5-2013

Numinous awakenings in The golden key.

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NUMINOUS AWAKENINGS IN "THE GOLDEN KEY"

By

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M.A., University of Louisville, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2013

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A Thesis Approved on

April 17, 2013

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Mr. David Nolan Maclin

and

Mrs. Joan Heines Maclin

for teaching me to seek the things that are above.

ABSTRACT

NUMINOUS AWAKENINGS IN "THE GOLDEN KEY"

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This thesis explores the relationship of "The Golden Key" to the numinous in the development of what George MacDonald calls the "childlike child" or individual who finds meaning in stories that illuminates his or her relationship to God. The numinous reveals the presence of the divine, is made manifest in symbols found in the natural world, and evokes specific feelings of awe or dread. Such elements awaken our imagination to perceive God. The numinous acts as a catalyst for change by prompting characters and readers to respond to the presence of the divine. Various objects including the golden key, rainbow, shadows, and arguably stories are infused with numinous qualities to awaken the childlike imagination of the minds of his readers. The elements of myth and the numinous serve as two ingredients of the alchemical elixir that provides the opportunity for both protagonist and reader to experience transformation and purification.

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Stories possess the potential to hold powerful sway over their readers. They can enable readers to live multiple lives and experience change and growth through those of the characters without ever physically engaging in the circumstances presented within the texts. Stories can make an impression on the minds of readers, whose imagination participates on both conscious and subconscious levels in the experiences of the created realm. In many kinds of literature, such experiences may not only instruct readers in virtue but also encourage them to improve themselves in order to assume and embody those virtuous qualities. George MacDonald realized this potential in stories that excite the imagination when he writes, "To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination… The word itself means an imaging or a making of likeness… As to what thought is in the mind of God ere it takes form, or what the form is to him ere he utters it; in a word, what the consciousness of God is in either case, all we can say is, that our consciousness in the resembling conditions must, afar off, resemble his" (MacDonald 4). MacDonald believed that human thinking and conduct should bear a resemblance to God's, and viewed fairy tales as stories that excite the imagination to emulate virtue. The development of the imagination is "one of the main ends of the divine education of life with all its efforts and experiences. Therefore the first and essential means for its culture must be an ordering of our life towards harmony with its ideal in the mind of God"

(MacDonald 24). This especially rings true in "The Golden Key," in which MacDonald employs the fairy story genre as a vehicle through which the numinous awakens the childlike minds of the protagonists.

MacDonald uses this awakening in hopes to inspire a similar process in readers. Although he acknowledges in his essay "The Fantastic Imagination" that not all readers will be affected by the numinous quality of his stories in the same ways, he also insists that all who "feel" the fairy tale will "read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another;" furthermore, meaning can also exist apart from the readers, and that if his stories do not generate interest, then they should be laid aside: "A meaning may be there, but it is not for you" (MacDonald 7). Here MacDonald recognizes readers' autonomy, but he also emphasizes the visceral influence of his stories, including the power of genre. In this way, he counters Fredric Jameson's assertion that, "as texts free themselves…from an immediate performance situation, it becomes harder to enforce a given generic rule on their readers" (Jameson 107). As David Brooks argues, humans are not "primarily the products of conscious thinking" but of the unconscious thinking that takes place below the surface level of knowing and awareness (Brooks x). It is here in this unconscious realm that the emotions and passions dominate how humans make sense of the world, and any reference on my part to the "readers" of "The Golden Key" reflects MacDonald's statement in "The Fantastic Imagination" that he writes for the childlike, or for "those who consciously or unconsciously acknowledge childlikeness as their goal in their responses to spiritual truth in life and art" (O'Connor 43). This thesis will explore to some degree the relationship of fairy tales to the numinous in the development of what

MacDonald calls the "childlike child" or individual who finds meaning in stories that illuminates his or her relationship to God as Father of humankind. Those who may take the most interest in reading "The Golden Key" are curious about the representation of the spiritual relationship between God and humanity in MacDonald's fairy tales, and what MacDonald means by encouraging others to achieve childlike innocence and humility of the soul.

About the Author

Born in Scotland in 1824, MacDonald undoubtedly received wide recognition as a result of C. S. Lewis' writings detailing MacDonald's influence on his work and spiritual life: "I know hardly any other writer who seems closer, or more continually close to the spirit of Christ himself" (Trexler 1). Although MacDonald enjoys more fame posthumously, he did receive attention as a well-liked writer throughout his life in addition to his work as a Congregationalist minister, lecturer, and tutor. His writing remains heavily influenced by his ministerial training, the death of his mother and brothers at early ages, and his self-guided studies of Romanticism. The Bible and works by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Goeth, and Schiller taught him to view death as more life, and to consider nature as a manifestation of the divine presence of God that must be reconciled with the Enlightenment's focus on knowledge: "The divine expressions of Nature, that is, the face of the Father therein visible, began to heal the plague which the worship of knowledge had bred" (Raeper 109). Over the course of his lifetime, MacDonald wrote 31 novels, 3 books on criticism, 5 sermon collections, 6 volumes of poetry, 5 children's fantasy books, and 2 adult fantasies (Trexler 3). Out of approximately 50 published books, MacDonald's sermons and works on fantasy – in particular *Lilith*,

Phantastes, and particularly "The Golden Key" – remain his most popular writings, in part because the latter move the imagination to contemplate nature and the manifestations of God in the visible world.

A Summary

To give the reader an overview of "The Golden Key," I offer the following summation. The opening of "The Golden Key" shows a little boy named Mossy becoming engrossed in a story told by his great aunt about a golden key. Her story inspires Mossy to enter into Fairyland to search for the key and for the keyhole. The female protagonist tangle enters into Fairyland on different terms, but her path briefly conjoins with that of Mossy at an old woman's cottage where she physically prepares the children for the next phase of their journey. From her house, they venture through the valley of the shadows, which inspires them to reach the land from where the shadows fall. They meet the Old Man of the Sea, who at different times positions Mossy and Tangle for a baptismal ritual that enables them to continue on to the end of the rainbow where the keyhole lies. Physical change is used in "The Golden Key" to reflect the inner transformation or awakening of the "childlike imagination" in the protagonists as prompted by their encounters with the numinous in the forms of the key, rainbow, old woman and men, and shadows. MacDonald uses water as one agent for this physical change, whereas the baptism of the characters likewise serves as the symbolic cleanser of the imagination. Additionally, the youthful characteristics of the old woman and men reflect the eternal youth and childlike nature of the soul, and especially the oldest man of all, who is portrayed as a little child who symbolizes the divine childlike nature of Christ. After Mossy opens the portal, they are brought to a stairway boasting beautiful ascending

and descending "forms" or souls, and they join the ascent to the land from whence the shadows fall.

Numinous Defined

The numinous is relevant to "The Golden Key" because it is used in the fairy tale to highlight the divine presence of God in Fairyland and how the manifestations of His presence influence the protagonists to search for the land from whence the shadows fall, which symbolizes heaven. The Oxford English Dictionary defines numinous as "Of or relating to a numen; revealing or indicating the presence of a divinity; divine, spiritual" with numen identified as "the spirit or divine power presiding over a thing or place" (OED). In *The Problem with Pain*, C. S. Lewis extends this definition by describing the numinous experience as foundational to all religions; he writes of it as something that excites a feeling of awe or dread. Dread, as opposed to fear, presents the beholder with a simultaneous feeling of wonder and inadequacy. Lewis conveys the crucial notion that awe is not the "result of an inference from the visible universe" (555). Rather, it is evidence of contact with the divine being or "Numinous Power": God. Not only do the numinous elements in stories or myth excite emotions of awe, dread, and wonder and point us to the divine, these elements awaken our imagination to perceive the virtuous deliverer of moral law and righteousness: the Numinous Power itself.

To expand on Lewis' observations concerning the numinous as the foundational element of all religion, Rudolph Otto in Idea of the Holy further writes that there are elements of religion that cannot be explained in rational terms, and that faith provides an opportunity to make up for the limitations of the rational (Otto 4). Otto is credited with coining the term "numinous", which he suggests has a specific element or "moment" that

sets it apart from the rational. Otto claims that knowledge of our reality is possible for humans by means of a feeling evoked by the numinous. David Bastow writes that this possibility is a consequence of the most essential nature of a human being: the soul (160). Otto continues by noting that our traditional understanding of the holy is often limited to mean something "completely good," or the absolute moral attribute, and that we are ignoring an important addition covered by meanings in other languages (Otto 5).

The Hebrew, Greek, and Latin words *quadosh*, *agios*, and *sanctus*, respectively, point to a special concept that adds to our understanding of holy by incorporating human response to God into its definition. Otto adopts a word coined from the Latin *numen* to keep this added meaning distinct from 'holy,' as well as to classify the stages of development that the meaning might reveal. He argues that the numinous classifies the emotional response to humankind's conception of the divine when human beings are confronted with a religious experience. Thus the numinous consciousness is an indescribable reaction to God, and is largely revealed through symbols from which we can derive meaning (Otto 7). Often, authors incorporate numinous symbols into their literature by relying on elements of the natural world to convey that meaning. Otto's understanding of the numinous relates to George Whalley's understanding of myth as something that makes tangible certain indescribable emotions through metaphors and symbols. After all, the root meaning of symbol in Greek signifies the bringing together of two different worlds (*OED*). Tolkien's discourse *On Fairy Stories* reinforces the transcendental quality of the numinous fairytale by suggesting that fairytales represent a more localized version of myths, and that occasionally "something higher can be glimpsed" by anyone in such mythology, and identifies this higher quality as divinity

(Tolkien 25). John Granger complements Tolkien's observation by noting that "Human beings are designed for transcendent truths, whether they know it or not, and they pursue experience of these truths and some exercise of their spiritual faculties anywhere they can" (Granger 2). Stories not only have a transcendental quality, but humans do as well, and this helps us understand the draw that the numinous might have over us.

Victorian critics like Stephen Prickett recognize the effect of stories that use the numinous to influence the mind when he notes that MacDonald aims to "demythologize the long record of man's awareness of the numinous" by reemphasizing the significance of myth and symbol in his literature as a "vital medium of human consciousness" (Prickett 18). Other critics like Jim Prothero equate MacDonald's stories to the "numinous grandeur" found in works by Wordsworth; furthermore, he writes that MacDonald takes Wordsworth's sense of beauty and wonder of the natural realm and situates it within the "Christian heaven" (Prothero 36).

Claim

I argue that MacDonald uses "The Golden Key" fairy tale as a vehicle for the numinous, where the stories told by the great aunt excite her nephew Mossy's sense of wonder and awe. Her stories and the tales told by other wise figures point Mossy and Tangle on their journey toward divine revelation. In the same vein, the numinous not only awakens the childlike mind; it is also made manifest in the divine Child himself: God. In this way, "The Golden Key" is a divine story since its elements hearken back to what C. S. Lewis calls the divine Myth – the true Story or Gospel accounts of God's redeeming love as seen in his own child, Jesus Christ. I further aim to explore how "The Golden Key" demonstrates the paradoxical relationship between physical change and inner

transformation or "awakening" of what MacDonald describes as the "childlike imagination" in the mind through the following devices: use of the numinous to characterize the divine and the soul's relation to it; the fairytale genre as a medium inviting reader participation; particular contrasts (i.e., old and new, life and death, physical and spiritual); and the symbolism inherent in his depiction of the physical body and spaces.

