

THE SCOTTISH NOVELS OF GEORGE MACDONALD

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DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by myself and the work in it
is my own.

David S. Robb

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the twelve works of fiction which may be called George MacDonald's Scottish novels. Extremely popular in their day, they have been largely lost sight of and are eclipsed, for critics and general readers alike, by MacDonald's fantasy writing. In this thesis, I claim that they are of much more than merely historical interest. In it, I attempt to describe both them and the beliefs which lie behind them more fully than has been done hitherto. Furthermore, on the basis of this description, I revalue them both as a group and individually. I conclude that they are strikingly individual works, but based on contrasts of attitude and technique for which twentieth-century readers are little prepared. As a result, MacDonald's Scottish novels are easily misunderstood. I also conclude that, along with Alec Forbes of Howglen (generally reckoned the most successful), one other, Malcolm, is notably fine; both these novels deserve a place of esteem among nineteenth-century works of Scottish fiction.

The first two chapters are introductory in character. The first gives an account of MacDonald's life, personality and work, based largely on his son's biography but also on three collections of unpublished correspondence. It also contains a description of twentieth-century critical views on the Scottish novels. The second chapter is a broad discussion of the sort of novel MacDonald was attempting to write. It denies that he was attempting to write in a realistic mode (as other critics have assumed) and locates his

works among nineteenth-century prose romances. As an aid to understanding the unconventionality of his fictional aims, there follows an account of MacDonald's general literary debts, not only to the English and German Romantics (already stressed by previous critics) but also to English writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to his Scottish predecessors of whom three, James MacPherson, Drummond of Hawthornden and James Hogg, are singled out. The chapter then proceeds to discuss how important aspects of MacDonald's outlook and purposes influence the novels as we find them; these aspects include his unashamed didacticism and, crucially, his rejection of the primacy of the material world. An important theme introduced at this point is his deliberate presentation in his fiction of his own personality, and the tendencies in his writing towards confrontation and challenge are explored. There follows a discussion of the relationships of MacDonald's novels with both his own fantasy writing and with various types of sub-literature. The chapter ends with a brief account of the Scottish novels as theological propaganda.

The third and fourth chapters are concerned with the twelve novels in detail, though with the emphasis on the first six. Chapter Three discusses the three novels of the 1860s, focussing on fundamental issues such as their themes, structures, language, and methods of characterisation. A principal concern of both these central chapters is the distinctiveness of MacDonald's novels from each other, both thematically and in imaginative qualities. This is an aspect which

earlier critics have ignored or denied. Chapter Four concentrates on the three novels of the 1870s. It describes a shift in MacDonald's religious perceptions which results in far-reaching changes in the meanings and imaginative roots of his novels. Less firmly grounded in MacDonald's own experience, they are more flexibly inventive than their predecessors. A further detailed discussion of source material is necessary, especially in the case of Malcolm, which is the high achievement of the second phase of MacDonald's Scottish writing as Alec Forbes was of the first. Sir Gibbie is discussed as a weaker novel than several twentieth-century critics have maintained. The chapter concludes with a swift discussion of the later, inferior, Scottish novels.

Chapter Five deals with a topic which had been immanent at many points in Chapters Three and Four, MacDonald's allegory. Indeed, it is in its insistence that the Scottish novels are thoroughly symbolic in character (as much so as his fantasies) and in its attempt at an extensive and systematic discussion of that symbolism that this thesis is in most marked contrast with previous critical accounts of MacDonald's Scottish fiction. The first part of Chapter Five is a general account of, firstly, MacDonald's sense of the material world as a means whereby divine truth can be read and communicated; secondly, his sense of poetry as a medium of divine truth; finally, his attitude to allegory. The main body of the chapter is an extended exploration of his allegory, and draws examples not just from his Scottish novels but also from his other writings.

This section is structured round a central metaphor of MacDonald's Christianity, the creature's homeward journey to God. This metaphor is broken down into five constituent parts, namely the voyager and his voyage, the goal of the journey, the hindrances encountered, the help received, the terrain over which the journey is made: each of these provides a conceptual framework within which some of MacDonald's proliferating allegories can be located and between them they cover, I think, the bulk of his symbolism.

The final chapter is a brief summary and assessment, which uses the idea of play - an idea which had been several times touched upon earlier - as one possible means of coming to terms with the contradictions of the Scottish novels. The chapter concludes that MacDonald wrote at least two classics of nineteenth-century Scottish fiction and that his Scottish novels should be better known and regarded.

There follow three appendices, on the variety of forms in which Robert Falconer has been printed, on the relationship between Castle Warlock and Stevenson's Treasure Island, and suggesting a correction to Greville MacDonald's biography of his father.

Acknowledgements

In writing a thesis, one inevitably accumulates a great number of personal debts, reflecting an array of help which ranges from the strictly practical to the intangibly emotional. The number of such debts is all the greater when the work is spread over a number of years, as this has been. Total acknowledgement is impossible, yet the list my memory could nevertheless produce would be excessively cumbersome. I restrict myself, therefore, to naming four people whose help has been greatest of all; those unnamed are yet remembered gratefully.

My largest debt of gratitude is to my supervisors, Professor John MacQueen and Dr Ian Campbell. Over the years, they have helped me with wisdom, encouragement and patience. I have benefitted immeasurably from their friendly guidance and I want to thank them both most heartily. My thanks is due, also, to Mrs Moira Anthony, secretary to the English Department of the University of Dundee: her good-humoured patience has been combined with a reliable professionalism of approach, so that the typing of the thesis has been, for me, an easy and pleasant stage. Finally, I must thank my wife Elizabeth, who has never known me when I have not been studying George MacDonald. She has barely read a word he wrote, nor has she contributed in any direct manner to the production of this thesis. Yet it could not have been completed without her, and my gratitude is immense.

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Abbreviations

There is no standard edition of MacDonald's works. First editions of the Scottish novels are only available, by and large, in main central libraries and the reader is otherwise likely to encounter a variety of editions. In the case of one novel, Robert Falconer, quite radical variations in different copies can be encountered (see Appendix One). In my experience, none of MacDonald's other Scottish novels present such differences, but as page numbering can vary from edition to edition I have made my references to chapter number and title, not to page. It is hoped that this will prove the most universally useful method.

References accompany the quotations when they are from MacDonald's fiction or from A Dish of Orts; other references from MacDonald's work are footnoted. The following is a list of abbreviations used in the body of the text; abbreviations used in footnotes are listed at the beginning of each section of footnotes. The dates in the list below are the years of first book publication. The twelve Scottish novels are listed as a group, then the other quoted works follow.

<u>David Elginbrod</u>	1863	DE
<u>Alec Forbes of Howglen</u>	1865	AF
<u>Robert Falconer</u>	1868	RF
<u>Malcolm</u>	1875	M

<u>The Marquis of Lossie</u>	1877	ML
<u>Sir Gibbie</u>	1879	SG
<u>Castle Warlock</u>	1882	CW
<u>Donal Grant</u>	1883	DG
<u>What's Mine's Mine</u>	1886	WMM
<u>The Elect Lady</u>	1888	EL
<u>Heather and Snow</u>	1893	H & S
<u>Salted With Fire</u>	1897	SWF
<u>Phantastes</u>	1858	Ph
<u>The Seaboard Parish</u>	1868	SP
<u>At the Back of the North Wind</u>	1871	ABNW
<u>The Princess and the Goblin</u>	1872	P & G
<u>Wilfred Cumbermede</u>	1872	WC
<u>Paul Faber, Surgeon</u>	1879	PFS
<u>The Princess and Curdie</u>	1883	P & C
<u>A Dish of Orts</u>	1893	<u>Orts</u>
<u>Lilith</u>	1895	L

Chapter 1

1. MacDonald's Life and Personality

The foundation of any account of George MacDonald's life is still, after more than half a century, the biography by Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife, published in 1924.¹ The following summary is no exception, for Greville MacDonald provided a notably full account and powerfully set out the shape of his father's life. It must immediately be said, however, that even on internal evidence alone, his work is marked by a lack of detachment, an assumption of his father's gifts and significance which amounts to uncritical veneration. Thus, while he provides us with most of the facts we might need to know, there is still much scope for a re-examination and reinterpretation of MacDonald's personality, and of the family life by which he laid great store. This work is now beginning, as the hoard of MacDonald letters in Yale and elsewhere are explored by more and more scholars. Personal reminiscence, too, can occasionally be tapped to provide an alternative vision of the MacDonalds. Thus, I am already able to supplement my basic account of his life with some details which present a more complicated, but more humanly probable, reality. Nevertheless, Greville's biography remains the single most important source for information on George MacDonald, and that fundamental debt must be prominently acknowledged.

MacDonald was born in Huntly in Aberdeenshire in 1824, into a family of fervent Christian outlook: it gave him contact with both the evangelical Calvinism against which he would react, and, in his father, the attitude of loving intelligence which would aid and inspire him in doing so. Both his family and community provided him with a varied wealth of human contact and experience, in a happy childhood which filled his consciousness with incidents, personalities, settings and scenery upon which he was to draw continuously in his long career as a writer. His boyhood was no unblemished idyll: his mother died when he was eight, and his health was delicate from his earliest years; his first schoolmaster was the brutal original of Murdoch Malison in Alec Forbes, and his family was under constant financial constraint, thanks largely to the mismanagement and irresponsibility of one of his uncles. Such difficulties in MacDonald's early life seem to have been more than compensated for, however, by the stimulation and happy security provided for him by a normal and satisfying environment. His childhood had for him a rightness and a representativeness which often induced him to mine even its smallest particulars in many of his later fictional models of human experience.

When he was sixteen, he went to King's College, Aberdeen. Financial reasons prevented him from building a career on his initial enthusiasms for chemistry and medicine, and his studies

included languages and literature. A key-stone of his literary sensibility was provided by the Romantic movement in England and Germany, while it may well have been in his mysterious vacation employment, in 1842, when he catalogued the library of an unidentified northern castle, that he came into extensive contact with literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Robert Lee Wolff conjectures that it was here, also, that MacDonald fell in love with a young lady of the household who aroused his emotions only to dash his hopes, creating a long-lasting emotional scar and an abiding aggressive class-consciousness.² Although this episode can be inferred only from MacDonald's writing, I accept Wolff's theory although I think he makes too much of it. Severe as the encounter no doubt was to experience, it takes its place with the rest of MacDonald's adolescent experiences as we have them from his son.

Recently, an attempt has been made by Muriel Hutton, on the basis of the MacDonald letters at Yale, to cast further doubt on this problematic part of MacDonald's life.

Admission cards to various classes, 1840-41, 1843, and 1843-44, are in the Yale collection, but nothing to confirm Robert Troup's statement that MacDonald missed a session and catalogued the library of a castle in the far North. When, later, MacDonald applied for the post of librarian and clerk at Owen's College, Manchester, neither he nor his sponsors mentioned any previous experience.³

This fails to disprove Wolff's theory and, indeed, could be added to it as further circumstantial evidence. If MacDonald did undergo some emotionally lacerating experience, the absence of reference to its setting in the Yale letters is entirely credible, as is also, perhaps, his failure to mention the fact even in a job application. Also, the Yale admission cards do not appear to include one for the session he reputedly missed, 1842-43. Furthermore, according to Greville's biography, Robert Troup is the authority only for a sojourn of 'some summer months in a certain castle or mansion in the far North'; the missing of the session of 1842-43 is discussed by Greville presumably on the basis of less narrow authority than his.⁴ Despite all this, one sympathises with Miss Hutton's impatience that biography has here to give way to conjectures and myth-making.

Although active in student life, MacDonald seems to have been rather distant from the generality of students and loneliness was a potential problem. His undergraduate days, too, were a time of considerable inner religious turmoil as he questioned, then rejected, the prevailing doctrines on election and salvation; that he was participating in a gradually changing climate of belief can have mitigated only marginally the difficulty of the personal experience. What Greville MacDonald calls the beginning of his manhood was undoubtedly a troubled though far from miserable time, but surely we have no need to follow Richard Reis in assuming that Alec Forbes

is strictly autobiographical, and that MacDonald took to drink and prostitutes.⁵ While at university, however, he did begin to write poetry.⁶

Graduating in 1845, he found employment as a private tutor to a family in London, a post he heartily disliked. The process of establishing social contacts, however, soon introduced him to the girl with whom he would enjoy a long and conspicuously happy marriage, Louisa Powell. Before he married her, he had committed himself to the ministry, entering Highbury College in 1848 for a shortened two-year training course, at the close of which he was called to the Congregational church in Arundel. His ministry there was immediately preceded, however, by a tubercular attack, the first of several such serious illnesses throughout his life: lung disease was endemic in his family, proving fatal in his own generation, as it did in his father's and that of his children. The post at Arundel enabled MacDonald to start his family of eleven children, but he held it only until 1853 when he was forced to resign by a congregation which disliked various aspects of his teaching, and the whole cast of his religious outlook. It is easy to deplore the mentality and behaviour of his congregation in the affair, but MacDonald's stance in expressing his message in his later writings usually contains an element of antagonism, of positive attack on views not his own, an attitude which would not make for harmony in a church community. It is notable that his friend and ex-teacher,

John Godwin, wrote to him criticizing his refusal to 'sympathize with the multitude'.⁷ The spirit of embattled isolation was strong in MacDonald, and was perhaps in evidence at this early stage. It was clearly hinted at, a decade later, by Mrs La Touche, in a letter to Ruskin urging him to attend MacDonald's lectures.

I am sure you know his works and I think you would like to know him. I wonder how you will get on with him - he says he will shock you. He is anxious to make himself out something horrible.⁸

Muriel Hutton feels, on the evidence of the Yale letters, that Greville's interpretation of his father's departure from Arundel needs qualification. She implies, rather, that MacDonald was ill at ease performing the obscure duties of a clergyman and suggests that literary fame was already a goal in his mind.⁹

Dismissed from his pulpit, MacDonald was now under the twin necessity of providing for a growing family and finding new outlets for his Christian teaching. He moved to Manchester, preaching, and lecturing on a range of subjects. After a struggle to place it, his long poem Within and Without was published in 1855, a work which brought him the sponsorship of Byron's widow, who provided the financial aid to spend the winter of 1856-7 in North Africa. This was the first of many winters spent near the Mediterranean, a practice necessitated by MacDonald's ill-health. In 1858, Phantastes was published, and in 1859 MacDonald began to become known to an

increasing number of prominent people in the artistic, intellectual and theological circles of London. David Elginbrod, published in 1863, brought him wider fame, the first of a flow of novels which lasted until Salted With Fire (1897). Increasingly, MacDonald lived by his pen; he was never successful in finding and holding a salaried position for long, although he edited Good Words for the Young from 1870 to 1873. Lack of money was a perpetual problem, despite the fact that his books sold, and despite a success like the triumphant lecturing tour of the United States in 1872-73. From 1877, the family finances were supplemented by income from theatrical performances organised by Mrs MacDonald, in which one of his daughters, Lilia, was notably successful, and in which MacDonald himself regularly appeared. Works by Shakespeare and Corneille were staged, but the cornerstone of their repertoire was Mrs MacDonald's dramatisation of The Pilgrim's Progress. Despite this, the family constantly had to rely on borrowing and charity, and their difficulties were heightened by the ill-health of several of them, including MacDonald himself, making it necessary for them to spend many winters in Italy. Two children died in 1878-79, followed within MacDonald's lifetime by two others and a grandchild, and by Mrs MacDonald in 1902.

The narrative of MacDonald's life has most shape and drama in its first half, up to the late 1850s, when he began to make a name for himself as a writer. From the early 1860s, his story is a long

but rather shapeless one, made up of family life and death, friendships, travels, ill-health, and hard work. Miss Hutton refers to a 'paucity of documentation' which, it seems, not even the Yale collection rectifies.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is possible to begin to piece together a more objective account of the man and his family life, during his decades of eminence and decline, than Greville (understandably) could provide.

In an interesting article recalling her own impressions of the MacDonald household at Bordighera in (presumably) the 1890's, Laura Ragg recalls a Louisa MacDonald very different from the supremely lovable mother depicted by Greville.¹¹ To Laura Ragg, she was 'my rather forbidding hostess' and the household over which she presided was far from harmonious.¹² When another guest, Lady Burne-Jones, arrived, 'she certainly contributed to the cheerfulness of the meals...The indefinable but always felt tension in the house diminished, and the daughter, Irene, looked less drawn and worried'.¹³ Laura Ragg's reminiscences brought forth, in ensuing correspondence, confirmation of this picture. Another visitor, Bernard Grenfell, later described the MacDonald household as a curious one to live in: 'It is constructed on most simple lines which take in most people, while it is really by no means peaceful and harmonious'.¹⁴

Neither writer denies the prominence of the MacDonalds among the English residents in Bordighera, but Grenfell claims they were

unpopular. 'Mrs MacDonald and her daughters were the crux with the Bordighera people, and I must say I sided with the latter. Mrs MacDonald cannot be better described than by saying she is the exact opposite of her husband and her daughters follow after her.'¹⁵ He is not very explicit in his account of the husband, however. 'George MacDonald himself was liked. He is very patriarchal in both his appearance and his mind, one cannot but admire his extreme simplicity...As he passed most of his time in his library, only coming out in the evening to whist, I did not see much of him, but enough to like him very much.'¹⁶ Grenfell nevertheless regarded his host, also, with a certain detachment. 'For a man who spends all his time in reading, as he does, his conversation is rather ordinary - at least so it seemed to me; and his method of passing without the least pause from a discussion on plum pudding to one on the immortality of the soul and then back again to plum pudding is rather startling to one unaccustomed to his books, where, I believe, he does the same thing.'¹⁷

Laura Ragg's tone is more sympathetic, but suggests a similar reality. She stresses that her host was 'a man whose once powerful intellect was dulled and clouded. Flashes from it returned at intervals when general conversation, to which he usually listened speechlessly, turned on subjects about which he had formerly been interested!'.¹⁸ She confirms, too, Grenfell's preference between

host and hostess, even implicitly in her account of her first glimpse of them. 'George MacDonald and his wife entered, and everyone rose and clapped as though they had been royalties. He had donned - as he did every evening - a black velvet coat, and she was swathed fantastically in white and gold draperies in which she looked rather brown and shrivelled.'¹⁹

Laura Ragg's article is interesting in its entirety. It should perhaps be treated with caution, as it is inaccurate in at least two details, one minor and one major. She describes the dramatisation of The Pilgrim's Progress as 'arranged for the stage by George MacDonald'.²⁰ Greville makes it quite clear that the arrangement was the work of his mother.²¹ Secondly, she recalls her last meeting with MacDonald, only a few weeks before his death in 1905: 'Rather to my surprise, Mrs MacDonald received me with great warmth!'.²² Greville is explicit here also: Mrs MacDonald 'died in January, 1902, three years before him!'.²³

Despite the limitations of such memories, however, these reminiscences and others confirm the essential picture of MacDonald (his waning mental and social powers apart) given by Greville and also that suggested by his own dwindling writing of the period (except for Lilith). Furthermore, the letters of MacDonald readily available in this country give first-hand confirmation of several aspects of his life and personality as they have publically

come down to us. Most are in the National Library of Scotland, including the valuable Mount-Temple collection, while I have consulted others in The Brander Library, Huntly, and in the library of King's College, Aberdeen.

Two recurrent difficulties of his adult life are vividly illustrated by these letters, his financial problems and his ill-health. On two quite separate occasions he complains of American pirate editions of his novels, with directly bad effects on his income from sales. 'Where I used always to get £300, I get now - for this book I am writing, only £110 - because they have begun - pirates, that is - to publish my books at 20 cents, or so.'²⁴

'We are trying a new dodge to get paid in America for our work, we poor authors, whose brains are picked with so little compunction.'²⁵

Even when over sixty years old, MacDonald had to arrange theatrical and lecture tours. In a letter to 'Dear W. Smith', dated March, 1890, he tried to arrange a lecture tour of North-East Scotland.²⁶

A letter of five years earlier, to Lord Mount-Temple, hints at the family's hand-to-mouth existence: 'We were four months in Scotland, and were very kindly received - with our Pilgrims. Though we cannot say we made any money exactly, we kept ourselves, and that is much, for it is the daily bread'.²⁷

Two years later, he was writing this sad letter to 'My Dear James': 'Once again I come a beggar to your door for my big handful of meal! Could you let us

have your usual kind gift this year. I should gladly pay for it but the offer to do so has become such a form by your always refusing to accept it, that it comes easier to beg for it right out'.²⁸

His ill-health is constantly touched on in these letters, both explicitly and implicitly (in that so many come from Italy). Despite spending so many winters on the Mediterranean, however, he was still severely affected by seasonal factors. 'And this winter I have had neither bronchitis nor asthma except one slight attack of the former - and have worked more steadily than any winter, I think, for thirty years - nearly.'²⁹ 'I am learning a little to be quiet and wait when winter blocks the way between this and the high countries. Winter is as needful as spring and summer for our poor hearts. I know I am very apt to forget in the summer day. But God comes nearer and nearer, I think.'³⁰

These letters are most valuable of all, however, for the degree to which they convey some of the quality of MacDonald's mind, and confirm much of what characterises the thought and method of his fiction. The endlessness of his search for God is suggested by his tentativeness even as late as 1888: 'The universe would be to me no more than a pasteboard scene, all surface and no deepness, on the stage, if I did not hope in God. I will not say believe, for that is a big word, and it means so much more than my low beginnings

of confidence'.³¹ Still later, in 1894, he laid claim only to a seemingly narrow area of belief. 'I may almost say I believe in nothing but in Jesus Christ.'³² He knows, too, his own limitations as a believer. How shaken he could be is suggested by this letter, written soon after the death of his son Maurice.

My wife says if we get this house we are looking after now she would like to put up in the hall 'And they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth'. That is our mood, and may it last until we shall be no longer strangers or pilgrims but at home. There are so many things that belong to home here - they must be strangers and pilgrims too somehow. - Nothing comes to perfection. There is no time for anything but getting ready to go. But my faith and hope grow stronger. I seem very hard to teach. Imagination must be sent out of the throne of faith, and taught to sit lowly on the footstool. A thousand things have to be set right. I have to be simply the child that tries to be good, and keeps close by his father.³³

His ability to trust in God, however, is visible in this slightly earlier one, expressing his resignation as his daughter Mary fails to rally from illness. 'Am I in danger of losing my human tenderness if I say - Let the Lord do as he will: I shall only hope and look forward the more. The present in no way satisfies me, least of all the present in myself. I want to be God's man, not the man of my own idea.'³⁴ His optimistic pictures in his writing of faith triumphant over death is not the work of a man spared the pain of living. Nor is his treatment of God as a near and loving father merely a fictional emphasis, a calculated

part of a message. He can write of him as a close, knowable and affectionate presence, as when he is discussing how dangerous particles from space are burned up in the atmosphere: 'It is so like God - who not merely wards, but frustrates with utter change of evil into good'.³⁵

A constant note in his letters, as in all his writings, is his sense of growth, of learning, of improvement. 'This life is a lovely school-time, but I never was content with it. I look for better - oh, so far better.'³⁶ 'We shall all be glad to change this lowly body for a better one day. And we hope in the Lord, who is my resurrection, for surely I have risen in him - a little already - I have got my head up and my heart too - and my body will follow.'³⁷

To Lord Mount-Temple he writes of his fictional treatment of this idea.

And your letter says of my books just what I try to go upon - to make them true to the real and not the spoilt humanity. Why should I spend my labour on what one can have too much of without any labour? I will try to show what we might be, may be, must be, shall be - and something of the struggle to gain it.³⁸

The same year, to the same correspondent, he indicates the goal to which he is heading, and indicates also the essentially non-conceptual nature of that goal. 'My wife and I look for and hasten

unto the coming of our Lord, whatever that means in words - we know what it means to our hearts.'³⁹ His novels can be seen as varied attempts to find words for that emotional reality.

Incidentally, in view of the fact that MacDonald so often uses imagery of climbing to symbolise progress to God, it is interesting to find that these effortful ascents to religious health had a physiological parallel, an urgent reality, in MacDonald's own experience. 'I am much better. I have a walk almost every day now. I never felt walking do me good before; but then I always walk up the hill, climb with effort and some weariness into the clear air, and am better all the day after it.'⁴⁰

Regularly, too, he writes of the world as something to be relinquished, as when, having tried to describe the sunsets of Italy, he continues,

Now this profusion of passing, untreasured, never-repeated, unrecorded splendour, makes me wonder whether all our recordings are not a heaping up of treasure after a worldly sort. When we are well up the hill, we shall no more - perhaps - think of treasuring a poem, or a drama, or writing a book, than my brother William thinks of heaping money together. We shall share our poems and our music, like eloquence, fresh from the heart, and let them go, no more to be recalled than last night's sunset, and no more to be mourned over, there being no time, because of expecting the sunset of tonight. The musicians will get up their concert, and when it is ready, we will gather to

heart be blest [sic], but the sounds will float away into the infinite of God in golden ripples, and when the consort is over, all that will be left will be the loud trumpets no tongue uplifted, with the other instruments of strange loveliness, waiting for the new life that is already throbbing in the eager heart of the master musician. Where all is vivid burning life, no one will think of storing its results any more than of drawing off the water of the perennial fountains into Heidelberg tuns. - There, I have done!⁴¹

This is not contempt for the precious things of the world, but it is a qualification of how they are to be appreciated: he always rejects any hint of avarice, a failing which he defined in broad terms. Part of his feeling against treasuring the things of the world derives from his sense of it as unreal, insubstantial. Several of the above quotations already testify to his belief that his relationship with the world is neither permanent nor substantial, and soon after Maurice's death he exclaims, 'How real death makes things look!'⁴² The true reality is merely obscured by that which is of the world, as is clear when he thanks Lady Mount-Temple for a 'New Covenant' she had sent him: 'The English is vanishing from me as inadequate - and so will the Greek by and by, and nothing be left but The Word'.⁴³ His vision of the world as evanescent is sanctioned, of course, by long tradition, but one wonders whether his sense of it as providing no permanent abode was not heightened by two features of his daily life much in evidence in these letters, his inability to find a secure financial foothold, and his recurrent forgetfulness. Both surely suggest that his bemused detachment

was no mere matter of theory, but the product of personality and experience.

As one might expect, the letters contain a host of small insights into his fiction, though no major or lengthy discussions appear in them. He writes to Blackwoods, offering them (presumably) David Elginbrod. 'I am about to put a few final touches to a novel, or rather romance, of the present day, which I have just written.'⁴⁴ He declares that the brothers in What's Mine's Mine are his own dead brothers, and expresses to Georgina Mount-Temple the fear that she 'may not quite like' one already in the printer's hands (probably Lilith).⁴⁵ Several times he claims to be especially concerned with the 'finish' of a book. He also says that he regards Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood, The Seaboard Parish and The Vicar's Daughter as a trilogy.⁴⁶

More important to us, perhaps, is the frequent evidence in these letters of his mind's tendency towards metaphor and allegory. Again, examples can be found in excerpts already quoted; to them I add the following, both to Lady Mount-Temple. The first suggests his ability to see the careful functionings of God expressed even in the realm of scientific observation, while the second, seemingly on the occasion of her husband's death, offers a characteristic embodiment of thought and belief in the form of imagery, of fiction.

I wonder if we shall need solitude as much when we rise into higher regions of life. I doubt it. Only we shall have it if we need it. Oh how solitary one could be yet in the universe! Railways and factories and dirt and smoke don't go very far after all. It is delightful to think that even in this world the precious sea keeps a wide solitary space for us; and that the very garment that wraps the world about and is one life is a consuming fire, in which no foul thing can have more than the momentary existence necessary to its dissolution; that as it sets on fire and dissipates the cometic fragments that reach it before they can reach and strike us, so also the evil things that come out of the world itself are consumed by it.⁴⁷

We are in a house with windows on all sides. On one side the sweet garden is trampled and torn, the beeches blown down, the fountain broken; you sit and look out, and it is all very miserable. Shut the window. I do not mean forget the garden as it was, but do not brood on it as it is. Open the window on the other side, when the great mountains shoot heavenward, and the stars, rising and setting, crown their peaks. Down those stairs look for the descending feet of the Son of Man coming to comfort you.⁴⁸

2. The Range of MacDonald's Writings

MacDonald's first attempts at writing were poems, and the long poem Within and Without was his first published work. He always preferred poetry to prose, as his son Ronald testifies, and thought of himself as a poet first and foremost: he regretted the necessity which demanded that so much of his time had to be given to fiction.⁴⁹

It was common, however, for many of his contemporaries to think of him as a poet as, apart from his major poetic productions, he regularly contributed verse to such publications as Good Words and The Sunday Magazine. Few of his novels, too, lack verse, which he worked in when he could. His collected poems fill two volumes, although even they do not contain everything he wrote, and some of the poems were revised for the publication.⁵⁰ His poetry is disappointing. Often, to my ear, it is clumsy in sound, rhythm and phrasing: too often, the effect is of ideas versified, rather than of a conception in which sound and idea are unified. It is interesting that his poems in Scots can often be excepted from this, for the rhythms become firmer, clearer, more musical, and the phrasing benefits from its closeness both to a conversational idiom and to the mannerisms of the songs and ballads he imitates.

Apart from his fiction, which I describe below, his remaining publications are of great variety. There are two volumes of verse translations, mainly from German: Exotics (1876) and Rampolli (1897). He edited, also, some of his own early poems along with verse by a brother and a friend in A Threefold Chord (1883). Several times, he presented (rather than edited) the works of earlier writers, creating editions and anthologies in which his own personality, views and sense of his author are offered along with the originals, a habit of mind which relates closely to his practice in writing

novels. In 1874, he published England's Antiphon, an anthology of religious poems set in a continuous discursive narrative: it is an extended lecture in book form on the history of English religious poetry and is notable for its high appreciation of Donne. In 1885, he published an edition of Hamlet, prefaced by a discussion of the Folio text of 1623, and opposing each page of text with a page of interpretative and critical notes which, taken together, constitute a vivid and passionate interpretation. This is usually referred to as one of MacDonald's more eccentric productions, and certainly one feels that Hamlet is being transformed into one of his own fictional Christian heroes. Yet there are many interesting comments, and his view that Hamlet must test the ghost's word is now a common interpretation. Yet another favourite author, Sidney, was 'presented' by MacDonald in 1891 in A Cabinet of Gems. A readership was even more directly addressed in the three volumes of Unspoken Sermons (1867-89), and in the collection of essays entitled Orts (1882) or A Dish of Orts (1893), mainly on literary and personal topics.

The great bulk of MacDonald's writing is fiction, and although I believe that the lines of demarcation between the different classes of his fiction are far less real and helpful than is usually assumed, classification makes description of his output easier, however it must be qualified later. Most of his books are what we must loosely

call 'realistic novels', meaning that they purport to be set in landscapes and environments continuous with our everyday world and peopled solely by human beings. However improbable characters, speech and actions may be, they give us a version of the world with which we are familiar. Many of them are set in places with which we know MacDonald was acquainted, and, of these, a dozen are set wholly or in large part in Scotland. I call these the Scottish novels, and the remainder the English novels. Both types were produced at all stages of his career; at no period does one predominate over the other. MacDonald's realistic fiction also includes short stories such as those in The Gifts of the Child Christ and other tales (1882), and some works for children such as Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood (1871) and Gutta Percha Willie (1873).

We may use the term fantasy to cover most of the rest of MacDonald's fiction, although further distinctions are possible. By this term, I mean works set wholly or partly in a domain which is other than the everyday human world, or works containing characters or elements which are explicitly alien to the economy of normal human experience, such as North Wind, or the supernatural in The Portent (1860, 1864). Of the works of this type, several are clearly intended for adults, such as Phantastes (1858) and Lilith (1895), while others are definitely written for children although they can also appeal to adults. These include At the Back of the North Wind

(1870, 1871), The Princess and the Goblin (1871, 1872) and The Princess and Curdie (1882, 1883). It is less easy to be precise in allocating many of the other fantasy works to one age group or the other, nor is it really important for my present purpose to do so. Much of MacDonald's fantasy writing is in short-story form, and was published in periodicals, interpolated into longer works, or appeared in collections such as Dealings with the Fairies (1867) and The Light Princess and other fairy stories (1890).

Since his death, most of MacDonald's works have been permanently out of print. Most frequently reprinted is At the Back of the North Wind; The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie are at present available in a children's paperback series. Phantastes and Lilith have been made available again several times. His Christian message has occasionally led to the publication of selections of his work, such as Harry Escott's selection of his devotional verse entitled God's Troubadour (1940) and C. S. Lewis's well-known compendium of prose extracts, George MacDonald: An Anthology (1946).⁵¹ The centenary of MacDonald's birth, in 1924, saw not only his son's biography but also the re-appearance of Sir Gibbie in Everyman's Library. In 1927, Cassell reprinted the first six Scottish novels, the last time, so far as I know, that any of the realistic fiction has re-appeared.⁵² Most of his novels are to be found second-hand, however, and there is now a

considerable turn-over of his books, especially the Scottish ones, on the shelves of second-hand book-sellers.

3. MacDonald Criticism in the Twentieth Century

Criticism of MacDonald's fiction has not been common in the twentieth century, and despite the variety of approach and personality among those who have written on it, there has been a considerable measure of agreement as regards MacDonald's strengths and weaknesses, and as to which are his best works. It is an important part of this thesis to extend and qualify the body of comment which has built up.

In the early years of the century, there was a distinct critical preference for the realistic novels, and an unease with, sometimes a distaste for, the fantasy writing. Thus, to J. H. Millar, Lilith 'is tedious and unintelligible, though scarcely more so than Phantastes'.⁵³ He devotes, however, two trenchant pages to MacDonald's fiction, which he wisely distinguishes from the work of the 'kailyard' writers, with which it is too superficially confused. He dislikes the 'preaching' in the novels, affirms the superiority of those set in Aberdeenshire, and regrets that 'Mr MacDonald's plots are never very coherent or probable'.⁵⁴ His highest praise is for David Elginbrod, Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer (especially the last), and it is couched in terms which have become the standard emphases in evaluating the Scottish novels.

His criterion is that of realism, and these books are preferred because they most accord with that standard. Characters are valued because they are 'wonderfully true to life', because they are 'the real thing'.⁵⁵ 'The atmosphere is extraordinarily well reproduced, and the Scots of the dialect seems to be unusually pure, racy, and idiomatic.'⁵⁶ Understandable and helpful as the criterion of fidelity to everyday life may be, in MacDonald's case it results in the valuing of a pitifully small proportion of his fiction.

J. H. Millar's emphasis is similar to that of Hugh Walker in The Literature of the Victorian Age (1913).⁵⁷ Dismissing, like Millar, MacDonald's poetry, he acknowledges Phantastes, but sees David Elginbrod as 'his true entry into literature'. Again the emphasis is on the novels as 'masterly studies of Scottish life', and on the 'admirable portraiture' which redeems the faults of stories which can be 'forced, unnatural and improbable'. Among critics of this period known to me, only W. Garrett Horder hints at a relative assessment which places the fairy writing above the novels.⁵⁸

The 1920's, however, brought a shift in emphasis, though not a radically different type of response. The fairy and fantasy writing was taken more seriously by several writers such as G. K. Chesterton, Oliver Elton, and MacDonald's son Greville, thus beginning what is now the standard reading of MacDonald's achievement, in which he is seen as supremely successful as a writer of symbolic fantasy who unfortunately devoted too much energy

to realistic fiction which is insufficiently realistic.⁵⁹ Chesterton, it is true, pointed to the fairy-story quality of the realism in his introduction to George MacDonald and his Wife, but in the body of that book itself, Greville MacDonald makes many comments betraying his feeling that the novels are artistically strongest when they are most full of solidly depicted human experience. To Oliver Elton, indeed, a book such as David Elginbrod is simply 'preposterous', although Phantastes is written of with warmth. In 1939, Ernest Baker wrote with some detachment of both areas of MacDonald's fiction, without preferring one over the other.⁶⁰ In the realistic novels, he deplores the regular improbabilities, but again values the depiction of community life and the creation of various prominent characters. His principal emphasis is on what he sees as MacDonald's close similarity to Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren, an estimate which can still occasionally be found today, as in A. A. H. Inglis's entry on MacDonald in The Penguin Companion to Literature and in Richard Reis's full-length study.⁶¹

Surveys of literary history more recent than Elton's or Baker's tend to omit MacDonald altogether, nor is he prominent even in present-day works describing specifically Scottish literature. Kurt Wittig shows neither knowledge of him nor interest in him, while Maurice Lindsay is more repelled by his preaching than he is attracted by his Scots dialogue and Scottish characterisations, so

that only Lilith elicits a substantial measure of praise from him.⁶² Knowledge of MacDonald, let alone enthusiasm for him, has been a much more specialised thing in the last thirty years, although, as already mentioned, his books have shown very recent signs of increased popularity.

Nevertheless, recent decades have produced a handful of critical texts which, together, constitute the current view of MacDonald. Essays by C. S. Lewis and W. H. Auden have been influential in their way.⁶³ Both see his claim on us as due to the mythopoeic quality of the fantasy writing. According to them, MacDonald's imagination is at its most powerful and original in creating resonant beings, settings and incidents, creations expressing, for Auden, MacDonald's psychic life, and for Lewis, 'something inexpressible'.⁶⁴ Neither rate the realistic novels highly in comparison with the fantasies: Auden hints that they have some worth, while Lewis suggests that their style is their worst feature, and that 'they are best when they depart most from the canons of novel writing'.⁶⁵ This refreshing rejection of realistic criteria in judging them is promising, but unfortunately Lewis's amplification of the point is brief in the extreme: the 'departures' he distinguishes are towards fantasy and towards preaching, both of which he prefers to MacDonald's realism. One feels that had Lewis respected the novels more, he would have been capable of writing

most interestingly on them. Unfortunately, his eloquence gave vivid expression, instead, to the view that MacDonald's novel-writing should be a cause of regret.⁶⁶ Louis MacNeice further emphasized the notion that MacDonald's skills and achievements were not really literary in character: 'MacDonald's writings are not to everyone's taste...partly because he is not essentially a writer'.⁶⁷

This is a view the most firm-minded of MacDonald's recent critics, Colin Manlove, rejects, insisting that the way in which the fantasy is expressed is an inevitable factor in the experience of reading, the style aiding or hindering the imaginative communication.⁶⁸ I agree with him, and obviously hope to show that the realistic novels, too, have merit of a specifically literary sort. They show signs of merit, it seems to me, both in terms of what Lewis calls 'the canons of novel writing', and in so far as they are imaginative literary attempts to embody a vision larger and more intractable than that usually portrayed in the nineteenth-century realistic novel.

The two men who have written most extensively on MacDonald's fiction, Robert Lee Wolff and Richard H. Reis, differ considerably in approach and in degree of literary sophistication, yet on the broad questions of what is good in MacDonald's output, and why, they come to similar conclusions. Like most modern critics they rate the fantasies far above the realistic works, even though Wolff is almost as selective among the former as he is among the latter. His

preferences and evaluations are primarily based on the religious ideas embodied in the fiction, and on the biographical data which is reflected in, or can be read into, what MacDonald wrote. Referring to 'the three major novels', David Elginbrod, Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer, he concludes: 'They engage our interest as social and psychological documents. But as art, with the exception of Alec Forbes, they fail'.⁶⁹ He is not explicit as to what he means by 'art', but his chapter on these three novels shows him disturbed, as most people are, by anything which impairs the autonomy of a fiction as a dramatic rendering of a possible commonplace reality; in other words, MacDonald's interventions as a didactic narrator and as a visibly wilful manipulator of character and event are unacceptable. Not only shall I be arguing against Wolff and others that a narrow adherence to realism is an unnecessary and unjust approach to these works, but I shall have to take issue with many of his interpretations and thematic emphases, for it seems to me that he has quite simply failed to understand many of the books he writes about.

It is also necessary, here, to comment at length on the heavy Freudian bias of Wolff's book. Occasionally, this takes the form of a Freudian interpretation of a work, as in his accounts of The Golden Key and Robert Falconer. Wolff's approach rightly disturbs a later writer, Richard H. Reis, who notes that despite Wolff's acknowledgment of multiplicity of meaning in the symbol of the key,

in practice only the sexual interpretation interests him.⁷⁰ Even if in some sense true, the psychoanalytical interpretation seems to have the disadvantage, in literary criticism, of closing the door to other interpretations: it fosters the illusion that the work has been unlocked and that the revealed truth leaves nothing for further discussion. Reis is also uncomfortable with the pervasive use of literature, in Wolff's book, as a key to MacDonald's unconscious self, as dreams are used in analysis to uncover a neurosis. Reis clearly feels both that such a handling of the fiction is irrelevant to literary criticism, and that, in any case, we may doubt whether MacDonald was so unconscious of the sexual implications of his writings as Wolff assumes. That I believe that Wolff's Freudianism has not usefully opened up the fiction to any helpful extent from a literary point of view is implied by my own account which forms the bulk of this thesis. Here, I should like especially to amplify Reis's doubts about the general validity of Wolff's approach. Does the fiction reveal MacDonald to be the man Wolff claims he was?

Briefly, Wolff's view is as follows. The early death of his mother left MacDonald deeply missing her, longing for her emotionally and sexually. The guilt arising from this was compounded by the unusually loving demeanour of his father, which made the natural filial resentments against him all the more shameful and caused them to be repressed: MacDonald, we are told, felt guilty for not loving

his father enough. The Oedipus complex, in MacDonald's case, failed to be satisfactorily resolved. Wolff's evidence for this, apart from the novels, is the letter quoted by Greville MacDonald in which MacDonald's mother discusses the weaning of the infant, a letter treasured by the novelist throughout his life.⁷¹ In addition, as already mentioned (p.3 above), Wolff conjectures that the eighteen-year-old MacDonald had a deeply wounding love relationship with an aristocratic flirt while he was cataloguing the private library in 1842, an event which caused severe mental pain for many years and which struggled to find therapeutic expression in his writings.

The American critic, in practice, goes some distance in agreeing with the Freudian view that art is the outcome of neurosis: much in MacDonald's writing seems to Wolff to be primarily cathartic. On the basis of MacDonald's symbolism, Wolff is prepared to suggest tendencies towards real perversion in his subject. For example, the instinctive sexual desire of Anodos in Phantastes for the beautiful grandmother-figure is taken to suggest not only the child's longing for his dead mother, but a specifically sexual, incestuous impulse. Later, discussing the frequent scenes of physical violence, chastisement and, specifically, whipping which recur in the novels from, say, 1877 (the year of The Marquis of Lossie) onwards, he suggests that MacDonald might well have been a sadist.

Wolff might be regarded, in all this, as doing two things: he is making a type of psychoanalysis of MacDonald the man on the basis of certain repeated motifs, and he is explaining the repetition of those motifs on the grounds provided by the psychological analysis. It is difficult for someone who is not an expert in psychoanalysis to make conclusive comments on Wolff's procedures, although that in itself might serve as the basis for an initial observation. One is reminded of the demand made by Northrop Frye for literary biography in the form of 'serious studies which are technically competent both in psychology and in criticism, which are aware how much guesswork is involved and how tentative all the conclusions must be'.⁷² We do not feel, in reading Wolff's book, that he has the fullness of technical psychoanalytic expertise to produce results which are thus convincingly tentative: the very downrightness with which he states his ideas is ground for lack of faith in them. The fact that I am myself in the same unqualified position prevents me from demonstrating with any conclusiveness that this actually happens, and so the following two suggestions as to why, from a scientific point of view, Wolff's procedures may be wrong, are put forward with some diffidence.

My first objection is based on the discrepancy between the MacDonald his contemporaries (as far as we can gather) knew and loved, and the pain, shame, and complexity of MacDonald's inner being as painted by Wolff. To outward appearances, MacDonald's

relationships with those around him were normal and contented. It is a predictable common man's reaction to believe, therefore, that there was, in fact, nothing wrong with him. This naïve layman's reaction, however, receives support from expert psychoanalytical opinion.. In an interesting article, Charles Rycroft makes the point this way:

Psychoanalysts are clinicians primarily concerned to relieve their patients of disabilities, and it is generally agreed by them that well-functioning capacities and 'sublimations' not only do not require analysis but are also unanalysable. Patients do not consult psychoanalysts because they can do things but because they cannot, not because they are sexually potent but because they are impotent, not because they can write but because they are suffering from writer's block. As a result psychoanalytical theory and practice are essentially concerned with the pathological factors inhibiting and distorting creative activity and not with creative activity for its own sake.⁷³

My second objection is to the idea that one can attain the same certainty of a person's true psychic disposition by treating his books as one would his dreams: I have doubts as to whether an author reveals himself so completely in the products of his artistic existence as he appears to do in his nocturnal dream-life. This suspicion appears to be confirmed by the generally agreed view that a particular analysis can only be regarded as sure when it is the product of active co-operation between analyst and patient. David Stafford-Clark puts it this way:

The fallacy of analysing the creation of an artist's imagination is that one's imagination inevitably fills in the gaps which genius always leaves in a character for that very purpose. To

attempt to analyse a human being we need all the help that human being can give us; and no analysis which rested purely upon a study of the dreams or the history of the person, without his association⁷⁴ or comments upon them, could claim to be complete.

He is here commenting primarily on the psychoanalysis of characters in fiction, rather than on the analysis of the artist himself, but the principle should hold for both instances. Charles Rycroft discusses the topic with greater fullness:

The essential difference between the relationship between an analyst and his patient and a psychoanalytical critic-biographer and his subject is that the patient is a voluntary participant in the therapeutic process and can reply to his analyst's interpretations while the subject of a pathobiography is a passive victim who can't. An analyst and his patient spend many hundreds of hours closeted together: interaction and communication take place between them; and the analyst's ultimate criterion of the truth of his interpretations is that his patient finds them convincing.⁷⁵

Wolff's later writing on MacDonald, in Gains and Losses, merely summarises part of his account in The Golden Key.⁷⁶ In disagreeing so radically with his book, however, I do not wish to underestimate the importance of what he has done. The student of MacDonald is heavily indebted to him for much information and stimulus, even when one is roused to oppose him. The enthusiasm, clarity and sheer length of his book must have done much to relight interest in an author whose place even in literary histories was insecure and on whom there was no extended modern discussion.

Richard H. Reis's book, George MacDonald, is sounder, if less exciting. His mind is a literary one, where Wolff's is not, and he is much more alive to MacDonald's symbolism than his predecessor was. Even so, I believe his view of what a novel is, and of the range of effects possible in prose fiction, is unnecessarily circumscribed by, once again, his demand that a novel be realistic, and by his desire to present a clear, simple picture of MacDonald's work, a picture in which the symbolic fantasies receive the warmest praise, and the novels, apart from Alec Forbes, are consigned to oblivion. He quotes with the highest approval the belief of C. S. Lewis that MacDonald was driven to a form to which he was temperamentally unsuited when he sought literary and financial success with his novels, and roundly claims, 'Everything about George MacDonald's character, life, philosophy, and cast of mind seems, in the glare of hindsight, to have fitted him for the writing of symbolic fantasy and to have predestined him to mediocrity as a realistic novelist'.⁷⁷

Reis is a little more explicit than Wolff as to the faults of the novels, but the two men are essentially at one: didacticism or 'preaching' intrudes to spoil the stories, and doctrinaire religious optimism plus enforced haste of production result in plots and human relationships which are willed and unreal. Reis raises the distinction between the novel and the romance, quoting with approval

Northrop Frye who lists Borrow, Peacock, Melville and Emily Brontë as writers of the latter kind.⁷⁸ Curiously, however, Reis sees the fantasy works as MacDonald's romances and the rest of his fiction as dire attempts at realism. Some pages later, he states with clarity a particularly useful proposition, then inexplicably turns his back on the most obvious application as far as MacDonald is concerned.

There is surely a middle ground between the archrealism of a Trollope and the archsymbolism of a Dante, and it is here that some of the masters of fiction - Melville and Emily Brontë, for instance - fit in the subcategory which Frye calls Romance. What is striking is that MacDonald never really occupied this middle ground, for Bauby Catanach is almost the only character who would be at home in the Gothic stories of Poe or among the grotesques of Dickens; she is, in fact, a sort of female Fagin. Most of MacDonald's characters, in contrast, are either realistic stereotypes or symbolic archetypes. He rarely achieves, as Melville almost always does, a blending of the two: characters too human to be an archetype; too weird to be a stereotype; too peculiar to be like the man who is mowing his lawn next door.⁷⁹

Ultimately inexplicable, Reis's blindness is fortified by such things as his reverence for Lewis, by his excited preference for the fantasy writing, and by his inability to come to terms with MacDonald's Scots, surely a severe disqualification for anyone hoping to do his author justice. Reis has not respected the realistic novels sufficiently to read them sensitively or to think about them carefully. To him, they are 'very much alike'

and he adopts the tactic, in discussing them, of postulating 'some hypothetical "typical" MacDonald novel'.⁸⁰ He regards only Alec Forbes as worthy of a measure of individual treatment. No piece of writing on MacDonald is utterly without value (not even Joseph Johnson's despised book), and Reis's book is better than most, but his treatment of the novels is not only unfair to a handful of books but seriously distorts our total understanding of MacDonald as a writer.⁸¹

Reis, therefore, states with especial clarity the current view of the relationship, in nature and value, between MacDonald's fantasy writing and his realistic novels, and with two exceptions, the few pieces of MacDonald criticism which remain to be mentioned do not qualify it in any notable way. Colin Manlove, by far the best writer on the fantasies so far, has recently published a valuable article on 'George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels', which effectively presents the case against them, in a sophisticated version of the familiar realistic standpoint.⁸² 'With his work we have an either-or situation where experience and reflection upon it cannot come together.'⁸³ Dr Manlove bestows some extremely sensitive reading on MacDonald's work, yet is curiously blind to the humour, irony and symbolism in these novels. For him too, MacDonald is to be valued now as a fantasist only.

The same is essentially true of Roderick McGillis, despite several passages of discussion of the novels in what is one of the two

most important theses on MacDonald.⁸⁴ This is especially valuable for its qualifications to Greville's biography and for its account of the debt MacDonald owed to Romantic thought. In a later article, 'The Lilith Manuscripts', Dr McGillis gives an example of the type of scholarly attention which MacDonald has hitherto been denied, in a critical and bibliographical essay which makes Reis's treatment of the fantasies look amateur.⁸⁵ The other important thesis is Glenn Sadler's pioneering study of the poetry, in which he has neither the space nor the inclination to reassess the Scottish novels.⁸⁶ Nor does he attempt to revalue them in his later essay, 'The Fantastic Imagination in George MacDonald', which is principally concerned with the adult fantasies and with the poetry, and which reiterates the familiar regret that MacDonald had to turn to novel-writing to make money.⁸⁷

Only three other recent writers have discussed the novels: William Webb in his 'George MacDonald: A Study of Two Novels', Muriel Hutton in 'George Eliot, George MacDonald and the Muckle Speat', and Francis Russell Hart's discussion of the novels in Chapter Five of his book, The Scottish Novel: a Critical Survey.⁸⁸ Webb, the first of my two exceptions, deliberately chooses to write on two obscure English novels, Mary Marston and Home Again, quixotically plunging into the most obscure MacDonald with an impulse one both applauds and regrets. The qualities of commitment and lack of system revealed by the choice of texts are confirmed by

the discussion itself. His two novels are related to the rest of MacDonald's output only obscurely and tenuously, and the internal structure of his discussions is discursive rather than firmly systematic. Nevertheless, his heart, one might say, is very much in the right place, and he touches on many topics and angles of approach which I hope this thesis will show to be relevant. He is fully alive to that fundamental factor, 'MacDonald's symbolic, "emblematic" habit of mind' and is quite prepared to make sense of an unrealistic character in a novel by approaching her 'from MacDonald's fantasy side.'⁸⁹ For all its scrappiness of execution, Mr Webb's article seems to me to be good MacDonald criticism in embryo.

Professor Hart is the second and more important of the two exceptions mentioned above. Where Colin Manlove, for example, stresses the polarity of the two areas of MacDonald's fiction, Hart insists on their proximity to each other. 'For all their rich regional particularity, MacDonald's "novels" are actually theological romances, where the fantastic and the normal, the ideal and the real, are separated only by semivisible and shifting boundaries.'⁹⁰ As so often in this stimulating book, Professor Hart's originality exhorts us to reassess an aspect of Scottish fiction, and his insight into the nature of MacDonald's Scottish novels ought to be critically fruitful. In general approach, he and I are notably similar, although working independently. His

account, however, remains a sketch. Muriel Hutton's essay is primarily concerned to demonstrate the use MacDonald made of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's An Account of the Great Floods of August 1829. It avoids giving a full account of Sir Gibbie, her principal concern, makes no mention of Alec Forbes, and makes comparisons with The Mill on the Floss which are sporadic and insufficiently integrated. She hints at a conception of MacDonald's method in Sir Gibbie but unfortunately does not amplify it: 'His method is to make it quite clear that he is not writing realistically. Everything Gibbie is and does is deliberately related to the source of all miracle, God; the underlying or primary source of the novel is the truth and "reality" of the Gospel'.⁹¹

At one point, Colin Manlove rather disapprovingly refers to C. S. Lewis, Auden and MacNeice as 'predisposed...to ignore the persona of the author for a level below (or above) consciousness', an approach which makes them 'in a sense MacDonald's ideal readers: they will not ask questions, will be untroubled by authorial uncertainties, and will be seized and carried away by the fairy-tale as MacDonald hoped'.⁹² This may well be true of their response to the fantasy writing, but their tolerance runs out, as does that of most critics, when faced with the realistic novels. These seem to encounter few 'ideal readers', for those that open them usually do so with powerful preconceptions and expectations which none

of the novels can completely satisfy. Literary and aesthetic considerations refuse to give way, in the experience of most readers, to a transcending acceptance of the religious faith MacDonald is offering. Nor can one wish it otherwise, when one reads the 'criticism' of the few who do seem to make that transcending acceptance, such as Joseph Johnson and, perhaps, Muriel Hutton.

4. Concluding Summary

To conclude this survey of twentieth-century criticism of the Scottish novels, and to provide a starting-point for my next chapter, it may be useful to swiftly summarise the chief complaints against them, as they have come down in over a hundred years of intermittent comment.

The principal criticisms, then, are these. MacDonald's pictures of life are untrue: they are variously distorted so as to deviate, in terms of what is probable and possible, from the reader's sense of the reality which confronts him in his everyday life. They are also badly structured, or plotted. These two faults are due to a third, over-riding fault, namely MacDonald's manifest urge to 'preach' (as it is normally expressed). The purpose of his books is patently not to entertain with pleasing images of the familiar world, but to promulgate a much more idiosyncratic vision of the truth, a vision which is irreconcilable

with that of the everyday. Many have objected to the aesthetic consequences of this, especially the constant pressure of the author's own presence and personality, whether it arise in the wilful manipulation of character and event, or the personal addresses from author to reader, or (a more modern version of the complaint) the projection on to the page of his own fantasies. Nor is it only the presence of the author and his ideas which gives offence; regularly, the contents of those ideas, and the quality of his feelings, have repelled. While some have merely disliked his unorthodoxy, and others his sentimentality, yet others have combined the two in their revulsion against the sentimentality of his vision of God. There is a strain of more mundane criticism, too, casting doubt on his fundamental qualifications for writing worthwhile fiction in the first place. Thus his fallible sense of the ridiculous, his willingness to adopt the conventions of cheap popular fiction, and his sheer verbosity, have all been used to highlight what is seen as a fatal, congenital crudeness in his artistic productions.

The total implication of all this is that MacDonald either could not, or would not, apply himself to the business of adequately rendering in fiction the lives and experiences of his fellow men. The exasperation which is to be detected in so many accounts and reviews of his work indicates the recognition that he is not doing, in these novels, what he ought to be doing. What occurs very

seldom indeed, is any detailed investigation into what he is trying to do in them.

For it seems to me to be, on the face of it, unlikely that an author who can show so much talent and originality in one form of prose fiction (the fantasy works) could show as little in another form as the prevailing orthodoxy would have us believe, and indeed, a substantial encounter with the novels suggests to me that they contain much that is effective, interesting and unique. Furthermore, I think that the number of the Scottish novels which have a claim on us is greater than the first three as singled out by Wolff, or the first four which are dealt with by Manlove. Thus, I shall give special attention to the first six (up to Sir Gibbie) and shall draw on all twelve in the course of my discussion of their allegorical method.

Before those detailed discussions, however, it is necessary for me to outline, in a general account, what I understand to be the nature of the fiction MacDonald is writing in these works, and it is to this question that I now turn.

Footnotes for Chapter 1

The following are the abbreviations which are used in this section of footnotes:

- GMDW Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (London, 1924). The second edition (September, 1924) was used.
- Grenfell Letter by Bernard Grenfell, quoted in correspondence in English, 11 (Summer 1956), pp. 246-247.
- Hart Francis Russell Hart, The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey (London, 1978).
- Hutton, 'MacDonald Collection' Muriel Hutton, 'The George MacDonald Collection', Yale University Library Gazette, 51(2) (1976), pp. 74-85.
- Hutton, 'Muckle Speat' Muriel Hutton, 'George Eliot, George MacDonald and the Muckle Speat', Scottish Literary Journal, 2(2) (December, 1975), pp. 36-46.
- Lewis C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald: An Anthology (London, 1946).
- Manlove, 'Early Scottish Novels' Colin Manlove, 'George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels', in Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays, edited by Ian Campbell (Manchester, 1979), pp. 68-88.
- Manlove, Modern Fantasy Colin Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies (Cambridge, 1975).
- Millar J. H. Millar, A Literary History of Scotland (London, 1903).
- NLS National Library of Scotland.
- Ragg Laura M. Ragg, 'George MacDonald and his Household: Some Personal Recollections', English, 11 (Summer 1956), pp. 59-63.
- Reis Richard H. Reis, George MacDonald (New York, 1972).
- Rycroft Charles Rycroft, 'The Artist as Patient', Times Literary Supplement, 22 September 1972, pp. 1089-90.

Webb William Webb, 'George MacDonald: A Study of Two Novels', in Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Romantic Reassessment, edited by J. Hogg, 11, 1973, pp. 57-118.

Wolff R. L. Wolff, The Golden Key (New Haven, 1961)

1. GMDW.
2. Wolff, pp. 16-17.
3. Hutton, 'MacDonald Collection', p. 75.
4. GMDW, p. 72.
5. GMDW, p. 66. Reis, p. 21.
6. GMDW, p. 80.
7. Quoted in GMDW, p. 183.
8. Quoted in Derrick Leon, Ruskin: The Great Victorian (London, 1949), p. 352.
9. Hutton, 'MacDonald Collection', pp. 77-78.
10. Hutton, 'MacDonald Collection', p. 83.
11. Ragg.
12. Ragg, p. 61.
13. Ragg, p. 61.
14. Grenfell, p. 247.
15. Grenfell, p. 247.
16. Grenfell, p. 247.
17. Grenfell, p. 247.
18. Ragg, p. 62.
19. Ragg, p. 61.
20. Ragg, p. 60.
21. GMDW, p. 470.

22. Ragg, p. 63.
23. GMDW, p. 561.
24. NLS, MS.9745. 34.
25. Unpublished letter, postmarked 'Bordighera', dated November 5, 1887, in Brander Library, Huntly.
26. Unpublished letter, Brander Library.
27. NLS, MS.9745. 58.
28. Letter of November 5, 1887, in Brander Library.
29. NLS, MS.9745. 37.
30. NLS, MS.9745. 53.
31. NLS, MS.9745. 68.
32. NLS, MS.2640. 109.
33. NLS, MS.9745. 40.
34. NLS, MS.9745. 29.
35. NLS, MS.9745. 26-27.
36. NLS, MS.2640. 109.
37. NLS, MS.9745. 32.
38. NLS, MS.9745. 36.
39. NLS, MS.9745. 42.
40. NLS, MS.9745. 30.
41. NLS, MS.9745. 27.
42. NLS, MS.9745. 42.
43. NLS, MS.9745. 32.
44. NLS, MS.4162. 115.
45. NLS, MS.9745. 53, 73.

46. Unpublished letter to Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., dated July 26, 1895, in Aberdeen University Library, MS.2254.
47. NLS, MS.9745. 26.
48. NLS, MS.9745. 67.
49. Ronald MacDonald, 'George MacDonald: A Personal Note', in From a Northern Window, ed. Frederick Watson (London, 1911), 55-113 (pp. 66-67).
50. George MacDonald, Poetical Works, 2 vol. (London, 1893).
51. Harry Escott, God's Troubadour (London, 1940). Lewis.
52. I have been informed that, until recently, an abridged version of Sir Gibbie has been published for children by Blackie, but I have been unable to verify this.
53. Millar, p. 617.
54. Millar, p. 618.
55. Millar, p. 618.
56. Millar, p. 619.
57. Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Age (Cambridge, 1913), pp. 573-574, 794-795.
58. W. Garrett Horder, 'George MacDonald: A Nineteenth-Century Seer', Review of Reviews 32 (October 1905), pp. 357-362.
59. G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (London, 1913), p. 152. Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature 1830-1880, 2 vol. (London, 1920), II, pp. 109-110. GMDW, pp. 296-299, 546-556.
60. Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, 10 vol. (London, 1924-1939), X, pp. 157-159.
61. A. A. H. Inglis, 'George MacDonald' in The Penguin Companion to Literature: Britain and the Commonwealth, ed. D. Daiches (London, 1971), pp. 334-335.
62. Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh and London, 1958), pp. 253-254. Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature (London, 1977), p. 334.

63. Lewis, Introduction. W. H. Auden, Introduction to The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald (New York, 1954), reprinted in W. H. Auden, Forewords and Afterwords, ed. Edward Mendelson (London, 1973), pp. 268-273.
64. Lewis, p. 16.
65. Lewis, p. 17.
66. C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936), p. 232.
67. Louis MacNeice, Varieties of Parable (Cambridge, 1965), p. 95.
68. Manlove, Modern Fantasy, pp. 91-94.
69. Wolff, p. 265.
70. Reis, p. 78.
71. GMDW, p. 32.
72. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 110.
73. Rycroft, p. 1090.
74. David Stafford-Clark, What Freud Really Said (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 193.
75. Rycroft, p. 1089.
76. R. L. Wolff, Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England (New York and London, 1977).
77. Reis, p. 106.
78. Reis, p. 114.
79. Reis, pp. 119-120.
80. Reis, p. 52.
81. Joseph Johnson, George MacDonald: A Biographical and Critical Appreciation (London, 1906).
82. Manlove, 'Early Scottish Novels', pp. 68-88.
83. Manlove, 'Early Scottish Novels', p. 78.

84. Roderick F. MacGillis, 'The Fantastic Imagination: The Prose Romances of George MacDonald' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Reading, 1973).
85. Roderick F. MacGillis, 'George MacDonald and the Lilith manuscripts', Scottish Literary Journal, 4, 2 (December, 1977), pp. 40-57.
86. G. E. Sadler, 'The Cosmic Vision: A Study of the Poetry of George MacDonald' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1966).
87. G. E. Sadler, 'The Fantastic Imagination in George MacDonald', in Essays in Literature and the Christian Faith Presented to Clyde S. Kilby, ed. C. A. Hutton (Grand Rapids, 1971), pp. 215-227.
88. Webb. Hutton, 'Muckle Speat'. Hart, pp. 100-109.
89. Webb, pp. 74, 94.
90. Hart, p. 101.
91. Hutton, 'Muckle Speat', p. 43.
92. Manlove, Modern Fantasy, p. 91.

Chapter 2

1. Classifying MacDonald's Scottish Fiction

It seems to me that modern treatments of MacDonald's fiction have often been bedevilled by the assumption that those works which are obviously not fantasies are therefore 'realistic' novels. Despite the fact that 'realism' is a notoriously slippery word, it is freely used, especially by Richard Reis, to label what is assumed to be the fundamental aesthetic tactic of the novels with which we are concerned. No doubt the word can be useful in indicating a basic distinction between what are obviously different kinds of work in MacDonald's output, and Professor Reis's initial account of how he is using the word seems sensible and tentative: 'By "realism" I mean not the creation of a completely credible world like the one in which we live, work, and suffer, but an attempt in that direction'. That he regards the extent to which novels fail to reach that goal, however, as a measure of their inferiority is made instantly clear in the next sentence. 'Certainly MacDonald's conventional novels are at times Gothic, sensational, and incredible, but these are faults in the execution, not in the conception [my italics], which at least aims at a sense of possibility.'¹ (One might ask if there is really no sense in which the fantasies 'aim at a sense of possibility'?)

Professor Reis is far from alone in his chain of assumptions, that when MacDonald was clearly not writing fantasy, he was therefore attempting to picture, without qualification, the everyday world, and that deviations into the region of the improbable are thereby to be deplored on such grounds as incompetence, or artistic irresponsibility, or because he was mistakenly trying to convey something which the novel, as a form, cannot express. His view is found, in embryo, in the statement from C. S. Lewis which he quotes several times with approval: 'A dominant form tends to attract to itself writers whose talents would have fitted them much better for work of some other kind. Thus the retiring Cowper writes satire in the eighteenth century; or in the nineteenth a mystic and natural symbolist like George MacDonald is seduced into writing novels.'² As already indicated, R. L. Wolff also rejects the novels because they are poor examples of ordinary realist fiction. This attitude is but a crystallisation of the element of impatience which MacDonald's novels have always been capable of arousing in many, perhaps a majority of, readers, including, on occasion, the present writer.

For it has become a basic assumption, among general readers and many critics alike, that any work of fiction which appears to mirror the familiar space-time continuum is thereby a work of realism, and that such an activity is a defining feature of those works we call novels. The tie-up between the notions of 'realism' and 'the novel'

goes back to the eighteenth century at least, when one finds, for example, Clara Reeve making her well-known distinction between the novel and the romance:

The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. - The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. - The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses, of the persons in the story, as if they were our own.³

Yet it should be obvious to modern critics, as it has been obvious to many earlier readers, that MacDonald was not, 'when he perpetrated his stereotyped and banal characterizations, trying to write conventional realistic novels.'⁴ Even his most realistic, Alec Forbes, surely has the quality of romance with sufficient obviousness to prevent it being mistaken for a work of the same type as Middlemarch, or Trollope's novels. Furthermore, MacDonald was sufficiently explicit in his antagonism to the conventional (as I shall discuss below) to make one pause in assuming that his aim was conventionality in writing novels. Further yet, he will occasionally admit to the reader that he is not writing with strict realism, as when he makes Robert Falconer, ennobled by



love for Mary St John, buckle down to his studies as never before:

A strange way of being in love, reader? You think so? I would there were more love like it: the world would be centuries nearer its redemption if a millionth part of the love in it were of the sort. All I insist, however, on my reader's believing is, that it showed, in a youth like Robert, not less but more love that he could go against love's sweetness for the sake of love's greatness. (R F, Part II, Chapter 20, 'Ericson Loses to Win')

Here MacDonald asks his reader to swallow the improbable, a request he makes implicitly on many of his pages, a request which must be granted if his novels are to be read at all, and which, in my own experience at least, can be granted with surprisingly little demur. It seems to me that two conditions are necessary, however. The first is that the reader should be aware, at least dimly, and to have accepted, at least tacitly, that the work he is reading is not an attempt at a realistic novel, but is consciously intended to accommodate the exceptional, the heightened, and the improbable. Secondly, the improbable must not be stretched till it becomes the impossible, as it does for me when, for example, Gibbie receives the unexpected and painful blow to the head from Mr Sclater's slate thus: 'a smile of benignest compassion overspread his countenance; in his offender he saw only a brother' (S G, Chapter 43, 'The Minister's Defeat'). I recognise, of course, that opinion on what is improbable and what impossible may vary from reader to reader, and perhaps within each reader as his moods vary.

Within these boundaries, however, I think that MacDonald must be seen as writing in a mode which has some kinship with Clara Reeve's conception of romance. He used the term himself, not only of Phantastes ('a faerie romance') and Lilith, but also, more revealingly, of novels such as Castle Warlock ('a homely romance') and David Elginbrod (a 'romance, of the present day').⁵ Little as it is to go on, these last two examples both suggest that MacDonald was aware of a paradox in what he was creating, aware of going against convention in writing of the domestic, the commonplace, or the present in romance terms. It is not until a very late Scottish novel, Heather and Snow (1893) that we find 'a novel' on the title-page. This perhaps reflects MacDonald's awareness of the beginning of that process, now almost completed in the present day, whereby we have lost the use of the term 'romance' to designate those works which, while remaining within the bounds of the possible, press hard against the boundaries of what is normally considered probable. We no longer automatically use it of works which depart from the feel, the texture of 'real life' by means of an element of heightening, or intensifying, or simplifying in the treatment. We now glibly refer to such works as 'novels', but as we still associate the word with 'such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friends, or to ourselves', we tend to regard departures towards the bounds of probability as aesthetic weaknesses, or, while reading, we often

lose a sense of what does constitute everyday reality. Neither alternative is healthy, in our reading or in our living.

It would be clumsy were I to try to employ some general term other than 'novel' for the works under discussion: it has become the inevitable word. Nevertheless, it is clearly necessary to qualify it considerably in applying it to MacDonald's fiction, so I shall do so by exploring further two aspects of what MacDonald is trying to write in these works. This involves discussion of two words in particular, which have both already featured prominently in this chapter so far: 'the romance' and 'the real'.

That MacDonald's novels should still be rejected because they violate canons of realism in fiction is surprising, in that in recent years criticism of fiction in general, and certainly of the nineteenth-century novel, has recognised dimensions quite other than realism as substantial elements of fictional structure and meaning. One thinks of various treatments of the symbolism of Dickens - or of Scott, Conrad, even Jane Austen. The work of Stevenson, for long regarded as second-string because in its romantic way it seems far from dealing directly with the important issues of real (i.e. everyday) life, has been persuasively revalued and reinterpreted by Edwin Eigner as a symbolic treatment of psychological issues.⁶ The willingness to see and accept romantic and even melodramatic elements as vital and valuable parts of the blends of many nineteenth-century works is one of the refreshing features of the

critical age in which we live. No longer does the Victorian period seem so supremely the great age of realism in fiction, for romance claims with realism a position of considerable prominence. Indeed, one recent critic, Elliott B. Gose, Jr., has suggested that 'one of the triumphs of the novel as a literary form in Victorian times was to transplant the patterns of romance into a nineteenth-century setting.'⁷ More generally, another recent discussion of the novel as a genre consciously leaves out realism as an essential element:

Too many works which lie close to the center of our generic conception of the novel are not realistic in any strict sense. There is too much of the non-realistic or too little of the fully realistic in Fielding and Sterne, in Dickens and Thackeray, in Joyce and Melville and Twain and Faulkner for us to consider realism as anything approaching a central, never mind necessary, feature of the typical form of the novel.⁸

Nor is this attitude simply a reflection of some cunningly inventive twist of perspective adopted by ingenious twentieth-century critics, for even in the nineteenth century, there was no universal assumption that the novel had to be, above all, realistic. Researchers such as Kenneth Graham and Richard Stang, exploring the conflict of ideas and values which marked discussions of the novel in the second half of the century, give us plenty of evidence that realism was but one of several important criteria by which a Victorian novel could be judged, or to which it could attempt to adhere.⁹ The strains of Christianity, of romanticism and of sheer idealism current

in the age led many writers, critics and readers to look to fiction for something other than a narrative of minute fidelity to human experience and probability. Realism itself had its champions, of course, but even in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, when the realistic approach was most dominant, there were numerous qualifications of it in various quarters, as Graham describes.¹⁰ In the 1880s, the opposition between the two modes became more extreme and articulate, but when romance was specifically championed against the new realists in France and America, an opposition which had existed in modern prose fiction for more than a century simply became more intense. The strain which the novel form has always contained was expressed as clearly as one could hope by Hardy: 'The writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality.'¹¹

The preferences which could lead certain authors, critics or readers to favour the interestingly uncommon in their fiction were related to their notions of the functions of fiction, or of the natures of art and the artist. It was common to deplore the representation of the minutiae of everyday existence for reasons which bordered as much on the snobbish as on the aesthetic: the critic who complained of Gissing's account of a character having a nightcap as a 'detestable and gratuitous touch of realism...about the glass of spirits' preferred to avoid the texture of the everyday

as much as Andrew Lang sought the escapism of fiction with his 'More claymores, less psychology'.¹² It was clearly a common notion that the pleasure of fiction derived from its avoidance of the everyday and that, furthermore, the very value of fiction was related to such an avoidance. The notion of the literary artist, or poet, as seer could still be encountered, and the everyday, surface experience of mankind could be displaced by a concern with hidden spheres of greater interest or importance. Thus, Hardy could see fiction as a means to articulating the principles behind the surface flux, while Hawthorne sought to express psychological depths and complexities by means of deftly managed symbolism.¹³

It is to America that one first turns for a body of romance, the works of Hawthorne, Melville and Poe, to offset the still common notion of nineteenth-century realism, but Victorian Britain was also rich in novels which failed to restrict themselves to an everyday vision. Early in the century, gothic fiction and stories of romantic, escapist love were frequent. Scott, too, although rejected as a romancer by one recent writer on the mode, Gillian Beer, has been read as a writer of romance by generations of readers, and while it is right and necessary to insist on his realism, the romance remains.¹⁴ Of later great nineteenth-century novelists, it is common to see romance as an important element in the artistic make-up of Dickens, the Brontës and Hardy, and on a slightly lower rung we can point to Hogg, and Stevenson, Wilkie Collins and Charles

Reade. Below this there were clearly dozens of novelists, prominent in their day but below the horizon from the standpoint of the later twentieth century, whose work was, and was recognised as being, in the romance mode. Bulwer Lytton, John Shorthouse and Hall Caine might be named as specimens of this class. The romance element of serious Victorian fiction modulates easily, also, into various classes of fiction further removed from the mainstream: fairy-stories, ghost-stories, and novels for children proliferate, all showing the characteristic allegiance to something other than the everyday. The realism of George Eliot and Trollope, and the realistic strain which co-existed with the romantic in the works of so many others, was far from enjoying the isolated supremacy we imagine for it.

Dr Visser's article (see above) starts from the sensible acknowledgement of the difficulty of fixing the meaning of a term describing a literary genre and it should surprise no one that the term 'romance', when applied to nineteenth-century fiction, was used of, and has real relevance towards, a wide variety of different fictional experiences. The swash-buckling adventures of Stevenson, located in distant times and places, have to be placed beside The Moonstone, set in contemporary Yorkshire and London. The powerful emotionalism and subjectivity of Wuthering Heights clamours beside the care and high thematic seriousness of John Inglesant and the delicate explorations of Hawthorne. One can

say, however, that the romancer eschews the fantasist's severing of links with the familiar world but that his impulse is always towards an enlargement or intensifying of probable human experience, while the realist is dedicated to a vision of the common world of men. The romancer feels realism as imaginatively constricting: Hawthorne's famous preface to The House of the Seven Gables constantly refers to the latitude, the extension of choice and control which the writer of romance has when compared to the novelist. This latitude may allow for a greater range of merely aesthetic opportunity, as the preface implies, or it may better accommodate an awareness of dimensions or factors which are not adequately embodied in surface events, thoughts and words. The role of romantic writing in the nineteenth century as a medium for the articulation of hitherto unexpressed depths and complexities in human psychology is now well recognised: the gothic novel, and the prominent works of such writers as Hogg, Hawthorne and Stevenson have all been discussed in this way.

