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One Between Worlds:
The Sibyl Archetype in the Works of George MacDonald

by

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Table of Contents

	Abstract	v
	Acknowledgements	vi
I.	Introduction	1
II.	Chapter One: The Sibyl in History	7
III.	Chapter Two: The Highlands and Romanticism	25
IV.	Chapter Three: Seraph Sibyls	47
V.	Chapter Four: Toward the Fantastic	73
VI.	Conclusion	83
	Notes	87
	Bibliography	88

Abstract

The archetype of the Sibyl has historically borne many dualities: good and evil, beauty and monstrosity, divinity and earthliness, paganism and Christianity. It spans many boundaries. This makes it a perfect vehicle for the introduction and fulfilment of George MacDonald's intentions in his fantasy novels the Curdie books, Phantastes, At the Back of the North Wind, and his fairy tales, such as "The Golden Key". The Sibyl's characteristics of wisdom and secret knowledge, particularly with regard to moral and divine insight, allow the archetype to act as a medium for the enlightenment of the hero in MacDonald's tales. MacDonald adds to the archetype, fashioning it to suit his purposes more closely. He makes it a vehicle for the transcendence of his young heroes and heroines, both morally and spiritually. In MacDonald's work, the Sibyl's magical and mystical aspects cater to the fantastic. His influence on this genre is considered here. The folk traditions of his native Scotland and his consuming interest in the transcendental writings of the German Romanticists have shaped the archetype, making it a highly specialized figure within his works. Furthermore, the influence of the Romantics requires the development of a new literary mode. Thus, the Sibyl archetype serves the needs of MacDonald's religious, fantastical, and romantic inclinations through which he develops a new literary form of fantasy.

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Introduction

The wise woman, or Sibyl, archetype is traditionally invested with an immense body of traditional lore, as well as a talent for prophecy. Her secret knowledge and mystical powers have traditionally been regarded as a mystery and, as a result, she has experienced varying degrees of popularity since antiquity. She has also endured various transformations in order to survive the passage of time. The Sibyl archetype is important because it embodies intuitive knowledge and insight and has remained a powerful figure in the fairy tale since its inception. It is this secret knowledge which remains a constant in the figure of the Sibyl.

For Scottish writer George MacDonald (1824-1905), this attribute of the Sibyl's persona was evidently attractive. The wise woman is a dominant paradigm within his fairy tales and fantasy novels. In his stories, the Sibyl takes on a central role in the plot, directing the hero or heroine, and acting as a spiritual guide. Her power is the ability to decipher the divine will of the universe and offer this divinity to the hero or heroine. She comforts the heroes and heroines in times of need and awakens their awareness so that they become the master of their own inner divinity and moral bearing.

The traditional role of the Sibyl, as described by Marina Warner in her book, From the Beast to the Blonde, acts as the basis for MacDonald's own interpretation of the archetype. However, in the history of the Sibyl, she has worn a number of guises. She has been a prophetess, a witch and hag, a grandmother, a monster, a fairy queen, as well as several more incarnations. Her various forms have added to her having a diversity of characteristics from deformity and monstrosity to sainthood and divinity. The dominant aspects of her character remain her wisdom and insight. These aspects of the Sibyl will

be the primary focus of this study. More specifically, we will be concerned with the way in which MacDonald builds on the characteristic of wisdom in his Sibyls.

It is sufficient for our purposes at this time to define the Sibyl archetype as a wise, mysterious, independent woman with the mystical power of prophecy, who is capable of directing the actions of others. As a result of her origins, she is associated with both the pre-Christian world and the Christian world.

In George MacDonald's works, the Sibyl takes on a new set of characteristics. Her new form is constructed from modifications of existing characteristics, which suit his purposes. In MacDonald's works, we encounter a dramatic, and often creative, use of traditional elements of storytelling mingled with innovative and unique ideas and themes. It is this blend of tradition and inventiveness that typifies the character of MacDonald's work.

His novels and tales were written at a time when the tradition of the longer literary fairy tale was being developed. MacDonald builds on a rich tradition of folklore that stretches back to classical times; one set down by those writers and collectors of tales such as the Grimm brothers and Charles Perrault. MacDonald's tales are derived from this same tradition.

The influence of certain more modern movements in literary thought also had a distinct influence on his work. As we will see later, he was greatly influenced by the German Romantics of the preceding generation. Novalis was a particularly strong influence on his ideas and perceptions of literature and spirituality. From Novalis, MacDonald acquired the view that intuition and imagination, controlled by moral

character, were the best way to witness divinity. This idea appears as a theme in many of his stories. For our purposes in this study, the influence of Novalis is important because his philosophy appears in the character of the Sibyl. We can, then, expect MacDonald's tales and novels to involve a philosophy and spirituality, qualities that are not usually the norm in the fairy tale.

MacDonald's interests and beliefs, as we will see, combine to shape his tales as well. More important, these interest and beliefs shape the image of the Sibyl in his tales. They alter the Sibyl in such a way as to create a variation of the archetype that can act as a vehicle for the presentation of his ideals. Interestingly, this process does not dramatically change the Sibyl. Rather, it emphasizes certain aspects of her character.

His Scottish background, with its own unique body of folklore, adds to MacDonald's otherworldly character of the Sibyl. In addition, the Scottish folk tradition serves as an influence on the moral character of the Sibyl. The influence of the Scottish tradition, with regard to its mystic inclinations, contributes to the influence of the German Romantics in his works. In MacDonald's tales, the Sibyl comes to represent imagination and intuition and the use of these two faculties reveals the divine and moral forces in nature.

MacDonald's Curdie novels, The Princess and the Goblin (1872) and The Princess and Curdie (1883), as well as the novel, At the Back of the North Wind (1871), have long been regarded as children's classics. The Curdie novels are often praised for their characteristic of entertaining children rather than their didactic nature. This is not to say that these books lack substance. The spiritual and moral vision in MacDonald's work

offers the reader a fully elaborated philosophy to consider. This philosophy, however, does not dominate the tale. Rather, it is interwoven in the plot in such a way as to be a believable part of the story. The themes of his stories are presented in a subtle and carefully structured system of symbolism. For this reason, his tales are accessible to the adult reader. The depth of symbolism that is attached to the Sibyl in these novels and tales allows for a reading that involves many layers of meaning. MacDonald's use of allegory is such that it reveals much more than it conceals as a result of the increased content and the recognizable nature of the symbolism. Therefore, we find that the character of the grandmother in the Curdie books is often surrounded by Biblical symbolism. Examples of this are doves and baptismal images. In fact, Biblical symbolism can be found accompanying nearly every one of the many grandmother or wise woman figures who appear in these stories. This is of particular interest to this study because the grandmother figures in these stories play a role similar to that of the Sibyl archetype. In the Curdie books, the grandmother plays a role much like that of Saint Anne who, having been the grandmother of Christ, acted as a protector and nurturer, but also was a figure who existed in both the pre-Christian and the Christian world. As we will see, the figure of the Sibyl offers a variety of possible influences on any literary work, both in the content and in the form of the tale takes.

MacDonald's disregard for the didactic conventions of contemporary writings for children is directly responsible for the dynamic nature of his tales. They are deeply spiritual and contemplative. At the same time, they are entertaining to young readers. This depth in his tales is largely a result of his use of the Sibyl archetype. The Sibyl's

"baggage," her "bag of tricks," adds to his tales in such a way as to develop a dynamic, entertaining, and intellectual tale, all combined within a story written for children.

The final aspect of the Sibyl to be considered here is her association with the process of telling a tale. The Sibyl archetype, particularly its association with spinning, weaving, and secret knowledge, is the embodiment of the voice behind the fairy tale. Marina Warner explores this aspect of the Sibyl in From the Beast to the Blonde. To explore MacDonald's work with regard to this aspect of the Sibyl we will have to examine how the Sibyl he creates interacts with the voice behind his tales. MacDonald's tales are quite different from the traditional fairy tale in their thematic content, and this is reflected in the voice behind his tales.

In this study, I will explore MacDonald's work through the Sibyl figures whom we so often meet in his stories, and will illustrate how MacDonald uses this archetype to introduce his ideals. Thus, it is the interplay of MacDonald's intentions and the traditional image of the Sibyl archetype which is of interest here. In order to explore the interplay of these diverse elements, we will need to first build a picture of the Sibyl archetype as it appears in the tradition of the fairy tale. For this, Warner's book will be a major source of historical information. Next we will need to examine those influences acting on MacDonald which shaped his view of the Sibyl. We will need to look to his roots in the Scottish Highlands and to his interest in the writings of the German Romantic writers, particularly Novalis. Finally, his religious interests will be considered, especially the way in which they manifest themselves in symbolism in these stories. By exploring his work in this way we can gain an intimate knowledge of the way in which

MacDonald's work introduced a dynamic new life and depth to the genre of fairy tales. It is through the Sibyl that he achieves this goal.

Chapter One: The Sibyl in History

The archetype of the Sibyl comes to us from classical times and beyond, and has gone through several transformations since that time. It is my intent in this first chapter to build an image of the traditional figure of the Sibyl which we can compare to the figure that appears in MacDonald's tales. With this image we can note those aspects of the Sibyl which MacDonald emphasizes and those which are undesirable with regard to his intentions.

The Sibyl began as a mythic figure who gained importance as a prophetess. As she developed through the next several centuries, she witnessed Christ's birth, was persecuted as a witch, and appeared as a grandmother figure. Her many guises include fearsome monstrosities, hags, beautiful enchantresses, prophetesses, and more. Her more benevolent and mystical characteristics are the source for MacDonald's Sibyl. Ultimately, the Sibyl appears in the figures of Saint Anne and the Queen of Sheba who, Marina Warner asserts, were two of the more important incarnations of the Sibyl (xxiv). Despite the popularity of the Sibyl in the traditional literature, there is very little information, historical or critical, available for the study of this fascinating archetype. For this reason, I will rely heavily on the work of Marina Warner for the historical information found in this chapter. I will be using Warner's extensive historical study of the fairy tale genre, From the Beast to the Blonde, as a resource for the exploration of this archetype and, by doing so, we will gain an understanding of the nature of the traditional figure of the Sibyl in legend and fairy tale. Warner's book charts the development of the voice behind the fairy tale and those characters who contribute to the figure of the wise

old woman who is so often found in these stories.

Despite the diversity of guises she wears, several of this archetype's characteristics remain unchanged. She remains a wise and independent figure capable of controlling her own existence. Her wisdom can often be interpreted as a gift for prophecy and secret knowledge. She always carries a supernatural aura derived from her prophetic and magical powers and, because of this, she remains an outsider, not so much an abomination, but someone to be feared and respected.

The term Sibyl actually refers to a number of figures who originated in antiquity, many of whom appear in the myths and even histories of the classical age. These figures are invariably female, and all possess the attributes of enchantresses and seers. Heraclitus tells us that the first of these was the product of the romantic engagement between the Lamia (a female monster: part snake, part woman) and the god Zeus. The child born of this union became the first woman to sing the oracles and was given the name, Sibyl, by the Libyans. Entire libraries of Sibylline prophecies were later created and revered after a fashion as the truth. It is easy to see how a figure who is the daughter of a god and monster, who has the ability to foretell the future, could find herself adopted into the realm of the fairy tale. Indeed, Warner asserts that the Sibyl's origins make her specifically suited to the fairy tale: "Here . . . we find an early trace of the later, wonderfully rich and suggestive legend about an oracular woman with some hidden, snaky nature, which later influences the fairy tale cast of fairy queens, demon brides, wicked enchantresses and cursing godmothers" (67).[1] In MacDonald's novel, Phantastes, Anodos encounters several female characters who fit this description. For example,

Anodos enters the cottage of such a woman who sits and reads from a mysterious "dark old volume". When they meet, she offers her prophetic warning, "You had better not open that door" (61). Behind the door, he acquires the hideous shadow that he comes to fear. It is later revealed that the woman in the hut, the Sybil, is an ogress. This characteristic of being monstrous in some way is shared by many sibyls and will be discussed later when we explore the figure of the Sibyl further. It is important to note that the monstrous aspect of the Sibyl is not necessarily a part of her personality. Rather, she often only appears monstrous. It will become obvious that we are taught by MacDonald's Sibyl to look beyond appearances. Monstrosity is indicative of the secret knowledge attributed to these figures, which is partly the cause of their ogrish reputation. Monstrous attributes are often kept a secret, as with the figure of the Queen of Sheba.

The sibyls enjoyed a prominent position in antiquity because of their prophetic visions. Some of the early prophecies attributed to the sibyls included references to the new saviour, and this effectively inducted the sibyls into the Christian "pantheon." As a result of some of these visions, they were not denigrated and rejected by the early Christians. Warner cites a notable writer of the time, Lactantius, and his book The Divine Institution, as a source for the illustration of the sibyls' transition into the Christian tradition. After giving a description of each of the sibyls, says Warner, Lactantius went on to offer examples of their prescience. Many of these Sibyls illustrate their gift of prophecy in their foresight of Christ's future role with assertions like, "He will satisfy five thousand from five loaves and a fish from the sea." Another example of the Sibyl's place in the Christian world came from the "Sibyl's Song" which contains similar

prophecies, and even manages to spell out the name of the saviour in the first letters of each line in the verse:

> Judgement's sign: the earth shall drip with sweat;
> Everlastingly the King shall come from heaven, who
> Shall be present to judge bodies and the world.
> Unfaithful and faithful shall thus behold God
> Sublime among the saints, at time's utmost limit. (68)

The Sibyl's relationship to Christ made it impossible for her to take the same path into the realm of suspicion that her pagan relatives soon took as Christianity began to dominate the Western world. Saint Augustine himself claimed the Erythraean Sibyl to be a "citizen of the city of God" (70). This dual nature of the archetype must be stressed. The Sibyl of antiquity acts as a hyphen between the pagan realm of her origin and the Christian realm. Her conformity to the ideals of Christianity will become a common motif in the development of the archetype, especially with regard to Saint Anne and the Queen of Sheba. We will see that MacDonald builds upon the Sibyls Christian qualities in order to introduce certain spiritual beliefs into his stories.

