THESIS

THE LION, THE OLD LADY, AND THE GOLDEN THREAD: ONTOLOGICAL AND RHETORICAL DISSONANCE IN THE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF GEORGE MACDONALD AND C.S. LEWIS.

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ISAAC R. SUNDERMANN ENTITLED THE LION, THE OLD LADY, AND THE GOLDEN THREAD: ONTOLOGICAL AND RHETORICAL DISSONANCE IN THE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF GEORGE MACDONALD AND C.S. LEWIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE LION, THE OLD LADY, AND THE GOLDEN THREAD: ONTOLOGICAL AND RHETORICAL DISSONANCE IN THE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF GEORGE MACDONALD AND C.S. LEWIS.

Starting from the premise that at least some works of children's literature are written with the motive of engendering religious conversion or de-conversion among their readers, this thesis sets out to establish the rhetorical differences among these types of works as a basis for a uniquely religious form of criticism. To demonstrate this method, a focus is placed on the two most popular children's books of George MacDonald (*The Princess and the Goblin*) and C.S. Lewis (*The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*).

The first section of this thesis consists of a review of relevant literature related to the intertwining of literary reputations between MacDonald and Lewis. The second section of this thesis argues that the respective soteriologies (salvation narratives) of MacDonald and Lewis act as windows into the ontological assumptions of each author. By first looking at these foundational assumptions, the rhetorical framework of each text becomes evident. These frameworks, explored through the lens of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad, provide a basis for the differentiation of the two authors. They also locate the crux of Lewis's misreading of his literary precursor MacDonald. Specifically, it is the universalism of George MacDonald (i.e. his belief that all will be saved) that

creates a profound dissonance with the thought of Lewis, who held to a more orthodox narrative in which all humans ultimately arrive at a state of eternal damnation or eternal bliss.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"The third way [of writing for children], which is the only one I could ever use myself, consists in writing a children's story because a children's story is the best art-form for something you have to say."

-- C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children."

"…beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed; and you may, if you will, call Imagination the tailor that cuts her garments to fit her."

-- George MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination."

The Rhetoric of Religion

In the children's book *The Amber Spyglass*, the ex-nun Mary Malone claims that "Christianity is a very powerful and convincing mistake" (441). When asked about this statement, as well as a general tone of anti-religion in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the author, Phillip Pullman, initially dodges the accusation: "Well, Mary is a character in my book. Mary's not me. It's a story, not a treatise, not a sermon or a work of philosophy" (Pullman "A Dark Agenda"). Pullman initially denies any rhetorical motives behind the

writing of children's books, where religion is concerned, only to later admit in the same interview that "wherever you see organized religion and priesthoods and power, you see cruelty and tyranny and repression. It's almost a universal law." Even though he is hesitant to admit that he may want to influence the thinking of his young readers in a certain way regarding organized religion, Pullman clearly has negative ideas about the nature of religion.

While Pullman may ultimately claim his own innocence in the attempt to influence children through his works, many critics have accused him of writing anti-Christian polemics in the form of children's fantasy. This becomes an even more compelling accusation when one takes into account what Pullman himself has written about the author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*[1] series of books, C.S. Lewis. In an article written for the *Guardian* entitled "The Dark Side of Narnia" (1998)[2], Pullman accuses Lewis of, among other things, racism, misogyny, moralizing, and a general disdain for life itself. He claims that all of this comes through in Lewis's books for children and implicitly accuses Lewis of doing the very thing that he denies doing in his own works—attempting to influence his young readers regarding religion.

Lewis, in a similar fashion, claimed that he did not write children's books to explicitly convey his own religious beliefs to readers, but, according to his friend and biographer George Sayer, Lewis wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia* books to "make it easier for children to accept Christianity when they met it later in life. He [Lewis] hoped they

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[1] *The Chronicles of Narnia* are a series of seven books written by C.S. Lewis between 1949 and 1954 and all take place in the fantasy realm of Narnia, which borrows from a variety of mythological and literary sources.

[2] *The Guardian* is an Independent British newspaper founded in 1821.

would be vaguely reminded of the somewhat similar stories that they had read and enjoyed years before" (318). One some level then, Lewis wrote with the motive of evangelizing when he created his children's books even if they were only designed to serve as a kind of first step in religious conversion. It is certainly true that many parents pick out Lewis's books for their own children based on the fact that he is considered a Christian writer. It is also true that many of these same parents reject Pullman's books because they believe he is explicitly anti-Christian. In other words, the nature of religious rhetoric found in children's books is often the basis for their readership.[3]

It is my contention that when fiction is created for the purpose of evangelizing (and here I use the term to mean preaching for the purposes of engendering religious conversion or de-conversion), no matter how muted, then the underlying motives and rhetorical acts of creating such texts can become the basis for a uniquely religious form of criticism. Approaching the criticism of children's literature from the perspective of the "rhetoric of religion," to borrow a phrase from Kenneth Burke,[4] can be a way to differentiate various children's works, as well as the respective authors of these works. If we can imagine that fictional works for children are elaborate, and perhaps veiled, counterparts to the pulpit, then knowledge about the underlying messages each author wishes to convey will go a long way in explaining how the respective texts are ultimately shaped. In other words, if a Muslim writer creates stories for children for the purpose, at

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[3] A church bulletin created by Anthony Horvath entitled "A Christian Parent's Guide to Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*" is one among hundreds of such bulletins, articles, and books cautioning parents about the dangers of Phillip Pullman's works.

[4] In Burke's *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1961) he is primarily concerned with how language about God helps us to understand language about the material world. I am using the term strictly as a descriptor and do not mean to imply that I am borrowing Burke's sense of the phrase.

least in part, of conveying Islam, it would be expected that elements of the stories will be explainable through an understanding of the author's beliefs, and how those beliefs are expressed on the page will be the basis for differentiation between authors, even if one author is the literary precursor of the other. In this case, it will be the "misreading" of the religious belief (or non-belief) of the precursor author that becomes the basis of discontinuity for the more recent author.[5]

While Pullman works from the influence of Lewis, he consciously makes a point of differentiating himself from Lewis on the level of religious belief. He is so anxious about being put into the same category with Lewis as a fellow writer of children's books, that he actually writes an article to make clear his disdain for Lewis, and Lewis's very popular children's books. It becomes apparent that Pullman has a vested interest in misreading Lewis in terms of religious belief, or at least in painting those beliefs in the most unflattering light possible. The children's books of Lewis clearly work at cross purposes to the children's books of Pullman. Pullman has effectively mounted his own pulpit in the form of literature for children and has consciously established his own stance as a voice of opposition.

When two writers of children's books set out to write with different religious or anti-religious motives, it is easy to see dissonance in the actual texts. When two writers both apparently share the same religious belief, however, finding dissonance becomes more complex. In this case, the misreading of a precursor will necessarily take place not in disagreement about the truth of a particular religion, but in the subcategory of

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[5] I am consciously using the language laid out in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973).

particular belief within the religious tradition. Therefore, even two writers from the same religious tradition can be critically differentiated by establishing a deviation in ontological assumptions and how those assumptions are expressed in comparative texts.

Lewis and MacDonald

A clear example of this phenomenon, and the focus of this thesis, lies in the literary relationship of C.S. Lewis to his precursor George MacDonald. Many readers of the fantasy works of George Macdonald are first led to them by their initial familiarity with the works of C.S. Lewis. This is especially the case with the children's literature of MacDonald. It doesn't take long before an avid reader of Lewis's works will come across his praise of MacDonald as his "spiritual master," as well as a source of awakening the "joy" that ultimately led to his conversion to Christianity. In Lewis's autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, he describes his first experience of reading MacDonald's adult fantasy *Phantastes*:[6]

> For the first time the song of the sirens sounded like the voice of my mother or my nurse. Here were old wives' tales; there was nothing to be proud of in enjoying them. It was as though the voices which had called to me from the world's end were now speaking at my side…That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized. (181-2)

Clearly, a fan of Lewis's own imaginative works would be left intrigued by such a description. If MacDonald could have such a profound effect on Lewis, as the reader might surmise, then it would be a natural desire to begin exploring his works.

