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Children's Fiction Discourse Analysis: The Critique of Victorian Economics in George MacDonald's *The Princess and Curdie*

Osama Jarrar

This article has a three-fold argument. First, it highlights some of the main differences between fairy tales and fantasy novels, as MacDonald uses both narratives. Second, it provides a perspective for analyzing children's books using discourse as a framework for analysis. Finally, this article keeps George MacDonald's fantasy novel *The Princess and Curdie* in sight as the novel challenges Victorian middle-class ideology of self-interest and privatization of property. This is primarily because MacDonald sees in this economic centrality a dangerous tendency that leads humans to "go down the hill to the animal's country" (*Curdie* 77-78). MacDonald's alternative ideology shuns the privatization of property and, one could argue, calls for a form of socialism.

Fairy Tales and Fantasy Novels: Utopian Spirit

Folklorists in general agree that the evolution of the fairy-tale genre is indebted to one of the earliest oral storytelling traditions related to the wonder tale—*Märchen*. The *Märchen* existed largely in Europe. They were spoken traditional narratives in the sense that they were meant to be told not read; they were told to adults by men and to children by women. From a Marxist viewpoint, the *Märchen* were used to reflect social problems and ideological concerns in pre-capitalist societies. In societies based on class struggle and exploitation, wonder tales embodied a subversive potential that reflected a utopian spirit. The questioning of norms upheld by the dominant socializing process was at the heart of this spirit; magic, elves, witches, kings, and queens were metaphorical representations of ossified reality. By the time writers like the brothers Grimm (Jacob and Wilhem) and Charles Perrault collected and edited wonder tales for the purpose of the socialization and acculturation of children, wonder tales had become what are now known as fairy tales. According to Katharine Briggs, the Grimm's *Märchen* inspired many English collectors and therefore paved the way to the emergence of literary fairy tales in England. She argues that

the Grimm Brothers' method of working was an inspiration to

collectors, and after their time the conscientious reproduction of tales as they were told began in England. Most of the *Märchen* are more tales of enchantment and strange happenings than of real fairies, but where fairies occur . . . they are very much after the English pattern. As far as the German fairies altered the English tradition it was to strengthen the image of the hobgoblins, pixies and hags and rather to overlay the memory of the fairy ladies of the Romances. From the time of the Grimms onward our own stories began to be collected. (179)

The literary fairy tale, however, is different from the fairy tale in the sense that the former is written by an identifiable author. Many literary fairy-tale writers incorporate some of the themes and motifs of the *Märchen* to add complexity to the narrative pattern and to enrich their fantasy novels. Although some theorists do not differentiate between the fairy tale and the fantasy and include them in the same discussion, fantasy can be seen as a more complex work of art than a fairy tale. This is due to the fact that the fantasy includes more literary features than a fairy tale, primarily in its length, theme, setting, and narrative sequentiality. George MacDonald is one of the well-known nineteenth century British writers who uses both forms of magic narrative—the fairy tale and the fantasy novel. MacDonald uses his fairy tales and fantasies to question economic centrality in England. His nonconformist and mystical tendencies are implicit in his fairy tales. Instead of using an explicit political discourse, MacDonald recognizes that the utopian spirit of fairy tales enables him to criticize utilitarian England.

Discourse and Children's Fiction

Many theorists assert that ideology is “inscribed in language” (Stephens 2; Knowles and Malmkjær 44). Texts often embody a social ideology, while the cultural contexts give authenticity to such texts. This is especially true because ideology, whether it exists in harmony with or in opposition to outside reality, cannot stand by itself. The influence of the cultural context on an author helps determine the ideological content of a text. Besides, reading itself is a dynamic process that involves the reader's role in responding to the ideological content of a text. In this sense, the author reflects a cultural context in a text to which readers are invited to respond. Thus, many literary theorists focus attention on the important role of reader-text interaction. Literature serves many purposes which include, among others, a potential to change the status-quo of the mainstream culture. Fairy tales and fantasy novels are not an exception in this matter. Writers of

fairy tales and fantasy novels question the socialization process and aim at alternative models in the hope of change without using a political discourse. Writers use figurative language to achieve this goal.