Before we move beyond the Classical Age, we should examine female figures from this time that contribute to this archetype. Karen Rowe suggests that other mythic females, such as Philomela, also acted as influences on this figure of the Sibyl. The myth of Philomela found in Ovid's Metamorphosis contains some of the earliest traces of the mysterious woman who can be found both telling and featuring in fairy tales. Rowe stresses the depiction of the weaving or spinning that Philomela performs as characteristic

of the classic wise woman of fairy tales. Later in the story Philomela is transformed into a songbird, thus illustrating another characteristic of this figure, that of singing or chanting. Philomela uses her weaving as a means whereby she can reveal to her sister, Procne, that Procne's husband Tereus has raped her and removed her tongue to keep her from revealing his horrible crime. Rowe states that what happens in this myth is important because of what it has to say about the power of the female in tales and as the teller of the tale. Even though Philomela's speech is impaired, she can still utilize a secret language, that of weaving, to convey her message to Procne. For Rowe, the power of speech, especially a secret speech, and its relationship to women is the key to understanding significance of this the Philomela myth:

> The paradigm that I envision is, therefore, twofold. First, Philomela as a woman who weaves tales and sings songs becomes the prototype for the female storytellers of later tradition, those *sages femmes* whose role is to transmit the secret truths of culture itself. It is critical to note . . . that the conveyor of the tapestry is herself an old and trusted servant woman. . . . Second, Ovid, the male poet, by appropriating Philomela's story as the subject of his myth also metaphorically reinforces the connection between weaving and the art of storytelling. (63-64)

The important aspect of the Sibyl revealed in the myth of Philomela is weaving and spinning, which becomes a metaphor for the power of speech, particularly that of women's speech and storytelling. Indeed, in the fairy tale tradition there are so many examples of wise women performing the tasks of weaving and spinning that Ruth

Bottigheimer tells us, "in the German tradition . . . Jacob Grimm asserted that 'the spindle is an essential characteristic of the wise woman' " (64).[2]

Karen Rowe reveals something of the nature of these women who spin and weave. She suggests that the figure of the Sibyl should be viewed as a repository of folklore and traditional knowledge:

> If not through graphically woven tapestries from Philomela's loom, then through the mesmerizing voice, wise women (like Metis, Athena, the Fates, Scheherazade) passed on the secret lore — of birthing, dying, destiny, courtship, marriage, sexuality — from generation to generation. (64)

It is this characteristic of having or embodying "secret lore" that is indicative of the Sibyl's air of mystery and wisdom. We will examine the subject of the Sibyl's secret knowledge again later when we discuss the Queen of Sheba as a Sibyl. This statement also illustrates the primary role of so many fairy tale Sibyls, such as the Old Princess in MacDonald's Curdie novels. Old Irene is depicted as a wise grandmother who spins, and who instructs her young granddaughter in various aspects of life. Finally, this statement is a comment on the symbolic nature of the fairy tale. Fairy tales are often seen as lessons in life, particularly those directed at young people. Young women, more often than young men, find themselves the subject of the lessons taught in fairy tales. We only need to look at the initiation experiences of such heroines as Cinderella, Rapunzel, or Sleeping Beauty to see examples of the typical young woman of the fairy tale. Their goal is to win a rich and handsome husband, thus ensuring stability, and presumably happiness, in their lives.

A more ancient influence on the development of the Sibyl occurs in the symbolism of the moon and its various associations with female power and sexuality. The Moon-Mother or Moon-Goddess is a cross-cultural figure, a figure who watches over the lives of women. The moon's association with the female menstrual cycle is a part of her power: "The Moon Goddess was thus giver of life and of all that promotes fertility, and at the same time she was the wielder of the destructive forces of nature" (Harding 111). Here we see yet another duality in the character of this archetype. This figure holds secrets of life, of female power, and at the same time she is monstrous and destructive. This secret knowledge is a common thread weaving its way through all of these various incarnations of the Sibyl archetype. It is this duality that we will see manifested in later images of the Sibyl as her image is changed by the rise of a fear of witchcraft.

The Virgin Mary is closely associated with this figure because there has been a long tradition of Moon-Goddesses who experience immaculate conceptions or are the mothers of gods (Harding 99). One such image of the Virgin Mary depicts her as standing on a crescent moon, which is symbolic of her chastity (Hall 213). Here again, we see a gap between the pre-Christian and the Christian world in the Sibyl figure.

In MacDonald's stories, there are several female characters who are associated with the power of the moon. Most obvious is the Princess of "Little Daylight", who has a curse set upon her that causes her age to fluctuate in correspondence to the moon's cycle. More closely related to the topic, however, are the figures of the North Wind, and the grandmother of Princess Irene of the Curdie books. In the dream of the girl, Nanny, in At the Back of the North Wind, the North wind is depicted as a mysterious woman who lives

in the moon (268-72). Another instance in which the moon is linked to a female character in MacDonald's stories involves the grandmother of Princess Irene. The old woman has a light that she keeps burning in her room atop the castle tower. To those who view it from outside it appears to be the moon. This strange light attracts Curdie to her room after he has slain one of her pigeons (The Princess and Curdie 17). The moon as a symbol in MacDonald's works will be discussed later when we address his use of symbolism and allegory. It is worth noting that, when Curdie finds Irene's grandmother in her room, she is busy spinning like the wise woman of many fairy tales. The association of MacDonald's Sibyls with the moon and with the art of spinning firmly attach this character to the classical image of the Sibyl.

Another example of those figures of legend who, like Philomela, have contributed to the role of the Sibyl is the goddess Baubo. This rather obscure, and often ignored, figure is the wet-nurse to the goddess Demeter. She is symbolic of many things as Winifred Milius Lubell states: "Baubo can be seen as a much older symbol for the power and energy of female sexuality. She can also be viewed as a trickster figure who with her own jokes, magic, and laughter embodies fecundity and fertility" (3). With a reputation for being vulgar, and with a rather odd deformity (Baubo is commonly depicted with her mouth in the place of her genitals), she is not a figure of myth who is well known to the modern world. However, her obscene appearance was not a part of her original incarnation as a fertility goddess. This is a characteristic she gained later which tarnished her reputation and made it possible to associate her with witchcraft and other disreputable pursuits (Lubell 5). Her association with witchcraft surrounded her with a sense of evil or

suspicion. She became a figure of darkness. As Lubell asserts: "It is in this role of night creatures or bogies that Baubo and her daughter Mise were frequently associated with Hecate, the great mistress of transformations" (18). Here we can see a definite relationship with the image of the sibyls since they, too, were seen as witches, particularly later in the Middle Ages (Warner 120-2).

Witches are also known for their secret knowledge. There are any number of characters who appear in fairy tales as witches and evil fairies. One only needs look to those evil fairies who so often set curses upon the young women of such tales as "The Sleeping Beauty" to find examples of their presence in the tradition. One should note that these characters appear in some of MacDonald's works; however, when they do, they are in adaptations of traditional tales, such as "The Sleeping Beauty". The Sibyls that appear in MacDonald's original works, those we are most concerned with here, are very different from the hags of the tales of the Grimm brothers and Perrault. His Sibyls play much more important roles in the lives of his heroes and heroines. Rather than serve as the antagonist, as the evil fairies very often do. MacDonald's Sibyls are benevolent and instructive, as we will see later.

It is difficult to imagine that the figure of the witch could become absorbed into the image of the Virgin Mary, but this did happen, though it took place in a rather indirect fashion (Lubell 114). The Sibyl's appearance in Christian theology is a result of the habit of the Christian church of absorbing much of the pagan symbolism of the Pre-Christian era. Thus, we find images in which the Virgin Mary is found depicted in scenes taken from the iconography of the goddess Baubo. An example of the iconography of Baubo

being adopted by Christians is the image of the Virgin holding a pomegranate (Lubell 38). Early Christian attitudes involved a fear of women's sexuality. The symbol of woman was Eve, who brought evil into the world. This, in turn, came to reinforce Baubo's association with the mystical and with witches, since witches were lusty women and Baubo fit well into this mold. It is helpful to illustrate the prevailing view of women's sexual power in the early Renaissance by noting an excerpt from the Maleus Malificarum of 1484 published by Pope Innocent VIII, which described women's relationship with witchcraft and sexual powers. This text made the assertion that: "All witches come from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable . . . . That she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations . . . . Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort with devils" (Quoted in Lubell 144). This document shows just how poor a reputation the figure of the Sibyl had gained in the Middle Ages. It is at this time that the Sibyl becomes tainted by carnality and becomes distanced from the Christianity with which it had become associated. Later, this figure will be accepted back into the arms of the Christian church in its transformation into the figure of Saint Anne in the seventeen century.

The next major stage in the development of the figure of the Sibyl takes place in the Middle Ages. With the rise of witchcraft in this age, the Sibyl took on a darker tone. She retained all of her mystical energy and her prophetic abilities, but people came to accept her far less and she became a symbol of dark power. Women with strange powers and the ability to foretell the future were not looked upon favorably when the entire population, particularly the Church, was afraid of witches. In MacDonald's work, we

find the same opinion of the Sibyl presented in the miner folk of The Princess and the Goblin. They express a fear of Old Irene, but their fear is founded on their lack of knowledge with regard to her nature. Curdie's mother explains this fear after he mentions Old Irene (154-6). The magical power of the old lady is what causes people to fear her. In MacDonald's story, however. the old woman's goodness is only witnessed by those who can believe in her power as a divine gift. We will examine this more closely later when we explore the symbolic nature of the Sibyl in MacDonald's tales.

As a result of fear and misunderstanding, as well as several stories written on the subject of the Sibyl's evil power, she came to be seen as an enchantress who might prey on those around her, as is the case in the tale of Guerino the Wretch (1391). In this tale the Sibyl lives in a secluded grotto. Guerino travels there and is promised riches and many wondrous foods provided he remains in her grotto. This sibyl turns out to be monstrous and vile, and Guerino escapes from her grotto (Warner 3-5). What this tale reveals is a transformation of the Sibyl figure. She becomes more monstrous in the Middle Ages, and. as we will see. the Medieval Age was a seed bed for fairy tale themes and subjects. The Sibyl, then. is the origin of the many hags and beguiling figures who appear in later fairy tales. An example of this figure is the trickster figure in the tale "Diamonds and Toads" who tests the kindness of the two sisters and lays a curse on the one who is not kind. In his Pentamerone, Giambatiste Basile also offers many examples of these wicked figures in what he calls "Ghuls." The witch's forbidden knowledge, her occult nature. blacken the image of the Sibyl in the Middle Ages. It is not until the emergence of the cult of Saint Anne that the image is seen in a benevolent light.

Prior to the seventeenth century, a form of the archetype emerges that is an amalgam of the images of the old sibyls and the witch. This is the character of the Queen of Sheba, who is a direct descendant of the classical sibyls. The Queen of Sheba is seen as an exotic figure because of her association with the Middle Eastern and northern African regions (Warner 105-6). Because of her origins, she is considered to be an outsider to the people of the Western world. However, she makes an appearance in the Bible at King Solomon's court and engages in a contest of wits with him in the form of an exchange of riddles, some of which are prophetic. Her wisdom allows her to play at intellectual games and riddles with the wise Solomon at a level equal to or above his own. Warner states that the Queen of Sheba remains anonymous in the Old Testament. Rather, she is called "the queen of the south." In the New Testament, Jesus tells us that she is one of the just who will rise up to condemn unbelievers (quoted in Warner 98). Her role is similar to that of the old sibyls. She is seen as both pagan and Christian, and as a mysterious wise woman: "She . . . also embodies — as a seeker after wisdom, as a putter of hard questions, as a woman who learns and passes on what she has learned — the multiple roles of fairy tales and their tellers from the seventeenth century onward" (Warner 97).

This statement refers to the Queen of Sheba's role as a questioner of King Solomon. As a Sibyl she both questions and provides prophecies. Like the sibyls, she also embodies knowledge and independence. Her independence is revealed in her single-handed challenge of King Solomon and the power of wisdom she demonstrates.

Her importance as a Christian figure is exhibited in the way in which she foresees

the fate of Christ. This prophetic ability is most evident in the Jacobus de Voragine's Lives of the Saints of 1483, where she comes to Solomon's court and is about to cross the footbridge into his home. Her insight allows her to discern the true nature of this footbridge. Warner tells us that the incident in which the Queen of Sheba encounters the footbridge is a prophetic experience:

> . . . her own wisdom includes the foreknowledge of the cross-tree. She recognizes there and then that the footbridge is made of the tree which will prove the future instrument of salvation — the same wood that will become the cross of the Crucifixion. She therefore draws back from desecrating it by setting her idolater's foot upon it, and wades the stream instead . . . . (Warner 100)

Here again we see the way in which these female figures are assimilated into Christian theology because of their insight and awareness. The Sibyl is a powerful figure, capable of seeing the significance of all things.

This wisdom and mystical insight influence the later images of women in folklore and fairy tales. Indeed, we find that, in more than one instance, it is Princess Irene's grandmother who guides the sequence of events in MacDonald's Curdie books. An example of this occurs in the beginning of The Princess and Curdie when Old Irene's moon-light summons Curdie to her spinning room atop the castle. It is here that she reveals to him that the king is in danger. She has foreseen what is happening to the king and what will happen to the kingdom if he is not saved. This episode in turn acts as a catalyst for Curdie's heroism in the story since it is at this time that he is introduced to his goal of saving the king.

Like witches, though, the Queen of Sheba has a flaw, a monstrous side, which causes her to be seen as an abomination. In the Queen of Sheba's case, it is her foot that is deformed. She often appears in images as having the foot of an animal, most often that of an ass or goose. This deformity is something she keeps hidden, and it acts as a symbol of her depravity. It is also a symbol of her hidden knowledge (Warner 112). This hidden knowledge became associated with forbidden knowledge which, in turn, moves her another step toward the realm of witches. For instance, in some medieval legends the stream through which she wades cures her vile affliction, an act which illustrates her willingness to accept Christianity as her system of beliefs, even though she comes from pagan stock (118). In this regard, the Queen of Sheba is redeemed. She appears in medieval romances which were, in turn, a great influence of the later fairy tale. Regardless of whether she was seen as evil or good, the Queen of Sheba appears most often as a seeker of wisdom and knowledge, both common and esoteric (125). This wisdom sets her alongside all the other wise women of history and legend. As we will see, the wise woman's wisdom is a crucial aspect of MacDonald's vision of the archetype, particularly her divine awareness.

