few of these clouds—only they do come up so fast! It’s like trying to blow a brook dry. There!” (103). *The Moon* (as described by Nanny): “there was a cloud, all crapey and fluffy, trying to drown the beautiful creature. But [. . .] the cloud couldn’t stick to her; she shook it off, and said *there*, and shone out clearer and brighter than ever” (296). Nanny’s immediate wellbeing on coming into the moonlight constitutes another clue, for North Wind had precisely the same instantaneous effect on a feverish Diamond. Once again, the meaningful echo can easily go unnoticed. *Diamond*: “The moment Diamond felt [North Wind’s] arms fold around him he began to feel better” (101). *Nanny*: “the moment I came into the moonlight, I began to feel better” (295).

North Wind’s lunar identity is similarly suggested by other details, at first sight trifling but which become eloquent once connected. The influence of Diamond’s surroundings on his dreams is suggested in chapter 8 where,

after dreaming of a dark cathedral and a pale window inhabited by sham Apostles (one of whom complains about the damage caused by the storm to his blue robe) he wakes up to find all this has gone and there is “but a dark heap of hay all about him and the little panes in the roof of his loft glimmering blue in the light of the morning” (90). In chapter 1 we were told about those “little panes in the roof for the stars to look in” (3), none others, obviously, than Diamond’s “windows” into North Wind’s “garret;” But the stars cannot be the only ones to [64] “look in,” as mere common sense will suggest, and the curiosity traditionally ascribed to the moon will confirm. (Latin authors taxed the moon with being “indiscreet.” Pindarus called her “the eye of the night.”) North Wind’s warning to Diamond—“even if you see me looking in at people’s windows like Mrs. Eve Dropper” (14)—suggests her symbolic identity with that heavenly eaverdropper inviting herself into our intimacy. This wonderful apparition that captivates Diamond—“the boy was entranced with her mighty beauty” (12)—and from whose eyes, significantly, comes “all the light by which Diamond saw her face and hair,” is the material, the wherewithal, seized upon by the feverish boy’s imagination to create a marvellous woman figure.

From a realistic perspective, the whole fantastic vein of the book thus corresponds to a recurring dream triggered by the sight of the Moon.<sup>6</sup> This is typical of MacDonald who, well aware that there can be “[no] other than a natural cause” (*Donal* 197) never neglects the *How* of phenomena, their “ways and means” (*Unspoken* 466)—even though as a believer he is first and foremost interested in their *Why*.

Another feature that deserves to be taken into consideration is the frequency of the word *moon* (of its compounds *moonlight*, *moonlit*, *moonshine*): it appears no less than a hundred and twelve times in the book. Of course it is not so much this frequency in itself that is interesting as that of which it is a sign. In particular, there are respectively thirty-one and forty occurrences in two of the more important texts “Nanny’s Dream” and “Little Daylight.” As will be remembered, a seriously-ill Nanny dreams in her hospital bed that the Moon has come to fetch her; inside the shining sphere lives a mysterious “moon-lady” whose orders the girl disobeys, which results in her being sent back home to her muddy surroundings. As for Princess Daylight who, owing to the Curse she is under, is doomed not to see that Light whose name she bears, her health and mood are synchronised with the waxing and waning of the moon.

That dream and that tale—both of them, as we see, under the sign of



the moon—, were inspired by North Wind. We learn this subsequently, from an exchange also instructive on other accounts:

“Did you give Nanny her dream too—about the moon and the bees?”

“Yes. I was the lady that sat at the window of the moon.”

“Oh thank you. I was almost sure you had something to do with that too. And did you tell Mr Raymond the story about the Princess Daylight?”

“I believe I had something to do with it. At all events he thought about it one night when he couldn’t sleep” (364-65).

Not only do we have here North Wind’s own word that she and the moon-lady of Nanny’s dream are one, but (with the mention of Mr. Raymond’s sleepless night, for which she accepts responsibility) another transparent allusion to her lunar identity, since the moon—a full moon—is traditionally held accountable for bouts of insomnia. By once again stating as good as openly that which he is bent on concealing, MacDonald seems to be playing with his readers very much as North Wind does with Diamond, telling us, rather impishly: “I wonder how long it will be before you know [her]; or how often [she] might take you in before you get sharp enough to suspect [her]” (98). The occupation in this [65] case consists in providing the information only at such time as it is bound to receive but mediocre attention, because it then seems rather trivial compared with the matter at hand (the pain of having to say farewell to a beloved person) and we sympathize all the more with Diamond’s plight since *we* as readers also have some melancholy leavetaking to do as we turn over the last few pages of the book.

With Nanny’s account of her dream in chapter 30, and Diamond’s repeated buttings-in, the “North Wind equals Moon” equation is equally brought to the fore and concealed at the same time, by a series of seeming (and most amusing) *non sequiturs*.

It must be stressed that the bringing together of such apparently distinct entities has a time-honoured foundation, for in the philosophy of the Stoics, the *Pneuma* is a firey energy, the *fire* permeating all the parts of the universe: that divine energy (πνευμα Τυιον) which MacDonald no doubt has in mind when he evokes “the indwelling fire of the world” (*Paul* 22). This equation is most suggestively hinted at in “The History of Photogen and Nycteris” with the heroine’s exhilarating first experience of the wind and the moonlit night:

As she knelt, something softly flapped her, embraced her, stroked her, fondled her. [. . .] It was likest a woman's breath. [. . .] It was like a spiritual wine, filling her whole being with an intoxication of pure joy. To breathe was a perfect existence. It seemed to her the light itself that she drew into her lungs (313-14).

This scene is most profitably put side by side with the beginning of Nanny's dream. As we read the children's entertaining thrust and parry it is worth noticing that the moonlight and the wind are both anthropomorphically described in much the same terms, as trying to get at (the real) Nanny: "a cold wind began to blow, and flutter all my rags about" (293); "the moonlight got in at every tear in my clothes" (296)—in other words, they are interchangeable symbols for that essential "good" "against the inroads of [which]" no man is "proof ("The Butcher's Bills," *Stephen* 185)—"Wherever the creative Pneuma can enter, there it enters [. . .]" as MacDonald writes elsewhere<sup>7</sup>:

"Then a cold wind began to blow, and flutter all my rags about—"

"That was North Wind herself," said Diamond.