In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, John Stephens draws attention to the distinction between fantasy and realism. He “define[s] fantasy as a *metaphoric* mode and realism as a *metonymic* mode” (248; emphasis in original). Unlike realism, fantasy allows for figuration of language and thus posits a multiplicity of meanings. This is mainly because fantasy privileges the paradigmatic axis of language that designates the superiority of metaphor over metonymy, while realism privileges the syntagmatic axis of language that designates the presence of metonymy. This implies that fantasy embodies a figurative playfulness of language and thus invites figurative interpretations. The language of fantasy is not a closed totality that consists in the combination of a signifier and a signified. Unlike realistic texts, there is not full semantic correspondence between sign and referent in fantasy narratives. Words in fantasy narratives do not represent actual objects but speech in fictional guise: a fictional language is figurative in the sense that it enables readers to construct imaginary objects. Thus, writing in a fantastic mode, writers of fairy tales will be able to criticize social conditions and express the need to develop alternative models. Therefore, the combination of ideology and language is fundamental because it mirrors the ideology the authors want to pass on to child readers whether consciously or unconsciously. However, this assertion does not mean that child readers are passive receivers of the writer’s ideology; instead, they are active producers of meaning. According to Stephens:

If a child is to take part in society and act purposively within its structures, he or she will have to master the various signifying codes used by society to order itself. The principal code is language, since language is the most common form of social communication, and one particular use of language through which society seeks to exemplify and inculcate its current values and attitudes is the imagining and recording of stories.
(8)

The subversive and aesthetic potential of fairy tales may be said to cause a kind of resistance on the part of children. This resistance is the primary purpose writers of fairy tales want to establish in order to make children question the value system upheld by the dominant socializing process. Zipes writes:

Yet, it is exactly this *disturbance* which the liberating fairy tales seek on both a conscious and unconscious level. They interfere with the civilizing process in hope of creating change and a new awareness of social conditions. This provocation is why it is more important for critics to recognize the *upsetting* effect of emancipatory tales and to study their uncanny institutions for old and young readers. (191; emphasis in original)

The fairy tale would thus appear to be otherwise than ideologically innocent. Fairy tales embody ideological messages. On the one hand, fairy tales may question the value system upheld by a society and criticize aspects of social norms. They may, for example, include an implicit satire on political parties, a criticism of child rearing, or an interrogation of established norms of sexuality, gender, and sex roles. On the other hand, fairy tales may stabilize the values and norms upheld by the social order. Writers of fairy tales may instill in the minds of children ideological messages that socialize them to meet the normative expectations of mainstream culture.

From antiquity to the present, many fairy tales have dramatized, in imaginary representation, humans' utopian ideal. This dramatization may disrupt the social and political structure. The king is represented as an idiot; the servant becomes a king; the poor become rich; the prince marries a servant. One reason for the durability of old fairy tales may be that they cross social and political borders and disrupt them. The disruption of social relationships in figurative representation gives fairy tales aesthetic capacity to reveal familiar world in a new light. In other words, wonder in fairy tales, according to Zipes, is ideological; wonder gives the fairy tale its subversive potential to evoke surprise in readers who respond to their hidden message. Stephens' *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* presents a theory which helps the student of children's literature locate the ideological content in children's books. Stephens claims that "a narrative without an ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated *in and by* language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language" (8; emphasis added).

Stephens comments on the works of critics such as Peter Hollindale and Aidan Chambers. According to Stephens, Hollindale has brought about an important discussion of the ways ideology functions in children's literature; the latter stresses the importance of filling gaps in the act of reading. Hollindale differentiates between three levels of ideology in children's books. The first level is the explicit "intended surface ideology"

of the writer's assumptions that he or she consciously wishes to pass to readers (28). The second level is "*passive ideology*" which necessitates the presence of "the individual writer's unexamined assumptions . . . which are taken for granted" (29-30; emphasis in original). The third level of ideology is *inscribed* in language's constituent part. Ideology on this level "transcends the idea of individual authorship, and reappraises the relationship between the author and reader" (32). This suggests that the mutual involvement of author-reader-text overlaps at this level of ideology. Chambers, in turn, stresses the importance of the process of filling gaps in the narrative on the part of the reader, and "stage-management" on the part of the author. Gaps are the unwritten implications that language embodies; that is, words and sentences present something beyond what they actually say. This is primarily based on the values and assumptions that readers relate to what theorists call the "unwritten parts" of the text. The meaning deduced from gaps will be guided in the sense that authors impose certain limits on gaps in order to prevent them from becoming impossible to understand. By piecing meaning together, readers establish an interconnectedness of the written and unwritten parts into a complete meaning. Chambers asserts that

as a tale unfolds, the reader discovers its meaning. Authors can strive . . . to make their meaning plain. . . . Other authors leave gaps, which the reader must fill before the meaning can be complete. A skillful author wishing to do this is somewhat like a play-leader: he structures his narrative so as to direct it in a dramatic pattern that leads the reader towards possible meaning(s); he stage-manages the reader's involvement by bringing into play various techniques which he knows influence the reader's responses and expectations (102)