The final Sibyl figure to be discussed here is Saint Anne, who came into popularity in the seventeenth century when cults dedicated to her worship grew up throughout Europe. Saint Anne's most important addition to the archetype is her benevolent and maternal nature. As kindly old grandmother of the Christ child, she cannot possibly appear in any unfavorable light. She brings to the archetype that which it needs to become more benevolent in nature, to raise it up from out of the low state into

which it had fallen. As Warner states, "The image of Saint Anne, the good wise grandmother, exerted a benevolent influence on the related figures of women with occult or even forbidden knowledge" (95). She is also seen as the instructor of Mary who taught Mary the Scriptures (The Book of Saints 63). The grandmother of Irene in the *Curdie* books is most like the figure of Saint Anne in that, like Saint Anne, she actively participates in the instruction and enlightenment of her grandchild. She can even be seen baptizing the girl (The Princess and the Goblin 149). The story of the rise of the cult of Saint Anne began with the emergence of various relics that were reputed to have been associated with her. It is with Anne of Austria, Queen of France, and mother of Louis XIV that we see how Saint Anne was regarded. Anne of Austria was unable to bear children for the first twenty-three years of marriage to Louis XIII. She attributed the arrival of her child to the intercession of Saint Anne (Warner 81). Saint Anne, then, became a symbol of fertility and nurturing.

In her role as the grandmother of the Christ child we see another indication of Saint Anne's importance as a Sibyl figure. She is commonly seen caring for the Virgin Mary and the Christ child. She is also a figure who, like the sibyls and the Queen of Sheba, originated in the pre-Christian era. Because Saint Anne predates the birth of Christ, and even the Virgin Mary, she is seen as a witness of the pre-Christian era. She is therefore knowledgeable of both worlds, having experienced both. Also, like these figures, she comes to be included in the Christian faith. Her case, as the mother of Mary, is stronger, in this regard, than that of the other Sibyl figures. She also foresees the future role of the child as the Saviour. Her iconography often shows her pointing toward the

Christ child indicating his importance (Warner 85). Her wisdom and knowledge are not confined to this gift of foresight. Saint Anne appears as a learned woman who can read, and who uses the scriptures as her prophetic device:

> Anne's recourse to the authority of scripture, like a Sibyl, provides assurance of her dependability as an instrument of God rather than an original narrator. In this respect, the literate Saint Anne acts as a counterweight to the illiterate storyteller — or at least proposes that a master narrative can be followed faithfully by an old woman: Anne acts as a wishful euphemism, countering prevailing prejudice. (Warner 90)

Saint Anne's role, then, is similar to that of the other Sibyl figures. She embodies female knowledge, prophecy, and the melding of pre-Christian and Christian worlds. She belongs to the sisterhood of those figures who have exerted such a strong influence on the tradition of the fairy tale.

In the archetype of the Sibyl we find an interesting concoction of ingredients that could compete with any witch's brew. The archetype is one that mixes the mystical and forbidden powers of a witch with the holy insight of a prophet. The Sibyl embodies the commonly perceived image of women as fertile and nurturing. She also acts as a repository of knowledge used to guide the young into adulthood. Saint Anne's role as the kindly grandmother standing behind the young mother of Christ like a benevolent spirit is indicative of this aspect of the Sibyl figure. What this picture offers us is a view of the fairy godmothers, tellers of tales, and bearers of folklore, who appear in so many of the fairy tales that we know. Not all of these figures have all of the characteristics of the

model presented here, but all contain important aspects of Sibyl. It is now our goal to explore the way in which George MacDonald interprets this archetype in his work, but first we must explore the particular influences that molded MacDonald's view of the Sibyl. His Scottish roots, his interest in German Romanticism, and his Christian upbringing, will be discussed with regard to the way in which MacDonald's interests and beliefs shape the archetype of the Sibyl. By doing so, we will reveal the significance of the Sibyl within his works.

Chapter Two: The Highlands and Romanticism

To gain an understanding of the way in which George MacDonald reformed the Sibyl archetype, we will now need to examine those influences that shaped his beliefs and perceptions of the world in which he lived. For this we need to look to the traditions of the Scottish highlands in which he was born and raised. More importantly, we need to examine the ideals of the German Romantics of whom MacDonald became a follower in his early twenties (MacDonald's religious beliefs, and resulting interest in Christian allegory, a crucial element of his work, will be discussed later in the subsequent chapter).

The argument here includes the ideal qualities he attaches to his Sibyls and their functions, which alter the appearance of the archetype. MacDonald's view of the Sibyl archetype will be particularly evident in the difference between the Sibyls who appear in the fairy tales of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries and those who appear in his work. He resurrects a more ancient, mythic, image of the Sibyl, one that has not degenerated into the hag so often found in the tales of the Brothers Grimm or Charles Perrault. Rather, the figure who appears in MacDonald's work is more attuned to the prophetic Sibyls of antiquity, who can appear in the guise of the Moon-Goddess, and who hold secret knowledge. The Sibyl who appears in MacDonald's work has a vastly different function from the Sibyl we find in Perrault's work. MacDonald's Sibyl is infused with a specifically Scottish influence, which provides her with a new environment in which to live: fairy land. In the tales of both the Grimm brothers and Perrault, fairies do appear; however, this nomenclature is little more than a label they carry. In many of the more popular tales, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Beauty and the Beast",

and "Puss in Boots", for example, no fairies appear at all.[3]

In those tales that have fairies, such as "Diamonds and Toads", the fairy is a hag who can be labeled as a wicked fairy. She is there to test the kindness of the two sisters whom she meets. When one is unkind to her, the trickster fairy sets a curse on her causing all her words to come out as snakes and toads. The polite sister is given the gift of speaking diamonds. A similar wicked fairy is found in the tale of "Rapunzel". In this fairy tale, the trickster fairy punishes a woman by taking her daughter away and locking the girl in a tower. These fairies are solitary and malicious, and rarely show the sort of wisdom or spiritual power that can be witnessed in MacDonald's Sibyls. As we will see in the tales of "Farquhar MacNiell" and "Thomas the Rhymer", the Scottish fairies are a very different breed than those found in Perrault and Grimm. In the Scottish tales, fairies have a greater sense of community, and a greater moral and spiritual awareness. Though they are feared, this fear is more a result of a respect for their power. In the tales of Thomas and Farquhar, we find that the fairies and Sibyls have a benevolent side. As well, these figures have an otherworldly quality that is not a part of Perrault's fairies. We will see an example of this transcendental aspect of the Sibyl/fairy when we examine the fairy queen who meets with Thomas the Rhymer. Here, then, we can see where the Scottish folk tales differ from the popular tales of Europe. The appearance and characteristics of MacDonald's Sibyls are much closer to the Scottish fairy queen than it is to the figures of the tales of the Grimm brothers and Perrault, as we will soon see (see page 33). The fairy quality of MacDonald's Sibyls is a result of his background.

It was in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, in northern Scotland that George MacDonald

was born in 1824. In this place, steeped in a rich tradition of folklore and superstitions, the young MacDonald was introduced to the traditional tales of Scotland. In her book, George MacDonald – A Short Life, Elizabeth Saintsbury describes him as an adventurous explorer and dreamer. She goes on to point out that Joseph Johnson, in his biography of MacDonald "calls him a mystic on the grounds that in him, 'spiritual apprehensions of truth often transcend his appreciation of mundane necessities' " (68). Saintsbury describes the landscape in which he and his siblings would enjoy outings:

> They roamed . . . over heather-clad moors and hills, exploring the little streams and burns which bubbled out of the hillsides or lay in the peat cuttings, forming bracken fringed pools. The boys liked to think these were inhabited by Kelpies [water-sprites]. For George in retrospect, these expeditions were full of nostalgia. (22)

Saintsbury makes it clear that this was a time in MacDonald's life when wonder and imagination, as well as the freedom of youth, were important. He enjoyed a good childhood which we see returning in his stories. The kelpie is one of the fairy creatures of Scottish folklore. It is specific to Scottish lore, and usually appears as a water-horse living in the streams and pools of Scotland (Arrowsmith 119). In the worlds that MacDonald created, we find such odd creatures. An example of this occurs in the character of Lina who appears in The Princess and Curdie.

In this landscape, MacDonald's imagination bloomed early. Stephen Prickett offers an indication of the inspiration for the archaic lands depicted in MacDonald's tales:

> The ruins of the old faith [paganism] and of clan warfare — the romantic abbeys

> and castles — were a part of George MacDonald's childhood landscape; and what, in the rest of his family, was no more than a slight fey streak, was to blossom in MacDonald into a fully elaborated mysticism. ("The Two Worlds of George MacDonald" 19)

Scottish folk tradition is filled with fairy lore, perhaps more so than the more popular "fairy tales," such as those of the Grimm brothers, because, in them, fairies and fairy queens really do appear. They live in mounds just over that hill or in the forest to the north. In the Scottish tradition, humans can share in some of the strange powers of fairies. These people have the gift of "sight" and are called seers. MacDonald himself wrote a story about seers called "The Portent" (1865), in which he describes the strange talents of a traditional Scottish seer.

Anne Ross, in her book, The Folklore of the Scottish Highland, describes the tradition of the seer and the role of the seer in folklore as well as in history. A seer is reputed to be able to see visions, both favorable and unfavorable, of future events. The seers are similar in this regard to the Roman and Greek sibyls who were noted for their prophetic abilities. Ross notes a number of famous seers from Scottish history. It is a tradition that dates back to when the first Romans came to southern Scotland and encountered the traditions of the druids (34). The Romans did not venture so far north as Aberdeenshire, but possibly influenced the folk tradition nonetheless. The sibyls were revered for their gift of insight among the Romans who made their first travels in Scotland at the end of the first century AD. Therefore, MacDonald's Sibyls could take their image from a more ancient source as is evident in their aspects of enchantresses,

prophetesses, and moon-goddesses. For example, in the Curdie books, Old Irene frequently exhibits her prophetic ability, such as when she foresees the fate of the kingdom if the poisoning of the king continues (The Princess and Curdie 66-76). She also shows up later in the story in a disguise, playing the prophetess. She tries to tell the people of the kingdom of the crisis happening, but they choose not to listen to her (184-90). It is fitting that the chapter in which this incident takes place is called "The Prophecy." She tells them that she knows best what it is that they should repent (180). As well, she gives the folk of the castle the warning, "You invite your own fate" (190).

The image of the Sibyl presented by Old Irene is in stark contrast to the hags of the Grimm brothers, Perrault, and Giambatiste Basile, who were otherwise, in a literary sense, MacDonald's forefathers. His Sibyl, however, seems to share her origins with both ancient Scottish and Roman sources. This supports the view of MacDonald's Sibyl as something closer to the origin of the figure. MacDonald's Sibyl is a direct descendant of the ancient sibyls, the Queen of Sheba, and Saint Anne, but mingled in this bloodline are strong traces of the fairy queens of Scotland.

In the Scottish tradition of the seer, there are a number of characteristics that do not occur in the figure of the classical sibyls. Ross states that the seers of Scotland are morose people. It is their gift that makes them so because of the power of their insight. Prophecy is a double-edged sword which causes grief to those who see undesired visions. As Ross says, they are "given to moroseness on account of their undesired power" (44).

Despite this, the seers are celebrated. The Brahan Seer is perhaps the most famous of these. One day while walking, his mother was given the gift of a magical blue

stone for her courage by the spirit, who was once a princess of Norway who was lost at sea. His mother gave the stone to her son so that it would one day make him famous for his prophetic abilities. His prophecies were reputed to be quite accurate and profound. He foretold of the breakdown of the clan system, as well as the destruction of certain well-known dams and monuments. Another of his prophecies was to foresee the building of the Caledonian Canal 150 years before its construction (Ross 34-37). Belief in the seers even continues to this day in parts of Scotland (49). Thus, when we look back to the classical role of the Sibyl, we can also see that the notion of a secret knowledge, even a forbidden knowledge is also a common theme in the folklore of Scotland.

In the Curdie books, the Old Princess Irene foresees the destruction of the kingdom by those who would have the king die. It is for this reason that she brings Curdie to meet with her and enlists his aid in order to set things right. To a lesser degree, her power is revealed when Curdie first goes to her room in the top of the castle. She knows that it is Curdie on the other side of the door even before he knocks, and says, "Come in Curdie" (21). In At the Back of the North Wind, the North Wind exhibits a "second sight" in her recognition of Diamond's special nature. She picks him as her chosen one and comes secretly to his room to take him on trips through the sky. It is Diamond whom she takes on a journey to her back at the north pole to see the wondrous land there. She is also an agent of fate in that she is given the task of sinking ships at sea. The storms she controls indicate that she is in the employment of some higher power. When asked by Diamond about why she sinks ships, she explains the nature of her work to him: ". . . how my breath has that power I cannot tell. It was put into it when I was

made. That is all I know. But really I must be going about my work" (67). Thus, it is evident in his books that MacDonald believed in the powers of seers.

Another indication of the influence of the Scottish tradition on MacDonald can be seen in a study of the various subjects and themes of traditional Scottish fairy tales. These themes and subjects occur often in his works. We will see that the interaction of MacDonald's Scottish roots and his interest in the German Romantics developed, in his work, a set of themes and motifs that are unique to his Sibyl. These elements combine to create an otherworldly Sibyl who serves to enlighten the heroes and heroines of his tales.

If we examine the fairy tales of Scottish tradition, we see a number of distinctive themes and ideas. In them there is an abundance of appearances by fairy folk and fairy creatures. This is in contrast to those told by Charles Perrault. In Perrault's tales, we find wicked stepmothers, ogresses, and others, but the only characters named as fairies are the very unfairy-like hags who so often lay curses on the fair maidens. For example, in Perrault's tale "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" one such being, simply called an "old fairy," causes the unending sleep of the young princess because the fairy was forgotten and did not receive an invitation to a feast (Opie 108-9). A similar instance of a slighted fairy's wrath occurs in the tale "Diamonds and Toads".

