INSIDE THE RING:
VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN FANTASY FOR CHILDREN

by

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Inside the Ring: Victorian and Edwardian Fantasy for Children

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Abstract

"For me, there is no such thing as a book for children," wrote Pamela Travers. "If it is true, it is true for everyone." Many children's fantasies of the Victorian and Edwardian periods possess this quality of truth, a mythic universality which is as potent for the adult as for the child reader. These fantasies have become classics, not only because they express positive truths about human goodness, but also because they demonstrate painful truths about human blindness and error.

John Fowles connects the desire of English writers to create imaginary worlds with the idea of retreat; thus, fantasy worlds provide a refuge within which the writer feels free to express his "private realities." George MacDonald, Beatrix Potter, Rudyard Kipling, James Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and "Lewis Carroll" were six writers who found this freedom in the fantasy worlds they created for children. Children's fantasy offered a protected position from which they could strike out at a society from which they felt alienated; at the same time, they avoided exposing their deepest feelings to the possible scorn of an adult audience.

Barrie, Grahame, and Carroll utilized children's fantasy to express ideas and emotions subversive of the religious, intellectual, and social consensus of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Fantasy offered George

MacDonald an alternative pulpit from which to express both his imaginative religious vision and his frustration at the selfish materialism of his fellow man. Rudyard Kipling's experiences as a child engendered an exaggerated fear of authority in the man; fantasy allowed him the exhilaration of rebellion and defiance. Beatrix Potter's tales for children result from her determination to fulfill her potential in spite of the constraints her society placed upon women.

Writing for children allowed these writers to remain "inside the ring" of the fantasy world, protected from a sense of inadequacy to the adult world from which all six writers, in different ways, suffered. The universal longing to remain in the golden world of childhood is at the heart of these works; the impossibility of the fulfillment of this desire imparts a sense of the tragic which renders the stories "true for everyone."

The magic, you see, lies in the ring or fence
that you take refuge in.

Kipling: Something of Myself

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Abbreviations

Chapter Two: George MacDonald: Poet and Preacher

US	George MacDonald:	*Unspoken Sermons*, Book 2
ADO	"	*A Dish of Orts*
Phan	"	*Phantastes*
Lil	"	*Lilith*
PC	"	*The Princess and Curdie*
PG	"	*The Princess and the Goblin*
WW	"	*Weighed and Wanting*
TLP	"	*The Light Princess and Other Stories*
BNW	"	*At the Back of the North Wind*
TWW	"	*The Wise Woman*
GMHW	Greville MacDonald:	*George MacDonald and His Wife*

Chapter Three: Beatrix Potter: Flying On Her Own

JBP	Leslie Linder, ed.:	*The Journal of Beatrix Potter*
TBP	Margaret Lane:	*The Tale of Beatrix Potter*
MBP	"	*The Magic Years of Beatrix Potter*

Chapter Four: Rudyard Kipling: Inside the Ring

JSS	Rudyard Kipling:	*Just So Stories*
TJB	"	*The Jungle Book*
SJB	"	*The Second Jungle Book*
Stalky	"	*Stalky and Co.*
SM	"	*Something of Myself*
Works	"	*The Mandalay Edition of the Works of Rudyard Kipling*, 12 vols. (Cited by volume and page number.)
KC	Green:	*Kipling and the Children*
CH	Green, ed.:	*Kipling: The Critical Heritage*

Chapter One

Victorian and Edwardian Fantasy for Children

I

> [T]he desire to create imaginary worlds other than the world that is the case . . . has always been strongly linked, at least in my own experience, with the notion of retreat, in both the religious and the military sense; of the secret place that is also a redoubt. And for me it is here that the Robin Hood--or greenwood--myth changes from merely symbolizing folk-aspiration in social terms to enshrining a dominant mental characteristic, an essential behavior, an archetypal movement of the English imagination.
>
> (John Fowles, Daniel Martin)

It seems paradoxical that at a time when the English middle-class was preoccupied with the attainment of political power to match its material wealth, Victorians and Edwardians should have witnessed a flowering of fantasy literature centering on childhood and children. But when we look closely at these children's fantasies, we find they reflect this very paradox: reality rubs shoulders with romance, practicality with idealism, the mundane with the visionary. Turning their backs on the intellectual ferment of a society in transition, certain Victorian and Edwardian writers retreated to fantasy worlds in which religious belief was not under attack, moral standards and codes of behavior were not mere contingencies, and order was not disrupted by constant change or, worse still, threatened by chaos. Safely within these worlds created for children,

and thus unlikely to be taken seriously by the critics, these writers were freed to express ideas which were at variance with the accepted wisdom of the age, and emotions for which they could find no other acceptable outlet. Paradoxically, then, these writers generated fantasies for children in an attempt to express their feelings about the "real" world and maturity. Perhaps this very paradox accounts for the fact that a century later, these children's stories are numbered among the great works of literature written for readers of any age.

The fact that (with the exception perhaps of the Tales of Beatrix Potter) these were book-length works of fiction for children instead of short tales was something new. So was the fusion of the instructive and the entertaining which was characteristic of all of them. Before mid-nineteenth century (if we take Edward Lear's Book of Nonsense published in 1846 as a starting point), children's fiction had tended to emphasize either the utile or the dulce. The rise of Evangelicalism led to a proliferation of moral tracts designed to promote the Horrors of Hell or the Rewards of Hard Work. At the same time, the little chapbook, scorned and suppressed by the moralist, survived to provide pure entertainment in the form of the beloved tales of Tom Thumb, Robin Hood, and Jack the Giant-Killer. A few classics managed to combine interest with instruction; Robinson Crusoe, Aesop's Fables, Pilgrim's Progress, and suitably edited versions of Gulliver's Travels retained their popularity

over the years. By 1850 the fortunate child might have these on his nursery shelf, along with the Arabian Nights and the fairy tales of Grimm, Andersen, and Perrault. And if he were especially lucky, he might also have Lear's recently published nonsense limericks and comic drawings to delight him at bedtime.

With very few exceptions (Catherine Sinclair's Holiday House, 1839, is one example), full-length fiction exploring the child's world and written for the child-reader was non-existent. Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, and George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, were all published between 1840 and 1860 and deal with childhood and the experiences of children, but these novels were aimed at an adult audience. As late as 1869, in an article on literature for children, Charlotte Yonge complained that girls were sent from "simple, easy stories" to "the unexplored recesses of Mudie's boxes." While deploring the lack of "good novels" for young people, however, Yonge still inclined to the instructive:

> Perhaps there have been three really original fairy-tales (we call them so for want of a better name) produced within the last twenty years--we mean the "Water-Babies," "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," and the "Light Princess," though we hesitate in naming the latter because it dwells in the hackneyed world of kings and princesses and fairy god-mothers; while the other two have the mark of originality--they deal with creatures of our own day, and just dip them into the realms of Dreamland. Of these two, we confess that the latent though not consistent meanings that run through the "Water-Babies" seem to us to render it more attractive than the exquisite bits of fun in "Alice." (452)

By the last quarter of the century, however, the figure of the child in the English literary imagination had changed. The Enlightenment vision of the child as an empty slate upon which to write and the Puritanical idea of the child as a sinful soul to save gave way to an idealization of childhood encouraged and furthered by the poets of the Romantic movement. Blake's "Songs of Innocence" (1789) and Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807) affirm the child's connection with a pre-birth state of spiritual perfection as yet unsullied by the fallen world around him. Still trailing his "clouds of glory," the child is able to respond to the natural world with instincts denied to the adult, who, looking back, laments his loss. This way of perceiving the contrasting states of childhood innocence and adult experience reaches back at least to the seventeenth-century poet Henry Vaughan, whose poem, "The Retreat," (the very title is suggestive in terms of Victorian fiction for children) laments the loss of childhood innocence:

> Happy those early days! when I
> Shined in my Angel-infancy. . .
> When yet I had not walked above
> A Mile, or two, from my first love,
> And looking back (at that short pace)
> Could see a glimpse of his bright-face;
> When on some gilded cloud or flower
> My gazing soul would dwell an hour
> And in those weaker glories spy
> Some shadows of eternity
> Before I taught my tongue to wound
> My conscience with a sinful sound
> Or had the black art to dispense
> A several sin to every sense,
> But felt through all this fleshly dress
> Bright shoots of everlastingness.

Here Vaughan expresses three of the major preoccupations of later Romantic thought, all of them pertinent to fantasy written for and about children in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The first involves the idealization of the child, whose state of innocence qualifies him as a moral preceptor, even a "savior," of the fallen adults around him. A second area of importance involves the debased adult, who through physical maturity and contact with a corrupt world has now lost touch with the child's state of grace. It embraces his sorrowful recognition of this loss and his nostalgia for the perfection he once knew. Related to this sense of loss is a third preoccupation of Romanticism: the tendency of the writer to describe what he has lost in pastoral terms, that is, depending upon his religious position, as an Edenic or Arcadian idyll. In addition to their idealization of childhood, both Vaughan and Wordsworth experienced a deep sense of spirituality (Wordsworth's less specifically Christian than that of Vaughan) in nature. Both poets emphasize the child's special ability to perceive this fusion of the natural and spiritual worlds, Vaughan underlining his references to nature in his text and describing the interaction between child and Holy Spirit in terms of the green growth of Spring.

It appears, therefore, that the Romantic idealization of childhood is inextricably interwoven with a profound sense of personal loss. At the same time, thinking Victorians recognized that all around them were children for

whom life was far from ideal, a source of disillusionment already introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's mid-eighteenth-century depiction of the "child of nature" in Emile (1752). Rousseau's educational treatise denies the concept of original sin and asserts that the child is, by nature, a moral being whom society corrupts:

> Every thing is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man. . . . Not content to leave anything as nature has made it, he must needs shape man himself to his notions, as he does the trees in his garden. But under present conditions, human beings would be even worse than they are without this fashioning. A man left entirely to himself from birth would be the most misshapen of creatures. Prejudices, authority, necessity, example, the social institutions in which we are immersed, would crush out nature in him . . . . (11)

As the social evils resulting from industrialization made themselves felt in the last half of the nineteenth century, the contrast between Rousseau's program for a "natural" education and the social and economic realities of an urban working-class childhood became apparent. Moreover, few nineteenth-century intellectuals were unaware of Rousseau's other theories, some of which made the whole idea of "progress" as a cure-all for social ills increasingly problematical.

In The Social History of Art, Arnold Hauser suggests that the "nineteenth-century novel of disillusionment" would have been inconceivable without Rousseau's "pessimistic approach to history and without his doctrine of the depravity of the present" (71). Even before the hope and

confidence of the early part of the century culminated in the Great Exhibition of 1851,. the appearance of Lear's "nonsense" limericks signalled a rebellion against the humourless and repressive respectability which stifled the Victorian middle and upper-middle classes. Lear's book was, on the surface, only nonsense for children, but his limericks target a society which operates to ridicule or defeat non-conformity, eccentricity, even mere lightness of heart. Lear distances himself from this faceless repressive force by referring to it, bleakly, as "They":

> There was an Old Man of Melrose,
> Who walked on the tips of his toes;
> But they said, "It ain't pleasant, to see you at present,
> You stupid Old Man of Melrose." (27)

> There was an Old Man of Whitehaven,
> Who danced a quadrille with a Raven;
> But they said--"It's absurd, to encourage this bird!"
> So they smashed that Old Man of Whitehaven. (44)

In his Preface to The Opposing Self (1955), Lionel Trilling writes of the relation of the self to culture, suggesting that by the end of the eighteenth century, men had "learned to see that they might be immured not only by the overt force of society but by a coercion in some ways more frightful because it involved their own acquiescence" (x). Literature both critical of the Establishment or frankly escapist began to find an audience receptive to what Trilling terms "selves conceived in opposition to the general culture" (xiv). Some writers masked their material as simple fantasy for children, consciously or

unconsciously recognizing their material as subversive of the social consensus and unwilling to risk a negative response. Others preferred to trust what they had to say to a less perceptive and critical reader, the child, because what they needed to express was so intensely private.

It is tempting, therefore, to see the Victorian and Edwardian writer of fantasy for children as a lonely and repressed individual, who, finding himself inadequate to the demands of normal adult relationships, escaped these pressures by creating fantasy worlds for a less critical reader, the child. Here he could regress to that "golden age" of childhood memory; here, through his manipulation of a child protagonist, he could be in control. Some support for this generalization can be found in the lives of the writers discussed below. In childhood, nearly all suffered the loss of one or both parents, or for various other reasons felt lonely and craved affection. George MacDonald (1824-1905), although deeply attached to his father, seems always to be searching for the mother he lost as a child; mother, grandmother, and godmother figures are central to his fantasies for adults and children. MacDonald's friend Charles Dodgson (1832-1897, better known, of course, by his pen-name, "Lewis Carroll"), appears to have coped well with the death of his mother when he was 16, at least in comparison with his reaction to the death of his father seventeen years later. This he referred to as the "greatest blow" of his life. Yet Carroll's lifelong devotion to young girls suggests some sort of obsessive attachment to his

mother and seven sisters.[1] Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932) lost his mother when he was only five, and his father, unable to cope, sent the three boys off to live with their grandmother: "Looking back to those days of old ere the gate shut to behind me," he wrote in The Golden Age (1895), "I can see now that to children with a proper accompaniment of parents, these things would have worn a different aspect" (3). James Barrie (1860-1937) laboured to supplant his dead older brother in his mother's affections. Subsequently, the substitute mother figure (epitomized by Wendy mothering the lost boys in Peter and Wendy [1911]) became a potent image for him; yet Barrie's writing moves between the poles of intense identification with, and an equally intense hostility towards, mother-figures of varying kinds. In "Something of Myself," Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) recounts his misery, when at six, perceiving himself abandoned by parents who returned to India, he was left with foster-parents in "The House of Desolation" in Southsea. Subsequently, Kipling was to provide the orphaned protagonists of The Jungle Books (1894-95) and Kim (1901) with a whole coterie of devoted "parents." Finally, the perfect interaction of text and illustration typical of the Tales of Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) can be seen as one happy result of the reading and drawing and observation of her pets with which Potter compensated for an emotional and physical isolation from her parents.

All of these writers belonged to the middle and upper-middle classes of Victorian society; all were well educated and several were artists as well as writers. Thus, while they lived their lives within the constraints of conventional society, they were fortunate in that their talents provided creative outlets denied to others less able. It would seem unlikely that these writers consciously desired a return to their lonely childhood circumstances; yet those very circumstances encouraged that intense life of the imagination upon which, as mature writers and artists, they were able to draw for inspiration and creative release. Kipling's experience in Southsea, for example, seems to have provided him with the same kind of emotional stimulus as did the blacking-warehouse episode for Dickens. And looking back on her childhood, Beatrix Potter recorded in her journal: "Thank goodness my education was neglected; I was never sent to school--it would have rubbed off some of the originality . . . " (32). Thus, the childhood experiences of these men and women appear to have been at once traumatic and formative. As they matured, a sense of loss and powerlessness resurfaced, leading them to explore various ways of regaining a sense of control over their lives. One obvious way to achieve a sense of mastery is by creating a fantasy world in which all is ordered by its creator.

As might be expected, therefore, the fantasies of these writers hold in tension two opposing movements. The first of these is regressive: a retreat from various aspects of the

maturing process and a profound longing for the home as a place of refuge within which one is assured of the nurture and protection of the parent and/or the family group. At the same time, however, in their ironic tone, brusque elimination of sentiment, and preoccupation with verbal and physical abuse, the stories display a range of aggressive behavior from covert hostility to overt violence. Thus, these works provide for their creators what John Fowles, in the quotation which heads this chapter, calls a "redoubt," that is, a position of safety to which one can retreat and, simultaneously, a protected position from which to launch a hostile action. In these fantasy worlds the creator has power and mastery; like Lewis Carroll writing Through the Looking-Glass (1871), the creator controls the board and the chessmen. Adventures undertaken by a protagonist within this world may appear to be fraught with danger and frustration, but ultimately they are safely contained within the fantasy world, thereby reflecting the situation of the child listening to a frightening tale without undue distress because he is sitting in the safety of his parent's arms. To his fantasy world the writer can retreat for protection and support; from this position of security he can experiment with "subversive" ideas, or ridicule, and thus punish, his society. He can carry on a kind of guerrilla warfare, now on the attack, now in retreat, engaging his opponent but obscuring his purpose, perhaps even from himself.

It appears, therefore, that the freedom of expression and protection from censorship that children's fantasy provided its creators allowed them to explore those aspects of personality for which they found no other acceptable outlet in their lives. Charles Dodgson, for example, was deeply attached to Alice Liddell, the young girl who inspired Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865). As "Lewis Carroll," however, he appears to derive a kind of vengeful satisfaction out of frustrating and confusing her namesake in Wonderland. Perhaps, having expressed and thereby defused his ambivalent feelings in writing, he was better able to cope with the difficulties his life presented. In its exploration of those shadowy areas of his own personality which a writer may sense but not fully understand, fantasy provided an avenue of self-discovery or at least an emotional outlet which might otherwise have been blocked.

II

Undoubtedly, the mainstream Victorian novelists deal more fully with the complexities of the emotional life than do the children's fantasists; the former are more at ease communicating directly with their audience, examining problems and suggesting solutions. Certainly none of the book-length children's fantasies discussed here present a youthful protagonist with the fully-developed inner consciousness of the hero of the typical Victorian Bildungsroman; fantasy tells a less prosaic, more

impressionistic tale. But the fact that Victorian and Edwardian fantasy for children operates at a less controlled and conscious level than the domestic realism of the same period does not mean that the fantasies themselves are detached from the realities of everyday life. On the contrary: our recognition of the fantastic is based upon our sense of what is normal or possible and is thus dependent upon reality for its existence. It is not surprising, therefore, that the mundane should so firmly anchor Victorian and Edwardian fantasy for children. In these works the presentation of primary and secondary worlds is sufficiently unambiguous that the child-reader can clearly differentiate between them. The framing devices by means of which various writers signal a move into the world of fantasy are obvious: the Darling children's flight out of the nursery window to Neverland (Peter and Wendy), Alice's fall down the rabbit hole into Wonderland (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland), Irene's ascent of the palace staircase to her Grandmother's room (The Princess and the Goblin [1872]). The child-reader recognizes at once that he has entered the world of fantasy and he is, therefore, not surprised to confront the fantastic there. Even within these secondary worlds, however, much of the familiar surface detail and routine activity of English middle-class life is retained: James Barrie uses this conflation of reality and fantasy for ironic purposes--"Would you like an adventure now," Peter Pan asks of John Darling, newly arrived in Neverland, "or would you like to have your tea first?"

(4:89)--while the activities of the make-believe family in Wendy's House and the "real" family in the Darling household provide caustic comment upon Edwardian middle class family life. Mowgli's life in the Jungle is obviously fabulous, yet his lessons at the hands of Baloo the Bear are highly reminiscent of the interviews between headmaster and boy in Kipling's more realistic school story, Stalky & Co. (1899). In the fantasy worlds of Potter and Grahame, animal characters merely substitute for people, their activities being the familiar ones of every day: spring cleaning, summer picnics, Christmas carol-singing. In Grahame's The Wind in the Willows (1908), for example, the behavior of the Riverbankers reflects that of the members of any good London club. When Otter abruptly leaves a gathering of the other animals to pursue "an errant May-fly," for example, the other animals simply ignore what might otherwise be an embarrassing faux pas:

> The Rat hummed a tune, and the Mole recollected that animal etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever. (1:20)

Perhaps the major attraction of Grahame's story lies precisely in this fusion of the imaginative with the realistic. The reader's satisfaction in Chapter 5, "Dulce Domum," for example, is rooted in a synthesis of these elements: the emotional (Mole's homesickness, Rat's kindness and sympathy, and Mole's subsequent expressions of gratitude) and the material (beer-rings on the table, a tin

of sardines, and a German sausage), both contained within a setting cosy and homelike yet "fantastic": Christmas in Mole's underground house.

In Tree and Leaf (1964), J. R. R. Tolkien suggests that it is by means of these connections with "realism" that fantasy is able to "recover" (perhaps, "uncover" or "rediscover" are more useful terms) that which familiarity has robbed of its impact, and is thus perceived as lost:

> Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator . . . hopes he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are [sic] derived from Reality . . . . Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. (70-71)

In children's fantasy it is important that the connections with the "real" world as the child knows it be retained, that he is not entirely bewildered by his surroundings. From this position of security, he can accept even what Pierre Mabille, in his Miroir de Merveilleux, calls "terrifying sensations": "Beyond entertainment," Mabille writes," . . . beyond the need to divert, to forget, or to achieve delightful or terrifying sensations, the real goal of the marvellous journey is the total exploration of universal reality" (Todorov 57). In Victorian Fantasy (1979), Stephen Prickett supports Mabille, suggesting that fantasy allows writers to deal with the "fringe areas of human consciousness inaccessible to realism" (204). By thus expanding the experiences available to the reader, the

fantasist provides him with a more comprehensive "reality."

Few theorists in the field of fantasy literature concern themselves specifically with fantasy written for children. Probably this is because many children's stories are set within such obvious fantasy worlds that little scope is provided for the theorist who wishes to define and categorize his subject. For example, in The Fantastic (1973), Tzvetan Todorov concentrates on the effect of fantasy and how the writer achieves it, defining the "fantastic" as that point at which an apparently supernatural event in the text causes "hesitation" in the reader (25). Todorov is, of course, referring to the adult reader, and to fantasy written for adults. The child's limited experience may well cause him to experience some hesitation when reading adult fantasy; even adults hesitate when faced with such works as Henry James's The Turn of the Screw. But fantasy written specifically for children in the late Victorian period evokes no such "hesitation": even a child knows that toads don't drive cars and that children can't fly. "Hesitation" on the part of the character does occasionally occur: in The Fantastic in Literature (1976), Eric Rabkin suggests that it is Alice's astonishment when she confronts the talking flowers in the Looking-Glass World that signals the presence of the fantastic (7). Alice's reaction, however, provokes no similar response or "hesitation" in the reader, who has been aware that he is in a fantasy world ever since Alice passed "through the Looking-Glass."

The views of those theorists of adult fantasy who are primarily interested in the psychological or ideological implications of fantasy literature, however, are relevant to a discussion of the children's fantasy of this period. Rosemary Jackson, for example, in Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (1981), comments that in the light of the unconscious content of fantasy literature, Todorov's refusal to address psychological and ideological implications limits the usefulness of his theory (6). She sees (adult) fantasy literature as a "literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (3). She further suggests that fantasy is generated by cultural constraint, noting that fantastic literature emerges in periods of relative stability and indicates subversion of the social consensus. Both Jackson and Tolkien agree that fantasy releases unconscious material which is subversive and potent. Neither sees fantasy literature as merely "escapist": in spite of Tolkien's belief that fantasy allows what he terms "the Escape of the Prisoner," he insists that this is not to be confused with "escapism," or "the Flight of the Deserter" (50). Tolkien maintains that as the "prisoner" escapes, so do those emotions which are often the "companions" of Escape, "Disgust, Anger, Consolation, and Revolt" (60). For Tolkien, fantasy is a reworking of the Christian myth, the "happy ending" symbolizing Christ's promise of eternal life. Unlike Tolkien, T. E. Apter (Fantasy Literature [1982]) feels that modern fantasy

reflects a pessimistic view of the world, that its purpose is "to show how awful, how limiting and imprisoning, the human world is" (6). Such fantasy, she suggests, presents problems rather than providing resolutions or what Tolkien terms "consolation." Rosemary Jackson would also take issue with Tolkien's inclusion of "consolation" as one of the by-products of the fantastic imagination. However, she suggests that the early fantasists (with whom it is fair to group the writers discussed here) often merely "transcend" reality, creating ideal worlds to compensate for painful realities. When these writers "simply go along with a desire to cease 'to be'" (140), they take a position which actually supports or stabilizes the existing order, rather than more directly opposing and rejecting cultural constraints.

The approaches of Jackson and Apter seem particularly relevant when applied to fantasy written for children in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Many of these books are pessimistic in their assessment of the human condition and its potential for improvement. In his Princess books (The Princess and the Goblin [1872] and its sequel, The Princess and Curdie [1883]), for example, MacDonald attempts to retrieve and invigorate spiritual faith. His fantasies seem to be seeking that "release from habitual assumption" which Apter ascribes to the fantasy genre and which, ideally, she feels, should provide a "viewpoint from which new possibilities can be released" (6). This, however, MacDonald signally fails do, ending the second book in desolation and despair. Grahame, Kipling, and Potter are rarely sentimental

about human nature, their animal characters displaying all of the complacency, foolishness, greed, and cruelty of which their human counterparts are capable. Kipling's Mowgli, raised in a "natural" setting, regards the men of the village with contempt and faces his inevitable move into their world with a notable lack of enthusiasm. Not surprisingly, therefore, the influence of Romanticism makes itself strongly felt as the future for the maturing protagonist appears to involve an increasing imprisonment of the spirit. Many of the books are preoccupied with loss and death; "happy endings" are rare. The poem which introduces Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass equates marriage and death, as does the pessimistic ending of MacDonald's The Princess and Curdie; Peter Pan's refusal to grow up offers the arid prospect of perpetual emotional isolation. The creators of Victorian and Edwardian fantasy for children take an approach to maturity that is not so often reassuring or "consoling" as it is melancholy, reflective, ironic, or openly hostile.

This pessimistic approach is not only rooted in the personalities of individual writers; it has much to do with the historical period which generated them. By the end of the nineteenth century, Freud and Darwin had shattered old complacencies. The emergence of fantasy literature in the later Victorian period accompanied a growing awareness that it was possible to view what had previously been considered "marvellous" or supernatural as being subjectively

generated. Freud showed how dreams present reality in unusual forms, fulfilling the subconscious wishes of the dreamer. Fantasy literature repeats this process, focussing on anxieties and desires which the writer, for personal or social reasons, feels unable to express in the language of everyday "realism": "Fantasy," writes Apter, "investigates fears and wishes and the strange relationship between the two, a relationship coloured by ambivalence, self-ignorance and simplicity" (136). She sees the special function of the artist as utilizing fantasy for the purpose of providing his audience with compensation for these suppressed desires and fears. This was the position taken by Freud in 1911, in a paper on the psychical consequences of adaptation to the reality principle:

> An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to erms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality. Thus in a certain fashion he actually becomes the hero, the king, the creator, or the favourite he desired to be, without following the long roundabout path of making real alterations in the external world. But he can only achieve this because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he does with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because that dissatisfaction, which results from the replacements of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality. (Vol.12:224)

"Other men" presumably accept the satisfactions the fantasist seeks as their own, and are thus freed to participate in the fears and desires they would normally suppress. The fantastic is preoccupied with these

unconscious wishes, just as for Freud, the "uncanny" exposed hidden anxieties in the subject.[2] (In this connection, Stephen Prickett suggests that the revival of interest in the fairy-tale in the nineteenth century was due to the fact that "the fairy-tale was one of the few ways in which stories about sexual fantasies could be told" [102].) Fantasy, then, uncovers or transforms what is real but hidden. At the end of Charlotte Bronte's Shirley (1849), Caroline Helstone comments: "I observe that to such grievances as society cannot readily cure, it usually forbids utterance." By exposing that which is culturally suppressed, we uncover that for which we have no language.

"Nonsense" is one example of a mode of fantasy which offers a language for those aspects of human experience which we feel forbidden to express, and which thus remain hidden. The limerick allowed Lear to thumb his nose at conventional public opinion. Through apparent "nonsense," both Lear and Carroll expressed the personal frustrations which a repressive society could not "readily cure" in a way that evaded the censorship of the public. In his paper on "Humor" (1927), Freud suggested that humor (under which heading we can usefully include irony, nonsense, and the grotesque) can mask feelings of inadequacy, depression, and despair. Perhaps it is not surprising that Dodgson, in daily life a rather staid Oxford mathematics don, should have found the nonsense form so congenial. Far from being "free" or formless, writes Prickett, nonsense "is the most highly

organized and the most rigidly controlled of all forms of fantasy" (126). Most people associate Lewis Carroll with "humor," yet beneath the surface word-play, the Alice books actually provide little to laugh about. The adult reader recognizes character types which effectively ridicule the pomposity of adult institutions. The breakdown of order (jam every other day), the distortion of time (storing up wasted time for future use), and illogical logic (the supposed difference between saying something and meaning something) intrigue and amuse the adult reader although they may be merely disconcerting to a child.

In spite of Carroll's word-games, however, a preoccupation with violence, cruelty, and death pervades the Alice books. The characters devour, smash, scald, and beat each other. The Hatter pours hot tea on the nose of the Dormouse, the Red Queen threatens to decapitate everyone who stands in her way, and the Duchess torments her baby: "If I don't take this child away with me," thought Alice, "they're sure to kill it in a day or two" (Chap. 6). This combination of the cruel with the grotesque is typical of Carroll. In 1862 he wrote of a birthday gift he had given Tennyson's son Hallam:

> I am glad you like the knife . . . if you were allowed to cut your finger with it, once a week, just a little, you know, till it began to bleed, and a good deep cut every birthday, I should think that would be enough . . . . I hope that if Lionel ever wants to have his fingers cut with it, you will be kind to your brother, and hurt him just as much as he likes. (Cohen 53)

Nonsense, as can be seen here, takes a simple idea and pursues it with ruthless literalness to its logical conclusion, no matter how destructive. For Carroll, the violent and grotesque elements of "nonsense" appear to have released a potent subconscious hostility to child and adult alike. To a lesser extent the same is true of Barrie, whose Peter and Wendy contains material much like that of Carroll in tone:

> Smee had pleasant names for everything, and his cutlass was Johnny Corkscrew, because he wriggled it in the wound. One could mention many lovable traits in Smee. For instance, after killing, it was his spectacles he wiped instead of his weapon. (5:104)

The "humor" arising from Carroll's wordplay and the sophisticated ironies of Barrie are probably lost on many child-readers. They provided release for the writers, but the aspects of the books that may disturb the adult reader attest to the fact that neither Carroll nor Barrie was entirely successful in displacing his own suffering: "I wish I could be glad!" exclaims the White Queen in Through the Looking-Glass, "only I never can remember the rule" (5:75). For Carroll, one must anticipate the pains of life in order to withstand them. Only if one follows this masochistic "rule" can one hope sometimes to experience "gladness." Perhaps this is why Carroll's nonsense achieves only a tension between "laughing and grief." Charles Dodgson loved Alice Liddell: as "Lewis Carroll" he exposed her to a cruel and uncaring world. The fascination of the Alice books has much to do with this paradox. Certainly the adult is more

likely than the child to sense the disturbance beneath the surface of these works; yet both may identify with the writer's subconscious wishes and thus experience emotions they might normally suppress. However, even the most sensitive reader feels little constraint to confront such implications when they are presented in the context of mere fantasy for children. Thus, if we accept nonsense as "humor" in Freud's terms, viewing it as a way of alleviating suffering, denying painful realities, and reducing the external world to "child's play," we can see the attraction of nonsense for both reader and writer.

If, as Rosemary Jackson suggests, fantasy literature emerges in periods of relative stability because of the fantasist's desire to transgress cultural constraints, it is not surprising that the nineteenth century, a period in which society placed a premium on conventional behavior and personal restraint, saw an outpouring of fantasy written, ostensibly at least, for children. Moreover, subversive tendencies were by no means the exclusive property of the children's fantasist. Mainstream novelists incorporated elements of fantasy--the Gothic, melodramatic, sensational, and grotesque--into their novels of domestic "realism." According to Jackson, writers used doubling, or the exposure of the Jekyll and the Hyde in human personality, as one way of "subverting a social order which makes that division the condition of being" (137). The novels of Dickens, the Brontes, R. L. Stevenson, Mary Shelley, and Wilkie Collins

all contain elements which allowed writers to express the "demonic," usually seen by the Victorian middle class as those elements which threatened society's religious and moral conventions: aggressive females, charming criminals, "innocent" prostitutes, revolutionaries, atheists, madmen, all are characterizations which subvert the social consensus. These portrayals, however, were typical of a more openly critical stance, an overt rejection of the conventional cant and humbug of Victorian life. Writing fantasy for children provided a much more subtle assault upon society. In Steven Prickett's words, fantasists express "secret and private experiences in such a way that you can continue to feel their privacy" (214). One way in which the children's fantasist masked his subversive tendencies and thus retained this sense of "privacy" was by grounding the subversive in the mundane: "Let's fight until six," says Carroll's Tweedledee, "and then have dinner." Hence the constant preoccupation in these books with an orderly society and its rituals: tea drinking, good manners, blazing hearths, tidy farms, green landscapes. Central to all these stories is a nostalgic longing for all the good things of childhood and a way of life that was fast disappearing--a lost "golden age."

III

Beset with the problems generated by a society undergoing rapid change, many Victorians experienced a sense of panic, of imminent loss, and a poignant sense of isolation. Ahead lay the unknown, behind, the blissful days of childhood innocence and freedom from anxiety. Memories of that simpler time provided solace; rose-coloured glasses made the vision even more attractive. Writing from a Christian perspective in The Nemesis of Faith (1849), James Anthony Froude described childhood in these terms: "God has given us each our own Paradise, our own old childhood, over which the old glories linger, to which our own hearts cling, as all we have ever known of Heaven upon earth" (116). The degree of idealization carried by the writer's words here indicates the strength of his desire to stop the clock, to keep at least a part of his life unchanged and uncorrupted. In The Victorian Frame of Mind (1957), Walter Houghton suggests that nostalgia is inseparable from loneliness, that "the longing for an earlier world . . . fastens on two images, historical and personal. The lost world is 'placed' either in a previous period, the childhood of the race, or in one's own childhood" (85-86). Here Houghton focusses on three major concerns of Victorian and Edwardian children's fantasy: nostalgia for the problem-free days of childhood, the centrality of the child's experience, and the idealized pastoral setting in which the fantasist places what Houghton terms "the childhood of the race."

The autobiographies of nineteenth-century writers illustrate how intensely Victorian writers longed to recapture their early years. Recreating the Romantic vision of childhood seemed so important, in fact, that certain writers appear to have "edited" their memories in order to present their early years as an uninterrupted idyll: happy, peaceful, and secure.[3] In Dickens's David Copperfield, for example, the narrator describes this phenomenon when, following the death of his mother, all his more recent memories are erased:

> From the time of knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour. . . . It may be curious but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her calm, untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest. (Chap. 9)

Kenneth Grahame's The Golden Age (1895), a collection of semi-autobiographical reminiscences, took the opposite approach, presenting a disconcertingly dispassionate child's-eye view of the adult world. The activities and motives of adults are satirized throughout; there is a strong flavour of Lear's "They" about the "Olympians." Grahame displays little of the complacency about "grown-ups" or sentimentality about childhood typical of the period. The title, therefore, can be taken either at face value or read as an ironic comment on the differing points of view of children and adults about those "golden" years. The book was enormously popular with adult readers, its combination of

satire and nostalgia offering a more sophisticated blend of aggression and regression than would be found in Grahame's later classic, The Wind in the Willows (1908). Thus, both the unconscious "fictionalizing" of a real childhood, and the conscious creation of a fictional one, can provide escape from the threats and pressures of the present.

