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The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie

Colin Manlove

George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), which first appeared in *Good Words for the Young* from November 1870 to June 1871, is based on the traditional notion of fairy people trying to kidnap women, and also ultimately stems from myths of subterranean beings stealing people of the surface for their own—notably in the story of Pluto and Proserpina. In MacDonald's story the goblins live in mines and dig into the house in which young Princess Irene lives, to seize her and make her the wife of their Prince Harelip. This idea is common in Victorian times in the frequent translations of such stories of the Grimms as "Snow White" or "Rumpelstiltskin," and from Dickens's "The Sexton and the Goblins" in *Pickwick Papers* (1838) to Mrs Juliana Horatia Ewing's "Amelia and the Dwarfs" (1871). Indeed the very year in which *The Princess and the Goblin* first appeared in book form also saw the publication of Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race*, the story of a technologically far advanced race living beneath the earth and planning to take over the world.

The Victorians, it is well known, were continually and fearfully aware of the potential for revolution among the downtrodden proletariat, for whom their numerous charities were in part sopas to Cerberus.¹ While MacDonald is rarely political in his writing, in *The Princess and the Goblin* he does tap into a social current of his age. His temperament, while often socialist towards individuals, is more laissez-faire towards groups. In *Robert Falconer* (1868), possibly the nearest thing MacDonald wrote to a social novel, the view of poverty is that it is the workings of God's love on sinners rather than an outrage demanding social and political change.² This is also seen in MacDonald's social fantasy *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871): the righting of all wrongs will take place in the next world, not in this one. The idea of compassion for the suffering poor as individuals is fine, but the notion of them calling for their rights is not admitted. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, the princess becomes friends with a miner-boy, and meets and loves his family, but then she leaves for the court. Only after it is announced in the sequel, *The Princess and Curdie*, that Curdie's parents are of royal blood, do the two marry. Both *Princess* books are concerned with the preservation of royalty and the destruction of its bestialised antagonists. The goblins in the first book are seen less as people with a grievance than as grotesques consumed with destructive ambition; and in the second book those

who would displace the king are portrayed as creatures of the pit—to which in the end several of them are dispatched.

Politics become moralised into good and bad—good being those who go with the grain of reality, bad being those who rebel. MacDonald made this a more universal imperative through his theology. To go against the current of things was to insist on the self, and the self for MacDonald was “the one principle of Hell.” Indeed he argued that there was no final hell, because the tide of the universe moved in one direction towards goodness and heaven, and no one could in the end stand against it:

He will have purity. It is not that the fire will burn us if we do not worship thus; but that the fire will burn us until we worship thus; yea, will go on burning within us until all that is foreign to it has yielded to its force, no longer with pain and consuming, but as the highest consciousness of life, the presence of God. (*Unspoken Sermons* 21)

In this MacDonald opposes the central belief of his beloved Blake, who asserted in his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) that “Without contraries is no progression,” and that “One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression”: in Blake’s view Christianity had divided reason from energy in man, and made the one good, the other bad. The goblins are the energies in *The Princess and the Goblin*: their ambitions generate the narrative. Their motive, which for MacDonald is the satanic one of injured merit, would for Blake be the revolution of the oppressed.

However, beneath the official moral simplicities of good and bad often found in the Victorian period, a sense of the truth of Blake’s view makes itself indirectly felt. The world was becoming too complex for morality to manage. The new science of psychology was from the 1840s beginning to explore the unconscious side of the mind, where images and promptings operated outside the control of reason.³ One could label these urges evil if one wished, but now they were more an essential than a sinful part of human nature, and could not so readily be suppressed. In the same way science was now insisting that humanity had an evolutionary ancestry going all the way back to the most hideous of monsters. In such a world the “heavenward” impulse could not so readily be divided from the “hellish”; but most people still believed that it could. MacDonald was fascinated by the new areas of discovery, which bore out much of what he had read in Novalis and E.T.A. Hoffmann, and he uses the psychology of dreams in all his fantasies: but he usually filters them through his Christian vision,⁴ dividing the unconscious, or as he calls it, the imagination,

into good and bad sides, mystical and monstrous, God-inspired and self-created:

If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imaginations, we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of a decay which could never feel—only declare—a slow return towards primeval chaos. But the Maker is our Light. (*Orts* 25)

Few writers could consciously acknowledge the challenge of the new psychology to moral values, which remained latent in their works. In Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) the official meaning is that Hyde is a monster created by accident and sustained by reckless habit; but the less obvious one is that Hyde is Jekyll, that he is the repressed and thereby uglified side of Jekyll the respectable Victorian doctor. Here Jekyll tries in vain to separate himself from his own creature, just as many Victorians tried to suppress or hypocritically conceal their own desires. And so their goblin side—Hyde himself is called a goblin—continually emerges in the grotesquerie, caricature and fantasy of the period. For all his passion for goodness, MacDonald, though never a hypocrite, is part of this predicament; for all his commitment to the light, he senses the presence of a shadow from which nothing can relieve him. And in the same way Princess Irene and the goblins are bound together in a way that the final extinction of the latter cannot deny.

For each is part of one mind—the yearning spirit and the passionate self, each differently imbued with desire. In *The Princess and the Goblin* the goblins have been banished from the world of humans: what is this but to say that men have called certain of their desires evil and thrust them out of sight? So they become misshapen, vengeful, ambitious, and are called evil. Yet the latent other meaning will out. At first the official moral narrative may seem reflected in the dividedness of the book, the way each goes on in separate chapters without evident relation to the other. For half of the book the concern is with the growing relationship between Irene and her grandmother, without much reference to the goblins. The other half involves the young miner Curdie and his attempts to find out what the goblins are plotting. It is only really at the end of the story that many of the characters from these separate parts come together, when the goblins invade the house and are repulsed. But the visits to the two areas of the story continually change place with one another: sections with Curdie and the goblins alternate continually with sections on Irene and her grandmother. Here the effect is of an interweaving of the two, and the suggestion is that they are somehow bound up with each other.

Because of their wish for moral absolutes, it was natural that Victorian

writers for children should find the fairy tale, with its total distinctions of good from bad, an attractive medium in which to write. And yet it is strange how often fairy stories in the Victorian period have two or more items in their title, which is rarely one word, as if terms were being set in apposition: “Uncle David’s Nonsensical Story of Giants and Fairies,” *The Hope of the Katzekopfs*, *The King of the Golden River*, *Granny’s Wonderful Chair*, *The Rose and the Ring*, *The Water-Babies*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *Mopsa the Fairy*, *Tinykin’s Transformations*, *Speaking Likenesses*, and so on down to *Five Children and It*, *Rewards and Fairies* or *Peter Pan and Wendy*. So also we have the appositions *At the Back of the North Wind*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie*—or even the dual title of MacDonald’s 1875 *The Wise Woman: A Parable*, first serialised and later published as *A Double Story*. Compare these with MacDonald’s adult fantasies *Phantastes*, *The Portent*, *Lilith*. Of course children are more persuaded to read if a title is fuller, for then they have a teasing notion of the contents; but nevertheless the habitually appositional mode does stand out.

Coming now to *The Princess and the Goblin*, let us start with its title, with its rather odd use of the singular “goblin.” It would appear that in this story MacDonald was reacting in particular to Mrs Ewing’s “Amelia and the Dwarfs” which had just appeared in *Aunt Judy’s Magazine* (1870-71). In this tale, naughty Amelia is halved underground by a number of dwarfs and taught to clear and wash up after herself, to stop breaking things, and to cease being pert. But then she becomes so good and useful that the dwarfs will not let her go, and one of them wants to marry her; only a magic charm saves her and returns her to her home. MacDonald writes a story that inverts this: his princess is the innocent object of a wicked goblin plot. And he does not call it *The Princess and the Goblins*, as one might expect (and actually many people think), but rather *The Princess and the Goblin*. Since Harelip, the projected goblin husband for the princess, plays no prominent part in the story, this seems a little odd: there is no other goblin that has any potential relation with her. We are made more aware of the princess’s use as a bargaining chip for their whole race, which would seem to make the plural title *The Princess and the Goblins* more apposite. But, by making it singular, MacDonald at once sharpens the opposition to one between “princess” and “goblin” qualities, while at the same time also suggesting—just as with the two terms in the title of the next book *The Princess and Curdie*—that they are somehow to be linked.

There are one or two other pointers here. Just as the goblins are enclosed in their mines, avoiding the light, so Irene is kept within the house, protected from

dark. (The situation recurs in some of MacDonald's shorter fairy-tales, such as "Little Daylight" and "The Day Boy and the Night Girl," where these opposites are brought together.) The goblins have a king and queen just as do the humans. Harelip is the husband the goblins intend for Irene: we notice that the goblin king had a first (human) wife who died giving birth to Prince Harelip; and the human king's wife died sometime after bearing Irene. Both kings have had a similar experience, and both children have been without their mothers—rather as MacDonald himself was as a child. Harelip has possibly been made vicious by his bullying stepmother. In this case his relation to Irene would not be far different from that of the oafish Hareton to young Cathy in *Wuthering Heights* (1847); and the relation of the two kings might be faintly analogous to that of Heathcliff and Linton—Heathcliff of the dark wilderness and Linton of polite society—and we recall that her father the king sends Irene away to the country just as Linton does when he gives Cathy to the care of Heathcliff. (Possibly even the two Irenes are analogous to the two Cathys, each "grandmother" in relation to the other.)

