

ABSTRACT

George MacDonald and the Journey to the Ideal

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Victorian author George MacDonald's fantasy novels reveal an ideal he hoped the world could someday achieve. He explores this idea through men, women, and society in general. The ideal man is a noble knight: he is chivalrous, gentle, and aggressive only when necessary. The ideal woman varies depending on her marital status and age, but in general she is brave and wise. She protects in whatever way she can while serving as a mentor for the hero. Society's ideal is impossible to achieve if it is not led by an ideal individual, but evidence of the change is shown in the attitudes of the citizens. The ideal leaders are frequently those society sees as weaker, such as women and children; under such a leader the people love each other well and embrace both strangers and minorities. This thesis traces the journeys MacDonald's characters and kingdoms make towards the ideal in order to determine whether or not MacDonald believed our world could ever reach that state.

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GEORGE MACDONALD AND THE JOURNEY TO THE IDEAL

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

C.S. Lewis credits Scottish writer George MacDonald with baptizing his imagination and helping to prepare the way for Christianity. Lewis remembers that when he first read *Phantastes* he could not tell what made it different from other romances, but only that it was different: the idea of dying a good death and an underlying “cool, morning innocence” (xxxiii). As he moved closer to Christianity, Lewis found that MacDonald’s writings followed him every step of the way. After his conversion, he realized that what really had attracted him to MacDonald’s works was goodness apart from religious law. He admits that the Scot may not be the greatest writer of the nineteenth century, but he also believes that MacDonald weaves myths and stories better than anyone. Lewis regards the Scot as his “master,” saying, “I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him” (xxxii). Unfortunately, most audiences do not notice the influence of MacDonald and as such the author has remained in relative obscurity.

George MacDonald was born in December of 1824 to a Scottish Calvinist family, though his writings do not reflect his Calvinist upbringing. In 1840 he started at King’s College in Aberdeen to study Chemistry. During his years at King’s College, he spent an unknown amount of time at a mysterious manor in northern Scotland working in the library. No one knows where the manor was or who it belonged to, but most assume that this library introduced him to sixteenth century theology, romance, romantic poetry, and German literature. Here he found the loving God reflected in his writings, not the cold Calvinist God. Even after rejecting Calvinism, he still looked back on it fondly. He

recognized it as the foundation of his faith. When characters that resemble the strict Calvinists of his childhood appear in his books, Lewis points out that MacDonald looks deeper than the hardness with both pity and respect.

In 1850, MacDonald became the minister of a Congregational church. At this time, the Congregationalists felt threatened by the biblical criticism emerging in Germany and hated anything they deemed tainted by German theology. Unfortunately for MacDonald, he was heavily influenced by German theology. Some of his ideas, such as the possibilities of universal salvation and animals being given a place in heaven, created enemies among the deacons of the church. They steadily decreased his salary, a huge blow for a young man trying to support a wife and child. Eventually his financial situation became such that he was forced to resign. After this, MacDonald began to focus more on his writing and published a collection of poetry, *Within and Without*, though it did not make him much money. Several years later, he spent two months writing a book in prose, hoping it would be more financially lucrative than his poetry had been. *Phantastes*, which he called a “sort of fairy tale for grown people,” became one of his greatest works (Raeper 143). The book is known for the sense of femininity spread throughout it, the idea that a good death gives life meaning, and its exploration of the soul. These are common themes throughout the rest of his works. He continued writing poetry, sermons, and novels. He died in 1905, after a life of teaching, writing, and sometimes preaching.

His best and most influential works are his fantasies: *Phantastes*, the *Princess* books, *The Golden Key*, *The Wise Woman*, and *Lilith*. The meanings and layers found in these works, not the writing itself, is what made them great and set the stage for later

Fantasy giants such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. The two authors model their definitions and ideas of fantasy after MacDonald as he expresses in his essay, “The Fantastic Imagination.” Though most people are unfamiliar with the writer, his influence on the Fantasy genre is definite and profound.

When considering the Fantasy genre, most audiences would think of the *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones* or any of the many Arthurian legend retellings. They would think of epic battles, magic, medieval worlds, dragons, and heroes. Fantasy frequently is associated with the eccentric people who attend Comic Cons while dressing up as their favorite characters. The genre is seen as an escape from reality with no benefit to the reader. In short, Fantasy is not usually seen as real literature. Because of this perspective, scholarship on the genre is relatively low and not always taken seriously by academia. However, Fantasy accomplishes things other genres are incapable of: it allows its authors to create entirely new worlds. It requires the “mythmakers” to both imagine a new world and consider all the implications of each individual aspect of that world, and then control them to create a world that feels real to both reader and creator. J.R.R. Tolkien argues that because of this, fantasy is a “higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent” (48). Much of what is available in the fantasy genre is indeed everything the genre is accused of, but successful fantasy can be truly great literature.

Fantasy is different from other genres in its extreme image-driven nature. In fantasy, evil and good can become obvious through appearance. The other worlds are somewhat different from ours visually, and those images can allow for unique commentary on social issues, environmental issues, and religious issues. According to

Lewis, fantasy “gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives” (xxviii). Fantasy has a unique way of revealing hidden truths about our world. Within the worlds of fantasy literature, evil is obvious and ugly while good is bright and beautiful. Abstract concepts are able to take concrete shape with the help of the imagination.

The uniqueness that Fantasy offers has allowed the previous forms of the genre to remain popular. MacDonald writes some of the first Fantasy novels, before the genre is even named when such writings were referred to as fairy tales. Fantasy first started gaining popularity during the Industrial age of the nineteenth century. It allowed for escape to worlds completely different from the materialistic and dark world audiences lived in and enabled authors to make easy contrasts to the real world. However, during this period there were no rules for writing Fantasy, which lead to both the chaotic nonsense of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books and the flamboyant allegory of Charles Kingsley. George MacDonald, arguably the greatest Fantasy writer of the period, was the first to create a “fully balanced artistic theory” for fantasy in his essay, “The Fantastic Imagination” (Prickett 12).

In this essay, MacDonald outlines the goal of the fairy tale and its writer. The writing of fairy tales requires a set of laws created by the author that must be followed throughout the story: consistency allows the reader to believe in the world. A foundation of Law allows for the growth of beauty, which is the “only stuff in which Truth can be clothed” (204). In MacDonald’s metaphor where Truth is a living being clothed in beauty, Imagination is the “tailor that cuts her garments to fit her” (204). The more truth

found in the story, the more that it will mean. The intentions of the author are ultimately irrelevant, MacDonald argues, since each reader will see a different side of the beauty clad Truth. Meaning will always be present in fairy tales, but it may never be the same meanings for everyone. The goal of the fairy tales is not to create meaning, but to awaken the conscience of the reader: “not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself” (207). MacDonald thus believed that fairy tales give readers intellectual freedom. No matter how much Truth is in the fairy tale, it is not allegory. Allegory will always be present to a certain extent, MacDonald explains, because every idea used by the author has its origins in God, but the purpose is not to be fully allegorical. The goal of the writer then is to “assail the soul of his reader as the wind assails an aeolian harp” (208). He aims to awaken the imagination.

Tolkien takes this discussion of fantasy even further in his essay, “On Fairy Stories.” He, like MacDonald, believes that Fantasy should awaken new emotions in the imagination of readers, but he adds certain qualifications that MacDonald does not have yet still conforms to. For Tolkien, Fantasy must take place in the “Perilous Realm” of Faerie (10). Despite its fantastic elements, the Perilous Realm is rooted in the reality of our own world with a sun, stars, trees and oceans. Because of the similarities to our world, Tolkien finds it necessary to distinguish between “Secondary” or “sub-created” worlds and our “Primary” or “created” world (47). We create these worlds instinctively because we ourselves were created. The purpose of Fantasy, for Tolkien, is Recovery, Escape, and Consolation. Recovery is the “regaining of a clear view,” like washing the windows (57). Recovery allows the audience to see the world in a new light: for example,

the trees still have leaves, but the leaves are clearer with more vivid colors. Unlike Fantasy's skeptics, Tolkien believes that escape is not a denial of the real world; it is escaping from an industrial prison to go home or just thinking and talking about anything other than the prison one's in. In both cases, the prisoner acknowledges that he is in prison and that prison is real, but he simply needs to find a way to function within prison. Consolation is the "joy of the happy ending" (68). The joy comes from a glimpse of a reality or truth that our hearts long for. Tolkien ends "On Fairy Stories" by tying recovery, escape, and consolation to Christianity. The Joy that we long for and catch a glimpse of in fantasy reflects the Joy of Heaven and the world God intended for us. The consolation is a glimpse of the Eucastrophe, the ultimate happy ending in which evil is finally defeated. MacDonald's fantasies behave as Tolkien expects: they take place in a perilous other realm and work towards the ultimate happy ending Tolkien mentions and that Lewis identifies as dying good death.

Understanding the origins of the genre can help readers to determine what to expect from the work, however the sources for Fantasy seem to vary from author to author and critic to critic. Brian Attebery believes that these sources include fairy tales, folklore, and mythology, or whatever else preceded the authors. MacDonald seemed to use primarily fairy tales, while other authors like Tolkien and Lewis rely more on mythology. After Tolkien, the author himself became the "source" for many other authors, some of whom imitate the general outline of the *Lord of the Rings* to the point that the reader abandons the work in favor of more original stories. Use of mythology and fairy tales declines as others try to attain the same accomplishment as Tolkien. Ursula le Guin uses Tolkien as a source in the same way that Tolkien used mythology: as an

example of world building. She successfully creates complex worlds of both Science Fiction and Fantasy that she uses to explore difficult issues (Attebery 166). Other critics like Maria Nikolajeva disagree, arguing that the fantasy genre truly begins in the 1950's and '60's with authors like Lewis and Tolkien, though its growth started in the nineteenth century. She ignores the possibility that authors like MacDonald found a new way of writing fairy tales and myths. For Nikolajeva then, fantasy authors take various aspects of fairy tales and mythology, such as fairies, wizards, and magic, and modernize them to fit the new Secondary World. Fantasy then is not the evolutionary product of fairy tales and mythology, but is instead the compilation of what came before combined with the author's own creativity.

Perhaps it is due to the essays of MacDonald, Tolkien, and various other Fantasy authors that critics of the genre agree that the purpose of Fantasy is to, as critic Charlotte Spivack says, "explore ideas that clash with society" and to search for meaning (x). Fantasy author Terry Brooks states the purpose plainly when he says that Fantasy is a perfect conduit for the discussion of social issues because the readers do not read to explore these issues. Therefore, a discussion of race, class, and gender can all be subtly included in the story and the reader will genuinely consider the argument in the context of the secondary world without lashing back with his own opinion. This allows for a more efficient exchange of ideas in which the reader can then be awakened to the debate in the real world. Regardless of its origins, writers use Fantasy to give readers a new perspective of the Primary World.

MacDonald takes full advantage of Fantasy's goals and purposes to explore a topic difficult to express in realistic fiction: the ideal. The ideal cannot be found in our

fallen world, but MacDonald believes that it exists. He suggest in his fantasies that there is an ideal to be strived for by men, women, and society as a whole. One of the primary ways he approaches the ideal is to address the devolution of man's morality and the move away from the ideal. The contrast between the ideal and the declining allows MacDonald to subtly define the ideal as well as explore what causes people to move in either direction. What is most important in his fantasy, as I argue, is that he unexpectedly chooses to use weaker, flawed, or outcast characters to grow towards and eventually gain the ideal state.

In the first chapter, I will analyze the journey of the ideal individual as expressed by Anodos, the protagonist of *Phantastes*. Anodos follows the stages of the individual's growth as outlined by MacDonald in his essay, "A Sketch of Individual Development." Though he is twenty-one, Anodos begins essentially as an innocent child entering Fairy Land for the first time. As he travels, he gains experience, but also grows in pride and selfishness until he commits a terrible act. The rest of the novel then becomes an ascent out of the pit he had fallen into and towards the ideal as represented by the Knight of the Soiled Armor. The ideal person as expressed by the knight and eventually by Anodos is first becomes aware of the flaws that prevent him from becoming the ideal, and then he does whatever he must to overcome them. He is a protector and a nurturer, depending on what is needed. As MacDonald insists, the ideal individual must love every person he comes across to achieve perfection.

The second chapter compares societies governed by ideal individuals and those governed by devolved individuals. Furthermore, this chapter argues that one of the most important qualities of MacDonald's ideal individual is the initially weak or outcast status

of these individuals. The *Princess* books show large populations within a society falling far from the ideal and then attempting to take control of the kingdom of Gwintystorm. In the first book, goblins try to take revenge on humanity for previous oppression. These goblins' disgusting physical state reflects their inner morality. The adults of Gwintystorm are nearly powerless against the goblins, but Curdie, a boy on his way to the ideal, has both the knowledge and the courage to help defeat the goblins. In the second book, Curdie is able to recognize and overcome his own character flaws and then go to the capital to save the kingdom once again. The court officials have been poisoning the king so that he is too weak to rule and they take over the kingdom. Though they appear to be normal humans, by touching their hands Curdie is able to see that they are deteriorating into various forms of animals. Under the influence of these corrupt leaders, the kingdom is falling into chaos governed by greed and slothfulness. With the help of Princess Irene, Curdie saves the kingdom and shows not only that the children are even more capable than adults at achieving the ideal, but that under the leadership of an ideal individual society can potentially reach this state as well.

Finally, in the third chapter I look at MacDonald's idea of the ideal woman as represented in both *Phantastes* and the *Princess* books. Unlike the ideal man, the ideal woman takes several different forms, depending on the audience of either children or adults. In the *Princess* books, MacDonald clearly lays out what makes the Princess Irene a princess: her honesty, maturity, and courage. She is given ideal role models like her great-great-grandmother. The wise grandmother is a common character in MacDonald's works and is marked by her wisdom. In general, she does not actively participate in the events of the story, but she becomes a mentor and guide to the heroes, providing them

with whatever tools they need to complete their journeys. For the adult readers of *Phantastes*, MacDonald shows the ideal of both married and unmarried women. Though she is not physically active, the ideal married woman has an abundance of intellectual freedom and is loyal and loving to her husband. The unmarried woman, on the other hand, is much more active. She is independent and capable of protecting even the male characters of the story. The ideal woman, like the children of MacDonald's works, is capable of making contributions to and having authority in society.