The universality of the tendency to idealize childhood probably accounts for the rise to mythic stature of James Barrie's Peter Pan, a children's fantasy hero who has become one of the immortals of literature. Both Barrie's 1904 play Peter Pan (subtitled "the boy who wouldn't grow up"), and the 1911 narrative version, Peter and Wendy, go beyond mere nostalgia for childhood, expressing a general celebration of immaturity, and specifically, the rebellious refusal of the hero to grow up and leave Neverland:

> "I don't want to go to school and learn solemn things," he told her passionately. "I don't want to be a man. O Wendy's mother, if I was to wake up and feel there was a beard!"
>
> "Peter," said Wendy, the comforter, "I should love you in a beard," and Mrs. Darling stretched out her arms to him, but he repulsed her.
>
> "Keep back, lady, no one is going to catch me and make me a man." (17:240-241)

Peter's refusal to mature and assume his adult responsibilities obviously subverts the Victorian position parodied by W.S. Gilbert in Ruddigore (1887): "Duty, duty must be done / The rule applies to everyone." Moreover, Peter's fear of the signs of physical maturity suggests a rejection of adult sexuality. Children's fantasists of the

period tend to sidestep the latter subject; they were, after all, writing for children and dealing with matters within the child's experience. But Peter's anxiety about his role of husband and father in "Wendy's House" seems curiously intense for a children's story; there is more than "playing house" happening here. Barrie's treatment of the whole subject of husband-wife, mother-son relationships displays a disturbing and obtrusive combination of hostility, eroticism, and pathos:

> Tootles' face was very white, but there was a dignity about him that there had never been before.
>
> "I did it," he said, reflecting. "When ladies used to come to me in dreams, I said, 'Pretty mother, pretty mother.' But when at last she really came, I shot her." (6:112)

Throughout the book, Barrie moves between the sentimental and the vitriolic in his treatment of Wendy and Mrs. Darling as both wives and mothers, a position in opposition to the usual Victorian tendency to idealize the women of the family:

> You see the woman had no proper spirit. I had meant to say extraordinarily nice things about her; But I despise her, and not one of them will I say now.
>
> . . .
>
> Now that we look at her closely and remember the gaiety of her in the old days, all gone now just because she has lost her babes, I find I won't be able to say nasty things about her after all. If she was too fond of her rubbishy children she couldn't help it . . . Some like Peter best and some like Wendy best, but I like her best. (16:228, 230)

Not surprisingly, conventional family life is grotesquely parodied in Peter and Wendy. The "lost boys" of

Neverland are delighted to have a make-believe mother and to play at "happy families" in Wendy's House. But although Peter has persuaded Wendy to leave her family and care for his, he is distressed when any suggestion is made that the make-believe family roles might be taken seriously. As "mother" to "his" boys, Wendy naturally sees Peter in the role of father and husband. However, Peter is a "betwixt and between," that is, neither human nor fairy, and is thus unable, as was Barrie himself, to fill adequately the role of husband. Peter wants only to be a son:

> "But they [the boys] are ours, Peter, yours and mine."
> "But not really, Wendy?" he asked anxiously.
> "Not if you don't wish it," she replied; and she distinctly heard his sigh of relief; "Peter," she asked, trying to speak firmly, "what are your exact feelings to [sic] me?"
> "Those of a devoted son, Wendy."
> "I thought so," she said, and went and sat by herself at the extreme end of the room. (10:163-4)

Meals and family relationships in Neverland may be only make-believe, but Barrie's description of the Darling family--a "real" Edwardian family in the "real" world--is a travesty. Mr. Darling is portrayed as a spoiled child cosseted by a mother-wife. The children are cared for by the family dog, a parody one could almost term malicious considering the circumstances of the writer's life.[4] Obviously, the family, an institution sacred to Victorian middle-class society, held little charm for Barrie; thus, when fantasy allowed him to do so, he satirized the whole subject.

In The Wind in the Willows, Grahame, unlike Barrie, is silent on the subject of the conventional family. He is neither sarcastic nor vindictive; he simply omits female characters from the story entirely, a rather timid approach, but one which avoids the rancour so obvious in Barrie's attempts to deal with male-female relationships. Thus, the Riverbank harbours an all-male community which is, in the author's own words, "clean of the clash of sex." However, in spite of the absence of wives and mothers, The Wind in the Willows manages to reflect a sense of family solidarity totally absent from Barrie's story. This is achieved in the warm and mutually supportive friendships of the Riverbankers who care for the younger and weaker members of the community and who care, very much, for each other:

> The Rat, astonished and dismayed at the violence of Mole's paroxysm of grief, did not dare to speak for a while. At last he said, very quietly and sympathetically, "What is it, old fellow? Whatever can be the matter? Tell us your trouble, and let me see what I can do." (5:118)

The sincere affection with which this interchange is charged is conspicuously absent from Barrie's story. Thus, although on the surface both writers reject the problems of conventional domesticity and family life, they do it in entirely different ways: Barrie uses the whole subject of domesticity as a focus for bitter irony; Grahame glorifies close relationships, but only those between men.

"Except for 'God,'" writes Walter Houghton, "the most popular word in the Victorian vocabulary must have been

'work'" (242). Perhaps more important to Grahame's story than his evasion of male-female relationships or the "clash of sex" is his attitude to working for a living. From the very first page of The Wind in the Willows, Grahame evokes a sense of release from tedium and drudgery, a sense of eternal summer holiday. No one works for his bread, yet food and money to purchase it are abundant: "--see you get Buggins's," says Rat of their Christmas provisions, "for I won't have any other--no, only the best--if you can't get it there, try somewhere else--" (5:132). The story begins with Mole's emergence from underground, from winter's darkness, from work: " . . . he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said, 'Bother!' and 'O blow!' and also 'Hang spring-cleaning!' and bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat'" (1:3). It continues in a succession of "days off"; eating, drinking, chatting, and "messing about in boats," the Riverbankers, like Peter Pan, defy the puritanical work-ethic of the period. Here Grahame is perhaps reflecting his own father's reluctance to shoulder his family responsibilities.

Grahame wrote various pieces for the Yellow Book, extolling rural life as a pastoral idyll. The quasi-archaic language with self-consciously Shakespearean overtones in which Grahame invokes a rural "Olde England" suggests the connection in his mind between nostalgia and the distant past, or "childhood of the race." Grahame expresses his admiration for those city dwellers who break away, as Mole

did, exchanging their urban labours for golden hours in the countryside:

> That stockbroker, some summers gone, who was missed from his wonted place one settling-day! a good, portly man i' faith: and had a villa and a steam launch at Surbiton . . . they found him in a wild nook of Hampshire. Ragged, sun-burnt, the nocturnal haystack calling aloud from his frayed and weather-stained duds, his trousers tucked, he was tickling trout with godless native urchins; and when they would have won him to himself with honied whispers of American Rails, he answered but with a babble of green fields. (Pagan Papers 188-189)

Grahame's dream was to be on permanent holiday from the Bank of England listening to the wind rustling the willows by the river. In just this kind of pastoral backwater the Riverbankers avoid all the stresses of adult urban life. Those problems that remain are ignored or minimized. Embarrassing or frightening subjects (the "others" dwelling in the Wild Wood, the Wide World beyond the Riverbank) are summarily dismissed:

> "Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World," said the Rat. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please." (1:15)

When this idyll is interrupted, the disruption is the result of the rambunctious Toad of Toad Hall, whose exploits dominate the last half of the book. Toad's escapades express an anarchic drive and a refusal to exert any self-control. He blatantly avoids responsibility, insisting upon freedom from restraint and denying the claims and pressures of the community. However, this anarchic stance is challenged by a

conservative force: from his position at the heart of the Wild Wood, the benevolent autocrat, Badger, controls the threatening "others" who surround him and would breach the peace. With an inflexible moral code and a stout stick, Badger fills the parental role so important in most of these works. His physical strength, moral courage, kindness to the smaller animals, along with his snug kitchen, fully compensate for the lack of conventional family-life in the book. Thus, The Wind in the Willows holds in tension two opposing movements: Toad's rebellious attitude and Badger's insistence upon order--on one hand, a truculent child who indulges gleefully in destructive behavior, on the other, a kindly but firm parent, under whose care life presents few problems.

Badger radiates security, warmth, and comfort, and even though constantly irritated by Toad's immature behavior, he cares for Toad, as for all the other animals. It is the lack of anyone who cares in this way for Peter Pan that is largely responsible for the sense of repressed unhappiness that pervades Barrie's story. Peter's determination to reject maturity and remain an eternal outsider seems a pathetic attempt to take revenge on an unloving world. His decision to remain "outside," forever looking through windows at the firelight within, evokes a melancholy response in the reader. Toad also refuses to give in to social pressure, yet his decision strikes no such chord. Perhaps this is because we sense a kind of death-wish, or at least a

withdrawal from life, in Barrie's hero, while the incorrigible Toad's rebelliousness seems more a reaching-out, a "lust for life." While often exasperating, it is a quality which compels admiration and results, paradoxically, in the Riverbankers banding together in a final battle on Toad's behalf.

Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass also demonstrates its writer's ambivalence about his heroine's determination to "grow up." Alice is determined to reach the Eighth Square of the chessboard and become a Queen. "That's easily managed," says the Red Queen, yet Alice's attempt to run across the chessboard results in frustration:

> "Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else--if you ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing."
> "A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place." (2:32)

Alice pursues her goal, over the objections of Humpty Dumpty and the earnest entreaties of the White Knight. The latter would like to keep her prisoner after the battle:

> "It was a glorious victory, wasn't it?" said the White Knight, as he came up panting.
> "I don't know," Alice said doubtfully. "I don't want to be anybody's prisoner, I want to be a queen." (8:121)

The White Knight cannot go past the end of the wood with Alice; he must retreat, while Alice is freed to run down the hill to the Eighth square. Arriving and finding a golden crown on her head, she exclaims, "Oh, how glad I am to be

here!" (8:137). Yet Carroll prefaces the book with a poem to Alice Liddell in which he equates the "unwelcome bed" of marriage with the grave:

> Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread,
> With bitter tidings laden,
> Shall summon to unwelcome bed
> A melancholy maiden!
> We are but older children, dear,
> Who fret to find our bedtime near.

Death is also the portion of the hero and heroine of MacDonald's two Princess books. The Princess Irene and Curdie finally marry, but the traditional "happy ending" is spoiled when we learn that their future holds not only a barren marriage, but also the destruction of all that they have worked for. Kipling's attempt to portray Mowgli, the Master of the Jungle, as a married working-man was such a failure that the story was never included with the others in The Jungle Books.

Beatrix Potter was a woman for whom life well into middle age held little joy other than excursions into her beloved countryside, and a writer who displays a notable lack of sympathy with immaturity in her Tales. Yet in the loving detail of her illustrations, Potter shows the depth of her longing for the rural settings of her childhood holidays. At age 47, torn between her desire for marriage and what she saw as her duty to her parents, Potter wrote in her journal of her longing to abandon the conflicts of middle age:

> Then as we struggle on, the thoughts of that peaceful past time of childhood come to us like soft music and a blissful vision through the snow. We do not wish we were back in it, unless we are daily broken-down, for the very good reason that it is impossible to be so, but it keeps one up, and there is a vague feeling that one day there will again be rest. (81-82)

For Potter, as for other children's fantasists, "growing up" held little charm; nostalgia provided some relief from daily struggles. Froude's nostalgic vision of childhood is of Paradise, the Garden of Eden, Heaven upon earth; Potter's is a more secular vision, yet still idealized: lulled by soft music, softened by snow, white with the innocence of childhood. Houghton suggests "the childhood of the race" as a focus for nostalgia. Certainly the rural paradise, either Edenic or Arcadian, provides the setting for most Victorian and Edwardian children's fantasy.

IV

Whether we place mankind's "racial childhood" in a religious or a secular setting, that is, for Western cultures, in the Biblical Garden of Genesis or in the Arcadian glade of Greek myth, we conjure up an enclosure, green and mysterious, haunting yet familiar. Inside, all is beauty and repose; outside, all is threatening and unknown. Obviously this is very much the world of Fowles's "greenwood myth," an idealized and domesticated vision of the past which was particularly seductive in a period during which England's "green and pleasant land" was changing, and in the

opinion of many sensitive Victorians, for the worse. In his article on classic fantasy and the Industrial Revolution, Jules Zanger refers to the children's fantasies of this period as "elegiac," suggesting that they represent a lament for a "pre-industrial, pre-urban" world of country houses, cottages, and village greens, a world, as he puts it, in which "the old magic still works, in which the old gods rule" (155). Writing in her journal, Beatrix Potter expresses this regret, mourning the loss of her innocent childhood imagination in words that suggest an elegy for the death of Nature:

> I was a child then, I had no idea what the world would be like. I wished to trust myself on the waters and the sea. Everything was romantic in my imagination. The woods were peopled by the mysterious good folk. The Lords and Ladies of the last century walked with me along the overgrown paths, and picked the old fashioned flowers among the box and rose hedges . . . . Then just as childhood was beginning to shake, we had to go, my first great sorrow. I do not wish to have to repeat it, it has been a terrible time since, and the future is dark and uncertain, let me keep the past. The old plum tree is fallen, the trees are felled, the black river is an open hollow, and the elfin castle is no longer hidden in the dark glades of Craig Donald Wood. (81-82)

The pastoral settings of Potter's Tales, Grahame's The Wind in the Willows, and Kipling's The Jungle Books are "fantastic" only insofar as they provide a background for activities that would never occur in the "real" world. Potter's illustrations are, after all, mostly painted from nature or memory, and the natural settings of Kipling's Jungle and Grahame's Riverbank, although idealized, are not unrealistic. Other fantasists created less familiar settings

for their stories: the dream landscape Diamond finds at the back of the North Wind, for example, or the impressionistic chessboard world of Carroll's Looking-Glass world. Although the three-tiered world of The Princess and the Goblin (the goblin caverns, the world above them, and the attic room of Irene's grandmother) clearly suggests the Hell, Earth, and Heaven of conventional Christian doctrine, MacDonald is less concerned in the Princess books with regression than with aggression; thus, these stories emphasize action rather than idyllic surroundings.

The illustrations of Potter's Tales reflect both the tamed garden and the pagan glade: a riot of domestic favourites--tiger-lilies, clematis, snapdragons, pansies--fill Duchess's cottage-garden and are formally gathered into the bouquet she presents to her hostess (The Tale of the Pie and the Patty Pan [1905]); the "foxy-whiskered gentleman," however, lurks "in an open space in the middle of the wood" surrounded by sinister foxgloves, plants traditionally associated with both life and death (The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck [1908]). With this exception, Potter's fields and farms, Kipling's Jungle, with its suggestion of mysterious green depths, and Grahame's Riverbank (and specifically his title, The Wind in the Willows), with their overtones of retirement and ease, all evoke an unfallen Paradise in which man effortlessly satisfies his basic needs, communicates freely with the lower creatures, and appears to live his life free of the artificial constraints of the real world.

This sense of liberation is largely illusory. As Zanger suggests, all these worlds are ultimately under the control of the "old Gods," that is, under the benevolent but autocratic rule of authority figures like MacDonald's various maternal deities, Kipling's Jungle Council, and Grahame's Badger. In the Alice books and in Potter's Tales, power is distributed among various characters, but overall control is obviously centered in the distant, austere, ironic, and authoritative voice of a narrator whose conservative position opposes violent change and disorder. In a pastoral setting, one might expect the "old gods" to refer to more traditional gods, the Christian God associated with the Eden of Genesis or the pantheistic god of Greek myth. In characteristically different ways, Barrie and Grahame do incorporate these deities into their stories, but in neither story do these "gods" have a controlling function in the plot.

Peter Pan, while "god" of Neverland and central to the action of that fantasy world, is only a boy-god and therefore can control events only within his own fantasies. The real limits of his power are made clear by the often patronising and always ironic tone of the narrator. Peter was originally introduced in Barrie's The Little White Bird (1902) in which he is described as an ageless child--"ever so old, but he is always really the same age" (131). He is, nevertheless, in this first appearance, provided with the correct classical baggage, including a goat to ride upon and a set of reed pipes to play. The replacement of the mature

and sexually-active Pan of myth by Barrie's asexual boy-god in the 1904 drama (a characterization made even more ambiguous by the usual casting of a woman in the role) evoked a powerful response from contemporary audiences. In answer to Peter's appeal, whole audiences regressed to childhood: "If you believe [in fairies], clap your hands."[5] Peter Pan is a god only insofar as he has devoted followers; however, the price of worshipping this god of irresponsibility, was, for Barrie's "lost boys," alienation from the world of real human relationships. Although his devoted followers do him homage in Neverland, Peter is ultimately powerless: he cannot convince Wendy to abandon her home and mother; these more powerful "old Gods" ultimately regain control over Wendy, forcing Peter into the position of eternal outsider.

While Peter Pan is central to the action of the fantasy world within Barrie's larger story in Peter and Wendy, in The Wind in the Willows, Grahame conflates the mythic Pan and the Biblical God into a pantheistic Piper who appears only once, in a chapter disconcertingly different from the others. Grahame's Pan fills a role more like that of the conventional Christian God; that is, his immanence is acknowledged, but worship is presumably a personal and private matter. Many readers wish that Grahame had maintained this position, one which would have been perfectly in keeping with the tone of emotional restraint and good breeding which permeates the text. He chose,

however, to introduce the God of the animals in person in a chapter entitled "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn." Here the Piper is presented as an unfortunate combination of the Biblical Christ (references to Him are capitalized, and the lost baby otter is found "nestling between his very hooves") and the hoofed and horned satyr of Greek myth. The latter is evoked in the sensuality of Grahame's description:

> Trembling [Mole] . . . saw the rippling muscles on the arm that lay across the broad chest, the long supple hand still holding the pan-pipes only just fallen away from the parted lips; saw the splendid curves of the shaggy limbs disposed in majestic ease on the sward . . . . (7:181)

The conception of a pantheistic god in a story which so obviously glorifies the pastoral landscape and celebrates male bonding is not unreasonable. However, for this reader, at least, Grahame's insistence upon a physical presence destroys the Piper's potential mythic power. In humanizing the ineffable, Grahame renders the Piper at once embarrassing and effete. Furthermore, Grahame's emphasis on the abject submission of the animals and their entrancement in the Piper's presence not only seems laboured, but has the effect of undermining and diffusing the authority he has already established in the person of Badger. Although the Piper has found and protected the "lost lamb," a function traditionally attributed to the conventional God, or "Our Father," the reader remains unmoved, preferring Badger as a more believable source of paternal authority. Badger has all the attributes of a God: he is distant, all-powerful, wrathful

when roused, and lovingly protective of the young and weak. At the same time he is a focus for the action of the story, awe-inspiring yet approachable because he is one of the animal "family."

Badger is, of course, an idealized, that is an "anthropormorphized," animal character, one of many whose activities are set against an idealized rural landscape in The Wind in the Willows. The story is entirely concerned with this animal community of which the Wide World is apparently unaware. Animals and humans interact as equals in stories like Potter's The Tailor of Gloucester (1903), Kipling's Jungle Books, and Carroll's Alice books. In MacDonald's The Princess and Curdie, animal and human forms are interchangeable, an evil nature betraying itself by causing the "devolution" of the human form into the animal. Animals as companions and representatives of human beings are still a commonplace in fantasy as in centuries past. The tradition is continuous from the early beast fables through fairy-tales like "Beauty and the Beast," in which the enchanted Beast's ugly exterior cannot disguise the inner beauty of his human spirit. The Romantic vision of the child as instinctively in tune with the natural world encouraged an integration of the "talking animal" tradition with the Victorian cult of childhood. Animal characters link Victorian (and modern) fantasy with an Edenic past when men could still communicate freely with the lesser creatures. Furthermore, animal characters enable a writer to emphasize the symbolic aspect of a story, that is, to universalize his

material and comment generally or ironically upon human behavior. In The Princess and Curdie, for example, MacDonald introduces an interesting variation on the "Beauty and the Beast" theme. The ugly creature, "Lina," is described, somewhat ambiguously, as having originally been a "woman who was naughty." She has therefore devolved into "beastliness" and must now "earn" her return to human form.

"Animals, talking animals," writes Roger Sale, are "creatures that can recreate, flatter, and repudiate the human wish that we are not alone . . ." (98). For a variety of reasons, most of the writers discussed here were "loners." Whether this sense of alienation was rooted in childhood deprivation, in a feeling of "not fitting in" to society as an adult, or in other intellectual, sexual, or emotional conflicts, the result was an idiosyncratic vision which set the writer apart from his or her society. This sense of the solitary is reflected in many children's fantasies. Although some of them are carrying out the instructions of a more powerful being, most of the child-protagonists operate alone. They are either orphans like Kipling's Mowgli and Kim, "lost boys" like Peter Pan and his band of followers, or courageous but solitary figures like MacDonald's Princess Irene and Curdie, Carroll's Alice, and Potter's Jemima Puddle-duck. Animal characters can provide both the lonely writer and the lonely protagonist with a sense of companionship and a focus for affection. The most obvious example of this is to be found in the life and works

of Beatrix Potter, whose early years produced an almost pathological shyness which made social occasions agonizingly painful. Only with the animal pets she had collected in the summer holidays and brought home could she relax and communicate lovingly. Houghton's reference to the "childhood of the race," that is, a time when humans and animals were able to communicate, as a focus for loneliness and alienation helps to explain the appeal of the undemanding companionship of an animal friend. Furthermore, the loyal devotion of a member of a lower order of creation provides a feeling of ascendancy to the child or adult who is, or feels, powerless.

While the "retreat to the greenwood," Garden of Eden, or Arcadian woodland provided an opportunity for escape from certain aspects of adult life, it also offered the opportunity for a retreat to something. One unvarying feature of the pastoral settings of these books is the rural cottage, its welcoming family circle, and at the centre of that circle, the hearth. The fireside, obviously an atavistic symbol for all of us, is associated with a sense of security--the warmth and coziness we associate with home. Kenneth Grahame records a recurring dream of just such a snug, enclosed space:

> First there would be a sense of snugness, of cushioned comfort, of home-coming. Next, a gradual awakening to consciousness in a certain little room, very dear and familiar . . . always the same feeling of a homecoming, of the world shut out, of the ideal encasement. All was modest--O, so very modest! But all was my very own, and, what was more, everything in the room was exactly right. (Green, Kenneth Grahame, 87)

The fireplace as a symbol of comfort and security is common to many of these stories. Grahame's Badger and Rat, Potter's Mrs. Tiggy-winkle (and others), and MacDonald's Curdie are associated with cozy kitchen hearths. Even Carroll returns Alice to the family hearth after her adventures through the looking-glass. Zanger's contention that the pastoral vision of the Victorian fantasist is one of a rural England of the past is supported by descriptions and illustrations which evoke the hearths of an earlier era: flagged floors, burning logs, chimney corners, high-backed settles, rows of spotless plates, bunches of herbs and onions suspended from the ceiling:

> One of these [doors] the Badger flung open, and at once they found themselves in all the glow and warmth of a large fire-lit kitchen. . . . The ruddy brick floor smiled up at the smoky ceiling. The oaken settles, shiny with long wear, exchanged cheerful glances with each other; plates on the dresser grinned at pots on the shelf, and the merry firelight flickered and played over everything without distinction. (4:84)

Here the impact on the reader, both visually and emotionally, arises directly out of Grahame's syntax. The whole scene takes on a kind of cosy Pickwickian charm: floors smile, settles are cheerful, plates grin, firelight is merry and playful--all within the "glow and warmth of a large firelit kitchen." The resulting prose carries a deep emotional charge which evokes an answering response in the reader.

The sense of being securely and snugly enclosed is not always described in terms of cosy interiors. Often it has to

do with physical expressions of affection such as being hugged, caressed, enfolded, or carried in the arms of a parent. In MacDonald's Princess books, loving embraces of a deeply sensual type play a major role in the relationships between the protagonist and the "mother," that is, Princess Irene and her grandmother, and Diamond and his beloved North Wind:

> When [Diamond] saw her, he gave one spring, and his arms were about her neck, and her arms holding him to her bosom. . . . she placed him on her lap and began to hush him as if he were her own baby, and Diamond was so entirely happy that he did not care to speak a word. (36:358)

In the completely different context of Kipling's Jungle, Mowgli is "embraced" by one of his "fathers," the great python, Kaa:

> "Art thou at ease now? Could Bagheera give thee so good a resting-place?"
>
> Kaa had, as usual, made a sort of soft half-hammock of himself under Mowgli's weight. The boy reached out in the darkness, and gathered in the supple cable-like neck till Kaa's head rested on his shoulder, and then he told him all that had happened in the Jungle that night. (SJB 136)

One reason for the melancholy underlying Barrie's depiction of the Neverland is the lack of both physical comfort and domestic coziness. Not surprisingly, "Wendy's House" has an insubstantial fireplace which is carelessly placed in "any part of the room where you cared to light it" (7:125) and has only a hat for a chimney. Holes for windows and leaves for blinds seem haphazard and cheerless in comparison with Grahame's Mole End with its beer-rings on the tables, skittle alley, and, a wonderfully whimsical

touch by the author, a decorative bust of Garibaldi. "Of all the delectable islands, the Neverland is the snuggest" (1:44) writes Barrie in Peter and Wendy, yet no sense of "snugness" is to be found within "Wendy's House." Here there are no embraces, not even friendly ones. Peter is selfish, sexless, limited, lonely; he cannot love. The sense of "snugness" missing from Wendy's House is not recovered until Wendy is reunited with her mother, who is, predictably, waiting for her children "by the fire, where in the old days she had nursed them" (16:236).

It is not surprising that the regressive yearnings of Victorian and Edwardian children's fantasists include this fascination with snugness and security, and with a rural paradise far from urban ugliness and stress. The fantasy world provides opportunity for adventure within a place of ultimate safety; it further provides warmth and affection and the opportunity to experience or re-experience it as a child. The writer who feels out of touch with his fellow man, who sees the preoccupations of others as absurd and the direction in which "progress" is leading as wrong, yet out of his control, will no doubt find his ideas, should he succeed in communicating them, rejected by others. His frustration and his resulting isolation from others may encourage him in the creation of a secure and manageable world over which he has complete control. "[E]very work of art, every goal-directed task, every game played with another or even with oneself," writes Eric Rabkin, "all of these attempt to impose man's perspectives on an intractable

universe. The reality of life is chaos; the fantasy of man is order" (213). The creator of a fantasy world can put his ideas directly into practice, avoiding the petty bureaucratic tyrannies of the real world. Thus, he imposes his own sense of order upon his literary chessboard, gaining a sense of mastery and a measure of power. His pawn in this game is the child protagonist.

V

6

The child-heroes of Victorian and Edwardian children's fantasies are courteous, beautiful, sexless, and good--very good--representing what Roger Sale calls "the apotheosis of the Victorian cult of childhood" (221), that is, the real in combination with the ideal. These children embody both the idealized Romantic vision of the child as the epitome of natural goodness, and a conflicting, Calvinistic attitude that sees the child as in need of firm moral guidance just because of his or her immaturity. The product of this fusion of attitudes is a passive and obedient protagonist who occasionally strikes the reader as rather puppet-like.

Obviously, control over a plot lies in the hands of the creator, and in these stories that creator is often clearly identifiable with his characters or his narrator. MacDonald's North Wind, Irene's Grandmother, and the Wise Woman--warm, wise, stern--all represent aspects of a creator whose intrusive didacticism makes his controlling function obvious. Although the sustained hypocrisy which conventional

behavior demands provides her with much material for ironic comment, Beatrix Potter's ascerbic common sense ultimately supports adherence to traditional social codes. Kenneth Grahame is a far less obtrusive narrator than either MacDonald or Potter, yet Badger's influence over the Wildwooders allows the Riverbankers to live in peace, satisfying Grahame's desire for personal liberty within a rural community which nonetheless values "civilized" behavior. Kipling's Balloo propounds a moral system for the Jungle dwellers that seems very much a product of his creator's desire to make up all the rules and have everyone else obey them. Barrie's Peter Pan refuses to concede to the requirements of the adult world; he wants to make up his own rules as he goes along, while Carroll's Alice finds the ad hoc system in Wonderland distressing, and would dearly like to be given some rules to follow.

Paradoxically, then, although these stories are fantasies, most embody a fairly rigid moral scheme from which their creators allow little deviation without punishment. Much of the material in the stories is essentially didactic and authoritarian, good sense, correction, and order being brought to bear on the foolish, evil, and chaotic elements within the fantasy world. Because of the conscious and unconscious impulse for control which motivates the fantasist, therefore, the stories generally lack the element of play or fun. With the exception of Barrie's Neverland, and to a lesser extent Grahame's

Riverbank, where there is a sense of escape from responsibility, there is always work for the protagonist--people to help, dangers to avoid, evil to be defeated. Although the tone of all of the stories is more or less ironic, the corrective impulse is not always subtle. Regulations and admonitions abound: "Don't go into Mr. MacGregor's garden"; "a real princess cannot tell a lie . . . is never rude . . . must not break her word"; "The head and the hoof of the Law and the haunch and hump is--Obey!"; "You must teach him to be good, whether you like it or not"; "We animals never allow our friends to make fools of themselves beyond a certain limit"; "Those that wish to be foul, foul they will be. Remember." In Wonderland Alice complains: "How the animals order one about and make one repeat lessons." Certainly the inhabitants of that world seem totally unable to converse as opposed to merely giving orders or threatening punishment.

The obedience of the child-protagonist to his mentor is essential because it enables him to recognize and exorcise evil and allows him safe-conduct through a hostile world. This is important because the mission of the child protagonist in most of these fantasies is to establish or to restore order within the fantasy world. George MacDonald and Charles Kingsley, both ministers,[7] utilized didactic prose and an idealized protagonist in the service of religious allegory, projecting child-heroes whose inherent goodness gives them a Christ-like ability to redeem their fallen fellow men. Punning on the name of his protagonist, Tom, in

The Water-Babies (1863), Kingsley wrote:

> And if I have wrapped up my parable in seeming Tom-fooleries, it is because so only could I get the pill swallowed by a generation who are not believing with anything like their whole heart in the living God. (Kingsley 137)

Tom, a little chimney-sweep, begins as a "real" and dirty little boy but is metamorphosed by his fall into the river, becoming an amphibious "water-baby." Purified by the cleansing effect of cold water, he is sent to the "Other-Side-of-Nowhere" to effect the salvation of his former cruel master, Grimes, and thereby attain a state of grace himself. Whether Tom has actually drowned in the river, making his subsequent experiences somehow angelic, or whether his immersion is a kind of baptism allowing him to receive instruction in the love of God and thereby achieve this state, is not entirely clear. But in either case, death and didacticism, in about equal measure, pervade The Water-Babies as they do MacDonald's At the Back of the North Wind.

The hero of this story, little Diamond, is dying of tuberculosis. At the point of death, he is taken by his maternal mentor, North Wind, to visit the Back of the North Wind, a kind of heavenly waiting-room where people are not dead, but "waiting to be made gladder." After this experience, Diamond regains his health long enough to convert a drunkard, reunite lovers, rescue a sick orphan, and generally radiate goodness. The abilities of these children to convert the wicked and uplift the fallen seem tied on one hand to their extreme youth (Tom is called a

water-baby and Diamond is referred to as "God's baby"), and, on the other, to the fact that these "babies" are, paradoxically, either dead or dying, that is, they are already angelic. Thus, in two different senses the children fit Vaughan's description of his "Angel-infancy," conflating the Romantic vision with conventional Christian doctrine.

In most children's fantasies of the period, however, the child-hero is older than Tom or Diamond and in robust health. His mission is not so much the reform of individuals as the suppression and/or eradication of groups which threaten the established order of the fantasy world. In most cases, order is reimposed by the end of the story. However, sometimes the protagonist cannot win by mere moral example, and stronger methods of persuasion are necessary. In the first of MacDonald's Princess books, for example, the dual protagonists, Princess Irene and her friend Curdie, are able to save each other's lives because of their courage and faith in Irene's "heavenly" grandmother. Once Irene has learned to rely on this mysterious person, she can save Curdie from imprisonment in the goblin caverns. This she does by using the magic thread her grandmother has given her which is both symbolically and literally a life-line to the source of goodness and power. In this story, the threatening goblins can be kept at bay by Curdie's reciting verses and treading on their tender feet--a form of persuasion that is not without humour. But in the sequel, MacDonald's purpose is more direct. Curdie's enemies are not

goblins but men; Curdie is only a boy and he cannot do the job himself without divine aid. Astonishingly, Irene's grandmother's way of helping Curdie to "put on the whole armour of God" is to offer him a supporting army of savage creatures which attack on command. Curdie and his army physically subdue the wicked citizens of Gwyntystorm who have imprisoned Irene and her father, the King. Curdie carries and uses a miner's mattock, dealing out a good deal of old-fashioned corporal punishment in the process. Finally, in both books a kind of moral cleansing takes place: in The Princess and the Goblin, the goblin caverns are cleared of their inhabitants by a flood; in The Princess and Curdie, the buildings of the city, undermined (an interesting word choice in terms of the plot of the former story) by a corrupt government and populace, collapse and are reduced to rubble.

The intelligence, initiative, courage, and physical strength displayed by Curdie are shared in varying degrees by the young protagonists of other fantasies of the period. All employ their abilities in order to control those elements of their societies which their creators see as dangerous to the public good. Kipling's Kim is trained in the British Intelligence service to protect British interests in India, in effect, to dominate, and if necessary betray, his former friends. Mowgli grows up to become master of his former teachers; with their help he punishes the dholes who invade his territory, and the monkey-people who do not adhere to Jungle law, with horrible deaths. With

Badger's assistance, Grahame's Riverbankers rout the rebellious Wildwooders who occupy Toad Hall. Interestingly, the fight is on behalf of Toad, whose conduct they have previously abominated. Presumably, Toad's social position cancels out his outrageous behavior when the old order is under fire. At this point, his arrogant rejection of conventionality becomes merely symptomatic of his aristocratic origins. Thus, the ending of The Wind in the Willows says much about Grahame's conception of those elements of the community which deserve suppression.

This is not to say that rebellious and unruly elements are always successfully suppressed in these stories. There are forces for disorder that survive. Grahame's Toad and Barrie's Peter Pan partake, to some extent, of the same regressive male drive, an immaturity which manifests itself in an implacable refusal to behave responsibly. Both are willing to pretend conformity in order to achieve their own ends, and ultimately both succeed. However, there are clear differences between the ways in which each character sees himself and his situation, differences which are made clear by the tone of each story's ending. Peter moves with ease between the human and the fairy worlds, finding neither entirely satisfactory. It is true that he suffers no remorse or guilt; when Wendy reminds him of the death of Captain Hook, Peter remarks carelessly: "I forget them after I kill them" (17:244). But Peter forgets the people with whom he comes into contact because he is unable to form lasting

relationships with them. Because of his decision not to grow up, Peter will never develop, marry, have children, or grow wiser. The pessimism pervading this story is due to Barrie's awareness of this fact, and of his acknowledgement of the price Peter must pay for never growing up: the alienation symbolized by Peter's wistful vigil outside Wendy's nursery window:

> There could not have been a lovelier sight; but there was none to see it except a little boy who was staring in at the window. He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be forever barred. (16:237)

Grahame's Toad is also childish but his immaturity takes a different and more recognizably "human" form than Peter Pan's. Toad is a smasher and a breaker, a liar and prevaricator, a boaster and show-off--in other words, a typical spoiled child. Like Peter, Toad feels no guilt; however, his bogus "reformation" secretly delights the reader:

> Toad felt, as he moved from one guest to another, making his modest responses, that he was an object of absorbing interest to every one. . . . At intervals he stole a glance at the Badger and the Rat, and always when he looked they were staring at each other with their mouths open; and this gave him the greatest satisfaction. (12:348)

The reader senses that the recalcitrant Toad will ultimately defeat the combined efforts of Badger and the others. This pleases him, partly because their lectures have been so patently pompous, so filled with the cliché's of the "heavy

father":

> "It's for your own good, Toady," went on the Rat. "You know you must turn over a new leaf sooner or later, and now seems a splendid time to begin; a sort of turning-point in your career. Please don't think that saying all this doesn't hurt me more than it hurts you." (12:343)

The Rat's condescending superiority is characteristic of the narrative tone of several of these stories. But although the various authority figures tend to display a god-like wisdom unusual in most parents, at the same time they clearly love and jealously guard the younger, weaker protagonist from harm. Unlike so many fictional heroines who are relieved of the burden of their parents early in the story in order to free them for adventures, and unlike the heroes of the typical Bildungsroman who leave their parents behind in a bid for independence, the youthful heroes of these fantasies are always ultimately protected by various author-surrogates. Princess Irene and Curdie can rely on her grandmother to help them confront malicious goblins and evil men; Mowgli takes Kaa's advice before attempting to outsmart the whole pack; Mole, inexperienced, cold, and frightened in the Wildwood, is "saved" by the devotion of Rat and the kindness of Badger; and Potter's Jemima is protected by Shep, the Collie, who, it turns out, has been keeping an eye on her all along.

Here, as is so often the case, Carroll's Alice proves an exception. She does return safely from Wonderland to the arms of a loving sister who takes the place of a parent, but

during her adventures in both fantasy worlds, the sense of a benevolent protector, so integral and obvious in the other books, is missing. Alice has to survive in a chaotic universe; her efforts to order it by her own initiative are in vain. Only a defiant front is respected in Wonderland; failure to maintain it merits derision. Unlike other fantasists of the period (with the exception, perhaps, of Barrie at his most merciless), Carroll ruthlessly excises the qualities of affection, sympathy, and sorrow from the Alice books. He was aware of this lack of emotional warmth: of Alice, he commented: "I think it was about m(alice)" (Phillips 304). In the Alice books, Carroll wrote out his suppressed anger, expressing, like Edward Lear, the conflict between society and the individual who doesn't fit in, and who feels unable to communicate with, or to influence, those in positions of power. Children often feel this kind of powerlessness vis-a-vis the adult world; typically, nothing that Alice can say in Wonderland really hurts. Everyone there is impervious to pain, their own and Alice's. Her "Who cares for you?" seems relatively ineffective as retaliation because, in Wonderland, no one cares for, or is caring for, her. Alice doesn't win in Wonderland; she merely abandons the whole project, withdrawing with hollow bravado from what her creator apparently saw as a cold and faceless enemy. For the other writers, the fantasy world seems to offer protection; for Carroll, the world "inside the ring" seems as threatening as the world outside.