I argue at this point, however, that MacDonald's own reputation has suffered when it has been propped up by the reputation of Lewis. I do not mean "suffered" in terms of sales and notoriety; in this respect, it is possible that the works of MacDonald

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[6] *Phantastes*, first published in 1858, is widely hailed as MacDonald's fantasy masterpiece.

are kept in circulation and on many reader's bookshelves solely because of Lewis's reputation. Where MacDonald's work does suffer is in how he has been viewed critically since Lewis's shadow was cast over his own. In the introduction to his anthology of MacDonald's religious thought, Lewis states that "If we define Literature as an art whose medium is words, then certainly MacDonald has no place in its first rank—perhaps not even in its second" (xxvi). I would not be the first to state that this seems to be a gross misjudgment of MacDonald's abilities as an author, but I will not attempt to settle the issue here. Instead, I am concerned with whether MacDonald would ever get a "fair trial" in the critical sense so long as he is judged through the lens of Lewis as one of his literary descendants. I believe that it is possible to move MacDonald away from Lewis critically first by 1) establishing the clear dissonance between the underlying ontological premises of MacDonald's thought as a Christian Universalist with what might be described as Lewis's more common and orthodox view that "not all will be saved," and 2) establishing the clear distinctions in rhetorical approaches that emerge from those differences.

Structure of Study

In order to isolate the ontological and rhetorical dissonance in the children's books of Lewis and MacDonald respectively, I will focus my attention on a single work of each author for purposes of comparison. For Lewis, I will focus on *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*[7] (*The Lion* from here), a seminal work that is often considered Lewis's most popular children's fantasy. For MacDonald, I will focus on his *The*

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[7] *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was first published in 1950 and even though it is second chronologically in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it was the first of the Narnia books written by Lewis. For a summary of the plot of *The Lion*, see appendix A.

Princess and the Goblin[8] (*The Princess* from here), which also retains a strong degree of popularity with children to the present day. I will first focus my attention on how the differences between the two authors regarding Christian concepts of salvation effectively translate to different ontologies. I will then demonstrate how these foundational differences come through in each respective text. Shifting from the texts as a whole, I will focus in on the characters of Aslan from *The Lion* and The Old Lady[9] from *The Princess*, to demonstrate how they serve as the rhetorical incarnations of each respective author's view of the divine.

In the first section of this paper I will conduct a review of relevant literature. To begin, I will focus on some of the scholarship related to the intertwining of literary reputations between Lewis and MacDonald. I will then shift my focus to literature written specifically about Lewis's character Aslan and MacDonald's character The Old Lady. In the second section of the paper, I will argue that by starting with the respective soteriology[10] of each author as an ontological foundation, the rhetorical framework of each author will become evident, and that will be the basis for treating each author as unique agents in the creation of religious literature written for children. In the third section, I will conclude with a discussion of how writing fiction for children can become a kind of pulpit for religious expression and evangelism. I will then suggest future

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[8] *The Princess and the Goblin* was first published in 1871. Reception of the work was initially poor, but the work has managed to remain consistently popular over the years and has never gone out of print. The poor reception at the time is most likely related to the preference for realistic novels. For a summary of the narrative, see appendix B.

[9] Although the Old Lady goes by many descriptions in the book, including Irene and the great-great-grandmother of the princess Irene, I am using The Old Lady throughout for the sake of clarity.

[10] Soteriology is a theological term for the study of the means of salvation.

directions for scholarship using the "rhetoric of religion" as a basis for granting MacDonald's reputation a degree of literary autonomy from that of Lewis.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Literary Relationship between Lewis and MacDonald

In William Gray's essay "Pullman, Lewis, MacDonald, and the Anxiety of Influence," he argues that any discussion of the adolescent literature of Philip Pullman and George Macdonald will necessarily be conditioned by C.S. Lewis if one is going to approach the work of all three within the framework laid out in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. He makes this argument primarily by pointing out the animosity that Pullman has for Lewis, and how Pullman's own work is shaped by it. He notes that "a writer must necessarily misread a significant precursor in order to achieve his identity as a writer" (1). His argument about Pullman then segues into a discussion about Lewis's own relationship with the works of MacDonald, who he clearly identifies as a "spiritual" mentor. Gray's conclusion is ultimately that Pullman may have more tolerance for the work of MacDonald, but that his approach to MacDonald may be too clouded by his view of Lewis.

The occluding of MacDonald's own reputation by the very strong presence of Lewis as a literary "descendant" of MacDonald is a key issue in the attempt to approach Macdonald with fresh critical perspectives. Gray entertains the question of how Pullman

might view MacDonald as a writer—especially as a writer of children's fantasies—if Lewis was not in the picture. He attempts to find common ground in the idea that perhaps Pullman's own apparent embrace of a kind of Gnosticism[11] in his fantasy works for children is also present in the work of MacDonald. This is highly problematic given Macdonald's clear embrace of Christian orthodoxy where such ideas as good and evil are concerned (evil being viewed by MacDonald as something parasitical in relation to good rather than an equal and opposite force at work in the cosmos) and certainly there is no notion that MacDonald was anti-materialistic in the sense of seeing matter as merely the realm of the tainted demiurge of much of Gnostic thought. His attempt to find a basis on which to separate MacDonald from Lewis is admirable, but I argue that MacDonald's universalism as a point of radical ontological difference with Lewis is the key to freeing MacDonald's work and reputation from the shadow Lewis casts upon them.

Catherine Durie first demystifies the apparent alliance between MacDonald and Lewis on a religious plane and then argues that this alliance is rooted in Lewis's own agenda to recruit MacDonald as a spiritual mentor in "George Macdonald and C.S. Lewis." Durie goes on to point out key theological differences between MacDonald and Lewis: "The difference between the two men can be summed up in the images they choose for divine compulsion" (171). In Durie's examples, she argues that MacDonald pictures the divine as a Great Shepherd, always working to bring lost sheep back into the fold. Pains and sufferings are described as the sheep dogs of the Shepherd. Lewis, on the

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[11] Gnosticism is comprised of a loose amalgamation of religious sects that possibly predated Christ in origin and co-existed with primitive Christianity. Among the beliefs of Gnostics is the notion that the world is ruled by a demiurge, an evil and inferior god who created the material world. Gnostics often identified the superior and good deity with Christ and the demiurge with the Hebrew God of the Old Testament. Pullman's picture of the deity of this world is weak, corrupt, and inferior.

other hand, tends to emphasize the severity of the divine to the negation of a model of reconciliation for all. She later notes that MacDonald tends to picture the divine as childlike whereas Lewis prefers images like a king, hunter, or husband to describe the Christian God.

Durie does an excellent job of bringing the differences of theology between Macdonald and Lewis to light in these preferred metaphors for the divine. On the other hand, she does not emphasize the ontological foundation that ultimately informs the respective theologies of each man. MacDonald takes the salvation of all people for granted, and this works to radically change his picture of the divine. The activities of the Christian God all point to a single outcome, and therefore actions that might be construed as punishment would not make any sense to Macdonald unless they could serve a purpose of spiritual rehabilitation. Lewis, on the other hand, is left with a picture of the divine that is much like a shepherd who accepts that a certain number of sheep will be lost from the flock. The shepherd may send out his sheep dogs to cause pain to the stray sheep, but since they may not return to the fold, the pains ultimately become a kind of pointless punishment.

In John Pennington's essay entitled "'Wolff' in Sheep's Clothing: The George MacDonald Industry and the Difficult Rehabilitation of a Reputation," he explores the ebb and flow of MacDonald's reputation in the years following his death. He asserts that Lewis has a mixed influence on MacDonald's own literary reputation. In particular, he points out how the association with Lewis has "pigeonholed" him as a religious writer, which has even led to him gaining fans among Christian fundamentalists. He notes that it

is the sense that Lewis is a safely orthodox religious writer that leads these readers to accept MacDonald as equally safe.