Stephens argues that Chambers's notion of filling gaps is similar to what Stephens calls a "process of subjection" which involves "the reader's internalization of the text's implicit ideologies" (10). Stephens's overall proposal is the following:

The discourse of narratives must be read simultaneously as a linguistic and a narratological process. This includes reference to important discursual components such as (among others) mode, point of view, narrating voice and order of events. It also includes a compulsion to read narrative discourse both for its story and its significance; ideology operates at both levels. (43)

Therefore, ideology functions both at the level of language's constituent parts and at the level of meaning or significance; that is, the morals, values,

and assumptions embodied in the text. Narrators often play a predominant role in synthesizing a multiplicity of meanings depending on their position in the story. The third-person narrator directs the reader's construction of meaning by facilitating the process of subjection. In contrast, the first-person narrator is unreliable and biased. Stephens maintains that "there are many strategies by which readers may be 'estranged' from the possibility of simple identification, and so prevented from adopting a single subject position, and these function with different degrees of severity" (70).

Point of view, "the construction of an attitude towards the story events and existents," is another discursual component that constitutes a narrative. In this way, the narrator often influences readers by directing their attitudes by purposeful "effacement" or "focalization" of narrative. The narrator shifts the point of view to contribute to the textual subjection of the reader; that is, readers will identify with the focalized character's intentions and motives. Children engage in a dialectical relationship with the text's implicit ideologies as the focalizer creates a subject position for readers to identify themselves with. Another strategy by which readers may be estranged from the possibility of simple identification is through "focalizers who are not 'nice people', and hence do not invite reader identification" (Stephens 70). This suggests that both acceptance and rejection of the text's ideologies are part of the socialization process.

"Intertextual allusiveness" and "overtly inscribed indeterminacies" are two other strategies that offer a variety of possible subject positions (70). Stephens defines intertextuality thus: "the production of meaning from the interrelationships between audience, text, other texts, and the socio-cultural determinations of significance, is a process which may be conveniently summed up in the term *intertextuality*" (84; emphasis in original). Intertextuality refers, partly, to narratives that evoke the reader's experiences in the sense that meaning reveals itself by the interaction of the reader's subjectivity and the text. As Stephens suggests, "the relationship between a subject's activities as a reader and a work of fiction which is the object of reading both replicates other forms of subject/sociality interactions and constructs a specular, or mirroring, form of those interactions" (47). Since readers' attitudes differ because of their changing circumstances, there are several semantic possibilities. Thus, intertextual references often prevent the reader from adopting a single subject position. As will be detailed later, MacDonald includes many intertextual references in his fairy tales and fantasy novels as *iconoclastic* gestures aiming at criticizing the socialization process upheld by Victorian society.

Government: Capitalism versus Socialism

The nation was victorious, but the people were conquered.

(*The Princess and Curdie* 249)

Victorian middle-class people were influenced by utilitarianism, and many adopted an evangelical spirit to rationalize their socio-political-economic norms and assumptions. There was a growing tendency among celebrated Victorian writers to recognize the dangers of utilitarianism and consequences of industrialization, the most obvious example being Dickens's *Hard Times*, which engages the fairy tale motif. This is also clearly seen in the work of George MacDonald. MacDonald was part of a growing tendency to interrogate the Victorian socio-economic ideology of private property and materialistic pursuit.

In *The Princess and Curdie*, two kinds of societies are juxtaposed. The first is built on the complementary relationship of the ruling class and working class. The second is built on individualism and self-interest, which distances the relationship between the ruling class and the working class. In my view, MacDonald relies on a symbolic interpretation on the part of the reader to understand the workings of the two societies. For example, the narrator invites his readers to think of the harmony of the universe:

Think of the creatures scampering over and burrowing in it [the mountain,] and the birds building their nests upon it, and the trees growing out of its sides . . . and the lovely grass in the valleys, and the gracious flowers . . . and the rivers . . . and the terrible precipices. [Think of] frightful gulfs of blue air cracked in the glaciers, and the dark profound lakes. . . . [Think of] inside the mountain: ores of gold or silver, copper or iron, tin or mercury. [Think of] ice 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 mountain tops and the snow. (10-12)

