George MacDonald's Fairy Tale Characters:
Variations of the Fairy Tale Conventions

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that George MacDonald wrote more than 90 different books during his life, only a small number seem to have caught the attention of scholars. The only comprehensive study is the psychological interpretation by Robert Lee Wolff The Golden Key.[1] *The major shortcoming of Wolff's analysis is its subjectivity, in that Wolff includes only a psychological interpretation of the eleven fairy tales. The present paper provides an analysis of characters in George MacDonald's stories. MacDonald has been referred to as an "unconventional traditionalist".*[2] *He proves how well he is acquainted with the genre conventions of the traditional fairy tale, then comments on and toys with these conventions, which include parody, irony, and puns. In order to discuss the characters in George MacDonald's fairy tales, we will divide them into two large groups: human and supernatural characters.*

KEYWORDS
Fairy tale conventions, the supernatural, characters, innovations, fantasy, George MacDonald

The eleven fairy tales included in my analysis are taken from *The Complete Fairy Tales of George MacDonald*, a collection edited by U.C. Knoepflmacher which brings together all the shorter fairy tales published between the years 1867 and 1879. The stories are divided into groups according to the time and the original source of their publication. "The Light Princess," "The Shadows" and "The Giants Heart" were originally included in the novel *Adela Cathcart*. The tales reappeared in *The Dealings with the Fairies* together with "Cross Purposes" and "The Golden Key." "Little Daylight," "Diamond's Dream" and "Nanny's Dream" were taken from the children's book *At the Back of the North Wind*. The *Later Tales* include "The Carasoyn," "The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess: A Double Story" and "The History of Photogen and Nycteris," these three stories being the last to be written before MacDonald abandoned writing fairy tales.[3]

The first aspect to point out when approaching fairy tale characters is the great variety of characters. If it can be said that the human characters represent ordinary men and women, the same is not true for the supernatural ones. Therefore, it appears necessary to subdivide the inhabitants of fairy tale worlds into smaller groups. First and foremost we shall carefully distinguish between the human and the supernatural characters.

Let us start with the humans, which will be analysed in terms of gender, social status and the functions they serve in the stories. Steven Swann Jones divides the human protagonists into males and females, thereby showing how gender influences the fairy tales. He argues that in "in folk tradition there appears to be a reasonable balance between the number of male and female protagonists [yet in] minds of literate audiences, the

female folk fairy tale seems to dominate".[4] Jones tries to explain this disproportion by comparing the fairy tales with a related folk genre, the heroic legend. He comes to the conclusion that female audiences looked for models in fairy tales because in heroic legends almost all the protagonists were males.[5]

Contrasting the genres, Jones explains that legends include "exceptional and extraordinary protagonists", and the events they depict are "remarkable phenomena".[6] On the other hand, the protagonists in fairy tales are quite ordinary people and their problems are not remarkable, but similar to ours. One example is *Cinderella*, who may be seen as simply a common woman experiencing problems with her wicked step-mother.

We could perhaps go further and ask ourselves whether there is a sexist bias toward females in fairy tales. This question is dealt with in depth by Maria Tatar[7] who describes the characteristics of male and female protagonists: "[T[he male protagonists in European classic fairy tales possess two virtues that set them apart from others: humility and compassion. […] For fairy-tale heroines, by contrast, the combination of a servile attitude and hard work pays off by attracting a groom […]".[8] In this definition Tatar makes a valuable point. By looking at fairy tale characters from this point of view it can not be denied that male characters are involved in more prestigious actions than the females. For instance, male protagonists kill dragons and save princesses or even entire kingdoms. In contrast, female protagonists are usually depicted as skilful, doing housework, spinning or sewing. Moreover, folklore tales are full of "lazy peasant women, gluttonous girls and unfaithful wives". Tatar makes us aware that many female heroines start off as proud, arrogant or lazy and do not change until they fall in love with a potential husband.[9] Jones comes to a similar conclusion, suggesting that female heroines "are associated with nature and primitive emotions and values".[10] In comparison with their male colleagues, female heroines seem to be depicted in a very stereotypical way.

In a traditional fairy tale the most important character is the protagonist, often an ordinary person with problems similar to ours.[11] Can this statement be applied to MacDonald's tales? Who are the characters? Can the reader identify with them and their problems? These questions will be addressed by looking at the characters in connection with their gender, age, qualities, and social status.

According to Knoepflmacher, the protagonists in MacDonald's fairy tales are "interdependent boys and girls who jointly travel into the unknown".[12] This statement is valuable because it makes us aware of two facts. Firstly, the protagonists in MacDonald's fairy tales are children. "The Shadows" is the only fairytale with an adult protagonist. Consequently, the tales depict commonplace situations in childhood ("The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess", "The Light Princess," The Carasoyn"), growing-up ("Cross Purposes", "The Golden Key"), and adolescence ("The Light Princess", "Little Daylight",

1 Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

2 U.C. Knoepflmacher, "Introduction," in *The Complete Fairy Tales* by George MacDonald," ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London et al.: Penguin, 1999), vii.

3 Knoepflmacher, "Introduction," viii-ix.

4 Steven Swann Jones, *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination* (New York et al.: Routledge, 2002), 44.

5 Jones, *The Fairy Tale,* 64.

6 Jones, *The Fairy Tale,* 8.

7 Maria Tatar, "Folkloristic Phantasies: Grimm's Fairy Tales and Freud's Family Romance", in *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing: Essays on Märchen in Psychology, Society and Literature,* ed. Michael M. Metzger, Katharina Mommsen (Bern et. al.: Lang, 1981), 75-98.