A plausible explanation for why Christian fundamentalists would embrace MacDonald, who himself embraced a religious view that would be considered extremely unorthodox in most fundamentalist circles, is that Lewis is trusted as a harbinger of a more palatable theology in which lines between the saved and the damned are clearly drawn. The universalism of MacDonald appears to be completely missed, or painted over with the trust granted to Lewis, who unabashedly recommends MacDonald as a spiritual mentor to his readers. While there is certainly nothing wrong with Christian fundamentalists enjoying MacDonald's works, their enjoyment is nevertheless discovered under false pretences. One wonders what even a brief primer on MacDonald's universalism (such as reading his essay "On Justice") might do for the average Christian fundamentalist's view of the relative worth of his works. Needless to say, this phenomenon once again emphasizes the need to point out MacDonald's universalism as a defining feature of his writing. If these readers are choosing MacDonald primarily for his qualities as a religious writer, then it is fair to note that their appraisal of his religious views must be largely illusory.

Divine Agents: The Lion and the Old Lady

While the amount of work dedicated to the character of Aslan is too great to cover here in full, a few samples of recent scholarship will help to frame the rhetorical significance of this fictional character as a divine agent. In her dissertation *Truth, Fantasy, and Paradox: The Fairy Tales of George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, and C.S. Lewis (2008),* Jennifer R. Overkamp explores the perennial debate concerning the

relative moral value of fiction and fantasy and the creation of such works by Christian writers to convey religious truth. Of particular relevance to this paper is Overkamp's discussion of Lewis's defense of the fearful elements in fairy tales and whether they are harmful to young readers. Overkamp points out that Lewis defends the existence of horrors in fairy tales by noting that "He [Lewis] argues that fairy tales contain both that which engenders fear but also that which combats it" (180). Therefore, *The Lion* contains the fearful witch Jadis, who turns creatures to stone among other things, yet it also contains Aslan, who inspires children to be brave and gives them courage so long as he is on their side.

While Overkamp discusses Aslan's role as a source of delight for the children throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, she does not explicitly mention Aslan as one of those palliatives for fear that Lewis uses to defend fairy tale horrors. It is Aslan's power to inspire a sense of bravery in young readers, however, that speaks to one of the significant aspects of Lewis's choice of Aslan as a divine agent. What child would not want a lion on his or her side in some epic battle against evil? One only has to replace Aslan with The Old Lady in this situation to see how much less inspiring an "old lady" would be in comparison.

Jennifer Rains-Proper explores the notion that "animal wizards" are a common theme in all of Lewis's fairy tales in her work entitled *C. S. Lewis' Animal Images in the Chronicles of Narnia* (2006). Her examination of Aslan as the "ultimate animal wizard," emphasizes comparisons between Aslan and Christ. Among other things, she notes

Aslan's creative powers (in *The Magician's Nephew* he breathes Narnia into existence)[12], his role as a guide and prophet to the children who visit Narnia, and his sacrificial nature as he dies in the place of Edmund (126-35).

There is little doubt that, on some level, Aslan was meant to be representative of Christ. Lewis conceived of Aslan by asking a question: "What might Christ become like, if there really were a land like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?" (*Letters* 283). While discussing Lewis's various uses of animals in his stories, however, Rains-Proper fails to consider the significance of using a Lion to represent Christ among all the other choices he had available. In her next section, she discusses the character Reepicheep, a fearless and chivalric mouse, yet never considers why Aslan did not take the form of a mouse. The choice of a lion among all the other possible animals is the choice to emphasize elements of strength, power, and even the threat of violence on the part of Lewis when he is representing Christ.

In her work entitled *Aslan As Transformer in C.S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia* (2009), Melanie Kolden-Ramsey emphasizes the role of Aslan as a catalyst for change in the land of Narnia—especially among the human characters that visit Narnia throughout the seven books in the series. The most interesting section of her thesis is the chapter entitled "Rival Transformers: Magic and Black Magic" because she juxtaposes the good magic of Aslan with the wicked magic of the various witches of Narnia—especially Jadis. While witches are not particularly novel for fairy tales, there is a great

[12] The Magician's Nephew is meant to be the first book in the chronology of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It depicts the creation of Narnia.

deal of significance in Lewis's choice to use a male lion to represent the powers of good in Narnia and a female witch to represent the powers of evil. In the same sense that Lewis chose not to use an animal that would have an inverse or paradoxical relationship with power to represent the divine, he chooses what could be considered a symbol of relative powerlessness (a woman) to represent the primary enemy of Aslan.

Forming a stark contrast with Lewis's use of a lion with magical powers to represent the divine in *The Lion*, MacDonald instead opts for an old lady in *The Princess* as his divine agent. While relatively little has been written on the subject of The Old Lady as a character of fantasy works in comparison to Lewis's Aslan, there is nevertheless some relevant scholarship worth reviewing. In her book entitled *Picture Maladies: The Illustrating of George MacDonald's Fairy-Tale Women* (1994), Amy Sonheim argues that when Arthur Hughes illustrated the female characters of MacDonald's fantasy works, he often worked independently of MacDonald's character descriptions, resulting in unique depictions of women of the time. Most notable in this work, however, is Sonheim's discussion of how Irene's grandmother, as she was penned by MacDonald, breaks with so many of the conventions of the time for older widows. Unlike many depictions, Irene's grandmother is youthful, sensuous, independent, healthy, and quick witted. When Hughes depicts her in an illustration, she is revealed as a "beautiful woman marked by morals, brains, and definite sex appeal" (177).

Sonheim's text is very helpful in revealing the significance of MacDonald's choice to use an old widow for his divine agent, even while he broke with many Victorian conventions and expectations regarding the elderly while doing so. Adding sensuousness, tied up in aged wisdom, also reinforces the notion that MacDonald's ideas

about the divine were unique. Perhaps the most important element of his depiction of Irene's grandmother as an old-yet-youthful woman is the reoccurring use of a theme of "strength in weakness" that MacDonald uses in many of his works to depict his notion of the divine. For example, in his fairy tale "The Golden Key", the oldest of the "wise men," which two children seek out in order to find the lock that a special golden key will open, winds up being a mere toddler. MacDonald frequently emphasizes his notion that to grow holy is to grow young and Irene's grandmother is yet another example of this.

Timothy Jonathan Bleeker explores the whole gamut of MacDonald's works his dissertation entitled *The Christian Romanticism of George MacDonald: a Study of His Thought and Fiction* (1990). Most notably, he asserts that MacDonald's children's stories (including *The Princess*) are meant to be subversive, both in the sense of combating the hyper-rationalism and utilitarianism of Victorian culture and the prominent religious ideas of the day (161). Working from that premise, Bleeker explores *The Princess* as religious myth, as well as a possible exploration of the psychological world of each person's mind. He speculates that Irene's grandmother may symbolize the Christian Holy Spirit in the sense that she guides, purifies, and protects, but also that she might represent the princess Irene's spiritually mature self in the same respect that the goblins might represent her spiritually degraded self (174-75). The latter image is especially intriguing considering that the princess Irene shares a name with The Old Lady. Bleeker's exploration of MacDonald's divine agent emphasizes her ambiguous nature. She is always a mysterious character in *The Princess,* which makes it much harder to definitively say what she symbolizes.

Elizabeth Kathleen Robinson argues that, in keeping with the experiences of other Christian mystics, MacDonald wished to emphasize the "motherhood" of the Christian God in the figure of The Old Lady. In her dissertation entitled *George MacDonald's Fantasy: Visions of a Christian Mystic* (1995), Robinson argues that The Old Lady is a fairly explicit representation of Christ, and that she fits the pattern of the mystical "mother Jesus" metaphor. While I think that Robinson's assertion that The Old Lady is a direct allegory of Christ is mistaken[13], a compelling aspect of her text is her assertion that MacDonald was intentionally trying to move beyond male descriptions of the divine. In this respect, it could be argued that the depiction of MacDonald's divine agent as a woman was not simply a plot device, but rather a conscious choice to depict the divine in terms of the feminine.

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[13] While The Old Lady has some powers that could be construed as "Christ-like," she is also tied to the narrative of the story in the sense that she is the great-great-grandmother of the princess Irene. She is much more of a fairy god mother figure than a Christ figure.

CHAPTER THREE

Ontology

"A damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see."