SECTION II

THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF "THE GOLDEN KEY" STORY & THE NUMINOUS

Numinous Qualities of the Key and Rainbow

The role of story as a medium remains central to "The Golden Key" as evidenced by MacDonald's opening line: "There was a boy who used to sit in the twilight and listen to his great-aunt's stories" (481). The author begins his fairytale by embedding a story within a story, and immediately suggests that of all that could be known about these two characters, the important point of knowledge is two-fold: the boy actively listens to stories told by his elder, and the great-aunt takes the time to tell them. MacDonald writes, "She told him that if he could reach the place where the end of the rainbow stands he would find there a golden key", and she is quick to instruct her nephew in the value of the key: "Better never find it than sell it" (481). In other fantasy stories like *The Princess and the Goblin* MacDonald demonstrates his concern with the consumerism and materialism of 19th century Great Britain, and this scenario suggests that although there is value in the composition of the key, the real worth lies in its utility. In the same way, MacDonald is quick to instruct his readership in the value or utility of stories, and particularly the kinds of stories that excite the imagination to desire the spiritual realm. This opening could be seen as an introduction to the macrocosmic function of "The Golden Key." The nephew "went to bed and dreamed about the golden key" and that the key itself is of another world:

> Now, all that his great-aunt told the boy about the golden key would have been nonsense, had it not been that their little house stood on the borders of Fairyland. For it is perfectly well known that out of Fairyland nobody ever can find where the rainbow stands. The creature takes such good care of its golden key, always flitting from place to place, lest anyone should find it! But in Fairyland it is quite different. Things that look real in this country look very thin indeed in Fairyland, while some of the things that here cannot stand still for a moment, will not move there. So it was not in the least absurd of the old lady to tell her nephew such things about the golden key. (481)

It is the "other-worldliness" of the golden key, and particularly its location within the borders of Fairyland that lends the key its sense of elusiveness and attractiveness. Perhaps the author endows the key with something more – some quality that sparks the emotion of the boy to yearn for the key and what it opens. The boy's longing for the key becomes evident when he gazed out of his bedroom window to see a "glorious thing… the end of a rainbow, large and brilliant" (482). Immediately the boy rushed into the forest, and yet when he saw the rainbow his focus shifted: he "stood there gazing at it (rainbow) till he forgot himself with delight – even forgot the key which he had come to seek. And as he stood it grew more wonderful still" (482). In these excerpts, MacDonald attributes to the key and the rainbow the qualities of the numinous. With the divine nature of symbols in mind, the reality experienced by the protagonists of "The Golden Key" in Fairyland exceeds their understanding of that realm, since the encounters with the golden key and rainbow enjoyed by Mossy and Tangle are numinous and thus symbolic of a

higher order and deeper meaning that they must uncover as the story progresses. When Mossy sees the rainbow, he gazes at it in delight, and "as he stood it grew more wonderful still" (MacDonald 482). Such adjectives of delight, wonder, and beauty and the emotional response displayed by the nephew in his response to the rainbow not only suggests the divine, numinous quality of the rainbow, but also serves as a foreshadowing element of the story. The placement of the key and rainbow in immediate proximity subtly suggests that the key opens an entrance into or participation in the activity of the rainbow: "For in each of the colors, which was as large as the column of a church, he could faintly see beautiful forms slowly ascending as if by the steps of a winding stair" (MacDonald 482). The use of church columns as a descriptive measure likewise implies the splendor of the rainbow as aligned with the delight in a Christian church and the fellowship of its members, or "beautiful forms." Both the rainbow and the church are of God's design. Thus the rainbow's numinous qualities deeply affect the boy by exciting his sense of wonder. The boy finds the key at the rainbow and in a "terror of delight he put out his hand and took it, and had it" (MacDonald 483). Here the author also reveals the numinous quality of the key, and communicates the excitement of the boy as at once terrible and delightful – an event that unifies two opposing emotions in the presence of the divine. While the feeling of delight indicates the fulfillment of Mossy's goal to find the key and the joy the presence of the divine brings, the simultaneous emotion of terror suggests that Mossy encounters the symbolic presence of divine greatness and authority that far surpasses his own. This moment signifies an otherworldly experience fit for Fairyland and effective at situating the reader outside of his or her normal realm of understanding and experience.

Storytelling as Character-Building

The great-aunt's story about the golden key excited the boy's imagination about the key and its function, and communicated the numinous qualities inherent in the meaning of her story. This act of storytelling is also one of instruction, and is used to educate listeners in the proper exercise of virtue. The virtuously minded and morally excellent dwell on heavenly things, as the apostle Paul admonishes in his letter to the church at Colossia: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (ESV, Col. 3:2). By telling Mossy about the key, his great-aunt is preparing his mind to seek out the divine elements like the key and rainbow that will direct his thoughts to God, although he does not yet realize it. The great-aunt's use of the golden key does not only introduce her nephew to the rainbow and Fairyland, but also excites and inspires his imagination. The writings of Jack Zipes and Vigen Guroian stress the importance of the fairy tale as a mechanism by which humans may achieve the maturity of the soul by encountering virtuous examples. Fairy tales instruct children that they have a moral obligation to behave in moral ways.

Guroian expands on this function of story when he writes "Children need a moral education…[that teaches] not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful… The child finds this kind of meaning through fairytales" (3). Fairytales offer children a script on how to choose and behave, and instruct them that humans have a moral obligation to cultivate proper relationships with other humans, and to exercise their freedom and character in moral ways. For MacDonald, the "beastliness of civilization was to be countered by uncovering and perfecting the divine qualities of humankind" (Zipes 102). In the proper education of

character, Guroian appeals to the notion of stories as a medium by which the moral examples found in the tales leave an 'impression' on the self of the reader; after all, he emphasizes that the Greek for character is 'impression,' and that the decisions made by the fictional characters heavily impress the choices the readers will make once they face life changes. David Brooks adds "much unconscious learning is done through imitation," which suggests that much of what people internalize subconsciously are examples of how others behave that are eventually retrieved for imitation. Bruno Bettelheim furthers Guroian's understanding of fairytales when he writes that they are impactful because through their example the reader may solve his or her own problems:

> The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his own solutions, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life. The content of the chosen tale usually has nothing to do with the patient's external life, but much to do with his inner problems, which seem incomprehensible and hence unsolvable. The fairy tale clearly does not refer to the outer world, although it may begin realistically enough and have everyday features woven into it. The unrealistic nature of these tales…makes obvious that the fairy tales' concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual. (Bettelheim 25)

"The Golden Key" continues to emphasize the power of story when the author introduces the audience to Tangle, the other protagonist of the story who lives in circumstances quite different from Mossy's upbringing. Tangle's mother passed away and in her father's frequent absence she is cared for by two idle servants: "…she was

neglected and left untidy, and was sometimes ill-used besides (MacDonald 483). Although the fairies live across the border in the forest of Fairyland, they sorely detest clutter and laziness, and so by extension they hold much disdain for Tangle's two maids whom the fairies view as "slovenly people" (483). To remedy this annoyance, the fairies devise a plan for the merchant father to expel the housemaids by driving his daughter Tangle out of the house. To accomplish this, the fairies play bedtime tricks on Tangle in the night:

> All at once she saw an ape making faces at her out of the mirror, and the heads carved upon a great old wardrobe grinning fearfully. Then two old spider-legged chairs came forward into the middle of the room, and began to dance a queer, old-fashioned dance. This set her laughing, and she forgot the ape and the grinning heads. So the fairies saw they had made a mistake, and sent the chairs back to their places. But they knew that she had been reading the story of Silverhair all day. So the next moment she heard the voices of the three bears upon the stair, big voice, middle voice, and little voice, and she heard their soft, heavy tread, as if they had stockings over their boots, coming nearer and nearer to the door of her room, till she could bear it no longer. She did just as Silverhair did, and as the fairies wanted her to do: she darted to the window, pulled it open, got upon the ivy, and so scrambled to the ground. (MacDonald 483)

This passage presents readers with another powerful example concerning the affect stories can have over people. Just as the story told by the great-aunt to Mossy about the golden key excites his imagination and shapes his course of action, so too does the

story of Silverhair, more commonly known as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" determine the behavior of Tangle when confronted with a situation similar to the one presented in the story. When she hears the voices and tread of the three bears, she behaves like Silverhair, and acts based on the images of the story that are imprinted on her mind. Tangle's behavior illustrates well both Bettelheim and Guroian's notion of the significance of stories as scripts for how children respond to similar circumstances in real life, and the impressions that stories make on the minds of the readers. In addition, these two examples have the potential to impress upon MacDonald's readers the deep significance of the type of stories that people read and remember. MacDonald and Guroian stress the importance of the fairytale as a mechanism by which humans may be educated to a virtuous end. Fairytales instruct children that they have a moral obligation to behave in moral ways. For Guroian and others, stories impress upon readers the idea that virtues must be seen in people (whether fictional or real) so that readers will be able to see and embrace virtues in others (6). The heroic characters encountered by readers in MacDonald's fairy stories abide by a moral law in their dealings, and one that signifies the presence of the numinous.

Although Tangle reacts to the fairies' jest by emulating the fear of Silverhair, Mossy takes delight in his great-aunt's story about the golden key, and harnesses the emotions he experiences as a result of his encounter with the numinous in his search for the key and the treasure it guards. Even during Mossy's stay in Fairyland, it is possible that he continued to use stories as a medium through which he might find direction on how to pursue the keyhole: "Now Mossy was the name his companions had given him, because he had a favorite stone covered with moss, on which he used to sit whole days

reading; and they said the moss had begun to grow upon him too" (MacDonald 488). Given the importance placed on stories by Guroian, Bettleheim, and MacDonald, it could be surmised that Mossy's stories continued to stimulate his imagination.

The Ability of the Mind to Influence Action

Tangle's reaction to the fairies' plot to rid her home of servants highlights the influence of stories on the mind, and perhaps no tale illustrates this sway over readers better than the age-old legend of the Ring of Gyges told by Plato's brother Glaucon in Book II of *The Republic*. To answer the question of whether or not an individual is only just under compulsion, Glaucon appeals to myth to illustrate his point. According to the legend, a shepherd named Gyges the Lydian uncovered a tomb exposed by a deep chasm in the ground after an earthquake. The tomb was fashioned as a hollow, "brazen horse" holding only an abnormally large dead body wearing nothing but a golden ring. Gyges took the ring and during a shepherds meeting, he found that if he turned the ring toward the inside of his hand, he would disappear:

> As he sat with the others, he happened to turn the collet of the ring round towards himself to the inside of his hand. As soon as this was done he became invisible to the company, and they spoke of him as if he had left the place… (Plato 157)

After this discovery, Gyges managed to be appointed as the king's messenger. During this service he seduced the queen and together they killed the king and reigned over the empire together. The moral of the story warns that when no one is looking, humans will act unjustly. The Ring of Gyges also encourages humans to guard and monitor their thoughts, since how people act when they are physically invisible is the same as how they

behave in their mind. As MacDonald's readers realize from reading "The Golden Key", the stories that stimulate the minds of Mossy and Tangle also affect and direct their actions.