In the quotation which heads this chapter, John Fowles

describes the English imagination in terms which incorporate all of the foregoing: the nostalgia of fallen man for a lost, specifically pastoral, state of childhood bliss, and his desire, in recapturing the past, simultaneously to escape from and give voice to his disillusionment with the present. According to Fowles, the English have made "a psychological art out of escaping present, or camera reality," an escape into literary fantasy worlds. This form of escape he calls the "retreat to the greenwood," the provision of a protective circle or secret garden within which the writer feels free to express his "private reality" (289-290). This perception of how the English writer utilizes imagination offers an illuminating way of explaining why certain Victorian and Edwardian writers created fantasies for and about children. Both the imaginary worlds they created and the fact that the books were, ostensibly at least, written for a child-audience, offered the writer psychological cover: an opportunity for both retreat and attack. This duality produces a constant tension within the works between the didactic conservative and the poetic visionary, between order and disorder, between constraint and freedom.

In the following three chapters I will further explore this duality in the works of three fantasists: George MacDonald, Rudyard Kipling, and Beatrix Potter. Each writer utilized the genre to express his or her own personal needs in a characteristic way. MacDonald's desire to strengthen

religious faith, to promulgate his idiosyncratic views of life and death and truth, results in a fascinating and complex interplay between the poet and the preacher. Potter's determination to fulfill her potential in spite of the opposition faced by capable women in the late nineteenth century resulted in the Tales, through which she finally achieved her liberty. Kipling's early experiences engendered a conflict between creativity and constraint, between the drive to demonstrate a rebellious initiative and ingenuity, and the necessity for unquestioning obedience to authority, however painful such submission might be.

Each of these children's fantasists used their works to convey subversive attitudes, to comment critically and satirically on their society. Ironically, rather than advocating revolutionary ideas and radical solutions, all ultimately place their confidence in an idealized but conservative social vision: a traditional England--peaceful, hierarchical, and orderly. Thus, it is not because their writers were escapist or revolutionary that these stories have retained their popularity long enough to attain the status of fictional classics. Rather it is the recognition by succeeding generations of readers that in these explorations of the fantasy worlds of childhood lies a desperate attempt to face the real world and maturity.

Notes

1

Like James Barrie, Charles Dodgson was an observer rather than a participant in human relationships. Barrie manipulated players on the stage; Dodgson posed them for his camera. His photography gave him a respectable reason for picking up little girls and his obsessive personal rectitude probably served the same ends. Paul Schilder suggests that Dodgson's devotion to young girls substituted for an attachment to his mother and eight sisters. The Alice books ridicule romantic love, associating it with old and ugly women, perhaps a further defense against the mature women of his family. This would indicate that Dodgson pursued young girls because he was able to convince himself of their asexuality or sexual innocence. His obsession produced frustration, insecurity and guilt, which were in turn repressed by his moral consciousness, surfacing in the "comic" distortions, or "nonsense," of the Alice books. In 1935 William Empson commented that "to make the dream-story from which Wonderland was elaborated seem Freudian one has only to tell it." See his essay and those of Schilder and others in Phillips, ed. Aspects of Alice, Part VII: "Freudian Interpretations."

2

On Freud and the "uncanny" see Jackson, pp. 63-72. On the relationship of Freud's heimlich and unheimlich ("The Uncanny," 1919) to Victorian fantasy, see Steig, pp. 81-82.

3

See Luanne Walther, "The Invention of Childhood in Victorian Autobiography," Approaches to Victorian Autobiography, ed. George P. Landow (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), pp. 64-83.

4

The obsessive attachment of Barrie's wife for their dogs partly compensated for her unsatisfactory marriage and lack of children: "Perhaps my love for dogs, in the beginning, was a sort of mother-love. Porthos was a baby when I first saw him . . . . My heart burnt hot for love of him . . . ."; "I only loved clever men. And clever men, it seems to me, are made up of reserves. And I loved my dogs so passionately because they could never, never be clever in that way. They could never be complicated as men are complicated" (Birkin 30. See also pp. 40 and 98).

5

Regarding the production of Peter Pan in 1904, Birkin comments: "[I]t is none too clear what sort of audience Barrie had in mind. The story seemed to be aimed primarily at children, yet much of the dialogue was curiously sophisticated . . . much of it appeared to consist of private jokes intelligible only to the author and the Davies family. Indeed the whole play seemed like indulgence on the grand scale . . ." (104).

6

It is hard to know what term best describes the central characters of these books. MacDonald's little Diamond is hardly a hero. He is too idealized and too much a tool of the powerful goddess, North Wind. The same is true of Princess Irene, although she is strong and healthy. Curdie is more traditionally heroic, but this is only because he is physically strong and personally punishes his enemies. But he is still only an agent of Irene's grandmother and could not triumph on his own without her personal support and that of her animal army. Carroll's Alice is a central character, but seems more acted upon than active. Who then is the protagonist in Wonderland? Perhaps it is because these are children and cannot therefore operate independently that the problem arises. As a child in "Kaa's Hunting," Mowgli is a victim; but as an adult in "Red Dog," he is a hero. Potter's Jemima is an adult and therefore a heroine for her efforts, even if they ultimately fail. Yet Grahame's Mole and Rat, both adults, are treated as children by the fatherly Badger: "He looked kindly down on them and patted both their heads. 'This is not the sort of night for small animals to be out,' he said paternally" (4:82). Peter Pan fills the role of hero fairly well, but this is because he is not human and his adventures are set in the realm of faery. His efforts against Hook and the pirates have none of the realism of Jim Hawkins' efforts to escape Long John Silver and his men in Stevenson's Treasure Island.

7

In this connection it is interesting to note that Charles Dodgson took Deacon's Orders but resolutely avoided final ordination. Study of the text of Alice indicates his ambivalence about conventional Christian dogma. As "Lewis Carroll," Dodgson parodied his own inflexibility. Dodgson condemned levity in reference to sacred things; Carroll wrote parodies of religious verse. Dodgson felt that fiction should be morally circumspect and realistic; Carroll opted for fantasy and the distancing effect of nonsense. Unlike other child-protagonists who are ultimately safe under the protection of a benevolent Authority, Alice's creator abandons his creation to an uncaring and apparently godless universe, not an orderly world filled with God's love, but

a chaotic and empty world, presided over by a "grin without a cat." Carroll's close friendship with George MacDonald, a minister who lost his pulpit in his youth for alleged heretical views, is suggestive.

Chapter Two

George MacDonald: Poet and Preacher

> The natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them . . . but they may suggest laws of other kinds, and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws . . . which is the nearest, perhaps, he can come to creation.
>
> MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination"

I

Most of the novels of George MacDonald (1824-1905) are forgotten now. Many of them are marred by intrusive sermonizing, attesting to the author's conviction that literary art and moral instruction need not be mutually exclusive. MacDonald was aware of the limitations of his fiction: "People," he once remarked, "find that I turn my stories into sermons. They forget that I have a Master to serve first before I can wait upon the public" (GMHW 375). MacDonald's willingness to subordinate mere art to what was, for him, the expression of truth, eventually resulted in the relegation of his realistic novels to the second rank. After some initial prodding by G.K. Chesterton, W.H. Auden, and C.S. Lewis, however, twentieth-century readers have discovered in MacDonald's fantasies for both children and adults a powerful imaginative vision.[1]

In the introduction to Barbara Fremantle's The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald (1954), Auden flatly states that MacDonald's The Princess and the Goblin is "the

only English children's book in the same class as the Alice books" (vi). Many readers would not be prepared to go this far; indeed, some would even balk at Richard Reis' statement in George MacDonald (1972) that three of MacDonald's fantasies for children--At the Back of the North Wind (1871), The Princess and the Goblin (1872), and The Princess and Curdie (1883)--are books which "continue to be popular in the twentieth century" (81). Whether or not one quibbles over the word "popular," however, these stories are at least readily available, and therefore must, even a century later, still hold some fascination for children. MacDonald's short fantasies, the best of which are "The Golden Key," an enigmatic quest story, and "The Light Princess," a delightful tale of a princess who loses her "gravity," deserve to be better known. MacDonald's other book-length fantasy, The Wise Woman (1875), does not, and is deservedly forgotten. In addition to the children's stories, MacDonald wrote two fantasies for adults: an early novel, Phantastes (1858), and Lilith (1895), his last work. The fantasies involve characters ranging from the grotesque to the godlike, settings varying from realistic scenes of urban blight to imaginary pastoral dreamscapes, and quasi-allegorical plots[2] in which characters undergo moral instruction in real and imaginary worlds. Like one of MacDonald's beloved highland mists, a brooding pessimism hovers over every story, threatening at any moment to descend and darken the landscape. Presumably these violent

contrasts reflect the deep divisions within Macdonald's personality.

The practical man and the romantic visionary were undoubtedly united in George MacDonald. An adherent of the English poets and the German Romantics, MacDonald composed Byronic poems while earning degrees in chemistry and physics from the University of Aberdeen: "Poetry is true as Science, and Science is holy as Poetry" he wrote; " . . . the moment that you put a man in the midst of it, the clashing of water-drops becomes a storm, terrible to heart and brain: human thought and feeling make the motions of nature alive with mystery and the shadows of destiny" (GMHW 71). By the time MacDonald graduated in 1845, however, he was considering the ministry rather than the medical career he had prepared for. He hesitated because his religious beliefs seemed antagonistic to orthodox Calvinist doctrine: "I firmly believe people have hitherto been a great deal too much taken up about doctrine," MacDonald wrote in 1851, "and far too little about practice . . . I am neither Arminian nor Calvinist. To no system would I subscribe . . ." (GMHW 155). This position is hardly surprising considering the influence of a father whose "unorthodoxy was so notorious that some were annoyed at their minister marrying his cousin" (GMHW 241). That one whose religious convictions were imaginative and quasi-mystical rather than conventionally doctrinal should have received a "call" to the ministry was perhaps inevitable. Equally predictable, considering MacDonald's dogmatic and

fearless temperament, was the denunciation for unorthodoxy that terminated his first and only appointment as a Congregationalist minister. Having been accused of flirting with German theology and of preaching Heaven even for the heathen, MacDonald was forced to resign from his post in 1853. His pulpit lost, MacDonald turned to writing as a way of meeting the urgent practical needs of a growing family.

In his realistic novels, MacDonald found an alternative pulpit from which to preach the Christian message. Here he restricted himself to conventional Christian dogma and a traditional plot; the stories conclude happily with self-denial rewarded and evil punished. He acknowledged that some of his readers were alienated by the sermonizing in his novels: "Why is it," he asked "that men and women will welcome any tale of love, devotion, and sacrifice from one to another of themselves, but will turn from the least hint at the existence of a perfect love at the root of it all?" (WW 2:26). The answer, of course, lies in the inability of the reader to take much interest in characters whose actions appear to have been predetermined in accordance with moral laws laid down by the author. However, in spite of their regrettable moralizing, occasional sentimentality, and MacDonald's insistence upon rendering the dialogue in his Scots novels in an almost incomprehensible dialect, the realistic novels sold well. Possibly they also paid off psychologically, in that, having written his more conventional sermons in the realistic

novels, MacDonald felt free to express a more imaginative, even subversive, vision when writing his fantasies.[3]

The realistic novels are less successful artistically than the fantasies because domestic realism provided an inadequate vehicle for MacDonald's creative strengths and little outlet for his emotional needs. Fantasy, however, could fulfill both of these functions while retaining a parabolic form. It allowed MacDonald to enrich and support his moral message with a potently evocative system of symbols. The resulting stories reflect this dualism: MacDonald's uncompromising adherence to what he terms moral law provides a framework for scenes of numinous mysticism and startling sensuality lacking in the realistic novels. Furthermore, the fantasies reflect a sense of pessimism, disillusionment, and a hostility rising to violence, all of which suggests that MacDonald felt profound if subconscious misgivings about God's purposes and mankind's potential to fulfill them.

In addition to providing greater scope for his creative powers and an outlet for a whole range of negative feelings, the creative freedom provided by the fantasy form released MacDonald from the constraints of conventional Christian dogma. The fantasies offer a religious perspective in the tradition of visionaries like Böhme, Swedenborg, Vaughan, and Blake. For example, MacDonald saw life and death, not as two different states of being, but as integral parts of the on-going process of life. Characters "experience" deaths in the fantasies and live to tell about them:

"You have tasted of death now," said the Old Man. "Is it good?"

"It is good," said Mossy, "It is better than life."

"No," said the Old Man, "It is only more life." (TLP 238)

Such an imaginative perception seems congruent with the nebulosity of "The Golden Key," but it is not an idea easily expressed within the time constraints of a novel whose readers expected a conventional denouement. Neither would it have been acceptable, in terms of traditional Christian dogma, to the average Victorian churchgoer. At the same time, while the fantasies present a religious vision which is creative, suggestive, and evocative, ultimately it is all but impossible for the reader to define. In the fantasies the preacher becomes one with the poet. Perhaps this was the only way in which MacDonald could convey such a highly idiosyncratic religious vision.

II

The fibres of MacDonald's religious and imaginative visions are so closely interwoven that it is difficult (and perhaps hardly necessary) to separate them. Greville MacDonald refers to his father's religious system as "theocratic individualism," a description which is probably as good as any for a kind of government by God, with MacDonald as chief priest and occasional advisor. From his earliest years, MacDonald seems to have had a remarkable

sense of intimacy with God. He saw their relationship as a kind of partnership in which his role was that of intermediary and interpreter of God's wishes for mankind. He insisted that God's love be available not just to the elect, but to all men, and didn't hesitate to communicate this idea to God:

> I well remember . . . feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was the love that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men. (GMHW 85)

It was, of course, MacDonald's insistence on the all-inclusiveness of God's love that cost him his first and only pulpit, and at least part of the reason is apparent in his assertive tone: compromise is unlikely with a man whose convictions are strong enough to allow him to dictate terms to God. MacDonald's exacting approach is further reflected in his demand that this all-loving God must, nonetheless, stand in an intimate personal relation with him, that is, as an adoring father to an only son:

> No; thou must be a god to me
> As if I stood alone
> I such a perfect child to thee
> As if thou hadst but one.
> (MacDonald, "The Disciple," 1868)

Acting as a self-appointed spokesman for a demanding God, MacDonald in turn required obedience from his characters. The plots of most of the fantasies involve a relationship in which patient but relentless pressure is

brought to bear upon a recalcitrant or hesitant protagonist by a powerful mentor or author-surrogate who is ultimately successful in his or her persuasive approach. Both Anodos (Phantastes [1858]) and Vane (Lilith [1895]), the protagonists of MacDonald's two fantasies for adults, submit to the God-like requirements of their creator. Each ends his pilgrimage distinctly chastened and subdued: "I have a strange feeling sometimes," says Anodos at the end of Phantastes, "that I am a ghost, sent into the world to minister to my fellow-men, or, rather, to repair the wrongs I have already done" (181). The reader is at a loss to understand how poor Anodos, whose greatest sin seems to have been to achieve his twenty-first year, has deserved to be thus reduced so early in life. Similarly, Vane, the hero of Lilith, must capitulate to Adam/Raven's requirement that he lie down and, at least metaphorically, die, before he can reassume an earthly existence. Like Mossy in "The Golden Key," Vane learns that life on earth is merely a preparation for death, or the beginning of real life:

> It may be that when most awake I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more. (47:420)

In the two fantasies for adults, the protagonists are so completely at a lost as to how to operate in the worlds in which they find themselves that they have to be led like children. The protagonists of the children's fantasies are more gently led than those of the adult books, but their

capitulation is as complete: "I have one idea of you and your work, and you have another," says Irene's grandmother in The Princess and Curdie, "You must be ready to let my idea which sets you working, set your idea right" (85-86). Paradoxically, then, dutiful obedience to authority underlies the structure of the fantasies, reflecting MacDonald's professed view of God's relation to mankind: "[God] makes the actors, and they do not act,--they are their part . . . Man is but a thought of God" (ADO 4). Yet, just as MacDonald was not by temperament passive or lacking in either physical or moral courage, so neither are his fictional characters submissive weaklings. On the contrary, the physical and mental trials they must undergo are described in horrific detail. Situations requiring considerable courage constantly arise; difficult decisions and choices must be made. In the fantasies, MacDonald the preacher was freed to wrestle, like Jacob, with his God. The books reflect this subversive struggle: ego is constantly at war with humility, recalcitrance with obedience, heresy with faith.

To lose this fight, to submit the will to the edicts of authority in a kind of death of the self, is the hardest trial MacDonald's protagonists must undergo. J. R. R. Tolkien's suggestion in Tree and Leaf that "death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald" (68) can easily be substantiated from the fantasies. MacDonald's son records his father's habit of saying "I wis we war a' deid!"

(GMHW 84) but hastens to add that his father's vision of life and death was such as to make this a positive statement. Death, which for MacDonald was to lead to "more life," required the abandonment of the individual will: "You will be dead, so long as you refuse to die," says Adam/Raven to Vane in Lilith (58). It appears, therefore, that God can effect his purpose only when man submits his will to God's. Yet MacDonald maintains that God's purpose will be fulfilled in spite of man's efforts to thwart it. The stubborn Lilith struggles against this Power:

> "I defy that Power to unmake me from a free woman. You are his slave, and I defy you! . . ."
> "There is no slave but the creature that wills against its creator . . ."
> "I defy you! I hold myself against you! What I choose to be, you cannot change . . ."
> "I am sorry: you must suffer!"

In the following scene, Lilith does indeed suffer and finally capitulates : "I yield," said the princess, "I cannot hold out. I am defeated" (39:371, 378). Thus human free will is discounted, even refuted. Man is at God's mercy and only imagines his freedom of choice; ultimately he is God's slave. It is difficult to determine MacDonald's religious position here: on one hand he insists that man's life is ultimately determined by a God who rewards obedience and punishes the exercise of self-will; on the other hand he suggests that there are genuine choices to be made.

Of the various literary forms open to him, fantasy, which deals in the suggestive and indefinable, could express MacDonald's religious system best, because in it the

symbolic, abstract, and visionary, can be given more concrete forms. For example, fantasy allowed MacDonald to give imaginative expression to his belief that evil, destruction, and death are merely parts of the process of human perfectibility. Thus, he can at least attempt to convince the reader (how successfully is another question) that such depressing events as Diamond's death in At the Back of the North Wind, the destruction of Gwyntystorm in The Princess and Curdie, and the survival of the monsters in Lilith, are merely inevitable and ultimately positive aspects of human existence. He could also give vivid expression to his idea that moral degeneration could be reflected in physical appearance, an interesting theory of "devolution." In the fantasies, animals can evolve upwards, becoming more human, while human beings degenerate into animals:

> Everyone, as you ought to know, has a beast-self--and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent-self, too--which takes a deal of crushing to kill! You can tell what sort a man is by his creature that comes oftenest to the front. (Lil 6:211)

Nevertheless, Curdie's "animal" army, composed of just such human degenerates, would appear grotesque, almost ludicrous, were it not provided for a serious purpose: to enforce "moral law" and order.

All of this leads one to conclude that, in spite of his rejection of orthodox Calvinist doctrine, MacDonald remained very much an authoritarian. He believed that man's

imagination is "made in the image of the imagination of God" and that "a man is rather being thought than thinking when a new thought arises in his mind" (ADO 3,4). Thus, when man creates, exercising his imagination, he bodies forth God-like ideas. No doubt MacDonald found this a comforting thought; however, problems arise when he maintains that man's imagination, supposedly a reflection of God's, can somehow be "right" or "wrong":

> A right imagination, being the reflex of the creation, will fall in with the divine order of things . . . will be content with growth toward the divine idea, . . . will know that every deviation from that growth is downward . . . . This is the work of the right imagination; and towards this work every imagination, in proportion to the rightness that is in it, will tend. (ADO 35)

If the "right" imagination is indeed "the reflex of the creation," one wonders where MacDonald would find the source of a "wrong" imagination. One is left to conclude that a "right" imagination is one which sees things in MacDonald's, and by extension in God's, way. Because in spite of his creative religious perceptions--a heaven for animals, death as "more life," the ultimate salvation of the Devil, and the coexistence of different worlds--MacDonald recreated God in an image that provided security and direction for his own life:

> Witness the dissatisfaction, yea desolation of my soul without him! It cannot act from itself, save in God; acting from what seems itself without God . . . is a mere yielding to impetus. All within is disorder and spasm. (US 2:77-8)

Within and without (the words form the title of one of MacDonald's early poems), God must be exerting his influence in MacDonald's life because this conviction helps to justify and validate his failed ministry and resulting poverty, his chronic ill-health, and what one suspects, considering his preoccupation with obedience, was a constant struggle to subdue intellect to faith.

III

In "The Fantastic Imagination" (1893), his theoretical essay on the uses of the imagination, MacDonald emphasizes the same moral considerations that underlie his religious system. Here, they function to constrain the freedom of the fantasist. This paradox, a liberated imagination loaded with chains, reflects MacDonald's inability to consciously express his self; he must be always doing his duty, "the work that God maketh."

> License is not what we claim when we assert the duty of the imagination to be that of following and finding out the work that God maketh . . . It is only the ill-bred, that is, the uncultivated imagination that will amuse itself where it ought to worship and work. (ADO 12)

The resulting fusion of religious and imaginative thought is at once complex, intriguing, and ultimately ambiguous. In the first place, his insistence upon a consistent and morally responsible fantasy world results in a considerably circumscribed definition of "imagination." His visionary or

imaginative ideas are always firmly anchored by an obsessive preoccupation with obedience and laws: "Obeying laws," he wrote, "the maker works like his creator" (ADO 315). As the real world was created in accordance with "physical laws," so the fantasist may create his own fantasy world as long as, once established, the laws are consistently applied. In "Tree and Leaf," Tolkien suggests that the invented world must, in some deeply-felt mythical or allegorical way, provide the reader with "a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality" (71). Similarly, MacDonald feels that it is "the duty of the imagination" to ensure that the "forms" or invented worlds of fantasy provide "new embodiments of old truths" (ADO 314). For Tolkien, the "Christian Story" does just this, combining historical truth and mythical significance. For MacDonald, "beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed," but "law is the soil in which alone beauty will grow" (ADO 315). Here MacDonald is referring to what he calls moral law, a "law of the spirit" which he considers inviolable in both real and invented worlds: "In physical things," he writes, "a man may invent, in moral things he must obey and take moral laws with him into his invented world" (ADO 316). The best products of "the fantastic imagination" are those which result when the fantasy world is subject to moral law and provides "new embodiments of old truths." Thus, MacDonald's approach to fantasy seems essentially conservative and exemplary of what Zanger and Jackson term the "elegiac" or "transcendent" fantasist of the period.

MacDonald makes it clear that he is not concerned to "label" the truths or meanings in his work; he wants his reader to respond freely to his writing. Man has only God's "embodied thought" to work with, and since these thoughts contain layers of "ascending significance," and because "so many [are] the facts hinted at in every symbol" (ADO 320-21), a writer cannot control the reception of his ideas in the mind of the reader. The "right reader" for MacDonald, therefore, is not necessarily a child, but a reader with the openness of a child:

> I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five"; . . . he that will be a man, and will not be a child, must . . . become a little man, that is, a dwarf. (ADO 317, 322)

There is, however, some ambiguity in MacDonald's approach. He grants his reader the right to a personal apprehension of the significance of his symbolic system; however, he has little patience with the reader who does not recognize "truth" when he sees it. The reader, MacDonald maintains with some acerbity, must "know a horse" when he sees one, because "the business of the painter is not to teach zoology" (ADO 317). His "right reader," then, is one who will read with enough sensitivity to recognize MacDonald's "truths," but will also, if necessary, accept them on faith:

> In respect of great truths investigation goes for little, speculation for nothing; if a man would know them, he must obey them. Their nature is such that the only door into them is obedience. (ADO 72)

The conflict here is obvious: "speculation," which one would expect to be the starting point of any search for "great truths," is to count for nothing; obedience is all. And certainly it is this quality which MacDonald requires from the protagonists of his fantasies: "Now, first of all, service is obedience, or it is nothing . . . we are put here in this world precisely to learn obedience . . . it is as divine for us to obey as it is for God to rule" (ADO 305, 310). Obedience, therefore, is as central to MacDonald's fantasy writing as it is to his religion. MacDonald's use of such paradoxical expressions as "the duty of the imagination" make clear his reluctance to allow either his reader's or his own intellect the freedom to probe spiritual matters. He prescribes work in lieu of faith, duty in lieu of conviction. Obedience becomes, in C.N. Manlove's words, "not only a means to unconscious surrender, but of conscious suppression of self" (63).

For MacDonald, therefore, the moral law which the fantastic imagination must serve involves the performance of man's duty to his God and his fellow-man: "When I say the book is full of Truth, I do not mean truth of theory or truth in art, but something far deeper and higher--the realities of our relations to God and man and duty--all, in short, that belongs to conscience" (GMHW 552). The fantasies center on the protagonist's discovery of this correct relationship between "God and man and duty," spiritual knowledge that must accompany the maturing process. Richard Reis suggests that in the fantasies MacDonald's subject

matter concerns "man's relations with his God and his conscience rather than with his fellow man" (106). This view seems closer to the truth than does Stephen Prickett's claim in Victorian Fantasy (1979) that MacDonald's characters "never lose the feeling that, whatever the circumstances, their behavior towards others matters. His worlds are never private 'fantasies' in which the other people encountered have no real existence of their own" (182). It is difficult, certainly in the case of Phantastes, Lilith, and The Wise Woman, to feel any real warmth, even between the protagonist and his mentor, or to feel that such characters as Lilith have any "real existence of their own." Furthermore, although MacDonald may have believed in the immanence in Nature of a loving God whose presence "interpenetrates both the material and spiritual dimensions," these three books, that is, the fantasies that seem least linked to the real world, reflect what seems at times a thinly-veiled hostility between God and his imperfect creation. The reader of these stories, along with, perhaps, "The Golden Key," can hardly be faulted for feeling that he has indeed stumbled into a "private fantasy," in which the "real existence" of any of the characters is difficult to accept.

Profoundly influenced by Pilgrim's Progress,[4] Bunyan's allegory of man's search for salvation, MacDonald also cast his fantasies in the form of parables of life's journey. Thus, MacDonald retained the familiar Bildungsroman form of the realistic Victorian novel in which the hero serves an

apprenticeship as part of the maturing process. In the fantasies, however, the apprenticeship is served under a Higher Moral Authority. Like Bunyan's Christian, MacDonald's protagonists undertake perilous journeys or quests during which they mature and develop under the protective guidance of this spiritual mentor. The protagonist is exposed to difficulty, danger, even death, in order that he or she may overcome them by demonstrating self-denial, moral courage, and an obedience which MacDonald would like us to see as faith, but which occasionally seems more like coercion. Unlike Bunyan's unified dream-vision, MacDonald's fantasies all involve the interrelationship of real and fantasy worlds, a schema he describes as the "interdependence of the material and spiritual dimensions" (GMHW 550). In Lilith, Vane's father records a conversation with his librarian, Mr. Raven:

> "There is in your house a door, one step through which carries me into a world very much other than this."
> "A better?"
> "Not throughout; but so much another that most of its physical and many of its mental laws are different from those of this world. As for moral laws, they must everywhere be fundamentally the same."
> (Lil 8:220)

Although MacDonald consciously constrained his imagination, his fantasies succeed because, while still preaching a moral message, they offer scope for his unusual strengths: his impressive symbolic structures, the arresting characters that inhabit his invented worlds, and his ability to impart a dreamlike, often nightmarish, quality to both setting and

action. The authoritarian stance and preoccupation with "moral law" which proves tediously didactic in many of the realistic novels functions more successfully in the fantasies (with the exception of The Wise Woman). Here all that is numinous, sensuous, and imaginative operates to balance the rigid moral schema and vice versa. The purpose for which Curdie's army of ferocious sub-human creatures is provided, for example, effectively controls what might otherwise have proved an overpowering symbolic profusion. In the fantasies, the dream modulates the sermon and the concrete tempers the abstract. The stories reflect MacDonald's personal "retreat to the greenwood"; sheltered in the protective ring of the fantasy world he could express ideas and feelings that had otherwise to be denied. Combining the sermon and the vision while while retaining an allegorical form, the fantasies reverse what was the case with the realistic novels: what might have been mere sermon, becomes story, or, as C. S. Lewis would have it, myth (Phan 10-11).

IV

"In his power to project his inner life into images, events, beings, landscapes which are valid for all," wrote Auden of MacDonald, "he is one of the most remarkable writers of the nineteenth century" (Fremantle vi). The source of the mythic quality which both Lewis and Auden

ascribe to MacDonald's fantasies is to be found in the writer's symbolic structure, both in the individual symbol and its repetition and variation throughout the stories. The symbols project what Auden terms "validity" largely because they fall into three categories with which readers, young and old, are familiar: 1) nature symbols--wind and moon, fire and water, fertility and drought; 2) mythic symbols--regenerative waters, tempering fires, doves of peace, words and music that charm; and 3) psychic symbols--mirrors, shadows, stairs, the doppleganger, and so on. Naturally the children's fantasies provide less symbolic complexity than do Phantastes or Lilith, but MacDonald can make relatively simple symbols carry an impressive symbolic load. When Princess Irene's grandmother bathes her, for example, the experience conveys overtones that are at once religious, maternal, sensuous, and magical. In this way, MacDonald manages to intensify the religious experience and convey his truths in ways that broaden the scope of conventional Christian teaching for children.

MacDonald's need for an intense parent/child relationship with God led him to conflate the Heavenly father with an earthly one. Even this did not seem entirely satisfactory and, perhaps as a way of expressing his desire for the protective love of a mother, he went one step further, transforming the Heavenly father into an earthly mother: the "father of lights" of the sermons becomes Curdie's "Mother of Light" (PC 7:51). In the children's

fantasies, these "divine" mothers also embody characteristics of the traditional "fairy godmother": age and wisdom, benevolence and patronage. All the children are physically caressed, comforted, bathed, and put to sleep by these "mothers" (although MacDonald does not use this term, preferring to call them "grandmothers")[5] who also function as traditional Christian godmothers, overseeing the child's religious training. In addition, they embody the omniscient attributes of God. In The Princess and the Goblin, for example, Princess Irene receives a magic ring attached to a thread spun by her "heavenly" grandmother. The thread leads her safely wherever she goes, reflecting the interaction of divine protection and love with human faith. Once Irene learns to trust her grandmother, her obedience pays off in terms of security, comfort, and physical pleasure:

> "But it is time we both went to sleep. Shall I take you in my arms?" The little princess nestled close up to the old lady, who took her in both her arms, and held her close to her bosom. "Oh, dear, this is so nice!" said the princess. "I didn't know anything in the whole world could be so comfortable. I should like to lie here forever."(PG 11:82)

In the adult fantasies, the female mentors combine the spiritual and the sensual (in Lilith, Mara's role is that of religious instructress, mother, and Eve); however, MacDonald utilizes them more explicitly to guide the sexual conduct of the protagonists. No sooner does Anodos enter the enchanted forest in Phantastes, than he chooses the wrong path and undergoes what is clearly a sexual temptation

or initiation in his encounter with the beech-tree:

> "You are a very beautiful woman. Is it possible you should not know it?"
> "I am very glad you think so. I fancy I feel like a woman sometimes. I do so tonight--and always when the rain drips from my hair." . . .
>
> As gently as I could, I cut with a knife a long tress of flowing, dark hair, she hanging her beautiful head over me. When I had finished, she shuddered and breathed deep, as one does when an acute pain, steadfastly endured without sign of suffering, is at length relaxed . . . . I rose, and put my arms as far as they would reach around the beech-tree, and kissed it, and said good-bye. A trembling went through the leaves; and as I walked away, I seemed to hear in a whisper once more the words: "I may love him, I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech-tree."
> (Phan 4:38-40)

In his study of MacDonald, The Golden Key (1961), Robert Lee Wolff sees all of this in terms of MacDonald's Oedipal longings for the mother who died when he was eight, and whose written expression of grief over his weaning MacDonald treasured all his life.[6] Certainly there is a preoccupation with mothering in the fantasies, particularly in Phantastes, which begins as Anodos looks into his "grandmother's" eyes and longs for his mother. Toward the end of the book, Anodos becomes more self-sufficient and less childlike, until finally the old lady in the cottage pushes him out into the world:

> I felt as if I were leaving my mother for the first time, and could not help weeping bitterly. At length she gently pushed me away, and with the words, "Go, my son, and do something worth doing," turned back, and, entering the cottage, closed the door behind her.
> (Phan 19:145)

Here, the evidence MacDonald had of his mother's distress over his weaning and his own feelings of loss combine in a general expression of anguish over the permanent separation of mother and son. This distress is reflected in MacDonald's repudiation of a Hell of endless punishment, and his insistence on death as a continuation of life; specifically, as a reunion of family members:

> What! . . . shall the love that he has thus created towards father and mother, brother and sister, wife and child, go moaning and longing to all eternity; or worse, far worse, die out of our bosoms? Shall God be God, and shall this be the end? (GMHW 402).

MacDonald's preoccupation with mother/child relationships in these stories strongly suggests that fantasy released in him a subconscious longing for a mother he remembered only in terms of physical closeness.

It is not surprising that a highly individual religious vision like MacDonald's should echo the visions of other religious mystics.[7] The attribution of maternal and goddess-like qualities to the beech-tree, for example, suggests that like Henry Vaughan, MacDonald read God's truth in Nature, and believed her mystic symbols would be made clear if only the veils dividing this world from the next could be stripped away: "Now and then, when I look round on my books," writes Vane after his adventures in Lilith, "they seem to waver as if . . . another world were about to break through" (47:420). MacDonald's female deities reflect this belief in the immanence of God in Nature. Diamond's North Wind actually embodies a natural force. Mossy and

Tangle of "The Golden Key" are counselled by an ageless Wise Woman who lives in the forest, communicates with wild creatures, and whose clothing, hair, and jewels are green. When Curdie and his father confront the "Mother of Light" in the cavern, she first appears as a green star, then as a woman "dressed in something pale green, like velvet," wearing slippers which "were one mass of gleaming emeralds, of various shades of green, all mingling lovelily like the waves of grass in the wind and sun." Curdie describes her as "clothed in green, and the mother of all the light that dwells in the stones of the earth!" (PC 7:48-49, 54). All of this is reminiscent of the "green lady" of myth,[8] the Goddess Natura, who is described by Claudian as early as 400 AD: "the age-old Mother of All; father, mother, nurse, sustainer; all-wise, all-bestowing, all-ruling; regulator of the gods; creator; first-born; eternal life and immortal providence . . ." (Curtius 106-7). MacDonald attempts no clear distinction between this female goddess of the natural world and the male Christian God. Rather, he suggests a kind of shared parenthood between God, the heavenly father, and Nature, the earthly mother. For example, in Phantastes, after Anodos has learned to love selflessly, he is rewarded with a kind of "death" which he describes in these terms:

> Now that I lay in her bosom, the whole earth, and each of her many births, was as a body to me, at my will. I seemed to feel the great heart of the mother beating into mine, and feeding me with her own life, her own essential being and nature. (Phan 24:178)

In Victorian Fantasy, Stephen Prickett suggests that MacDonald recognized what was sometimes seen as a conflict between Naturalism and Platonism in Wordsworth, as a reflection of the Christian view of God as both immanent in nature and transcendent over it: "This world is not merely a thing which God hath made, subjecting it to his laws," he wrote, "but is an expression of the thought, the feeling, the heart of God himself" (ADO 247). The God/Godmother/(Grand)Mother/Goddess Natura figure was a synthesis which allowed MacDonald to express what he termed Wordsworth's "Christian Pantheism" in more concrete terms. In the relationships between the children and their female mentors in At the Back of the North Wind and the Princess books, MacDonald expressed the Romantic conviction that the child has unique access to the spiritual influence of Nature. He had a Wordsworthian faith in the ability of the child to perceive what he called the "the unshowable"; in Blakean terms, the children see "with, not thro', the eye." At the same time, while MacDonald believed in the receptiveness of the unsophisticated child to God's meaning and influence, he seems not to have seen the maturing process as necessarily "imprisoning" in Wordsworth's sense. He accepts that maturity can bring what he calls the "usual consequences," that of "getting rather stupid," but he describes this as less a function of maturing generally, than a result of a certain kind of maturing: "There is this difference between the growth of some human beings and that of others: in the one case it is a continuous dying, in the other a continuous

resurrection." In other words, the maturing process need not be a negative one. It can produce a man of moral sensitivity, the kind of man who "comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true the moment it comes before him." This ability is symbolized by the magic sensitivity of Curdie's fingers after they have been burned in Irene's grandmother's fire of roses. Maturity can also produce the opposite kind of man, one who comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner (PC 2:17-18). Obviously, it is only a step from here to MacDonald's idea of moral degeneration reducing man to an animal state.