-- C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

"Who, that loves his brother, would not, upheld by the love of Christ, and with a dim hope that in the far-off time there might be some help for him, arise from the company of the blessed, and walk down into the dismal regions of despair, to sit with the last, the only unredeemed, the Judas of his race…who, I say, would not feel that he must arise, that he had no choice, that, awful as it was, he must gird his loins, and go down into the smoke and the darkness and the fire, traveling the weary and fearful road into the far country to find his brother?"

-- George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*

Lewis's Orthodoxy

In the article "The Dark Side of Narnia," Philip Pullman brings up a particularly controversial element in the last of the Narnia books by Lewis, *The Last Battle*. In the narrative, one of the original four Pevensie children, Susan, does not make it to heaven or "Aslan's country." Pullman is appalled at the notion that Lewis would leave her out of the final bliss that all the other "friends of Narnia" experience in the final chapters of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Pullman's disgust for Lewis is particularly pronounced since Susan is accused of no greater crime than being "interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She was always a jolly sight to keen on being grown up" (*The Chronicles of Narnia* 741). From Pullman's point of view, Lewis has exempted Susan from heaven simply for being a woman with social and sexual interests.

Whether Pullman's take on the subject is equitable to Lewis is largely irrelevant to this paper. The really startling aspect of the event of Susan being kept out of heaven is that it serves as a blatant example of Lewis's view that "not all will be saved" and that an unknown number of humans will ultimately find themselves in hell. Lewis is far from alone in this view. It could be said that a belief in an eternal state of damnation represents a majority in Christian theology, and that it is often equated with a mainstream orthodoxy among the major traditions in Christianity. In this respect, it is MacDonald's belief in the eventual salvation of all humans that is the minority opinion and one that would generally never earn the moniker "orthodox." I argue that this difference between the two authors, however, is fundamental to understanding all of their fictional writing and that it is certainly implicit in their children's books. What follows is a demonstration

of Lewis's orthodox views on Christian salvation in *The Lion*, followed by a demonstration of MacDonald's unorthodox universalism in *The Princess*.

Lewis was always a firm believer that those who would end up in hell would do so because they ultimately chose to be there. Ironically, it is Lewis writing through his characterization of George MacDonald in *The Great Divorce*[14] that best explains his own view. When Lewis, as narrator, asks his fictionalized guide to the afterlife how people could choose hell, the fictionalized MacDonald responds:

> "Milton was right," said my Teacher. "The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words 'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.' There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy—that is, to reality. We see it easily enough in a spoiled child that would sooner miss its play and its supper than say it was sorry and be friends."

Lewis and MacDonald both upheld the notion of human freedom in deciding their final state in the afterlife, but MacDonald believed that the Christian God would ultimately persuade all of his creatures to emerge from spiritual darkness and reconcile with Him. It is at the level of human freedom that the two authors depart and it is from this departure that their own respective expressions of Christianity in their children's works become so dissonant.

The belief that a person is choosing his own fate is very clear in the experiences of Edmund in *The Lion*. When Edmund first crosses over to Narnia through the wardrobe, he makes contact with the witch Jadis, who feeds him Turkish Delight, which works on his mind like an addictive drug. After his first taste of the treat, Edmund begins his

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[14] In *The Great Divorce* Lewis is the narrator and travels from "the gray city," a depiction of hell, to the gateway of paradise in a bus. He and his fellow travelers are mere ghosts in paradise and can only become more solid if they travel deeper into the country, which is frightening and unpleasant. At the gateway of paradise he eventually meets George MacDonald, now a being of light, who acts as a guide to the narrator and explains the circumstances of each ghost's decision to travel further in or return to the bus.

downhill slide towards betrayal and the unpleasant service of Jadis. It is Edmund's desire for the pleasure of Turkish delight that drives him to ignore the pangs of conscience:

> Edmund was already feeling uncomfortable from having eaten too many sweets, and when he heard that the Lady [Jadis] was a dangerous witch he felt even more uncomfortable. But he still wanted to taste the Turkish Delight again more than he wanted anything else. (38)

What starts as a desire for sweet treats eventually leads Edmund to betray his own siblings to the witch Jadis, who desires to kill them all before they are able to defeat her. By the time Edmund realizes his mistake in falling for the temptations of Jadis, he is her hopeless slave and can only be freed when Aslan brokers a deal with Jadis to trade Edmund's freedom for Aslan's life.

Edmund is the ultimate representative of the unredeemable sinner whose free choices lead him to perdition. Without the great sacrifice of Aslan to free him, he would forever remain the slave of Jadis, who is representative of a Satan figure in the story. In the larger framework of the narrative of *The Lion* there are clear distinctions between the good and the evil and each character freely chooses which side he or she will serve. Aslan is clearly the enemy of the witch Jadis and has no apparent love for her. By the end of the tale he has killed her violently in a final battle. It is evident that all of her faithful servants will not be redeemed and will suffer the same defeat as her. In the story of Edmund we see a character who narrowly avoids his own damnation when the unpleasant nature of serving Jadis finally convinces him to make amends with his siblings and join Aslan's side in the battle.

MacDonald's Universalism

MacDonald's Universalist beliefs were not unique in his time. They seemed, in fact, to be a natural reaction to the strict Calvinism which dominated the Scotland of his

youth. The Church of Scotland experienced a schism in 1843 when a third of its members broke away to form the Free Church of Scotland. While universalism was not the core catalyst of this split, it was becoming more and more common for dissenting ministers to teach it and therein be relieved of their duties as pastors to their flocks (Hein 18). One of these men was named Alexander John Scott and he was a strong influence on MacDonald's own views. MacDonald attended many of Scott's lectures and named one of his daughters Lilia Scott after his mentor (Neuhouseer 85). At the heart of the issue for MacDonald and many of his contemporaries like Scott, was the apparently contradictory belief held by the majority of Scottish Presbyterians that the divine is benevolent but subjects the damned to eternal punishment, while working to actively determine who will be damned apart from their own free will. It was this notion that MacDonald primarily rejected. A passage from his novel *Adela Cathcart* sums up his objection:

> And the man was telling them, sir, that God had picked out so many men, women, and children, to go right to glory and left the rest to be damned forever and ever in hell. And I up and spoke to him; and "sir," says I, "if I was tould as how I was to pick out so many o' my children, and take 'em with me to a fine house, and leave the rest to be burnt up… which o' them would I choose?" (220)

MacDonald did not strictly reject the concept of hell, however. Some forms of Christian universalism reject the notion that there is a place or state of punishment in the next life. MacDonald, however, pictured hell as a remedial state designed to purge and reform sinners for the ultimate purpose of reconciliation with the Christian God. MacDonald's own vision of hell would form the core of how he expressed his unique views in his writing, and why he saw all people destined to find paradise at some stage in their existence, but also prone to experience corrective sufferings until they were purified

and perfected as part of that journey. In his essay entitled "Justice," which is the most detailed explication of MacDonald's views on the subject, he argues for the necessity of a temporal hell:

> Justice then requires that sin should be put an end to: and not that only, but that it should be atoned for; and where punishment can do anything to this end, where it can help the sinner to know what he has been guilty of, where it can soften his heart to see his pride and wrong and cruelty, justice requires that punishment shall not be spared. And the more we believe in God, the surer we shall be that he will spare nothing that suffering can do to deliver his child from death.

The notion that all people are destined for paradise, yet may experience purgative suffering in order to be spiritually perfected, turns out to be one of the most common implicit themes in his writing.