SECTION III

THE PARTICIPATORY NATURE OF THE NUMINOUS, MYTHIC FAIRY TALE

Tangle's Entanglement

Just as "The Golden Key" traces the development of the imaginations of Mossy and Tangle, MacDonald encourages his readers to experience a change in their knowledge and understanding of the fairy tale, which may or may not be recognizable. Although Mossy's great-aunt seems to have conditioned and prepared his mind by telling him stories about the golden key and its value, Tangle's situation seems to mirror that of an untaught reader in the sense that her mind has not been conditioned by stories to seek out virtuous things. Colin Manlove reinforces this possibility when he observes that if Fairyland signifies the imagination, then Mossy is more at home than Tangle, who can be said to represent the lower aspects of the imagination with her "entanglement in the worldly consciousness" (Manlove 34). Perhaps MacDonald anticipates variation in the development of some of his readers' imaginations, since the text focuses more on Tangle's journey, encouraging a more intense identification with her than with Mossy. Tangle's first encounter with the otherworldly Fairyland is one of "terror" and struggle, in contrast to Mossy's exciting and confident entrance by choice:

> The sun was now set, and the darkness coming on, but the child thought of no danger but the bears behind her. If she had looked round, however, she would have seen that she was followed by a very different creature… After running a long way, and as the last of the light was disappearing, she passed under a tree with drooping branches. It dropped its branches to the ground all about her, and caught her as in a trap. She struggled to get out… She was in great terror and distress… (MacDonald 484)

Tangle did not enter Fairyland by choice; rather, she is driven by fear of the images of bears in her head. The "air-fish" that followed her tore at the branches of the magical tree with its beak and led her "gently along" until they reached the old woman of the cottage. MacDonald describes the air-fish as a fish with fins covered in multi-colored feathers, and the head of an owl. The author employs the air-fish as a significant symbol that points back to the rainbow. Just as the rainbow boasted multicolored columns resembling those of a church, the air-fish likewise glows in varied hue with its feathers "glittering and sparkling all lovely colors" (MacDonald 484). According to biblical tradition, the fish and the rainbow are interrelated signs used in the story to point back to God's promises. God uses the rainbow as a symbol of his promise that he will not destroy the earth by water: "I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (*ESV*, Gen. 9:13). The fish also serves as a widely accepted symbol of the church of Christ, and both the air-fish and rainbow situate the characters and readers in the numinous presence of the divine. The function of the air-fish as a guide for Tangle also brings to mind the pun made by

Jesus to his disciples when he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (*ESV*, Matt. 4:19). Just as the air-fish leads Tangle to the grandmother of the wooden cottage, so too does MacDonald lead his readers through an extraordinary world that sets them outside of themselves so that they might look inward and contemplate their own emotions and desires. These biblical examples also reinforce the interrelatedness of stories, as MacDonald works to draw on existing literature to craft "The Golden Key."

Participatory Nature of the Numinous Story

Tangle's experience with the air-fish reinforces the understanding of the numinous as participatory in nature. It is something in which one should take part, respond to, and build on just as Tangle responded to the air-fish by following it through the wood. Lewis shares in this idea of the numinous as a participatory experience in myth. Lewis relays to us his own understanding of myth in his work *Experiments on Criticism* (1961), where he cites the numinous as one of the six characteristics of myth. The first characteristic that describes Lewis' notion of myth is that the story exists exclusive of its art of telling. Second, myth is enthralling for its own sake and does not arise form the narrator's skill at building suspense. Third, he writes that readers are not to project themselves onto the characters, but rather to observe those characters already created (Lewis 43). MacDonald for our purposes took great interest in the receptive process of the reader, since to engage in the work as an observer was in itself an imaginative activity akin to the creative process. Fourth, Lewis identifies the next characteristic as one where myth incorporates the creatures of fantasy. Next, readers see that the experience of myth is solemn and

grave, even if the myth is joyful. Finally, Lewis sees that the experience of the myth is not only grave, but also awe-inspiring: "We feel it to be numinous" (Lewis 44). Lewis wants readers to think of myth as something to be experienced, and to identify an authentic myth by their response to the numinous.

"The Golden Key" represents one such story that invites readers to participate in the experience it offers, and Ed Chapman provides a possible explanation for this draw when he writes, "We are enamored with a love for beauty in old myths that contain anything from enchanted islands, haunted forests, and heroes, to sword fights, mist covered mountains, and necromancers" (Chapman 3). However, Chapman highlights a less obvious reason: a desire to encounter spiritual images in literature. He elaborates by linking the terms *fantasy* and *myth* together to show that fiction presents myth as a living image (Chapman 3). When we encounter knights slaying dragons or Beowulf defeating the evil Grendel, we find ourselves wanting nothing more than for that action to come alive, and to become part of that imagined reality. George Whalley defines myth as:

> …a direct metaphysical statement beyond science. It embodies an articulate structure of symbol or a narrative vision of reality. It is a condensed account of the being of humankind and attempts to represent reality with structural fidelity, to indicate at a single stroke the salient and fundamental relations which for a man constitute reality. (Chapman 3)

Chapman identifies Whalley's definition as one that subscribes to the dimensions of the numinous with its reference to the symbols and visions of reality. Myth, through

metaphors and objects, makes tangible certain feelings and emotions that would otherwise be difficult to describe. In addition, myth should also be identified as the representation of an ultimate and absolute reality. According to Charles Moorman, myth in literature operates as a mirror to reflect the central reality, as well as the meaning and power implicit in the myth itself. He continues by writing, "…myth functions in literature as a suggestive archetype to which ordinary fictional situations may be referred by allusion. In this way, myth lends its own total meaning and inherent power to the fictional situation (Moorman 405). Just as myth showcases elements of the numinous for Whalley, it also serves as a reflector of the meaning and power implicit within itself. The aforementioned and discussed myth of the Ring of Gyges serves as a relevant example since it is like Whaley's mirror that reflects our central reality, and depicts our real-world situations through other world dimensions. This story not only questions the role of justice in the life of the individual, but to a lesser extent encourages an examination of what motivates the mind to make just or unjust decisions. The Ring of Gyges encourages humans to guard and monitor their thoughts, since how people act when they are physically invisible is the same as how they behave in their mind. Likewise, "The Golden Key" demonstrates that the stories that stimulate the minds of the protagonists also affect and direct their actions. Kathryn Hume adds to this discussion by presenting an inclusive definition of fantasy as "any departure from conscious reality" and thus makes room for Whalley and Moorman's understanding of myth, which incorporates the numinous and the reflective ability of myth to convey meaning (Hume 21).

Participation as Sub-Creation

Owen Barfield's understanding of myth further suggests that myth possesses multiple meanings for different ages in that truth can be represented in varying myths without compromising its inherent meaning. This is true for the biblical story of Noah's ark, which provides an archetype for different cultures that adopt the underlying theme of the great flood for their myths. For Barfield, the myths of the Christian tradition are unique because they not only reflect reality as Moorman suggests, but also are true stories about real events: "God as author had used images that were precise in location, history, and consequence: the old myth of a dying God had become fact" (Johnson 101).

For Lewis, the miracle of the story of Christ is that despite its authenticity, it does not cease to exist as myth; Christian truth and myth are not mutually exclusive, but rather reinforcing. Johnson writes that this knowledge of the "true myth" of Christ converted Lewis to Christianity and inspired him to engage in what Tolkien labeled as sub-creation, or what he viewed as the "moral duty" of humankind to seek truth through myth and to make stories in the creator-image of God so that divine truth might be disseminated through story. Thus, the use of the imagination in the act of creation serves as a "participation in and apprehension of God's inspired revelation" (Johnson 106). Perhaps, then, humankind's higher calling involves creating a medium that remains inherently dependent on its participatory relationships with other stories and readers, and one that intends to relate to its own readership.

The Alchemical Relationship between Reader and Story

"The Golden Key" invites the participation of the reader by nature of its relationship to the "literary alchemy" tradition of English literature. For centuries, alchemists attempted to transform lead and other non-precious metals into gold by experimenting with different elixirs that would promote a process of purification. Literary Alchemy applies this practice to the protagonists of stories and to the readers, where both groups undergo a type of transformation that aims to cleanse and perfect the individual from its *nigredo* or impurities. John Granger writes that English literature's use of alchemy is about perfecting the spirit:

> The first is that the use of alchemy in the English literary tradition is about personal transformation that is… about the spirit and human perfection. The tradition is spiritual, religious if that term does not appall you… "Real world" alchemy, be it Arabic, Chinese, Hindu, or Western, was always ancillary to works done within the prevalent religious tradition; Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Luther, for example, were alchemists themselves or expressed their admiration of the alchemical effort. Alchemy has a transcendent goal that great English writers have tapped into for their edifying purposes in writing. (Granger 1)

MacDonald joins a long-standing tradition of English authors ranging from Chaucer and Shakespeare to John Milton and C. S. Lewis who employ literary alchemy in their writings. As author and alchemist he engages in "sub-creation" by participating in the larger effort to create an elixir or combination

of elements – which includes the numinous – that will catalyze the purification and transformation of the protagonists and readers. Research conducted by Dartmouth University in tandem with Ohio State University affirms that literature has a lasting impression on the behavior of readers who identify with the protagonists of "immersive literature," which causes "…readers to reflect the strong qualities of main characters in their own lives" (Rauschenfels 1). Psychologists Geoff Kaufman and Lisa Libby measured the "experience-taking" or reactions of their subjects to the story by having a group of participants read with a mirror in front of them, and a control group read without a mirror. They found that readers without access to their reflection were less self-conscious than the other group, which enabled them to "connect on a deeper level to the story's character" (Rauschenfels 1). Alchemical literature is a type of "immersive literature" described by Rauschenfels that invites the reader into the story as a participant and leaves the reader changed as a result. The level of change is dependent, MacDonald argues, on the developmental level of the reader having the experience.

Priscilla Hobbs writes of literary alchemy in *Harry Potter*, noting that those who read the books in some ways "…re-enact the myth, owning and internalizing the material to experience a figurative heroic transformation in a world otherwise separated from myth" (Hobbs 1). The same can be said of "The Golden Key," which is a spiritual fairy tale that possesses an elixir to draw readers in through the numinous encounters and encourages an intense and lasting identification with the protagonists.

Participation as Reflection

Not only does "The Golden Key" invite readers into the story by encouraging them to participate in what the protagonists experience, but as a fairytale it also possesses a quality that inspires readers to reflect on themselves. J. R. R. Tolkien communicates this idea when he writes:

> Even fairy-stories as a whole have three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man. The essential face of Faerie is the middle one, the Magical. But the degree in which the others appear (if at all) is variable, and may be decided by the individual storyteller. The Magical, the fairy-story, may be used as a *Mirour de l'Omme*; and it may (but not so easily) be made a vehicle of mystery. This at least is what George MacDonald attempted, achieving stories of power and beauty when he succeeded, as in "The Golden Key" (which he called a fairy-tale)… (Tolkien 26)

For Tolkien, MacDonald presents his "Golden Key" fairytale as a masterful blend of magical, mystical, and reflective prose that prompts the reader to contemplate the numinous, symbolic nature of the story by situating readers in a magical world; this encourages readers to turn inward and reflect on their spiritual condition in their share of the protagonists' search for the mystical realm of the divine.