Though the roles of children and women have certainly been examined, the concept of the ideal in MacDonald is unexplored by critics. This thesis looks specifically at how MacDonald uses the ideal to reveal a perfect world that we cannot hope to achieve, but can still strive for. Understanding the ideal in MacDonald can enlighten readers to his view of the Victorian age. In such a time of major transition society could have been moving in any direction. MacDonald seems to have noticed a trend in a downward direction as materialism and industry take over the minds of leaders; he therefore uses his Fantasy books to show where he believes the world should go, who it should be lead by, and how it should get there. However, the endings of both *Phantastes* and the *Princess and Curdie* suggest that he doubted society could ever reach that point.

CHAPTER TWO

The Journey of the Individual

For George MacDonald, the journey of the individual from his birth to his best self is incredibly important in the process of creating an ideal world. *Phantastes* neatly lays out the various stages of this development, both the good and the bad, in Anodos's journey through Fairyland. On one of Anodos's first days in this new land, the flowers tease him and say, "Look at him! Look at him! He has begun a journey without a beginning, and it will never have an end. He! He! He! Look at him!" (23) Even the flowers know that Anodos is not simply exploring a new land: he is on a never-ending journey. This journey of the individual that Anodos is embarking on is common and he meets several other characters who are also on this journey. Humanity itself seems to be moving toward the ideal, a journey whose beginning is so far removed from Anodos that it seems to be completely without a start. By stepping into Fairyland, Anodos is beginning his part in this journey without a beginning. Likewise, the journey has no end. After Anodos has left Fairyland, he must strive to maintain the growth he found in that land while at the same time showing others how to achieve similar growth. His journey to the ideal self cannot end until death, and while his is finished by death, society as a whole must continue to seek out ways of becoming the ideal.

As Stephen Prickett suggests in *Victorian Fantasy*, the effects of the Industrial Revolution on society hugely influenced Victorian fantasy authors. These effects included a shift towards greed, materialism, and ambition in the individual. While society was evolving technologically, MacDonald felt that it was devolving morally, a major

theme of the *Princess and Curdie*. MacDonald certainly believed that individuals existed who were so immersed and controlled by the current of society that they were beyond the reach of reason or morality (“A Sketch of Individual Development”). In his fantasy stories, MacDonald makes pride and greed major issues, especially how they affect the growth of the individual. Ultimately, MacDonald’s central characters are able to overcome their flaws and move closer to the ideal.¹ I will argue that Anodos must morally regress to his most flawed self before he can move on to the ideal. He is the first example of the weak or flawed characters MacDonald uses to lay out the difficult work of gaining ideal character traits.

The Arthurian Legend and the idea of the medieval knight provide MacDonald with culturally relevant examples of ideal men, which he incorporates into *Phantastes*. The knight of the soiled armor and the giant fighting princes are the major examples of the ideal knight I will be discussing. After establishing a definition for the ideal knight, I will explain how Anodos falls short of this ideal. I will show that Anodos’s faults gradually grow from poor decisions to cruel actions based on the appearance of his shadow. As is suggested by MacDonald’s essay, “A Sketch of Individual Development,” Anodos’s journey will consist of various stages that take him morally downward before he can begin his upward ascent to the ideal. After his lowest moment, I will prove that Anodos eventually becomes like the knight and the princes through his self-sacrifice.

Based on the examples provided by the Knight of the Soiled Armor and the two princes, I will argue that the ideal knight is aware of his shortcomings and does what he

¹ Prickett also argues in “The Two Worlds of George MacDonald” that MacDonald was individualistic and believed that each individual must climb his own stairway to the discovery of truth.

can to overcome them. He protects the weak and innocent at the risk of his own life. He is gentle and tender when necessary, and a fierce foe if needed. He humbly places others above himself. The ideal is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. Anodos is far from achieving these qualities. As will be discussed below, Anodos is too comfortable in his flaws, such as lust, to become the ideal. However, by humbling himself to the point of servitude toward the Knight of the Soiled Armor and later sacrificing his own life to save a community from a monster, Anodos is able to understand that the ideal loves the people around him, whether that be through tender care or fierce protection.

“A Sketch of Individual Development,” traces the growth of an individual from birth to his discovery of God, or the truth Prickett mentions. This development will include failures that seem to push the individual’s growth backwards, but in fact move him closer to the ideal. The various stages and emotions the individual experiences, as described in this essay, are closely aligned with the growth of Anodos in *Phantastes*, indicating that MacDonald had a specific model in mind when he wrote the character. Understanding this model can help us understand the journey of Anodos and the structure of *Phantastes*. MacDonald refers to the first stage of development as a man’s “second birth:” this is the moment the child realizes that he is alive. The second stage is the discovery of a will that can refuse instructions and cause strife. In this stage, the child also discovers his conscience, which introduces previously unknown responsibilities. The child also finds that his worst foe is himself. The third stage is the use of the will to act against the instructions of the conscience. During this stage, the individual reaches his lowest point. As the child grows to be a man, the original magic and beauty of the world begin to disappear. He becomes increasingly aware of his imperfections, his mortality,

and the hurt he has caused people. In literature and his imagination, he will frequently run in to the ideal hero, which serves to further remind him of his imperfection. Finally, in the last stage he will discover God and realize that without God achieving the ideal is impossible. He will find that “he fails of his perfection so long as there is one being in the universe he could not love” (47). The individual will not be able to achieve the ideal in his life, but knowing what is required will allow him to move gradually closer.

Anodos’s downward and upward journey is reflected in the structure of the novel itself. Roderick McGillis argues that the structure of *Phantastes* supports the idea of Anodos moving further from and then closer to his ideal self. The two halves of the book mirror each other. In each half there is a cottage that provides a safe haven and a building that imprisons Anodos. The oak-tree cottage and the cottage with the four doors provide hospitality, protection, and nurturing. The cottage with the Shadow and the tower prison both imprison Anodos, one binding him to the shadow and the other literally imprisoning him. The central chapter of the book tells the story of Cosmos and the mirror lady. In this story, Cosmos falls in love with a woman who lives in a magic mirror, which parallels Anodos’s own story with the Marble Lady. He ultimately sacrifices his life in order to free the woman from the mirror.² This essay shows that MacDonald used even the structure of the book itself to support Anodos’s growth as an individual, moving further from then closer to his ideal self, but still, like the novel itself, moving forward. William Raeper also notices the differences between the two halves of the novel, but he views the journey as one that moves towards acceptance rather than improvement. He sees the journey of Anodos as mental journey toward learning to accept both parts of himself, the

² For McGillis, *Phantastes* is about Anodos’s journey to discovering a way to be a part of a community.

good and the evil, rather than learning to sacrifice for the community. Anodos's journey is certainly psychological. His battles are largely mental battles against the shadow. After he loses the shadow and is back in our world, he accepts that the shadow was necessary for him to grow into a better person, therefore accepting both the good and the bad parts of himself. Recognition of the bad is necessary for the individual to grow to the ideal; otherwise he will not know which areas to develop in. These two critics provide two different readings of Anodos's journey, but MacDonald's "Sketch of Individual Development" suggests that McGillis's interpretation is closer to what the author had in mind. Regardless of their differences, these essays confirm that as I argue and as MacDonald suggests in "Sketch," Anodos must devolve morally before he knows how to move forward towards to ideal.

Phantastes begins with the first birth of the individual: Anodos wakes up. He suffers from the "usual perplexity of mind" the sleeper experiences as he reenters the waking world, or what a newborn infant may experience upon birth (1). This morning is the day after his twenty-first birthday, the first day of a new year, or a new life. If waking is to be like birth, then this morning is like Anodos's "birth" into adulthood. Not only is Anodos born into adulthood, he is also made aware of the existence of a fairyland, so he is also born into an entirely new world. This is significant because he is starting the journey of the individual from the beginning, which makes it easier for readers to understand his character's growth.

His first encounter with a fairy is the fairy who claims to be his grandmother and introduces him to the reality of the fairy world. She mentions that the evening before he had read a fairy tale to his sister and expressed a desire to find his way to Fairy Land, if it

existed. By beginning the book with a reference to fairy tales, MacDonald implies that the portion of the story that takes place in Fairy Land will be a fulfillment of the fairy tales themselves. Fairy tales differ from real life in that the ideal is more obvious, such as in the character of the Knight of the Soiled Armor. By living out a fairy tale where the ideal is more easily achieved, Anodos will experience a fulfillment of the longings stirred up by these stories and he will have the opportunity to become the hero of the story. MacDonald also implies that he will be relying heavily on fairy tale themes and archetypal characters, such as the Wise Old Woman.

As Katherine Bubel argues in her essay, “Knowing God ‘Other-Wise,’” MacDonald uses the Wise Old Woman archetype to help restore Christianity in an increasingly agnostic, or even atheistic, age. The Wise Old Woman serves as a seer, encourager, and advisor to those called to adventure: she can appear as both a beautiful woman and an old crone. The wise old woman is important to the individual because she is frequently used as a guide in character growth. In “A Sketch of Individual Development,” the individual requires another person to suggest ideas and to ultimately guide him to the discovery of God. The wise old woman serves as this guide, pushing the individual in the right direction. In *Phantastes*, the wise old woman appears several times. She is the fairy grandmother, the woman of the oak cottage, the woman of the cottage with four doors, and the witch in the goblin caves. She is used as a guide, a nurturer, and a tester. She always encourages Anodos to have faith in something, whether that be the existence of a fairy world or that no matter how difficult his life is, there is always good somewhere.

MacDonald also uses more legendary sources, such as the Arthurian legend and medievalism. He uses these legendary sources in similar ways as his contemporaries: to show an example of the ideal to be strived for. Megan Morris suggests in her essay, “Recalled to Life,” that in the nineteenth century an ideal hero such as Arthur was admired. According to the legend, he brought stability and unity to England, both of which were longed for by people living in an age of transition like the Victorian era. He was also admired for his moral values and overall manliness. The age of Arthur was a romantic time when men and woman seemed to fulfill the Victorian ideals (Morris).

In the nineteenth century, the Arthurian legend’s themes of nobility, chivalry, and bravery were not just admired, but encouraged in children. The popularity of this legend is apparent in the multitude of Victorian retellings, as David Staines discusses in his essay, “King Arthur in Victorian Fiction.”³ Although much of what was written on Arthurian legend were retellings of the famous love triangle or stories simply set in Arthurian England, occasionally the legend was used to make a point on Victorian society, such as its conservatism. Some critics felt that the Grail Quest was missing from the retellings and said that the retellings should mention the importance of religious purity. Ultimately, Staines believes that the Arthurian legend in the nineteenth century showed ideals of marriage, love, and courage that society could strive for.

Velma Bourgeois Richmond notices similar trends as Staines, but applies them more specifically to their desired effect on children in her essay, “King Arthur and His Knights for Edwardian Children.” Richmond provides a summary of Arthurian literature in the 19th century, connecting the works through their emphasis on chivalry and gender

³ Staines provides a comprehensive bibliography of Arthurian literature in Victorian England.

roles. Boys were shown knights who began as obscure youths but grew to honor and glory, especially Galahad whose boyish innocence allowed him to succeed in the grail quest. Girls were given assertive women who only married the handsome knights when the women became meek and mild. Richmond argues that the abundance of Arthurian stories suggests a desire for chivalrous, Christian boys. His article describes a desire to inspire chivalry in boys and sweetness in girls, but MacDonald's adventurous heroines seem to suggest that the author valued chivalry in girls as well. In *Phantastes*, MacDonald shows a character trying and failing to become chivalrous like the ideal knight presented by Arthurian legend.

Phantastes tells the story of Anodos's journey through fairyland after he awakes one night to find his room turned into a forest. He follows a path out of his room through the forest, but intentionally deviates from the path. This deviation leads him to encounters with the spirits of trees, both good and bad, and to the acquaintance of a knight who proves to be the ideal Anodos must strive for. Throughout Anodos's journey, he is ultimately motivated by a desire to find the woman he refers to as the "Marble Lady." In a Sleeping Beauty like situation, Anodos sings a beautiful woman awake from a spell only to have her flee from him. As he searches for this ideal woman he is placed in situations that reveal his own lack of character, until finally he makes his way to the Fairy Palace where his positive growth begins. The second half of the novel shows Anodos gradual shift to the ideal as he overcomes his faults and lets go of his desire for the Marble Lady.

Anodos is essentially a child when he enters fairyland: he has just turned twenty-one and is thrust into a world he has no experience with. He lacks the wisdom of a man,

as can be seen by his deviation from the path, and he weakly gives in to fear and lust. Without the aid of the ideal knight, one of the evil trees would have killed Anodos early in the story. Without the love of a kind beech-tree, Anodos would not survive any more nights in the forest, though because of lust he loses the protection given to him. Anodos is not driven by the noble and chivalrous motivations of ideal knights but is instead driven by his own fears, lusts, and pride.

In *Phantastes*, MacDonald uses the Arthurian Legend, especially Sir Galahad, to give Anodos an ideal to strive for. At the start of his journey through Fairy Land, Anodos reads a passage comparing the armor of Arthur's knights, Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale. Sir Galahad's armor "shone like the moon," a reflection of his nobleness and purity, and his horse is a "great white mare" (14). In contrast, Sir Percivale's armor is rusty and his horse's gear is filthy. The excerpt ends with Sir Percivale being led away by the lady of the alder tree, presumably to a fate similar to the one Anodos narrowly escapes later on. The reading on the knights prepares Anodos to meet a knight exactly fitting Sir Percivale's description. This Knight of the Soiled Armor has rusted armor and a dejected face, but he is still obviously noble. The knight reveals to Anodos that he has encountered the lady of the alder tree and gives the appropriate warnings, which go unheeded. Despite his failings, the knight's nobility drives him to seek atonement for his weakness: his armor will only be made clean through the blows given to him in battle. Only when battle and good deeds have washed his armor clean will he feel worthy of a squire to keep his armor shining (43). Over the course of the book, the knight appears several more times and each time his armor is cleaner than the last. He finds the battles that scrape away the rust.