In the fairy tales of Scotland, the fairies are a race of their own. They live in mounds around the country and appear as either sprite-like beings or tall, beautiful, elfin creatures with auras of magic about them. Perpetual youth is also a common characteristic of these beings. Evidence of this can be seen in the tale of Thomas the Rhymer when the fairy queen explains to him the temporal workings of the land of the

fairies in relation to his own world. In fairy land, time moves incredibly slowly. This characteristic of fairy land supports the idea that fairies (and Sibyls) have an otherworldly quality. Because time moves strangely in fairy land, the seven years of service he is to give her passes for him in only three days while he is in fairy land (Scottish Fairy Tales 17). In the world of men, time has sped by, but in fairy land time has barely passed. Seven years have passed in the human world and neither he nor the queen has aged.

If we examine the tale of "Thomas the Rhymer" further we gain an insight into the workings of the Scottish fairy world. In it there appears a figure not unlike that of the Sibyl. This is the tale of a man, Thomas, who is taken by the beautiful Queen of fairy land into her native realm. When they first meet, he mistakes her for the Virgin Mary. She enlists him, by way of trickery, to serve her for seven years. It is her beauty that causes him to forget himself and allow himself to be beguiled even though he knows it is dangerous to have relations with "the fair folk":

> For he knew that it was dangerous for mortals to meddle with Fairies, yet he was so entranced with the Lady's beauty that he begged her to give him a kiss. This was just what she wanted, for she knew that if she once kissed him she had him in her power. (Scottish Fairy Tales 11)

The fairy queen's power over mortals is strong. She is not limited to this aspect of her character, though.

The fairy queen's power over Thomas allows her to act as his spiritual guide. Unlike the tales we find in Grimm and Perrault's collection, the Fairy Queen does not treat Thomas badly while under the influence of her power. In the tales of "Guerino the

Wretch," which come out of the sixteenth century, the Sibyl, who holds Guerino in her grotto, seeks to keep him as a slave and works as an agent of the Devil who collects the souls of men (Warner 3-4). This image of the Sibyl is one that influenced the tales of Basile and the Grimm brothers and leads to its induction into the tradition of hags and witches. In contrast to the hags of the European tales, Thomas's fairy queen teaches him the way in which one must live one's life in order to live it right. She offers instruction in the form of a crossroad and its three paths, some of which are easier than others to travel. The easiest of these is the path of evil. The hardest to travel leads to righteousness. The last, the most appealing, leads into fairy land which no mortal may take. This suggests that the fairy race is that of a "higher" state of being. (This will become important again later when we discuss the unconscious with regard to the ideas of Novalis.) It is this path on which she takes him. On the way she gives him the Apples of Truth to eat, so that "his lips will never more be able to frame a lie" (15). At the end of the tale, Thomas realizes, when he is released from her service, that he has spent only three days in fairy land and is loath to leave. This adventure he has undertaken is an enlightening journey. It also shows that the Sibyl figure of the Fairy Queen serves as a spiritual guide and moral guide for Thomas. She is a receptacle for a highly specialized form of secret knowledge which is directed toward the spiritual and moral enlightenment of mortals. This form of secret knowledge is the very same one that MacDonald's Sibyls hold.

In Phantastes, the strange mystic woman who lives in the hut with four doors leads Anodos on a similar spiritual journey. Anodos finds her spinning in her cottage. He describes her in much the same way one would describe an immortal fairy woman.

The enthusiasm is evident in his words:

> The most wonderful, I thought, that I had ever beheld. For it was older than any countenance I had ever looked upon. There was not a spot in which a wrinkle could lie, where a wrinkle lay not. The skin was ancient and brown, like old parchment. The woman's form was tall and spare . . . straight as an arrow . . . her eyes . . . were absolutely young, — those of a woman of five-and-twenty. (145)

This Sibyl is characterized by the same agelessness and grace as figures of antiquity. We must keep in mind that the hags and wicked fairies who appear in the fairy tale are not being regarded here as the same Sibyls who appears MacDonald's work because they do not embody the wise and prophetic aspects of the archetype.

The Old Princess Irene of the Curdie books appears in a similarly ageless form. In The Princess and the Goblin, her granddaughter asks, "Are you a hundred?" To this she answers, "Yes — more than that. I am too old for you to guess. Come and see my chickens" (22). This careful description of these figures infuses them with the same ancient wisdom and ageless beauty that are characteristic of the Queen of Sheba, Saint Anne, and the sibyls of classical times. The woman of the cottage teaches Anodos several tales and poems as she spins her wheel. Anodos says, "While she sung, I was in Elysium, with the sense of a rich soul upholding, embraced, and overhanging mine, full of all plenty and bounty" (135). It is a positive and spiritual influence that he finds in the cottage of this woman.

Each of the four doors of the cottage offers Anodos a new lesson in life. When he leaves through each, he encounters a different sort of dream vision and lesson. She calls

three of the doors, "Sighs," "Dismay," and "the Timeless." As well, there is the door through which he entered the hut.[4] Thus, like the Fairy Queen of the tale of "Thomas the Rhymer", the woman of the hut in Phantastes is an immortal spirit guide. Her role is not so far removed from the guiding role played by the Sibyls of tradition, but it is a specialized guidance that is specifically attuned to MacDonald's motives. His motives, as we will see, are directly taken from a deep interest in the theories of Novalis.

Other aspects of Scottish fairy tales reveal their influence on MacDonald. There are countless tales, like "Thomas the Rhymer," that tell of mortals who go to visit the fairies in their homes and homeland. In the story of "Farquhar MacNeill" a boy visits one of the fairy mounds that surround his home. He falls down into their mound and finds the fairies feasting and dancing. Rather than run, he joins in the fun and dances with the fairies. As in the tale of "Thomas the Rhymer", Farquhar is also beguiled by the fairies and is made to stay with them. He forgets his work and wishes to stay with them for the rest of his life. While he is with the fairies, he enjoys a luxurious, carefree life outside of the boundaries of time (Scottish Fairy Tales 239-44). This tale illustrates the close proximity of the fairy lands to those of common mortals.

It is easy to see a parallel between this and the fairy land of Phantastes. For Anodos, fairy land is as near to him as his dreams. When his story begins, he is visited by a fairy who claims to be his "great-grandmother." He is at first confused by the fact that she first appears very tiny but, then grows to "normal" size. She tells him, "You shall find the way into Fairy-land to-morrow" (18). Indeed he does find it. He finds the way into fairy land when he wakes the next morning to discover that fairy land has engulfed

his bedroom. He cannot help but relate this miraculous transformation to the reader:

> I looked up, and saw that the branches and leaves designed upon the curtains of my bed were slightly in motion. Not knowing what change might follow next, I thought it high time to get up; and springing from my bed, my bare feet alighted upon a cool green sward: and although I dressed in all haste, I found myself completing my toilet under the boughs a great tree, whose top waved in the golden stream of the sunrise with many interchanging lights . . . . (7)

Like Thomas and Farquhar, Anodos has to remain in fairy land once he has entered it.

Anodos is also witness to a number of enlightening lessons on his journeys in this land, as we have seen. In his case, however, rather than stay until he finds a way to escape or be released, he must remain until he comes to terms with his nature, until he rids himself of the dreadful shadow that haunts him. He cannot leave fairy land until he learns to live independent of the various maternal (Sibyl) figures that he meets in his journeys (Manlove, Scottish Fantasy Literature 91). Until they have shown him that he need not rely on them but, rather on his own inner faith, he is not free to move on. Along the way, he must be guided by these women into a realization of his true relation to the world and nature. Thus, Anodos's journey is not at all unlike that of Thomas the Rhymer. Thomas is shown the various paths the are open to him by the fairy queen. In the end, Thomas chooses to eat the apple. Thus, he takes a moral path in that he chooses to never lie again. Both Thomas and Anodos gain a higher consciousness of the workings of the universe. The Sibyls, in their respective stories, awaken an aspect of Farquhar and Thomas that is required for inner harmony.

Though the Scottish tradition had an impact on the appearance and tone of MacDonald's work, it is the influence of the German Romantics which shaped his stories most. The Romantics, especially Novalis, influenced the meaning and philosophy behind MacDonald's works, and, from them, he borrowed a view of the transcendence immanent in all life. The interaction of his Romantic inclinations with his religious convictions is crucial to understanding what MacDonald was trying to achieve in his stories. The central figure in this mix of philosophies is the Sibyl.

If we look to Novalis, we can see what MacDonald is trying to achieve with his Sibyls. MacDonald is using the Sibyl as a means of activating the moral character of his heroes and heroines. Novalis would call this an ignition of the "moral organ" in the human being. As he says, the "moral organ" is "An organ that could energize the other senses while being a visionary organ for man's infinite desires" (Scholz 75). We can link this idea of the "moral organ" with MacDonald's own words on the nature and function of the imagination: "We dare to claim for the truth, childlike humble imagination, such an inward oneness with the laws of the universe that it possesses itself an insight into the very nature of things" (Hein 150). It seems evident that Novalis's "moral organ" is essentially the same as MacDonald's idea of the imagination. Further proof of this link lies in Novalis's Hymnen an die Nacht. In this work, Novalis associates the night with dreams and the imagination. As the sunrise approaches, he says, "Gone was wonder-working Faith, and its all-transforming, all-uniting angel-comrade, the Imagination" (Novalis). MacDonald himself made the translation of Novalis's work presented here. The imagination in MacDonald's work, as Rolland Hein tells us, is "essential to the

apprehension of spiritual truth" (150). Further support of this interpretation of MacDonald's view of the imagination can be found in Colin Manlove's book Christian Fantasy:

> The object of MacDonald's fantasy is to express the inner world of the imagination, and in so doing make it available, to those spiritually open to it, something of a sense of the immanent God. Thus his fantasy takes on the character of the creative unconscious itself — mysterious, imbued with archetypal images, dreamlike in its transition from one item to another. (166)

Thus, the imagination is a crucial element in understanding MacDonald's goal, as well as the influence of Novalis on his works.

The Sibyl's role in MacDonald's philosophy is centered on the idea that she is the embodiment of an ideal in spiritual awareness. Her power and otherworldly quality invest her with all the characteristics MacDonald envisions as ideal in a human being. Her wise woman role makes her particularly suited to the instruction of others. We will see this image of the Sibyl evolve when we examine the various ways in which she interacts with the heroes and heroines of MacDonald's tales.

The influence of the German Romantics on MacDonald manifests itself in his view of how nature functions. Along with a stress on the imagination as an important tool for apprehending the transcendent, the Romantics also stressed a divergence of literature from the realm of traditional western forms and ideas. This idea is seen in Philip Gilbertson's description of Romanticism's intent to revise literary aesthetics. He tells us that a major goal of Romanticism was "its challenge to the idea of fixed,

insurmountable limits of human nature and impassable boundaries of experience inherited from the great western traditions" (143). In the 1820's, Hegel offered insight into the urgency among the Romantics to find a new literary form via the exercising of our innate ability to create: "[The artist could work] with any traditional forms, conventions, themes, styles, as his skill permits. He is not bound by Greco-Roman or Christian or other traditions. Art has become a free instrument of the creative mind" (Pipkin 98). Novalis would add to this, with true transcendental fervor, and call the work of the Romantics "a tremendous intimation of the creative will, of boundlessness, of infinite multiplicity, of the sacred particularly and the universal capability of the inner man" (Gilbertson 143). This philosophy not only justified experimentation, but also allowed MacDonald to use the Scottish tradition as a major influence in his work. These Romantic ideas also gave him permission to attach further significance to various common forms, such as the Sibyl archetype. As a result, MacDonald was able to lead the way in creating a literary form based on the utilization of pure imagination, fantasy.

MacDonald also gained from the Romantic thinkers an interest in the unconscious mind and an interest in dreams. It was through imagination and contemplation that a human being became more in tune with his/her place in the universe. At the end of Phantastes MacDonald quotes a fitting comment made by Novalis on this subject. "Our life is no dream, but it ought to become one, and perhaps will" (180). At the end of another of his novels, Lilith (1895), we find the same quotation (420).

In his book, At the Back of the North Wind, MacDonald has Diamond make some very Novalis-like comments concerning the dream of Diamond's friend Nanny. In the

dream, Nanny is taken to the moon where the North Wind, in the form of a moon-goddess, lives. There she is made to wash the windows of the moon-house and, while she is doing this, she is tempted to look at the lady's golden bees, which the North Wind keeps in a closed box and which Nanny has been told to not disturb. As one might expect, some of the bees escape because of Nanny's disobedience and the North Wind must destroy them. In secular allegory, the bee is symbolic of the Golden Age and thus the destruction of the golden bees can be seen as a loss of innocence (Halls 43). Taken in this context, Nanny has committed an act similar to the act Eve performs that results in the expulsion from paradise. Because of Nanny's failure, the North Wind brings Nanny back to earth and says the girl cannot live in the moon. In other words, the girl's disobedience and lack of discipline makes her unworthy of a place beside the North Wind. On the other hand, Diamond, the good boy who is selfless and righteous, is allowed to be with her.

Diamond, then, has the insight to try to enlighten Nanny as to the nature of dreams and in his words we see the influence of Novalis. First, Diamond says that he is "so fond of dreams" (261). He tells Nanny that it was the North Wind who sent Nanny her dream and tells her there is truth in dreams, that dreams are important. He tells her that dreams take one to the back of the North Wind which, for him, is a transcendental place, the place where he had previously seen great beauty. Nanny does not understand him and thinks that Diamond must be what the others call him, "God's baby," meaning that he is deluded. In response to this he says, "How kind of them!" (we must note the double meaning of the name "God's baby"). When she says that dreams are only dreams, he tells

her, "But I know besides they are something more as well" (264-5).

MacDonald owes a debt to Novalis for his philosophies of the imagination, dreams, and spiritual harmony. It must be stressed again that the character who introduces these philosophies in this book is the Sibyl figure, the North Wind. It is the North Wind who offers the opportunity for the enlightenment of Diamond and the lessons he learns. One must also note the imaginative way in which the ideals of Novalis are presented by MacDonald, which only serves to illustrate his interest in the Romantic ideals of imagination. This is a novel written for children after all, and as such, these deeply philosophical ideas make an unexpected appearance. MacDonald's treatment of traditional forms and ideas makes his work important for the time in which they were written.