For Tangle to continue into what Tolkien would call the "magical" realm of Fairyland, her path converges with the air-fish that leads her to Grandmother's cottage, which suggests that the guidance Tangle receives from Grandmother – an

otherworldly being – is needed. Mossy received instruction from his great-aunt through the stories she told concerning the golden key, and such stories conditioned his mind to be aware of the value of the key and by extension the rainbow boasting the beautiful ascending forms. Tangle did not receive the same care from her father or housemaids. This implies that the children need training and preparation for their time in fairyland, as well as the notion that such preparation is a communal activity facilitated by the participation of older and wiser women in the story who have the foresight and prudence necessary to prepare the youth for situations that they might not understand. On a more theological level Grandmother also symbolizes the deep frustration that MacDonald had with Calvinism and what he considered as the doctrine's stern portrayal of God as a God of justice and not of love. He "repudiated a God of rewards and punishments", which he feared would lead a Christian to focus only on "what could be obtained from God" rather than the Lord's display of universal love and His gift of grace (Raeper 241). The elderly female figure functions as a recurring motif for God's love and supremacy in many of MacDonald's stories ranging from "The Golden Key" to *The Princess and the Goblin*, and such characterization also works to soften the image of authority. MacDonald's poem *The Disciple* lends readers a picture of his position on the Calvinist view of God when he writes,

> They preach men should not faint, but pray,
> And seek until they find;
> But God is very far away,
> Nor is his countenance kind. (Robb 13)

Jack Zipes also writes that the prominence of the female figures serves as one example of the subversive nature of MacDonald's fairytales, and adds that the prominence of protagonist women like Tangle and Grandmother departs from traditional norms of gender representation (100).

Grandmother: A Beautiful Soul

When we see that the Grandmother figure had been searching for Tangle for a long time, we understand that the story is much larger than that of the little girl. The author presents Grandmother as a prudent and seemingly omniscient figure, and also as a very beautiful woman who inspires in Tangle similar emotions that Mossy felt about the golden key and rainbow:

> She sat down with her on her lap, and there the girl sat staring at her. She had never seen anything so beautiful. She was tall and strong, with white arms and neck, and a delicate flush on her face. The child could not tell what was the color of her hair, but could not help thinking it had a tinge of dark green. She had not one ornament upon her, but she looked as if she had just put off quantities of diamonds and emeralds. Yet here she was in the simplest, poorest little cottage, where she was evidently at home. She was dressed in shining green. (MacDonald 484)

Grandmother is not only a beautiful woman, but she is also thousands of years old, which comes as a surprise to Tangle, who believed that as humans grow old, they age in appearance as well. Grandmother issues a series of responses that seem

"otherworldly" in that they are quite unusual for a child or anyone to hear, and particularly that her age should come as no surprise to Tangle: "Don't you see how beautiful I am?" she retorts (MacDonald 484). Grandmother continues by suggesting that she has "no time to grow old" and that she is "too busy for that. It is very idle to grow old" (MacDonald 485). Despite her age, Grandmother is clothed in youthful strength and beauty, and her character introduces readers to a foundational paradox: MacDonald uses her physical appearance to reflect or expose the inner condition of her soul.

SECTION IV

PHYSICAL RENEWAL AS A SYMBOLIC PROCESS: AWAKENING THE CHILD

Governing Structures of Imagined Worlds

In "The Fantastic Imagination", MacDonald participates in a critical effort to examine the imagination and its relationship to the fairytale by contemplating three significant elements that he views as formative of the fairytale: law, the childlike, and the mind of man, with elements such as time falling under the realm of law as dictated by the author. Ironically, he begins his discourse by juxtaposing ideas of law and the rational with the imaginative and intangible, only to show that law and the imagination are relational, correlative, and wholly dependent on one another when he writes "Nothing lawless can show the least reason why it should exist, or could at best have more than an appearance of life…the natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them… but they themselves may suggest laws of other kinds" (5). To this end, MacDonald emphasizes that humanity may participate in the making of laws for their imagined worlds as made manifest in story. In this way, humans most closely approach the act of creation by giving form to "new embodiments of old truths"; such embodiments are the direct products of the imaginative mind. MacDonald continues by suggesting that to live even for a single moment "in an imagined world, we must see the laws of its existence obeyed" (6). Once the laws of that world are broken, humans fall out of that world and the imagination loses its governing structure.

MacDonald makes a direct connection between law and the mind when he writes that human minds are the "products of live law; it thinks by law, it dwells in the midst of law, it gathers from law its growth, with law, therefore, can it alone work to any result… Obeying laws, the maker works like his creator…" (6). In this sense, the storyteller assumes a divine function and responsibility to abide by the spiritual laws in all realms – real and imaginative. MacDonald's construct of time operates as one law unique to the realm of fairy, and the processes of aging and physical change likewise fall under that governance. In addition, readers find that in order for Tangle to continue in Fairyland, her body must be conditioned and refined through physical cleansing so that she might radiate like Grandmother. Such a transition made by Tangle serves as an example of what Pemberton describes as liminal time used in fairytales; such time is experienced during a transition from one state to another (Pemberton 39). This physical cleansing highlights the significance of time as a device of "The Golden Key."

Awakening the Childlike Child

Grandmother's physical appearance is stunning and is such that makes her seem either one with or one over the natural realm, and akin to the classic Mother Nature figure. She is tall with a tinge of green in her hair, strong yet delicately flushed, smiles like the sun in a "summer shower," beautifully clothed in a "shining green" gown, and looks as if she "put off emeralds and diamonds" (MacDonald 484). Yet, she is thousands of years in age, and this presents readers with an important paradox: despite Grandmother's age, she is clothed in youthful strength and beauty, which suggests that her physical appearance is used by the author to reflect or expose the inner condition of her soul. Her nature could be said to be childlike despite the duration of her existence, for

she looks and feels eternally young. Grandmother's character is important because she represents the first of a string of characters who espouse such youthful, childlike qualities.

Readers have reason to believe the intent of MacDonald to communicate the childlike nature of model figures in the story, since in "The Fantastic Imagination", he emphasizes, "For my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy five" (7). Despite the fixed laws of governance that frame humankind's dealings in the physical and imagined realms, MacDonald suggests that the meaning behind the created worlds – which he holds to be "art" – is vast and unrestricted when he notes "A genuine work of art must mean many things; the truer its art, the more things it will mean" (7). MacDonald aims to "wake" meaning within the reader or, in other words, have them "think things for themselves" rather than merely tell what the meaning is; the meaning that readers may glean from stories through the numinous exists as a permanent fixture in the realm of truth, and transcends the imagination, reader, and artist.

MacDonald attempts to adorn readers with a particular quality or characteristic that transforms their minds so they can approach the meaning that the storyteller wakes in them through numinous encounters in "The Golden Key." This quality is that of the childlike, and Tangle serves as one example of an ill-prepared participant in a numinous encounter, since her confrontation with the air-fish brought her a sense of dread, which is the feeling the numinous can evoke that is opposite of awe and wonder. Tangle's encounter with the numinous sets her apart from the "childlike" and youthful Grandmother as the young and yet un-childlike counterpart. MacDonald's emphasis on

writing for the childlike rather than solely the child signifies for Zipes another point of subversion, since MacDonald discards the limitations of the traditional nursery audience for one much broader in scope and age. By writing for children and adults, MacDonald tries to establish "possibilities for radical cultural transformation by making fluid the relations between these realms (imaginary and symbolic), suggesting, or projecting, the dissolution of the symbolic reversal or rejection of the process of the subject's formation" (Zipes 99). In this way, MacDonald uses fairytales as a mirror that might reflect the state of the reader and motivate the reader to consider an alternative lifestyle.

MacDonald follows the trend set by the German Romantics by transforming common, everyday reality into "mysterious, symbolic landscapes which lured readers to question the former secure worlds of conservative fairytales and the very real world of their immediate surroundings" (Zipes 99). Zipes is suggesting that Fairytales work to place the reader far outside of his or her traditional reality and comfort zone, and that such stories use the contrast between reality and fairylands to review the existing, real world of the reader in a new light. Furthermore, Zipes conveys the possibility that such a shift in the traditional fairytale implies a certain "longing" exhibited by adult writers to: "Open up and subvert traditional socialization by posing infinite textual possibilities for the subjects and readers to define themselves against the background of finite choices proposed by society (Zipes 100). Although Zipes and MacDonald convey in different ways the notion that infinite possibilities of meaning exist, readers sense from MacDonald that meaning remains fixed and rooted in a particular understanding of truth as related to Christianity, which is somewhat of a departure from Zipes' primary focus on MacDonald's concern with industrialization and the bourgeois. MacDonald writes that

humans cannot envision anything they choose in his work, but only what they are able to imagine: "If he be not a true man, he will draw evil out of the best…If he be a true man, he will imagine true things" (MacDonald 8). The true and the beautiful things come from God, and although God's work means precisely what He intends, the storyteller's work must mean much more than s/he intended:

> For in everything God has made, there is layer upon layer of ascending significance; also he expresses the thought in higher and higher kinds of that thought; it is God's things, his embodied thoughts, which alone a man has to use, modified and adapted to his own purposes, for the expression of his thoughts… (MacDonald 9)

MacDonald implicitly communicates the idea that like his readership, the storyteller must also assume the characteristics of the childlike – humble, receptive, and obedient – for the meaning of the fairy story to have its proper effect.

The meaning that wakes in us through numinous encounters – or that we are able to understand and receive – must point us to God. We find meaning in our own lives through fairy stories and other fantasies or myths when we look to the divine meaning-maker for our origin as His children. In his sermon "The Child in the Midst", MacDonald suggests that not all children are childlike:

> One of the saddest and not least common sights in the world is the face of a child whose mind is so brimful of worldly wisdom that the human childishness has vanished form it, as well as the divine childlikeness. For the childlike is the divine… (MacDonald 6)

Ironically, Tangle is a child by age in the fairytale and yet she does not give off a physical appearance of childlikeness. Grandmother complains that Tangle is too untidy when she says: "Do you know I can't find a clean spot on your face to kiss?" (MacDonald 485). If one accepts the premise that not all children and adults are child-like, then it must be that they require some form of example and instruction in order to be in the likeness of the divine God. Fairy stories assume the responsibility of conveying myths that condition readers to wake the divine meaning of the text, and understand the Christian truths inherent in the nature of the story, self, and universe. For MacDonald, such revelation requires a conditioned response – a transformation of the self of the reader into the divine childlikeness of the Father. In this way, readers come to know what it means to be genuinely human. Grandmother signifies an important recurring symbol of the "older mentor" or advisor who aids the main protagonists on their mission and who also embodies "part of the divine truth to which the protagonists are growing" (Robb 58). Although not explicitly mentioned by Robb, Grandmother of "The Golden Key" represents just one of many older female or grandmotherly figures who exhibit the numinous quality of the divine, childlike nature of Christ, and impart knowledge or wisdom on their listeners in George MacDonald's work.