The knight's journey is the journey Anodos would have taken, if he were a better man. The episode in the goblin caves confirms that the knight is the nobler of the two men. The goblins taunt Anodos with the phrase: "You shan't have her: he! he! he! She's for a better man" (131). The Marble Lady is the wife of the knight of the soiled armor, who is more deserving of her than the impatient and prideful Anodos. The knight is able to recognize his own failings, become more humble through them, and finally reach the ideal he had been striving for through nobility of actions. Anodos, on the other hand, ignores his faults and weaknesses, or gives into them too frequently, to learn and grown from them.

In the final chapters of Anodos's time in Fairy Land, the knight is finally able to provide Anodos with an example of the ideal of knighthood through his actions:

"He took the little thing in his arms, and, with the mother's help, undressed her, and looked to her wounds. The tears flowed down his face as he did so. With tender hands he bound them up, kissed the pale cheek, and gave her back to her mother. When he went home, all his tale would be of the grief and joy of the parents; while to me, who had looked on, the gracious countenance of the armed man, beaming from the panoply of steel, over the seemingly dead child, while the powerful hands turned it and shifted it, and bound it, if possible even more gently than the mother's, formed the center of the story" (188).

The knight is patient with a worried mother and tender with a wounded child. He is unaware of his own gentleness as he helps the mother tend her child, but the effect on Anodos is enormous. He begins to see in the knight the "imbodiment of what [he] would fain become" (193). He also feels that if he could serve the knight until he dies, his life "would be no lost life" (193). The knight's example prepares Anodos for the final stage of his development as an individual: a realization that he cannot be perfect until he can love every being on the earth. Until this point, every example of the ideal knight has been shown in battle. Though the battles have been self-sacrificial and on behalf of the weak,

they were still battles. Anodos here witnesses the need for healing from the ideal man. A knight, or a man, should protect the gentle and innocent while remaining gentle himself.

The princes that Anodos aids in killing the giants are the other examples of ideal men that MacDonald provides Anodos. The princes were so heartbroken by the damage the giants do to their kingdom that they gave up their high positions in order to help the people and rid the land of the giants. However, they were aware of their own shortcomings as warriors and consulted a wise old woman. She instructed them to make their own armor and swords and to wait for Anodos. They obediently wait and then train Anodos when he arrives. When they fight the giants, Anodos is the clumsiest of the three yet is able to be victorious unscathed. The princes are not so lucky. They die defeating the giants in as much glory as they could ever wish for. Anodos's pride leads him imagine that he had won more glory than the brothers, and even to forget that the princes contributed anything at all to the fight. He considers himself to be among the "glorious knights of old; having the unspeakable presumption...to think of [himself]...as side by side with Sir Galahad" (177). Anodos at this point in the story is incapable of the kind of self-sacrifice needed to achieve the nobility of the brothers, though his original willingness to help suggests that he has come much closer.

Despite the example of an ideal man provided to him at the start of his journey, Anodos frequently makes decisions and gives into negative character traits that take him further from his ideal self. His chief faults are lust and pride, and lust first rears its head early in the story. When he first sees a fairy, before his journey has begun, he is "overcome with the presence of beauty" which leads him to unconsciously reach out to touch her (4). The fairy promptly answers his advance by saying, "a man must not fall in

love with his grandmother” (4). While this scene could be read as a natural reaction to unnatural beauty, it also shows Anodos’s weakness toward women and beauty. Despite his potential relation to the fairy, her beauty is impossible for him to resist.

The alder-tree maiden twists real love and appreciation for beauty into lust. As Anodos searches for the marble lady, he comes across a woman he believes to be his love, but who is in fact the maiden of the alder-tree. Anodos’s desperation to find the marble lady drives the warnings from the knight of the soiled armor and the story of Sir Percivale from his mind. This places Anodos in the second stage of his development: using his will to ignore the instructions of others and causing strife in the process. In an effort to woo the Marble Lady back to him, Anodos sings like he did to wake her up and in response he hears a laugh “of one who has just received something long and patiently desired” (45). He knows that the situation is not right: “there was something either in the sound of the voice, although it seemed sweetness itself, or else in this yielding which awaited no gradation of gentle approaches, that did not vibrate harmoniously with the beat of my inward music” (46). Despite the warning of his conscience, Anodos continues to draw closer to her. When he finds her beauty “too plenteously, a cold shiver” runs through him, but he ignores this second warning from his conscience (46). As his night continues, Anodos continues to ignore warnings and is further enchanted by her beauty.

The horror Anodos feels on waking eradicates all feelings of love and enchantment:

“The damsel had disappeared; but in the shrubbery...stood a strange looking object. It looked like an open coffin set up on one end; only that the part for the head and neck was defined from the shoulder-part. In fact, it was a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree. It had arms, which were only slightly seamed, down from the shoulder blade by the elbow, as if the bark had healed again from the cut of a

knife. But the arms moved, and the hand and the fingers were tearing asunder a long silky tress of hair. The thing turned round—it had for a face and front those of my enchantress, but now of a pale greenish hue in the light of the morning, with dead lusterless eyes” (48).

The creature his lust leads him to believe is his marble lady is far enough away from the ideal presented by the marble lady that she is the evil counterpart. She is tearing apart a protective girdle of beech leaves given to Anodos by the beech tree maiden. The alder-tree has symbolically raped Anodos through her deception. Anodos’s lust led him to ignore the myriad of warnings he was given, both from others and himself, so that he ultimately loses the protection lovingly given to him by the beech tree. After giving in to this lust, Anodos’s faults and weaknesses become more apparent.

At this point, Anodos’s lust brings him trouble and puts him in danger, but it does not harm anyone else. The introduction of his shadow brings a deeper evil that gives Anodos the capacity to do others harm. Anodos is warned to not go into the house of the ogre. Once again, he ignores the warning. He comes across a house that gives him a “vague misgiving,” but he enters it anyway (59). Inside an old woman is reading a twisted version of John 1:1, which says that darkness, not light, was at the beginning. Even the woman’s face is “forbidding” (60). When he starts walking toward a closet door, the woman says, “you had better not open that door,” but Anodos decides to ignore another warning (60). Through the door is a dark, empty space that seems to end at a faint glimmering that could be sky. He senses another being present in the closet, and then sees a dark figure race toward the open door. The being pushes past Anodos and attaches itself to him as a shadow. Anodos’s encounter with the alder tree woman and the loss of his beech girdle has made him more susceptible to the shadow’s attack, and the new companion’s profoundly negative influence soon becomes evident.

The shadow introduces moral evil to Anodos. Jeff McInnis argues in his book, *Shadows and Chivalry*, that MacDonald believed moral evil is worse than evil actions. McInnis suggests that actions can be forgiven, but moral evil must be killed in order for the world to be cured of its problems. In the case of *Phantastes*, this moral evil does not immediately produce actions but festers in Anodos's mind. The first symptom is not being able to see the beauty and the magic of fairyland. As Anodos looks at a fairy child in "wonder and delight, round crept from behind [him] the something dark, and the child stood in [his] shadow. Straightaway he was a commonplace boy, with a rough broad-brimmed straw hat straw hat" (65). Like the individual of "A Sketch of Individual Development," Anodos has reached the point in his development when natural beauty is affected by his own moral evil so that the beauty no longer excites feelings of wonder but instead is a reminder of his own shadow.

While under the influence of the shadow, Anodos finds that he no longer trusts the Knight of the Soiled Armor the when they meet for the second time. Though the knight's armor is nearly spotless after his many battles and good deeds and Anodos longs to tell him about the shadow either for advice or comfort, the shadow wraps itself around the knight so Anodos cannot trust him. At this point in his time with the shadow, Anodos has retained enough of his individuality to recognize that something is not right in him and to know he needs help. Unfortunately, he is losing his will to act against the shadow and according to his conscience.

Anodos completely loses his will and ability to act according to his conscience, the third stage of his development as an individual, when a young woman joins him on his journey. She is very young, but old enough to not be entirely seen as a child. This

young woman holds a precious globe that is “bright and clear as the purest crystal” (68). She both plays with it as a toy and guards it as her “greatest treasure” (68). Anodos’s encounter with the maiden is arguably the most important episode for his character’s growth as an individual; it is certainly his darkest moment.

Anodos is fascinated by the globe, which symbolizes the girl’s virginity and purity. She both flaunts the globe and guards it carefully, though upon reflection Anodos believes that she guarded more than flaunted it. The flaunting of the globe is the equivalent of flirting. At first, she will not allow Anodos to come near the globe, then she allows him to touch it “gently,” which produces a “sweet sound” from the globe (68). This first touch is like a hesitant kiss. And then she allows a second touch, which makes the sound louder. After a third touch, a “tiny torrent of harmony rolled out of little globe” (68). Each touch, or kiss, creates more passion. When more than just a “sweet sound” is produced, the girl is overwhelmed and afraid of losing her globe, or virginity.

Without the shadow, Anodos would have likely left the girl alone and not sought more touches. Unfortunately, the shadow “glided round and inwrap the maiden,” just like it did to the knight of the soiled armor, and desire for the globe overcomes Anodos, proving his weakness:

“I put out both my hands and laid hold of it. It began to sound as before. The sound rapidly increased, till it grew a low tempest of harmony and the globe trembled, and quivered, and throbbed between my hands. I had not the heart to pull it away from the maiden, though I held it in spite of her attempts to take it from me; yes, I shame to say, in spite of her prayers, and, at last, her tears...at last [the globe] burst between our hands, and a black vapour broke upwards out from it” (68-69).

The vapor wraps itself around the girl, so black that even the shadow is hidden. Her purity is gone. She is stained with darkness to match the shadow Anodos carries. She

wails, “You have broken my globe; my globe is broken—my globe is broken” (69). As she runs away with the fragments of her globe, Anodos tries to follow her to comfort her, but a great storm suddenly blocks his path and he has to let her go. Even nature reacts passionately against Anodos’s actions. The shadow drives Anodos to rape the girl, even though his conscience tells him to stop and the event haunts him for the rest of his days. Anodos’s lowest moment, the greatest mistake of the book, is the destruction of the innocence and joy of a young girl.

MacDonald creates characters and worlds where it is easy to see people moving closer to or further away from their ideal selves. For Anodos, his ideal self is a heroic knight. MacDonald gives the reader glimpses of this ideal, or of Anodos’s potential to reach this. He sings the Marble Lady awake, allowing her to eventually make her way back to her husband, the Knight of the Soiled Armor. He is more than willing to help the princes and he returns their bodies to their father the king. For every mistake he makes, Anodos has a moment hesitation where he is aware of the mistake. But, he still chooses to make his mistakes and the shadow’s appearance makes his mistakes much worse. Throughout the first half of the novel, up until the rape of the maiden and his stay in the fairy palace, Anodos moves further and further from the ideal presented by the description of Sir Galahad. As he moves further from this ideal, he begins to project his own darkness onto the people around him, like the knight and the girl.

Anodos begins to move closer to his ideal self in the second half of the novel. He symbolically climbs down a narrow path that takes him deep underground to the goblin caves. As his actions prove, Anodos has morally fallen deeper and deeper into the ground and must now climb out of his pit. Anodos enters the caves in pursuit of the marble lady

and is heckled by the goblins the entire journey. He hears “harsh grating laughter, full of evil humor” (130). These cruel goblins remind Anodos that he is not worthy of the Marble Lady and that she is meant for a “better man” (131). Anodos replies, “if he is a better man, let him have her” (131). His willingness to give up the marble lady to a man more deserving of her is in stark contrast to his being so desperate to have her that he is deceived by the alder-tree maiden, or when he “rapes” the young maiden. At this point in his journey as an individual, Anodos is becoming aware of his own imperfections and of an ideal he cannot meet. The rape of the maiden stirred his conscience and will into action against the moral evil introduced by the Shadow. Anodos then goes on to be further purified by the wise old woman and to help the princes to defeat the giants. Finally, when the shadow is completely gone Anodos is able to perform the ultimate form of self-sacrifice.

Even though many characters illustrate the ideal state of humanity in MacDonald’s fiction, the majority of his characters must experience death to achieve perfection. In “A Sketch of Individual Development,” the individual is finally aware that the world seems to be rushing for death: he sees death in the faces of people around him and in the temporality of nature, especially flowers. The individual is dreading the rest of his own hopeless race until a friend asks, “Is not vitality, revealed in growth, itself an unending resurrection?” (37) For the individual to grow or “resurrect,” he must die. Life then becomes a series of small deaths that prepare him for the final death and resurrection, which leads to the final and greatest growth: at last he is his ideal self.

MacDonald illustrates the need for a final death and resurrection in many of his stories. For example, in “The Golden Key,” Tangle and Moss spend their lives trying to

reach the perfect world where the shadows come from. After traveling through a valley full of shadows but lacking the objects creating the shadows, Tangle and Moss experience an intense “longing after the country whence the shadows fell” (202). Before Moss can reach the door to the country, he must die. But his death is not painful or traumatic: he is old and weary so he takes a bath to refresh himself. When he emerges the Old Man of the Sea tells him:

“You have tasted of death now...Is it good?”
“It is good,” said Mossy. “It is better than life.”
“No,” said the Old Man, “it is only more life” (211).

Only after experiencing life-giving death can Moss finally reunite with Tangle and place his golden key in the door leading to the “country whence the shadows fell” (213). Death for MacDonald seems to symbolize the passing from one state of being to another, better state. Moss and Tangle must live their lives to old age and death before entering the perfect land.

The death of Anodos is perhaps the most revealing of MacDonald’s views on death and its role in the individual’s journey. Death, and the following resurrection, provides a final birth and stage of the individual’s development: he has a revelation of the sacrifice needed to achieve the ideal. Anodos and the knight come across a temple made of trees in the woods. In this temple, worshipers are dressed in white robes and swords, resembling both priests and warriors. Everyone appears to be waiting for a great event. The knight in his goodness expects something great, such as a prophet, to appear, but Anodos has an “unaccountable conviction that here was something bad” (194). Unlike his actions before the disappearance of the shadow, Anodos is now listening to his conscience and is prepared to act on it. In the center of the temple is a throne that the

crowd of worshippers shoves first a boy and then a girl towards. These sacrifices are pushed through an opening at the base of the throne and disappear.