"Eh?" said Nanny, and went on with her story (293-94).

"the moment I came into the moonlight, I began to feel better."

"That's why North Wind blew you there," said Diamond.

"It came of Mr. Raymond's story about the Princess Daylight," returned Nanny (295).

"the moonlight got in at every tear in my clothes, and made me feel so happy—"

"There, I tell you!" said Diamond.

"What do you tell me?" returned Nanny.

"North Wind—"

"It was the moonlight, I tell you," persisted Nanny (296).

"and what do you think I saw?"

"A beautiful lady," said Diamond.

"No—the moon itself, as big as a little house" (298). **[66]**

Again and again Diamond steers the conversation back to the object of his love—"Just like her," said Diamond, who thought everything strange

and beautiful must be done by North Wind” (298)—as lovers are wont to do, so that, while listening to him with an amused, sympathy, not for a moment do we take seriously his remarks (with their implication that the moon and North Wind are one). And when we are at last undeceived, we realize, not without some compunction, that we often reacted like a profane Nanny seeing in Diamond but “an amiable, over-grown baby” (333). One cannot but admire MacDonald’s cleverness at making his readers personally experience the situation which is the very object of his discourse: the overbearing attitude of the less, towards the more, advanced. Indeed the chapter contains two more remarks by Diamond eliciting from us the same idle, slightly condescending attention; again far from justifiable as they constitute literal truths.

When Diamond, wishing that Nanny’s disobedience had not brought her dream to a premature end, exclaims: “What a pity you opened that door [ . . . ] You might have had such a long dream, and such nice talks with the moon-lady! Do try to go again, Nanny. I do so want to hear some more” (308), he gives, most literally, a definition of his own recurring dream and adventures, together with a hint at what made them possible: because, unlike Nanny, Diamond is obedient, and puts into day-time practice the teachings of the night, *his* “moon-lady” pays him several visits. It is those visits that constitute the backbone of the book. In accordance with MacDonald’s idealistic philosophy, it is this fantastic vein that carries the whole of the realistic vein. *At the Back of the North Wind* is first and foremost the story of Diamond’s “long dream” and of his much awaited “talks with the moon-lady,” the story of a *Colloquium cum angelo bono*; so much so indeed, that Jung’s disquisition on the subject provides an exact description of this so-called children’s book:

Because archetypes are relatively autonomous, like all numinous contents, they can’t simply be integrated in a rational form; they demand a dialectic treatment, that is to say a proper confrontation, which the patient frequently achieves under the form of a dialogue, thus unwittingly verifying the alchemical definition of meditation: ‘*Colloquium cum angelo bono.*’ the interior dialogue with the guardian angel. The progress is usually dramatic, in that it presents numerous events. It is expressed or accompanied by oniric symbols akin to those ‘collective representations’ which have at all times represented the phenomena of psychic transformation under the garb of mythological themes (*Racines* 59).

But MacDonald's philosophy being far from escapism, and Diamond's *meditation* being therefore interspersed with practical work in the world, what the book ultimately is about is an Alchemical Marriage between the spiritual and the material.

A double meaning also characterizes Diamond's final reflection concerning Nanny's dream as he obediently leaves the hospital:

But now the nurse came and told him it was time to go; and Diamond went, saying to himself, "I can't help thinking that North Wind had something to do with that dream. It would be tiresome to lie there all day and all night too—without dreaming. *Perhaps if [67] she hadn't done that, the moon might have carried her to the back of the north wind—who knows?*" (308, my italics).

In addition to the obvious meaning—which could be paraphrased as follows: if North Wind had not given Nanny that dream, through feeling sad and bored as she lay idle in her hospital bed she might have gone to the back of the north wind, in other words, might have died—there is a second meaning suggested by the parallelism between Diamond's remark to Nanny (the one that has just been commented on): "*What a pity you opened that door and let the bees out! You might have had such a long dream,*" and his final reflection here: "*Perhaps if she hadn't done that, the moon might have carried her to the back of the north wind—who knows?*"

The use of the same modality (*might have* plus past participle) authorizes Diamond's "if she hadn't done that" to be understood as again referring to Nanny's transgression, in which case his two reflections are near-synonyms, and the meaning becomes: if Nanny had not disobeyed, her beautiful moon-lady (North Wind) might have carried her to the back of the north wind, just as she did with Diamond. In fact, all the ambiguity lies in the *she*, presumably referring to North Wind (the patent meaning) but which can legitimately (the occult meaning) be understood as referring to Nanny, making of the sentence yet another secret disclosure.

## 2. Coherence of MacDonald's Symbolism

One has to admire the great artistic coherence of a book which, in paradoxical fashion—but the case is not quite unprecedented—could be said to be "progressive, and digressive too, and at the same time."<sup>8</sup> In spite of its surface heterogeneity, *At the Back of the North Wind* is, most emphatically, an organic whole, the "spiritual scaffolding or skeleton" of which North

Wind's lunar identity enables us to perceive (*Orts 38*). What that "spiritual scaffolding" is, I will show here to a certain extent in examining the themes of the book; inasmuch as it is impossible to deal with any one aspect of a whole without touching, or at least throwing an oblique light on, the others.

While the themes of *At the Back of the North Wind* can severally be ascribed to other semantic fields, it is highly significant that they should all belong to the same "gravitational system," that of the Moon (see above the example of the rabbit). To name at random some of the more obvious, it is plain that Insomnia, Lunacy, Dreams and Artistic Creation as the products of the Unconscious; Mediation; Initiation; the processes of Waxing and Waning; Death and Resurrection; and Endless Recurrence, all have the Moon for a single common denominator.