Because his universalism represented an ontological foundation for the life and thought of MacDonald, I argue that it is implicit in all of his works. This is certainly true of *The Princess*. The first example of universalism in *The Princess* is Macdonald's use light and darkness symbolism. While light and darkness may, typically, be metaphorical symbols of good and evil, MacDonald's own use of light and darkness symbolizes the spiritual progression or regression of each person within an evolutionary metaphysical framework. In MacDonald's world, movement towards light is movement towards the divine. In *The Princess,* darkness has the power to change those who dwell there into monsters. MacDonald borrowed this concept of metaphysical evolution from the German Romantic poet/philosopher Novalis. When the race of goblins which serve as the antagonists of the story choose, long before the start of *The Princess*, to descend into the earth in order to avoid taxes or some other law of the king of that day, they begin to change physically:

> Those who had caught sight of any of them said that they had altered in the course of generations; and no wonder, seeing they lived away from the sun, in cold and wet and dark places. They were now, not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous or ludicrously grotesque in face and form. (10)

My suggestion is that this transformation is more evidence of Universalist thought. Quite literally, MacDonald shows that sin (i.e.: dwelling in darkness) have negative consequences—in the case of these "sinners," they become physically deformed. Nevertheless, MacDonald proves that for the divine all punishment is instructive rather than punitive. By the end of *The Princess*, the surviving goblins move back into the world of the sun, and, subsequently, become transformed:

> … most of those [Goblins] who remained grew milder in character, and indeed became very much like Scotch Brownies. Their skulls became softer as well as their hearts, and there feet grew harder, and by degrees they became friendly with the inhabitants of the mountain and even the miners (203).

The setting of *The Princess* is unique among works of children's fantasy and also expresses MacDonald's universalism. No journey takes place within the narrative of the story, so the setting remains static; the setting of the text is, largely, the house in which the princess lives. In the opening lines of the novel, the audience is told that, shortly after the princess was born, she was taken to the house to be raised by country people, because her mother was not very strong. MacDonald describes the house as "large… half castle, half farmhouse, on the side of…a mountain, about half-way between its base and its peak" (7). The house itself is important to the underlying themes of the story. In fact, the house becomes a complex metaphor for life itself. The house is precariously placed on the side of a mountain, and beneath it winds the long, dark tendrils of underground passageways frequented by miners seeking ore for the king's coffers, and, more forebodingly, the race of darkness-dwelling goblins and their deformed house pets.

Above, in the uppermost tower, lives the princess's great grandmother who possesses a great lamp that shines upon the mountainside to guide those who may see it. The metaphor of the house emphasizes the notion that life is a precarious existence lived between the forces of light and darkness, both of which remain largely unseen by those living in the "central" part of the world. Even so, it is these forces that ultimately decide the fate of those who live within the house. What is hidden is more consequential than what is explicitly seen.

In G.K. Chesterton's appraisal of *The Princess*, it was this particular metaphor which led him to regard the book so highly. Chesterton insists that the metaphor is a faithful picture of what life is really like:

> When I say it is like life, what I mean is this. It describes a little princess living in a castle in the mountains which is perpetually undermined, so to speak, by subterranean demons that sometimes come up through the cellars. She climbs up the castle stairways to the nursery or the other rooms; but now and again the stairs do not lead to the usual landings, but to a new room she has never seen before, and cannot generally find again. Here a good great-grandmother, who is a sort of fairy godmother, is perpetually spinning and speaking words of understanding and encouragement. (10)

Chesterton goes on to explain that this metaphor is powerful to him because it works against the notion that what is sought is far away and a journey must be undertaken to find it. The weakness of the fantasy work which requires a journey (and Chesterton makes it clear that he enjoys reading this type as well) is that it "hardly suggests how near both the best and worst things are to us from the first" (10).

The house, therefore, paints a vision of reality in which the spiritual world exists not on a separated second story (as in a three tiered cosmology with heaven above and hell below), but rather one which rests side by side with the material world. The idea of thin places—those places like churches and cemeteries where the veil between the

spiritual and material is less opaque—works well with the metaphor of the house. The stairs don't always lead reliably to the upper rooms where Irene's grandmother resides, but she exists nonetheless in the same house and is never far away. The goblins are rarely visible, for they only come out at night to roam the land of the "sun born," yet they are always present, literally just below the surface. This vision of reality is important if one is to understand the religious thought of George MacDonald. The notion that the cosmos can be neatly divided into the material and the spiritual, like oil dividing from water, would be alien to his own vision of Christianity. The influence of a spiritual world which works either to pull characters towards the light or drag them into darkness is something MacDonald took for granted.

If one reads *The Princess* through the lens of MacDonald's belief in universal reconciliation, the way Irene is encouraged to respond to the "unbelief" of her nurse Lootie, and the miner boy Curdie, makes much more sense. After Irene rescues Curdie, she takes him up the stairs to her grandmother's rooms. Her grandmother holds Irene in her lap yet Curdie does not see her grandmother or the spinning wheel. He only sees a bare room and Irene appears to be talking to herself. When Irene asks her grandmother what to do about Curdie's inability to see her, the old lady says that "you must give him time…and you must be content to not be believed for a while. It is very hard to bear; but I have had to bear it, and shall have to bear it many a time yet" (151). This of course points to MacDonald's notion that God is perpetually patient with those who do not believe in him. MacDonald, through the voice of Irene's grandmother, advocates patience and understanding with those who do not believe rather than anger and judgment.

The significance of how an "unbeliever" should be treated as it plays out in *The Princess* cannot be understated in light of Macdonald's own upbringing in the harsh and humorless world of Scottish Calvinism. One of the outcomes of Calvinist theology is that it tends to lead its followers to put people into the two strictly demarcated categories of being saved or unsaved or, to use Calvinist terminology, the elect and damned. Macdonald's own universalism leads him to resist putting people into neat metaphysical categories, allowing that even the most regressed creatures in spiritual darkness may repent and come back into the light. This plays out clearly at the conclusion of the story. While a good portion of the goblins are killed by their own attempt to drown the miners, some of those that survive experience a transformation.

C.S. Lewis was certainly aware of MacDonald's views on Christian universalism and he did, in fact, make a conscious attempt to deemphasize it and make it a peripheral aspect of MacDonald's thought rather than an ontological foundation. In his book, *The Great Divorce,* Lewis pens MacDonald as a guide to the afterlife a la Virgil in Dante's *Inferno*. In the latter half of the book, the narrator asks Macdonald about his Universalist views, and Lewis-as-MacDonald explains away the idea of universalism through an elaborate discussion; Lewis-as-MacDonald details the problems that surface when one attempts to answer ultimate questions on a temporal plane. Nevertheless, the final result is a direct contradiction of MacDonald's view that all people will be saved and reconciled with their creator. This incident reinforces the notion that even Lewis was aware of where a core difference lay with the man he considered to be a spiritual mentor.

CHAPTER FOUR

RHETORIC

"When a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards."

-- C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

"God will not conquer evil by crushing it under-foot-any god of man's idea could do that-but by conquest of heart over heart, of life over life, of life over death, of love over all."

-- George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*

Divine Agents

If ontology can be viewed as the foundation of any particular metaphysical framework, then we can suppose that any two frameworks with differing ontological underpinnings will, of necessity, show visible differences in their respective expressions. Certain surface level similarities may appear from time to time, but these must truly be viewed as superficial in nature considering the difference that lies beneath. This holds true when we compare how Lewis and MacDonald's religious thought is expressed through their children's literature, and this is most certainly the case in their respective choices of "divine agents" and the rhetorical significance of those choices. By divine

agents I mean those characters, in *The Princess* and *The Lion* respectively, which are most representative of the Christian God, both in His attributes and in His actions, as each author would necessarily see them, considering their differing ontological views about Him.

A particularly helpful framework by which to compare the religious rhetoric of Lewis and MacDonald in their children's literature is Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad. Burke's pentad, explicated in his seminal work *A Grammar of Motives*, was devised in order to help make sense of the question of motives. In order for an action to take place (as opposed to a mere motion), whether in real life or in art, there must be five elements present: the act, the agent, a scene or context, agency, and a purpose (Burke xv). By identifying the agents which Lewis and MacDonald chose as representative of the divine in their respective books, then exploring the attributes of those agents and the rhetorical implications that stem from those attributes, much can be revealed about how different each author's picture of the Christian God actually was. Furthermore, if each divine agent is then paired, in a Burkean fashion, with his and her respective agency, much will be revealed about how differently each author viewed divine motives.