Tangle's Conditioning

In her quest to condition Tangle into a childlike child, Grandmother uses water as an agent to refine Tangle's physical appearance and cleanse her of filth when she throws Tangle into a deep tank filled with multicolored air-fish, flowers, and green plants:

> The fishes came crowding about her. Two or three of them got under her head and kept it up. The rest of them rubbed themselves all over her, and

> with their wet feathers washed her quite clean. Then the lady, who had been looking on all the time, spoke again; whereupon some thirty or forty of the fishes rose out of the water underneath Tangle, and so bore her up to the arms the lady held out to take her. She carried her back to the fire, and, having dried her well, opened a chest, and taking out the finest linen garments, smelling of grass and lavender, put them upon her, and over all a green dress, just like her own, shining like hers, and soft like hers, and going into just such lovely folds from the waist, where it was tied with a brown cord, to her bare feet. (MacDonald 485)

Now physically cleansed by the water and air-fish, Tangle resembles Grandmother in youth, cleanliness, and even fashion. The air-fish likewise engages in a transformative ritual that highlights Grandmother's authority over the animal and reinforces Tolkien's depiction of the magical and mystical qualities of "The Golden Key." Grandmother prepared the air- fish in a boiling pot of water, and they ate the fish for supper. The author described the fish "as white as snow" and delicate, like "cream"; furthermore, this fish helped further an important work in the gradual physical transformation of Tangle, when "as she swallowed it, a change she could not describe began to take place in her" (MacDonald 486). Tangle immediately began to feel a sensory change, and her ears opened up to the space around her. For the first time, she was able to hear the speech of Fairyland's animal inhabitants. The fish underwent a stark transformation, both similar to and yet much more striking than Tangle's bath. When Grandmother removed the lid off of the pot, a new creature sprang from the boiling water:

> A lovely little creature in human shape, with large white wings, rose out of it, and flew round and round the roof of the cottage; then dropped, fluttering, and nestled in the lap of the lady. She spoke to it some strange words, carried it to the door, and threw it out into the darkness. (MacDonald 486)

Traditionally, the fish serves as a representation of the church, and the air-fish's transformation mirrors the gradual change that Tangle must undergo in order to become childlike and perhaps even a part of the church. After all, the Greek word for church – *ekklesia* – means to literally be "called out". Perhaps this explains in part why Tangle experienced the sensory change in her ears: it symbolizes her experience of being "called out" or set apart from her old self and changed or humbled into a childlike child.

The Nature of the Kingdom

We humans – born out of God's created order and law – realize the true meaning of the divine nature of the person when we humble the self and become like the Child Himself. In Mark 9:33-7 Jesus capitalizes upon the opportunity to give his followers a glimpse of the order of his Father's kingdom when he responds to their argument about who was the greatest by stating: "'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.' And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me'" (Mark 9:35-37). Here Christ establishes the primacy of the child as a model for how his followers may receive God. By humbling themselves, they clothe themselves in the true character of the kingdom: childlike. Of the lesson imparted by Jesus, MacDonald continues, "For the idea

of ruling was excluded where childlikeness was the one essential quality. It was to be no more who should rule, but who should serve… Then to receive a child in the name of Jesus is to receive Jesus; to receive Jesus is to receive God; therefore to receive the child is to receive the Child himself" (MacDonald 9). Thus MacDonald helps to capture for us the image of the childlike child: an obedient and charitable youth. To receive the childlike child is to receive Jesus and the Father: the paradox of the obedient God and lowly King of the kingdom. For MacDonald, it is not who should exercise authority in the kingdom, but rather who should serve. In this way, the spirit of the child functions as the ideal spirit of Heaven. Through Grandmother, readers may understand that for MacDonald, childhood is "that to which we aspire, as the goal of our spiritual development" (Pridmore 64). In this way, the childlike child remains the continuous moral and spiritual goal that MacDonald must impress upon his readers.

MacDonald's work remains heavily influenced by the Bible as well as prominent authors of the Romantic era who viewed the child as a means of subverting the "hegemony of reason" established during the Enlightenment age, with the child now seen as "the representative of an alternative mode of awareness, challenging the dominant orthodoxy about ways of knowing and proclaimed with prophetic urgency and passion" (Pridmore 65). Pridmore observes that MacDonald capitalizes on all of the familiar Romantic motifs concerning children, including the child's ability to "perceive certain things hidden from adult view, the inherent oneness with nature, fresh vision, and the capacity for wonder" (Pridmore 67). The childlike child thus represents the essence of what both adults and children must become in nature and appearance.

Grandmother continues to model this childlike nature to Tangle and then to Mossy when another air-fish leads Mossy to her cottage. The first thing that Grandmother notices when Mossy enters her home is the shiny object he guarded in his hand:

> Mossy held out his hand. The moment the lady saw that it was the golden key, she rose from her chair, kissed Mossy on the forehead, made him sit down on her seat, and stood before him like a servant. Mossy could not bear this, and rose at once. But the lady begged him, with tears in her beautiful eyes, to sit, and let her wait on him. 'But you are a great, splendid, beautiful lady,' said Mossy. 'Yes, I am. But I work all day long – that is my pleasure; and you will have to leave me so soon!' (MacDonald 488)

By receiving Mossy in a humble fashion, Grandmother continues to reflect the childlike essence that MacDonald uses in his sermon to characterize the Heavenly Father as humble, obedient, and charitable. In her majesty, beauty, and superiority as the elder of these two youth, Grandmother humbles herself to the status of a servant, noting that her pleasure is to work in the service of others. As with Tangle, Grandmother provides Mossy with food, shelter, and new clothes; however, readers also see that even the beautiful and soul-bearing Grandmother reacts differently at the sight of the golden key than when she received Tangle. This moment also marks a significant point of convergence where Grandmother assumes authority to impart to both Mossy and Tangle instructions on how to proceed on their journey, and to marry Tangle to Mossy's mission. Earlier in the story Grandmother emphasized to Tangle that like the air-fish, she must "wait her time" before continuing on her life journey; for Tangle and Mossy, their time is

now, and is marked by Mossy's possession of the golden key. Although grandmother cannot join them on their journey, she can ensure that Tangle will be further aided in her spiritual development with the help of Mossy as her companion on their journey to find the keyhole.

SECTION V

THE IMAGINATION AND "THE GOLDEN KEY"

Dreams

Sleep and dreams serve as an important motif in the works of MacDonald, and particularly in "The Golden Key". When asked what he should do to find the keyhole for the golden key, Grandmother replied, "I do not know. I dream about it, but I know nothing" (MacDonald 488). The author records Mossy's first evening in Fairyland by noting that he fell asleep while waiting for morning to return so that he might find the golden key; and, once Tangle enters Fairyland, readers notice that she also became lost in the "strangest, loveliest dreams" with Grandmother appearing in all of them (MacDonald 487). Tangle's dreams reveal her subconscious mind at work, where images and even the subtlest of Grandmother's influences on Tangle's thinking surface. Dreams provide a framework by which people can organize and make sense of new or meaningful information. As David Brooks observes, "…many researchers believe that during sleep the brain consolidates memories, organizes the things that have been learned that day, and reinforces the changes in the brain that have been ushered in by the previous day's activity" (Brooks 94). In contrast to Tangle, Mossy's sleep does not appear to present him with dreams boasting strange images or new ideas that he must try to understand. Zipes notes that MacDonald viewed dreams as akin to "religious epiphanies" and that fairytales held

close symbolic relations to those dreams (Zipes 103). For MacDonald, Fairytales revealed the inner workings of the imaginative component of the human mind, and the genre proved particularly salient for its capacity to accommodate the wondrous and marvelous (Raeper 145). Such awe-full and wondrous signs are most readily presented to readers by numinous symbols and objects as evidenced by the reactions displayed by Mossy and Grandmother when presented with the golden key. Their emotional responses to the key starkly contrast with Tangle's reaction, which for all intents and purposes is left unrecorded by the author. In the same way, Mossy's reaction to his sleep differs substantially from Tangle's response. Perhaps this is because the author aims to juxtapose Tangle's un-childlike nature with the childlike natures of Mossy and Grandmother, which allows the latter two characters to demonstrate awe and wonder at the sight of the key, while Tangle remains either emotionless or without any known reaction attributed to her character. Pridmore's observations of the childlike child's abilities to "encounter and embrace spontaneous joy in nature and existence", as well as exhibit a "capacity for wonder" most readily applies to Mossy and Grandmother who exhibit both joy, wonder, and awe at the sight of the golden key (Pridmore 65).

Cultivating the Moral Imagination

MacDonald employs the fairytale genre as a medium by which the imaginative functions of the human mind can be revealed. He views stories such as "The Golden Key" as art, and suggests that works of art are:

> …essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the

> combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind. (Raeper 110)

If the author functions as the creator, then the text is the creation made possible by the power of the imagination. Professors and undergraduates at Aberdeen College readily described MacDonald as a "youth of imaginative power," which suggests that MacDonald recognized the potential of his mind early on, and its capacity for invention (Raeper 46). Most importantly, the imagination serves as the part of the created human that mirrors the primary function of God's power, where nature is a repository pregnant with meaning as prescribed by God Himself:

> For the world around him is an outward configuration of the condition of his mind; and inexhaustible storehouse of forms whence he may choose exponents – the crystal pitchers that shall protect his thought and not need to be broken that the light may break forth. The means are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of unveiling. (Raeper 113)

This insight reinforces Tolkien's observation that fantasy authors like MacDonald serve as sub-creators of a secondary, fantastic world in which readers realize the image of God, the true Creator. For MacDonald, the outward world or present reality is but a "passing vision of the persistent true" (Raeper 114). By aiming to place readers outside of familiar spaces of everyday reality, MacDonald's fairytale not only attempts to position readers within an extraordinary dimension, but also point readers inward in an effort to encourage reflection on their own immediate, mental state.

Manlove rightly reinforces the idea that an entry into MacDonald's Fairyland is an entry into the imagination. If Manlove's premise that Mossy and Tangle's entry into Fairyland marks a passage into the imagination is accepted, then their journey throughout Fairyland is not only a physical trek out of their initial realm into an exotic Fairyland, but possibly a mental journey that penetrates inward to examine the condition of the soul as well. Manlove quotes MacDonald, who believes that God works inside of our minds if we enable Him:

> To give us the spiritual gift we desire, God may have to begin far back in our spirit in regions unknown to us, and do much work that we can be aware of only in the results; for our consciousness is to the extent of our being but as the flame of the volcano to the world-gulf whence it issues: in the gulf of our unknown being God works behind our consciousness. (Manlove 34)

Perhaps then the transformation that Mossy and Tangle undergo throughout their time in Fairyland is in part attributed to their numinous encounters with the golden key and rainbow and the impressions such objects make on the person, which represent God's implicit and even invisible dealings with the individual and his/her mind. Robb observes that hidden meanings surround humankind, and that in creating the world, God "devised a vast reservoir of divine utterances" (Robb 52). MacDonald attempts to expose these divine symbols or "utterances" and highlight their extraordinariness by using the otherness that is the numinous quality of those utterances; and most significantly, the eternal nature of humankind signifies as the greatest of such divine creations. God's work on the spirit can be found in the letter to the Romans in the

Bible, where the apostle Paul appeals to his brethren to "…not be conformed to this world" but rather "transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (*ESV*, Rom. 12:2). In the commentary on the book of Romans, E. M. Zerr writes that to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" suggests that a different form of living must be pursued by radically changing the desires of the mind "for the better" (Zerr 369). "The Golden Key" serves as a significant work because it likewise aims to radically alter the desires of the minds of its readers to pursue virtue and conform the spirit to the divine, childlike nature of God. Furthermore, the imagination is an entity that should be correlated with that which is "divine in us," which MacDonald calls the "Christ-self" (Robb 54). To unite with God is for MacDonald a liberation of the imagination. Mossy seems to be closer to achieving a transformed existence as evidenced by the stories not only told him by his great-aunt, but also his encounter with the numinous golden key and rainbow, his continual reading of stories during his tenure in Fairyland, and his persistent journey to the keyhole. The stories passed down to Mossy and subsequently "The Golden Key" story passed on by MacDonald accomplishes what Russell Kirk labels as the true aim of literature: to inspire the moral imagination.