To take another example, the mythical fight between the forces of Good and Evil is characteristic of the fairy tale, but it is also moon-related. The moon being both Hecate and Aphrodite, *At the Back of the North Wind* features both the fairy, (better called the Wise Woman) and the witch: Diamond's North Wind—"Then are you a bad thing?" "No, for *you* see me, Diamond dear" (37)—and Nanny's Sal. **[68]**

The same splitting of the archetype appears in "Little Daylight" with the "very nice tidy motherly old woman" (267) who gives shelter to the Prince, and the witch who lays traps for him. On the black, Lilith side of the moon,<sup>9</sup> belong all untamed shrews (14) and "swamp-fair[ies]" (273) and nurses *à la* Mrs Gamp (36), and Old Sals "a-cuddlin' of [their] ugly old bones" (45). On the bright, Mara side of the moon, belong Diamond's North Wind, his mother, his aunt, Miss Coleman, Mr Raymond's fiancée, not forgetting Old Goody at Sandwich and that typically Victorian "vinegar aunt" Mrs Crump with her "good kind of crossness" (22). While being protagonists in their own right, all those characters, dark or luminous, are in varying degrees as many approximations of the Great Mother archetype which "contains on the one hand the witch and the devilish mother, Death, and on the other hand the wise woman and fecundity goddess" (Von Franz 2: 100).

Lameness equally belongs to the semantic field of the moon. Because the Moon is not only that glorious creature sailing fearless across the sky, but also at other times a weary old hag, she can be imagined in that capacity as affected by a limp—the anthropomorphic equivalent to the inequality of the lunar phases. "Amongst the sacred rites due to the imitation of Mother Moon features lameness. Lameness was the subtlest means that was found to represent [. . .] the inequality of lunar phases" (Cailler 129). According to

Mircea Éliade (49), a series of mythical characters whose “lunar structure” has been clearly established, exist in a great variety of cultures. Those characters had rain-making powers due to the fact that they were one-footed or one-handed. A playful allusion to this theme is Martha’s reflection to Joseph that he “got out of bed the wrong leg first this morning” and Joseph’s facetious answer: “I always get out with both at once” (95). Sure enough, the wicked fairy in “Little Daylight” “hobble[s] away” in a pet (263). Jim’s lameness, a telling symbol of our crippled, imperfect condition, is mentioned no less than five times,<sup>10</sup> and Ruby himself, while he is yet “in the making” is lame.

Indeed all the characters’ tribulations are to be understood in relation with the peripeteia of the moon cycle, whose pattern our lives follow closely with their ups and downs. For at some time or other everybody is bound to feel alternately in the depths of despair and on the top of things—“over the moon” like Diamond (226)—according to whether The North Wind Doth Blow, or The Prospect Brightens; everybody experiences hope and despondency; everybody in the course of their lifetime suffers a million deaths followed by a million resurrections which are but the type, the symbol, of their ultimate resurrection.

Like Diamond, like North Wind herself, like the waning, sickening moon, all the characters are eclipsed or taken ill for a while, undergoing a symbolical death before rising Phoenix-like from their ashes. “Who knows but disease may be the coming, the keener life, breaking into this, and beginning to destroy like fire the inferior modes or garments of the present?” (*David* 343-44).

Diamond’s father, Joseph, was that “man of little faith” grumbling in the face of the Incomprehensible, whom illness turns into a “true child” able to “trust absolutely, against all appearances” (*Unspoken* 353), as Diamond was all along. **[69]**

Considered in its anagogic meaning, Martha’s condition—“Diamond’s mother was but poorly, for a new baby was coming” (311)—is that of all humans, who are sick that they might be blessed, pregnant with an inner child of whom they are delivered by illness.

Nanny’s case is a good illustration of this dying of the caterpillar into the butterfly, which makes it so difficult for Diamond to recognize her (254). He had the same difficulties recognizing a much-altered Old Diamond (159), and yet it is this new Old Diamond that will eventually give birth to the Ruby.

Mr Raymond also is taken ill (in Switzerland, a country of mountains

and snow, rather like the country visited by Diamond) hence his prolonged absence, leaving Ruby on Joseph's hands. "I've wished I were rid of [Ruby] a thousand times" exclaims Joseph. "It was only to be for three months, and here it's eight or nine" (326). Nature has its laws, which will not be bypassed: not three months, but "eight or nine," the length of a gestation, were necessary before the Ruby could be born.

Not three months, but eight or nine also for a new Mr Raymond to replace the old: "Mr Raymond was an old bachelor no longer: he was bringing his wife with him to live at the Mound" (336). This symbolism tallies with MacDonald's solemn views regarding marriage, possibly inherited from Swedenborg, whose *Conjugal Love (fie Deliciae Sapientiae de amore conjugiali)* features a chapter entitled "The change of state through marriage." Indeed marriage, the earthly symbol of the heavenly marriage, when our souls shall become whole by espousing the Divine, is closely linked to the theme of lameness. The contrasted figures of Old Diamond and Ruby in chapter 33 are another image of a lameness soon to be cured by marriage, and the moon, which can be both "lame" and "whole" is an eloquent symbol of both.

Mr Evans's adventures offer another interesting illustration of this process of death and rebirth: after nearly getting drowned (escaping physical death by the skin of his teeth like Diamond); after sojourning, like Diamond again, on an island, and "go[ing] through a great many hardships and sufferings" (247); he is seen to reappear, weary and pale-faced, from. . . *Gravesend* (the skill with which MacDonald uses geographical data for symbolical purposes is indeed admirable). Yesterday's speculator and immature lover is gone: the man who emerges from the tomb-womb—coming to the light, suggestively enough, after a passage through a "tunnel" (245)—is a new man who, like the snake shedding its skin, has sloughed off his Vain old self—"he had come to see that he had been foolish as well as wicked" (247)—as suggested by the prospect of his renewed engagement vows and the fact that he has now become his name: for what is a Mr *Evan(s)* but a con-verted Mr *Vane*?

Closely related to the moon also is the all-important theme of *lunacy* introduced by Nanny's contemptuous assessment of Diamond in chapter 30—"I think you must ha' got out o'one o' them Hidget Asylms" (49)—, to be followed by many such: "The cabbies call him God's baby [. . .] He's not right in the head, you know. A tile loose" (187). For the moon is the friend of the initiated and the poets, whose wisdom appears like madness

in the eyes of the profane—”I [70] suspect the child’s a genius’ said the poet to himself, ‘and that’s what makes people think him silly’” (212). The adjective is liberally applied to Diamond throughout the book. The narrator’s hint, however—”I could not help thinking of the old meaning of the word *silly*” (343)—, and MacDonald’s own explanation elsewhere—”*Silly* means *innocent*, and therefore *blessed*” (*Antiphon* 100)—remind us that, as is widely illustrated in world literature, so-called Idiots can sometimes hold closer communion with divine influences than the average person. Another reminder is the meaningful exchange between the children: “‘Well, we won’t dispute about it,’ said Nanny: ‘you’ve got a tile loose, you know,’ ‘Suppose I have,’ returned Diamond, ‘don’t you see it may let in the moonlight, or the sunlight for that matter?’” (295).