As I shall demonstrate, MacDonald's novels can also be seen as dealing with the hidden inner states of man, but for him, romance must draw aside not only a microcosmic veil, but a macrocosmic one, too. His sense of the universe as an expression of God clearly invites romance treatment. That it was a much scarcer romance subject may be due not merely to the scarcity of such a sense among the nineteenth-century novelists, but also to the sheer difficulty

of the task. Indeed, to sense the world about us as but a tiny aspect of an infinitely greater and unimaginable whole is a vision of reality so different from that underlying most other novels that one might expect a radically different literary form to be needed for its expression, and the more secure artistic success of MacDonald's own fantasies might seem to bear this out. But MacDonald's belief was that our world of time and space is an ineluctable presence not to be denied, however far short of the All it may fall (a favourite aphorism from Novalis was 'Unser Leben ist kein Traum, aber es sol und wird vielleicht einer werden' - 'Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will'): two economies co-exist about and within us, the limited and the ultimate, and his desire was to capture in fiction his awareness of this co-existence.

I suggest, therefore, that MacDonald can be helpfully located among the writers of romance in the nineteenth-century debate between realists and romancers. Nevertheless, I also think it helpful to consider the word 'realist' a little longer, and to apply it to MacDonald in the specialised sense it has carried in philosophy, a sense quite at odds with the way it is now normally used. Among theories of universals, those are called 'realist' which hold that a universal has a reality independent of any physical representative of that class. Realism in this sense is an outlook which asserts that there is a level of existence which not only transcends that

of the everyday world of the senses, but which orders that everyday world, which in turn depends upon the higher level of true reality. Theories which are opposed in view to this outlook are nominalist, implying that universals are merely class names, and denying that there are levels of existence beyond or above that of the material world. A writer of this persuasion, therefore, can imitate reality only by imitating the everyday world.

MacDonald is normally treated, by critics such as Wolff and Reis, as if he were of a nominalist outlook: they expect, it seems, all novelists to be nominalists. But MacDonald regularly refers to a level of existence beyond the mundane as constituting the truly real:

That a thing must cease takes from it the joy of even an aeonian endurance - for its kind is mortal; it belongs to the nature of things that cannot live. The sorrow is not so much that it shall perish as that it could not live - that it is not in its nature a real, that is, an eternal thing. (Orts, p. 61)

Earlier in the same essay, he has defined 'real life' in terms of a mode of existence which partakes of the ultimate independence: 'By real life, I mean life which has a share in its own existence' (Orts, p. 45).

The letters, too, contain evidence of this same outlook: 'May you and we be real, and so grow into the fulness of the Real! That

which is in God alone exists, and alone can become ours'.¹⁵
The quotation from his letter to Lord Mount-Temple (see above, p. 14) explicitly applies this outlook to his fiction: MacDonald's concern is with the truly real, not with the unreality of everyday probability. This last he regards as unreal; hence, I suggest, the extent to which he was drawn to literary forms which reject mimesis, such as the dream and the fairytale.

But for clumsiness, I should adopt the terms 'realist novel' and 'nominalist novel' to distinguish between what MacDonald is doing in these works under discussion, and what most modern novelists mimetically strive for. As it is, however, it should be sufficiently clear that I regard MacDonald's 'novels' as being both 'romances' and 'realist novels' in the senses I have outlined.

Does this mean, therefore, that I have entirely abandoned fidelity to the probable and to the everyday as a value in judging MacDonald's novels? To do so would be to risk obliterating any fundamental distinction between them and the fantasy writing, and would also run counter to the instincts and desires of most readers of fiction. Worst of all, it would be to deny much of what is both present and entertaining in MacDonald's Scottish novels. For they contain much which is 'realistic', as the term is normally understood, and many of my detailed comments will be in praise of mimetic success, as found in his Scots dialogue, in the truth of his portrayals of small Scottish communities, or in the psychology

of such a relationship as that between Robert Falconer and his grandmother.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that very few of MacDonald's characters actually run counter to realism, however much we may feel that many of them are primarily formed from the conventions of the fairy-story, or the melodrama, or just from MacDonald's own prejudices and imagination. Of the leading characters, only Gibbie Galbraith represents a complete abandonment to the impossible; otherwise MacDonald's impossibilities are merely episodic, as in the instance, mentioned above, of Robert Falconer's behaviour while in love. Thus even characters who at first sight seem to be willful inventions of a mind steeped in fairy-stories - characters such as Mrs Catanach and the mad laird in Malcolm - prove on closer examination to be grounded in a social reality. Mrs Catanach's status as witch is firmly based on her mere personality and disposition, and inflated by the reactions to her of the peasant minds among which she lives; only occasionally does MacDonald resort to hocus-pocus, as when she pretends to be communicating, from her home in Portlossie, with Florimel who is trapped in the ruins of Colonsay Castle (M, Chapter 40, 'The Deil's Winnock'). Similarly, the mad laird, dwarfish, hump-backed and not fully sane, seems a wild fruit of MacDonald's imagination, but he is doubtless due to MacDonald's personal

observation of the high incidence of both physical and mental deformity which is a result of the in-breeding of the fisher communities of the North-East of Scotland.

It is true that some of MacDonald's characters are far more realistic than others. Thus, we might say, Thomas Crann in Alec Forbes and Mrs Falconer in Robert Falconer are much closer to the everyday than Mrs Catnach and the mad laird are. There is a spectrum underlying MacDonald's range of characters, a scale of different proportions of the mimetically real and the romantic. There is no doubt that a newcomer to MacDonald's fiction will feel more immediately at home with the patently realistic, but ultimately the aesthetic success of a character does not seem to me to be due simply to its position on such a scale. I find, rather, that the crucial factor which determines the success or failure of a character is its vitality, a vitality which has not so much to do with lifelikeness as with imaginative liveliness. Success depends, it seems to me, on the degree of imaginative involvement which appears to have gone into the character's creation. The question is, are MacDonald's characters imaginatively potent, or are they thin? In turn, this is primarily a question of MacDonald's success in inventing for them behaviour and circumstances which have the vitality of variety. Also, MacDonald must involve them in interactions with their social and physical environment which are entertaining, arresting, and harmonious with the conception of the character which MacDonald

has granted them, however eccentric that may be. In other words, do they seem to be the products of MacDonald's imagination at its most alert and inventive, or do they become familiar and predictable too rapidly?

It is by these criteria that characters such as Mary St John and Eric Ericson (both in Robert Falconer) seem to me to be weak, despite the basic realism of their treatment. They are dull because too little is asked of them in terms of behaviour or inner complexity. On the other hand, Beauchampin Alec Forbes, whose villainy is patently melodramatic, has an attractive energy and resourcefulness, the ability to function as a character in a variety of settings and circumstances, which make him, for me, a success, despite his stockness. (For a more extended discussion of Beauchamp, see below, pp. 175-178).

Perhaps Gibbie Galbraith is the most significant example of my general point here. As I discuss extensively in Chapter Four, Gibbie is clearly designed to be an unrealistic figure in a humanly realistic environment. I think he fails as a character, but he comes close to success, and that closeness is due to the fertile inventiveness which MacDonald lavishes on him and his story. Indeed, I believe that his failure has to do with the fact that he is based purely on an idea: in his case, the question of whether he is a realistic or unrealistic character is irrelevant, because he is barely a character at all. That MacDonald comes as close to success as many readers seem to think he does in Gibbie's case is an indication,

I suggest, of the power of MacDonald's creative imagination to persuade the reader of the imaginative truth of his characters, however improbable.

2. MacDonald's Literary Allegiances

If my discussion in the previous section has any validity, it is clear that MacDonald's approach to fiction was among the most original and unusual in the nineteenth century, whatever his success in that approach may have been. As he was such a distinct and, indeed, isolated figure among the novelists of his own day, it is natural for us to enquire what his literary roots were, that could lead to such idiosyncratic results. If he was not, ultimately, part of that ever more powerful striving after mimesis which characterises the most notable fiction of his day, where did his literary allegiances lie? We find that the answer to this question is, broadly: in various areas of poetry of a visionary kind, and in certain areas of prose which tend away from mimesis and towards poetry. He was drawn, in fact, to types of poetry and narrative in which the everyday world is either shunned or transmuted. This is not to say that he was unaware of other types of literature and literary ideal; this was far from being the case. Nevertheless, it is notable how prominent, in the literature to which he refers and which can be seen influencing him, is material of a non-mimetic

kind. An exploration of this material serves both to define and partially explain MacDonald's work; it supplies him with a context which the Victorian novel, as it is normally understood, fails to do. In the following discussion, I group this material in terms of national origin.

It is one of the great virtues of Robert Lee Wolff's book that he stresses firmly the importance of German Romantic literature as prominent among the influences upon MacDonald's life and work, and that he goes so far as he does in introducing this area of literature to his English-speaking readership. An extensive reading of MacDonald's work itself would swiftly confirm his enthusiasm for this area of literature, for explicit references, especially to Jean Paul, Goethe and, above all, Novalis, are constantly made. Beyond this, one can readily trace the relationship between various formal characteristics of MacDonald's work and the narrative and fictional modes favoured by his German predecessors. Many of MacDonald's works, for example, fall into the bildungsroman form. Similarly, the general influence of the kunstmärchen, as Wolff points out, is directly and obviously behind the various fairy and fantasy stories: I suggest, also, that its presence can be felt in the Scottish novels, and contributes to the particular flavour of their romance.¹⁶ Furthermore, MacDonald's willingness to break the flow of his main narrative with inserted short stories (often supernatural) and with verse is licensed by the practice of Goethe, Novalis and others.

Behind such superficial marks of kinship we can postulate MacDonald's response to the essential characteristics of belief, outlook and temperament which mark much of the writing of the German Romantics. Their yearning to encounter truths beyond those of the material world, their committed idealism of outlook, their faith in art as a means whereby that truth can be revealed, their instinct to apply a romantic vision not just to art but to philosophy, science, and religion, the powerful strand of religious revival in Novalis, especially - all these things combined to form a response to life and to art with which MacDonald's temperament was in great sympathy. Praver's summary swiftly leads us very close to the world of MacDonald's work, and especially to the world of his Scottish novels:

The most characteristic art of German Romanticism transports reader, viewer and listener to a frontier between the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible. Something transcendent shines through everyday reality, something ineffable (and often frightening) through those scenes of German country or city life which are depicted with increasing realism in the course of the period.¹⁷

Novalis was his avowed mentor among the ranks of the German Romantics: in addition to his intensely Christianised form of Romantic outlook, MacDonald was clearly indebted to his desire to raise that which is familiar and everyday into the realm of the unfamiliar and the mysterious - to transmute the commonplace in an act of 'romanticizing'. As Novalis expressed it, 'By giving a high meaning to what is ordinary, a mysterious aspect to what is

commonplace, the dignity of the unknown to the familiar, a semblance of infinity to the finite, I romanticize it'.¹⁸

Novalis regarded der Roman as a central means of achieving this, and his concept of this term stays clear of what is now normally thought of as 'the novel': 'That Novalis does not regard the Roman as a realistic imitation of everyday life is evident from a note that compares it with "an English garden": "Every word in it must be poetic. No plain nature (keine platte Natur)".¹⁹ Also, MacDonald's instinct for symbolism and allegory must have been stimulated by Novalis's elaborate conception of the world as a vast store of meanings, with a bewildering network of interconnectedness available to the poetic mind:

Novalis' creative philosophy functions on the basis of encouraging a constant motion between concrete images and abstract ideas, and continually translating from one idiom to another. The operation of transforming things into thoughts and thoughts into things implies a curious flexibility of mind, the capacity to entertain analogies between highly divergent orders of experience. For Novalis, analogical thinking is a process of unending metaphorical development.²⁰

Crucial, then, as was the artist in Novalis's eyes, art was vehemently not an end in itself, but a means to a romantic sense of life in its totality: 'Novalis saw the Romantiker as a person whose business it was to experience life poetically, as romance, and to create a literary expression of this experience'.²¹

In addition to these general aspects of relationship between MacDonald and these earlier German writers, we can point to two

instances in which crucial narrative patterns, carrying a deal of meaning in their locations in MacDonald's fictions, are found in obvious German sources. The first three Scottish novels are all built on the pattern neatly encapsulated in the famous little märchen which Novalis inserted into The Disciples at Sais, the story of the questing Hyazinth and his Rosenblüte, who is both his commonplace beloved and also Isis, the goal of both his erotic and philosophical yearnings. M. H. Abrams sees this as a particularly good example of what he calls 'a recurrent pattern in German literature at the turn of the nineteenth century', namely the educational journey from childhood, into painful experience, and on to the better grasping of the truths encountered in childhood.²² There can be no doubt that this märchen was MacDonald's model; its climactic two sentences are used as a chapter-motto for the last chapter of David Elginbrod, and its climax is the subject of the painting discussed by Malcolm and Lenorme in The Marquis of Lossie. A second common type of story pattern in the later novels is well summed up by the surely autobiographical account ascribed to a story-telling hero, Wilfred Cumbermede. The final comment both suggests and complicates the idea that its source lay in German literature:

My favourite invention, one for which my audience was sure to call when I professed incompetence, and which I enlarged and varied every time I returned to it, was of a youth in humble life who found at length

he was of far other origin than [sic] he had supposed. I did not know then that the fancy, not uncommon with boys, has its roots in the deepest instincts of our human nature. I need not add that I had not yet read Jean Paul's Titan, or Hesperus, or Comet. (WC, Chapter 10, 'I Build Castles')

The Germans are the principal continental writers lying behind MacDonald's writing, but we catch occasional glimpses of an acquaintance with others, who, more often than not, confirm his visionary idealism. Thus, in Heather and Snow, we are startled to find Kirsty Barclay passing the hours with Plato's Phaedo (H & S, Chapter 14, 'Steenie's House'). The same chapter also contains a reference to Dante, a writer of whom elsewhere he writes warmly, 'His books will last as long as there are enough men in the world worthy of having them' (ABNW, Chapter 10, 'At the Back of the North Wind'). Well attested, too, is MacDonald's fascination with Boehme.²³ In the light of all this, it is something of a surprise to read Ernest Rhys's first encounter with him, when MacDonald, in stage armour and waiting to go on as Mr Greatheart, was found passing the time with a novel: 'The book, I noticed, was a French yellow-back, possibly a Balzac novel?'.²⁴

If his response to German literature played a large part in shaping his literary sensibility, an equally large part was played, more predictably, by several areas of English literature. His reading was voluminously extensive, and testimony to this can be found throughout his work, though especially, perhaps, in the

chapter-mottoes in Phantastes and David Elginbrod, and in England's Antiphon. It is clear, however, that two general periods were of especial appeal to him, namely the Renaissance literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the work of the Romantics. Shakespeare, of course, was an enduring joy and example to him. One of MacDonald's stylistic characteristics was his habit of utilising Shakespearean phrasing, without quotation, in the normal flow of a paragraph: his words, like those of the Bible, had become part of MacDonald's normal lexical coinage. Two of the essays in A Dish of Orts are devoted to him, and MacDonald published an interesting edition of Hamlet (1885). Rather more unusual was his predilection for poets of Shakespeare's day. Sidney, a poet of whose work MacDonald also produced an edition, was a great favourite both as a man and as a writer. Similarly, his great contemporary, Spenser, had an immense effect on MacDonald's imagination, and on his literary practice. While following the standard Romantic line in despising allegory as a mechanical mode while revering symbolism, MacDonald was still capable of responding to what he called 'the wonderful allegory' of Book I of The Faerie Queene, and of structuring a lot of his own fiction in a way which we must call allegorical.²⁵ These two writers appealed to him on perhaps three counts in particular: his assessment of Spenser as 'a Christian gentleman, a noble and pure-minded man, of highest

purposes and aims' really expresses how he saw both men; their largest works, Arcadia and The Faerie Queene, are rambling romances with the sort of narrative appeal he loved; and, thirdly, their neoplatonism coincided with his own sense of 'otherness'.²⁶

Perhaps even more idiosyncratic was MacDonald's knowledge and love of seventeenth-century English verse. This area provides the centre of England's Antiphon, in which he gives a picture of the period which must have been striking in its day. Especially notable, in hindsight, is the prominence and understanding of the treatment of Donne. Once again, it is the urgent religious reference in the poetry of the period which appeals to him, and its neoplatonism. More than thirty years ago, Coleman Parsons suspected a link between MacDonald and Henry More.²⁷ MacDonald's familiarity with More is demonstrated in England's Antiphon, but it would be wrong to single him out as the only seventeenth-century figure with especial meaning for MacDonald. Bunyan, for example, also greatly influenced him. In itself, an enthusiasm for Bunyan would seem in no way to set MacDonald apart from countless other devout Victorians, even though his work is a constant reference in MacDonald's writing, and also the family had their production of The Pilgrim's Progress as a substantial presence in their lives. Several other factors, however, can be offered as suggesting that The Pilgrim's Progress would have appealed especially deeply to MacDonald, and as encouraging us to see it as a prominent model behind his fiction. Two salient

aspects of it chime uncommonly well with MacDonald's outlook: it is the classic English expression of the metaphor of the journey to God, and it is cast in the form of a dream. Furthermore, it is a great allegory and despite some statements in which MacDonald expresses hesitations about the mode, I believe he was an instinctive allegorist. In addition, the humble origins and the persecution of its author could well have made him yet more sympathetic to MacDonald, who partly saw himself in the same mould.

In general, I believe that the religious, mystical, allegorical and Platonist writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had an influence on MacDonald's thought and writing which has been insufficiently recognised. In many ways, it provided a body of ideas and attitudes which were echoed in the doctrines and values of the Romantics whose heir MacDonald is normally seen as being. I suggest, however, that these earlier writers were substantial influences upon him in their own right, and that reference to them is at least as valuable in making sense of MacDonald's singularities as is reference to more nearly contemporary writers.

Nevertheless, much in MacDonald's notion of the artist as a seer, and many of the attitudes and themes we find in his novels, are to be related to the English Romantics, with Wordsworth (for MacDonald) at their head. Both Byron and Shelley are frequently mentioned in his work, while Greville MacDonald, seeking to account for Lilith, tells us of the extent of his father's knowledge of

Blake.²⁸ Wordsworth, however, is the poet of the early nineteenth century who most looms over MacDonald's work, for in common with so many others of his generation, MacDonald regarded him as more than a poet, a manipulator of words. To MacDonald, he was 'the high priest of nature', while nature is 'the flowing forth of [God's] heart, the flowing forth of his love of us, making us blessed in the union of his heart and ours' (Orts. p. 247). MacDonald begins his essay on 'Wordsworth's Poetry' with the statement that 'the very element in which the mind of Wordsworth lived and moved was a Christian pantheism' (Orts. p. 245). In MacDonald's mind, Wordsworth was among the highest rank of poets because of his insight into God's truth, and his ability to convey it to a reader. The Wordsworthian influence is to be felt powerfully, especially in MacDonald's earlier writings, in which childhood and nature feature prominently as blessed things, and even in the later essay, 'A Sketch of Individual Development' (1880), Wordsworthian ideas and expressions permeate (Orts. pp. 43-76). To MacDonald, poems such as The Prelude, Tintern Abbey and, perhaps especially, the Immortality Ode, contained true and penetrating analyses of human growth. As in so many other instances, (his views of Shelley, and of Hamlet, are other examples) MacDonald's notions of Wordsworth and his works were heavily modelled on his own prejudices and assumptions, and he often imputed to the older poet a more specifically Christian vision than the poems themselves define: MacDonald could

not conceive that Wordsworth could mean anything even slightly different from this.

Nevertheless, we cannot underestimate the power of MacDonald's response to a poet who seemed to give expression to insights of universal truth and importance, and to do so not just in spite of a concomitant fidelity to the world of ordinary people, but precisely as a result of that fidelity. 'He saw God present everywhere; not always immediately, in his own form, it is true; but whether he looked upon the awful mountain-peak, sky-encompassed with loveliness, or upon the face of a little child, which is as it were eyes in the face of nature - in all things he felt the solemn presence of the Divine Spirit' (Orts, p. 247). A little later, he compares Wordsworth's treatment of everyday reality with that of most novelists:

In most novels, for instance, the attempt is made to interest us in worthless, commonplace people, whom, if we had our choice, we would far rather not meet at all, by surrounding them with peculiar and extraordinary circumstances; but this is a low source of interest. Wordsworth was determined to owe nothing to such an adventitious cause. [He then quotes 'The Reverie of Poor Susan'] Is any of the interest here owing to the circumstances? Is it not a very common incident? But has he not treated it so that it is not commonplace in the least? (Orts, pp. 261-262)

In England's Antiphon, it is true that he acknowledges Coleridge as a great influence on much that he finds valuable in Wordsworth, and regards him as outdoing the latter in some respects. 'There is

little of a directly religious kind in his poetry; yet we find in him what we miss in Wordsworth, an inclined plane from the revelation in nature to the culminating revelation in the Son of Man.²⁹ Despite this, it is Wordsworth whose presence is more powerfully felt in MacDonald's writing, and who can be felt influencing the themes, the forms and the feeling of so much of his fiction from David Elginbrod (where he is extensively conjured up) onwards.

By now, MacDonald's relationships with German and English Romantic writers are well known, and regularly touched upon in discussions of his work. Surprisingly (in view of both his avowed nationalism and of the substantiality of his fictional treatments of Scotland) very little attempt has been made, so far as I know, to relate him to earlier Scottish writers. He was indeed aware of his Scottish predecessors, but, once again, the pattern of substantial influence is not the one we might have expected. We find that his idealistic and visionary impulses lead him to an affinity with writing which has not usually been regarded as forming the main tradition of Scottish letters. Thus a general influence from Burns and Scott can be taken for granted, to a certain extent, especially as they and their work are occasionally referred to in the Scottish novels. Beyond this, however, it is difficult to discuss a more specific indebtedness to them, a conclusion which causes one some initial surprise. It is easier, however, to relate MacDonald to

a handful of less well-known Scottish predecessors.

James MacPherson is not the earliest of these I wish to mention, but MacDonald was a firm believer in the genuineness of his Ossianic forgeries, regarding them as true specimens of Scottish verse from the third century A.D. Thus, he quotes from Ossian, as from many other poets, in a chapter-motto in David Elginbrod (Book II, Chapter 3, 'Euphrasia'). More explicitly, he creates an opportunity to expand upon his general belief in Ossian, as Hugh Sutherland and Margaret Elginbrod develop their acquaintanceship. The thoughts are given to Hugh, but are surely MacDonald's own.

'Margaret,' he said, as they stood waiting a moment for the cart that was coming up to be filled with sheaves, 'what does that wind put you in mind of?'

'Ossian's Poems,' replied Margaret, without a moment's hesitation.

Hugh was struck by her answer. He had meant something quite different. But it harmonized with his feeling about Ossian; for the genuineness of whose poetry, Highlander as he was, he had no better argument to give than the fact, that they produced in himself an altogether peculiar mental condition; that the spiritual sensations he had in reading them were quite different from those produced by anything else, prose or verse; in fact, that they created moods of their own in his mind. He was unwilling to believe, apart from national prejudices (which have not prevented the opinions on this question from being as strong on the one side as on the other), that this individuality of influence could belong to mere affectations of a style which had never sprung from the sources of real feeling. 'Could they,' he thought, 'possess the power to move us like remembered dreams of our childhood, if all that they possessed of reality was a pretended imitation of what never existed, and all that they inherited from the past was the halo of its strangeness?' (DE, Book I, Chapter 11, 'A Change and No Change')

In Malcolm, he has Duncan MacPhail beguile Florimel with tales, legends and songs "come down," he said, "from Ossian himself" (M, Chapter 29, 'Florimel and Duncan'). And in a letter, he is able to report that his own enthusiasm seems to have swayed the doubting Tennyson:

What do you think he borrowed? A splendid copy of the Gaelic Ossian, which I bought at Uncle's sale, that he might read the prose Latin translation, which seems to be a literal one. He had never believed Ossian was a reality, but seemed a good deal more ready to believe in him when he had read a few lines, with which he was delighted.³⁰

What did MacDonald find in Ossian, which we can see being transmuted into his Scottish novels? He found a heroic world, in which the deeds and attitudes of men and women take on a vast, epic significance. He found a poetic narrative composed of individuals in a wide landscape, a condition towards which his own fiction usually tends. He found, as so many had done before him, an image of natural man, an image which portrayed man as heroic, valiant, chivalrous, loving, emotional. The concept of Gaelic as the language of nature, and, consequently, the concept of those who speak it as being more natural, more true to their own human essence, is put forward humourously in Malcolm (Chapter 6, 'Duncan MacPhail'), but the humour does not entirely negate the idea. It is hard to believe, also, that MacDonald did not respond to Ossian's own status as son of the supremely matchless Fingal, a status which could be taken as a correlative, not only of MacDonald's own sense

of his relationship with his father, but also of his sense of himself (with the rest of mankind) as the child of the heavenly father. Furthermore, he encountered in Ossian himself one who was both bard and warrior, a double condition to which MacDonald himself aspired. Ossian's presence in his own poems as a character, transcending the function of pure narrator, may well have encouraged a tendency which I note below as a feature of MacDonald's novels, namely his use of them as a means of presenting himself to the reader. Closely related to this last point, MacDonald must have responded favourably to a literature which purports to arise directly from the conflicts and processes of life itself: in Ossian, an aesthetic intention appears to be firmly balanced by a commemorative and truth-telling one, and the implied raison d'etre is the spontaneous need of the bard to give voice to an utterance which both contains, preserves and articulates truth. As we shall see, this is close to MacDonald's concept of the nature and function of art.

In addition to these generalisations, which admittedly retain an element of speculation, one can point to various incidents or types of episode in the Scottish novels which seem to owe a considerable debt to Ossian. Especially important are the various supernatural warnings and revelations which come to MacDonald's characters in dreams: one thinks of Falconer's dream of his own ancestry (RF, Part I, Chapter 17, 'Adventures'), the dream-

revelations in Castle Warlock, and Donal Grant's mother's sense of Lady Arctura's danger (DG, Chapter 72, 'Sent, Not Called'). These have their counterparts in, for example, Ossian's vision of his wife Evirallin, who warns him that their son Oscar is in danger, and also in the visions Ossian and Oscar experience in Cathlin of Clutha. In general, Ossian will have confirmed MacDonald's belief that the dead are still to be communicated with; and also his belief in the visionary instincts, and the instinct to perform the right and needful action, which he saw as belonging to man's natural state.

Less conjectural is MacDonald's acquaintanceship with one of the Ossianic poems, Oina-Morul, for it is from this that he selects his chapter-motto in David Elginbrod. The motto records the emotional and truth-telling power of a maiden's song over the susceptible Ossian:

Soft music came to mine ear. It was like the
rising breeze, that whirls, at first, the thistle's
beard; then flies, dark-shadowy, over the grass.
It was the maid of Fuarfed wild: she raised the
nightly song; for she knew that my soul was a stream,
that flowed at pleasant sounds.

This incident not only parallels the effect of Euphra's singing on Hugh Sutherland's feelings, but typifies MacDonald's general sense of how the best of humanity have souls that are streams, that flow at pleasant sounds, whether musical or poetic or both. Furthermore, this poem has two crucial narrative elements which

reappear prominently in MacDonald's work, namely the maiden who is destined for someone other than the hero or narrator, and the hero's positive acceptance of this fact, as in Anodos' exclamation, 'Well, if he is a better man, let him have her' (Ph, Chapter 17).

The other Scottish novel which I have indicated above as directly suggesting MacDonald's belief in MacPherson's work is Malcolm, in which the character of the blind piper must be partly based on Ossianic conventions. Thus, Duncan not only combines powerful capacities for music, poetry and violence, but is also gifted with second-sight. Furthermore, in his late reappearance in The Marquis of Lossie, Duncan brings with him the 'ubi sunt' theme which is yet another hallmark of MacPherson's work. MacDonald describes the old man returning to Glencoe:

There he found indeed the rush of the torrents and the call of the winds unchanged, but when his soul cried out in its agonies, they went on with the same song that had soothed his childhood; for the heart of the suffering man they had no response. Days passed before he came upon a creature who remembered him; for more than twenty years were gone, and a new generation had come up since he forsook the glen. Worst of all, the clan-spirit was dying out, the family type of government all but extinct, the patriarchal vanishing in a low form of the feudal, itself already in abject decay. The hour of the Celt was gone by, and the long-wandering raven, returning at last, found the ark it had left afloat on the waters dry and deserted and rotting to dust. (ML, Chapter 55, 'The Wanderer')

The second Scottish writer I wish to mention as having contributed to, and reinforced, MacDonald's ideas and literary practice is William Drummond of Hawthornden. Drummond's contribution is far less idiosyncratic than that of MacPherson's Ossian, in that several of the English poets of the earlier seventeenth century must have influenced MacDonald in a similar fashion and to a similar degree. Nevertheless, it is valuable to highlight the Scottish poet, here, for his religious verse illustrates with especial clarity those themes and values in the verse of the period with which MacDonald's writing has a particular kinship.

The evidence of MacDonald's knowledge of Drummond is in the chapter-motto to the tenth chapter of David Elginbrod, 'Harvest', and in the four pages he devotes to him in England's Antiphon. The motto, six lines from Drummond's 'An Hymne of the Resurrection', is also quoted in England's Antiphon, and is based on the image of the growing seed which MacDonald uses himself so frequently throughout his own writing. It epitomises one of the types of relationship between Drummond's work and MacDonald's, for one can find several similar instances of Drummond's poetry containing images which were also favoured by the novelist. Thus in one of the sonnets quoted in England's Antiphon we find the line 'A Saviour there is born more old than years', which foreshadows many examples of MacDonald's association of Christ-likeness with a combination of age and

youthfulness - above all, in the Old Man of the Fire, 'the oldest man of all', whom Tangle, in The Golden Key, discovers to be a playing child. The fire, there, is partly a pentecostal fire, a fire of love like that which revives the ailing king in The Princess and Curdie (Chapters 31-32); this notion, too, is prefigured in Drummond, who writes of

A Love which while it burnes
The Soule with fairest Beames,
In that uncreated Sunne the Soule it turnes,
And makes such Beautie prove,
That (if Sense saw her Gleames?)
All lookers on would pine and die for love.
('An Hymne of True Happinesse', ll 97-102)³¹

Similarly, MacDonald's imagery of the shadow, especially prominent in Phantastes and Lilith, is called to mind by Madrigall i ('The Permanencie of Life') of Drummond's Flowres of Sion:

Life a right shadow is,
For if it long appeare,
Then is it spent, and Deathes long Night drawes neare...
(ll 1-3)

Furthermore, the duality which I find in MacDonald's allegories of nature (see below, Chapter 5, pp. 416-423) is matched by Drummond's image of a being which seems divine from the human point of view but which, sub specie aeternitatis, is a limited, material force:

Low under them, with slow and staggering pace
Thy hand-Maide Nature thy great Steppes doth trace,
The Source of second Causes, golden Chaine

That linkes this Frame, as thou it doth ordaine;
Nature gaz'd on with such a curious Eye
That Earthlings oft her deem'd a Deitye.
(*'An Hymne of the Fairest Faire'*, ll 181-86)

Such instances of similarity are superficial, however, in comparison with the relationship of outlook between the two writers, visible when one takes account of the tendency of Drummond's religious verse as a whole. The similarities are striking, even though MacDonald does not choose to dwell upon them in his brief account of the poet in *England's Antiphon*, where his stress is on the song-like qualities of Drummond's verse. 'Through the greater part of his verse we hear a certain muffled tone of the sweetest, like the music that ever threatens to break out clear from the brook, from the pines, from the rain-shower, - never does break out clear, but remains a suggested, etherially vanishing tone. His is a voix voilée, or veiled voice of song.'³²

Nevertheless, it is in Drummond's dedicated neoplatonism that the real affinity between the two writers lies. His vision of the truth of things is based on a clear hierarchy of the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and the eternal. The juxtaposition of the two is a perennial theme of his religious poetry, as it is everywhere in MacDonald's fiction. Drummond associates the higher of the two regions with the domain of mind, and values it supremely, to the ultimate exclusion of the contemptible earthly:

Once did this World to mee seeme sweete and faire,
While Senses light Mindes prospective keep blind,
Now like imagin'd Landskip in the Aire,
And weeping Raine-bowes, her best Joyes I finde:
Of if ought heere is had that praise should have,
It is a Life obscure, and silent Grave.
(Sonnet iv, 'Worlde's Joyes are Toyes', ll 9-14)

His Flowres of Sion, however, are the products of 'mindes prospective' once it has attained to clarity; as we shall see in Chapter Five, MacDonald, using different language, expresses a similar notion of the mind's capacity to respond to the divine. And just like MacDonald, Drummond at different points in his writings juxtaposes, with his contempt for the world, a seemingly paradoxical valuing of the world as a means to God, of whom it is an expression. Thus, he not only writes a sonnet, Sonnet vi, entitled 'The Booke of the World', but, in a later sonnet (xxiii) has this response to a nightingale's song:

What Soule can be so sicke, which by thy Songs
(Attir'd in sweetnesse) sweetly is not driven
Quite to forget Earths turmoiles, spights, and wrongs,
And lift a reverend Eye and Thought to Heaven?
Sweet Artlesse Songstarre, thou my Minde dost raise
To Ayres of Spheares, yes, and to Angels Laves.
('To a Nightingale', ll 9-14)

Two other emphases occur in Drummond's verse, which foreshadow important tenets of MacDonald's writing. One is the Christian assessment that death is better than life - a belief upon which MacDonald memorably builds in the oft-quoted statement of the Old Man of the Sea, in The Golden Key, that death is only more life.

Here is Drummond's Sonnet xxvi, 'The Blessednesse of Faithfull
Soules by Death':

Let us each day enure our selves to dye,
If this (and not our Feares) be truely Death;
Above the Circles both of Hope and Faith
With faire immortall pinniones to flie?
If this be Death our best Part to untie
(By running the Jaile) from Lust and Wrath,
And every drowsie languor heere beneath,
It turning deniz'd Citizen of Skie?
To have, more knowledge than all Bookes containe,
All Pleasures even surmounting wishing Powre,
The fellowship of Gods immortall Traine,
And these that Time nor force shall er'e devoure?
If this be Death? what Joy, what golden care
Of life, can with Death's ouglinesse compare?

The other frequent emphasis in Drummond's religious work is on the idea that the human soul is on a homeward journey to its creator. As an example, here is Sonnet xiii, 'For the Prodigall', a re-telling of Christ's parable which encapsulates much of the meaning of MacDonald's first two novels, David Elginbrod and Alec Forbes, in particular:

I Countries chang'd, new pleasures out to finde,
But Ah! for pleasure new I found new paine,
Enchanting pleasure so did Reason blind,
That Fathers love, and wordes I scorn'd as vaine:
For Tables rich, for bed, for frequent traine
Of carefull servants to observe my Minde,
These Heardes I keepe my fellows are assign'd,
My Bed a Rocke is, Hearbes my Life sustaine.
Now while I famine feele, feare worsor harmes,
Father and Lord I turne, thy Love (yet great)
My faults will pardon, pittie mine estate.
This, where an aged Oake had spread its Armes,
Thought the lost Child, while as the Heardes hee led,
Not farre off on the ackornes wilde them fed.

The idea of heaven as home, and of the natural tendency of the human mind to travel from earthly things to heavenly, is as frequent in the earlier as it is in the later writer.

Finally, in reading Drummond, one notes how he has an inevitable tendency towards the allegorical. One finds it in the lines on the seed, quoted twice by MacDonald as we have seen; it lurks in such a poem as the one just quoted; and it bursts forth in the ambitious attempt to write of 'the Nature, Attributes, and Workes of God', his 'An Hymne of the Fairest Faire', from which MacDonald quotes the last fourteen lines. In this work, we find God's attributes personified in a series of characters, Youth, Might, Truth, Providence, Justice, Love, and several lesser figures. Such an example can be placed along with the better-known allegories of Spenser and Bunyan, as a model and encouragement for MacDonald's own allegorical practice.

The last Scottish predecessor whom it seems valuable to discuss here is James Hogg, 'the Ettrick Shepherd'. That he held a special place in MacDonald's estimation is indicated, above all, by the reference to him in At the Back of the North Wind, where he is coupled with Dante himself as giving us a vision of heaven. MacDonald quotes fourteen lines of 'Kilmeny', and clearly values it as a poem of religious vision (an interpretation which has been rediscovered for the twentieth century by Douglas Mack).³³ The other hard evidence of MacDonald's special interest in Hogg is in George MacDonald and his Wife, where Greville is discussing his

father's beginnings as a poet during his student days. 'He appears to have written poetry more or less throughout these Aberdeen years. Some was copied into a book for his cousin Helen MacKay, along with The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner, portions of Shelley's Wandering Jew, and extracts especially from such poets as Mrs Hemans, James Hogg, Tom Moore and Stoddart.'³⁴ Clearly, Hogg appealed to him from an early age, but before going on to explore the details of his influence, it is worth pointing out the strong possibility that, in part, the very idea of Hogg struck a chord in MacDonald's imagination. Far more than Burns, Hogg, with his few months of formal education, accords closely with the notion of the untaught peasant of genius, a concept dear to MacDonald. Furthermore, Hogg was clearly more of an outsider than Burns, as regards polite society in Edinburgh, a figure of rustic awkwardness who surely lies behind the account of Donal Grant's reception in Aberdeen, for example (see SG, Chapter 46, 'The Girls').

It is Hogg's poetry that we know to have been revered by MacDonald; his response to Hogg's tales is much more conjectural. Let us examine then, first of all, what MacDonald seems to have taken from Hogg's verse, or would have found sympathetic in it. 'Kilmeny', and MacDonald's comments upon it, provide the basic clue: he responds to Hogg's work in that it moves beyond the ordinary world of men to regions which can only be approached in special circumstances, or by special faculties. When Hogg says, of the land to which Kilmeny

was taken, 'The land of vision it would seem,/And still an everlasting dream' (ll 50-51), MacDonald acknowledges the subjectivity of the statement, without thereby dismissing it: 'The last two lines are the shepherd's own remark, and a matter of opinion' (ABNW, Chapter 10, 'At the Back of the North Wind'). (In Mack's edition, the last line is given as 'A still, an everlasting dream'). He must have welcomed the later statement that 'now she lived in the land of thought' (l.170), an emphasis which recalls Drummond's frequent neoplatonic stress on the power of mind. Other details in the poem, reminding us of patterns or ideas particularly associated with MacDonald's writing, include the rainbow motif on the couch on which Kilmeny finds herself (ll 63-64), the bathing in the stream of life (ll 128-31), and the suggestion of an endlessly ascending hierarchy of levels, with earth as the lowest part of heaven:

O, never vales to mortal view
Appeared like those o'er which they flew!
That land to human spirits given,
The lowermost vales of the storied heaven;
From thence they can view the world below,
And heaven's blue gates with sapphires glow,
More glory yet unmeet to know. (ll 158-64)

Hogg's other great poem in The Queen's Wake, 'The Witch of Fife', is nowhere mentioned by MacDonald, so far as I know, but it would be a matter of some surprise were he not to have been influenced by it, too. Its comedy sets it far apart in mood from 'Kilmeny', but it is nevertheless based upon a similar juxtaposition

of the commonplace and the otherworldly. In some ways, it is closer still to what we find in MacDonald's fiction, because the relationship between the two domains does not depend on abandoning the everyday world: the supernatural powers and activities of the witches transform the commonplace itself, just as MacDonald strives to do. Both poems suggest that contact with the otherworldly draws the subject away from contentment with the everyday, but while the wonders of heaven, as encountered by Kilmeny, have a certain haziness so that their appeal depends, to a considerable extent, on the music of Hogg's verse, the earth-enclosed marvels of the witches have a vividness to which an equal verbal music is an extra, despite its potency:

'He set ane reid-pipe till his muthe,
And he playit se bonnilye,
Till the gray curlew, and the black-cock, flew
To listen his melodye.

'It rang se sweet through the grein Lommond,
That the nycht-winde lowner blew;
And it soupit alang the Loch Leven,
And wakinit the white sea-mew.

'It rang se sweet through the grein Lommond,
Se sweetly butt and se shill,
That the wezilis laup out of their mouldy holis,
And dancit on the mydnycht hill.

(ll 49-60)

Furthermore, the pull of the supernatural in 'The Witch of Fife' has an extra power because it is psychologically credible. The witch's satisfaction is derived from the vigorous freedom and

excitement of her journeys, and from the sexual fulfillment they provide; the auld man is drawn to participate, despite his original denunciations, by the prospect of a debauch which surpasses, both in quantity and quality, anything that his daily life can offer. This poem shows, in greater detail than 'Kilmeny', the power of an impulse towards a realm of uncommon fulfilment. Like Hogg, MacDonald loved the supernatural, and includes several witch-like characters in his fiction; he would have responded both to the diabolic beauty with which nature is treated in this poem, and to the comedy of the poem, a quality which frequently marks his own writing (see below, pp. 209-212). Again, too, one is tempted by possible resemblances of detail. The bathing which transforms the witches (ll 117-20) is an echo of a motif already touched on as regards 'Kilmeny'. The account of the old man in bird-like flight, too, is interesting:

His arms war spred, and his heide was hiche,
And his feite stack out behynde;
And the laibies of the auld manis cote
War wauffyng in the wynde.

And aye he neicherit, and aye he flew,
For he thochte the ploy se raire;
It was like the voice of the gander blue,
Whan he flees throu the aire.
(ll 305-12)

Could this have contributed to Mr Raven in Lilith, whose appearance approximates both to that of an old man, and a bird?

Before leaving these two poems, it is worth pointing out that the two bards to whom Hogg gives them, approximate to important features of MacDonald's own concept of the poet and teacher. Thus the eighth bard is a visionary, and closely in accord with nature - an Ossianic figure, in fact:

He deemed that fays and spectres wan
Held converse with the thoughts of man;
In dreams their future fates foretold,
And spread the death-flame on the wold...
At evening fall, in lonesome dale,
He kept strange converse with the gale;
Held worldly pomp in high derision,
And wandered in a world of vision.

Of mountain ash his harp was framed,
The brazen chords all trembling flamed,
As in a rugged northern tongue,
This mad unearthly song he sung.
('Night the First', ll 21-24, 31-38)

The last six lines, especially, contain several details which suggest MacDonald's vision of himself. So does the account of the thirteenth bard, like the eighth a visionary hermit, but also, one notices, a rebel from orthodox religious practice:

Well versed was he in holy lore;
In cloistered dome the cowl he wore;
But, wearied with the eternal strain
Of formal breviats, cold and vain,
He wooed, in depth of Highland dale,
The silver spring and mountain gale.
('Night the Second', ll 9-14)

A third major poem of Hogg's which it is worthwhile to stress here is 'Superstition', which articulates many of the beliefs and

associations which underpin Hogg's writing, and with which MacDonald must have agreed. The poem is a lament for the defeat of the superstitious by the rational outlook. Hogg laments the loss on account of the imaginative vitality and beauty to which superstition gave rise in the peasant mind, on account, also, of its being part of what was distinctive and unique in the peasant outlook, and because of its encouragement of healthy, and true, religious impulses.

Thou sceptic leveller - ill-frame with thee
Is visionary bard a war to wage:
Joy in thy light thou earth-born Saducee,
That earth is all thy hope and heritage:
Already wears thy front the line of age;
Thou see'st a heaven above - a grave before;
Does that lone cell thy wishes all engage?
Say, does thy yearning soul not grasp at more?
Woe to thy grovelling creed - thy cold ungenial lore!

Be mine to sing of visions that have been,
And cherish hope of visions yet to be;
Of mountains clothed in everlasting green,
Of silver torrent and of shadowy tree,
Far in the ocean of eternity.
Be mine the faith that spurns the bourn of time;
The soul whose eye can future glories see;
The converse here with things of purer clime,
And hope above the stars that soars on wing sublime.
(11 10-27)

Like Hogg, MacDonald valued all instances in which men seemed to be in contact with the supernatural, so that his attraction to ghosts and the second-sight were part of his total religious sensibility. In this poem, Hogg takes the same stance.

One cannot prove a close relationship between Hogg's prose fiction and MacDonald's, although there is the occasional tantalising detail. Thus, in the tale of Lord Gernon, in Malcolm, we find the following which is very reminiscent of The Three Perils of Man (or The Siege of Roxburgh, as MacDonald may have known it). Robert the Bruce has been complained to, on account of the spiriting away of a girl by the necromancer of Lossie House. 'That righteous monarch immediately despatched a few of his trustiest men-at-arms, under the protection of a monk whom he believed a match for any wizard under the sun, to arrest Lord Gernon and release the girl' (M, Chapter 27, 'Lord Gernon'). The central action of Hogg's novel is the embassy of border fighting-men and the friar-magician (later revealed as Roger Bacon himself) to the feared wizard Michael Scott.

Similarly, one of Hogg's tales in particular, 'Welldean Hall', contains a cluster of small details which seem to find echoes in MacDonald. Thus, a prominent character is called Gibby Falconer, while a less important one, a highland gaoler called Malcolm, first appears on a page which has a reference to 'Clan-Khattanich' (compare Mrs Catanach in Malcolm), and has a style of highland English which is very close to Duncan's in MacDonald's novel.³⁵ Furthermore, the tale contains a ghost who is associated with a particular book in the library (compare Mr Raven in Lilith) and who is the ghost of a sinful ancestor (like the old captain in

Castle Warlock); it also has a bibliophile who receives a terrific shock in the library (like Cupples in Alec Forbes), and a crucial document and sum of money left, for a rightful owner, in the book guarded by the ghost (like Annie Anderson's bank-note willed to her in the minister's bible). The ghost, too, talks as MacDonald was inclined to think, informing its hearers that 'I am now in the true world, and you still in the false one'.³⁶ All in all, one is tempted to see this as in some sense one of MacDonald's sources, although final certainty does not arise from these details.

One feels more certain if one takes into account the general similarities between Hogg's fiction, taken as a whole, and MacDonald's; then one is on firmer ground. As with Hogg's poetry, we find in his tales the regular juxtaposition of the commonplace and the otherworldly, whether in the form of ghosts, or the peasant belief in fairies and omens, or in striking natural events which are viewed as the intervention of Providence. The commonplace, furthermore, is a specifically humble, rural and Scottish commonplaceness, treated with an insider's natural familiarity which must have helped and encouraged MacDonald considerably. In addition, we can perhaps detect a similar handling of character and event, in relation to social and topographical setting, in the work of the two writers. Like MacDonald's, Hogg's stories are of essentially ordinary individuals, variously and copiously located in each work

of fiction, and powerfully and strikingly interacting in narratives of melodramatic action which frequently border on the unbelievable. (Hogg's regular resort to folk-tradition and to hearsay confirmation of these improbabilities is the counterpart of MacDonald's various tactics in sanctioning the improbable, as discussed throughout this thesis.) The social context for these characters and their adventures is clearly known intimately, but is less prominent than the yet wider context of nature itself, especially in its more striking, awesome and dangerous aspects. This is a balance similar to what we find in MacDonald, despite the clear success of his small-town communities in his earlier novels. It is towards Hogg's balance of striking human affairs set in a dramatic landscape, with an interposed environment of a thinly but surely drawn rural society, that MacDonald's fiction tends.

A few more details will help substantiate the kinship. Could MacDonald, whose work is regularly described as straddling a boundary between the real and the visionary, have failed to respond to Walter Laidlaw's account of his journey home, which was not just to a location, but to a way of feeling and seeing?

'I fand I was come again into the country o' the fairies an' the spirits,' said Walter; 'an' there was nae denying o't; for when I saw the bit crookit moon come stealing o'er the kipps o' Bowerhope-Law, an' thraw her dead yellow light on the hills o' Meggat, I fand the very nature an' the heart within me changed.'³⁷

Also, there is in Hogg a marked proneness to striking, occasionally bizarre, physical violence, which seems to foreshadow MacDonald's occasional outbursts of surprising action, such as Alec's assault on Cupples at the door of the brothel (AF, Chapter 74), and even the shocking cutting of Sambo's throat in Sir Gibbie (Chapter 8, 'Sambo'). The physical horror of this last is matched by such a detail as this from Hogg, of a man struck by lightning.

When they came to the green hollow, a shocking spectacle presented itself: There lay the body of their master, who had been struck dead by the lightning; and, his right side having been torn open, his bowels had gushed out, and were lying beside the body.³⁸

In the same tale, 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope', there is an account of a sudden storm and flash flood which could well be one of the sources of MacDonald's floods, especially those in Sir Gibbie and What's Mine's Mine. Similarly, MacDonald's early personal experiences of deadly snowstorms would have been joined by Hogg's various accounts to help produce MacDonald's numerous fictional examples.

Finally, without wishing to suggest that it is a firm source for MacDonald, one can still point to such a tale as Hogg's 'The Woolgatherer', which contains various details which remind one of MacDonald, and which suggests how the two writers are closely related practitioners of the same tradition of robustly melodramatic fiction.³⁹ Its characters include an oppressive, snobbish mother,

an idealised heroine who is also the destitute orphan of a poor man, and a lost heir, all of whom can be readily paralleled in MacDonald. Its action depends upon a secret marriage which is eventually revealed during the final unravelling, as in Malcolm. The lost heir is cared for by one who is thought of as a parent (as Duncan is believed to be Malcolm's grandfather) but who is really a secret guardian. A crucial scene is that of an outcast being welcomed into the household of a Scottish peasant, as Gibbie Galbraith is. As often in Hogg, characters show a belief in fairies, but the overriding stress is on God's providence, and his care for men. Such a tale, I believe, amounts to a concentrated illustration of the way in which MacDonald's style of narrative is foreshadowed, and very possibly influenced, by Hogg.

Thus, I believe that MacDonald not only turned to the major models in German and English literature as he created his own idealistic and visionary novels, but was also able to find in the work of Scottish predecessors several more diverse examples of writers who had not allowed themselves to be hampered by the need to be faithful to a mundane normality. Ossian, Drummond and Hogg, each in a distinct way, showed how literature could attempt to handle a vision which went beyond rationalism and materialism.

3. The World of Matter in MacDonald's Novels

MacDonald's temperamental idealism was thus fed and confirmed by a rich array of idealistic literature and, as we have seen, he deliberately and insistently incorporated, in his novels, characters and attitudes of an idealism which he acknowledged as impossible by mundane standards: he aimed at suggesting a higher, a better, reality. His novels, however, also face out on to the mundane plane, and the converse of his idealism is a placing of, a judgement upon, the mundane values and outlooks to be found within it. A general discussion of the sort of novel he writes, therefore, must also sketch his critical attitude towards the earthly, a critical attitude not only implied by his formal refusal to be constricted by it, but embodied in a number of ways in which he more positively expresses dissatisfaction with it. One means he adopts to lead men to God is to encourage them to a dissatisfaction with their familiar earthly existence, to persuade them to dislodge the material world from its position in their minds as the supreme, or only, reality.

MacDonald down-grades the things of this world with tireless regularity. His concern is with anything which is merely of the earth, or which clogs the progress of the individual towards contact with God. His vision of the variety of such impediments is considerable, ranging from the material possessions predictably mistrusted by a Christian, to those outlooks and beliefs which obscure or contradict his own Christian doctrines. Such outlooks

include the rationalistic, unspiritual beliefs he associated with the previous century, but also what he saw as mistaken, malformed versions of Christianity, such as the Calvinist sense of a wrathful rather than a loving God. He regarded all such outlooks as materially tainted, earthbound, creations of man's mind rather than of God's revelation. With something of the fervour of a Blake, he mistrusted the human reason and its products: hence his trusting in types of truth-tellers, seers blessed, such as children, peasants, humble old men and women, and 'fools', rather than in more established embodiments of wisdom.

At this point, one might admit that there seems an inevitable discrepancy between MacDonald's valuing of the unsophisticated outlook, and the sophisticated, knowledgeable articulacy of his own mind and works. The discrepancy is closely related to the even wider discrepancy between his most extreme love of the inchoate, his belief that reality is nearer to the world of dream than to the ordered, scientifically predictable world we call the real world, and the necessity, from which he cannot escape, to impart a degree of order, meaning, interpretation in his writing. This theoretical objection regularly breaks through to the details of his fiction, in that he often makes his heroes or moral exemplars triumph in the truth by means of their superiority of logical demonstration: they win arguments. Yet MacDonald is not thereby committed, by accident as it were, to rationalism. For example, if one examines one of

his most clear-cut, set-piece argumentative contests, that between Donal Grant and Sophie Carmichael in Donal Grant, Chapter Forty-five, 'A Last Encounter', one finds that though the hero wins by a logic and knowledge which enables him to expose the illogicalities of his opponent, he still strikes us as a representative of the simple-minded and the unsophisticated winning against received, educated opinion. This is primarily because the foundation for his logic, namely his uncomplicated, human conception of the father-child relationship between God and man, is naively straightforward beside the mysteries and moral conundrums of Miss Carmichael's stance:

God's mercy is infinite; and the doctrine of Adoption is one of the falsest of false doctrines. In bitter lack of the spirit whereby we cry Abba, Father, the so-called Church invented it; and it remains, a hideous mask wherewith false and ignorant teachers scare God's children from their Father's arms.

Furthermore, neither here nor elsewhere does MacDonald fall into the trap of showing an intellectual defeat produce, by itself, a change of heart (a cliché which had real meaning for him): 'Miss Carmichael was intellectually cowed, but her heart was nowise touched. She had never had that longing after closest relation with God which sends us feeling after the father'. It is noteworthy, too, that at several points in the discussion, body-blows from Donal take the form of verbal plays, or of a better grasp of language than

his opponent can muster. Under a beech tree, they discuss the nuts for which nature seems to have no use, although Donal insists they may still be needed in a way humans cannot perceive:

'But you must admit that some things are lost!'

'Yes, surely!' answered Donal. 'Why else should he come and look till he find?'

The tables are turned here because Donal has a more flexible, more imaginative and poetic sense of the pivot-word than his more strictly reasoning opponent, a mastery which reappears a little later when he is able to give a more accurate translation of a doctrinally crucial Greek word. A love and mastery of words and literature is one of the attributes most frequently ascribed by MacDonald to his simple truth-bearers.

Two individual instances from the Scottish novels might be mentioned here as further illustrations of the multitude of ways in which MacDonald's fundamental abhorrence of a rational, mechanistic vision of the universe is expressed. In Malcolm, the titular hero, working on the estate of the marquis of Lossie, encounters an eighteenth-century folly, a grotto in which a mechanical figure of a hermit rises to meet anyone who enters. The horror with which Malcom contemplates the device is insufficiently explained even by the suddenness of the gruesome encounter, and MacDonald is clearly intending the model to embody the purely materialist vision of man as a mechanism forever bounded by earth, by the grave:

The moment, therefore, Malcolm stepped in, up rose a pale, hollow-cheeked, emaciated man, with eyes that stared glassily, made a long skeleton-like stride towards him, and held out a huge bony hand, rather, as it seemed, with the intent of clutching, than of greeting, him. An unaccountable horror seized him; with a gasp which had nearly become a cry, he staggered backwards out of the cave. It seemed to add to his horror that the man did not follow - remained lurking in the obscurity behind. In the arbour Malcolm turned - turned to flee! - though why, or from what, he had scarce an idea.
(M, Chapter 44, 'The Hermit')

It is interesting to compare this concrete, symbolic representation of MacDonald's view of rational man (and his portrait of Malcolm's father, whose mental world is symbolised by the mechanical hermit) with A. O. J. Cockshut's summary of the 'characteristic early Victorian view of eighteenth-century man. He is polished, gentlemanly, heartless and false. For the early Victorians, as for the Romantics, lack of heart, lack of natural feeling, is the ultimate transgression. Any form, any custom, any constitutional principle must be informed with living faith and love; otherwise it was merely, in Carlyle's words, that he loved to apply both to the French and English eighteenth century, "buckram" or "sham"'.⁴⁰

More explicit is the account of the sadness of the boy Cosmo Warlock when he loses the pleasure of the mystery of the source and nature of the stream which flows by Castle Warlock, as his books tell him of the rain cycle. The notion of infinity gives way to a knowledge of the earthbound circle of which the stream is a part:

He became aware that he had lost the stream of his childhood - the mysterious, infinite idea of endless, inexplicable, original birth, of outflowing because of essential existence within. There was no production any more, nothing but the merest rushing around, like the ring-sea of Saturn, in a never ending circle of formal change!

(CW, Chapter 1, 'Castle Warlock')

MacDonald describes the stream as having been 'deathened' for Cosmo, now that he has been denied the glory and the dream of his less factual, less material vision: but where for Wordsworth the visionary gleam had been the gift of a merely psychical dimension of man, for MacDonald the Wordsworthian childhood vision was a means to literally religious truth. Cosmo's loss of the stream's intimations of infinity is a real loss of contact with God, and the religious imagery with which MacDonald's Romantic predecessors expressed their notions takes on, in his hands, an explicitness and firmness of significance. For MacDonald, the world which is not imaginatively perceived is dead because God is no longer described in it. This stance is different from that of so many Victorian writers only in the degree of Christian colouring with which it is imbued, but the placing of the issue in a specifically religious context enables it to be dealt with in a spirit of a crusade, and with a clarity, an obviousness of reference to the lives of ordinary men and women which could seldom be achieved by better, more profound writers.

This is instanced by my last example, Alexander Graham's pulpit

success in the drabbest of environments, an obscure London nonconformist chapel, in which the spirit of his vision overcomes the most depressing and depressed circumstances. The prevailing metaphor of the chapter is that of a knight of romance sallying forth to fight a dragon - here allegorised by MacDonald:

'Here I am,' he said to himself, 'lance in hand, spurring to meet my dragon!'

Once when he used a similar expression, Malcolm had asked him what he meant by his dragon; 'I mean,' replied the schoolmaster, 'that huge slug, The Commonplace. It is the wearifulest dragon to fight in the whole miscreation. Wound it as you may, the jelly-mass of the monster closes, and the dull one is himself again - feeding all the time so cunningly that scarce one of the victims whom he has swallowed suspects that he is but pabulum slowly digesting in the belly of the monster'.

(ML, Chapter 27, 'The Preacher')

The image well conveys the vigorous aggression which MacDonald saw that his multifarious enemies required. The aggression is typical of MacDonald, and will be dealt with below. Here, I am concerned with the object of aggression, the 'huge slug, The Commonplace'. By this expression, MacDonald meant to include everything to which it can normally refer, for this Christian heir of the Romantics saw the commonplace as residing in the perceiving vision, not in the thing perceived. As already made clear, MacDonald saw the commonplace vision as related to the mere growth into adulthood and to adherence to a materialist philosophy, but he also associated it with more specific, practical and morally charged

emanations of a materialist outlook such as those in which acquisitiveness and class-consciousness dominate. His books are full of undesirable shop-keepers and merchants, of time-serving ministers and nonconformists whose primary interest has become the financial rather than the religious health of their chapel, of foolish or cruel noblemen, or ladies who fail to achieve the truly lady-like because they have only the trappings of position. MacDonald ferociously attacks a whole gallery of characters whose conduct, sometimes grotesque, is the result of adherence to the values of the world, and which he at times despises not only because they are commonplace but because he regards them, in a powerful instance of inverted snobbery, as common. Those possessed of the child-like, knightly, romantic vision, and who form their conduct upon it, are the true aristocrats. Thus, his thrusts at the unimaginative worldliness of his readers often take the form of calling 'common', characters who would, in real life, regard themselves as above the common herd - characters of a superior or aristocratic type with which the readers of romance were, and are, in the habit of identifying, and thus the charge is made not only against the characters, but passed on to the reader with a soft spot for creations of this type. Thus, for example, the sisters who develop into the heroines of What's Mine's Mine are presented without flattery at first:

They were criticizing certain of the young men they had met at the said ball. Being, in their development, if not in their nature, commonplace, what should they talk about but clothes or young men? And why, although an excellent type of its kind, should I take the trouble to record their conversation? To read, it might have amused me - or even interested, as may a carrot painted by a Dutchman; but were I a painter, I should be sorry to paint carrots, and the girls' talk is not for my pen.

(WMM, Chapter 3, 'The Girls' First Walk')

Here, MacDonald is very explicit about the attitude he adopts both to the commonplace in life and to the commonplaceness of literary ideals and practices which allow, or advocate, the reproduction of such matter. That he feels that a total aesthetic principle is at stake is suggested by his reference to the domestic realism of Dutch painting, a reference which makes the passage seem like a deliberate rejoinder to a metaphor commonly adopted by those advocating realism in the Victorian novel. (The best-known instance of the comparison between realism in the novel and in painting occurs in Chapter Seventeen of Adam Bede.)

MacDonald not only regarded empirical reality as inferior because it is solid and earthbound, however: he also seems to downgrade the world we think we live in by an opposite belief, in its insubstantiality. For another romantic belief he makes very much his own is the likening of the world, and of human life, to a dream - something evanescent, spurious and insignificant. The difficulty of discerning any divine, benign plan in experience is clearly put by one of his most harried heroes, Cosmo Warlock:

'I was almost as ill-off,' he said to himself,
'when I sought work the first time, yet here I am -
alive and after work again! It's like going on and
on in a dream, wondering what's coming next!'
(CW, Chapter 53, 'Help')

Here, the dream-like quality of human experience is very clearly related to what is painful and unideal: to the Victorians, the alternative to a vision of a benign universe is chaos. But it is only due to man's limitations that the pattern cannot be discerned, and a dream-like chaos is therefore to be trustfully welcomed, as preferable to a comprehensible order which is, per se, inadequate and mistaken as a version of the truth of things. An acceptance of the chaotic, the fragmented, the dream-like is a necessary first step, a needful fragmentation of the inadequate ordered universe revealed by our senses and minds in isolation, before a better, deeper, wider, truer grasp of the truth of things can be built up. Thus, one of MacDonald's recurrent aims is to encourage us to feel human experience as a dream, to attain a strange and uneasy vision which is related to the old religious insistence on the worthlessness and transience of the earthly, but which outflanks the old view by making that rejection a reinterpretation, rather, which points more clearly and firmly to a possibility of contact with God and his truth. MacDonald's version, in other words, is more positive than the negative rejection of other prophets.

But if life is dream-like, then so too is art, for another facet of German Romantic thought which bore upon MacDonald was the notion

of poetry as creative dreaming, especially as this is a notion particularly associated with two of the Germans to whom he refers most frequently, Novalis and Jean Paul.⁴¹ The free play of the mind, untrammelled by exterior restraints (though developed to a natural, inner rectitude), is one of MacDonald's most powerful preferences: hence his stress on the cultivation of the imagination, his descriptions of characters acting automatically or subconsciously, and his frequently naive portrayal of the truth of dreams. His faith is that when man abandons some of the conscious, rational control over his own mental operation, God will step in, and the result will be his. That he regarded the creation of art as an aspect of this type of process is clear from his reiterated insistence that 'one difference between God's work and man's is, that, while God's work cannot mean more than he meant, man's must mean more than he meant' (Orts, p. 320). Agreeing that critics ascribe significance to Shakespeare's plays beyond what their author calculated, he says, 'Taking this assertion as it stands, it may be freely granted, not only of Shakespere, but of every writer of genius. But if it be intended by it, that nothing can exist in any work of art beyond what the writer was conscious of while in the act of producing it, so much of its scope is false' (Orts, p. 141). Not that MacDonald advocated an art in which rules and craftsmanship were to be abandoned, any more than another heir of those early German Romantics, Richard Wagner, did when he made Sachs, his master of the craft of song-composition, insist that 'all Dichtkunst und

Poeterei/ist nichts als Wahrtraumdeuterei'.⁴² (All poetry and versification is nothing but true dream interpretation). At no important point in his writing does MacDonald imply, or envisage, a complete abandonment of man's earthly limitations: the limitations of the human consciousness can never be completely shrugged off, and man, as he now is, cannot be free of imperfections. Thus even the two fantasy novels end on a return to our own world, and the Scottish novels portray movement across the frontier of the empirical and the ideal without finally abandoning the former for the latter. Hence, MacDonald never finally advocates, or attempts, the creation of uncontrolled fantasies.

Thus, MacDonald seems to envisage reality as at once solid and dreamlike, and art as a means to a double kind of truth, which resides both 'here' and 'beyond'. The key to the reconciliation of the paradoxes in MacDonald's outlook is to be found, however, not in the observed but in the observer. For MacDonald is heir to the Romantics in the yet further sense that he saw the human mind as itself contributing to the apprehension of reality. The inner state of the individual is a creative element in the encounter with what is. Here, too, a Romantic doctrine chimes in with a centuries-old Christian notion: coming to God involves, indeed requires, a transformation of a man's inner world. MacDonald was being true to both of his principal mental inheritances as he sought to mould the outlook of his readers, to induce them to look about them in a different way.

It is not so much that he believed reality to be a dual (or multiple) entity in itself. Rather, he believed man has the capacity, though it requires development, for a dual (or multiple) vision. When Curdie cannot see Irene's grandmother in the attic, it shows the limitations of his vision, not the limitations of her reality (P & G, Chapter 22, 'The Old Lady and Curdie'). All that is needed is for him to improve, which he does later in the story. Similarly, Hugh Sutherland returns to Turriepuffit and to Margaret with new eyes for their meaning and importance to him.

Here, obviously, is the significance to MacDonald of the Hyazinth and Rosenblüte märchen: the hero develops the capacity to respond to the everyday as magical. The glorious 'other' realm to which we think we want to escape is around us now: what is needed is a change within us, not one in our surroundings. Thus, in the novels, his attempt is to induce us to see the empirical world in a new light - as the place for which we yearn in our imaginations, as a place both familiar and other. He tries to detach his reader from a secure sense of contact with the everyday, not just so as to start him thinking of a new world, but to get him to think newly about the old. MacDonald's impulse is to render the familiar less so, and to make his reader less easily satisfied with its familiarity: he wishes to make the natural world seem more attractive, profound and important, but to do so by presenting it as the visible surface of a reality which rises far above the merely natural.

4. 'I would not write novels if I could not preach in them'

The creation of ideal characters, and the explicit down-grading of the natural world as it is commonly perceived are extremely important methods used by MacDonald to communicate his ideas and values to the reader, but they are not the only ones. In several other crucial ways, his novels depart from what were becoming the orthodoxies and the decorum of the form - they depart, that is, from the Jamesian view of what constitutes the art of fiction, a view many of the elements of which were already current at the time MacDonald was writing. I believe that not only was MacDonald fully aware of this, but also that he accepted and welcomed his aesthetic unorthodoxy as a counterpart of his doctrinal originality.

Two statements of his which have come down to us concerning his practice as a novelist have an area of contradiction and were made, presumably, in different moods, but they both suggest how deliberately he set about writing novels with specialised goals. One writer, W. Garrett Horder, reminiscing about his contacts with MacDonald, remembers him declaring, 'I would not write novels if I could not preach in them'.⁴³ Against this, there is Ronald MacDonald's account of a conversation with his father:

Once I asked him why he did not, for change and variety, write a story of mere human passion and artistic plot. He replied that he would like to write it. I asked him then further whether his highest literary quality was not in a measure injured by what must to many seem the monotony of his theme -

referring to the novels alone. He admitted that this was possible; and went on to tell me that, having begun to do his work as a Congregational minister, and having been driven...into giving up that professional pulpit, he was no less impelled than compelled to use unceasingly the new platform whence he had found that his voice could carry so far.⁴⁴

In communicating the truth, he was clearly selecting a type of novel which avoided 'mere human passion and artistic plot': both statements imply a conscious refusal to write with more normal aesthetic aims. Our assumptions as to what is required of a good, or at least an adequate novel, are so deep within us as to constitute unarticulated instincts: MacDonald's violations of these instincts (for 'realism', for the avoidance of too obviously primitive construction or too blatantly controlled event-sequence, for the minimum of authorial 'preaching', whether direct or indirect, etc.) thrust themselves at us, and proclaim their rationale with concomitant power. The violation of what is commonly held to be the novelist's art is an effective means of advertising MacDonald's outlook, as generations of review and critical comment bear witness.

An important general technique is his adoption of a narrator's stance and tone which is so individual as to make the reader feel in contact with MacDonald's own personality. Even now, when critics such as Wayne Booth have made us very conscious of the differences between historical author, implied author, and narrator, it is hard not to feel that the living George MacDonald is addressing the reader of his pages face to face. We may still feel suspicious, on turning

to Greville MacDonald's life of his father, to find that his picture accords so closely with the sense of the man derived from the novels, but we have also the testimony of another son, Ronald, that 'there has probably never been a writer whose work was a better expression of his personal character'.⁴⁵ Be that as it may, the illusion of an unusual directness of utterance in the novels, of a peculiarly close identity of author and narrator, is marked. And as such, MacDonald's narrator is notably different from the narrators of certain other, standard Victorian novels, of whose authors J. Hillis Miller has written:

The characteristic work of each of these novelists comes into existence when he chooses to play the role not of a first person narrator who is an actor in the drama, and not even the role of an anonymous storyteller who may be identified with an individual consciousness, but the role of a collective mind.⁴⁶

Discussing Meredith, Hardy, Dickens, George Eliot and Trollope, Professor Miller describes them as, each in his way, isolated from the community for which he wrote and which he portrayed, yet imaginatively joining with that community by the adoption of the particular 'collective' stance, as described in the quotation. And while a degree of individuality is nevertheless likely to persist in the narrative of nineteenth-century novels, Professor Miller's description seems widely applicable. For present purposes, it seems unnecessary to decide whether the initial isolation Professor Miller ascribes to his six novelists is true of all notable writers of fiction in the century, but it is obviously a formula with clear

relevance to MacDonald. Despite his eventual acceptance as a member of the London literary establishment, we can point to several crucial factors which could have contributed, and in some cases undoubtedly did, to such a feeling, and that is without resorting to Freudian speculation about the impact of the early loss of his mother. His gloom and capacity for depression in his student days, his hatred of his tutorship during his first year in London, the proud sense of Scottishness which never left him, his rejection from the Arundel charge and all the subsequent friction caused by the unorthodoxy of his religious views, the difficulty he always had in finding a place in society which would afford him a secure living, the regular banishment to warmer climates to bolster his poor health, the high degree of critical rejection of his novels, his alienation from the materialism of the age, his powerful inverted snobbery and inferiority complex, even the residual Calvinism which fostered his sense of his own election to the role of prophet and allowed him to sustain his public role of holy man - all these things contributed to making him the natural outsider that he was, despite the large number of estimable friends upon whom he could count.

But the crucial point is that this alienation was not, in MacDonald's case, transmuted into the collective consciousness which Professor Miller describes in the books of his prominent contemporaries, but was made, rather, an essential element in the narrator's personality which MacDonald adopted. And this standpoint not only proclaimed

itself at odds with the normal fictional practice and outlook of the age but, it seems, actually was so at odds, at least in terms of what was normal fictional practice. MacDonald's status as outsider not only influenced the content of his novels, but their form as well, so that they strove to manipulate their readers into a sense of a new and unfamiliar relationship with normality.

As is already clear to the reader, MacDonald's novels attempt to combine a variety of elements which tend not to fuse in an aesthetic unity. In the first place, he wishes to use the medium to preach. As against this, he is also purporting to render his sense of reality, which includes both a physical and spiritual dimension. Immensely subjective, this vision has its source and sole being in the mind of George MacDonald, and the presentation of the vision is thereby an inevitable portrayal of that mind. A reality comprising two dimensions of being is filtered through MacDonald's consciousness before it enters our own. MacDonald is attempting to dissolve the two elements and recreate a single unity out of them. And he himself is the crucible in which this takes place; or, to change the metaphor, he is the screen on which two slides are superimposed and, viewing them, we take in, not only the combined picture but the screen, without which the images would not exist, as well. MacDonald knows, as it were, that he is a palpable presence in his fiction, in any case, and therefore does not hesitate to state, or 'preach', his own thoughts and values.

Furthermore, one can see his novels as designed to communicate his personality for its own sake, not just so as to reconcile conflicting elements within them or to provide a pulpit for his ideas. In part, this is an element, in the range of entertainment the novel can provide, which was frequently recognised and appreciated in MacDonald's time, at least by those readers prepared to defend authorial intrusion. Just as there were many readers prepared to turn to 'Thackeray' or 'Trollope', as encountered in their novels, as surrogate acquaintances, or even friends, so there were many prepared to respond to MacDonald in the same way. On top of this aspect of the relation between reader and embodied author, however, is the type of personal impact a Victorian essayist with a palpable design on his reader (a Carlyle, say, or an Arnold or a Newman) could strive for. John Holloway's The Victorian Sage alerts us to how a writer could create an assenting following among his readers by making them believe in him, trust him - by creating a sense of his own attractive, sympathetic, powerful or trustworthy personality, so that the reader is won heart and soul, not just intellectually.⁴⁷ Holloway opens a section of his chapter on Newman thus:

'Who could resist the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St Mary's, rising into the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music - subtle, sweet, mournful? I seem to hear him still -'. This is how Matthew Arnold describes what it was like to encounter the physical presence and speaking voice of Newman, and the same 'ineffable sentiment' of Newman's presence, which to Arnold made him seem irresistible,

is sustained through his books by several telling things. There is the impression gained from what he says of the frame of mind in which he approached his subject, and that too of the frame of mind in which he approached his reader or audience; and these are important partly for their own sakes, and partly because they influence the frame of mind in which readers or audience approach his subject and him.⁴⁸

MacDonald's character-types, settings, styles, themes and values are so characteristic as to be unmistakable to anyone who has sampled his work, and to these intrinsic elements which go to create his fictional personality there is, as already mentioned, the frequency with which the reader is directly addressed. My purpose here is to point out that the powerfully present personality of the author can be seen as a deliberate and controlled feature of the design of these books, and that MacDonald, in communicating himself as a means of communicating his ideas and outlook, was employing a freely available technique of the age.

And over and above the presence of great literary and didactic contemporaries whose technique in this he could strive to match there was, for MacDonald, a yet higher example of a teacher who communicated by impinging his whole personality on the taught, instead of manipulating the pupil's mind. In the New Testament, Christ is frequently shown winning over converts by personal contact, and it is one of the oldest Christian traditions that his personality, his human reality, is to be encountered by later ages in the four gospels. From the countless examples of this notion in MacDonald's

writing, here is the account of the religious teaching Gibbie receives from the peasant woman, Janet Grant:

So, teaching him only that which she loved, not that which she had been taught, Janet read to Gibbie of Jesus, talked to him of Jesus, dreamed to him about Jesus; until at length - Gibbie did not think to watch, and knew nothing of the process by which it came about - his whole soul was full of the man, of his doings, of his words, of his thoughts, of his life. Jesus Christ was in him - he was possessed by him.

(SG, Chapter 23, 'More Schooling')

So it was not vanity in MacDonald to present himself to his reader in the manner of a Christ; rather, he was hoping that the Christ which he believed to be within himself would, by personal contact, bring out the Christ within his readers, just as he found himself influencing so many of those with whom he came into contact in the course of his daily life.

Another crucial aspect of the Scottish novels which enables MacDonald to present his readers with a sense of reality washed clean of familiarity is the fact that they are set in Scotland. I shall have more to say in a later chapter about a yet more radical use to which MacDonald puts the unfamiliarity of the bulk of his readers with the Scottish scene. Here, I am merely concerned with the straightforward manner in which a solidly evoked environment, if it is geographically remote, can still, in a novel, operate on the reader as a romantically strange place in which the range of the probable is extended. To direct the narrative to exotically distant

parts is a basic technique of the writer of romance: in English literature, Emily Brontë, Stevenson and Conrad spring instantly to mind as examples. The technique has the advantage, often, that the more minute and realistically particular the author may be, the more attractively remote the result can seem. In MacDonald's case, the chief element which creates the exotic out of the realistic is the language, which is a notably (if not completely) faithful rendering of localised North-East Scottish speech, but many other aspects of regional manners press in close behind this. The result, to many readers, is realistic yet strange - uncomfortably so, in many cases, if the frequency of complaints about the impenetrability of MacDonald's Scots is anything to go by.