A term that may be helpful in thinking about divine agents in *The Lion* and *The Princess* is the Hindu *avatar*. The literal translation of the term is "descent," and it generally referred to when higher spiritual entities (such as Vishnu)[15] descended to a lower plane of existence in order to help resolve certain conflicts. The form these deities took would vary, but they would normally adopt forms that didn't directly correlate with

[15] Vishnu, the Supreme Lord of many Hindu sects, is traditionally believed to have had ten avatars or incarnations in lower realms of existence.

the deities they represented. Avatar is also a term that has been borrowed for computer games. Using Kenneth Burke's theories, Marxist theorist Ken McCallister, in his book *Game Work*, actually includes avatars as agents in his analysis the computer gaming industry apart from players and game designers. While players and game designers both input their own actions to help shape the avatar, the avatar nevertheless remains a separate agent, with some degree of autonomy[16].

Both of these ways of seeing an avatar can provide a helpful picture for viewing MacDonald's and Lewis's divine agents. In the original sense of the word, the avatar is a particular deity (or spiritually enlightened) being acting in a lower realm. How that deity chooses to incarnate herself is, of course, a highly significant rhetorical act. The significance of that act will, of necessity, be highly conditioned by the particulars of the realm that she appears in. In the same way, the divine agents that Lewis and Macdonald respectively create are shaped rhetorically both by the form they take and the nature of the world they appear in.

The second definition of an avatar, that of an online representation of the self such as a character in a computer game, also fits how divine agents act in *The Princess* and *The Lion*. Rhetorically, they work as agents separate from both the authors that created them, and the readers who interpret them and imagine them in unique ways. The authors do not entirely control the avatars in the sense that a great deal of how characters are imagined operate on a subconscious level, but also in the sense that divine agents, in

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[16]The term avatar is sometimes used to describe an online representation of the self. Avatars can act as agents apart from the players who use them. For example, a male player who chooses a female avatar will quickly find other male players responding to him as if he was female and this can change the entire dynamic of online interactions.

particular, are formed out of implicit ontological underpinnings. There are only so many incarnations that would fit each author's own unique ontological picture of the divine. Readers don't entirely control how divine agents meet them in the rhetorical sense, but their own imaginations certainly add degrees of impact and identification (to use another Burkean term)[17] to their experience of these agents.

In *The Lion*, Lewis's divine agent is Aslan. After the four Pevensy children have all entered the land of Narnia, and have made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, they are given a description of Aslan by Mr. Beaver. The youngest of the children, Lucy, asks whether Aslan is a man:

> "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver Sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion—*the* Lion, the great Lion. (75)

In this wonderful bit of foreshadowing, a sense of awe concerning Aslan is built up in the minds of the attentive children. It is Aslan who seems to hold the key to the salvation of Narnia, which is in the grips of the witch Jadis, who keeps Narnia in a constant winter where Christmas never comes.

The divine agent in MacDonald's *The Princess* is the Old Lady, who is also named Irene and is the princess Irene's great-great grandmother. She morphs in appearance somewhat, shifting from an old lady to a young lady at different times. Very early in the narrative, when Irene first meets The Old Lady, it is revealed that she lives in the top of the house to watch over Irene. The Old Lady is a protective spirit, who will

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[17] Identification is a key term used by Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969) and refers to the need in humans to overcome separateness through identifying with particular groups. A female reader of The Princess may immediately identify with The Old Lady in ways a male reader may not, and it is the power of this identification on a rhetorical level that Burke was interested in.

ultimately save both Irene and the kingdom of Irene's father from the Goblins. Both Aslan and The Old Lady are, in their own ways, the otherworldly agents who will ultimately resolve the conflicts of the two narratives.

Divine Agency

The nature of a divine agent will necessarily control the way in which that agent operates within the narrative of the story. By choosing a lion, Lewis already places a multitude of limitations on the particular agency[18] he will subscribe to his divine agent. The actual way in which Lewis came up with Aslan as a unifying character for his Narnia books has all the hallmarks of a subconscious origin. Sayers notes that Lewis had been "having a good many dreams of lions about that time" (312). Lewis's divine agent emerges from subconscious levels, but Aslan still must remain compatible with Lewis's own ontological assumptions. Returning again to the division of "saved" and "unsaved" explicit in some forms of Christianity, it makes sense that Lewis would choose a divine agent particularly associated with dominance through violence. If things that are evil can't be wooed by the divine back into goodness and wholeness, then a divine agent must be something capable of stamping out that evil. That necessarily means a positive action in the destruction of evil. Hence, Aslan as a character emanating from Lewis's own division of people into damned and saved is compelled to act in the narrative story through violent means.

Before Aslan can violently dispatch of the evil forces in Narnia led by the witch Jadis, he must first succumb to them because of the demands of the "Deep Magic." This

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[18] I am pairing agents with agency in Burke's classical method of dramatistic analysis. The nature of an agent in any rhetorical act will condition the agency (how the act is carried out) so the choice of agent by each author is highly relevant to their own motives.

primordial law by which all Narnians must live is laid before Aslan by Jadis, who seeks the life of the traitor Edmund. When Aslan asks Jadis to explain the claims of the Deep Magic, she responds:

> "Tell you?" said the Witch, her voice growing suddenly shriller. "Tell you what is written on that very Table of Stone which stands beside us? Tell you what is written in the letters deep as a spear is long on the trunk of the World Ash Tree? Tell you what is engraved on the scepter of the Emperor-Beyond-the Sea? You at least know the magic which the Emperor put into Narnia at the very beginning. You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to a kill." (139)

This strange passage implies that even the divine is limited by certain foundational laws. Using this device, Lewis is able to explain why the otherwise capable Aslan does not simply dispatch Jadis with his claws or teeth right away. It also explains why he willingly lays down in a passive manner to be executed by Jadis and her cohorts. He stands in as a sacrificial victim to atone for the sins of Edmund.

The importance of the compulsion of the Deep Magic in regards to Lewis's concept of divine violence can't be underestimated. It shows that under normal circumstances, he has no objections to the violent overthrow of evil forces and the use of violence to effect outcomes in the narrative world of Narnia. Even the fact of Aslan first being executed on the Stone Tablet through violent means seems to add to this notion of "redemptive violence." Redemptive violence is the reasonable outcome of an ontology founded on the pluralistic division of the damned and saved.

It should come as no surprise then that Aslan would emerge from his own death only to carry out a violent overthrow of Jadis. As Aslan explains his resurrection to the girls Susan and Lucy, he points out Jadis's ignorance of an even deeper magic at work in Narnia:

> "...though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards." (160)

So Aslan never succumbs to the violence of Jadis for the sake of a non-violent victory, but only because he knew that he would ultimately emerge again to kill her in a violent manner. When he finally meets her, the demise of the White Witch is nearly anticlimactic, but very much reminiscent of a real lion taking his prey:

> Then with a roar that shook all Narnia from the Western lamppost to the shores of the Eastern sea the great beast flung himself upon the White Witch. Lucy saw her face lifted towards him for one second with an expression of terror and amazement. Then the Lion and the Witch had rolled over together but with the Witch underneath... (174)

The White Witch and her army is ultimately defeated in the violent culmination of a battle. Lewis's divine agent defeats evil through sheer force and dominance of numbers.

In stark contrast to Lewis's divine agent, The Old Lady uses no violence to bring about a desired outcome in the narrative of *The Princess*. One quality The Old Lady seems to desire most in Irene is faith in her own existence even when she can't be seen. After Irene visits The Old Lady the first time, she can't wait to tell her nurse Lootie about her experience in the room at the top of the stairs. She is greatly disappointed when Lootie does not believe her. She begins to have her own doubts—considering that perhaps it was all a dream. When she attempts to find The Old Lady the second time, and fails, this finally convinces her that her encounter with The Old Lady truly was a dream. She eventually does find The Old Lady again, and is given a test of; if she ever finds herself in trouble she is to run to The Old Lady for safety. She initially fails the test when one of the goblins' creatures comes through her bedroom window and she responds to her

fear not by running up the stairs to The Old Lady, but rather outside to the side of the mountain. She eventually goes up to The Old Lady when she sees her light and, even though she expects The Old Lady to be greatly disappointed in her lapse of faith, she is patient with Irene. Her next test is harder than the first, however. She is called to follow The Old Lady's thread down into the caverns of the goblins below. She follows the golden thread, obviously a metaphor for the invisible guidance of Providence, until she meets with a dead end as the thread appears to vanish into a pile of stones. She then thinks that she can at least follow the thread back out, but when she attempts this it disappears. It finally occurs to her that she could work away the stones and this, in turn, leads to her rescue of Curdie. Before this moment of clarification, however, she is left sobbing on the floor of the cave and virtually loses all her faith in The Old Lady.