Russell Kirk explains that the moral imagination espouses what T. S. Eliot calls the "permanent things", which Darrin Moore defines as "those that lift us toward saintliness rather than degrade us in savagery" (Moore 1). Kirk writes that these "permanent things" or standards can be used by literature to develop a normative consciousness; in this way, the goal of "true" literature is to cultivate the imagination

so that readers may know what it means to be "genuinely human" (Kirk 3). This imagination reveals the dignity of human nature in that humankind is superior to the animals that exercise base desires; furthermore, this imagination receives fortification from the "spirit of religion" and the type of manners or behaviors exercised in virtue (Kirk 2). To condition the individual to assume what Kirk labels as a "normative consciousness" or standards-based frame of existence, he identifies fantasy as being the literature needed for the moral imagination to "quicken" or grow in the child, where "Out of the early tales of wonder come a sense of awe and the beginning of philosophy. All things begin and end in mystery" (Kirk 7). Kirk makes a slight departure from MacDonald when he limits the fantasy genre to children, but he does allude to the numinous when he suggests that fantastical stories generate the sense of awe that comes from tales boasting the numinous quality.

Nature as a Means of Communication

Despite Tangle's reluctance to venture out into Fairyland in pursuit of the keyhole, Grandmother reveals that her destiny would require that she pursue Mossy's end goal eventually:

> I am never allowed to keep my children long. You need not go with him except you please, but you must go some day; and I should like you to go with him, for he has the golden key. No girl need be afraid to go with a youth that has the golden key… If you should lose each other as you go through the – the – I never can remember the name of that country, -- do not be afraid, but go on and on. (MacDonald 489)

In this exchange, Grandmother twice reminds Tangle to not be afraid of her journey, but to continue until she reaches her destination, though she is uncertain about what it is at this point in the story. Yet based on the physical character of Fairyland as forest, it can be surmised that the bulk of the journey will require her and Mossy to pass through some variation of the natural landscape. Robb observes that for MacDonald, it is the natural realm that serves as the only way to communicate ideas with humankind:

> MacDonald imagines a man with a thought in his mind and the desire to communicate it, but who is thwarted because, within himself, he has no means of sharing his idea with another. 'Gazing about him in pain, he suddenly beholds the material form of his immaterial condition. There stands his thought! God thought it before him, and put its picture there ready for him when he wanted it… This he seizes as the symbol, as the garment or body of his invisible thought, presents it to his friend, and his friend understands him.' MacDonald's writings are symbolic communications to his friend, the reader. (Robb 54)

MacDonald uses the literature of the fairytale as a medium through which he might reveal the divine but obscured meanings that are hidden in the world around us. The path that Mossy and Tangle choose to take leads them through the forest, but gradually the wooded area grows smaller, and the landscape morphs into different topographic variations that range from a dark, narrow corridor through crevices and valleys that feed into tall, strong mountain ranges. Despite the uncertainty, difficult

terrain, and obscure pathways, the shadows that blanket a large portion of their trek remain heavy, crowded, innumerable, and symbolic in the forms they represent:

> The mass was chiefly made up of the shadows of leaves innumerable, of all lovely and imaginative forms, waving to and fro… No forests clothed the mountain-sides, no trees were anywhere to be seen, and yet the shadows of the leaves, branches, and stems of all various trees covered the valley as far as their eyes could reach. For the shadows were… heaped up above it like substantial forms of darkness... Sometimes a profile of unspeakable beauty or grandeur would appear for a moment then vanish… After sitting for a while, each, looking up, saw the other in tears: they were each longing after the country whence the shadows fell. (MacDonald 490)

The shadows encountered by Mossy and Tangle on their journey gave them a new sense of purpose; initially, these children set out to find the keyhole that would fit the golden key, but their encounter with the shadow lands seemingly shifts their desire. Although it appears to be a redirection of motive at face value, it should be emphasized that the emotional response evoked by the shadows most adequately resembles the same emotions displayed by Mossy when he encountered the golden key and rainbow. The shadows displayed vanishing forms of "unspeakable beauty" and "grandeur" that elude any description that could be made by language. Rather, the feelings of wonder they develop within Mossy and Tangle are the same feelings conjured by the numinous objects of the key and rainbow, and such feelings evoke a strong desire for the divine that is revealed through the numinous elements of the

shadows of the natural realm. Although the protagonists do not realize it yet, their journey for the keyhole and for the "land from whence the shadows fall" is one and the same, with the end goal of having communion with the divine source of their spiritual encounters. In many ways, the contact with the numinous objects as experienced by Mossy and now Tangle whet the appetite so that the brief taste of the appetizer prepares the palette for the main attraction of the entrée; in the same fashion, MacDonald aims to communicate that the glimpses of the divine workings in our world through the church and other symbols are but fleeting grandeurs in comparison to the magnificence of Heaven and grandeur of God, the Numinous Power. The "land from whence the shadows fall" symbolizes Heaven, and the journey to that land reflects MacDonald's adherence to Coleridge's idea of organic growth: the "soul is like a young plant, reaching out after the light that enlightened every man" (Raeper 243). Thus Mossy, Tangle, and the reader journey on the road that leads back to God as the source.

Despite their delight in the shadows, their continued journey presented them with yet another landscape and environment where shadows hovered over them and encompassed them in darkness:

> As evening grew on, the shadows fell deeper and rose higher. At length they reached a place where they rose above their heads, and made all dark around them. Then they took hold of each other's hand, and walked on in silence and in some dismay. They felt the gathering darkness, and something strangely solemn besides, and the beauty of the shadows ceased to delight them. All at once Tangle found that she

> had not a hold of Mossy's hand… 'Mossy, Mossy!' she cried aloud in terror. But no Mossy replied. (MacDonald 490)

The author packs this excerpt with emotive description, where Mossy and Tangle feel "dismay," the "gathering darkness," and Tangle experiences terror. This dramatic shift in feeling covers the spectrum of emotions influenced by the numinous encounter with the shadows. Within a seemingly short period of time in the story, the protagonists shift from delight to dread, and their physical appearance likewise makes an acceleration from youthful to aged features. Mossy displays streaks of grey in his hair, while Tangle develops wrinkles on her forehead, and both become unsettled in their separation from each other in the dark and solemn shadows. From an alchemical perspective, this instance potentially serves as a metaphor for the *nibrido* or "the dark night of the soul, when an individual confronts the shadow within" (Hopeke 165). More importantly, this scenario demonstrates what happens when the soul is spiritually separated from God, and serves as a foreshadowing of their spiritual death and renewal.

SECTION VI

THE PARADOX OF DEATH AS MORE LIFE

The Exodus Parallel

Tangle's encounter with the former air-fish turned "aeranth" as a new, transformed creature exposes readers to the product of dramatic renewal. To undergo this change, the air-fish willingly flew into a pot of boiling water to meet its death. In death, the air-fish received new life, the new name of "aeranth" and yet a similar responsibility to lead Tangle through the forthcoming mountainous terrain and to the seaside:

> Thereupon the aeranth took to his wings, and flew on through the long, narrow passage, reminding Tangle very much of the way he had swum on before her when he was a fish. And the moment his white wings moved, they began to throw off a continuous shower of sparks of all colors, which lighted up the passage before them. All at once he vanished, and Tangle heard a low, sweet sound, quite different from the rush and crackle of his wings. Before her was an open arch, and through it came light, mixed with the sound of sea waves. (MacDonald 491)

The white aeranth and colorful sparks emitted by its wings during this leg of the journey recalls the pillar of fire that God used to guide the Israelites through forty years of darkness in the wilderness and into the promise land of Canaan: "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud… and by night in a pillar of fire to give the

light…" (*ESV*, Ex. 13:21). MacDonald's passage concerning the aeranth, Tangle's journey to the sea, and the relationship of the aeranth to the pillar of fire provided as a guide by God all point to the biblical motif of baptism as a means of redemption once readers consider that the Israelites' exodus from Egypt required them to pass through the parted Red Sea.

Paul's letter to the church at Corinth reinforces this symbolic relationship between the Israelites' deliverance from the Egyptians or "Moses' baptism," and the Christian baptism that represents the new deliverance from sin: "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea…" (*ESV*, I Cor. 10:1-2). The Israelites entered into the Red Sea and took part in the "baptism of Moses" before they could enter new land; likewise, before Tangle can approach the land from where the shadows fall, she must participate in a redemptive ritual.

Before Tangle can proceed on her journey, she must lie in a bath prepared for her in the Old Man of the Sea's house, and remain there until he summons her out of the water. Once in the bath, she experiences changes in her mind and to her emotions:

> No sooner was she undressed and lying in the bath, than she began to feel as if the water were sinking into her, and she were receiving all the good of sleep without undergoing its forgetfulness. She felt the good coming all the time. And she grew happier and more hopeful than she had been since she lost Mossy. (MacDonald 492)

Tangle's bath not only gave her an unparalleled sense of peace that eased the pain of her separation from Mossy, but also purified her as "the good" entered in her. In addition to

her renewed hope and feeling of happiness and restfulness, Tangle left her bath feeling "whole," "strong," and deeply refreshed. This marks an important moment of change and purification akin to the baptismal ritual. When Tangle received the Old Man of the Sea, she did not recognize him at first, because he had changed in her eyes and assumed the form of a "grand man, with a majestic and beautiful face" (MacDonald 492). Although Tangle enjoyed an audible change after partaking of the air-fish remnant, her change in vision and ability to emit light from her eyes after the bath points to a transformation much greater than one that affects the senses. The Old Man remarked that when others encounter him in his "youthful" form, they are "terribly frightened" and in their fear, they cannot see him for what he really is.