Anodos makes his way to the throne and finds evil. Instead of a king or lord, the throne is occupied by a rotting wooden idol. Anodos rips the image off the throne revealing a large hole of rotting wood. Out of the hole leaps a giant wolf that Anodos catches by the throat and begins to wrestle with. He tightens his grip on the monster's throat hoping that "even after [the worshippers] had killed [him], they would be unable to undo [his] gripe," ensuring that the evil these people worshipped would be destroyed (197). Anodos is now able to understand the sacrifices of the princes and the conviction of the knight. Though Anodos is killed, his short experience with being dead is one of intense peace and contentment. As his spirit wanders, he can only think of the ways in which he can love the people he encounters: to minister to them, hold them, and "haunt" them with his love (201-2). Anodos has to die in order to understand the love MacDonald believes to be central to the ideal human. MacDonald may not be saying that perfection for the individual is only possible through death, but he does seem to believe that a significant amount of self-sacrifice is required, whether that be humbling oneself to serve another or giving up one's life for the sake of others.

MacDonald uses medievalism to show what made the knights of the medieval romance and the Arthurian legend noble and honorable: helping those who asked for help and protecting those who could not protect themselves. The knight of *Phantastes* is chivalrous, gentle, and ready to help whoever asks, no matter the seeming insignificance of the request. The princes are noble and they understand that the safety and well being of their people is worth more than their own positions and lives. In MacDonald's third stage

of the individual's development, his immorality becomes painfully apparent to him, such as when Anodos breaks the girl's glove. During this stage he is more aware of the ideals that he fails to meet. MacDonald is able to use the medieval knight to give Anodos an ideal he can look up to, and also to see where he falls short of the ideal. Eventually, Anodos comes to understand the sacrifices made by these noble men and is able to sacrifice himself, becoming capable of achieving the ideal for the individual.

The gentleness of the ideal knight is countercultural, as McGillis argues in his essay, "A Fairytale is Just a Fairytale." He suggests that MacDonald challenges the cultural ideals of both men and women without going beyond the cultural boundaries, though in his article he focuses on male gender roles. MacDonald's men cannot be traditional fairy tale heroes because they have been given certain feminine qualities, such as nonviolence, caring, and vulnerability. As his male characters become more sensitive, the women of MacDonald's stories take on more conspicuous roles, such as leading the quest or talking more. McGillis feels that MacDonald's male characters display a feminine side and a need for feminine instruction. MacDonald presents his contemporary audience with a different ideal, using qualities of the ideal they are used to. However, his central character falls short of his ideal. The Knight of the Soiled Armor is both caring and vulnerable, as McGillis argues MacDonald's heroes are, but Anodos is neither of these. The incident with the globe and his battle with giants certainly prove that Anodos is not nonviolent. MacDonald's central characters are also more willing to participate in battle for the sake of the world than McGillis seems to believe, such as when Anodos strangles a giant wolf. This suggests that MacDonald did not expect the average person to live up to his ideal, but he did believe the individual should try.

In *Phantastes*, MacDonald shows that the individual can do a great deal to make his world closer to the ideal simply by caring for the people around him. After his death and his revelation of the need to care for the people around him, Anodos returns to the human world and his own life. He considers the best ways to apply what he learned in fairyland to his life in this world. He is not sure how he can do that, but he prays that the world “may be brighter for [him]” (205). Ultimately, he summarizes his journey by saying that he “who set out to find [his] Ideal, came back rejoicing that [he] had lost [his] Shadow” (205). Perhaps for MacDonald it is enough to lose the shadow that dims the world, even if the person is not fully ideal yet.

CHAPTER THREE

The Journey of Society

In his children's books, MacDonald shows that society grows when ideal individuals lead it, and these individuals may not always be what people expect. In his *Princess* books, he shows readers the same kingdom as it is led by devolving individuals and again led by evolving individuals, allowing the reader to see the importance of the individual's contribution to society. The evolution and devolution of the individual forms the growth of the society as a whole. When Curdie first arrives in Gwyntystorm in *The Princess and Curdie*, he sees a baker trip on a loose stone and hurt his head. As a courtesy to the man and the neighborhood, Curdie levels the broken bit of road but in the process a piece of stone flies through the barber's window. The barber comes running out, furious at Curdie who responds to the accusations:

“Look at your friend's forehead...See what a lump he has got on it with falling over the same stone.’

“What's that to my window?’ cried the barber. ‘His forehead can mend itself; my poor window can't.’” (106)

The people of Gwyntystorm are selfish. The barber does not care that his neighbor has been injured or that a kind stranger is willing to improve the condition of his street: he is only interested in the damage done to his window and in getting money for repairs.

Likely the reason the street is damaged is because the individuals in charge of its upkeep have moved further from instead of closer to the ideal, selfishly keeping the money for city upkeep to themselves. Curdie, an individual on the journey towards the ideal, is willing to help in any way he can, but the people of the city do not care. They do not want

help. They are willing to let the world fall to ruin around them, so long as they have their money and small amount of power over another.

Critics of the *Princess* books typically examine either the children or MacDonald's comments on society, but the two are rarely placed together. Critics such as William Raeper discuss the maturity of the children as the major feature; Claudia Nelson and Ravena Helson expand the argument for mature children by pointing out the contrasting adults. Nelson believes that the adults are childlike and Helson suggests that they are rigid in comparison to the children's flexibility and potential for growth. In regards to MacDonald's attitude toward society, the critics agree that the fantasist is challenging the values of his time. Stephen Prickett finds fantasy to be a common outlet for this sort of challenge during the Victorian era. Osama Jarrar and Ruth Jenkins both comment on MacDonald's elevation of people that his society would oppress, such as the poor or the outcasts. Based on what the critics emphasize, MacDonald clearly felt that children were more mature than generally believed and he was frustrated with his society. I will argue that MacDonald ultimately places his hope in children to reverse the devolving trends of society and bring it closer to the ideal. In order to bring society to the ideal, ideal individuals must be placed in control and the outcasts must be integrated into the community.

The community's treatment of Curdie and its selfishness shows how far from, or close to, the ideal it is. The people of Gwintystorm reject and abuse Curdie, an outsider, but MacDonald uses Curdie to show how society should respond to the outcasts. Ruth Jenkins argues that MacDonald creates characters that challenge the values of Victorian society while at the same time revealing the uncertainty of the age. She points out that

MacDonald's *Princess* books show both the evolutionary and the devolutionary states of society, along with an ideal society that accepts both the normal and the outcast. Jenkins decides to include Curdie and Irene with the ostracized because of their social status and age. Though she recognizes that the two have major roles to play in the bettering of society, she does not consider that these ostracized children lead society to its ideal state. Perhaps the children are in a state separate from normal or outcast: they are ideal leaders.

Considering that an ideal society should accept the outcast, it stands to reason that MacDonald's ideal would fully embrace the roles of women and children, typical outcasts in Victorian society. Not only this, but Curdie, a largely ideal individual, embraces the ultimate outcasts: the goblins' former creatures. As he and the creature Lina travel, former goblin creatures frequently appear to challenge Lina. After Lina defeats them, they join the two travelers until Curdie has an army of terrifying but good creatures. Curdie accepts them and they eventually drive the corrupt officials out of the court. But outcasts who are completely rejected and oppressed can also become evil, like the goblins. They are rejected by society and when they push back against that rejection, they are defeated: the goblins are never reintegrated, unlike their creatures. The creatures are willing to fight for a place in society rather than steal it; they are willing to give up power to serve instead of mastering over humans, chiefly due to seeing how another of their kind has been accepted. Because Curdie embraces one creature, Lina, the goblins' creatures follow her and are in turn embraced by Curdie. The difference between the goblins and their creatures lies largely in how they are treated after their initial rejections. The successful integration of the goblins' former creatures illustrates the important point of the *Princess* books that the oppressed must be treated with love and respect.

Before describing an ideal society, MacDonald shows what a society made up of the worst individuals is capable of, and fantasy gives him the freedom to show physical manifestations of this devolution. Physical manifestations allow MacDonald's child audience to better identify the evil and then come to understand the goblins' skewed morality. In the *Princess and the Goblin*, the goblins live beneath the surface of a mountain. Originally they had lived above the surface and were similar to humans, but a greedy king:

“...laid what they thought too severe taxes upon them, or had required observances of them they did not like, or had begun to treat them with more severity, in some way or other, and impose stricter laws” (*Princess and the Goblin* 3).

The creatures were needlessly singled out and treated unjustly; the seeds of hatred were planted. They retreated beneath the surface to form their own community. Through the generations, the goblins' bitterness grew: they became more cunning, more mischievous, and unkind. By the start of the story, their hate is centered on the decedents of the king who drove them to the caves, specifically princess Irene: “they sought every opportunity of tormenting [the decedents]” (5). They plan to kidnap Irene and marry her to the goblin prince, not caring about the cruelty of taking a child deep into a mountain to spend the rest of her life with frightening creatures. When the goblins capture Curdie, the goblin queen wants to turn feeding Curdie to her pets into a sort of twisted entertainment for the goblin masses. If they are successful in taking over the human kingdom, they want to remain living in their subterranean homes instead of returning to their former homes. The goblins simply want revenge and power over humanity: they do not really want the land they are preparing to claim. When the oppressed are treated badly and not given the

opportunity to return to society, like the goblins' creatures are, they become evil. Without the initial oppression, the goblins would not have become evil.

The physical deformities, such as missing toes, represent the moral decay of the goblin people. They are either “absolutely hideous, or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form” (4). Their heads are large and very hard; their arms are long with “thick nail-less fingers at the ends of them” (139). The most vulnerable parts of their bodies are their feet, which have no toes. These goblins hate humans and find human bodies disgusting, especially the toes. They believe humans wear shoes because they “can’t stand the sight of their own feet” (55). Ironically, though their appearance may be different, toes are the only human limbs that the goblins do not have, and they are what goblins find the most grotesque. Their hatred for humans that springs from their experiences with oppression causes the goblins to reject distinctly human traits, such as toes. Unfortunately for the goblins, toes are useful: they help people balance and move forward as they walk. The devolution of the goblins leads them to lose essential aspects of their physical bodies; the goblins are so proud of their own toeless feet that they cannot understand that they are missing a body part. This fixation on the physical difference between themselves and humans also connects back to the treatment of strangers in the *Princess and Curdie*: the goblins do not benefit from obsessing with the difference, and the difference actually shows that they themselves are lacking important features.

Other evidence of the goblins' devolution is their hatred for order and beauty. Because they live in the dark, the goblins cannot appreciate visual beauty as much as they could above the surface, but auditory beauty is still available to them. To creatures living in dark underground caves, sound is the most important of the senses. Living in the dark

heightens the goblins' auditory senses, leading one to believe that music would be important. However, the combination of sensitive ears and twisted priorities causes the goblins to hate beautiful, orderly sounds to the point of being weakened by them. When miners encounter the goblins, they sing simple songs to drive the creatures away. According to Curdie, the goblins "can't sing themselves, for they have no more voice than a crow; and they don't like other people to sing" (35). When the goblins hear Curdie sing, they make "horrible grimaces all through the rhyme, as if eating something so disagreeable that it set their teeth on edge and gave them the creeps" (139). Similarly to their disgust at human toes, the goblins cannot stand what they do not have. In this case, the orderly sound of the rhymes and the beauty of the singing seem to physically hurt the goblins. This ties in to their disregard for the land they want to claim: they just want the power over human land and possessions, but they do not actually like what the humans have. They have digressed to the point that they do not want to leave their mountain home to enjoy life above land and they hate the beauty and order of music.

Through the goblins' history, MacDonald shows the tremendous power of society's treatment of minorities or oppressed populations. Discriminatory laws drive an entire people group underground where their newfound hatred and dark home physically change them to the point that they cannot appreciate the beauty offered them in the dark. The oppression eventually backfires and the oppressed attempt to take their revenge. The focus on oppression and its root cause in selfishness continues in the sequel to this book, the *Princess and Curdie*, except now instead of the physical devolution of goblins, MacDonald includes the moral devolution of humanity.

In the *Princess and Curdie*, societal devolution takes a moral rather than physical manifestation. Though the citizens outwardly appear to be people, by touching their hands Curdie can perceive that most of them are turning into animals: instead of a hand, he may feel a paw, hoof, or snake scales. The people, including the king and princess, are not aware of this devolution because, unlike the goblins, the change takes place beneath the surface. Anyone can be turning into anything and the devolution will be undetected. For MacDonald's readers, this serves as a reminder that in the real world where physical evidence like the goblins does not exist, people can be in a morally devolved state. These bestial people do not like each other and do not trust strangers. When Curdie is attacked by a pack of dogs in the street, he and Lina defend themselves the best they can. One of the dogs lunges at Curdie and Lina kills it to protect him. The owners of the dog come running out, furious at the loss of the dangerous dog. When Curdie explains that the animal was going to kill him, the owner replies, "That's no business of mine" (111). The people then want to lock Curdie up and kill Lina. This shows more egregious evidence of the devolution than the window incident when a man valued his window more than his neighbor's injury. Here, the citizens value a dangerous animal over the life of a fellow human. They ignore the lawful right Curdie and Lina had to defend themselves, choosing instead to prosecute the pair for daring to harm their possessions. Not allowing the two strangers to defend themselves shows that to the citizens, Curdie and Lina's value is so little that self-defense is not justified. Belittling not just a person's injury but also their status as a human being proves this incident to be even worse than the window incident. Like the goblins cannot stand musical beauty and order, these people do not care about

lawful order. Disregard for human life and lawful order is the most detectable evidence of moral devolution.