It seems to me that MacDonald's purpose in introducing the nature cycle in the first chapter of *The Princess and Curdie* is to show that the universe works in harmonious interaction towards a *macrocosmic* unity that is based on an organic structure where the parts and the whole complement each other. MacDonald presents his ideal society in the relationship of Curdie and his father on the one hand, and the king and his people on the other. Each has a definite job to do. For example, "Curdie and his father were of these [working class]: their business was to bring to light hidden things; they sought silver in the rock and found it, and carried it out" (12). The narrator further maintains that the king

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

not to buy rich things for himself, but to help him to govern the country, and pay the armies that defended it from certain troublesome neighbours, and the judges whom he set to portion out righteousness amongst the people, so that they might learn it themselves, and come to do without judges at all. Nothing that could be got from the heart of the earth could have been put to better purposes than the silver the king's miners got for him.
(13)

The passage cited above presents guidelines that define the jobs of the working class and ruling class. The former works for the king and the latter rules for the common good of the people by a programmed plan that invests the riches for the welfare of people in general. The relationship between the former and the latter envisages teamwork and altruism: this gives the government the right to interfere in economic sectors. Knowles and Malmkjær argue that MacDonald "explains the role of the kings, the possible consequences of good government and the process of social perversion" (186). The image of the common good is juxtaposed by another image that stresses the consequences of the misuse of private property. The narrator maintains that "there were people in the country who, when it [silver] came into their hands, degraded it by locking it up in a chest and then it grew diseased and was called *mammon* and bred all sorts of quarrels" (13; emphasis in original). This quotation creates a situation of cause and effect.

To illustrate this the narrator presents the inhabitants of the capital city of Gwyntystorm as an example of people who misuse public property and privatize it for the sake of individual interest. The reason behind this privatization of property is that people lack a sense of teamwork, are devoid of altruism, and act out of selfishness and antagonism. In the capital city of Gwyntystorm, "No man pretended to love his neighbor, but everyone said he knew that peace and quiet behavior was the best thing for himself, and that, he said, was quite as useful, and a great deal more reasonable" (108). The narrator comments that material wealth makes people selfish and egocentric so they do not take care of the poor: "The city was prosperous and rich, and if anybody was not conformable, everybody else said he *ought to be*" (108; emphasis added). The phrase "ought to be" indeed presents a utilitarian rationalization that the poor will *always* be poor and their poverty is not subject to question, primarily because "nature" makes them so. Curdie, whose mission is to set things right in the city, is surprised at the shabby and ill-organized fortifications and gates, a viewpoint different from that of the narrator, who comments:

But everyone in the city regarded these signs of decay as the best proof of the prosperity of the place. Commerce and

self-interest, they said, had got the better of violence, and the troubles of the past were whelmed in the riches that flowed in at their open gates. (108)

The people internalize a false notion of prosperity. They believe that the ideology of self-interest contributed to the prosperity of their ancestors, and will be a potent weapon for their survival.

The relationship between the baker and the barber in “The Baker’s Wife” is built on self-interest. The baker, and his friend, the barber, rationalize things for their own purposes. As the baker runs to the barber’s shop, he stumbles over a stone and falls down heavily. Motivated by his care for the public good Curdie crushes the stone that caused harm to the baker. However, the barber gets angry at Curdie because a piece from the stone breaks his window. The following dialogue reveals that the barber has internalized a false notion of his duties to and rights from the government:

“What’s that to my window?” cried the barber.

“His forehead can mend itself; my poor window can’t.”

“But he’s the king’s baker,” said Curdie, more and more surprised at the man’s anger.

“What’s that to me? *This is a free city. Every man here takes care of himself, and the king takes care of us all.* I’ll have the price of my window out of you, or the exchequer shall pay for it.” (111; emphasis added)

The barber does not care about the baker’s forehead. Filled with greed, the barber wants Curdie to give him a “crown” for breaking the window of his shop, rationalizing his claims on the grounds that freedom is built on self-interest and that the king is responsible for his subjects. Thus, the barber wants to get his rights but not to perform his duties. The barber’s assumptions have a utilitarian tendency that reflects the Victorian ideology of the importance of the privatization of property, and that the government has no right to interfere with the way people deal with their property.