5. Conflict and Tension in the Scottish Novels

MacDonald was not simply concerned to communicate a glimpse of the beyond, however; his business was not merely to reveal the ideal within the material. For his books are not just works of vision, but works of propaganda. They do not merely passively show the mundane glorified; instead, they aggressively challenge the reader to see better, and confront him with his own limitations. Already some of what I have written above suggests the spirit of challenge in which they are written. And that feeling of strain between author and reader reflects both a strain within MacDonald

himself, and also a spirit of conflict, rather than mere co-existence, between matter and the immaterial. For MacDonald, despite aspects of his public stance, was not so completely set apart from his age in his role of prophet that he could bring back an unshakeable vision of divine truth. His stance is within, not outside, the limitations of his ordinary humanity, and his works are affected accordingly, especially by a fitfulness and insecurity which is perhaps not apparent at first reading. He has been included, it is true, in an anthology entitled The Protestant Mystics and has been often referred to as a seer (as, we are told, he himself described poets as being, in essence).⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in an obscure fifty-year-old essay on MacDonald which is so full of good sense that it ought to have become as seminal as the more readily available introduction by C. S. Lewis, Professor Grierson made the essential point about this:

Was George MacDonald a mystic? It was along the mystical line that he sought the solution of the enigma of sin and pain and death. But that is not sufficient to make one a mystic. For that one must have passed through the mystical experience. We know those who have so passed because they have no more doubts. They have seen and they believe, or rather know. They are no longer questers, doubting, inquiring, adumbrating allegorical arguers to the questions they are still really asking themselves. The great mystic proclaims... Compared with them George MacDonald is, like so many of his generation, a quester after a mystical solution rather than a mystic. What he utters is not so much a conviction he has attained to once and for all as a faith to which he passionately aspires - like Tennyson, or Browning, or F. D. Maurice. The nineteenth century was full of them.⁵⁰

The novels show how true this is. None of them can be claimed as the rapt reports of a mystic's insight: ideal reality is seldom presented with the effortless ease of an ultimate truth finally encountered, a truth untrammelled by lesser associations. The struggle between the conditional and the absolute which MacDonald portrays is what he sees and knows, and he knows it because it is within himself. Greville admits that his father was as open to doubt as the next man, and one notes that 'hope' is a very common word in both the novels and the biography. His novels are not the special visions of a mystic; they are the reports, rather, of a war correspondent.

While part of MacDonald believed, in the light of both romantic and Christian traditions, that the material and (for want of a better word) spiritual dimensions can and do co-exist (with Christ as the supreme instance of that co-existence), another part of his mind was influenced by the notion that spirit is at odds with matter, and that the two dimensions are locked in conflict, with a fluctuation of supremacy, in different places, people, and portions of a man's life. Unfortunately, this has the disadvantage of introducing conflict into the very nature of his fiction: his fluctuating sense of the nature of reality prevents him from developing a coherent, stable fictional medium in which to embody it, and his work appears to veer between realism and fantasy as he portrays the supremacy of the real or the ideal.

It was seldom that MacDonald expressed his sense of a fundamental opposition as being that between spirit and matter. His own preferred terms were more purely moral:

It is not easy to serve God, and it is easy to serve mammon; if one strove to serve God, the hard thing, along with serving mammon, the easy thing, the incompatibility of the two endeavours must appear. The fact is there is no strife in you. With ease you serve mammon every day and hour of your lives, and for God, you do not even ask yourselves the question whether you are serving him or no. Yet some of you are at this very moment indignant that I call you servers of mammon. Those of you who know that God knows you are his servants, know also that I do not mean you; therefore, those who are indignant at being called the servants of mammon, are so because they are indeed such. As I say these words, I do not lift my eyes, not that I am afraid to look you in the face, as uttering an offensive thing, but that I would have your own souls your accusers.
(PFS, Chapter 7, 'The Pulpit')

Clearly, conflict is, if anything, even more desirable than it is inevitable. MacDonald's sense of how mankind approaches the truth is thoroughly dialectical:

One of the great goods that come of having two parents, is that the one balances and rectifies the motions of the other. No one is good but God. No one holds the truth, or can hold it, in one and the same thought, but God. Our human life is often, at best, but an oscillation between the extremes which together make the truth.
(SP, Chapter 2, 'Constance's Birthday')

The quotation, above, from Thomas Wingfold's sermon in Paul Faber, Surgeon, indicates the two principal areas which concern MacDonald as seats of the healthy conflict: not only must it take

place within the individual, but it must occur between individuals. Within the story, Thomas is portrayed as knowingly outraging many of his hearers, as he explains; but the further implication of the latter part of the quotation is surely that any preacher worth his salt must offend and hurt his hearers, George MacDonald as much as Thomas Wingfold. All are engaged in the ultimate battle, here described by Alexander Graham, Malcolm's mentor: 'That's the battle of Armageddon, Sheltie, my man. It's aye ragin', ohn gun roared or bagonet clashed. Ye maun up an' do yer best in't, my man' (M, Chapter 7, 'Alexander Graham').

Even on this topic, however, there are latent contradictions in MacDonald's vision. Here, he describes more fully Alexander Graham's mode of fighting.

He rarely contradicted anything: he would call up the opposing truth, set it face to face with the error, and leave the two to fight it out. The human mind and conscience were, he said, the plains of Armageddon, where the battle of good and evil was for ever raging; and the one business of a teacher was to rouse and urge this battle by leading fresh forces of the truth into the field - forces composed as little as might be of the hireling troops of the intellect, and as much as possible of the native energies of the heart, imagination, and conscience. In a word, he would oppose error only by teaching the truth.

(M, Chapter 7, 'Alexander Graham')

Here, his opening and closing phrases reveal MacDonald's highest notion as being to juxtapose truth and falsehood, and let falsehood wither by mere proximity to the truth. The imagery and spirit of

the long central sentence, however, implies a much more deliberate, positive assault on wrong, a more bitter, less lofty conflict. And we can recognise conflicting features of the texts to match the opposition in MacDonald's own mind. There are many passages of harsh, jeering denunciation of outlooks and creeds of which he disapproved, and countless more in which his sense of their limitations is clearly outlined. Especially prominent is his animus against traditional Calvinism and against the English nonconformist ethos. In less specifically religious connections, his books frequently express his dislike of most of the nobility, and of unenlightened Highland landlords in particular. Even when he does not resort to explicit statement, his attitude towards characters he dislikes is always clear from the actions and language which he gives them. Many a time, the reader feels caught, not between two opponents of whom one is inherently supremely powerful and the other cringingly powerless, but between two equally-matched, locked adversaries, MacDonald and the world. The sheer vigour and extremity of MacDonald's righteous assault contains a guarantee of the formidableness of his opponent, and of MacDonald's consciousness of the fact.

The whole notion of MacDonald's pressing forward his own personality and his, at times, unorthodox opinions receives here its major justification in his eyes. The more the theologically orthodox complain about his concepts, and the more the aesthetically orthodox

complain about their presence as statements in the novels, the more MacDonald can be sure that he is engaged in healthy strife. Looked at from this point of view, the apparent unsuitability of the novel as a preaching medium turns into its exact opposite. (We have already noted above how MacDonald used a type of narrator which avoided his imaginative identification with the community outlook.)

Secondly, the way he envisages the human personality and interpersonal relations will necessarily be influenced. Seeing, as he does, a moral conflict underlying everything, his characters will tend to group into two camps, and any idiosyncrasy of personality will be weakened by the simplifying pull of their moral status. The power and interest of individual characters will arise, therefore, from the surface attributes which are imbued by their basic significance (as in the case of the hunchback laird in Malcolm) or, if they are to have a genuine inner complexity, it will remain somewhat schematically dualistic, as in the cases of Thomas Crann and Mrs Falconer. The interaction of characters - the novels' portrayals of social intercourse - will tend towards characters falling into fairly immediate postures of concord or discord, of clear alignment for or against each other. Furthermore, they tend to fall into roles of dominance and subservience vis-à-vis each other: to a position of supremacy of will when morally opposed, and into a master-pupil relationship when morally aligned. More than is the

case with any other Victorian novelist I know, MacDonald's works feel inhabited by isolated human particles. Even when his portrayals of small rural communities seem most densely realistic, the sense of unified community is often pale beside the work of George Eliot, say, or Hardy. Like any preacher, MacDonald's concern is with the individual soul and its relationship with God: his interest in men's relation with each other is distinctly secondary.

Again, J. Hillis Miller's investigation of some better-known Victorian writers provides a confirmation of this observation, by contrast, as it were. Seeing most Victorian novelists confronted with 'the death of God' (the total absence of belief in the existence of a deity), he describes how this altered their sense of themselves and of the external world:

This evacuation of man's nature and of external nature is associated with an additional transformation of man's sense of himself. To define man as a lack, as a hunger for fulfillment, is to define him as a will, as a spontaneous energy of volition which reaches out in longing to substantiate itself by the assimilation of something outside itself. When God vanishes, man turns to interpersonal relations as the only remaining arena of the search for authentic selfhood. Only in his fellow men can he find any longer a presence in the world which might replace the last divine presence.⁵¹

Parts of this statement clearly implicate MacDonald, but its central core describes an outlook still quite alien to MacDonald's mentality: if the increasingly complex rendition in fiction of the texture of human personality and community is linked to the

secularisation of ontological outlook, then the simplification and fragmentation I ascribe to MacDonald is not to be wondered at.

Committed, therefore, to 'preaching', and viewing human interaction as, essentially, the affair of fragmentation and tension that I have described, it is not surprising that these two traits merge, as they so often do, in the passages of argument, or of discussion on serious topics, which arise between characters. It is a dear habit of MacDonald's to deploy his ideas in the Socratic form of dialogue, for not only do his novels fall with natural ease into the form of argumentative discussion, but the same is true of his sermons and essays. To envisage the opposition of separate minds was a natural habit of his own imagination.

His combativeness, too, gives point to his inclusion in his novels of various fictional types and elements which conflict violently with what was then regarded as appropriate for intelligent readers. At this point, one must stress the importance of his high valuation of the outlook of the child, as a crucial and commonplace nineteenth-century corollary of the mistrust of man's rational capacities, those 'hireling troops of the intellect' as opposed to 'the native energies of the heart, imagination, and conscience'. There are numerous instances, in the books, of child-characters as the supreme carriers of truth - Annie Anderson, Alec Forbes, Robert Falconer and Gibbie are only the most obvious. MacDonald's principal precedents

for this are, of course, Blake and Wordsworth, along with the full weight of the Bible's valuing of the child, perhaps supremely in Matthew 18.3: 'And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'. Here and elsewhere in the Bible, the notion of a man becoming child-like and thereby a child of the Father is clear. Again, such a process is visible in MacDonald's fiction, as when Hugh Sutherland submits to the motherhood of Nature and of David Elginbrod's widow, or when Alec Forbes returns to love the sweetheart of his boyhood, or when Dr Anderson, in Robert Falconer, remodels one of the rooms in his Union Street house after the fashion of the cottage benn end in his father's house, and, later, on his death-bed, returns to the dialect speech of his youth. Examples could be multiplied, but more to the present purpose is the fact that MacDonald not only induces his favoured characters to return to child-likeness, but writes his books so as to place his readers in a child-like position. A novelist creates his readers as well as his characters, and MacDonald attempts to make children of his.

6. The Scottish Novels and Sub-literature

This is most clearly the case in the fairy stories and fantasy-writing, in which MacDonald attempts to appeal to what remains, in the adult reader, of the child's capacity for wonder and imaginative

participation. In the novels, too, he attempts something of the same by a variety of means. His stories consist of 'plots' of the utmost simplicity, such that they can be summarised in a sentence or two, but combined with a profusion of subsidiary detail and event. The combination is just what one might arrive at in telling a child a story, but results, in MacDonald's case, in the perpetual charge that he cannot construct. The oft-noted tendency of his characters towards the typical rather than the individual, already mentioned, can be included here as a part of the child-like nature of the books. Indeed, MacDonald seems to have been fully conscious of the part played in a child's imagination by certain stock characters and situations, as the comment of the narrator of Wilfred Cumbermede (quoted above, pp.70-71) indicates.

The outline similarity of so many of MacDonald's characters and situations can be ascribed to the closely related fact that he regarded them as embodying important truths, as I shall discuss in a later chapter, and (in the light of the Wilfred Cumbermede quotation) to his belief that his story-types have a permanent, rooted appeal to the child within us, which he is striving to bring out. Other means he adopts to the same end include the whole gamut of sensationalism to which he is prone: the disasters, the violent deeds, the various degrees of the gothic in his work, the melodrama - all that colours his work to a pitch way beyond a sober account of the familiar. His attempt is constantly to invest his imaginings

with a heightened vividness. Most of all, there is the frequency with which he dwells on childhood experiences, or that of adolescence: in responding to the fortunes of his numerous young characters, there is a sense in which the reader does become appropriately young in his imagination. As MacDonald said of his fairy-tales, 'For my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five' (Orts, p. 317).

One can take this a stage or two further. Many of his books follow their principal characters from quite an early age, but we never see them become old. Most end, for us, at the traditional breaking-off point of marriage; two, Robert Falconer and Andrew Ingram (in The Elect Lady), die in what we take to be middle-age. We accompany most of them for a large number of years. In all cases where childhood is extensively treated, the effect on the reader's imagination is such that the character never quite ceases to be the child we knew. In the work of other nineteenth-century novelists, such as Thackeray, Dickens or George Eliot, it is often a triumph of their art when we feel how the years have aged and transformed Jos Sedley, Becky Sharp, Pip, or Maggie and Tom Tulliver. It is, perhaps, a triumph of George MacDonald's alternative art that we feel, so powerfully, the unchanging essence, revealed so clearly in their earliest years, of Annie Anderson, Alec Forbes, Robert Falconer, Gibbie and Donal Grant, despite the welter of various circumstances the years bring them. MacDonald is subtly true to his own ends in

avoiding making his characters age in the traditional way of fiction: the element in them which does not seem to us to grow up is, in his eyes, their most precious, saving part. And in recognising it, and responding to it, the eternal child in the reader is called forth.

Furthermore, at least as regards his most memorable child characters, there is a further subtlety in his elevating of their child-likeness, a subtlety which he loses later in his career. In his early books, the superiority of the truly child-like had been conveyed, paradoxically, by making his children essentially older than their years. About Alec (at his best), Annie and Robert, there is a sombre maturity which encourages us, the readers, to look up to them. In a sense, those books 'place' their readers as less outstanding, perhaps even 'younger', children: we are, it is implied, ordinary children looking up at our pre-eminent peers. In the case of Sir Gibbie, however, the image of the child is suddenly looked down upon from an adult height, as it were. MacDonald wishes to arouse the reader's capacity for pathos, and to highlight the strangeness of the contrast between Gibbie and his surroundings, neither of which he could do if the book's emotional stance were too closely aligned with Gibbie's inner experience.

The child's-eye vision is thus deeply engrained in the fabric of the Scottish novels, and, furthermore, there are perhaps sufficient data to suggest that they were imagined, by MacDonald, as being not

far from the world of the fairy stories. The landscape of the two modes in MacDonald's writing are very close: a detailed description of the fairy and fantasy works would have to acknowledge how close their settings were to Scottish scenes. Their moors and castles seem close to the places MacDonald knew from earliest years. The discussion on allegory will suggest how much the two modes share, in terms of character-types and meaningful settings, but here we can already note how often castles and large houses are crucial to the action and mood of so many of the novels. Also discussed above is the relationship between MacDonald's novels and plot outlines he discovered in some of the kunstmärchen. In addition, few of the novels are short of the striking, and indeed of the marvellous. As an example of the way in which the very texture of the writing can be influenced by fairy-story technique, here is the appearance of a clerical goblin near the beginning of Donal Grant:

When he had eaten his dinner, its dryness forgotten in the condiment his book supplied, he rose, and taking his cap from his head, filled it from the stream, and drank heartily; then emptied it, shook the last drops from it, and put it again upon his head.

'Ho, ho, young man!' cried a voice.

Donal looked, and saw a man in the garb of a clergyman regarding him from the road, and wiping his face with his sleeve.

'You should mind,' he continued, 'how you scatter your favours'.

(DG, Chapter 2, 'A Spiritual Foot-pad')

Another area of similarity is between MacDonald's novels and the clichés of popular fiction throughout the ages. As noted above, this is one of the principal grounds upon which Richard Reis rates the novels so poorly. Reminding us, once again, of MacDonald's twin ends in writing novels, the financial and the didactic, he says:

From these two causes, together with the literary taste of the average Victorian reader, follow most of the superficial characteristics of MacDonald's conventional fiction. From this conventionality, in turn, follow other general attributes. The plots are based on a few formulas; the characters are usually stereotypes; the thematic issues are derivative; and the mechanisms of suspense and motivation are sensational and artificial. MacDonald was too busy to be a deliberate craftsman, nor did his popular audience demand craftsmanship of him.⁵²

Reis does not consider the possibility that MacDonald may have been deliberately eschewing the criteria which found favour with received critical taste. That this may indeed have been the case is suggested by the following notice of a dramatic performance in the East End, describing the fare demanded by Garrick Theatre audiences in the 1870s. The observer is a Frenchman, Blanchard Jerrold:

The sympathies of the audience, however, were kindly. They leant to the starveling, and the victim of fate; for four out of five understood only too well what hard life in Whitechapel meant: and had spent nights with the stars, upon the stones of London. In this, and kindred establishments, the helper of "a female in distress" (dismissed from the West End long ago) is sure of his rounds of applause...But in the Starving Poor comedy, let me note, albeit the jests were of a full flavour and the dialogue was uniformly ungrammatical, the sentiments were worthy.⁵³ Virtue is always rewarded in these humble dramatic temples; manly courage gets

three times three; and woman is ever treated with respectful tenderness. It is not in such establishments as the Garrick...that the ignorant poor learn how to slip from poverty into crime.⁵⁴

The attitudes and values applauded by the East End theatre audience are clearly very close to those habitually celebrated by MacDonald; the character of the mature Robert Falconer, for example, would not have been out of place on the stage of the Garrick, but must have seemed both old-fashioned and slightly anti-establishment to many of the novel's readers. That MacDonald, writing from the 1860s onwards, was out of step with the most advanced taste of the day can be inferred from another interesting source, Philip Collins's article 'The Decline of Pathos'.⁵⁵ He swiftly characterises the 1850s and succeeding decades as in positive reaction, in the most intelligent circles, against the emotionalism which had been so prized in the literature of the 1830s and 1840s:

In other words, the critical consensus which had, with few exceptions, applauded Dickens's pathos in the Thirties and Forties was beginning to show cracks in the later Fifties and a substantial fissure by the Seventies; by and large, the critically unsophisticated remained (and for long after then) faithful to Little Nell and her fellows, while the intelligentsia reacted against them.⁵⁶

MacDonald's novels, on the other hand, are always well supplied with pathos, whether in connection with children, deathbeds, or whatever. Nevertheless, that it is unsafe to merely classify MacDonald amongst the critically unsophisticated, at least in the

sense of seeing him as blissfully unconcerned with any sophisticated levels of thinking about literary art, is confirmed by the high respect he had for his own art. It was just that his notion of art and the artist was at conscious odds with the tenets of his day. That he believed that the best work of an artist is liable to be initially abused is suggested, for example, by his example of the initial reaction against Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, scorned 'the most by critics who could not understand him, and who were unworthy to read what he had written' (Orts, p. 260). MacDonald reaches too often, of course, for the argument that those who reject him and his favourite writers and ideas are, ipso facto, unworthy. Yet this stance, based on his own belief that he was doing something supremely valuable, is to be distinguished from the opportunistic pandering to mass demand which Reis offers us.

It may seem odd to claim for MacDonald a high respect for his own art. The statement that he would not write novels if he could not preach in them seems typical of a man whose every page, almost, proclaims his esteem of purely aesthetic creation to be as low as his aesthetic success has been almost universally rated. Within one of the novels itself, he proclaims preferences which appear to reject the possibility of artistic success. He has just given one of his personal responses to the action of the novel:

'Which it is an offence to utter in the temple of Art!' cry the critics.

Not against Art, I think: but if it be an offence to the worshipper of Art, let him keep silence before his goddess; for me, I am a sweeper of the floors in the temple of Life, and his goddess is my mare, and shall go in the dust-cart; if I find a jewel as I sweep, I will fasten it on the curtains of the doors, nor heed if it should break the fall of a fold of the drapery.

(M, Chapter 38, 'The Two Dogs')

Colin Manlove, for example, reads this as a confused rejection of art: 'First he says his work does not go against Art, but then says he will make it do so. And the plea of "life" as the criterion of such intrusions ignores the fact that they destroy the felt life of his work'.⁵⁷ This is not quite fair. MacDonald does not say here that he will make his work go against art, only that he knows that some, whose worshipful attitude elevates art into a goddess for them, will be offended. He then, with gleeful mischief, proceeds to goad the worshippers further by offering an alternative personification of art as a horse. He implies that the choice of image is a human matter and that no single image really touches upon the contradictory reality of the essence of art. And although his image of art pulling a dust-cart is flagrantly provocative, it need not imply, in MacDonald's eyes, deep disrespect. The parallel, surely, is with those supernatural beings in his fiction - North Wind, say, or the grandmother in The Golden Key - who appear, simultaneously, as homely and familiar, but also as superior beings of immense power, and in touch with vast, barely visible truths.

Similarly, the 'life' to which MacDonald refers is something much vaster than that implied by Dr Manlove's 'felt life': the distance between the two is the distance between the commonplace vision of most novels, and the scope of the reality to which MacDonald's work tries to open our eyes.

In something of the same way as North Wind is an awesomely superior being in comparison with Diamond, but a humble and dutiful agent of that much higher force whose will she executes, so this passage suggests a dual evaluation of art, a dual evaluation which encapsulates the seemingly contradictory attitudes MacDonald expressed throughout his writing.

For, although there are times when MacDonald seems not to care about aesthetic values, one must acknowledge that there are many other indications in Greville's biography that MacDonald viewed his literary efforts with a high seriousness (though this is more true of his poetry than of his prose). Furthermore, to Ronald MacDonald's testimony quoted above (pp. 112-113), we can add the following view of the psychology of artistic creation, part of a discussion of a Handel oratorio in The Elect Lady. The hero rejects any notion that Handel at his most inspired was motivated by any purpose for the music (although the music is felt to be an expression of the divine):

He was filled, not with the lust of fame, not with the longing for sympathy, and not even with the good desire to give delight, but with the music itself. It was crying in him to get out, and he heard it crying,

and could not rest till he had let it out...
Creation is God's self-wrought freedom.
(EL, Chapter 21, 'What is it worth?')

For 'God is the first of artists' (Orts, p. 246). Clearly, the distinction MacDonald would have drawn is that the foundation, or goal, of art is not beauty but truth, and that if the truth is embodied in art, then beauty is the result, however it is achieved. His way is thus open to techniques of wild unorthodoxy and originality.

7. The Novels and the Fantasies

It should be clear by this point that the current habit of seeing MacDonald's fiction as falling into two distinct groups, the realistic and the fantastic, has led to a considerable oversimplification of the true relationship between them. Distinctions must be drawn, of course, but the two modes are as closely related as the two sides of a coin. One critic, Donald G. Marshall, reviewing a handful of books on fantasy, succinctly summed up the role that fantasy fiction came to play in the nineteenth century:

In narrative forms especially, 'imagination' tended in the nineteenth century to run toward fantasy and the fantastic. And eventually the fantastic assumed a specific historical function: to defend a residual belief in the supernatural against a scientific rationalism that appeared all the more irresistible because it had been adopted with the passion of dogmatism and seemed validated as the intellectual reflex of triumphant industrialism and urbanization. In literary terms, fantasy fights realism on its own

ground, using its workmanlike prose, circumstantial descriptions, and narrative conventions to assert an antirealistic content. In the reduction of 'imagination' to this essentially defensive position lies the significance of fantasy for nineteenth-century fiction.⁵⁸

This statement is clearly as true of Phantastes and Lilith, and of the shorter fantasy and fairy works, as it is of any of the other works of Victorian fantasy: this, indeed, is the job that fantasy was performing in MacDonald's hands. The fundamental point here, however, is that the so-called 'realistic' novels were attempting to do something broadly similar - indeed, Marshall's formulation applies to them, if anything, even better. With such a radical similarity of intention, it is not to be wondered at that similarities at all levels occur between the two types. Subsequent detailed discussion will show various further points of similarity: here, I should like to extend discussion of the general relationship between the two.

At first glance, they seem separated by an utterly radical difference: the realistic novels seem to imitate the world we live in, while the fantasy novels transport the reader's imagination to a world in which MacDonald is free to invent what he likes. No adequate discussion of the fantasy novels, however, can fail to approach them as symbolic - in other words, they must be treated as referring, essentially, to life as we know it, and the whole array of the fantastic is but a device for viewing our world from a novel

angle. That this was part of MacDonald's intention, and not just the ingenuity of a restless critic, is suggested by, among other things, the two principal transition scenes in the adult fantasies, the scene in which Anodos's bedroom is transformed into a leafy glade (Stephen Prickett's analysis of this is telling) and Mr Vane's vision of Mr Raven's world physically overlapping the familiar world.⁵⁹ In both cases, the essential transition is not one of place, but of type, or capacity, of vision. A parallel example of the same fact is to be found in The Wise Woman, which is really set in England, not in fairyland as a cursory glance might suggest. That the book is an ironic fairy-tale treatment of some everyday reality (which is admittedly quite heavily made up in a symbolic disguise in places) is clear from a passage such as the following:

There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was impossible to say whether the next baby would be a boy, or a girl, or even, after he was a week old, whether he would wake sweet-tempered or cross. (Chapter 1)

In the fantasy writing, therefore, MacDonald was writing, however obliquely, about a very familiar world, but was adopting a mode of vision which lays bare a certain level of moral truth more forcibly than any other technique he might have adopted, just as an X-ray photograph presents the human body in a guise which is strange, grotesque even, but immensely truthful and informative.

There is even a case for believing that, of the two groups of fiction, it is the fantasy works which are the more concerned with life in our everyday reality. Thus both Anodos and Mr Vane seem essentially much nearer our fallen selves than any of the heroes of the novels do: even Alec Forbes almost always has an essential nobility of character which keeps him 'above' Anodos and Mr Vane, whose lives lack Alec's moral base and security. They feel more morally pliable and unformed than he ever does. It is in the novels, too, that we find the goal of MacDonald's characters being reached: they end with pictures of consummated happiness as hero and heroine marry and show the ideal receiving an embodiment. At the end of the major fairy stories, however, the characters are still journeying and yearning. The 'Curdie' books seem an important exception, but the final paragraphs of The Princess and Curdie introduce a sudden note of ambiguity. The fairy stories, if anything, have a stronger sense of the way things actually are, while the novels have a stronger vision of the way things ought to be.

To get into fairyland, to develop a fairytale vision, is a metaphor MacDonald is using for having an outlook which sees the world more vitally, and without the numbing staleness of familiarity - the vision, in fact, of someone nearer to God than most people are. The fantasy novels are an attempt at some such vision, but in them, the process of how such a vision is achieved is largely ignored. The mysterious suddenness with which fairyland is entered is simply the

first of the marvels of fairyland itself. Here, if anywhere, is the real difference between the two types of fiction, for in the 'realistic' novels, the process of acquiring the 'fairy' vision is very far from avoided: indeed, it becomes their central concern. They show the pain and difficulty which the process involves: each of them, in so far as they centre on a hero who shows initial lack, or imperfection, charts that progress afresh. They are about how this world gets better, or how some people are getting better within it. The fantasies show the world from the fairy point of view, as it were, but juxtapose it with distinctly limited, imperfect central figures, mysteriously granted the better, truer vision. The novels, on the other hand, show individuals moving towards perfection. (Indeed, one might say that the fallible mortals suddenly plunged into the fantasy fairylands are the equivalent of those readers who open MacDonald's novels .) One might suggest that the greater popularity of the fantasies is due, paradoxically, and in part, at least, to their greater essential realism. It is the novels which really press against our sense of the possible.

8. The Scottish Novels as Theological Propaganda.

What, finally, is left, after all this, of the stock modern view that in the novels MacDonald is principally concerned with advocating one theological view in opposition to another, and that this theological

dimension is our prime source of interest as readers? It should now be clear that I am shifting the emphasis of discussion away from the theological content of the books to a broader account of their concerns and techniques. The Scottish novels do indeed have a palpable design on their reader, but more is involved than merely persuading him from one side of an ideological divide to another. MacDonald is trying to coerce his reader into a radically new awareness of himself, his life and his God. It is true that Wolff, the critic most immediately concerned with the theology of MacDonald's fiction, singles out only the first three Scottish books as especially concerned with theological doctrine, but the impression is then given that the later works are but pale attempts to reiterate an unchanging message. The fact is that while all the later books have similar doctrinal implications, they increasingly displace direct treatment of MacDonald's theological aversions, while what is positive and personal in MacDonald's outlook comes increasingly to the fore. And one must stress that, even in the 'three theological novels', there is so much more than a limited theological dispute. As detailed discussions of the principal novels will indicate, a more total response to their characters, stories, events, and to the implications of these things, reveals a larger and more positive concern on MacDonald's part. The traditional Calvinist theological outlook is only one of the things which is wrong, and capable of improvement, in this fallen world.

Footnotes for Chapter 2

The following are the abbreviations which are used in this section of footnotes:

- Allott Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (London, 1959).
- Antiphon George MacDonald, England's Antiphon (London, 1874).
- Collins Philip Collins, 'The Decline of Pathos', The Listener, 8 May 1969, pp. 635-637.
- Garrett Horder W. Garrett Horder, 'George MacDonald: A Nineteenth-Century Seer', Review of Reviews 32 (October 1905), pp. 357-362.
- GMDW Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (London, 1924). The second edition (September, 1924) was used.
- Graham Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900 (Oxford, 1965).
- Hillis Miller J. Hillis Miller, The Form of Victorian Fiction (Notre Dame and London, 1968).
- Hogg's Tales The Tales of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. Library Edition, 2 vols (London and Glasgow, n.d.).
- Holloway John Holloway, The Victorian Sage (London, 1953).
- NLS National Library of Scotland.
- Prawer The Romantic Period in Germany, edited by Siegbert Prawer (New York, 1970).
- Reis Richard H. Reis, George MacDonald (New York, 1972).
- Ronald MacDonald Ronald MacDonald, 'George MacDonald: A Personal Note', in From a Northern Window, edited by Frederick Watson, (London, 1911), pp. 5 -113.

1. Reis, pp. 27-28.
2. C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London, 1936), p. 232, quoted in Reis, p. 30.
3. Clara Reeve, The Progress of Romance, Vol. 1, Evening 7, reprinted in Allott, p. 47.
4. Reis, p. 115.
5. Title-pages of Phantastes, Castle Warlock, Lilith. Letter, NLS, MS.4162.115, quoted above, p. 17.
6. Edwin Eigner, Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition, (Princeton, 1966).
7. Elliott B. Gose, Jr., Imagination Indulged. The Irrational in the Nineteenth-Century Novel (Montreal and London, 1972), p. 40.
8. N. W. Visser, 'The Generic Identity of the Novel', Novel. A Forum on Fiction, 11 no. 2 (Winter, 1978), 101-114 (p. 112).
9. Graham. Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870 (New York and London, 1959).
10. Graham, pp. 61-70.
11. Thomas Hardy, notebook entry (July 1881) from The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891 (1928), Chapter 11, reprinted in Allott, p. 58.
12. Graham, pp. 32, 10.
13. Graham, p. 39.
14. Gillian Beer, The Romance, The Critical Idiom, 10 (London, 1970), p. 66.
15. Letter to Lady Mount-Temple, 7 October 1897, quoted in GMDW, pp. 544-545.
16. R. L. Wolff, The Golden Key (New Haven, 1961), pp. 45-46.
17. Praver, p. 4.
18. Quoted in Praver, p. 48.
19. Raymond Immerwahr, 'The Word "Romantisch" and its History', in Praver, 34-63 (p. 48).

20. Roger Cardinal, German Romantics in Context (London, 1975), p. 65.
21. Praver, p. 48.
22. M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York, 1971), p. 245.
23. GMDW, p. 557.
24. Ernest Rhys, Everyman Remembers (London, 1931), p. 90.
25. Antiphon, p. 63.
26. Antiphon, p. 64.
27. Coleman Parsons, 'George MacDonald and Henry More', Notes and Queries 188 (1945), pp. 180-183.
28. GMDW, pp. 552-555.
29. Antiphon, p. 307.
30. GMDW, p. 380.
31. William Drummond of Hawthornden: Poems and Prose, edited by Robert H. MacDonald (Edinburgh and London, 1976). All quotations are from this edition.
32. Antiphon, p. 146.
33. James Hogg: Selected Poems, edited by Douglas S. Mack (Oxford, 1970), pp. xxii-xxvi. All quotations are from this edition.
34. GMDW, p. 80.
35. Hogg's Tales, vol. 1, pp. 226-261.
36. Hogg's Tales, vol. 1, p. 240.
37. Hogg's Tales, vol. 1, p. 76.
38. Hogg's Tales, vol. 2, p. 107.
39. Hogg's Tales, vol. 1, pp. 87-120.
40. A. O. J. Cockshut, 'Victorian Thought', in The Victorians, edited by Arthur Pollard, The Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, vol. 6 (London, 1969), 13-40 (p. 14).

41. William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1957), pp. 376-377.
42. Richard Wagner, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, III.2.
43. Garrett Horder, p. 360.
44. Ronald MacDonald, pp. 66-67.
45. Ronald MacDonald, p. 58.
46. Hillis Miller, p. 63.
47. Holloway.
48. Holloway, pp. 164-165.
49. The Protestant Mystics, edited by Anne Fremantle (London, 1964). Garrett Horder, p. 357.
50. C. S. Lewis, Preface to George MacDonald: An Anthology (London, 1946). H. J. C. Grierson, 'George MacDonald', The Aberdeen University Review, 12 (1924-1925), 1-13 (p. 11).
51. Hillis Miller, pp. 32-33.
52. Reis, pp. 52-53.
53. A play entitled Starving Poor of Whitechapel.
54. Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, London (London, 1872), pp. 165-166.
55. Collins.
56. Collins, p. 636.
57. Colin Manlove, 'George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels', in Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays, edited by Ian Campbell (Manchester, 1979), 68-88 (p. 70).
58. Donald G. Marshall, review of C. N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy, etc., in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 32 no. 1 (June, 1977), p. 81.
59. Stephen Prickett, Romanticism and Religion (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 231-232.

Chapter 3

1. Theme and Place

This chapter is concerned with fundamental aspects of the technique of MacDonald's first three Scottish novels, such as characterisation, language and structure. In discussing them, it tends towards that method, common in MacDonald criticism, of treating his novels in the mass, so that the individuality of each work is ignored in the glare of the eccentricity of the species as a whole. There is considerable justification for this, even apart from the fact that most commentators are prevented, by limitations of space, from giving extensive separate treatment to a large number of now quite obscure works. Many obvious and singular characteristics are indeed to be found throughout the series - not only characteristics which relate to the general assumptions I outlined in the previous chapter, but also details such as the repetition of episodes and character-types. So common are these detailed echoes that my final chapter is based upon them: the oft-repeated details constitute an elaborate network of symbols, and the novels must be discussed and related on that basis.

This frequent critical approach, however, is not just based upon the intimate resemblances which undoubtedly exist between the novels, nor is it merely a reflection of the common assumption that these works, taken individually, are of little worth. It also derives

from the fact that too little attention has been paid to what these books are actually about. Most writers on them assume that their thematic heart is, collectively, the propagandist assault on the Calvinism with which MacDonald disagreed. Thus Wolff deals with the first three under the heading 'three theological novels' (the title of his fourth chapter), then says that 'with few exceptions, the twenty-three novels MacDonald wrote in addition to the three we have already examined at first glance seem simply to ring the changes on one or more of his favourite themes'.¹ The seeming qualification in 'at first glance seem simply to ring the changes' is not borne out. Similarly, Colin Manlove seems to be about to qualify Wolff's view that they are dominated by the assault on Calvinism when he writes of Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer containing 'in part [my italics] the working out of a theme which preoccupied MacDonald all his life - the Calvinist doctrine of the elect versus his own universalist position', but again the qualification is not expanded upon.² Richard Reis is a little more explicit, despite regretting 'the general sameness of MacDonald's plots'. He points to such 'subsidiary issues' as vivisection, transfusion, hypnotism and (lamely) 'the conflict...between Love and Honour'.³

In the face of all this, I must make two general points. As I mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, I find it impossible to accept that the universalist critique of Calvinism is the overriding controlling concern in these works, frequently as it appears in them. There is a general theme which can be found in MacDonald's

Scottish novels, but it is a more positive thing than that, and is primarily articulated at an allegorical level: it forms the basis of my fifth chapter. Secondly, 'subsidiary issues' of a less superficial kind than those mentioned by Reis are not only present but important, because they are near the heart of the individuality of each work.

And it is the individuality of each of MacDonald's Scottish novels which now, I believe, requires stressing. To my mind, each has its own integrity, a unique organisation of theme, characterisation, setting, style and mood. No doubt the freshness regularly flags, and the ultimate thematic consistency, as I have indicated, is not to be disputed. Yet far greater distinctions must be made than have been made hitherto - distinctions of interpretation and of response to the imaginative individuality of each work. MacDonald began something new with each beginning: the arresting strength of most of his opening pages indicates this. In novel after novel, we can feel him plunging in to the new setting and characterisation with renewed energy. He usually begins with an episode of action or movement, very often using dialogue as his opening words. He eschews slow beginnings, preferring to start at a pitch of imaginative involvement and prepared to let explanations follow.

The individuality of theme and emphasis within each novel is not, finally, to be located in such contemporary concerns as vivisection, spiritualism, etcetera; it is to be perceived, rather, in the shape

and implications of the story told. It is implied, that is, in the relationship between the central figures and the book's narrative architecture; it is embodied in who the hero is and in what happens to him, and in those with whom he is most closely associated.

Thus, David Elginbrod has as its hero Hugh Sutherland, whom we first meet in association with the David of the title, and with his family. David is the saintly grieve on the Scottish estate where Hugh is the tutor, and the friendship between the young man and the Elginbrods develops while Hugh passes on his academic learning to the receptive peasants. A new tutorship is found in an English country household, where, after a sound start with his new pupil, Hugh falls emotionally into the clutches of a young woman who is the unwilling agent of the book's villain. Hugh's time at Arnstead ends in a flurry of gothic adventures and he moves on to London and a further uncongenial tutorship. The difficulties of the second part are resolved, partly with the aid of the mysterious Falconer, and also that of Margaret Elginbrod, whose father has died in the meantime, and with whose family Hugh has lost touch. On the death of his own mother, the desolate Hugh returns to the goodness and insight of the Elginbrod household, to marry Margaret, in whom the spirit of her father survives.

The tale is thus one of the progressive stripping away of the pride which mars Hugh's worth, and of the power of a divine goodness

to survive all change and earthly vicissitude, even death. The book's essential contrast is between the unfluctuating, ever-available goodness and truth of the Elginbrods, and Hugh's physical and moral mobility. The optimism of the work is expressed in miracle - the miracle of David's continued existence and power for good, and the miracle of the salvation of Euphra Cameron, the seductress who brings Hugh such loss and pain. In David Elginbrod, MacDonald attempts to represent directly in the narrative structure the relationship between erring humanity and the timeless divine goodness.

Alec Forbes of Howglen has a seemingly similar narrative and thematic concern, for it, too, has a hero who falls into error and must be reclaimed. Alec is first presented to us as the natural leader, morally and imaginatively, of a group of country schoolboys. He is sent to university where he comes temporarily unstuck, taking to drink and women in the aftermath of a frustrating passion for a neurotic cousin. He pulls through with the help of an eccentric friend, the college librarian, but has to undergo the further trials of illness and isolation in the Arctic wastes before he is ready to return, experienced and purged of folly, to his country home and to the love of his childhood sweetheart. This last, Annie Anderson, is a character of equal prominence and interest in the book, which opens with her early adventures, and the vicissitudes of Alec as a student are counterpointed by the story of Annie's relationships with the people of the country town, Glamerton. The marriage ending is as

much the reward of Annie's goodness, courage and selflessness as it is the sign of Alec's triumph over himself. Indeed, the story of Annie's long search for a home is as much a concern of the book's as is the tale of Alec's moral education. The theme of Annie's homelessness is a new development in the series of Scottish novels, and its juxtaposition with the more familiar bildungsroman of the hero gives this novel a massive originality. Furthermore, although Alec's story seems to be a mere recasting of Hugh Sutherland's, it is drained of some of its moral weight by the fact that Alec is a younger man - indeed, a boy and adolescent for most of the book - while Hugh was older: where the first novel told a tale of failure in responsibility, Alec Forbes is the story of the difficult growth of the capacity to assume an adult's responsibility.

While Robert Falconer also has a hero who does not escape criticism, as we shall see, the concern with moral adequacy which is variously embodied in the first two novels drops away almost entirely. Instead, MacDonald develops the implications in Annie Anderson's story, but whereas in the earlier novel Annie's need was for a home, in Robert Falconer MacDonald represents, more nakedly and less metaphorically, the search for God in this fallen world. Having lost his mother to death, the boy Robert has been left with his grandmother in Rothieden by his disgraced father, whom he can scarcely recall. Mrs Falconer is a loving guardian, but her regime is strict and unsmiling, thanks to the narrowness of her religious precepts. She allows Robert to

associate with such reprobate figures as Shargar, a waif, and Dooble
Sanny, the drunken shoemaker, as well as with the mysterious Mary
St John, who moves in next door. She stifles Robert's inherent
musicality, however, and can give him no help in his gropings after
an optimistic theology. Robert moves to Aberdeen University, and
renews acquaintance with Dr Anderson, a kindly family friend, and
with Eric Ericson, an older student of great promise, but afflicted
both by religious doubt and by poor health. Despite Robert's
growing love for Mary St John, it is Ericson who wins her heart, just
before he dies. Afflicted by this double loss, Robert travels
through Europe till a new-found religious basis to his life, a
commitment to faith in God's love and to moral action, gives him new
impetus. A qualified doctor, he becomes a kind of social worker in
the East End of London, starting a network of like-minded Christian
activists who imitate Christ's earthly mission to the needy with none
of the panoply of a church organisation. Eventually, Robert's father
is found in a desolate state, from which only slow and patient reform
can reclaim him. At last reunited, father and son set off for India,
in response to a deathbed request from Dr Anderson, but their ship
sinks en route. They leave behind, however, a working social help
organisation which is sustained by its own rightness of impetus.

Wolff's thematic summary is true but misleading, when he says,
'the search for the lost father: here is the theme of Robert Falconer'.⁴
I shall explore its truth in Chapter Five, where I interpret this

plot action allegorically. Wolff himself demonstrates its misleadingness, I think, in his eager side-step into biographical speculation of a Freudian type. In his hands, the book as a totality begins to disappear, for in the total context of the original this plot strand lacks the exclusive dominance which he suggests. Thus the mystery of the father's fate (both in this world and the next) is but one dimension of the plethora of concerns, desires and influences which make up Robert's boyhood and youth, in the home of his sternly loving grandmother and at university. In his Alpine retreat, he rebuilds the foundations of his life with barely a mention of the need to find his father. Indeed, MacDonald is explicit in avoiding making this a deliberate goal, so that when the father is eventually found, it is a by-product of a life well lived. The story of the search adds a certain narrative stiffening, but the book's theme is surely the search for happiness and harmony in God, and the difficulty of that search in a complex and limiting world. Thus, I suggest, the book's climax comes, not with the discovery of Andrew Falconer, but in a later moment of harmony - one which includes the reclaimed father, indeed - when Robert and his friends view the colossal seascape sunset at the end of the chapter entitled 'In the Country'. After a kaleidoscopic word-picture, which has a dangerous ripeness but which serves to contrast with the prevailing imagery and mood of darkness of the bulk of the book, MacDonald drives home the point:

I stood rapt. The two Falconers were at some distance before me, walking arm in arm. They stood and gazed likewise. It was as if God had said to the heavens and the earth and the chord of the seven colours, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people'. And I said to my soul, 'Let the tempest rave in the world; let sorrow wail like a sea-bird in the midst thereof; and let thy heart respond to her shivering cry; but the vault of heaven encloses the tempest and the shrieking bird and the echoing heart; and the sun of God's countenance can with one glance from above change the wildest winter day into a summer evening compact of poets' dreams'.

Despite many similarities, therefore, MacDonald's first three Scottish novels are thematically distinguishable, and their distinctness of concern is an important element in their comprehensive separateness. That separateness is difficult to demonstrate swiftly in its totality, for most of the facets of fiction, which we might conceivably analyse, contribute to it. In order to stress the basic point, however, it might be useful to investigate further one aspect of these novels which not only clearly demonstrates the originality of each, but which also contributes in very large measure to the reader's total sense of the book he is reading. The sense of place is a substantial factor in the imaginative appeal these works make, and that it was not merely an incidental aspect in MacDonald's eyes is suggested by the pointed and structural large-scale contrasts of place which he variously aims at in each. The fact that the places concerned are firmly based on real locations is not immediately to the point, though it is significant and I deal with it in a later chapter. What is relevant at this stage is that each location is perceived differently in each book - in other words, that each place is recreated afresh to suit

the thematic and imaginative needs of each succeeding novel.

With some variation in the pattern, MacDonald draws upon three principal locations to provide settings in these first three Scottish novels, namely the Scottish countryside, Aberdeen and London. David Elginbrod omits Aberdeen and substitutes the regionally anonymous English country mansion of its central section; Alec Forbes omits London. Nevertheless, these three locations are sufficiently consistent to enable us to demonstrate variations in their handling, and to draw some conclusions about the ways they are related to each other in each book.

Thus, the Scotland of David Elginbrod is a narrowly delineated thing, with no attempt to evoke the life of a large community or of a region. What community life there is lies in the comparatively limited setting of a Scottish estate. In the main, what Scotland amounts to in David Elginbrod is the Elginbrod cottage and the fir-wood beside it. Book One does not, however, feel drained of Scottishness, for the life within the cottage is done with considerable detail and substance, in the speech especially. Nevertheless, there remains a hint of anonymity about this Scotland: it is a region which seems to owe as much to Romantic notions of the rural as to an observed reality. Thus, nature seems to have shrunk to a fir-wood that is a near relation of die Wald, the forest of so much German Romantic myth, poetry, and music, while the cottage seems as akin to forest dwellings in Grimm's fairy-tales as it is to the abode of

Burns's cotter. There is thus a half-withdrawal from the possibility of a richly realistic rendering of the Scottish scene, a withdrawal in the direction of the enchanted and the notional. The whiff of literariness indicates the first novel but it accords well with the literariness of the second part of the work, set in a detached near-aristocratic environment, and pervaded by gothic and supernatural mysteries as it is. The supernaturalism is there because MacDonald had a liking for it, also because he wanted his novel to lead away from the commonplace, and because he wanted to have his say about 'spirit-rapping and mediums, and what not' (DE, Book II, Chapter 17, 'Materialism alias Ghost-hunting'). It may also be there as a challenge to the hero's intellectual pride, though this is an issue which is not clearly brought out. In the third portion of the book, a London is evoked which similarly lacks the tangibility of later Londons. It hardly exists visually at all: it is a place of poverty, friendlessness and personalities, a battleground of moods and influences. Each of these locations wears its status as a state of being (rather than as an autonomous environment) on its sleeve, as it were: MacDonald's concentration on the inner life and standing of his hero produces a narrowing and artificial intensity which precludes a full imaginative openness. Each setting brings with it a new suite of interiors, and the whole has a faintly claustrophobic quality which is appropriate for the essentially inward journey its hero is making.

Alec Forbes similarly appears to be about an inner development, but upon examination it proves to be less concerned with sheer linearity of change as with a more static coming to terms with experience. Thus Alec's story is of a brief deviation into loss, wrong and despair, an episodic departure from the norm of staunch rightness which is established at length as being his in his boyhood. His adolescent folly is but his momentary stumbling on the threshold of experience. Similarly, Annie's growth in courage, religious knowledge, and power to do good is subsumed within the less linear transformation which is focussed through her, namely the slow metamorphosis of Glamerton from an alien, threatening environment into a home for her. In a sense, the discovery of Glamerton as a home is the essence of Alec's story as well: the setting is of central importance in this work and it is of considerable interest that MacDonald originally intended to call the book The Little Grey Town.⁵ Glamerton and its surroundings are a rich and many-faceted presence. Town and country interpenetrate to a magical extent, and community is represented by a wealth of personalities, outlooks, classes and trades. This is one novel to which Colin Manlove's generalisation is surely less applicable, that 'he has perhaps not so much grasp of his villages as whole communities as of individuals who stand out even while they belong'.⁶ The host of individuals in this book goes far to letting us feel in contact with a whole community, while further cohesion is provided by the occasional adopting of a community outlook, as in the account of representative reactions to

the 'spirit of mischief...in the youth of Glamerton' at the opening of the twentieth chapter, and by the constant context of nature and the seasons which is so powerfully created. After the narrow exaltedness of David Elginbrod's Scotland, Alec and Annie are presented with a much more paradoxical and various domain, a repository of intense pleasure and pain alike, a playground and a prison which is really nothing less than a slice of the world men must live in.

In contrast with this extensive and solid world, the Aberdeen of Alec Forbes is of limited complexity: it is a student's Aberdeen, a domain of learning and fellowship. A more elaborate treatment of the city has to await later novels. This rather specialised environment suggests that Alec's time there is a superficial and transitory matter, and one result is that his extremes of debauchery have some of their sting drawn from them. More fundamentally, this Aberdeen never feels as if it could be a permanently alternative environment for Alec, and the juxtaposition of place only serves to emphasise Glamerton's constant centrality. Aberdeen, almost as Scottish as Glamerton and closely intermingling with it (thanks to Alec's vacation adventures and the need to prosecute Annie's story) represents but a phase in Alec's basic existence. The move from country to town is, on reflection, less significant as a linear development than at first appears.

The same cannot be said for the corresponding relationship between Rothieden and Aberdeen in the next novel, Robert Falconer, a work

which is powerfully linear in its progress, and which contains all three principal locations with which we are concerned here. Like David Elginbrod, it is a work mainly of interiors, but is more heavily marked by the glooms and darkness of night and of Scottish winters than either of its predecessors. Beside the openness and variety of Glamerton, Rothieden is darker, bleaker, more purely urban and constricting. Its most real and central locations are Mrs Falconer's house, and the inn on the square. Apart from these, only Miss St John's house and Dooble Sanny's have any great prominence, and that far less. The difference between the two evocations of Huntly well matches the difference in theme and mood between Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer. Rothieden is no place for Falconer to rest content with, and when he moves to Aberdeen he is irrevocably giving himself to a new environment. In this book, the Aberdeen of purely student life is neither so prominent nor so celebratory, and MacDonald's view now includes much more of the town, from the Spital, near Old Aberdeen, to the harbour and the River Dee, and includes the bourgeois world of the west end of Union Street. It is a much more real, solid and challenging environment than Alec's Aberdeen had been, darker and, once again, heavily composed of interiors.

Perhaps the greatest contrast to a previous treatment of place which Robert Falconer provides, however, is in its London, in comparison with that in David Elginbrod. The later treatment stresses

physical setting to a far greater degree, and that setting can be almost infernal in its gloomy awfulness:

Vague noises of strife and of drunken wrath flitted around me as I passed an alley, or an opening door let out its evil secret. Once I thought I heard the dull thud of a blow on the head. The noisome vapours were fit for any of Swedenborg's hells. There were few sounds, but the very quiet seemed infernal. The night was hot and sultry. A skinned cat, possibly still alive, fell on the street before me. Under one of the gas-lamps lay something long: it was a tress of dark hair, torn perhaps from some woman's head: she had beautiful hair at least. Once I heard the cry of murder, but where, in that chaos of humanity, right or left, before or behind me, I could not even guess.

(RF, Part III, Chapter 11, 'The Suicide')

The horror of the East End is here distilled so as to equate such human depths with hell itself; such a passage combines with the individual episodes of slum life to form a great counterweight to the story of Robert's boyhood. This last now seems comparatively idyllic, but its pains and stresses are nevertheless related to the desperation of the East End. Robert's movement, then, is from circumstances of desolation and deprivation of a degree appropriate to boyhood, to the fully developed horror which he is only capable of encountering as a man. This fearful descent, however, is mirrored over the book as a whole by the contrasting growth within Robert to poise, to hope and to adequacy in responding to the imperfections of human life. This London is not merely the urban opposite of a pastoral simplicity and nearness to God; each of the three main locations are progressively urban in character and the London of the

down-and-out is but the quintessence of them all. Small wonder, then, that MacDonald's low-life realism spills over into the phantasmagoric.

2. Characterisation

In the previous chapter, I have already touched briefly upon realism and the unreal as they apply to the characters in the Scottish novels, but MacDonald's approach to characterisation is a topic on which much more must be said, and which also requires a more detailed discussion than I have given hitherto. It is to the characters of these works, therefore, that I now turn.

Of the three heroes, it is the first, not surprisingly, who is handled least successfully. MacDonald's plan calls for an initial combination, in Hugh Sutherland, of goodness and moral immaturity: the latter will lead him into difficulties in the central and later stages of the book, until experience allows his intrinsic worth to stand forth untainted. MacDonald fails, however, to define him sufficiently firmly at the outset. His goodness is taken for granted rather than being extensively projected with any force of its own: we are aware of it primarily through the reflected admiration of the Elginbrods. As I describe below [pp. 172-184], this is a technique of which MacDonald makes considerable use, but it is one which is fraught with difficulty for the reader, and which regularly means that

we cannot read and respond to his work as he seems to wish. Similarly, the flaws in Hugh's character are but weakly and infrequently indicated. The real trouble, in fact, is that MacDonald is mainly taken up with the figure of David, and one of Hugh's principal functions as a character at this stage is the intermediary role between the reader and the rural sage the fiction is displaying. Removed to Arnstead, however, he seems a very different person. He is confident in standing up to Mr Arnold, and not only swift in his diagnosis of his pupil's malaise, but correct: he has a sureness of judgement for which little in Book One has prepared us. This infallibility of insight is otherwise reserved for David, Margaret and Falconer. MacDonald has failed to envisage this character as a free-standing entity, with a unique personality; instead, he allows it to fluctuate with its surroundings, and sacrifices its consistency for didactic purposes. MacDonald is not really interested in Hugh, despite the degree of autobiography which may be included in him. He is little more than a point of view, from which those things in which MacDonald is interested can be observed. Yet, as I have indicated, the path of his experience bears much of the weight of the book's meaning: it is due to this discrepancy that the work seems to lack unity, rather than to the simple reason, of the move away from a Scottish setting, which Wolff suggests.⁷

The expedient of beginning with his hero's boyhood, in the next novel, is a happy one, for Alec's activities at school and at play

give scope for the display of his leadership, personal and moral, and a note of the fallibility of his immaturity is easily slipped in. He, too, is contrasted with an intrinsically superior character, but Annie Anderson, growing in her goodness, is both more dynamic and less dominating a personality than David Elginbrod who is a full-blown conception which can only be displayed in its grandeur, not developed. Furthermore, Alec is strong where she is weak, in his emotional resistance to the horrors of Glamerton, a sharing of virtues which adds a stature to the later hero which Hugh, superior to his religious mentor only in academic attainment, wholly lacks. The robust schoolboy is an inherently more heroic figure than the faintly effete Hugh, in any case. Furthermore, MacDonald creates, in the boy Alec, a figure forcefully combining rude boyish vigour with more elevating qualities of rectitude, tenderness and an imagination which is creative, even poetic. MacDonald's real success, however, is in finding activities and episodes, arising out of the rough-and-tumble of a rural boyhood, which express the finer qualities as well as the vigour, so that the character does appear a unified conception. Thus, his courage and rectitude are evinced in his early dealings at school with Malison, while something of the poetic in his nature is gently suggested by his conceiving and building of the boat, 'The Bonnie Annie', and his construction of the igloo. All his qualities combine naturally to make him the leader ('the General') in the group activities of the loons, above all in his master-minding of the assault on Robert Bruce's dog.

The change of scene to Aberdeen University, with its new challenges and new personalities to be encountered, in no way results in a seemingly different Alec: his university experiences develop him with considerable naturalness while his move into adulthood, with his acceptance of responsibility and his return to Annie, is credible, if swiftly done.

Colin Manlove complains that we feel there are two Alecs in the book, 'the ageless schoolboy, like Richmal Crompton's William', and the developing student.⁸ I doubt, as will be clear from my opening account of the book, the fundamental difference Manlove notes between its two portions, one based on being, the other on becoming. Consequently, I doubt whether the juxtaposition of two very different periods in his life results in a feeling that we are faced with two different characters, as it certainly does with Hugh Sutherland. The capacity for love and the instinct for gallant service, offered to Kate Fraser, have already been sparked off by Annie Anderson; the ability to engage the friendship of an older man, who tutors him, is shown in his response to Thomas Crann, George MacWha and Peter Whaup, long before he encounters Mr Cupples; the instinctive conflict between Beauchamp and himself has been foreshadowed by his opposition to Robert Bruce and to the unreformed Malison. Conversely, his adventures in Aberdeen are far from those normally to be expected, even by a student with abnormally high spirits. Thus, his fights with Beauchamp, his rooftop escape from the mob, let alone his rescue

of Annie from the flooded cottage, all have the flavour of his boyish escapades about them. Indeed, it is one of MacDonald's minor triumphs that he is able to transmute some of that quality even into the final period of Alec's life, after his main student days. With the death of Kate and the successful completion of his studies, adolescence gives way to manhood, yet MacDonald is successful in tingeing even this last with some of the physical excitement, danger and adventure in which the loons had revelled: the Arctic expedition is a sudden development, and its tale is told swiftly and indirectly, yet it succeeds in preserving that particular quality of life's challenges and dangers which Alec's boyhood expresses so vividly.

Indeed, so lengthy and captivating are the accounts of childhood in Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer that even when the principal characters grow up to become young men and women, we still respond to them, as I indicated in the previous chapter, as the children we have got to know. Despite all they do and experience, Alec, Annie and Robert never quite grow up for the reader, a strange and meaningful effect which still allows their adult worlds to include miracle and enchantment. Dr Manlove is right in pointing to an element of contrast between the boyhood section and the remainder of Alec Forbes, but he is surely wrong in suggesting it is a contrast within the hero's personality, and he misses what I believe to be the case, that the timelessness we encounter in the first part is not

supplanted by the rest, but merely overlain by it, and not without its contributing to the texture even of the temporal itself.

Robert Falconer would appear to present its author with a yet more difficult challenge, for he is, at every stage, a paragon, becoming ever more Christ-like. MacDonald, however, mitigates the difficulties, even if he cannot abolish them. For one thing, Robert's right instincts are, for long, a matter of feeling and reaction, rather than prompting him to eccentrically virtuous behaviour. When action does ensue from his distinctive virtue, it still has much of the trappings of boyish pranks and subterfuges against authority, as when he smuggles Shargar into the garret, and when he secretly practises his violin in the ruined factory. This is but a step from another of MacDonald's techniques, which is to invest the ordinary enthusiasms of boyhood (kite-flying, voracious reading) with his own religious significance. Furthermore, MacDonald hits exactly the right note when he (accurately) describes Robert as 'sober': 'Her commonest injunction was, "Noo be douce," - that is sober - uttered to the soberest boy she could ever have known' (RF, Part I, Chapter 10, 'Another Discovery in the Garret'). This is what he has successfully created, a boy of unusual seriousness and intensity; these qualities in no way diminish his boyish energy and originality, although he does seem older than his years.

Most important, he manages to include opportunities for criticism even in this near-blameless boyhood: Robert's imperfections are

presented, however, merely as the defect of his virtues, as on the various occasions when he deliberately aims at preserving what the book unequivocally grants him in any case, his superiority over Shargar. MacDonald explicitly accuses him of this fault in the passage on the discovery of the violin (RF, Part I, Chapter 9, 'A Discovery'), an exchange in which the reader is clearly expected to side with Shargar. An even more ironically critical passage is that in which Shargar tells of some of Baron Rothie's villainous dealings; here, as elsewhere, Robert's consciousness of moral superiority is clearly part of his inheritance from his grandmother.

'There's ae thing, though, Shargar: gin ye want to be a gentleman, ye maunna gang keekin' that gate intil ither fowk's affairs.'

'Well, I maun gie't up. I winna say a word o' watter Jock Mitchell tellt me aboot Lord Sandy.'

'Ow, say awa'.'

'Na, na; ye wadna like to hear aboot ither fowk's affairs. My mither tellt me he did verra ill efter Watterloo till a frent lass at Brussels. But that's neither here nor there. I maun set aboot my version, or I winna get it dune the nicht.'

'What is Lord Sandy after? What did the rascal tell you? Why do you make such a mystery of it?' said Robert, authoritatively, and in his best English.

(RF, Part II, Chapter 21, 'Shargar Aspires')

Of the total scene of which this is a part, Colin Manlove refers to Robert's 'uncondemned' patronage of Shargar and claims 'it is a significant comment on MacDonald that the potential ironies of this scene escape him.'⁹ I do not see how this can be sustained in the

face of the clear irony at Robert's expense throughout this scene, an irony which overflows into the next chapter. Robert is surprised by further vital information:

'Ye vratch! what for didna ye tell me that afore?'

'Ye wadna hear about ither fowk's affairs. Na, not you!'

(RF, Part II, Chapter 22, 'Robert in Action')

MacDonald is too intelligent to remain blind to the aesthetic vulnerability of his superior hero, and he takes several similar opportunities to build such protective ironies and criticisms into his treatment. Such a distancing technique, however, is no longer available once the moral rigour and leadership, which occasionally bears so hard on Shargar, has matured to produce the Christ-like Falconer of the East End, and MacDonald has to resort to another device, that of interposing a narrator between the reader and the character. Gordon, the narrator, is neither vivid as a personality nor invariably present as a character, but he is sufficient to help us readjust our sense of relationship with the central character.

Because the novels are structured round them, these heroes are crucial in any consideration of how successful MacDonald is in handling moral complexity in his characters. The problem is particularly acute in their cases, as the changes which occur in them along the narrative line result in their moral contradictions separating out rather than more realistically coexisting. In characters who do not

essentially alter as the books progress, MacDonald is often able to achieve a more traditionally satisfying blend of moral attributes, so that certain of his people, at least, have a claim, by any standards, to stand high among the achievements in character creation in nineteenth-century Scottish fiction. One thinks especially of two of his severe Calvinists, Thomas Crann the stonemason in Alec Forbes, and Mrs Falconer, Robert's grandmother. These are characters whose severity is twinned with an unusual capacity for love, and which is, in each case, the outcrop of genuine instinct for the religious and for the true. Both, therefore, nourish the hero of their respective books; both, however, are also shown as capable of bruising some of what is most tenderly and valuably human.

The peculiar vitality of each as a character, however, is not simply due to the fact that they have contrasting facets which different plot episodes bring out. Mysteriously, our response to each is not dictated purely by the accumulation of fictional facets; they are not finally delineated by what they do. In them, MacDonald has not, as it were, conceived of characters which he has proceeded to embody in a sequence of invented detail; his own relationship to them as characters is less dictatorial, less creator-like. Thus the 'truth' about Mrs Falconer is not merely envisaged and illustrated by the novelist; how she appears to other characters is a light upon her which is given an equal authority with the author's own vision. Thus, her awesomeness is in no way separable from Shargar's vision of

her, or, at times, Robert's. Similarly, her destruction of Robert's fiddle (one of MacDonald's most famous scenes) is no mere illustration, for the reader's benefit, of the cruel joylessness of her creed. The reader responds through the eyes and feelings of Robert himself, and that response is conditioned, as Robert's is, by a prior experience of her. At other points, we respond to her as comically, and perhaps even lovably, fallible because Betty her servant responds to her as such. Our sense of the character's personality, and, more vitally, her worth, is considerably dependent upon the responses to her of other characters within the work. The truth of a character, or even of an act, is not defined by action itself.

Such a subtle approach to the moral portrayal of character is perhaps least obvious in those characters where it most contributes to their convincing lifelikeness. It is more readily visible in those instances of more artificial, less normally convincing characters such as Margaret Elginbrod, or Mary St John, or even such larger-than-life figures as Euphra and Cupples. For MacDonald, the truth of his characters lies, as it were, in the response they arouse in the characters with whom they come in contact, not in any preconceived notion of normality which MacDonald or his readers may have. Thus the strength in purity of Margaret Elginbrod is felt as arising, in its ultimate source, from the responses to her of the two characters who have most to do with her, Euphra and Hugh. Similarly, the angelic nobility of Mary St John has its roots in the responses of Robert and

Ericson. To other characters, she is 'a fine lass' (RF, Part II, Chapter 17, 'Home Again'), whose mind during a long hungry night will probably be adequately preoccupied by a bit of flirting (RF, Part II, Chapter 16, 'A Strange Night'). But it is the feeling of the young heroes that she is a heavenly being which is allowed to be the truth for the readers, too.

A brief illustration of the subjective vision of a central character becoming the controlling vision of the novel, if only momentarily, is to be found in the following, in which the inner feelings and assumptions of a character and the objective facts of the fictional case converge and mingle. Annie Anderson is being driven through Glamerton to her new home.

A few faces were pressed close to the window-panes as the cart passed; and some rather untidy women came to the house-doors to look. And they spoke one to another words which, though inaudible through the noise of the cart, were yet intelligible enough to Annie, with her own forebodings to interpret the expression of their faces.

'That'll be little Annie Anderson', they said.
'She's gaein hame to bide wi' her cousin, Robert Bruce,
up i' the Wast Wynd. Puir wee lassie!'
(AF, Chapter 7)

The words of the women exist both as a record of something actually said, and as an expression of the feelings of Annie; the two functions have no clear dividing line. There is no sense of strain in this instance, even though it is based on a sense of reality which is somewhat different from the implied objectivity of conventional fiction:

what Annie ascribes to the watching faces, namely their knowledge of her destination and their consequent pity, is credible enough on its own account.

Nevertheless, MacDonald's subjectively-based characterisation often leads to less conventionally acceptable results when it produces characters of more extreme good or evil. The resulting characters can seem open, at first sight, to the two charges of being cliché and of being unrealistic. Yet I suggest that, in many cases at least, neither of these charges proves finally damning, for the cliché often becomes justified - has a life and rationale breathed into it - and the character retains a link with the world of commonplace, psychological realism. Let us look at two examples, Patrick Beauchamp and David Elginbrod.

Beauchamp first appears briefly in the account (AF, Chapter 34) of Alec's first night at the university debating society: he is the speaker whom Alec and others ridicule for the poverty of his oratory. It is also hinted that he assaults Alec in the general confusion as the hall is cleared; the reader is told no more than Alec knows himself, and our sense of Beauchamp is already controlled by Alec's sense of him. In Chapter Thirty-Six, the two meet again, and the commitment to Alec's vision not only becomes more pronounced, but his emotional state is increasingly felt as a factor conditioning our sense of Beauchamp as his adversary.

This chapter, brief but still too long to quote here, is the one in which Alec attends his first dissection. MacDonald envisages him as sensitively apprehensive at the prospect; the account of his feelings and behaviour is both realistically credible and melodramatically stylised - the two do not conflict in practice.

When he entered the room, he found a group already gathered. He drew timidly towards the table on the other side, not daring to glance at something which lay upon it - 'white with the whiteness of what is dead'; and, feeling as if all the men were looking at him, as indeed most of them were, kept staring, or trying to stare, at other things in the room. But all at once, from an irresistible impulse, he faced round, and looked at the table.

There lay the body of a woman, with a young sad face, beautiful in spite of a terrible scar on the forehead, which indicated too plainly with what brutal companions she had consorted. Alec's lip quivered, and his throat swelled with a painful sensation of choking. He turned away, and bit his lip hard to keep down his emotion.

His emotion, however, increasingly invades what follows. It is fuelled by his anger at the behaviour of his fellow students, who parade their disrespect for the corpse and despise his sensitivity, and it takes control of the narration, so that Alec's view of the matter becomes the book's fact:

The best quality he possessed was an entire and profound reverence for women. Indignation even was almost quelled in the shock he received, when one of the students, for the pleasure of sneering at his discomposure, and making a boast of his own superiority to such weakness, uttered a brutal jest. In vain the upturned face made its white appeal to the universe: a laugh billowed the silence about its head.

But no rudeness could hurt that motionless heart - no insult bring a blush on that pale face. The closed eyes, the abandoned hands seemed only to pray:

'Let me into the dark - out of the eyes of those men!'

It is in this context, the book's 'truth' being created by its hero's emotional apprehension, that Beauchamp, simply the spokesman for all Alec's class-mates, utters the crucial insult. Alec's victory in the ensuing fisticuffs confirms Beauchamp's enmity, without discharging Alec's antipathy, and the course is set for the relationship which develops between them in the rest of the book. The essential point is that Beauchamp first clearly emerges as Alec's adversary, both in Alec's awareness and in ours, in an emotional context in which the subjective is made fictional fact. Thus MacDonald proceeds to develop him along lines conditioned by Alec's sense of him: he is cruel, proud, vindictive, and mysterious in his determined resourcefulness as he persecutes the book's hero. Beauchamp lurking as Alec and Kate meet the steamer, or mysteriously appearing in the ruins of Glamerton Castle, is a devil-figure through which is projected Alec's sense of a malevolent evil. Even an account of his appearance becomes an expression of his diabolism:

Beauchamp was magnificent, the rather quiet tartan of his clan being lighted up with all the silver and jewels of which the dress admits. In the hilt of his dirk, in his brooch, and for buttons, he wore a set of old family topazes, instead of the commoner cairngorm, so that as he entered he flashed golden light from the dark green cloud of his tartan.

(AF, Chapter 69)

Once again, however, the preceding sentences implicitly make this overtly objective description an account of Alec's attitude, one of despair and jealousy:

'Oh Kate!' said Alec, overpowered with her loveliness.

Kate took it for a reproach, and making no reply, withdrew her hand and turned away. Alec saw as she turned that all the light had gone out of her face. But that instant Beauchamp entered, and as she turned once more to greet him, the light flashed from her face and her eyes, as if her heart had been a fountain of rosy flame. Beauchamp was magnificent...

The fact that Beauchamp is of a stock character type, the aristocratic and blackguardly seducer, would negate his effectiveness as a character were this a more conventional novel, but in this one it has its justification, for the impassioned human mind, such as Alec's, tends to think in terms of stereotypes rather than responding to the complex uniqueness of an individual.

Similarly, one recognises that David Elginbrod's idealisation is in part literary, deriving from the Romantic cult of the lowly in general, and from the specifically Scottish tradition of celebrating the peasant for his virtues of diligence, contentment and fervent religious soundness, the tradition which produced 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' and Christopher North's 'Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life'. Where Burns, however, voiced his sense of the cotter's exaltedness by means of direct narrator's statement, MacDonald mediates David's impressiveness through the consciousness of Hugh Sutherland,

and allows Hugh's sense, that the Elginbrod cottage is, for him, a special place, to be the means of designating it as, in truth, a special place in the reader's eyes, as well. In addition to Hugh's response to David in Book One, both Margaret and Euphra, much later in the book, confirm and extend our sense of David's status. The reverence they have for the dead man does not merely function in the book as an illustration of the divinity of David as something already established; their reverence in a sense creates that divine power.

Tibbie clearly illustrates an evaluation being made on the basis of the response of a few chosen characters, rather than being directly communicated to the reader in terms of how she is created by MacDonald. Physically, she is mean and ugly while her religious ideas are doctrines deplored by her author; she lacks the largeness, the grandeur which Thomas Crann, whom she resembles in many important ways, retains even at his worst. Her claim on our respect is reflected almost entirely through Annie's response to her, and while that goes a long way in creating that claim, there remains about her total stature an element of mystery, or paradox, which is in itself an important constituent of her memorability as a character. Despite all the obvious motivations which bring her and Annie together, there is still something unexpected and entirely original in their association, so that she strikes us in herself as being unexpected and original.

In making the 'truth' about many of his characters depend upon how they are perceived by other characters within the book, instead of

simply presenting and evaluating them directly, from author to reader, as it were, MacDonald has found a technique which aids him in making evaluations which are unorthodox, or complex, or both. Thus in so far as we as readers find ourselves responding with warmth and high respect to the crabbedness of Tibbie Dyster, we are negating what would have been a more immediate reaction, namely to lack patience with, or interest in, an obscure, cantankerous old peasant. The same is true with even more force in the case of Mrs Falconer, whose outlook and actions are sufficient to repel those judging her on those alone: 'Knowing nothing of Mrs Falconer's character, Miss St John set her down as a cruel and heartless as well as tyrannical and bigoted old woman, and took the mental position of enmity towards her' (RF, Part I, Chapter 23, 'An Auto da Fé'). Tibbie and Mrs Falconer are limited and limiting, and yet, to at least one character in each case, they are formative and liberating as well. The truth about them is complex, and MacDonald has employed a technique which enables him to make this point.

It is a technique, one might say, of realism, for to base one's portrayal of the moral and emotional truth about a character on the subjective appraisal of another character is, in a way, true to everyday experience. Furthermore, it is a form of realism which allows MacDonald to include characterisations which would otherwise conflict with the normal conventions of fiction - hence, for example, the diabolism of Beauchamp. MacDonald's handling of this technique is highly personal, and often, a less than fully attentive reading fails

to reveal that this is what he is doing. His approach is not entirely without parallels, however, and one can see Stevenson doing something very similar in The Master of Ballantrae (1889), while, more overtly, Hogg had made a grander use of just such an ambiguity in The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824), in which the reader is teased as to whether Gil-Martin is to be taken as a fully independent character or merely as the product of the crazed mind of the sinner.

Also in Alec Forbes, however, MacDonald creates in Murdoch Malison a character and situation which illustrate the aesthetic difficulties his method of characterisation can produce, especially when he takes it a stage further. Colin Manlove rightly points out that MacDonald's insistence that Malison is not a bad man cuts no ice with the reader, who simply sees the schoolmaster ill-treating children.¹⁰

Here, the significant viewpoint held by other characters works against MacDonald, for the author's charity cannot outweigh the fear and hatred Malison arouses in his child victims. Nevertheless, the book's self-contained independence from its author and his world eventually allows the inter-action of the children and the teacher to produce not just a change in our view of the latter, but a real change in his very nature and outlook: the surprising expression of pity and love for Malison after his failure in the pulpit ends his tyranny. The impact of his pupils brings out a benevolence which effectively was not there before; this is unrealistic enough, but it is compounded in the miracle of the transformation of the pupils themselves in response to his humiliation.

Character reacts on character without reference to the probabilities of the world outside the book; the author is not responding to his characters as real people, but observes them, rather, as beings in a world into which he and his readers are gazing.