The servants of the king show a similar disregard for order. They take advantage of their positions to steal the castle's food and wine, ignore their duties, and let the castle fall to ruin. When Curdie first enters the castle at night, the servants are sleeping everywhere after having drunk too much wine and eaten too much food: "they seemed...to have eaten and drunk so much that they might be burned alive without waking" (*Princess and Curdie* 139). Everywhere in the castle is filthy: no one has cleaned anything recently. The servants all sleep around the fires throughout the castle with many dogs and rats. Curdie is so horrified that he leaves the halls in "miserable disgust" (141). The servants' jobs are to maintain the order and cleanliness of the castle; they have purposefully failed their tasks for gluttony's sake, leading to a disgusting disorder in the home of their king. As he goes through and touches the hands of each of the sleeping servants, Curdie finds only animals. The servants show a disregard for responsibility and order, rather than life and law, and prove their moral devolution.

To counter the chaos of the goblins and lawless people, MacDonald also shows what a society made up of the best individuals is capable of. In the *Princess* books, he shows that when the best individuals contribute to society, they inspire cooperation and are capable of bringing about real change. Those who are oppressed in a devolved society are loved and included in a society led by ideal individuals. These individuals are not knights or princes like in *Phantastes*, but the young and the old. Curdie, a child, is an ideal individual capable of leading society. As established in the previous chapter, an ideal individual loves and protects the people around him. Curdie's first appearance in the

Princess and the Goblin is protecting Irene from the goblins. He continues to protect her for the rest of the book. In the *Princess and Curdie*, Curdie shows a desire to protect Lina and he travels to Gwyntystorm in order to help Irene and the king. He works to protect society itself by purging it of the lawlessness it is falling into. The ideal leader of society is able to counter the chaotic devolved state and bring order to that chaos; he courageously protects those weaker than him, the oppressed or minorities. Curdie first shows signs of his ideal nature in the *Princess and the Goblin*. He knows that the goblins despise the order of rhyming songs, so he sings those songs to drive them away from the princess. Later on, he overhears goblins in the mines discussing some sort of sinister plan; to find out the plan, he risks his own life to venture into the goblins caves. In doing so, he finds that the goblins plan to kidnap the princess and marry her to their prince. He also discovers that they are digging their way up in to the castle's wine cellar for the kidnapping. However, when Curdie tries to warn the guards of the castle, they shoot him with an arrow and lock him in the dungeon. Despite Curdie's noble intentions and best efforts, the people do not trust him until he proves himself worthy of their trust.

As an ideal individual, Curdie brings order to society. In the *Princess and the Goblin*, he escapes imprisonment with the help of the great-great-grandmother and arrives to the battle in the castle just in time to inform the knights of the goblins' weaknesses, bringing order to chaos with his bravery. The knights are losing the battle: the goblins' heads are too hard to harm and the queen is stomping and kicking the knights with her granite shoes. Without knowledge of their enemy's weaknesses, all the knights are capable of doing is pointlessly attacking impenetrable bodies. Curdie's arrival and expertise changes the tide of the battle. After he tells the knights to stomp on the goblins'

feet and they act accordingly, the goblins begin “running from [the battle] as fast as they could, howling and shrieking and limping, cowering every now and then as they ran to cuddle their wounded feet...or to protect them from the frightful stamp-stamp of the armed men” (213). Curdie’s presence brings a battle ruled by lawless goblins to an orderly close. An individual close to the ideal is capable of helping society grow by bringing order.

Another example of an ideal individual contributing to society is the grandmother. She is nearly ancient in the eyes of the children, but MacDonald still chooses her as the ideal mentor of Curdie, instead of a strong young knight. She exhibits the ideal trait of guardianship, which allows her to aid Curdie as he helps move society away from devolution. MacDonald chooses to make the grandmother the epitome of the ideal individual, which he illustrates by a sort of divinity reflected in her. She lives in a tower, far above the rest of the castle, and no one knows she is there unless she leads him or her to her room. The vertical nature of her distance from the general population suggests superiority. Raeper points out that the physical highness reveals more specifically her moral superiority over the rest of the world. Her greatness is further established by the uncertainty of her existence. No one can see her unless they will also be able to really believe in her, which is why when Irene brings Curdie up the tower to meet her grandmother he sees nothing but an old, largely empty room: he could not understand the grandmother’s existence and therefore could not believe it. The magical ability to see the heart of an individual and know whether it would be wise to reveal herself to him is also a mark of the grandmother’s divinity. She appears to be immortal. In the *Princess and the Goblin* Irene describes the Old Princess as looking young, yet very old. Her grandmother

tells her that she is “too old for [Irene] to guess,” like a goddess (16). A divine woman is higher than other women and can see the men’s hearts. As a divine figure, the grandmother establishes herself as an ideal that will be hard to copy, but should be strived for. Through the guidance of this isolated woman, Curdie is placed on the path to the ideal and sent off to save the kingdom.

MacDonald tends to use unlikely characters as models for ideal citizens. Curdie, Irene, and the grandmother may seem like strange choices for various reasons: Irene’s status as a child and the implied immaturity, Curdie’s social status, and the grandmother’s old age. Irene has the most obstacles to face because of her youth. At the start of the *Princess and the Goblin*, Irene is eight years old. She is unaware of the existence of goblins and the dangers outside the palace: the servants intentionally do not tell her because they believe she is too young. Her true self is ignored and she is treated as a young child.⁴ Because the servants underestimate the maturity and capability of the princess, she is unprepared when she stays out too late and meets goblins for the first time. Though he is also a child, Curdie’s main obstacle is his social status. The servants ignore him because he is a miner, a significantly lower social status than princess.⁵ From their first meeting, Lootie does not trust Curdie to protect the princess from the goblins, even though he has grown up fighting the creatures, and she refuses to let the princess kiss him because of his social status. Despite this attitude toward him, Curdie saves Irene, discovers the goblins’ plots, discovers the court officials’ plots, and saves the king.

⁴ Maria Nikolajeva suggests that by constantly mentioning Irene’s age, even the narrator underestimates and oppresses her.

⁵ Osama Jarrar believes that MacDonald is making a deliberate point on the true source of nobility through Curdie’s social status. Rather than coming from rank, true nobility comes from moral character.

But MacDonald pushes this point even further when he shows that children are mature and capable of contributing to society. Children often reach ideal states in the *Princess* books long before adults do. Curdie and Irene are children, but they save their kingdom. Both children at various points show more understanding and maturity than their adult counterparts. In the chapter of the *Princess and the Goblin* entitled “Irene Behaves Like a Princess,” Irene knows that her nurse will not believe that she spent the night in the goblin caves rescuing Curdie: “...she did know perfectly well that if she were to tell Lootie what she had been about, the more she went on to tell her, the less would she believe her” (196). In the scene, Irene goes on to calmly request that a nurse who accuses her of lying be removed from her service. The other servants are shocked by the maturity they sense in her because up till this point “they had all regarded her as little more than a baby” (196). Irene shows herself to be capable of assessing a situation and knowing what she should or should not do. In this case, she chooses not to say anything that would be called a lie and reminds her nurse of her place. It is not until Lootie remembers that she is Irene’s servant that she is able to calm down and do her job. Like Curdie, Irene’s age does not stop her from leading people and bringing order to chaotic situations.

Curdie and Irene’s maturity is placed at the forefront of their characters. Nikolajeva argues that gender is a minor issue in the *Princess* books, claiming that MacDonald makes his child protagonists’ power the priority. While their power is certainly a part of MacDonald’s argument, his priority seems to be their maturity and capability. This sometimes involves humbling themselves to those with less power, such as when Irene submits to her maid’s decision that a princess should not kiss a miner, even

if she has promised to do so. The children show both their maturity and capability when they are successful in their missions despite obstacles created by ignorant or lawless adults. Curdie is imprisoned by the adults simply because the people want “to see him made an example of” (*Princess and Curdie* 121). They want to punish him for their own pleasure because “what greater pleasure could they have than to see a stranger abused by the officers of justice?” (125) Because of Lina’s loyalty and Curdie’s calm in a ridiculous situation, he is able to dig them out of prison.⁶ MacDonald uses this adult-like maturity in Irene and Curdie to point out the important role children can play in society, despite their supposed weakness. The two children work hard, even when the king is dying and unable to help them. They are fully capable of ridding the kingdom of the corrupt officials. The only adult who helps them is the grandmother, and her help is in the form of tools that the children can only use if they are brave enough to try. When the weak are allowed to reach their full potential, they are no longer weak but strong: these children are capable of leading a disordered society to order and prosperity.

Just like strength in the midst of difficulties is an indication of maturity and the ideal state, so is the ability to love all creatures. Irene shows herself to have grown into a mature, if very young, woman in the *Princess and Curdie*. She is protective, as she proves in her concern for her ailing father and again when she goes to war alongside her father to save their kingdom. She provides safety for her father when he is suffering from nightmares, and again when she stops giving him wine from the malicious doctor and starts feeding him bread and good wine. Despite her adult behavior, Irene maturely

⁶ Claudia Nelson suggests that Victorian writers inverted the ages of their characters, making children like adults and adults like children. The innocent but mature children were frequently used to comment on subjects such as social systems and morality.

recognizes that she is a child and cannot take care of her father the way her mother or grandmother could: “It is so sad he should have only me and not my mamma! A princess is nothing to a queen!” (147) She humbly acknowledges that she still needs to grow up. Irene unconditionally loves, despite appearances and this love is especially apparent when she meets Lina. Lina, Curdie believes, was once a woman who “was naughty, but is now growing good” (160). Upon meeting Lina, Irene does not shrink from her, as most people do, but is overcome by pity and embraces her. Unlike the lawless citizens, Irene is closer to the ideal state of the individual and is capable of loving every being she comes across, no matter the appearance.

Like Irene, Curdie’s love and understanding for Lina shows his maturity, indicating that he is at least on his way to the ideal. He takes longer than Irene to love Lina, but when he does he trusts the creature with his life. During their journey to Gwyntystorm, Lina is “so ready to risk her life for the sake of her companion, that Curdie grew not merely very fond but very trustful of her; and her ugliness, which at first only moved his pity, now actually increased his affection for her” (*Princess and Curdie* 96). Unlike many of the adults in Gwyntystorm, Curdie sees past the surface of the creature to the noble woman underneath. His love for Lina is to the point that he loves her terrifying physical nature. He does not ignore any aspect of a person but fully accepts them. This mark of maturity places him far above the citizens of Gwyntystorm.

MacDonald shows that the life of a child is not as carefree as many would like to believe and that children can handle the challenge. Curdie has never had a carefree life. He worked in a mine, was kidnapped by goblins, fought in battles, and has been abused by people he tried to help. Dieter Petzold suggests that the Victorian authors tended to see

children as more free than innocent. Children in literature are free from the cares of adult life and often free from adult supervision. The idea that children are more free than innocent is a perspective that MacDonald was likely aware of and that probably influenced him in his writing. However, as many authors of the Victorian era conclude, the dream of a carefree life is unsustainable and everyone must grow up. Combining Petzold's idea of the unsustainability of a carefree life and Nelson's of age inversion in Victorian literature reveals an interesting point MacDonald is making about society: adults are largely incapable of reversing the devolution. The citizens of Gwyltystorm are lawless and animalistic because they are trying to live carefree lifestyles. They do not want to accept responsibility for their actions and are willing to take advantage of the people around them to minimize work, like the servants in the castle. The fact that the people of Gwyltystorm are not willing to take responsibility or face challenges in the way that Curdie does shows that the roles of child and adult have been reversed. An ideal society requires individuals who are familiar with difficulties and possess the maturity to deal with difficult situations. Curdie is not portrayed as an innocent child: he is familiar with violence in battle. Despite the difficulties he faces, Curdie handles them and emerges like a mature adult capable of leading his society.

Finally, the ideal leader of society is able to recognize and learn from mistakes. In Gwyltystorm, the court officials taking care of the kingdom during the king's illness are far from this ideal state and as a result drag the kingdom down with them. Of all the officials, the lord chamberlain and the butler are perhaps the least repentant of their schemes against the king. They poison the king, steal from him, and sell the kingdom to the enemy. They are given a chance to redeem themselves. All the villains are warned, "if

you do not repent of your bad ways, you are all going to be punished – all turned out of the palace together” (*Princess and Curdie* 187). Most of the warned refuse to repent, including the lord chamberlain and the butler. The butler even replies to the warning, “A mighty punishment... why, pray, should we be turned out? What have I to repent of now, hour holiness?” (187-88) He does not even recognize that he has done wrong. They are captured by the “uglies,” the goblins’ former creatures, and peacefully removed from the palace. Instead of giving up and finding another way of life, they run to the enemy and tell them of the king’s illness, suggesting that this is the perfect time to attack. Thanks to the uglies, the attack fails and the traitors are taken as prisoners of the battle. The now revived king judges the traitors: “Ye slaves... I would have freed you, but ye would not be free. Now shall ye be ruled with a rod of iron, that he may learn what freedom is, and love it and seek it. These wretches I will send where they shall mislead you no longer” (250-51). When people refuse to acknowledge their mistakes, refuse to change when the mistakes are pointed out, and then refuse to repent, they lose whatever power they thought they had and become like slaves. Slaves cannot lead a society to a free, ideal state: a leader who can grow from mistakes is necessary.

In contrast to the pride of adults, MacDonald offers an example of a child maturely realizing his mistake and then overcoming it and continuing to grow. In the *Princess* books, Irene and Curdie are almost entirely without adult supervision, with the exception of the grandmother who watches over them from her tower. Curdie at the beginning of the *Princess and Curdie* is free but not innocent. Curdie has become more of a normal boy. He thinks very little on the possibility of supernatural elements to the world and he believes “less and less in the things he [has] never seen,” becoming a

“commonplace man” (*Princess and Curdie* 12). The narrator says from the start of the story that people grow in two ways: a “continuous dying” or a “continuous resurrection” (12). Unfortunately, Curdie is experiencing the former. On his way home one night, Curdie sees a beautiful white pigeon:

“For a moment, he became so one with the bird that he seemed to feel both its bill and its feather, as the one adjusted he other to fly again, and his heart swelled with the pleasure of its involuntary sympathy. Another moment and it would have been aloft in the waves of rosy light – it was just bending its little legs to spring: that moment it fell on the path broken-winged and bleeding from Curdie’s cruel arrow” (13).