Baptism: Death as More Life

Tangle's "bath" should be most readily perceived as a metaphor for baptismal cleansing, an act that has great significance in the life of the church established by Jesus in Scripture. While the larger body of criticism concerning "The Golden Key" seems to view the baths taken by Tangle and eventually Mossy as another form of physical cleansing, such analyses seem to overlook the Christian symbolism inherent in this fairytale and other stories by MacDonald. Other critics like Pemberton seem to only consider the bath provided by the Old Man of the Sea as a mere form of physical death, and fail to interpret it as a baptismal symbol for spiritual cleansing (Pemberton 41). Although Mossy encounters the Old Man of the Sea later in the story, his contact with the Old Man reveals more about the nature of the bath and what it offers to those who participate in the cleansing ritual. When Mossy first reached the shore, he noticed a "majestic figure" and reacted with shock when he discovered that the individual was a

"strong kingly man of middle age" (MacDonald 495). Because of his possession of the golden key and of extraordinary sight for his condition, Mossy was able to recognize the Old Man of the Sea in all of his majesty. In contrast, Mossy appeared aged and weathered, but his participation in the symbolic bath altered his condition significantly:

> "I'm not sure that I'm not old. I know my feet ache." "Do they?" said the old man, as if he really meant to ask the question; and Mossy, who was still lying in the bath, watched his feet for a moment before he replied, "No, they do not. Perhaps I am not old either." "Get up and look at yourself in the water." He rose and looked at himself in the water, and there was not a gray hair on his head or a wrinkle on his skin. "You have tasted of death now," said the old man. "Is it good?" "It is good," said Mossy. "It is better than life." "No," said the old man: "it is only more life." (MacDonald 496)

The narrator uses the bath of the Old Man of the Sea to introduce readers to a central paradox of the story, namely that death leads to more life for the protagonists. This paradox is coupled with another central paradox: participation in this symbolic, baptismal death brings an inward change made evident in the outward appearance. As a former minister, MacDonald would have been quite familiar with the baptismal paradox of death as more life as Paul describes it in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we

> have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his… For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the live he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (*ESV*, Rom. 6:3-5, 10)

The aforementioned verses suggest that baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which parallels the symbolic death of Mossy and Tangle as they are buried or submersed in the bath and raised or "resurrected" to new life. This process is evidenced by the paradox that the protagonists must undergo physical changes to emphasize the internal, spiritual cleansing initiated by the baptismal ritual. Both Mossy and Tangle felt cleansed and whole, and Mossy's wrinkles and gray hair dissolved away. When an individual is baptized or spiritually cleansed, the outward, physical appearance does not change, but an inner transformation of the mind and renewed conscience is the goal. Yet in "The Golden Key" an outward change is needed in order to communicate the inward transformation of the protagonists in Fairyland. MacDonald uses this portion of the storyline to communicate meaning but also to wake meaning within the reader and symbolically baptize the imagination by way of the reader's participation or "immersion" into the story of the characters, as well as the regeneration of their understanding of the story and of the protagonists' relationship to God.

Zerr sheds light on the excerpt of Paul's letter to the Romans, noting that the central idea of death implies a separation, since "The body and spirit of Christ were separated at his death, and it was done for the sins of man" (Zerr 359). Zerr continues by writing that while Christ died for sin, humans must die to sin in order for it to benefit

them, since they must repent in order to separate from sin: "In order for this figurative death of a man to be benefited by the literal death of Christ, it is necessary for him to get into that death. Divine wisdom has decreed that such an experience is to be accomplished by baptism" (Zerr 359). When humans are buried in baptism, they rise to walk in newness of life spiritually, and are dead to the "old man of sin".

This spiritual, baptismal death experienced by Tangle suggests that when she reappears to the Old Man of the Sea, he finds her "ready" to continue on in the next phase of her journey, and this mirrors the process that the Christian must undergo in order to reach heaven as signified by the shadow lands. Tangle and Mossy experienced liminality during this process of transformation, which takes place during a transition from one state of being to another, or is as Pemberton describes "a period of dying" (Pemberton 39). Pemberton first points out the subversive nature of MacDonald's use of death as a motif in the fairy tale, since when a fairy tale mentions death, it usually serves as a "judgment for wrongdoing;" furthermore, MacDonald works to wrestle with the Victorian preoccupation with spiritualism which questioned whether life exists after physical death takes place in the world:

> At the time when "The Golden Key" (1867) and *North Wind* (1871) were written, death was very much part of everyone's life… In the earlier part of the century the majority of Christians had no doubt that the sinful would "go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 26:46). The certitude of life after death was felt with less and less confidence, however, resulting in the increased popularity of spiritualism during the second half of the century. (Pemberton 36)

More evidence supporting Pemberton's observation of MacDonald's sense of purpose to reinstate hope in his audience comes from *A Dish of Orts*, where he recognizes that the "terror" in the hearts of the Victorians "grows, lest there should be no Unseen Power, as his fathers believed, and his mother taught him, filling all things and meaning all things, no Power with whom, in his last extremity, awaits him a final refuge" (MacDonald 60). In many ways, death or its other significations of slumber or rest serve to awaken the reader to a heightened sense of awareness of his or her immortal nature, and thus MacDonald uses his "Golden Key" fairy tale to communicate the paradox that death is more life, employ baptism as a vehicle needed to obtain that life, and to position numinous symbols in nature as a way to show that God as the "Unseen Power" participates in his created realm.

Old Man of the Fire: The Christ Child

Tangle's journey leads from the Old Man of the Sea to the Old Man of the Earth, and finally the Old Man of the Fire, with all three characters serving as representations of some aspect of the divine nature of God in the created order of Fairyland. Her encounter with the Old Man of the Fire proves to be most fruitful, but Tangle's time spent with the Old Man of the Earth reveals even more about her transformed nature. Despite his long, white beard that spread out on the cave floor, MacDonald describes the Old Man of the Earth in the same manner as the Old Man of the Sea: both are youths of "marvelous beauty"; these characters, Grandmother, and the transformed, beautiful Tangle suggest that despite their age, the youth displayed on their physical bodies signifies the purity and childlikeness of their souls. Tangle beheld the Old Man of the Earth peering into a mirror, and the use of such a reflective device possibly explains Tangle's physical interactions

with the old man. Tangle approached the beautiful, marvelous individual while trembling, and this emotive reaction suggests that she experienced a numinous encounter with a being that "mirrors" the divine presence of God, and perhaps the divine spirit that Tangle now has within her. After all, MacDonald calls the imagination clothed in wisdom as "the presence of the spirit of God" (Robb 53). The exchange between Tangle and the old man also points inward, since when she speaks, her voice does not make a sound, and when she hears the old man's replies, she does not hear with her ears (MacDonald 493). Although not explicitly stated or pursued by outside criticism, the fact that Tangle did not need these senses to communicate suggests that her mind presided over her physical interactions with the Old Man of the Earth. Robb emphasizes that by reuniting with God, imagination will be "liberated" and "valued" (Robb 54). This ability marks a stark change from the Tangle first introduced to readers, who differed from Mossy because of her lack of exposure to stories worthy of imitation and other resources that could have fortified her imagination.

Although Tangle's encounter with the Old Man of the Earth exposed readers to particular details and abilities of her transformed state, time spent with the Old Man of the Fire proved to be the most beneficial to her quest. To access the last and oldest of the three men, Tangle had to fling herself down a hole full of rushing water; after passing through an unbearably hot stairway, she entered a cool cave full of moss (MacDonald 494). After partaking of a small stream to quench her thirst, the author writes that Tangle possessed a "marvelous sense" that she beheld the secret of the earth:

> Everything she had seen, or learned from books; all that her grandmother had said or sung to her; all the talk of the beasts, birds, and fishes; all that

> had happened to her on her journey with Mossy, and since then in the heart of the earth with the Old man and the Older man – all was plain: she understood it all, and saw that everything meant the same thing, though she could not have put it into words again. (MacDonald 494)

This moment marks a culminating point in Tangle's life, since her exposure to the stories she read, those told to her by Grandmother and the animals, and the story in which she participated during her quest for the land from whence the shadows fall demonstrates the interrelatedness of story in her life, as well as the participatory nature of story and its power to connect all of nature. Tangle developed this understanding and yet ironically she could not "put it into words" or communicate any of her understanding through language. Yet after enjoying this brief moment of revelation, her encounter with the Old Man of the Fire changed her perception of her understanding:

> The next moment she descried, in a corner of the cave, a little naked child sitting on the moss. He was playing with balls of various colors and sizes, which he disposed in strange figures upon the floor beside him. And now Tangle felt that there was something in her knowledge which was not in her understanding. (MacDonald 494)

Tangle knew that the way in which the child changed and sequenced his colorful balls signified an "infinite meaning," but it was something she could not understand despite the "flashes of meaning" that would transmit from the balls to her and wake an "indescribable vague intelligence" in her mind (MacDonald 494). When considering Greco-Roman mythology and the potential interrelatedness of "The Golden Key" with other stories, the balls hearken back to those used by the child Zeus, who signified the

god of Western mythology. Soto suggests that the magical balls potentially parallel "Zeus' future mastery of the world"; Plato also references Zeus' colorful balls, describing them as related to the earth (Soto 111). Biblically speaking, these myths correlate with the scriptural account of Jesus who was present at the creation of the world and who continues to preside over it. The Apostle John reveals this about Jesus when he writes,

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (*ESV*, John 1:1-5)

Through the myth of Zeus and John's account of Christ's existence, readers see that parallels are drawn and potentially used by MacDonald to establish the relatedness of the Old Man of the Fire child to Christ as an authority of the balls or created elements of the universe and possessor of primordial wisdom. Tangle stood receiving such images from the balls that reminded her of the shadows, and staring in fascination and wonder at the child for seven years of Fairyland time, a number that traditionally symbolizes religious wholeness and spiritual completion. The balls and the awful, "absolute repose" in the face of the child evoked numinous feelings of reverence and awe within her, which prompted her to stand before him, dumbfounded (MacDonald 495). The child did not smile at Tangle, for "the heart of the child was too deep for any smile to reach from it to his face" (MacDonald 495). MacDonald uses this moment to reveal to readers the essence of the divine child-Christ in the form of the childlike Old Man of the Fire. The time Tangle spent with each old man signifies a shift from physically aging figures to bodies

of outward youthfulness. The Old Man of the Sea is a "grand" man with a beautiful, "majestic face"; the Old Man of the Earth has a white, long beard and yet is a youth of "marvelous beauty", and the Old Man of the Fire is a little naked boy playing on a bed of moss (MacDonald 494). The irony that the older the men are in age, more childlike they are in appearance, since the outward image of the men is used to symbolize the inward, pure, and childlike spiritual state of the characters:

> "Are you the oldest man of all?" Tangle at length, although filled with awe, ventured to ask. "Yes, I am. I am very, very old. I am able to help you, I know. I can help everybody." And the child drew near and looked up in her face so that she burst into tears. "Can you tell me the way to the country the shadows fall from?" she sobbed. "Yes, I know the way quite well. I go there myself sometimes. But you could not go my way; you are not old enough. I will show you how you can go." (MacDonald 495)

Though "filled with awe," Tangle attempted to speak to the child, but when he approached her and looked into her eyes, she "burst into tears." Tangle's overwhelming emotional response demonstrates that the child himself is a numinous presence in the story. MacDonald's sermons shed much light onto the pure and divine character of this child. In "The Child in the Midst," MacDonald instructs that God is represented in Jesus and that Jesus is shown in the child, because Jesus is like the child which makes God like the child as well: "God is childlike. In the true vision of this fact lies the receiving of God in the child" (MacDonald 10). In the Old Man of the Fire, Tangle beholds the childlike child, in whom God and Jesus are represented. MacDonald concludes the same sermon

by making a dramatic shift from his characterization of God as a loving, childlike child to that of a consuming fire:

> When he prays for comfort, the answer may come in dismay and terror and the turning aside of the Father's countenance; for love itself will, for love's sake, turn the countenance away from that which is not lovely; and he will have to read, written upon the dark wall of his imprisoned conscience, the words, awful and glorious, Our God is a Consuming Fire. (MacDonald 11)

MacDonald writes concerning an individual who has forgotten not only his responsibility of repenting for his sins, but also the responsibility inherent in the nature of God to either purge out the unclean elements of his child or cast him or her into "outer darkness" for an unwillingness to transform. In "The Golden Key", MacDonald marries the two elements of the child and fire in his creation of the Old Man of the Fire character. This old man possesses the childlike beauty and magnificence of the everlastingly pure God, as well as a love immeasurable for all of his creatures. This love, both "awful" and "glorious" as numinous qualities, is represented in the fire as managed by the old man. The fiery love consumes the impurities of the world since sin forever remains incompatible with the perfection of God. Paul admonishes the church in his letter to the Colossians to set their "minds on things that are above" if they have "been raised with Christ" in baptism (*ESV*, Col. 3:2). He continues by writing that in the symbolic death of baptism, the church members have "put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (*ESV*, Col. 3:9-10). The new self and the renewal of knowledge likely relates to the knowledge Tangle received

from standing in the presence of the old man. The Old Man of the Fire's ability to behold Tangle in her transformed state shows her cleanliness as a result of her baptism. Her renewed condition likewise enables him to provide her with passage into the land from where the shadows fall.