Then again, we may ask why Irene has been sent where she has no other children to play with (recalling that MacDonald himself never sent any of his children away from their family). Yet, in another sense, there are children all around Irene: for the goblins are in size as children compared to adult humans; they are indeed the lost children of the story. (Perhaps they are even a figure for rude lower-class children with whom a little lady is not allowed to play.) And here it may occur to us that MacDonald nicknamed his own daughter Irene, for whom he wrote this book "goblin."⁵ The stairs by which Irene first climbs to grandmother's attic rooms are "so steep that she went on like a four-legged creature on her hands and feet"—like one of the goblins' creatures (17).

There are parallels also between the goblins and grandmother, who are the two sides of the imagination, and of the unconscious, about which MacDonald wrote in his essay on faculty psychology, "The Imagination: Its Functions and its Culture" (1867), published just before he began writing this book. Both live in the midst of labyrinths. The goblins have a network of tunnels in which Curdie is easily and dangerously lost; grandmother lives at the top of a little stair which is only really to be found when one has lost oneself in the upper levels of the house. Grandmother weaves her thread as the goblins weave their plots. Grandmother's workroom (20) is as bare of furniture as the equivalent one of the goblins (62).

Most of all, the goblin plot to seize Irene involves them tunnelling towards Irene. The story sees this as projected rapine, but it is also the bringing together

of opposites which the “human” side fastidiously abhors. The goblins effectively try to engineer a marriage of divided races— or in other terms, mental faculties—which is refused. Of course put like this, it sounds untrue, because the goblins’ motives are selfish, their actions involve violent capture, and they themselves, symbolised in Harelip, are hideous and unnatural. But if we recall that it is their division from the rest of human nature that has distorted them, we may be inclined to look beyond the merely censorious reading.

The impression of secret unity among all the different characters is added to by the oft-remarked symbolism of the house in which the princess lives and its surroundings. The goblins live underground in tunnels and caves. The princess lives on the ground floor of the house, but ventures four storeys up to make friends with a strange old lady who lives in the attics and says she is her great-great-grandmother, and has come to the house unseen to take care of her. There is a tradition of houses as symbols of the mind going back to Spenser’s House of Alma in *The Faerie Queen, Book IV* (1593), and frequently seen in the nineteenth century, in works such as Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher” (1834), Tennyson’s *The Palace of Art* (1832), Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853) and William Morris’s “Lindenberg Pool” (1856). The landscape of *The Princess and the Goblin* can be seen as symbolising three areas of the mind, first the good imagination or the soul, then reason and the senses, and last the bad side, where twisted ideas and corrupt desires hold sway in the shape of the goblins and their misshapen creatures.

Alternatively some have put this in non-moral terms, as Freudian superego, ego, and subconscious id.⁶ It is typical of MacDonald that this is not unambiguously so: though the goblins are subterranean, they are not always beneath Princess Irene or even her “grandmother,” for their tunnels extend up the mountain beyond the location of the house; and the hero Curdie and his fellow-miners also work half their lives underground next to the goblins. Since Princess Irene is at the centre of the story, and is the only one to enter all three of these regions, we may say that hers is the human mind being symbolised here, and that this mind contains the goblins no less than the “grandmother” part. The reference of the “mental” imagery of the story to Irene is heightened by the way she is isolated in this story, sent away from her parents and the court to this lonely house, where she is kept in, and where there are no companions of her own age. However the larger mind behind the narrative is for MacDonald God, whose imagination makes the world.⁷

If we follow this mental imagery, what then is happening? Before Irene gets to know her “grandmother” she is frightened by the goblins. Her heart may be

brave, which is why she persuades her nurse Lootie to take her for a walk further up the hill than they should go. But then they are menaced by the goblins. We have a choice here. We can say that Irene is not so afraid as Lootie, who becomes hysterical, and that the two of them are eventually rescued by a little miner boy who has no fear of the goblins and who knows how to drive them off. That is, we can read this simply as the account of three different characters and their reactions to a threat. Alternatively, we can say that the goblins are grotesques suddenly rising in the dark from Irene's unconscious, that Lootie is Irene's own fear, and Curdie her eventual reason and common sense, and that the one overcomes the other. Almost certainly while reading we chose the former, because the characters seem so vivid as individuals, and it is hard, say, to identify the silly Lootie with any part of Irene: but the suggestion of the latter is also present, and more present when we look back at the story. One of the graces of this tale is the way we can slip between one level of reading and another without any sense of transition.

In the same way we can see Irene's meeting with the old lady of the attics as her first encounter with her "higher" imagination, the imagination which MacDonald often described as inhabited in its deepest recesses by God. In exploring further and further upwards in the house Irene has lost herself, which means she has lost her self, the being that thrusts its way between man and the truth. Later she says, "I went upstairs, and I lost myself, and if I hadn't found the beautiful lady, I should never have found myself" (26). By climbing to the attics she has found her truer self, a lady whose name is also Irene. She has climbed upwards into her "higher" imagination. This lady's name is also Irene, suggesting her identity with the princess. If we have read others of MacDonald works, we will know how stairways fascinated him as symbols of ascent towards the spirit. Yet so great a spiritual journey is rendered through a bored child exploring some stairs and finding an old relative at the top of them.

The young princess has four meetings with her grandmother, on each of which details quietly change. On the first, dirty from climbing the stairs, she has her face washed with water from "a little silver basin" (20); next time her feet are washed in "a large silver basin" (85); on the third encounter she is shown "a large oval tub of silver" (103), and on the fourth she is immersed in it and washed all over. It is a progressive baptism, in which she sinks deeper and deeper into the holy imagination. And alongside these changes, more and more of the lady's nature is revealed. At first she seems to Irene a very odd relative living on her own, eating pigeons' eggs and spinning. But then when the princess next meets her, grandmother says she did not find her again till now

because "I didn't want you to find me" (81); she speaks of the thread she spins with as coming from spiders of a particular kind from far across the sea; she shows Irene her unexpectedly magnificent bedroom; and she says the moon by whose light she works is to most people invisible. From being strange or odd in the first interview, grandmother has become rather wonderful.

In their third meeting this wonder is turned to supernatural awe. Irene finds the old lady now transformed to a beautiful young golden-haired woman, dressed no longer in black but rich blue, with a fire whose flames are shaped like roses, and whose bedchamber has dissolving walls; she gives Irene a ball of invisible thread she has been spinning, telling her always to follow where it leads her. Their last encounter occurs after Irene has taken Curdie the miner to meet her grandmother and, angry at not seeing her, he has left: this time the atmosphere changes from the supernatural to the holy. Now grandmother gives Irene a mystic experience beyond anything she has known before, when she lays her in her bath with no apparent bottom to it:

When she opened her eyes, she saw nothing but a strange lovely blue over and beneath and all about her. The lady and the beautiful room had vanished from her sight, and she seemed utterly alone. But instead of being afraid, she felt more than happy—perfectly blissful. And from somewhere came the voice of the lady, singing a strange sweet song, of which she could distinguish every word; but of the sense she had only a feeling—no understanding. Nor could she remember a single line after it was gone. It vanished, like the poetry in a dream, as fast as it came. In after years, however, she would sometimes fancy that snatches of melody suddenly rising in her brain must be little phrases and fragments of the air of that song; and the very fancy would make her happier, and abler to do her duty. (158)

This is Irene's form of the experience little Diamond had at the back of the North Wind, and the song he heard in the stream. It is an intuition of heaven, symbolised in the blue colour all about her. Throughout Irene has been journeying deeper into her own imagination, symbolised in the changing aspects of the lady and her surroundings. Finally giving herself up to it, as she does when she yields herself to being placed in the bath, she approaches the outer edges of something great at the centre of her mind and the world alike.

This, however, is only one side of the symbolic narrative. On the other is Irene's relation to the goblins, who symbolically are the darker and more voracious side of the imagination. Here it will seem harder for the reader to accept what the imagery implies, because Irene is so much made the innocent

child and the friend of her mystic grandmother, and never but once visits the goblins. But here it is not Irene herself but Irene in her “higher” imagination that has met the grandmother. This is why Irene’s every meeting with the mystic lady is prefaced either by the possibility that she is dreaming, or by the presence of another with her who cannot see the lady while she does. What she sees is what her imagination sees, but what the imagination sees is for this story more real than sight. There are other parts of Irene’s mind—the goblins, Lootie, Curdie, that the story itself means us to think of as separate people when they are not only that. One problem for the story is precisely that Irene’s various faculties are so separated: and in the end they all come together, though more in a collision than as a unity.

The goblins, who were once driven underground, are the side of mind that cannot be admitted in the lives of pure Victorian maidens, and which their repression has rendered hideous and grossly physical. Indeed, during the story Irene is, in her imaginative self, to banish the goblins further. For, following the invisible thread her grandmother has given her, she overcomes her fear of them, enters their dark and labyrinthine world and rescues Curdie, who has penetrated their realm and been trapped by them. For most of the narrative Irene’s reason and commonsense in the shape of Curdie have tried to keep this dangerous imagination “under,” and to frustrate it by working out where it may erupt. But in fact these efforts are in vain, for only the higher imagination can foresee and circumvent the actions of the lower. So it is also that when later the goblins break into the house, it is grandmother, not Curdie, who thwarts them and removes Irene to a safe place. They are then thrust back to the depths by the operation of Curdie as reason, which has found out their weak spot. In the end this dark side of Irene’s mind is entirely removed, through the destruction of the goblins through the flood.