The narrator presents two pictures that contradict each other. The pictures evoke the reader to compare and contrast the inhospitality and ingratitude of the people in Gwintystorm who “keep their gates open, but their houses and their hearts shut” (118), with the kindness of the old woman who “welcomed Curdie” (120) and gave him food and shelter. “And because she [the old woman] never gossiped or quarreled, or chaffed in the market, but went without what she could not afford, the people called her a witch, and would have done her many an ill turn if they had not been afraid of

her" (119). This comment by the narrator reveals that the people reverse the standards of normality in the relationship of goodness to wickedness. If the woman is wicked, people will consider her normal. Therefore, the concept of normality in the market place demands that people "gossip, quarrel or chaff." Filled with fear, the people lock Curdie in the old woman's house and wait for the city marshal to "examine" Curdie. To stress the corruption of the people and the injustice of the officer the narrator intrudes: "For the people of Gwyntystorm always gave themselves an hour of pleasure after their second breakfast, and what greater pleasure could they have than to see a stranger abused by the officers of justice?" (128). The descriptions of the antagonism of the people and the indifference of the officer create undesirable images in the mind of the reader who will identify with Curdie and anticipate that the wickedness of people results from their concern with greed and pleasure. Most of the wicked subjects flee from the city, and it is assumed that the reason for their discharge is "peculation," that is, they embezzle the king's private property in violation of trust.

The ending of *The Princess and Curdie* is important in understanding MacDonald's philosophy of the respective rights and duties of governments and of people. MacDonald gives different alternatives and different consequences of good and bad governments. The first alternative is that of the king and his people in the city. Princess Irene's father pays attention to his subjects but the latter do not care about the king's welfare, nor ultimately the kingdom, because they misuse private property and devote it to their own good. Finally the king becomes aware that people should be "ruled with a rod of iron, that ye may learn what freedom is, and love it and seek it" (250). Curdie tells the king that the city stands upon gold and so the king calls for Peter and his friends to mine the gold. The "king used it wisely"—he invests the riches for the welfare of the people in Gwyntystorm (254).

The second alternative suggested by MacDonald is an ideal government in the communal relationship of the king and his people; MacDonald presents his ideal government in the reign of Curdie and Irene. The narrator states: "Irene and Curdie were married. The old king died, and they were king and queen. As long as they lived Gwyntystorm was a better city, and good people grew in it. *But they had no children* and when they died the people chose a king" (255; emphasis added). Because MacDonald sees no hope of good government to come he indirectly criticizes both the Victorian middle-class and the government. The way *The Princess and Curdie* ends is clearly MacDonald's purposeful intent. This is to show how reforms are

ineffectual for the people because they alone do not have the potential to run business without the agency of a government.

The narrator offers a third alternative: the consequences of bad government. In this case, the *new* king does not pay attention to his subjects but directs his concerns to material riches and greed:

And the new king went mining and mining in the rock under the city, and grew more and more eager after the gold, and *paid less and less heed to his people*. Rapidly they sunk towards their old wickedness. But still the king went on mining and coining gold by the pailful, until the people were worse even than in the old time. And so *greedy* was the king after gold, that when at last the ore began to fail, he caused the miners to reduce the pillars which Peter and they that followed him had left standing to bear the city. And from the girth of an oak of a thousand years, they chipped them down to that of a fir tree of fifty. (255-56; emphasis added)

Unlike the new king, Irene's father was aware of the wickedness of people and tried several times to reform them, but "they got worse and worse. *Evil teachers, unknown to him, had crept into the schools*; there was a general decay of truth and right principle at least in the city; and as that set the example to the nation, it must spread" (180; emphasis added). MacDonald's ideal government is like a school of students, teachers, and a headmaster; each one has a definite role to play and every one's job complements the other. For the government to function properly and thus survive in the face of dangers, people should prove themselves capable and have a sense of teamwork. MacDonald believes in the division of labor that classifies work into functional units assigning everyone a specific job. The harmonious interaction of all units assures the government's survival. In my view, MacDonald contradicts the ideology of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1849), which stresses the free pursuit of self-interest and restricted government interference in economic sectors. Like people, kings have duties and rights and the relationship between their duties and rights determines the kind of society that ensures the stability or instability of its survival. John Stuart Mill has an argument somewhat similar to MacDonald's when he asserts that the rich have moral and religious responsibilities toward the poor, and the latter in return should work for the common good and thus participate in the country's development. He maintains that

the relationship between rich and poor should be only partially

authoritative; it should be amiable, moral, and sentimental: affectionate tutelage on the one side, respectful and grateful deference on the other. . . . Their [the poor's] morality and religion should be provided for them by their superiors, who should see them properly taught it, and should do all that is necessary to ensure their being, in return for labor and attachment, properly fed, clothed, housed, spiritually edified and innocently amused. . . . Of such feelings it must be admitted that the relation of protector and protected has hitherto been the richest source. (364-65)