Diamond’s intriguing gesture of putting both his hands to his head “as if it had been a globe he could take off and set on again” (294) could well be an allusion to cephalophoric saints and the necessity of not giving the last word to the intellect: as tool and tool only, the right place of the intellect (the head) is in our hands (see Illustration 3). From dumb Sir Gibbie to Dog-Steenie in *Heather and Snow*, via characters like Clare in *A Rough Shaking* or Diamond himself—not to mention MacDonald’s explicit-pronouncements on the question—there is a strong case throughout MacDonald’s work for such a reading.

But even more cogent in this respect is the very *structure of the book*. With as much as one third of it being taken up by sub-texts constantly breaking into the main narrative, *At the Back of the North Wind* can be said to be literally riddled with holes. Far from being a flaw, this feature is part of the overall message concerning the necessity of inviting “moon-wisdom”<sup>13</sup> [Note: endnotes 11 and 12 not indicated in original text] in us. “MacDonald’s apparent unwillingness to tighten or compress *At the Back of the North Wind* upon reissuing it as a book” (Knoepflmacher, *Ventures* 229) substantiates the view that the interpolations are part and parcel of the work.

There is, indeed, a strict parallelism that needs to be pointed out between such “holes” and Diamond’s “tile loose.” Just as this tile loose (the panes in the roof through which the Moon looks in, and the hole in the wall permitting North Wind’s—the Pnuma, alias the Moon again—intrusion into his cosy hay-loft), makes the boy receptive to heavenly light, so the so-called sub-texts are the *theion*<sup>14</sup> or leaven working the dough of the text (in both cases to the same effect). They are in actual fact lunar (*pneumatic*) super-texts, and they act as relays for a *pneumatic* (or lunar) North Wind. This



is suggested in various ways: they are read by Diamond in “North Wind’s book,” or in Mr Raymond’s (and Mr Raymond is a terrestrial substitute for North Wind), or else they are inspired by North Wind herself or by the river in her country; in other cases there is no knowing their origin—”I could never find out where he got some of his many [71] [Note: image not available] songs” (346); “but generally he would say, ‘I don’t know, I found it somewhere’ or ‘I got it at the back of the north wind’” (349)—a sure sign of their kinship with North Wind, for “thou canst not tell whence [the wind] cometh” (John 3.8).

Just as Diamond may sound silly to some, and is apt to be misunderstood precisely because he speaks, on earth, the language of a better world, the texts in the text represent the very same moon-wisdom, which, because it takes the shape of enigmatic or apparently nonsensical dreams, rhymes, and tales—”such nonsense to those that c[an’t] understand it!” (157)—is all too often regarded as moonshine. “Who can tell how many have been counted fools simply because they were prophets; or how much of the madness in the world may be the utterance of thoughts true and just, but belonging to a region differing from ours in its nature and scenery!” (“The Wow O’Rivven,” *Portent* 251).

Moon-related also is the striking recurrence of number 7 and its multiples, even if it is also a discreet reference to a Great Exemplar, since number seven is of peculiar relevance in Saint John’s Gospel, and this Gospel is of peculiar relevance in *At the Back of the North Wind*.

As appears when one takes the trouble of adding up the information provided, Diamond learns to read over a period of seven weeks: “Within a month he was able to spell out [. . .]” (192) *plus* “This took him nearly a fortnight” (192) *plus* “In a week or so I shall be able to go to the tall gentleman and tell him I can read” (202). He replaces his sick father over a period of fourteen days: “For a fortnight Diamond went on driving his cab” (251). He brings back to his mother “one pound one shilling and sixpence” (226), in other words twenty-one shillings. Trivial as it may seem at first sight, such information cannot be insignificant because in all three instances it is repeated, as if to ensure that it registered: “But before the week was over” (202); “After that fortnight, his father was able to go out again” (251); “[Martha] was thinking more of her twenty-one shillings and six pence” (231).

Temperance, a key-notion of the book, corresponds to the fourteenth arcanum of the Tarot.

North Wind pays seven distinct visits to Diamond. By “visits” should be understood the interviews in which Diamond is able to both see, and speak to, North Wind, successively in chapters 1; 3 and 4; 5 to 8; 9; 11; 36; and 37. On one occasion (chapter 32) Diamond hears North Wind, but cannot see her—“neither now was he to see her” (315). On her final apparition to him, “she did not speak to [him]” (376). And it seems that most of North Wind’s visits,<sup>15</sup> like those of another lunar character, Lady Alice in *The Portent*, have “an interval of seven days, or a multiple of seven between” (79).

Seven also are North Wind’s transformations “in fun” (122-24) since, to the animals already mentioned (spider, weasel, cat, leopard, jaguar, tiger) must be added that which seems to trigger off the whole series of transformations. Significantly enough, this playful interlude is also, if somewhat secretly, moon-related. Flying past Diamond’s face as the boy is beginning seriously to long for home, is an intriguing creature which looks “like a great humble-bee or cockchafer” but “c[an] be neither, for there [are] no insects amongst the ice.” [72] The logical impossibility suggests that what we have here is a fabulous creature. Additional clues as to what it *can* be are provided by the long compact paragraph devoted to North Wind’s other metamorphoses. Three features are particularly noteworthy in that paragraph: the “Continuity-Rupture”<sup>16</sup> which causes an animal to be succeeded each time by a bigger animal, the cat for instance becoming a leopard and thus, literally speaking, a big cat, in other words the same and not the same animal; the never-ending, chain-like, song-of-the-river quality of the description, (“and . . . and . . . and”), suggestive of eternity; and the accelerando of the style, the text itself gathering speed and strength and volume as it goes.

All these characteristics point to the passage as being an oblique evocation of the moon, and more precisely of the phases of the waxing moon. Just like the animals described here, the moon changes gradually and almost imperceptibly, until all of a sudden it is no longer that “poor thin crescent” (17) in the sky but a quarter-moon, which goes on changing night after night until it is no quarter moon any more but a half moon, which in its turn changes into a full, moon, thus showing herself to be, like North Wind, *eadem in diversis*, the same and not the same.