While at first sight it seems that MacDonald is being naïve in offering us this episode as within the bounds of probability, it is really the reader, thinking this, who is naïve. MacDonald knows that the world of his Scottish novels is not our world, any more than his fairy worlds are our world - although he regards the worlds of his fiction and of everyday reality as related. The fictional world of Alec Forbes is its own system, where, among other things, the struggle of right and wrong is clearer, where the cycle of fall and redemption in human experience is more prominently displayed than in our world, and where the optimistic view of man and God, which is a matter of hard-won and ever-slipping faith in everyday life, is secure and triumphant. Confronting such a fictional world, MacDonald's stance is one of wonder and humility; it is God's world, not his, and it is not for MacDonald to say who these creatures are or, in many cases, what we are to think of them. This, in effect, is the posture he takes up. It is clearly an impossible one to maintain for the length of an entire novel, but it is one he strives for.

To help support these points, let me quote from his article on fairy-stories, entitled 'The Fantastic Imagination'. Conversing with an imaginary interlocutor, he insists first of all on harmony as the essential principle in an imaginary story, even if its harmony is not that of everyday life:

The natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use; but they themselves may suggest laws of other kinds, and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws; for there is that in him which delights in calling up new forms - which is the nearest, perhaps, he can come to creation. When such forms are new embodiments of old truths, we call them products of the Imagination; when they are mere inventions, however lovely, I should call them the work of the Fancy: in either case, Law has been diligently at work. (Orts, p. 314)

Then, insisting that such a fictional world as a harmonious fairy-tale has a meaning, he disclaims any special claim to understanding and insight; the story floats, beautifully and mysteriously, before both author and reader. The reader's mental grappling is with the story itself, not with the author's mind as communicated by the story:

'How am I to assure myself that I am not reading my own meaning into it, but yours out of it?'

Why should you be so assured? It may be better that you should read your meaning into it. That may be a higher operation of your intellect than the mere reading of mine out of it: your meaning may be superior to mine. (Orts, pp. 316-317)

The author's frequent failure, or refusal, to create characters from a stance of total omniscience and control is in accord with some other features of his techniques of characterisation. Occasionally, he explicitly refuses to delve into the deepest motivation of a character, or expresses (astonishingly) ignorance. When the narrator in Robert Falconer does so, the effect may perhaps be contained by his eventual emergence as a pale character within the tale, even when the refusals or doubts come before that development:

the narration is full of 'I think...', 'I suspect...', 'It may be that...I do not know', and similar expressions implying uncertainty and incomplete knowledge. It is much more surprising, however, when such a relationship between narrator and events occurs where the narrator never steps on to the stage, as in Alec Forbes:

Whether Beauchamp tried to throw him from the bridge may remain doubtful, for when the bodies of two men are locked in the wrestle of hate, their own souls do not know what they intend. Beauchamp must have sped home with the conscience of a murderer; and yet when Alec made his appearance in the class, most probably a revival of hatred was his first mental experience. But I have had no opportunity of studying the morbid anatomy of Beauchamp.

(AF, Chapter 71)

It is an unorthodox way of asserting the reality of these characters to the reader, but one appropriate to novels which depart as often as these from the normal realistic conventions.

Such lack of certainty on the part of the narrator often debar MacDonal from using the frequent Victorian manner of introducing a character by means of a lengthy, authoritative summary. Instead, MacDonal more often than not shows his characters, first of all, in action, or at least speaking, and, once again, the effect is to make the reader feel such characters, in his imagination, as physical presences, as visual or aural data, which embody a mystery. The essential externality of MacDonal's way of projecting character is usually stressed from the outset; this makes at once for the characteristic strong openings of his works. Moreover, this

externality in its various manifestations (such as the loving precision with which he details such physical and technical operations as the building of the extension to the Elginbrod's cottage, the essentially visual nature of the gothic effects in David Elginbrod, the dwelling upon Alec's very physical adventures, and the idealistic rather than realistic motivations which are so often ascribed to characters) combine with the regular extreme demarcation between narrative and narrator's matter (prayer, opinions, speculations) to help create the artificial, dream-like quality which touches all these works.

At several points in this discussion of the idiosyncracies of MacDonald's characterisation, I have picked up a theme which I raised in general terms in my second chapter, namely the conspicuous intrusion of his own mind and personality into the novels. It links in again, I think, at this point, for the strange equality which MacDonald often grants his characters as personalities opaque to himself and over whom he does not have a final, creator's word is the necessary concomitant of the Christ-like self-projection which I described in the second chapter. Not only is MacDonald's narrator no longer the usual nineteenth-century combination of authority and transparency, but his status as an autonomous character, a presence (whether or not he is plunged into the plot, like Gordon in Robert Falconer) is suggested, indeed confirmed, by the autonomy of the others.

Furthermore, what by normal expectations can appear to be the

clumsy and self-indulgent juxtaposition of comment and narrative can be seen as effective and necessary if other goals are assumed. MacDonald wants his books to be read with the conscious intelligence: it is no part of his intention to create an illusion of reality into which the reader can escape. To utilise, once again, a quotation from Malcolm, 'If it be an offence to the worshipper of Art, let him keep silence before his goddess; for me, I am a sweeper of the floors in the temple of Life, and his goddess is my mare, and shall go in the dust-cart' (M, Chapter 38, 'The Two Dogs'). Besides this, let us remind ourselves of those occasions in which MacDonald explicitly refuses his readers the emotional titillation he knows they expect and desire, turning deliberately to something better:

If my younger readers want to follow Kate and Alec home, they will take it for a symptom of the chill approach of 'unlovely age', that I say to them: 'We will go home with Tibbie and Annie, and hear what they say. I like better to tell you about ugly blind old Tibbie than about beautiful young Kate.'
(AF, Chapter 47)

Despite his rating of the emotional and the instinctive above the rational and conscious, MacDonald clearly wishes his readers to read with their heads rather than their hearts. Fanciful and dream-like as these works may be, MacDonald is relying on the intelligence of his reader in coming to terms with them, and all their surprising and unorthodox techniques, including those of characterisation and the addition of what is derisively termed 'preaching', are included for that purpose. They are what have been called, in the twentieth

century, 'alienation techniques', and MacDonald's purpose in using them is the same as Brecht's, to displace the primary emotional response by a thoughtful, intelligent one. Part of MacDonald was as revolutionary, as anti-establishment, as the twentieth-century Marxist, and the forms of MacDonald's works, like those of Brecht, reflect that aggressive originality.

It is easier to observe MacDonald's strange handling of his narrator and his other characters than it is to explain it. His denial to himself of complete knowledge of and judgement over the characters, responding so often to them as entities with some reality of their own which does not derive from him, occurs too habitually and discreetly for it to be other than a natural product of his mind: he seems to feel that in writing he is observing a reality, as much as he is creating it. In a subsequent chapter, I shall discuss at much greater length his ideas on the imagination, but I think it relevant at this point to quote a couple of crucial passages from his essay, 'The Imagination', to confirm that his attitude to his material had the humble, self-negating streak we have been discussing. He suggests that the world is God's stage and that all that happens or moves there, even in man's mind, is the direct action of the divine thought and will:

If we now consider the so-called creative faculty in man, we shall find that in no primary sense is this faculty creative. Indeed, a man is rather being thought than thinking, when a new thought arises in his mind. He knew it not till he found it there, therefore he could

not even have sent for it. He did not create it, else how could it be the surprise that it was when it arose? (Orts, pp. 4-5)

Nor can man even ascribe meaning to what has already been created, 'for the world around him is an outward figuration of the condition of his mind...The meanings are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of unveiling'. (Orts, p. 5). In writing, therefore, MacDonald is dealing with something which is already meaningful and coherent, so that, in a sense, the action which remains to the observing author is to fit his own mind properly to his material: it is the author's highest aesthetic responsibility simply to get it right.

3. Language

In the above discussion of various important characters in MacDonald's first three Scottish novels, it would have been appropriate to point out several times, and not just in the case of Mrs Falconer, the importance of the Scots speech MacDonald gives them, but such a repetitious point is better made once, here. The fundamental and obvious point is that MacDonald's Scots dialogue is vigorous, varied, and largely faithful to the speech of the North-East of Scotland. This is especially the case in matters of vocabulary, and MacDonald's writings are a constant resource to compilers of Scots dictionaries. The range of sounds, too, (where particular vocal characteristics can

be implied on MacDonald's page) has many North-East features - enough, at least, to make readers accustomed to standard literary Scots aware that they are here dealing with something different. I have neither the skill nor the space here to provide an adequate linguistic description of MacDonald's Scots in itself: a rough placing (between standard literary Scots and the more daunting North-East of Johnnie Gibb of Gushetneuk) and a broad welcome for its vigour and truth (in contrast with, say, Richard Reis's rejection of its obscurity) must suffice.¹¹ What is possible here is some indication of its literary advantages to the novels.

MacDonald's Scots dialogue, with its firm rooting in living speech, is one of the resources available to him in the creative struggle he describes via his fictional proxy, Wilfred Cumbermede, who in his writing finds 'that invention is ever ready to lose the forms of life, if it be not kept under the ordinary pressure of its atmosphere' (WC, Chapter 55, 'Attempts and Coincidences'). Nor is the freedom of invention the only thing kept in check by MacDonald's truthfulness to Scottish speech; even sentimentality can be countered, as in this scene between Falconer and the father of the seduced Jessie Hewson.

'John,' said his wife, coming behind his chair, and laying her hand on his shoulder, 'what for dinna ye speyk? Ye hear what Maister Faukner says. - Ye dinna think a thing's clean useless 'cause there may be a spot upo''t?' she added, wiping her eyes with her apron.

'A spot upo''t?' cried John, starting to his feet.
'What ca' ye a spot? - Wumman, dinna drive me mad
to hear ye lichtlie the glory o' virginity.'

'That's a' verra weel, John,' interposed Robert
quietly; 'but there was ane thocht as muckle o''t
as ye do, an' wad hae been ashamed to hear ye speak
that gait about yer ain dauchter.'

(RF, Part III, Chapter 2, 'Home Again')

The Scots in David Elginbrod is, if anything, slightly less broad: the compromise that all nineteenth-century Scots novelists have to make between truth to the language and intelligibility to an English readership is weighted more towards the latter, thanks, no doubt, as much to a lack of confidence as to a lack of skill. It is arguable, however, that Janet's language is marginally more dialectally committed than David's or Margaret's; more mundane and narrow in her outlook, she is given utterances which locate her more narrowly to a particular region. One notes, also, that the book's design gives far less opportunity for dialogue between Scots speakers than most of its successors, but then, one of the striking features of Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer is the sheer quantity of Scots speech they contain. That said, David Elginbrod still contains a bold amount of a language with which the readers MacDonald so desperately needed were unfamiliar. There is defiance in its first sentence, juxtaposed with the Chaucerian chapter-motto, 'Meg! whaur are ye gaein' that get, like a wull shuttle? Come in to the beuk.' There is a powerful sense, too, of the dignity of the language and its capabilities in David's prayers, combining living Scots with the

rhythms of the English bible. The impossibility of conceiving of David without his Scots is explicit in the book, and it is an association which demands a respect for the language. On the face of it, however, David Elginbrod contains many hinted asides that Scots is an inferior language:

'I didna ken it was sae late, mither,' replied Margaret, in a submissive tone, musical in spite of the rugged dialect into which the sounds were fashioned.

(DE, Book I, Chapter 1, 'The Fir-Wood')

To his more refined ear, there was a strange incongruity between the somewhat coarse dialect in which she spoke, and the things she uttered in it.

(DE, Book I, Chapter 7, 'The Secret of the Wood')

It will be observed that Margaret's speech had begun to improve, that is, to be more like English.

(DE, Book I, Chapter 9, 'Nature')

Taken at face value, these and other statements like them would seem to imply that Scots is inferior, in MacDonald's eyes. Against this is the dignity and reverence of David's speech, the extensiveness and wholeheartedness of the deployment of Scots through the book, and the nationalism which is a perennial feature of MacDonald's mind. Once again, I think we here encounter something with which MacDonald is seldom credited, namely irony. It is perhaps inexpertly handled here, and fails to signal its presence adequately. In the last quotation above, for example, only the italicisation of 'improve' indicates irony, and that not very clearly: no doubt, to have heard

MacDonald speak the sentence would have removed the ambiguity, but he is not entirely sure-footed in writing for cold print at this point.

Another point on which ambiguity is possible is in the matter of the shift from Scots to English in the speech of a single character. It is certainly of great comfort to a reader if a character is consistent, and preferably idiosyncratic, in his speech throughout a work. In David Elginbrod, both Hugh and Margaret are bilingual, Hugh when we first meet him, Margaret as she grows over the length of the novel. There is no inherent psychological improbability in this; in so far as there is a difficulty, it is due to MacDonald's English dialogue being far less lifelike than his Scots. Hugh and Margaret speak less colloquially in English, and MacDonald is unable to sketch the phonological continuity which would prevail to create the complex linguistic situation of such characters. To do him justice, however, he is aware of the difficulty: 'She spoke nearly as Scotch as ever in tone, though the words and pronunciation were almost pure English' (DE, Book III, Chapter 19, 'Margaret'). When our sense of a character depends so much on the manner of his speech as is so often the case with MacDonald's characters, the alternation of languages can make it seem that two different characters are being imagined.

The problem can be exaggerated, however, and MacDonald unjustly accused of faulty effects. Writing of Robert Falconer's speech

alternation, for example, Colin Manlove complains that the linguistic switch occurs not just because of the speakers' emotional states (as MacDonald claims) but because of whom they are talking to, and accuses them of hypocrisy.¹² He illustrates with reference to the passage quoted and discussed above (p. 170). This exchange between Robert and Shargar directs criticism at Robert, but it is not hypocrisy of which it accuses him, but pride. A similar amused guying of a hero when he is a little too conscious of his own leadership-potential occurs as Alec Forbes makes his arrangements against Juno, Bruce's dog:

'In future,' he said to Curly, with the importance of one who had the affairs of boys and dogs upon his brain - so that his style rose into English - 'in future, Curly, you may always know I am at home when you see the red flag flying from my flag-staff.'
(AF, Chapter 16)

The fact is, surely, that a great many Scotsmen since MacDonald's day and perhaps earlier have been bilingual in Scots and English, and use them according to the social context; the present writer is distinctly aware of moving from one speech to the other in exactly this way. Edwin Morgan's cleaner does just the same: 'My cleaner will regale me with a racy account of a man so mean that "ach, he widnay gie a blin hen a wurrm!" - and the next moment she will be answering the telephone in a pretty fair imitation of standard English.'¹³ It might be permissible to call us, and the many like us, hypocrites, but I should think it unjust. It is simply the case that many Scots

can do this and do it automatically; MacDonald is recognising a fact of Scottish life, just as he is when he makes Dr Anderson urge Robert to develop the capacity to speak English (RF, Part II, Chapter 15, 'The Last of the Coals'), to take his place in a world which sees the mastery of English as a necessity for a gentleman. MacDonald was not so far in advance of his time as to conceive of gentlemanliness without its trappings. Furthermore, his ambivalence towards Scots here, which Robert must partly replace by English while still cherishing Scots as the language of the heart, intimately parallels his ambivalence towards childhood, a state which must be superseded while, mysteriously, its essence is retained. Dr Anderson, who voices this worldly advice to Robert, is himself the embodiment of its opposite, for it is round him that MacDonald weaves the fantasy of the replica of the humble cottage interior embedded in the Victorian splendour of Aberdeen's Union Street (RF, Part II, Chapter 6, 'Dr Anderson Again') and who, as on his deathbed his racial inheritance stands hand in hand with his own childlikeness ('As he spoke, the polish of his speech was gone, and the social refinement of his countenance with it'), reverts to 'the rugged dialect of his fathers'. This development may seem sentimental and unreal but is not entirely without parallel, for when James A. H. Murray, editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, was caring for his first wife, Margaret, in 1865, he observed something similar. 'James nursed her, noting with interest, in spite of his distress, that when in delirium she dropped the refined speech he had so much admired and reverted to the broad Scotch of her childhood.'¹⁴

MacDonald's reverence for Scottish speech is clearly visible throughout his work, and its associations for him with the truth and honesty of childhood and of the pastoral are usually firmly present. Indeed, when a character shifts from English to Scots, it is to articulate an attitude or emotion of particular value. Thus it is disturbing to encounter, as Professor McGillis has pointed out to me in private conversation, even one passage in which MacDonald seems to be regarding Scots as a poor second-best to English. This occurs when Robert Falconer bursts into Mary St John's bedroom, eager to enlist her aid in comforting the desolate Jessie Hewson. The sudden intimacy startles both characters, especially Mary.

She was soon relieved, however, although what with his contemplated intercession, the dim vision of Mary's lovely face between the masses of her hair, and the lavender odour that filled the room - perhaps also a faint suspicion of impropriety sufficient to give force to the rest - Robert was thrown back into the abyss of his mother-tongue, and out of this abyss talked like a Behemoth.

(RF, Part II, Chapter 19, 'Robert Mediates')

'Abyss' and 'Behemoth' seem pejorative enough at first glance, but even this passage can be brought into line with the many declarations of MacDonald's respect for Scots. In so far as the last few lines of the quotation do contain condescension towards Scots, the condescension is surely Mary's, not Robert's, let alone the author's. The sentence has a fluctuating centre of consciousness: it starts from Mary's point of view, slides into Robert's in the summary of the tensions inside him, then resumes Mary's outlook, as the admittedly obscure

sentence structure nevertheless indicates ('She was soon relieved, however, although...Robert was thrown back into the abyss of his mother-tongue...'). This last reference to 'his mother-tongue' is most appropriate as coming from Mary's startled, detached, English, and disapproving attitude, of the three points of view available. MacDonald has miscalculated here, allowing his long and complex sentence to appear to end with an expression of his narrator's point of view, when he intended it to end with Mary's: we have here a momentary loss of control, but not a Freudian slip which reveals his secret rejection of Scots.

I do not think, furthermore, that the two words I have singled out must necessarily be taken as pejorative in themselves, and it might be worth pausing on them a little longer, if only to show how complex a tiny detail of MacDonald's prose can be. He uses 'Behemoth', not because he intends to stress the demonic or the ugly, but to point up Robert's sudden flow of speech as being, to Mary, grotesquely and annoyingly ample. Nor need we take 'abyss' as inevitably equivalent to the fiery pit; it also suggest the primal chaos, the resource from which God brought forth the creatures (including Behemoth, according to Milton in Paradise Lost VII. 471). MacDonald uses the word principally to bring out the recoil, the degree of reaction, Robert undergoes in plunging down from the height of paralysing, idealising veneration which had been his instant response on entering her presence. 'He could have kneeled before her - not

to beg forgiveness, he did not think of that - but to worship, as a man may worship a woman. It is only a strong, pure heart like Robert's that ever can feel all the inroad of the divine mystery of womanhood.'

In most other respects, however, MacDonald is sure-footed in his handling of Scots, which, in addition to the colloquial colour and vigour it naturally imparts, yields MacDonald a rich harvest of memorable phraseology, and allows a freedom which the refinement of English and its gentlemanly ethos denies him. Here is Shargar's mother, rejecting the Christ offered by Falconer.

'He cam to save the likes o' you an' me.'

'The likes o' you an' me! said ye, laddie?
There's no like atween you and me. He'll hae
naething to say to me, but gang to hell wi' ye for
a bitch.'

(RF, Part III, Chapter 6, 'Shargar's Mother')

And this strikes us as daring for an age reputedly shy of legs:

'I never saw sic widdiefows!' chimed in a farmer's wife who was standing in the shop. 'They had a tow across the Wast Wynd i' the snaw, an' doon I cam o' my niz, as sure's your name's Charles Chapman - and mair o' my legs oot o' my coats, I doobt, than was a'thegither to my credit.'

'I'm sure ye can hae no rizzon to tak' shame o' your legs, gude wife,' was the gallant rejoinder; to which their owner replied, with a laugh:

'They warna made for public inspection, ony gait.'
(AF, Chapter 20)

The juxtaposition of Scots and English is often used with the maximum effect drawn from the contrast, as in the opening paragraphs of Alec Forbes, in which the mystery of the unnatural farm scene is suddenly explained in an explosion of Scots: 'Gin ony o' ye want to see the corp, noo's yer time.' A similar, but even more heightened contrast occurs later in the book, when the leap from a swelling of meditation and prayer from the narrator back to the action of the novel is extreme in its total relinquishment of transition.

Follow till ye have brought me to the feet of my
Father in Heaven, where I shall find you all with
folded wings spangling the sapphire dusk whereon
stands His throne, which is our home.

'What do ye want sae ear's this, Annie Anderson?'
(AF, Chapter 91)

In addition to the qualities described, one notices about MacDonald's Scots the sheer naturalness it imparts to most of the scenes where it is used, as in so many conversations where the easy flow from topic to topic brings the pleasure of authenticity. As a single example, there is that between Annie and Thomas Crann in Chapter Sixty-eight of Alec Forbes, in which matter containing plot information, religious teaching and character exposition is gracefully and extensively combined. And furthermore, time and again in these novels, MacDonald's undoubted relish for the language breaks through to obviousness:

'Haud the tongue o' ye,' retorted Lammie.
'Dinna ye ken a proverb whan ye hear't? De'il
hae ye! ye're as sharpset as a missionar'. I
was only gaun to say that I'm doobtin' Andrew's deid.'

'Ay! ay!' commenced a chorus of questioning.

'Mhm!'

'Aaay!'

'What gars ye think that?'

'And sae he's deid!'

'He was a great favourite, Anerew!'

'Whaur dee'd he?'

'Aye some upsettin' though!'

'Ay. He was aye to be somebody wi' his tale.'

'A gude-hertit crater, but ye cudna lippen till him.'

'Speyk nae ill o' the deid. Maybe they'll hear ye,
and turn roon' i' their coffins, and that'll whumle you
i' your beds,' said MacGregor, with a twinkle in his
eye.

(RF, Part I, Chapter 5, 'The Symposium')

Nowhere is this enthusiasm more evident than in the characteristic metaphoric imagery of the country speech: 'I dinna care the black afore my nails for ony skelp-doup o' the lot o' ye.' (DE, Book I, Chapter 10, 'Harvest').

I have made no attempt to disguise the fact that, in general, MacDonald's Scots dialogue is far more lively and effectively controlled than his English. This is normally undistinguished, with a bookish quality far removed from the life in the Scots. At times, one is

tempted to think that it achieves, in its very stiltedness, a usefully unreal quality which brings out the symbolic force of the melodrama, as in the confrontation between Alec and Beauchamp in Mr Fraser's library.

'You brute!' said Beauchamp. 'You will answer to me for this.'

'When you please,' returned Alec. 'Meantime you will leave this room, or I will make you.'

'Go to the devil!' said Beauchamp, again laying his hand on his dirk.

'You can claim fair play no more than a wolf,' said Alec, keeping his eye on his enemy's hand. 'You had better go. I have only to ring this bell and the sacrist will be here.'

(AF, Chapter 69)

What is much more certain is that such dialogue can occasionally slip over into the excruciatingly bad:

'Cruel! cruel! You are doing all you can to ruin me.'

'On the contrary, I am doing all I can to save myself. If you had loved me as you allowed me to think once, I should never have made you my tool.'

'You would all the same.'

'Take care. I am irritable to-night.'

For a few moments Euphra made no reply.

'To what will you drive me?' she said at last.

'I will not go too far. I should lose my power over you if I did. I prefer to keep it.'

'Inexorable man!'

'Yes.'

(DE, Book II, Chapter 20, 'The Bad Man')

Occasionally, MacDonald tries to insert some cockney slang into his dialogue, with a couple of instances in David Elginbrod, and a much more extensive attempt at underworld slang in Robert Falconer. Here, for example, is what Gordon, the narrator, hears as he is set upon in East London: 'We've cotched a pig-headed counter-jumper here, that didn't know Jim there from a man-trap, and went by him as if he'd been a bull-dog on a long-chain. He wants to fight cocum. But we won't trouble him. We'll help ourselves. Shell out now.' (RF, Part III, Chapter 11, 'The Suicide'). Such an attempt was no doubt due to the influence of James Greenwood, 'the Amateur Casual', a journalist and social observer, now largely eclipsed by Henry Mayhew, and MacDonald's guide to disreputable London.¹⁵ Greenwood's high qualifications as interpreter of this scene can be judged by his book The Seven Curses of London (which contains a section on 'thieves latin').¹⁶ Despite such expert guidance, however, MacDonald's view of the East End seems to be fundamentally that of Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, who describe how they were taken on a heavily-guarded tramp through the region, like a tourist party being shown the jungle.¹⁷ MacDonald writes like the outsider he was.

His English narrative prose is even more of a mixture of virtues and blemishes than his dialogue is. Like most Victorian novelists, his narrative voice is essentially conversational, but with an overlay of heightened, rather bookish grace, which is due chiefly to a gentle

artificiality of rhythm and a tendency towards the mannered turn of expression. This mean can diverge towards either plainness or to a range of heightened and poetic levels. His style has various forms of badness, from the 'unbearable pitch of tropical sentimentality' of which Manlove complains, through the jargon of the would-be philosopher:

I believe that even the new-born infant is, in some of his moods, already grappling with the deepest metaphysical problems, in forms infinitely too rudimental for the understanding of the grown philosopher - as far, in fact, removed from his ken on the one side, that of intelligential beginning, the germinal subjective, as his abstrusest speculations are from the final solutions of absolute entity on the other.

(RF, Part I, Chapter 14, 'Mary St John')

to the occasional near-incomprehensibility: 'And that these thoughts flowed not always with other than sweet sounds over the stones of question, the curves of his lip would testify to the friendly, furtive glance of the watchful Robert' (RF, Part II, Chapter 14, 'Mysie's Face').¹⁸

MacDonald, nevertheless, has his characteristic skills. The poet in him can regularly arrest us with a surprising or apt metaphor, at length, as in the description of the smith in Chapter Twenty-one of Alec Forbes, seemingly enraging the fire with the impudent puffs from the bellows and his importunate pokes from the poker, or briefly, in this account of Robert Falconer:

He took more and more to brooding in the garret; and as more questions presented themselves for solution, he became more anxious to arrive at the solution, and more uneasy as he failed in satisfying himself that he had arrived at it; so that his brain, which needed quiet for the true formation of its substance, as a cooling liquefaction or an evaporating solution for the just formation of its crystals, became in danger of settling into an abnormal arrangement of the cellular deposits.

(RF, Part I, Chapter 14, 'Mary St John')

MacDonald was fully alive to words, phrases and the images they conjure up, so that, for example, he can revitalise phrases which have become trite: 'In the garden Annie soon found herself at the mercy of those who had none' (AF, Chapter 8). Later in the same book, we encounter a similarly clichéd phrase expanded much more fully into a sudden powerful and significant image:

But his thoughts had not ceased to run in some of the old grooves, although a certain scepticism would sometimes set him examining those grooves to find out whether they had been made by the wheels of the gospel-chariot, or by those of Juggernaut in the disguise of a Hebrew high priest, drawn by a shouting Christian people.

(AF, Chapter 80)

Such verbal liveliness occurs frequently when MacDonald is deploring or attacking something (usually a religious stance of which he disapproves), at which point a rather bleak irony enters his voice: '[Annie] followed him into the shop, and saw quite a fabulous wealth of good things around her; of which, however, lest she should put forth her hand and take, the militant eyes of Robert Bruce never ceased watching her' (AF, Chapter 8. My italics). This is mocking

imitation, but at times his metaphors reveal what he sees as the essence of his object of attack, as here, where he stresses the materialism lying behind the veneration for the Catechism: 'Nearly a dozen boys were kept in for not being able to pay down from memory the usual instalment of Shorter Catechism always due at the close of the week' (RF, Part I, Chapter 7, 'Robert to the Rescue'). Sometimes all humour departs from his voice, however: 'Till now Mrs Bruce had had the assistance of a ragged child, whose father owed them money for groceries: he could not pay it, and they had taken his daughter instead.' (AF, Chapter 31).

MacDonald's gift for metaphor often endows his writing with a positively symbolic quality. His natural gift for symbolism is apparent in this account of Mrs Falconer's outlook:

But while such a small portion of the universe of thought was enlightened by the glowworm lamp of the theories she had been taught, she was not limited for light to that feeble source. While she walked on her way, the moon, unseen herself behind the clouds, was illuminating the whole landscape so gently and evenly, that the glowworm being the only visible point of radiance, to it she attributed all the light.

(RF, Part I, Chapter 12, 'Robert's Plan of Salvation')

An example of how deeply embedded in his writing symbolism can be is in this sentence from the account of how Robert Bruce, sitting at a church meeting at the back of the church under the gallery, is finally exposed as a petty thief.

'There's some foul play in this,' cried Bruce, out of the darkness.

(AF, Chapter 85. My italics)

An effect based upon verbal compression seems at odds with the essential expansiveness of MacDonald's style, but such techniques regularly occur at narrative climaxes, especially those involving swift action: '[Alec] sent him with a crash into the peat fire which was glowing on the hearth. In the attempt to save himself, he thrust his hand right into it, and Alec and Annie were avenged' (AF, Chapter 13). Another striking instance is the confrontation between Alec and Cupples outside the brothel: '"Haud oot o' my gait, or I'll gar ye," he said fiercely. "I will not," answered Mr Cupples, and lay senseless on the stones of the court' (AF, Chapter 74). Sometimes the shock is emotional rather than physical, as when Cupples confronts his lady in the library: '"Auld Spenser says something like that, doesna he, mem?" I added, seein' that she luikit some grave. But what she micht hae said or dune, I dinna ken; for I sweir to ye, bantam, I know nothing that happent efter, till I cam' to mysel' at the soun' o' a lauch frae outside the door.' (AF, Chapter 70). A more dignified, though just as intense, emotion is expressed through succinctness, when old Mrs Falconer is confronted by Robert after a long absence:

'Weel, grannie,' said Robert, and took her in his arms.

'The Lord's name be praised!' faltered she. 'He's ower guid to the likes o' me.'

And she lifted up her voice and wept.

She had been informed of his coming, but she had not expected him till the evening; he was much altered, and old age is slow.

(RF, Part III, Chapter 2, 'Home Again')

He is capable, too, of a different sort of compression, in which plainness gives way to a packed, poetic suggestiveness. This can be seen in the sentence which finally sums up Thomas Crann: 'The Forlorn Hope of men must storm the walls of Heaven' (AF, Chapter 88). The phrase 'forlorn hope' in itself sums up the contradictory religious instincts of Thomas, while the violence of the assault image is well in accord with their fierce, positive quality; furthermore, the military reference in 'forlorn hope' conjures up the world of seventeenth-century battles for religious and personal freedom, an age with which the staunch, stiff spirit of Thomas Crann is well in accord, while the exposed, forward position of the forlorn hope in line of battle is MacDonald's way of doing justice to the religious leadership and advancement of Thomas's outlook. Similarly, a phrase such as 'the burning bush of human pain' (RF, Part III, Chapter 2, 'Home Again') suggests not just intense pain but, in its recollection of Moses' encounter (Exodus 3) embodies the apparent endless unquenchableness of human suffering, its paradoxical utility in communicating God, and its superficiality.

MacDonald can be poetic in more loquacious ways, as well, so that one constant feature of his style is a love of natural description laden with metaphor and all the richness of sound and rhythm he can command. The intention is clearly to make the familiar gorgeously strange, and to suggest the presence of a life and meaning within nature to which we are normally blind. Such passages do not naturally accord with twentieth-century taste, but they can often be surprisingly

successful, as I think this is:

Yet as he lay in the gloaming, and watched those crows flying home, they seemed to be bearing something away with them on their black wings; and as the light sank and paled on the horizon, and the stars began to condense themselves into sparks amid the sea of green, like those that fleet phosphorescent when the prow of the vessel troubles the summer sea, and then the falling stars of September shot across the darkening sky, he felt that a change was near, that for him winter was coming before its time. And the trees saw from their high watch-tower the white robe of winter already drifting up above the far horizon on the wind that followed his footsteps, and knew what that wind would be when it howled tormenting over those naked fields. So their leaves turned yellow and gray, and the frosty red of age was fixed upon them, and they fell, and lay.
(AF, Chapter 59)

Such full-blown animism is perilously close to sentimentality and redundancy, but it is saved by the passage's ability to clarify our sense of trees in late autumn almost overcome by winter: this writing need not obscure reality, and it can heighten it. The same might be said of the description of the smiddy's forge (see above, p. 202) or of this brief account of a steamer entering Aberdeen harbour:

By the time they reached the quay at the other end of the pier, the steamer had crossed the bar, and they could hear the thud of her paddles treading the water beneath them, as if eagerly because she was near her rest. After a few struggles, she lay quiet in her place, and they went on board.
(AF, Chapter 42)

There are times, of course, when MacDonald's determined subjectivism and his striving for effect lead to easy cliché: 'There was a weak expression about his mouth - a wavering interrogation: it was so

different from the firmly-closed portals whence issued the golden speech of his son!' (RF, Part III, Chapter 16, 'Change of Scene'). There is no escaping, however, that a lush extravagance of style is an essential contribution to the character of these books, and we can welcome it surprisingly often, I think.

Not all MacDonald's verbal fecundity results in extremes of subjectivity, however. There are many passages in these novels in which the sheer imaginative fullness reminds us that whatever his failings or his perversities, MacDonald was gifted with a novelist's imagination. In these early books at least, he gives us much more than the sparse outlines of narrative, character and setting. This healthy fullness may take the form of the merest detail, the shortest sentence: 'She led him into a room, with nothing in it but a bed, a table, and a chair. On the table was a half-made shirt. In the bed lay a tiny baby, fast asleep. It had been locked up alone in the dreary garret' (RF, Part II, Chapter 22, 'Robert in Action'. My italics). Here, the additional sentences fill out the bare bones to an extent far beyond their own length: they conjure up her life and situation in an extraordinarily brief compass. Much more extensive examples can be found; look, for example, at the first page or so of Chapter Twenty-nine of Alec Forbes, in which Annie Anderson visits Thomas Crann. The business could have been summarised in a couple of sentences, but MacDonald takes his chance to make an amusing and revealing situation of it.

Perhaps the best example of MacDonald's novelist's imagination joyously disporting itself is the chapter in Robert Falconer entitled 'The Symposium' (Part I, Chapter 5). One is surprised that MacDonald did not allow himself such genre paintings of Scottish speech, humour and character more often in his writings, for this is a joyful interlude not just for the characters but for the reader and, one suspects, the author as well, for the chapter's length seems primarily due to MacDonald's pleasure and confidence in handling the dialect situation. Even this douce bourgeois bacchanalia has its further justification, however, for it embodies part of the community life from which Mrs Falconer holds herself aloof and embodies its attractive cosiness as well as its failings and impurities. The chapter portrays behaviour which a strictly evangelical viewpoint would roundly condemn (and did, in Alexander Webster's pamphlet based on the novel), but which, thanks to the comedy, the reader is encouraged to view with the utmost indulgence.¹⁹ It is a comedy which reconciles us to things such as drunkenness and swearing, uglinesses from which the puritan Mrs Falconer holds herself in condemnatory aloofness - a moral fastidiousness over which Robert will eventually triumph in himself. The high jinks in 'The Boar's Head' seem a far way from the horrors of the East End, however:

'Willie MacGregor's had eneuch, mem, an' a drappy ower.'

'Sen' Caumill doon to Mrs MacGregor, to say wi' my compliments that she wad do weel to sen' for him,' was the response.

Meantime he grew more than troublesome. Ever on the outlook, when sober, after the foibles of others, he laid himself open to endless ridicule when in drink, which, to tell the truth, was a rare occurrence. He was in the midst of a prophetic denunciation of the vices of the nobility, and especially of Lord Rothie, when Meg, entering the room, went quietly behind his chair and whispered:

'Maister MacGregor, there's a lassie come for ye.'

'I'm nae in,' he answered, magnificently.

'But it's the mistress 'at's sent for ye. Somebody's wantin' ye.'

'Somebody maun want me, than. - As I was sayin', Mr Cheerman and gentlemen -'

'Mistress MacGregor'll be efter ye hersel', gin ye dinna gang,' said Meg.

'Let her come. Duv ye think I'm fleyt at her? De'il a step'll I gang till I please. Tell her that, Meg.'

Meg left the room, with a broad grin on her good-humoured face.

'What's the bitch lauchin' at?' exclaimed MacGregor, starting to his feet.

(RF, Part I, Chapter 5, 'The Symposium')

Comedy, however, is not scarce in Robert Falconer nor in Alec Forbes, though it is rather lacking in David Elginbrod until the Appleditch episode brings some satirical humour. It frequently enriches the two more mature novels, however, and is in accord with the optimism which these works ultimately express. It can be swiftly found, for example, in the opening chapters of Alec Forbes, despite their chiefly sombre content. "'Ye plaguesome brat!" cried Auntie;

"There has Betty been seekin' ye, and I hae been seekin' ye, far an' near, i' the verra rottan-holes; an' here ye are, on yer ain father's buryin' day, that comes but ance - takin up wi' a coo.'
(AF, Chapter 2). Other examples will be found in passages already quoted or referred to. Humour gently permeates the story of Malison's mishap in the pulpit (AF, Chapter 56). At times it can approach the slap-stick as when Bruce steps over the ankle into a water-filled hole and thinks the town flooded (AF, Chapter 62). At other times, it takes the form of glorious peasant retorts:

'Pray to God about an auld meal-mull?' said Simon with indignation. ''Deed, I winna be sae ill-bred.'
(AF, Chapter 63)

'Hoot, Richard! it's Scriptur', ye ken' said Thomas, soothingly.

'Scriptur' or no Scriptur', we're nae for't,' growled Richard aloud.
(AF, Chapter 85)

Humour, especially associated with Shargar, flickers through Robert Falconer, a dark book where it is very precious:

'Weel, Shargar, it's grown something awfu' noo. It's Miss Lindsay. Was there iver sic a villain as that Lord Rothie - that brither o' yours!'

'I disown 'im frae this verra 'oor,' said Shargar solemnly.
(RF, Part II, Chapter 22, 'Robert in Action')

Humour enters even the very bleakest portions of the book, when Robert is tormented by the possibility of a god of eternal damnation.

Shargar, once again, performs the vital comic function of defusing the near-despair, his marvellously sour reply suddenly revealing a strand of unnecessary melodrama in Robert's anguish:

'Shargar, what think ye?' he said suddenly, one day. 'Gin a de'il war to repent, wad God forgie him?'

'There's no sayin' what fowk wad du till ance they're tried,' returned Shargar, cautiously.

Robert did not care to resume the question with one who so circumspectly refused to take a metaphysical or a priori view of the matter.

(RF, Part I, Chapter 12, 'Robert's Plan of Salvation')

Such quotations approach the status of fully-fledged, detachable jokes, but their importance is in the clarity with which they illustrate the presence of humour which, for much of the time in Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer, runs more gently through the writing than even these examples suggest.

A last comment on the qualities of MacDonald's writing might be made here, one which picks up what I have said above about the strongly external method of portraying character, and the prominence of MacDonald's own personality in the writing (see above, pp. 184-187). Not only are characters not usually explored as complex beings but essentially observed and evaluated from outside; not only are important characters usually first encountered in action or in speech; and not only is the narrator both more strongly than in most novels an observing presence in the books and denied, in theory, any greater

capability than that of observation; but the books themselves are written with a stress on the visual, with a near naive reverence for the appearance of the scenes, people, situations and operations within them. I have touched on this at various earlier points, but it seems justified here to point out once more how MacDonald is observing his material with something of the wide-eyed openness, the tenacity and wonder, of a child. The child within him is observing with a freshness and, often, a fancifulness which goes a long way to portraying the world as both familiar and strange. Seeing through MacDonald's eyes as they read, his readers become, once again, as little children.

The effect is easy to justify and to illustrate from Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer, for, as I note above (p. 168), the principal characters of these novels are children and, in a sense, remain so for the complete work, despite the outward signs of ageing. Thus, so many of the principal scenes, situations and other characters are observed from the child point of view, and they make their impression on us as, in a sense, children. That MacDonald does not actually need the presence of a child character to angle his observation of a scene, however, is clear from the opening paragraphs of Alec Forbes, with the mystery and menace of the funeral communicated easily by a simple visual response to the quietness of the farm and the monumental stillness of the mourners. A rather different, and even more extensive example is in the descriptions of the East End in Robert Falconer

(quoted above, p. 163) in which the dream-like catalogue of dispassionately observed phenomena creates an effective infernal atmosphere, detached from reality as Manlove observes, but surely not therefore to be deplored as he thinks.²⁰ The observer moves through a terrible world, rather like the tiny figure briefly glimpsed a little earlier in the novel:

My attention was attracted to a woman who came out of a gin-shop, carrying a baby. She went to the kennel, and bent her head over, ill with the poisonous stuff she had been drinking. And while the woman stood in this degrading posture, the poor, white, wasted baby was looking over her shoulder with the smile of a seraph, perfectly unconscious of the hell around her.
(RF, Part III, Chapter 8, 'My Own Acquaintance')

4. Organisation

At various points in this chapter, the insubstantial, imaginative and dream-like qualities of these works have been touched upon, as detailed instances of MacDonald's allegiance to the romantic preference for the chaotic in literature (see Chapter 2, p. 108, above). These novels are long, rambling, episodic in character, the onward thrust of their narratives often so weakly to be discerned that they seem to be still in the shadow of the quotation from Novalis with which MacDonald prefaced Phantastes: 'Ein Märchen ist wie ein Traumbild ohne Zusammenhang. Ein Ensemble wunderbarer Dinge und Begebenheiten, z. B. eine Musikalische Phantasie, die harmonischen Folgen einer Aeolsharfe, die Natur selbst'. Nevertheless, these three works show

evidence of an architectonic sense, an awareness of structure which does not cancel out the dreamy progress they make from page to page. To a considerable extent, this structure is derived from the allegorical level, and I discuss it fully in my final chapter. Even so, indications of structural strength are visible to the reader who is unresponsive to MacDonald's symbolism. In the first place, of course, the mere fact that they are bildungsromanen allows for the very combination of pattern and fluidity I am describing. This is compounded, in Alec Forbes, by its being a double bildungsroman: the stories of Alec and Annie are told in parallel, inter-weaving at times closely, at times distantly, to form a shape which has some beauty. There is a security, a confidence as MacDonald switches from one to the other which is impressive; in the handling of the twin strands, MacDonald is aided by a skill he shows several times in Alec Forbes, namely that of making one scene perform more than one function (though its functions beyond the obvious one may be apparent only in retrospect). Thus, the scene (Chapter 28) in which Annie, terrified by the missionar's god, seeks help from Mr Cowie the minister turns out, much later, to have been part of a complex chain of fortuitous events which leads right through to the public exposure of Robert Bruce. A similar flexibility allows the adventure of the 'Bonnie Annie' (Chapter 31) to be one of several pivot-scenes between the stories of Annie and Alec: seemingly part of her story, it is also the re-introduction of Alec, and from it the book moves to the death of Truffey's rabbit and to Alec's departure for university.

Nor is it simply the lives of Alec and Annie which are contrasted in the book as a whole: even before Alec makes his first appearance, MacDonald has established the rhythm of contrast by the alternation, in the opening chapters, between the solitariness of Annie, and the events and decisions which for long decide her fate. The contrast swiftly projects Annie as an outsider, essentially isolated even as she is drawn into the hard and complex adult world.

Contrast is most clearly used as a structural principle as I have described in Alec Forbes, but it serves MacDonald well in other forms. In this novel, as well as in David Elginbrod and Robert Falconer, a powerful use is made of the age-old contrast of town and country, with all the symbolic values the opposition has inherited. Contrast occurs most subtly in the opening chapters of Robert Falconer, however, again with the community and its values being sensed in opposition to an isolated world created by and surrounding one person, in this case Mrs Falconer. She is firmly associated with the interior of her house, which she is not shown as clearly leaving until Part I, Chapter 16, 'Mr Lammie's Farm', where we are told that she has not left her own house for a single night for ten years. This voluntary confinement is the counterpart of the exclusiveness and separation from the ordinary world produced by her religious beliefs. Robert himself is almost the sole means of contact between the world of the interior and the rest of humanity, gradually wearing down the barriers between the two. In the early chapters, too, Mrs Falconer

is contrasted with another matriarchal figure, Miss Napier of 'The Boar's Head', just as principled and autocratic, but with a relationship with the sins of humanity (here represented by, and indeed symbolised by, drinking), which in its charity retains the opportunity for minimising their dire effects, whereas, it is later hinted, Mrs Falconer's insistent piety may have contributed to her son's going to the bad.

On the largest scale, even, MacDonald shows an ability to shape his work, for meaning and for its own shapeliness. I have discussed the handling of the two centres of interest in Alec Forbes, but should also mention the contribution made to their long slow dance by his evocation of the passage of time in that book. For Alec and Annie do not merely create their own rhythms; their lives are securely embedded in a larger sweep of time, and counterpointed with the rhythms of the seasons, to the cycle of which MacDonald is especially sensitive in this book. A similar control of the total sweep of a book is to be noticed in Robert Falconer, in which the narrative plays down what could have been the book's easy climax (Robert's mental victory in his Alpine retreat) in favour of the much later moment of harmony and illumination when the great sunset over the sea (RF, Part III, Chapter 17, 'In the Country') seals the harmony and confidence in God which by this time the narrative has justified. Against these two books, David Elginbrod has little to match, for although one admires the boldness of the plan whereby David, having

made his mark, was to disappear leaving only his influence behind, this proves a conception beyond MacDonald at this stage.

There is enough here to suggest, I think, that MacDonald was far from entirely lacking the constructive faculty, but it must also be confessed that this leisureliness, his tendency to create in terms of the scenic unit and his willingness to insert episode upon episode on the thin strand of essential narrative gives great scope to his attackers, even though it can be a source of pleasure to the sympathetic.

What few would surely deny is the sheer power and memorability of many passages in these novels. Alec Forbes abounds in episodes which are strikingly involving, especially those which make up Annie's childhood. In Robert Falconer, such gripping scenes are perhaps fewer but it, too, has its emotional climaxes. Scenes of full-scale comedy are scarcer, but the entry of the battered Juno into the Glamerton schoolroom, and the discovery of Shargar in the garret, are excellently done. In David Elginbrod, the story of Euphra Cameron's beglamouring of Hugh Sutherland, and of her escape from the power of the mesmerist, is essentially successful, despite weak moments. The range of themes and concerns which find a place in these books, although they may seem to break them down almost too far from an obvious unity, benefits these works through the enrichment of variety. Even more enriching and satisfying is the massive Scottishness of

speech and setting: these novels of the 1860s surely deserve more than the passing asides which MacDonald receives in acknowledgement of his place in most accounts of nineteenth-century Scottish fiction. Furthermore, the intense seriousness which patently lies behind them is itself a thing to value, as the critics of MacDonald's own day frequently acknowledged. Perhaps we should not express our sense of the good things in them as critics of that earlier generation did, but the ambition and idealism of these books is surely impressive.

From various comments in the course of this chapter, however, it will be apparent that I regard Alec Forbes of Howglen as the finest of the first three novels. Indeed, it is one of the handful of works through which MacDonald's claim to our attention is most insistent. Its success can be expressed negatively, in that it lacks any large-scale unevenness of interest such as marks David Elginbrod and Robert Falconer. Its success can be expressed positively, in that it contains, to a higher degree than the other two novels of the 1860s, those facets of MacDonald's writing which are most clearly successful and appealing - his skill in Scottish character and speech, and in portraying Scottish communities and scenes. His imagination here vigorously invents situations which convey the emotions in which he is interested, namely powerful anger, pathos and warmth. In telling of fall and redemption, it succeeds in balancing the components of the cycle as the other two novels do not: in the story of Alec and

Annie, innocence and moral responsibility, original and eventual happiness, pain and longing are combined in a whole which does justice to them all. By its side, David Elginbrod fudges the story of fall and redemption, while Robert Falconer has a more limited focus on the state of loss (of happiness, of God) for the greater part of its length. Alec Forbes is a beautifully judged expression of the pain, the optimism, and the serenely calm longing which is the essence of the Christian (or, indeed, human) experience as MacDonald saw it.

I stress the notion of Alec Forbes's richness and balance, because it is this which is the heart of its success. More obvious signs of its aesthetic superiority over the other two - the confinement of its action to Scotland, the wide range of prominent and intriguing characters - are results of its fundamental success in articulating MacDonald's Christian vision, rather than being the roots of success in themselves. As in the case of the later masterpiece, Malcolm, the greatness of Alec Forbes is bound up with its sheer fecundity of character, incident and theme, and also has to do with the balance of narrative drive, and episodic variety. Both books are profoundly static: they introduce us to large casts of characters, in whom interest is maintained over the greater length of each book. In the lesser novels, change of scene usually brings a considerable change of cast, and MacDonald seems to be essentially handling the relationship of only a few characters at any given stage.

The result is a comparative thinness when set beside his very best work.

I call such a book as Alec Forbes 'static' because its rich variety of interest, maintained throughout its length, counterpoises and envelops its narrative drive. Unusually, this is, in MacDonald's case, a recipe for quite profound satisfaction, for it expresses what he means. Thus, the narrative interest in Alec Forbes expresses the human progress, through vicissitude, towards happiness in God. In contrast, the quality of the environment through which that progress is made - an environment which is both a human society and the natural world - expresses both the seeming permanence of the pain, the unideal, the cruel and the deadly in the created world, and also the antithetical permanence of happiness, goodness, kindness, warmth, and the eternally living in that same created world. A time-based notion of progress, contained in the narrative momentum, is all but overborne by an apprehended changelessness, which is a type of man's seemingly perennial condemnation to the confines of matter, and also of the eternity of God and his goodness, to be beheld, paradoxically, in that same confining matter.

The profundity of this paradox, and the profound penetration and beauty of MacDonald's expression of it, is to be felt most tellingly of all in the image of Annie's solitary nocturnal wandering through Glamerton on the night of Alec's return from the Arctic

(Chapter 91). After all she has suffered and achieved, she is still homeless, as much so as in the early chapters; at a stroke, MacDonald negates her entire narrative progress, for she is where she always was. Yet there is a crucial contrast with the beginning, for the sense of threat has gone. Nothing has changed but Annie's sense of her position; she behaves with a calm and submissive assurance, an assurance which, retrospectively, can be seen as having been appropriate even in her childhood anguish, had she been capable of achieving it. Now, as then, she is essentially 'amid the alien corn'; then, as now, she was with God.

Alec Forbes is great, therefore, because in it MacDonald essentially achieves the expression of his extended sense of reality; he is able to combine in it a sense of time with a knowledge of the timeless. He reconciles the two concepts of the real, the mundane and the transcendental, in a vision which is true to both. This novel succeeds, not in spite of its idealism, but because, in it, that religious idealism is given a notably complex expression.

Footnotes for Chapter 3

The following are the abbreviations which are used in this section of footnotes:

- GMDW Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (London, 1924). The second edition (September, 1924) was used.
- Manlove Colin Manlove, 'George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels', in Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays, edited by Ian Campbell (Manchester, 1979), pp. 68-88.
- Reis Richard H. Reis, George MacDonald (New York, 1972).
- Wolff R. L. Wolff, The Golden Key (New Haven, 1961).

1. Wolff, p. 267.
2. Manlove, p. 70.
3. Reis, p. 57.
4. Wolff, p. 230.
5. GMDW, p. 19n.
6. Manlove, p. 72.
7. Wolff, p. 227.
8. Manlove, p. 77.
9. Manlove, p. 82.
10. Manlove, p. 77.
11. Reis, pp. 53-54.
12. Manlove, p. 82.
13. Edwin Morgan, 'Registering the Reality of Scotland', in Essays (Cheadle, 1974), 153-157 (p. 155).

14. K. M. Elisabeth Murray, Caught in the Web of Words. James A. H. Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary (New Haven and London, 1977), p. 65.
15. GMDW, p. 320.
16. James Greenwood, The Seven Curses of London (London, 1869).
17. Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, London (London, 1872), pp. 141-149.
18. Manlove, p. 79.
19. Alexander Webster, George MacDonald's Influence on Scottish Religion:- Robert Falconer's Plan for Emptying Hell, British and Foreign Unitarian Association Pamphlet, New Series no. 27 (London, Essex Hall, n.d.).
20. Manlove, p. 79.

Chapter 4

1. The Scottish Novels of the 1870s

Despite superficial similarities of theme and style, the three Scottish novels of the 1870s, Malcolm, The Marquis of Lossie and Sir Gibbie, differ from their predecessors of the preceding decade in two fundamental but related ways.

In the first place, they are no longer so confident of the essential innocence of man; evil is treated with greater prominence and seriousness, and the individual is no longer shown as steadily progressing to perfection merely through the operation of time and experience. In the novels of the 1860s, evil is seen as something essentially outside humanity, or at least outside that essence of humanity which MacDonald so often represents as a lost innocent far from home. Indeed, from his own day to this, MacDonald has been accused of sentimental simplicity of mind because he blinks the doctrine of the atonement.¹

We may doubt if his theology was ever so flimsy as Wolff implies, for even in Phantastes MacDonald is vividly aware of man's capacity for evil. Indeed, in an early statement of the process whereby the divine in man destroys the merely mundane, we find a version of both the atonement and hell itself. 'The man whose deeds are evil, fears the burning. But the burning will not come the less that he fears it or denies it. Escape is hopeless. For Love is inexorable. Our God

is a consuming fire. He shall not come out till he has paid the uttermost farthing.'² The atonement, clearly, is still there; the points wherein MacDonald differs from the theology of Selby and Wolff are, rather, in his conception of God's emotion towards man (love instead of wrath) and in his powerful sense of the presence of the divine within man. On both counts, MacDonald sees man and God naturally tending towards each other, whereas the traditional theology insisted upon their essential separation.

Nevertheless, the sheer flow in the narrative of the earliest novels, culminating in the perfection and happiness of the heroes, does suggest a rather easy inevitability in the triumph of man's best, that is divine, self, and consequently those works do lay themselves open to charges of oversimplification and complacency. Such charges are far less easy to maintain against the novels to which we now turn, for in them man's stupidity and capacity for evil are given far greater prominence, and are overcome with far less ease, or assurance of success. An immediate consequence of this new emphasis on the stubbornness of evil is that the force which eventually overcomes it is automatically felt as more formidably powerful, in its turn, than it had previously. Thus Christ stands forth more clearly and conflict and contrast become the immediate stuff of these novels; hitherto, these dynamic qualities had been enclosed within structures of flowing unity. Good and evil now seem locked in an ever-fluctuating struggle; men seem more naturally drawn to the latter, and the eventual triumph of the former is no longer expressed in such comfortingly mundane terms as in the earlier books.

Whereas, in the 1860s, MacDonald could end his novels on the establishment of love and harmony purely at the personal level, in marriage or in the reconciliation of father and son, in these later works such interpersonal solutions are dwarfed by more elaborate and, in a sense, more abstract assertions of right, in the reclamation of family titles initially denied to their heroes. The reign of goodness is imposed, to a certain extent, instead of arising completely and naturally from the hearts of men. This crucial shift, of course, involves no abandonment of MacDonald's universalist position: a belief in universal redemption does not require one to believe in an intrinsically good creature, but can be sustained merely on the assumption of an infinitely loving Creator.

The second fundamental difference between these novels and the earlier ones has already been foreshadowed in the above discussion. The change I have tried to describe - which is not so much one of theme as one of emphasis, or perhaps of moral sensibility - results in a notable change in narrative type and shape. MacDonald's declining sense of the steadiness of man's moral improvement leads to the abandonment of the autobiographical basis upon which his image of moral growth seems to have depended. Thus, in these second three novels, his heroes do not grow morally: they are essentially perfect even when we first encounter them. Nor do they proceed from a Huntly-based rural innocence to the experience of being Aberdeen undergraduates. MacDonald must now invent his novels, in a way which he has not had to do before. With Malcolm, a new imaginative sweep and freedom enters

his Scottish fiction, as he is thrown back on his inventive and constructive powers to a degree which perhaps only Phantastes had demanded of him hitherto. It is clearly at this point in the Scottish series that his novels begin more openly to take on many of the qualities of his fairy and fantasy writing. It is with Malcolm, too, that the reader becomes aware of unexpected literary source material coming to prominence: if MacDonald's earlier novels had been especially marked by the influence of Wordsworth and the German Romantics, Malcolm can be seen deriving sustenance from an array of additional and more surprising sources. These sources are far from being props to his imagination, but they do suggest, I think, the new openness and fertility of a mind eagerly seizing on grist to its creative mill.

Once again, it will perhaps be helpful to summarize the narratives with which we are concerned. In its opening chapters, Malcolm introduces us to a succession of characters and situations, including the young fisherman of the title, his grandfather Duncan MacPhail, the newly returned local aristocrat the marquis of Lossie, and his daughter Florimel. These first chapters also introduce us to the various locales within the total setting of the book, a setting which Greville MacDonald informs us is based on Cullen in Banffshire.³ From the wealth of episodes in the book, there emerges, as narrative emphasis, the growing relationships between these four characters, a process which leads to Malcolm taking up residence and service in Lossie House itself, and to the half-growth of a romantic involvement between him and Florimel. As the book progresses, two further narrative ideas are increasingly

caught up in the main story of the relationships between the leading characters. The desire of the wicked mother of a half-witted and deformed local laird, Stephen Stewart, to have him put away leads to her claiming Malcolm as her true son. Malcolm and those nearest to him repudiate this, not just because they believe it to be false, but because they are repelled by Mrs Stewart's persecution of the son who is undoubtedly hers. A second interest is provided by the story of the religious revival in the community, a swelling of religious emotion outside the established kirk, focussed by the meetings held in a cave on the sea-shore. These meetings and this location intertwine with Malcolm's story, but also result in the banishment from the post of schoolmaster of Malcolm's friend and mentor, Alexander Graham. The book ends with the revelation of Malcolm's birth, which involves other secrets about Lossie House itself, as well as implicating various characters in various ways. Malcolm is revealed as the legitimate son of the marquis and heir to his title; Florimel is Malcolm's illegitimate half-sister. The marquis dies at the end of the book, but Malcolm mysteriously lays no claim to the title, which Florimel believes she has inherited.

The Marquis of Lossie carries on from this point, with Malcolm occupying the post of groom on the estate, and Florimel removed to London by worldly and aristocratic friends. Hearing that his sister is on the point of marrying Lord Liffmore, a blackguard who has already seduced one of the fisher girls, Malcolm follows her to London, in the company of Peter Mair, a trustworthy fisherman, and Kelpie, a wild but

magnificent horse which is Malcolm's special care. He joins his sister's London household, and tries to foster the relationship between her and Lenorme, a worthy artist. He also meets her friend Lady Clementina Thornicroft, whose tenderness resents the rigorous discipline he applies to Kelpie, but who gradually comes to understand, respect and, eventually, love him. Unable to positively influence his sister in London, Malcolm tricks her into returning to Portlossie, where the oppression of a factor is making life hard for the ordinary fisher folk. On the journey, Malcolm tells Florimel that he is her brother, but remains quiet on his own right to the title. This last revelation is held back until it is absolutely necessary to reassert right and order both in the Lossie estates and in Florimel's moral and emotional outlook. Once Malcolm openly adopts the title, however, harmony is established in both the social and personal realms.

Although it, too, ends with a title being justly reclaimed, Sir Gibbie is in many ways quite different again. We first encounter Gibbie as a dumb waif in the slums of a city, the son of a drunken cobbler who dies while the child is still very young. Gibbie survives in the city until he is horrified by witnessing a particularly brutal murder, the shock of which causes him to flee the company of men, so that he journeys on foot up the river at the mouth of which he had always lived. He comes eventually to an estate, in which he secretly helps in the farm chores until he is found and whipped as a trespasser. In flight once again, he finds shelter with the Grants, a shepherd family living high in the mountains, where he grows to adolescence and hears

about Christ. A notable long episode in the middle of the book is the terrible flood in which all Gibbie's selfless energy and harmony with nature are needed, and in which a character from his early childhood recognises him, so that his true identity as Sir Gilbert Galbraith is revealed. He is taken back to the city, to be brought up by the Reverend Sclater, the minister who makes the discovery and who becomes his guardian. Much of this part of the book is concerned with the contrast between the refinement of middle-class manners, and the spontaneity of Gibbie and his friend Donal Grant. A conclusion is reached partly via the romantic theme of the choosing of Gibbie, in preference to Donal, by Ginevra Galbraith, the daughter of the stupid and blinkered man who now owns the lands which had been in Gibbie's family. The conclusion also comes about when Gibbie, having come into his fortune, is able to initiate a scheme of good works among the city slums, and buys out Ginevra's father prior to installing his daughter as mistress, by marriage, of the estate.

2. Themes

As I indicate in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, these three novels are preoccupied with the opposition between good and evil, and deal with the subject with a directness new in MacDonald's Scottish series. A more detailed account of their thematic concerns, however, will not just underline this observation, but will also distinguish between the three of them: once again, we find that the seeming

similarity of one with another is far less complete than appears at first sight.

In Malcolm, the first of the three, we find the vision of moral conflict being given its most straightforward expression. With a deft instinct, MacDonald finds a symbol to stand for this conflict, and to allow it to be stressed in the dialogue. Florimel and Malcolm watch the fishing boats go out as the sun sets in splendour:

'I want to know,' she resumed, 'why it looks as if some great thing were going on. Why is all this pomp and show? Something ought to be at hand. All I see is the catching of a few miserable fish...'

'It's the battle o' Armageddon, my leddy,' he cried, as he came within hearing distance... 'The battle o' Armageddon's no ane o' the Scots battles; it's the battle atween the right and the wrang, 'at ye read about i' the buik o' the Revelations... It's just what ye was sayin', my leddy: sic a pomp as yon bude to hing abune a gran' battle some gait or ither.'

(M, Chapter 23, 'Armageddon')

The whole of the discussion at this point is to the effect that all life's processes, all human activity, are part of an ultimate moral struggle, and that willy-nilly we are all soldiers in it. The point had been made as clearly, but with far less symbolic prominence, when Alexander Graham, the dominie and Malcolm's especial mentor, discussed man's unstable moral ambivalence with one of his pupils.

'You think, then, Sheltie, that a man may be both bad and good?'

'I dinna ken, sir. I think he may be whiles ane an' whiles the ither, an' whiles maybe it wad be ill to say

whilk. Oor collie's whiles in twa min's whether
he'll du what he's telled or no.'

'That's the battle of Armageddon, Sheltie, my man.
It's aye ragin', ohn gun roared or bagonet clashed.
Ye maun up an' do yer best in't, my man.'
(M, Chapter 7, 'Alexander Graham')

And it is a sense of the perennial ebb and flow of moral forces which lies deepest in the book. The characters either fall neatly into one of the moral extremes, or are strikingly ambiguous in their moral stature - clearly containing within them the double potential which Sheltie recognises in men and dogs. Even more important, the narrative itself avoids implying that good is inevitably and resoundingly triumphant. It is true that past wrongs are eventually revealed and rectified, and that Malcolm finds out the truth about himself. Yet his impulse to remain incognito serves not only to keep the way open for a sequel, but also avoids the seemingly irresistibly final assertion and demonstration of right. The quality of the denouement is well judged: right achieves dominance and evil is checkmated, but the black pieces are not swept from the board, only held in check. The battle of Armageddon will rage again, despite this lull.

A subsidiary issue within the book's main theme of moral conflict is the impulse of evil to possess, to enslave the good. The battle, that is, takes the form of fending off an evil encroachment, so that at different times little Phemy Mair, the mad laird, and Malcolm himself are all trapped or threatened by Mrs Stewart and her agent Barbara Catanach. Duncan MacPhail, it transpires, is one who has escaped the

power of evil, in his rejection of his wife Mrs Catanach, while, in the course of the book's action, Malcolm's father is saved from the clutches of unbelief by the approach of death itself. On the other hand, Alexander Graham falls victim, in so far as his enlightened religious thinking leads to his dismissal from his post, and thus from Portlossie itself. Again, balance is maintained right to the book's end.

Where, in Malcolm, the aggressive moral force seems to be evil, with goodness essentially in the role of defending itself, in The Marquis of Lossie it is good which is the positive, encroaching force. Evil here becomes, not so much a predator, rather a stupid and stubborn resistance to its own best interest. The forces of evil are allowed one major initiative, when Mrs Catanach and Caley, a ladies maid, attempt to poison Malcolm. Apart from this brief episode as victim, the force of righteousness is here an aggressor, adequately symbolised by the image which colours the account of Alexander Graham's preaching (ML, Chapter 27, 'The Preacher'), when he sees himself as a Spenserian knight 'lance in hand, spurring to meet my dragon'. In this moral struggle, it is evil which is on the defensive, so that the paced grandeur of Malcolm's assumption of the title and of his rectification of the ills which have flourished in his absence is fitting in the later book where it would not have been in the earlier.

Especially as Epictetus is given such prominence in The Marquis of Lossie, (see below, p. 256), it is clear that what MacDonald is really writing about in it is the rectification of the will. The story he tells

about Malcolm's attempts to bring his sister to choose a morally healthier way of life (and a better husband), is an allegory of the struggle between the divine and the fallen in man, the former attempting to reclaim the latter before being forced to assert its inherent sway. More accurately, we might see Malcolm's effort as being to persuade Florimel's deepest will, which is righteous, to assert itself. The distinction is clear at the point at which Florimel, en route from London to Portlossie, gradually realises what Malcolm has done.

London and the parks looked unendurable from this more varied life, more plentiful air, and above all more abundant space. The very spirit of freedom seemed to wave his wings about the yacht, fanning full her sails. Florimel breathed as if she never could have enough of the sweet wind; each breath gave her all the boundless region whence it blew; she gazed as if she would fill her soul with the sparkling gray of the water, the sun-melted blue of the sky, and the incredible green of the flat shores...

'What does it all mean?' she said, her eyes and cheeks glowing with delight.

'It means, my lady, that you are on board your own yacht, the Psyche. I brought her with me from Portlossie, and have had her fitted up according to the wish you once expressed to my lord, your father, that you could sleep on board. Now you might make a voyage of many days in her.'

'Oh, Malcolm!' was all Florimel could answer. She was too pleased to think as yet of any of the thousand questions that might naturally have followed.

A little later, however, anger intervenes:

'Then it was all a trick to carry me off against my will!' she cried, with growing indignation.

'Hardly against your will, my lady,' said Malcolm,

embarrassed and thoughtful, in a tone deprecating and apologetic.

'Utterly against my will!' insisted Florimel.
(ML, Chapter 51, 'The Psyche')

Later in the voyage, however, it is clear that Malcolm knows Florimel better than she knows herself:

She was not yet quite spoiled. She was still such a lover of the visible world and of personal freedom, that the thought of returning to London and its leaden-footed hours, would now have been unendurable. At this moment she could have imagined no better thing than thus to go tearing through the water - home to her home.
(ML, Chapter 56, 'Mid-Ocean')

In this portion of the narrative, Florimel is revealed as embodying the human capacity for will, for choice. Her deepest instinct is to select the option which is best for her, namely to leave the materialism of London and go home. She has in her, however, the desire to assert her individuality, and it is manifest in her bouts of rebellion against her own best interests. Her homeward journey is imposed, however, as the Christ-like Malcolm is at the helm of Florimel's 'Psyche'. The boat is an allegory of her soul, as the name suggests, and it is given into Malcolm's captaincy. Under his guidance it heads unerringly for its home port, carrying the faulty decision-making dimension of the human being to God, despite its childish struggles. MacDonald is doubtless not only responding to the meaning of the Greek word in his naming of the boat, but is surely using to the full the myth of Psyche in which she is the beloved of Love itself. The name thus connotes not merely the dry theology of

the relationship between Christ, the soul, and the will, but also the spirit of love which impels Christ to override the will's fitfulness.

If Florimel, however, is the central narrative focus for the theme of the will, MacDonald gives it its most concentrated and memorable expression in the image of Kelpie, the magnificent but dangerous horse which Malcolm cherishes and masters for its own good. If the equestrian knight spurring to meet the dragon is one important symbol in the book, another and related one is the image of the charger being tamed in the first place.

When he got her rid of the saddle, he gathered the reins together in his bridle hand, took his whip in the other, and softly and carefully straddled across her huge barrel without touching her.

'Now, my lady!' he said. 'Run for the wood.'

Florimel rose and fled, heard a great scrambling behind her, and turning at the first tree, which was only a few yards off, saw Kelpie on her hind legs, and Malcolm, whom she had lifted with her, sticking by his knees on her bare back. The moment her fore feet touched the ground, he gave her the spur severely, and after one plunging kick, off they went westward over the sands, away from the sun; nor did they turn before they had dwindled to such a speck that the ladies could not have told by their eyes whether it was moving or not. At length they saw it swerve a little; by and by it began to grow larger; and after another moment or two they could distinguish what it was, tearing along towards them like a whirlwind, the lumps of wet sand flying behind them like an upward storm of clods. (ML, Chapter 39, 'Discipline')

It is part of MacDonald's attractiveness to us that his belief in the need for the mastery of Christ is far from demanding the rejection

of the human, and in Kelpie he finds an excellent symbol for our animal instincts, fire, energy and ferocity which only need to be guided, channelled in the service of the right, to make us effective fighters in Armageddon.

Thus, not only is a sense of the constant, and near-equal, struggle between good and evil to be found in each of these two books, but, placed together in sequence, they embody the ebb and flow which is their subject-matter, as first evil, then good, takes the initiative. In various aesthetic respects, we may well prefer the earlier of the two, but there can be little doubt that together they constitute a unified and impressively ambitious statement.

An important part of the action of The Marquis of Lossie takes place in London, and its underlying premise is the piquant and challenging contrast between Malcolm's right-mindedness, with his unorthodox behaviour, and the metropolitan environment which is the summit of worldliness. This pattern and theme is made even more central in the next novel, Sir Gibbie, in which it constitutes the basic idea of the book, a fable of Christ walking the streets of the Victorian city. In moral terms, its theme is that of the Portlossie books, only expressed in briefer compass; the first part of Sir Gibbie shows the Christ-like child horrified by the repellent evil in mankind, while the last part portrays an older Gibbie returning to the city with a view to improving it. In between, MacDonald shows his hero nurtured in rural goodness and isolation, and taught a Christianity based on the

New Testament, so as to transform his native benevolence to a positive force capable of attacking evil, and defending right.

Nevertheless, such language suggests a belligerence which Gibbie entirely lacks (though Malcolm had it). Despite Gibbie's astonishing energy, he is passive, in the sense that his efforts are towards rectification of a wrong situation (be it the degradation of the alcoholic, the destructiveness of a flood, or the misappropriation of a title which is rightfully his). In this book, goodness seems to be a force called into being by evil, rather than an impulse which spurs in search of evil to destroy it. This is a modification of the vision of the Portlossie books, with a view to presenting goodness as an utterly selfless and loving force. The quality of sharp opposition between moral forces is still strong, but it is embodied not so much in the book's action, as in the startling juxtaposition of the unworldly and the worldly achieved by the very act of setting a character like Gibbie in the world of Victorian Scotland.

3. The Influence of Other Literature

One of the things which sets Malcolm apart from its predecessors, and which make it something of an epoch in MacDonald's Scottish fiction, is the extent and manner of the use of echoes of earlier literature. The development is partly one of degree, for all MacDonald's Scottish novels are full of references to, and quotations from, other writers. MacDonald's mind was filled with his reading, and it was natural to him to

draw upon it as an aid to expressing himself. Phantastes and David Elginbrod, with their chapter-mottoes, make this especially obvious, but it is true of all his fiction. Furthermore, even in the three earliest Scottish novels, we can detect particular emphases in these references, indicating that certain authors were especially prominent in his mind at the time of writing. Thus, David Elginbrod and Alec Forbes show an allegiance to Novalis and to Wordsworth. Furthermore, David Elginbrod has been tinged by the macabre world of Jacobean revenge tragedy, while Alec Forbes, on the other hand, has many references to, and quotations from, Milton. The latter novel also makes use of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's Great Moray Floods. None of these earlier writers, however, seem to have radically influenced the first three novels, except for Novalis. Apart from him, MacDonald seems to have written his earliest Scottish fiction on the basis of his own life, and the hopes and rationalisations based upon it.

Malcolm, however, is not only well endowed with sources, but their contribution lies deeply and partly hidden. In some instances, they have substantially contributed to the fundamental details of the narrative; in others, they have percolated through the story, cropping up in seemingly unrelated details, so that it is clear that MacDonald's mind has been steeped in them throughout the considerable period of the novel's creation. The result is a novel which is no longer built around the shape of MacDonald's early life. It represents a wrench away from MacDonald's previous fictional practice, a wrench the effects of which are henceforth felt in all the succeeding Scottish novels.

Malcolm embodies, one might almost say, a liberation in its author's writing, and certainly the novel reads with considerable freedom. From the Portlossie books onwards, most of the Scottish novels are structured round a reading of Christ; the Bible, rather than MacDonald's own experience, is now their core. And in line with this, their detail, settings and incidents are drawn more widely, from beyond Huntly and Aberdeen (in terms of Scottish geography) and, more firmly than before, from past literature. MacDonald had now to construct, to invent, his Scottish novels in a way he had not had to do before. He is remarkably successful in welding his borrowings into wholes which become entirely his own, but the contributing material nevertheless powerfully marks the end results.

In breaking away from his own past, as the basis of his narrative structures, however, MacDonald does not cease to be an autobiographical novelist. He ceases to be, we might say, naively autobiographical, but the novels of the 1870s and later continue to reflect his feelings and beliefs, and maintain a close contact with his mental life (as I discuss in the last section of this chapter).

In writing Malcolm, MacDonald not only takes over the names of his principal characters from characters in earlier literature, but, with the names, some of their characterisation and circumstances. Florimel is the most evident example, and MacDonald explicitly relates her to the character in Books Three and Four of The Faerie Queene.

Though not greatly prejudiced in favour of books, Lady Florimel had burrowed a little in the old library at Lossie House, and had chanced on the Fairie Queene. She had often come upon the name of the author in books of extracts, and now, turning over its leaves, she found her own. Indeed, where else could her mother have found the name Florimel?

(M, Chapter 15, 'The Slope of the Dune')

Like her original, MacDonald's Florimel is a heroine (indeed, a heroine in two books, Malcolm and its sequel) but an ultimately inferior heroine beside a more impressive figure - not that Lady Clementina seems intimately modelled on Britomart. Both Florimels are of immediate sexual attractiveness, and both receive the attentions of more than one man. More importantly, MacDonald's character is a deeply two-sided figure, her worthiness and essential rightness of heart radically at odds with her wilful worldliness. That he has Spenser's invention of the two Florimells in mind - the true, living Florimell and the false creature made of animated snow (The Faerie Queene, III. 8.6) - is clear in this early passage of interaction between Malcolm and his Florimel:

And as he spoke, he gently stretched himself on the dune, about three yards aside and lower down. Florimel looked half amused and half annoyed, but she had brought it on herself, and would punish him only by dropping her eyes again on her book, and keeping silent. She had come to the Florimel of snow.

(M, Chapter 15, 'The Slope of the Dune')

Nor do the connections stop there, for perhaps Florimell's flight from Prince Arthur is a significant foreshadowing of MacDonald's heroine's increasingly furious efforts to evade her half-brother's

righteousness and wise care for her. Spenser's words could apply to the later pair as well as to his own:

With no lesse haste, and eke with no lesse dreed,
That fearefull ladie fled from him, that ment
To her no evill thought, nor evill deed.
(The Faerie Queene, III. 4.50. 1-3)

Indeed, Spenser's Florimell had been previously chased by a peasant, 'a griesly Foster' (The Faerie Queene, III, 1.17.2), and the fact that MacDonald's character is befriended by Malcolm first as a humble fisher lad and then as a marquis and elder brother is only one of many parallels which seem to echo between the two seemingly very different works. Thus, Spenser's account of the growing love felt by the wounded squire for Belpheobe again seems to express a feeling MacDonald articulates both in this book and in several others.