The modern reader will protest at this: how can the dark unconscious mind be treated as an outsider, how can it be destroyed when it is an essential part of the mind? But we forget that for all his interest in the unconscious, MacDonald did not see things this way. For him this area of mind was associated with evil and worldly desire: it was only what he saw as the “higher” unconscious, the one that goes upstairs rather than down, that is to be explored. His psychology operated through a Christian prism. We think of our desires as part of what we are: he thought of them as something to be banished and if possible annihilated. To post-Freudian and post-Jungian modern understanding, this is impossible. It depends on one’s notion of the self: MacDonald thought of the self, considered as a separate entity, as a chimera; one only gained one’s true self by giving it to

God. To us in their quest to seize the princess, the goblins can be felt to be Promethean in their daring; or in another view an uglified side of the mind trying to recover beauty. While at one level the story opposes such readings, on another it does not.

All this still leaves Curdie, who so far has been seen as “reason.” It seems fair enough to say that in character at least he is honest, balanced, loyal, and both sensible and commonsensical. Also, unlike the goblins, he is an agent of rationality in that he mines ore for the benefit of the kingdom: the goblins by contrast dig and sell nothing, and, apart from their nefarious plots, would probably do nothing. Most of all Curdie is an empiricist, who believes only in what he sees. His commonsense and his senses alike tell him that Irene’s great-great grandmother does not exist when according to Irene she is right in front of him in her attic workroom. He is the part of Irene that always demands proof and sensible evidence, and has no truck with the imagination and with faith. As such, he has to go back downstairs where he belongs. But her reason and empiricism must themselves be converted before Irene has complete faith, and thus the companion-book, in which Curdie is transformed, will be part of Irene’s transformation too.

Indeed one of Curdie’s problems in *The Princess and the Goblin* is that he is left to operate on his own, and by his own lights, which are as a candle in the dark of the mine. MacDonald wrote, in his essay “The Imagination: Its Functions and its Culture” (1867) that “the Intellect must labour, workman-like, under the direction of the architect, Imagination,” and “It is the imagination that suggests in what direction to make the new inquiry” (*Orts* 11). The string of sense, by which Curdie would find his way out of the darkness of the goblin tunnels, is once displaced by the goblins’ creatures in their play, and he is lost. That is, Irene’s reason, finding no direction, gives way to fancy, and loses its thread, leaving it at the mercy of chance. Chance, in its ambiguous way, then does two things: it puts Curdie, as all his searches could not, where he can at last hear something of the goblins’ secret plot; but it also brings about an accident by which he is captured and imprisoned in a hole by the goblins and cannot do anything about it. There he remains until Irene reaches him, and her thread shows that there is in fact a gap in his prison by which he could have escaped. In other terms, Irene’s imagination finds a way where reason and her senses could not.

But then all other faculties are closed in on themselves compared to the “higher” imagination, which always opens out. The dark mine tunnels lit only fitfully by candles symbolise this. The goblins have shut themselves away from

men. Curdie, though he detests the goblins, is familiar with them, and for half his days shares their kind of existence. As Blake says, “everything would appear... as it is, infinite,” but for man having “closed himself up, till he sees things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern.” The spiritual imagination, by contrast, continually opens out: grandmother’s nature grows ever larger as Irene gets to know her; her chamber walls can dissolve and open to the night and stars, her moon shines through them, her bath of water has no bottom to it.

Curdie is as noble as man’s natural faculties are noble, but no more, and his mind operates only along one track. He does at the end of the story, however, begin to use that lower area of the imagination which MacDonald considered to be behind the construction of any scientific hypothesis (*Orts* 12-15). Till then he has learnt the first goblin plot by overhearing it, but has never discovered the second. However, he now puts separate facts he has learned together to conclude that the goblins may be tunnelling towards the house to capture Irene. He tries to test this by listening at night to try to hear in what directions the goblins are digging: but on the very night that he becomes certain that his guess was correct, he is shot in the leg by one of the king’s archers, who has mistaken him for one of the goblins’ creatures. Now helpless, even his warnings are useless, for the guards do not fully understand him and think he is raving from his wound. (Thus Curdie is disbelieved just as he disbelieved Irene before.) Once again his lack of true imagination, his myopic concentration on one thing to the exclusion of all others, leaves him vulnerable, here literally. Meanwhile the goblins successfully dig their way into the house, only to find their own ignorance: for being unaware of the grandmother’s presence, they expected to find Irene in her bed. The divine imagination that comprehends everything cannot be understood by them.

The goblins, the dark imagination, are as said portrayed as inimical, and are totally rejected and destroyed. But they are, in terms of faculty psychology, a part of the mind of Princess Irene. In this sense, at the end of the story, though her “higher” imagination has been transformed by her meetings with the lady of the attics, she is lacking in this other area of the spirit. In Blake’s terms, “Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling. / And being restrained, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.” Officially the story denies this and the princess is its unambiguous heroine; unofficially, Blake’s dialectic works like a suppressed desire. And if the princess puts aside this part of her unconscious mind, as Victorians like her gazed to heaven and tried to ignore what they saw as the pull of the devil of sexuality, so

she here separates her femininity from the masculine qualities of engagement with the outside world. Curdie, practical, common-sense Curdie, who lives on and under the ground, is divided from her when he cannot see imaginatively as she sees in the attic rooms, and in the end does not go with the king and her to the court. The result we see in *The Princess and Curdie* is that Irene lacks character except as the devoted daughter, and Curdie first meets her again when he can hardly recognise her in the shadowy bedroom of her father. She has become Blake's "shadow of desire," her love for her father more to her than anything else. She and Curdie never speak of their love for one another, and all we hear at the end is that "Irene and Curdie married" (219), and then that "they had no children," which is not surprising. In addition, during the story, lacking the commonsense and worldly perception of Curdie, she has been taken in, more even than her sick father himself, by the false masks of his evil counsellors, and has been allowing them to poison him.

It is actually Curdie who becomes the more complete hero in *The Princess and Curdie*. We have here a better instance of the "intellect labour[ing] workman-like, under the direction of the guiding imagination," in the way that Irene's grandmother takes the increasingly cynical and materialistic Curdie in hand, transforming him into an acolyte of the imagination. And in this story the darker side of the imagination is not rejected but tamed, and works as part of a divine creation. The hideous and vicious dog Lina and the monsters and grotesques who leave their dark wood to join Curdie on his way to Gwyntystorm, are the goblins transmuted to benevolent use, or the Bad Burrow of *Lilith* changed to creatures working their passage to heavenly bliss. At the same time they are the nightmares produced by sin in Gwyntystorm. Curdie and the beasts digging their way into the king's palace; Curdie being able to tell by a handshake who is good, who evil; the beasts enacting a vengeance at once grotesque and terrifying upon the evil counsellors; what else are all these in MacDonald's faculty psychology, but a demonstration of the senses, the intellect, the body, and the two areas of the imagination now working together as a unity?

In parallel with its separation of faculties, *The Princess and the Goblin* has separated areas of action. The princess in the house or with her nurse Lottie, the princess with grandmother in the attics, Curdie in the mines, the goblins in their caves or digging their tunnel, Curdie's parents in their house, all these places only occasionally meet, as with Curdie's incursions to the goblin mines, Curdie's failed visit to the attics, or Irene's rescue of Curdie from the mines. Curdie's doings have nothing to do with Irene till late on, and Irene's activities with her grandmother go on without knowledge of Curdie. Irene is sent to

rescue Curdie at just the time he has begun to guess that the goblins' main scheme is aimed at her. They have as it were been tunnelling in their own directions, and finally these tunnels have intersected.

All the characters apart from the lady of the attics are in ironic situations, ignorant of the workings of others. For long Curdie does not know the second goblin plot, Irene knows nothing of Curdie's activities in the mine, Curdie cannot believe that grandmother is present in the attics, the goblins are not aware that Curdie has discovered their first scheme. At the same time these plots are isolated in the story in the sense that they have no final influence on its outcome. Curdie's hard-won discovery of the goblins' threat to Irene cannot be communicated, because he has been wounded and put out of action at the critical moment. All the goblins' plans to capture Irene fail, because grandmother knows what they are about and removes the princess. And the goblin plot to flood the human mines is overheard by Curdie, who has the place where the water will break through so blocked that the water fills up the goblins' mine and drowns them. It may be added that the goblins' entire tunnelling scheme seems as otiose as their converse, for there was nothing to have stopped them overrunning the house by night from above ground.

The fact that actions are so often futile or circumvented lends a certain stasis to the book. By contrast, in *The Princess and Curdie* all Curdie's efforts to save the king from being poisoned by his counsellors are successful, and there is only one core action going on, not a series of them. The ultimate reason for all this is that *The Princess and the Goblin* is about being, not becoming. The condition of existence in *The Princess and Curdie* is change, whereby Curdie is changed from being a materialist to a believer in the invisible truths of the world, and all creatures and men in the book are seen as continually able to alter their inner natures by their actions. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, however, the medium is not plastic in this way. The goblins' stunted shapes exist before the story begins and are the expression of their permanent environment of damp and darkness, not of moral choices. Apart from grandmother, who changes from old to young woman through Irene's visits to her, no one else alters aspect in the slightest. They are as they appear, and that is all.

And when grandmother thus changes in appearance to Irene in *The Princess and the Goblin*, it is not that she is "becoming" something different, but that she is revealing more of what she is. And in the same way, young Irene is not changing so much as realising her potential. *The Princess and the Goblin* is a gradual revelation of the true natures of things. Through several meetings grandmother as it were dilates from a quaint relative to a lady of supernatural

and ultimately Christian power. In Curdie the strengths and weaknesses of the natural man of reason and commonsense are explored. The goblins, seen at first as partly comic, show their innate viciousness as they try to enact their schemes. And through contact with the lady of the attics, and through her behaviour, Irene is able to discover the true princess that is in her. The book is rather like seventeenth-century masque where individual characters reveal the living ideas that work through them.