The richly allusive quality of his fantasies illustrates MacDonald's theoretical statement in "The Fantastic Imagination" that "in everything that God has made, there is layer upon layer of ascending significance" (ADO 320). This sentence incorporates imagery that was profoundly important to MacDonald, both in terms of story and belief. It is not surprising that a man who saw life in terms of steps in a spiritual journey which continues beyond the grave, would use and reuse the imagery of quest and ascent. Greville MacDonald states that, to his father, the virtue of a symbol lay in its "substantial unity" with the idea presented. His father describes a "co-substance between the stairs of a cathedral-spire and our own 'secret stair' up to the wider vision"; "I have a passion for stairs," he wrote to a friend in 1885 (GMHW 482, 530). Like Ruskin, MacDonald was inspired by mountains. Writing to his wife

from Switzerland in 1865, he expressed his impressions:

> I am sure the only cure for . . . all of us is getting up, up--into the divine air. I for my part choose the steeple-cure for my weariness. How will it be when I get amongst God's steeples? (GMHW 349)

When he was deeply depressed, MacDonald wrote: "My windows are all darkened--all save my skylight" (GMHW 84). This sense of heavenly radiance and of stairs and mountains symbolically lifting man closer to it was central to MacDonald's symbolic structure. As a bookplate, he used a Blake illustration for Blair's The Grave, in which an old man enters his grave below, while above, transfigured, a youth gazes rapturously upward into the radiance of Heaven.

Phantastes introduces and Lilith elaborates and completes the familiar symbolic pattern of MacDonald's fantasies: the quest for spiritual knowledge, the expiation of guilt, the interaction of death and rebirth, communion with nature, and so on. The protagonists of both books are imprisoned in the many-roomed house that was to reappear in the Princess books. It is at once setting and symbol: the familiar home and refuge of the protagonist, and on a symbolic level, the unconscious, full of unexplored stairways leading to dusty garrets, shadowy libraries, and dark cellars inhabited by subhuman creatures. The child is probably unconscious of all of this. However, most adult readers recognize that the three levels of physical action in The Princess and the Goblin (attic, mountainside, cavern) and their respective inhabitants (wise grandmother,

innocent child, evil goblin) are congruent with a three-tiered universe: Heaven, Earth, Hell. Furthermore, post-Freudian readers are quick to connect this schema with Freud's hierarchy of superego, ego, and id. It seems inevitable that from this setting, both Anodos and Vane should inadvertently stumble into the dreamscapes which complete the settings of the stories. After all, Freud's perception of the dream as the unconscious attempt of the dreamer to fulfill his desires differs from MacDonald's only in that Freud finds the source of the dream within the dreamer, while for MacDonald, dreams originate with God and embody His truths: "When a man dreams his own dream, he is the sport of his dream," he wrote in Lilith; "when Another gives it him, that Other is able to fulfill it" (47:420). If, as MacDonald believed, man's unconscious imagination is the source of all truth, one would expect to find in these most dreamlike fantasies the clearest expression of the author's ideas and beliefs.

In The Princess and the Goblin, Princess Irene climbs the stairs of her father's mansion and discovers her old wise grandmother in one of the attic rooms. On a subsequent occasion, her grandmother does not wish to be "found," and Irene searches in vain. The latter scene is one which many child-readers remember; presumably the anxiety it arouses triggers some basic insecurity in the reader. I suspect that many of MacDonald's symbolic effects work in this unconscious sort of way, leading critics to use such terms as "universal" for his symbolic patterns. There is often a

disturbing sense of the frightening within the familiar in MacDonald's stories, as, for example, when Vane describes his own terror of the garret in Lilith:

> The garret spaces had an uncanny look . . . . Nothing should ever make me go up that last terrible stair! The garret at the top of it pervaded the whole house! I was nowhere safe! . . . "If I know nothing of my own garret," I thought, "what is there to secure me against my own brain? Can I tell what it is even now generating? . . . What is behind my think? Am I there at all?--Who, what am I?" (Lil 3:197-8)

MacDonald has an astonishing ability to blur the distinction between the real and the imaginary, to endow the symbol with the function of the thing it symbolizes. Here, for example, the garret at the top of the stairs symbolizes the brain, the unconscious workings of which frighten Vane. The quotation illustrates MacDonald's ability to generalize outward from the symbol. He begins with the fear of an unknown staircase; his lack of knowledge of what lies ahead moves rapidly from a consideration of the question "Where am I going?" to the most unanswerable of human questions "Who, what am I?" All of MacDonald's fantasies deal with these questions, but it is in his two fantasies for adults that he addresses them most directly.

V

Phantastes (1858) and Lilith (1895) were written at opposite ends of MacDonald's writing career. Nevertheless, like the children's fantasies of the intervening years,

these stories document quests during which the protagonist (in these books a young adult) discovers the answers to the questions posed above. The learning process is conducted by a semi-divine mentor who assists the protagonist in his acquisition of spiritual wisdom. However, these two stories deal more directly with the stern necessity of these lessons than do the fantasies for children, because having reached physical maturity, Anodos and Vane are still unable to subdue "self" in obedience to moral authority. The two young men are forced to face their own shortcomings, to see themselves as they really are, in short, to know themselves.

Like all of MacDonald's fantasies, Phantastes and Lilith stress the interpenetration of this world and another; both Anodos and Vane discover the entrance to fairyland within their own homes. The dream-like quality of the passages also suggests that these fantasy worlds originate within the minds of the protagonists. In a much-quoted early passage of Phantastes, Anodos watches half-awake while his room undergoes a process of transformation:

> I saw that a large green marble basin, in which I was wont to wash . . . was overflowing like a spring; and that a stream of clear water was running over the carpet . . . My dressing-table was elaborately carved in foliage . . . I happened to fix my eye on a little cluster of ivy-leaves. The first of these was evidently the work of the carver; the next looked curious; the third was unmistakeably ivy; . . . I looked up and saw that the branches and leaves designed upon the curtains of my bed were slightly in motion. (Phan 2:19)

Finding himself in a forest glade, he washes in the stream (bathing is of great symbolic importance throughout

MacDonald's fantasies) and sets out upon his quest through fairyland. Anodos--the name means "pathless," perhaps to suggest that he has not yet found the Way--hopes to find his "Ideal," but discovers his Shadow instead. This sinister pre-Jungian reminder of guilt seems associated with Anodos' sexual desires and with various wrong choices arising out of his willful refusal to stay on the right path, both literally and figuratively: "Whenever a choice was necessary," he admits, "I always chose the path downward" (17:121). He longs to possess the white lady, but must learn to love without seeking possession. He fails, atones for his failure, and finally succeeds in a different direction: "Thus I, who set out to find my Ideal, came back rejoicing that I had lost my Shadow" (25:182). Phantastes, then, is a Bildungsroman in which the hero progresses from innocence to experience, from a willful immaturity, through humility, to true selfhood. After losing his shadow, Anodos dies what seems a blissful death, but he must "die back" into the mortal world, awakening to "a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life" (24:180). He lives on, sadder but wiser, awaiting the good that "is always coming" to the obedient, the faithful, and the fearless.

Nearly 40 years later, in 1895, MacDonald restated much of the same material in his final adult fantasy, Lilith. The book is a more complex and tightly-plotted version of the earlier work, with a cyclical rather than a linear story-line. In Phantastes, Anodos completes his quest in fairyland before returning to the mortal world. In Lilith, however,

Vane (named, presumably, for his vanity or self-love, or perhaps, like a weather-vane, for his inability to maintain a steady course) continually retreats from fairyland into this world in his reluctance to accept Adam/Raven's insistence that "death" is a stage through which he must pass in his quest for true "life." Vane's pilgrimage begins when he inadvertently stumbles through a mirror in his garret and finds himself in a barren landscape confronting the austere man-bird, Mr. Raven, who later takes on the added persona of Adam, a sort of universal father. Adam/Raven's explanations are far from clear or reassuring to Vane, but he suggests that Vane will never find the truth by merely relying on his intellect:

> "I never saw any door," [Vane] persisted.
> "Of course not!" [Mr. Raven] returned, "all the doors you had yet seen--and you haven't seen many--were doors in; here you came upon a door out. . . . the more doors you go out of, the farther you will get in! . . . There are places you can go into, and places you can go out of; but the one place, if you do but find it, where you may go out and in both, is home." (3:194, 196)

"Home" is Raven's cottage, a resting and waiting place for the dead, around which the hero vainly circles throughout the story, crossing and recrossing his steps, until he finally submits to Adam/Raven's edict and lies down to sleep there. In the last chapter, entitled "The Endless Ending," Vane is returned to the mortal world where he waits in preparation for another death which will lead to the true life.

In Phantastes, Anodos must learn how to subdue self, and to achieve this end he must change. In Lilith, Vane tries "vainly" to retain his individual will even though when asked by Adam/Raven "Who are you, pray?" he becomes "at once aware that I could give him no notion of who I was. Indeed, who was I?" (3:195). Both Vane and Anodos must find out who they are and, having faced their inadequacies, must submit to "losing" that self. Thus, for all the complexity of their symbolic structure, Phantastes and Lilith ultimately propound the Christian message at its most orthodox: man must "die into life," that is, he must enter the house of death in order to be reborn. Lilith provides MacDonald's most gruesome expression of this symbolic regeneration when Lilith, unable to obey Adam/Raven and open her hand, begs him to cut it off:[9]

> She saw the sword, shuddered and held out her hand. Adam took it. The sword gleamed once, there was one little gush of blood, and he laid the severed hand in Mara's lap. Lilith had given one moan and was already asleep. (Lil 40:389-390)

After the publication of this last fantasy, Lilith, MacDonald lapsed into the long silence which preceded his death. His final book had answered as fully as was possible for him the questions "Who are we and where are we going?" At the end of Lilith, Vane propounds the lesson he has learned with such difficulty:

> I lived in everything; everything entered and lived in me. To be aware of a thing, was to know its life at once and mine, to know whence we came, and where we

were at home--was to know that we are all what we are because Another is what he is! (44:412)

VI

In MacDonald's fantasies for children the protagonists are young and inexperienced; they are not exposed, as are Anodos and Vane, to the inevitable results of selfish choices and ill-considered decisions. The child protagonist is more closely supervised, more carefully protected, more firmly guided. In the children's fantasies (with the exception of The Wise Woman), therefore, the relationship between the protagonist and his female mentor[10] is a warmer and more intimate one, because the child's acquisition of wisdom depends on his receptiveness to the mentor's instructions and his unquestioning obedience:

> "What do you want me to do next, dear North Wind?" said Diamond, wishing to show his love by being obedient.
> "What do you want to do yourself?"
> "I want to go into the country at your back."
> "Then you must go through me."
> "I don't know what you mean."
> "I mean just what I say. You must walk on as if I were an open door, and go right through me."
> "But that will hurt you."
> "Not in the least. It will hurt you, though."
> "I don't mind that, if you tell me to do it."
> "Do it," said North Wind.
> Diamond walked toward her instantly.
> (BNW 9:111-112)

The mentor/pupil relationship is so central to the children's fantasies that their success or failure depends to a great extent on the restraint with which the mentor

carries out her role. For MacDonald, obedience is an essential part of a Christian education: "Teach your child to obey and you give him the most precious lesson that can be given to a child . . . . So with the Christian man; whatever meets him, obedience is the thing" (ADO 307, 309). Yet the spiritual mentor must be sensitively drawn: too heavy a hand and the protagonist becomes a mere puppet; too little control and the intended lesson on the importance of obedience and faith is undermined.

MacDonald seems to have handled this problem most successfully in The Princess and Curdie, written a decade after The Princess and the Goblin. After Curdie's initial interviews with Irene's grandmother at the beginning of the book, the youth copes throughout the story on his own. His physical strength, moral courage, and intelligent use of the magic powers with which the old queen has endowed him, ensure the success of his quest. The grandmother-mentor appears only at the beginning and end of the story; in between, her continuing presence is suggested in other characters whose identities remain slightly mysterious and therefore intriguing. In the first of the Princess books, The Princess and the Goblin, Princess Irene and Curdie are much younger, and her grandmother, the old queen, must play a greater role, providing more in the way of direct instruction. North Wind, the mentor-figure of At the Back of the North Wind (1871), is presented in passages of imaginative splendor, but unfortunately, MacDonald is not content to let her carry the book's message. Adult readers

find the intrusive moralizing of the narrator tedious and irritating, although this is not necessarily the case with children, for many of whom this book is a favourite. Both adult and child will agree, however, that in the case of The Wise Woman (1875), the mentor-figure is abusive, arbitrary, cruel, and unforgiving, and provides the major reason for the book's lack of success.

In the adult fantasies, the mentor function is divided among several characters; in the children's fantasies, it is centralized in one sub-deity. In MacDonald's best short story, "The Light Princess," the author eliminates this figure entirely, and with great success; for with the removal of the all-knowing mentor goes the sense of a pre-determined ending which weakens certain of the other stories by diminishing their suspense. "The Light Princess" holds the reader's attention just because there is no God-like authority to direct or control the spoilt, selfish, stubborn, and thus recognizably human, heroine.

The "light" princess is so-called because she has no "gravity": that is, her body is weightless unless immersed in water. MacDonald is punning here, of course; she also refuses to be "grave," to take life seriously, or to face the responsibilities of maturity. Naturally, the princess loves to swim and does so in company with a young man who has fallen in love with her. He is, not surprisingly, a prince in disguise. When a witch spitefully drains the lake, the princess is furious and indulges in a prolonged sulk.

The hole through which the lake water is draining away can only be plugged by the body of a man who is willing to drown as the lake refills. The prince volunteers. Now the scene is set for a struggle between the desire of the princess for sensual pleasure (swimming with her companion) and her recognition that, in return, she must accept responsibility (the death of the prince). Fortunately, her love for the prince influences her decision, but not before the reader has been kept in some suspense as to how deep her self-love really is. Thus, the interaction of the two main characters carries the plot through to its conclusion without the interference of any third party. The princess in not "taught" a lesson; she learns it on her own. She weeps for the prince, thereby achieving both physical and emotional "gravity" or maturity. "The Light Princess" is a story about growing up, both emotionally and physically. The sexual symbolism which underlies the narrative is so obvious, in fact, that one can hardly imagine MacDonald to have been unaware of what he was doing.[11] He handles the theme with such dexterity and humour, however, that the allegory never obtrudes and the story can be enjoyed at various levels. The princess recovers her "gravity," taking on the responsibilities, sexual and otherwise, of maturity, putting away childish things, and learning how to weep in the process.

This formula for growing up is typical of MacDonald's fantasies. Youth is treated, not as a period of carefree irresponsibility, but as a time of preparation for the cares

and sorrows of maturity. He places daunting responsibilities on the shoulders of his young protagonists who then require constant instruction and supervision if they are to carry the burden successfully. Once they have learned to live for others and not for "self," their missions are two-fold: first, to effect the reformation of others by good example, and second, to defeat and/or eliminate troublemakers who refuse to modify their conduct. In the process, the young protagonists attain spiritual wisdom, a process which inevitably requires the submission of self to duty through obedience to a higher moral authority. The obvious danger of this quasi-allegorical formula lies in the excessive idealization that sentimentalizes and distorts the presentation of the child and his perceptions in many late-Victorian novels. As successful embodiments of the real in combination with the ideal, the protagonists o MacDonald's book-length fantasies vary greatly. At one end of the scale are Agnes and Rosamond of The Wise Woman. One of the reasons for the failure of this story is that, in comparison with MacDonald's other child-heroes, Agnes and Rosamond are selfish, stupid, and generally tiresome. The reader concludes that they and their equally repellent mentor are mere puppets utilized for the author's allegorical purposes. Much more believable are Princess Irene and Curdie of the Princess books. They are realistic children, likeable on the whole, although like all children, occasionally obstinate, bad-tempered, and impulsive. At the other end of the scale

comes little Diamond of At the Back of the North Wind, and here MacDonald could be said to err on the side of idealization. The goodness that radiates from little Diamond effectively redeems his fallen fellow-men, but occasionally alienates the modern reader. Diamond achieves his conversions with relative passivity, at least in comparison with the truculent and powerful Curdie whose good health belies his days in the mine and whose usual weapon is a miner's heavy mattock. Even Princess Irene exhibits a stubborn determination in the face of the goblins and their loathsome creatures. But Diamond has an excuse for his angelic temperament: he is dying of tuberculosis, a disease with which MacDonald was, unhappily, too well acquainted.[12] Ill as he is, however, Diamond performs good works. So, of course, do L.M. Alcott's Beth March (Little Women [1868]) whose selfless sweetness also marks her for an early death, and F. H. Burnett's Cedric Errol (Little Lord Fauntleroy [1885]) who also converts others by example. Diamond, however, has a definite personality. Although dying, paradoxically he is full of life. He shows courage and enterprise. He laughs a lot. Diamond has more intelligence, curiosity, humour, and certainly more initiative than many other angelic and/or dying Victorian children. The very directness of his speech helps to balance the occasionally cloying sweetness of his nature. Even so, the Christ-like overtones of Diamond's character (he is nicknamed "God's baby") undermine the realism of his characterization. Fortunately, Diamond's preternatural goodness is tied to a fact of which we are

constantly reminded by the author: Diamond has been to the back of the North Wind, that is, he has been through death's door and has returned. This pre-vision of death gives him an other-worldly quality which makes his moral radiance acceptable to the reader. We feel that it is this experience, rather than an inherent namby-pamby goodness, which has purged him of the sin of "self," MacDonald's major target in the fantasies:

> You see, when he forgot his Self, his mother took care of his Self, and loved and praised his Self. Our own praises poison our Selves, and puff and swell them up, till they lose all shape and beauty and become like great toadstools. But the praises of father and mother do our Selves good, and comfort them and make them beautiful. (BNW 16:156)

Diamond's purity of spirit sheds its beneficent influence over all he meets--shaming some, reforming others. Fortunately the sentimental passages describing Diamond's unwitting intervention in the lives of his friends and neighbours in London are balanced by the imaginative splendor of the sequences concerning North Wind and the realistic passages describing the squalid life of the poor in the city. These scenes help diffuse the halo of goodness ("his face shone pure and good . . . like a primrose in a hailstorm" [17:166]) which surrounds Diamond's fevered brow. In the London sequences, Diamond is able to act, to save Nanny from the streets, re-unite the lovers, reform his drunken and foul-mouthed neighbours, help his father by driving the cab and his mother by minding the baby, and so

on. At other times Diamond's illness and delirium take him into the arms of North Wind who carries him through the skies snugly wrapped in her hair. The abruptness with which the plot of At the Back of the North Wind moves between the imaginative and the realistic is somewhat disconcerting to the reader. The sections of the book dealing with Diamond's everyday, "real" life and those describing his imaginative flights with North Wind seem somewhat arbitrarily stuck together and result in a novel that is both structurally shaky and overlong. But MacDonald's juxtaposition of the negative theme of Diamond's illness and death and the positive actions of his life results in the book's generally encouraging tone, as, of course, does MacDonald's constant insistence that Diamond's death is merely the beginning of an even better life.

Aside from its rather arbitrary episodic structure, the other aspect of the book which intrudes on the reader's consciousness is the inability of the narrator to keep his comments on the action to himself. MacDonald is not content to let North Wind carry his message to the reader, and insists on additional narratorial moralizing:

> Diamond learned to drive all the sooner that he had been accustomed to do what he was told, and could obey the smallest hint in a moment . . . with an obedient mind one learns the rights of things fast enough; for it is the law of the universe, and to obey is to understand. (BNW 16:163)

This can be irritating, but just because it is obviously narratorial comment, the reader's annoyance does not attach

itself to the character of North Wind. Unfortunately, this does happen in The Wise Woman where MacDonald puts his sermons directly into the mouth of the mentor-figure:

> "Agnes, you must not imagine you are cured. That you are ashamed of yourself now is not sign that the cause for such shame has ceased. In new circumstances, especially after you have done well for a while, you will be in danger of thinking just as much of yourself as before. So beware of yourself." (TWW 105)

In At the Back of the North Wind, the role of North Wind is to bring Diamond, and through him the child-reader, to an understanding and acceptance of human suffering and death. This she attempts to do, although, as noted earlier, with a certain lack of conviction. North Wind can neither control pain and death nor can she account adequately for its existence. She can only argue for faith, which she admits in her own case has taken thousands of years to develop. This suggestion of an anxious compassion on North Wind's part reflects her creator's own misgivings and adds a sympathetic dimension to her undoubted attractions. Certainly, North Wind is an irresistible figure--strong, omniscient, sensuous, and cool in comparison with Diamond--small, innocent, frightened, and feverish. Her physical presence is immensely more comforting than her words, although she does not preach; she speaks as a doting mother to a favourite child. North Wind is both grave and loving as befits her mission: to prepare Diamond for death. This combination of qualities inspires the devotion of her young charge who, unlike the rebellious Vane in Lilith, has

complete confidence in his mentor's wisdom. All of this is very much in keeping with MacDonald's personal vision of a kind of parent-child relationship between man and his God.

The reader shares Diamond's awe of North Wind partly because the passages describing Diamond's travels with her are so exhilarating and memorable and remain with the reader long after the realistic passages fade:

> The next moment he was rising in the air. North Wind grew towering up to the place of the clouds. Her hair went streaming out from her till it spread like a mist over the stars. She flung herself abroad in space. (BNW 4:40)

However, the interpolation of the realistic scenes of Diamond's daily life do lend credibility to the fantastic voyage for which the book is named, that is, Diamond's "death," his return to life, and his subsequent description of his experiences "at the back of the North Wind." This enables MacDonald to fulfill his presumed purpose: removing some of the child-reader's apprehension about death. The dual structure of the book, while rather unwieldy, does convey two generally positive contentions. The realistic sequences suggest that while the individual may be weak and/or ignorant, moral instruction will inspire obedience to God which will, in turn, enable the individual to make the right choices in life. The imaginative scenes convey the message that for the individual who has lived his life in the service of others, death provides a triumphant entry into the even better life ahead.

In At the Back of the North Wind, the mentor's

function is to prepare Diamond for death. The child is not in need of moral instruction; he converts the misguided by a purity which shines from within. In the Princess books, however, MacDonald's faith in the inherent goodness of man wavers. In the first book, The Princess and the Goblin, evil is more deeply-rooted than in At the Back of the North Wind, and in both a literal and figurative sense. It cannot be so easily removed because it is inherent in the group rather than in representative individuals. Here, the mentor's function is to help the protagonists defeat wickedness, but as yet, MacDonald does not confront evil in human society. It is embodied in a race of creatures at one remove from humanity, the goblins:

> At one time they lived above ground, and were very like other people. But . . . the king had laid what they thought too severe taxes on them, or had required observances of them they did not like, or had begun to treat them with more severity . . . and the consequence was . . . they had all taken refuge in the subterranean caverns . . . .(PG 1:8)

These creatures, therefore, are not presented as the traditional gnomes and goblins of fairy tales, but rather as a group of rebellious citizens whose fight with the establishment has been carried underground. The price they have paid for subversion is to have become hideously grotesque and misshapen in appearance. Jules Zanger sees in this depiction the tendency for turn-of-the-century children's fantasy to "discover the private nightmares of an England beset from without and within by the forces of

social breakdown," and to share a "predilection for the past, or as a variant, a distrust of the future" (154-155). Certainly the whole "underground" theme of the story allows for the expression of hostility, cruelty, and lust, but these threatening aspects of the story are mitigated by the levity with which the author handles them. The goblins, as an evil force living in "hell," remain at a safe distance--a symbolic and somewhat ludicrous enemy; for example, they can be routed by stamping on their feet, and kept at bay by music and verse. Yet the goblins present a very real danger: they plan the destruction of the king's palace and the abduction of Princess Irene, whom they plan to marry to their goblin prince. Irene and Curdie learn by trial and error that faith in the old queen's existence and obedience to her instructions will provide the moral and physical courage necessary to foil this plan. They also learn to trust in the good judgement of Curdie's parents.

In At the Back of the North Wind, good is done and conversions effected merely by Diamond's example and influence, not by his mentor's cunning. In the Princess books, however, the goodness of the protagonist does not have the power to convert others. Here evil is a stronger force and so must be the measures that are taken against it. Even though Princess Irene, like Diamond, is "as good as she is beautiful," she and Curdie must believe implicitly in Irene's grandmother's existence and power; even during her inexplicable absences their faith must never falter. In return, the old queen counsels the children and enables

them to foil the goblin plot. But instructions are not enough. Irene and Curdie need magic to defeat the goblins. The old queen spins the magic thread which allows Irene to locate Curdie in the goblins' cavern and bring them both out safely. In The Princess and Curdie she burns Curdie's hands in her magic fire to give him the power to tell good men from bad. At the end of the book she must physically take part in the battle if good is to triumph over evil. In the Princess books, it appears that MacDonald's confidence in the power of good example and the effectiveness of moral instruction begins to falter. He relies more on magical solutions to the problem of evil and less on sermonizing. The result of this change in emphasis is that although Irene and Crdie are young (at least in the first of the Princess books), and therefore need a lot of support and counsel from the old queen, didacticism is rarely obtrusive. There are none of the angry diatribes of The Wise Woman and little of the narrative comment that interrupts the flow of At the Back of the North Wind. Irene's grandmother provides practical counsel as well as moral advice, but the latter is persuasive rather than sermonlike:

> "But in the meantime, you must be content, I say, to be misunderstood for a while. We are all very anxious to be understood, and it is very hard not to be. But there is one thing much more necessary."
>
> "What is that, grandmother?"
>
> "To understand other people."
>
> "Yes, grandmother. I must be fair--for if I'm not fair to other people, I'm not worth being understood myself, I see. So as Curdie can't help it, I will not be vexed with him, but just wait."
>
> "There's my own dear child," said her grandmother, and pressed her close to her bosom. (22:152)

Irene's grandmother is always kind, if firm, but her presence is unpredictable. This is true of all of MacDonald's mentors, but in the case of North Wind, who embodies a natural force, it seems a reasonable enough characteristic. In The Princess and the Goblin, however, the absence of the old queen is tied to the children's obedience. Although less formidable than the Wise Woman, Irene's grandmother, like all of MacDonald's mentors, is always in control. She and her mysterious upper room simply disappear when the children forget her words and lose faith in her existence. Occasionally this seems arbitrary; after all, Irene is very young in the first book and is at least willing to believe in her grandmother; yet she still can't find her when she is needed. This apparent unfairness is not lost on the young reader, for whom the unreliability of the old queen introduces an unpleasant element of anxiety. Perhaps this is why Irene's ascent of the staircase in search of her grandmother is such a memorable scene. MacDonald's insistence that a personal relationship with God is dependent upon an unflagging faith is here presented in terms which include an unpleasant suggestion of blackmail, if not revenge. Submission to authority must be willing, immediate, and complete. Otherwise the author's message seems the same as that given by Mara to the recalcitrant Lilith: "I am sorry; you must suffer."

However, vengeance is hardly more than a suggestion in The Princess and the Goblin. A much more powerful and

unpleasant emphasis on vengeance was earlier manifest in The Wise Woman, and reappears in a more controlled and effective form in the second of the Princess books, The Princess and Curdie. Here the evil which in the first book was embodied in a symbolic enemy of society is brought closer and confronted in the majority of the townspeople of Gwyntystorm. The story becomes a sermon on the sickness of society; its cure involves a punishment which verges on raw vengeance:

> They were flung about in all directions; their clothes were torn from them; they were pinched and scratched any- and everywhere . . . . They were bespattered with the dirt of their own neglect; they were soused in the stinking water that had boiled greens; they were smeared with rancid dripping; their faces were rubbed in maggots: I dare not tell all that was done to them. (PC 26:180-181)

The force for good in The Princess and Curdie seems weakened. Potent magic, muscular Christianity, and outright violence are necessary to subdue evil at all levels--in the royal servants, municipal politicians, and townspeople. Irene's grandmother is finally forced to abandon her spinning-wheel and emerge as a mounted warrior-queen fighting at the side of the princess and Curdie. Even so, God's representative can only beat evil back by a combination of magic and the brute force of Curdie's animal army. The plot of the book shows none of the ultimate triumph of good which MacDonald tries to preserve in At the Back of the North Wind and The Princess and the Goblin: the malevolent citizens of Gwyntystorm are apparently subdued

only for the time being. MacDonald does not hesitate to make ironic but explicit narratorial comment:

> No man pretended to love his neighbour, but every one said he knew that peace and quiet behavior was the best thing for himself, and that, he said, was quite as useful, and a great deal more reasonable. The city was prosperous and rich, and if everybody was not comfortable, everybody else said he ought to be. . . . Commerce and self-interest, they said, had got the better of violence, and the troubles of the past were whelmed in the riches that flowed in at their open gates. . . . Indeed, the general theme of discourse when they met was, how much wiser they were than their fathers. (13:94-95)

As might be expected, this society dedicated to self-interest eventually destroys itself. The triumph of Irene and Curdie, therefore, is short-lived; they marry but have no children. The new king weakens the foundations of the city in his relentless search for gold, and finally the city falls. Thus, the story ends in destruction and desolation.

None of this comes as a shock to the reader already familiar with The Wise Woman. In At the Back of the North Wind Diamond needs little encouragement to help others--he is inherently good and converts evil-doers by mere example. In the Princess books Curdie is also a good boy, but he needs help to defeat evil in others, and even with help, he cannot entirely succeed; in the first book some of the goblins escape, and in the second disaster overtakes the city in spite of all his efforts. In The Wise Woman, however, there is no question of the protagonists (or their parents) converting anyone else; they are themselves in too much need of intensive reformation. The function of the

mentor in this book, therefore, is to defeat evil in the protagonists, a proceeding which can only be read as a Calvinistic attack on original sin. The setting of the book is gloomy, the mentor unpleasantly austere, and the girls alternately frightened and defiant. Although a decade later MacDonald was to handle the generally unhappy ending of The Princess and Curdie with some restraint, this was far from the case in The Wise Woman.

Rosamond, a princess, and Agnes, a peasant girl, are abducted by the Wise Woman and taken to her cottage in the forest where they are to be cured of their egotism: they are too ready to think themselves "SOMEBODY." This failing was apparently serious enough to warrant MacDonald's capitalization of the word in the book, and certainly once in the hands of their mentor, the girls undergo a grim reprogramming process. Rosamond is first terrified by a wolf which the Wise Woman kills with her bare hands. She is then controlled by hunger and by fear of the woman's ferocious dog:

> [A] few more outbreaks of passion, and a few more savage attacks from Prince, and she had learned to try to restrain herself when she felt the passion coming on; while a few dinnerless afternoons entirely opened her eyes to the necessity of working in order to eat. Prince was her first, and Hunger her second dog-counsellor. (TWW 130)

Not surprisingly, Rosamond hates her mentor; in fact, she thinks the Wise Woman wants to fatten and eat her. In the other books the mentor-figure is occasionally absent when she is wanted; in The Wise Woman this capriciousness is

often protracted and cruel, leaving the girl to endure night terrors and hunger. Agnes, the shepherd's daughter, is also smug and self-satisfied, although she is not as demanding or prone to tantrums as is the princess. For her sins she is imprisoned in a "great hollow sphere." In this place of solitary confinement, the turning sphere keeps her in one place as she tries to walk "like a squirrel in a cage."

By the end of the book the characters are all gathered at the castle of Rosamond's parents and the Wise Woman appears in the role of an avenging goddess:

> She threw her cloak open. It fell to the ground, and the radiance that flashed from her robe of snowy whiteness, from her face of awful beauty, and from her eyes that shone like pools of sunlight, smote them blind. (218)

She chastises both sets of parents for the ways in which they have raised their daughters and announces to Agnes's mother that her unreformed daughter is to be her continuous punishment:

> "She is your crime and your punishment. Take her home with you, and live hour after hour with the pale-hearted disgrace you call your daughter. What she is, the worm at her heart has begun to teach her. When life is no longer endurable, come to me." (221)

At the same time, she takes Agnes's father away with her at his own request, and leaves Rosamond's parents blind, promising only to open their eyes at some unspecified time in the future. When MacDonald subtitled The Wise Woman "a parable," he obviously understated the case. The book is an

unrelentingly didactic tract in which the protagonists are unreal and unattractive, the mentor inhuman, and the overall tone black and nihilistic. Whatever were the reasons for the darkness of MacDonald's vision in 1875, he understated the case when he suggested that at the end of the story his readers would "look a little solemn and sigh as they close the book" (TWW 222).

VII

It would appear, therefore, that MacDonald's fantasies for both children and adults originate in a Calvinistic obsession with the eradication of "self" and its replacement by dutiful obedience to one who combines aspects of both the earthly parent and the Heavenly Father. Neither fun nor complacency have any part in this process. MacDonald's child protagonists undergo constant mystical experiences, physical challenges, and mora dilemmas, all of which speed up the maturing process, leaving little time for carefree play. The children enjoy none of the light-hearted "messing about in boats" of Grahame's The Wind in the Willows, none of the exhilaration of Mowgli's travels through the tree-tops in Kipling's Jungle Books, and none of the imaginary games of Barrie's Peter and Wendy. MacDonald does not indulge in the kind of "golden age" escapism which presents childhood as a world set apart from, and unsuspected by, adults. MacDonald's fantasy world is one in which the protagonist is directed, and sometimes not too

gently, toward the spiritual maturity that will enable him to recognize and embrace the potentialities, not only of life, but also of death. Thus, although Diamond enjoys his flights with North Wind, they always provide opportunities for his moral education. Otherwise, Diamond is too busy being ill, minding the baby, learning to read, and helping his father support the family, to waste any time playing. Besides, he enjoys the realization that he is doing good, and this, of course, is part of MacDonald's message. Because Curdie works all day in a mine, he has little time free for play, but Princess Irene, who by virtue of her position has every reason to have time on her hands, finds her dolls "dreary" and "tiresome," and thrives on the self-discipline and physical courage that are required if she is to follow her grandmother's instructions. In The Wise Woman, Agnes and Rosamond are so fully occupied listening to lectures and undergoing punishments that play is out of the question. And the children of "The Golden Key," Mossy and Tangle, simply leave childhood behind them in their rather depressing pilgrimage to "the land where shadows fall."

Selflessness and the performance of good works provide their own reward in a sense of accomplishment and the satisfaction of having done one's duty. Because rewards of this kind are often enjoyed only in the hereafter, writing fantasy released MacDonald from the time constraints of the realistic novels, in which selflessness had to result in a tangible reward here and now. In the fantasies, the final triumph of good over evil in this world is by no means

certain; most of the stories end in a minor key. Even if MacDonald does try to convince the reader that death is an extension of life and as such, a positive step for Diamond, the child is, after all, dead at the end of the story. The conclusion of The Princess and Curdie is, likewise, a depressing one: a barren marriage for Irene and Curdie and the destruction of the city which they have laboured so hard to save. And the ending of The Wise Woman is equally bleak. Agnes' mother is to be punished indefinitely; at least, the only hope the Wise Woman can hold out is to suggest, "When life is no longer endurable, come to me" (TWW 221). MacDonald's last fantasy, Lilith, is no exception to the rule. Although by the end of the book, the hollow filled with monsters has become a beautiful lake, the creatures are still clearly visible below the surface: "Not one of them moved as we passed; but they were not dead. So long as exist men and women of unwholesome mind, that lake will be peopled in loathsomenesses" (Lil 45:413). Considering the effort expended by MacDonald's protagonists, suppressing the self in the interests of obedience seems to have produced few positive results.