But foolish boy, what bootes thy service base
To her, to whom the heavens do serve and sew?
Thou a meane Squire, of meeke and lowly place,
She heauenly borne, and of celestiall hew.
How then? of all love taketh equall vew:
And doth not highest God vouchsafe to take
The love and service of the basest crew?
If she will not, dye meekly for her sake;
Dye rather, dye, then ever so faire love forsake.
(The Faerie Queene, III. 5.47)

More peculiarly applicable to the Portlossie books is the motif, appearing twice in Spenser's Book Three, of siblings born under peculiar circumstances and brought up separately so that marked differences appear. Thus, in Canto Six, is the story of Belpheobe

and Amoretta, the one a chaste huntress whom Malcolm partly echoes, the other more like MacDonald's Florimel and brought up by Venus. Both are essentially good, however, as MacDonald's siblings are; in Canto Seven, Spenser introduces a contrasting pair of lewd and incestuous kind, Argante and Ollyphant.

Further faint, but not necessarily insubstantial, echoes can be found. Thus there is surely some foreshadowing of the mad laird in the stanza describing Florimell's attendant dwarf:

...a Dwarfe, that seemed terrifyde
With some late perill, which he hardly past,
Or other accident, which him aghast.
Of whom he asked, whence he lately came,
And whither now he trauelled so fast:
For sore he swat, and running through that same
Thicke forest, was bescracht, & both his feet nigh lame.
(The Faerie Queene, III. 5.3.3-9)

Similarly, Mrs Catanach seems to have owed something to both Genius in Canto Six ('He letteth in, he letteth out to wend,/All that to come into the world desire' (32.1-2)) and to the witch who creates the snowy Florimell. Furthermore, the wildness of Kelpie in The Marquis of Lossie may have some root in Florimell's bolting palfrey (The Faerie Queene, VII. 2.7-9). In addition, reference to Spenser permeates MacDonald's phrasing itself. We have seen one example in the reference to the Florimell of snow; another, much later in the book, is when Miss Horn is described as 'the Christian Amazon' (M, Chapter 60, 'The Sacrament') in clear remembrance of Britomart.

Such details are small, however, compared to the other major indebtedness to Book Three of The Faerie Queene. This is in the matter of Malcolm's birth, and his being discovered in a sea cave by Duncan MacPhail. In Spenser, Florimell's beloved is Marinell, son of a mortal man and a sea nymph.

There he this knight of her begot, whom borne
She of his father Marinell did name,
And in a rocky cave as wight forlorne,
Long time she fostered up, . . .
(The Faerie Queene, III. 4.20.1-4)

Beyond this, however, it is hard to press a resemblance between Marinell and Malcolm; his birth apart, the character in Book Three Malcolm perhaps resembles most is Britomart herself - not in his sex, certainly, but very much in his being far other than he seems.

Several other figures stand behind Malcolm, however. One, and surely the source of his name, is Shakespeare's character in Macbeth. It is MacDonald's pairing of Malcolm and Duncan which is the suggestive detail, of course, and his making the young man a disinherited wanderer who eventually comes into his own, while the old man is a father-figure at the mercy of time and of evil. The conjecture receives strong support from our knowledge that Shakespeare's play was very much in his consciousness during the several years before Malcolm was published, and when he knew it was being planned. Greville tells us that his father visited Huntly and Cullen in May 1872 'to look up things' for 'his new novel, Malcolm'.⁴ This was a few months prior to his departure for his first, triumphant lecturing tour of America, in the

course of which he attended a performance of Macbeth in Boston. Lady Macbeth was played 'so indifferently that it set my parents thinking', and George MacDonald wrote home to his daughter suggesting they incorporate the play in the repertoire of their family dramatic enterprise:

I find I can learn Macbeth's part very easily for me, and before we come home expect to be complete in it, as far as the words go. Whether I can act it is another thing, but if you will be Lady Macbeth I will try.⁵

The play was often done by the MacDonald family, and there are extant several photographs of George MacDonald in the title role.

Once again, MacDonald's tendency is to take over the superficial characteristics of the earlier character, rather than to attempt to transpose its essence, but this is merely part of his proneness towards categorizing rather than individualizing characters. Thus MacDonald's Malcolm is (eventually) the heroic and righteous son of a dead father; like Shakespeare's character, too, he chooses to veil the truth about himself for a short-term advantage. Both works end with a Malcolm publically enthroned.

Once the relationship between such central characters is discerned, other similarities between the two texts begin to appear. Among MacDonald's other characters, therefore, it is not hard to believe that Mrs Stewart, the mother of the mad laird, owes a considerable amount to Lady Macbeth. In his essay, 'Shakespeare's Art', MacDonald calls her 'the fiend-soul of the house' and sees her as she 'steps

from the door, like the speech of the building, with her falsely smiled welcome' (Orts, p. 164). Just so does Mrs Stewart, in her interview with Malcolm, cloak with welcome her hidden fiendishness. 'She took a step forward with the quick movement of a snake about to strike, but stopped midway, and stood looking at him with glittering eyes, teeth clenched, and lips half open' (M, Chapter 58, 'Malcolm and Mrs Stewart'). Lady Macbeth, of course, has no children that we can see, but her unnaturalness is summed up in her notorious claim that

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me -
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.

(Macbeth, I, 7.54)

Similarly, the sudden appearance of a powerfully witch-like character, Mrs Catanach, in the Scottish series must be at least partly due to MacDonald's current preoccupation with the play containing the most famous witches in English literature. One wonders, too, if the kidnapping and near-murder of Phemy Mair owes anything to the murder of MacDuff's son at a similarly late stage in the play. There is surely a strong possibility that the dramatically disrupted banquet (M, Chapter 19, 'Duncan's Pipes') was partly modelled on that at which Banquo's ghost appears. Furthermore, the several scenes in which Malcolm confronts the gang of Mrs Stewart's men as they seek out her deformed son may well owe something to the scene of the murderers waiting for Banquo and his son.

Individually, each of these instances is weak; taken together, they achieve a form of strength. In none of these cases can we say that MacDonald's book would have been quite different had it not been for Shakespeare's play, but we must believe that MacDonald had an awareness of these similarities, and allowed the relevant elements in Shakespeare to influence the conduct of the story in its colour and emphasis. He would have been perfectly aware of the fortuitous associations between Macbeth and the region of his novel: Cawdor Castle is a little to the west of Cullen, while MacDuff is to the east. All in all, there seems to have been a constant interplay, in his mind, between the novel he was writing and Shakespeare's tragedy.

At this point, too, I must add a qualification to the statement in Chapter Two that the influence of Scott on MacDonald is of a very general sort, rather than being specific (see above, p. 77), for the novels of the 1870s, and Malcolm in particular, closely resemble in certain respects Scott's early novels of lost heirs and sea-coast adventures, Guy Mannering and The Antiquary. We need not doubt that MacDonald was well acquainted with them, though it is interesting to note that it is The Antiquary which Alec and Kate attempt to read at the outset of Kate's holiday at Howglen (AF, Chapter 48): the implication is that neither young person is in a sufficiently receptive state to take in such a substantial and worthwhile book.

It is the internal similarities, however, which are striking. Both Scott novels move towards the identification, in adult life, of

a hero who had been early snatched from his family and place in circumstances of romantic drama and, indeed, violence. MacDonald's Malcolm is carried off in a fairy-tale melodrama while Gibbie is finally banished from his father's place by a rush of blood from a gaping throat. In the two Scott novels and the three by MacDonald, the possession of a castle and all that goes with it is also at stake, apart from sheer justice. In each of the Scott novels, essentially good-hearted but limited fathers (Godfrey Bertram, Guy Mannering and Sir Arthur Wardour) create situations of difficulty for their daughters, while the Marquis of Lossie and Thomas Galbraith find themselves at loggerheads with their daughters in turn. In addition, Guy Mannering shares with Malcolm the motif of the stickit minister and a sea-cliff cave in which important episodes are set.

The further detailed resemblances with The Antiquary, however, are more extensive. Like Malcolm, it blends a plot of unashamed romance with a near-documentary portrayal of life among Scottish east coast fishermen: the Seaton of Portlossie owes something to the Mucklebackits as well as to MacDonald's own observation. Some of the romance, too, in The Antiquary has the colouring of German folk-tales: while ultimately critically placed, this strand is nevertheless enjoyed by Scott and will have appealed profoundly to MacDonald. One notes, too, that the idea of the haunted room is present in both works. In each case, such fancifulness is balanced by realistic observation such as that embodied in the treatments of the power of gossip in small communities.

Most important of all, however, is the similarity of the Colonsay family's situation with that of the Glenallans. In both, a secret marriage between a son of the house and an outsider produces a baby boy who is smuggled away (returning later to claim his own). In each case, a female servant plays a crucial, and indeed fiendish part, and both Elspeth Mucklebackit and Barbara Catanach are important sources of the truth of the family secret. In each case, also, the husband acts a poor part, although the full extent of his position is hidden from him, and the wrongs done are partly to be blamed on conniving relatives. The Colonsay family, it is true, has no counterpart of the Countess of Glenallan, but Mrs Stewart, who now uses Mrs Catanach as her agent, is partly modelled upon her.

Incidentally, one notes in passing how The Antiquary contains a few other elements which find echoes elsewhere in MacDonald's writing. Thus, the motif of buried treasure and of the truth-imparting dream (see, especially, Scott's Note I - 'Mr R - - - d's Dream') are similar to what is to be found in Castle Warlock, while Lovel's dream-experience of the tapestry coming to life (Chapter 10) is surely a source of the transformation scene in the second chapter of Phantastes. Perhaps most tellingly of all to MacDonald, the antiquary himself is a scholar who has experienced the mockery of the girl he loved, and who, like Alexander Graham, had lost her to the hero's aristocratic father. Whether or not MacDonald himself had ever been so rejected, it is, as we have seen, a predicament in which he places various of his own characters.

Further sources, both major and obscure, are indicated by explicit references within Malcolm itself. Thus, a footnote points to an account, in a current periodical, of a noted French eccentric, Martin Féréol, from whom MacDonald takes over, for the mad laird, his isolation and his closeness to nature.⁶ Similarly, the prominence with which William Law is mentioned as an influence on Alexander Graham is enough to make us feel that the book is being written in the shadow of that eighteenth-century controversialist and disbeliever in a god of wrath.

Less obvious, but hardly less convincing once they have been pointed out, are two influences on the story of Duncan, in addition to the Ossianic influence I describe in Chapter Two. Greville gives a certain amount of information, referring us to MacDonald's great-grandfather who was a piper at Culloden, and who escaped the ensuing man-hunt by hiding in sea-caves near Portsoy: 'The original of the blind piper, though the idea came from that ancestor who escaped from Culloden, was, I am advised, a certain Farquhar McGillanders'.⁷ Yet another piper contributed to Duncan MacPhail, however, at least as far as one striking episode in the book is concerned. Here is an extract from part of a series of articles, in the Annual Miscellany for 1812, on the family of the Sempills of Beltrees, one of whom, Robert, was the author of the famous poem which commemorates 'The Life and Death of Habbie Simson, the Piper of Kilbarchan'. Some of the more obscure allusions in that poem are explained by such information as the following. Habbie was playing at a wedding 'when a young fellow

that had drank more than he should, designing to play a trick on Habbie, pulls out a knife, and thrusts it into the bag, which let out all the wind. Habbie was sensible of the affront, and pulls out his durk, as he thought, and gave the fellow a backward push in the breast, which hearted him, so that he fell down'.⁸ Thinking himself a murderer, Habbie flees, returning home later on finding that the blade itself had not left the scabbard. MacDonald takes over not just the puncturing of the bagpipes and the piper's violence, but the unexpectedly mild outcome of his violent fury, as well.

Quite different, and not to be documented, is the similarity between Duncan and Adam in Lilith, both of whom had earlier married evil wives whom they had then put by. One strongly suspects that MacDonald already knew, and was using, the Lilith legend in the 1870s.

In addition to this array of literary sources, Malcolm benefits from MacDonald's family history (as we have seen) and also from his awareness of local conditions, traditions and legends. Thus there is often a flavour of pure sociology in some of his descriptions of the fishing community, while the revival and its cave-preachings were exactly what happened until very recently in these areas. Indeed, I can confirm that there is just such a cave exactly where MacDonald says it is, and that it was still remembered, in 1972, as the scene of religious gatherings. Furthermore, there were many poems and stories circulating in this part of the Scottish coast about the necromancy of a seventeenth-century baronet, Sir Robert Gordon, which seem to have contributed to the two ghost stories in Malcolm, in Chapter Twenty-

Seven, 'Lord Gernon' and Chapter Forty-One, 'The Clouded Sapphires'.⁹

The last major influence which must be mentioned, however, is the Bible itself, and the stories of two men in particular, Christ and Moses. The latter is explicitly conjured up by the reference to Mount Pisgah in Chapter Forty-Nine: MacDonald suggests that Malcolm's glimpse of hope, while depressed by the possibility that he is the son of Mrs Stewart, is tantamount to a glimpse of the promised land. In addition, it is hard to believe that the discovery of Moses in the bullrushes was not equally in MacDonald's mind along with Spenser's story of Marinell while he was inventing the circumstances of Malcolm's birth. Above all, however, the pattern of Malcolm's high birth, his descent to obscurity, and his eventual return to power and glory, is to be linked with Christ. This is a relationship to which I return in my final chapter, but it must be made clear here that the skeleton of the book's narrative structure is derived from the gospel story itself.

The range and diversity of sources behind Malcolm is noteworthy; the novel is constructed from works considerably removed from MacDonald's Romantic starting-point, and shows especially clearly how formative Renaissance literature was to him. The sources, too, have penetrated deeply into the fibre of the book, especially in the matter of characterisation, but only a little less so in the narrative itself. Finally, the importance of the Macbeth parallels illustrates some further related characteristics of MacDonald's creativity. It highlights

his opportunism - his ability to respond to the stimulus of whatever occupies his imagination at the time of writing and to blend it in with his own work. A similar, much later example of his taking over a significant element from a recently encountered work of fiction is to be found in Castle Warlock (see below, section six and Appendix Two). Doubtless, the Scottish novels contain many more examples which are less easy to date, so that MacDonald's significant literary encounters are now lost in the privacy of his own general reading. One might also add that it was not just other literature to which his own writing responded. At various times, his reader is aware of MacDonald's preoccupation with some issue of the day, perhaps most notably in What's Mine's Mine, his response to the social crisis in the highlands in the 1880s. Once again, one is reminded that MacDonald could not regard his novels as self-contained works of art; they were extensions and expressions of his total consciousness.

It is both a cause and a symptom of the decline in richness and vitality which marks The Marquis of Lossie that it has (so far as I can tell) far fewer signs of varied source material than Malcolm. The two principal parallel sources remain visible, namely The Faerie Queene and the Bible, achieving prominence in, respectively, the accounts of Alexander Graham's first preaching at the London mission (ML, Chapter 27, 'The Preacher') and in the principal actions taken by Malcolm (the revelation of true identity to the chosen fisherman, the tussle for the allegiance of Florimel, and the assumption of rightful power). There are also many detailed echoes of The Faerie

Queene, and thus these two sources, carried over from the inspiration of Malcolm, are still powerfully present. Beyond this, one notes the traditional use of the image of the horse, hardly to be controlled, to symbolise the passions, or the rebellious instinct in man, while if William Law is an intellectual presence in Malcolm, his place is taken in The Marquis of Lossie by Epictetus, the Christian slave whose teachings were especially focussed on the issue of the will. The novel constantly touches upon Malcolm's love of and indebtedness to his writings. Epictetus's personal circumstances were such as might have encouraged MacDonald to feel an affinity with him: his slave origins placed him among the most obscure of humanity, and, far from teaching in any elaborate and formal context, his 'works' are a summary of sayings and ideas preserved and handed down by disciples.¹⁰

Sir Gibbie also lacks the range of influences apparent in Malcolm, but, once again, the sources which are visible suggest that MacDonald was constructing a novel in which autobiography had little place. The most notable feature of the inspiration of this work is its use of folk-tale material, the legendary and the archetypal, in its central character. F. R. Hart has put the point vividly but not extremely. 'He is almost a force of nature and a fabulous one...He becomes a legend. He plays fabulous roles as local sprites; the natural springs of his true inheritance are inseparable from the springs of faith and wonder.'¹¹ To the image of the child, MacDonald has here added the notions of the brownie and the literally 'natural man' in developing a new and yet more insistent version of man's hidden and

otherworldly potential. Folk-tale sources merge with the other principal 'source' - the idea of God on earth, in the person of Christ - to produce Gibbie. Beside these, perhaps one other literary type contributes to the book, namely the Romantic theme, from Blake and Wordsworth through to Dickens, of the child plunged in the squalor of the modern industrial city. As we have seen, also, in Chapter Two, the literary tradition of writing about the Scottish peasantry, as exemplified especially by Burns and Hogg, is used here by MacDonald. Finally, one must acknowledge the avowed importance of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's book on the Moray floods of 1829, which contribute so much to the central episode.

Of these three novels, The Marquis of Lossie appears to be less well endowed with a variety of source material, and it is tempting to make an equation between this fact and the lower level of freshness and originality which strikes its readers. In the novels of the 1870s, the interconnectedness in MacDonald's mind of thinking, studying, reading and writing seems demonstrated: his creative energy was but one facet of a larger mental effort to come at, and communicate, the truth. Relying less heavily on his own experience, he turned more and more to the broader horizons that other people's books and experience provided.

4. Malcolm

Although Sir Gibbie seems to be the best-known of these three novels, I believe that it is Malcolm which constitutes the principal

creative achievement. To some extent, this might be expected from what I have just written: Sir Gibbie is, thematically, something of a repeat of the Portlossie books, although, in it, MacDonald goes a long way to finding a startlingly new garb for his tale of good and evil. Furthermore, while sharing some of the original inspiration of Malcolm, The Marquis of Lossie is nevertheless a sequel and much of the flair of its predecessor has inevitably gone. It was with Malcolm that MacDonald broke new ground in his Scottish fiction, and it is that book of the three which is pre-eminent in freshness.

Its success is also to be related to the fact that it was the result of an unusually long (for MacDonald) creative effort. It was published in 1875, and, as we have seen, MacDonald made a special visit to Cullen, the village on the Banffshire coast where he was envisaging the action, in order to 'look things up'.¹² Nor was this the only trip of its kind, for another was made 'in the autumn of 1873'.¹³ As we have seen, also, MacDonald's renewed study of Macbeth, stimulated during the intervening visit to America, appears to have influenced the novel. As MacDonald quite often had to produce several three-decker novels a year, in addition to all his other activities, it is not surprising that Malcolm should be more original than many of them, while our other scraps of evidence suggest that it is among the best prepared of all his fictions. Greville suggests, also, that other factors can be linked with the success of this novel. 'The years 1873 and 1874 were among the happiest spent at The Retreat. Malcolm gave news of the mental strength its writer regained from the rest to

his pen and the temporary alleviation of his debts.¹⁴

At the end of the previous chapter, I have briefly touched upon the excellence of Malcolm. Like Alec Forbes, Malcolm is characterised by a large and varied cast of characters, interacting in a seemingly episodic way but nevertheless moving towards a firm, satisfying conclusion. If anything, the structure is even finer in Malcolm, partly thanks to the fact that the conclusion to which it moves is the revelation of a truth pointing back prior to the novel's beginning. Like Oedipus, Malcolm journeys to a knowledge of who he is and what his relationships are with the people around him. The action is an even more interior one than in the case of Alec Forbes, while over its gentle progress MacDonald lays a scintillating patina of incident and action. The first fourteen chapters form a masterly foundation for this plan: they deftly introduce the notion of mystery, in the matter of the dead woman around whom the beginning revolves, then they introduce to us, in a seemingly random, panoramic fashion, a succession of characters whose social relationships seem clear but whose fictional (that is, true) relationships in the novel's pattern are still to be discovered. Our instinct, dampened as it is by the sheer interest of the moment, is to wonder why they are so many and so various. From here, MacDonald concocts a story of their involvement with each other which is, within the romantic conventions, easy and plausible, yet enlivened by a succession of arrestingly unexpected incidents. From this rich eventfulness, the truth of Malcolm's birth is discovered in no flagrantly unlikely fashion.

Like Alec Forbes, the success of Malcolm seems due in part to the fact that its action is confined to Scotland: once again, MacDonald deploys his large cast of characters throughout the entire length of the work, without moving from one small group to another as a setting changes. Such superficial variety is unnecessary as MacDonald succeeds in drawing so much variation among the inhabitants of the one small fishing community. In part it is that MacDonald has seized upon the class differentiations occurring in Portlössie, so that a full cross-section of Scottish lowland small town life is achieved. Thus we are introduced to the nobility, the middle-classes (in Miss Horn, Alexander Graham, and the parish minister), and the working-classes in the fishers of the Seaton. In addition, Duncan MacPhail can be seen as embodying highland attitudes, so that the book contains a generalised sample of Scottish society.

More important than this pattern, however, is the sheer imagination which has produced so many characters of real individuality within the one book. Thus the leading figures from each of the town's classes all escape the confines of their class type, while remaining true to them: Florimel and her father, Duncan, Miss Horn, Phemy Mair, and Alexander Graham are simply interesting and individual characters. Mixed with them are characters whose essence is classless, and who are bizarre and demonic outsiders - the mad laird and his mother, and Barbara Catanach. Finally, of course, Malcolm himself stands apart from all the others in his combination of goodness, vigour, courage and attractiveness.

More important still, however, is the weighting of interest across this range of varied characters. More so even than in Alec Forbes, each prominent character feels like a centre of interest in his or her own right. Although the narrative revolves round Malcolm, MacDonald projects the characters with whom he is involved as much for the sake of their own idiosyncracies and significance as for their role in furthering Malcolm's fortunes. Again, the leisurely opening sequence of chapters pays dividends, and enables MacDonald to achieve that balancing of varied local interest against the thrust of narrative, upon which his finest success as a novelist appears to depend. The characters stand off from each other, as individuals in our imaginations.

The quality of individuality in the characters, and the process of redefining their relationships, are symptoms of that principle with which the book deals and round which it is constructed - the principle of diversity and conflict. In squarely confronting the opposition of good and evil in the universe, MacDonald makes opposition and separateness permeate his whole vision, so that a new type of dynamism appears in his Scottish fiction. Conflict becomes the very stuff of the book, and one result of this is that Malcolm is perhaps easier to read than its predecessors: we are more often involved in episodes of high dramatic charge than we were in reading the earlier Scottish novels.

In imbuing this novel with the tension of conflict, MacDonald released yet more of himself into his fiction. In the biographical material we have, there are several indications of the passions in his

nature. In the biography, Greville is not very revealing on this topic, although he does refer to his father's 'swift and splendid anger' in defence of the right.¹⁵ In his own autobiography, however, Greville is more candid, admitting even to a fear of his father, who demanded complete obedience from his children.¹⁶ Another literary son, Ronald, further amplifies this side of MacDonald:

His anger was fulgurous - a Highlander's; but, in my experience, rare, and never for wrong done to himself. Himself the perfection of courtesy, he has confessed to me that the contingency in which he most feared for his self-control was to find himself the object of discourtesy which he believed intentional... If he did not love all men, it is a grievous charge against some. That he could love his enemy I am sure as that, in the proper circumstances of human strife, he could have killed his friend without stain of conscience.¹⁷

Such biographical material only serves to confirm what we could gather from the novels alone. One of their most striking characteristics, from David Elginbrod onwards, is the frequency of scenes involving the deep detestation of a character or creed, and a heartfelt rejoicing when such things are overcome. Such intensity of hatred and anger is the perhaps inevitable corollary of the immense love and gentleness of which MacDonald was also undoubtedly capable.

We notice, however, in Malcolm an increase in the number of scenes of physical violence ranging in intensity from the scuffle between the pupils in the school to the dirking of Malcolm's hand. A count reveals fifteen notable instances, involving both humans or animals. To this must be added the constant threat of physical

violence from Duncan: any suspicions that this might just be verbal posturing by the old man are dispelled by his visit to the castle. Also, there is a vast number of situations in which hatred, indignation, anger and opposition of all sorts are to be found. Perhaps only the mad laird is entirely free from this, and is entirely passive in the face of wrong: little Phemy Mair opposes Malcolm at least to the extent that she distrusts him and refuses to tell him where to find her crazed friend. Malcolm himself is quite outstanding among MacDonald's heroes for his capacity to take offence, and to think violently of another, being prepared to use his fists on frequent occasions. Christ's anger in the Temple provides allegorical justification for this (Matthew 21. 12-13).

All this makes for exciting reading, and MacDonald can rely on his old ability to involve the feelings of his reader on the side of right. The result of this explosion of feeling within MacDonald's output, however, is that the whole question of the right and wrong uses and occasions of violence is inevitably raised: they centre on Duncan, with his unrelenting enmity towards the Campbells as a result of the Massacre of Glencoe. What MacDonald honours, in this novel, is the upsurge of an immediate revulsion against the bad: revenge, and the long harbouring of murderous feelings, are quite at odds with the Christian doctrine of charity.

Perhaps even more significant for MacDonald's fiction is the emergence of a new note of intense conflict in the conversations which are reproduced. A dialectical mode now produces confrontation between

two viewpoints, and where in earlier novels the frequent didactic dialogues take place between master and willing disciple (like the dialogues in William Law's The Spirit of Love, for example), here they are dramatic, alive with passionate involvement by both parties, and sometimes producing a verbal liveliness lacking in more staid discussions. The theological dialogue between the marquis and Graham, for example, takes on its intensity from the dramatic situation - the nobleman is on his death-bed - and we sense true involvement by both men:

'Sit down, sir,' said the marquis courteously - pleased with the calm, self-possessed, unobtrusive bearing of the man. 'They tell me I'm dying, Mr Graham.'

'I'm sorry it seems to trouble you, my lord.'

'What! wouldn't it trouble you, then?'

'I don't think so, my lord.'

'Ah! you're one of the elect, no doubt!'

'That's a thing I never think about, my lord!'

'What do you think about then?'

'About God!'

'And when you die you'll go straight to heaven of course!'

'I don't know, my lord. That's another thing I never trouble my head about.'

'Ah! you're like me then! I don't care much about going to heaven! What do you care about?'

'The will of God. I hope your lordship will say the same!'

'No I won't. I want my own will.'

'Well, that is to be had, my lord.'

'How?'

'By taking his for yours, as the better of the two which it must be every way.'

'That's all moonshine.'

'It is light, my lord.'

Graham goes on to reproach the marquis for his conduct to his wife, Malcolm's mother, and the object of Graham's own love:

The marquis made no answer.

'God knows I loved her,' he said after a while, with a sigh.

'You loved her, my lord!'

'I did, by God!'

'Love a woman like that, and come to this?'

'Come to this! We must all come to this, I fancy, sooner or later. Come to what, in the name of Beelzebub?'

'That, having loved a woman like her, you are content to lose her. In the name of God, have you no desire to see her again?'

'It would be an awkward meeting,' said the marquis...

'Because you wronged her?' suggested the schoolmaster.

'Because they lied to me, by God!'

'Which they dared not have done, had you not lied to them first.'

'Sir!' shouted the marquis, with all the voice he had left - 'O God, have mercy! I cannot punish the scoundrel.'

'The scoundrel is the man who lies, my lord.'

'Were I anywhere else -'

'There would be no good in telling you the truth, my lord. You showed her to the world as a woman over whom you had prevailed, and not as the honest wife she was. What kind of a lie was that, my lord? Not a white one, surely?'

'You are a damned coward to speak so to a man who cannot even turn on his side to curse you for a base hound. You would not dare it but that you know I cannot defend myself.'

'You are right, my lord; your conduct is indefensible.'
(M, Chapter 69, 'The Marquis and the Schoolmaster')

Even in the less melodramatic passages in this chapter, there is a liveliness, a sense of two personalities interacting, lacking in, say, the pontificating of Robert Falconer to his father and his friend (RF, Part III, Chapter 17, 'In the Country'). In that previous novel, even a potentially similar scene to that between Graham and the marquis, the one between Falconer and his 'neophyte' (RF, Part III, Chapter 10, 'A Neophyte') lacks the sense of equality of weight in the personalities of the participants: Lady Georgina is merely a symbol erected by MacDonald to be knocked down, which Falconer's paragraphs do with ease.

Similar points can be made about other, non-theological scenes of confrontation and interaction in Malcolm. Several interviews between Florimel and Malcolm, for example, have a tension radically different from anything we encounter with Alec or Robert, or between Hugh and Euphra. Both Hugh and Alec are, in effect, emotionally teased by upper-class flirts, and our feelings are quite strong on their behalf. But this aspect of their relationships never achieves embodiment in direct personal interviews: it lives in the actions of the novels as a whole. Thus such a scene as the following is new with Malcolm,

even though the situation is old in MacDonald's mind, and his anti-aristocratic feelings long in his nature. Florimel and Malcolm have met on the sand-dune, the girl instinctively playing upon the sense of obedience in her uncouth acquaintance:

Simple as it was, the explanation served to restore her equanimity, disturbed by what had seemed his presumption in lying down in her presence: she saw that she had mistaken the action. The fact was, that, concluding from her behaviour she had something to say to him, but was not yet at leisure for him, he had lain down, as a loving dog might to await her time. It was devotion, not coolness. To remain standing before her would have seemed a demand on her attention; to lie down was to withdraw and wait. But Florimel, although pleased, was only the more inclined to torment - a peculiarity of disposition which she inherited from her father: she bowed her face once more over her book, and read through three whole stanzas, without however understanding a single phrase in them, before she spoke. Then looking up, and regarding for a moment the youth who lay watching her with the eyes of the servants in the psalm, she said, -

'Well? What are you waiting for?'

'I thocht ye wantit me, my leddy! I beg yer pardon,' answered Malcolm, springing to his feet, and turning to go.

'Do you ever read?' she asked.

'Aften that,' replied Malcolm, turning again, and standing stock-still. 'An I like best to read jist as yer leddyship's readin' the noo, lyin' o' the san'-hill, wi' the haille sea afore me, an' naething atween me an' the icebergs but the watter an' the stars an' a wheen islands. It's like readin' wi' fower een, that!'

'And what do you read on such occasions?' carelessly drawled his persecutor...

(M, Chapter 15, 'The Slope of the Dune')

At their very first meeting, Florimel had indulged in teasing of a quite specifically sexual variety:

One might well be inclined to ask what could have tempted her to talk in such a familiar way to a creature like him - human indeed, but separated from her by a gulf more impassible far than that which divided her from the thrones, principalities, and powers of the upper regions? And how is the fact to be accounted for, that here she put out a dainty foot, and reaching for one of her stockings, began to draw it gently over the said foot? Either her sense of his inferiority was such that she regarded his presence no more than that of a dog, or, possibly, she was tempted to put his behaviour to the test. He, on his part, stood quietly regarding the operation, either that, with the instinct of an inborn refinement, he was aware he ought not to manifest more shamefacedness than the lady herself, or that he was hardly more accustomed to the sight of gleaming fish than the bare feet of maidens.

'I'm thinkin', my leddy,' he went on, in absolute simplicity, 'that sma' fut o' yer ain has danced mony a brow dance on mony a brow flure.'

'How old do you take me for then?' she rejoined, and went on drawing the garment over her foot by the shortest possible stages...

(M, Chapter 5, 'Lady Florimel')

Most basic of all to the novel, perhaps, is the series of simple confrontations between people who find themselves deeply opposed. Miss Horn, with her fine sense of the right, is especially liable to this, and she has uncompromising interviews at each end of the book, with Mrs Catanach at the outset, and with the marquis himself towards the end. The latter is a double meeting, on consecutive days, and is quite extraordinarily exciting, as Miss Horn strives to spur the devious nobleman to see that justice is done. In this interview and others, we encounter the short, staccato statements by which characters normally address each other and which is a novel and welcome feature of this work: the mere appearance of the pages is less congested than that of previous novels.

Nor is it merely in the dialogue that we find an enlivening dialectical movement. In his accounts of the events which form the religious revival, for example, MacDonald often expresses a satisfyingly complex attitude to the crude manifestation of faith, a complexity which compares very favourably with the more slashing assaults on evangelicalism which we find elsewhere in his work. His own detachment remains clear, but he seems able to react with more than one feeling. For example, he gives part of a preacher's sermon, then continues as follows:

Here, unhappily for his eloquence, he slid off into the catalogue of women's finery given by the prophet Isaiah, at the close of which he naturally found the oratorical impulse gone, and had to sit down in the mud of an anticlimax. Presently, however, he recovered himself, and, spreading his wings, once more swung himself aloft into the empyrean of an eloquence, which, whatever else it might or might not be, was at least genuine.

(M, Chapter 48, 'The Baillies' Barn Again')

Dialectic seems suddenly to have become the characteristic working mode of his mind; as he begins to summarise the final stages of the revival, each new statement implies a qualifying antithesis to the attitude of the last:

The turn things had taken that night determined their after course. Cryings out and fainting grew common, and fits began to appear. A few laid claim to visions, - bearing, it must be remarked, a strong resemblance to the similitudes, metaphors, and more extended poetic figures, employed by the young preacher, becoming at length a little more original and a good deal more grotesque. They took to dancing at last, not by any means the least healthful mode of working off their excitement. It was, however, hardly more than a dull beating of time to the monotonous chanting

of a few religious phrases, rendered painfully common-place by senseless repetition.

I would not be supposed to deny the genuineness of the emotion, or even of the religion, in many who thus gave show to their feelings. But neither those who were good before nor those who were excited now were much the better for this and like modes of playing off the mental electricity generated by the revolving cylinder of intercourse. Naturally, such men as Joseph Mair now grew shy of the assemblies they had helped to originate, and withdrew - at least into the background; the reins slipped from the hands of the first leaders, and such wind-bags as Ladle got up to drive the chariot of the gospel - with the results that could not fail to follow. At the same time it must be granted that the improvement of their habits, in so far as strong drink was concerned, continued: it became almost a test of faith with them, whether or not a man was a total abstainer. Hence their moral manners, so to say, improved greatly; there were no more public-house orgies, no fighting in the streets, very little of what they called breaking of the Sabbath, and altogether there was a marked improvement in the look of things along a good many miles of that northern shore.

Strange as it may seem, however, morality in the deeper sense, remained very much at the same low ebb as before...
(M, Chapter 48, 'The Baillies' Barn Again')

The discussion which ensues follows, on a slightly larger scale, a similar zig-zag course, so that by the end of the chapter a broad and complex set of author's attitudes has been defined.

The writing in Malcolm has other virtues, as well. The Scots dialect is excellent, and it is used so extensively as to be completely part of the linguistic resource from which the work is formed, with few hints of its merely being relied on for special effects. There is, I think, an unobtrusive maturity to be noted in MacDonald's whole approach to the handling of Scots in this work: for the first time, we feel, he gives his characters Scots to speak for the simple reason

that that is what they speak. Even in Robert Falconer there had been a feeling that Scots was part of the projection of a particular standard source of literary entertainment, the Scottish 'character'. Mrs Falconer herself is displayed rather than just written about: she is created with a degree of distance between her and both the reader and the author. In Malcolm, Scots is made to feel completely natural. On the basis of that naturalness, however, it is also able to rise to vigorous comic effects such as the following, in which Miss Horn reacts to a gossiping neighbour:

'Said!' repeated Miss Horn, in a tone that revealed both annoyance with herself and contempt for her visitor. 'Ther's no a claver in a' the countryside but ye maun fess't hame aneth her oxtter, as gin't were the prodigal afore he repentit.'

(M, Chapter 1, 'Miss Horn')

Character, language and structure are not the only dimensions of the novel which are marked by controlled variety and contrast. Place, also - as ever, a vital element in the effect made by any MacDonald novel - is treated in the same way. Indeed, the opening fourteen chapters introduce us to a diversity of place just as fully as they introduce us to a range of characters. Each character is associated with a different point or area in the Portlössie landscape and townscape. Just as social differences seem firmly established at the outset, so the physical differentiations seem to be severely hierarchic: the town is split between the middle-class New Town built above and back from the shore, while the fishing community of the Seaton is set down right at the water's edge, overlooked by its 'superior' neighbours. Set

further inland still, and towering even over the New Town, is the castle itself. The hierarchy is an accurate account of Cullen, to which the symbolising mind of MacDonald must have readily responded. Beyond the human community, however, stretches the beach with its salient features of long dune and grotesque rocky outcrop. Beyond this again is the promontory which terminates the beach and which contains the cave where the religious meetings take place. Beyond this yet again is a smaller fishing village - Scaurnose in MacDonald's book, Portknockie in real life.

The course of the book is devoted not just to utilising and exploring these locations, but to redrawing their relationships with each other. The various episodes on the beach and at the cave serve to break down the seemingly settled hierarchy of castle, town and Seaton, and to create new and unsuspected relationships between these places. Thus, not only do the castle grounds open on the beach via a small doorway, enabling a free and spontaneous relationship to spring up between Florimel and Malcolm (and, as a result, between the communities of the castle and the Seaton), but one of the ultimate secrets of the book's denouement is the connecting passage between the heights of the castle and the cave on the shore. In a way, the book comes to its conclusion when an alternative geography of Portlossie is revealed, underlying and bypassing the topography of hierarchy and distinction which first greets the eye.

With such a profound sense of distinctiveness attached to the

various locations in the book, it is not surprising that it contains no major portion set outside Portlossie. The symbolic contrast of place, which is one of MacDonald's instinctive techniques, is fully achieved within the total location of Portlossie and its environs.

Place, too, constitutes an important element on one side of a contrast which is perhaps the most fundamental of all in this book, namely that between its realism (as normally understood) and its melodrama and allegory. This latter dimension must await a fuller account in my next chapter, while the cheerful melodrama of the narrative is clear to any reader, and is apparent even in the brief summary near the beginning of the present chapter. In seeming sharp juxtaposition with these aspects of the book is its commonplace realism. I have touched on several instances already: the fidelity to North-East speech is one of the joys of the book, while its topography adheres with unusual faithfulness to what a visitor to Cullen will find.

It is not necessary, however, that the reader have personal knowledge of the area for him to feel that MacDonald is accurately portraying a place and community which he knows well, since his descriptions carry their own ring of authenticity. He is thus able to combine vivid physical description with unobtrusive social comment:

The home season of the herring-fishery was to commence a few days after the occurrences last recorded. The boats had all returned from other stations, and the little harbour was one crown of stumpy masts, each with its halliard, the sole cordage visible, rove through a top of it, for the hoisting of a lug sail, tanned to a rich red brown. From this underwood towered aloft the

masts of a coasting schooner, discharging its load of coal at the little quay. Other boats lay drawn up on the beach in front of the Seaton, and beyond it on the other side of the burn. Men and women were busy with the brown nets, laying them out on the short grass of the shore, mending them with netting-needles like small shuttles, carrying huge burdens of them on their shoulders in the hot sunlight; others were mending, calking, or tarring their boats, and looking to their various fittings. All was preparation for the new venture in their own waters, and everything went merrily and hopefully. Wives who had not accompanied their husbands now had them home again, and their anxieties would henceforth endure but for a night - joy would come with the red sails in the morning, lovers were once more together, the one great dread broken into a hundred little questioning fears; mothers had their sons again, to watch with loving eyes as they swung their slow limbs at their labour, or in the evening sauntered about, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth, and blue bonnet cast carelessly on the head: it was almost a single family, bound together by a network of intermarriages, so intricate as to render it impossible for any one who did not belong to the community to follow the threads or read the design of the social tracery.

(M, Chapter 23, 'Armageddon')

In this book of synthesized contrasts, description balances criticism to produce a stance of detached but sympathetic understanding and fairness:

Their women were in general coarse in manners and rude in speech; often of great strength and courage, and of strongly-marked character. They were almost invariably the daughters of fishermen, for a wife taken from among the rural population would have been all but useless in regard of the peculiar duties required of her. If these were less dangerous than those of their husbands, they were quite as laborious, and less interesting. The most severe consisted in carrying the fish into the country for sale, in a huge creel or basket, which when full was sometimes more than a man could lift to place on the woman's back. With this burden, kept in its place by a band across her chest, she would walk as many as twenty miles, arriving at some inland town early in the forenoon, in time to dispose of her fish for the requirements of the

day. I may add that, although her eldest child was probably born within a few weeks after her marriage, infidelity was almost unknown amongst them.

(M, Chapter 4, 'Phemy Mair')

Furthermore, the social stratification which corresponds to the geographical hierarchy in MacDonald's book is not merely MacDonald's invention. It is interesting to compare MacDonald's account with that of the Rev George Henderson in The New Statistical Account of Scotland:

The almost invariable habit which prevails, of intermarrying with those of their own craft, and the no less general practice which obtains, of every fisherman's son following his father's occupation, prove very serious drawbacks to the progress of this order of the community in the march of improvement; having the effect of rendering them a distinct class of society, with sentiments, sympathies, and habits peculiar to themselves. Until some amalgamation shall take place between them and their brethren of terra firma, their advancement in the improvements of civilised life must necessarily be slow and partial.¹⁸

Henderson's sense of the separateness of the two communities in the town itself further shows through in the following, in which he even hints at a latent rebelliousness of character as one feature of the fisher-life, which is interesting in view of events in The Marquis of Lossie:

The town of Cullen consists of two parts, which are completely separated, viz. the New Town, and the Sea Town or Fish Town; the latter being situated on the shore, and inhabited chiefly by fishermen. The predecessor of the former, which was called the Old Town, was meanly built, and, about twenty years ago, was utterly demolished, in order to make way for the improvements of Cullen House. The New Town, by which it was replaced, stands nearer to

the sea than the old one did, being close to the eastern extremity of the Sea Town, above which it is considerably elevated. It is a very neat little town...Its symmetrical form presents a curious contrast to the contiguous awkward squad of fishermen's houses constituting the Sea Town, and which display a total independence of anything like partial subordination to the 'rank and file' of streets - their relative positions very much resembling those of hail-stones as they fall on the ground.¹⁹

MacDonald's sense of the community of Portlössie goes still deeper, however. He responds to the comedy of neighbourly interaction, as in the prickly rapprochement between Miss Horn and Mrs Mellis (M, Chapter 59, 'An Honest Plot') - even at this level of detail there is seething conflict and tension. The life of the community is expressed also by its superstitions; we can see the workings of the superstitious mind in this reaction to the deformed mad laird:

'I haena seen him for a while noo,' returned the other. 'They tell me 'at his mither made him ower to the deil afore he cam to the light; and sae, aye as his birthday comes roun', Sawtan gets the pooer ower him. Eh, but he's a fearsome sicht whan he's ta'en that gait!' continued the speaker. 'I met him ance i' the gloamin', jist ower by the toon, wi' his een glowerin' like uily lamps, an' the slaver rinnin' doon his lang baird. I jist laup as gien I had seen the muckle Sawtan himsel'.'
(M, Chapter 3, 'The Mad Laird')

Here, in brief, we encounter the process of imagination which transforms the irascible and sinister Mrs Catanach into a witch-like being for the community as a whole, a response upon which MacDonald further builds the completed character. Further hints of the superstitious imaginative life of the area are to be found in the two interpolated ghost-stories, in Chapter Twenty-Seven, 'Lord Gernon',

and Chapter Forty-One, 'The Clouded Sapphires'. Both are presented as folk-possession, and each is possibly based, as mentioned in section two above, on a real Moray Firth legend.

In the past, critics have tended to dismiss Malcolm as one of MacDonald's inferior later novels, a swift and seemingly unquestioning reaction which must be due both to their unwillingness to approach it as allegory, and also to its overt melodrama. My fifth chapter will include a discussion of its allegorical interest; here, I wish to stress how its melodrama, far from being creatively trite, or a sign of weakness, is better seen as an indication of the zest and force of feeling which marks the book. It is not just that it suggests an untrammelled confidence in MacDonald at this time. Such things as the baiting of Duncan at the banquet (Chapter 19, 'Duncan's Pipes'), the encounter of Malcolm with the mechanical hermit (Chapter 44, 'The Hermit'), and the various incidents connected with the 'haunted' attic room in the castle are not merely sensational but, in their context, convey the vivid vigour of MacDonald's sense of the evil forces he, and all true Christians, are up against. They also convey the extremity of his commitment against them. Similarly, in such characterisations as those of Mrs Stewart and Mrs Catanach, MacDonald's blatant creation of fairy-tale monsters is a powerful appeal to our fundamental moral sensibilities. And again, his creation of the mad, hunch-backed laird, fleeing along the shore from the mother he fears and detests, and crying 'I dinna ken whaur I come frae', risks the ludicrous, but achieves a striking expression of the anguish of God's

creature tormented by its separation from the heavenly father. The melodrama in this book grips the reader in a primitive and powerful way, and engages him, in his imagination, in what MacDonald is treating as the fundamental dynamic of the created universe. MacDonald's creative zest in portraying the struggle of good and evil is not merely parallel with his real-life zest in engaging in the same struggle: writing the book is an act in that engagement. The mood in which MacDonald writes this book is perhaps well represented by the tone in which Alexander Graham does his recruiting: 'That's the battle of Armageddon, Sheltie, my man...Ye maun up an' do yer best in't, my man' (Chapter 7, 'Alexander Graham'). And with the same confident, invigorating sweep, MacDonald's imagination seizes upon the striking, and synthesizes his contrasts into a novel which has no superior as an expression of his individual genius.

5. The Marquis of Lossie and Sir Gibbie

One might have expected, with The Marquis of Lossie so firmly designed as a sequel to Malcolm, that Sir Gibbie would be the novel which stands apart, in theme and in aesthetic achievement, from the other two novels of the 1870s. Malcolm is the first, however, to embody both the new thematic emphasis, and also the new, more fabricated approach to structure, and thus Malcolm proves to be the novel which stands out in originality and unity. Its sequel and Sir Gibbie are both, I think, lesser works, and also embody, following from the moral confrontation in Malcolm, a further thematic development whereby evil

is associated with the commonplace worldliness of everyday human existence. Thus both make considerable play of the startling juxtaposition of a Christ-like figure with the world of the nineteenth-century city. It is understandable that MacDonald should wish to do this, for didactic reasons, yet the result in each case is an artistic weakening. I think this occurs, not for the simple reason that a major change of scene makes a novel fall part (as I have said before), but because the grand moral opposition is thereby lessened. It is diminished by confining one of its poles to such a local, specific cultural milieu. One of the reasons for the success of Malcolm had been the simple, nearly timeless forms in which its moral warfare was embodied.

Nevertheless, there is no avoiding the persistence of MacDonald's urge, in The Marquis of Lossie, to comment on, and indeed denounce, his own age. He appears preoccupied with the lack of true religious feeling in his time, as reflected in the general outlook ('I sometimes think that the present belief in mortality is nothing but the almost universal although unsuspected unbelief in immortality grown vocal and articulate' (ML, Chapter 12, 'A New Livery')) and in the advance of scientific materialism, as hinted at in the following.

It was a conversation very unsuitable to London streets - but then these were raw Scotch fishermen, who had not yet learned how absurd it is to suppose ourselves come from anything greater than ourselves, and had no conception of the liberty it confers on a man to know that he is the child of a protoplasm, or something still more beautifully small.

(ML, Chapter 11, 'London Streets')

Much more extensively, however, the religious life of the metropolis is subjected to explicit criticism. The principal vehicle for this is the treatment of nonconformist outlooks in the portion of the book telling of Alexander Graham's establishing of himself as a local preacher. It is not just the sharpness of his portrayal of the Marshals, the dissenting family against whose deadly materialism Graham has to struggle, which makes his attack so telling. Even more important and effective is his description of their chapel itself, a description in which realistic detail combines effectively with confident interpretative imagery.

If the schoolmaster's dragon, spread abroad as he lies, a vague dilution, everywhere throughout human haunts, has yet any head-quarters, where else can they be than in such places as that to which he was now making his way to fight him? What can be fuller of the wearisome, depressing, beauty-blasting commonplace than a dissenting chapel in London, on the night of the weekly prayer-meeting, and that night a drizzly one? The few lights fill the lower part with a dull, yellow, steamy glare, while the vast galleries, possessed by an ugly twilight, yawn above like dreary openings of a disconsolate eternity. The pulpit rises into the dim damp air, covered with brown holland, reminding one of desertion and charwomen, if not of a chamber of death and spiritual undertakers, who have shrouded and confined the truth. Gaping, empty, unsightly, the place is the very skull of the monster himself - the fittest place of all wherein to encounter the great slug, and deal him one of those death blows which every sunrise, every repentance, every child-birth, every true love deals him. Every hour he receives the blow that kills, but he takes long to die, for every hour he is right carefully fed and cherished by a whole army of purveyors, including every trade and profession but officered chiefly by divines and men of science.

When the dominie entered, all was still, and every light had a nimbus of illuminated vapour. There were hardly more than three present beyond the number Mr Marshal had given him to expect; and their faces, some grim, some

grimy, most of them troubled, and none blissful, seemed the nervous ganglions of the monster whose faintly gelatinous bulk filled the place. He seated himself in a pew near the pulpit, communed with his own heart and was still.

(ML, Chapter 26, 'The Schoolmaster')

To this depressing setting, the antidote proves to be an act of imaginative sympathy with, or comprehension of, a charwoman in the congregation. MacDonald's paragraph outlining her oppressed consciousness does not confine knowledge of that consciousness to the narrator or to Graham as he beholds her. The act of sympathetic understanding is given to both, and similarly, Graham's ensuing transformation, by means of the passionate communication of Christ, of the chapel to 'the dusky bottom of a glory shaft, adown which gazed the stars of the coming resurrection', is an image of MacDonald's aim in writing his religious fictions in the first place.

The dissenters receive the most penetrating attack in this book, but the establishment does not get off lightly. Lady Clementina is MacDonald's mouthpiece here:

The church of England is like the apostle that forbade the man casting out devils, and got forbid himself for it - with this difference that she won't be forbid. Well, she chooses her portion with Dives and not Lazarus. She is the most arrant, respector of persons I know, and her Christianity is worse than a farce. It was that first of all that drove me to doubt.

(ML, Chapter 52, 'Hope Chapel')

From Alexander Graham, however, she finds her attitude given powerful articulation - again, in words which surely constitute one of MacDonald's ideals for himself:

Sweeping, incisive, withering, blasting denunciation, logic and poetry combining in one torrent of genuine eloquence, poured confusion and dismay upon head and heart of all who set themselves up for pillars of the church without practising the first principles of the doctrine of Christ - men who, professing to gather their fellows together in the name of Christ, conducted the affairs of the church on the principles of hell - men so blind and dull and slow of heart, that they would never know what the outer darkness meant until it had closed around them - men who paid court to the rich for their money, and to the poor for their numbers - men who sought gain first, safety next, and the will of God not at all - men whose presentation of Christianity was enough to drive the world to a preferable infidelity.
(ML, Chapter 52, 'Hope Chapel')

Most fundamentally of all, however, MacDonald is concerned in this book with attacking 'society', for it is from its clutches that Malcolm must rescue Florimel. As portrayed by MacDonald, the leading representatives of London society in the book are the people from whom Florimel is in most danger, Lady Bellair and Lord Liftore. Once again, the allegory of the book must await the next chapter for a fuller discussion, but it is clear that in selecting fashionable society as the snare from which Florimel must be rescued, MacDonald is dignifying it by making it the symbol of all that endangers the human soul.

Unfortunately, MacDonald's ability to locate his fiction in upper-class London society is nowhere near so fine as his powers to portray, say, Scottish rural life. For one thing, he is an outsider, and, for another (and possibly in part as a consequence) his prejudice against that stratum of society prevents his writing of it with any poise. As a result, his instinct to use it as a symbol of human depravity works well enough in its way, but there is no point in

pretending that the result matches his richest pages.

The urgency of Malcolm's offensive against evil in this book is given extra point by the theme which emerges in the later stages of the novel, when the fishermen of Scaurnose come very close to being evicted by their factor, Mr Crathie. In Malcolm, the innocent members of mankind had been called 'the doos' (doves) and seen as potential individual victims of the serpent-like, or cat-like, powers of evil. In The Marquis of Lossie, however, an entire community is threatened, so that evil appears immanently triumphant both on a large scale and also at the urgently personal level, with Malcolm's sister herself in immediate danger. All in all, the sequel suggests that a great urgency is necessary to cope with an immanent threat. The image of something approaching a highland clearance is not too extreme for expressing the radical peril MacDonald perceives confronting the forces of goodness and innocence. The Scottish community which stands for simple purity as against London's sophisticated depravity is threatened from within.

It is not just that the world around him stimulates MacDonald to greater opposition in this book; just occasionally, there are hints that he is aware of his own idealism cracking under the pressure of dreary fact. Gone, for example, is his easy assumption that motherhood must always be a passport to womanly perfection. Lenorme, the painter Florimel eventually marries, was blessed in his mother, but she now seems unusual:

Her influence had armed him in adamant - a service which alas! few mothers seem capable of rendering the knights whom they send out into the battle-field of the world. Most of them give their children the best they have; but how shall a foolish woman ever be a wise mother?

(ML, Chapter 14, 'Florimel')

And Malcolm, chastened by Clementina's misunderstanding of his treatment of Kelpie, muses on MacDonald's behalf.

I used to think ilka bonny lassie bude to be a poetess - for hoo sud she be bonnie but by the informin' hermony o' her bein'? - an' what's that but the poetry o' the Poet, the makar, as they ca'd a poet i' the auld Scots tongue? - but haith! I ken better an' waur noo! There's gane the twa bonniest I ever saw, an' I s' lay my heid there's mair poetry in aul man-faced Miss Horn nor in a dizzin like them.

(ML, Chapter 40, 'Moonlight')

Less protected against the harsh realities of human nature and society by his idealistic optimism, MacDonald reacts more severely than before against the evil he sees around him, and he makes his hero wage his war with it in a more positive way than hitherto. As I have already indicated, Malcolm takes much more of the initiative against evil than any hero had done in the previous Scottish novels, and the human will is a prominent intellectual concern here. The result is that Malcolm, in The Marquis of Lossie, has a dimension to his inner life which earlier heroes lacked; he is faced with choices of courses of action, when confronted with the news of Florimel's life in London, when facing the difficulties of justifying his presence in the capital and also of detaching his sister from its snares. He is confronted by a dilemma when Clementina, so clearly a worthy and right-minded

person, violently disapproves of the treatment he knows is necessary for his horse. He is puzzled by the problem of how best to inform Florimel of the truth of her status. And, underlying all, he must continually choose to remain incognito, even when this demands that the Portlossie folk, who are his natural charge, suffer at the hands of an unjust factor. MacDonald finds that he has committed himself to writing a kind of book which is quite new to him, one in which his hero's inner life is characterised by the anguish and tension of moral choice. Elsewhere, his heroes suffer as more purely reactive beings, crossed by impediments in their progress to happiness.

George MacDonald was no George Eliot, however, and this is a dimension of experience to which, as a writer, he did not fully respond. The choices are there in the narrative: Malcolm must make them and he does. What MacDonald does not, or cannot, do is to make drama from them. His instinct, as ever, is to smooth his narrative so that its progress seems inevitable, perhaps predetermined. It is one reason why The Marquis of Lossie is a falling-off from its predecessor, that it fails to rise completely to its own challenges. MacDonald is here losing control of his Christ-like hero, who, having been moved away from Portlossie and its Boys Own Paper adventures, threatens to become a more complex human being. In part, the complication facing MacDonald in this is compounded by the fact that, at one level of meaning, the choices facing Malcolm Colonsay are the choices which can be naively seen as facing Christ himself - how to reconcile kindness and firmness, or how to balance the welfare of one part of humanity against that of another.

In the Malcolm of The Marquis of Lossie, the two levels of the MacDonald hero, the realistically human and the allegorically divine, no longer fit neatly together. One result is that Malcolm the teacher of religious truth is often in danger of becoming a prosy bore, and at other times fails to achieve a tone of voice which is both authoritative and attractively humane:

'That'll do, Davy; I'll give you a chance, Davy,' he said, 'and if I get a good account of you from Travers, I'll rig you out like myself here...Now I want to tell you, both of you, that this yacht belongs to the Marchioness of Lossie, and I have the command of her, and I must have everything on board ship-shape, and as clean, Travers, as if she were a seventy-four. If there's the head of a nail visible, it must be as bright as silver. And everything must be at the word. The least hesitation, and I have done with that man. If Davy here had grumbled one mouthful, even on his way overboard, I wouldn't have kept him.'

(ML, Chapter 25, 'The Psyche')

MacDonald's problem, in writing an allegory of Christ's offensive against evil and his assumption of his rightful authority over human nature, is that of finding a human embodiment for a conception which is, by definition, above the human. In earlier books, the idea of Christ variously laid emphasis on divine love, warmth, tenderness and service vis-à-vis ordinary men - an emphasis on the humanity of the Christian god, in fact. Now, in attempting to write more ambitiously of Christ's ultimate authority over man, MacDonald is enlarging his conception so that it can be no longer comfortably contained in commonplace human images. MacDonald is aware of the problem himself, I think, and builds it in to his narrative, in his account of Blue Peter's growing sense of alienation from Malcolm (Chapters 16, 17, 19)

and in a later passage such as the following, in which the alienation between Malcolm and the fishers of Scaurnose is not merely the dramatic point but is also visible in the contrast between living speech and Malcolm's dead English - a point which is unlikely to have been intended by the author:

'Mr Crathie,' he said calmly, 'you are banishing the best man in the place.'

'No doubt! no doubt! seeing he's a crony of yours,' laughed the factor in mighty scorn. 'A canting, prayer-meeting rascal!' he added.

'Is that ony waur nor a drucken elyer o' the kirk?' cried Dubs from the other side of the ditch, raising a roar of laughter.

The very purple forsook the factor's face, and left it a corpse-like grey in the fire of his fury.

'Come, come, my men! that's going too far', said Malcolm.

'An' wha ir ye for a fudgie fisher, to gi'e coonsel ohn speired?' shouted Dubs, altogether disappointed in the poor part Malcolm seemed taking. 'Haud to the factor there wi' yer coonsel.'

(ML, Chapter 58, 'The Trench')

And if the book's hero begins to find his individual humanity compromised by his allegorical role, the same is true of most of the other characters, who are called upon to act mainly in accord with their positions in the book's allegory rather than as living characters interacting with their environment. In Malcolm, MacDonald had managed to balance these two requirements very well. The difference between the two novels is rather extremely encapsulated in the change in attitude to Malcolm's father who, though now dead, is still a presence

in the later book. In it, there is no hint of his regency escapades, of his thoughtlessness and capacity for violence, or his capability for sin. Malcolm is made to revere him unreservedly, and the dead man becomes a symbol of God the Father, no less. Nevertheless, if characters such as Clementina, Alexander Graham, Lord Liffmore and Miss Horn have rather narrow roles to fill, they at least do so vigorously, with conviction. Of none is this more true than Florimel herself: less attractive and less complex than in Malcolm, she is made to behave as a wilful and perverse brat with the utmost success.

It is not only in characterisation that the new thematic emphasis produces a difference between Malcolm and The Marquis of Lossie: it influences the handling of place, also. The landscapes of Malcolm have an open, clear, precise, almost sunlit quality, while those of The Marquis of Lossie have a murky moodiness which corresponds with both the book's sense of acute moral danger and also its emphasis on moral choice. Even more, though, MacDonald stresses, with his romantic atmospheres, the possibility of the earthly giving way to the ideal - as indeed occurs when Malcolm finally claims his own. It is on such a note that the book opens:

It was one of those exquisite days that come in every winter, in which it seems no longer the dead body, but the lovely ghost of summer. Such a day bears to its sister of the happier time something of the relation the marble statue bears to the living form; the sense it awakes of beauty is more abstract, more ethereal; it lifts the soul into a higher region than will summer day of lordliest splendour. It is like the love that loss has purified.

(ML, Chapter 1, 'The Stable-yard')

It is through a foggy twilight, too, that Duncan MacPhail, seer-like, senses the approach of Malcolm as he returns to Portlossie, to initiate the book's final movement which culminates in his installation. And the descriptions of nature, fewer, one suspects, than in Malcolm, have an elaborate, poetic artificiality which aims at an animistic suggestiveness rather than a hard and fresh sensual accuracy. The approach to landscape is nearer to that of Caspar David Friedrich than to that of Constable:

But the sun was not yet down, and among the dark trees, shot through by the level radiance, he wandered, his heart swelling in his bosom with the glory and the mystery. Again the sun was in the wood, its burning centre, the marvel of the home which he left in the morning only to return thither at night, and it was now a temple of red light, more gorgeous, more dream-woven than the morning. How he glowed on the red stems of the bare pines, fit pillars for that which seemed temple and rite, organ and anthem in one - the worship of the earth, uplifted to its Hyperion! It was a world of faery; anything might happen in it. Who, in that region of marvel, would start to see suddenly a knight on a great sober war-horse come slowly pacing down the torrent of carmine splendour, flashing it, like the Knight of the Sun himself, in a flood from every hollow, a gleam from every flat, and a star from every round and knob of his armour? As the trees thinned away, and his feet sank deeper in the looser sand, and the sea broke blue out of the infinite, talking quietly to itself of its own solemn swell into being out of the infinite thought unseen, Malcolm felt as if the world with its loveliness and splendour were sinking behind him, and the cool entrancing sweetness of the eternal dreamland of the soul, where the dreams are more real than any sights of the world, were opening wide before his entering feet.

(ML, Chapter 40, 'Moonlight')

Utterly subjective, and glaringly obvious in its attempt to intoxicate the reader, such a passage nevertheless has its beauty and appeal, albeit of a dangerously heady sort. Even when the scene to

be described is of the utmost freshness and clarity, as in an account of a sunny, early morning seascape, MacDonald infuses it with animistic imagery which urges the reader past the surface appearance and towards the life within and beyond.

Florimel woke, rose, went on deck, and for a moment was fresh born. It was a fore-scent - even this could not be called a fore-taste, of the kingdom of heaven; but Florimel never thought of the kingdom of heaven, the ideal of her own existence. She could however half appreciate this earthly outbreak of its glory, this incarnation of truth invisible. Round her, like a thousand doves, clamoured with greeting wings the joyous sea-wind. Up came a thousand dancing billows, to shout their good morning. Like a petted animal, importunate for play, the breeze tossed her hair and dragged at her fluttering garments, then rushed in the Psyche's sails, swelled them yet deeper, and sent her dancing over the dancers. The sun peered up like a mother waking and looking out on her frolicking children.

(ML, Chapter 56, 'Mid-Ocean')

Once more, we can find a passage in the book which confirms what observation reveals. Early on, Malcolm has a discussion with the painter Lenorme about how to depict the scene, from Novalis's Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, in which the goddess of Nature brings the hero's original beloved to him. Malcolm is critical of Lenorme's handling of the figure of Nature:

'Don't you think then, that one of the first things you would look for in a goddess would be - what shall I call it? - an air of mystery?'

'That was so much involved in the very idea of Isis, in her especially, that they said she was always veiled, and no man had ever seen her face.'

'That would greatly interfere with my notion of mystery,' said Malcolm. 'There must be revelation before mystery. I take it that mystery is what lies behind revelation; that

which as yet revelation has not reached. You must see something - a part of something, before you can feel any sense of mystery about it. The Isis for ever veiled is the absolutely Unknown, not the Mysterious.'

'But, you observe, the idea of the parable is different. According to that Isis is for ever unveiling, that is revealing herself in her works, chiefly in the women she creates, and then chiefly in each of them to the man who loves her.'

'I see what you mean well enough; but not the less she remains the goddess, does she not?'

'Surely she does.'

'And can a goddess ever reveal all she is and has?'

'Never.'

'Then ought there not to be a mystery about the face and form of your Isis on her pedestal?'

(ML, Chapter 28, 'The Portrait')

MacDonald's own descriptions of nature, such as those I have just quoted, contrive to suggest the presence both of a film between the reader and the natural scene, and also, paradoxically, of a more penetrating insight than is achieved by the common eye. He thus strives to imply nature's eternal unveiling.

Such passages may be counted by many as characteristic of the book's weakness: I see them as constituting a narrow part of the book's strength. For despite the criticism which the inevitable comparison with Malcolm precipitates, the book is far from being a failure amongst MacDonald's Scottish novels. If it has basic flaws, as I suggest it has, it is nevertheless considerably redeemed by many passages, some brief like those I have just quoted, others much longer, like the dramas of Alexander Graham's assault upon 'that huge slug,

The Commonplace' in the dissenting chapel, Malcolm's growing struggle with his increasingly obdurate sister, and the final overthrow of unrighteousness in Portlossie. MacDonald may fail to create inner dramas within his individual characters, but he has here lost none of his instinct for the moral struggle embodied in a nexus of characters, locked in confrontation.

The Marquis of Lossie would not appear to have assuaged MacDonald's instinct to challenge his contemporaries with chastening images of Christ confronting their civilisation, for the next Scottish novel, Sir Gibbie, does this even more vigorously. In the later novel, however, he tries to circumvent some of the difficulties into which he had been led in The Marquis of Lossie, while at the same time making the bizarre juxtaposition between Christ and the nineteenth century even more startling: he creates Gibbie Galbraith. A difficulty had developed, in The Marquis of Lossie, of combining an adequate conception of Christ with an attractive human embodiment. His solution, in Sir Gibbie, is drastic. He opposes to the everyday world a figure in whom unworldliness is incarnate, a character whose behaviour, reactions, and values are totally unexpected. To help counteract the essential inhumanity of this conception, MacDonald creates a Christ who is a very young child when we first meet him, and who essentially remains child-like even when he comes of age. By this means, MacDonald is able to tap an automatic warmth of response in his reader, and is able to express his belief that in childlikeness lies true wisdom and holiness. Furthermore, since Gibbie's impossible altruism seems less impossible in a very young child than in an adult,

the reader is initially induced to view Gibbie as a viable human possibility, an attitude of which remnants will linger even when the older Gibbie is at his most unique. Once again, MacDonald makes no pretence about what he is doing, and why:

It is the noble, not the failure from the noble, that is the true human; and if I must show the failure, let it ever be with an eye to the final possible, yea, imperative success. But in our day, a man who will accept any oddity of idiosyncratic development in manners, tastes, or habits, will refuse, not only as improbable, but as inconsistent with human nature, the representation of a man trying to be merely as noble as is absolutely essential to his being - except, indeed, he be at the same time represented as failing utterly in the attempt, and compelled to fall back upon the imperfections of humanity, and acknowledge them as its laws. Its improbability, judged by the experience of most men, I admit; its unreality in fact I deny; and its absolute unity with the true idea of humanity, I believe and assert.
(SG, Chapter 8, 'Sambo')

This passage conveys not only MacDonald's awareness of the objections his story will meet but fixes the author as being in a minority (perhaps of one) in opposition to a blinkered, mundane majority - a vision of the exceptional individual which the book itself dramatises with its Christ-like hero in utter opposition to the actual ways of the world. With the long second sentence ('But in our day...') - lofty and rounded, but also conversational and direct - MacDonald further epitomises his approach to this novel and its readers. Yet more nakedly concerned with criticising the thinking and attitudes of contemporary society than in his previous Scottish novels, MacDonald adopts blunter rhetorical tactics than in previous books. Hence the opposition on which the novel rests: the incompatibility between the

world of his readers (the urban, middle-class world of the later nineteenth century) and MacDonald's vision of the Christian ideal derived directly from the New Testament, without doctrinal interpretation. Hence, also, the greater emphasis on the narrator's comments, with far less, and less effective, dialogue than the previous Scottish novels had provided. The emphasis is on a blunt statement of MacDonald's ideas and attitudes: the work is nearer the sermon than hitherto, and language, plot and character are all influenced by this. The action and characters are less autonomously dramatic than in his earlier Scottish novels; direct address to the reader becomes the basic medium of the work, so that the narrator's consciousness, more prominently than ever, is the cocoon in which action and description are embedded. To this alteration in the ever-precarious balance in MacDonald's novels between fictional interest and didactic intention the essential failure of this work is partly due.

One can deduce other elements of MacDonald's calculations in developing Gibbie as his central character. In his Scottish fiction, MacDonald creates only one other prominent character of comparable youthfulness and vulnerability as the Gibbie we first meet, and that is Annie Anderson. With the urge to point the ordinary world of men as even more hostile and terrible than it had seemed a decade earlier, however, MacDonald makes Gibbie even more of a victim, placing him in circumstances of greater squalor and loss, before subjecting him to the fearful sight of Sambo's murder. Never emotionally reticent, MacDonald strives here for the utmost pathos, relying on the image of

the cherubic street-urchin, not much more than a toddler, to work its effect on us.

The pathos is further heightened, of course, by Gibbie's dumbness, but this in turn leads us on to other dimensions of the character's significance. Like the mad laird in Malcolm, Gibbie is physically maimed in a way which is intimately related to what other characters take to be a mental handicap: he is often thought of as an idiot. Robert Lee Wolff points to a comparison with Dostoevsky's Myshkin, and one can attempt to relate MacDonald's character to the literary and folklorist traditions of holy fools, as found in many countries, as well as in, say, King Lear.²⁰ A prominent writer on these topics, Enid Welsford, points to the appearance of holy simpletons, 'God's folk', in War and Peace, and, clearly, Russian peasant society contained a rich array of attitudes towards madmen.²¹ There is, however, no sign of a similar richness in MacDonald's novel: his projection of an unconventional, good-hearted mute as the embodiment of what is finest in human nature has a sharpness, a clarity and a lack of suggestiveness which well befits his aggressively didactic mood, but which is imaginatively impoverished. He is tapping a deeply-held, age-old and potent human response to mental deficiency or simplicity, but he conveys none of the power of mystery which explains and justifies that response. Instead of being the crystallisation of a powerful amalgam of ideas and feeling, Gibbie seems rather the expansion of an almost purely verbal paradox, underlying the whole book, but occasionally rising to explicitness in such a comment as

Mr Galbraith's, when exasperated by his right-minded daughter:

Therewith Ginevra burst into tears.

'Abominably disagreeable!' muttered the laird.
'I always thought she was an idiot!'
(SG, Chapter 57, 'A Hiding-Place from the Wind')

It is as if MacDonald were responding to the colloquial, insulting use of the word as much as to its original sense of a permanent mental deficient. He is not so interested in the insane or near-insane as he is in the unconventional and unselfish, or even in the literal-minded. As the book progresses, the 'idiocy' MacDonald advocates approximates more nearly to mere lack of sophistication, a negative approach which finds expression in such an arbitrary detail as Gibbie's child-like bursts of happiness when dancing around and ending up on one leg. Any unconventionality, it seems, if it is child-like, will express a superiority of heart and mind over the mass of humanity, and therefore any unconventionality might get into this book.

Gibbie is idiotically unconventional because he is always child-like. Compare him with other characters in MacDonald's fiction and it becomes apparent, I think, why the fusion, in him, of standard MacDonald elements fails here while other, seemingly similar creations have a success. Stephen Stewart, in Malcolm, is an idiot, is physically imperfect, and is closely associated with childhood. He can move and fascinate the reader, however, as Gibbie cannot, for the mad laird is mad, and his other attributes and associations are characteristics bound in with, and bound together by, that central

fact of his imagined personality. The character of Gibbie cannot be described in the same way. It is as if he were merely the sum of his attributes ('idiocy', childness, rural origins, childhood cut off from parents, home, kindness and gentleness, etc.) with nothing of flesh and blood at the centre.

Indeed, as one considers and probes his character, it almost dissolves into insubstantiality, because its core is nothing less than the concept of unselfishness. In Gibbie, self is totally negated, and it is from this fact that our dissatisfaction over individual incidents proceeds. Gibbie is more fundamentally unreal than any other prominent character in these novels: he has no solid core of personality whatsoever. Thus the unreality of behaviour such as his selfless concern for Ginevra as he regains consciousness after being whipped (Chapter 21, 'The Punishment') and his total self-control after Mr Sclater assaults him with a slate (Chapter 43, 'The Minister's Defeat') is of a totally different order from the unreality of the mad laird, say. It is the difference between unlikelihood and impossibility.

The absence of a central core to the character has other results. MacDonald had always a strong tendency to base his characters on previously existing literary types, so that they have much of the cliché about them. Gibbie, however, is made up of a succession of character-types, inviting a series of disparate responses from the reader, and failing to convince us that a single personality is going through

various stages of growth, as Alec and Robert do. The Gibbie we first meet is doubly a figure of pathos: the unstainable, innocent child and the wretched street-arab. His seed, in MacDonald's fiction, is perhaps to be found in that description, in Robert Falconer, in an incident in the London slums:

She went to the kennel, and bent her head over, ill with the poisonous stuff she had been drinking. And while the woman stood in this degrading position, the poor, white, wasted baby was looking over her shoulder with the smile of a seraph, perfectly unconscious of the hell around her.

(RF, Part III, Chapter 8, 'My Own Acquaintance')

In the years with the Grants, Gibbie becomes a noble savage - a 'beast-boy'. It is an archetype which can often be felt underlying many of MacDonald's valued, primitive, simple, rural, instinctively right characters, but this is the only point at which it appears nakedly. Blended in with this idea is the folk-tale of the brownie, as the child Gibbie had already been called.

In the last section, in Aberdeen, Gibbie's status as a Christ-figure reaches its fullest expression, with two main emphases that MacDonald chooses to develop. At first, Gibbie is Christ-like in his opposition to the social conduct of the Sclaters. Mrs Sclater, with her expertise in deportment, is a counterbalance to Janet Grant, who crystallises the New Testament ethos of the croft, and Gibbie progressively shows up her rules of conduct, and the mentality behind them, as unnecessary or even verging on the immoral. This emphasis gives way to Gibbie's activity as a Christ-like social worker, providing shelter for the down-and-outs.

Our principal interest here is not merely with the details of the different roles Gibbie plays, but with the fact of them. Their variety indicates, I think, the absence of any imaginative centre to the character which would aid in the illusion of a continuity in Gibbie's growth. I have mentioned the principle of selflessness as being at the heart of MacDonald's idea of Gibbie: to it must be added, once again, the fact that he is always child-like, and that MacDonald is here providing a set of variations on the concept of the child. However, MacDonald is using the idea of the child, rather than his observation of flesh-and-blood children: Gibbie's child-likeness is as intellectual a conception as his selflessness. Alec Forbes, on the other hand, is essentially child-like in that he is imperfect and needs completion: in him, also, the child regularly embodies a freshness of response and action which makes him a potent and valuable moral force (to the degree of Christ-likeness, in fact), but, just as important, he is a being moving towards a higher and better status. Gibbie, Christ-like from the start, has no such need of growth and no such inner diversity: his progress can only be towards greater scope for doing good. Gibbie has very little inner life which can be presented to us, and our main means of apprehending him is visual rather than dramatic - the street-arab, the beast-boy, the 'odd-looking lad' in the streets of Aberdeen, as opposed to Alec being drawn towards Kate, or towards whisky. (This is another reason, I take it, why MacDonald makes him dumb: a vocal Christ-figure, in MacDonald, is apt to promulgate ideas and belief at great length - see Janet Grant

herself, for example, whose eagerness to testify and to correct the belief of those around her brings her unintentionally close to Mause Headrigg. And the dimension of speech would have forced MacDonald to imagine a more continuous inner life for Gibbie. As we have seen, both these difficulties afflicted Malcolm in The Marquis of Lossie. As it is, Gibbie can be safely portrayed in terms of the simplest of emotions, and in terms of deeds.)