More proof of MacDonald's adherence to the Novalis's ideas is found in The Princess and the Goblin. This is evident in the symbolic construction of the world surrounding the castle in which the Old Princess Irene lives. It is a simple triple-layered construction in which the filthy, simple, goblins live on the lowest tier in their caves beneath the castle. Humans live in the castle, and Old Irene lives in the topmost part of the castle closest to Heaven. She takes on a seraphic form and represents the higher form of consciousness by being closest to God. Rolland Hein asserts that she represents the "highest self" (34). For MacDonald, as we have already seen, the highest self is one characterized by an inner harmony and a freedom from self-centered behavior. Old Irene guides the humans, her great-granddaughter and Curdie, and is farthest from the vulgar goblins. Colin Manlove stratifies this layered construction into the subconscious

(goblins), the super-conscious (humans), and the unconscious (Old Irene) (Scottish Fantasy Literature 95). The goblins, who live in the earth quite literally lead filthy lives. Their names indicate their superficial view of the world. The prince of the goblins is named Harelip. Here, then, we see that MacDonald consciously intended the Old Princess Irene to be a representative of dreams, and of an enlightened soul. She is magical, and mysterious, and takes on a godlike direction of the people of the area. As we have seen, she directs Curdie to help rescue the king. We will also see that she helps to guide Curdie and Young Irene out of the goblin tunnels with faith alone.

Old Irene introduces, as do all MacDonald's Sibyls, a new set of characteristics to this ancient archetype. His Sibyl is the one who holds the secret knowledge capable of revealing the divinity within a person. Thus, we can see in the figure of Old Irene the personification of the "moral organ" because it is this faculty that allows an individual to apprehend the infinite. We can see the way in which MacDonald effectively tailored this archetype to his needs and created a new form.

The dream became, for Novalis, a higher state of consciousness because of its relation to the unconscious mind and the imagination. When Novalis delineated his view of how the world was to be romanticized, he used the mathematical analogy of "raising to a higher power". This he called *potenzieren*, "a consciously creative infusion of the extra-ordinary into the commonplace" (Pipkin 395). The dream is a state of pure imagination in which the unconscious takes control. In Hymnen an die Nacht, Novalis deifies the dream when he says, "Holy Sleep — gladden not too seldom in this earthly day-labor, the devoted servant of the Night" (Novalis). Further evidence of Novalis's

obsession with dreams is evident in the quotation that MacDonald placed at the end of both Phantastes and Lilith. That MacDonald subscribed to Novalis's particular view of the world is evident in his view on the nature of life and religion:

> The love and truth of God he believed could be conveyed to the human spirit by the power of the imagination through the many varied experiences of life – in the beauty of nature, the love of parents, wife, or child, in the joys and sorrows of human life. (quoted in Saintsbury 84)

We can see here that MacDonald placed great importance on the imagination as a guide for the reading of the world around him. It is also, for him, the means by which one can witness the power of God. The imagination, then, becomes a tool for conceiving. Without the imagination one could never conceive of anything other than that which can be seen. Therefore, this view is remarkably similar to the Romantic view of the nature of the world. Again it is the importance of the imagination which MacDonald focused on, particularly its facility for "raising to a higher power."

This transfiguration of ideas and elements is what takes place in the world of fantasy literature and just what we find in MacDonald's work. We see this process most pronouncedly in the figures of the Sibyls. Though they are marvelous creatures, they become accepted as integral parts of the created worlds in which they live. In Phantastes, the inhabitants of fairy land, the several Sibyls that Anodos meets, are treated not as freaks or monsters, but as members of the nation of fairy land. Phantastes, one must remember, is also a dream in written form. It is in this strange world of Anodos's unconscious that these creatures, the White Lady, the woman of the hut with four doors

and the girl who dances about with her crystal ball, all live. In his dreams they are the common folk of fairy land. This same acceptance is a characteristic of the Scottish tales. As we have seen, the fairies make their homes next to the houses of mortals.

This interest in the ancient figure of the Sibyl, and of Scottish folklore, combined with the influence of the German Romantic movement, creates a variation on this archetype that is uniquely MacDonald's own. It is an archetype that foreshadows the genre of fantasy, a form steeped in myth, imagination, and transcendentalism. The Sibyl figure becomes a representation of a higher consciousness, of a transcendental force that can guide mortals to a better place. Emphasis on the transcendence of the Sibyl archetype is MacDonald's more important addition to this archetype. No longer do these mother figures, prophets, moon-goddesses, guide young women into puberty and womanhood. Nor do they signal the arrival of the Savior. They do carry with them traces of these functions and in some cases they serve these functions. However, they are tailored by MacDonald's unique influences and become something more mystical and magical. Their role of storyteller also is not lost but, in the case of MacDonald's Sibyls, it is evident that their tales are specifically focused on the transcendence of the human mind and soul. This, we will see, was to be a concern that occupied MacDonald's thoughts. It is known that he was preoccupied with solving the mystery of what happens to us after death. It is for this reason that there is an abundance of death imagery to be found in his works. In the next chapter we will see how MacDonald's imaginative use of allegory was integral in expressing his spiritual views. As well, we will witness the Sibyl's role in his vision.

Chapter Three: Seraph Sibyls

One of the major reasons for the popularity and strength of George MacDonald's fantasy novels and fairy tales is his creative use of allegory. In this chapter we come to the most important aspect of his Sibyl: her role in the spiritual enlightenment of the hero and heroine. MacDonald did not intend to confuse his reader with obscure or densely packed allegory in his stories. The majority of his tales are directed at an audience of children, we must remember. Rather, he intended to offer allegory as a means by which readers could discover moral lessons for themselves. He utilized allegory and symbolism to expound his own unique vision. For instance, MacDonald's stories often involve an interest in death and the notion of the afterlife. In Phantastes and At the Back of the North Wind the tales end with a triumphant death of the protagonist. He believed in the afterlife and considered it to be the human goal. For MacDonald, the afterlife is a celebrated union with God. MacDonald's interest in the afterlife is a part of what Hein calls his "doctrine of becoming" (30). Hein also tells us that "MacDonald felt deeply that the great responsibility for mankind is to grow into complete godlikeness so that men shall become one with God" (30). Thus, MacDonald's interest in death is not a macabre one, rather a yearning to join the infinite. We can see the same interest exhibited in Novalis's Hymnen an die Nacht when he exults, "In everlasting life death found its goal, / For thou art Death who at last makes us whole" (Novalis). MacDonald's works are filled with examples of characters who either seek, or rather achieve, the afterlife. In Phantastes, Anodos dies, and in the process of this he achieves a freedom of conscience, a freedom from his dreaded shadow. In At the Back of the North Wind, the boy Diamond

finally dies in the end implying that he has returned, in spirit, to the beautiful place at the back of the North Wind. Death, for MacDonald, is a release from the worldly realm and all it entails: material things, base desires, and temporal reality. In his tales we see many creative illustrations of characters moving on a path toward this ideal.

MacDonald's method for the presentation of ideas, such as that of the afterlife, involves the exercising of the imagination. We need only look to the land at the back of the North Wind to find an example of a creative depiction of the afterlife. Diamond is taken to the land at the North Wind's back when he is very ill (94-98). There he witnesses paradise and returns to the world healed as if he has been reborn. In fact, during the remainder of the book, Diamond shows an increased spirituality and confidence. He takes over the cab business when his father is becomes ill (133-40). In Diamond's case, death is the path to rebirth. The implication for Diamond is that he is Christlike. This distinction is hinted at in the name, "God's Baby," which he acquires. In order to both be understood and to present his profound ideas, MacDonald needs to do so in a creative manner, especially for the entertainment of the children who read his books. However, it is also important that the symbolism he uses be accessible to the reader. It is almost impossible to miss the Christian symbolism attached to Diamond in At the Back of the North Wind. Therefore, rather than simply taking on an instructive tone, he carefully interweaves his morals into the allegory of the story in the form of recognizable, but fantastical images. This is by no means a trait unique to his work, but his characters and the events to which he attaches allegorical meaning makes for an original use of symbolism.

Jack Zipes and Martha Sammons comment on MacDonald's tales with regard to the nature and aim of the symbolism in them. Zipes tells us that MacDonald's aim is to achieve a transformation in the reader by making it possible for lessons of spirituality to be taught within the story. He calls him a pioneer for his contributions to the fairy tale in this regard. "MacDonald stressed the aesthetic reversal of the traditional fairy tale schemes and motifs and social transformation in all fairy tales," says Zipes (Victorian Fairy Tales xxii). What Zipes is describing here is something that MacDonald adopted from the German Romantics, which is their emphasis on the invention of the new literary genre of fantasy. MacDonald made a conscious attempt to alter the tradition of the fairy tale by adding a strong Christian element to his tales. Sammons states that, by putting religion in the fairy tale and not within a realistic context, MacDonald puts it in a language possible for all to read, even those repulsed by biblical language (3). MacDonald himself comments on the use of innovation in literature and calls it a product of the imagination:

> 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 Fancy: in either case, Law has been diligently at work ("The Fantastic Imagination" 24).

We will see that much of the symbolism present in his tales is directed to the presentation of his spiritual and moral beliefs. We will also see that, in all cases, it is the Sibyl figure who is the agent of this enlightenment and the embodiment of imagination in these tales.

She is also the focal point of the symbolism present in MacDonald's tales. In MacDonald's fairy tales, the heroes do not marry into a royal line, nor do they gain worldly possessions. The reward for his heroes is finding divinity within themselves (Zipes Victorian Fairy Tales xxiii).

In order to aid in the process of enlightening his reader and awakening the reader's imagination, MacDonald attaches symbolism to the mythic figures of the Sibyl. It is by making these powerful women the focal point of his allegory that it can be realized and understood. Such a well-established archetype acts as a signpost and attracts the reader's attention because it is a familiar figure in the tradition of the fairy tale, and, indeed, within the body of MacDonald's own work. By investing his Sibyls with such a concentration of symbolism, MacDonald makes them appear even more magical and mystical. The Sibyl in MacDonald's stories acts as a repository and vehicle for the actualization of his ideals. These ideals are what he intends to instill in his reader, as he tells us when commenting on his view of the writer's responsibility: "The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is not to give him things to think about, but to wake up things that are in him . . . or . . . make him think things for himself" (quoted in Sammons 68). This philosophy is partly the result of his interest in German Romanticism and partly a result of his religious ideals. His wish to make people aware of their own inner divinity and the transcendence so important to the Romantic movement are evident in the connotations of this statement. We can see here the notion of igniting one's imagination and bringing out the moral goodness within oneself that is so important in what MacDonald gained from Novalis.

MacDonald saw the potential for enlightenment in everyone, as is evident in the character of Diamond. If a poor, uneducated child living in the harsh, cold streets of London can achieve an enlightened state it is possible for anyone to do so. Of course, in his case, he has the North Wind to help him in his journey, but one must remember that she, as a Sibyl, is a symbol of the imagination and the transcendence that MacDonald is so concerned about. Thus, MacDonald wants us to see the Sibyl as symbolic of the will and possibility in every human being, even poor children, of achieving transcendence. She does not see the outer appearance of a person. Rather, the Sibyl focuses on the inner divinity of an individual which has not yet been realized. As we have already seen, the Sibyls in MacDonald's stories have a specialized role, and we will see that they are also deeply involved with the symbolism present in these works. In the vast majority of cases where allegory appears in his novels and tales, that the allegory is either attached to, or created by, a Sibyl figure.

His intent in his fantasy novels and fairy tales was to use symbolic constructs to "rouse" the conscience of his readers and stimulate their "moral organ". The manner by which this effect of MacDonald's symbolism is actualized is observed by Rolland Hein. He speaks in reference to the symbolic rose-shaped fire, that the Old Princess Irene has in her room , which burns away impurities in The Princess and the Goblin:

> The symbol does not — it cannot — capture or imprison the insight so as to define it precisely and hence exhaust its meaning . . . Art may function this way, helping us glimpse what the mind has not otherwise discerned, and, when the glimpse is momentarily in focus, arousing a profound intuitive response deep

within us. (Sammons 70)

Here Sammons refers to MacDonald's intention to give only hints to guide his readers' interpretation of his work, to make these hints a part of the experiences of his heroes and heroines rather than highlighting them as lessons. MacDonald was opposed to pure allegory such as John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, in which each character's symbolic role is made blatantly obvious in his/her name. It was his opinion that a fairy tale can never be wholly allegorical because if it where it would cease to be a fairy tale ("The Fantastic Imagination" 25-6). What is important about these "hints" is that they have to be recognizable enough, and ingrained in the human consciousness, to be effective. Again, this is where the archetype of the Sibyl offers aid, because as a recognizable figure, the symbolism of these stories surrounds her.

In The Princess and the Goblin, the rose-fire of the Old Princess is one example of how MacDonald carefully manipulates symbolism. It also shows how the Sibyl figure is intimately connected to the allegory of the story. The fire is used as a purging or cleansing agent to make Young Irene pure again after having been in the goblin tunnels (see page 60). The use of smoke, or incense, to cleanse holy places is a common practice in religious rituals. MacDonald uses the smoke and odor of the fire to burn away undesired impurities in the human being. As we will see later, the goblin tunnels represent the base desires and materialism of the human being. It is the contamination of the goblin realm that is being removed from Young Irene. This is a form of alchemy, which itself is a significant aspect of what MacDonald tries to depict in his tales. Alchemy involves a transformation from within, which is the essence of the development

of many of MacDonald's heroic characters (see page 57).

A further illustration of how MacDonald depicts traditional Christian themes in a creative fashion can be seen in the character of Diamond from At the Back of the North Wind. When Diamond decides that he wants to go to the country at the back of the North Wind, he discovers that, in order to do so, he must go through the body of the North Wind herself. She tells him that this is a difficult journey (80). The North Wind acts as a door for Diamond to travel through (92). More than this, she carries him to the threshold of this realm, and his journey through her body is a struggle. What appears in this instance is a birthing image, or rather a rebirth. The country he finds at her back is the most beautiful and perfect thing he has ever seen. Before he goes to this strange land, we are told that Diamond is very ill. Thus, this episode makes for a creative interpretation of a common Christian theme: death and resurrection. Diamond is near death and goes to a paradisical place through a very angelic figure, a representative of God. There he sees many spiritual things and then returns to the earth through the body of the Sibyl figure. This sets Diamond up as a Christian sacrifice, an idea which is further supported by the nickname, "God's baby," that he is given by the others characters in the book. Therefore, in this instance, we can see the imaginative way in which MacDonald transfigures biblical imagery in his fairy tales. We also see his use of the figure of the Sibyl as an agent for the introduction of his allegory. The Sibyl as vehicle for symbolism will become a common theme in all his tales, as we will soon see.