With the tiger being seen gradually to diminish until it is but a black speck on the ice, the other half of the moon cycle is also evoked, but not dwelt upon, as it is not relevant at this stage of Diamond’s adventures.

The overall logic of the book must be recalled here, for only when

examined in its light do the above clues become meaningful. *At the Back of the North Wind* is the story of a travelling *There and Back*, and back again for good to that *There* which is in fact a *Here*, the home of the eternal present, Home, the Father's arms, to speak like MacDonald. The waxing and waning moon becomes the image of this two-way travelling. The first ten chapters correspond to Diamond's journey *There*, symbolised by his "waning" (his illness) and disappearance (his near death experience). After his stay *There* (up north, in Hyperborean regions) Diamond in chapter 11 is going back "home" to his mother, in other words travelling southwards. As if to draw attention to the symbolism involved, MacDonald repeats the information no less than five times: Diamond thinks of North Wind sitting on her doorstep "looking southwards, and waiting" (118). Sitting in a special tree of the country, he is himself "looking southwards after his home" (120). The little spider is making its way "over the ice toward the south" (123): The tiger flies "over the snow in a straight line for the south" (124). And the very last words of the chapter, which thus receive full emphasis, concern North Wind and Diamond "flying southwards" (125).

The text becomes slightly more explicit in the next chapter: "they went so fast that Diamond himself went the other way as fast—I mean he went fast asleep in North Wind's arms" (126). The southward journey then, from so-called sleeping to so-called waking, from so-called dreams to so-called reality, from so-called death to so-called life, is a journey from the world of essence to the world of existence. After dwindling and to all appearances dying like the old moon (chapters 1 to 9), a new Diamond is born in chapter 10, soon to be "waxing" in [73] the following chapters, "getting strong again with chicken broth and other nice things" (128).

This southward, or earthward plunge (what the Ancients called "generation") is that of all incarnations; the terrestrial destiny of humans and rivers alike: "The song of the brook [. . .] seemed to Diamond to be singing the story of its life to him. And so it was" (369). What starts as a tiny bubbling spring (the spider) gradually turns into a gushing little stream or frolicsome brook (the weasel, the cat), eventually becoming a big river of mighty meanders (the big cats). That stream "though here born, yet is acquainted / Elsewhere" (Vaughan "The Dawning," *Antiphon* 261), and like Diamond and in the image of the waning moon, up that stream we must travel, if we are to obey our spiritual vocation. As might be expected, it is with that travelling *back*<sup>17</sup> that *At the Back of the North Wind* is concerned.

At one stage, both Diamond and North Wind are as good as dead—

”He thought she must be dead at last. Her face was white as the snow” (111); “”Oh, Diamond, my darling! you have been so ill [. . .] I thought you were dead,’ said his mother” (126). Then both rally and resuscitate: “her face began to change like one waking from sleep. Light began to glimmer from the blue of her eyes” (121); “I should just like a slice of bread and butter!” (125).

The perfect congruence of such fainting and reviving with the symbolism of the Egyptian scarabæus (eternal recurrence, resurrection),<sup>18</sup> leaves little doubt as to the nature of the insect flying “in circles” (123) around Diamond. In the papyri, the scarabæus with outstretched legs means something like “to come to existence by taking on a given form,” a definition consistent with the context in which the “cockchafer” appears here.

The parallelism in the descriptions of North Wind’s awakening and of the indeterminate creature whose form she takes on is worth noticing: “A moment more, and she laid her hand on Diamond’s head” (121); “she was no longer vapoury and thin. She was solid, although tiny. A moment more, and she perched on his shoulder” (123). The minute creature corresponds to the neomeny, to the as yet hardly visible new moon inaugurating a new lunar cycle and a new stage in Diamond’s development. In view of its symbolism, it is hardly surprising if the scarabæus has been associated with the figure of the tail-devouring snake or ouroboros (see Illustration 4).

Another metaphor for this travelling back of the soul (or “psychanody”) and which is used as such by MacDonald, is the alchemical Great Work. In between *nigredo* and *rubedo*, the second stage is *albedo*, which, as may be gathered from its name, is *under the sign of the Moon*. In fact, because of MacDonald’s deliberately optimistic outlook, which causes him not to dwell on the negative [74] [Note: image not available] aspects of things and people, and on the other hand because, of impossibility to convey the glory ultimately awaiting us, it is so to say the whole book that is under the sign of the Moon. And it all hangs together: if, as established in a previous paper, (*North Wind* 20: 1-29) Old Diamond equals North Wind,<sup>19</sup> and if, as shown here, North Wind equals the Moon, it follows we should also have the equation Old Diamond equals the Moon.

That such is indeed the case is suggested in various ways. First of all the equation fits in with the unfolding of the journey, to whose successive stages the names of the three horses obviously correspond. As will be remembered, Old Diamond’s first companion in harness remains anonymous (which, in the light of MacDonald’s philosophy, is in itself suggestive).

On the strength of both internal and external evidence, however, it is not impossible to guess what his name can be. The identical nature, suggested by their shared anonymity, of that horse and of Stonecrop's must first be understood. Then the putting side by side of Stonecrop's remark—that he never calls his horse by his name because “it's not a nice name” (162)—and of North Wind's similar reluctance at pronouncing “the most dreadful of all” the names by which she is called, gives the sought-for answer: Old Diamond's first companion in harness is “Death”—not an unlikely name, considering that *The Flight of the Shadow* features a horse called “Thanatos,” often called by his English name. Not uninteresting either, in this context, is the symbolism of the Tarot: where all the other Major Arcana have a specific name, the thirteenth Arcanum, representing Death, is traditionally the only one to be nameless. The horses, men, correspond to the three stages of the alchemical Great Work, “Death” being a transparent allusion to earth-related *nigredo*, just as “Diamond” is a transparent allusion to moon-related *albedo*, and “Ruby” a transparent allusion to sun-related *rubedo*.