SECTION VII

INTO THE LAND FROM WHICH THE SHADOWS FALL

Biblical Motifs

The author continues to capitalize upon the life motif when the Old Man of the Fire provides Tangle with a serpent to guide her on the final leg of her journey. The old man and Tangle watch as a snake hatches from an egg and matures into a full-grown serpent prepared to lead Tangle through the wilderness. The old man instructed Tangle to follow the serpent because "it will lead you the right way" (MacDonald 495). The serpent has mixed connotations, since Satan assumed the form of a snake to tempt Eve in the Garden of Eden; however, the Apostle John also compares Christ to the serpent that Moses raised up in the wilderness so that those who gazed upon the snake would not perish. John writes, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (*ESV*, John 3:14). Furthermore, the serpent of the ancient world traditionally symbolized regeneration and new life with the shedding of its old skin so that the new skin might be revealed. It is understandable then that the serpent is leading Tangle to the land of the shadows, and that Tangle must watch the serpent and diligently follow it so that she might obtain life eternal.

Mossy took a different path to the land from which the shadows fall, which further demonstrates the contrast in the development of his character to that process

which developed Tangle's. After his baptismal bath provided by the Old Man of the Sea, the man led him to the edge of the water where he beheld the numinous rainbow from the beginning of his journey. To access the rainbow, he "stepped out onto the water" in the middle of a storm; and, although he did not notice, a shining fish guided him along the way:

> Day after day he held on, and he thought he had no guide. He did not see how a shining fish under the water directed his steps. He crossed the sea, and came to a great precipice in the rock, up which he could discover but one path. Nor did this lead him farther than halfway up the rock, where it ended on a platform. Here he stood and pondered. It could not be that the way stopped here, else what was the path for? It was a rough path, not very plain, yet certainly a path. He examined the face of the rock. It was smooth as glass. But as his eyes kept roving hopelessly over it, something glittered, and he caught sight of a row of small sapphires. They bordered a little hole in the rock. (MacDonald 497)

For those familiar with biblical accounts, they might recognize the symbolism inherent in the author's representation of Mossy as a Peter figure in the fairy tale. The apostles Peter, Andrew, James and John comprised Jesus' inner circle of his closest companions during his adult life. Peter and Andrew also worked as fishermen, and so the timing of Mossy's meeting with the Old Man of the Sea who cared for the fish aligns well with Peter's occupation. Other similarities exist, including the walk that both Peter and Mossy take on the water during a sea storm. Matthew writes that Peter asked Jesus to identify himself by enabling him to walk on the water; yet unlike Mossy, Peter's faith wavered in the wind

and Jesus had to save him from sinking (*ESV*, Matt. 14:28-31). Merely two chapters later, Matthew reveals more information about Peter and the keys Christ bestows upon him:

> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven… (*ESV*, Matt. 16:18,19)

In like manner, Mossy served as the keeper of the golden key, the numinous object that inspired him to initiate his journey to begin with; in this way, readers see yet another parallel drawn between the land from where the shadows fall and heaven. It is no coincidence that Mossy passed over a great rock to access the keyhole, for Peter's name is commonly understood to mean *petras* or "rock" in Koine Greek. In the rock, Mossy found a keyhole decorated with sapphires that matched the design of his own golden key, and when he turned the lock, the rock fell away to reveal an irregular staircase that led to pedestals of seven columns, and on one sat Tangle:

> And on the pedestal of one of them sat a woman, motionless, with her face bowed upon her knees. Seven years had she sat there waiting. She lifted her head as Mossy drew near. It was Tangle. Her hair had grown to her feet, and was rippled like the windless sea on broad sands. Her face was beautiful, like her Grandmother's, and as still and peaceful as that of the Old Man of the Fire. Her form was tall and noble. Yet Mossy knew her at once. (MacDonald 497)

Tangle had finally transformed into a beautiful, pure, and peaceful soul, which she bore literally on her physical person for Mossy to see; likewise, Mossy looked and behaved as if he had all assumed the physical characteristics and other features of all three old men,

for he was “like them all.” Both Mossy and Tangle were “younger and better, and stronger and wiser, than they had ever been before” (MacDonald 497). The divine childlikeness they assumed during their journey radiated from within, and together in their transformed state of renewed spirit, they found the final sapphire keyhole that opened to the ascending stairway of the numinous rainbow. Mossy and Tangle climbed the stair “out of the earth” with other beautiful forms to the land from whence the shadows fall, and “by this time”, the narrator supposes, “I think they must have got there” (MacDonald 498). Mossy and Tangle depart their cave to reach the land from which the shadows fall, which mirrors Plato’s discussion of the guardians’ journey in the Allegory of the Cave.

Plato’s Cave

Recall the earlier myth concerning the Ring of Gyges as told by Glaucon, and consider that the Allegory of the Cave is but a continuation of the discussion between Glaucon and Plato, and the potential influence that this conversation had over the larger conversation concerning heaven that is inherent in “The Golden Key.” When describing the allegory to Glaucon, Plato remarks that a certain philosopher has spent his entire life trapped in a cave, and that he is only able to hear other voices and to see dancing shadows on the cave wall illuminated by a glowing fire from behind the prisoners:

> One might be released, and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck around, and to walk and look towards the firelight; all this would hurt him, and he would be too much dazzled to see distinctly those things whose shadows he had seen before. (Plato 313)

This philosopher escapes the shadows of the cave and beholds the world of the forms outside of the cave. The shadows of the cave are but representations of the real, beautiful, and true forms illuminated not by fire but by the sun. When the philosopher first gazes on the forms in the sun, his eyes adjust painfully which makes it difficult to for him to accept his reality. The philosopher returns to the cave to try and convince the dwellers that the shadows are not reality but literally "shadows" of persistent truth, but they do not believe him. Perhaps MacDonald views it as the responsibility of the storyteller to communicate the truth of heaven and the soul to an audience convinced that the shadows are indeed the reality of their existence, and as a preacher turned storyteller with the knowledge of the universal truth of God, perhaps he views himself as the philosopher of Plato's allegory.

The Alchemical Elixir

MacDonald as "literary alchemist" employs the fairy tale genre as a medium to disseminate important and life-changing ideas and experiences about what is true to human nature. In "The Golden Key", he exercises the fairy story as a vehicle through which the numinous might awaken the childlike mind of the characters and subsequently the readers. The numinous acts as a catalyst for change by prompting characters and readers to respond to the presence of the divine. Various objects including the golden key, rainbow, shadows, and stories – including those told Mossy by his great aunt concerning the key – are infused with numinous qualities so that like the philosopher in Plato's "Cave," MacDonald might awaken or illuminate the childlike imagination of the minds of his readers. The elements of myth and the numinous serve as two ingredients of the alchemical elixir that provide the opportunity for both protagonist and reader to experience transformation.

Both Mossy and Tangle undergo physical changes to reflect the inner transformation or awakening of the "childlike imagination" in the mind as prompted by their numinous encounters. They journey through the land of the shadows and their encounter with the divine inspires them to look for the land from which the shadows fall. As they travel through the shadow lands they experience physical aging, weariness, and terror, which demonstrates what happens when the soul is spiritually separated from God. This instance highlights the impurities of their souls and their spiritual *nibrido*, and serves as a foreshadowing of their spiritual death and renewal through baptism. Both participate in a baptismal ritual that cleanses them of their impurities so that they might gain access to the land from which the shadows fall. Their baptism or rebirth is the ultimate form of cleansing and renewal, since out of this death comes new life and a purified soul. The outward appearances of Mossy and Tangle become youthful and beautiful, and they reflect the inner youthful and childlike transformation.

Tangle and Mossy could not have reached their inner childlike state without guidance from influences ranging from figures like the great-aunt, Grandmother, the old men and the numinous symbols that cultivated in them a sense of longing for the divine. These led Tangle and Mossy to seek out heavenly things and become childlike children of God in their obedience and participation in baptism so they could access the heavenly realm. Once a physically dirty child entangled in worldly consciousness and fear, Tangle transformed into a beautiful soul full of love, charity, and wisdom. Although Mossy did not undergo changes as drastic as Tangle's, he transitioned from a fearful child in the land of the shadows to a confident Peter figure that could walk on the water post-baptism. Like the protagonists, readers also experience an alchemical change with renewed

conscience as the goal. The participatory nature of the numinous, mythic tale invites readers to enter into the story and to suspend consciousness of the present reality in favor of the alternate, fictional reality of Fairyland, just as the numinous key invited Mossy into the realm and as the shadows invited both Mossy and Tangle to pursue the land from which the shadows fall. As readers become invested in the story, it begins to unfold in their minds, and may provide a model of how situations can be handled for real-life application. When the protagonists encountered the divine inherent in the numinous entities, it is likely that the readers responded in similar ways by undergoing a similar transformative process that aimed at purifying the mind of its *nigredo* in favor of situating its thoughts on aspects of the divine by first using numinous symbols to point to God.

"The Golden Key" presents its audience with a story that charts Mossy and Tangle's spiritual development and maturity. In the end, they are finally prepared to enter heaven, or the land from which the shadows fall, and as the narrator concludes, "By this time, I think they must have got there" (MacDonald 498). It is impossible to say that readers will also have reached a similar maturity, especially when MacDonald recognizes that each reader will process and understand the story after his or her own point of development. However, to say that the story had no effect on the minds of the readers is to approach the other extreme and to discredit the role of the subconscious in affecting how we process information. David Brooks argues, "Character emerges gradually out of the mysterious interplay of a million little good influences," and that it is a process "that emphasizes the power of small and repetitive action to rewire the fundamental mechanisms of the brain" (Brooks 128). "The Golden Key" is important because the

numinous symbols invite reader participation, response, and awakening which begets action. Although it is difficult to say that readers' minds will be influenced and that they will adopt childlikeness, perhaps they will be aroused from their slumber.

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