At the same time the book is full of questions about what is seen. It continually interrogates “being.” Who, Irene asks her, is the lady in the attic? How did she get there, how does she live, what does she do, where does she sleep, where does she get her silk for spinning? How did the goblins get into the mines? Why are they so ugly? Why are their creatures so grotesque? What are their plans? The goblins have peculiarities, such as their detestation of poetry, or their orotundity, or their sensitive feet and rock-hard heads. The meetings between Irene and her great-great-grandmother are as idiosyncratically human as they are symbolic. Always we are looking at the extraordinary nature of things as they are. When grandmother tells Irene that she eats the eggs of her white doves, the princess replies,

“Is that what makes your hair so white?”

“No, my dear. It’s old age. I am very old.”

“I thought so. Are you fifty?”

“Yes—more than that.”

“Are you a hundred?” (23)

But the main question about reality in the book of course concerns whether or not grandmother is “really” there. Irene has to learn to believe that she is real and not a dream even when she is away from her, and Curdie cannot believe that she is real even when she is right before him. The same goes for Irene’s thread, which leads her in and out of the mines by ways Curdie himself could not have found, and which he himself cannot feel. Lootie, who believes that Irene is making up stories about lady in the attics, is a constant source of distress to Irene. Curdie’s mother tells him that she has cause to believe that grandmother is real, and that he should not judge Irene when he cannot himself be certain of the limits of the world. We even have an almost parodic version of believing in the reality of what cannot be seen in the goblin queen, who, having kept her human feet invisible in shoes, demands that the goblins believe that her feet are as toeless as theirs. But the goblin queen is denying reality with a lie, where grandmother is denying reality with a higher truth.

The official object in the book is to keep things as they are. It is deeply

conservative. Grandmother, who has come "to take care of [Irene]," protects her from the goblins so that she may remain princess in the upper world and not become one in the lower. Irene continues the royal line and the past, which her great-great-grandmother, who is also called Irene, exists partly to symbolise. The goblins must be thrust back to the place where they belong. Any insurrection must be stopped, including Lootie's attempt to gain authority over Irene (169-71). In the end even Curdie will not accept the promotion to court offered him, but chooses to remain with his parents.

At the end, however, as in some comedy, all (or most, anyway) plots and characters come at last together, and all is revealed. The goblins and their underground world come to the house, Curdie is there too, the king arrives, and Irene is safe in Curdie's parents' house. All the aspects of Irene's nature, wanted or unwanted, are together in one place. Now we stand outside the house which is still a symbol of Irene's mind, and see it invaded by the flood released by the goblins. It is Irene's final symbolic immersion in water: her whole being is cleansed and purged, her spirit and royal person are now complete. That is what the story asks us to believe. But as the bodies of the slain goblin race wash out of the doors and windows we see her failure in the midst of her success. The dark side of her mind has not been understood, nor reconciled with the rest of her being, it has simply been expunged, in a kind of frontal lobotomy of the spirit. The book ends with a sense not of unity but of dissolution, as Irene and her father leave, and Curdie politely refuses the king's offer of a job at court. Now we have entered the world outside the 'centripetal' house that has fixed all interest till now, the world where people are no longer aspects of Princess Irene, but people with lives of their own. This more fragmented and lonely world of free will and choice will be the darker spiritual context of *The Princess and Curdie*.

The Princess and Curdie

The Princess and Curdie, first serialised in 1877, retains a good number of the constituents of *The Princess and the Goblin*. Indeed, it takes place only a year after the action of its predecessor. Most of the main characters are the same—Curdie, the old princess-grandmother, the king, and young Irene. In both books we find groups of grotesque animals—the cobs' creatures, and then the fifty helpful beasts of *The Princess and Curdie*. Like its companion book, *The Princess and Curdie* portrays the (d)evolution of one species to another; and a part of the human body is a recurrent motif—feet in *The Princess and the Goblin*, hands in *The Princess and Curdie*. In both books we start with the big

house and its attics, the mines and their environs, and the hillside cottage of Curdie's parents.⁸

Just as *The Princess and the Goblin* portrayed Irene's tutelage by the lady of the attics, so Curdie is educated in turn; and as they both develop, so does the form of the lady to them, from withered crone to strong young woman. As in *The Princess and the Goblin*, Curdie has adventures in the mines, which alternate with visits to the lady in the attic. Curdie has to find and rescue the helpless king from his enemies in Gwyntystorm, just as Irene in *The Princess and the Goblin* had to search for Curdie in the goblin mines and release him from their trap. Each story also involves mining up into the wine cellars of a house or palace—in the one, by the goblins into the house where Irene lives, and in the other by Curdie digging and scrambling into the cellars of the palace of Gwyntystorm. Both books end with mining that goes wrong and ends in a flood that destroys the miners: in the former the goblins drown themselves instead of the humans in the mines, and in *The Princess and Curdie* the later gold-obsessed king of Gwyntystorm chips away at the rock on which the city is built until it collapses and he and the entire population are drowned.

However, despite their similarities, the narrative of the second book rewrites that of the first in quite different terms, reversing its largely happy vision. The two stories are made quite self-contained. At the end of *The Princess and the Goblin* the goblins are finished, Irene has moved away with her father the king, and only Curdie, who has no intention of following them, remains. At the start of *The Princess and Curdie* he is not the same boyish, reckless Curdie of the first book, nor the Curdie who has come to believe in the reality of the old princess: now he is a more cynical, even materialistic teenager, who with his new bow can shoot a beautiful pigeon while it is resting. The grandmother of the attic now also appears as the lady of the mines and later as a palace servant maid in the city. People are now harder of heart—the miners, the rude housekeeper who tries to bar Curdie from the house, the people who stone him as a dirty miner on his way to Gwyntystorm. The Princess in *The Princess and the Goblin* is little Irene, but the apparent similarity of *The Princess and Curdie* is belied by the Princess now being the old Irene of the attic. We have moved from Innocence to Experience (MacDonald well knew his Blake). Goblin evil in the first book has no reference to man; but in the second we learn about human corruptibility, even that of the good king.

The oppositions of the books encompass the whole range of experience. In the first we are in the country, in the second we spend much time in the city. In *The Princess and the Goblin* the concern is more with individuals, and the

interaction of characters is a continuing interest: but we are not so concerned in *The Princess and Curdie*, and interactions are infrequent (for instance towards Irene's grandmother, Curdie is much more unquestioningly obedient than ever the princess herself was). Then, in *The Princess and the Goblin* we have a little girl heroine, in *The Princess and Curdie* we have a teenage hero. In the one we stay in one place: in the other we travel. Indeed in *The Princess and the Goblin* one of the central values is keeping to your place, which it is the central aim of the goblins to violate. So Irene learns to be more fully the princess she is, Lootie the nurse is condemned for her presumption, and at the end Curdie chooses to remain a miner with his parents rather than accept a post at court. But in *The Princess and Curdie* there is often no "place": the lady of the attics now appears outside them, in the mines or at court; Curdie turns out to have royal blood; a man may have a beast inside him, or a beast a man; and a human city may be invaded by creatures from purgatory. Here the walls of being are much thinner.

The Princess and the Goblin is focused on the individual, while its successor becomes much more concerned with society and civil conduct. The morality, such as it is, of the first book concerns belief in the unseen, but in *The Princess and Curdie* it is much more how you behave: the one concerns matters of being, the other of doing. Time is more an issue in the second book, where man is seen as becoming either more or less like a beast as he lives and acts, and where the story is set in a larger movement of geological and social change. *The Princess and the Goblin* is concerned rather with relations between places—human mines in relation to goblin ones, attics in relation to the rest of the house, directions. When we consider this and other differences, it is almost fair to say that in the scope and precision of its contrasts with *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie* is its inverse reflection, and that the two taken together are opposite faces of one coin.

We have seen how the books are alike; and we have seen how they are also polar opposites. This difference-in-similarity between the two books expresses an idea we see throughout *The Princess and Curdie*—that reality is as much discontinuous as a seamless whole. What looks the same is here also different. And this is in fact a major theme of the book, in which appearance and reality are rarely the same. Irene's grandmother tells Curdie that she can take any form, and in addition that anyone who meets her sees his or her own subjective version of her. One night she appears to Curdie as a frail old crone, and on the next, in the mine, she is a beautiful young woman: but her self within remains constant. She says, "Shapes are only dresses, Curdie, and dresses are only

names. That which is inside is the same all the time.” When he asks, ”Then how can all the shapes speak the truth?” she replies, “It would want thousands more to speak the truth, Curdie; and then they could not. She continues,

But there is a point I must not let you mistake about. It is one thing the shape I choose to put on, and quite another the shape that foolish talk and nursery tale may please to put upon me. Also, it is one thing what you or your father may think about me, and quite another what a foolish or bad man may see in me. For instance, if a thief were to come in here just now, he would think he saw the demon of the mine, all in flames, come to protect her treasure, and would run like a hunted wild goat. I should be all the same, but his evil eyes would see me as I was not. (55)

Here we change what we see by the light of our varying inner selves. This is what happens to Curdie as he grows in belief in the lady: first he could not see her (26), then he saw her as a very frail, wispy, almost spider-like old lady (27-8), then as “a tall, strong woman, plainly very old, but as grand as she was old” (33), and later, in the mines and on his second visit to the attics, as a beautiful, and each time younger, woman (48-9, 66).