If the absence of a tangible and coherent inner life, however, solves some problems, it produces other difficulties in the book, and its absence is especially unfortunate when MacDonald moves towards his marriage ending: we have no sense that Gibbie wants or needs Ginevra - being utterly selfless, he needs nothing for himself - and thus the wedding has no essential relevance to the book, except as far as Ginevra is concerned. It is a mainly mechanical, and fanciful, tying-up. The logic of Gibbie's Christ-status is towards a solitary ending, as occurred in Robert Falconer, but that book was bleaker, more stern in its facing of human realities than this one, which is always, and pre-eminently, a fable. This happy ending, therefore, is at once inevitable but unsatisfying.

Similarly, Gibbie's journey is a mechanical thing compared with those of earlier heroes. We sense in earlier characters a real need driving them ever onwards, an unsatisfactoriness either in themselves or their environments which needed resolution. Gibbie has no inner needs of this sort (for example, he has had no contact with hell-fire

Christianity), while it is in his nature to be contented with circumstances which would horrify, we are supposed to feel, anyone else. Thus MacDonald is forced to the extreme horror of the murder of Sambo, to pierce what amounts to Gibbie's thick skin, and drive him away from the town on a journey to God. Even Sambo's gaping throat, however, can impel Gibbie only a little way through the book. His placid contentedness poses MacDonald with a genuine narrative problem - a flood of 1829 proportions is necessary, we feel, to fill up enough of the book - and it is solved in purely narrative terms (although MacDonald does this very well). There is none of the inner direction and inevitability of earlier and better works.

If The Marquis of Lossie helps define one of MacDonald's weaknesses as a novelist, its successor, Sir Gibbie, which is his boldest attempt to write a novel of the living Christ, helps define the weaknesses of the sort of novel to which he felt called. Striving to picture, with the utmost clarity and directness, Christ in a nineteenth-century environment, he brings his fiction to the point at which it ceases to be just a novel and becomes a fable, while still insisting upon that semblance of interior normality and causation in his central character which a novel demands. Gibbie thus becomes, as a character, a hollow sham. The element which is missing to allow this novel become a successful fable is mystery. In a work like Mr Weston's Good Wine, for example, the arrival of the supernaturally unpredictable central character seems to be a miraculous, inexplicable advent, which opens up vast, misty perspectives of possibility. Gibbie,

on the other hand, has no mystery in the same sense: his dumbness is merely a physiological fact which happens not to be explained. MacDonald's didactic point is clear: Christ could appear on modern soil, if any one of us would allow him to. MacDonald wishes to avoid too strong a suggestion of miracle. But without such a suggestion, the aesthetic juxtaposition is too harsh, too complete. Christ and this world must have, in fiction, the mediating elements (of specialised fictional place, of commonplace human characteristics) which MacDonald provides in earlier works.

Gibbie, we might say, is insufficiently like Christ. There is, in him, too much divine incarnation, and too little of that parallelism, between human image and divine idea, which is essentially allegorical. MacDonald must write either fantasies or allegories and, indeed, he normally does. In *Gibbie Galbraith*, however, despite various allegorical elements in the narrative as a whole, MacDonald tries to eschew the doubleness of allegory in favour of an approach to the singleness of a direct representation. The resulting failure shows, I think, just why MacDonald needs allegory.

The book is hardly a complete failure, however, as the esteem which Sir Gibbie has enjoyed among MacDonald's readers must surely indicate. Even such a stern critic as Robert Lee Wolff has written more warmly of the character of Gibbie than I can.²² Nevertheless, there are other strengths to which I must point. The plot outline is firm and memorable; indeed, it is among MacDonald's firmest, as Hart

has noted.²³ MacDonald clearly knows where he is going, and how he is going to get there. The story-type of the lost heir coming into his own is new, of course, neither in fiction in general nor to MacDonald's work in particular. Similarly, MacDonald makes as free use of coincidence as he has ever done. Still, the telling has a controlled eventfulness which raises the book high in the author's work. We are especially aware, as we read, of MacDonald's sheer experience as a novelist by this time, his professionalism which maintains a narrative momentum underneath the copiousness of his individual incidents, his painstaking detailing, and the direct statements of his narrator. He keeps before our eyes a large and varied group of prominent characters, weaving them into his action with a notable lack of strain. This is all the more impressive in that he divides his action between the urban and rural settings, and he is able to spread that action across the two with a fluidity which we might not have forecast from earlier works. When coincidence is needed to bring a character from one area to another (for example, when Mrs Croale tracks down the lost-lost Gibbie) it is largely absorbed by the narrative, and the major surprise of Mr Sclater's arrival at the cottage (Chapter 38, 'The Muckle Hoose') is effective and credible, unlike, for example, Margaret Elginbrod's appearance at Arnstead. Another way of making essentially the same point is to praise the economy MacDonald shows in the book. Mr Sclater first appears as a foolishly zealous clergyman grappling ineffectively with social diseases, but his later close involvement in the plot is deft and effective,

however unexpected. Similarly Mrs Croale is shown in an astonishing number of metamorphoses, but her central personality is never quite destroyed, and again MacDonald's economy is noteworthy.

Closely tied in with firmness of structure is a further narrative virtue which is typical of his best work: characters are independently imagined, and stand off from one another with clarity. Scottish settings always allow MacDonald to introduce greater variety of character-type, mainly because of the social and regional spread available to him. His English novels are more exclusively set in middle-class worlds, and he is less daring or sure when he introduces eccentricity into them - this is one reason why, for example, Guild Court ('A London Novel') is vastly inferior to Dickens. In earlier (and better) Scottish novels, however, he conveyed a sense of community within his country-town settings and even, to a limited extent, in his treatments of Aberdeen. This is true, however, neither of the urban sections of Sir Gibbie, nor of its rural ones, and its absence is certainly a loss to the novel. The principal characters, however, are individually imagined with considerable vigour, have each a vastly different background and experience behind them and, lacking the cohesive social environment of a Glamerton or a Rothieden, they stand out in our imaginations with a clarity which is satisfying in itself, and appropriate to the particular texture of didacticism of this novel.

Just as the novel handles character and society in a less fully satisfying way than earlier works did, but thereby achieves a lesser

virtue of its own, so the prosiness of the narrator is ultimately a loss, but far from a total loss. Alec Forbes and Malcolm owe much of their success to MacDonald's lavishness in conversational passages, and to the dominance within them of narrative over commentary. He does not seem able to let this story tell itself, however - with a central character like Gibbie, it probably could not be left to tell itself. The book is full of passages (especially in the opening urban chapters and in those dealing with the child's flight up Daurside) in which a heavily personal account, self-indulgently leisurely, is combined with a particularity of imagination to produce a prose medium which is well suited to the unlikely fable MacDonald is telling. One example from many is the paragraph of Chapter Four, 'The Parlour', describing George Galbraith's nightly adjournment to Mistress Croale's. Subjectivism and detailed imagining of the realistic details involved combine, too, in many incidents from Gibbie's journey up-river - see, for example, the last two paragraphs of Chapter Nine, 'Adrift'. The fabulous situation is often locally reconciled, on the page, with our sense of the realities of life.

6. The Later Scottish Novels

By the end of the 1870s, MacDonald had finally written up the theme which lies at the heart of his Scottish novels, namely the essential benevolence towards man of a god who is not immensely 'other'

(whether in terms of his nature, location, or sympathy towards man) but who is marked by his nearness in these respects, rather. MacDonald's mission, he felt, was to preach a god of love - in a word, Christ. In the six Scottish novels which began with David Elginbrod, he had done it in two ways. In the first three, he had shown Christ-likeness growing out of the individual limited human being, gradually coming to the fore in the course of the individual's experience and education. In the second three, he had placed his Christ-like character, in a summary fashion, among ordinary men and women: the interaction was then one of conflict and contrast, rather than of growth to freedom. In the first place, he had started, as it were, with humanity; in the second, with divinity. Both, however, served to show clearly the rapprochement between the two which was his principal concern.

Sir Gibbie, however, formed a natural conclusion to this exploration: it brought together, in the one book, the two sides of the relationship with such startling directness that MacDonald was left with nothing new to attempt in this line. The essential effort of the Scottish fiction was now over. Nevertheless, MacDonald produced another six Scottish novels, which decline from the achievement of the 1860s and 1870s with almost mathematical regularity.

I believe that the principal reason for the falling-off in the later works is contained in the point I have just made. There was no important way in which his later fiction could develop: at base, there was only one thing he wanted to do with his novels, and by 1879 he had

done it. Thus, the later novels show only minor (if still discernible) shifts in thematic emphasis. In Castle Warlock, Donal Grant, What's Mine's Mine and The Elect Lady, therefore, we find a notable concern with the theme of loss or deprivation: the just man and those associated with him have to fight as never before to preserve their inheritance from the encroachment of evil. In Castle Warlock, the symbolic castle is miraculously saved at the last moment, but in Donal Grant and its successor, loss is actually sustained, at least in earthly terms; Donal loses his beloved to death, just as other difficulties are finally cleared away, while it is the clan in What's Mine's Mine which is cleared, being forced to emigrate to Canada leaving their ancient lands in the hands of the materialist. Heaven and its rewards are still before the heroes of these novels, but MacDonald can no longer envisage permanent happiness in earthly terms.

Another concern dominates Heather and Snow and Salted With Fire, namely the sinfulness of man and the necessity for its painful rectification. In these works, characters are made to suffer extremes of horror and difficulty, so that they can be transformed from abject sinners and fools to Christ-like forces for good. The contrast between the original and final moral states of the heroes of Heather and Snow and Salted With Fire is complete. Their final goodness has little or no foreshadowing in their early behaviour; only the continuity of love and cherishing from other characters suggests a constant worth in

these heroes. Even in his final fictions, MacDonald makes the truth of his characters reside in the opinions of others.

These two themes of his final writings had always been present, part of the rich web of themes, attitudes and beliefs on which all his fiction is based. The pessimistic tendencies which tinge them, however, had been muted, and diminished, by a firm, all-embracing optimism. In the later works, this is far less naturally expressed: the joy, harmony and goodness which eventually prevail do so in a far more willed way than had been the case in MacDonald's great achievements. The mood of these last works is much grimmer and less patient than that of earlier works: MacDonald comes much closer to preaching a god of retribution. His god is still one of love, but it is a more fearsome and daunting love than hitherto, a love which will whip and bludgeon its creature for his own good. The crucial distinction is still there, of course: these heroes are not being eternally punished, and they are saved, but MacDonald had never been less sanguine about the ease with which man will allow himself to be saved. Thus, one of the damaging tensions within these last works is the conflict between form and content - that is, between a narrative form firmly committed to an optimistic conclusion, and a mood, or outlook, which is far from taking such optimism for granted.

We can only speculate as to why, apart from the question of thematic development, these later Scottish novels are so much less imaginatively satisfying than their predecessors, and why they are so much more

pessimistic. It seems safe to invoke the onset of old age, and the gradual diminution of mental powers, which observers noted in MacDonald the man (see Chapter One). The gloom, too, is surely to be related to MacDonald's growing experience of death amongst his immediate family: he lost children in 1878, 1879, then again in 1891. A favourite grandchild died in 1884. And in the nature of things, death was taking a toll of many long-standing friends. In addition to these blows, MacDonald had to maintain his long effort to feed his family and preserve his own health: both of these factors must have strained his mental reserves and buoyancy.

Other sorts of reasons are also at hand. One suspects that his sense of the actuality of Scotland was becoming less vivid. He does seem to have made the occasional trip north still, but his life at this time must have been essentially lived in England and in Bordighera. Even for health reasons, Scotland must have been substantially barred to him; his sudden exclamation in Castle Warlock, however, suggests that his mind dwelt upon it no less fondly and perhaps helps explain why he continued to write about it: 'Oh, that awful gray and white Scotch winter - dear to my heart as I sit and write with windows wide open to the blue skies of Italy's December!' (CW, Chapter 13, 'Grannie's Ghost Story'). Yet in these later works, Scotland becomes more purely a landscape and a scene of timeless, fairytale actions. Much of the social density of the earlier work is lost.

Finally, one notices how, in the echoes of other writers lying within these books, MacDonald seems increasingly drawn to the more

extrovertly romantic among nineteenth-century writers. Colin Manlove has wisely, if briefly, drawn attention to MacDonald's response to Poe: among the novels, it is most obvious of all in Donal Grant, but it also tinges Castle Warlock and Salted With Fire among the later novels, just as it can be seen sporadically in earlier works such as Phantastes and David Elginbrod.²⁴ It is interesting to note, also, how swiftly MacDonald responded to the early works of Stevenson: I discuss a particularly extensive parallel between Castle Warlock and Treasure Island in Appendix Two.

Both these writers seem to have nourished his imagination at this time, but they helped to produce fiction which is much thinner in human content compared with the best of MacDonald's earlier work. I have already remarked on the diminution of social content in the later novels: they are set in more and more isolated parts of the Scottish landscape, and the country town gradually ceases to be a presence in them. MacDonald now focusses on smaller and more self-contained groups of characters; in earlier works, his central body of characters would shade off into the rest of mankind. There is, as I have also hinted, a marked increase of the gothic, with MacDonald straining, most notably in Donal Grant, for sensational effects. Related to this tendency is the trend towards ever more stereotyped characters, and towards a lessening of the lively accretion of detail which used to surround the earlier narratives. In the last three short books especially, simple narrative stands forth with a new prominence, like a skeleton under a wasted skin. And, occasionally, the reader is aware of a tendency in

the writing itself towards some temporary mannerism of style.

When all is said, however, only The Elect Lady is completely null, drained of nearly all that can appeal in MacDonald's Scottish novels; on the other hand, Castle Warlock, Donal Grant, and perhaps What's Mine's Mine, at least, can be confidently recommended to anyone who has developed a taste for MacDonald's Scottish writing. The confrontation with loss and deprivation in Castle Warlock and What's Mine's Mine is genuinely moving, while the gothic in Castle Warlock and Donal Grant is handled with vigour and enthusiasm. Those who can respond to MacDonald's personality as embodied in his novels, or who relish his Scots dialogue and natural descriptions, will still find pleasure here. Most notably of all, those interested in the allegory in MacDonald's writing, and willing to let it colour their reading, will find a considerable richness even here.

Footnotes for Chapter 4

The following are the abbreviations which are used in this section of footnotes:

GMDW Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (London, 1924). The second edition (September, 1924) was used.

Hart Francis Russell Hart, The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey (London, 1978).

New Statistical Account The New Statistical Account of Scotland, 15 vols., (Edinburgh and London, 1845), XIII.

Wolff R. L. Wolff, The Golden Key (New Haven, 1961).

1. Wolff, p. 261.
2. George MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons, First Series (London, 1867), quoted in C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald: An Anthology (London, 1946), p. 25.
3. GMDW, p. 418.
4. GMDW, p. 418.
5. GMDW, p. 452.
6. Anon., 'Martin Féreol', St Paul's,⁴ (1869), 452-464.
7. GMDW, p. 466.
8. Annual Miscellany; or Rational Recreations, for MDCCCXII (Paisley, 1812), pp. 88-89.
9. Charles Rampini, A History of Moray and Nairn, (Edinburgh and London, 1897), pp. 234-237.

10. See Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, revised edition, 9 vols., (London, 1946-75), I (1947), 431-435.
11. Hart, p. 108.
12. GMDW, p. 418.
13. GMDW, p. 466.
14. GMDW, p. 465.
15. GMDW, pp. 557-558.
16. Greville MacDonald, Reminiscences of a Specialist (London, 1932), p. 27.
17. Ronald MacDonald, 'George MacDonald: A Personal Note', in From a Northern Window, ed. Frederick Watson (London, 1911), 55-113 (pp. 82, 85).
18. New Statistical Account, p. 331.
19. New Statistical Account, p. 342.
20. Wolff, p. 294.
21. Enid Welsford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History (London, 1935), pp. 77-78.
22. Wolff, pp. 288-294.
23. Hart, p. 105.
24. Colin Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 75, 275n.

Chapter 5

Part I: MacDonald on Symbolism and Allegory

1. 'The meanings are in those forms already'

The symbolism of MacDonald's novels is rooted deep in his sense of reality itself. Thus, his brief comment in the letter to William Mount-Temple (see p. 14, above) sums up much of his approach to his novels: he tries 'to make them true to the real and not the spoilt humanity'. Nor, as we have seen, is it merely the reality of humanity with which he is concerned, but the reality which lies behind all that we encounter through our senses and our experience. In 'A Sketch of Individual Development', he eventually pictures his typical human being reaching a stage when the truth as revealed by science is insufficient.

He would rather cease to be, than walk the dull level of the commonplace - than live the unideal of men in whose company he can take no pleasure - men who are as of a lower race, whom he fain would lift, who will not rise, but for whom as for himself he would cherish the hope they do their best to kill. Those who seem to him great, recognize the unseen - believe the roots of science to be therein hid - regard the bringing forth into sight of the things that are invisible as the end of all Art and every art - judge the true leader of men to be him who leads them closer to the essential facts of their being. Alas for his love and his hope, alas for himself, if the visible should exist for its own sake only! - if the face of a flower means nothing - appeals to no region beyond the scope of the science that would unveil its growth. (Orts, p. 58)

The idea that the world of the commonplace vision, the world of men and of science, does not exist merely in and for itself is, of course, an old one, predating MacDonald by many centuries. His ideas are often, in fact, a reformulation, a reinvigoration, of concepts which had been Christian property since the Middle Ages. MacDonald himself makes a trusted character point out that the concept of the world as a revelation of God goes back to St Paul:

The Bible will keep till you get home; a little of it goes a long way. But Paul counted the book of creation enough to make the heathen to blame for not minding it. Never a wind wakes of a sudden, but it talks to me about God. And is not the sunlight the same that came out of the body of Jesus at his transfiguration?

(EL, Chapter 11, 'George and Andrew')

Similar notions are constantly appearing in the rest of the Scottish fiction. Early in his first novel, he describes the heroine rising early to renew her contact with nature:

Little they knew how early she rose, and how diligently she did her share of the work, urged by desire to read the word of God in his own handwriting.

(DE, Book I, Chapter 9, 'Nature')

In a later work, he grants his hero more than the mere ability to perceive the science of nature: 'There was in him an unusual combination of the power to read the hieroglyphic aspect of things, and the scientific nature that bows before fact' (CW, Chapter 1, 'Castle Warlock'). Nor can we simply assume that he adopts the idea of 'the hieroglyphic aspect of things' for the sake of his novels.

In his last published sermon he insists 'that the loveliness of the world has its origin in the making will of God, would not content me; I say, the very loveliness of it is the loveliness of God, for its loveliness is his own lovely thought, and must be a revelation of that which dwells and moves in himself'.¹

The ancient notion of creation as a revelation of God's truth and reality was deeply embedded in MacDonald's mind, not as a received doctrine, but as a personal and living article of belief. Although the countless examples of the significances in nature are nearly always drawn in the novels from the traditional (one might say the traditionally poetic) features of landscape, a letter already quoted provides an example of how even the nature revealed by science showed God to MacDonald:

It is delightful to think that even in this world the precious sea keeps a wide solitary space for us; and that the very garment that wraps the world about and is one life is a consuming fire, in which no foul thing can have more than the momentary existence necessary to its dissolution; that as it sets on fire and dissipates the cometic fragments that reach it before they can reach and strike us, so also the evil things that come out of the world itself are consumed by it. It is so like God - who not merely wards, but frustrates with utter change of evil into good.²

For MacDonald, as for so many Christian allegorists before him, our mundane reality is itself a symbol, carrying the reality of God to each man in a form and to a degree suited to his station. It must be stressed, too, that there is no question of a man inventing and

ascribing meaning to the forms of nature: 'the meanings are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of unveiling' (Orts, p. 5).

The essay from which this quotation comes, 'The Imagination: its Functions and its Culture', is grounded, in part, on the notion that God's truth is given form both in nature and in man, that creation involves the location of meaning in the forms of nature as well as in the mind of man. Hence MacDonald's rejection of the notion of the poet (or of any man) as an originator of ideas or as a creator; he finds the very word 'poet' misleading: 'Is not the Poet, the Maker, a less suitable name for him than the Trouvère, the Finder?' (Orts, p. 20). Reading the hieroglyphs is not a matter of invention, but one of recognition, rather. Both in this essay and in his statement on symbolism to his son Greville, MacDonald insists on the truth of the meanings. Greville writes:

Once, forty years ago, I held conversation with my father on the laws of symbolism. He would allow that the algebraic symbol, which concerns only the three-dimensional, has no substantial relation to the unknown quantity; nor the 'tree where it falleth' to the man unredeemed, the comparison being false. But the rose, when it gives some glimmer of the freedom for which a man hungers, does so because of its substantial unity with the man, each in degree being a signature of God's immanence. To a spiritual pilgrim the flower no longer seems a mere pretty design on the veil, 'the cloak and cloud that shadows me from Thee'; for see! she opens her wicket into the land of poetic reality, and he, passing through and looking gratefully back, then knows her for his sister the Rose, of spiritual substance one with himself.³

The process of recognition is a difficult one to grasp, as the

ground of that recognition is unclear, both in this quotation from Greville and in the essay on the imagination. As he discusses the matter in the essay, MacDonald never considers the possibility that the meaning he connects with the form may have no reality outside his own mind. He is not talking about a private symbolism at all, but trusts the imagination absolutely to reveal the significances in nature's forms. Despite his idealism, it is as if he felt securely anchored by the objects of the world of sense, for he is not interested in meanings which utterly transcend them or dwarf them; rather, the meanings transfigure the object in a mutual illumination.

The meanings are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of unveiling. God has made the world that it should thus serve his creature, developing in the service that imagination whose necessity it meets. The man has but to light the lamp within the form: his imagination is the light, it is not the form. Straightway the shining thought makes the form visible, and becomes itself visible through the form. (Orts, p. 5)

The majesty of MacDonald's notion of the power of the imagination as a means to the divine truth of the mundane is clear in this, especially when one considers how close the parallel example of Christ's Transfiguration must have been in his mind. Yet MacDonald's stress is always on the naturalness, the everydayness and the easy simplicity of the miracle; as, indeed, is the case with the Transfiguration itself, which he interprets as the visible manifestation of the sense of joy experienced by Jesus in the knowledge of God's presence, a process which, as he describes it, seems close to his idea of the working of the imagination.

Thus, like the other miracles, I regard it as simply a rare manifestation of the perfect working of nature...The outer man shone with the delight of the inner man - for his Father was with him - so that even his garments shared in the glory. Such is what the presence of the Father will do for every man. May I not add that the shining of the garments is a type of the glorification of everything human when brought into its true relations by and with the present God?⁴

The Transfiguration seems to have held a special place among the miracles of Jesus in MacDonald's mind, for his book on the miracles culminates in this discussion. Nevertheless, it is the common, everyday aspect of the miracle which he stresses, just as in Greville's report of MacDonald's ideas on symbolism. The immediate revelation of the rose is not one of devastating illumination, but rather of the pleased recognition of a brother or sister in creation. MacDonald's warmly human sense of God the Father with the family he created is a constant condition of his thought.

I should clarify, perhaps, MacDonald's relationship with certain other thinkers on these matters. In discussing these things, MacDonald and his commentators have to make much use of the idea of recognition, so much so that it might be tempting to see him as using a version of the Platonic concept of anamnesis, as described by Socrates in Meno. MacDonald did not, however, make prominent use of the idea of earlier existence on which Plato's concept is based, although such a notion is implicit in many of MacDonald's favourite habits of thought and reference, such as the vision of heaven as a home to which we are returning and the stress on the special insight of

the child's way of seeing, while it is explicit in the poem of Wordsworth's which influenced MacDonald so greatly, the Immortality Ode. MacDonald does not ascribe man's ability to recognise the truth to a previous inculcation, but sees it as the response of what is true in his own nature. MacDonald's rationalisation of the grounds of the recognition, however, must have been very close to a version of anamnesis, and the closeness of the concept helps stress how far MacDonald was from countenancing the notion of a man's creativity arising solely within himself.

Perhaps even more tempting is to see MacDonald's ideas on the imagination as part of his obviously massive debt to Romantic thought, and especially obviously to Coleridge. No wonder Professor McGillis and others insist on discussing MacDonald as a Romantic, for a list of the literary, psychological and metaphysical concerns which MacDonald shares with Coleridge would include the distinction between fancy and imagination, the interrelationship between mind and nature, the power and tendency of the imagination to reveal a vision of unity, the importance of imagination in revitalising language, especially poetic language, a discontent with the 'inanimate cold world' (Dejection, st. 4) revealed by sensory perception and their need for the capacity to revitalise it, to give 'the charm of novelty to things of every day',⁵ their valuing of joy and of hope in opposition to a despairing vision of the merely commonplace, and an avowed preference for the symbolic over the allegorical. That MacDonald was indebted to Coleridge is obvious.

Nevertheless, it seems to me less helpful than one might expect to attempt to discuss MacDonald's conception of the imagination in the terminology of Coleridge's famous (if brief) account. At the root of Coleridge's theories is the vision of the mind as an active, creative thing. Even in the mere perception of ordinary sense objects, the mind is creating, though at a level which is lower than when it fuses ideas and images into a new poetic unity. Coleridge envisaged a union, an identity, between the domains of mind and of matter, and avoids any suggestion of a dualism even when he is referring to commonplace sense-perception, let alone when he is discussing the operation of the secondary imagination.

MacDonald, however, does not really concern himself with the nature of commonplace sense-perception; he does not discuss the imagination as having any part in it. Thus one must take issue with Professor McGillis, who sees a version of the primary imagination in MacDonald's statement about the word 'imagination', 'the word itself means an imaging or a making of likenesses' (Orts, p. 2). I disagree with Professor McGillis that this is MacDonald's 'definition' of the imagination: it is a preliminary statement of the meanings which come together in the lexical item.⁶ MacDonald's definition of the concept to which the lexical item is a label comes in his next sentence: 'the imagination is that faculty which gives form to thought - not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in sound, or in any mode upon which the senses

can lay hold' (Orts, p. 2). Here we already find a dualism (between thought and form), and we do not find any excuse for believing that MacDonald saw the imaginative act as creative. If the possibility remains after this, it is extensively rejected later in the essay, for the denial of creativity to the human imagination is one of his principal concerns. Indeed, despite the saturation of MacDonald's writing with Romantic terminology, his ideas, on this crucial issue at least, go some way back before Wordsworth and Coleridge, for his concept of imaginative perception, of the actual functioning of the imagination, is surely closer to the tradition of Locke and Hartley, in which the mind is seen as passive. He postulates a man, with a thought to impart, seeking a means of communicating it:

Gazing about him in pain, he suddenly beholds the material form of his immaterial condition. There stands his thought! God thought it before him, and put its picture there ready for him when he wanted it.

(Orts, p. 8)

The operation of the imagination, the giving of a communicable form to a thought, is a stumbling-upon, at best - a recognition. How creative MacDonald envisaged that recognition as being is not clear (nor is it clear that he even pondered the point), but he is obviously not dealing with 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'.⁷ Nor is the thought which needs the clothing of nature a result of creative mental activity:

Indeed, a man is rather being thought than thinking, when a new thought arises in his mind. He knew it not till he found it there, therefore he could not even have sent for it. He did not create it, else how could it be the surprise that it was when it arose? (Orts, pp. 4-5)

Professor McGillis finds the activity of the Coleridgean imagination in MacDonald's quest for the natural form which will communicate his thought, but Coleridge's imaginative activity lies in the encounter itself between mind and object, not in what occurs prior to that encounter.⁸ Despite a massive surface indebtedness to Romantic thought, the heart of MacDonald's ideas and beliefs lies in earlier ages, if it is to be given a temporal location at all.

To sum up, then, the created universe is an expression of God's truth, a product of the divine imagination which, in heaven as much as on earth, 'is that faculty which gives form to thought'. As firmly as any of the early Christian fathers, MacDonald believed nature could be read as a gospel.

2. The World of Books

It is far from being the only gospel, however, and besides the book of nature and God's own book, the Bible, the books produced by the human imagination can also contain the truth. The process of creating them may not be comparable in kind to the original creation, but if the meanings have been properly described in the forms, the written product is valid. In discussing the imagination, MacDonald is at pains to stress that it is essentially the same faculty in God and man; the products of the imagination, human and divine, are in parallel and constitute the same world, 'the world of poetry, both that in Nature and that in books' (Orts, p. 60). For MacDonald,

the world of books is intimately bound up with that of nature, and he has no patience with those whom books fail to lead, imaginatively, to nature and the truth, whether they be lovers of fact like Mysie Lindsay's father ('he could not be called a man of learning; he was only a great bookworm; for his reading lay all in the nebulous regions of history'. (RF, Part II, Chapter 10, 'A Father and a Daughter')) or merely verbal analysts of poetry. Often, it can seem that MacDonald views the world of books as secondary, as a substitute which is not to be preferred to nature, the thing itself. Nevertheless, his writing implies that he sees the two media as mutually illuminating: certainly, he is always at pains to supplement the experience of his children of nature with an education of poetry and formal learning, and, indeed, he occasionally makes poetry the means of attaining a just appreciation of nature (as in the case of Margaret Elginbrod) in contrast with the more predictable Romantic sequence of response.

Literature, therefore, is also God-given and a means whereby the Real can be glimpsed. MacDonald (like the believers of earlier ages) sees God as an artist, and, conversely, sees Man's artistic creativity as God-like, as being part of that which in man is nearest God in kind. In one essay, he pictures God as the supreme dramatist. 'He begins with the building of the stage itself, and that stage is a world - a universe of worlds. He makes the actors, and they do not act, - they are their part' (Orts, p. 4). The closeness of the two dramas, God's and man's, is striking in this passage. God's

is better because it is infinitely vaster and involves the manipulation of more miraculous and intractable actors and properties: 'instead of writing his lyrics, he sets his birds and his maidens a-singing' (Orts, p. 4). He also hints here, in a parenthesis, at a difference between human and divine creativity in the matter of the actual embodiment of the thought or vision: '... (if indeed thought and act be not with him one and the same)' (Orts, p. 3). In another essay, he further puts man's sense of reality in its place when he asks, 'Shall God's fiction, which is man's reality, fall short of man's fiction?' (Orts, p. 223). Obviously not, for clearly God's embodiment of the truth is superior, as it uses a language which leads one closer to the nature of that truth as it is in itself.

Nevertheless, the comparative inadequacy of the products of man's imagination is less extreme than might have been expected. Nature can be copied, and the truth in it preserved, so long as nature is portrayed as God created it. In other words, humanity must be portrayed in its most natural forms (as we should say, idealised, or approaching the ideal) and not in the depraved guises which are our everyday human experience. Once again, it is the reality of humanity which art must portray, not its falling-off. With that proviso, the products of the two imaginations have much the same kind of effect:

A fairytale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away: do you begin at once to wrestle with it and ask whence its power over you,

whither it is carrying you? The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way.
(Orts, p. 319)

The human imagination, however, must perform at least one function not required of God's:

But while the imagination of man has thus the divine function of putting thought into form, it has a duty altogether human, which is paramount to that function - the duty, namely, which springs from his immediate relation to the Father, that of following and finding out the divine imagination in whose image it was made. To do this, the man must watch its signs, its manifestations. He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the works of His hands. (Orts, p. 10)

Thus MacDonald envisages two functions for the human imagination. It must try to comprehend God's truth, his reality, by responding to Creation and other divinely-inspired books; and it must forge a means whereby ideas and insights can be communicated to one's fellow man. Seemingly disparate, these two activities are quite close, in MacDonald's view, for he envisages communication as based on the imaginative response to the forms of nature. Nature has a meaning which can be read from her just as a book's can, as in his favourite illustration of the snow-drop:

Science may pull the snowdrop to shreds, but cannot find out the idea of suffering hope and pale confident submission, for the sake of which that darling of the spring looks out of heaven, namely, God's heart, upon us his wiser and more sinful children. (Orts, p. 10)

Similarly, literature must always have a meaning, even when it seems

least profound and most designed for immediate narrative effect.

'You write as if a fairytale were a thing of importance: must it have a meaning?'

It cannot help having some meaning; if it have proportion and harmony it has vitality, and vitality is truth. The beauty may be plainer in it than the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give no delight. (Orts, p. 316)

At this point, a difficulty seems to arise, for he continues in an unexpected passage:

Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another.

'If so, how am I to assure myself that I am not reading my own meaning into it, but yours out of it?'

Why should you be so assured? It may be better that you should read your meaning into it. That may be a higher operation of your intellect than the mere reading of mine out of it: your meaning may be superior to mine. (Orts, pp. 316-317)

This sudden revelation that MacDonald is prepared to countenance a whole range of interpretations, of equal validity if not of equal value, is in sharp contrast with what seems to be implied in much of the foregoing. The snowdrop, for example, is spoken of with no hint that it can mean anything other than 'suffering hope and pale confident submission'. MacDonald's insistence that the individual creates neither the thoughts he wishes to express nor the forms by which he expresses them, his belief that the meanings are already in the forms just waiting to be found by the trouvère in each of us, seems quite at

odds with what appears to be a granting of a subjective freedom of interpretation. The discrepancy, however, is only illusory, for in the above passage, MacDonald is still using the term 'meaning' to connote something found, not something described. The multiplicity with which he here deals is not merely in the body of the readers, but also in the thing meant. In other words, the truth of God, to be glimpsed in nature or in true books, is incomprehensibly various, of its very nature not to be fixed or finalised by any human phrase or concept. Thus what might appear to be a recognition by MacDonald that each reader of a book, or beholder of nature, is merely able to devise a meaning in accordance with his own cast of mind, is still an expression of his belief that the imagination is for finding the truth. 'Truth' is the keyword: when it is absent from a work of literature, or from an interpretation, then a familiar pairing reappears: 'When such [mental] forms are new embodiments of old truths, we call them products of the Imagination; when they are mere inventions, however lovely, I should call them the work of the Fancy' (Orts, p. 314).

The endlessly suggestive quality of a truly imaginative work of art, its constant power to please and the universality of its appeal are thus to be ascribed to the seeming endlessness of the divine truth within it: MacDonald has no expectation that only one meaning is to be found in it, let alone intending that the meaning of which he is most conscious is that which must inevitable be grasped:

The fact that there is always more in a work of art - which is the highest human result of the embodying imagination - than the producer himself perceived while he produced it, seems to us a strong reason for attributing to it a larger origin than the man alone - for saying at the last, that the inspiration of the Almighty shaped its ends.

(Orts, p. 25)

Nevertheless, not all meanings are equally valuable, either to any single reader at any one point, or in themselves, as an earlier quotation implied: 'It may be better that you should read your meaning into it. That may be a higher operation of your intellect than the mere reading of mine out of it: your meaning may be superior to mine'. A later passage amplifies this:

One difference between God's work and man's is, that, while God's work cannot mean more than he meant, man's must mean more than he meant. For in everything that God has made, there is layer upon layer of ascending significance; also he expresses the same thought in higher and higher kinds of that thought: it is God's things, his embodied thoughts, which alone a man has to use, modified and adapted to his own purposes, for the expression of his thoughts; therefore he cannot help his words and figures falling into such combinations in the mind of another as he had himself not foreseen, so many are the thoughts allied to every other thought, so many are the relations involved in every figure, so many the facts hinted in every symbol. A man may well himself discover truth in what he wrote; for he was dealing all the time with things that came from thoughts beyond his own. (Orts, pp. 320-321)

The notion of hierarchy applies not just to the meanings of a work, but to their expression, as well. The imagination is thus, in part, an organ of discrimination and organisation, for it 'takes forms already existing, and gathers them about a thought so much higher than

they, that it can group and subordinate and harmonize them into a whole which shall represent, unveil that thought' (Orts, p. 20). The work of a single artist, however, will obviously not begin to approach, in thought or imagery, the vast variety of God's truth. Thus MacDonald, his mental landscape dominated by insights and concerns which were the products of his experience and his beliefs, appears not only to write books which are clearly similar in general concern and tone, but which are also repetitive in the detailed imagery which constitutes them. Having discovered, as it were, which meanings reside for him in the forms, he has no choice but to offer them to his readers. Thus individual allegorical narrative patterns, characters and images recur often throughout his long career as a writer.

For despite the unashamedly public nature of his Scottish novels, with their pedagogical intentions and their projection of the author himself, there is a less obvious private dimension. They are records of MacDonald's own efforts to articulate the truth, whoever may or may not overhear him. Once again, one remembers his playfulness with names of people and places: the witty games are an end in themselves, for they are, in MacDonald's eyes, an example of what all men should be doing with the world of matter and experience. The oldest man of all whom Tangle meets in The Golden Key is also presumably the wisest, and he is a little naked child playing with toy balls and thereby ordering the universe. So MacDonald plays his games with

his fiction, trying to create the ultimate patterns afresh. If few understand, the activity is still worthwhile. If he puns on a real street name, calling Aberdeen's Union Street 'Pearl Street', who will know he has done it except for a few alert Aberdonians? No matter: his joy in the witty connection is a sign to him that a further tiny fragment of truth is embedded in his writing. That, it would seem, is enough.

3. MacDonald and Allegory

I have already insisted that the meanings in the forms of nature do not, in MacDonald's view, so transcend the forms that the latter fall away to nothing in the receptive consciousness, but, rather, that the awareness of meaning transforms and irradiates the forms.

MacDonald held a parallel view as regards the relationship between meaning and imaginative forms which constitute God's other books, too. Here is a spokesman in a late novel, Andrew Comin in Donal Grant, discussing the interpretation of the Bible:

What the man said was this - 'at the sea 'at Peter gaed oot upo' wasna first an' foremost to be luikit upon as a teep [type] o' the inward an' spiritual troubles o' the believer, still less o' the troubles o' the church o' Christ. The Lord deals wi' fac's nane the less 'at they canna help bein' teeps. Here was terrible fac's to Peter. Here was angry watter an' roarin' win'; here was danger an' fear: the man had to trust or gang doon.
(DG, Chapter 7, 'A Sunday')

MacDonald rejected as an inferior method of literature any radical

divorce between form and meaning. Only for God can form and meaning be one and the same thing, but MacDonald clearly believed that man's imagination can approach that divine unity. Certainly, any technique in which form and meaning seem to have a relationship which is less natural than it is willed by the writer is inferior in his eyes. Like so many writers after Coleridge, MacDonald believed that allegory is just such a technique. There can be little doubt that Andrew Comin's views echo MacDonald's own and the essay on 'The Fantastic Imagination' is yet more directly explicit:

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. An allegory must be Mastery or Moorditch. (Orts, p. 317)

I think, nevertheless, that allegory can be a very useful term to us here. As with the terms 'novel' and 'romance', difficulties with 'allegory' and 'symbol' are often created by the absence of a final consensus on the scope and precise meaning of the words themselves. The twentieth century thinks it has attained a consensus, but it is more of a consensus of attitude than one of definition. Attempts at precision tend to be delimiting rather than helpful. For example, one of the clearest distinctions, known to me, drawn between allegory and symbolism is by C. S. Lewis, in his The Allegory of Love. It is useful to consider this instance not just because of its clarity, but because Lewis was an avowed disciple of MacDonald's, and has been influential, in his turn, on yet more recent MacDonald critics. To

Lewis, allegory is a way of personifying the emotions, whereas symbolism is a means of descrying the infinite in the material.

The difference between the two can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given - his own passions - to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real. To put the difference in another way, for the symbolist it is we who are the allegory. We are the 'frigid personifications'; the heavens above us are the 'shadowy abstractions'; the world which we mistake for reality is the flat outline of that which elsewhere veritably is in all the round of its unimaginable dimensions.⁹

Yet the absoluteness of this distinction, however attractive, does not directly equip us to discuss MacDonald, who writes, as it were, in both ways at once: in Lewis's terms, the first section of the present chapter deals with MacDonald the symbolist, while the second approaches MacDonald the allegorist. I suggest that although MacDonald is intensely serious when he implies that the created world is a means to the truth of God, he is equally serious in offering fictive literature as a means to the same end. (As we have just seen, MacDonald regards the idea of play with the utmost seriousness.) He is capable of implying that both are equally real or, depending upon his argumentative mood, equally unreal. The inner dimensions of the human individual (the 'passions', in Lewis's word) which MacDonald allegorises are part of the same reality as that which is revealed by the book of nature. Perhaps Lewis's use of 'leave', in the above quotation, is unfortunate; certainly, we do not feel that MacDonald is in any sense quitting either the inner human dimension he projects in his novels, or the material dimension

which symbolises the infinite. I repeat, the meanings he perceives do not utterly transcend the objects of sense, but transfigure them, and the surface of his fiction is irradiated by meaning, not obliterated.

Lewis's notion of allegory seems excessively narrow and artificially clear-cut. When applied to MacDonald, it appears to take insufficient account of the idea of correspondence, an idea which is due, in part, to a parallelism arising out of different views taken of the object. Thus, one person or event can be seen as having several different levels of interpretative meaning, according to the argumentative context. MacDonald moves with ease from the concretization of man's moral life to the implication that there is a divine life indwelling in nature; to him, these are all levels of the one, ultimately ungraspable, reality. Thus it is more helpful for us to turn to a concept of allegory which allows a freer movement between the three levels of narrative surface, everyday reality, and ideal reality. Such a concept is provided by Aquinas, for example, for whom allegory can exist both in the written word and in the material world:

The author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify his meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, his science [of sacred doctrine] has the property that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal and presupposes it.¹⁰

Such a passage seems close to the general spirit in which MacDonald writes, even though we cannot apply to his work Aquinas's further discussions of the 'threefold division' of 'the spiritual sense'. The immediate value of this passage to us is in its demonstration of the possible breadth of the term 'allegory', for Aquinas uses it to cover the two processes Lewis outlines, and thereby underlines the essential kinship between them which we sense in MacDonald's work, but which Lewis seeks to play down.

Nor does MacDonald himself utterly repudiate the term allegory, despite his preference for the symbol. Andrew Comin does not deny the typological significances of the sea on which Peter set foot, he merely gives another sort of significance priority. In England's Antiphon, MacDonald expresses his two-sided assessment of allegory very clearly: 'Allegory has her place, and a lofty one, in literature; but when her plants cover the garden and run to seed, Allegory herself is ashamed of her children: the loveliest among them are despised for the general obtrusiveness of the family'.¹¹

Certainly, the last quotation from A Dish of Orts (p. 331 above) is very far from divorcing allegory and fairytale. It admittedly seems to be making two statements, the second of which does not necessarily follow from, or precisely illuminate, the former; thus the extreme difficulty of creating a work which is both allegorical in all its details and also a delight to read does not therefore mean that a fairytale cannot, under any circumstances, be a 'strict

allegory'. Despite this non-sequitur, we can nevertheless be clear that what MacDonald disliked was not allegory in itself, but the attempt to construct a narrative in which every detail is determined by reference to an unstated but consciously envisaged significance. His use of 'strict' suggests that what he deplored was the thought of the limitation this model puts upon the spontaneous working of the imagination. It seemed to him an imposition of mental constriction parallel to the adoption of the confining dogmas on such matters as salvation and divine wrath imposed, in effect, by the tradition of Christian thought. In a 'strict allegory' as envisaged by MacDonald, that which is signified is too much the product of man's mind, too little the living truth of God. Clearly he is not against the parallelism of allegory per se; indeed, it is noticeable that even the expression of Andrew Comin's literal response to Peter's stormy sea begins to take on a hint of allegorical resonance as his references slide from the elements to Peter's state: 'here was angry watter an' roarin' win'; here was danger an' fear: the man had to trust or gang doon'. When MacDonald says that a fairy-tale can contain allegory, we may conjecture that he is thinking of those portions of the story in which the author himself detects or recognises a meaning. What MacDonald mistrusted about allegory was the air of system which the term would have carried down to him from the rigours of biblical exegesis, and also the 'allegorical personifications of the analysed and abstracted constituents' of human beings in the morality plays.¹² The term clearly suggested to him the operation of the analytical

rather than the imaginative capacities of the human mind.

In this mistrust, MacDonald had an illustrious predecessor in Coleridge; furthermore, the Romantic preference for symbolism to allegory continues to the present day. Nevertheless, allegory seems too useful a term to avoid while discussing MacDonald's work, and it is unnecessary to see the technique, as MacDonald did, as constricting or as imaginatively squeezing the life out of God's creation. Consider, once again, that brief illustration which surely merits the term:

Science may pull the snowdrop to shreds, but cannot find out the idea of suffering hope and pale confident submission, for the sake of which that darling of the spring looks out of heaven, namely, God's heart, upon us his wiser and more sinful children. (Orts, p. 10)

Even such a fleeting image (the briefest use of the snowdrop that I can recall in MacDonald's writings) seems to me allegorical on two counts. In the first place, MacDonald is precise and explicit as to the significance of the flower, which carries for him no mysterious, half-glimpsed hints of another sphere (as a symbol, as frequently described, would do) but embodies 'the idea of suffering hope and pale confident submission'. In other words, there is that parallelism between two conceptions which is at the root of allegory. Secondly, even as the image is briefly glimpsed here, MacDonald is thinking in terms of action in time. This snowdrop does not exist in his mind as a static, timeless image: it struggles upward in growth though afflicted by the harshness of the season and by its own frailty

('suffering hope'), it hangs its head, a head which is white, which droops and shakes in every gust but which stands out from its setting, clearly and persistently ('pale confident submission'). MacDonald is utilising the total growth process and circumstances of the snowdrop; its significance depends on a packed narrative of the flower's existence. And the presence of narrative has always been felt as one of the principal distinctions between allegory and symbolism.

Furthermore, the two characteristics I have here picked out are typical of MacDonald's writing. It is usually possible to achieve some precision in analysing the meaning of his symbolism, even though he is not usually so explicit as he is in this example. Though he allows for a wide range of interpretation of his fairytales, the interpretative choices in his Scottish writing seem much narrower. On the second count, MacDonald's symbols are always, in the Scottish novels, part of a narrative sequence, and it is as narrative elements, not as isolated images, that we must respond to them. I shall therefore use the term allegory freely, in a straightforward, not restrictively technical sense, believing that its basic meaning of symbolic narrative is apt for the fiction of MacDonald's with which we are concerned. In its general unpopularity and, more narrowly, its widely assumed contrast with the favourite Romantic term symbolism, it is true to the way in which MacDonald was in contrast with his age; true also to the way in which his structures of mind and belief go back to Medieval roots and models; and true, furthermore, to the way in which he creates

his often naively fresh symbolic parallels with more of the essential directness associated with an allegorical process, rather than in the spirit of suggestive complexity which is now conjured by the term symbol.

Part II: The Scottish Novels as Allegories

The similarity between MacDonald's Scottish novels, which has often been despised, is due not simply to the unvarying nature of the writer's personality as we meet it in the novels, nor to the lack of development in his theological and literary thinking, nor just to the persistently autobiographical strain in his writing.¹³ It is due in large measure to the fact that MacDonald constructs his stories round the idea which was for him the deepest and most inescapable fact about human existence, the slow return of God's creatures to the source of their being. Not only did he think that 'heaven will be continuous touch with God', he interpreted the central Christian symbol of the resurrection, the necessary preliminary to mankind's direct contact with God, as an eternal movement of mind and moral stature:

For repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future, an urging on of the motions of life, which had better far be accelerated into fever, than retarded into lethargy.

(Orts, p. 1) ¹⁴

At different levels of meaning (moral or psychological), with different proportions of the literal and the allegorical, with at times quite different conceptions of the difficulties to be overcome in the course of that return, MacDonald's novels are built round the ancient pattern of what we must call, already unavoidably allegorically, a journey. That the individual is on a journey to God lies near to the heart of his belief: it is not surprising that the keystone of the MacDonald family's dramatic repertoire was Mrs MacDonald's adaptation of The Pilgrim's Progress. England's Antiphon contains a particularly clear statement of MacDonald's thinking:

For the movements of man's life are in spirals: we go back whence we came, ever returning on our former traces, only upon a higher level, on the next upward coil of the spiral, so that it is a going back and a going forward ever and both at once. Life is, as it were, a constant repentance, or thinking of it again: the childhood of the kingdom takes the place of the childhood of the brain, but comprises all that was lovely in the former delight. The heavenly children will subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, wax valiant in fight, rout the armies of the aliens, merry of heart as when in the nursery of this world they fought their fancied frigates, and defended their toy-battlements.¹⁵

The idea of a journey gives coherence to MacDonald's view of human experience; it therefore naturally constitutes the over-arching allegorical context within which the various local allegories take their places. And just as this pattern structures MacDonald's belief and his fiction, so it provides a convenient structure within which one can demonstrate the allegorical dimension of his Scottish novels. Not

only can particular items of symbolism be located within a total frame of reference, but the narrative constituent of each will be highlighted: as the above discussion of the snowdrop allegory indicates, MacDonald's outlook is imbued with the notion of process, and his meanings are incorporated in symbolic actions, not just in symbolic images.

It is convenient, therefore, to break down the pattern of the journey to God into five constituents. In the first part, I discuss examples of the various manifestations of the journey itself and of the entity which makes that journey. I follow this with an account of the different ways in which the concept of the journey's end is allegorized. The third and fourth sections focus on, respectively, the various difficulties encountered on the journey and on the agencies which aid the traveller on his way. Finally, I look at some of MacDonald's allegorical uses of landscape, or of place, concluding with some general considerations. Occasionally, illustrations are drawn from the fantasy writing instead of, or in addition to, examples offered by the Scottish novels. I do this because the implication may be clearer in the fantasy example, and also to underline, in detail, the kinship between the two modes.

1. The Voyager and his Voyage

Who is the voyager who is returning to God? In plot terms, it

is the hero of each book; in terms of allegorical meaning it is what one might broadly call the human essence, an entity which is at various times thought of as the imperfect human state before it attains to Christ-likeness, while at other times it is that Christ-likeness itself, incipient until it achieves dominance.

In the novels of the 1860s, David Elginbrod, Alec Forbes and Robert Falconer, MacDonald's vision of essential human experience was summed up in the notion of the happy fall, and his heroes variously embody a combination of innocence and blindness, the strength of goodness and the limitations of ignorance. For such a combination of strength in weakness, the image of the boy is the version of the hero which best suits, a formula which MacDonald discovered in his second novel, Alec Forbes. Earlier writers have well discussed the meanings and uses of the child image in nineteenth-century literature, most notably Peter Coveney in his general account The Image of Childhood and, specifically on MacDonald's use of childhood, Roderick McGillis.¹⁶ They both make much of the concept of the child's nearness to God and the blessedness of the child-like state. What perhaps needs further stress, however, is the limitation which is felt to inhere in the child. Thus, in reading Alec's boyhood, we may occasionally feel that heaven lies about him in his infancy, but as the book progresses, we can see how ignorant he is of the truth of God's nature and of his love for man, an ignorance which lays him open to fear and error, and which therefore leaves him vulnerable and imperfect. Boyhood is a state which will not only be left behind,

but which must be grown out of; the reason why imperfection can be so readily blended with blessedness in a boy like Alec is his blamelessness, his lack of accountability for his ignorance.

Nevertheless, if the story to be told about MacDonald's boys is that of the curing of their blindness, their hero-status retains a positive aspect. Boyhood is a state in which the natural tendencies and inherent goodness of man have free play, and are linked with a superabundant energy through which they can be expressed. Boys are shown as having a strong sense of right and of justice, and an uninhibited capacity to act on this sense. They frequently have a freer sense of what is appropriate and possible than their elders have. They have an unconventional spontaneity which MacDonald clearly wishes adult Christians had, a willingness to act and react with a directness adults usually fail to achieve. Alec's thoughtlessness is as much a strength as it is a weakness.

Once a boy in a MacDonald novel, always a boy. That quality of blameless imperfection is retained by a boy-hero like Alec until the imperfection begins to mend. We register that Alec ages physiologically and that the nature of the experience confronting him grows more adult, but he remains, we feel, in his inner being, the boy we first encountered, an effect which is more clearly embodied still in our surprise at the physical ageing of the two children, Mossy and Tangle, in the fairytale, The Golden Key. It is an effect which is especially possible in Alec Forbes, however, as Alec's experience

barely takes him beyond student days (unlike Robert Falconer). In the idyllic gladness of Alec's boyhood (one can use these terms despite 'Murder' Malison, for it is Annie, not Alec, who truly suffers at his hands and at the hands of Glamerton's other imperfections) MacDonald allegorizes mankind's native goodness, its oneness with nature (Alec has the most thoroughly Wordsworthian youth of any of MacDonald's Scottish heroes) and its capacity to rise to Christ-likeness in his rescues of Annie. Above all, his playfulness is important, for his joy, his zest and his sense of natural justice constitute 'the spirit of loons' (AF, Chapter 18), which is in explicit contrast with the materialism of Robert Bruce. With such a hero firmly symbolizing the basic goodness of humanity, MacDonald can dare to make Alec 'fall' indeed: his drunkenness and whoring would have been aesthetically impossible in a hero whose goodness was more equivocal. In Alec Forbes, MacDonald achieves a notable success in allegorizing a difficult, indeed paradoxical, concept: it is a parable of man's innocence, but it also begins to face honestly man's intimate knowledge of evil.

In David Elginbrod, the novel prior to Alec Forbes, MacDonald had tried to embody the same essential pattern, but did so with a more conventional hero, for Hugh Sutherland is a young man, already ripe for romantic involvement when we first meet him. The first part of the story MacDonald devises for him, his pedagogic relationship with the grieve and his family, provides far fewer opportunities for the demonstration of his inherent goodness, and his Christ-like rescue of

Margaret from the snow appears as an unexpected episode which greatly contrasts with the rest of the early action (a contrast which barely exists in Alec's boyhood rescues of Annie). In Hugh's case, also, the fall is more a matter of the pain and unhappiness which is humanity's lot, rather than a matter of sin, as Alec's ultimately becomes: it is true that MacDonald shows a moral falling-off in Hugh's neglect of his pupil and of the Elginbrod family, but the stress is on the hero as victim rather than on his moral failure. In both books, however, MacDonald's interpretation of the Fall is personal; to Paul, 'the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6. 23), but in Hugh's Fall his sins and the deaths of his hopes are contiguous, not sequential, while Alec's sins follow from his deathly despair on the loss of Kate. Evil, in MacDonald's view, is not part of man's root nature.

There is even less danger of associating the boy-hero with sin in the third Scottish novel, Robert Falconer. In this book, a change begins to come over MacDonald's handling of the hero, and although a boy still, Robert lacks the sheer thoughtlessness which had been an essential part of 'the spirit of loons'. Instead, he is 'sober': to his grandmother 'the soberest boy she could ever have known' (RF, Part I, Chapter 10, 'Another Discovery in the Garret'). Robert's childhood contains some of Alec's joyous communion with nature, but it is hampered by the repressive instincts of his grandmother. Where, in Alec, MacDonald had portrayed goodness without moral stature, Robert is more undeniably the child whose father has vanished, the isolated soul cut off from God. He has far

less moral growing up to do than Alec had; his development consists in coming to terms with life in a world which does not readily reveal its creator. Tough and steadfast as he is, Robert is very clearly the child as victim, and is an allegory of how the fresh and fine human essence is long thwarted and depressed by its earthly environment - and of how the vigorous instinct of that essence is to find God despite the material difficulties. Nevertheless, MacDonald clearly felt the need for a more direct embodiment of something like 'the spirit of loons', and so he places, beside the grave maturity of Robert, the earthy, commonplace Shargar. This last might be seen as an emanation of the hero, who introduces and maintains the ragamuffin in an environment, Mrs Falconer's house, which seems entirely at odds with such a boyish rogue. Robert's liaison with Shargar is an allegory of his preservation of his own lower nature, and acceptance of aspects of his own human fallenness. Shargar embodies Robert's abandonment, his fear and, soon, his trust; lacking Robert's bookish intelligence, he highlights a level of instinct in Robert himself. In his loyalty, Shargar embodies the capacity for humble, capable, selfless service, and is an antidote to the pride and exclusivity which we can faintly detect in the attitude of moral exaltedness which is one of his grandmother's gifts to Robert. Together, Robert and Shargar are a pairing which makes up the contradictions combined in Alec Forbes. As in Alec's case, also, Robert remains, essentially, the sober boy we first encounter, although the more fragmented structure of the later novel and the greater

fictionalised length of the hero's life mean that the feeling of his not really growing up is far less marked.

MacDonald's splitting of the boy into 'Robert' and 'Shargar' components, and his preoccupation with the 'Robert' aspect of the allegory, suggest that by the late 1860s, his changing perceptions were bringing about a transfiguration of his symbolic needs. In a sense, Robert's boyhood is an anti-boyhood, a statement that a happy and cared-for innocence is not, after all, the basic condition of humanity. What is wrong and harmful in the world surrounding man cannot be so inevitably vanquished as these early tales of growth suggest. Thus, Robert's comparative lack of moral growth is followed up by a series of heroes whose childhoods are ignored and who are young men from the start, the first being Malcolm. These heroes are variously the embodiment of the heroic element in the great moral battle, or tension, as perceived from MacDonald's Christian vantage-point, and they approximate to what he called the Christ-self.¹⁷ One can find references to this in his early fiction, as in 'the unknown caves of our deepest humanity, where lies, yet swathed in darkness, the divine image' (AF, Chapter 29). Where in the first three novels, however, he had portrayed the fitful emergence of the divine image within man, his emphasis in the fiction from Malcolm onwards is rather to isolate that concept in the central figure, and to thereby portray the vicissitudes of that precious human element in conflict with material circumstances. Malcolm, Donal Grant, the Macruadh brothers (in What's Mine's Mine) and Andrew Ingram (in The Elect

Lady) are the principal instances.

Occasionally, to ensure that we do not miss the parallel with Christ, MacDonald marks these heroes with a sign: Gibbie is flogged to produce the shape of the cross on his back (SG, Chapter 21, 'The Punishment') and Malcolm receives bad cuts in hand and foot. (As Duncan MacPhail so helpfully says, 'Wounded in ta hand and in ta foot! What can it mean? It must mean something, Malcolm, my son'. (M, Chapter 42, 'Duncan's Disclosure')).

The obvious danger, that such heroes fail to become distinct from each other as personalities, is not avoided: Malcolm and Donal, especially, are the same vigorous, self-sufficient, nobly low-class, invariably victorious conception. The Macruadhs are nearly the same, though they form a dual allegory of Christ, in that Ian is the Christ who goes forward to prepare a place for man in the house of many mansions, while Alistair is the Christ who 'calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out' (John 10. 3).

Gibbie Galbraith is a special case. He appears to be, but is not, a return to the 'boy' type of hero most purely embodied in Alec Forbes. He is not of Alec's type because he is perfect from the outset; from the beginning, he is as much a Christ-self as Malcolm. Where Alec and Robert are variously hampered by the world they encounter as children, Gibbie is simply at odds with it. Hence his paradoxical freedom from taint, despite the utter squalor of his childhood; our first vision of him, as he scrabbles in the gutter

looking for a lost jewel, can be seen as an allegory of Christ seeking to rescue human perfection and preciousness from the mire of matter. Gibbie is not really a boy symbol at all; he is a 'child', rather, or even a 'baby'. For MacDonald, the boy suggests a measure of imperfection and, therefore, of moral weakness. A baby, however, is yet nearer to God, and thus more secure in goodness; Gibbie's growth has no moral dimension. It is simply the development of the capacity of his goodness to make an impact on the world. So much of what is implicit in a loon like Alec is absent in the bairn Gibbie: the mischief, the thoughtlessness, the incipient sexuality. His dumbness can be seen as marking him as a divinely inspired, maimed fool. Depending less on literary and folk-tale parallels, however, we can see this impediment to explaining himself as part of MacDonald's emphasis on Gibbie's doing rather than on his thinking: his impact on other characters derives from his behaviour rather than on his rationalisations and explanations (just as God's reasons are hidden from men, though his benevolence can be distinguished in practice). Furthermore, Gibbie's silence is part of what keeps him a 'baby' in our eyes, at every stage of the action.

MacDonald's last heroes provide yet another emphasis of meanings, for in them MacDonald directly confronts humanity's failings. They are perhaps to be related to a character-type with which I shall deal later, namely the aristocratic villain, although they are not overtly aristocratic. The two with which we are concerned here, Francis Gordon in Heather and Snow and James Blatherwick in Salted With Fire,

seem a superficial return to the changing, improving hero of the 1860s, but there is such a complete contrast between their bad and good phases that we are closer to the moral firmness of Lilith than to anything in the earlier literature. Their experiences go beyond even those of the sinning Alec Forbes. Francis not only skirts an isolated death in his abandonment in the besieged city in the Mutiny (an incident which parallels Alec's Arctic experience), but then tastes another symbolic death by his collapse in the souterrain. Rescued by the Christ-like Kirsty, his reformation enables him to perform a similar Christ-like service as regards his mother, whom he rescues from the thrall of drink. James Blatherwick is plunged, not in death, but in sin: where earlier heroes had been in some danger of being the children of sin, Blatherwick produces a child of sin, but again, the acknowledgement to himself and to others of the bitter truth leads swiftly to peace, happiness, and a Christ-like power to minister unto others. These last books are an intensification of an earlier message, but their mood is less charitable towards mankind than most of their predecessors: man seems less worthy in his state of separation from God than in earlier books, and his salvation is even more miraculous.

To the human mind, at least, each journey, even one to God, must have a beginning. To MacDonald, of course, all things also begin with God, so that what he provides, in various allegorical guises, is the story of mankind's loss of contact with its maker, a departure which could be located at various stages in human life, but which naturally tends to be associated with some aspect of youth. He usually avoids,

however, the simplicity of a single unavoidably allegorical equivalent for the loss of God, or for the ejection from the heavenly home, even though the plots of his books usually contain some instigating episode which we can interpret in this way. Indeed, MacDonald achieves richness of effect and a quality of timelessness (even though he is embodying a narrative pattern which seems unavoidably structured as a time sequence) by the overlapping, with that 'instigating episode', of other, similarly significant factors. He thus handles allegory in a way which avoids what he seems to fear in the mode, namely a lifelessly hard, clear narrative which prosaically embodies a fixed, resonance-free meaning. For MacDonald, the ejection from heaven, and the laborious return to it, are realities which have meaning at a variety of levels, morally, emotionally and psychologically within the individual and within the species, as well as at a mythological or metaphysical level. They have meaning, furthermore, at the historical level, for the story of Christ's time in the world is also a version of this pattern. To cope, then, with such a meaning as this, the complexities of which shade off into the ungraspable, MacDonald certainly needed an allegorical technique more complex than that which he understood by the phrase 'strict allegory'. His allegory is multiple and suggestive rather than a single linear entity.

Even before we encounter, in the plot of each book, a development which allegorizes, to a major degree, the concept of the Fall, there is usually to be understood, in the story's circumstances prior to the main narrative's getting under way, a version of a loss of heaven. Very

often, in the events which influence the hero's life but which lie in his forgotten earliest years, MacDonald embodies the suggestion of a bliss lost, a height of power, prominence, security and love from which the conscious present is a descent. Surprisingly, in only one of the Scottish Novels, Malcolm, is the moment of birth itself interpreted as the moment when loss begins, as I shall discuss at greater length below. In none of the other books does the hero, for example, lose his mother in child-birth, despite the early loss of the mother which several of the heroes suffer in the first few years of life. Nevertheless, the mother is barely remembered, if at all, by Robert Falconer, Gibbie, Cosmo Warlock and Annie Anderson (whose mother did die at her birth); she is a parent to be yearned for despite the fact that she does not exist clearly in their minds as a personality, and as such is an effective allegory of the environment of love and security which was lost with heaven, and which our present pain as well as the lingering of memory teach us to yearn for. In other instances, it is a father who is lost in a time which consciousness can enter no more. The opening paragraphs of Robert Falconer provide the clearest instance, but the heroes of all but Castle Warlock, The Eldest Lady and Salted With Fire are separated from their fathers (usually by death) for the bulk, and often all, of the book. In general, one can interpret the lost father as the God from whom we are separated, as he is normally considered - that is, as a being from whom we are separated, to whom we owe our being, and to whom is due both our love and obedience.

The other type of descent from an original eminence which frequently lies behind the action of MacDonald's Scottish novels is the loss of family position. MacDonald's heroes usually belong to families which have come down in the world, either from a position of plump, middle-class financial security, like the Sutherlands, the Forbes, and the Falconers, or from a more distinctively aristocratic pinnacle. In the latter case, which is more common in the later novels, the concepts of aristocratic domains, duties and dues lend themselves to grander and more complex allegories of the Kingdom of God, as in Malcolm, Sir Gibbie, Castle Warlock and, perhaps most thoroughly of all, What's Mine's Mine. The downfall of the aristocratic families, however, always has a financial element within it, both as cause and effect, and part of the meaning of such tales lies in the contrast between ancient, traditional and divinely sanctioned social orders, which crumble in a world of Victorian materialism and social change, a world, that is, in which men are habitually further from God than ever before.

Occasionally, these two types of Fall, having occurred prior to a novel's beginnings, are taken up in the action and become prominent, and sometimes dominant, parts of it. To the Fall-like episodes within the novel's actions, then, we must now turn.

In the two earliest novels, MacDonald's heroes experience a twofold loss of heaven, a moral one and a physical one, and there is no simple, predictable relationship between them. In David Elginbrod,

Hugh's departure from Turripuffit at the end of Book One is a loss of friends and environment which, in comparison with what awaits him at Arnstead, is a type of heaven. In addition, he himself creates a further breach by his failure to keep in touch with the Elginbrods, a first moral lapse of a kind which he will further display when, enthralled by Euphra, he will neglect his pupil Harry. In Alec's case, a measure of moral self-criticism (after the slaying of Truffey's rabbit) leads to an improvement in his schoolwork which, in turn, helps him to leave Glamerton (and his childhood) for the university. It is perhaps easier to see Alec's putting of his childhood behind him as a loss of heaven, than to swiftly interpret Hugh's association with David Elginbrod as a period 'in heaven'. Nevertheless, Hugh's challenges and failures do not really begin until he goes to Arnstead, where he must encounter experience after a state of innocence. Furthermore, MacDonald's handling of David himself - saintly and truth-possessing while Hugh encounters him; lost, revered and living in others while Hugh grows in experience - is clearly modelled on the Christian divinity, from whom we are separated by time (by the individual's entry into the world of time, and by the separation of the centuries between mankind now and mankind's encounter with God in Jesus) and by death (the fallenness of the individual, and the withdrawal of Jesus into heaven after the resurrection).

The action of Robert Falconer contains no Fall-like development of a magnitude comparable to those just mentioned; in a way, much of

Robert's early experience is a whole series of losses, as he takes up route after possible route to God, only to have them lead nowhere. Nevertheless, that onset of religious doubt, when 'the gloomier aspect of things began to lay hold upon him' (RF, Part I, Chapter 12, 'Robert's Plan of Salvation'), and which forces him to confront his grandmother's hell-fire theology, initiates the period of near-despair which only ends with his Alpine revelation. Although the contrast between his sense of life prior to and after the onset of doubt is not unmistakably marked, his loss of mental security is nevertheless an epoch in his progress. It is fitting that in this least romance-like of the Scottish novels, the hero's fall should be a matter of mental development rather than of the plot's action.

Sir Gibbie contains two different episodes which are Fall-like, in addition to the prior circumstances of family loss and of the pure Gibbie's sheer presence in the world's squalor. The two deaths he encounters in his childhood in Aberdeen represent different aspects of the loss of God. His father, despite his poverty and drunkenness, had been his loving and beloved maker. He had been the emotional centre of Gibbie's life and MacDonalld is quite explicit: 'In his father he had lost his Paradise, and was now a creature expelled' (SG, Chapter 7, 'The Town-Sparrow'). The death of Sambo, stigmatised by McGillis as a 'lapse in taste', is surprising in its sudden brutality: it is an admittedly severe breach of the pervading charm which this critic responds to so powerfully in the book.¹⁸ A

lapse in taste is perhaps essential at this point, for the necessity is for the charm to be broken - the charm, that is, of the hitherto charitable, warm-hearted behaviour of mankind towards and around Gibbie. Gibbie's sudden knowledge of the blackness within humanity requires an image, an episode which can devastate the reader as it devastates the child's awareness.

In the later fiction, the notion of the Fall is taken more for granted, and accorded far less prominence: MacDonald is too preoccupied with the process of undoing its effects to devote much attention to its occurrence, let alone to celebrating the bliss which preceded it. Thus, in Castle Warlock, Cosmo is described as experiencing a blighting of vision in some ways similar to Robert Falconer's, but this is recounted in the first chapter before the action gets under way. In Donal Grant, Donal's descent from the mountains as he sets off across the world is a departure from an environment of home and of purity, and is explicitly interpreted by MacDonald in terms of growing up: 'Donal was now descending the heights of youth to walk along the king's highroad of manhood: happy he who, as his sun is going down behind the western, is himself ascending the eastern hill, returning through old age to the second and better childhood which shall not be taken from him!' (DG, Chapter 1, 'Foot-Faring'). Nevertheless, the sense of contrast between a former and present state is barely evoked at all. The tendency of the later novels to begin with the hero in a fallen state is crystallised in Francis Gordon's

failings: the pampered young aristocrat is unfortunate in the prominence and luxury of his earthly estate, summed up in his knowingly named mansion, Castle Weelset.

From such varied starting-points as these, MacDonald builds his novels round the process of having his heroes make their way back to God. He envisages not just one impulse which prompts his characters to journey thus; indeed, at times we are not aware of any particular impulse other than sheer growth itself. Nevertheless, he was not so optimistic that he could portray the reunion of the creatures with their creator as being as inevitable as all that, and does distinguish a few more specific factors which impell men towards God.

Perhaps the simplest factor is a sheer inability to stand still, which is very close, of course, to mere growth. That reference to restlessness, however, early in 'The Imagination: Its Functions and its Culture' indicates the positive light in which he viewed it: 'For repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead' (Orts, p. 1). Such an unwillingness to rest in the grave of this world can sometimes, however, take the form of a more explicit dissatisfaction: 'For never, in the midst of the good things of this lovely world, have I felt quite at home in it. Never has it shown me things lovely or grand enough to satisfy me. It is not all I should like for a place to live in'.¹⁹ Thus, when Robert Falconer's sense of the bleakness of the world and of his separation from God overwhelm him with gloom,

MacDonald is recounting an experience which is a cause of hope, of joy:

The sea neither glimmered nor shone. It lay across the horizon like a low level cloud, out of which came a moaning. Was this moaning all of the earth, or was there trouble in the starry places too? thought Robert, as if already he had begun to suspect the truth from afar - that save in the secret place of the Most High, and in the heart that is hid with the Son of Man in the bosom of the Father, there is trouble - a sacred unrest - everywhere - the moaning of a tide setting homewards, even towards the bosom of that Father.

(RF, Part II, Chapter 7, 'Eric Ericson')

The idea receives quite different embodiments in other works. The restless exuberance of the loons in Alec Forbes is clearly part of the divinity in their natures, an interpretation which is taken as far as it will go in the constant movement of Gibbie, both when he flees from the dame school ('Thus, after one night's brief interval of respectability, he was again a rover of the city, a flitting insect that lighted here and there, and spread wings of departure the moment a fresh desire awoke.' (SG, Chapter 7, 'The Town-Sparrow')) and when, Sambo slain, he blindly races 'up Daurside' to his ancestral domain ('For warmth, only motion and a seasoned skin were necessary: the latter Gibbie had; the former, already a habit learned in the streets, had now become almost a passion.' (SG, Chapter 9, 'Adrift')). MacDonald is at times close to believing that all 'movement' is of itself a good thing, and so he frequently endows his heroes, such as Malcolm, with a physical activeness which can approach the comic:

'Afraid beyond all things of doing nothing, and driven by the formless conviction that if he stopped to deliberate he certainly should do nothing, he shot up the dark screw like an ascending bubble, passed the landing of the second floor without observing it, and arrived in the attic regions of the ancient pile' (M, Chapter 24, 'The Feast'). Different again in the quality of its mood is Dog Steenie's need for room and freedom to move: 'That he could not rise and wander about among the stars at his will, shaped itself to him as the heaviness of his feet holding him down. His feet were the loaded gynes that made of the world but a roomy prison. The limitless was essential to his conscious wellbeing' (H & S, Chapter 12, 'The Earth-House').

A willingness to move when necessary is a mental trait not too far removed from the restlessness we have been discussing. Such an adaptability is, of course, a fundamental if unstressed characteristic of many of MacDonald's heroes, and most of his novels are structured on physical journeying in the course of their lives. This is a necessity for any person who truly gives himself up to the spirit of God, for the wind bloweth where it listeth. The virtue of such an adaptability is more specifically allegorized in What's Mine's Mine, not only at the end, when the clan triumphantly accepts the need to emigrate to Canada, but earlier, when the strange mobility of the highland village which can cluster round its chief's house in a single night is contrasted with the immobility of the Victorian mansion of the ironically named Peregrine Palmer, the moneyed English landowner,

an immobility which embodies, of course, his disastrous inflexibility and insensitivity. For MacDonald makes the converse, an immobility of mind and body, significant of a lack of response to the divine. Nor is Palmer alone in MacDonald's characters. Of Mr Galbraith, for example, we are told that 'growth was a doctrine unembodied in his creed; he turned from everything new, no matter how harmonious with the old, in freezing disapprobation' (SG, Chapter 19, 'The Laird'). And, embodying the contrast differently again, Mrs Catanach's dual role as howdie in seeing to the arrangements for both birth and death in the community places her in stationary contrast with the living souls who enter, progress through, and leave, the world.

There are other images to which MacDonald keeps returning in his attempts to picture man's progress to God. One which constantly lurks in the texture of his writing, but which becomes part of the narrative structure only in the fairy-story, The Golden Key, is the image of the child attracted to the rainbow, constantly tantalised by the insubstantial, yet heavenly apparition which glorifies all it touches. Another means MacDonald adopts to embody life's beautiful insubstantiality is his use of the qualities of the dream, the fairy-story and the romance, as discussed in Chapter Two. MacDonald is concerned to convey the evanescence, the mutability of the life of the creatures. As we have seen, MacDonald derives one of his important plot structures from daydreams (see above, pp. 70-71). Similarly, his account of the daydreams of young Cosmo Warlock brings us close both to a recurrent element in MacDonald's own fictions, and to the

high evaluation of the dream-like which his other writings imply:

Those of Cosmo were chiefly of a gracious woman, much older than himself, whom he obeyed and served. They came from the heart that needed a mother, and were bodied out from the memory, far-off and faint, of his own mother, and the imaginations of her so often roused by his father. This woman would be now one, now another of the powers of the fire, the air, the earth, and the water, who favoured, helped, and protected him, through dangers and trials many. Such imaginings may be unhealthy for those who will not face duty; but to those who labour in the direction of their ideal, dreams, I think, do no hurt, fostering rather the ideal.

(CW, Chapter 7, 'Dreams')

It is Cosmo who later exclaims, 'It's like going on and on in a dream, wondering what's coming next!' (CW, Chapter 53, 'Help').

A yet further set of images which MacDonald employs to allegorize the progress of human life is based on the notion of the river-journey to the sea, and on boat journeys on rivers and on the sea. As always, the allegory can be found cropping up, briefly, as metaphors in the texture of MacDonald's writing or briefly recounted so as to highlight the implication. Here is a dream Cosmo Warlock experiences during an illness:

In his half-slumbers he seemed always to be floating down a great gray river, on which thousands more were likewise floating, each by himself, some in canoes, some in boats, some in the water without even an oar; every now and then one would be lifted and disappear - none saw how, but each knew that his own turn would come; in the meantime all floated helpless on, some full of alarm at the unknown before them, others indifferent, and some filled with solemn expectation.