The metaphor of the golden thread reveals many things about MacDonald's own view of faith. It is clear that by following the invisible thread of Providence one may be led in directions that seem counterintuitive. Irene first assumed that she would follow the thread back up the stairs to The Old Lady. The thread, however, leads her in directions that turn out to have far greater benefits in the end. By keeping faith in the path the thread maps out, Irene is able to rescue Curdie and she is later saved from being kidnapped when she follows it to Curdie's home. MacDonald once described faith as "the leaving of your way, your objects, your self" (Lewis, *An Anthology* 73). It becomes clear by the end of the story that the salvation of the princess, Curdie, and even the entire kingdom hinges not on the plans of Curdie, or the provisions of the king's household, but rather on the princess's willingness to trust in the guidance of The Old Lady. The

purpose of faith, then, is not a test of loyalty, but the way by which Providence works good in the world.

While Irene and Curdie are spared from evil primarily through the non-violent interventions of The Old Lady, evil itself, embodied in the goblins, is allowed to exhaust itself or bring about its own destruction. The goblins ultimately drown themselves by the end of the story in their attempt to drown the miners. MacDonald's divine agent has no need to battle evil head on. She is always one step ahead and can out-fox the agents of evil through non-violent means so long as her followers have faith in her ability to do so. While Irene's grandmother might have had the power to destroy the goblins through violent means, it appears to be contrary to her nature. Any punishment they receive at her hands is purely incidental or, at worst, corrective since ultimately the goblins as a race reform their ways by the end of the narrative. This makes perfect sense within a Universalist paradigm in which all evil agents must also transform into good ones, even if they have to do so the hard way.

I have demonstrated that both Lewis and MacDonald start with certain ontological assumptions and that the particular directions their writing takes flows out of those assumptions. MacDonald's picture of the divine as a patient persuader who intends to reconcile all of his creatures makes perfect sense of his choice of an old lady as his divine agent. The Old Lady is content to weave her golden thread for many years in order to bring about, with the willing obedience of the princess, her non-violent ends. The forcefulness of Aslan, however, points to a view of the divine that must eventually settle scores and establish a clear distinction between the saved and the damned. In MacDonald's view, the divine tolerates evil because evil is the byproduct of free will and

free will is the only means by which creatures can be reconciled with the divine. For Lewis, free will also plays a role, but ultimately the divine will set a limit on how long evil will hold sway. In his quest to set things right in Narnia, Aslan must bring about a final defeat and estrangement of Jadis and her cohorts.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

"Despite those who seem heaven-bent on apologizing for or improving his work, MacDonald is a survivor, a resilient writer who perseveres in spite of a MacDonald industry that attempts to apologize for him as a writer and co-opt him as a fundamentalist Christian."

-- John Pennington, "A Wolff in Sheep's Clothing"

In this paper I have argued that when children's literature is created with the purpose of conveying religious ideas, then those works lend themselves to a uniquely religious analysis that focuses on the ontological assumptions of each author and how those assumptions will appear in terms of rhetoric in each respective text. I have further argued that these differences, in both ontological assumptions and their rhetorical manifestations, are a basis for separating the otherwise intertwined literary reputations of C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald. As John Pennington and many other writers have argued, MacDonald's literary reputation has been both helped and hindered by Lewis. The only way to give MacDonald a fair trial in terms of his ability as a writer will be to separate him from Lewis's own reputation. I believe that this is merely a starting point

in achieving that goal and that more work can be done along these lines so that MacDonald can eventually be viewed as an author apart from Lewis.

There are a few directions that future scholarship might take to change this situation. Most importantly, perhaps, would be for other scholars to place more focus on the significance of MacDonald's Universalist beliefs as an ontological foundation which informed his creative writing. There is, first of all, a lot of room for bringing to light the implicit universalism in Macdonald's other fiction. Both *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, which are his two most popular adult fantasies, are pregnant with Universalist imagery. Since universalism is the underlying premise of MacDonald's thought that most separates him from the thought of Lewis, the more explicit it is made, the more MacDonald will become a distinct literary figure, especially within the purview of Christian writers who maintain a modern readership.

If we believe Burke's sense that all religious thought is an act of rhetoric, then further rhetorical analysis of the works of MacDonald are in order. This is especially true if MacDonald's fiction, as I asserted earlier, supplanted his sermons. In many respects, the sheer differences of the pulpit from the writing desk have led to separation of these means of expression in terms of critical analysis. Taken from a rhetorical perspective, they can be viewed as means of expression of the same ideas on a continuum. Finally, with a writer like Pullman implicitly stating that he writes children's literature to counter the influence of works like Lewis's *The Lion*, examination of MacDonald's role as an author of children's literature from a rhetorical perspective will yield many insights about his place in this ongoing debate about children's literature as a tool of evangelism.

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APPENDIX A

A SUMMARY OF *THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE*[19]

At the beginning of World War II, the four Pevensie children—Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy—are evacuated from London in 1940 to escape the Blitz. They are sent to live with Professor Digory Kirke, who lives in a country house in the English countryside with his housekeeper, Mrs. Macready. One rainy day, the children decide to explore the house. Lucy, the youngest, is curious about the wardrobe in an empty room, and discovers that it is a portal to a snow-covered forest with a gaslight post in the center. There she meets a faun, who introduces himself as Tumnus, and invites her home for tea. He tells her that the land is called Narnia and is ruled by the ruthless witch Jadis, who keeps Narnia in a constant state of Winter, but never allows Christmas.

Lucy returns through the wardrobe, having spent hours in Narnia, to find that only a few seconds have passed in England. She is unable to convince the others of her adventure, as the wardrobe now prevents access to Narnia to the other children. Edmund, the next youngest of the four siblings, is particularly spiteful towards Lucy. Several weeks later Lucy and Edmund hide in the wardrobe while playing hide-and-seek, and

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[19] Adapted from Lewis, C. S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. New York: Collier Books. 1970. Print.

find that it leads again into Narnia. In the forest, Edmund fails to catch up with Lucy and encounters Jadis on a sledge pulled by a white reindeer. She introduces herself as the Queen of Narnia, and enchants him with some magical Turkish Delight. She promises to make him Prince and eventually King of Narnia, if only he will bring the other children to her castle.

After the witch drives on, Lucy finds Edmund in the woods and they return together through the wardrobe. Lucy mentions the witch Jadis and Edmund realizes that she is none other than the lady who befriended him. Back in England, Edmund lies to Peter and Susan about finding Narnia as well, claiming that he and Lucy were just playing and that the wardrobe is no more than an ordinary one.

A few days later, all four children scramble to avoid Mrs. Macready, who is showing some visitors around the house. They hide in the wardrobe and find themselves in Narnia. Lucy guides them to Tumnus's cave, but they discover that Tumnus has been arrested, just as the Jadis had threatened, and that his cave has been ransacked by Maugrim, chief of the witch's secret police. A pair of talking beavers, Mr.

Beaver and Mrs. Beaver, shelter the children and recount an ancient prophecy that the witch's power will fail when "two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve fill the four thrones at Cair Paravel." The beavers tell of the true king of Narnia, Aslan, has been gone many years, but is now "On the move again."

Edmund, still craving Turkish Delight and the power offered by Jadis, steals away to her castle while the others set off to find Aslan. They soon realize that they have been betrayed by their brother. The witch Jadis treats Edmund harshly when he arrives without his siblings, and sets out in pursuit of them. But her power over Narnia is waning, and

soon a thaw strands her sleigh. The other children reach Aslan, and a penitent Edmund is rescued just as the witch is about to kill him. Calling for a truce, the witch demands that Edmund be returned to her, as an ancient law (the "Deep magic") gives her possession of all traitors. Aslan offers himself in Edmund's place, and the witch accepts. Aslan is sacrificed by the witch, but comes back to life through "Deeper magic."