Finally, we see that the transcendence that Diamond experiences is common among the characters in MacDonald's tales. In the Curdie books and Phantastes we find

the soul enduring a struggle of faith, both in God and in oneself. Curdie and Anodos illustrate this notion well. In The Princess and the Goblin there is an instance when Curdie goes into the caves that are the territory of the goblins through a hole he has made in the miner's caves. In order to keep from getting lost in these unfamiliar caves, he uses a piece of string tied to his pick axe, which he leaves outside in the mine (111). This brings to mind the myth of the Minotaur in which Theseus uses string to provide a trail for himself to come back out of the Labyrinth. Symbolically, then, Curdie is associated with a cunning mythic hero. This is not the whole significance of the string. It provides a means by which we can witness a trial of faith and awareness in this young hero.

While Curdie is in the goblin tunnels, his string is disturbed and he is lost in the darkness among his enemies. If, as we have seen, the goblin tunnels represent a lower, more basic, form of the mind, it is only natural to think of the goblin lair as a place of baseness in other terms. This means that their lair is associated with the realm of primitive and material concerns, something quite removed from the "heavenly" apartments of the Old Princess Irene. It is in this realm that Curdie becomes lost (Manlove, Modern Fantasy 86). The earthy quality of the goblin tunnels becomes even more evident if we consider the nature of the goblin's feet. Feet are commonly associated with baseness and earthly things. The foot is the part of the body farthest from the heavens. The goblins in The Princess and the Goblin have particularly vulnerable feet. In other words, their feet are their weakness and eventually their undoing since they cannot conquer the castle while their feet are being constantly trod upon by the soldiers and Curdie. Their baseness is a weakness that prevents them from gaining access to the

high place in which Old Irene lives.

The Young Princess Irene, coming from the castle, finds her way to Curdie and leads him out. What is important about this is that Irene has slowly been introduced to the wisdom of her grandmother in a way that suggests she may become like the old woman. Their common name is also an indication of a link between the two. The bond of ancestry is another issue to consider here. Irene is, after all, a descendant of the Old Irene and it has been argued that a woman is in essence a part of her mother and her mother's mother (Patterson 169). We can also include Curdie's mother in this sisterhood because she is aware of the true nature of Old Irene, as we see when she convinces Curdie that the old woman can exist (The Princess and the Goblin 152-61). Thus it is the Sibyl's power which saves Curdie from the base realm. More proof of this occurs when they are nearly out of the tunnels and Irene assures Curdie that they are safe now that the torches of the pursuing goblins seem to be growing more distant:

> Just as they thought they saw a gleam behind them, the thread brought them to a very narrow opening, through which Irene crept easily, and Curdie with difficulty.
>
> "Now," said Curdie, "I think we shall be safe."
>
> "Of course we shall," returned Irene.
>
> "Why do you thing so?" asked Curdie.
>
> "Because my grandmother is taking care of us."
>
> "That's all nonsense," said Curdie. "I don't know what you mean."
>
> "Then if you don't know what I mean what right have you to call it nonsense?" asked Irene, a little offended. (139)

Curdie's reaction to Irene's confident statement is typical of the rudeness of the goblins. His time among them has colored his mood and manner. He insults his friend and no longer recognizes the guiding power that the grandmother has. He no longer has the faith and awareness to see, whereas Irene easily accepts the reality that her grandmother is protecting them like a guardian angel. She has faith in the power of this seraphic Sibyl (Manlove Modern Fantasy 88).

As we learn early on in the book, Irene also has her own secret stairway up to the room of her grandmother, a secret knowledge that allows her to approach this mystical old woman. That she has faith is evident in her comment on the string that leads her out of the goblin tunnels. As she says, even when they are in total blackness and hope seems lost to Curdie, "I must follow my thread, whatever I do" (135). This string has become a symbol of her faith, which prevents her from falling into the same state as Curdie as a result of being among the goblins. Here Curdie can only question her again, to which she answers, "You will see when you get out" (135). In effect, then, Curdie's string represents his faith which he lost among the goblins.

The miners with whom Curdie works also suffer from the same inability to see the old woman. When, at one point, the Old Princess Irene appears before them, they do not see her as the shining mysterious lady, but as a thing to fear. The miners are also blinded by their constant need to be digging for material things. They are incapable of seeing beyond the earthiness in which they dwell day after day. Curdie's mother comments on this as she convinces him that Irene's grandmother really does exist (152-7).

In terms of the Minotaur myth, this episode is a reversal with Irene taking on the

role of the hero rather than that of the betrayed Ariadne. Irene's strength and bravery make her a perfect choice for the development of a future Sibyl. Her faith in the secret mystical powers of her grandmother is even more important in this regard. Along with the strength of the female Sibyl figures that often appear in his works, instances such as this indicate one of MacDonald's beliefs. He was in favor of women's self-determination and the equality of the sexes (Zipes Victorian Fairy Tales xxv). His method for communicating the equality of all beings deserves praise in that he expresses this belief in a medium which has always been steadfast in its adherence to sex roles and stereotypes; the fairy tale. In the fairy tale, young women are very often depicted as damsels in distress who need to be rescued by some handsome prince. Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, and Snow White all fit this model in that they wait for their savior, whereas Irene actively seeks out her own savior and, in the process saves Curdie. His rejection of traditional roles again refers to MacDonald's insistence on the transformation of literary traditions, and again it is the Sibyl whom he uses as a vehicle for the communication of his ideals of spirituality and morality. This vision is one of the soul's struggle toward a realization of the divinity within each of us as we rise above natural, social, and even gender conditioning. Diamond rises above his humble roots, and Irene gains in confidence in a situation where, in traditional sex roles, she should be the one being saved. For Young Irene, her ordeal underground serves to illustrate her transformation into a more Sibyl-like character. Her transformation also serves as an example of Hein's insistence that MacDonald's books are chiefly about "becoming" (30).

If we examine the symbolism of caves and mines with regard to the concepts of

the German Romantics and Platonic symbolism, we can see where MacDonald gains some of the symbolic paraphernalia for his Curdie books. The symbolism of the cave also serves as an example of transformation, as we will see. Theodore Ziolkowski notes a peculiar emphasis on the mine as a symbol within German Romantic writings. He explains that the reason for this is simply that many of these writers were also miners. Novalis himself had once worked in a salt mine (Ziolkowski 365). As a result of the number of German writers of the Romantic period having mining in their background, there is an abundance of writing that contains the mine as a symbol. Ziolkowski tells us that there are two uses of mine and cave symbolism that arise out of their writings. The first is the notion that the mine represents the struggle of the human soul to escape from natural predisposition and social conditioning. This is specifically a struggle of faith in one's abilities under harsh conditions (Ziolkowski 380-1). Coming out of the mine is seen as a process of coming into a divine light. We can see a clear parallel between this and the faith struggle of Curdie as a result of his time among the goblins. We can also see the same depicted in the miners who Curdie works with.

The aspect of symbolism attached to the mine represents a rigorous test of faith in God and oneself. In The Princess and the Goblin, the light that leads Curdie out of the mine is the Sybil, or rather Young Irene's faith in the Sibyl. What occurs as a result of this struggle is a form of alchemy, or in Hein's words, a process of becoming. The miner turns this experience into the something precious, in both a literal and figurative sense. He gains the gold which he has been searching for, and also turns his inner self into something precious as well. In Novalis's novel Heinrich Von Ofterdingen, an old

Bohemian miner offers an insight into the nature of the miner's ordeal. He calls it "the precious growth that blossoms for him in these frightful depths" (Pipkin 372-3). This, too, appears as a theme in Curdie's struggles underground. In his case, what he discovers is a way of harming the goblin (stepping on their toes), a knowledge he uses against the goblins in order to save the castle. As a result, he gains confidence and becomes a hero, which prepares him for his role in the second book, The Princess and Curdie.

The Platonic symbolism of the cave sheds another light on Curdie's adventures. Actually, it is the young princess who best shows what MacDonald wants to express. Frank Riga suggests that MacDonald transfigures the notion of the cave as the human soul. In the Platonic tradition it is the light from without the cave that saves the human soul. The divine light entering the cave enters and comforts the human soul sheltered therein. In the Platonic model there is also a little fire built within the cave. It is not this fire that warms the human soul because it was created by a mortal. Riga makes the point that MacDonald takes the Platonic symbolism and introduces it to the fairy tale (112). It is important to add that he not only borrows from this idea. but he alters the meaning of the symbol. In MacDonald's vision of the universe it is one's inner light, each person's faith within and their faith in God, which is the light that saves and enlightens a person. In the Platonic model, as interpreted by MacDonald, it is both the little fire burning within the cave and the light from outside working together that illuminates the human soul. For MacDonald, divinity is comprehended within the soul of the mortal. This transformation of the model can be witnessed in the character of Young Princess Irene. She has no sight of her grandmother, nor any light at all, and yet she believes in herself enough to get out

of the caves. She has faith in the protection of her grandmother, as she asserts when she tells Curdie that the old woman is watching over them. She also has the faith from within to realize that, unlike Curdie, she does not have to give in to despair. Curdie has lost his faith in himself now that he has lost his string and cannot even imagine the presence of the grandmother. Therefore, the mine or cave is a potent symbol for Curdie's struggle in MacDonald's fantasy novels. The cave is one of the instruments that MacDonald uses to illustrate his vision of the divinity within each human. It also exists as an example of the way in which he reinterprets literary traditions.

Another symbolic episode in this book occurs after the two children make their way back to the castle to the apartment of Old Irene. Curdie still does not see with the vision that Irene has. He does not see the old woman, nor does he hear her. He becomes hurt by her insistence on the existence of her grandmother, thinking that a game is being played on him, and so he leaves. He does not see Old Irene's rose-shaped fire either, which is symbolic of purgation in that it has previously been used to clean Irene (145-6). After Curdie leaves, Irene's grandmother says that he should be forgiven his rudeness and ignorance since he cannot see (148). She knows he has lost his ability to see with his soul and imagination. He cannot see the transcendent being that she is. He has become blind to insubstantial things as a result of being among the goblins. Thus, he can only see material objects. Since the Sibyl is representative of the imagination and the unconscious, Curdie is unable even to imagine her, since he lacks that faculty. As the door to Old Irene's room opens, Curdie can see nothing within, not even a floor. Old Irene tells him to enter. As he watches the moon's light spill into the room, everything —

the old woman, her spinning wheel, furniture — appears as if out of thin air. This spiritual light ignites his ability to see the magical room in which she lives (22). Later, in The Princess and Curdie, Old Irene explains the effect that the base realm of the goblin's has previously had on Curdie:

> There is another thing that is of the greatest consequence – this: that all men, if they do not take care, go down the hill to the animals' country; that many men [the goblins] are actually, all their lives, going to be beasts. People knew it once, but it is long since they forgot it. (72)

In this speech she reveals something akin to the idea of the Great Chain of Being. Beasts are the lowest form of life, while God is the highest. Human beings are in between and can move toward either pole based on our action. MacDonald's hope is that we move toward the divine. It is also important to note that this speech illustrates Old Irene's secret knowledge. She says that what she is relating to Curdie is something forgotten by human beings, however she knows.

After Curdie leaves the room in The Princess and the Goblin, the grandmother proceeds to nurture the young girl and bathes her in a silver bath. This act is another allegorical reference to Christianity. The Old Princess Irene's bathing of her granddaughter is a form of baptism. It is a cleansing in a two ways. Irene is cleansed in the sense of simply removing the grime that she has acquired from her trip into the caves, and also in the sense that she, like Curdie, has been underground in the base realm of the goblins (Manlove Scottish Fantasy Literature 89). The latter is the more important of the two forms of baptismal symbolism in this book. Old Irene is washing away the moral and

spiritual filth that exists in the realm from which Young Irene has just emerged. This act prepares Young Irene for "becoming" a Sibyl. In The Princess and Curdie we find a similar scene in which Curdie is prepared for his quest to save the kingdom. Old Irene uses her rose-fire to cleanse him after he shoots her pigeon (68-71). The fire removes his sins and makes it possible for him to become a hero.

This instance of symbolism is directly linked to the figure of the Sibyl. It is impossible to separate the two. Old Irene is required here as a symbol of the spiritual confidence and awareness that MacDonald advocates. Curdie needs to achieve this ideal, and the Young Princess Irene is heading toward it under the careful instruction of Old Irene. Baptismal symbolism is a common and important occurrence in MacDonald's fantasy novels and tales. Most often they occur in the form of bathing. They provide a symbolic illustration of the character's enlightenment and introduction to the moral world of the soul.

There are a number of episodes in Phantastes in which the hero, Anodos, goes through a form of baptism. He does so just before he enters fairy land, as if it is an initiation into this strange, beautiful realm. Two of these instances make a definite statement about the nature of these "baptisms." These offer a glimpse into the struggles of Anodos's soul and his need to shed his inability to believe in himself. In these "baptisms," he comes closest to a transcendent state, one lacking all self-conscious tendencies. Anodos's shadow represents his self-centered behavior. Because of this it ruins the wonder of fairy land for him, inhibiting his imagination, and thus, inhibiting his transcendence. Rolland Hein states that, "The Christian concern arises because the

natural process of seeking satisfaction for the human desire is self-centered, and self-centeredness is spiritually destructive" (55). We can see the notion suggested in this quotation exemplified in another character in Phantastes. As we will see later, the girl who is obsessed with a small globe is almost entirely self absorbed. However, when her globe is destroyed, she blossoms into a Sibyl, who goes about the land singing to its people (see page 72).