(CW, Chapter 52, 'A Rest')

The river allegorizes life by virtue of its one-way, unceasing flow and because of its easy associations with death. It is hardly an unusual allegory, any more than is this image of death as a shipwreck after a sea-journey: 'While Thomas Crann was bending his spiritual artillery upon the poor crazy tub in which floated the earthly presence of Peter Peterson, Mr Cowie's bark was lying stranded upon that shore whither the tide of time is slowly drifting each of us' (AF, Chapter 53).

A river is a really important element in two of the novels we are considering, Alec Forbes and Sir Gibbie. Indeed, Glamerton in Alec Forbes has two rivers, as Huntly itself has. MacDonald intensifies the river names of Huntly in order to produce an allegory of the two appearances material life can present: where he found, by Huntly itself, the names of the Bogie and the Black Water (an important upper tributary of the Deveron), he creates the Glamour and the Wan Water. 'Bogie' in Scots is a craze, an infatuation, so that it is only a slight semantic movement to a word suggesting the enchantment, the glow of joyously apprehended life. 'Wan' suggests, on the other hand, the bleakness of life, as 'black' on its own does not. Thus it is on the Glamour that the boating expeditions in 'The Bonnie Annie' take place (though the dangerous treachery of human existence is to be encountered even here, in the upset from which Annie must be rescued) and it is from the swollen Glamour that Alec rescues Annie from the flooded cottage. It is the river with which the children are most

associated. The Wan Water it is, however, which more seriously threatens Glamerton with a flood, suggesting the mentally blighting effects on the community of the superstitious fear which has gripped the town. (I deal with further aspects of these river symbols in Section 5, below.) The total immersion in human life and ways of thought is, to MacDonald, a form of death. There is a sense in which we might interpret Alec's progress in the book as a river journey, because his revelation of truth comes once a sea-voyage has brought him closer still to an encounter with death.

Gibbie's river-journey, however, is in the opposite direction, away from the river-mouth and up to its source. His river is called the Daur, a Scots word which means to dare or to fear, and his river of life is a force the opposition of which must be faced and overcome before a Christian dispensation can prevail. The Daur has phonetic similarities to the Dee, one of Aberdeen's two rivers, and there has clearly been an intermediate mental stage in which MacDonald has taken this real river name as a Scots word, meaning to do, or to die. We should probably feel the force of both of these meanings as we ponder the Daur: a capacity for sheer activity, as well as a willingness to die, are important MacDonald virtues. Where Alec's river-journeys all tend downstream, towards death, Gibbie travels back up to the source of his being, to pastoral simplicity and ancestral possessions. He travels up-river to nature and to a home; he travels down-river again to the world of nineteenth-century sophistication.

An allegory which is most prominent of all in the fairy stories, especially in The Princess and the Goblin, The Castle, and Lilith, is the exploration of a large house and its secrets; the journey becomes an internal one. It is a symbolic action which is especially common in MacDonald's later Scottish novels, including Malcolm, Castle Warlock, and Donal Grant, but there is a suggestion of the theme even in David Elginbrod. The castle is traditionally used as an allegory for the human body, or for some aspect of the human personality; one thinks especially of Spenser's castles, such as the House of Busirane or the House of Holinesse, or that elaborate allegory of the physical body, the House of Alma.²⁰ MacDonald, too, can be quite explicit about the relationship between dwelling-house and human nature, as in Donal Grant:

'Do you know,' he added presently, his eyes straying about the room, 'I feel almost as if I were trying to understand a human creature. A house is so like a human mind, which gradually disentangles and explains itself as you go on to know it! It is no accidental resemblance, for, as an unavoidable necessity, every house must be like those that built it.'

(DG, Chapter 54, 'Lady Arctura's Room')

Donal goes on to elaborate on the relationship between the accumulated physical inheritance of a family house and the inheritance of family nature from one's ancestors. This correlation is taken up once again, after the bodies have been discovered in the secret chapel: 'This house is like every human soul, and so, like me and you and all of us' (DG, Chapter 56, 'The Lost Room'). MacDonald does not seem to be greatly concerned about distinguishing between mind and soul:

his interest is in what we can broadly call man's inner being, his personality. Furthermore, despite what appears to be, in the above quotation from Chapter Fifty-four, a narrow correlation between a particular house and a particular family, the later quotation reveals that his allegory applies to man as a species. The family inheritances with which he is concerned are the moral developments which have produced modern man, and his heroes, exploring their various castles, are revealing the complexities and contradictions, the hidden vices and virtues of the human species.

MacDonald's castles are usually under some form of threat, and their danger hinges on the question of ownership. Either the rightful owner is so enfeebled that resistance is weakened to the point of collapse, or the castle is in the wrong hands and things are consequently going badly for it. In either case, exploration of the house itself is the necessary procedure to find the means of defence. In Castle Warlock, for example, the family is still in possession, but greatly impoverished so that the possibility of finally being driven from the ancestral home is real. The threat is primarily an economic one: the Warlocks cannot afford to run an estate which has consequently diminished in recent generations. As the estate has shrunk, so has the proportion of the castle which they can fill with life: they essentially inhabit the kitchen with the servants, and the burgeoning, hierarchical splendour of the castle life of earlier generations is no more. They are specifically threatened by the

financial pressure of a villainous neighbour, Lord Lick-my-loof, who seeks to buy them out. A parallel allegorical threat comes from the elements themselves, and the image of the castle isolated and assailed by the ferocity of a Scottish winter is one of the book's most memorable things. The allegory is of the all but resistless encroachment of the world, of materialism, on the heritage of the beleaguered Christian believer, MacDonald is explicit in defining what the castle is a defence against: '...the ravaging cold outside - remorseless, and full of mock, the ghastly power of negation, of unmaking' (CW, Chapter 21, 'That Same Night').

It is the world of nature without God, the universe viewed merely as a mechanism ('remorseless'), as a construct without a life within it. Castle Warlock is an extended treatment of that perennial Victorian theme, Faith and Doubt. This allegorical reading becomes clear and pressing as Castle Warlock itself is gradually established as a crucial and meaningful presence in the book. It is a reading, however, which reveals a significance in the very opening chapter, which at first sight is no more than description. Glenwarlock is a boundary region between Highland and Lowland, and is inhabited by men of a dual nature, 'Celt and Goth'. MacDonald usually associates Celtic characteristics with an aptitude for poetry, song, and the ability to achieve contact with another world of fairies and the immaterial. 'Goth', replacing the more usual 'Saxon', suggests blind and godless destruction, the blundering, materialistic, crude and

earthly side of man. In this harsh debatable land, where human nature is radically two-sided, Castle Warlock stands on a south-facing slope, receptive to the source of 'the warmth and the growth'. In his description of the castle itself, in the second and third paragraphs of the book, MacDonald seems to be describing his own Scottish religious heritage:

Upon a natural terrace of such a slope to the south stood Castle Warlock. But it turned no smiling face to the region whence came the warmth and the growth. A more grim, repellent, unlovely building would be hard to find; and yet, from its extreme simplicity, its utter indifference to its own looks, its repose, its weight, and its gray historical consciousness, no one who loved houses would have thought of calling it ugly. It was like the hard-featured face of a Scotch matron, with no end of story, of life, of character, holding a defensive if not defiant front to the world, but within warm, and tending carefully the fires of life. Summer and winter, from the chimneys of that desolate-looking house issued smoke; for though the country was inclement, and the people that lived in it were poor, the great, sullen, almost unhappy-looking hills held clasped to their bare cold bosoms exposed to the bitterness of freezing winds and summer hail, the warmth of household centuries: their peat-bogs were the store-closets and wine-cellars of the sun, for the hoarded elixir of physical life.

The House of Glenwarlock, as it was also sometimes called, consisted of three massive, narrow, tall blocks of building, which showed little connection with each other beyond juxtaposition, two of them standing end to end, with but a few feet of space between, and the third at right angles to the two. In the two which stood end to end, hardly a window was to be seen on the side towards the valley; while in the third, which, looking much of the same period, had all its upper part of later origin, were more windows, though none in the ground story. Narrow as were these buildings, and four stories high, they had a solid, ponderous look, suggesting a thickness of the walls such as to leave little of a hollow within for the occupiers; they were like the huge shell built for itself by a small mollusk [sic]. On the other side of them was a kind of court, completed by the stables and cow-houses, and towards

this court were most of the windows, some of them small enough for a cottage. The court was now little better than a farmyard.

(CW, Chapter 1, 'Castle Warlock')

The image of the hard-featured but warm-hearted 'Scotch matron' is an echo of Mrs Falconer, and beyond her, of Mrs Charles Edward MacDonald, the grandmother who so epitomised for young George the contradictions of his early religious environment.²¹ It is tempting to see the three towers which make up the building as symbolic of some tripartite interpretation of the Scottish religious tradition (presbyterianism and episcopalianism, with a more modern spirit of less partisan Christianity, for example?). If MacDonald had some such scheme in mind, he does not make it explicit. What is clear, however, is that his account includes his sense of the salutariness and openness of the recent innovations in theology of which he was a spokesman ('In the third, which...had all its upper part of a later origin, were more windows, though none in the ground story'.) In the shell-like walls, we can detect criticism of the rigidity and massive inflexibility of the beliefs his generation had inherited from the past. Yet, although the walls of Christian belief seem unnecessarily and grotesquely insensitive and unhuman, they only just succeed in defending man from the storm of a godless universe, and even in the above quotation they are described as sheltering scenes of homely and humble activity.

If the castle is man armed with the faith MacDonald had inherited, it is possible to interpret the events of the novel with more detail.

The decayed state of the family possessions suggests, of course, an enfeeblement of belief. The family reprobate, the old captain, is a figure like Adam: far from sinless himself, he yet falls victim to a far worse person. Still a force in the lives of his descendants, he points to the treasure within the walls of faith, and the creed which had fallen into decay is discovered to contain unsuspected sources of life, power and richness. Has the treasure itself got a specific allegorical meaning? If one must be found, I should read it as standing for Christ himself, the Christ who was part of Adam's nature, and who had been concealed within the rigid structures of organised religion. The arrival of Lord Mergwain and Joan seems a mere attempt to diversify the narrative, but Joan brings a beauty and grace to the castle of faith which it has lacked since the death of Cosmo's mother, and her final installation as its mistress is a thematically appropriate point at which to end the book. Mergwain's death, similarly, is not just melodramatic: he dies through the re-activation of conscience, on renewed contact with the world of faith, in which his past crime is unavoidable and potent.

Incidentally, there is a subsidiary allegory in the portion of the book in which Cosmo leaves Castle Warlock to visit Joan. Her existence, in the castle of Cairncarque is more obviously allegorical than the rest of the book, and even the name is a punning symbol. 'Cark' has the figurative meanings (numbers 3 and 4 in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary), 'a burden of anxiety; anxious solicitude, labour, or toil', and 'care, pains'. In addition, meaning 3 is

usually used with the word 'care' in Middle English, so that the Scottish appearance of the castle's name is the punning disguise of a medieval phrase with which MacDonald would have been familiar.

Castle Warlock, then, is an allegory of the saving of one's faith by the discovery of the life-renewing treasure at the heart of it. Donal Grant is an allegory of mankind's restoration to religious and moral health by means of facing and cleansing away the dark secrets of human nature. Much more than Castle Warlock, it is an allegory of light and dark, height and depth, space and enclosure. Donal's Castle Graham is explored largely at night, with sinister mystery as the end of the search: the result is a sensation of claustrophobia, heightened by the high proportion of action set within the building. It is a building in which the vertical is the crucial dimension, and, consequently, I discuss it further in a later section dealing with allegories of height and depth.

2. The Goal

It is difficult to separate discussion of the process of voyaging from discussion of the end of the journey, and some of the matter in the present section has already been prefigured in its predecessor, especially in the account of the exploration and cleansing of the castle. The goal of an exploration, or of a spring-cleaning, has clearly been reached once the whole is totally known or totally

pure, and it is obvious that, in part, MacDonald is describing the attainment, within the individual, of moral health and self-knowledge. The two are closely related, whether their relationship takes the form of Alec's beneficial awareness of his own failings and capacity for vice, or whether that of the Christ-like Donal discovering and tending the inner wound in Castle Graham, which is the record of past misdeeds. As ever, it is the concept of Christ which unites what seems separate: Christ it is who must know man's sin, so that it can be washed away, and it is a short step from the belief that Christ's knowledge is essential, to the concept of that knowledge being, in itself, Christ. In his sermon on 'The Truth' MacDonald makes clear, in language as little metaphorical as possible, that the goal of the most searching inner exploration of man is Jesus Christ:

He is true and the root of all truth and development of truth in men. Their very being, however far from the true human, is the undeveloped Christ in them, and his likeness to Christ is the truth of a man, even as the perfect meaning of a flower is the truth of a flower. Every man, according to the divine idea of him, must come to the truth of that idea; and under every form of Christ is the Christ. The truth of every man, I say, is the perfected Christ in him. As Christ is the blossom of humanity, so the blossom of every man is the Christ perfected in him.²²

The goal of the voyage, therefore, is the perfected Christ, though all that can be embodied in fiction is one of the forms of Christ: Christ's actuality can only be suggested by the parallels which the material world offers. The range of allegorical reference to Christ, also, is extended and complicated by MacDonald's envisioning Christ as a double reality, namely as the historical Christ whose story is told

in the four gospels, and the Christ within each of us. The range of possible combinations of these two levels of Christ, the historical and the morally implicit, results in a wide selection of allegorical forms by which the perfection of Christ is imaged in MacDonald's fiction.

The climactic allegorical stage need not be an overtly demonstrative one, depending on action or on a muscular resolution of plot. There are stories in which a triumph of Christ is expressed in terms of a cleared vision. Just as the fairy works express the truth by bypassing the limitations of the commonplace, material vision, so MacDonald's Scottish heroes are usually granted a penetrative understanding of what affects them which is radically superior to the insight with which they began. They now see with God's eyes, as it were, not with those of men. In the later novels, the discoveries of the hidden secrets of a castle, or the self-knowledge of the hero's own failings in Heather and Snow and Salted With Fire, are all instances of this. In the earliest of MacDonald's novels, cleared mysteries and moral self-awareness are largely subsumed in the motif of the original, familiar beloved: like Hyacinth in the *märchen*, Hugh and Alec re-encounter their familiar beloveds with washed eyes, responding to them with a completeness which is a mark of the stature they have attained.

It is not necessary, considering the coherence of these allegories and also the deeply embedded status in MacDonald's mind of the notion

of Christ-likeness as cleared vision, to attempt to pin down a source or sources. Nevertheless, it is tempting to point to two narratives, known to MacDonald, which undoubtedly reinforced (to put it no more strongly) his sense of the idea's importance. The first is the New Testament narrative of the miracle of the blind man cured, in John 9: 'he hath opened mine eyes' (v 30). What must have especially commended the story to MacDonald, however, is the dimension provided by the stress on the hate and suspicion the miracle aroused in the Pharisees. This chapter provided MacDonald with an important element in his notion of Christ, who not only made men see, but consequently aroused the opposition of the religious establishment. A chapter like this could only have supported MacDonald in his conflict with the orthodox attitudes to his universalism.

A non-biblical reinforcement of the idea of divinely cleared human sight is to be found in a passage from Paradise Lost, from which MacDonald selected a chapter-motto in the first of his Scottish novels (DE, Book II, Chapter 3). Michael has led Adam up the hill in Paradise, to view the future of mankind, though the man's vision must first be rectified:

...but to nobler sights
Michael from Adams eyes the Filme remov'd
Which that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight
Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue
The visual Nerve, for he had much to see.
(Paradise Lost, 11, 411-5)

(MacDonald's quotation is the last line and a half.) With a touch of psychological realism which suggests that the experience is

autobiographical, Hugh Sutherland remembers the phrase, when his relationship with Euphra receives a check. 'The words "euphrasy and rue" kept ringing in his brain, coming over and over with an awful mingling of chime and toll' (DE, Book II, Chapter 16, 'A New Visitor and an Old Acquaintance'): Euphra is a bitter medicine who helps clear Hugh's sight.

Incidentally, one minor aspect of MacDonald's ability to see with a cleared vision, and to remove the film of the familiar and commonplace from the eyes of his readers, is shown in the punning on real place-names, a practice upon which I have touched before. In addition to earlier instances, I quote here again a particularly neat example in his re-interpretation of the name of the main street of Aberdeen, Union Street, which becomes Pearl Street in Sir Gibbie. Wittiness has removed the film of custom from MacDonald's eyes, and he has responded to the street name as to something rich and strange.

Very often, in MacDonald's writing, the goal of his heroes' journeyings appears to be a version of the idea of home, a regaining of the starting-point and a bliss of comfort, ease and security. The various circular patterns in his fiction are related to this idea; in part, he is influenced by the massive tradition of cosmic thought which M. H. Abrams explores in his Natural Supernaturalism, a tradition starting with Plotinus, who posited a One of such superlative goodness that it overflows in a series of ever more remote emanations, including the material universe with its division and multiplicity, and in which

the individual soul longs to reunite with the source of its being. In part, MacDonald would have imbibed this pattern from the thought of his Romantic predecessors, but it would have been familiar to him, also, directly from their principal sources in biblical, patristic and Renaissance literature.

It is as a human need and moral necessity that MacDonald envisages the completion of this pattern, however; it is no mere literary tradition to him. He is writing about no far-off divine event, but about an identification with Christ which could happen at any moment in an individual's life, and the sooner the better. 'When a man truly and perfectly says with Jesus, and as Jesus said it, "Thy will be done", he closes the everlasting life-circle; the life of the Father and the Son flows through him; he is a part of the divine organism'.²³ The taking of God's will as one's own is very often, in MacDonald, pictured by some form of discovery which brings comfort and joy, and provides the basis for a settled, happy, future existence.

The return home to God, in doing his will and thereby becoming like Christ, can be the basis of local incidents in the course of a longer narrative, as when Kirsty Barclay, acting as Phemy Craig's conscience, carries her off from the scene of her assignation with Francis Gordon: 'I'm takin ye to the best place I ken - hame to my mother', answered Kirsty, striding on for home-heaven as straight as she could go' (H & S, Chapter 17, 'A Novel Abduction'). It is also, frequently, the dominant image upon which many of the novels come

to rest. Home is a place of stillness, after the journeying of the novel, and as such is looked forward to as Hugh Sutherland moves to London on the third stage of his travels: 'But there is a central repose beyond the motions of the world; and through the turmoil of London, Hugh was journeying towards that wide stillness - that silence of the soul, which is not desolate, but rich with unutterable harmonies' (DE, Book II, Chapter 32, 'Departure'). It is a place in which a settled, secure relationship is at last granted to the hero, in a loving wife, as a goal of his yearnings. It is also, often, a place associated with parental authority, as the ultimate sanction and source of harmony. Thus, many of these heroes, from Robert Falconer on, in seeking their fathers (either literally or in the sense of establishing their own identity), or in struggling for the secure possession of the ancestral place, are coming home. Ultimately, the image depends on, and is an expression of, the idea of humanity as the children of God. 'There is no type so near the highest idea of relation to a God, as that of the child to his mother. Her face is God, her bosom Nature, her arms are Providence - all love - one love - to him an undivided bliss' (Orts. p. 44).

With the image of the return home providing the over-arching symbolic framework, we can now turn to discuss several of its subsidiary aspects, those just mentioned, in greater detail. Home as a place of respite from the toilsome journey of life is regularly embodied in the havens formed of warm hearths presided over by kindly old ladies. They can be both temporary or ultimate refuges from the

storms of life. Turriepuffit is both to Hugh Sutherland: his ultimate homecoming to Margaret and Janet is prefigured early on by Mrs Glassford's reproach on his spending so many evenings with the Elginbrods: 'Ye're a day-labourer it seems, Mr Sutherlan', and gang hame at night' (DE, Book I, Chapter 13, 'Heraldry'). Turriepuffit is to be his final home, but as with other MacDonald heroes, a briefer respite, embodying a moment of contentedness and divinely healing comfort, is provided by a suddenly discovered cosy hearth:

She helped him to carry his boxes up-stairs; and when he reached his room, he found a fire burning cheerily, a muffin down before it, a tea-kettle singing on the hob, and the tea-tray set upon a nice white cloth on a table right in front of the fire, with an old-fashioned high-backed easy-chair by its side - the very chair to go to sleep in over a novel. The old lady soon made her appearance, with the teapot in one hand, and a plate of butter in the other.

'Oh! thank you,' said Hugh. 'This is comfortable!'

She answered only by compressing her lips till her mouth vanished altogether, and nodding her head as much as to say: 'I know it is, I intended it should be'.
(DE, Book III, Chapter I, 'Lodgings')

The image lends itself to a variety of moods and shades of meaning. Here, there is a fairy-tale quality, resulting from the modest surprise of the transformation of the homely setting and also from the quaintly mysterious air of the landlady's ministrations, which conveys the delightful reinvigoration of Hugh after his recent travails. Alec Forbes experiences something rather similar on arriving, as a student, at his lodgings in Aberdeen. These examples shade into the images of a more seriously-needed haven in such instances as the reception of

Gibbie into the Grants' cottage after his thrashing, the shelter Cosmo Warlock finds in Grannie's cottage after being assaulted by the schoolmaster, and the reception of Isy Constable into the Blatherwick cottage in Salted With Fire. In such cases, humanity has taken a brutally severe beating at the hands of experience, and the various refuges embody the healing granted by God.

Often, in MacDonald, the quintessence of the home for which the hero strives is distilled in the central spirit of the Victorian house, the wife. MacDonald was far from alone, among nineteenth-century novelists, in giving his marriage endings something of a religious significance. Here is J. Hillis Miller explaining how the experience of 'the disappearance of God' led writers such as George Eliot, Thackeray and Hardy to portray characters impelled by a sense of their own incompleteness. Such characters seek wholeness and perfection by uniting with something, usually a loved one, outside themselves:

All these novelists concentrate on the theme of love, and all in one way or another see the relation of the self to the other as an attempt to satisfy religious longings in a world where relations to God are blocked. To put this another way, Victorian fiction may be said to have as its fundamental theme an exploration of the various ways in which a man may seek to make a god of another person in a world without God, or at any rate in a world where the traditional ways in which the self may be related to God no longer seem open.²⁴

MacDonald, of course, did not live in a world without God, but he was fully alive to a sense of separation from God: hence his persistent treatment of the journey back to the heavenly Father. The women his

heroes marry are embodiments of the divine, to be loved and worshipped, and from whom peace, comfort, and rest are to be derived. 'In the woman, the infinite after which he thirsts is given him for his own' (Orts. p. 54).

But while MacDonald's wives are 'other' in the most obvious sense, they must also be seen as an element within the hero, just as Christ is both outside and within mankind. Thus MacDonald makes a distinction: 'The woman is on her way whose part it is to meet him with a life other than his own, at once the complement of his, and the visible presentment of that in it which is beyond his own understanding' (Orts. p. 52). In a letter to Lord Mount-Temple (dated September 30, 1885) he hopes for peace and hope for 'you and your visible soul'.²⁵

Many of the attractive female characters in his works, I believe, have this as part of their meaning. In Phantastes, for instance, the white lady released from the alabaster by Anodos is not just an ideal, she is a product of, an expression of, the young man's mind and personality. When he first dimly discerns her face within the alabaster, he describes it thus: 'What I did see appeared to me perfectly lovely; more near the face that had been born with me in my soul, than anything I had seen before in nature or art' (Ph, Chapter 5). Dependent on Anodos for her life, but independent of him to a baffling extent, the white lady has the status of a work of art, with Anodos its creator:

she finds a natural abode as a statue in a museum, until Anodos, defying the universal art gallery ban on touching the exhibits, attempts to embrace her. While the relationship between them is that of art-object and creator, she embodies an ideal which he cannot attain, and which seems finally attained by the knight of the rusty armour. Rejecting R. L. Wolff's Freudian interpretation of this mysterious figure as Anodos' father, I read it as being Anodos himself at a much later stage in his development, triumphantly experienced in life, having attained the maturity granted by the struggle with his limitations and faults. Time and growth are relevant dimensions in Phantastes from the outset: the fairy grandmother does not appear to Anodos till he comes of age. Thus, I suggest, an element of Anodos's future takes its place fitly within the tale. The progression from his artistic relationship with the white lady to the marital bond is a means of expressing the improving quality, the increasing intimacy and joy, of the relationship between Anodos and his purest self.

Turning to one of the best of the Scottish novels, a generally similar relationship can be seen between Alec Forbes and Annie Anderson. Like Alec, Annie has lost a father before the novel begins, and she is unprotected in a society in which she has no natural place, and the dynamics of which are provided by material, indeed financial, considerations. She can clearly be interpreted as a human soul, cut off from its father in heaven, and at the mercy of a hostile, fallen world. Over the novel as a whole, however, she also comes to be seen as symbolising something

specifically in Alec, who only gradually comes to the forefront of the book.

Annie's fear and hatred of so much of her early life in Glamerton, her need for love and kindness, can all be seen in relation to Alec. His impressive, chivalrous consideration for her, repeatedly demonstrated, is indicative of his essential wholeness and outstanding worthiness; in so far as he neglects her, and treats her and other people with less than full consideration, we sense his lack of secure perfection. In this secure, childhood, rural world, Alec's weaknesses, his lack of personal integration, do not show up as they will once he is really tested: the focus on the relationship between the two, therefore, falls on Annie and her need for him. Hence the vividly presented horrors of her life with the Bruces, at school and at church. For her, life in Glamerton is a terrible thing, while for Alec, largely unaware of what his God-given essence is suffering, it is idyllic. It is true that he is spared life with the Bruces, but he and Robert Bruce regard each other, instinctively, as enemies, and Alec is threatened, financially, by Bruce at the end of the book, a threat with which Annie, his alter ego, deals in his absence. Alec is exposed to the same religious doctrines as terrify her, and is far more directly exposed to the horror of Malison's school. These things barely move him, however, and the difference is due to his low sensitivity, his lack of imagination and true awareness. The pattern is frequent in the novel: the same unideal circumstances impinge upon hero and heroine but he is largely oblivious to them, while she suffers.

The difference of response to life in Glamerton has, as an incidental result, the effect of making this section of the novel unusually vivid and gripping. Both viewpoints are suggested with conviction and fullness, while there is a powerful tension set up by the ambiguity with which the community is presented: life in Glamerton is both idyllic and horrific for these children. A true focus will see both together, but Annie's insight is the more valuable, as it is apprehended with a sensitivity not granted in anything like the same measure to any of the other characters, and is to be seen as an essential truth about the world we live in.

Alec's glimpse of Annie's experience, and his final high conscious evaluation of her, are still far away, however. The preparation for their ultimate love-relationship is made, nevertheless, in these early years. Several times, Alec rescues her from fear, pain, and death, going a little way to giving Glamerton something of the quality of a home for the little orphan. This strong instinct to protect her is, at the conscious level of his mind, the result of pure kindness and chivalrous altruism; with hindsight, we can see it also as an instinct for self-preservation, an unconscious desire to nourish and protect a divine spark within himself, in readiness for the day when he will be able to openly acknowledge its necessity and value to himself, so that a psychic wholeness, conceived in terms at once psychological and religious, can be achieved.

In the later stages of the book, Annie's thematic function takes

on several dimensions. Her homelessness, so melodramatically powerful in her childhood, changes to something more gentle, more subtle in her young womanhood. Floods apart, her life appears tranquil, but the persistent transitoriness of her attempts at domesticity, with Tibbie and with Mrs Forbes, is very moving. Her eventual union with Alec comes to the reader like a perfect cadence long delayed. Her goodness, too, becomes more widely appreciated among the other characters, and especially, after the death of Tibbie, by Mrs Forbes, who gives her a near-permanent home, finding her, in effect, a daughter. Annie, thrice rescued by Alec and brought to his mother's house, is an aspect of her son to which Mrs Forbes, limited by convention despite her kindness, is blind, an aspect which he has to nurture within himself and bring to his mother to enrich their life together. Finally, Annie is placed opposite Kate Fraser, the object of Alec's disastrous adolescent love. A full understanding of this part of the book must await a discussion of the flirt figures, but the device of giving the hero a choice of women to love, a right and a wrong one, is age-old and familiar.

Annie is a rather purely conceived ideal. Other heroines, fundamentally similar in role, are particularly associated with some aspect of the hero's finest potential. Thus Margaret Elginbrod finally serves Hugh as an embodiment of the spirit within nature to which he ultimately responds:

Nature lay around him like a shining disk, that needed a visible centre of intensest light - a shield of silver, that needed but a diamond boss: Margaret alone could be that centre - that diamond light-giver; for she alone, of all the women he knew, seemed so to drink of the sun-rays of God, as to radiate them forth, for very fulness, upon the clouded world.

(DE, Book III, Chapter 23, 'Nature and her Lady')

In possessing Margaret, Hugh comes to possess Nature and, consequently, God. It is a neat illustration of how a rigorously moral concern becomes ever more insistent in MacDonald's fiction, that we can juxtapose this early heroine with Kirsty Barclay, in Heather and Snow, who surely embodies the conscience of the hero, Francis Gordon. This is nowhere more apparent than in the scene in which she whips him with his father's whip, for his treatment of Phemy Craig, and is clear not only in the moment of chastisement itself, but also as he approaches the interview:

His nonchalance, I believe, was forced and meant to cover uneasiness. For all that had passed to make him forget Kirsty, he yet remembered her uncomfortably, and at the present moment could not help regarding her as an angelic bête noir, of whom he was more afraid than of any other human being.

(H & S, Chapter 18, 'Phemy's Champion')

That MacDonald envisages a heroine as an allegory of a quite specific moral quality within the hero is yet clearer in the case of Malcolm's wife, Clementina, 'his Clemency' (ML, Chapter 72, 'Knotted Strands'). Malcolm does not strike us as having notably lacked clemency, nor does his character change at the point of his marriage and resumption of the title. For long in The Marquis of Lossie,

however, Lady Clementina had regarded Malcolm's firm, seemingly brutal treatment of the horse Kelpie as an indication of cruelty in his nature, whereas his firmness had been a training and curbing of the animal for its own good - an act of clemency, in fact. The marriage union, therefore, signifies the openness, the obviousness of the merciful, charitable spirit in which the new marquis wields his power. The evil elements in Portlossie have been neutralised, and a benevolent despotism set up: Malcolm's wife is a sign and a guarantee of that benevolence.

Moving to another group of symbolic goals and conclusions, for a MacDonald hero to discover a lost parent or ancestor, or to establish his right to the ancestral place, is clearly to 'come home', and is an allegory of humanity's discovery of itself as the children of God. This has already been lightly touched on, but the more prominent instances can usefully be discussed here. Thus, the rediscovery and salvation of Andrew Falconer (the goal of what plot Robert Falconer possesses) functions in two related ways. The Christ-like Robert is the Son of Man, descending to the depths (the slums of London as an equivalent of hell, or of the world of matter) to rescue his father Mankind, or Adam, wantonly and weakly fallen off from the eminence to which it was called. Andrew in his squalor, also, can be taken as the tainted, squalid notion of God against which MacDonald spent so much of his life battling, the unacceptable, contradictory, immoral offspring of the outlook of Robert's grandmother.

The same sorts of interpretation can be applied to Gibbie and his

father: Sir George's broken life is an even more effective allegory of the impoverishment of man's estate than Andrew's static squalor, while the theological limitations and ineffectiveness of current dogma are vividly embodied in the meaningless attempts to inculcate the Shorter Catechism. In this later novel, however, this broken-down figure has no place in the final ordering, which is concerned, rather, with the wresting of the power of God from the hands of the established clergy (who, in the person of Mr Sclater, are put in their true place as Christ's agents), the retrieval of humanity from the hands of stupid materialists (Ginevra's father), and the restoration of the house and estate (stricken by the flood, which embodies the destructive tendencies of the world of matter, of nature).

In Sir Gibbie, the conclusion involves the public acknowledgement and acceptance that the hero is as he really is: his status is clear and unavoidable. In other words, the triumph of the Christ in man is to be openly recognised and confirmed. In some books, this public establishment of Christ is developed on a large scale, and involves an allegory of the setting up of Christ's kingdom, either in the form of the growth of a network of disciples, or in a rendering of the Day of Judgment itself, as in The Marquis of Lossie. MacDonald's aim is to show a dispensation established on Christ's coming into his own: punishment is less his concern than the growth of a harmonious society based on love and mutual responsibility. He first treats this at length in Robert Falconer, where Gordon, the narrator, is invited to identify with the amorphous, organic community which is MacDonald's vision, in this book, of Christian mankind. This group, inspired by

the Christ-like Falconer and devoted to practical and sympathetic works of charity, is MacDonald's attempt to translate the spread of early Christianity into a Victorian setting. In terms of personal allegory, Falconer's network of social workers is an embodiment of the growth of the individual's capacity to act as a Christian, and thereby to have a beneficial influence on his fellow men. At such moments, MacDonald tries to suggest both the harmony within the Christ-like individual, and the social ordering attainable by such persons - a social ordering consciously in contrast with the actual society of Victorian Britain.

A further model for God's kingdom was provided for MacDonald by his concept of the patriarchal structure of Highland clan society, a society whose destruction he was conscious of witnessing and which he regarded as based on a concept of human relationships altogether superior to that prevailing in Victorian Britain as a whole. In What's Mine's Mine, the father of the Macruadh brothers is described passing on various lessons and insights to the next generation:

One of the chief lessons he left them wrought well for the casting out of all with which the feudal system had debased the patriarchal; and the poverty shared with the clan had powerfully helped: it was spoken against the growing talionic regard of human relationships - that, namely, the conditions of a bargain fulfilled on both sides, all is fulfilled between the bargaining parties.

'In the possibility of any bargain', he had said, 'are involved eternal conditions: there is relationship - there is brotherhood'.

(WMM, Chapter 5, 'The Chief')

MacDonald regarded the patriarchal clan system of the Highlands as combining hierarchy and equality, duty and selfless love in a satisfying social whole - one which went back to Biblical roots, and which epitomised for him the relationship of mankind with itself and with God.

Related to MacDonald's willingness to recommend such broken-down Highland families as the Warlocks and the Macruadhs as symbolic embodiments of what is left of mankind's proper feeling about God and about morality, is his ideal of gentlemanliness. As we have seen, several of his books tell the story of heroes whose actual gentlemanly status is revealed and accepted; many others show the hero developing as a moral gentleman, overcoming the imperfections in his being so that what is best in him shines forth. An extreme and explicit instance of this occurs in the case of Shargar, to whom gentlemanliness is an avowed goal. Often, MacDonald is concerned with differentiating between a true and false gentlemanliness, between being one of nature's gentlemen and merely possessing social status. Indeed, the stark and melodramatic figure of the wicked nobleman, self-willed and licentious, is of considerable use to MacDonald in this connection, as in the contrast between Shargar and his half-brother, Lord Sandy.

In part, what MacDonald wants to do is to wash the word clean for us once more, by returning to an earlier sense of it, just as he desires done with our vision generally. Here is MacDonald arguing against a common prejudice that a young woman whose imagination has been nurtured is thereby handicapped in life:

If what mothers mean by a good match, is the alliance of a man of position and means - or let them throw intellect, manners, and personal advantages into the same scale - if this be all, then we grant the daughter of cultivated imagination may not be manageable, will probably be obstinate. We hope she will be obstinate enough. But will the girl be less likely to marry a gentleman, in the grand old meaning of the sixteenth century? when it was no irreverence to call our Lord

'The first true gentleman that ever breathed;'

or in that of the fourteenth? - when Chaucer teaching 'whom is worthy to be called gentill,' writes thus:-

'The first stocke was full of rightwisnes,
Trewē of his worde, sober, pitous and free,
Clene of his goste, and loved besinesse,
Against the vice of slouth in honeste;
And but his heire love vertue as did he,
He is not gentill though he rich seme,
All weare he miter, crowne, or diademe.'
(Orts. pp. 34-35)

One strongly suspects, too, that MacDonald will often have had in mind the avowed intent of another author very close to his heart. Spenser's introductory letter to The Faerie Queene is quite explicit: 'The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'.²⁶ MacDonald's redefined ideal of gentlemanliness was clearly a moral end in itself, but the first of the above quotations confirms that, once again, here is a plot goal which is equivalent, in his eyes, to Christ-likeness. Hence the frequency, in the novels of the 1870s and early 1880s, with which MacDonald establishes either the legal right, or the moral right, of his heroes to overt social status: their final eminence is an outward sign of the firm dominance of their Christian virtue.

3. The Difficulties on the Journey

As the goal of MacDonald's journey is somewhere other than in this world, so the various hindrances encountered by his voyager are all, essentially, of the earth. They hinder by attempting to retain him in the material, ensnaring him in the limitations of mundane thought or feeling. They are not simply to be equated with the world of matter: as we shall see in later sections, MacDonald had a dual, conflicting sense of the world of nature taken as a whole. Nevertheless, the allegories to be dealt with here all partake of the material world, and try to retain the traveller within it. They are all, therefore, forces of negation, draining strength, hope and joy from the victims. One must point out in passing that even these influences eventually contribute to a positive outcome. The hardships they inflict are all essentially the hardship of being deprived of God, and the pain of being cut off from God makes it imperative to find him. As MacDonald says of the questing Robert Falconer in the depths of his troubles:

Where was God?

In him and his question.

(RF, Part II, Chapter 19, 'Robert Mediates')

The principal symbols which MacDonald uses for the allegory of hindrance constitute, to a certain extent, a mythology which is MacDonald's own. Some, like those R. L. Wolff calls 'flirts', and the regency libertines, have been felt to derive from MacDonald's own bitter early experiences. This is possible, but forever conjectural; nor is the quality or meaning of these symbols affected by these

considerations. Their source could be as convincingly suspected as being the domain of popular narrative, both prose fiction and drama, so that MacDonald's Beauchamp and Baron Rothie can be felt sharing the literary ancestry of Dickens's Steerforth or James Harthouse, while the flirts have a memorable cousin in Pip's Estella. This is not to deny that there is a certain urgent insistence in MacDonald's repeated handlings of these plot elements.

They are allegories of evil, but of a pathetic and sometimes reclaimable evil. Girls like Euphra Cameron, Kate Fraser and Florimel are clearly 'wrong for' the heroes who first desire them; the recognition and eventual acceptance of this truth is a crucial stage in the hero's growth. They are obviously opposite to the heroines who are so often the eventual goal in the hero's journey, and thus must be seen embodying a false impulse, a fraudulent hope, an evilly mistaken potential within the central figure. They are 'of the earth' in their obvious sexuality; their appeal is largely of the senses, and hence unfruitful. Especially in the earlier works, their rivals hold the heroes by means of their moral qualities, rather than through any rival physical attractiveness.

The flirts are vampire-like, and the hurt they do is by means of drawing off emotional and moral vitality from their young men. They have their prominent counterparts in the fantasy works, in the Alder-maiden, in Lilith, and in the story of the Shetland vampire interpolated into Robert Falconer (RF, Part II, Chapter 14, 'Mysie's Face'). They are a necessary, perhaps inevitable feature of MacDonald's

fictional mythology, for in so far as his overriding concern is to show how the world of matter is irradiated by higher significances, it is prudent of him to build in an acknowledgement of a complication within this scheme. It would be hopelessly naïve of him to pretend that everything material leads directly to God; his own experience suggested otherwise and a constant theme of his writing is how matter separates man from God. Thus, just as the world is given life by the divine spirit of God, and as love is 'Creation's final law' (In Memoriam 56.14), so the hero finds himself bestowing love on an unresponsive other.²⁷ The flirts accept and absorb love without returning it; thus Kate Fraser, for example, is described as 'an absorbent rather than a diffuser of life' (AF, Chapter 59). In such a character MacDonald embodies the need within matter for a totally divine supportive giving - divine in that it can give endlessly without recompense. The divine in the hero attempts that giving, but the mortal in him fails to support the lack of response. Nevertheless, the exercise of a love comparable to God's is a vital stage in the hero's moral growth.

Nor is this the only positive facet of the encounter between hero and flirt, for, like so many of MacDonald's virtuous heroines, the flirts are variously in need of rescue. And at this stage in the discussion, the usefulness of the distinction between ideal and flirtatious females in MacDonald's fiction begins to disappear again. For all these young women are relevant to the heroes precisely because they need rescuing - because they demand that the heroes give of

themselves. Essentially, their vulnerability and need constitute their power to inspire. Thus even Lilith is saved in the end, and the climax of the first novel, David Elginbrod, is the death-bed salvation of the first flirt, Euphra Cameron. Despite the cruelty of the lady in the library, therefore - and Cupples's story of his experience with her in Chapter Seventy of Alec Forbes shows how bitter the encounter can be - MacDonald's emphasis is on her salvation, not her damnation. Writing of her in this spirit, too, MacDonald is able to merge her with the more straightforward heroine figure. Thus, in a sense, Mary St John and Florimel are both flirts, but clearly not to be swiftly classed with Lilith, say, or even Euphra, as embodiments of evil. The females with whom MacDonald's heroes become involved, in fact, are principally the means whereby the hero is impelled along the road to moral maturity and self-sufficiency, and they also act as indicators of the stage reached in that journey. The distinction MacDonald draws in Sir Gibbie is relevant here:

He was a rare one, who did not make the common miserable blunder of taking the shadow cast by love - the desire, namely, to be loved - for love itself; his love was a vertical sun, and his own shadow was under his feet...But do not mistake me through confounding, on the other hand, the desire to be loved - which is neither wrong nor noble, any more than hunger is either wrong or noble - and the delight in being loved, to be devoid of which a man must be lost in an immeasurably deeper, in an evil, ruinous, yea, a fiendish selfishness.

(SG, Chapter 59, 'Catastrophe')

MacDonald's heroes move from the desire to be loved to love itself; they learn to give love even when that love is not returned. In the

Scottish novels, there is one major character who is wholly worthy, while still denied to her hero - Mary St John. Robert Falconer's failure to possess her is due, on the surface, to the discrepancy between their ages: their story is an allegory of the individual's growth through aspiration, even when that aspiration is thwarted. But where she is angelic, the other girls the heroes yearn for in vain are all, variously, beneath them: in such cases, the allegory is of the inability of the world of matter to respond with the divine force of love. The hero's quest for God is temporarily misdirected. The essential pattern remains the same - desire is aroused and thwarted, but the emotional pain is eventually subsumed in a phase of loving service by the hero - but the detailed outcome depends on his moral and religious strength. Thus Kate Fraser's drowning, despite Alec's attempt to save her, is a reflection of his ultimate rightness. Florimel's rescue by Malcolm, on the other hand, is achieved by the full force of his Christ-likeness. Euphra's death-bed salvation is allegorically more complex, as the immediate agent is Margaret Elginbrod, who only later is fully revealed as an essential part of Hugh Sutherland; nevertheless, he is part of the team which works to free her from the thrall of evil.

As previous writers (notably Wolff) have observed, the hurtful heroines are often associated with the libraries of large houses or institutions. Thus Euphra and Florimel are both prominently associated with libraries, and Alec's most painful encounter with Kate and Beauchamp also occurs there (AF, Chapter 69). Again, a psychological

explanation is possible, but unnecessary and incapable of proof: the significance of the setting is tolerably clear on internal evidence alone. Briefly, MacDonald both reveres and mistrusts collections of books as means towards the truth of things. Books do contain the truth, and libraries (especially the family and ancient university libraries MacDonald writes of) are emblems of mankind's love accumulated through the ages. Roderick McGillis is right when he sees MacDonald's libraries as 'emblems of their owners' spiritual states' and describes them, in their accumulation over the generations, as 'compared to spiritual growth in general'.²⁸ MacDonald's heroes have all an inordinate love of books, and Malcolm's sense of the organic vitality of libraries and of printed volumes is unusual only in its explicitness, as he confronts the library of Lossie House: 'It's jist like a byke o' frozen bees! Eh! gien they war a' to come to life an' stick their stangs o' trowth intill a body, the waukin' up wad be awfu'!' (M, Chapter 33, 'The Library').

This way of putting it, however, contains an implicit awareness of the library's limitation: a collection of books is a dead thing until it is brought to life, by sensitive and rightly orientated imaginative reading. The truth within a book is available only to a mind which can enliven it through imagination and love. Otherwise, a book is a symbol of deadly dullness, as when Mr Vane, catching the butterfly, finds it transformed into a book in his hand (L, Chapter 10, 'The Bad Burrow'). In MacDonald, books and nature are often equivalent embodiments of God's truth: both are of the world but both can lead out of it. Nevertheless, the Book of Nature is superior,

and the two realms can sometimes seem opposed, as when Hugh Sutherland, awaiting an assignation with Euphra in the library, is rebuked by a vision of Margaret Elginbrod in a 'bare, stern, leafless pine-wood' (DE, Book II, Chapter 11, 'The First Midnight'). Certainly, to live only among books is not enough, as Mysie Lindsay's father and Cosmo Cupples show - one notes that it is only after his salvation by Alec and his opening up to the country life that Cupples 'wrote a good book' (AF, Chapter 93). Books embody truth in a less widely accessible form, and they are far more open to limited or improper responses than Nature is. They enclose God's truth mediated through humanity, and are consequently more limited and misleading. Thus libraries are not just for the likes of Malcolm; they can also be the scene of inadequate, debased contact with the world of the immaterial (as in the ghost-hunting and spiritualism at Arnstead), and they can be the frequent venue for illicit assignations.

The lady in the library, therefore, can be the distillation of the immoral and inadequate uses to which books (and, hence, man's capacity to grapple with truth) can be put; in this, her quintessence is Cupples's lady, whom he discovers reaching for 'a buik that was no fit for her' (AF, Chapter 70). Euphra's ploy of requiring help in her Italian is a similar debasement of learning. For all that such characters sum up a deceptiveness in the domain of book-learning, however, they still feel, in part, at odds with their environment by means of which the notions of debasement and, hence, of the library's ultimate importance are implicitly conveyed. In yearning for the library lady, MacDonald's hero is mistaking a false path to God for the

true one, but the mistake is venial, and is a sign of how close to the truth he is.

If the flirt, whether within a library or not, is an allegory of the limitations of the material world as a goal of the approach to God, so another, less frequent, character-type embodies the inadequacy of the natural world in constituting mankind's source, or origins. MacDonald several times creates rapacious, threatening mother figures. Some of the most prominent occur outside the Scottish series, in Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood and, above all, in Lilith. Among the Scottish novels, Mrs Stewart in Malcolm and Mrs Gordon in Heather and Snow are the clearest examples, although Marion Blatherwick in Salted With Fire approaches a comparable fallibility. All three attempt to dominate and (whether they know it or not) destroy their offspring. Their children are all blighted sons (in the Scottish series, that is - in Lilith and Annals it is daughters who are threatened); Stephen Stewart, Francis Gordon and James Blatherwick all typify a limited humanity entrapped in mundane circumstances. These mothers are the source of what is impoverished about mankind; they are our origins in matter, and are thus opposed to that which is heavenly in us. Thus, Marion Blatherwick tries to shield her son from public disgrace by urging him to shirk his responsibilities to his child and its seduced mother, a course leading, in MacDonald's view, to James Blatherwick's moral destruction. Similarly connected with pride is Francis Gordon's mother's behaviour to him: she inflates him with unjustified self-esteem and family pride, while ruining his inheritance

through alcoholism. Both of these characters are reclaimable. Mrs Stewart, however, is a narrower distillation of the malevolence and destructiveness of the worldly; she is the evil which exists, only to be cast out, in Mrs Gordon and Marion Blatherwick. Her mis-shapen son is an allegory of the twisted and pathetically limited state which is man's earthly existence. She seeks to destroy him, as he is evidence of her true nature, whereas she desires to claim the Christ-like Malcolm as her own. Nor is man's Christ-likeness alone threatened by her, for in kidnapping Phemy Mair she torments and nearly extinguishes his child-like innocence, entrusting it to the doubtful care of mortality itself, embodied in Mrs Catanach. None of these mothers has a Christ-like character for offspring; man's heavenly nature has higher origins than matter.

These predatory mothers pervert humanity's origins, whereas the harmful girls perverted humanity's goal. A third group of materialistic characters strive to pervert man's life in the world, and to dispossess him of what in the world is rightfully his. In many instances, MacDonald's stress is on the dispossessor's invasion of the earthly home, and of the unfortunate necessity of sometimes having to accommodate him - for a while. Thus Funkelstein gains a foothold in Arnstead, the better to enslave Euphra, to entangle Hugh and gain the desired ring. His veneer of science and civilisation is a materialistic front to his desire to dominate the Will, which is the essence of his evil. His impact on Hugh is to deprive him of that free instinct which will lead him to God - and to Margaret.

In Alec Forbes, first Annie and then the Forbeses have to reach an accommodation with a much more subtly created despoiler, Robert Bruce. In him, the materialism underlying all this group of characters is writ large, but the allegorical narrative of his relationships with his victims is more subtle than MacDonald had achieved in the earlier Funkelstein. The threat of the material can never be finally negated in this life, though David Elginbrod perhaps implies that it can. Instead, in Alec Forbes, MacDonald shows that a genuine portion of one's heavenly inheritance must be given up, and the dispossessor lived with, though one can hope to escape his immediate hold. Until then, he has the entré of one's home, or even worse, one must make one's home with him, like Annie herself. Something similar is true of Mrs Catanach in the Portlössie novels, for despite her exposure, she is checkmated and maintained in the community, not ejected or liquidated. Where Bruce had embodied the materialistic usurpation of greed, Mrs Catanach - midwife and attendant upon the dead - stands at the entrance and exit of man's presence in the world: she embodies his mortality itself. Hence her instinctive opposition to any good character, and hence, also, her centrality and intimacy in all the secrets which must be uncovered. Her name is itself significant: 'Catanach' means, in Gaelic, 'belonging to (Clan) Chattan', which claimed descent from Gillacatain, 'servant of (St) Catan', 'little cat'.²⁹ MacDonald reinforces this by having Miss Horn label her a 'cat-wumman' (M, Chapter 9, 'The Salmon-Trout'), and endowing her with a feline, sinister insidiousness. He seems to be associating cats with mortality here, nor is this the only place he does so. The

large leopards in Lilith can be interpreted as different types of death, good and bad, while Lilith herself appears as a repulsive cat (L, Chapter 29, 'The Persian Cat'). What's Mine's Mine contains a character, Mistress Conal, in some ways very like Barbara Catanach in being witch-like and given cat associations. 'Cleared' from her cottage, she is taken in by Alister, the chief, but dies amid a night of cat-screeches: once she is dead, her pet cat is never seen again. What we have here, in part, is a little allegory of the death of death. Denied its traditional place among men, death is subsumed into the otherworldliness of Christian outlook and values. Even Annie Anderson's rescue from the rats in Robert Bruce's attic can perhaps be read in this light. The 'rottans' are clearly symbols of the fear and depression induced in the human soul by an unmitigated immersion in materialism; the cat's association with death does not mean Annie is considering suicide, but the overtones of mortality the animal seems to have had for MacDonald allows him to use it as an emblem of heavenly power and comfort. Similarly, her later cherishing of her kitten by placing it in Mrs Forbes's protection (AF, Chapter 50) suggests her need to preserve her sense of a route through to God.

The domestic threat posed by the characters I have been discussing is yet clearer in figures such as Mr Galbraith in Sir Gibbie, Lord Lick-my-loof in Castle Warlock, the earl in Donal Grant, and Peregrine Palmer in What's Mine's Mine. All seek or possess a domain to which they have no moral right but which is open to them by legal means; all are of the world, in Galbraith's antipathy to imagination,

in Lick-my-loof's greed, in the earl's enslavement to drugs, and in Palmer's pride and stupidity. As MacDonald made increasing use of the symbols of the castle and the estate, so such figures who constitute the threat to rightful ownership become correspondingly prominent.

In earlier works, in which the hero's fictional goal is more narrowly the heroine, rather than any hereditary property, the encroachment of the material takes the form, rather, of a dastardly rival for her hand. In part, Funkelstein can also be seen in this light, but it is with Beauchamp in Alec Forbes that MacDonald really begins a sequence of regency bucks and aristocratic seducers who claw back, or attempt to claw back, the hero's beloved so that his divine goal turns to dust. MacDonald shared the typical Victorian view of the regency period as despicable: even the limitations of Malcolm's father are broadly categorised in the account of him as 'one of the boon companions of the Prince of Wales' (M, Chapter 13, 'The Marquis of Lossie'). Baron Rothie is 'a foam-flake of the court of the Prince Regent', and if the 'resurrectionist' riot in Chapter Sixty-Seven of Alec Forbes can be associated with the 'Burkin Hoose' disturbances in Aberdeen in 1831, then Beauchamp, of university age, is the product of a regency marriage.³⁰ The Victorian disapproval of the regency period was intensified in MacDonald's case by his strong partisan feeling for Lady Byron, and his consequent antagonism to the memory of one of the most famous of all regency figures. He invests Beauchamp and Baron Rothie, therefore, with all the licentious

selfishness which a caricature of regency values could stand. The aura of sexual licence which they carry over from the regency of popular imagination is a potent symbol for the sensual, worldly encroachment upon what MacDonald holds as most valuably elevated in human nature.

MacDonald's repertoire of symbolism is not just made up of characters and locations, and one of his most regular methods of allegorizing the condition of man's deviation from rightness of thought, value and direction in life is to use imagery of drunkenness and drug-taking. In Alec's dissipation, drinking can be read as simply the plot precondition for his neglect of his work, for his use of prostitutes and for his assault on Cupples, but the latter's alcoholism encourages us to take drunkenness as laden with meaning beyond the immediate narrative demands. Cupples's addiction is the symbol of his life's disorientation, for the physical symptoms of drinking (torpor, pessimism, mental cloudiness, belligerence, even the sluggish walk) serve admirably to sum up his lack of progress in the journey of life, and his blighted relationships with God and with his fellow men. Both characters take to drink after their amorous failures: humanity relapses into disorientation, lassitude and despair on finding a promising route to heaven denied them. Even on the evidence of this one book, one could claim drunkenness as one of MacDonald's symbols; reviewing the extent of its presence throughout the Scottish series, one sees it as among his most important allegorical elements. Thus it also figures with some prominence in Robert Falconer, Sir Gibbie, Castle Warlock, What's Mine's Mine and Heather and Snow. In addition,

the related notion of drug-taking appears in The Marquis of Lossie, and, very prominently, in Donal Grant. The general meaning is clear in what I have said of Alec Forbes: drunkenness stands for a state of stupefying and inactive incarceration in the material world. Thus Falconer's descent into the slums of the East End to rescue his father is partially an allegory of Christ's putting on of flesh to save mankind. Mergwain's terror in his drunken hallucinations indicates how completely he is envisioning the dead from a narrowly earthbound point of view: his drunken delirium embodies the totality of his commitment to a materialistic outlook and values. The earl in Donal Grant, having walled up his religious and moral conscience with the entombment of the relics of the wife he had persecuted, is prey to the disorder of material, scientific investigation and becomes a drug-addict, again trapping himself in a state of godlessness. Peregrine Palmer's source of money is distilling - not only credible for a story dealing with the later phase of nineteenth-century Highland social developments, but symbolically indicative of the materialistic spirit he brings with him to the blessed community.

Most important of all, perhaps, alcoholism plays a leading symbolic role in Sir Gibbie, for it is a point of meaning which variously recurs in different contexts throughout the book. Thus, not only is the allegory of Gibbie's drunken, disinherited father clear (and the memorable image of Gibbie's ingenious and indefatigable guiding of his father home is a marvellous allegory of Christ's procedures in inducing mortals to participate in the homeward journey to God), but Mistress

Croale's drunken failure to support the responsibility placed upon her (SG, Chapter 59, 'Catastrophe') is a convincing symbol of the human inadequacy which hinders the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. Perhaps most resonating of all, however, is Gibbie's response to Mr Sclater, who, having angrily upbraided Donal and Gibbie for their unconventional, spontaneous behaviour (SG, Chapter 42, 'Donal's Lodging'), later asks Gibbie why he had then followed him home: 'I thought you was drunk' (SG, Chapter 43, 'The Minister's Defeat'). With this, the metaphor implicit in so much of the book becomes explicit: all short-sighted insistence on worldly values are a 'drunken' stepping aside from the straight path to heaven.

Over the total length of the book, Mistress Croale becomes a character of notable symbolic weight. This is especially clear at the end, as already discussed, while her role as a drunken witch-wife is a plain allegory of the entrapment of humanity in fallenness. That she should rediscover Gibbie and bring him back to the city implies both the perennial deprecation of the mortal upon the immortal parts of ourselves and, conversely, the perennial need of the mortal to be irradiated and saved by the immortal. What is less clear is that even as we meet her at the outset, she has some symbolic weight. One is encouraged in this both by the firmly allegorical nature of the rest of the book, and by the prominence, at least once elsewhere in MacDonald's Scottish fiction, of the image of the female autocrat presiding over a well-run hostelry, Miss Napier of the Boar's Head in Robert Falconer. The repetition suggests that the image had some

meaning and interest for MacDonald, especially as in each case it is the moral ambiguity which fascinates him. By their lights, and also, to a considerable extent, by the lights of most charitable and sensible people, both ladies run their businesses responsibly and with humanity. Thus Miss Napier has no desire that her customers attain complete intoxication, while not only is Mistress Croale extremely good to Gibbie's father, but she is allowed a real victory over the pompous Mr Sclater (SG, Chapter 3, 'Mistress Croale'). Nevertheless, the degradation of Andrew Falconer is a retrospective criticism of the trade at the Boar's Head, while later events in Sir Gibbie even more clearly prevent complacency about Mistress Croale even at her most respectable. By anticipating my discussion of the figure of the old woman in MacDonald, we might interpret these two characters as embodiments of Nature in so far as Nature has aspects which must accommodate human failings. These characters embody, I think, those aspects of the natural world which pander to what is weak and unideal in us; at best, a moral equilibrium can be maintained, but MacDonald is aware of the constant possibility of how material considerations can swamp our moral beings (the need for money, or for sex, or for the esteem of our fellows, or for countless other preconditions of mortal existence, can become total).

Moving from these examples of a rather private pantheon of symbols of the mortal, the restricting, the hindering, we come to those aspects of MacDonald's work in which the symbolic and the satiric overlap.

In other words, one facet of his concern is to reveal certain aspects of his own society as incarnations of the very perils that humanity in its struggle to reach God must shun. Thus, the concrete and the universal dimensions of these instances doubly relate to each other, just as Bunyan's *Vanity Fair* and Pope's *Colley Cibber* are specific examples of universal truths, while at the same time Bunyan and Pope are insisting that there are universal principles at work in these two instances of everyday reality. Similarly, the nonconformism of the Appleditches in David Elginbrod functions as one of the soul-sapping aspects of Hugh's London existence, along with his poverty and his disappointment in love, but at the same time they reveal an essentially satiric instinct in MacDonald, attacking them in their folly, pettiness and exclusivity. The various nonconformist and evangelical outlooks in his fiction are all to be seen finally as mundane, either because they reflect allegiances to human establishments (in their valuing of conventional respectability in behaviour and theology) or because of the fallibility of their reliance on conscious reasoning which lays them so open to the arguments of the likes of Robert Falconer and Donal Grant. In MacDonald's symbolic satire, one can still feel echoes of the Augustan antipathy to 'dullness', doubly hateful in its meanings of 'drabness' and 'stupidity'. MacDonald's name for this is 'the commonplace', rather, as consciously opposed by Alexander Graham in the nonconformist chapel, and by many of his other champions of truth and life. In different works, MacDonald chooses to attack his religious opponents from different

angles, depending on the total narrative and allegorical circumstances. Thus, the folly and rather petty objectionability of nonconformist mores are stressed in the Appleditches: after the gothic intensity of the Arnstead portion of the book, the Appleditches provide something of a necessary light relief, and their capacity to grate on Hugh and the reader is partly a reflection of the pitch of debilitated sensibility to which his Arnstead experiences have reduced Hugh. In Annie's encounter with hell-fire theology, on the other hand, it is the cruelty of the doctrine - its incompatibility with the suffering and innocent child within each of us - which is at stake. And as a final example, in Donal Grant the hero must encounter the traditionally sanctioned aspect of this set of beliefs: in his freedom of thought, he is challenging it both as an orthodoxy and as a cement in the social fabric which accords respect to established ministers and to the traditional social hierarchy. Donal is the first of the Scottish heroes to win an aristocratic lady purely on the merits of his mind and personality, without the aid of any hint of rank of his own. Also, it is perhaps no accident that his principal disputant is named Sophia: she purports to embody supreme truths of human wisdom, and in so far as she is shown by Donal to be limited, so the theological tradition she inherits is limited.

Theological benightedness, as embodied by Sophia Carmichael or by MacDonald's various London nonconformists, is associated both with the general materialism to which human rationality tends and also with the materialism of snobbery and class-distinction, as we have seen.

It remains to point out that these associated impulses are themselves regularly embodied in a purer form in MacDonald's writing. Thus the rationalism of science and philosophy is seen as a potential snare in the materialistic outlooks of various close relations of MacDonald's religious wanderers, such as Malcolm's father, Lady Arctura's uncle in Donal Grant, Lady Joan's brother in Castle Warlock. In each case, these characters are in a position of earthly authority or guardianship over a character whose religious needs are threatened by the scientific impulse: in this world, religious considerations are so often swamped by the immediate exigencies of matter. Florimel, Arctura and Joan variously dwindle while the influences of their earthly guardians are in the ascendance. Equally oppressive and destructive are the snobbery of a Thomas Galbraith and the hypocritical values of aristocratic society - its intellectual and snobbish materialism - as imparted by Lady Bellair to Florimel in The Marquis of Lossie. As in all the allegories of the material which have been discussed here, that which is destroyed is not merely the moral or intellectual health of the individual, but, supremely, his happiness.

4. The Helpers on the Journey

To MacDonald, a crucial aspect of God's supremacy was his total independence of any other force; an unmoved mover, his very stillness makes him the goal of every journey, every development. Thus, it is

correspondingly characteristic of his creatures, not only that they move towards him, but that they require help in doing so. The attainment of an independent control over the self is one of MacDonald's great concerns; hence, Malcolm's horror on discovering that his courage was not under the complete control of his own will (ML, Chapter 46, 'Portland Place'). It is to the eradication of such dependence that he makes his heroes strive; to achieve that independence is to free oneself from the earthly, to become more like God, and to approach reality itself. For (to quote the words given to Ian Macruadh) 'God is the only real person, being in himself, and without help from anybody' (WMM, Chapter 29, 'Nature'). Yet, though the ideal is not to require help, it is inevitable, within the earthly economy, that help will be needed. The helpers, therefore, are to be welcomed as aids to God, as well as regretted in so far as aid is needed.

Thus, if the allegories of the last section were embodiments of the material as a trap, those of the present section embody matter's capacity to aid man to freedom and God. The differences between the latter and the former are sometimes less complete than separate discussion makes them appear; thus, as I said earlier, the difficulties experienced by MacDonald's heroes 'turn to aids in the journey to God by stimulating the need to overcome them'. Nevertheless, in the case of the symbols and episodes with which I am now concerned, their benefit to the hero is immediately apparent, where, before, the narrative dwelt on the immediate experience of deprivation of the

divine. I defined the hardships of MacDonald's heroes as 'the hardship of being deprived of God'. Here, we are variously concerned with encountering God, for he is felt as present in each of the 'helpful' manifestations in this discussion. In other words, here are circumstances which aid the individual to his ultimate union with his creator but, with some element of paradox, we find that each of these encounters itself partakes of that ultimate union. The joy of Robert Falconer's kite-flying, and the fervour of love between hero and heroine, are each, in MacDonald's eyes, real communions with God, each case tailored to suit the stage of development attained by the hero. 'What boy, however fain to be a disciple of Christ and a child of God, would prefer a sermon to his glorious kite, that divinest of toys, with God himself for his playmate, in the blue wind that tossed it hither and thither in the golden void!'³¹

Thus, we find that the examples with which we must deal here cluster round two poles, one centring on the idea of joy, of happiness, and the other focussing on authority and discipline. We can find instances in which each of these poles is embodied simply and purely: these will be discussed first, as an aid to clarity. The most important and impressive allegories of God's shepherding care for his wandering creature, however, partake of both of these characteristics, and in so far as these forces of love and authority lead to God, it transpires that, in a sense, they are God, or, perhaps better, the truth of God. Once more, we find MacDonald envisioning God as a wisely loving and firm father, and once more we find that father actively leading his

children home.

Where was God?
In him and his question.

MacDonald was envisioning an identity between God and the narrative influences bringing about the necessary growth in his heroes; it is the failure to appreciate this which has caused so much misunderstanding of both the theology and the method of MacDonald's fiction. Thus the apparent dichotomy seized upon by one of the nineteenth-century critics quoted by Wolff does not really exist.

Undue emphasis is laid on the part played by natural influences in the process of man's salvation, and regenerating efficiency, which we had thought belonged exclusively to the Spirit of God, is freely attributed to such things as fiddles, kites, scenery, music and the memorials of departed friends.³²

The passage quoted above from Unspoken Sermons makes more explicit, perhaps, than Robert Falconer does, the way in which MacDonald could envisage kite-flying (say) as a formative communion with God. MacDonald's summary in the novel stresses the notion of symbolism ('What a full globated symbolism lay then around the heart of the boy in his book, his violin, his kite!' (RF, Part I, Chapter 21, 'The Dragon')) which without further gloss could perhaps allow S. Law Wilson to assume that the author's fictional kites are parallel with, separate from, God. As we have seen, however, MacDonald's notion of symbolism included the notion of identity between the material object and its heavenly significance. And even with only

Robert Falconer itself to hand, a sensitive reading of the kite-flying in Chapter Twenty-One would surely recognise that the kite is an allegory of Robert's aspirations to God and also a closely related allegory of the goal of heaven-ward impulses?

Sometimes, to aid his aspiration, he would take a bit of paper, make a hole in it, pass the end of the string through the hole, and send the messenger scudding along the line athwart the depth of the wind. If it stuck by the way, he would get a telescope of Mr Lammie's, and therewith watch its struggles till it broke loose, then follow it careering up to the kite. Away with each successive paper his imagination would fly, and a sense of air, and height, and freedom settled from his play into his very soul, a germ to sprout hereafter, and enrich the forms of his aspirations.

(RF, Part, I, Chapter 21, 'The Dragon')

In the chapter's final sentence, the word 'globated' stands out in its unfamiliarity and its inelegance. Nevertheless, it has significance, for its reference is to the filling-out of the symbol by the active imaginative participating in its being which MacDonald describes in his preceding paragraphs. In this twin stress on imaginative participation and on joy, MacDonald is clearly the heir of earlier Romantic poets and thinkers. We are close, yet again, to Coleridge's sense of the human imagination as capable of reproducing 'in the finite mind...the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'; close, too, to Wordsworth's insistence that it is not the events described in Lyrical Ballads which constitute the importance which has a claim on the reader's attention, but the emotions to which those events give rise.³³ Wilson is wrong in crudely implying that it is the kite which in itself exerts 'regenerating efficiency'.

It is a meeting-place, rather: soaring in the sky, and symbolising both the flight of Robert's inner being, and also God as accessible to the boy's mind, it is where the two meet, and are one.

The same can be said of the fiddles, scenery, music, and memorials of departed friends, of which S. Law Wilson is so contemptuous. The individual's appreciation of such things, his imaginative participation in them, is partly a healthy forgetting of the self, partly a going out from the self to meet the divinity which can be apprehended in such objects, and partly an embodiment of God in the very act of imaginative involvement. Yet contempt is not an entirely erroneous response: these objects are offered with something of MacDonald's aggressive challenge, and retain an implication of inadequacy which relates to his constant insistence on growth, on movement. Thus, the flying of the kite has, I think, the significance I described, yet we still expect Robert to put it aside as he grows. Growth on this set of assumptions, is the increasing capacity to see God more adequately; there is a measure of inadequacy in kite-flying as an encounter with God. In narrative terms, a hero like Robert progresses until his earthly being focusses on an object or objects which stand amongst the uttermost that this earthly economy can offer as a symbol of God: in his case, it is the reclamation of a father and the inspiring of Christian charity. At such a point, a novel for adults, and about adults, can rest, but this is no ultimate conclusion. There is a sense, then, in which the helping agencies with which I am here concerned are merely lesser, more overtly temporary, goals,

essentially related to the goals which I described in an earlier section.

And if the allegory of help through joy is related to the symbols of goal which we have already discussed, the allegory of help through stricture or discipline is related to the symbols of difficulty in the previous section. Here, we are concerned with the frequent infliction of pain, the chastisements, which punctuate the novels; the distress involved is swifter, sharper and more evidently symbolic. We can lay Wolff's psychoanalytical speculations on one side, for such chastisements form part of the internal logic of the writing, and do not insist upon a biographical explanation.³⁴ Each instance marks a closer approximation to Christ in one of two ways. In those cases where the central character inflicts physical punishment (Alec's assault on Juno, Falconer's defeat of Lord Sandy, Malcolm's grappling with various ruffians, Donal Grant's attack on Lord Fergie, Kirsty Barclay's whipping of Francis Gordon, etc.) the essential allegory is of the righteously wrathful Christ cleansing sin. The ultimate correlation is with the Christ of the Day of Judgement; a more mundane parallel might be Christ's scourging of the money-changers in the Temple (Mark 11. 15), where the notion of a violent cleansing is especially clear. In the cases of the other type, in which the central character physically suffers, the correlation with Christ is, of course, in the crucifixion itself. The obviousness of this parallel results in an occasional extreme crudeness of symbolism, as when Malcolm's wounding in the hand and foot is underlined by Duncan's

speculations. Both wounds are got while Malcolm is saving mankind (represented by the marquis and Florimel) from danger and folly. Very often, however, such chastisements function by bringing forth Christ in the responses they prompt; thus the episode of Gibbie's whipping brings Christ nearer to human embodiment not just because of the physical shape of the marks on his body, but because his plight calls forth Ginevra's passionate, protective defiance and, a little later, the powerful maternalism of Janet Grant. Christ happens in us when victimised innocence and righteousness conjure up the full power of human charity. Similarly, Cosmo Warlock's blow at the hands of his irate schoolmaster (CW, Chapter 5, 'The School') helps bring forth Christ in the charity of Agnes and of her great-grandmother, and in the early developments in the unravelling of the truth of Castle Warlock which Cosmo's recuperation in Grannie's cottage brings forth.

For the total pattern is always, dimly, that of the crucifixion: the Christ-figure, upholding righteousness or charity, suffers an assault from a wrong-doer, but with narrative results (either short-term or long-term or both) leading towards a final happy dispensation. Thus, Malcolm's ordeal by drug in The Marquis of Lossie brings him yet nearer a Christ-like perfection by giving him a clearer, firmer mastery over his own will and furthers the book's total movement by bringing to his hand a necessary plot-aid in Rose, the kitchen-maid. Alec's brutal beating by Malison not only leads to a fearful reprisal on the schoolmaster as his hand is burnt, but, more important, it brings

Annie into contact with the Forbes household when she visits the invalid. This is an early stage in the process, which the book describes, of the finding of a home for Annie, with all the allegorical implications of that result. Alec's second notable youthful incapacitation, after the fight with Juno, presents the same pattern more intensely: the assault on the dog is again for Annie's sake, and in its aftermath there is a yet clearer rescue of Annie from death and a provision for her of something approaching a heavenly warmth and comfort, after Alec finds her unconscious in the igloo. In all these cases, the suffering of the Christ-like hero is the pivot-point for a sequence in which the creation of a heavenly dispensation is brought nearer.

Therefore, joy and pain can both be, independently, gateways on the road to heaven. Taken together, they create the most important powers which usher the child-heroes on to their divine homes. As we have seen, they are both attributes of God; taken together, they come close to constituting God himself. Certainly, we can say that when the heroes encounter the entities in which both are found, they are close to encountering the truth of God. That is, when one of MacDonald's heroes adjusts his relationship with one of these forces, or beings, so that he properly responds with love and respect, to the love and authority incorporated in it, he is much closer to finding his place in the total scheme of things - closer to making an eternal home for himself.

The world itself - Nature - is the clearest example of kindness and wrath embodied in the one entity, so as to constitute an allegory of God and man's relationship with Him. The pattern of early existence in the countryside, followed by a period in the environment specifically of men, followed by a return to the countryside, is very frequently found to be the means whereby the tale of the loss and recovery of innocence, of bliss, is told. All the Scottish novels, except What's Mine's Mine and The Elect Lady, contain it to an important extent, with the first of them, David Elginbrod, clearly signalling the presence and implications of the pattern. Thus, shorn, as it seems to him, of all close human relationship, and harrowed by the harshness of recent experiences, Hugh Sutherland finds that nature itself now has a significance for him of which he had not previously been aware. The form of personification adopted by MacDonald is noteworthy: 'But now she herself appeared to him - the grand, pure, tender mother, ancient in years, yet ever young; appeared to him, not in the mirror of a man's words, but bending over him from the fathomless bosom of the sky, from the outspread arms of the forest-trees, from the silent judgment of the everlasting hills' (DE, Book III, Chapter 23, 'Nature and her Lady'). There lurks within this sentence the image which is much more blatantly provided in What's Mine's Mine, when Ian Macruadh explains to Mercy Palmer why he talks of nature as a person.

Whatever influences us must be a person. But God is the only real person, being in himself, and without help from anybody; and so we talk even of the world which is but his living garment, as if that were a person; and we call it she as if it were a woman, because so many of God's loveliest influences come to us through her. She always seems to me a beautiful old grandmother.

(WMM, Chapter 29, 'Nature')

In the passage from David Elginbrod, just as the living image of the ancient mother takes form to Hugh's sight within the outward forms of nature, so the core of MacDonald's conception peeps out from within the words: nature's purity and tenderness is contained within, and partly obscures, her grandmotherliness ('the grand, pure, tender, mother'), yet the separation of the two elements of the word gently emphasises both her grandeur, with its hint of awesomeness, and her maternal quality. These twin aspects are then further differentiated and located, in 'the outspread arms of the forest-trees', and 'the silent judgment of the everlasting hills'.

Here, then, within one symbol, is the duality of God's bearing towards his earthly children, in his love and his chastening firmness. And we find this duality occurring, whether God is being manifested in the novels by physical nature, or by the image of the old woman, or grandmother. Thus, in What's Mine's Mine, following on from Ian's statement, nature is referred to, especially by the author himself, as 'Granny'. Nature, in this book, is usually a smiling comforting force, but the deluge which almost kills Christine and Ian is described in the chapter entitled 'Granny Angry'. A similar sense of nature as a source of both comfort and chastisement occurs in most of the other

books, so that the pleasures of rural life are contrasted with the occasional crises of flood or blizzard. It is significant that those threatened on these occasions are usually the young as they approach adulthood, and that though the rescue is also achieved by a character at the same stage of development, it is by his exerting a daring and an athleticism which we have come to associate with an earlier, boyish, period in life. Grandmothers are only seriously angry with grandchildren who have moral responsibilities akin to those of adult life. Their younger grandchildren are largely immune from their power of wrath, and are to be found in several books enjoying a winter landscape as a pure playground, playing in what is a difficulty and even a danger to their elders.