Bearing out this reading are two pregnant conceptions towards the end of the book. One of them is the parallel between Diamond and Ruby's partnership on the one hand, and Martha and Joseph's on the other. When Martha cannot help laughing at the thought of such different horses going together in harness, a wiser Diamond puts her right: “But why not, mother? With a month's oats, and nothing to do, Diamond'll be nearer Ruby's size than you will father's” (331). Like Joseph and Martha, like any wedded spouses, the yoked horses are a metaphor for the alchemichal *coniunctio*, or union of the two natures<sup>20</sup>—“I think they make a very nice pair. If the one is too fat, the other's too lean—so that's all right.” (329); “I think it's very good for different sorts to go together” (331)—male and female, sulphur and mercury, or again Gold and Silver corresponding to the Sun and the Moon.

The second notation is the one concerning the light in the stable: “The light showed the white mark on Diamond's forehead, but Ruby's eye shone so bright, that [Diamond] thought more light came out of it than went in” (315). The reference here is to a light which is only reflected, a Lunar light, as opposed to a radiant, Solar light (“more light came out of it”); in other words to the passive, feminine principle (the Moon, receiving the light of the Sun) as opposed to the active, masculine principle (the radiating Sun). It could be argued that North [75] Wind (the Moon) was the object of a similar formulation: “From her eyes came all the light by which Diamond saw her face” (12). This is no contradiction when we remember

MacDonald's constant emphasis on relativity. The Moon is the Sun of our night, and in our ignorance of things as they are, we may be deluded into thinking it generates its own light, when in actual fact this light is only reflected. So MacDonald tells us implicitly in chapter 7: when, with the moon peeping over the horizon, the figures of the Apostles gradually "dawn" in the cathedral window, Diamond, not knowing "that the wonder-working moon [i]s behind" thinks "all the light [i]s coming out of the window itself" (86). In other words, the Apostles reflecting the light of the moon are an analogical evocation of the moon reflecting the light of the sun. This relative value of the moon, which represents the inferior principle in the Sun-Moon; relation, but the superior principle in the Moon-Earth relation<sup>21</sup> is the law of the alchemichal tribulation: "during the dissolution quick silver is like the agent, but in the coagulation, it becomes the patient which is submitted to the operation" (Roger 189). Old Diamond is the male or active principle in the Death-Diamond syzygy, and the female or passive principle in the Diamond-Ruby syzygy.

North Wind's lunar identity possibly appears rather startling to some, who may be at a loss how to reconcile it with MacDonald's deep-seated Christian faith. In fact, there is no contradiction there, for it is of no less man Christ himself that the Moon in her turn is the symbol. What I would now like to emphasize therefore, is the remarkable congruence of North Wind's lunar identity with her identity as an image of God, in other words with her Christie dimension.

In the almost universal scheme whereby the Sun stands for the Supreme God,<sup>22</sup> it is hardly surprising that the Moon should be the symbol of Christ, and there are very good reasons indeed if North Wind is at once a *Christic* and a *Lunar* figure. This is a frequent association in MacDonald's writing, of which Diamond himself and young Clare<sup>23</sup>—another name referring to Light—are possibly the next most striking examples.

It could be put forward that Christ—"Sol Verus" or "Sol Invictus"—is traditionally a solar figure, and that he is occasionally presented as such by MacDonald. The "sunny realm of the radiant Christ" is evoked in *There and Back* (389); in the sermon "The Higher Faith" it is also to the sun that Christ is implicitly compared, while a lunar symbolism is ascribed to the Bible, inasmuch as it leads to Jesus. Again, this is no contradiction in view of MacDonald's analogical logic, and for the further reason that "the moon illustrates the same principle as the sun" (Von Franz 1. 222). But, in addition to being the more frequent in MacDonald's work, the Christ-Moon

association is justified on multiple accounts.

Benevolence. Christ is the embodiment of God's benevolence towards mankind, and the moon is intuitively perceived as such by MacDonald, as evidenced by his lines to his father: "Going upstairs to my study, the moon shone bright in the high heavens, and the conviction arose within me that God cared for his children. Has he really, I thought, put that shining thing up there to light up this round earth, and will he not minister to my wants?" [76] (May 4th 1854). Quoting this letter, Hein comments: "The moon always had an especial significance for him, often as a symbol of the providence of God" (161).

Kenosis: As Jung explained, and as MacDonald suggests where he writes: "I saw, shadowed out in the absolute devotion of Jesus to men, that the very life of God by which we live is an everlasting giving of himself away" (*Wilfrid* 483), the waxing and waning of the moon offers an image of  $\chi\epsilon\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , of God descending that he might ascend for us. The waning of the moon can be compared to Christ "laying aside his divine form to assume a human form" (Jung 1: 64). The dwindling of the moon, its death and subsequent rebirth are suggestive of Christ's passion and resurrection, as Simeon Weil the French philosopher points out (2. 88).

This is all the more relevant because the moon, while being, from a strictly scientific point of view, absent for one day only (the neomeny), is actually as good as invisible for three days, the very time spent by Christ in Hell, as recalled in Donne's "Resurrection"<sup>24</sup>: "Whose body [. . .] would [. . .] For these three days become a mineral" (*Antiphon* 123).

The relation of cause and effect between Christ's obedience unto death and God's elevation of him is stressed in Philippians 2.5-8. Like Christ therefore, the moon teaches us the "basic spiritual imperative [. . .] that one must die into life" (Hein, 203). The perfect, albeit ever changing, complementarity between the visible and the invisible parts of the waxing or waning moon offers rather a fascinating image of that Heraclitean flow between two realities, that "communicating-vessels logic," which is so important in MacDonald's work.

Consubstantiality. The Moon is "of the same nature as" the Sun, just as Christ is "consubstantial with" the Father, a kinship the reader is bound to be reminded of by the Prince's disquisition to Daylight: "[The sun] shines like the moon, rises and sets like the moon, is much the same shape as the moon, only so bright that you can't look at it for a moment" (275). Mediation. The above description is also an *ab absurdo* evocation of

the moon's mediatorial role: God (or the sun) being that which cannot be contemplated ("so bright you can't look at it for a moment"), it is Christ (the moon) that offers us an image of his Glory, as evoked in the first stanza of "The Night," a poem by Vaughan which MacDonald again chooses to quote in *England's Antiphon* (258):

Through that pure virgin-shrine,  
That sacred veil drawn o'er thy glorious noon,  
That men might look and live, as glowworms shine,  
And face the moon,  
Wise Nicodemus saw such light  
As made him know his God by night.