It is difficult to define MacDonald's position on the struggle between good and evil. In Phantastes, written early in his career, MacDonald makes an attempt to place evil in a positive light; after all of his trials, Anodos is still able to say that "What we call evil is the only and best shape which, for the person and his condition at the

time, could be assumed by the best good" (25:182). God's intentions, albeit inscrutable, are always ultimately benevolent, as man is ultimately perfectible, although man may be at too early a stage in his spiritual development to recognize this. But MacDonald's attempts to give positive expression to this idea are not entirely successful, as, for example, in North Wind's explanation of why ships must sink and men be drowned:

> "I am always hearing, through every noise, through all the noise I am making myself even, the sound of a far-off song. Somehow, I can't say how, it tells me that all is right; that it is coming to swallow up all cries."
>
> "But that won't do them any good--the people, I mean," persisted Diamond.
>
> "It must. It must," said North Wind hurriedly. "It wouldn't be the song it seems to be if it did not swallow up all their fear and pain too, and set them singing it themselves with the rest. I am sure it will." (7:76-77)

As an attempt to justify the ways of God to children, this passage is hardly reassuring; as an expression of MacDonald's insecurity, it is enlightening. The best construction that can be put upon it is that God's purpose is often veiled, even from his earthly representatives, of which MacDonald, as a minister, was one.[13]

The action of the fantasies is also occasionally at variance with MacDonald's stated beliefs. While he repudiates eternal punishment, maintains that evil is only one "shape" of good, and that the devil himself will eventually submit to the divine will (Phan 25:182, Lil 40:386), he is still ready, here and now, to deal harshly

with those who refuse such submission. Laziness, selfishness, and dereliction of duty, are judged, condemned, and punished: "There are plenty of bad things that want killing," Irene's grandmother states succinctly in The Princess and Curdie (3:32).[14] Later in the book, the scene in which Curdie and his animal army punish the king's servants and the citizens of Gwyntystorm is written with what seems a sadistic relish.

It is tempting to suggest that MacDonald's moral attitudes increased in harshness and severity as he lost the resiliency of youth. Something of this kind i suggested by the bleak ending of The Princess and Curdie (1883), and the sinister symbolism of Lilith (1895). In the preface to a 1977 reissue of The Wise Woman, Mark Zaitchik espouses this theory, stating that "as [MacDonald] grew older the religious sensibility which had always informed his best work grew increasingly pessimistic" (TWW v). An assessment of a writer's state of mind based on his "best work" seems pointless, particularly when that work is unspecified. But even supposing that Zaitchik refers to the later fantasies, his theory doesn't account for the existence of the very book he is introducing, The Wise Woman, a book written in 1875 when more than half of MacDonald's realistic novels remained to be written and Lilith was still 20 years in the future.[15] This consideration makes nonsense of Zaitchik's conclusion that "[By] the time MacDonald wrote his third fairy tale, The Wise Woman (1875), he was, I believe, preparing for the silence of his last years" (TWW v).

Certainly some disillusionment specific to 1875 may have contributed to the book's peculiarly unpleasant tone, but as MacDonald did not die until thirty years later, one can hardly attribute the book's limitations to its author's approaching death.

It seems more likely that as early as Phantastes in 1858, MacDonald was using the fantasy mode to express disillusion over the selfish materialism he saw as alienating men from each other, from nature, and thus, from God. MacDonald wrote four book-length fantasies for children, three of them in the brief period 1871-1875. Of the latter, The Wise Woman (1875) is certainly his "darkest" story. The other fantasy which has an unhappy ending and a rather negative tone is the second of the Princess books, The Princess and Curdie, which did not appear until a decade after the earlier group. It appears, therefore, that if MacDonald, consciously or subconsciously, harboured a jaundiced view of his fellow-man, this attitude was deeply-rooted. While he may not have been aware of the extent of his pessimism about the society he lived in, the very fact that many of MacDonald's most potent symbols are repeated throughout the novels indicates that his preoccupations did not change much over the years. Tears and weeping, for example, are seen by MacDonald as symbolic of a mature acceptance of the human condition, and thus, as regenerative. This concept reappears throughout the fantasies: in Phantastes (1858), "The Light Princess"

(1864), The Princess and the Goblin (1872), and finally in Lilith as late as 1895. From his first fantasy to his last, therefore, MacDonald expressed his distress about the moral decay of soy. In doing so he conveys his pessimism about society's lack of potential for moral improvement, a subversive attitude in the light of Victorian confidence in continued progress. MacDonald's pessimism did not so much increase with the years; rather his way of expressing his feelings became increasingly focussed and disturbing.

Fantasy offered MacDonald an outlet for visionary ideas, suppressed desires, and subversive emotions. One of the latter was his pessimism regarding the potential of the average Victorian Englishman for self-improvement. One concludes that early on MacDonald weighed his fellow-man and found him morally wanting. Furthermore, he seems to have had little confidence in the capacity of society at large for reformation. Creating fantasy worlds enabled MacDonald to intervene in the lives of his characters with God-like authority. He could take revenge for the loss of his legitimate pulpit, his constant ill-health, and his many years of poverty. The reason for the failure of The Wise Woman is that it functions so completely as an outlet for anger and defiance and revenge, that there is little energy left over for the development of character or plot. The author is at once the writer and the subject, the tormenter and the tormented.

Fantasy also offered an opportunity for MacDonald to develop his "Christian Pantheism," his vision of God in

Nature. He could embody this vision with some concreteness, in North Wind, for example, or in the "green lady" of "The Golden Key." The creation of the mentor-figure encompassing Mother, Goddess, God, and Nature opened another door for MacDonald, offering suppressed desires an opportunity to surface. Fantasy worlds allowed for the expression of feelings of adoration and awe, of sensuality and sexuality, of the desire for a return to the security of childhood. MacDonald's fantasies for children are a synthesis of all of these aspects of the author's complex personality. Whether the preacher or the visionary is ultimately triumphant in MacDonald's fantasy world is difficult to assess. Perhaps this very fact is a tribute.

Notes

1

See W.H. Auden, Introduction to The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald, ed. Anne Fremantle (New York: Noonday Press, 1954); C.S. Lewis, Introduction to George MacDonald: An Anthology (New York: Macmillan, 1947); G.K. Chesterton's obituary article is to be found in the London Daily News, September, 1905, p. 6.

2

MacDonald did not consider his work strictly allegorical. In "The Fantastic Imagination" he wrote: "A fairytale is not an allegory. There may be allegory in it, but it is not an allegory. He must be an artist indeed who can, in any mode, produce a strict allegory that is not a weariness to the spirit" (ADO 317). Auden agrees: "if [the writer] allows the allegory to take control so that symbol and thing symbolized have a mere one-to-one correspondence, he becomes boring." At the same time, however, Auden suggests that "if Lilith is a more satisfactory book than Phantastes, one reason is that its allegorical structure is much tighter" (Fremantle vi).

3

In George MacDonald, Richard Reis suggests that the realistic novels also allowed MacDonald the financial security to experiment with fantasy: "whenever he got far enough ahead of his bills to afford a sure failure, he indulged his less popular taste for fantasy" (25-26). This seems not to have been the case with either of MacDonald's book-length fantasies for adults, Phantastes (1858) or Lilith (1895). Greville MacDonald quotes his father as writing in 1858: "I am writing a kind of fairy tale [Phantastes] in the hope it will pay me better than the more evidently serious work" (GMHW 288). Lilith was written at the end of MacDonald's productive period and under what the author felt to be divine inspiration (GMHW 548). Neither of these books, then, appears to have been written because MacDonald could "afford a sure failure." Reis further suggests that Phantastes "was generally ignored or abused" (25), yet Greville MacDonald goes on to comment: "The book, too, was well received--so well indeed that the hack reviewers were driven to vituperation" (GMHW 296). This comment could, of course, be explained in terms of filial respect, but Victorians were pretty hard-headed about financial matters, and as the son has been quite candid about his parents' poverty up to this point, it seems unlikely that he should be unreliable here. Presumably, therefore, although the Athenaeum described Phantastes as "a confusedly furnished, second-hand symbol-shop" (GMHW 296), the public liked the book as MacDonald had hoped they would. And far from writing fantasy because he had enough money, it appears MacDonald wrote fantasy in hopes of earning some.

4

MacDonald's wife dramatized The Pilgrim's Progress for her family and it was first performed in their home on the MacDonalds' 26th wedding aniversary in 1877. The play, with MacDonald in the role of Mr. Greatheart, soon became an institution: "The Pilgrims has [become] such a reality," Mrs. MacDonald wrote in 1879, "that it seems a duty to do it--from the multitude of testimonies we have had to the moral and good [sic] of the play . . . ." Greville MacDonald comments that their friends "came to look upon The Pilgrim's Progress as part of my father's mission in the world" (GMHW 490, 503).

5

MacDonald's preference for the term "grandmother" over "mother" is probably an attempt to distance himself from the intensity of his feelings about his own mother and her death. The complexity of these emotions is suggested by the physical ambiguity of the mother/godmother/grandmother characters, each of whom can appear in varying forms--sometimes small and old, sometimes tall and young. When Anodos is confronted with his tiny "grandmother" at the beginning of Phantastes, she is almost immediately transformed into a "tall gracious lady":

> Drawn towards her by an attraction as irresistible as incomprehensible, I suppose I stretched out my arms towards her, for she drew back a step or two, and said "I was two hundred and thirty-seven years old, last Midsummer eve; and a man must not fall in love with his grandmother, you know."

Anodos looks into her eyes and is filled with "an unknown longing. I remembered somehow that my mother died when I was a baby" (Phan 1:17-18).

6

Richard Reis takes Robert Lee Wolff to task for his suggestion that "MacDonald, unable to resolve his Oedipal wishes, nurtured a lifelong fantasy of sleeping with his mother" (Wolff 47). Reis objects to Wolff's statement on the grounds that Wolff can offer no "factual evidence" for his assertion (Reis 21). While one may disagree with Wolff's relentlessly Freudian analysis of MacDonald's works, it is hard to imagine what kind of evidence Reis could have in mind.

7

For MacDonald's reading of Böhme, see GMHW 557. MacDonald quoted the poet Henry Vaughan frequently (GMHW 124), and, like Vaughan, believed in an afterlife for animals (GMHW 177). MacDonald used a Blake etching as his bookplate (see p. 90).

8

Thomas Vaughan, twin brother of Henry, had much in common with MacDonald, being a minister, an (al)chemist, and a mystic. One of his works, Lumen de Lumine (1651), includes a description of "Nature her self." Finding her in a "Temple of Nature," the author sees her first as a light, then as a woman "attir'd in thin loose silks, but so green, that I never saw the like . . . . Her walk was green, being furr'd with a fine small Grasse. . . 'I have many names,' she announced, 'but my best and dearest is Thalia, for I am alwaies green, and I shall never wither.'" When "her houre of Translation was com, shee past . . . into the Aether of Nature." (See The Works of Thomas Vaughan, ed. Alan Rudrum [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984], 305-6, 311.)

9

"And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Matthew 5:29).

10

I use the term "his" here on purpose. The protagonists of the adult fantasies are male, as are those of the children's books, that is, Diamond, and the real protagonist of the Princess books, Curdie. Although Princess Irene can be taken more seriously as a protagonist than can Agnes/Rosamond of The Wise Woman, her moral development is not as central a concern in the plot as is Curdie's. Although her grandmother does guide and protect her, Irene is relatively unchanging, "as good as she is beautiful" throughout her childhood and adolescence. MacDonald says as much at the beginning of the story: ". . . when I tell a story of this kind, I like to tell it about a princess. Then I can say better what I mean, because I can then give her every beautiful thing I want her to have" (PG 1:2).

11

The snake that triggers the emptying of the lake is clearly phallic; the draining of the lake suggests the onset of menstruation; disaster is threatened if a man cannot be found to "plug the hole"; having achieved emotional and physical maturity, the princess is free to "tumble into the lake as often as she pleases," and so on.

12

Two of MacDonald's brothers died of tuberculosis, as had their father before them. The disease that MacDonald called "the family attendant" was to carry off four of his eleven children. Although he lived to be eighty, MacDonald suffered all his life from recurring tubercular attacks.

13 Apparently God's purposes could be made clear to man, however. Greville MacDonald describes his father as writing Lilith under the conviction that "it was a mandate direct from God, for which he himself was to find form and clothing; and he set about its transcription [my emphasis] with tranquillity" (GMHW 548).

14

In a sermon based on Hebrews 12:29 (Our God is a consuming fire) MacDonald wrote: "Nothing is inexorable but love. . . . Therefore, all that is not beautiful in the beloved, all that comes between and is not of love's kind, must be destroyed. And our God is a consuming fire" (Hein 32).

15

Furthermore, the decade of the 70's was one of MacDonald's most prolific. The Wise Woman (1875) was written in the middle of a ten-year period which produced a dozen novels, a book of sermons, another of poetry, a third of German translations, an edition of English religious poetry, and a collection of short fantasies for children. If Zaitchik's theory holds, all of these works would be imbued with "pessimism," and this is patently not the case.

Chapter Three

Beatrix Potter; Flying On Her Own

> But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. "I cannot get out," as the starling said.
>
> Jane Austen, Mansfield Park

> She flew beautifully when she had got a good start.
>
> Beatrix Potter, The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck

I

The frustration of capabilities, the limited opportunity for intellectual achievement, the dearth of congenial companions--all of these factors contributed to what Barbara Hardy calls the "disability" of being a woman in the nineteenth century.[1] It was a disability from which Helen Beatrix Potter (1866-1948) was to suffer for the first forty years of her life. In the repressive atmosphere of No. 2 Bolton Gardens, Potter was forced to "admit the limits of the paternal roof, but learn to live beneath it"[2] with a vengeance. In middle age, Potter was able to overcome the limitations of her early years: "Genius--like murder--will out," she wrote in her journal in 1891, "--its bent being merely a matter of circumstances" (JBP 207). Fortunately, in Potter's case, this statement turned out to be true. But even after she escaped from "the Boltons," her early conditioning was reflected in a profound ambivalence about

her position, both as woman and writer. "I hold an old-fashioned notion that a happy marriage is the crown of a woman's life" (JBP 313), she wrote at age 28, and certainly a strong conservatism manifested itself after her marriage in an angry insistence that admirers of her work address her as "Mrs. Heelis" rather than "Miss Potter."[3] As a writer, she insisted upon editorial control over every detail of the publication of her books, welcomed the enthusiasm of her American readers, and willingly made the changes necessary for foreign editions of her works. Simultaneously, she refused the adulation of her own countrymen,[4] disparaged references to her international reputation, and scornfully rejected any serious critical appraisal of her work.[5] All of this reflects Potter's ambivalence about a career she once pursued with the courage of desperation. Writing and illustrating fantasy for children had offered Beatrix Potter an outlet for her particular form of genius. It had also provided the financial independence which resulted in her marriage and escape from Bolton Gardens. However, once married, financially secure, free of the burden of filial guilt, and able to expand her range of interests, Potter appears to have found further writing neither necessary nor important. Perhaps it merely served to remind her of less happy times.

Much has been written about the formative influence of Potter's early years. In 1940, upon hearing that her old home had been destroyed by bombs, she responded by referring

to the house, bleakly, as "my unloved birthplace" (MY 20). She was an only child until age 6, when a brother, Bertram, was born. This welcome companionship was short-lived, however, as Bertram was soon sent away to school. Potter was educated at home by a governess and given the occasional lesson in French or painting by visiting teachers. She mixed with no other children and did not even become acquainted with her cousins until she was quite grown up. From childhood, her activities had to be carried out quietly, in an enclosed space, with a minimum of equipment, and usually alone. As a result, she spent the winter days of more than thirty years in her upstairs rooms at No. 2 engaged in solitary occupations: lessons, drawing and painting, reading, scientific studies, and between the ages of 15 and 30, writing in her coded journal. This seclusion resulted in an excruciating shyness which lasted into middle age; in 1897, the 31-year-old Potter could not even find the courage to ask questions of the staff at Kew: "I saw the Director at a distance. I kept behind a bush" (JBP 429). However, the many hours to be filled provided an opportunity for the development of her own special talents. She recognized her own capabilities: "I fancy I could have been taught anything if I had been caught young," she confided to her journal, " but . . . only boys went to school in most families" (TBP 32). Too old for a governess, Potter continued patiently observing and painting her caged pets, and occasionally visiting museums and galleries.[6]

The major break in the endless succession of days took place in the summer. Potter's memories of childhood focus upon her happiness during this annual three-month escape from Bolton Gardens into Arcadia by the River Tay in Perthshire: "My brother and I were born in London," she wrote in old age, "but our descent, our interest and our joy were in the north country. I was a child then, I had no idea what the world would be like. Everything was romantic in my imagination . . . I remember every stone, every tree, the scent of the heather . . . oh, it was always beautiful, home sweet home, I knew nothing of trouble then" (JBP 82). The tedious minutiae of respectable middle-class life in London seem to have held little reality for Potter, but her imagination responded at once to every feature of rural life: the animals of the countryside, the village post-office and general store, the cottage gardens filled with hollyhocks and foxgloves, the farmhouse kitchens with their blue-and-white crockery and flagged floors. The world of village, farmyard, and fell offered Potter a stimulus which the austerities of life at No. 2 could not provide: "I do not remember a time when I did not try to invent pictures and make for myself a fairyland amongst the wild-flowers, the animals, fungi, mosses, woods and streams . . . that pleasant unchanging world of realism and romance, which in our northern clime is stiffened by hard weather, a tough ancestry, and the strength that comes from the hills."[7] The farming life exercised an immediate and permanent attraction for both Beatrix and her brother, and it was to

form the backdrop against which her fantasies for children would be enacted.

Not only did Potter recapture the rural landscape in the delicate and precise portraits of English life that constitute the Tales, but much of her drive to achieve financial independence was fueled by her determination to escape permanently from London to the country. By age 23 Potter had never had a holiday away from her parents. In her journal she laments her irritability, noting that she suffers from insomnia and feels "dreadfully tired and empty," but like George Eliot, Potter always felt well in the country. On returning to London from a brief trip, she wrote: "Came home 13th. I do wish we lived in the country. I have been perfectly well in mind and body these few days . . . I wish for many things . . . but these odious fits of low spirits would spoil any life" (JBP 118). The rigid and idiosyncratic behavior of her parents was a great trial, the stress of which probably produced her frequent "sick headaches." She found relief in extensive reading, utilizing her wakeful nights to memorize whole plays by Shakespeare:

> I also learned four Acts of Henry VI and ought to have learned all, but . . . every line was learned in bed. The 4th. Act is associated with a robin who came in at daylight and sat on the wardrobe. . . . I was feeling very much down for a few days. I derived much quiet pleasure from reading Matthew Arnold's letters. I . . . obtain much consolation at present from reading the Old Testament and Wordsworth; set after Shakespeare, however, of whose existence Matthew Arnold seems to have been almost absolutely unconscious.
> (JBP 358, 402)

She also wrote every day, although for many years she had little material beyond tedious daily activities to record. Late in life she wrote to her cousin: "When I was young I already had the itch to write, without having any material to write about" (TMY 32). Nevertheless, these everyday events were painstakingly recorded in a code which provided a challenging way of passing the time, with the added attraction of secrecy.

Potter notes in her journal that "no one will see this," but, in fact, most of what she writes there is fairly innocuous. Although she is airily outspoken on a variety of impersonal topics, Potter rarely criticises her domestic situation or expresses resentment of her parents. She is 28 before her comments become overtly critical, and even then they are cast in the form of apologies or confessions:

> I must confess to having been in excessively bad temper being rather tired and very much vexed that I could not have the Hutton girls [her cousins]. There is only one spare bedroom but the sting of my annoyance was the knowledge that this was regarded as a convenient excuse. . . . I was also much provoked because my mother will not order the carriage in the morning or make up her mind, and if I say I should like to go out after lunch, I am keeping her in . . . . (JBP 338)

A year later she complains: "Must confess to crying after I got home, my father being as usual deplorable and beginning to read Gibbon's Decline and Fall from the beginning again . . . . It is a shade better than metaphysics, but it is not enlivening" (JBP 398). By the next year she was desperate enough to consult a doctor. This visit, had, of course, to be accomplished in secret: "I fretted so wearily

that I went privately to see Dr. Aikin and had it out with him. He was very kind . . . . I am anxious to do my best, but I really cannot face going abroad with him [her father]" (JBP 402). Telling her parents about this visit would no doubt have precipitated a scene. Mrs. Potter was particularly anxious to make Beatrix feel that she was not "strong" enough to face the rigours of independent action. This, of course, kept Beatrix close at hand to be made use of, and added to the intensity of her sense of frustration:

> I went to Harescombe on Tues. the 12th of June . . . . I had not been away independently for five years. It was an event. It was so much of an event in the eyes of my relations that they made it appear an undertaking to me, and I began to think I would rather not go. I had a sick headache most inopportunely, though whether cause or effect I could not say, but it would have decided the fate of my invitation but for Caroline [her cousin] who carried me off. (JBP 312)

Upstairs at No. 2, Potter found painting an indispensible outlet: "I cannot rest," she wrote, "I must draw, however poor the result, and when I have a bad time come over me it is a stronger desire than ever . . . . I caught myself making a careful and admiring copy of the swill bucket and the laugh it gave me brought me round" (JBP 106). Concentrating on the pen-and-ink representation of a concrete object probably provided relief from day-to-day problems. In addition, the tone of detached objectivity here is typical of all of Potter's writing. She required the same courage, restraint, and common sense of her fictional characters that she exhibited in her own life: "I was much distressed about several negative worries, least said

soonest mended" (JBP 409). She never gave in to self-pity, and scorned the weakness in others.

While Potter and her brother were growing up, summer holidays in the country were still the high point of the year. They collected fossils, identified flora and fauna, and reassembled the skeletons of small animals. These activities led to an interest in entymology and zoology. Small animals came home to No. 2 in cages, providing further opportunities for minute observation and for what Potter termed "copying." As they grew older, Beatrix and Bertram were allowed unsupervised visits to the Museum of Natural History.[8] Here she learned the use of the microscope and her interests became focussed upon mycology. Later still, she was able to make independent excursions in a pony carriage for the purpose of collecting specimens, recording her modest successes with characteristic restraint: "There is extreme complacency in finding a totally new species for the first time" (JBP 331). Potter's study of fungi culminated in a paper on symbiosis in lichen, a theory which later proved to be correct. (Credit for this theory, however, goes to a German whose discovery briefly anticipated Potter's.) Her work was encouraged, supervised, and painstakingly proofread by her uncle, a chemist of some distinction. As might be expected, this undertaking had to be carried out in an atmosphere of extreme caution: "I came home 11th in a state of suspended fidget about my letter to my discreet uncle . . . I escaped out of the house soon after eight and

walked up and down Barnham Gardens. I was afraid of being stopped from going" (JBP 423). With the help of her uncle, and in spite of the rudeness and skepticism of various botanical experts, Potter carried this venture through. She was justifiably irritated by the treatment she received, however, recording in her journal: "I fancy he [the Director of the Herbarium] may be a misogynist . . . but it is odious to a shy person to be snubbed as conceited, especially when the shy person happened to be right" (JBP 430). The paper was eventually read before the Linnaean Society of London by one of its members. Female scholarship was accepted by the Society, albeit grudgingly; the physical presence of the female scholar, however, was not.

Perseverance in the male-dominated world of science seemed pointless, especially so for a woman of little confidence, less freedom of movement, and no formal education. Roger Sale suggests that many writers of children's books share "the myth of adult life as a prison house" (98). Frustrated in her scientific studies and deprived of affection and companionship, Potter could hardly be faulted for seeing her "imprisonment" as more real than mythic. Probably with a real sense of fellow-feeling, she turned her attentions back to her caged pets. With them she had always had affectionate yet detached relationships. She continued her meticulous observation of her animals, recording, among other things, her conviction that hibernation was internally controlled, rather than dependent upon external influences such as temperature. Her pet

hedgehog, Tiggy, provided her with a subject for these studies. Tiggy also provides an example of Potter's dual vision; although affectionately attached to her pet (she described hedgehogs as "fairy beasts"), she could yet pronounce Tiggy's death-knell with the objectivity of the scientist: "She has got so dirty and miserable I think it is better not to have her any longer; and I am going away for a few days so it is best to chloroform her first" (TBP 81). Eventually, however, the scientific studies were set aside.

Potter's journal records her development into an opinionated woman, forthright, emotionally detached, and given to an ironic turn of phrase. In the early pages of the journal she dismisses the literati, politicians, and even the monarch, with airy aplomb. She writes of Ruskin and Rossetti, concluding, "not that I think much of either chappy"; of Gladstone: "he really looks like he has been put in a clothes-bag and sat upon"; and of the Queen: "some say she is mad, not that that is anything uncommon, half the world is mad when you come to inquire" (JBP 54, 104, 76). In company, however, Potter was far from outspoken, her painful shyness and lack of confidence occasionally leading her to see insults where none were intended. She was easily affronted and unable to bear fools gladly. As she grew up, Potter was given little opportunity (and probably less encouragement) to form or express independent judgements based on her own observations. Doubtless many of the ideas about art and politics which she expresses in the journal

reflect those of her father whom she was expected to accompany on outings. Later, however, the journal reveals dispassionate views on subjects which most middle-class Victorians avoided, such as atheism and nudity:

> All outward forms of religion are almost useless, and are the cause of endless strife. What do Creeds matter, what possible difference does it make to anyone today whether the doctrine of the resurrection is correct? Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good, behave yourself, and never mind the rest. (JBP 104)
>
> . . .
>
> There has been a discussion of two and three columns in The Times, started by a British Matron about nude pictures. I do not see the slightest objection to nude pictures as a class . . . . Indeed the ostentatious covering of certain parts only, merely showing that the painter considers there is something which should be concealed, is far worse than pure unabashed nudity. (JBP 143)

Forthright language such as this, which expresses a desire to dispense with dogma and cant while retaining an essential moral conservatism, was to be typical of Potter's later style in the Tales. The Journal of Beatrix Potter records, not so much what Leslie Linder in his Appreciation calls a "pertinacious search for the medium in which her own innate talent was to find expression," as the source of that medium. The simplicity of language, the dispassionate and direct approach, and the inflexible moral tone which are the hallmarks of Beatrix Potter's best work, are to be found first in the journal.

As might have been expected, Bertram Potter left home early to pursue the country life his sister longed for. He

married in Scotland, wisely refraining from informing his parents of the event until many years had passed: escape was possible for unmarried sons, but not so for daughters. His sister was to have a much longer wait. She was aware of her isolation and her lack of confidence: "I wonder why I never seem to know people," she wrote in 1896; "It makes one wonder whether one is presentable. It strikes me as the way to make one not" (JBP 407). For Beatrix Potter, over thirty, frustrated in her attempts to use her talents in a productive and satisfying way, resigned to spinsterhood, and contemplating a future of service to increasingly demanding parents on whom she was financially dependent, no escape from Bolton Gardens seemed possible. At 17, Potter had written in her journal: "I will do something sooner or later" (JBP 30). In this prediction, she was correct, although her "something" was a long time coming. Beatrix Potter's sense of herself as an individual and as an artist developed with what Roger Sale aptly calls "terrifying slowness." She was to spend over 30 years searching for some kind of outlet for her talents.

Fortunately, while she was still in her late twenties, Potter had submitted a few "fanciful" animal designs for birthday and Christmas cards to a publisher. To her astonishment, they were accepted. The resulting cheque for six pounds was Potter's first inkling of the road to independence: money. "I returned to bed, and lay awake chuckling till 2 in the morning," she records in her journal (JBP 205). Five years later, after receiving a modest gift

of money from her father and commenting upon her increasingly difficult relationship with him, she writes: "I also increasingly derive consolation from a less elevated source, the comfort of having money. One must make out some way. It is something to have a little money to spend on books and to look forward to being independent, though forlorn" (JBP 402). Now 35, her options limited, Potter remembered this modest early success and was encouraged to experiment further with what she deprecatingly termed her animal "rubbish." Animals had always been her companions, and it was with them rather than with humans that she had shared her days. Roger Sale suggests that "animals that are children or specially allied with children . . . can flatter, and repudiate the human wish that we are not alone--that is the backbone of children's literature as we know it" (98). Certainly her animals fulfilled all of these needs for Beatrix Potter. One of her favourites, a pet rabbit called Peter, did not live to see himself immortalized. He was still alive, however, in 1893, when his owner wrote a famous picture-letter to the son of her old governess. The letter began: "My Dear Noel, I don't know what to write to you so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits, whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter" (TMY 65). Now Potter decided to see if the letter (fortunately hoarded by her young correspondent) could be made into a story. By December of 1901 the little book had been rejected by several publishers. Courageously, Potter

had 250 copies of the story printed at her own expense. Thus it was that a modest bank balance allowed Potter to realize her early ambition to "do something, sooner or later." The little book sold well enough to interest the publishing firm of Frederick Warne and Company which had earlier rejected it. Warne conferred a measure of immortality on his company (as well as assuring its future fortunes) by publishing The Tale of Peter Rabbit in the summer of 1902.

II

To the modern consumer numbed by the textual inanity, crude drawing, crass colouring, and general "cuteness" of much that is mass-produced for children, Beatrix Potter's Tales may come as a revelation. Readers unfamiliar with the books are surprised by the continuing popularity of stories written before the first war, which, in terms of text and illustration, make little concession to the child-reader. With the exception, perhaps, of Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, Potter's Tales are far more widely read today than any other Victorian or Edwardian children's stories. Potter's Tales contain few references to contemporary social, historical, and political issues, and therefore remain relatively undated. Yet Potter's best stories have a special magic that is almost impossible to define. The world she creates within the small pages of her books is austere, the moral tone disciplined and consistent, the prose astringent. The delicate and detailed water-colour

illustrations which face and complement each page of text are set within wide margins which focus the eye and invite the close attention the paintings deserve. By a felicitous interaction of text and illustration, the best of Potter's Tales constitute modern-day emblem books of a most enchanting kind.

Potter's water-colour illustrations never lose their charm, particularly for the reader fortunate enough to see the original scenes and recognize how perfectly the artist has captured them. The Tales aside, Potter's evocative water-colours of London and the Lake District, her lovingly detailed drawings of interiors, and her illustrations of a vast range of flora and fauna, all attest to the fact that, as an artist, she need not have limited herself to illustrating children's books. However, in doing so, Potter may have been attempting to achieve in a limited way what she felt incapable or frightened of doing at a different level. Years before, after seeing Angelica Kauffman's paintings, Potter had recorded her admiration of "what a woman has done," yet she herself never attempted to enter the artistic world to which she had an obvious entree through her father's friendship with John Millais. An illustrator of children's books can expect to be ignored by the serious art critic. Furthermore, the female illustrator avoids the accusation of arrogance which might be levelled at her if she had attempted to enter what was still largely a man's domain. Potter had already been humiliated by the

male establishment and presumably did not want to repeat the experience. And, as always, any new departure would have produced inevitable and exhausting difficulties with her parents. No doubt she realized that writing and illustrating books for children provided a way of avoiding all of these problems. At the same time, however, Potter was intelligent and realistic; she recognized both her talent and her timidity, her artistic potential and the limitations imposed upon it by her temperament and family situation. In later life, when Potter's landscape painting was compared with that of Constable, she was enraged.[9] Her anger suggests not so much an embarrassed humility, as a rejection of the imputation that she aspired to "real" art or was attempting to compete with "real" artists, in other words, a frustrated awareness that such recognition could not be truly hers because of the medium in which she worked. Fortunately for posterity, Potter's decision to write for children, in combination with her stubborn refusal to lower her standards, resulted in literature with a lasting appeal to readers of all ages.

Compared to the fantasy worlds of other writers, the world of Potter's Tales is an austere one. Her stories lack the warm humour and the intimate, almost familial, relationships common to the inhabitants of Grahame's Riverside and Kipling's Jungle. The distance Potter maintains from her characters reflects her relationship with her pets: affectionate but detached. In the Tales, as in MacDonald's stories, no one "plays," wastes time, or has

much fun, at least not without paying a price. Potter's characters either exhibit courtesy and common sense in the conduct of their affairs, or they suffer for not doing so. But events in the Tales never appear to have been manipulated by a benevolent despot as they do in MacDonald's stories, and Potter's laconic narrative intrusions entirely lack the tone of fatherly admonition which hovers over the protagonists of the Princess books. She distances herself from her reader, avoiding all that is sentimental, ambivalent, or insincere. This very lack of emotional complexity in combination with an inflexible moral scheme encourages the child-reader to place his confidence in the teller and the tale.

For Beatrix Potter "a room of one's own" seemed an impossible dream. The jewel-like illustrations set within their wide, shiny white margins reflect a constricted life lived within narrow limits. At the same time, however, the enclosed spaces within which she created her fantasy world provided a private retreat, offering the same relief she had recorded years earlier in her journal when concentration on copying the swill bucket had "brought her round." Painting and writing offered her a form of escape from the loneliness and stress of her family situation. Within these small pages, as in her journal, Potter is in control, the narrative voice is bold and opinionated, the authoritarian asserts herself. Potter never patronizes her reader. She assumes that children can cope with the realities of her

world and with the vocabulary she uses to describe it, providing the stories stay within the limits of the child's experience. This they do, perfectly fitting C.S. Lewis's description of the fairy-tale form with its "brevity, its severe restraints upon description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections, and 'gas'."[10] Potter's terse, unadorned diction combined with an uncompromising moral tone results in prose which is highly epigrammatic, almost Biblical in effect. This is not surprising, considering Potter's comments to an American friend:

> Never does anyone outside your perfidiously complimentary nation write to tell me that I write good prose . . . . My usual way of writing is to scribble, and cut out, and write it again and again. The shorter and plainer the better. And [I] read the Bible (unrevised version and Old Testament) if I feel my style wants chastening.[11]

The reader who comes to Potter's Journal, as most readers do, already steeped in the Tales, is struck at once by the familiar syntactical cadences and the characteristic ironic-laconic tone. When the journal was put aside, Potter continued to write in her accustomed style: simply, directly, honestly. Of a hotel in Torquay, for example, she had written in her journal: "It is possible to have too much Natural History in a bed. I did not undress after the first night" (JBP 97). Abrupt, categorical authorial intrusions are typical of the Tales. Consider, for example, these lines from The Pie and the Patty-Pan (1905): "I do not approve of tin articles in puddings and pies. It is most undesirable--

(especially when people swallow in lumps!)" (44). Similarly, in The Tale of Benjamin Bunny, Benjamin informs his cousin Peter that "It spoils people's clothes to squeeze under a gate. The proper way to get in is to climb down a pear tree" (25).[12] Potter's emphasis on the rational and the practical, expressed in the succinct and balanced prose of her beloved Jane Austen, gives the Tales that convincing sense of rightness which the reader finds both satisfying and comforting.

This sense of moral order, the confident assertion that rational behavior will result, perhaps not in happiness, but at least in fairness, is reflected in the themes of the Tales as well as in the language in which they are written. The narrator suggests that Nature, while not malevolent, is neither benevolent nor particularly concerned with the welfare of the individual. Each species exists to provide a meal for another; therefore the price of existence is eternal vigilance and prudent action. In the fantasy world of her stories, safe within those wide margins, ducks may wear bonnets and foxes read newspapers, but their real relationships are never falsified. Ribby the cat and Duchess the dog are friends, as are Kep the Collie and Jemima Puddle-Duck. But these are the domesticated animals of hearth and farmyard. Beyond these boundaries, Potter's natural world is realistically depicted. While Grahame refers to the creatures beyond the Riverbank only vaguely, as the "others," Potter's descriptions are much

more graphic:

> I have made many books about well-behaved people. Now, for a change, I am going to make a book about two disagreeable people, called Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod. Nobody could call Mr. Tod 'nice.' The rabbits could not bear him; they could smell him half a mile off . . . . Mr. Tod went into the kitchen lighted the fire and boiled the kettle; for the moment he did not trouble himself to cook the baby rabbits. (The Tale of Mr. Tod 7, 71)

In the polite world of village and farmhouse, courtesy is taken for granted. But in the woods and hedgerows, as in Mowgli's Jungle, and Grahame's Wild Wood, there are rules to be followed. In Potter's world these include prudence, intelligence, practical action. When these rules are flouted, ducks risk the teeth of foxes and expose their eggs to the instinctive greed of puppies. If parental wisdom is ignored, the crafty will victimize the young and innocent: rats can outsmart kittens, and baby rabbits are no match for predatory foxes.

However, even though frightening things happen in the stories, they happen, as Marcus Crouch puts it, "within the framework of a known society" (3). This framework includes the child-reader's understanding that here there is no random violence, no tragic, undeserved consequence. Within the ring of Potter's fantasy world, safely inside those wide, white borders, life and death occur according to an inevitable, well-established, and acceptable pattern. Thus, it seems to me that John Fletcher's article on "sadism" in Potter's works is generally wrong-headed. He suggests that "If this [The Tale of Samuel Whiskers] did not give Miss

Potter's little friends nightmares, children must have been made of rather sterner stuff in those days" (71). The suggestion that a child who eats meat every day will be unable to accept, for example, the fact that Peter Rabbit's father was unfortunate enough to be "put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor" (10), is ludicrous. To such a suggestion, one can only reply that generations of children have accepted the event (as does Mrs. Rabbit) with remarkable equanimity.