Similarly, the grandmotherly old women have the power to instil, into the young men, awe and a sense of their own failings, as well as providing them with the comfort, the warmth and security which they need. Thus Hugh returns to Turriepuffit to make his peace with Janet, accusing himself of neglect of the Elginbrod family. The severity of the religious outlooks of Tibbie Dyster and Mrs Falconer, partly deplored, as we have seen, is also valued by MacDonald as a form, however inadequate, of right religious ambition: their outlooks nurture a saving seriousness in Robert and in Annie (as ever, to be thought of as an aspect of Alec).

Malcolm's origins are felt as more directly heavenly, and there is less need to provide him with an immediate embodiment of God's care

for his nurture. In the absence of such a figure, however, Malcolm's origins can become an issue (as Mrs Stewart claims him as her own), and two other old women, less centrally dominant or imposing in his life, nevertheless play their part in the affairs of the young Christ-figure who finds himself having to make his way in the world of men. Thus, justice or righteousness is given the rather eccentric form of Miss Horn, whose crabbed personality does not negate a warm heart, nor prevent her from being instrumental in seeing that Malcolm gets his rights. Similarly, Mrs Catanach, howdie and layer-out of the dead, is the sign and guardian of our mortal state; instinctively pulling the good towards death, she nevertheless has her part to play in the process of Malcolm-Christ's sojourn among ordinary humanity. In their very different ways, both women therefore embody the pairing of grimness with benevolence which is God's stance towards men.

The sequence continues with Janet Grant in Sir Gibbie, hugely warm to Gibbie and her family, the means whereby the truth of God is imparted to those around her, and yet severe enough upon the gamekeeper who wounds Gibbie. Similar characters can be found in Castle Warlock, What's Mine's Mine and Heather and Snow.

One must point out, also, how frequent a figure this is in the fantasy writing, and how memorable it often is there. Also striking is how varied are the guises in which it appears in the fairy stories; the variety and paradox of Anodos's grandmother (Ph, Chapter 1) merely prefigures the unexpectedness with which MacDonald presents his

fantasy old women in general. Thus, while some are fairly obvious examples, such as the old woman of the isthmus (Ph, Chapter 19), the wise woman of the story of that name, and (above all) Princess Irene's grandmother, others are 'old women', not by virtue of their appearance, but in respect of their ages and functions. These include North Wind, Eve, and Grandmother in The Golden Key.

I suggested above that when the allegory of help through joy and the allegory of help through discipline combine, the result is what we might term the allegory of truth. We find confirmation of this interpretation in connection with one of the old women, the Wise Woman, whom MacDonald describes thus:

After a minute, the wise woman unfolded her arms;
and her cloak dropping open in front, disclosed a
garment made of a strange stuff, which an old poet
who knew her well has thus described:-

All lilly white, withoutten spot or pride,
That seemd like silke and silver woven neare;
But neither silke nor silver therein did appeare.
(The Wise Woman, Chapter 1)

These lines describe Una, in The Faerie Queene, I, 12. 22, ll 7-9: the Wise Woman is Truth herself (and, thanks to MacDonald's aside, Una becomes one of her metamorphic forms).

Various as the forms taken by the old woman, Truth, may be, her female, and grandmotherly, characteristics ensure that she never quite ceases to embody that aspect of God's truth which is a comfort to man - the truth about God, however severe, is ultimately a refuge, a context

to which all creatures will eventually joyfully adjust. In his personifications of nature, and in his old women and grandmothers, MacDonald is ever tending towards a conception of nature which combines grandeur with the maternal to a high degree, a conception very like those held by earlier, favourite authors of his. Chaucer, for example, calls her 'Nature, the vicaire of the almyghty Lord' in The Parliament of Fowls 379, and, at greater length, Spenser provides this portrait of a supreme and awesome being in the last complete canto of The Faerie Queene:

Then forth issewed (great goddesse) great dame Nature,
With goodly port and gracious Maiesty;
Being far greater and more tall of stature
Then any of the gods or Powers on hie:
Yet certes by her face and physnomy.
Whether she man or woman inly were,
That could not any creature well descry:
For, with a veile that wimpled euery where,
Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.

That some doe say was so by skill deuized,
To hide the terror of her vncouth hew,
From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized;
For that her face did like a Lion shew,
That eye of wight could not indure to view:
But others tell that it so beautious was,
And round about such beames of splendor threw,
That it the Sunne a thousand times did pass,
Ne could be seene, but like an image in a glass.
(VII. 7. 5 - 6)

Here, Spenser envisages Nature as, ultimately, a mystery, a being of opposites and paradox and, in the second stanza quoted, not unlike God himself in power, beauty and incomprehensibility. Both quotations imply that Nature is a representative, an embodiment even, of God himself, and there is some feeling of this in all MacDonald's embodiments of her.

None, however, in the Scottish novels at least, attain to quite the power and stature of Chaucer's or Spenser's Nature: they are all too limited for that, and MacDonald keeps a sense of a wide gap in power and knowledge between them and the divinity they only imperfectly communicate. To use the schema of the previous section, they have too much of the earthly, the deathly, about them still, for them to attain such obvious heights. Not that for earlier writers Nature does not include the idea of death; these lines from The Pardoner's Tale, used by MacDonald as a chapter-motto to the final chapter of Phantastes, only bring out an aspect of her implicit in the terrible figure Spenser outlines:

And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,
And say to hire, Leve mother, let me in.
(ll 267 - 9)³⁵

Thus even Mrs Catanach, unbridled representative of death as she is, is an aspect of this powerful and extensively used symbol. She embodies death's power to intimidate; in this, she is checkmated, but she is nevertheless retained in Portlossie, for death is also natural, inevitable, and (as for Chaucer's old man) desirable. Thus, all these old women embody death in the sense that the heroes, in responding to them, are accepting the death of the self. Beyond the old women lies heaven and God; by obeying them, and accepting their terrors, the joys and benefits of death are achieved (just as Diamond reaches heaven by boldly and obediently walking through North Wind). The old

women, like Nature herself, are gatekeepers, or guides, to a better life for the young people in MacDonald's stories.

This leads on to a last general point I wish to make about them. To return once more to that first astonishing appearance of a 'grandmother' in Chapter One of Phantastes, we might summarise as follows. The hero is afflicted with an impulse of dissatisfaction, of detachment from his normal world, and is confronted by a supernatural female figure of great beauty and the ability to change size. She alleviates the hero's distressed restlessness by granting him special insight and by sending him on a voyage of discovery. This is a very unusual opening in nineteenth-century literature, but has many precedents in the allegorical literature of medieval Europe. MacDonald was very familiar with the great example of the Divine Comedy, in which the hero's personal crisis brings Virgil as mentor, and may perhaps have known Chaucer's translation of Boethius. Might he also have known, say, the Complaint of Nature by Alan of Lille, or other works with the same type of opening? It is perhaps unnecessary to attempt to show that he did: at least one recent writer on these allegories, Paul Fiehler, sees them as records of a recurring psychological experience. Having described such widely separated data as the dream of a Sumerian priest-king and a patient of Carl Jung's, he generalises:

Each dreamer was faced by an alarming problem that set up considerable emotional tension and was felt to be beyond his volitional/conscious control. In each case the initial answer to the problem was provided by an enigmatic vision of a psychic 'authority' in a place with sacred associations.³⁶

Piehler then goes on to discuss a number of allegorical works, ranging widely in time and culture, relating them to this initial conception, seeing their similarities as due to the archetypes rather than as being the result of literary influence, simply and solely. We are therefore fortunate, I think, in having such a clear reincarnation of these medieval dream goddesses in MacDonald's first large-scale fiction; Anodos' grandmother provides a link between the medieval figures and MacDonald's later grandmother figures who are more organically embedded in their narratives than she is, but whose significance as initial healing forces acting on states of tension or incompleteness is therefore less readily discernible. Mossy discovers Grandmother after the desire to find the golden key has seduced him into fairyland, while Tangle does so having been frightened out of normality by the mischievous fairies, representing her sudden perception of the imperfections of her world. Princess Irene discovers her grandmother as she explores the castle on a rainy day: she has been bored by the familiar, lifeless and restricted environment of the nursery to which she has been confined. Curdie is introduced to grandmother in the same book, but is not prepared within himself to see her; he feels no need, and so she remains invisible to him. The opening of The Princess and Curdie, however, shows him attaining a new awareness of his moral weakness, an insight which horrifies him and immediately sends him in successful search of her.

Among the Scottish novels, one notes that Hugh seeks his 'old woman', Janet Elginbrod, once he is thoroughly dissatisfied with

himself and his conduct. Tibbie Dyster enters the story once Alec Forbes goes to university to experience the tribulatory period of his life, and when Annie, his 'visible soul', is troubled by her loss of contact with him. Robert's grandmother is permanently associated with his early life of limitation and frustration. Miss Horn is the agent whereby what is unsatisfactory (because unjust and untrue) in Malcolm's life is rectified. Janet Grant enters Gibbie's life at his point of sorest need, after his crucifixion-like whipping. And the list could go on: clearly, even in the Scottish novels, MacDonald is using his old women as resources of comfort in times of pain or dissatisfaction, and is making them the means whereby a better condition of existence is achieved by the hero in a way akin to Piehler's analysis. The comparison with the guide characters of medieval literature serves to bring out the fundamental paradox of MacDonald's characters, namely that they are both goals and starting-points; MacDonald's children turn to them for comfort and refuge, only to find that a longer journey still awaits them.

Differentiating between the allegorical implications of the old women and the old men in MacDonald's fiction is not an easy or swift matter, for the old men, too, seem to embody the truth of God. They, too, can be both loving and severe towards the youthful heroes. Any distinction between the two images, then, is liable to be a matter of degree, not of kind.

That the old men are also an allegory of God's truth can be

speedily suggested by referring, among the fantasy works, to the three old men encountered by Tangle in her journey in The Golden Key, and, among the Scottish novels, to the first of the sequence of sages, David Elginbrod himself. Tangle is clearly encountering the controlling spirits of the created world, each guardian of a truth which is progressively nearer the heart of the matter than the previous one. In the case of David Elginbrod, we have already interpreted his domain in Turriepuffit as a type of heaven, and the opinions he voices are obviously meant as being nearer the truth of things than those of anyone around him.

Later novels introduce various old men as mentors and educators of the central heroes. Alec Forbes has two of them, Cosmo Cupples and Thomas Crann. Cupples, a drunken recluse, can still develop Alec's knowledge of men and of nature, and can impart a relaxed and imaginative habit of mind through the breadth of his humane reading. Thomas embodies the essential power of a knowledge of God, and of faith. The deficiencies of the one might be made up by the virtues of the other; they complement each other in their common care for Alec and in their mutual liking and respect. They combine to bring about the downfall of Robert Bruce, in an allegory of the defeat of materialism by the twin forces of moral or religious rigour, and human sensitivity. Thomas embodies a fundamental righteousness with Alec; Cupples represents not only his weakness and his kindness, but, crucially, Alec's capacity to grow in goodness.

In novels after Alec Forbes, however, this figure diminishes in importance, both in his prominence in the fiction, and in his allegorical role. This is no doubt due to the creation of less fallible heroes, from Robert Falconer onwards, heroes who carry their own truth within them. With them, the guardianship of the old man subtly changes, becoming more purely a matter of mediating between the world and the hero during the latter's early years. Thus Duncan MacPhail, the incarnation of an ancient way of feeling, is granted the care of the infant Malcolm-Christ: that which is truest and best among man's strictly mortal feelings and attributes takes on the task of cherishing what is divine. In large part, the allegory in Duncan lies in what he is, and not just in what he does in the course of the novel. Much of the narrative which focusses on Duncan is concerned to reveal the moral limitations of our mortal part, embodied in his thirst for revenge on the Campbells; this failing, however, itself becomes a strength when his hatred focusses again on Mrs Catanach, embodying the utter death to which he, as mankind, was once wedded, and now utterly rejects.

Mr Sclater, in Sir Gibbie, is similar in type, but the reading of the details differs. Thus, a clergyman, he embodies socially organised religion, the church establishment. His significance is to be read more in the pattern of the book's events, than in what is revealed of his past. Thus he ignores the Christ-like Gibbie in his original state of scruffy obscurity, taking an interest in him only when he is proclaimed a person of great importance. This is not just an

allegory of the church's venality, however: Mr Sclater acts in large part out of a desire to have justice done. Much of the later allegory of the book, however, is concerned with the inability of the formalised church to accommodate itself to the spontaneously child-like and anti-materialist spirit which drives Gibbie, so that it is promptly superceded in the wielding of Gibbie's power and wealth by Gibbie himself when he comes of age, and placed firmly in the role of agent.

In both of these characters, a curious limitation comes over the old man; he is a far less powerful figure than originally he appeared to be. Nevertheless, the later works do contain very similar figures who more swiftly embody the role of guides and helpers in the journey to God and truth. They include Andrew Comin in Donal Grant and MacLear in Salted With Fire, both cobblers like several earlier characters before them, and the reason, I think, for the prominence of this trade is to be found in that ancient pun which we find expressed thus in Donal Grant:

'That's what we may ca' deith!' remarked the cobbler, slowly turning the invalidated shoe.

'Ay, deith it is', answered Donal; 'it's a sair divorce o' sole an' body.'

'It's a some auld-farrand joke,' said the cobbler, 'but the fun intil a thing doesna weir oot ony mair nor the poetry or the trowth intil't.'

(DG, Chapter 5, 'The Cobbler')

(This, incidentally, is a clear confirmation of MacDonald's reasons for repeating symbolic characters, episodes, setting.) The joke built in to this character-type not only lets MacDonald make his cobbler's forces ranged against the power of death, but the trade also perfectly accords with the over-riding metaphor of the journey. Soul and body are kept together and in good repair, so that more miles towards God can be walked. The cobbler's business is with both the comfort and the strong support of his customer's walking: even in this unlikely image, the supple allegorical mind of MacDonald finds an embodiment of the giving of the needful comfort and moral stiffening to the individual in his journey homeward.

5. Allegories of Place

In the previous section, we have seen how one of the most important of MacDonald's symbols, the old woman or grandmother whom he associates with Nature herself, presents a dual aspect to the growing, advancing hero, being both kindly, and grimly stern. We find this duality carried over into the allegorical implications of MacDonald's more direct evocations of nature, in his use of natural phenomena, such as floods and snowstorms, and his employment of a symbolism of heights and depths. In such allegories, the ultimate duality with which he confronts us is the double sense of what death means to him, for these material manifestations are used by him as emblems of that ultimate aspect of life in the material world. Thus while death, in both its literal

and moral senses, can be a terror even to such an optimistic Christian as MacDonald, his vision of truth tells him that both literal and moral deaths will lead, in God's beneficence, to eventual good, for that is the only ultimate reality. We have already seen how the allegories of hindrance are negated and turned to benefit, so that even they become allegories of help. Just so, the symbolism, to which we now turn, which seeks to draw allegorical matter from the environment which most fundamentally cuts us off from God and in which we are so drastically unlike him in the circumstances of mortality which prevail here - that symbolism also proves Janus-faced. The world both conceals and proclaims God; matter both deprives us of him, and leads us to him.

The three dimensions of our world all lend themselves naturally to allegorical employment: thus while the horizontal dimensions lead to allegories of journeying, the symbolism of heights and depths easily communicates the ideas of nearness to, or distance from, God. This Janus looks, not just from side to side, but up and down. In MacDonald's landscapes, this is often the crucial dimension, and it is one which applies to the man-made structures, houses and castles, within the landscape as much as to the purely natural features themselves. MacDonald often avoids making a crucial distinction between man-made heights and depths, and natural ones: the two often merge into one another, so that the good characters are drawn to whatever height is available to them, and cellars and dungeons can merge, in our

imaginations and occasionally in the narratives themselves, with underground passages of natural origin. The crucial thing, to MacDonald, seems to be that height and depth are opposites contained within the one system, and connected to each other, often by short and easy routes. Thus the denizens of the heights can have contact with, and radical influence upon, the beings below them, while the creatures of the depths have always access, whether they know it or not, to the heights. In the opposition of height and depth, the fall into division of the world which emanated from God is pictured, but beyond and within the obvious contrast an essential unity is to be encountered, for the opposites need each other to define themselves. Thus even the world of the fragmented can imply oneness, and the fallen world of matter is a landscape containing eternal forces and truths.

The result is that MacDonald's fictions do not imply the rejection of the material world, even at its most stubbornly material. The processes he outlines lead to the transfiguration of the material - to the real vision of matter as something beautiful and valuable, because God-derived and harmonious with the highest realities. His writing tends to a reinterpretation of the material. This occurs, within his narratives, at such points as when the buried chapel, a place of horror and repulsiveness when first encountered by Donal Grant and Lady Arctura, is transformed by due ceremony and by being thrown open to the light. It becomes not only a place in harmony with the rest of the castle, but a source of harmony, symbolised by the music which emanates from it. A very different instance occurs, I think,

when Anodos, stumbling after his white lady and mocked by a cavern-full of goblins, finds he is prepared to relinquish his desire to a better man (Ph, Chapter 17): the place of torment is ennobled. Such transformations, due to the application of a higher outlook to what is low and ugly, correspond to what MacDonald is doing in writing these books in the first place: the ugly elements (goblins, materialists, believers in hell-fire theology, etc.) are transformed by their context in these allegorical narratives into objects of interest and beauty. They have their places in these works of art, and we want to read of them, not to avoid them. Beyond them, indeed, all the elements of the everyday world (places and people), are subjected in his books to the same divine artistic process, as I have already suggested. No wonder MacDonald saw the imagination as essentially the 'faculty which gives form to thought', for by form he meant the harmonious relationship between parts. His instinct to see relationship and meaning was always active and alert. At times, the results can no doubt be ludicrous. (plum-pudding and the immortality of the soul, etc. - see p.9 above), but when he is handling the symbolic potential of the elements of nature and of the basic features of our physical environment, his touch is much more secure.

In MacDonald's work as a whole, the roof-top area of a house is a far more frequent embodiment of height than the mountain-tops one might have expected. The latter are used sparingly, as places of especial insight and closeness to God; indeed, it is as if MacDonald thought of them as above the normal reach of man. Thus, Irene's

castle is half-way up a mountain-side, as is the Alpine village in which Robert Falconer gains his healing insights, and so is the castle of the parable of that name. Mountains in MacDonald's work tend to overlook the scene of the action, rather than forming part of that scene: when they do occur, they are places to which a hero will retreat in a time of extreme trouble, and where a sudden illumination is often to be found. Malcolm on his Mount Pisgah and the child Gibbie on Glasgar are good examples.

MacDonald's heights are usually roofs and attics, and they can easily be seen to embody the most nearly divine faculties of the human personality. Thus MacDonald sums up in Malcolm, 'The cellars are the metaphysics, the garrets the poetry of the house' (M, Chapter 32, 'The Skipper's Chamber'). The implications of this relative evaluation are clear: the one is superior, the other inferior in terms of the contrast between the subconscious and rationally conscious faculties of the mind. The cellars are of the earth, material and limiting; the roof is of heaven, with its airy freedom and its far-reaching viewpoint on the totality of things. This last amounts to the truth-revealing poetic vision itself; metaphysics vainly try to pierce to the truth through the stubbornness of matter. Thus attics, especially, are constantly associated with the best, the most instinctive, the God-seeking tendencies in man. Cupples inhabits an attic though without knowing it opens out to the roof and the stars; it requires Alec to discover this for him. This instance, in turn, reminds us

of how the attics are felt as the natural domain of childhood and youth, as in Robert Falconer's early years. They are a place of a free and stimulating chaos, a valuable repository of the past where crucial discoveries can be made (as in Robert's various finds), and a place of refuge from the limiting order of adult life (for Robert, for Annie, and for child-like personalities like Donal Grant). It is typical of the adult outlook that it relinquishes to the child what it regards as the least valuable portion of the house: materialism rejects the poetry embodied in the attics. Mrs Bruce's donating of the attic to Annie is an especially clear instance, as is her refusal to make it comfortable even by the amount of a candle. "'Can'le! Na, na, bairn," answered Mrs Bruce. "Ye s'get no can'le here. Ye wad hae the hoose in a low about our lugs. I canna affoord can'les"'. (AF, Chapter 8). Indeed she can't, for in a sense the refused candle is a symbol of imagination and love, and were such divine forces to catch hold, as well they might, in the attic, there would be such a pentecostal destruction of the materialism of the rest of the house as to be instinctively avoided by Mrs Bruce.

That the attic can be regarded, as well as a haven of childhood bliss, as a source of terror in that it imaginatively opens out on a world far removed from our cosy materialism is clearest of all in

Lilith:

Nothing should ever again make me go up that last terrible stair! The garret at the top of it pervaded the whole house! It sat upon it, threatening to crush me out of it! The brooding brain of the building, it was full of mysterious dwellers, one or other of whom might

any moment appear in the library where I sat! I was nowhere safe! I would let, I would sell the dreadful place, in which an aerial portal stood ever open to creatures whose life was other than human!
(L, Chapter 3, 'The Raven')

To the inadequate creature, a more naked contact with God's truth and mystery can be a terrible thing, and in addition to Annie and Mr Vane, MacDonald's work contains further instances, in the terror-inspiring upper rooms of Lossie House, the attic where the contrite Curdie must brave the anger of Irene's grandmother (P & C, Chapter 3, 'The Mistress of the Silver Moon') and the mysterious roof-top wail which prompts Donal Grant to plumb the secrets of Castle Graham. Indeed, the essential process involved in these attic adventures is the removal of terror by honest confrontation. The 'cleansing' of Lossie House and Castle Graham is a matter of opening up the murk of awesome possibilities: the complete revelation of the truth, however unpalatable, is a necessary step in the establishing of God's light and harmony. These are all allegories of the process whereby the individual's imagination confronts the extent of his own depravity, and thereby negates it by viewing it in the light of the harmonising eternal goodness.

Attics are constantly imminent. We spend a regular proportion of each day in their vicinity. Just so near, would MacDonald say, is the challenge of the encounter with God. The narrative of Donal Grant, however, is built round a slightly more elaborate, more explicit allegorical lay-out, in that the confrontation with the terror of the

roof (the location of the aeolian harp) leads to a further confrontation with a greater terror in the depths of the castle. The wail of the roof-located imagination is a plea for the discovery of the dead human matter in the buried chapel. Before Donal's Christ-like intervention, that place of matter's reconciliation with the divine had been lost sight of, and thereby seemed to infect the whole structure by means of an ignorance-bred horror. This elaborately gothic tale is an allegory, once again, of how the created, earthbound thing is to be rendered healthy and beautiful in the sight of God and men; where in earlier books, however, this process was embodied in a character, in Donal Grant the castle itself is the principal entity so transformed. The reclamation of its owner, Lady Arctura, is subsidiary in narrative and imaginative terms. As her name suggests, she is the heavenly essence who possesses the castle for a while; it is her harmony which is musically disseminated through the castle once the chapel has been restored to its proper use.

An allegory of heights and depths is much more suggestively, and much less starkly, achieved in Malcolm. Once again, the terror-filling attic region is connected to the depths of the material, by another secret stairway which descends, this time, to a cave on the sea-shore. While no less fantasy-like, this tale is far more satisfying than Donal Grant for two principal reasons. For one thing, the symbolic images are drawn much more from nature and more harmoniously take on symbolic implications. Furthermore, the narrative itself brings out the symbolism to a satisfying degree: the tale of

Malcolm's birth, and transportation down the tunnel to the care of the piper at the cave mouth, doubles as an allegory of the birth of every man and as a specific allegory of the implanting of Christ-likeness in humanity, and of Christ's historical appearance in the world. The one tale of the birth, in the lordly, high domain, of the heir to that domain, followed by the evil-induced descent through the passages of matter to the cave of a foster-parent, serves as a version of the physical, psychological and theological aspects of our finding ourselves in the world of matter. The cave by the shore has a gynaecological aspect, but is also a route from our heavenly origins: hence the appropriateness of the religious services there, however mistaken the theology of the gatherings.

As we can see, from both of these stories, matter itself can be a route to God - an intellectual route, at least, if no longer a physical one: Malcolm finds the underground passage to be blocked up, but still understands the connection between castle and sea-cave. Something of this paradoxical possibility of heaven and truth being attainable through descent into matter is found in the obviously symbolic context of one of MacDonald's fantasies, The Castle. There, the adventurous wanderers among the family occupying the castle explore down to the foundations, where they find

...a great black gulf, in which the eye could see nothing but darkness: they recoiled with horror; for the conviction flashed upon them that that gulf went down into the very central spaces of the earth, of which they had hitherto been wandering only in the upper crust; nay, that the seething blackness before them had relations

mysterious, and beyond human comprehension, with the far-off voids of space, into which the stars dare not enter.³⁷

This gulf is clearly grave-like, and it embodies, in the form of a fantasy exploration, the taste of death which many of MacDonald's characters experience - so many, in fact, that the ability to confront death itself is one of MacDonald's prerequisites for successful completion of the journey. The underground regions I am here discussing are akin to the various hollows in the earth which MacDonald offers as versions of the grave itself: the entombing snow-drifts, the cave-study of the Macruadh brothers (WMM, Chapter 21, 'The Brothers'), the souterrain in Heather and Snow which so terrifies Steenie, but which serves the heroine as a haven of study and knowledge, and which finally completes the moral education of the erring Francis Gordon. In such images and episodes, MacDonald is attempting to represent not only the fact that death must be confronted and welcomed as a route to God, but, faintly punning, he wishes to convey the concept of the death of self, the loss of self-centredness. To lose the self is as hard and as paradoxical a notion as those of the grave as a haven and death as being 'more life'.

Little more need be said, I think, about the various tombs, dungeons, caverns, and pits which confront MacDonald's various heroes. They are ultimately to be welcomed, even sought after, for they are within 'my modres gate'. Other aspects of the world of nature need discussing here, however, for they are equally, with the grave emblems, purely inimical to man at first sight. These include 'those tremendous

snowstorms that alternate with floods as MacDonald's catastrophes of nature', as Wolff, with a hint of asperity, puts it.³⁸ These phenomena are regularly present in MacDonald's fiction, not because of a poverty in his imagination, but because, I submit, he saw in them types of ferocity and near-lethal potential presented to the divine element in man by its material surroundings. Ultimately similar in implication to the underground settings, they seem more overtly deadly. Yet even in them, MacDonald detects a dual implication which resolves into a promise of 'more life'.

Despite Wolff, the two do not merely 'alternate' in a haphazard fashion, for they can be differentiated in meaning. As I have already discussed above, the flow of the river is associated with the flow of life itself, and MacDonald's floods and river accidents generally suggest a sudden threat from within the flow of the hero's experience. A blizzard, or state of winter, however, suggests the power of the material world to overwhelm the individual from without, and, unlike the flood, it occurs regularly, seasonally. Winter is the perennial manifestation of the inherently dead state of matter: it is the death which combines with the life of the summer to produce our dual environment, just as depth alternates with height. Thus MacDonald associates snow with burying, just as water implies immersion, and depth suggests interment. Let us look at some examples.

I have already touched upon the adventures of Alec and Annie on the rivers of Glamerton, but it is appropriate to deal with them more fully here. The episode of the boating accident with 'The Bonnie

Annie' (AF, Chapter 31) is to be read, I think, as indicating the specific dangers of Alec's intoxicated, boyish engagement with the immediate joys of life. Soon, he will be sent away to the next stage of experience, because his sense of fun is insufficiently grounded in moral responsibility. This earlier episode is a symbolic forewarning of that development, with Annie, his most precious part, endangered in the course of his total commitment to the joy of living. The accident occurs, one notes, after the boys, unable to manage the boat adequately, give up and let her drift with the current. They drift under the cascade of the mill sluice, whereupon the boat fills and founders. The world is too much with them; they allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the immediate claims of the senses.

A rather different form of possession by the world of matter is symbolised in the flood later in the book: the materialist force here is the diminished and perverted religious thought which MacDonald stigmatises as superstitious and, in its attempts at logic, laughably inadequate. Earlier in the book, MacDonald had touched on the spirit of prophecy and denunciation which grips the religious consciousness of Glamerton, a plot development which allows him the important incidents of Bruce's domestic prayer-meeting and Malison's failure in the pulpit. In Chapter Sixty, MacDonald describes how the movement increases in intensity and wildness until it is widely feared that Glamerton is to be destroyed. It is at this pitch of communal superstitious folly that MacDonald introduces his swollen rivers, threatening a physical inundation to parallel the mental and moral

chaos which is abroad. The religious observances which help such notions to breed are stressed, as literal and symbolic interactions occur between the rising waters and mounting madness. MacDonald's principal concern, though, proves to be less with the community as a whole than with Alec himself, for it is in this episode that he, particularly, becomes obsessed with thoughts of perdition. Trapped indoors by the flood, he spends Sunday reading books of evangelical theology, and at night, in bed, the downpour mingles with, and symbolises, the increasing torment of his thoughts.

All he seemed to know was that he was at that moment in imminent danger of eternal damnation. And he lay thinking about this while the rain kept pouring upon the roof out of the thick night overhead, and the Glamour kept sweeping by through the darkness to the sea. He grew troubled, and when at last he fell asleep, he dreamed frightfully.

(AF, Chapter 63)

It is because he is in this state of mind that he hesitates when called upon to risk his life to save Annie and Tibbie, and it is this state of mind which he puts behind him so completely once the flood episode is over. One notes that Tibbie is drowned at this point, a character with whom Annie has been much associated, and who brings, as does Thomas Crann, some warmth to the evangelical outlook. Her death seems to have immediate consequences for Annie rather than for Alec, but through Annie's role as an allegory of Alec's deepest self, her loss is relevant to him, too. Through both Tibbie and Thomas Crann, MacDonald had portrayed the religious environment offered to Alec as both limited and vitally powerful. Having gone through his

little religious crisis only to put religious thought behind him, Alec is now morally and emotionally completely vulnerable to the stresses and disappointments the coming session have in store. He has survived the flood of materialistic, rationalised belief, but has found nothing to put in its place.

The other two important floods in the Scottish novels are less complex in their allegory; both embody the dangers of the material world, and both give Christ-like heroes an opportunity to rescue the frail humanity which would otherwise be swept away. The long flood episode in Sir Gibbie is a concentration of the total allegorical pattern of the book: the Christ-like Gibbie performs wonders in the service and salvation of mankind from a death in materialism. It functions like a prior sub-plot, echoing and underlining the action which is to come, once Gibbie returns to the city. His boundless energy on this occasion acts, too, as a summing-up of the healthy, strength-giving influences of nature and Christian teaching, to which he has been exposed while living with the Grants.

A similar interpretation seems demanded by Ian Macruadh's preservation of Christina, as the flash-flood sweeps down the valley (WMM, Chapter 30, 'Granny Angry'). Done at the cost of some pain and danger to himself, the episode clearly looks back, allegorically, to the crucifixion itself, but also sums up, once again, the total relationship between Christina and her rescuer: he rescues her (or rather, the brothers rescue the sisters) from the silly, unreal

materialism of outlook which MacDonald depicts so graphically in the opening chapters.

These examples seem to suggest that, in itself, the river is to be feared, although in practice a rescue by the spirit of Christ is always effected. Yet MacDonald's sense of ambivalence applies even here; were it not so, the river would become a symbol of absolute terror, an ultimate horror. Yet there are instances of river-deaths which cause MacDonald's readers no real pain. Thus the loss of the crippled Truffey, of Malison who tries to save him, and of Tibbie Dyster, all in the one flood in Alec Forbes, none of which is presented as a disaster, suggest that it is only to the growing creature, the being who is still developing, that the river-death would be truly fatal. These characters are all, in their way, perfected; Annie, however, and Alec when he risks his life for her, have the full development of perfection in front of them. They therefore need to escape the river.

Yet their various river perils are tastes of death, needful for the developing creature. Closely related to this allegory is MacDonald's oft-repeated image of the desperate character who, fortunes at a low ebb, commits himself to the waves which seem to be his greatest peril, as Anodos does near the end of Chapter Eighteen of Phantastes. To the fully child-like character, the water of death is a source of bliss, not of terror, as Princess Irene finds (P & G, Chapter 22, 'The Old Lady and Curdie') and as Mossy and Tangle find in the bath

of the Old Man of the Sea in The Golden Key, in which death is discovered to be 'only more life'.

More obviously like a burial are the engulfing snow-drifts of MacDonald's winter blizzards. Once again, we can interpret them as desirable or to be avoided, according to the state of growth or completeness of the prospective victim. Thus Steenie and Phemy Craig, in Heather and Snow, have essentially got what good they can from their earthly existences: their deaths are treated in a mood of pathos, not of anguish. On the other hand, the death from which Hugh Sutherland rescues Margaret Elginbrod seems awful to us, with the implication that at this early stage in the novel she is nowhere near her full moral maturity, as indeed the rest of the book bears out. Comparable are the states of frozen whiteness, of death-in-life, from which are rescued Anodos' white lady, and the heroine of a tale entitled The Cruel Painter, a heroine whose father's obsession with images of human suffering blights the environment in which she lives:

She seemed like one whose love had rushed out glowing with seraphic fire, to be frozen to death in a more than wintry cold: she now walked lonely without her love...[Karl] felt nothing except the coldness of Lilith...He was compelled at last to see that she was in the condition of a rosebud, which, on the point of blossoming, has been chilled into a changeless bud by the cold of an untimely frost.³⁹

Yet MacDonald's ambivalence to winter comes out in the chapter in David Elginbrod in which the story of Margaret's rescue is told, because before that horror sets in, the winter landscape is described in terms of positive beauty:

It was the shroud of dead nature; but a shroud that seemed to prefigure a lovely resurrection; for the very death-robe was unspeakably, witchingly beautiful. Again at night the snow fell; and again and again, with intervening days of bright sunshine. Every morning, the first fresh foot-prints were a new wonder to the living creatures, the young-hearted amongst them at least, who lived and moved in this death-world, this sepulchral planet, buried in the shining air before the eyes of its sister-stars in the blue, deathless heavens.

(DE, Book I, Chapter 14, 'Winter')

The dualisms of this ambivalence come together in another snow-rescue, that of Annie from Alec's igloo. Annie, like Margaret before her, clearly needs rescuing: with his 'visible soul' slain, Alec would have been fatally maimed himself. Yet the episode is strangely, beautifully characterised by an absence of horror; the hollow in the snow is unearthly but bewitching, and curiously alive ('throbbing'):

The passage was dark, but she groped her way, on and on, till she came to the cell at the end. Here a faintly ghostly light glimmered; for Alec had cleared a small funnel upwards through the roof, almost to the outside, so that a thin light filtered through a film of snow. This light being reflected from the white surface of the cave, showed it all throbbing about her with a faint bluish white, ever and anon whelmed in the darkness and again glimmering out through its folds.

(AF, Chapter 19)

Annie is already a perfected being, a child-ideal, thus this skirmish with death is her equivalent of Diamond's visit to the back of the North Wind, and some of that book's sober acceptance of death is to be felt here. There is, however, some feeling of danger averted, as the death with which the episode also deals is the risk to Alec's

finest self. What mitigates the danger, and thus turns it towards the positive, is the playfulness with which it is associated. Alec's headlong engagement with his earthly environment takes the form of boyish pranks and activities; the snow igloo itself is a product of that spirit. Alec is playing with matter, as the infant-like Old Man of the Fire does in The Golden Key, and the fortuitous rescue is part of his instinctive, natural righteousness. The igloo which nearly kills Annie is a gateway to a taste of heaven, as Alec's wholehearted youthful commitment to the snow is, paradoxically, part of his growing capacity to rise above the circumstances of his earthly environment.

From this point, it is a short step back to Castle Warlock, to that other playful creator in snow, Cosmo Warlock. His 'seraph man' (CW, Chapter 16, 'That Night'), the human image which he hollows out within the snow and illuminates is in itself an isolated symbol of the instinct of the righteous to animate the material world, and to apprehend death as a beacon towards more life; it is an expression of an intuitive understanding that the illumination, the vivifying of the stuff of death is the essential process of God the creator. In Christian tradition, the seraphim are an order of angels especially associated with burning heat and hence with love; MacDonald would have here wished these notions to be felt paradoxically clashing with the ideas of snow and emptiness.

This bizarre episode, however, is not introduced merely as an instance of Cosmo's instinctive, boyish precocity. The terror induced

by glimpsing this sportive creation is one of the things which hasten Lord Mergwain, one of MacDonald's least young-at-heart characters, to his death. At the literal level of the story, his reaction against the image is due to his thinking he is seeing a ghost. At the allegorical level, his fear is due to his profound materialism, so that he cannot accept such a sign of life within the stuff of mortality. Completely unrighteous in his outlook, Lord Mergwain can only view any sign of lifelikeness in the domain of death as gruesomely frightening: hence his terror at the seraph man, and also his fear of the old captain's ghost. More broadly, the story of Lord Mergwain's entrapment in snowbound Castle Warlock is an allegory of the way the materialist view of things makes death (represented by the snow) seem an impenetrable barrier. With death viewed as a final limit, all forward progress (to God) is denied, and the individual is shut up with only his imperfect, indeed evil, past for terrifying company. While the other inhabitants of the castle kitchen can wait for the seeming barrier to dissolve, to Lord Mergwain it is insupportably absolute. His coming with his daughter is an epoch in Cosmo's development; the two visitors signify his dawning awareness of such issues as the pursuit of the good and lovely, and also of the possibility that death can seem final, so that man's material circumstances can seem a nightmare entombment.

In the light of this discussion, it should now be clear that MacDonald uses place, or setting, as an integral part of his allegorical web, and I have no doubt that detailed analysis of the Scottish novels,

as well as of the rest of his work, could be continued along these lines almost indefinitely. I wish to conclude, however, with a more general consideration of the role of place in MacDonald's allegories, especially the specific question of the Scottishness of the settings and the implications which arise from that.

Clearly, Scotland is used as a portion of the everyday world, and an obvious intention behind this sequence of novels is to demonstrate, or at least suggest, that the forces with which he is concerned as a religious teacher have a firm place in the everyday world; they are not realities only in the worlds of fantasy or of metaphysical speculation. Despite his commitment to heaven, MacDonald had no desire to utterly reject, or deny the importance of, the commonplace world: 'our life is no dream', as his favourite quotation from Novalis has it. Furthermore, he could see that encountering the sheer facts that a materialistic, or scientific, outlook reveals could be a means to truth and moral poise in the growing individual:

He begins to descry the indwelling poetry of science. The untiring forces at work in measurable yet inconceivable spaces of time and room, fill his soul with an awe that threatens to uncreate him with a sense of littleness; while, on the other side, the grandeur of their operations fills him with such an informing glory, the mere presence of the mighty facts, that he no more thinks of himself, but in humility is great, and knows it not.

(Orts, p. 55)

Nevertheless, the poetry of facts is a limited poetry, and we are left to contemplate, yet again, the stubbornness of the relationship between the worlds of the everyday, and of the poetic and religious

vision. As I have suggested, part of MacDonald's concern is to stress that stubbornness, to present the world of materialism as ultimately incompatible with that of heaven. Nevertheless, he is writing books, and he wishes them to have coherence, so he must perpetually blunt the edge of that incompatibility. We have discussed various of the means by which this is done, but one important element still remains to be described. The Scottish scene itself provides that element. I think that the precision with which Scottish speech, characters and settings are introduced into these novels aids considerably in reconciling the world of allegorical meaning with our sense of the physical reality of the everyday world.

For while so much of the setting of the Scottish novels is clearly a reflection of a living reality, and although MacDonald's fidelity to life in North-East Scotland is the more striking in proportion to the reader's familiarity with the region, it is still a world unfamiliar to most of his readers, in his own day as now. Indeed, it would have been quite challengingly alien to the bulk of his nineteenth-century English readership, not just in that it was a Scottish setting which was offered to them, but it was a very particular Scottish setting for which nothing in their previous reading, not even Scott, would have prepared them. Strangeness of speech is surely the most substantially alienating element, but countless details of idiosyncratic outlook, social organisation and general atmosphere must also have contributed to this. The more precise MacDonald is in delineating manners in the North-East of Scotland, the more complete is his success in casting his

readers in the role of excluded observers of a social economy like their own and related to it, yet containing much that is unexpected and alien.

To a certain extent, therefore, I would argue that the Scottish setting functions very much as the landscape of the fairy books do in unbuttoning the reader's expectations in terms of character and event. Indeed, it could be argued that the fairy landscapes essentially derive from MacDonald's mental images of the Scottish rural scene. In the strangely heightened and elusively familiar landscapes of MacDonald's Scottish settings, we have an equivalent, not only of his own fantasy settings, but of the landscapes of The Faerie Queene and The Pilgrim's Progress, landscapes which serve the double purpose of providing a scene which we can imaginatively grasp (because made up of familiar components) but which has a quality of strangeness which allows strange events to happen within it.

In addition to its unfamiliarity to his general readership, MacDonald's Scottish scene had various intrinsic attributes which heightened its usefulness to him as a setting for moral and metaphysical conflict. It is essentially a dramatic landscape, amply provided with contrast of height and depth, forest and field, bleakness and plenty, heat and cold, gentleness and violence; it thus provides a wealth of symbolically rich images. It is far enough north for its light, in summer, never to die:

The flush that seemed to promise the dawn of an eternal day, shrinks and fades, though, with him, like the lagging skirt of the sunset in the northern west, it does not vanish, but travels on, a withered pilgrim, all the night, at the long last to rise the aureole of the eternal Aurora. (Orts, p. 55)

And with its landscape dotted with castles, villages and isolated cottages, it is well in accord with the demands of the fairy-tale quality which lingers within so much of what MacDonald writes. If anything, this aspect of its nature is clearest of all in certain later novels, notably Castle Warlock, Donal Grant, and What's Mine's Mine, in which MacDonald focusses almost entirely on a Scotland of natural scene, castle, cottage, and clachan: the larger communities are almost completely absent, and the settings, though imaginatively solid, are less specifically to be located on a map.

Despite this developing tendency towards less firm location in the later novels (a feature which becomes quite extreme in Salted With Fire and, especially, The Elect Lady), it is characteristic of much of MacDonald's best writing that the reader familiar with the region can detect MacDonald specifically locating his actions in real places, both in the open country, in the villages, and in the northern university city which is Aberdeen. I have discussed this in some detail already, but raise it again here for the sake of what it implies about the role of Scottish settings in MacDonald's consciousness, and why he persistently used them long after his life ceased to be lived in Scotland.

The answer, I think, lies in that very paradox. In writing about Scotland he is writing about his own past. Furthermore, as already pointed out, he tends to set the actions of his Scottish novels, in so far as they can be located in time, in the period of his own childhood in the 1820s and early 1830s. It would be foolish to assume that there is no nostalgia in this; we have seen how in Castle Warlock, he laments 'that awful gray and white Scotch winter - dear to my heart as I sit and write with windows wide open to the blue skies of Italy's December!' (CW, Chapter 13, 'Grannie's Ghost Story'). Nevertheless, there is no general atmosphere of sentimentality colouring his treatments of Scottish life. What glamour adheres to his rural settings is the mark of a firmly used pastoral convention. The Scottish scene is important in MacDonald's writing because it is associated with his childhood, but, again, this notion is not used in any weakly escapist way.

MacDonald is creating fiction out of his sense of his own earliest years (a sense made up both of memory and of the renewed acquaintance with people and places in later years), because that remembered childhood is an analogue of his conception of the world which all humanity inhabits, could they but realise it. His belief is in the reality of the vision of childhood, a vision which 'having been must ever be', although it becomes tainted and more difficult with the passing years, a poetic vision which granted truth and contact with God with an unusual directness. Time and blindness cut us off from that vision, just as the blindness and wearisomeness of the commonplace

vision cut us off from a sense of the still omnipresent divine. The haziness and distortions of memory correspond with the imprecisions and imperfections of the adult's present sense of God. For our vision of the past is dreamlike: 'Looking back we can but dream, looking forward we lose ourselves in speculation; but we may both speculate and dream, for all speculation is not false, and all dreaming is not of the unreal' (Orts, p. 44). And dreaming is to MacDonald an appropriate mental route to God, suggesting as it does the operation of man's subconscious rather than rational mind, and also containing within it the concept of hoping. The Novalis quotation about life being no dream continues, 'but it ought to become one, and perhaps will', and MacDonald's fiction is an attempt of this sort.

Thus MacDonald's dreamlike sense of his own past, and his dreaming fictional manipulations of it, are a correlative of man's sense of God: limited, selective and distorting, yet still a memory of bliss and security; never to be encountered more with a full directness, yet intellectually and emotionally within mental reach; true, and contained within each human being, thus always available to an act of the mind and personality, whatever the immediate circumstances. To return in the mind to that world is to lose one's present self, and to become at least marginally more childlike, for 'not this world only, but the whole universe is the inheritance of those who consent to be the children of their Father in heaven, who put forth the power of their will to be of the same sort as he' (Orts, pp. 68 - 69).

There might seem to be an inherent irredeemable privateness in a vision of truth which depends for its expression on the writer's sense of his own past; the truths his novels contain might seem to be valid only for him. The degree of rejection these works have suffered in the twentieth century would appear to confirm this. Yet it was not so in his own lifetime, and it need not, I think, be true today. Both the final strength and weakness of these books lie in the degree to which they are personal testaments: to fully approach them one must have a sense of their author, or be open to the extent to which they communicate their author to us. MacDonald wrote in the belief that God's truth, glimpsed from however biased and individual an angle, has a relevance for all. Furthermore, he was unable to write out of anything other than his own experience: he confronts his developing individual with 'Have you then come to your time of life, and not yet ceased to accept hearsay as ground of action?' (Orts. pp. 66 - 67). Thus he offers his reader a direct encounter with a vision based on a personal experience: the reader encounters MacDonald and his mental world in these writings, just as Christ and his insights are to be encountered in the New Testament. MacDonald has no intention of persuading the reader simply to take over his vision, however - that would be to 'accept hearsay as ground of action'. The very artificialities and breaches of conventions of mimetic realism are a sign that MacDonald's Scottish novels are not to be responded to in any simple way, while their allegorical commitment ensures, or should ensure, that the reader takes little on trust but brings his own mind

to bear on this indirect mode of discourse. For MacDonald's aim, and achievement, is to stimulate, to tease, the reader into a new, non-commonplace outlook, and to offer himself as an encouragement, a guide and a guarantee as the reader steps into a strange new world of insight. It is thus that C. S. Lewis responded to MacDonald, as we can see in his The Great Divorce, in which he explicitly casts MacDonald in the role of guide and mentor, in the tradition of Virgil in The Divine Comedy, and Mr Greatheart in The Pilgrim's Progress. Lewis's response is surely correct: MacDonald clearly knew and was influenced by these great originals. What is astonishing and still too little recognised is the extent to which he allowed the spirit and techniques of such great doctrinal allegories to invade the Victorian novel.

Footnotes for Chapter 5

The following are the abbreviations which are used in this section of footnotes:

- Antiphon George MacDonald, England's Antiphon (London, 1874).
- Biog. Lit. S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, edited by George Watson, second edition (London, 1965).
- F & I George MacDonald, Works of Fancy and Imagination, 10 vols., (London, 1871).
- FQ Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, edited by T. P. Roche, Jr and C. P. O'Donnell, Jr (Harmondsworth, 1978).
- GMDW Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (London, 1924). The second edition (September, 1924) was used.
- MacGillis Roderick F. MacGillis, 'The Fantastic Imagination: The Prose Romances of George MacDonald' (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Reading, 1973).
- NLS National Library of Scotland.
- US George MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons, Third Series (London, 1889).
- Wolff R. L. Wolff, The Golden Key (New Haven, 1961).

1. US, p. 251.
2. NLS, MS.9745. 26-27.
3. GMDW, p. 482.
4. George MacDonald, The Miracles of Our Lord (London, 1870), pp. 276-277.

5. Biog. Lit., p. 169.
6. MacGillis, p. 75.
7. Biog. Lit., p. 167.
8. MacGillis, p. 77.
9. C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, second edition (London, 1938), p. 45.
10. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I, 10, quoted in John MacQueen, Allegory (London, 1970), p. 53.
11. Antiphon, p. 54.
12. Antiphon, p. 54.
13. Wolff, pp. 267, 282, 305. Colin Manlove, 'George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels', in Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays, edited by Ian Campbell (Manchester, 1979), 68-88 (p. 70). MacGillis, p. 73.
14. US, p. 258.
15. Antiphon, p. 256.
16. Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood (Harmondsworth, 1967). MacGillis, pp. 115-167.
17. George MacDonald, The Diary of an Old Soul (London, 1880), 'February' 2.4.
18. MacGillis, p. 152.
19. US, p. 261.
20. FQ, III. 11. 21; I. 10. 3; II. 9. 21.
21. GMDW, pp. 26-29.
22. US, pp. 79-80.

23. US, p. 21.
24. J. Hillis Miller, The Form of Victorian Fiction (Notre Dame and London, 1968), p. 96.
25. NLS, MS. 9745. 56.
26. FQ, p. 15.
27. The Poems of Tennyson, edited by Christopher Ricks (London, 1969), p. 912.
28. MacGillis, p. 12.
29. P. H. Reaney, A Dictionary of British Surnames, second revised edition (London, 1976), p. 67.
30. Fenton Wyness, City by the Grey North Sea. Aberdeen (Aberdeen, 1965), pp. 236-237.
31. US, p. 257.
32. S. Law Wilson, The Theology of Modern Literature (Edinburgh, 1899), p. 284, quoted in Wolff, pp. 262-263.
33. Biog. Lit., p. 167. Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads, edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, second edition (London, 1965), p. 248.
34. Wolff, pp. 306-314.
35. This differs in details of spelling from the version given in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F. N. Robinson, second edition (London, 1957), p. 152. I have been unable to ascertain which edition of Chaucer MacDonald was using.
36. Paul Piehler, The Visionary Landscape. A Study in Medieval Allegory (London, 1971), p. 3.
37. F & I, X, 96.
38. Wolff, p. 295.
39. F & I, X, 26-27.

Chapter 6

As a novelist, MacDonald has usually been judged severely, but it should be obvious that no writer can be adequately judged until he has been properly understood and I should maintain that, hitherto, MacDonald's Scottish novels have not been fully comprehended. Understanding them is a dual activity: it involves grasping what their thematic concerns really are, and it also involves perceiving in what modes he is working, and with what type of artistic commitment. None of these things is readily visible to an initial, or a partial reading.

Furthermore, the present-day reader must adjust to MacDonald's set of assumptions about the very structure of the reality which his fictions purport to imitate. He is one of the few novelists (perhaps George Mackay Brown is another) who feel compelled bluntly to articulate a vision which transcends the material world with which most novelists are content. MacDonald, like Brown, is fiercely unwilling to accept that the world given them by their time and their senses is the measure of all things, and writes accordingly. Yet MacDonald has no wish utterly to deny the material world: his task, rather, is to relate it to the infinitely vaster context which he rather yearningly perceives. As a man and, more narrowly, as a writer the world of matter is all he knows - as Professor Grierson pointed out, MacDonald was denied the certainty of the mystic. And in his Scottish novels he clearly wishes to do more than he does in the fantasy stories, that is to plunder the

world of matter for imagery which would express, in its phantasmagoric arrangement, eternal forces considered in the abstract, as it were. His Scottish novels, rather, attempt the much more difficult task of relating the mundane to the eternal; they try to see both at once, and the one as part of the other. Where the fantasies only attempt to cope with the moral and supernatural dimensions of life on earth, the novels try to render also as much of earthly experience as possible.

Readers find MacDonald's novels difficult to adjust to, therefore, because they are works which aim at combining various opposites; this thesis is unavoidably full of comments on a wide variety of dualities and contradictions. As fictions, his novels straddle various divides which are all, ultimately, facets of the fundamental division between the mundane and the eternal. In formal terms, they combine the novel (as normally understood) and the fantasy - a modal opposition which spawns several other contrasts, such as that between the realistic and the fanciful, the prosaic and the poetic, the objective and the subjective, the modern (in so far as these works resemble other Victorian novels) and the ancient (in so far as these works resemble, say, Medieval allegories). In terms of religious belief, they are strung between mere hope and triumphant certainty.

Perhaps most disconcerting of all, MacDonald seems to veer between the extremes of respect and disrespect for his own art. His novels are patently means to an end (whether it be a financial or didactic end) with the consequence that they are devalued in the eyes of modern commentators. If MacDonald does not take his writing seriously as art,

why should we? Yet he lavishes on them, so often, an intoxicated inventiveness and verbal richness. A parallel argument would invoke Ronald MacDonald's questioning of his father (see pp. 112-113, above): clearly MacDonald was, in a sense, utterly wedded to novel-writing but equally clearly the commitment was one of duty rather than of natural preference. Is it possible to resolve such difficulties? So long as they remain unreconciled, we are encouraged to avoid taking the Scottish novels seriously ourselves.

The contradictions in MacDonald's attitudes to art are part of that total instinct to reverse conventional evaluations which characterises his mind as a whole. Thus, for example, he believes in an aristocracy, but one of merit rather than one of inherited wealth. He believes that certain types of mind can begin to apprehend God, but they are the minds of the childlike rather than those of adult philosophers. He is committed to rendering what he understands to be reality, but for this his model is the dream. Similarly, he is convinced of the importance and benefits of literature, but he sees them as available, not in the literature of sober, adult concerns but in writing which releases the imagination in joyous flight. Thus, I believe, one important idea which helps reconcile the problems outlined in the previous paragraph is that of the typical childlike imaginative activity - in fact, play.

In MacDonald we are dealing with an author who took the idea of play with the utmost seriousness. Thus not only does he make his Old Man of the Fire a little playing child, but in book after book he shows

the play of children as much for its own sake as for the educational benefits to be demonstrated from it. In play, as MacDonald presents it, the human being is diffused with those twin forces so dear to the nineteenth-century inheritors of Romantic values, joy and imagination. The activity which seems to the adult mind least valuable - the activity which we are expected to grow out of - is therefore one of the most important we can perform. And to value play, or to approach experience in its spirit, is to deny the deep-seated values of materialism and bring to bear what is divine in humanity.

Thus MacDonald's Scottish novels are all, variously, playful. They incorporate styles, motifs, techniques and character-types drawn from various forms of literature which were in low critical esteem, from the fairy-story to the stage melodrama. In a sense they are escapist - and if MacDonald used the word to himself, he would have resoundingly assented to its non-pejorative implications. His novels, too, as he occasionally admitted, are related to his day-dreams (Walter Mitty-like) about himself, his life, his past experiences and places he has known: he is imaginatively playing with the everyday reality he has encountered. These are works, too, which proclaim their own artificiality - partly, as we have seen, to distance his readers into a more thoughtful, less emotional relationship with fictional events but also partly to deny themselves any conventional seriousness. Thus, MacDonald intrudes his own comments and personality, occasionally drifting into sermon. Also related to this are his games with place-names and with elements from earlier literature: like Scott, he often

indicates his sources and, also like Scott, he does so because his intention for a novel goes beyond the aesthetic. Sometimes the games are more teasing and savage, as he challenges, thwarts and attacks his readers in their literary preferences and their values in life. At other times, his games are private, even verging on the arcane, as he instinctively utilises the doubleness of allegory.

His novels, then, are flagrantly artificial, What life they have is derived from the religious sense which animates them: we have found that it is religious meaning which gives them most unity and pervasive interest. Approach them with the beliefs and ideas of MacDonald himself, and much which had seemed fictionally dead or irrelevant stirs like the limb of a living organism. With MacDonald's sense of God inside them (a sense which few modern critics have adequately attained) these novels echo the world itself as MacDonald apprehended it. A quotation from a letter, already used (see above, p. 12), contains a significant image: 'The universe would be to me no more than a pasteboard scene, all surface and no deepness, on the stage, if I did not hope in God'. Only a sense of the divinity within matter brings the material world, for MacDonald, to the pitch of life the rest of us take for granted. Once again, God is the artist whose divine spirit vivifies the play. Just so, it is the urgent sense of what is divine in MacDonald's ideas and personality which gives imaginative life, or form (to use his own definition of the imagination) to his novels. The sight of that artistic resurrection taking place - the spectacle of trite and commonplace fictional fragments being given depth and power by a pervasive

religious vision - is a means of imparting to his readers MacDonald's larger sense of the enlivening of matter which produces the world we live in.

MacDonald is not serious, as other novelists are, about the rendering of the material world by verbal means, because his interest does not stop with the world of the senses. He is concerned with what the world of the senses means, in its turn. In his books, as in Aquinas's allegorical method of interpreting the truth, the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. One might object that this can be said of most serious novelists, who select characters and events so as to form, to put it simply, a meaningful pattern. The difference is that MacDonald regards the meanings in the things his words represent as being God's, not his own. His books return, again and again, to a meaning, a vision, which is given, not invented. Hence their seeming repetitiveness and the changing, developing meaning which that facade of sameness half conceals. Hence, also, the visible detachment between the author and his fictional events and characters - characters who, as we have seen, are allowed to judge each other rather than having that judgement authorially imposed. Here, too, is another reason for MacDonald's prominence in his own books: he thereby articulates the distinction between himself and his creations, whereas a more self-effacing author can seem much more insidiously part of the world of the characters. MacDonald's self-assertiveness does not intrude upon the autonomy of his characters, but affirms it, rather.

MacDonald's concern is not just with the world of matter, but with a far vaster and more complex reality. He senses a truth which no human mind can comprehend, a truth before which the cleverest human is a child. So he encourages us to see ourselves as children, by giving us fiction designed to appeal to the child-like within us. He tosses us toys to play with, his intriguing, colourful and teasing books.

I believe that MacDonald was much more clever than he is often given credit for being but, if what I have said about his novels is true, it was achieved at least partly by instinct. MacDonald fails to be a completely astounding experimental novelist for the very reason which makes him an intriguing and individual one: he does not take art seriously as an end in itself. It requires, however, only the merest semantic shift to transform that condemnatory statement into one which, while equally true, is a pointer to his individual strength: he takes art very seriously because it is not (to him) an end in itself. He saw art's function as being, not the creation of beautiful objects to add to this world's already teeming store, but the revelation of what is beyond this world. Thus, he does not work out, James-like, an aesthetic for his Scottish novels. Instead, he instinctively lavishes upon them what he believes and knows to be true and beautiful: these are, pre-eminently, the Christian vision on which his adult life is founded, and also the rich stores which comprise the people and the scenes of the Scotland he had so happily grown up amongst, as well as the worlds of literature which meant so much to him. Without the

aesthetic, the fictional mixtures are sometimes unstable, but usually very rich. Despite what other critics have said, MacDonald was an instinctive novelist, as countless imaginative details of speech, action and description testify. And because his novels are written, like Lawrence's, out of the very pressures of living, rather than in any more detached aesthetic spirit, he achieves that intensity and individuality of obsession with fundamental things which produces, as we have seen, that appearance of sameness which masks a growing, shifting thematic emphasis.

Although we can say, however, that MacDonald was writing out of the pressures of living, and that his novels have, variously, an autobiographical dimension, this is not the same as saying that he is merely writing about himself, or that the principal interest his fictions offer is their insight into his subconscious. Similarly, to see their raison d'être as an assault on Old Testament religion is to narrow their interest unjustly. His subjects are the natures of God and man and the relationship between them, the divinity within man and nature, and the struggle of good and evil. These concerns are constant throughout his writing, though the emphases change from book to book, and the initial optimism darkens as the series progresses. His subject, in other words, is much less transient, and much more profound, than any mere preoccupation with doctrinal error, or with himself.

It is to a measure of placing and judgement that we must finally turn. I believe that MacDonald is less minor among Scottish novelists

than current awareness of his works might suggest. He is too easily thought of as a mere eccentric, or as a pre-echo of Barrie, Crockett and 'Ian Maclaren', themselves of minor stature. It is true that some of the Scottish communities he draws make his novels resemble, superficially, those of his successors - especially as his works appear to share their piety. I hope I have succeeded, however, in indicating that not only are his renderings of the Scottish scene notably rich, varied, lacking in easy complacency and not utterly reliant on formulae of character and event, but that, where resemblances do occur with other examples of Victorian popular fiction, the clichés are handled with sophistication, taking their places in elaborate literary structures and articulating ideas and insights of some profundity. Like all the other elements in the novels which are our concern here, the world of Victorian rural Scotland is neither an emotional nor comic end in itself, but a means whereby a religious belief can be articulated.

It is with other nineteenth-century Scottish novelists that MacDonald should be associated, namely those powerful individualists and formal innovators, Hogg, Scott, Galt and Stevenson. None would claim him as pre-eminent among these, yet this, surely, is his true company. If his intellectual world is derivative and occasionally muddled, yet it is active and omnipresent; it gives his writing a weightiness which is a distinction. He has a powerful and (again) individual sense of structure: at their best, his massive novels have a firm shapeliness which is not only controlled and graceful but also

expressive of what he feels and believes. At their best, also, his works contain a great variety of tones and moods - they entertain with great variousness. Their humour, in particular, has been seriously lost sight of by intense and myth-seeking twentieth-century commentators; MacDonald's Victorian readers knew better.

One's claim for MacDonald as a novelist devolves, ultimately, upon two novels, Alec Forbes of Howglen and Malcolm. In them, he achieves a fusion of form and content which should surely carry its own conviction to those readers with ears to hear. With two such successes to his name, MacDonald is at least better off by one than some other writers whose reputations as Scottish classics are more widely acknowledged, namely George Douglas Brown and J. MacDougall Hay (and, some might add, James Hogg). Without necessarily claiming him as a better writer than all or any of these, it seems at least partly relevant to remind ourselves also that the considerable achievement his two best novels represent is backed up by a vast body of further fiction, some of it almost as good, most of it interesting, and all of it individual. At the very least, we should be as willing to consider and value MacDonald as a writer of Scottish novels as we now are to see him as a fantasist.

Appendix 1

Editions of Robert Falconer

In the course of this study, it became apparent that Robert Falconer has been printed in several different forms, without it always being clear that a given text is more or less complete than any other. It is assumed, even by MacDonald specialists, that the numerous single-volume editions in circulation are identical with each other, and no one has attempted, so far as I know, to investigate the extent of the variations which exist. Without pretending to be an exhaustive bibliographical study, the following note is a sketch of the relationship between different editions, in so far as it appears from the copies in the possession of the National Library of Scotland, and in my own possession. My concern here is with large-scale additions and omissions, not with detailed verbal changes. The picture which emerges is the most complex, I suspect, that any of MacDonald's Scottish novels will prove to present to the researcher.

Robert Falconer first appeared as a serial in The Argosy (December 1866 to November 1867) but MacDonald was forced to make it shorter than he had intended. His true conception of the novel was represented by its 1868 three-volume form, as published by Hurst and Blackett. Because a library had started issuing bound copies of the Argosy version, he felt compelled to repudiate it in a letter to The Athenaeum of 1 August 1868, claiming that of the three-decker

version 'a fourth part is entirely new matter, while the amount of alteration would almost justify the statement that the story had been re-written...I altogether refuse to have the work judged by that adumbration of it which appeared in the Argosy' (p. 146).

The differences between the two versions are undeniably considerable. Part One is essentially the same in both, but the 1868 publication has some bulky additions in Part Two and a great quantity of new material in Part Three. Here is a list of the major additions in 1868 - by major additions I mean additions which occupy a page or more in the yet later single-volume format. All references are to the single-volume reprint of 1927 published by Cassell, the most complete edition ever to be published.

Part II

- Chapter 12, 'The Granite Church' - The entire chapter.
- Chapter 14, 'Mysie's Face' - The story of the Shetland wolf-woman.
- Chapter 25, 'In Memoriam' - The entire chapter.

Part III

- Chapter 8, 'My Own Acquaintance' - The entire chapter.
- Chapter 10, 'A Neophyte' - The entire chapter.
- Chapter 11, 'The Suicide' - Most of the chapter, as, in Argosy, the story of the suicide is told in one paragraph, and Gordon's adventure is omitted.
- Chapters 16-20, 'Change of Scene' to 'The Vanishing' - Almost totally new, as the corresponding portion in Argosy is merely what became the final two-thirds of 1868's Chapter Eighteen, 'Three Generations'.

The additions to Part Three represent MacDonald's final shaping of his conception, for they contain almost all of the scenes in the East End (only the material of 1868's Chapter Seven, 'The Silk-Weaver', was in The Argosy), the two chapters on the holiday in Devon, and the events after Mrs Falconer's death. The Argosy version is, essentially, a working-out of the plot elements introduced in Part One, namely the search for the father, and the Baron Rothie subplot. The 1868 additions elevate the novel above these limited concerns, which take their place in a book much more broadly concerned with earth's sin and pain.

A year later, in 1869, Hurst and Blackett issued a one-volume edition, best described as using the text of 1868 but employing the structure of the Argosy version. Someone - surely not MacDonald himself, after his letter to The Athenaeum - prepared a version by cutting from the 1868 text many of those major portions which first appeared in it. Here is a list of the portions concerned:

Part II

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Chapter 9, 'A Human Soul' | - Most of the poetry by J. H. MacDonald. |
| Chapter 12, 'The Granite Church' | - The entire chapter. |
| Chapter 14, 'Mysie's Face' | - The story of the Shetland wolf-woman. |
| Chapter 25, 'In Memoriam' | - The entire chapter. |

Part III

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Chapter 10, 'A Neophyte' | - The entire chapter. |
| Chapter 11, 'The Suicide' | - Several pages of discussion between Falconer and the narrator. |

Chapters 16-17, 'Change of
Scene' and 'In the Country'

- Only the first three paragraphs of Chapter 16 are given; they run in to the third sentence of Chapter 18, 'Three Generations'.

The effect of this is to reduce weight from the portrayal of Falconer as a social worker and Christ-figure; also, it removes the vision of the autumn sunset, and makes the theme of the reconciliation between mother and son very prominent once again. Their meeting, in fact, becomes the book's climax, as it had been in The Argosy.

The 1869 one-volume version was reprinted in the Hurst and Blackett Standard Library until it was replaced in that series by a 'new and enlarged edition' (no date, but probably between 1892 and 1896, the dates inscribed on the flyleaves of the two Standard Library copies I have examined). The new edition not only gives the full 1868 text, but even has an extra final chapter, 'In Expectation', which is merely another of John Hill MacDonal'd's poems. This is the version reprinted by Cassell in 1927 and is also the version published by Hurst and Blackett as a double-columned soft-backed edition in 1907, price 6d and to all appearances unabridged (unlike the Sir Gibbie in the same series).

Appendix 2

Castle Warlock and Treasure Island

A particularly interesting and unexpected instance of MacDonald's use of source material occurs in Castle Warlock (1882). In this late novel, one of the most memorable episodes is the story of Lord Mergwain's stay at Castle Warlock, trapped by winter blizzards until he dies in a drunken paroxysm (Chapters 14-21). I am convinced that this portion of MacDonald's book was heavily influenced by the opening Billy Bones episode in Stevenson's Treasure Island.

The central consciousness of each is a youth on the brink between boyhood and adolescence, and the arrival of the old stranger starts him on his way to maturity: Jim Hawkins is much more obviously a central consciousness than Cosmo, who does not narrate, but, after MacDonald himself, Cosmo's are the eyes through which we view events. The two homes are prepared to take in visitors: The Admiral Benbow is an inn, while it seems that Castle Warlock can be mistaken for one. Both families have to be frugal, but neither is destitute yet. Chance brings to each household an old man, quite alien in his personality and behaviour to his new environment, and bringing with him the marks and consciousness of ways of life and experience remote from those of the local people. Both are alcoholics, with their health seriously impaired by drink. Their language is bad, their behaviour towards their hosts ungracious, rude and domineering. They have outsize, dominating personalities, capable of arousing dislike

which those around them must stifle. Each has a background which links him with piracy, and their stays with their reluctant hosts are to a certain extent imposed upon them: they are trapped, by weather in the one case, by fear of detection in the other, although Lord Mergwain shows a susceptibility to fear, also, as the action progresses. Each provides the youthful hero with clues which eventually lead to treasure trove. Over a short period of time, in which their stories move to a climax, they are threatened by the resurgence of the piratical past, and both expire in a moment of supreme conflict with it, succumbing to drink and ill-health. The sense of tension spread over several days is especially similar in the two stories. These periods of tension and death are located in bitter winter weather: snow prevents Mergwain's departure, and the hard winter frost is an exceptionally successful atmospheric detail in Treasure Island. There are differences, inevitably, between the two version, in details of personality and action, but the difference one is most aware of is in the greater effectiveness of Stevenson's narrative pace and succinctness.

These two episodes constitute the most substantial similarity between the two works, but, once alerted to the relationship, one can perceive other possible resemblances. Both books are punctuated by memorable and enigmatic quatrains referring to treasure:

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest -
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest -
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

for which MacDonald's equivalent is:

Catch yer naig an' pu' his tail;
In his hin' heel caw a nail;
Rug his lugs frae ane anither -
Stan' up, an' ca' the king yer brither.

The main scene of the action of each book contains a spot where murder has been committed and both stories revel in the unwinding of a complex, puzzling route to the treasure. Furthermore, MacDonald's novel contains an interpolated story (Chapter 58, 'An Old Story') set on the high seas and containing some of the swash-buckling action typical of the most famous pirate story of all.

It is possible that Stevenson's novel had an even longer-lasting influence on MacDonald than I have hitherto suggested. Not only has Castle Warlock, in comparison with MacDonald's earlier novels, more of the adventure story and of the boyish gothic towards which MacDonald had often tended, but so has its successor in the Scottish novels, Donal Grant (1883). The sinister and the macabre are very pronounced in these two works: one wonders if the entombed and chained skeletons in Donal Grant (Chapter 56, 'The Lost Room') would have been discovered without the guidance of Flint's Pointer (Treasure Island, Chapter 31). These romantic horrors had long been latent in MacDonald: they only needed some encouragement to come forth.

The evidence for this influence, however, is internal and circumstantial. Our only other evidence that MacDonald knew

Stevenson's work comes from Joseph Johnson in whose George MacDonald (1906) we find the following:

A friend with whom at this time he occasionally stayed, during these lecturing tours, remembers with grateful gladness some of the talks; how enthusiastically he spoke of men and books; of Stevenson and his stories, in the early days of his writing, before his star was much above the horizon. Once, before leaving for a long train journey, he asked his friend to inquire if the new story by Stevenson was out. On its being brought from the bookstall, he took the volume in his hands with the glee of a schoolboy, saying: 'Now I shall have a pleasant journey'. (p. 62)

The circumstantial evidence is interesting, however, and suggests that Johnson's point about MacDonald's early enthusiasm for Stevenson is true. If I am correct in deducing that Treasure Island was an important influence on Castle Warlock, it is clear just how quick MacDonald was in responding to Stevenson's quality, for Treasure Island would have been only in serial form when MacDonald reworked it. It did not appear as a book until 1883, but it began its serial appearance in Young Folks on 1 October 1881. We need not be surprised that such a successful children's author should have kept an eye on what was appearing for young readers. Castle Warlock, meanwhile, appeared in 1882; I have no means of pinning down when the manuscript was written, or how much time there was between 1 October 1881 and the publication of MacDonald's novel. All we can say is that the dates fit the possibility we are considering.

Appendix 3

'A Scotch Story without any Scotch': a correction

On page 531 of his biography of his father, Greville MacDonald quotes from a letter of his father's to A. P. Watt, dated 10 January 1885. It contains the following, which Greville glosses as referring to the novel The Elect Lady: 'I think it will turn out well. It is a Scotch story without any Scotch and touches on Highland affairs not in detail but in principle'.

The Elect Lady is indeed set in Scotland but even bearing in mind the distinction between detail and principle it is exceedingly hard to see it as touching in any way 'on Highland affairs'. Furthermore, it was not published until 1888 and it would have been exceedingly unusual for MacDonald to have allowed a completed novel to wait three years for publication. Indeed, it was preceded, in 1886, by the appearance of What's Mine's Mine, and I am sure that it is to that novel that the letter refers.

The Elect Lady has practically nothing of the Highlands in it and it has quite a lot of Scots dialogue. What's Mine's Mine, on the other hand, is specifically set in the Highlands and does indeed lack Scots speech. Its tale of how economic circumstances had resulted in the Highlanders losing their lands to materialistic outside landlords is indeed a simplified reflection of what was happening in the 1880s. The decade was a period of notable unrest

in the Highlands - it was the time of the 'Crofters' War' in Skye - and was marked by, among other things, a notable head of feeling against landlords who, it was said, were striving to make their lands profitable by clearing the remaining Highlanders to make way for sportsmen. This is precisely what MacDonald depicts.

MacDonald's comment in his letter to Watt is far more applicable to What's Mine's Mine rather than The Elect Lady, both as regards content and timing. Greville has simply made a mistake.

Bibliography

1. Bibliographical Material

The standard bibliographical account of MacDonald's work is still J. M. Bulloch's, A Centennial Bibliography of George MacDonald (Aberdeen, 1925). For editions and criticism of his work which have appeared since 1969, the reader should consult the supplements published by The Bibliothek entitled Annual Bibliography of Scottish Literature, edited by James Kidd and Robert H. Carnie (1970 -). Also useful are the annual articles on 'The Year's Work in Scottish Literary Studies' published in supplements to Scottish Literary Journal, edited by Thomas Crawford (July 1974 -). As with any aspect of nineteenth-century fiction, the guides to research published by the Modern Language Association can be useful: Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research, edited by Lionel Stevenson (Cambridge, Mass., 1964) and Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research, edited by George H. Ford (New York, 1978).

2. Works of MacDonald's Used in this Thesis

The following are the works on which this thesis is based. In each case, the date of first book publication is given, along with the abbreviation used, if any, in the thesis. The working copies used in the preparation of the thesis were not, however, first editions; only the Works of Fantasy and Imagination, Salted With Fire and

the non-fictional works are exceptions to this. In the case of the other Scottish and English novels, one-volume reprints of Victorian editions were used, while in the case of the children's stories and the works of adult fantasy, modern editions were available. I give publication details of these last.

<u>A Dish of Orts</u> (1893)	(Orts)
<u>Alec Forbes of Howglen</u> (1865)	(AF)
<u>At the Back of the North Wind</u> (1871)	(ABNW) (New York, 1950)
<u>Castle Warlock</u> (1882)	(CW)
<u>David Elginbrod</u> (1863)	(DE)
<u>The Diary of an Old Soul</u> (1880)	
<u>Donal Grant</u> (1883)	(DG)
<u>The Elect Lady</u> (1888)	(EL)
<u>England's Antiphon</u> (1874)	(Antiphon)
<u>Heather and Snow</u> (1893)	(H & S)
<u>Lilith</u> (1895)	(L) (London, 1962)
<u>Malcolm</u> (1875)	(M)
<u>The Marquis of Lossie</u> (1877)	(ML)
<u>The Miracles of Our Lord</u> (1870)	
<u>Paul Faber, Surgeon</u> (1879)	(PFS)
<u>Phantastes</u> (1858)	(Ph) (London, 1962)
<u>Poetical Works</u> , 2 volumes (1893)	
<u>The Princess and Curdie</u> (1883)	(P & C) (Harmondsworth, 1966)
<u>The Princess and the Goblin</u> (1872)	(P & G) (London, 1949)

<u>Robert Falconer</u> (1868)	(RF)
<u>Salted With Fire</u> (1897)	(SWF)
<u>The Seaboard Parish</u> (1868)	(SP)
<u>Sir Gibbie</u> (1879)	(SG)
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<u>What's Mine's Mine</u> (1886)	(WMM)
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<u>Works of Fancy and Imagination,</u> 10 volumes (1871)	(F & I)

3. Major Modern Critical Studies

The following are either monographs on MacDonald's work, or major essays, or books containing an extensive treatment of an aspect of MacDonald.

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4. Other Works

This section is a selected list of works which have proved useful in the preparation of this thesis.

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