This is an idea we find elsewhere in MacDonald’s fantasy, but never made the core of the work as here. In *Phantastes* Anodos is at one point tricked by the Alder Maiden’s likeness to his white lady, and captured by the Ash. In *Lilith* the queen of Bulika appears now as a woman, now as a leopardess, and these appearances are further confused by Mara’s also sometimes taking the form of a leopardess. The three Old Men in the fairy tale “The Golden Key” are progressively younger, the third being a baby. In *At the Back of the North Wind* the great lady of the sky tells little Diamond that “I have to shape myself various ways to various people” (313); and she also grows big or small depending on her strength. On one occasion she takes the form of a wolf to terrify a drunken nurse who is neglecting her charge (29-30); on another she plays with Diamond by assuming a whole variety of shapes (101-03). She tells Diamond that he only sees her as a beautiful woman because he himself is good; and insists that however much her appearance changes, her inside self remains the same (58-60, 311-13). But this theme is not as central as it is in *The Princess and Curdie*. And in the latter book it is also applied to the false appearances human beings can assume for the purpose of deception.

Generally, MacDonald was a Platonist in his thinking: that is he believed that beyond the shifting forms of this world are certain unchanging realities, which no one image of them can contain. Insofar as such realities were made the centre of any work of art, that work could only glance at expressing them:

he called the results “broken music” (Orts 322). But in *The Princess and Curdie* the gap between inner and outer selves is often peculiarly violent. Beneath the savage monster that is Lina the dog is a little child; and, if Curdie is to be believed, under the grotesque shapes of the forty-nine creatures that follow him to Gwyntystorm are the souls of former miners. It is as though one could never read between the two orders of being without magical help—which is what Curdie is in fact given, in the shape of his “seeing” hands, which can tell by a handshake the true nature of another creature.

More than this, the book deals with the gap between image and truth not only at a mystical level, but also in terms of the elected hypocrisies of men. At the court the counsellors about the king are all false, pretending concern for him while slowly poisoning him. Princess Irene, caring for her father—who is drugged into compliance—thinks nothing but good of the evil Dr Kelman until Curdie enlightens her. This is an environment in which the notion of “good” itself has been perverted: the first priest of Gwyntystorm delivers a sermon saying that one should give away one’s superfluities to one’s needy neighbours because that makes the giver more pleased with himself (189-90)—one senses MacDonald making a side-swipe at his own society here, particularly at Puritanism). Evil reality is concealed beneath lies and disguises, and to perceive it, only magic, in Curdie’s hands, can expose it, by revealing the beast growing beneath the skin. In other episodes in the book MacDonald tries to hint that vigilance on Curdie’s part would have been enough, as when he is saved only by Lina from the ravages of some beautiful birds that hypnotise him on his way to Gwyntystorm (85-7), or when he fails to recognise the old princess in the palace servant girl (214, 216). But in general he feels that goodness is too much at the mercy of false seeming, and this gives an added tone of darkness to the book.

The *Princess and Curdie* as a whole is full of uncertainties about identity. Early in the story our fairly happy picture of the house where young Irene lived in *The Princess and the Goblin* is rudely shaken, when we find the place now ruled by a hostile and snobbish housekeeper and a number of morally dubious servants. A green light Curdie and his father see one night in the mines leads them far into unknown regions: it could be a deception, but in the end it turns into a strange woman’s face near them, which Curdie only at length recognises by the eyes to be a form of the lady of the attics. It is not clear whether we are to consider Curdie’s mother and father as poor country folk or as potential royalty (53, 218). The city of Gwyntystorm becomes uncertain in nature when Lina and the forty-nine strange creatures from the forest enter it, for it is inhabited at once by living humans and by creatures from purgatory.⁹

Indeed our first vision of Gwyltystorm is confused, for we are given two different pictures of it. Curdie's initial sight of it is a grand one, as "a great rock in the river, which dividing flowed around it, and on the top of the rock the city, with lofty walls and towers and battlements, and above the city the palace of the king, built like a strong castle" (94). However the next sentence goes on, "But the fortifications had long been neglected." The same happens in the next paragraph to Curdie when he gets close to "the mighty rock, which sparkled all over with crystals," and finds "a narrow bridge defended by gates and portcullis and towers with loopholes": with his prior disposition to admire the capital, this is the kind of grandeur his mind sees, until contrary physical fact crowds in:

But the gates stood wide open, and were dropping from their great hinges; the portcullis was eaten away with rust, and clung to the grooves evidently immovable; while the loopholed towers had neither floor nor roof, and their tops were fast filling up their interiors. (95)

The identity of the king becomes indefinite too: for we find the hearty, outgoing and confident ruler of the last book abruptly replaced by a sick and petulant old man now confined to his bed. Curdie cannot take in the change, finding the king's voice "altogether unlike what he remembered of the mighty, noble king on his white horse" (129). Nothing has prepared us either for this alteration, for even at the beginning of this book we were still being told of the king using the wealth gathered from the mine wisely—"He was a real king—that is, one who ruled for the good of his people and not to please himself, and he wanted the silver... to help him to govern the country" (12). We are also told that he used it to pay his armies to defend the country and "the judges whom he set to portion out righteousness among the people, so that they might learn it themselves, and come to do without judges at all." All this portrays a sort of utopia of good governance, so that when we arrive at the decrepit capital city, experience the selfishness of the populace, and find the army, judiciary and civil functions poisoned by the greed and treachery of their officers, we wonder if we are in the same story with which we began.

A similar gulf between our previous knowledge and present reality is seen between Princess Irene's last appearance in *The Princess and the Goblin* as still a delightful nine year-old child, and the now much taller and older-looking figure who comes to greet Curdie in the dimly-lit king's chamber (129). He recognises her through her behaviour more than her appearance; and we too take a while to accept that this figure is still a girl aged between nine and ten. Meanwhile, she has to come right up to him to be sure of him. This, and the

accompanying obscurity, remind us of the earlier difficulty in identifying Irene's grandmother in the mines. Last, there is an ambiguity in the title of the book, for the word "Princess" could refer equally to young Princess Irene or her great-great grandmother. Indeed Curdie spends far more time with the latter, in her various forms, than he does with the princess he so often met in the earlier book.

The world itself with which we are dealing also becomes uncertain in nature. For one thing there are at least two worlds, that of the country and that of the city. In *The Princess and the Goblin* grandmother kept to the attic, where she in part symbolised the divine imagination and the soul; but here she enters the mines, travels to Gwyntystorm, purifies the king and takes part in the battle to restore him. The world is no longer simply "natural," it is "supernatural" too. Central here are Curdie and his beast companions, on licence from purgatory, who enter and cleanse the city: for now, as well as a boy with seeing hands, we have fifty animals impossible to nature, from a creature shaped like a sphere, to a winged serpent that walks on tiny legs; and at the head of them all a "dog" called Lina, with legs like an elephant's attached to a very short body, a tail like a ship's boom, a long bare neck, monstrous teeth like railings, and a head which is a cross between those of a polar bear and a snake. These creatures transform the local doings of the citizens into acts that will determine their fates beyond death.

So—differences in likeness, great gaps between how a creature looks and what it is inside, hypocrisies whereby the self is hidden, multiple identities—all these dualities pervade *The Princess and Curdie*. And with them comes another: absolute division between good and evil. Through Curdie, this book is made revelation, exposing the bad and precipitating the good. It is a polarising medium, which is why we find people here either one or the other—with no in-betweens such as Curdie or Lootie in *The Princess and the Goblin*. The hands that Curdie shakes in Gwyntystorm reveal either creatures often associated with evil—serpent, vulture, monkey—or else "honest" human hands: he does not encounter through his hands the limbs of less morally definite animals, such as, one might suppose, those of a rabbit, dog, or horse. Here one is either for or against. In the judging medium of the book, it cannot be surprising that MacDonald himself as narrator-god is precipitated out of solution, in that he now speaks more nakedly than in most of his fantasies what he feels, and continually points out the true natures of good and evil. Such moralising, it must be said, is never trite or formulaic, but often exact, judicious and wise: still, it is continually there, discriminating the smallest flaw (for example, page 14).

This recurrent split between appearance and reality, and indeed between appearance and appearance, in the book might in one way seem to be a function of its involvement in a more urban world. We have moved from the managed locality of providential care and happy endings that we saw in rural and more comedic *The Princess and the Goblin* to a political world taking its own cynical path to destruction. (Incidentally, *The Princess and Curdie* is the only one of MacDonald's fantasies, and possibly his only book, to deal so fully with public life.) In the world of politics, power is often founded on self-concealment. But while this might account for Gwyntystorm, it would not so readily explain the wider discrepancies of appearance and reality in the strange beasts and in the lady, the absolute moral oppositions, the reversals of expectation and the ambiguities, that run throughout the entire story. And here we must consider another and wider division in the book.

For of course, it falls into two parts. The first third of it deals with the training of Curdie by the lady. The remainder portrays Curdie's doings in Gwyntystorm. The former is set in the country and has an individual emphasis; the latter has an urban and social concern. The one portrays a process of spiritual evolution in Curdie, whereby he learns to trust beyond his senses, and to believe in the unseen; the other shows us the decline of Gwyntystorm, the decay of social bonds, and spiritual descent in the form of the beasts the citizens are becoming. The two sections are cut off from one another in that initially no clear purpose arises from Curdie's education. For much of the time it seems he is being made better for his own sake; and then finally the lady tells him he must travel to Gwyntystorm, but will not say why. This leaves us to surmise that he is simply going to the king's court because he is now morally fit to join it. It is only later that we can look back and say that the lady was preparing Curdie for a particular task there. But the fact that she will not vouchsafe it means that Curdie has as it were to begin what seems an entirely new story.