"That sacred veil" is nothing else but "the body of Jesus"<sup>25</sup> as MacDonald himself comments. His high appreciation of the poem ("This is glorious") makes sense in view of the emphasis that can be found throughout his work [77] on the necessity of a partial revelation. By reflecting the light of the sun, the moon enables us dimly to apprehend that which would otherwise remain the "unspeakable unknown," that "light by abundant clarity invisible" (*Unspoken* 425). If God be that "splendour probably too keen for our eyes to receive" (*Malcolm* 64), Christ is God made visible, just as the moon is a *sun* we can look at. A most explicit passage in this respect can be found in *Alec Forbes of Howglen*. Blind old Tibbie Dyster has just asked Annie Anderson to try and explain to her what the moon is, and the girl accordingly has run to fetch her Bible:

"Noo, ye jist hearken, Tibbie," she said as she returned, And, opening the Bible she read one of Tibbie's favourite chapters  
[. . .]

"Weel, lassie, I canna mak heid or tail o' 't."

"I'll tell ye, Tibbie, what the mune aye minds me o'. The face o' God's like the sun, as ye hae tellt me; for no man cud see him and live. [. . .] But *the mune* [. . .] *maun be like the face o' Christ, for it gies licht and ye can luik at it notwithstanding'.* *The mune's jist like the sun wi' the ower-muckle taen oot o' 't.* Or like Moses wi' the veil ower's face, ye ken. The fowk cudna luik at him till he pat the veil on."

"Na, na, lass; that winna do; for ye ken his coontenance was as the sun shineth in his strenth."

"Ay, but that was efter the resurrection, ye ken. I'm thinkin' *there had been akin' o' a veil ower his face a' the time he*



*was upo' the earth; and syne when he gaed whaur there war only heavenly een to luik at him, een that could bide it, he took it aff'*

*"Weel, I wadna wonner. Maybe ye're richt. And gin ye be right, that accounts for the Transfiguration. He jist lifted the veil affo' 'm a wee, and the glory aneath it lap oot wi' a leme like the lichinin'."* (250-1 my emphasis).

Proportional mean. The moon is to the earth what the sun is to the moon, just as Christ is to men what God is to Christ, or 3 is to 9 what 1 is to 3—the proportional mean evoked in Plato's *Timæus*:

[I]t is not possible that two things alone should be conjoined without a third; for there must needs be some intermediary bond to connect the two. And the fairest of all bonds is that which most perfectly unites into one both itself and the things which it binds together; and to effect this in the fairest manner is the natural property of proportion. For whenever the middle term of any three numbers [ . . . ] is such that as the first term is to it, so is it to the last term,—and again, conversely, as the last term is to the middle, so is the middle to the first [ . . . ] they all form a unity (31 c).<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to put suchlike passages side by side with sundry declarations in John: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (15. 9); "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (17. 23).

This similarity of the Christian and the Pre-Christian logics is emphasized by Simone Weil, who sees in the proportional mean of the Ancients an image of Mediation in the theological sense, an image of the Logos therefore—of Christ. Perfection. "Every divine influence tends to the rounded perfection of the whole" writes MacDonald, evoking the personality yet in the making of the Christie Robert Falconer (162). The full moon presents us with an image of our potential perfection, of what we can and will become when we succeed in shaking off the "clouds" that sully our true, divine visage. Then shall we be Christ-like indeed, beauteous and resplendent. **[78]**

Benevolence, Perfection, Kenosis and the Dying into Life, Consubstantiality, Mediation: the moon is indeed a most eloquent symbol for Christ. It also brings to life a notion dear to MacDonald's heart, that of Progressivity. As repeatedly suggested in his writings, there is no metamorphosis, however sudden it may look, but it was prepared far back

in time. The struggle in Nanny's dream between the moon and the clouds (a recurring MacDonald image<sup>27</sup>) implies that a Christ-like perfection is not to be achieved overnight. However, it also implies that this is no cause for despair: "'Up came the clouds and the clouds, and they came faster and faster, until the moon was covered up. You couldn't expect her to throw off a hundred of them at once—could you?' 'Certainly not,' said Diamond" (297), "We may be as far from perfection as a 'lame' moon (the dying or nascent moon, or again the cloud-darkened moon, symbolically one and the same thing) is from the resplendent full moon, but just as it is *in* the puny sickly sliver of a moon to become a full moon, so this perfection is in us,<sup>28</sup> and just like the moon—in other words gradually ("Continuity-Rupture")—shall we draw nearer to it until the day when, rolling like Diamond "over the threshold" (112), we shall ourselves become perfect. Christ being "the way,"<sup>29</sup> it is worth noticing, yet again, the perfect congruence there is between North Wind's Christic identity and her lunar identity as Diana or Jana.

What Christ is to the Christian MacDonald—"He is my life, my joy, my lord, my owner, the perfecter of my being by the perfection of his own" (*Unspoken* 539)—, and what the luminous Princess, the well-named Daylight (or Delight!), is to the Prince; so in this children's book which yet, like fairy-tales, manages to convey the highest possible truths, North Wind is to Diamond: the object of his amorous quest.

North Wind's lunar identity is indeed the secret angle of vision from which the anamorphosis of the book suddenly makes sense. As has been shown here and will be shown further, it illumines the profound meaning and the very structure of *At the Back of the North Wind*. It also serves as a useful reminder that we should not "forget in the symbolism the thing symbolised" (*Seaboard* 210) or pass hasty judgments on works that are in actual fact rich with "layer upon layer of ascending significance" (*Orts* 320).

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N.B. Where a work is not cited in an English translation, the translation is my own.

### Illustrations [Note: images not available]

1 RABBITS (Gamier 420): illuminated initial of the first book of *Samuel*. 12th-century Bible (town library of Orléans).

2 OUROBOROS (Gamier 420): illuminated initial of Book IX of *Le Livre des propriétés des choses* by Barthélémy l'Anglais. 14th century (Sainte-Geneviève Library in Paris).

3 CEPHALOPHORIC SAINT (Appavou 135): healing fount of saint Nolwenn (Sainte-Noyale, Vannetais, Brittany).

4 OUROBOROS-SCARABEUS (Roob 672): Johannes Macarius, *Abraxas et Apistopistus*, Anvers, 1657.

### Notes

1. See the chapter “Disguise” in John R. Reed’s *Victorian Conventions*.

2. *Girl*, it is worth remembering, is the literal meaning of the word κορη, one of the many names given to Athena and Persephone.