Like Anodos and the rape of the maiden in *Phantastes*, Curdie has destroyed a pure and beautiful being. Curdie rejects the opportunity to enjoy the bird’s beauty and instead harms it for pleasure. Only when Curdie picks up the bird does he realize that “he had stopped saving and had begun killing” (15). Curdie still feels connected to the bird as it is dying in his hands; he understands the pain and confusion in the bird’s eyes. In this moment, Curdie sees the bird as a creation to be cherished and not destroyed: he understands that he was not meant to be a destroyer. Because of this incident, Curdie is able to stop his devolution and move closer to the ideal. Curdie recognizes his mistake and the need to change on his own, before he discusses it with an adult, showing his maturity and sense of responsibility as a child.

How does society reach this ideal state? One of the most important ways that society reaches an ideal state is by showing love to everyone. As MacDonald says in “Sketch of Individual Development:” a man “fails of his perfection so long as there is one being in the universe he could not love” (47). MacDonald suggests that perfection is impossible if one cannot love every person in the world. As Curdie and Irene show in their love for Lina, a love for every being is necessary to reach the ideal state. Children

are shown to be especially capable of loving, no matter the rank or physical appearance of the object of their affection. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the child Barbara in the *Princess and Curdie*. Though Lina initially alarms young Barbara, she quickly warms up to her. After petting the creature, she rides Lina home “in merry triumph” (115).

Barbara knows that despite her appearance Lina is a kind creature and she feels safe riding on her back. Barbara shows her childlike love again for the king. She does not see the king as a king, but rather as a friend. She plays with the crown, and even pretends to make food in it. When her grandmother tries to take away the crown, “the king would not allow her to interfere, for the king was now Barbara’s playmate, and his crown their plaything” (225). Barbara’s love is not hindered by rank or appearance.

Curdie even shows a form of love to the king’s enemies. Despite their treason and state of devolution, Curdie still shows them mercy. When Lina is about to kill one of them, Curdie orders her to not kill him (205). When his army of terrifying creatures is attacking the traitors, they do not kill the conspirators but simply scare them and drive them out of the castle. They counter the hate of evil people with mercy. Even the creatures understand that hate and greed only cause destruction and chaos. Curdie and his army of goodhearted but hideous creatures fight against the evil people until the good people have restored order in the kingdom. Eventually, Irene and Curdie become the king and queen of Gwyntystorm. Under their rule, “Gwyntystorm was a better city, and good people grew in it” (256). Curdie’s miner father is able to find a way to mine gold safely from under the city, so that the kingdom financially prospers as well. Through their love, compassion, and bravery, Irene and Curdie are able to create a society free from the greed

and corruption of the devolved people and that allows individuals to continue to grow to the ideal.

But is the ideal state sustainable? After a generation the kingdom begins the descent back to its former greedy state, suggesting that the flaws in humanity are too great for true perfection to be achieved in this life. Irene and Curdie leave no children, so the people elect a new king:

“The new king went mining and mining in the rock under the city, and grew more and more eager after he gold, and paid less and less heed to his people. Rapidly they sank toward 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...left standing to bear the city...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” (256).

Without ideal individuals leading the kingdom, the kingdom literally crumbles because of greed. The ideal state of society is sustainable for a generation, but as soon as the leadership changes everything falls apart. For MacDonald then, in order to maintain the ideal, society's leaders must be ideal. Like Curdie and Irene, the ideal leader loves everyone around him or her, but drives out the wicked. This leader does not force slave labor, but finds a way to fairly treat the people. The ideal individual must lead society for it to reach its ideal state.

Without an ideal leader, society cannot sustain the ideal even if it is achieved. Because Curdie and Irene do not have children, the kingdom no longer has an ideal leader so it crumbles. With a few exceptions, MacDonald does not find the ideal leader of society in adults: the children are the answer. He has lost his faith in the current generation of adults' ability to lead the world and is now placing his hope in the children,

hoping they can correct the mistakes of their elders. The children of the *Princess and Curdie* succeed. They save the kingdom and purge it of its wickedness; they lead it to peace, order, and prosperity. Driving home the idea that children are necessary for the betterment of society, MacDonald leaves Irene and Curdie childless. Without children, society cannot reach or maintain an ideal state.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ideal Woman

The ideal woman is not as easily located in MacDonald's work as the ideal man or ideal society. Women in MacDonald's stories have many different roles with different amounts of power, and all of them seem to be presented as an ideal of that particular role. Are there in fact many different ideals women can strive for, or is there a common attitude that can be extracted to shape the ideal? The different types are most obvious when comparing MacDonald's children's and adult fiction. The ideal women of his children's stories are presented differently from the ideals of his adult fantasy. The women of *Phantastes* are more vulnerable, do not have as much power, and fit closer to the Victorian angelic ideal. However, in the children's stories the women are more powerful, aid the children in their quests, and are respected authorities in the kingdom. The difference is due to the needs of the audience: because children are growing and learning, they need teachers to guide them. Adults, on the other hand, have finished most of their growing and do not need the same sort of guidance. MacDonald thus creates more realistic women for adult readers who will actually identify with characters who more closely experience the limits of their own lives, such as marital status.

MacDonald frequently addresses gender roles in his fairy stories. In his children stories, MacDonald writes powerful and independent women that belie the ideal set by Victorian society. Critics often comment on the ways in which MacDonald critiques society's ideals of women. A common method of this sort of commentary in the Victorian age is the fairy tale. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas and Anita Moss argue,

fairy tales in the Victorian period were used to question social, political, and cultural issues. Talairach-Vielmas specifically mentions how “Beauty and the Beast” questions wealth, marriage, and the role of women: the Beauties are less passive and more active than the Victorian ideal, pushing the Beast to the background. Confrontations with the Beast give the heroines opportunities to assert themselves and to gain power and independence. Katherine Bubel applies the use of fairy tale motifs to MacDonald by discussing the wise old woman’s purpose. Critics also discuss MacDonald’s critique of women’s roles in general, not necessarily just in his fairy tales. They agree that MacDonald is challenging the Victorian ideal of a submissive and mild woman, but focus on different aspects of this new version of a woman. Edith Honig emphasizes the assertiveness and independence of the woman characters, while Deborah Thacker is more impressed by the power relationships and women’s authority. The general consensus among MacDonald critics is that he does push the conventional roles of women. However, the roles of women in his children and his adult fantasies are not usually compared, nor are the roles of women versus the roles of men. I will argue that MacDonald includes significant differences between his women in the adult fantasy and his children’s fantasy in order to give a more complete view of the ideal woman to be comprehended by the two audiences.

The most important way that MacDonald presents the ideal woman to children in the *Princess* books is through the older female characters who act as role models for the younger female characters. All of these role models are independent and industrious,

therefore highlighting these traits for the ideal woman.⁷ MacDonald's woman characters are not idle while men work: he assigns work to his characters regardless of gender. Curdie's mother is poor and she works hard; her hands bear the evidence of her hard work. The grandmother spins thread, cares for pigeons, and watches over Irene. Social status does not determine a woman's value as a role model. As Osama Jarrar points out, MacDonald felt that true nobility is found in morality rather than rank.⁸ He suggests that MacDonald purposefully writes poor characters in order to illustrate the source of nobility. Indeed, of all the older female characters who serve as role models to Irene, only one of them is noble according to social status. The ideal woman is not limited to social status and can be found anywhere.

MacDonald's women in the *Princess* books are strong and brave, regardless of social status; they are able to contribute to society and help it move closer to the ideal, just like the ideal man does. However, women's methods are subtler. The women are capable of saving themselves and are willing to fight, but they are not placed on the frontlines. They support each other and the male heroes. Irene stands ready to use the strength given to her by the grandmother to save the ones she loves. Not even Irene's age can fully stop her from being a major supporter of the people around her. Irene saves herself and saves Curdie when he is trapped in the goblin caves; she is willing to fight in battle alongside her grandmother. When Irene saves Curdie in the caves, she is following her grandmother's string and believing that it will lead her to safety. Her utter faith in her

⁷ Moss suggests that showing industrious women is a way for Victorian fantasy and fairy tale authors to challenge conventional roles of women.

⁸ Jarrar argues that MacDonald is directly questioning the Victorian middle-class' ideology and the social hierarchy in England through his fairy tales and fantasies.

grandmother gives her strength to save her friend and lead him out of the mountain, despite her fears. She shows her bravery again in the *Princess and Curdie* when she volunteers to fight in the battle. Because she is just a young girl, her father does not allow her to fight, but she stands on the sidelines fully prepared to act if she is needed. While he may not take her into the middle of battle, MacDonald does not allow Irene's gender to make her weak. Instead, he shows that she is brave, courageous, and heroic; she is willing to fight and is able to overcome her fears.

Irene is chiefly able to overcome her fears by working together with her grandmother and Curdie to save the kingdom. This more communal approach to growth is in contrast to Curdie, who later leads the two women more than working side by side. In the *Princess and the Goblin*, the princess Irene lives in a castle on a mountain. She is just a child, so the servants raising her do not tell her about the dangerous goblins living under the mountain. She finally encounters the goblins one night when she and her nurse have stayed outside too long, but they are saved by a miner boy named Curdie. Irene then discovers that she has a great-great-grandmother living in a secret tower above her. The grandmother is a magical and mysterious woman who gives Irene a ring with a silk thread attached: if Irene ever feels she is in danger, she needs to follow the thread. The thread leads her beneath the mountain to where Curdie has been taken by the goblins and she is able to rescue him. The goblins during all this time have been working on a plan to kidnap Irene and make her marry their prince, giving them control of the human kingdom. Through the supernatural aid of the grandmother, Curdie and Irene are able to stop the goblins. As a child growing towards the ideal, Irene needs people around her to

guide and support her. For MacDonald's child audience, this illustrates a need to find a community of individuals in order to foster positive growth.

Though he gives examples of the ideal woman in his children's stories, MacDonald makes sure that his readers are aware that these women are different from the average woman. He even suggests that normal girls cannot become exactly like princess Irene. MacDonald repeatedly reminds the audience that Irene is a princess. At the beginning of the *Princess and the Goblin*, Irene explores an unknown part of the castle and gets lost. But she does not let herself feel helpless for very long because she is "as brave as could be expected of a princess of her age" (8). Later, when her nurse questions where she was, Irene tells the absolute truth: she found a hidden staircase and met her great great-grandmother. Though the story is difficult to believe and a lie might have made her life easier, "a real princess cannot tell a lie" and a "real princess is never rude" (21). MacDonald does not limit himself to informing readers of the qualities of a real princess: he also compares her to an ordinary woman. After Curdie saves Irene and her nurse, Lottie, from the goblins the first time, Irene promises to reward him with a kiss. The idea of the princess kissing someone so below her station horrifies Lottie and she prevents Irene from giving what she promised. She does not understand that a princess should never break her word: "the nurse was not lady enough to understand this" (43). Lottie has "very foolish notions concerning the dignity of a princess, not understanding that the truest princess is just the one who loves all her brothers and sisters best, and who is most able to do them good by being humble towards them" (199). By qualifying what it takes to be a true princess and comparing her to Lottie, MacDonald ensures that his readers are aware of the gap between them and the ideal. But by giving such clear

qualifications for becoming the ideal, his readers will know exactly what is needed to journey in that direction. He writes the *Princess* books in such a way that they can become manuals for young girls who want to grow closer to the ideal.

The major source of instruction comes from the mother or grandmother figures of MacDonald who act as mentors and supporters, but not as guides. They point people in the direction they need to go and may provide tools, but do not give specific instructions. In *Princess and Curdie*, the grandmother gives Curdie the gift of perceiving a person's true nature by touching their hand. He is sent to the capital city of Gwyntystorm with a monstrous looking but good-hearted dog named Lina to help Irene and her father. When he gets there he discovers that the people have turned against the king: he has been poisoned and is dying. Curdie uses his gift to determine which people are trustworthy and which people are becoming animals. He is able to help heal the king and form a small army out of frightening, but good, creatures, and the few remaining trustworthy men and women in the city. With the aid of the grandmother, Curdie drives out the most corrupt individuals and saves the kingdom.

The great-great grandmother is behind the heroic actions of both Irene and Curdie, and she participates in, but does not lead, the battle. When Irene comes to her grandmother frightened, the grandmother gives the princess a magic ring with a string attached that will always lead Irene back to her. The confidence this instills allows Irene to save Curdie and travel through the goblin caves. Similarly, the grandmother gives Curdie the ability to discern a person's true character in order to prepare him to save the kingdom. At the end of the *Princess and Curdie*, the grandmother turns the tide of the battle with her magic pigeons. The birds fly "right in the face of man and horse...blinding

eyes and confounding brain” (244). The grandmother’s power and role in these stories is to give the children the ability to save their kingdom. She supports others in whatever way she can and guides the children in their quests. She never throws herself in the way of danger to protect the children, but instead gives them the tools they need to protect themselves: she empowers them.

Despite the empowering themes of these stories, Judith John argues that MacDonald’s work should not be read as feminist, but that the stories still hold value for feminist readers. She suggests that MacDonald presents a new role for women that can enlighten the mind of the feminist. MacDonald’s mothers and grandmothers are “ageless, powerful, and eternal” but generally stay within Victorian social bounds (John 28). MacDonald’s different depiction of powerful woman was possibly linked to his own mother’s early death: he searches for the perfect mother among his characters. The grandmother of the *Princess* books is the perfect Victorian mother, and unlike MacDonald’s mother, will never die. Yet these mothers share a special bond with their daughters and granddaughters that the boys in the stories can never experience. For John, the powerful relationships between women were MacDonald’s biggest contribution to the feminist movement. The grandmother guides Irene, gives her tools, protects her, and has much more direct contact with her than with Curdie. During Irene’s adventures, she frequently returns to the grandmother whereas Curdie only sees her at the beginning and end of his adventures.

Yet the grandmother can still be read as a reflection of MacDonald’s support of women’s rights, or feminism. For example, Thacker believes that MacDonald challenged the cultural view of power relations through the grandmother’s special authority.