The two sections of the book are split at a deeper level than this. In the first we deal with the inner world, the world of the mind and spirit. When Curdie kills the lady's bird, "the underground waters gushed from the boy's heart" (20). When he goes to own up to the lady, and finds her room full of moonlight, he wonders, "But there's no moon outside," to which she replies, "Ah! but you're inside now" (26). We are prepared for this by the way Curdie finds the lady's elusive attic rooms in the big house: "He knew its outside perfectly, and now his business was to get his notion of the inside right with the outside"—

So he shut his eyes and made a picture of the outside of it in his mind. Then he came in at the door of the picture, and yet kept the

picture before him all the time—for you can do that kind of thing in your mind—and took every turn of the stair over again, always watching to remember, every time he turned his face, how the tower lay, and then when he came to himself at the top where he stood, he knew exactly where it was, and walked at once in the right direction. (24)

The idea of insides and outsides, and the relation between them, is to be the subject of much of the lady's later discourse to Curdie. In this first part, the door of the big house is always open, despite the housekeeper's efforts, signifying the way inside; but in the second, doors are generally closed, conveying exclusion, and to pass through they have to be broken. The ruined gate of Gwntystorm is left open, but this is a sign of indifference to the outside world, not of welcome; on entering the city and being met with hostility, Curdie tells Lina, "the people keep their gates open, but their houses and their hearts shut" (104).

In the first part of the book Curdie learns through the lady to value the inside world more than the outer. From believing only in material things—so much that he was approaching the position of a man "for whom to be sure of a thing . . . [was] to have it between his teeth" (18)—Curdie learns to believe in the real existence of the mystic lady in the attic, and to have faith in her while she is absent from him in the mines. There, too, he is shown how by the light of the lady beautiful ores and gems reveal themselves, as they do not in ordinary light. The truth here is that the lady reveals a little of the heavenly beauty that lies behind the commonest rock: she is showing him the things of God. Then Curdie is taught how the inside world he now accepts does not often have an outside that matches it: there is a split between the spirit and the matter it inhabits. Finally, he learns spiritual rather than physical pain when he is bid to thrust his hands into the lady's mystic rose fire, and afterwards finds them quite whole. He can now detect by a handshake the inner nature of another. But the rose fire is more than this, for it is God's love, which expresses itself as burning only when we are at a distance from it. After Curdie has kept his hands in the fire the pain disappears. He is now at one with God. MacDonald believed that such oneness enabled one to inhabit the true "nature" behind nature, where what we call miracles are part of being: and in this wider sense Curdie's magic hands are part of the insight gained by all those who live in the idiom of their maker.

As we saw, before Curdie sets out on his journey, the lady, strangely, will not tell him the objective of his mission. Indeed she replies rather testily to his questions, saying,

Curdie! . . . did I not tell you to tell your father and mother that you were to set out for the court? And you *know* that lies to the north. You must learn to use far less direct directions than that. You must not be like a dull servant that needs to be told again and again before he will understand. You have orders enough to start with, and you will find, as you go on, and as you need to know, what you have to do. But I warn you that perhaps it will not look the least like what you may have been fancying I should require of you. (75)

Well, we feel, we might have asked the same question. But here again there is the idea of a gap between expectation and reality, preconception and fact, mind and body. Curdie is to find out for himself. He is not to start with *a priori* ideas and plans, but to work out what to do from what he sees. The facts are to come first, then the conclusions, *a posteriori*. This putting of the physical world before the mental one seems counter to all the spiritual and “inner” training Curdie has received from the lady, and to the mental emphasis of the book to this point. But what it heralds is a world opposite to the one so far, where the material rather than the spiritual will be dominant. The uneasiness in the lady’s retort suggests the awkwardness of the change, the fact that she should be able to reply and cannot, because her idiom is no longer quite relevant.

Thus while given his training so far, we might expect that Curdie’s sojourn in Gwyntystorm would be directed at matters of the spirit, we find that this next two thirds of the book is almost exclusively “physical” in emphasis. (The contrast is made almost paradoxical by the fact that we are now almost always inside buildings, suggesting mind or spirit, where before we were often outside, in the “body” of nature.) Everything we come across at first is the mutual impact of solids. Curdie’s first encounter in Gwyntystorm is with a baker, who has just fallen over a piece of rock sticking up in the street and hurt his head. The rock is then levelled by Curdie’s mattock, but fragments of it break the barber’s window. Then the butcher’s dogs attack Curdie and Lina, and are killed, one with Curdie’s pickaxe through its brain, the other with its neck snapped in half in Lina’s jaws. Thrown in a dungeon by the citizenry, Curdie hacks his way at a weak part of the stone floor, helped by the light thrown by Lina’s great eyes, until he breaks through and sees water far below. The method by which he then gets himself through this hole, finds a rough passage leading off just below it, and manoeuvres himself and Lina into it, is all so detailed at the physical and practical level that we are dealing simply with the movement of bodies through space and little else.

The same is true later when the fantastic beasts also arrive in Curdie’s

former dungeon room, and the legserpent stretches itself from the hole to the passage, so that the other creatures may use his body as a bridge. (Incidentally, Curdie thinks all these creatures were once miners.) The punishments of the wicked people of the palace are entirely physical—the doctor has his leg bitten through, the legserpent bites the lord chamberlain’s nose and reshapes his silver bed into a cage, the attorney-general is wrapped in a cocoon of spider-web, a gluttonous magistrate is given a bath in his own turtle soup. There is also much elsewhere on the topic of food and drink, and on the dirty and insanitary castle kitchens, which the beasts visit to give the corrupt servants a physical taste of their own bad medicine.

Meanwhile, the spiritual insight contained in Curdie’s transformed hands is not needed to determine where evil is. When Curdie emerges from the passage into the palace wine cellar, it is to witness a man pouring a substance into one of the wine-casks from a flagon. This man, who proves to be the butler, then carefully rinses the flagon, fills it from another cask, and then drinks. Then he fills the flagon from the cask he poured the substance into, and takes it away. Curdie sees that something is wrong, and this is later confirmed when he sees the same flagon in the king’s chamber, and the doctor, Kelman, asks him to refill it from the adulterated cask. By this point Curdie suspects all the counsellors of plotting against the king, and does not need his hand to inform him of evil. When we first meet the lord chamberlain, he and his actions are so described as to indicate evil—he looks, with his thin hook nose, glittering eyes, long scraggy neck and lean, yellow aspect, very like the vulture Curdie’s hand is later to confirm he is inside (147, 160). All this goes against the lady’s earlier statement that the hand was needed to tell the truth beneath the deluding outside, just as the savage-seeming Lina had the hand of a child (73): here the evil are being made to look like or reveal what they truly are. Spiritual insight is used only to confirm physical suggestion and evidence.

There is also a question concerning the recovery of the king. The good bread and wine Curdie and Irene feed him set him on the road to recovery from what has been portrayed as a physical illness. But then one night Curdie finds the king laid in a bed of burning roses by the great lady of the attics, after enduring which “The king opened his eyes, and the soul of perfect health shone out of them” (204). Clearly the lady’s ministrations are meant to provide the purgation of his spirit, yet, coming out of nowhere as they do, they seem as much a garnish to his physical cure. And at the end of the story, when the lady uses her doves as missiles against the invading army, we feel partly that creatures of spiritual import have been reduced to material weapons.

Of course, it will be replied, we are not to read these actions as merely physical. The doves are in part divine grace and love, which their enemies cannot bear, being at a distance from them (compare MacDonald, “It is only at a distance it [divine love] burns” [*Unspoken Sermons* 319]). The king’s sickness, it may be argued, is not finally physical at all: he says once that he fell sick at the degeneration of his subjects (157). It could, on the other hand, be posited that the king’s sickness and poisoning represent an illness of his soul, which has sent evil to all his members, the people of his country. However, MacDonald is unwilling to show his king as at all spiritually wrong, so that any such metaphoric reading goes against the literal one given. His emphasis, moreover, is not on the king’s sickness but on his being poisoned by others. It seems not insignificant that at the time of writing this story MacDonald was editing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

It could more readily be argued that the king has been cut off from his subjects in Gwyntystorm just as his spirit has been cut off from his body—his mind wandering, his body poisoned. Also, when Curdie enters Gwyntystorm, this could be a figure for entering the king’s self, his limbs. Curdie then has a striking debate with the baker about who was responsible for the obstructive stone in the king’s highway. The baker blames the king for not removing the stone, but Curdie says that the baker’s “king,” his head, should have guided his feet (97). This idea of “man the microcosm” is one native to Shakespeare, and this scene has suggestive parallels in *Henry V* (the debate before Agincourt on the king’s responsibility for his subjects’ deaths in battle) and in *Coriolanus* (Menenius’ speech condemning the rebellious members of the civil body). The potential medical analogy throughout Curdie’s workings in the city is with a vaccine or antibiotic that enters the body and removes the disease that inhabits it; all of the wicked are in the end purged.