Children not only accept the inevitability of events in Potter's world, but they also accept the language in which the events are described. Some critics consider Potter's vocabulary "difficult," but in fact children cope with it perfectly well. If a child doesn't know the meaning of a word, he will either form a general idea from the context, or ask and learn. In The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies (1909), the narrator comments: "It is said that the effect of eating too much lettuce is 'soporific.' I have never felt sleepy after eating lettuces, but then I am not a rabbit" (9). The fact that the word "soporific" appears in quotation marks in her text indicates that Potter knew exactly what she was doing. She used "big" words on purpose, and not only with didactic intent. The long words enhance the cadences of her prose, lingering in the reader's mind. Certainly this is the case with the well-known opening sentence of The Tailor of Gloucester:

> In the time of swords and periwigs and full-skirted coats with flowered lappets--when gentlemen wore ruffles and gold-laced waistcoats of paduasoy and taffeta--there lived a tailor in Gloucester. (9)

Potter selected her diction and syntax purposefully for her own (and her reader's) enjoyment. In The Tale of Peter Rabbit, for example, when the hapless Peter entangles himself in a gooseberry net, the narrator informs us that the sparrows, surely of all birds those most likely to resort to hysterical twittering, "flew to him in great excitement and implored him to exert himself" (33). In The Tale of Samuel Whiskers, when the rats tie up Tom Kitten and roll him in dough to make a pudding, Potter gives Samuel's lines a delightful eighteenth-century flavour: "But I am persuaded," says Samuel to his wife, "that the knots would have proved indigestible, whatever you may urge to the contrary" (67).

The highly idiosyncratic sense of humour pervading Potter's Tales is, for me, one of their greatest attractions. Because, in spite of the fact that in many of her best stories Potter takes a didactic and rather coldly rational approach, she is always alive to the ironic: "I do not consider the stars," she had written in her journal years before; "It is more than enough that there should be forty thousand named and classified funguses" (JBP 411). Potter's use of ironic understatement balances her tendency to didacticism. In The Tale of Ginger and Pickles (1909), for example, Potter defines her terms clearly for the young reader:

> Now the meaning of "credit" is this--when a customer buys a bar of soap, instead of the customer pulling out a purse and paying for it--she says she will pay another time. (19)

But at the same time, humour softens the prosaic details of bookkeeping and bankruptcy. Ginger (a cat) asks Pickles (a dog) to serve the mouse customers because "he said it made his mouth water. 'I cannot bear,' said he, 'to see them going out the door carrying their little parcels'" (15).

Potter's humour may be missed by the immature reader, but it remains a major incentive for the adult to read the stories aloud. The adult recognizes, for example, that correct etiquette is the satirical focus of The Pie and the Patty-pan (1905), in which Duchess the dog is invited to tea by Ribby the cat. The hostess has prepared "a pie of the most delicate and tender mouse minced up with bacon" as the pièce-de-resistance of the meal. Duchess, revolted by the prospect ("I really couldn't, couldn't eat mouse pie. And I shall have to eat it because it is a party") secretly attempts to replace the pie with one more palatable to dogs, a pie of veal and ham. The plot hinges on the problems which arise out of the attempt of one party not to hurt another's feelings when honesty is not possible, that is, when people meet for social rather than for personal reasons. Although the story is handled with deftness and humour, the implicit message is a serious one: telling the truth may not make one popular, but it may save trouble in the long run. The Tale of Jeremy Fisher is another tale in which the humour appeals more to the adult than to the child reader. Although for the most part, Potter sticks to sexual stereotypes--male characters are often calculating, dirty, aggressive

creatures of the outdoors, while females are innocent, tidy, and obsessed with housework--there is a notable exception here. Jeremy, a fastidious dilettante whose sartorial splendor and gourmet proclivities are exceeded only by those of his aristocratic dinner guests, is surely Potter's ironic comment on the effeminate aesthete of the 1890s.

Every reader of the Tales of Beatrix Potter has his own favourites. Mine are different from those of my parents, and my children's favourites are not my own. There is, of course, some overlap--we all love Jemima and Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle--and certain of Potter's lines have passed into the family vernacular: "worn to a ravelling," for example, from The Tailor of Gloucester, and "foxy-whiskered" to describe any arrogant and predatory male. C.S. Lewis loved The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin, a story which I find dull. Graham Greene agrees with me, calling Nutkin an "unsatisfactory book"; yet he describes The Tale of Jeremy Fisher, which I find charming, as a "failure."[13] Roger Sale's list of Potter's five "very best" books (143) includes only two that I would choose: The Tale of Peter Rabbit and The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck. My favourite Potter story (and the author's), The Tailor of Gloucester, does not appear in this group, and another favourite, The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, does not even appear in Sale's list of the best nine books. There is no accounting for these differences in taste, heavily weighted as they must be by childhood associations. However, the books that seem to me the best involve elements of mystery and danger set in

enclosed and fascinating interiors, and display some measure of humour. Stories such as The Tale of Benjamin Bunny, The Tale of Tom Kitten, and The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin, in which the action takes place outdoors and in which the tension is provided by mere disobedience or foolhardiness, seem less interesting.

The fact that Potter was innured to a rather joyless and limited existence is reflected to some extent in the plots of her stories. The Tales fall into two general categories: the (for the most part) earlier stories involving what we could term "animal-children," and the later, more complex stories dealing with "animal-adults." Generally speaking, the first group of stories deals with rebellion and naughtiness. They centre upon the misdeeds of such youthful perpetrators as Squirrel Nutkin, Tom Kitten, Peter Rabbit, and his cousin, Benjamin Bunny. Their misbehavior reflects that of small boys everywhere: losing and dirtying clothes, showing off, ignoring and evading parental instructions, eating immoderately, and so on. All of this results in equally conventional punishment: angry words, spankings, upset stomachs, and banishment. Worse behavior merits harsher punishment. Rebellion is short-lived, and, as in The Tale of Peter Rabbit, limits are swiftly reimposed. Peter directly disobeys his mother and, as a result, suffers the terror of near-capture, the misery of being lost, and the further humiliation of illness following his over-indulgence in McGregor's garden. The foolhardy behavior of Nutkin,

based as it is on pride rather than mere youthful high spirits, results in near-disaster when Nutkin is nearly skinned alive by Old Brown the Owl. He escapes with his life, but, as a logical consequence of his arrogance, loses his beautiful tail. The incorrigible Tom Kitten, whose naughtiness in The Tale of Tom Kitten (1907) continues in The Tale of Samuel Whiskers (1908), is nearly killed and eaten by rats.

In the second group of stories, the animal protagonists are older and the plots more complex. Foolishness and incompetence are treated with scorn and harshly punished. Jemima Puddle-duck, a mature but naive female who should know better, nearly loses her life to the "foxy-whiskered gentleman" under whose spell she so foolishly falls. Jemima is saved by Kep, the farm Collie, but pays for her imprudence with the loss of the eggs she tried so hard to protect. In what is perhaps Potter's darkest tale, The Tale of Mr. Tod, the premeditated attack on Tommy Brock, the badger, by Mr. Tod, the fox, involves the eternal struggle of natural enemies. The plot develops in terms of a human practical joke, but there is no doubt about the fox's intentions as he looks in the window after the "trick" has been played:

> In the middle of the bed was a wet flattened something--much dinged in, in the middle where the pail had caught it. Its head was covered by the wet blanket and it was not snoring any longer . . . . Yes, there was no doubt about it. The pail had hit poor old Tommy Brock and killed him dead! (69).

In one sense Potter's Tales are descendants of the animal fables of Aesop and others. The animal fantasy came naturally to her after years of close confinement with small animals as companions and objects of study. This accounts for her almost inexplicable ability to imbue the animal with human qualities. The natural world of instinctively-opposed natures is honestly depicted in the usual triumph of the cunning and predatory over the timid and less intelligent. Yet this natural order is described simultaneously in animal and in human terms. The best example of this is the "mighty civil and handsome" villain of The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck, who is at once a human and an animal predator. His plus fours and newspapers discarded, the fox is all animal as he gloats over Jemima's eggs. Kep, the sheep-dog, plays the role of an older brother to Jemima, but his "human" qualities do not extend to protecting her eggs. They are gobbled up by his puppies just as they would have been by the fox. Somehow, without losing the "human" element which Kenneth Grahame emphasises, Potter never loses the essential "animal-ness" of her characters. Tom Kitten is both kitten and boy when he dirties and loses all his new clothes, just as Mr. Drake Puddle-duck is both duck and man when he dons Tom's clothes and preens himself, announcing, "It's a very fine morning!" Human clothing removed, they revert to mere cat and drake. On one level Jemima Puddle-duck is a foolish maiden in the hands of a wily seducer. At the same time she is a rather unintelligent fowl at the mercy, as a duck would

always be, of a more intelligent predator. Mrs. Tittlemouse is a mouse and Mr. Jackson a toad. Yet simultaneously she is the quintessential harried housewife and he the exasperating and unwanted houseguest. The unkindness of Simkin the cat in The Tailor of Gloucester is perhaps not premeditated enough to be termed "revenge," but his behavior seems cruel enough as his master, the tailor, lies ill with the mayor's wedding coat unfinished because he has "no more twist." But consider the complexity of this situation: Simkin has hidden the thread to pay his master back for freeing Simkin's captive mice. Thus we are forced to look at this story first from the point of view of man, who views the cat's action in trapping the mice as cruel, then from the point of view of beast, who has acted out of mere instinct. The result of this conflict in the plot is that a beast takes revenge like a man. Furthermore, the cat's "human" plot to punish the tailor is foiled by animals, the mice themselves. These display gratitude and sewing skill, both highly unmouse-like, and complete the tailor's task in time for the mayor's wedding. Similarly, in The Tale of Jeremy Fisher, the reader finds himself in a highly authentic world of frog and pond. Yet the story is so convincing on a "human" level (Potter's father was a keen fisherman; can there be a touch of satire here?) that it is only when the author intrudes upon the genteel dinner party of Jeremy Fisher and his aristocratic friends with a comment upon roasted grasshopper ("I think it must have been nasty") that the reader is brought abruptly to the realization that this is an animal fantasy rather

than the "real" world.

In The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame describes the relationships between his Riverbankers in warmly affectionate, human terms. There is little of this "heart-warming" quality about Beatrix Potter's stories. As Roger Sale rightly says: "When intelligence, intentness, and precision are crucial, one is not going to achieve except very occasionally, warmth or compassion" (163). The quality of "coziness" is less obvious in Potter's interiors; the sense of home as a comfortable, inviting, and protective haven from the world is not so obvious here. Many of the animals live in constricted spaces, burrows with hidden entrances and many cupboards, cabinets, and enclosed beds. Even the Tailor of Gloucester's home seems oddly underground, with its low ceilings, hanging-enclosed bed, and crockery-crowded counters. However, most of these interiors boast a glowing fireplace in front of which the characters drink tea, doze, warm themselves, and generally relax. Here is one recognizable affinity between the visions of Grahame and Potter: for both, home appears to be where the hearth is. In The Wind in the Willows, the fire blazes in the kitchen of Badger, the benevolent father-figure whose cozy underground home in the Wild Wood provides a protective haven for all the smaller animals. This scene is matched only once in Potter's Tales, in the kitchen of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, the hedgehog laundress who provides motherly care for the child Lucy. They drink tea in the farmhouse kitchen

with its hot, "singey" smell of ironing, and its irons heating by the fire. This kitchen is first described in the original version of the story, written in an exercise-book:

> It was a very nice clean kitchen with a grey-flagged floor and whitewashed walls and a wide fireplace and shining copper pans--just like any other Lakes kitchen, only the ceiling was very low and the pans were as little as you have in a doll's house. (TMY 133)

It seems fair to say that Potter's vision of "home" took the form of a farmhouse kitchen complete with blazing hearth, willow-pattered tea-cups, geraniums in pots, and bunches of onions hanging from the ceiling. The vision seems idyllic, but it was one day to be realized, providing a happy ending to the tale of Beatrix Potter.

III

> I was quite sure in advance that you would cut out the tailor and all my favourite rhymes! Which is one of the reasons I printed it myself. (Potter: Letter to Norman Warne)

> "I wish to hatch my own eggs; I will hatch them all myself," quacked Jemima Puddle-duck." (10)

In her late thirties, Potter was resigned to spinsterhood and a life of continued attendance upon her parents. The successful publication of The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Frederick Warne in 1902 had offered the possibility of financial self-sufficiency, but not of physical escape from Bolton Gardens. Like Jemima Puddle-

duck, however, Beatrix Potter was determined to grasp a measure of independence. Unlike her fictional alter-ego, she finally achieved her objective and "flew beautifully when she had got a good start" (21).

Happily, in the months following the publication of The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Potter formed a close friendship with Norman Warne, the younger son of the publishing family. This relationship provided not only a fruitful artistic and literary collaboration, but a long-awaited emotional attachment and, ultimately, the only legitimate avenue of escape for a dutiful daughter: marriage. Over the objections of her parents (as a publisher, Warne was "in trade"), Potter accepted Norman's proposal of marriage in July of 1905. After an engagement of less than a month, however, Warne died of leukaemia. This tragic and unexpected blow prompted a rare expression of emotion from Potter. She wrote to Norman's sister, pathetically:

> Do you remember Miss Austen's Persuasion . . .? It was always my favourite, and I read the end part of it again last July. On the 26th, the day after I got Norman's letter, I thought my story had come right, with patience and waiting, like Anne Elliot's did.
> (TMY 138)

In the happy year before this tragedy, Potter had taken the first humble step toward the realization of her dream: a farm of her own in her beloved Lake district. With the modest nest-egg accumulated from the sale of her first two books, she purchased a field in the town of Sawrey above Lake Windermere in Westmorland. Shortly after Norman's

death, she received news that a small farm lying adjacent to this acreage was for sale. Fortunately, the negotiations for the purchase of this farm, Hill Top, occupied the months following the tragedy. The publication of her third book, The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-winkle, was imminent and Potter was already engaged on the exquisite illustrations for The Tale of the Pie and the Patty-pan. Both books were published before the end of 1905.

Norman Warne's death was, in effect, an affirmation of Beatrix Potter's indefinite imprisonment in Bolton Gardens. In the face of this realization, her continued productivity in the pursuit of a fast-fading vision says as much about her desperate need to escape as it does about her courage and tenacity. The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-winkle sold thirty-thousand copies in the first few weeks after publication. After this, Potter continued to produce at the rate of two or three books a year. As the popularity of the Tales grew and she became more experienced in the literary and publishing fields, Potter gained enormously in confidence and self-assertion. The popularity of her work gave her a measure of power, and, at least in her dealings with her publishers, she was not afraid to use it. For example, the elder Warne was nervous about references to such things as lice and cigar-smoking in books for children. His timid and prudish deference to "Mrs. Grundy" occasionally prompted an outburst:

I cannot think what you are driving at. If it were not

> impertinent to lecture one's publisher--you are a great deal too much afraid of the public . . . . I must ask you not to make any arrangements without letting me know. I am seriously provoked about things being in such a muddle. (TMY 180)

The assertive tone here demonstrates Beatrix Potter's development from the woman who, at 31, was still hiding in the bushes at Kew to avoid confronting the staff. She was equally determined to pursue her acquisition of land in Sawrey, adding another property, Castle Farm, to her possessions in 1909. She could not, of course, live in her new home, but she was able to make brief visits to supervise the furnishing of her farmhouse and the purchase and care of the stock. Potter now owned nearly half of the property in the village.

Although she had developed enormously in confidence and assurance in those areas where she felt in control, Potter was still tied to the family home and the endless attendance upon her parents. Where her duty as a daughter was concerned she was entirely submissive. Her inability to oppose her parents' wishes caused a major conflict in the fall of 1912, when she received a a second proposal of marriage, this time from William Heelis, the Sawrey solicitor who had been handling her business interests in the village. The Potters opposed the match and, unable to cope with the conflict between her own desires and her sense of duty, Potter finally broke down. Her serious illness prompted a rare appearance by her brother, who arrived from Scotland to give her his support by informing his astonished parents of his

own eleven-year marriage. Cousin Caroline, who had earlier carried Potter off on a holiday over the Potters' objections, also wrote to encourage Beatrix to "marry him quietly in spite of them" (TMY 192). The proposal was finally accepted in the spring of 1913. In October of that year, Beatrix Potter became Mrs. William Heelis, and began what was, in effect, a new life. Undoubtedly the Tales had been instrumental in helping her realize her dreams of a happy marriage and a productive farming career. Now she immersed herself in her new roles: "I cannot work to order," she wrote in old age, "and when I had nothing more to say I had the sense to stop" (TMY 198).

In the years between 1902 and 1913, the year of her marriage, Potter produced twenty-two books. Critics agree that of the books written after her marriage and before her death in 1934, only one, The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse (1918), approaches the quality of her earlier work. One hesitates to read too much into (or out of) the Tales: the books are small, the illustrations delicate, the stories simply told. Yet it seems possible to trace Potter's slow but inexorable movement toward a fuller life through the little pages of the Tales. As might be expected, the stories grew out of their writer's experiences: the plots reflect her feelings of rebellion and frustration in the face of limited opportunity, the settings demonstrate the constricting narrowness of her world, and an obsession with cleanliness suggests the guilt produced by this conflict. Plot and setting thus balance each other: disorder is given

play only briefly before physical and moral order is restored and limits reimposed. Overall, Potter's emotionally detached tone attests to that saving sense of the ironic which enabled her to cope with these stresses in her daily life. As a narrator, Potter is opinionated; but, unlike George MacDonald, she avoids making judgements, letting the consequences of her characters' actions speak for themselves. There is a sense that the alert intelligence which controls the action is always at a distance from the characters involved.

Generally speaking, the earlier books concern the flight of naughty, disobedient, and inexperienced little animals from their stronger and more cunning enemies. Most of these Tales involve simple action plots which take place in field and garden. They include the domestic scene only insofar as the plots deal with family relationships: for example, when punishments are meted out by parents like old Mr. Bunny, a tartar with cravat and pipe, a switch for his son, and a defiant contempt for cats. By 1908, however, the protagonists of Potter's Tales are animal-adults rather than animal-children. The stories still maintain a precarious balance between the dangers of rebellion against authority and the security of an orderly domestic routine, but they treat these themes with more complexity. Feelings give way to action; anger motivates revenge; rebellious tendencies lead to premeditated violence, even murder. Order ceases to be expressed merely in terms of good behavior, that is, in

conformity to familial and social authority. An obsession with cleanliness and domestic order functions to compensate for feelings the writer wishes to deny or at least control. Thus, angry and destructive impulses are always followed by frenzied house-cleaning. All of Potter's female characters are personally fastidious and preoccupied with their roles as excellent mothers and meticulous housekeepers. Her obsession with domestic competence is not surprising considering the tedious daily routine at Bolton Gardens and Potter's responsibility for reproducing it in an endless succession of furnished holiday lodgings. Like many Englishmen of their class and period, the Potters expected their daily routine to continue regardless of location, and, presumably, it would be their daughter's task to make sure that her "difficult" father and "exacting" mother were not inconvenienced or made uncomfortable. Potter's irritation at muddle and delay and her insistence upon neatness and order result partly from her duties, and partly from the desperate need to assert some control over her own life.[14] Furthermore, curiously claustrophobic settings begin to contain the action. These small, enclosed, airless, and intense domestic interiors provide an atmosphere one can only describe as "farmhouse Gothic." Their inherently threatening quality reflects the increasing sense of imprisonment and the subsequent frustration Potter felt in her domestic situation.

An early example of a story in which the order/disorder themes are dealt with in a confined domestic setting is to

be found in The Tale of Two Bad Mice (1904), a story of frustration and destruction in which the two "bad" mice, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca, think they have found a real home in a dolls' house. When they discover that everything in the house is sham, even the food, "[T]hen there was no end to the rage and disappointment of Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca" (30). They smash, break, and destroy what they don't want, steal what they can use, and run away before they are caught, leaving the dolls' house a shambles. This behavior cannot go unpunished. In keeping with Potter's insistence upon the responsibility of women for domestic order, the narrator informs the reader that while Tom "paid for everything he broke," Hunca Munca continues to come "every morning before anybody is awake . . . with her dust-pan and her broom to sweep the dolls' house" (59). The ambivalence in this story is apparent, immediately so in the cover illustration of a dainty, feminine, and good little Hunca Munca sweeping up with her dust-pan, a picture curiously at odds with the words above her head which announce a tale about "bad" mice.

A later recycling of the same material, frantic house-cleaning following upon a demonstration of anger and frustration set in a claustrophobic domestic interior, is to be found in The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse (1904). This "most terribly tidy particular little mouse" lives in a house with "yards and yards of sandy passages, leading to storerooms and nut-cellars and seed-cellars, all amongst the roots of

the hedge" (10). Potter's illustration of the little mouse in her "little box bed," placed as it is within the wide white borders of the page, emphasizes the sense of constriction which is felt throughout this story. Mrs. Tittlemouse's problem is the fat toad, Mr. Jackson, who constantly drops in uninvited and muddies her tidy house. Potter's illustrations show him squeezing through the narrow passages of her house in search of honey: "Indeed, indeed you will stick fast, Mr. Jackson!" (40-41) warns Mrs. Tittlemouse. Eventually, she gets rid of her unwanted visitor and makes the door too small for him to re-enter. Then she surveys the damage: "But the untidiness was something dreadful--`Never did I see such a mess--smears of honey; and moss, and thistledown--and marks of big and little dirty feet--all over my nice clean house!'" (49). She embarks upon a complete housecleaning: "She swept, and scrubbed and dusted; and she rubbed up the furniture with beeswax, and polished her little tin spoons . . . .`Will it ever be tidy again?' said poor Mrs. Tittlemouse" (53-54).

Although one can trace an attempt to resolve the guilt generated by feelings of anger, frustration, and revenge in these two Tales, the stories are given a relatively light-hearted treatment. The idea of vandalism by mice is amusing, and Mr. Jackson, although unwanted, is an amiable character; we know he means no harm, even before we are informed that he has "No teeth, no teeth, no teeth!" Similarly, Potter's early "revenge" story, The Tailor of Gloucester (1902), is treated as a fairy-tale, with songs throughout and a happy

ending. Even here, however, Potter provides a smoky, crooked, and low-ceilinged setting: the Tailor's room, full of hidden cupboards and secret drawers. Against this background, the sinister cat, Simkin, furious with the Tailor for releasing all of Simkin's captive mice, takes advantage of his master's illness to hide the last skein of "cherry-coloured twisted silk" in a tea-pot, making it impossible for the Tailor to complete the Mayor's wedding suit. However, the mice complete the Tailor's task out of gratitude for their release, and, having watched them at their work and presumably learned his lesson, Simkin goes home "considering in his mind." Shamed and repentant, he offers both the skein of silk and the ubiquitous cup of tea to the recuperating Tailor.

In later stories--The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck, The Tale of Samuel Whiskers (both 1908), and The Tale of Mr. Tod (1912)--themes of rebellion frustrated, disobedience punished, and vengeful violence persist. These Tales take place in atmospheres of greater menace. The protagonists here are relatively helpless: the rabbits are mere babies, Tom is a child/animal, and Jemima is physically and mentally weak. It is obvious that all are likely to be killed and eaten by their enemies. However, the tone and form of these stories distract the reader from what is actually happening. Jemima can be read at two levels: the Red Riding-Hood plot is familiar to the child reader, while the amusing overtones of an Edwardian seduction

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scene--from the fox's predictable opening line, "Madam, have you lost your way?" to his cozy "Let us have a dinner-party all to ourselves" (25, 38)--entertain the adult. In The Tale of Samuel Whiskers, Samuel and his wife, Maria, prepare a "roly-poly pudding" with Tom as the major ingredient. However, in this story irony masks and softens the intentions of the villains. The macabre plot focusses on the culinary details of the Pudding ("Make it properly, Anna Maria, with bread-crumbs"), while, at the same time, the elegance and urbanity of the dialogue between husband and wife distract the reader from the rats' horrible task. It is not until The Tale of Mr. Tod that Potter presents the reader with two equally malicious protagonists who, while described by the author with characteristic understatement as "disagreeable people," are, in fact, openly predatory and deadly serious in their recognition that each must either kill or be killed.

These three Tales take place against domestic interiors of increasingly threatening intensity. In The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck, the fox's retired dwelling, with its sinister shed filled, horribly, with feathers, shouts "Bluebeard" to the alert reader. In The Tale of Samuel Whiskers, Tom, who has become lost in his attempt to evade his mother, falls into a "very small stuffy fusty room, with boards, and rafters, and cobwebs" inhabited by an "enormous rat." The most frightening setting for any of the tales, however, is that of Mr. Tod's house:

> This house was something between a cave, a prison, and a tumble-down pig-stye. . . . The sun had set; an owl began to hoot in the wood. There were many unpleasant things lying about that had much better have been buried; rabbit bones and skulls, and chickens' legs and other horrors. It was a shocking place, and very dark. (38)

This is the setting for Potter's darkest tale of murder and revenge, in which two sworn enemies wage all-out war upon one another. There is a battle of epic proportions:

> Everything was upset except the kitchen table. And everything was broken, except the mantlepiece and the kitchen fender. The crockery was smashed to atoms. The chairs were broken, and the window, and the clock fell with a crash, and there were handfuls of Mr. Tod's sandy whiskers. The vases fell off the mantelpiece, the canisters fell off the shelf; the kettle fell off the hob. Tommy Brock put his foot in a jar of raspberry jam. And the boiling water out of the kettle fell upon the tail of Mr. Tod. (74)

Even in the midst of this open hostility, however, rampant disorder must be set right. Mr. Tod, thinking he has succeeded in killing his enemy, undertakes a major cleanup. His plans are given a peculiarly detailed description, perhaps in direct ratio to the violence which has gone before:

> "I will bury that nasty person in the hole which he has dug. I will bring my bedding out, and dry it in the sun," said Mr. Tod. "I will wash the table cloth and spread it on the grass in the sun to bleach. And the blanket must be hung up in the wind; and the bed must be thoroughly disinfected, and aired with a warming-pan . . . . I will get soft soap, and monkey soap, and all sorts of soap; and soda and scrubbing brushes; and persian powder; and carbolic to remove the smell. I must have a disinfecting. Perhaps I may have to burn sulphur." (70-71)

In fact, no clean-up takes place because Tommy Brock is still very much alive at the end of the story. So, for that matter, are Samuel Whiskers and his wife; and so, for all we know to the contrary, is Jemima's "foxy-whiskered" oppressor. The stories about Tom Kitten and Jemima end on a reasonably positive note with the rescue of the two protagonists, although Tom suffers the punishment of a hot bath "to get the butter off" and Jemima loses her eggs and goes home in disgrace. In The Tale of Mr. Tod, however, although the rabbit babies are saved, the violent conflict between the two rivals continues beyond the end of the story, a tale which the author informs us is "not long enough to tell the end of the battle between Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod." The natural order, never wicked but always ruthless, continues.

As one might expect, the story with which we can most usefully identify Beatrix Potter is one in which, again, the tension between freedom and confinement underlies the plot. The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck was written in 1908 when Potter was 43. The tragedy of Norman Warne's death was behind her and her interests were centred on Hill Top Farm, which she visited whenever possible. In The Magic Years, Margaret Lane calls the story "simple and flawless . . . Potter's poem about the farm itself, its human and animal characters, the northern summer beauty of its fields and woods" (155). As mentioned earlier, the story is a reworking of the Red Riding-Hood tale, although Jemima is closer in

age to her creator than was the protagonist of the original story. Jemima, however, is just as inexperienced as Little Red Riding-hood.

Potter herself calls Jemima "a simpleton," and certainly she is at best indefensibly naïve, and at worst, merely stupid. In spite of Jemima's obvious failings, however, Potter defends her, treating the simple-minded innocence which leads to disaster with an affectionate, if regretful, resignation. Roger Sale suggests that in this story, Potter's "admiration and scorn are at war with each other" (155). Perhaps "scorn" is too harsh a term here. True, Jemima pays for her lack of good sense, but Potter does not remain as detached from Jemima as she does from her other characters. The very fact that readers find Jemima a touching heroine and that, in spite of Jemima's foolishness, the term "heroine" seems fitting, attests to Potter's emotional investment in her protagonist.

Like Potter, Jemima Puddle-duck is impatient with the status quo; she is an amiable eccentric in her community. Her desire to hatch her own eggs, rather than giving them up to the farmer's wife, is seen as subversive. Her peers are derisive, suggesting Jemima's inability to carry through her plan: "I have not the patience to sit on a nest for twenty-eight days, and no more have you, Jemima. You would let them go cold; you know you would." But Jemima is determined: "I wish to hatch my own eggs; I will hatch them all by myself" (10). To do so, Jemima must leave the security of the farmyard. Like flying, this is something she has never done.

However, she succeeds at both, albeit with difficulty, because she is encumbered by conventional clothing: a shawl and poke bonnet. Even so, Potter tells us that "she flew beautifully when she had got a good start" (21). This seems an unequivocal comment. Thus, Sale's cavil that the picture illustrating this text gives quite the opposite effect is puzzling. Potter, he maintains, admires what Jemima can do "under the circumstances, not how gracefully" (154). Certainly it is Jemima's determination to succeed in spite of the social and cultural conditioning symbolized by her conservative dress that merits her creator's admiration. But Potter finds no fault with Jemima's flight: "She skimmed along over the tree-tops" is a statement which hardly suggests a graceless performance. On the contrary, up to this point in the story, Potter seems delighted with Jemima's progress.

As long as Jemima operates independently of others, things go smoothly. However, problems arise when she must confront and interact with the strange and frightening creatures who inhabit the world outside the farmyard. Jemima's lack of experience leaves her vulnerable. Like Red Riding-hood, unaware of her danger, she meets a predatory member of another species and falls under his spell. Here Potter does a superb job of combining within her simple plot aspects of the dangerous animal world (foxes eat ducks), the natural sexuality of that world (male mates with female), and the transmutation of that process in the human species

(male seduces or rapes female). It is not surprising that Jemima is fooled. Her betrayer is a smiling villain, attractive and impudent:

> But--seated upon the stump, she was startled to find an elegantly dressed gentleman reading a newspaper. He had black prick ears and sandy coloured whiskers. . . . The gentleman raised his eyes above his newspaper and looked curiously at Jemima--"Madam, have you lost your way?" said he. He had a long bushy tail which he was sitting upon, as the stump was somewhat damp. Jemima thought him mighty civil and handsome. (25)

Jemima accepts the fox's offer of a feather-filled shed to nest in and even provides him with the herbs for an intimate dinner party for two, herbs which usually accompany roast duck. As Potter admits, Jemima is not very bright. Fortunately, she confides her activities to Kep, the farm Collie. Sale suggests that Kep's role as Jemima's champion and protector is "closer to Rupert Potter than rince Charming" (154); it seems to me that he is closer to brother Bertram than either. Be that as it may, Kep and two fox-hound puppies rescue Jemima from a fate no worse than death.

Sadly, Jemima's eggs are lost in the rescue attempt. This pained me as a child-reader, but it seems fair comment now. Jemima is fighting a world in which brain and muscle power are embodied in male characters who see her in one of two ways, both negative: one views her as fair game and the other patronizes her. The latter approach is emphasized by Potter's language when she describes the result of Jemima's attempted escape: "Jemima Puddleduck was escorted home in

tears on account of those eggs" (56). The accompanying illustration shows a procession, the puppies leading a subdued Jemima, with Kep, his eye firmly on his wayward charge, bringing up the rear. A world in which presumptuous females are "escorted" back to where they belong is one in which a Jemima cannot win or even compete. She needs education, experience, sophistication--none of which are available in the barnyard. Potter's choice of words underlines the ignominy with which Jemima will re-enter the farmyard.

Once reconfined, Jemima is offered a sop to her independence:

> She laid some more in June, and she was permitted to keep them herself: but only four of them hatched. Jemima Puddle-duck said that it was because of her nerves; but she had always been a bad sitter. (59)

Like her creator and countless other ambitious females in past centuries, Jemima capitulates, and her suppressed anger and frustration is expressed in terms of physical debilitation or "nerves." Even Potter the writer is betrayed by her cultural conditioning: in The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck the fox gets all the good lines.

Roger Sale is unhappy with the ending of this story. He suggests that, following Jemima's rescue, "the story does not work very well" and "there is a tenuous control of tone in the later pages" (154). This criticism strikes me as unfounded, and not only because Sale does not detail his objections. The ending seems to me perfectly in keeping with

what has gone before and with Potter's personal investment in the story. The moral here is not as simple as that stated by Lane in The Magic Years: "that the helpless and the simple, if they are not wary, may make a meal for somebody else--a truism fully as applicable to the modern world as in the jungle" (157). There is a lesson here more specifically applicable to Potter and other ambitious women of her time and circumstances: the expression of intellect and creativity, the assertion of female will, the attempt to escape the paternal roof can be doomed to frustration unless women are given the tools with which to operate independently. Considering Beatrix Potter's situation, her flight was a rare achievement.

Immediately upon her engagement to William Heelis, Beatrix Potter began work on the last of her best books, The Tale of Pigling Bland (1913). It is the only story Potter wrote which could be said to have a love interest. Of the book, the author wrote to a friend, "the portrait of the two pigs arm-in-arm is not a portrait of me and Mr. Heelis, though it is a view of where we used to walk on Sunday afternoons" (TMY 196). This romantic theme in combination with Pigling's fond desire to "have a little garden and plant potatoes" reflects the two projects uppermost in Potter's mind: marriage and farming. The Tale of Pigling Bland marks the end of Potter's productive period, celebrates her final escape from Bolton Gardens, and

forecasts its form : the story ends with Pigling and his sweetheart dancing "over the hills and far away." It was published in October, 1913, the same month in which Beatrix Potter was married.

Notes

1
Barbara Hardy. The Novels of George Eliot. London: Athlone Press, 1959, p. 47.

2
Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 121.

3
In angry response to being so addressed, Potter wrote: "When a person has been nearly thirty years married it is not ingratiating to get an envelope addressed to "Miss." See Margaret Lane, The Magic Years of Beatrix Potter, p. 200.

4
In her 1946 biography, The Tale of Beatrix Potter, Margaret Lane records Potter as saying that her few English visitors were "very inquisitive, and completely uninteresting. However it happens, the class of Americans who take the trouble to call, are quite different from the English." Lane comments that "this special feeling towards her American public goes a long way to explain what otherwise would seem an eccentric action on the part of so English a writer--the decision to withhold from English children her longest and most personal book" (142). However, in her later book, The Magic Years of Beatrix Potter (1978), Lane suggests a reason less flattering to the American reader: "The reason for this [publishing her later books only in the U.S.A. in her lifetime], I believe, was that she was privately aware that they showed a sad falling-off, and while she was fairly confident of praise from the professional priestesses of `kid lit.' in America, she was unwilling to expose herself at home" (200).

5
Graham Greene published a mock-serious appraisal of Potter's Tales in which he postulated an "emotional ordeal which changed the character of her genius." Greene suggested that this "ordeal" resulted in Potter's "great comedies" being followed by the great "near-tragedies" like The Tale of Mr. Tod. Potter responded with characteristic energy, in an "acid" letter which ascribed Mr. Tod to the "after-effects of flu" and "deprecated sharply the Freudian school of writing." See Greene, "Beatrix Potter," 106-111.

6 In her journal, the 17-year-old Potter describes a visit to the Royal Academy: "Angelica Kauffman is represented by only one picture, Design, . . . rather hot and ruby, but the expression and drawing is very good. . . . That picture by Angelica Kauffman is something, it shows what a woman has done. If you ever feel uncertain remember the face of Faith" (27-28).

7 Beatrix Potter. "The Strength That Comes From the Hills." The Horn Book. Vol. 20 (Jan., 1944), p. 67.

8 It is interesting to speculate as to whether Beatrix and her brother passed their afternoons in the Kensington museums in close proximity with Rudyard Kipling and his sister, who used to visit the museums in the late '70s when they were living in the Brompton Road. See Angus Wilson, The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling, p. 62.