MacDonald believed in a patriarchal society and was his family's patriarch, however, he also supported women's rights and trusted women to have the wisdom to know which rights should be theirs. In William Raeper's biography of MacDonald he explains some of MacDonald's history with feminism. Several of his female friends actively campaigned for women's rights, such as the right to property. MacDonald firmly believed that women should be given better educations, if for no other reason than that they are the primary teachers of their children. The idea that women are children's teachers is strong in MacDonald's children's fiction. The grandmother teaches the children to be brave and compassionate, to solve problems, and to lead people. She corrects the children when they are wrong and then gives them advise for growing beyond that mistake, such as when she tells Curdie to "do better, and grow better, and be better" (*Princess and Curdie* 28).

MacDonald confirms his feminist sympathies when he shows that the grandmother is much more than just a teacher to the children. The grandmother appears in many forms, including a beautiful queen, according to what the people she supports need. Her age does not affect her beauty, but only enhances it. When Irene first meets her, Irene "could tell that the old lady was an old lady...but her skin was white and smooth...[her hair] was white almost as snow. And although her face was so smooth, her eyes looked so wise that you could not have helped seeing she must be old" (*Princess and the Goblin* 11). She does not stoop but is "straight and tall" (13). However, the first time Curdie sees her she looks very different from the first time Irene saw her. She is "crumpled together, a filmy thing that it seemed a puff would blow away, more like the body of a fly the big spider had sucked empty" (*Princess and Curdie* 23-4). She still

maintains some of the characteristics Irene saw, such as her silver hair and wise eyes. By the end of his first meeting with the grandmother, she has grown taller and stronger until she is finally like the grandmother Irene knew. Why appear different for the two children? As John points out, her relationships with men and women are different. Her appearance also varies depending on the need of the people around her. Irene, as a motherless princess, needed a queen to look up to and imitate. Curdie, as mentioned in a previous chapter, had just harmed one of her birds. He needed a woman who was like an old grandmother to chastise him without inducing the fear that could come from such an awe-inspiring person.

For the sake of other people the grandmother appears in forms far from her role as queen, but sometimes her forms are misinterpreted. She appears as a beggar lady to Peter, Curdie's father, and as a witch to the simpler miners. The miners tell stories of Old Mother Wotherwop, an old woman who can take on many forms. Most believe her to have poisoned a well, but a few remember that the well actually had healing powers. The stories warn against her beautiful form, saying "she struck every man who looked upon her stone-blind" (*Princess and Curdie* 40). The people prefer to believe a scary story of a witch than one of a kind, magical woman. She does not attempt to correct their beliefs and continues to help the community by doing deeds such as giving a well healing powers or helping lost people find their way home. People's perception of her does not matter so long as she can continue to assist the people in whatever way they need. Like Irene being willing to ignore appearances to kiss a miner, the grandmother ignores appearances to help the community. Giving appearance a low priority is then a mark of the ideal woman.

The grandmother is also humble and loyal to those she supports, and is willing to suffer even physical abuse in order to help them. She disguises herself as a housemaid in the king's castle while Curdie tries to save the kingdom. She does not reveal her true identity until the final battle and instead simply does whatever task Curdie assigns her to the best of her abilities. She becomes Curdie's messenger to the corrupt officials of the court, telling them, "if you do not repent of your bad ways, you are all going to be punished" (*Princess and Curdie* 187). When the authority of her message is questioned, she does not reveal her true self or her royal status. Instead, she says that the authority comes from "one who is come to set things right in the king's house" (188). She has not come to save the kingdom but to support the one who has. The recipients of the message become so angry with her that they beat her. She is given a "box on the ear that almost threw her down; and whoever could get at her began to push and bustle and pinch and punch her... They fell furiously upon her, drove her from the hall with kicks and blows... and threw her down the stair" (190). Physical abuse is not enough to drive the truth from the grandmother; she remains constant in her role as a supporter until the end, never seeking her own power or a more conspicuous role in the kingdom. The grandmother is willing to place herself at the bottom of the social hierarchy and obey the orders of the boy on a quest she sent him on, all for the sake of ensuring his success. Her actions are based on the orders Curdie or the king gives. She does not attempt to derail what Curdie is planning in favor of her own plan. Throughout her time in disguise, she is the epitome of feminine beauty, modesty, and courage, suggesting these are the characteristics MacDonald would like his young audience to grow in as well.

MacDonald places a grandmother like figure in *Phantastes* as well. Unlike the grandmother, this woman does not offer physical gifts and does not leave her home to support Anodos; but she does help him to grow in understanding and clarify the direction of his journey. After leaving the Fairy Palace and traveling through the goblin caves, Anodos finds himself at a cottage on an island. She is not a magnificent queen like the grandmother Irene first sees, but rather an old woman like the first impression given to Curdie. The woman's face is very old: "there was not a spot in which a wrinkle could lie, where a wrinkle lay not" (141). Despite her old appearance, like the grandmother when the woman stands her body is "tall and spare...straight as an arrow" (141). In her presence, Anodos feels a "wondrous sense of refuge and repose" and cannot help but weep (141). She comforts him like he is a child until he falls asleep. When he wakes up she is spinning, just like the grandmother. In the cottage there are four doors that contain different visions Anodos must experience in order to continue on his journey, including the vision of the Marble Lady and her husband. When he returns from each door he is emotionally distraught and the woman comforts him. She never forces him to go into the doors. Like the grandmother, she does not push him to do anything. She tells him when the time to leave comes and shows him the direction to go, but does not tell him what he is required to do. As Katherine Bubel argues, MacDonald uses the Wise Old Woman archetype as a seer, encourager, and advisor who takes on many different forms; her ultimate purpose is to help foster character growth.

The ideal that the grandmother expresses, and the most prominent of the *Princess* books, is that of a supporter and mentor. She pushes the children in the right direction and rarely intervenes after that point. She leaves the children to complete their journeys on

their own. In *Phantastes*, the old woman shows Anodos what he needs to see in order to grow, and then sets him on the path to complete his journey. Despite her wisdom and capability, this wise woman figure is never a leader: she exclusively advises and supports. Her lack of leadership position is never presented in a negative light: the heroes, kings, and princes, of MacDonald's fantasies, revere her. For MacDonald then, leadership does not mean veneration or honor. Perhaps the most honorable characters are those who do not seek power but whose power is in turn sought after. The wise woman does not need to be placed in a leadership position because the respect given to her places her in a position of authority.

Unlike in the *Princess* books, for the adult readers of *Phantastes*, MacDonald does not provide clear instructions or qualifications for ideal women. He does, however, show two main sorts of women: married and unmarried.⁹ The married women are much more limited and conventional in their actions, whereas the unmarried women automatically have more freedom and are more active. The primary married woman is the Marble Lady. She is the sought after ideal of the story, but she cannot be attained by anyone less than the ideal, her husband. MacDonald never explicitly states what makes her the ideal like he does in the *Princess* books; he just shows that she is desirable and held up by Anodos as the epitome of women. She is not a supporter or a mentor, but becomes a different type of role: a motivation for the male lead. While the married women are physically less active than others, they have intellectual and emotional

⁹ Talairach-Vielmas argues that women's role in marriage is frequently discussed in Victorian fairy tales, especially in "Beauty and the Beast."

freedom.¹⁰ The Marble Lady is free to return at least some of Anodos's love, and a farmer's wife is free to believe whatever she wishes to about the truth of Fairy Land.

Anodos's first impression of the Marble Lady establishes her as an ideal to be sought after. At first, she is not a real person: she is a marble statue enclosed in alabaster. Irene's first introduction in the *Princess and the Goblin* is an exploration of unknown regions of the castle that leads her to meet her mysterious great-grandmother. As an unmarried girl, Irene begins her story full of energy and life, enjoying the freedom her single status gives her. The Marble Lady does not have this freedom; there is no life in the lady. Her physical inactiveness does not lessen her ideal state and Anodos, even in his imperfection, can sense her perfection. Anodos sees this marble statue as a being out of a classic fairy tale, like "Sleeping Beauty," just waiting to be awoken. Because the alabaster blocks his spell-breaking kiss, he sings her awake. What is most striking about this first encounter is his longing to be with her, even if it means joining her in this sleep: "Let thy slumber round me gather / Let another dream with thee" (39). Though she is beautiful, Anodos's longing does not necessarily stem from her beauty. When he sees her face he believes that it is "more near the face that had been born with [him] in [his] soul, than anything [he] had seen before in nature or art" (37). He is attracted to a vision of himself that he finds in the Marble Lady. What does this imply about the ideal woman? At this point in the story, Anodos is far from the ideal individual and is essentially a child in his journey. Though her movement may be limited and Anodos cannot comprehend her superiority, her idealness is still present. For the imperfect man then, the ideal is a

¹⁰ In his essay, "Language, Ideology, and Fairy Tales," Jarrar says that MacDonald emphasizes the intellectual freedom of women in his fantasies, making him a part of the nineteenth century's "cultural debate over the liberation of women" (43).

reflection of himself; he cannot see or love a woman for anything other than what she means to himself. The fact that the lady is only ideal in order to present a version of the male characters to themselves limits the ideal woman in MacDonald's adult fiction. In contrast, the ideal women of the children's fantasy works are free of this limitation and are therefore more complete and independent.

Nevertheless, MacDonald still emphasizes the importance of intellectual freedom even with the character of the Marble Lady. The lady's meaning to Anodos changes as he grows closer to the ideal. He finds the lady in statue form again in the Fairy Palace, but this time he has grown as an individual and as he sings to her again he focuses more on her beauty than his own need. As he sings he feels that "a real woman-soul was revealing itself by successive stages of embodiment, and consequent manifestation and expression" (122). His song begins by describing her "feet of beauty" and works its way upward, stanza by stanza, until it ends on her "fall of torrent hair" (122, 126). His original song for her made little mention of her physical characteristics, other than being made of marble. This new song describes both her physical beauty and the effect her beauty has on him. Her eyes are the "gate...of gladness" and as he gazes in them he is "lost; / Wandering deep in spirit-mazes, / In a sea without a coast" (125). He tells her, "Woman, ah! thou art victorious, / And I perish, overfond" (125). He no longer sees himself in the woman and is aware of the beauty she herself possesses. She has power over him, not just through her beauty but also through the world of "gladness" he finds in her eyes. Anodos sees beyond her beauty to her "soul." As Anodos moves closer to the ideal, the ideal woman changes for him as well. She stops being a projection of himself and becomes a source of wonder and gladness. The Marble Lady is still physically inactive: she is a statue once again. But

here MacDonald provides definite evidences of the intellectual freedom she experiences, and even the imperfect Anodos can see it. For the ideal woman, a form of freedom and independence is available even when she cannot move.

The Marble Lady also serves as an example of how the ideal wife develops, which seems to rely heavily on the ideal individual, her husband. Her husband is the Knight of the Soiled Armor, who is the ideal that Anodos strives for. Anodos sees a vision of the couple together in their home discussing him. After returning home and being embraced by his wife, the couple remembers the influence Anodos had on their lives. Because of his songs, the lady was freed from an evil curse. The knight describes him as having “nobleness of thought, and not of deed” and worries for his fate in Fairy Land (152). He asks his wife if she is in love with Anodos and she replies:

“...how can I help it? He woke me from worse than death; he loved me. I had never been for thee, if he had not sought me first. But I love him not as I love thee. He was but the moon of my night; thou art the sun of my day” (153).

In the presence of the ideal individual, the ideal wife is revealed: she is loyal and honest towards her husband, while at the same time loving others where it is deserved. Despite her love and gratitude toward her savior, her husband comes first in her love. She becomes an example of how MacDonald creates more conventional female characters in his adult fiction.

Does MacDonald make any move to construct the Marble Lady into someone other than just the recipient of the chivalrous actions of Anodos and the Knight of the Soiled Armor? Other than the her conversation with her husband and the tears she sheds over Anodos’s death, the lady serves more as Anodos’s motivation for continuing his journey through Fairy Land. Her changes in the reader’s perception of her are almost

entirely because of Anodos's character growth. While she stays largely stagnant, she never aids Anodos or her husband. She is sought by Anodos and waits at home for her husband. This version of the ideal is much less active than what is shown through the grandmother. The intended audience may affect the reading of *Marble Lady*. Since *Phantastes* is intended to be a fairy story for adults, the lady is not set up to be a role model for young girls and the story is not for the education of children. Are the adult women who read this story meant to strive towards the ideal of the Marble Lady, whereas young girls should be more like the grandmother? Or does striving for a character like the grandmother lead to an adult woman like the Marble Lady? In the *Princess and Curdie*, Irene's role becomes less active than in the *Princess and the Goblin*. She loves and supports, but does not venture directly into danger like she does in the first book. As the women grow older they seem to move away from conspicuous roles and into more supportive roles.

The other women of *Phantastes* are not constricted by their social class and tend to be more complex than the Marble Lady. MacDonald provides examples of these fully human women to contrast the ideal nobility of the Lady. During his travels Anodos comes across a farmer and his wife. The wife fully believes in the magic of Fairy Land, especially the dangers of the forest, but the farmer does not believe the stories. When he describes his wife, the farmer says that she "believes every fairy-tale that ever was written...She is a most sensible woman in everything else" (54). During dinner the farmer and his son laugh about the silly stories people tell and that the wife believes, and throughout the conversation she listens to it all "with an amused air, which had something in it of the look which one listens to the sententious remarks of a pompous

child” (55). Though she is not a lady or supernaturally beautiful, this woman is kind toward her husband. Her husband respects her sensibility, even if he cannot understand her beliefs. She respects her husband’s lack of belief: she does not try to convince him or correct him. She does not argue her case. She just listens to her husband’s laughter and enjoys the amusement he finds in the situation. In this case, the imperfect human wife loves and respects her husband despite differences in belief. Though not every woman is in a position to perform courageous acts, especially if she is married, every woman is capable of a superior sort of wisdom. Her mind is constantly active as she believes in the fantastic, and from that mental activity she is able to provide sound advice to those who need it, like Anodos. This is a state that any imperfect woman could strive for and that does not need extreme beauty or nobility to attain.