Inside the palace Curdie finds its officers idle or in revolt, the sources of their food, the kitchens, dirty and unhealthy. All the passages and rooms he visits could be seen as metaphors for parts of the king’s brain. By investigating them all, Curdie makes connections concerning what is going on, and draws everything together into a plan of action. What was secret or divided from others is pulled into one; and in parallel the discomposed mind and the sick body of the king become once more coherent. The king himself can also be seen as having become separated from the divine source of his being: then the good bread and wine he is fed become symbols of renewed communion, and the lady completes his restoration through the rose fire that burns away all remaining distance from God’s love.

All this may doubtless have some truth, and perhaps MacDonald intended that the physical actions, items and characters should so operate as metaphors of the spirit and its changes. Perhaps when we read how, after the punishment of the slovenly kitchen servants “there was such a cleaning and clearing out of neglected places, such a burying and burning of refuse, such a rinsing of jugs, such a swilling of sinks, and such a flushing of drains as would have delighted the eyes of all true housekeepers and lovers of cleanliness generally” (182)—perhaps we should be reading this as a metaphor for the king’s renewed self: but the sheer physical detail and specificity tend to suppress such a reading. And so it is with all the other too, too solid descriptions, from the movements of Curdie into and through the palace to the bizarre punishments meted out by the fantastic beasts to the counsellors. As for the beasts themselves, collectively they could be said to be an image of the monsters that rise from a sick unconscious mind, whether “the terrible dreams” of the king himself or the putative guilts of the evil servants (Lina passes among them “like a shapeless terror through a guilty mind” [145]; and occasionally we are told that the strange forms of the creatures express some previous distortion of the soul, as with Curdie’s reflection on “Ballbody” [182]), but their mental and spiritual aspects are lost in their more practical uses as hole-borers, bridges, trippers-up and tormentors.

There was something of the same duality of spirit and matter that we find in this book in *The Princess and the Goblin*, where, on the one hand, we had the mystical realm of the old princess at the top of the house, where every solid-seeming object, from a bath to a fire, and from a dove to a spinning wheel, was also a traditional Christian symbol; and where, on the other hand, we were with the very practical operations of Curdie against the goblins in and around the mines. But this duality was overcome by the overarching symbolism of the mind in the landscape of the book—attics, day-rooms, mines (soul, reason plus the senses, the “dark” unconscious); and also by the way each “spiritual” and mystical chapter alternated with one concerning Curdie and the more physical world, so that the two were not divided, but became aspects of one another. (There is a similar treatment in *At the Back of the North Wind*.) But in *The Princess and Curdie* the two areas are radically divided from one another: there is a long section concerning the developing relation of Curdie and the old princess, and then we have Curdie’s work in the world, and the whole book becomes an image of duality. This is partly because the action takes place in two widely separated places, but this does not account for the ontological chasm between the two.

This division between spiritual and material worlds in the two parts of the

book is reflected in other contrasts. For instance, as we have seen, the first part concentrates on individuals, the second on a whole society. Yet paradoxically the society is a collection of isolated egos, whereas the individuals come together in a society—Curdie, then Curdie and his father, and finally Curdie’s mother to form a spiritual companionship with grandmother. But in Gwyltystorm we rarely find people interacting, and they are usually on their own, or in a mob. The baker, the barber and the butcher deal with Curdie severally, and inside the palace we never see the doctor, the lord chamberlain or even the butler meeting. Symbolically each of the plotters inhabits a room by himself.

Perhaps the most interesting contrast is that the first part concerns itself with change and “becoming,” where the second lacks movement. Throughout the first part Curdie is being “developed” out of his careless worldliness into spiritual awareness (which is what in a sense his mystic hands represent). The great lady herself is also a “becomer”: she is never in one place for long, but is found in the mines or Gwyltystorm as much as in her rooms. Also, she assumes ever-changing appearances, as frail old woman, beautiful lady, crone, and later, house servant. She speaks of life as a series of shifting forms, of morals as evolution upwards or downwards in the scale of being, and of heaven in terms of its approach:

The stars are spinning their threads,
And the clouds are the dust that flies,
And the suns are weaving them up
For the time when the sleepers shall rise. (65)

Gwyltystorm, by contrast, is static. There is none of the bustle and energy of a rich nation state. The idea of wealth as a river emanating from the centre to all people has gone. Their very wealth has made the citizens idle and indifferent to others and the obligations of the state. The king too no longer travels about his kingdom, but has fallen sick at the turpitude of his subjects and taken to his bed. The plot against his life involves slowly poisoning him with false medicine, when he could have been simply murdered. (One is reminded again of *Hamlet*: everything takes “unnecessarily” long.) The punishments eventually meted out to the evil counsellors involve their being made static in ways they do not like—the lord chamberlain wrapped in his silver bed, the doctor with his leg bitten through by Lina, the butler tied underneath the poisoned wine-cask, the attorney-general bound to his chair by the web of an immense spider, the master of the horse forced to keep to his bed by the bites of a tapir. Even the victory of the good at the end is only a temporary interruption to the settled greed of the

city's people—and indeed the good help to further this by showing that the city is built on gold and then mining it. In the end this produces a single change out of which no human change will ever again be possible—the final destruction of Gwyntystorm and its people.

Why are there all these dualities? Why is the book so divided? The explanation lies in a theme that runs throughout. It is sounded from the first chapter, in which there is a strange and moving picture of the birth of a mineral-rich mountain from the fiery depths of the earth. This mountain is described, in no mere personification, as “the heart of the earth . . . come rushing up among her children, bringing with it gifts of all that she possesses” (11): the mountain's wealth is freely given. Life then partly colonises the outside of the mountain, before man comes to dig shafts and tunnels into it to mine its ores. In the hands of a wise king, these riches are used to sustain the offices of a healthy kingdom. Like mountain streams that end in the ocean, thence to return once more to the mountain as rain, wealth flows from the centre to the furthest and poorest in the land, and is returned in work, productivity and social happiness. But whenever people dammed this flow, and seized the wealth for themselves, “then it grew diseased and was called *mammon*” (12). They hid this wealth away, the opposite of what miners do: the business of Curdie and his father “was to bring to light hidden things.” This is later to be true in another sense, when Curdie mines his way into and through the palace of Gwyntystorm to expose the evil and bring the hidden king to light.

The people of Gwyntystorm keep things, and themselves, to themselves. When Curdie picks up a stone from the highway and considers it with interest, the barber demands it from him, merely to have power over it (98). Because they care only for themselves and what they may possess, all social sense has declined in the people of the city, which, for all the wealth it contains, appears ruinous. The barber cares nothing for the injured head of his “friend” the baker, only for the damage Curdie has accidentally caused his window; the butcher is outraged that Curdie has killed his dog because it wanted to kill him; the people wait till they have had their second breakfasts before proceeding with Curdie's trial: everywhere material or bestial values are put above human or civil ones—everywhere, that is, save in the baker's wife and the poor old woman Derba, who give Curdie good bread and hospitality. The city people do not care even for their own past, thinking their present far superior to anything before (95): they shut themselves off in time just as they shut themselves off in other respects. They think of the king only as bound to take care of them, as each takes care of its self (97); and this results in their not heeding the fact that they

have not seen the king for some time. Their selfishness is epitomised in their attitude to good works, which involves giving to the needy only so much superfluity as will swell the complacency of the giver. For the “first fundamental principle, grounded in inborn invariable instinct, was that every One should take care of that One. That was the first duty of Man” (189). The mountain, we recall, gave its wealth to all, as once did the king.

As for the people within the palace, the king’s counsellors are busily trying to weaken his mind so much that he will sign away the kingdom to them; and the servants have neglected their work for eating, drinking, and thieving. The counsellors are simply higher class thieves: on the night of their eventual punishment, the lord chamberlain is in his bed of silver gilt, and the attorney general is “trying the effect of a diamond star which he had that morning taken from the jewel room” (185). After the vengeance exercised on them, they all are ironically driven to huddle together for the night in the tiny hovel of Derba, the only person in the city who will give them shelter.

Perhaps because of their enormous wealth, the citizens have become as possessive of it as though they were about to lose it. Their complacency regarding the city’s defences is not matched in their daily lives. They all seem paranoid: the baker sees the stone in the road that trips him up as malign, the barber laments over his broken window, everybody is shut in houses or rooms. The reason is that instead of people owning their wealth, it owns them. Their commitment to wealth cuts them off from every other value. They have forgotten their king, believe there is no such thing as society, and are quite ready to yield their city to an enemy if it suits them. But this selfishness also makes them blind to what is around them, and under their very feet: Curdie is the first to see that the city rock is made of gold. Nor, while their lust for wealth grips them, are the people able to reason properly: when they learn that their country is being invaded by a foreign king, they do not think to pay a little money to build up Gwyntystorm’s ruined defences, but instead rush to hide their riches and then make peace with the invader, inviting him to enter at their open gates (199). Their cupidity exposes their wealth to search by the incomer and his army. Thus they think to save their money by putting it at risk. Slaves of wealth, they would hazard all for want of a little; where self-love and social would have been the same, they still put self first.

The implications of such self-enclosure are outlined by MacDonald in his Platonic “unspoken” sermon, “The Hardness of the Way”:

Things are given us, this body first of things, that through them we may be trained both to independence and true possession of them.