The mystical nature of fairy land is constantly being ruined for Anodos by his shadow. It consistently, in a both a figurative and literal sense, casts a dark light on the wonder and mystery of this place. His shadow represents his intellectual and self-conscious mind. It destroys the mystery and magic of fairy land by causing him to doubt it and himself (Manlove Scottish Fantasy Literature 71). When Anodos's shadow is having the most profound effect on him, when he is depressed, he can only think of the fantastical world around him with great scepticism. He will make remarks such as the one he makes as he throws himself into the sea (see page 62).

In the palace of fairy land, Anodos finds a marvelous ornamental fountain in a great hall. He is so overcome with it, finding it to be beautiful beyond all earthly comparisons. He cannot help but indulge in this moment of spiritual freedom, and so casts off all inhibitions and leaps into the pool. "Led by an irresistible desire, I undressed and plunged into the water. It clothed me as if with a new sense and its object both in one. The waters lay so close to me they seemed to enter and revive my heart" (79). What Anodos actually experiences here is a casting off of his spiritual doubts as to the reality of fairy land, as is evident in the spiritual experience that he undergoes after leaving the

fountain. These waters have a rejuvenating effect on his soul. As he says, they awaken a "new sense" in him; one that is, no doubt, what MacDonald would call his imagination. With this new sense, he can see the grace and beauty of the waters that surround his entire being. He can witness the new calm and peace that has come over him. It is important to note that it was only a short while earlier that Anodos was in pain due to the presence of his hated shadow, which itself acts as a symbol of his deficiency. The waters of the fairy fountain take away that anxiety for a short period of time. After he emerges from this bath he begins to see faint "gracious forms" moving about the palace around him (79). These are spirit forms, apparitions, but forms that attest to the wonder and grace of the beings who inhabit the wonderful palace of fairy land. It is following his bath (baptism) that he manages to gain a glimpse of how the queen of fairy land might appear:

> I sometimes saw only the passing wave of a white robe; or a lovely arm or neck gleamed by in the moonshine; or white feet went walking alone over the moony sward; nor I grieve to say, did I ever come much nearer to these glorious beings, or ever look upon the Queen of the fairies herself (80).

Anodos's new sight gives him a rare chance to view the fairies who surely roam around him unseen. Before Anodos bathes, he is in a state not unlike Curdie after emerging from the goblin mines. Anodos is unable to see the Sibyl figure of the fairy queen in the same way that Curdie is incapable of seeing Old Irene. With his doubt removed, he is able to glimpse the ideal spiritual figures.

It is worth pointing out that it is by the light of the moon that he has this almost sacred experience. In fact, MacDonald manages to place the word "moon" in this

sentence twice as if to highlight it. The moon is closely associated with the tradition of the Sibyl. Interpreting this further, we can see the common symbolic use of the moon at the Virgin Mary's feet as a symbol of her chastity (Halls 213). It is the "moony sward" over which these ghostly fairies walk. What this vision achieves is an association of these fairy beings with Christian divinity. Thus Anodos has a sort of epiphany as a result of his "baptism." Given what we know of MacDonald, this is just the sort of interpretation that he would have hoped for. His intention to awaken the reader's mind parallels the experiences of Anodos.

Anodos also experiences a "baptism" before he comes to the hut of four doors. As with his experience in the fountain, here he also enjoys a spiritual freedom. He plunges himself into a raging sea when he sinks into despair. At this time he proclaims to his shadow and his uncertainties: "I will not be tortured to death . . . I will meet you half way. The life within me is yet enough to bear me up to the face of Death, and then I shall die unconquered" (Phantastes 127). He is experiencing a crisis of the soul. Some time later, as he bobs in the sea, a little boat conveniently appears out of the waves and approaches him. In this vessel, he drifts to the island where the hut with four doors sits (144). In this hut he meets one of the Sibyls who provides the love he so dearly needs. When he arrives in her hut, he tells us, "She put her arms round me, saying, 'Poor child! Poor child!' " (130). While he is in her care, she feeds him and sings him to sleep with the story of Sir Aglovaile (131-5). She gives him such love that, later, he feels as if he is leaving his mother for the first time as he leaves her hut (145). The woman of the hut teaches him and gives him hope which will eventually lead to the self-exorcism of his

shadow. Thus, once again, Anodos bathes and comes out of the waters into a transcendent experience. Both of these encounters involve an emphasis on an awakened consciousness and the figure of the Sibyl as a catalyst or an agent of this enlightenment. It is no coincidence that in each case Anodos emerges from his baptism to find a Sibyl waiting for him. We have already determined that the Sibyl is the embodiment of an ideal, and the servant of God, in the works of George MacDonald.

In contrast to the Sibyl figures who aid Anodos in his travels toward his ultimate goal, which is the death of his self-consciousness and doubt, there is one Sibyl whom he inadvertently aids. She appears in the forests of fairy land carrying a ball of crystal and stares, as if mesmerized, into it. Her fixation borders on obsession and causes her to be overly protective of the ball. Anodos tells us that she is still little more than a child. He is overcome with a great curiosity and wishes to touch the glowing sphere. The girl tells him, "You must not touch it," but gives in after a moment (68).

The two travel together for a few days, during which she hardly ever takes her eyes off the precious object. Later, Anodos is again overcome with a need to touch the sphere and snatches it from her grasp. He tells us of his impression of this action and of the unhealthy lack of compassion on his part. He also tells of the strange feelings he experiences with the crystal ball in his hands:

> I put out both my hands and laid hold of it. It began to sound as before. The sound rapidly increased, till it grew a low tempest of harmony, and the globe trembled, and quivered, and throbbed between my hands. I had not the heart to pull it away from the maiden, though I held it in spite of her attempts to take it

> from me; yes, I shame to say, in spite of her prayers and at last her tears. (68)

Shortly after this the globe explodes and releases its strange gasses. Both are disappointed at the loss, but the girl is devastated, "wailing like a child" and crying, "You have broken my globe! My globe is broken! My globe is broken! Ah, my globe!" Anodos tells us that her wails have entered his nightmares since that event. He is terribly upset by his covetous actions, as he states above.

This episode in Anodos's journey illustrates a moral lesson on the nature of materialism. Both the girl and Anodos are so overcome by the beauty and strangeness of a material object that they become covetous and uncaring. The young woman's fixation on the globe causes her to exhibit antisocial behavior. As a Sibyl, she seems quite different in this regard from the others who are much less concerned with material things.

Both Irene's grandmother and the woman on the island whom Anodos visits live humbly and have no interest in material things. Sibyls are much more concerned with spiritual and moral concerns. This is not to say that the girl with the globe is not one of their kin. She later shows a dramatic change in character and serves to illustrate the lesson which we are intended to gain from her and her strange mesmerizing globe. The globe for her is a tangible thing, and a substitute for the qualities she already possesses. When she appears again she is not recognized by Anodos; she has become a woman. She frees him from a prison in which he is being kept. Then she explains what happened after their fateful meeting:

> I took the pieces, all black, and wet with crying over them, to the Fairy Queen. There was no music and no light in them now. But she took them from me, and

> laid them aside; and made me go to sleep in a great hall of white . . . . When I awoke in the morning, I went to her, hoping to have my globe again . . . but she sent me away without it, and I have never seen it since. Nor do I care for it now. I have something so much better. I do not need the globe to play for me; for I can sing. I could not sing at all before. Now I go about everywhere through Fairy-land, singing till my heart is like to break, just like my globe, for very joy at my own songs. And everywhere I go, my songs do good and deliver people. (163)

The girl has experienced an awakening of her inner divinity as a result of being freed of the material influence of her globe. For this she thanks Anodos and, when he falls to his knees and begs forgiveness, she says, "Rise, rise, I have nothing to forgive; I thank you" (163). She has come to realize that she can create the beauty of the globe within herself. She has also realized that her inner beauty can aid others who live in fairy land and help them to achieve the peace of spirit and happiness that she has gained. Therefore, the girl has grown into a full-fledged Sibyl as a result of shedding her worldly desires. She has gained confidence and an ability to live with the world of fairy land rather than be fixated on her globe. As well, we can see that it is with language, or singing rather, that she is using to bring joy to the people of fairy land. Singing and chanting are traditional attributes of the Sibyl archetype. She also helps Anodos at this point in his journey by giving him the assurance that he can do something to help himself by being an example for him to follow: "With a sad heart, soothed by humility and the knowledge of her peace and gladness, I thought of what I should do now" (187). It is only a short time later that he achieves his own enlightenment.

After Anodos gains the resolve to change his situation, he can then go on and eventually die a martyr. Thus, Anodos plays a similar role to the boy Diamond. In Anodos's case, however, he does not so much walk through the body of the seraphic Sibyl, as he walks through a series of encounters with these Sibyl figures.

An examination of the more common symbolic and allegorical themes in MacDonald's fantasy novels provides us with a view of his ideal human. He offers the reader an insight into the way in which he feels the human soul functions. He would advise a life less preoccupied with self-consciousness and material things. In order for us to become truly happy, we must discover the inner divinity of our self just as the young woman with the globe discovers her own beauty after having the material beauty of her globe taken away. This is achieved by opening our minds to the unconscious powers that are within us. MacDonald makes it clear that this opening of the mind is the awakening of the imagination. Without the imagination. we cannot apprehend the intangible.

It is evident. as well. that he manages to illustrate this vision without making it seem like preaching. Thankfully, this never happens. MacDonald offers his moral in the form of the lessons learned by his characters, but does not comment on the lesson or point it out to the reader. These morals are also so cleverly hidden within the fantastic landscape in which he places his story that they go unnoticed at the surface level. He introduces a variety of mythic motifs and forms, such as the Sibyl figures. G. K. Chesterton has called what MacDonald does in his fantasy novels "alternative theology" (Sammons 66). It is this element of his work that later fantasy writers have respected and adopted. C. S. Lewis, famous for his *Narnia* series and Christian fantasy, was a great

follower of MacDonald. He named MacDonald his master and said that MacDonald "seems to know everything and I find my own experience in constanty . . ." (Riga 111). Lewis even claimed that his imagination was baptized after reading Phantastes. Though he made mention of this in life, he does so most eloquently in a fictional manner in his book, The Great Divorce, in which the narrator states the following after having read Phantastes:

> I started to confess how long that life had delayed in the region of imagination merely: how slowly and reluctantly I had come to admit that his Christendom had more than an accidental connexion with it, how hard I had tried not to see that the true name of quality which first met me in his books is Holiness. (quoted in Hein ix)

Finally, from the examination of MacDonald's use of allegory, we gain a view of the way in which he uses the figure of the Sibyl. The Sibyl plays an integral role in MacDonald's vision and, in directing the plot, this is the most important role. She acts as a seraph who guides the heroes of the tales. She is also symbolic of the unconscious mind, that part of the mind that is in tune with God's own will. She also comes to represent the path to enlightenment, as in the case of the North Wind. MacDonald's Sibyl is not so far removed from the functions of the classical sibyls, Saint Anne, and the Queen of Sheba. His Sibyl serves a major function as the impetus for becoming. We will remember that they, too, pointed out the path to transcendence by foretelling of the birth of Christ. Therefore, we see in MacDonald's fantasy novels a return to the mythic form of the archetype, which marks a dramatic departure from those fairy tales that were

written down in the century preceding the Victorian period. The inherent value and beauty of his work is the creative way in which he manipulate these various ideas and pieces them together to form something unique.

Chapter Four: The Storyteller

With what we have learned of the function of the Sibyl in MacDonald's works, we can now move to an examination of how the archetype interacts with the art of storytelling. The Sibyl's relationship with prophecy, and the association of her spinning and weaving with tale telling have tied her to the voice behind the fairy tale. Warner's From the Beast to the Blonde is a good source for the development of the Mother Goose figure, whom Warner asserts is a descendant of the Sibyl. What concerns us about her, however, is the relationship between the Sibyl archetype, storytelling, and MacDonald's theories on the imagination and transcendence. This is a logical step from our discussion in the previous three chapters because it points to a paradigm that transcends the story. In other words, the Sibyl's role in MacDonald's work not only embodies his spiritual and moral vision, it also functions as a personification of his ideal of authorial responsibility.

It is important to begin with MacDonald's theory on the process of constructing a work of imaginative fiction. He stressed that a work of fancy should have a consistency of reality within it, and he considered this an act of creation on the part of the storyteller. All this he perceived decades before Tolkien, who reworked the idea into a theory of fantasy literature. By insisting on laws of harmony which create coherence in the fictional world, MacDonald propounds the same characteristics of imagination, "sub-creation" and inner consistency that Tolkien does. If we return to the following words, which we have seen previously, we can see how MacDonald's theory functions:

> . . . [The author] 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 work of the Fancy: in either case Law has been diligently at work.
>
> His work once invented, the highest law that comes next in play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist; and in the process of his creation, the inventor must hold by those laws. ("The Fantastic Imagination" 23-24)

MacDonald's use of the word "law" has the same connotation as Tolkien's term "inner consistency of reality" (46). It is the factor of verisimilitude: the checks and set of limitations that guarantee that the secondary world will function as a unit. As we will also see with Tolkien, the imagination is a critical factor in the production of secondary worlds. We must remember that MacDonald's definition of the imagination includes much more than its simple definition as the creative faculty. His insistence is on the imagination as a pathway to, or means of perceiving, things transcendent. This view of the imagination will become more important when we consider the Sibyl as storyteller.

To clarify the process of creating imaginative worlds, we should analyze Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories." Tolkien calls this process "sub-creation" (47). The world made by this creation new worlds Tolkien calls the "secondary world" (48-49). He tells us: "The faculty of conceiving the images is (or was) naturally called Imagination" (46). In his definition, the author is like God in that he creates the world and populates it as he sees fit. The author produces everything that is needed to create the illusion of a

"real" world. This, of course is the product of the imagination. The writer, Tolkien says, must also create an "inner consistency of reality" (or fancy in this case) within this imaginary world (46). This means that everything within this created world should seem to fit together as a cohesive unit. If this cohesion is not successfully rendered, the illusion will not be successful. This process is perhaps best exemplified by Tolkien's own work, The Lord of the Rings. In it we find a world that is so well wrought and so well conceived that the system within the story — faiths, customs, lore, social structure — functions as a believable unit, even though it is entircly a construction of the imagination. The new world must be a believable alternate reality. Tolkien's insight into this process tells us that the creation of successful works of fantasy requires considerable work on the part of the author's imagination.