3. Cf. also: “The Moon Goddess was sometimes called Hecate-the-Three-Headed. This is a combined form composed of Artemis, Selene, and Hecate. It represents the moon in its three phases: Artemis is the crescent or waxing moon, Selene the full moon, and Hecate the waning and dark moon” (Harding, 113).

4. Jana; a variant of Diana = 1/ the Moon. 2/ goddess of the crossways (feminine of Janus).

Janua = entrance door (Gaffiot’s Latin/French Dictionary).

5. This time-honoured link between spider and moon is suggested in “The Giant’s Heart”: ‘The moon was now up [. . .] above them was the clear heaven, and Mount Skycrack rising into it, with its endless ladders of spider-webs, glittering like cords made of moonbeams’ (95).

6. This is grist to F. Hal Broome’s mill:

Dr MacFarlane delineated three main ‘activities’ of dreaming found [. . .] in MacDonald’s works.

First of all there was ‘*Activity instigated by Sensory Stimuli*’ [. . .] Of great importance was the effect of light [. . .] ‘a bright light falling upon the eye may give rise to visual dreams’ (Raepers 97).

7. *Castle Warlock* (36).

8. This is Lawrence Sterne's assessment of his *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, 1768.

9. This lunar identity also throws light on other works by MacDonald

10. "His mother broke his leg when he wur a kid, so he's never come to much."

(189); "a lame boy, called Jim" (334); "People's kind to lame boys, you know, sir."

(336); "a pale-faced, awkward-looking boy, who limped much on one leg" (342);

"Jim vanished with a double shuffle" (352). **[81]** [Note: endnote 11 not in original text]

12. "Later form, of Middle English *sely* (dial, *seely*) from Old English \**saelig*. Old Saxon, Old High German *salig* from West Germanic \**sæli*, luck, happiness" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*).

13. It will be recalled that the wisdom of Isis, when searching for the lost body of the dead Osiris, was represented as coming to her in quite irrational ways. She was first guided by the babbling of little children, then by the instinct of the dog, and lastly by the word of her own daemon voice. . . [she listened] to the voice of the moon wisdom (Harding 235).

This could profitably be put side by side with MacDonald's poetical page devoted to Tycho Brahe and his fool (*Portent* 253-254).

14. The Greek "theion" (literally "pertaining to God") is the name for sulphur in Alchemy—interchangeable words for that Fire so often alluded to by MacDonald: "there dwells in everything the Father hath made, the fire of the burning bush" (*Flight* 78).

15. *Between visit 1 and 2*: "For a week [. . .] all that week" (28). *Between visit 2 and 3*: "nothing remarkable took place in Diamond's history until the following week"

(52) "a week even makes such a long time in a child's life" (55). *Between visit 3 and 4*:

less precision; all we know is that Diamond has had time to make friends with Old Goody, and go often to her shop (97), and he speaks of his stay in the Cathedral as "that night" (99). *Between visit 4 and 5*: "You've just been seven days" (122).

*Between visit 5 and 6*: "for two months or so" (338). *Between visit 6 and 7*: "I'll come for you again to-morrow night" (365).

16. I have called thus a notion which I show to be especially important in MacDonald's outlook in my Ph.D. thesis: "Draco aut serpens qui caudam devoravit": Étude critique de *At the Back of the North Wind*, accompagnée de la traduction du roman." Toulouse le Mirail, 2000).

17. "O how I long to travel back, / And tread again that ancient track!" Vaughan "The Retreat" (*England's* 254).

18. "The scarabæus is a classic symbol of rebirth. In the description in the *Am Tuat*—a book from Ancient Egypt—the solar god transforms himself at the tenth stage after his death into *Kheperâ*, the beetle, and it is in that guise that, at the twelfth stage, he steps into the barge where the rise of the rejuvenated morning sun is accomplished" (Jung 3: 41). Is it just a coincidence if Diamond re-appears in chapter

12 precisely?

19. See “And All About the Courtly Stable. . .” in *North Wind* 20.

20. The vital exchange I have shown to exist (*North Wind* 20) between the two horses is most consistent with MacDonald’s conception of marriage, as evidenced by this reflection concerning the unworthy husband (Tom Helmer) of a loving wife: “He had no notion that when he married, his life was thereby, in a lofty and blessed sense, forfeit; that to save his wife’s life he must yield his own, she doing the same for him—for God himself can save no other way” (*Mary Marston* 174).

21. The notion is evoked in Plutarch “[the Egyptians] call the moon (Selene) the mother of the world and they believe her nature to be both male and female since she is filled and made pregnant with the sun, while she herself in turns projects and disseminates procreative elements in the air” (43 d).

22. Cf. MacDonald’s own eloquent passage:

“You remember whom the apostle James calls the Father of Lights?”

“Oh yes, of course, father. But doesn’t that mean another kind of lights?”

“Yes. But they couldn’t be called lights if they were not like the sun. All kinds of lights must come from the Father of Lights. Now the Father of the sun must be like the sun, and, indeed, of all material things, the sun is likest to God” (*Ranald* 281).

23. Like Diamond, Clare has a beneficial influence on the people around him (*Rough* 66); like Diamond he is often considered as a dimwit (70); like him, he is a definitely lunar character: “the pale face shining [. . .] like a sweet calm moon” (66); “a countenance calm and sweet as the moon in highest heaven” (84); “Clare [. . .] bent down his face where he stood on the step above her and its moonlight glow of love and faith shone clear in the eyes of the little girl” (332). **[82]**

24. The poem shows an instance of the traditional association of Christ and the Sun.

25. See also the *Sermons*: “Was not his very human form a veil hung over the face of the truth that, even in part by dimming the effulgence of the glory, it might reveal? What could be conveyed must be thus conveyed: an infinite More must lie behind” (86).

26. MacDonald resorts to the same logic in “The Child in the Midst.”

27. Other passages that would deserve a full comment can be found in “The History of Photogen and Nycteris” (Knoepflmacher 317) and *Sir Gibbie* (378).

28. As the Buddhists say: “You are That (perfection).”

29. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me”

John 14. 6. **[83]**