9 "Great rubbish, absolute bosh!" she wrote in response to an article which placed her in the company of Palmer, Calvert, and Bewick, among others. She wrote that she had read the article with "stupefaction." An explanatory letter from the article's author led Potter to believe she had been accused of copying Constable. To this imputation she responded with even more hostility. See Lane, The Magic Years, p. 200.

10 C.S. Lewis. Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966, pp. 36-37.

11 Lane, The Tale of Beatrix Potter, p. 141.

12 One of my favourite Potter dictums is found in a letter to a friend in Canada: "Worry," she wrote, "is not good for thin people in cold weather." See Dear Ivy, Dear Jane: Letters from Beatrix Potter, p.11.

13 See Greene, "Beatrix Potter," p. 108.

14

"I will have 4 [pounds] sent by money order by the Westminster Bank as our village postmistress is a bungler." Dear Ivy, Dear Jane, p. 11.

15

Potter wrote her own version of Perrault's fable, providing the story with a characteristically unsentimental ending: "But Granny, Granny, what big white teeth--" / "And that was the end of little Red Riding Hood." See Lane, The Magic Years, p. 157. This ending was in keeping with Perrault's version. See Andrew Lang, "Little Red Riding Hood" in The Blue Fairy Book (1889), rpt. Puffin Books, 1987, pp. 51-53. Presumably, modern children are familiar with a happier outcome.

Chapter Four

Inside the Ring

> What he loves better than anything in the world is the intimacy within a closed circle.
>
> C.S. Lewis, "Kipling's World"

I

In the autumn of 1871, Alice and Lockwood Kipling brought their children to England from India. Having given them no warning or explanation, the Kiplings left six-year-old Rudyard and his three-year-old sister, Trix, with foster parents in Southsea and returned to India. The children were first bewildered, then miserable; finally they accepted that they were to remain indefinitely in what Kipling later termed "The House of Desolation." Before she left, Alice Kipling read her children "a wonderful tale of a land where the Goblins were always warring with the children of men until they were defeated by one Curdie."[1] Undoubtedly, George MacDonald, then 45 and the father of a large family, would have been moved by the plight of the little boy whose sense of abandonment and loss on his parents' departure was so acute.

Although Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) wrote his autobiography, Something of Myself (1937), in the thirties, it remains very much a nineteenth-century document, avoiding

the introspective and evading the personal. The work is headed: "Give me the first six years of a child's life and you can have the rest," an epigraph which seems curiously inappropriate considering the author's own childhood experiences. Possibly Kipling eventually convinced himself that the happiness and security of his first six years in India had given him the strength to withstand the deprivations of the following six years in England. Kipling was emotionally reticent to an almost pathological degree; his autobiography is indeed well titled. Perhaps, therefore, one should not be surprised when he ignores the fact that, in his own case, it was the second six years of his life, the half of his childhood spent in Southsea, that was to exert a major influence over the man and the writer.

In his preface to Kipling: The Critical Heritage (1971), Roger Lancelyn Green comments upon the dangers of criticism based on a psychological approach to Kipling's works. This approach, he suggests, was initiated by Edmund Wilson, most of whose "exaggerations" have been either "disproved, or shown to be in need of drastic toning-down and re-statement."[2] Green goes on to reject such "clinical psychoanalyses" of Kipling's works as had been attempted to date (1971) as "based on such shaky foundations of pre-conception and sheer ignorance as to be hardly worth mentioning" (31-32). My studies, however, have led me to conclude that a consideration of Kipling's childhood experiences illuminates and enriches an adult re-reading of his fiction for children. It seems reasonable to suggest,

for example, that the abrupt and traumatic dislocation that took place in the middle of Kipling's childhood resulted in a polarization of attitudes in his children's stories. A preoccupation with obedience and self-abnegation is held in tension with an admiration for personal initiative, especially when that quality results in the discomfiture of the "enemy." This may well be the result of Kipling's need to create a fictional form in which he could express opposing aspects of a childhood self that was of necessity repressed. The stories provide an outlet for the exuberant verbal precosity, or "showing off," which was deemed a punishable offence at Southsea; simultaneously, the author's insistence upon obedience and submission to authority suggests anxiety and lingering feelings of guilt. Through the interplay of release and control in his fiction, Kipling attempts to heal some of the wounds caused by the brutal loss of his parents and his happy home in India. At the same time he seems anxious to appease some nameless, faceless enemy, symbolic perhaps of the fear and misery with which home and family had been replaced in England.

The story of Kipling's years with "Auntie Rosa" in Lorne Lodge, Southsea, is too well known to need recounting here.[3] In the writer's own words, "It was an establishment run with the full vigour of the Evangelical as revealed to the Woman. I had never heard of Hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors" (SM 8). The antagonism of his foster mother was an additional burden to a child already

overwhelmed by the sudden disappearance of his parents and the culture shock of the move to England. The loss of parents, security, and status were all part of his longing for India, but as a writer, Kipling always attached particular significance to places, and his memories of India had a sensuous intensity:

> My first impression is of daybreak, light and colour and golden and purple fruits at the level of my shoulder. This would be the memory of early morning walks with my ayah . . . . Our evening walks were by the sea in the shadow of palm-groves which I think were called the Mahim Woods. (SM 3-4)

Kipling's sister remembers her brother's stories of their early life in Bombay: "Ruddy remembered our lost kingdom vividly," she wrote, "and used to tell me stories . . . . He remembered all our toys, and the tales Papa would tell him after I had gone to sleep, and the songs Mamma would sing to us after we were in bed."[4] The shock of a new environment, physically damp, dark, and cold, and emotionally and intellectually repressive, led the child to ponder his own possible responsibility for the disaster that had overtaken him. Unable to discover the causes for his fall from grace and anxious to avoid his foster mother's anger, he had good reason to repress his resulting feelings of anger and injustice and his desire for revenge. Summarizing these experiences in his autobiography, Kipling concludes: "In the long run, these things drained me of any capacity for real, personal hate for the rest of my days" (SM 18). Perhaps Kipling, a man who scorned (or feared) introspection, really

believed this. However, the final words of "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," a fictionalized account of the Southsea years written when Kipling was only 23, seem conclusive, if somewhat melodramatic. After the child, Punch, is "rescued" by his mother, he comments: "It's all different now, and we are just as much mother's as if she had never gone." The narrator, however, has the last word:

> Not altogether, O Punch, for when young lips have drunk deep of the bitter water of Hate, Suspicion, and Despair, all the love in the world will not wholly take away that knowledge . . . . (Works XII: 283)

Furthermore, the woman in whose home "Baa Baa Black Sheep" was written reports that Kipling was "in a towering rage" until the story was completed (Birkenhead 88).

One result of the inquisitorial bullying of "Auntie Rosa" was an intense emotional defensiveness. The child soon learned that silence meant survival,[5] and it was a lesson he was not soon to forget. However, this form of self-protection masked an intense, inward-driven imaginative life:

> When my father sent me a Robinson Crusoe with steel engravings I set up in business alone as a trader with savages . . . in a mildewy basement room where I stood my solitary confinements. My apparatus was a coconut shell strung on a red cord, a tin trunk, and a piece of packing-case which kept off any other world. Thus fenced about, everything inside the fence was quite real, but mixed with the smell of damp cupboards. If the bit of board fell, I had to begin the magic all over again. I have learned since from children who play much alone that this rule of "beginning again in a pretend game" is not uncommon. The magic, you see, lies in the ring or fence that you take refuge in. (SM 11-12)

The extreme personal reticence which arose as a result of the Southsea experience continued throughout Kipling's life. His autobiography tells us nothing of his parents' reaction (surely intense) to the publication of "Baa, Baa Black Sheep," nothing of his relationship with his wife, and nothing of the deaths of two of his three children, six-year-old Josephine in 1899, and eighteen-year-old John in 1915. His anguish over these deaths was expressed only obliquely in such stories as "They" (1904) and "The Gardener" (1926). The only overt reference to his son's war death is a bitterly ironic one in Kipling's two-volume history of the Irish Guards:

> Of the officers, 2nd Lieutenant Pakenham-Law had died of wounds; 2nd Lieutenants Clifford and Kipling were missing, Captain and Adjutant the Hon. T.E. Vesey, Captain Wynter, Lieutenant Stevens, and 2nd Lieutenants Sassoon and Grayson were wounded, the last being blown up by a shell. It was a fair average for the day of a debut, and taught them somewhat for their future guidance. 6

Writing for children was one way in which Kipling could reach back past the accumulated experiences of later years, re-establish contact with the repressed and unhappy child within, and attempt to resolve the loss of his own children.

To what extent Kipling's writing was influenced by the Southsea period is a question which has generated much critical debate. Writers differ as to how credible they find such imaginative reconstructions of the period as the story "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" and the first chapter of Kipling's

novel The Light that Failed (1890). Roger Lancelyn Green suggests, for example, that Kipling may unconsciously have borrowed the incident in which "Auntie Rosa" made him wear a placard reading "Liar," from the similar incident in Dickens' David Copperfield. After all, Green notes, Kipling and his sister knew Dickens so well that they could converse in quotations (KC 49). This suggestion becomes even more plausible if, as a child reader, Kipling responded to the fictional child's sense of banishment as a reflection of his own situation. As evidence that there may have been an element of self-pity in his reconstructions, critics point to the fact that Kipling omits any mention of his yearly Christmas visits to his Aunt "Georgy" and Uncle Edward Burne-Jones from the fictionalized accounts of the Southsea period. These visits alleviated the miseries of "The House of Desolation" for a month each Christmas, and were, for Kipling, a return to Paradise:

> I went alone, and arriving at the house would reach up to the open-work iron bell-pull on the wonderful gate that led me into all felicity. When I had a house of my own . . . I begged for and was given that bell-pull for my entrance, in the hope that other children might also feel happy when they rang it. (SM 13-14)

However, even if the adult Kipling is, consciously or unconsciously, courting the reader's sympathy for his child-self by these omissions, this circumstance only emphasizes further the depth of anger and resentment that led him to focus on the ill-treatment he felt he had so unjustly undergone. The fact remains that, although we may never

determine exactly what went on in "The House of Desolation," the experiences of those years were traumatic and formative ones for Kipling.

II

Rudyard Kipling differed from George MacDonald and Beatrix Potter in that, even as a very young writer, he lacked neither professional, social, nor financial status. Less than six months after his return to England in 1889, at age 24, Kipling was being hailed as the successor to Charles Dickens. Kipling's position as an Anglo-Indian journalist in Lahore had given rise to his first collection of stories, Plain Tales from the Hills (1888). Writing popular fiction offered Kipling the financial independence prized by Potter, while, simultaneously, the opportunity to write newspaper editorials provided the substitute pulpit sought by MacDonald. Like MacDonald and Potter, Kipling refused to "write down" to his young readers, and produced children's books that can be read on varying levels. Of Rewards and Fairies (1919), he wrote:

> Yet, since the tales had to be read by children, before people realized that they were meant for grown-ups . . . I worked the material in three or four overlaid tints and textures, which might or might not reveal themselves according to the shifting light of sex, youth and experience. (SM 205)

Unlike MacDonald, however, Kipling did not use children's fantasy as a vehicle for subversive ideas which he found

himself unable to express in realistic fiction. His recurrent preoccupations--the desire to be accepted in a tight-knit group, the craving for a father's protection, the sense of original sin (no doubt a product of the Southsea days) which led him to propitiate a hostile fate by self-abnegation, hard work, and if necessary, "licking the cub into shape"--these underlie all of Kipling's fiction whether written for an adult or a child audience.

Like the children's books of MacDonald and Potter, Kipling's stories are didactic in tone--sometimes gentle, sometimes stern, sometimes ironic--but always and relentlessly instructive. An early critic described the Jungle Books (1894-5) as "a sustained treatise on the claims of the commonwealth and the development of the individual" (CH 275). Learning Jungle Law, and subsequently obeying it, is central to Mowgli's education. The Just So Stories (1902) consist of tongue-in-cheek natural history lectures for little children told by an infallibly wise father-figure, and Kipling himself referred to the stories in Stalky & Co. (1899) as "tracts or parables on the education of the young" (SM 144). Thus, although writing for children did not fill the same professional, social, or financial needs for Kipling as was the case with MacDonald and Potter, the didactic tone inherent in the authoritarian and moralistic stance of the narrator indicates that Kipling's need to order and control his fictional world equalled that of the other two writers.

Kipling obviously fixed his own childhood happiness in the very early years when he was the focus of attentive parents and doting Indian servants, before all of this was stripped away and he found himself abandoned and defenceless in England. It is not surprising, therefore, that like Grahame's Wind in the Willows and Barrie's Peter and Wendy, Kipling's books for children take the form of regressive male fantasies. Mowgli's Jungle is a Paradise suspended in space and time like Barrie's Neverland and Grahame's Riverbank. Both the adventures of Stalky and his friends at Westward Ho! and those of Kim on the Grand Trunk Road in India take place in immutable and inviolable worlds like that "High and Far-off Time" that provides the setting for the Just-So Stories. Kim, Mowgli, and Stalky, like the boys of Barrie's Neverland, are unhampered in their exploration of worlds in which the opportunities for adventure are limited only by physical skill and mental ingenuity, worlds from which the problems of maturity are omitted. Not only do the youthful protagonists of the stories evade the complexities of adult life; their adult mentors are also distanced from financial, sexual, and familial complications. Kim's companions and teachers--an Irish priest, a Tibetan Lama, a British spy, an Afghani horse-dealer--are all geographically, professionally, or psychologically removed from the tedium of respectable middle class English domesticity. Similarly, the masters who attempt to control Stalky and his friends are a group of bachelors confined within the artificial world of Westward

Ho! and constituting the enemy in a battle of wits.

It is not surprising therefore, that although Kipling stresses the necessary process of leaving childhood behind, he does not concern himself with the problems that undoubtedly lie ahead for his maturing protagonists. In the Jungle Books, for example, he displays little concern about the problems of adjustment that Mowgli will undoubtedly face upon his move to human society.[7] This is not a major concern for most readers, however, because the Mowgli stories are patently fabulous. But critics have complained that Kim's English/Indian identity conflict and the concomitant East/West philosophical debate is never fully resolved, that the question "Who is Kim?" is not satisfactorily answered, and that there is no clear sense of the direction Kim's life will take at the end of the story. Doubtless Kim poses more of a problem in this regard because the setting of the novel is so vividly realistic and the plot so much more plausible than that of the Jungle Books. Kipling's failure to grapple with these problems detracts from the moral complexity of Kim and is partly responsible for its reputation as a book for young readers.

Although Kipling's young heroes operate in fantasy worlds far removed from the realities of everyday existence, they are by no means abandoned or unprotected as the six-year-old Kipling had felt himself to be. Whereas Barrie's "lost boys" find a substitute mother in Wendy, and MacDonald's child-heroes each has a maternal protector, Mowgli and Kim are protected by a profusion of stern but

loving surrogate fathers. Mowgli's exhilarating romps through the tree-tops never abrogate the laws he has been taught by his mentors. Kim's knowledge of the unsavory life of the streets is balanced by the instruction he receives from both the learned curator and the gentle and holy Lama. The lawless exploits of Stalky and his cohorts are ultimately controlled by the boys' respect for their godlike Headmaster, whose penchant for corporal punishment is transmuted into a necessary rite of passage for the maturing male, specifically, the future military officer. All Kipling's young protagonists, therefore, perform within a protected environment. Because Kipling's protagonists respect and obey their mentors, such diverse settings as Mowgli's Jungle, Kim's Grand Trunk Road, and Stalky's study become refuges like Badger's den in The Wind in the Willows and "Wendy's House" in Peter and Wendy. Thus, the interaction of order and disorder, the toleration of chaos within carefully circumscribed limits characteristic of the children's books of MacDonald and Potter, is also to be found in those of Kipling.

Fortunately, while Kipling's stories for children are to some extent regressive, he manages to avoid that sentimental empathy with children that the reader can find intolerable in J. M. Barrie and A. A. Milne. This is partly because within the simplified worlds of his children's books, Kipling, like MacDonald, deals with larger issues. In keeping with his expressed belief, "as soon as you find you can do something, do something you can't" (SM 205),

Kipling presents his youthful heroes with physical and moral hurdles which they must surmount. The books do not merit the term "escapist" in the way that Grahame's Wind in the Willows and Barrie's Peter and Wendy do. Although Kipling does not deal with the later lives of his protagonists, he does insist that they grow up. To this end he "licks them into shape" for later life by confronting them with rules that must be obeyed and then focussing upon the resulting collision between youthful energy and wit, and the necessary but often humourless and narrow application of rules. He constantly returns to this conflict between the ingenuity and enthusiasm of the individual and the ultimate necessity for submission of self to the common good which he sees as necessary preparation for adult life.

Life in Kipling's Jungle, therefore, is a much tougher proposition than life on Grahame's Riverbank. There life is one long holiday occasionally interrupted by the exasperating Toad or the intrusive outsiders from the Wild Wood. True, the latter frighten Mole, but we sense Badger's comforting presence and the Wild Wooders' ultimate obedience to his authority. They are never as dangerous as those inhabitants of the Jungle who refuse to respect its laws. Survival for Mowgli (and, presumably for Kim in the world of espionage) is a life-and-death proposition. The impulse to escape, to explore, to express one's individuality, is constrained by the necessity of obeying the Law of the group, that is, if one wishes to remain a member, and, more

importantly, if one wishes to remain alive. The Law, therefore, provides protection against anarchy and death. Both Mowgli and Kim, who are unsure of who they are, can find security in obeying their masters. This involves the stoical performance of duty even when it conflicts with part of one's personality. If, as Angus Wilson suggests, "all Kipling's art is suffused with a personal and mysterious despair and apprehension" (173),[9] it may be that the writer saw the performance of work or duty as a way of propitiating the fates, and thereby shielding oneself from thoughts of death and, by extension, of the ultimate meaninglessness of life. By silence and obedience, the young Kipling was able to survive the Southsea ordeal. Similarly, by placing civilized constraints upon a world which, in its natural state, is untamed and frightening, Kipling made it possible for his child protagonists to survive. In this way Kipling ordered his fantasy world and provided his protagonist with that "ring or fence that you take refuge in."

III

As had been the case with her father before her, Josephine Kipling's first six years were happy ones. The Just So Stories celebrate the loving relationship that existed between Kipling and his daughter until her death in 1899. Kipling recaptured his own happy early years in this "best beloved" child; thus her tragic early death was a

profound shock from which he never fully recovered. He was rarely to speak of her for the rest of his life. Although many of the Just So Stories originated as bed-time stories for Josephine, they were not published until 1902, seven years after the Jungle Books and four years after her death. A contemporary critic pronounced them "not so delightful as the Jungle Books" (CH 272), but they were, after all, intended for a different age group: the original title was The Just So Stories for Little Children. Furthermore, the Jungle Books are written to be read, while the Just So Stories are patently written to be "told." Perhaps, therefore, although she died before they were written down, Josephine enjoyed the stories in their purest form.

Roger Lancelyn Green notes that the Just So Stories are difficult to write about because in form and content they are unique in that they have no ancestors or descendants: "If to linger in the mind and supply the perfect phrase is a sign of greatness, Just So Stories come second to Alice alone among children's books" (KC 178, 180). Angus Wilson suggests that in the Just So Stories Kipling is "more free to play and display himself than in any other of his work" (307). Certainly the "playful" aspect is obvious in Kipling's verbal acrobatics, in his use of the "superbly possible impossibility carried out with absolute logic" (KC 180) in the tradition of Carroll, and, not least, in his own delightful illustrations for the stories. What Wilson terms "display" appears in the opportunity the stories offer for performance, in the didactic tone of the all-knowing

narrator, and in the amount of practical instruction he packs into his fables. These two aspects of the stories are closely interwoven: children know that the stories do not provide the "right" explanations of natural phenomena and find this simple fact amusing; however, the adult goes a step further, recognizing in Kipling's quasi-scientific nonsense a sly send-up of both religion and science.

Many of the stories begin with Kipling's variation on the time-honoured fairy-tale opening, "once upon a time," but "The Crab That Played With the Sea" continues with a humorous echo of Genesis:

> Before the High and Far-Off Times, O my Best Beloved, came the Time of the Very Beginnings; and that was in the days when the Eldest Magician was getting Things ready. First he got the Earth ready; then he got the Sea ready; and then he told all the Animals that they could come out and play. (JSS 171)

As is obvious from their titles, the stories describe, if not the origins, at least the development of various species. In the first seven stories, at least, the Darwinian joke is gentle but relentless:

> They scuttled for days and days and days till they came to a great forest, 'sclusively full of trees and bushes and stripy, speckly, patchy-blatchy shadows, and there they hid: and after another long time, what with standing half in the shade and half out of it, and what with the slippery slidy shadows of the trees falling on them, the Giraffe grew blotchy, and the Zebra grew stripy, and the Eland and the Koodoo grew darker . . . . (JSS 45)

Thus, in the varying levels at which they can be read, the Just So Stories provide examples of what Kipling described

as the "overlaid tints and textures which might or might not reveal themselves" in his writing.

Josephine Kipling's cousin (later the novelist Angela Thirkell) wrote that the Just So Stories were "a poor thing in print compared with the fun of hearing them told in Cousin Ruddy's deep unhesitating voice. There was a ritual about them, each phrase having its special intonation which had to be exactly the same each time." Kipling himself recalled that the children would not allow him to "alter those [stories] by one single little word. They had to be told just so, or Effie would wake up and put back the missing sentence" (KC 169, 171). What readers and listeners find most memorable about the stories is the incantatory repetition of such felicitous phrases as "the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees" and "I am the Cat who walks by himself and all places are alike to me," the hypnotic rhythm of "still ran Dingo--Yellow-Dog Dingo," and so on. This repetitive element provides a kind of chorus to the supposedly humorous but occasionally ponderous and self-conscious didacticism of the text: "I have drawn the Doors of the Equator. They are shut. They are always kept shut, because a door ought always to be kept shut" (JSS 8). Although some children find this superior tone condescending,[10] the adult "teller" can have fun with the author's use of inflated language:

> "Rash and inexperienced traveller, we will now seriously devote ourselves to a little high tension, because if we do not, it is my impression that yonder self-propelling man-of-war with the armour-plated upper

> deck" (and by this, O Best Beloved, he meant the Crocodile) "will permanently vitiate your future career."
>
> That is the way all Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snakes always talk. (JSS 70)

In the Just So Stories, Kipling's use of rhythmical and repetitive syntax and his tone of paternal bossiness are utilized in the service of the animal fable. The stories take place in the distant past, the settings are exotic and remote from the reader's experience, and the protagonists are, for the most part, non-human. In spite of Kipling's humorous context, there is always a reason for the story. "How the Camel Got His Hump" is a traditionally moral tale and emphasizes por laziness:

> "Do you see that?" said the Djinn. "That's your very own humph that you've brought upon your very own self by not working. To-day is Thursday, and you've done no work since Monday, when the work began. Now you are going to work." (JSS 25)

The elephant's child, however, is punished simply for the intellectual curiosity and precosity that Kipling's "Auntie Rosa" called "showing off":

> He asked, "What does the Crocodile have for dinner?" Then everybody said, "Hush!" in a loud and fretful tone, and they spanked him immediately and directly, without stopping, for a long time. (JSS 64)

And in "How the Whale Got His Throat," Kipling's purpose, while instructive, may have been to relieve his daughter of a real fear:

> But from that day on, the grating in his throat, which he could neither cough up nor swallow down, prevented him eating anything except very, very small fish; and

> that is the reason why whales nowadays never eat men or boys or little girls. (JSS 11)

It appears, therefore, that while the Just So Stories embody the element of "play" in their brilliant manipulation of word and phrase, the "display" element has much to do with ritual, order, and authority.

In The Art of Rudyard Kipling, J. M. S. Tompkins describes the "fusion of three worlds" to be found in the Jungle Books: the worlds of play, fable, and myth (66-68). The first two of these roughly correspond to Wilson's "play and display," and are truly fused in the Just So Stories: the language is playful ("all done brown and smelt most sentimental") and the form fabulous ("and from that day to this the Camel wears a humph--we call it 'hump' now, not to hurt his feelings"). But the third aspect, that of myth, is harder to pin down. It is connected with human emotion:

> But the true utile dulci of the children's book is not attained unless it conveys intimations of obligations and passions outside the reach of a child's experience. The Jungle Books do this again and again. . . . The laws of life and death have their way with Mowgli's brethren, and the child learns all this from the shelter of a fairy-tale. (70-71)

In the Just So Stories, Kipling plays with a didactic form and creates superbly successful stories. But in the Jungle Books, Kipling adds an emotional dimension to the playful and the fabulous. This emotional content is responsible for what Tompkins calls the "mythic" quality of the Jungle Books. It is this quality which raises them to classic

status, while the Just So Stories remain delightful fairy-tales.

IV

"The Jungle Books are more powerful as a residue in the memory than when they are reread," comments Roger Sale (206), and his statement is acute. Adults asked to reflect on their childhood associations with Kipling's Jungle Books invariably support his view. Reminded of such individual stories as "Red Dog" or "Kaa's Hunting," readers readily recall the thrilling moment when Mowgli leaps from the Bee Rocks into the gorge of the Waingunga only seconds ahead of the dhole-pack, or the sinister scene in the Cold Lairs when the Dance of the Hunger of Kaa causes the Bandar-log, helplessly mesmerized, to "walk down the throat" of the giant python. But such specific memories surface only during and after discussion. Initial responses emphasize the pleasure of re-readings (few children seem to have read the stories only once), and an unfocussed but intense appreciation of the romance of Mowgli's life in the Jungle: "I loved those books," is a common response.

The vivid memories which remain in the minds of many who read the Jungle Books as children arises from the equally powerful emotions which Kipling associated with the memories of his first six years. These emotions, triggered by his loving relationship with a small daughter, Kipling invested in the Mowgli stories. In spite of the fact that he

was an unusually intelligent, sensitive, and observant child, Kipling's recollections must surely have been fragmentary at best. But the Jungle Books offered an opportunity to express something of the intense happiness and equally intense pain connected with that period in his emotional life. This "emotion by association" produced a work which J. M. S. Tompkins calls "mythic," a work which leaves a "powerful residue" in the reader's memory.

The mythic quality of the stories arises partly from the language in which they are written. Much of the dialogue is cast in the syntax and cadence of the Bible, and given a quasi-proverbial form. The effect of this is to give a timeless quality to the prose, to establish the content as archaic lore, and thus to give authority to the narration:

> "Hai mai, my brothers," cried Mowgli, throwing up his arms in a sob. "I know not what I know, I would not go, but I am drawn by both feet. How shall I leave these nights?"
>
> "Nay, look up, Little Brother," Balloo repeated. "There is no shame in this hunting. When the honey is eaten we leave the empty hive."
>
> "Having cast the skin," said Kaa, "we may not creep into it afresh. It is the law." (SJB 174)

The memorable effect of the stories is also connected with the romantic appeal of the Mowgli who emerges in the later stories as Lord and Master of the Jungle:

> As he stood in the red light of the oil lamp, strong, tall, and beautiful, his long black hair sweeping over his shoulders, the knife swinging at his neck, and his head crowned with a wreath of white jasmine, he might easily have been mistaken for some wild god of a jungle legend. (SJB 167)

The narrator further increases his hero's god-like stature by suggesting an untold history of legendary exploits:

> All the Jungle was his friend, for all the Jungle was afraid of him. The things he did and saw and heard when he was wandering . . . would make many, many stories, each as long as this one . . . .
> But we must tell one tale at a time. (SJB 130-131)

However, the mythic quality of the Jungle Books has to do with something more than heroic syntax and the star-quality of the protagonist. It is connected with the writer's ability to convey to the young reader, albeit at some not fully-realized level, what Tompkins calls those "intimations of obligations and passions" that the child is not yet ready to articulate. Yet they touch him deeply because they arise from his closest human associations, those of the family. Given Kipling's usual emotional reticence, one might suspect that special circumstances at this point in Kipling's life triggered the depth of feeling with which the Mowgli stories are charged, and, in fact, this appears to have been the case.

After a punishing stint as a journalist in India and two remarkably productive but intensely lonely years in London, Kipling married Caroline Balestier in 1892. Following the marriage, the couple settled in the United States, near Caroline's family home in Vermont. Here personal and financial stability combined to offer Kipling the first period of relative leisure he had enjoyed since his early childhood. Here also the "best beloved" Josephine

was born. Secure, relaxed, and happy, with Josephine for inspiration and Caroline "protecting" him from interruption, Kipling wrote prolifically. The Just So Stories had their genesis here, as did many of Kipling's best Indian stories, including an early draft of Kim. But the crowning achievement of this period is undoubtedly the Jungle Books (1894-95). It is not surprising that this period of tranquillity, connected intimately with Kipling's first child, should result in a flood of memories of that period before his family life was so brutally interrupted. He returned with intense enjoyment to the preoccupations of childhood:

> Let's go up to the pig-sties and sit on the farmyard rails!
> Let's say things to the bunnies, and watch 'em skitter their tails!
> Let's--oh, anything Daddy, as long as it's you and me,
> And going truly exploring, and not being in till tea! (JJS 61)

A return to childhood play released memories of those happy six years when, like Mowgli, Kipling had enjoyed the devotion and protection of a profusion of loving adults. Yet memories of that period brought with them the threat of impending loss: although the lost child finds his way home in the Jungle Books, his security is always precarious. Mowgli's position at the centre of his family is overshadowed by the inevitable approach of a maturity which threatens permanent exile from his Jungle home. In the Jungle Books, Kipling transmutes personal tragedy into an expression of a greater human truth. The mythic quality of

the Jungle Books arises from the reader's half-perception of this tragic progression: loss of innocence, loss of love, loss of life.

"We'll play Jungle Books and I shall be Mowgli" is the characteristic pronouncement of Oswald Bastable in E. Nesbit's The Wouldbegoods (1901); "The rest of you can be what you like--Mowgli's father and mother, or any of the beasts." While it is typical of Oswald to assume the dominant role in any activity, the last part of his statement makes an important point. It is not only Mowgli as Lord of the Jungle with whom child-readers identify. For many, the emotional impact of the stories derives from the child Mowgli's coveted position within his Jungle "family." No one, even Oswald Bastable, wants to be Mowgli without the loving support and companionship of Baloo, Bagheera, Kaa, and Akela, leader of the Seeonee wolf-pack, the "free people." As Lionel Trilling suggests, Mowgli's Jungle is "a world peopled by wonderful parents" (Rutherford 86), all of whom place their wisdom and physical strength at the disposal of the beloved "manling." Thus, the Jungle Books celebrate the child-centered family. The lost boy is not only found, but provided at a stroke with parents, siblings, and a whole coterie of adoring male relatives, all of whom, individually, command enormous respect in the community. And to make the family romance even sweeter, Mowgli's wolf-mother assures her foster son, in the presence of his half-brothers: "Child of man, I loved thee more than ever I loved my cubs" (JB 20). The "little frog" can survive in this

large and hostile pond because instead of being at the mercy of the Jungle animals, he is adored by them. Like Kipling, an Anglo-Indian child among native servants, Mowgli's racial difference sets him apart from and "above" his Jungle mentors; even the powerful Bagheera cannot look him in the eye. Mowgli's position in the centre of a magic family circle is both flattering and reassuring to the reader's ego. At the same time, the difference between Mowgli and his animal family provides the potential for tragedy. Mowgli loves his animal "parents" but must leave them; he scorns men but must inevitably become part of their world.

However, while sadness and loss permeate the stories, the initial impact of the Jungle Books is of life, and of life intensely, ecstatically, lived. This impression arises from the juxtaposition of descriptive passages of vivid action with others of sensual physicality. In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to quote at length--first, a passage which describes Mowgli's terrifying abduction by the Bandar-log or monkey-people:

> Then they began their flight; and the flight of the Monkey-People through tree-land is one of the things nobody can describe. . . . Two of the strongest monkeys caught Mowgli under the arms and swung off with him through the tree-tops, twenty feet at a bound. Had they been alone they could have gone twice as fast, but the boy's weight held them back. Sick and giddy as Mowgli was he could not help enjoying the wild rush, though the glimpses of earth far down below frightened him, and the terrible check and jerk at the end of the swing over nothing but empty air brought his heart between his teeth. His escort would rush him up a tree till he felt the thinnest topmost branches crackle and bend under them, and then with a cough and a whoop would fling themselves into the air outward and

> downward . . . and then the branches and leaves would lash him across the face, and he and his two guards would be almost down to earth again. So, bounding and crashing and whooping and yelling, the whole tribe of Bandar-log swept along the tree-roads with Mowgli their prisoner. (JB 28)

The following excerpt, an evocation of the sinister gorge below the Bee Rocks, alerts all of the senses:

> The length of the gorge on both sides was hung as it were with black shimmery velvet curtains, and Mowgli sank as he looked, for those were the clotted millions of the sleeping bees. There were other lumps and festoons and things like decayed tree-trunks studded on the face of the rock, the old combs of past years, or new cities built in the shadow of the windless gorge, and huge masses of spongy, rotten trash had rolled down and stuck among the trees and creepers that clung to the rock-face. As he listened he heard more than once the rustle and slide of a honey-loaded comb turning over or falling away somewhere in the dark galleries; then a booming of angry wings, and the sullen drip, drip, drip, of the wasted honey, guttering along, till it lipped over some ledge in the open air and sluggishly trickled down on the twigs. (SJB 139-140)

The appeal to the ear here conveys a sense of isolation from the outside world, a claustrophobic airlessness in which small sounds are amplified and threatening, while the alliteration and assonance particularly noticeable in the last sentence suggest a tactile dampness, a thick stickiness that is extraordinarily effective.

In the Jungle environment sounds, smells, taste, and touch take on new and thrilling overtones. Nothing seems more natural than that Mowgli should hunt naked, exult in the chase, and eat meat still warm from the kill. Paradoxically, the impression of vivid life in the Jungle Books is achieved in spite of the fact that most Jungle

activity is connected, in one way or another, with death. However, Mowgli expresses no apprehension of danger. Like Peter Pan, Mowgli considers death merely another "really big adventure":

> "But, oh, Kaa,"--here Mowgli wriggled with joy, "it will be good hunting! Few of us will see another moon . . . Alala! If we die we die. It will be most good hunting. . . When I am dead it is time to sing the Death Song. Good Hunting, Kaa." (SJB 137)

When death does occur, the circumstances are often so bizarre as to distance what is actually happening from the child-reader's experience. Few children can grasp the realities of being stung to death by a horde of bees, trampled by a herd of bulls, or swallowed whole by a python. Mowgli revels in the wholesale slaughter of the dholes, yet he scorns the men of the village because, like Shere Khan, they kill for choice rather then necessity. However, these ambiguities pass the young reader by because death in the Jungle is treated as part of the general joie-de-vivre:

> In good seasons, when water was plentiful, those who came down to drink at the Waingunga . . . did so at the risk of their own lives, and that risk made no small part of the fascination of the night's doings . . . young bucks took a delight in [this] precisely because they knew at any moment Bagheera or Shere Khan might leap on them and bear them down. But now that life-and-death fun was ended . . . . (SJB 3-4)

Furthermore, the action sequences are so superbly written and so exciting that the enormous toll of lives taken passes unnoticed by the reader. "Nature red in tooth and claw" notwithstanding, stampeding a whole herd in order to trample

one tiger to death and slaughtering over a hundred dholes because of what is, after all, an instinctive kill, seems excessive. These exploits seem orchestrated by the writer more in the service of his hero's personal power rather than as a natural event in Jungle life. These sequences allow Mowgli the licence to indulge a passionate and almost anarchic vengeance which seems out of proportion to its cause. Perhaps it is not overstating the case to suggest that the violent and destructive exploits of Mowgli allow, as no realistic fiction could, an expression both suitable in context and ferocious enough in kind to express adequately the writer's own suppressed anger.