In a final battle, Jadis is defeated and killed by Aslan. The children become kings and queens, and spend fifteen years reigning in Narnia. They grow to maturity before returning to our world, where they find themselves children again. They hear Mrs. Macready still talking to the visitors in the passageway; their years in Narnia have taken no more than a few minutes of time on this side of the door.

They explain their adventure to the professor, who believes them straight away (we later find that he was present at the creation of Narnia in *The Magician and his Nephew*) and tells them that they would return to Narnia one day, though never again through the wardrobe.

APPENDIX B

A SUMMARY OF *THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN*[20]

The story of *The Princess* focuses on Irene, an eight year old princess who lives in a large house almost like a castle on the side of a mountain. Her father, the king, does not live in the house, but travels around his realms to see all of his subjects and keep a sharp eye out for worthy men and women to serve in his capital, which is far away from Irene's mountain home. Irene's mother is dead so she is looked after by her nurse, who Irene calls Lootie, as well as the rest of the household attendants. Irene is never permitted to leave the house after dark because of an ancient threat to her safety. Under the mountain upon which her house sits lives a race of goblins. The goblins are supposed to have descended from people, but have evolved into a wholly unattractive race of miscreants. The legend has it that they had gone underground to flee taxation or some other policy of the king they did not agree with. Because of their enmity with the royal family, Irene's caretakers were "much too afraid of the goblins to let her out of the house" (10).

The other main character of the story is Curdie, who is about twelve years old, and is the son of a miner. One day, when Irene and Lootie find themselves out in the countryside too late, they are accosted by the goblins. Lootie becomes distraught, panics, and gets lost. It is then that Curdie, coming home from the mines, happens upon them.

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[20] Adapted from MacDonald, George. *The Princess and the Goblin*. London: Puffin. 1988. Print.

He is singing strange rhymes and appears to be making light of a dire situation. It turns out, however, that the goblins hate verse and they especially hate the kind which is made up on the spot. Curdie uses songs to keep the goblins at bay and has no real fear of them as a consequence. He sees the princess and Lootie safely back home and the princess promises to give him a kiss, which Lootie strictly forbids.

One rainy day the princess is extremely bored and decides to venture through the house. She takes a stair going up—one she had never seen before—and finds a beautiful old lady spinning at a wheel in an upper room. The old lady (also named Irene) turns out to be the princess's great-great-grandmother. She has been living in the upper rooms ever since the princess came to the house after her birth. The old lady encourages Irene to tell Lootie about her encounter, but when she does Lootie does not believe her and thinks the princess is making up stories. When Irene tries to access the upper room again she cannot find it.

As time passes the princess convinces herself that her encounter with the old lady was really only a dream. One night, when she has pricked her finger with a pin, and the pain awakens her, she ventures back up the stairs once again. This time she finds her great-grandmother spinning at her wheel. The old lady tells her that if she had not come to believe that her first visit was merely a dream she would have found her again sooner. Irene learns that the old lady's pigeons bring her spider webs to spin and she only works on moonlit nights. The old lady shows the princess her beautiful bedroom:

> It was large and lofty and dome-shaped. From the centre hung a lamp as round as a ball, shining as if with the brightest moonlight, which made everything visible in the room, though not so clearly that the princess could tell what many of the things were. A large oval bed stood in the middle, with a coverlid of rose-color, and velvet curtains all around it of lovely pale blue. The walls were also blue—spangled all over with what looked like stars of silver. (80)

The princess is invited by her great grandmother to spend the night. She explains to the princess that her light stays on night and day so that her pigeons can find their way home. The princess asked the old lady if the light might not draw people to her room if they see it. The old lady answers that it would be good for them if it did, but points out that most people do not see the light and those who do quickly dismiss it as a meteor or the like. She points out that if the light was to go out the princess would find herself "laying in a bare garret, on a heap of old straw" (81). The princess falls asleep in her great grandmother's arms and awakes the next day in her own bed.

When the goblins moved underground they took animals with them. These creatures also evolved and were much more hideous than the goblins themselves. One night, when the princess is fast asleep, one of these creatures, which looks like a cat with very long legs, breaks into the window of her room. The princess flees down and out of the house unto the mountainside in a state of panic. She becomes lost and immediately realizes that she should have fled up the stairs to the protection of her great grandmother. At that moment she spots her grandmother's great light in the tower of the house and makes her way back into the house and up the stairs. This time her grandmother's spinning room is barren and dark and the princess once again begins to doubt that her grandmother is real. She then hears her grandmother call from her bedroom inviting her to come in. There is a fire the color and shape of roses in the hearth and her grandmother has now transformed into a young woman of only twenty three years. The princess's grandmother explains that her ability to see the great lamp is a gift and that the reason she saw the light, despite there being no windows in the tower, is because her grandmother has the power to make it shine even through walls. The princess's grandmother is done

spinning and puts the ball of thread, only the size of a pigeon egg, into the rose fire. She puts the ball into a cupboard and gives the princess a ring, which she is to put under her pillow whenever she is in trouble. She will then be able to feel the invisible thread and follow it wherever it leads her.

In the meantime Curdie has been down in the mines spying on the goblins. When he decides to work through the night to help pay for a petticoat for his mother, he overhears the conversation of a goblin family discussing a devious plan the goblins have concocted to get their revenge on the royal family. Curdie decides to further explore what the goblins are up to. As he makes his way to the central chamber of the goblin kingdom, where the king and queen of the goblins hold court, he is captured by the goblins and put in a holding cell after they decide to let him starve.

The princess awakes in the middle of the night to the sound of a dog and cat fighting and becomes very afraid. She follows her grandmother's thread to what she believes will be her grandmother's room once again, but instead the thread leads her down into the mines. Eventually her thread leads her to the wall next to Curdie's holding cell and together they dig him out. Curdie is mystified that she would be able to find him in the dark of the mines, but he does not see her invisible thread or believe it is guiding her. The thread leads them deeper into the mines and Curdie goes along with her because she is so insistent on following the thread wherever it leads her and because he wishes to protect her. The thread eventually leads them out of the mines and into the courtyard of the house. The princess then invites Curdie to her grandmother's room, but when they arrive only she can see the rose fire and bed and lamp and Curdie thinks she is playing a trick on him and goes away feeling insulted.

When Curdie arrives home his mother reminds him that sometimes what is real cannot be easily seen and tells him a story about how she had once seen the old lady's lamp in the tower and how one of her pigeons had saved her from the goblins. Curdie decides that he will apologize to the princess the next time he sees her. In the meantime, however, he is ever watchful of the goblins' next move. He has become convinced that they intend to kidnap the princess. In one of his nightly forays to see what the goblins are up to, he is wounded by a cross bow bolt in the leg by one of the house guards who mistook him for one of the goblins' creatures. He is suspected of being a thief and is locked in one of the rooms of the house while he recovers from his wound. When Curdie is sleeping in the fits of a fever one night, the old lady comes to visit him in a dream and heals his leg. He awakes to find the door of his room unlocked and the goblins already in the house. He helps the attendants and soldiers in the house to turn the tide on the goblins by pointing out the weakness of their bare feet (a weakness he discovered when eavesdropping on the goblin family). The soldiers and attendants manage to defeat the goblins but the princess is nowhere to be found. Curdie then finds the invisible thread and believes it will lead him into the mines where he assumes the princess is being held captive to marry the prince of the goblins. Instead, the thread leads him to his own house and he finds the princess safe in his mother's lap. Curdie returns the princess to the king, who has heard of the attack on the house and believes his daughter dead. Curdie's quick thinking then prevents everyone's drowning when he realizes the goblins had tried to flood the miner's tunnels with an underground river as a backup plan if the first should fail. The goblins did not realize the miners had sealed off the path to their own tunnels so the water floods the house instead. The king invites Curdie to serve in his court, but

Curdie chooses to stay with his parents and finally receives the kiss promised by the princess.