There is a curious parallel between the nature of the Sibyl figure and the process of writing the story. For this we need to focus on the character of the Sibyl as a wise woman, a keeper of lore, and weaver of tales. A prophetess and keeper of secret knowledge, she combines the figure of storyteller, and all its creative energies, with the figure of the creator. Her perception and wisdom allow her to create stories and things, both magical and mundane. Her stories and prophecies are not unlike spells. Anodos is calmed and soothed by the songs of the woman of the hut with four doors (see page 65). The myth of Philomela, as we have seen, is symbolic of the storytelling tradition and its association with the idea of spinning or weaving a tale, with its characteristic of secret knowledge (see page 11). Philomela's use of weaving as a form of speech is taken, in the fairy tale, to be an asset for the Sibyl figure. In the Sibyl, this secret knowledge translates

into a potential for telling tales and for transmitting knowledge to those around her. For this reason, she can be seen as someone who opens up new views, either imaginary or otherwise, for her listener. In MacDonald's work we see this happening in the Sibyl figures, such as Old Irene and the North Wind, because they open the spiritual doorways in the heroes and heroines they meet. Thus, there is an interaction between these three forces: the Sibyl, MacDonald's spiritual objective, and the figure of the storyteller.

Marina Warner's book, From the Beast to the Blonde, is an insightful study of the parallel of the Sibyl archetype and the storyteller. She tells us that there is a deep-rooted connection between the Sibyl and the teller of the tale. By "teller" she refers to the voice behind the tale. Warner cites such examples as the Philomela myth as an example of the Sibyl playing the part of storyteller. Another example she mentions are the elderly, wise women, from whom the many collectors of tales gathered their fairy tales. Giambatista Basile's Pentamerone illustrates this process in its framing tale. It depicts the gathering of a large group of wise women to tell the tales collected in the book. Each takes her turn telling her story so that the volume is actually a collection of tales told by old women set within a framing story (Warner 14). The role of Scheherazade in the Arabian Nights is similar to this. Warner also cites a lesser known example of the association of the Sibyl figure with the tradition of storytelling in The Gospel of the Distaves (1475). This collection of tales is composed of a gossiping session involving a group of wise women. The knowledge these women impart is usually the sort that will instruct young people, particularly young females, in the lessons needed to move into adulthood. Therefore, in the tradition of the Sibyl, their knowledge is a secret lore intended to instruct young

people, particularly young women, in the process of maturity (36).

It is a traditional characteristic of the elderly woman to be a repository of folk knowledge and wisdom, therefore the Sibyl figure is particularly suited to be associated with the role of the storyteller. As well, there is the Sibyl's role as foreteller of prophecies. The storyteller — MacDonald and Tolkien — creates a tale, and a world, in order to impart their wisdom to the reader in the same fashion as the Sibyl figure weaves her tale to impart wisdom. When we see Old Irene in The Princess and the Goblin imparting her wisdom to Young Irene, we can see the Sibyl's role in action. She acts as an instructor. The woman of the hut with four doors in Phantastes offers stories to Anodos as well. She sings him ballads while she mothers him:

> Amazing stories of old ballads rippled from her lips, over the pebbles of ancient tunes; and the voice that sang was sweet as the voice of a tuneful maiden that singeth ever from very fullness of song. The songs we almost sad, but with a sound of comfort. (146)

In another of his shorter works, the fairy tale "The Golden Key," the Sibyl figure who calls herself Grandmother adopts the young woman Tangle and instructs her in the ways of her art before setting the girl on a sort of life-quest.

In MacDonald's tales, the function of the Sibyl is altered with regard to her audience in that she is not directing her instruction to young women. The exception here is in the case of Young Irene, but the grandmother is still not instructing the girl in sexuality or adulthood. The emphasis in MacDonald's tales is not on the maturity of the body or sexuality, but on maturity of the soul. Because of her spiritual inclination and

rejection of the material world, she is no longer concerned with the gender or appearance of those she instructs. For instance, the one whom the Sibyl is instructing in MacDonald's stories is usually a male. As we have already noted, it is the inner spiritual aspect of the person that she is concerned with. No longer is the Sibyl's function to prepare young women for adulthood, rather, it is to prepare the soul for transcendence. Therefore, we need not confuse the issue with gender issues. It has been hinted that MacDonald was almost pathological in dismissing any value in material things, and we safely assume that he included the human body as material. This is especially evident in that in several of his tales — Phantastes, At the Back of the North Wind, "The Golden Key" — the heroes finally reach their goal by either dying or symbolically experiencing death.

Here, then, we can see that the role of the Sibyl is the same as the role undertaken by the storyteller. If this is the case, then we can make further comment on MacDonald's vision of the storyteller with regard to the way in which he perceives the Sibyl as symbolic of the unconscious mind. There is a parallel between this aspect of MacDonald's Sibyl figure and his philosophy of storytelling. The Sibyl in his stories is representative of that part of the human mind, or soul, that can comprehend the transcendent. Therefore, if she is also linked with the nature of the storyteller, MacDonald's goal as a storyteller, which is to enlighten the reader's mind, is paralleled by the role of his Sibyls. MacDonald's goal of enlightening, or awakening the transcendence within his reader is seen in his Sibyl figures because this is often their task or objective in his stories. The Young Princess Irene's faith in her grandmother serves as

a means for her escape from the base realm of the goblin tunnels. We should also remember that it is through the body of the North Wind that Diamond reaches the wondrous land at her back.

There is also parallel between the figure of the Sibyl and the process of reading and immersing onself in the tale as well. The nature of the secondary world is such that it is removed from the real world, the conscious world. Tolkien calls the faculty used by readers to "enter" the imaginary world "willing suspension of disbelief" ("On Fairy Stories" 36-37). By this he means that a reader must willingly accept what is presented in the secondary world as something real within the realm of the story. For the time that the reader is actively participating in the tale there can be no scepticism on their part or the illusion is broken and the tale is ruined. The idea of "willing suspension of disbelief" parallels the shedding of doubt that the hero or heroine in MacDonald's tales must do in order to achieve transcendence. As we have seen, it is the Sibyl who initiates this process in the heroes and heroines within his novels and tales. Curdie and Anodos are coached by the Sibyls they encounter to believe in something more than the material world. An example of a test of faith for Curdie occurs in The Princess and Curdie when Old Irene tells him to thrust his hands into her rose-fire (69). The young woman who is obsessed with a globe, whom Anodos meets, is another example of this need to believe in the immaterial. She needs to believe in her own potential and talents.

This phenomenon of belief within MacDonald's tales is closely related to the process of participating in a work of imaginative fiction. Belief, as MacDonald tells us, is the imagination of the person embarking on this journey that is the most important tool

for achieving success. This is, then, no simple passive escape from reality, but an active use of imagination to transcend it. The Sibyl / author embodies the imagination that hero or heroine / reader must use to open doorways into a transcendent state of being. In the same way a storyteller opens doorways into imaginary worlds.

This process parallels the action undertaken by the heroes in MacDonald's stories in their quest for transcendence. Stephen Prickett constructs the model of two differing worlds to describe this process of moving into the transcendent realm. The two worlds in question are the earthly realm of materiality and the transcendent realm of one's inner divinity, which for MacDonald is often found in the afterlife. Prickett says that in order "to move between [the two worlds] we need nothing magic, we need faith, but more than this it must be a 'very positive moral quality' that involves trust" (184). In all MacDonald's heroes, Diamond, Curdie, Irene, and Anodos, we have seen that faith and moral quality, and trust in the God — or in the one who can lead them to God — is essential for the characters discovery of inner divinity. Their belief allows them to move into this realm. The figure who most often acts as a guide or catalyst for this movement is almost always the Sibyl figure in MacDonald's stories. She, then, is also a symbol of faith and moral quality. The doorway in question, then, connects the two worlds that Prickett is talking about.

This aspect of MacDonald's work relates to Tolkien's idea of a "willing suspension of disbelief" in that the heroes in his tales must accept their new reality in the same way that the reader of a work of fantasy, in Tolkien's theory, must also accept their own. Thus, in a very real fashion, the trials and actions of the characters in MacDonald's

tales parallel the way in which he believes that the reader of his works acts. In a strangely appropriate fashion, the philosophy that MacDonald tried to expound in his tales functions as a model for the way in which his fantasy literature functions.

One cannot forget that it is the Sibyl figures in his works that act as the impetus for change, be it inspiration or imagination. It is this characteristic of the Sibyl that makes Roderick McGillis characterize her as the action of MacDonald's stories: "The wise woman function is to break up the ice of fixed ideas and expectations, for she knows that without conflict, without the piquancy of fear, there will be no progress" (cited by Battin 209). Indeed, she is, as Hein would say, the catalyst for the hero or heroine's "becoming". Thus, MacDonald's vision is realized in the movement of his characters from the world of human beings to the world in which his Sibyl lives.

Conclusion

George MacDonald and the figure of the Sibyl owe a debt to one another. MacDonald benefitted from the archetype's rich tradition in achieving his endeavors. The Sibyl evolved into a new character because of the ideas that he attached to it. MacDonald breathed new life into this ancient archetype. His use of the archetype as a vehicle for the expression of his vision caused the Sibyl to assume a new form. Most importantly, this form incorporates aspects of Transcendentalism which he inherited from German Romantic thinkers like Novalis. It also incorporates a distinctly Scottish flavor in the appearance of the worlds that MacDonald presents to us.

The image of the Sibyl that arises out of MacDonald's stories is one veiled in mysticism. She retains her prophetic voice and her connection with the pagan world. She retains her secret knowledge and wise woman characteristics. As well, she maintains her association with the moon. All these are traits that the figure, in a sense, was born with. We see these aspects in the ancient Sibyls, the Queen of Sheba and Saint Anne. Because of this adherence to the traditional image of the Sibyl, MacDonald's work takes on an archaic tone. This archetype carries with it a great many resources, such as wisdom, prophecy, and magic. As a result it shapes his stories, taking control of the action of the tale and directing the lives of its heroes and heroines. The Sibyl plays a pivotal role in each of the stories that we have examined here. She acts as the doorway through which the heroes of the story step in order to enter into their adventures and ultimately their understanding of the universe. She represents their movement toward an increased awareness of the ideal way in which to live. This way of life involves the exercising of

one's inner divinity in order to better grasp the infinity of God and the universe. The Sibyl also functions as a moralizing agent. Thus, the Sibyl's example advocates a rejection of material things. This philosophy also involves an interest in things that are insubstantial, and infinite, rather than tangible things.

MacDonald's contribution to the figure of the Sibyl involves his interest in the imagination, because with the imagination we can, at the very least, conceive of the infinite. The Sibyl in MacDonald's work is the character who shows others how to conceive of insubstantial things. As a result of MacDonald's own beliefs, in his work, the Sibyl figure becomes a representative of a higher state of consciousness, an ideal of spiritual awareness. With her many magical powers and her ability to see what others do not, she also becomes the embodiment of the imagination.

For MacDonald, the imagination is the key to unlocking the inner divinity in all of us. It is the means by which we can attempt to comprehend God's power and grace. The Sibyl's wisdom and prophetic insight allows her to see God's power and, through her guidance, lead others to witness this vision. Her role in this regard is similar to that of her traditional role in ancient times of prophetess, who heralded the coming of Christ, in that both Sibyls are revealing the path to transcendence. What we have in MacDonald's work is a development of this idea. In his works, the focus is on individual divinity. The individual's ability to comprehend the path toward enlightenment on a personal level is MacDonald's goal. Very often this transformation involves a rejection the base, material world in favor of concentration on that which is purely spiritual.

As a result of this new role that the Sibyl assumes in MacDonald's work, we have

characters such as the North Wind who, in a literal sense, takes the worthy boy, Diamond, through her own body into the realm at her back. This land at her back is the representation of this new enlightened state. It stands as a symbol of the imaginative powers that MacDonald envisions, and serves as a model for the afterlife.

MacDonald's insistence on the power of the imagination also makes his Sibyl the embodiment of the processes of imaginative storytelling. The Sibyl's transformational powers also contribute to MacDonald's development of the genre of fantasy literature. This aspect of his work also illustrates the effect of the Romantic need to create new and fresh literary forms. By applying his imagination to traditional literary, and biblical, themes and motifs, MacDonald transformed them into something magical. In essence, he added magic to every aspect of his stories by appealing to the imagination. The response of the reader's imagination means that there is an infinite number of interpretations of MacDonald's work. The reader's role is to suspend disbelief, in the same way the heroes and heroines of the tales do. in order to apprehend the immaterial. This is a part of MacDonald's charm as a writer and a major reason for his popularity among younger readers.

"Alternate theology" is just what we find in MacDonald's work. The correlation between the belief and imagination is a crucial element in understanding his goal in writing. For MacDonald, transcendence, beyond the earthly realm is an ideal. He makes this an aspect of all of his tales. The focal point for the transcendence that occurs within these tales is the Sibyl. She stands as an ideal of spiritual awareness. as well as a guide for the heroes and heroines who encounter her.

Notes

1. It needs mentioning that the darker, monstrous side of this archetype will only be mentioned in passing as it does not play a significant role in the character of MacDonald's Sibyls. Rather, he focuses on the benevolent aspects of the archetype. This is not to say that the monstrous Sibyl does not appear in his works. The incarnations are few, however, and do not embody the spiritual and philosophical views which MacDonald wishes to express in his Sibyls.

2. A discussion of the Sibyl's relationship with the storyteller, with weaving and spinning as a metaphor for the art of storytelling, will be the focus of chapter four. I will not discuss this aspect of the archetype further here on the grounds that we are only interested in building a basic impression of the traditional Sibyl in this chapter.

3. The source of the fairy tales mentioned here is Iona and Peter Opie's The Classic Fairy Tales.

4. The symbolic significance of the door in relation to the Sibyl archetype will be discussed more fully in chapter four. The Sibyl's importance as a doorway, or opener of doors, into the spiritual realm is significant, however, because she also has a significant relationship with the storyteller as an opener of doors. For this reason, the symbolism of the door will be discussed when we touch on the nature of the storyteller.

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