We must possess them; they must not possess us. Their use is to mediate – as shapes and manifestations in lower kind of the things that are unseen, that is, in themselves unseeable, the things that belong, not to the world of speech, but the world of silence, not to the world of showing but the world of being, the world that cannot be shaken, and must remain. These things unseen take form in the things of time and space—not that they may exist, for they exist in and from eternal Godhead, but that their being may be known by those in training for the eternal; these things unseen the sons and daughters of God must possess. But instead of reaching out after them, they grasp at their forms, reward the things seen as the things to be possessed, fall in love with the bodies instead of the souls of them. (200)

This grasping at material forms rather than unseen realities is the disease of the people of Gwyltystorm. They are possessed by it, to the point where they have lost all their humanity. Putting material things first, they live in a world of nothing but matter. Their wealth contrasts with the huge emerald the lady seizes from the floor of the mine and gives to Curdie's father: while Curdie is on his quest it will stay green when things go well with him, but will turn pale when they do not; here the stone's power is changed from mercantile to metaphysical, from getting to giving. By contrast, the obstructive stone that Curdie dislodges from the street in Gwyltystorm is immediately coveted by the apothecary even though it is valueless.

It is the lust for things in Gwyltystorm that polarises the book. Under morally more healthy conditions the unseen resides within the seen, but in the urban world of this book it has been driven out. Thus the book separates into its two sections, the first dealing with the excluded spiritual world of the lady, and the second concerned with the material and materialistic world the city has become. Rightfully governed, the city should shadow a heavenly one, but Gwyltystorm/Jerusalem has become more a Babylon or a Gomorrah. Similarly, in this landscape of being, the physical appearance of a man or beast has become divorced from its inner nature. Those who look like men may in fact be snakes or vultures, and those with the aspects of hideous creatures have human and gentle inner selves. Because appearance is no longer an index to reality, because the physical and the spiritual no longer mirror one another, what we see becomes uncertain in nature. We have a noble and then a weak king, a government first apparently ideal, then corrupt, a princess who is now a child, now a young woman, a city which as Curdie approaches it changes from imposing nobility to ruinous decrepitude. Lina the dog is here a symbol, for her body is a composite

of many identities, none of which expresses the present nature of her inside self. This is also represented through her physical incongruities, whereby no part of her fits with anything else:

She had a very short body, and very long legs made like an elephant's, so that in lying down she kneeled with both pairs. Her tail, which dragged on the floor behind her, was twice as long and quite as thick as her body. Her head was something between that of a polar bear and a snake. Her eyes were dark green, with a yellow light in them. Her under teeth came up like a fringe of icicles, only very white, outside of her upper lip. Her throat looked as though the hair had been plucked off. It showed a skin white and smooth. (72-3)

These teeth, incidentally, would seem incapable of closing in a bite, which they are frequently described as doing: again, nothing fits.

Here again the mountain described at the beginning of the book supplies a template, for it unites opposites in itself. First, it is both still and moving. It is formed out of liquid fire, cools to an apparent solid, yet then lives among the winds, the rains and the suns, sustaining life in grass, beasts and men, freezing water into glaciers, and releasing it as streams. It is like a living body, which is also part of the larger body of the world, and its water

runs in channels as the blood in the body: little veins bring it down from the ice above into the great caverns of the mountain's heart, whence the arteries let it out again, gushing in pipes and clefts and ducts of all shapes and kinds, through and through its bulk, until it springs newborn to the light, and rushes down the mountain in torrents, and down the valleys in rivers—down, down, rejoicing, to the mighty lungs of the world, that is the sea, where it is tossed in storms and cyclones, heaved up in billows, twisted in waterspouts, dashed to mist upon rocks, beaten by millions of tails, and breathed by millions of gills, whence at last, melted into vapour by the sun, it is lifted up pure into the air, and borne by the servant winds back to the mountaintops and the snow, the solid ice, and the molten stream. (11)

The mountain is part of the family of the universe, not something cut off, like a miser with his wealth. The sun is its “grandfather” and the moon its “little old cold aunt,” and the wind turns its rocks and caverns “into a roaring organ for the young archangels that are studying how to let out the pent-up praises of their hearts” (10).

Here the “material” and the “spiritual” are one, for the mountain is a gift

from the heart of mother earth to her children, and the creatures of heaven delight in it. Its inside is as rich as its exterior, and there is no divorce between outer and inner worlds. It is at once a centre, for beasts, men and archangels come to it, and a periphery, for it is but a bubble sent up by the earth, itself once a mere blot of fire thrown out by the sun. It is hot and cold, darkness and light, solitude and society, all together. It even unites opposite impressions in the beholder:

A mountain is a strange and awful thing. In old times, without knowing so much of their strangeness and awfulness as we do, people were yet more afraid of mountains. But then somehow they had not come to see how beautiful they are as well as awful, and they hated them—and what people hate they must fear. Now that we have learned to look at them with admiration, perhaps we do not feel quite awe enough of them. To me they are beautiful terrors. (9)

Within the book itself, such a reconciliation of contraries is possible only occasionally with the princess, who we are told is both old and young (33, 52, 56, 64), and who heals the king with both fire and water (201-02). Usually we are faced with opposites, such as between “outside” and “inside” when Curdie wonders at the absence of a moon for the moonlit room of the princess (26); or between “uphill” and “downhill” in the conversation he has about life’s journey with his father (60-1).

Just as the book began with a prologue describing events before its narrative, from the very beginning, so in an epilogue it pursues things to their very end. During the story Curdie discovered that the rock on which Gwyntystorm is founded was full of gold. In the epilogue we are told that the king after Curdie mines into this rock so obsessively that in the end it collapses into the river taking Gwyntystorm and all its people with it. Afterwards the whole area returns to a wilderness, in the midst of which a river rushes among the rock fragments of the now forgotten conurbation.

Many readers have found this epilogue harsh, and have felt that MacDonald is here showing disillusion and even misanthropy on his own part.¹⁰ But what happens is no bitter aftermath, but a continuation of what has gone before. After the battle, the king’s victorious return, and the punishment of the ringleaders, the people of the city still remain hostile to the king, who tells them he will therefore rule them “with a rod of iron” (215). The kingly head and the body of the people of Gwyntystorm remain at root divided. Division then governs the subsequent history of the city. Curdie marries princess Irene (something of a surprise since he rarely speaks to her during the story), and on the death of

Irene's father they become king and queen. But their union in marriage does not outlast them, for they do not have children. When they die, the still potentially wicked people elect a king of their own. This king is obsessed with gold like the rest of them, and instead of mining the gold in the rock of Gwyntystorm sensibly, he goes on digging it out until he brings the whole city down. Thus the preoccupation with the material at the expense of the spiritual, or even the rational, which we saw in the main story, here continues to work in Gwyntystorm long afterwards. Gwyntystorm, which in its once ideal state was a civility married to nature, a town on a rock in a river, even the human form itself, is now a collection of shapeless boulders in the midst of a nature which, on its own, is much more savage:

One day at noon, when life was at its highest, the whole city fell with a roaring crash. The cries of men and the shrieks of women went up with its dust, and then there was a great silence.

Where the mighty rock once towered, crowded with homes and crowned with a palace, now rushes and raves a stone-obstructed rapid of the river. All around spreads a wilderness of wild deer, and the very name of Gwyntystorm had [sic] ceased from the lips of men. (221)

Indeed, Gwyntystorm could be said to have reverted to what its name means in Welsh: "a storm of winds." Here we may recall by contrast the joyous streams that leapt down the mountain at the start of the story, and the civil brook outside Curdie's home, beside which on a lovely summer evening he sat down to tell his parents of his first experience of the great lady of the attics:

When they were seated on the grassy bank of the brook that went so sweetly blundering over the great stones of its rocky channel, for the whole meadow lay on the top of a huge rock, then he felt that the right hour had come for sharing with them the wonderful things that had come to him. (36-7)

Thus the city, viewed only as material, becomes mere material, shapeless masses of ruined stone. Civility, MacDonald is saying, can only exist where there are bonds holding it together: the greed that disjoins stone from stone also disjoins man from man; and the king, who should be the centre and focus of loyalty, here lowers himself to a mere covetous digger. The stones that then collapse are an image of the collection of disjoined atoms that society has become. More than this, social atomism here expresses individual greed, greed to enlarge the self: and that greed here ironically culminates in destroying itself. The people of Gwyntystorm, who founded their lives on wealth, find that come literally and to them fatally true, in the discovery that the rock supporting their

own city is a mass of gold ore.

Endnotes

1. Houghton, 246.
2. Robert Falconer, 378-80.
3. Ellenberger, 202 ff., shows how Romantic theories of the unconscious tended to be idealistic, with the unconscious being seen as working in harmony with nature to perfect the individual; but with Schopenhauer, whose influence was not felt till the 1850s, the unconscious is seen as a blind irrational force founded the primal instinct of sex (208-09). MacDonald evidently starts from the first, while also uneasily admitting the second.
4. As, for example, in the last chapter of *Lilith*.
5. Raeper, 326.
6. Tanner, 52-3.
7. "As the thoughts move in the mind of man, so move the worlds of men and women in the mind of God, and make no confusion there, for there they had their birth, the offspring of his imagination. Man is but a thought of God" (*ADO* 4).
8. Also, in *The Princess and the Goblin* we have a secular/sacred contrast between the string that fails to lead Curdie back out of the goblin mines, and the mystic thread that leads Irene into the mines to rescue him. Similarly in *The Princess and Curdie* the lady of the mines pulls a large stone from the solid rock floor with ease, while Curdie's skill with a mattock is needed to strike away the piece of rock jutting up from the main street of Gwyntystorm.
9. This is similar to the picture in Margaret Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City* (1879) of the city of Semur being taken over by its dead. MacDonald and Oliphant were close friends.
10. The *locus classicus* is R.L.Wolff, *The Golden Key: A Study of the Major Fiction of George MacDonald*, Yale University Press, 1961, 176-9.

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