In contrast to the married women of *Phantastes*, Anodos encounters fully human women who serve as his guardians and who contain certain aspects of the ideal: these women are unmarried and actively protect the male lead. When Anodos first enters Fairy Land and strays from the path, he meets a young woman who guides him to safety and gives him advice for surviving in the forest. She keeps her face down and gathers flowers, an image of purity and innocence, but quietly tells him which trees to trust and which trees are dangerous. She and her mother offer Anodos shelter that night in their home and continue to educate him on the dangers of the forest. The two women keep watch at night to carefully observe the evil Ash tree’s movements. Though good trees protect their home, the women display boldness and bravery in protecting their guest. The maiden especially is willing to leave the safety of her home to ensure the safe travels of Anodos. These human women are more active than the Marble Lady and show the

bravery Irene had when she was younger. The bravery is used to protect and support and not to lead.

The beech tree maiden is the other guardian. While the Ash tree attacks Anodos, a beech tree arrives to rescue him. She throws herself over Anodos, forcing the ash tree to retreat. She continues to hold and protect Anodos until the sun rises. She is not human and therefore “largely proportioned,” but she is beautiful (28). Her kisses drive away Anodos’s fear and anxiety. She repeatedly says, “I may love him, I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech tree” (28). Like the practically unrequited love of Anodos for the Marble Lady, the beech tree loves the man. However, she cannot leave the location of her tree. She knows that she cannot protect Anodos from every creature in the forest, but she is willing to do what she can. She cuts off her hair and fashions a girdle around Anodos. In the morning when he wakes up, the hair has turned to beech leaves and he is sleeping under a beech tree instead of in her arms. The beech-tree maiden bravely faces the ash tree and provides Anodos with whatever protection she can. The two women from the beginning and the beech tree together suggest that the ideal woman should play the role of guardian or protector, similar to the grandmother.

MacDonald gives a single example of a woman growing as a character in *Phantastes*. Unlike the other, more conventional women of the story, this girl displays a similar journey towards the ideal as Curdie and Anodos, though as a woman her ideal is different. Before her journey, she is not imperfect and commits no completely wrong actions. After her journey, she is independent and joyful, and she uses that independence

to help others like the ideal is supposed to.¹¹ As was discussed in a previous chapter, after the appearance of his shadow, a girl with a globe joins Anodos. She treasures the globe and flaunts it. Occasionally she will let Anodos touch it, but never hold it. Eventually Anodos's desire to take the globe overpowers him and he destroys the object, despite the girl's cries. Throughout their time together, the girl is bright and cheerful. She first appears "singing and dancing, happy as a child" (67). Her source of joy is the globe and the only thing that gives her trouble is worrying about the globe. After the globe's destruction, she is devastated by both the violation she experiences and by the loss of her source of joy. Anodos meets the girl once more near the end of his journey.

The ideal woman as exemplified by the girl is capable of recovering from hurt and using her newfound joy to save others. Anodos is trapped in a tower by his shadow and has lost all hope of escaping. One day, he hears a woman singing. The song frees him from his depression and allows him to see the door out of the tower. When he approaches the singer, she reveals that she was the girl whose globe he broke, but she does not reiterate the distress or hatred that she felt before. She tells him that she took her shattered globe to the fairy queen who would not fix it for her. Instead, the girl wandered around the land and discovered that she has something better than her globe:

"I do not need the globe to play for me; for I can sing. I could not sing at all before. Now I go about everywhere through Fairy Land, singing till my heart is like to break, just like my globe, for very joy at my own songs. And wherever I go, my songs do good, and deliver people. And now I have delivered you, and I am so happy" (181-82).

The girl matures from a child to an ideal woman through her hardships. Now, as an ideal woman, she responds to her attacker with grace and forgiveness, going so far as to thank

¹¹ Honig suggests that authors of Victorian children's fantasy subvert the Victorian ideal of a woman by creating assertive and independent female characters.

him. The ideal woman in this case finds joy in herself and not in the world. She uses her inward joy to bring joy to the people around her and show them love. Because of her independence, she is able to actively journey and help people such as Anodos. By including this single example of a female character's growth, MacDonald shows that he does not fully believe that women are as stagnant as the Marble Lady. Women are fully capable of growing, letting go of childish loves and becoming both intellectually and physically independent.

The ideal individual of "A Sketch of Individual Development" is someone who can love every person in the world. The knights and princes of MacDonald's fairy stories become the ideal by overcoming their flaws, acknowledging their weaknesses, and striving for better. In practice, this takes the form of protecting those who cannot protect themselves and comforting the broken hearted. The ideal individual meets unmet needs in the people around him. Women, on the other hand, do not make the journey outlined in the essay. None of the women discussed have a moment of realizing their faults and then striving to overcome them. Irene never has any major faults: she is simply held back because of her age and lack of strength. The women tend to be already near the definition of the ideal. Because they themselves are not making any journeys the women can only support the hero as he moves toward the ideal, with a few exceptions such as the maiden with the globe or Tangle from the "Golden Key." Tangle is a child who wanders into Fairy Land, then makes a long journey to find the land where the shadows come from, the ideal land. She is alone for the majority of the time. As she travels, the boy Mossy also makes the same journey, but his is much shorter and simpler. When women do make the journey to an ideal place, their journey is longer and harder. This difference in journeys

presents a double standard in the gender roles: men are allowed to become their worst selves before reaching the ideal while women must maintain an almost ideal status as they journey. So instead of showing the women characters as making that journey, MacDonald tends to write them as having completed the journey, not needing it, or as guardians of the journeys of others.

Though he may seem to be reinforcing cultural stereotypes, MacDonald is subtly pushing against Victorian gender roles. As was seen in the *Knight of the Soiled Armor*, he exhibits feminine gentleness when he takes care of a child showing that MacDonald's male characters are not wholly masculine. Likewise, Irene shows her knightly chivalry when she saves Curdie from the goblins. These two characters do not perfectly conform to the Victorian ideals for gender roles and show each gender taking on traits of the other. Even through the *Marble Lady*, MacDonald shows that he does not completely agree with the passivity encouraged in wives. The lady's immobility is due largely to the fact that the first two times Anodos sees her, she is either in an alabaster case or is a statue. Both situations are caused by a spell. This immobility is not presented as a positive trait but instead as a spell that must be broken. MacDonald never reveals exactly how the spell is broken, but Anodos's persistence in seeking her out definitely seemed to play a part.

Ultimately, the ideal woman and the ideal man have the same basic qualifications: to love every person in the world. However, the ways in which men and woman show their love are where the two differ. In MacDonald's fiction, men's love is more active whereas women's is more supportive and empowering. He makes further distinctions between women in adult fantasy versus women in children's fantasy by making the characters relatable to the audience. The women of the *Princess* books are brave, wise

and kind, and enjoy both intellectual and physical freedom. On the other hand, in *Phantastes* MacDonald explores how the ideal translates into marital life: the married woman, as represented by the Marble Lady, is intellectually free and generally wise, but she is ultimately submissive to her husband. In all the fantasies, the ideal woman takes the shape of distinct roles: guide, mentor, guardian, and supporter. The role of a leader is never required of the women because they are already so respected. The women of MacDonald's fantasy books advise and support the leaders of kingdoms and the ideal men. His female characters are outwardly conservative: they are loyal, conventional, and do not contribute anything major to the overall plot. However, as they support and love the male characters, the women prove their intellectual freedom and even superiority through their wisdom and understanding of the unusual world around them. MacDonald stays within Victorian society's feminine boundaries, but subtly pushes those boundaries by suggesting that women are capable of far more.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Does the world actually have any hope of achieving the ideal? Can every person reach that state and lead society in such a way that the ideal can be sustained? MacDonald does not seem to believe so, at least not within the confines of this imperfect world. Anodos is only able to understand and reach the ideal in another world, and even then he has to die to achieve it. With the deaths of Curdie and Irene, the kingdom they worked so hard to lead to the ideal slides into a corrupt and greedy state, far from the ideal it was under the rule of ideal individuals. Even the ideal women are far above the average human woman: they are divine, royal, or the resident of another world. The average woman may be able to take on certain characteristics of the ideal, but in the end she is still human. The ideal appears to be reached by all of these categories, but it is only temporary. So what does MacDonald really believe is necessary for sustaining that state? Though definitions of and requirements for the ideal have been given, this state is still missing something that was crucial to MacDonald: Christianity.

MacDonald's essay, "Sketch of Individual Development," traces the growth of the individual not just until he reaches knowledge of the ideal but also until he reaches God. Therefore, the journey towards the ideal is in reality a journey toward God. As the individual grows closer toward his discovery of God, more about the ideal is revealed and he becomes more aware of his own failings. As this individual comes to realize his imperfections, he learns of a hero, the ultimate ideal: "a remarkable legend... a man, represented as at least greater, stronger, and better than any other man" (42). He learns

that people who have believed in this man have “lived pure, and died in gladsome hope” (42). He reads about this man and finds that his followers must be like children because “only the obedient, childlike soul can understand [his] words” (46). Finally, he believes in this ideal hero, in Christ. According to MacDonald, during the journey towards the ideal, Christ is the example to be strived for and his followers retain a childlike spirit throughout their lives.

MacDonald’s individual understands that life without God is meaningless, incomplete, and imperfect. He understands that at the center of the world is an “absolute, perfect love; and that in the man Christ Jesus this love is with us men to take us home” (48). In this context, “home” is not an earthly place but refers to a heavenly home. Nothing on this earth can ever hope to compare to the “live Ideal” (48). Without a real, living Ideal, MacDonald believes that “a falsehood can do more for the race than the facts of its being...falsehood is greater than fact, and an idol necessary for lack of God” (48). An ideal, whether it is real or not, is absolutely necessary for society and man to move forward: there must be something to strive towards. Fortunately, MacDonald’s ideal is real and, unlike the worshipers at the end of *Phantastes*, our hope does not need to be placed in a falsehood. Because this Ideal is living, he is able to bring order to our chaotic world. Christ models the ideal that MacDonald sees the individual striving for, and the leader that Curdie becomes.

MacDonald shows that a supernatural or divine ideal exists not only for the individual, but also for society. In his short story, “The Golden Key,” MacDonald illustrates his belief that the ideal society only exists on the other side of death: anything before then is simply a shadow. The story follows Tangle and Mossy’s journey through

Fairy Land. The children's lives before their adventure were tainted by the world's imperfection. For example, Tangle's maids abuse and neglect her, resulting in constantly unkempt hair and her name: "Tangle." The children escape their hardships by stumbling into Fairy Land where they find a valley covered in mysterious shadows. They do not know where these shadows come from; they only know that this other world is infinitely better than our own. Longing for that perfect world drives the children to tears; their mission is now to find that land. Over the course of this story, several versions of society are shown: our imperfect world, the ideal land that the shadows come from, and Fairy Land, which serves as a bridge between the two. The three worlds reflect stages in society's journey to the ideal, with each land being better than the last. The children cannot find the ideal in our own world, so instead MacDonald sends them to a different land that facilitates their journey and leads them to a perfect world.

Just like the three stages of society, in "The Golden Key" MacDonald shows stages of growth toward the ideal using age. Three old men help Tangle arrive at her destination: the Old Man of the Sea, the Old Man of the Earth, and the Old Man of the Fire. As she encounters each man she asks if he can tell her how to reach the land where the shadows come from. The Old Man of the Seas has no idea how to get there, but the older and wiser Old Man of the Earth might know. Unfortunately, that man has only glimpsed the shadows in the mirror; perhaps the oldest of the three knows the way to that land. The Old Man of Fire does know the way, but he cannot take Tangle down the path he uses: she is too young. This man looks like a child but, similarly to the great grandmother of the *Princess* books, his eyes reveal his true age. Through these old men, MacDonald shows that the closer to death they are, the more they know about how to

reach the perfect land. Tangle's experience in Fairy Land demonstrates that for people from our world, reaching the ideal is not easy and even if the way is found, the journey takes a lifetime.

Tangle physical appearance reflects her journey. She begins the story as a child who wanders into Fairy Land and is taken in by a grandmother figure who is like the great-great-grandmother of the *Princess* books. By the time Tangle and Mossy are reunited, the both of them are old and have tasted death. In her old age, Tangle looks just like the grandmother: "her face was beautiful, like her grandmother's, and still and peaceful as that of the Old Man of the Fire. Her form was tall and noble" (212). As she ages, she becomes closer to the ideal woman and finally reaches that state at her death. The two children have to walk through death before they find the door to lead them to the land where the shadows come from. Only after Tangle and Mossy are old can they move on to the ideal land: the land from whence the shadows come. The growth toward the ideal is certainly a journey, and MacDonald chooses to reflect that journey in the aging process. The older the characters are, the closer to the ideal land they are. Interestingly, through the old men of the elements, MacDonald suggests that both old age and a childlike state are necessary to reach the ideal land. Tangle and Mossy are not aware of their ages or of the passing of time. The pair remains childlike until the end: their age is in appearance only. Ageing and still remaining completely like a child is not really possible in our world like it is in Fairy Land, but in "Sketch" MacDonald suggests that the separation adulthood and childhood is resolved through childlike obedience to Christ.

Is the ideal land of the "Golden Key" to be read as heaven? The land itself is never shown in the story because it is completely separate from our world. The children

must first enter Fairy Land, then travel through strange places and meet with strange people. They grow to old age and experience death. Only after death are the two able to find the entrance to the land the shadows come from. To enter the land, they find a door of a color that does not exist in the rainbow with a keyhole surrounded by sapphires. The golden key opens the door. Beyond, they climb a winding stair that takes them far above the earth and into the rainbow. Not just the land, but the road and entrance to the land are completely otherworldly: they cannot be found in our world. The ideal world is place beyond our world that contains colors we could never imagine and can only be reached after death. This is heaven.

For MacDonald then, the ideal society and individual cannot possibly be fully reached until after death when we enter heaven. However, as we age we are able to move closer to that ideal by learning more about Christ and retaining a kind of childlike faith. In *Phantastes*, Anodos's brief time between death and new life in the human world offers him a glimpse of what MacDonald believes to be the ultimate ideal: absolute and unconditional love for every being on earth. Once he returns to our world, Anodos cannot be a chivalrous Arthurian knight, but he can love the people around him. Curdie and Irene are able to lead their kingdom into an ideal state by encouraging compassion, love, and generosity among the citizens, but because the kingdom exists on this side of death that ideal is unsustainable. MacDonald's ideals may not be achievable for humanity on earth, but striving towards the ideal will improve the lives of everyone.

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