When Tompkins states that "the laws of life and death have their way with Mowgli's brethren," she puts her finger on one of the ways in which Kipling balances this quality of "overkill" in the stories. When death follows a natural human law, as when Mowgli's beloved Akela dies of old age, Kipling is careful to prepare the reader fully. Akela's death is foreshadowed the first time the reader meets the old wolf; it will come, inevitably, as part of a predictable pattern:

> Akela said nothing. He was thinking of the time that comes to every leader of every pack when his strength goes from him and he gets feebler and feebler, till at last he is killed by the wolves and a new leader comes up--to be killed in his turn. (JB 9)

Thus, we know what to expect when we are told that Akela is aging:

> Akela raised his old head wearily:--
> "Free People . . . for many seasons I have led ye to and from the kill, and in all my time not one has been trapped or maimed. Now I have missed my kill." (JB 16)

Soon Mowgli must intervene if he is to stave off the inevitable:

> "Thou art the master," said Bagheera, in an undertone. "Save Akela from the death. He was ever thy friend."
> Akela, the grim old wolf who had never asked for mercy in his life, gave one piteous look at Mowgli . . . . (JB 18)

Finally, after acquitting himself with valour in the adventure of the dholes, Akela dies. His passing is mourned with genuine pathos and at length:

> "Said I not it would be my last fight?" Akela gasped . . . . "I die, and I would die by thee, Little Brother."
> Mowgli took the terrible scarred head on his knees, and put his arms round the torn neck. . . . The Lone Wolf drew a deep breath and began the Death Song that a leader of the pack should sing when he dies; it gathered strength as he went on, lifting and lifting and ringing far across the river, till it came to the last "Good Hunting!" and Akela shook himself clear of Mowgli for an instant, and leaping into the air, fell backwards, dead upon his last and most terrible kill.
> "Good hunting!" said Phao, as though Akela were still alive, and then over his bitten shoulder to the others: "Howl dogs! A wolf has died tonight!"
> (SJB 152-153)

Perhaps the major factor balancing the violence of daily life in the Jungle Books is the Jungle inhabitants' adherence to Jungle Law. "Kipling at his best," writes Sale, "is a writer about the relations between order, and laws, and youthful boyish energies" (FTA 196-197). Certainly this

is a succinct summary of the action of Stalky & Co and is applicable as well to both the Jungle Books and Kim. Rules are as important to Kipling as to MacDonald and Potter. "The only human being a man is responsible to is himself. His business is to do his work and be still," wrote Kipling (Birkenhead 125), echoing Beatrix Potter's "behave yourself and never mind the rest." Yet there is a difference here. "The rest" for Potter refers to conventional religious dogma. While not accepting it, she remains relatively optimistic: "Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good" prefaces her statement, whereas Kipling's "be still" suggests a listening vengeance waiting, like Auntie Rosa, to pounce on the unsuspecting. As the old soldier says in Kim:

> "I have noticed in my long life that those who break in upon Those Above with complaints and reports and bellowings and weepings are presently sent for in haste . . . . No, I have never wearied the Gods." (Works VI:70)

Kipling's pessimistic preoccupation with crime and punishment results from the intense sense of original sin instilled by "Auntie Rosa" with the "full rigour of the Evangelical." Mowgli, who is a "man-cub," cannot be expected to submit to the law easily; therefore Baloo must literally "lick the cub into shape":

> [A]s Baloo said to Bagheera, one day when Mowgli had been cuffed and run off in a temper: "A man-cub is a man's cub, and he must learn all the Law of the Jungle. . . . That is why I teach him these things, and that is why I hit him, very softly, when he forgets."
> "Softly! What doest thou know of softness, old

> Ironfeet?" Bagheera grunted. "His face is all bruised today by thy--softness."
>
> "Better he should be bruised from head to foot by me who love him than that he should come to harm through ignorance," Baloo answered very earnestly. (JB 23)

Mowgli does not appreciate his mentor's efforts on his behalf:

> "My head is ringing like a bee-tree," said a sullen little voice over their heads, and Mowgli slid down a tree-trunk very angry and indignant, adding as he reached the ground: "I come for Bagheera and not for thee, fat old Baoo!" (JB 24)

Mowgli's acceptance of discipline in spite of his resentment at its imposition reflects Kipling's sardonic comment in Something of Myself: "Discipline that makes no claim to justice is the best preparation for maturity because it exemplifies the conditions of life" (241). In Stalky & Co., when Stalky, Beetle, and M'Turk, "the allied forces of disorder," are sent for by the Head, their technical innocence is ignored:

> "I'm going to execute you without rhyme, Beetle, or reason . . . There is not a flaw in any of your characters. And that is why I'm going to perpetrate a howling injustice." (Stalky 34)

For Kipling, doing one's work means doing one's duty, and this in turn implies obedience. The Jungle remains an Arcadian refuge only insofar as its Laws are obeyed. Like the world of man, the Jungle is a fallen world; but this was not always the case. In "How Fear Came," Hathi the elephant, master of the Jungle animals, describes the Beginning when Tha, the First of the elephants, "drew the Jungle out of the

deep waters with his trunk." The comparison with the early verses of Genesis is obvious here, as is the story of the Fall. Hathi goes on to describe how Fear in the form of man was introduced into the Jungle as a punishment for the animals' inability to govern themselves:

> "And so there was no Law in the Jungle--only foolish talk and senseless words. Then Tha called us together and said: 'The first of your masters has brought Death into the Jungle, and the second Shame. Now it is time there was a Law, and a Law that ye may not break.'" (SJB 11-12)

Jungle Law emphasizes the interdependence of the individual and the group:

> Now this is the Law of the Jungle--as old and as true as the sky;
> And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die.
> As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back--
> For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack. (SJB 17)

To reduce the potential conflict here between the individual and society, Jungle Law is always eminently practical--never arbitrary or merely conventional. Furthermore, the anger of Tha and his subsequent imposition of the Law is not irreversible as is God's expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. While Jungle Law is obeyed, the Jungle remains Edenic, its inhabitants innocent, and Mowgli a noble savage, trailing clouds of glory in the Romantic tradition.

The triumph of Kipling's characterization of Mowgli is that having accepted the Law and his obligations to his

brothers, Mowgli retains his autonomy. Similarly, the wolf-pack, the "Free People" of the Jungle, are free and strong because they obey Jungle Law as embodied in their chosen leader, Akela. It is by paradoxes such as this that Kipling yokes desire to necessity and reconciles the tendency to individual anarchy with the acceptance of obligation. When the pack abandons the Law and deposes Akela, it disintegrates, and Mowgli is cast out. His misery, but his "acceptance of uncomprehended necessity" (Tompkins 71), foreshadows the pessimism of the book's ending when Mowgli must return to his own race, seemingly against his will. Even his animal mentors seem dubious about Mowgli's future with his own people: "'No one, then, is to be feared,' Baloo wound up, patting his big furry stomach with pride. 'Except his own tribe,' said Bagheera, under his breath" (JB 25).

Mowgli's final exit from the Jungle is supposedly the result of his recognition during the spring mating season or "Time of the New Talk" that because he is physically mature he must rejoin his own race: "When Mowgli drives Mowgli I will go," he tells Akela. Yet when the time comes, the sense of inner compulsion is lacking. The reader perceives Mowgli's maturity as the acceptance of a regrettable but inevitable obligation rather than an opportunity for triumphant entry into a fuller life. One reason for this is to be found in Kipling's treatment of man throughout the stories. The men of the village have been characterized as cruel, greedy, immoral, and stupid. By the end of the book, Mowgli's assessment of men, that they "must

always be making traps for men, or they are not content" (SJB 44), has become our own. Furthermore, the single and relatively lifeless prose paragraph which signals Mowgli's awareness of his sexual maturity, and ends, vaguely and inconclusively, with Mowgli's words "And now I do not know," hardly compensates for the lyrical expression of the pain he experiences at leaving his "family":

> "Hai-mai, my brothers," cried Mowgli, throwing up his arms with a sob. "I know not what I know! I would not go; but I am drawn by both feet. How shall I leave these nights?" (SJB 174)

Even though the mating season supposedly calls Mowgli to his own kind, his anguish is even greater than it was on the earlier occasion of his expulsion from the pack. The last paragraph of the book actually suggests the animals pushing Mowgli "out of the nest," rather than his leaving voluntarily. We feel that with a little encouragement he would gladly stay "within the ring." Baloo and Kaa meet Mowgli's initial opposition with the insistence that he must leave the Jungle:

> "Having cast the skin," said Kaa, "we cannot creep into it afresh. It is the Law."
> "Listen, dearest of all to me," said Baloo, "There is neither word nor will here [my emphasis] to hold thee back." (SJB 174)

Mowgli further objects that he has yet to pay a debt to Bagheera. This time his words are

> cut short by . . . Bagheera, light strong, and terrible as always . . . . "All debts are paid now.

> For the rest, my word is Baloo's word . . . ."
> "Thou hast heard," said Baloo. "There is no more. Go now." (SJB 17)

Thus is Mowgli dismissed, and Gray Brother's last words, "from now on we follow new trails," convey no sense of excitement or anticipation. When the wolf comments that "the stars are thin" we tend to agree with him. All of this suggests the emotional investment Kipling has made in Mowgli's Jungle family and his ambivalence about relinquishing those relationships. Kipling was aware of the cost of that experience and therefore he was unable to imbue Mowgli's new life with a sense of hope or optimism. As we read the closing words of the Jungle Books, "and this is the last of the Mowgli stories," it is the reflection of Kipling's own pain which leaves such a "powerful residue in the memory."

V

> The diamond-bright dawn woke men and crows and bullocks together. Kim sat up and yawned, shook himself, and thrilled with delight. This was seeing the world in real truth; this was life as he would have it . . . . (Works VI:95)

In Kim (1900), Kipling recycles the family romance, placing his former hero, now older and wiser, in another world "peopled by wonderful parents." In Kim, however, the Indian setting is so powerfully evoked as to vie with both plot and character for primacy. This more diffuse focus works because the novel is aimed at a teen-aged or adult

reader; probably few children under twelve would attempt it. Kipling moves away from the fabulous and presents a more complex hero against a realistic, albeit theatrical, backdrop. Like the Jungle Books, Kim is intensely romantic, but romantic about life in a crowded urban setting rather than in the pastoral paradise which is Mowgli's Jungle. The noisy scenes with their profusion of detail provide a sense of realism, yet the world of the novel is more vital, magical, exotic, and dramatic than reality can ever be. This fusion of realism and romance results in the paradox suggested by the lines above; in Kim we experience a world of "real truth" which is, simultaneously, "life as [we] would have it."

Nearly a century after its publication, Kim presents a formidable challenge to the young North American reader, yet it remains an enormously seductive work. The India of Kim is, historically and culturally, very much an alien world; the Indian characters--a Tibetan lama, an Afghani horse-dealer, the Babu Hurree, for example--might be expected to present some problems for readers of limited experience. However, the novel's potential difficulties are mimimized by Kipling's strongly defined (if rather one-sided) characters and the brilliant descriptive writing which brings the unfamiliar scene to life:

> By this time the sun was driving broad golden spokes through the lower branches of the mango trees; the parakeets and doves were coming home in their hundreds . . . and shufflings and scufflings in the branches showed that the bats were ready to go out on the night-picket. Swiftly the light gathered itself

> together, painted for an instant the faces and the cart-wheels and the bullocks' horns as red as blood. Then the night fell, changing the touch of the air, drawing a low, even haze, like a gossamer veil of blue, across the face of the country, and bringing out, keen and distinct, the smell of wood-smoke and cattle and the good smell of wheaten cakes cooked on ashes. (Works VI:83)

Like Beatrix Potter, Kipling makes no syntactical concessions to youth; neither, considering the book's publication date, are there any concessions to youthful innocence in the novel's subject matter:

> He went out into the warm rain smiling sinfully, and sought a certain house whose outside he had noted down sometime before.
>
> "Arre! Dost thou know what manner of women we be in this quarter? O shame!"
>
> "Was I born yesterday?" Kim squatted native fashion on the cushions of that upper room. . . .
>
> "Who is she? Thou art full young, as Sahibs go, for this devilry." (Works VI:163)

. . .

> From behind the shaking curtains came one volley of invective. It did not last long, but in kind and quality, in blistering, biting appropriateness, it was beyond anything that even Kim had heard. . . . Here the the voice told him truthfully what sort of wife he had wedded, and what she was doing in his absence. (Works VI:97)

In spite of the novel's appeal to readers of all ages, however, Kim has retained its status as "children's literature"; Roger Sale refers to it as one of those books that are "boyish about boys," placing it between Barrie's Peter Pan [sic] and Stevenson's Kidnapped (Sale 219). Kim remains a book for adolescents because of the lack of moral complexity which results from Kipling's conflation of the

real and the ideal worlds. A certain amount of plain speaking aside, evil in Kim's world hardly exists. No sooner are we aware of corruption, than it is somehow absorbed into the local colour--or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the exotic background somehow lends a kind of respectability to wrong-doing. Although Kim is a child of the streets who has "known all evil since he could speak," and "executes commissions by night on the crowded housetops for sleek and shiny young men of fashion" (Works VI:5), he remains uncorrupted. Like Diamond in MacDonald's At the Back of the North Wind, Kim is the "little Friend of all the World"; his innate goodness and innocent charm touch everyone he meets. He moves through a world which derives more from Kipling's childhood memories and his yearning to recapture those perfect years when he was, happily, both Indian and Sahib, than from the "real" India of his journalist days. Kim's India, therefore, is presented as a world in which intrigue, murder, and prostitution are as untouched by corruption as the innocent protagonist himself.

The result of this idealization is that although the world of Kim seems at first glance far more sophisticated than that of the Jungle Books, the stories share a certain simplicity. Neither is tightly plotted; both are episodic in structure (Kipling called Kim "picaresque"), and both conclude rather arbitrarily. The reader immediately recognizes that Kim and Mowgli speak the same "language," Kipling having decided to render Indian dialects in English by using the same quasi-archaic syntax, Biblical cadences,

and proverbial forms that he used to translate animal speech in Mowgli's Jungle. Not only does the horse-dealer Mahbub Ali play the same paternal role in relation to Kim as Baloo the Bear does to Mowgli, but the two characters speak with much the same voice:

> Creighton heard Kim say bitterly: "Trust a Brahmin before a snake, and a snake before a harlot, and a harlot before an Afghan, Mahbub Ali."
>
> "That is all one," the great red beard wagged solemnly. "Children should not see a carpet on the loom till the pattern is made plain. Believe me, Friend of all the World, I do thee great service. They will not make a soldier of thee." (Works VI:143)

As heroes, Kim and Mowgli share the same innate morality, intelligence, and sense of humour, as well as a becoming humility and a willingness to learn. However, in addition to the boundless enthusiasm he shares with Mowgli and in keeping with the romantic tradition, Kim possesses a "wise passiveness." He reflects--on his identity, his relationships, his duty, his future. He exhibits all of Mowgli's love of life without his initial insecurity. After all, we first meet Mowgli as a toddler who must learn Jungle Law in order to survive. Kim, however, learns the rules of the Great Game not for mere survival--Kim is already a survivor--but because therein lies his future vocation. Obviously, for Mowgli, physical prowess is all important, but Kim's involvement in the Great Game requires the highly developed and sensitive intelligence that is part of his personality. Both boys are stimulated by the possibility of danger; but while Mowgli "wriggles with joy" at the thought

of a physical challenge, Kim "bristles like a terrier" at the prospect of a mental one; "he beamed with delight. Here was a man after his own heart--a tortuous and indirect person playing a hidden game" (Works VI: 152). With or without lessons, Kim is always at one with his surroundings; unlike Mowgli, Kim seems to have been born wise in the ways of his world. Rarely is he disconcerted. Even at their first meeting, when the other boys are intimidated by the Lama's strange appearance, Kim is in control:

> "Strange priests eat boys," whispered Chota Lal.
> "And he is a stranger and a but-parast" (idolater), said Abdullah the Mohammedan.
> Kim laughed. "He is new. Run to your mothers' laps and be safe." (Works VI:9)

And although the ending of the book is not conclusive, we have some sense of a future for the hero in his beloved India. He does not have to face Mowgli's problem, the exchange of present Paradise for a future that even his creator cannot imagine. Kim's paradise is his own country:

> "I must be free and go among my people. Otherwise I die!"
> "And who are thy People, Friend of all the World?"
> "This great and beautiful land," said Kim, waving his paw round the little clay-walled room.
> (Works VI:176)

The most obvious similarity between the books is the centrality of the family romance in which an orphaned boy is restored to a circle of loving adults. In Kim the abandoned waif comes complete with Kipling's initials (reversed) and his own birth-date. Like Mowgli's Jungle "family," Kim's

"foster parents" provide not only affection and security, but recognize the boy's physical and intellectual attributes. The latter qualities Kipling had in abundance, although, as a child, he learned to suppress them in the face of "Auntie Rosa's" scorn. But physically, Kipling was never a figure of romance, being short in stature, oddly large-headed, and afflicted with extremely poor vision.[11] However, in keeping with their status as fairy-tale heroes, foundlings who turn out to be superior to and better loved than their brothers, both Mowgli and Kim are physically beautiful. Messua, Kim's village "mother" is openly admiring:

> "Son," she said at last,--her eyes were full of pride,-- "have any told thee that thou art beautiful beyond all men? . . . Am I the first then? It is right, though it comes seldom, that a mother should tell her son these good things. Thou art very beautiful. Never have I looked upon such a man." (Works V: 234-235)

Kim is the object of universal female admiration as he grows to manhood:

> How can a man follow the Way or the Great Game when he is eternally pestered by women? There was that girl at Akrola by the Ford; and there was the scullion's wife behind the dovecot--not counting the others--and now comes this one! . . . Walnuts indeed! Ho! ho! It was almonds in the Plains! (Works VI: 334)

Cast upon the world with nothing, both Kipling's boy-heroes follow the fairy-tale progression, growing up strong, wise, beautiful, and beloved. In their preoccupation with nurturing and their romanticization of the hero and his family, both the Jungle Books and Kim derive from emotional

sources which were tapped during the same period of his life, the mid-nineties in Vermont. In Something of Myself, Kipling describes the genesis of the novel:

> Now even in the Bliss Cottage I had a vague notion of an Irish boy, born in India and mixed up with native life. I went so far as to make him the son of a private in an Irish Battalion, and christened him 'Kim of the 'Rishi'--short, that is, for Irish. This done, I felt like Mr. Micawber that I had as good as paid that IOU on the future, and went after other things for some years. (148)

Like the Jungle Books, Kim celebrates the parent/child relationship, but unlike the former books, the writing of Kim was a joint father/son venture which was finally undertaken upon Kipling's return to England and his reunion with his parents:

> In a gloomy, windy autumn, Kim came back to me with insistence, and I took it to be smoked over with my Father. Under our united tobaccos it grew like the Djinn released from the brass bottle . . . . Between us, we knew every step, sight and smell on [Kim's] casual road, as well as all the persons he met . . . . [Kipling, Sr.] would take no sort of credit for any of his suggestions, memories or confirmations--not even for that single touch of the low-driving sunlight which makes luminous every detail in the picture of the Grand Trunk Road at eventide. (SM 149-150)

In addition to his collaboration on the text, Lockwood Kipling undertook the illustrations for Kim in the illustrated edition of his son's works published in 1901.

Kim is one book which refutes Chesterton's accusation that Kipling too often displays "old age without its charity and youth without its hope" (CH 273). Confident as he is, Kim's delight in each new experience, childlike without

being childish, is the key to the charm of both the novel and its hero. The "Great Game," an expression which supposedly refers specifically to the activities of the British Secret Service, in effect reflects Kim's attitude to daily life:

> Kim shifted from head to foot, his eyes ablaze with mirth as he thought of the fat days before him. He gave the girl four annas, and ran down the stairs in the likeness of a low-caste Hindu boy--perfect in every detail. A cookshop was his next point of call, where he feasted in extravagance and greasy luxury . . . In all India that night was no human being so joyful as Kim. (Works VI: 165)

In fact, if any criticism can fairly be levelled at Kim, it is that the tone of the novel is so relentlessly positive as to be unbelievable. Unlike the hero of the typical Victorian Bildungsroman, Kim's character never changes or develops. If Kim is a novel of apprenticeship, then the apprentice already seems to know the ropes. Although Kipling's Kim and MacDonald's Curdie are roughly the same age when they take to the road, they are two very different heroes. Curdie is made aware of his shortcomings and, through self-discipline, learns to overcome them. Kipling, however, is not interested in introspection; he does not want to explore Kim's psyche. We must accept Kim, therefore, without analysis. Our response, fortunately, is like that of Roger Sale: "Oh, to be that young and that good at once. Kim is the apotheosis of the Victorian cult of childhood . . . ." (221). Like a prince in a fairy-tale, Kim is already perfect; there is little about him we would wish to change.

The other characters of the novel tend to share the perfections of its hero. While philosophically, Kim's "parents" represent the whole spectrum from spiritual idealism to pragmatic materialism, they share one characteristic: all have Kim's best interests at heart. For no apparent reason, Father Victor, the Catholic priest who first discovers that Kim is white, immediately enlists in his behalf. Despite her irritability, the woman of Kulu also loves Kim: "`The Sahiba is a heart of gold' said the lama earnestly; `She looks upon him as her son'" (Works VI: 207). Even Mahbub Ali, Creighton's ruthless and cynical Indian confederate, comes under Kim's spell: "Thou art my Little Friend of all the World, and I love thee. So says my heart" (Works VI:186). Problems exist only on the most superficial plot level; no character struggles with a personal problem of any emotional depth. Aside from the almost incidental Russian threat which engages the players of the Great Game, the usual sources of human discord, and thus, of plot complexity,--religious, political, economic, and cultural--are played down or non-existent. There is complete harmony, for example, between the Anglican and the Catholic chaplains of an Irish regiment:

> Between himself and the Roman Catholic chaplain of the Irish contingent lay, as Bennett believed, an unbridgeable gulf, but it was noticeable that whenever the Church of England dealt with a human problem she was likely to call in the Church of Rome. Bennett's official abhorrence of the Scarlet Woman and all her ways was only equalled by his private respect for Father Victor. (Works VI:110)

This lack of conflict extends beyond the novel's romantic hero and his circle of admirers to include both the fascinating setting and the story of Kim's apprenticeship in the Great Game. The book celebrates India, or rather India as Kipling recreates it in the rosy light of childhood reminiscence. But the hero's love-affair with his adopted country is hopelessly at odds with his future role in the British Secret Service. The major implication of Kim's becoming a Sahib, that is, that in joining the Great Game he condones and fosters British control of his beloved country, is a moral dilemma left unexplored. As Edmund Wilson puts in in The Wound and the Bow: "We have been shown two entirely different worlds existing side by side, with neither really understanding the other . . . but the parallel lines never meet; the alternating attractions felt by Kim never give rise to a genuine struggle" (101).

The reason for this is, of course, that the child in Kipling wants to continue to enjoy the best of both worlds as long as possible. While he is at school, Kim can do this. He can be both Indian and Sahib, dividing each school-year between being an English school-boy in term-time and an Indian wanderer in the holidays. Thus freedom alternates with order, rags and bare feet with tight collars and army boots. The chapter which tells of this schizophrenic existence is headed with these lines:

> Something I owe to the soil that grew--
> More to the life that fed--
> But most to Allah Who gave me two

> Separate sides to my head.
> I would go without shirts or shoes,
> Friends, tobacco, or bread
> Sooner than for an instant lose
> Either side of my head.
> (Works VI: 170)

But the time must come when one of the "separate sides" of Kim's nature must take precedence over the other. Problems lie ahead for the schoolboy:

> St. Xavier's looked down on boys who "go native altogether." One must never forget that one is a Sahib, and that some day when examinations are passed, one will command natives. Kim made a note of this, for he began to understand where examinations led. (Works VI:162)

If examinations will lead to problems for Kim, the implications of the situation held an even great threat for his creator. Perhaps reflecting on his rather unfortunate attempt to depict the adult Mowgli as a married forest-ranger, Kipling never attempts to deal with the problems Kim will confront when, as an adult "Sahib," he will command those he considers his countrymen. Kipling simply refrains from speculation on the future, and lets his young protagonist move contentedly between two worlds for the duration of the story:[12]

> Each long, perfect day rose behind Kim for a barrier to cut him off from his race and his mother-tongue. He slipped back to thinking and dreaming in the vernacular, and mechanically followed the lama's ceremonial observances at eating, drinking, and the like. (Works VI:278)

The presentation of the differing claims of the idealist (Kim's Lama) and the realist (Creighton and the others in

the Game) is fundamental to the story; at various points Kim and his Lama switch roles, the worldly Kim advising and protecting the unworldly priest, son becoming father. This see-saw movement provides no clear indication of the direction Kim will take in the future; will he choose the active or the contemplative life? There are, however, suggestions as to Kipling's intentions for his hero in Kim's discussion of the question with his Lama:

> "Then all doing is evil?" Kim replied, lying out under a big tree at the fork of the Doon road, watching the little ants run over his hand.
> "To abstain from action is well--except to acquire merit."
> "At the gates of Learning we were taught that to abstain from action was unbefitting a Sahib. And I am a Sahib."
> "Friend of all the World,"--the Lama looked directly at Kim, . . ."We be all souls seeking escape. No matter what thy wisdom learned among Sahibs, when we come to my River thou wilt be freed from all illusion--at my side." (Works VI:276-277)

This mild rebuke elicits an impertinent response. Kim suddenly questions the Lama as to the source of the money with which he has paid for Kim's education. The Lama replies, composedly: "I ask for all that I need. I am not concerned with the account" (277). Certainly there is more than a reminder here of the interdependence of the material and spiritual, and a suggestion of impatience with the idealist who ignores it. Furthermore, given the gusto with which Kim greets each new experience, there is little doubt in the reader's mind as to whose footsteps Kim will choose to follow. He absorbs the influences of all of his

"parents," but will presumably find a middle way between both extremes, blending sophistication with compassion and practicality with ethics. The dialogue above also indicates Kipling's way of reconciling the "separate sides of his head": the occupation and control of his beloved India by the British creates a situation in which the Players of the Game enable the Seekers of the Way to continue their search.

Writing children's fantasies provided Kipling with the opportunity to recapture the childhood years that had been abruptly and prematurely taken from him. Simultaneously, he was able to release suppressed anger, both at his abandonment by his own parents and at his mistreatment by his foster-mother. The childlike qualities of both Mowgli and Kim, their restless activity and the excitement and enthusiasm with which they address life, is part of the charm of both books. In addition to a delight in the active life, an intense pleasure in intellectual cleverness is a part of all the stories. Mowgli, Kim, and the boys at Westward Ho! all focus on outwitting their enemies; Kipling was smarter than "Auntie Rosa" and they both knew it. But the years at Southsea had left their mark. Punishment, however arbitrary, must be accepted without complaint. Sadly, for Kipling, freedom is contingent upon the favour of those in power, and Rudyard Kipling's gods are implacable.

Six Victorian and Edwardian writers--James Barrie, Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, George MacDonald, Beatrix Potter, and Rudyard Kipling--utilized the writing of children's fantasy as a kind of coping mechanism, a process that can be traced in their works. The works support John Fowles contention that created worlds act as a "redoubt" for the fantasist, a fortified retreat which is at once a focus for regression and aggression. Safe inside the fantasy world--"inside the ring" as Kipling called it--these writers were able to express ideas and emotions for which they could find no other satisfactory outlet; simultaneously, the fantasy world empowered writers who perceived the real world as threatening and indifferent, and gave them a sense of control. Creating fantasy for children allowed these writers to liberate parts of their personalities hitherto suppressed, releasing them from pressures, both internal and external, and freeing them to express emotions subversive of the social consensus of the period.

As the personalities and problems of these writers were various, so were the kinds of relief that writing for children provided. George MacDonald was denied a legitimate pulpit; children's fantasies provided him with an opportunity to preach while freeing him from Presbyterian orthodoxy. This resulted in the expression of a highly imaginative religious vision. The desire of the child within the man for an intense physical closeness to a mother-figure (if not for a death that would reunite him with her) is a preoccupation throughout the fantasies, and provides some of

MacDonald's most powerful and affecting scenes. His apprehension of God's presence in Nature, embodied in a maternal yet stern female authority figure, is an unusual and often attractive one, conflating the suppressed longing for a mother and the desire for a deeply personal relationship with God. It is difficult, however, to avoid the conclusion that MacDonald is very much an authoritarian, and implacable in the face of determined resistance to the word of God as manifested by himself.

Unlike MacDonald, Beatrix Potter espoused few theories, and those of the most commonsensical kind. She was an intelligent and gifted woman whose interest in science and desire for a "room of her own," specifically a farm in the country, were highly anti-social in terms of the late-Victorian period, and Potter's sex, class, and domestic situation. In middle age, she began to write for children in a last-ditch attempt to utilize her intellectual and artistic abilities while at the same time providing the financial independence she needed in order to free herself from her stifling life. These pressures, both practical and psychological, are reflected in both the prose and the illustrations of Potter's Tales.

Rudyard Kipling wanted very much to be a boy again, to recapture the childhood which had been tragically taken from him. His children's stories demonstrate this, and further indicate an obsession with winning, especially if doing so satisfies a desire for revenge. Although writing for

children did not fulfill the same needs for Kipling as for MacDonald and Potter, his desire to conserve the past and control his fictional world was equal to theirs. In his children's fantasies, Kipling balances his desire to outsmart his enemies with an insistence upon playing the game according to the rules, and a paradoxical willingness to accept punishment, however arbitrary, without complaint.

The children's fantasies of Kenneth Grahame, James Barrie, and Lewis Carroll also embody elements of escapism and aggression. In The Wind in the Willows, Grahame evokes a pastoral idyll far removed from urban pressures and the demands of family and career. Barrie's Peter and Wendy is more overtly subversive, centering upon a rebellious boy-god who refuses to grow up and become part of the middle-class domesticity parodied by the writer. Carroll's Alice, on the other hand, is a conventional enough child, but the world in which she finds herself is one which, to her discomfort, makes nonsense of all the rules. In varying degrees, therefore, all three writers engage in a negative assessment of their social milieu.

Good criticism is at best an aid to the reader's more complete experience of the primary work--never a substitute for that experience. My thesis suggests that a psychological approach to these works provides a valid way of exposing the energy of a work of literature, of showing how and why it works. Furthermore, this may be the only way to account for a child's love of a particular story. For a book to truly enchant a child, it must touch an emotional chord. This

chord can involve the unconscious responses of even a very young reader to some deeply-felt human truth. Considering that these fantasies were written, ostensibly at least, for children, one is surprised at their pessimistic vision. Yet, because these works express something of the tragedy of the human condition, they express an extraordinary engagement with life which is apprehended even by the child reader who is unaware of the sources of this vitality. Books can convey, in J. M. S. Tompkins' words, "intimations of obligations and passions outside the reach of a child's experience." If the purpose of criticism is to express one's sense of the life of fictional works created by men and women, works which center upon the lives of other human beings, then surely one cannot discount the psychology of the characters, their creator, or, for that matter, the reader.

It is a commonplace to suggest that literature arises within and is determined by its historical and social context. These six fantasists inherited the Romantic preoccupation with the development of the self, but brought to this essentially positive and sympathetic position the fears and frustrations of a generation which scorned solipsism and repressed introspection. Victorians, aware of theirs as an age of transition, were forced to cope with change in every aspect of their lives while desperately trying to retain a sense of stability and order. The attempts of these fantasists to reconcile these positions

result in a poignant and fascinating interplay of antithetical elements: rebellion resists control, imagination modulates didacticism, and the need for love conflicts with a contempt for sentiment. Although writing fantasies for children fulfilled different professional, social, and practical needs for these six writers, in their nostalgia for childhood and the pastoral world, all exhibit their desire to conserve the past and to control at least some portion of their lives. All of these books are now considered literary classics. I suggest that they have achieved this status because succeeding generations recognize in these fantasies for children, emotional truths that can help them to cope with adult realities.

Notes

1 See "Wee Willie Winkie," in Works XII, 239-246.

2 See Edmund Wilson. "The Kipling That Nobody Read." The Wound and the Bow. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 86-147.

3 The principal sources of information about this period are to be found in Kipling's Something of Myself, Chapter 1, and in his fictionalized treatment of the Southsea years in "Baa, Baa Black Sheep," Works XII, pp. 247-283 and The Light That Failed, Works VII, Chapter 1. Some of this material is corroborated by his sister (see note 4 below). See also, among other discussions, Lord Birkenhead, Rudyard Kipling, Chapter 2; Angus Wilson, The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling, Chapter 1; Roger Lancelyn Green. Kipling and the Children, Chapter 2.

4 Mrs. A.M. Fleming. "Some Childhood Memories of Rudyard Kipling by His Sister." Chambers Journal. 8th ser. 8 (March, 1939), pp. 171.

5 See Elliot L. Gilbert, "Silence and Survival in Rudyard Kipling's Art and Life." Gilbert maintains that "Kipling's single most creative act was to turn the reticence forced on him by his childhood agony into an instrument of personal and artistic survival, that his ultimate achievement was to press silence into the service of his best work as a writer" (121).

6 Rudyard Kipling, The Irish Guards in the Great War quoted in Elliot L. Gilbert, "Silence and Survival in Rudyard Kipling's Art and Life," English Literature in Transition, vol. 29, no. 2 (1986), 115.

7 Fortunately, Kipling decided his early attempt to depict an adult and married Mowgli simply would not do and omitted it from the final collection of stories in the Jungle Books. See SJB 178 (Appendix A).

8

Considering his early experiences, it is not surprising that Kipling is somewhat ambivalent about women, specifically mothers. In his autobiography, he describes his parents as his best critics: "I think I can say with truth that those two made for me the only public for whom I had any regard whatever until their deaths in my forty-fifth year" (SM 97). Kipling wrote Kim in collaboration with his father, who was also responsible for much of "On Greenhow Hill" (Orel 5). In Something of Myself, Kipling describes his mother "abolishing" one of his stories with the words, "Never you do that again" (78) and commenting on the structure of Kim, "You couldn't make a plot to save your soul" (149). Alice Kipling also supplied her son with such well-known lines as "What do they know of England who only England know?" (SM 97) and "Oh East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" (Orel 5).

In Kipling's fiction, women do not come off well. The younger woman in The Light That Failed is destructive and incapable of valuing the hero's work; the mother is interfering and prudish. Interestingly, Kipling's sister recalls that "Mother and I used to drop severely on things his women said in Plain Tales. 'No, Ruddy, no! Not that.' 'But it's true.' 'Never mind; there are lots of things that are true that we never mention'" (Orel 12). In his autobiography, Kipling described "deep voiced men laughing together over dinner" as "the loveliest sound in the world" (15). He portrayed the hero of The Light That Failed as "yearning for men-talk and tobacco after his first experience of an entire day spent in the society of a woman" (109). The last lines of "Baa Baa Black Sheep" (see p. 182 above) suggest that Kipling retained some resentment of his mother in connection with the Southsea experience.

Angus Wilson suggests a split in the author's mind between the idealization of the mother which was typical of the period, and the intelligent and assertive reality of Alice Kipling. He sees a "fundamental submissiveness to authority" in Kipling (Wilson, Strange Ride, 28-30, 98). Kipling married another such strong woman, Carrie Balestier, whom his father described as "a good man spoiled." Her domination of Kipling is well documented. Birkenhead suggests Kipling was "emotionally incapable of protesting his wife's control" (306) and a close friend commented, "I myself during the long years never once saw any signs of murmuring or of even incipient mutiny" (Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, 121.) Mothers appear only occasionally in the children's books. Mowgli's wolf-mother appears only rarely, but when she does, she is fierce to defend him and admittedly prefers him to her real children. And in spite of her sharp tongue, the woman of Kulu "looks upon [Kim] as her son" (Works VI: 206).

9

Perhaps this essentially childish impulse arose in the dark days at Southsea. Whatever its genesis, Kipling's anxiety not to offend the fates, or God, or whatever malevolent impulse might be hovering, recurs throughout his works. It is reflected in lines from Life's Handicap (1901): "You start with the chances and make the best of the race, sure to be tripped up half-way by the irony of the fates and powers, or balked at the very finish" (46), and, of course, in the book's title. Regarding his own creative process, Kipling commented:

> My Daemon was with me in the Jungle Books, Kim, and both Puck books, and good care I took to walk delicately, lest he should withdraw . . . . When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, obey. (SM 227)

10

A cousin of J. M. S. Tompkins objected to the narrator's repeated injunction to the listener not to forget the suspenders in "How the Whale Got his Throat," with the comment: "You needn't say that again" (Tompkins 55). James Harrison remembers finding such "knowing authorial comments" "quite intolerable" and "insufferably condescending" (60). Kingsley Amis dislikes what he calls Kipling's "paraded wisdom" (73) and Harvey Darton objects to the "crude avuncularity" of the Just So Stories (CH 369).

11

As a schoolboy, Kipling was nicknamed "Gigs" (for gig-lamps), a reference to the thick spectacles which kept him out of games. "Gigs" was also the nick-name of Beetle, Kipling's alter-ego in Stalky & Co.

12

Kipling occasionally slips up as in his description of Kim discussing his future with the Colonel: "Kim thought. Would it be safe to return the Colonel's lead?" (Works VI:153). A boy of Kim's age and background would be highly unlikely to think in bridge terms at any time, much less when he is supposedly conversing in Urdu and thinking in the vernacular.

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