Critics in general dispute whether *The Princess and Curdie* should be considered a children's book. The critics base their claims on the grounds that the novel is very pessimistic because it ends tragically contrary to what children may expect. The ideology behind the apocalyptic ending of *The Princess and Curdie* is that the novel has a direct and outspoken socio-political criticism of utilitarianism and the capitalism of Victorian society on the one hand, and the industrialization process on the other. The narrator relates that

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 has ceased from the lips of men. (256)

This passage has many ideological implications, and one of these is that MacDonald presents his indifference to the effectual urgency of reform. The tragic ending of the city is something akin to William Blake's philosophy of the apocalypse. MacDonald expresses his pessimism by wiping out all sorts of *human* life in the city, but allows "a wilderness of wild deer" to remain there. In my view, the closure is subversive and its subversiveness does not designate that MacDonald calls for a *radical change* in the structure of Victorian society, but that he calls for a *gradual reform* of all the functional units of that society. As Zipes suggests:

[MacDonald] never argued for a radical transformation of the hierarchical structure of society and government. Influenced by his agrarian upbringing, his politics were more inclined to take

the form of safeguarding the natural rights and autonomy of individuals whose own responsibility was to create the moral and ethical fibre of good government. (103)

MacDonald's purpose in the closure of *The Princess and Curdie* is two-fold. First, people should aspire to a state of utopianism by cultivating the inner goodness of their heart and soul to pursue an ideal society. Second, MacDonald presents the society of the goblins to highlight that people might return to barbarism when it is too late for reform. He punctuates his *Princess* books with episodes about the goblins when he addresses issues of an evolutionary theory similar to those found in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). This is clearly seen when the narrator states that "their [the goblins'] countenances had grown in grotesque resemblance to the human . . . in the case of these the human resemblance had greatly increased: while their owners had sunk towards them, they had risen towards their owners" (105), and maintains that "the goblins themselves were not so far removed from the human as such a description would imply" (9-10).

When Irene's grandmother removes the calluses from Curdie's hands, he gets the feeling that they will not be fit for the king's court. Irene's grandmother responds: "It would be a poor way of making your hands fit for the king's court to take off them all signs of his service" (77). This assertion acknowledges the complementary relationship between kings and workers. The workers work for the king and the former should, according to the old lady, be proud of their service to the king. The image of king-worker relationship is linked to a revolutionary concept of the origin of humans. The old lady addresses Curdie:

"Have you ever heard what some philosophers say—that *men were all animals once?*"

"No, ma'am."

"It is of no consequence. But there is another thing that is of the greatest consequence—this: *that all men, if they do not take care, go down the hill to the animal's country*; that many men are actually, all their lives, going to be beasts. People knew it once, but it is long since they forgot it." (77-78; emphasis added)

The concept of "taking care," in MacDonald's eyes, takes on a wider perspective that includes not only the prerequisite to the ideal relationship of people and governments, but also encompasses the *inner* value of all humans. The cultivation of the inner goodness of heart and soul ensures the stability of

all functional units of society—units that include family, government, labor, and class. The deterioration of this goodness leads people to wickedness. It is clear that MacDonald derives his view of the origin of humanity from two perspectives. The first is biological evolution, while the second is the biological devolution from human to animal. MacDonald opposes the Calvinist doctrine of the “elect” and directs his attention to writing where he expresses his heterodoxy of salvation: he believes that no one is exempt from salvation.

In summary, MacDonald's ideal government is determined by the interaction of all the functional units of the society that demand teamwork among all economic sectors. If material riches are devoted for the sake of the common good, one finds a stable and organic society, whereas the misuse of private property leads to the destruction of the solid pillars upon which a government is built. Victorian middle-class people saw in self-interest and privatization of property a potent economic weapon that assured their wealth and ultimately wealth for everyone. MacDonald challenges this ideology because he sees in this economic *centrality* a dangerous tendency that leads man to “go down the hill to the animal's country” (77-78).

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