8 Tatar, "Folkloristic Phantasies: Grimm's Fairy Tales and Freud's Family Romance," 42.

9 Tatar, "Folkloristic Phantasies," 98-105.

10 Jones, *The Fairy Tale,* 65.

11 Jones, *The Fairy Tale,* 14.

12 Knoepflmacher, "Introduction," xii.

"The History of Photogen and Nycteris"). Secondly, in the majority of the tales, there are two protagonists. In "The Light Princess" and "Little Daylight", the protagonists are a stereotypical pair - a princess in need and a prince saviour who solves her problem. In "Cross Purposes" and "The Golden Key" the female heroines are passive; their male companions make important decisions and decide for both of them how obstacles are to be overcome.[13] In "The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess", both female protagonists are disagreeable spoilt girls, and Tricksey-Wee in "The Giants Heart" is surprisingly cruel.

The narrator in "Nanny's Dream" describes Nanny as not particularly clever. "Nanny was [not] able to say what she meant so well as I put it down here. She had never been to school […]."[14] Nanny is not the only female character deprived of education. The protagonist Fairy in "The Carasoyn" is described as a "lovely" girl taking care of the household, whereas the boy Colin is educated by a schoolmaster.[15] All of this points to the conclusion that the female heroines in MacDonald's fairy tales are depicted in a traditional way as passive and in need of guidance. The one exception is "The History of Photogen and Nycteris". In "The History of Photogen and Nycteris, Nycteris and Photogen are equal, and learn to rely on each other in order to survive. Consequently, Knoepflmacher's suggestion that the characters are interdependent can be applied to the "The History of Photogen and Nycteris" without any restriction. In the other tales, the female protagonists are dependent on their male counterparts. The males, however, make a very independent and self-assured impression. Can this depiction of the male protagonists be seen as stereotypical as well?

Male characters are described in a more positive way; they are brave, smart, and good-looking. However, a close reading of MacDonald's fairy tales reveals that the stereotypical characteristics of the male protagonist are often used as means of irony. For example, the prince in "The Light Princess" is described as follows: "All I know is, that he was a fine, handsome, brave, generous, well-bred, and well-behaved youth, as all princes are."[16] In "Cross Purposes" the character is introduced as "Richard-which is name enough for a fairy story […]"[17] There is an incongruity about MacDonald's male protagonists in that the writer seems to be well-aware that characters in traditional fairy tales are stereotyped. In calling attention to the convention he parodies it, and therewith tries to keep a distance.

The protagonist in "The Shadows" is different from the protagonists discussed thus far. Ralph Rinkelmann is a comedian, a married man, and a father. He is ill, and we meet him when he is lingering between life and death. Due to his liminal condition, Ralph is crowned the king of fairyland, as it is only between life and death when fairies can get hold of humans.[18] In contrast to the child-protagonists, his problems do not concern developmental processes, but questions of faith and one's position within society. In this fairy tale, MacDonald created a modern character different from his idealised fairy tale

characters. Ralph is an anti-hero. He is ill, weak, and must be taken care of by his wife. Moreover, he is not at all courageous; darkness and solitude cause fear in him,[19] inducing uneasiness in the reader as well. This makes him easy to identify with because he is not an idealized type of character.

In traditional fairy tales, characters inhabit different ends of the social scale. There are rich and poor people, kings and humble folk. The binary social system of traditional fairy tales is turned into a tertiary one in MacDonald's tales, as he includes characters from middle class as well, by which he opens a debate on social issues, particularly social prejudice. In "Cross Purposes" the "Queen of Fairyland" is bored and requires mortals to be brought to court to entertain her. Peaseblossom, a fairy, offers to bring her a girl and Toadstool, a goblin, wants to bring a boy.[20]

The female protagonist, Alice, is the daughter of a squire "whom her friends called fairy-like and others called silly."[21] The boy, Richard, is the son of a poor widow, a shy dreamer who loves books. When they meet in fairyland, Alice despises Richard. She is proud of having been brought there by a fairy, and Richards poverty makes her feel superior. "Will you please to sit on the other side of the tree? I wonder what my papa would say if he saw me talking to you!"[22] Alice does not let Richard walk with her. However, the fairyland is a dangerous place, and Alice soon finds out that her riches will not help her find the way home. She realizes that although Richard is poor, he is brave and ready to help her. They fall in love with each other. Owing to Richards's courage, they manage to overcome all the obstacles in fairyland and are able to return home. Once back in their village, they feel that they must part ways. Wolff explains that this ending expresses the fact that a "love affair across class lines" can only be successful in a fairyland.

We need to apply other criteria besides social rank, age, and gender when classifying the supernatural beings in MacDonald's fairy tales. The starting point for our analysis will be the origin of the beings, by which they will be subdivided into two groups: folklore creatures and humanoid beings. It is important to mention that there are a large number of supernatural beings in MacDonald's fairy tales. Many of these however are rather minor characters and are mentioned only briefly and thus will be excluded from our discussion.

The category of folklore creatures includes supernatural beings like fairies, witches, and giants. These characters are to be found in conventional fairy tales, thus we may infer that MacDonald draws inspiration from the oral tradition when creating his own original versions of well-known character types. MacDonald introduces three different witches in his fairy tales. The witch in "Little Daylight" resembles her folklore predecessors. She is a "wicked old thing,"[23] who comes to a christening to cast a spell on the princess. This witch is a flat stereotypical character. Her counterparts Makemnoit in "The Light Princess" and Watho in "The History of Photogen and Nycteris" are much more complex. They can be seen as conglomerations of tradition and innovation.

Similar to witches in folk tales, the appearance of Makemnoit and Watho expresses their inner qualities. "The wrinkles of contempt crossed the wrinkles of peevishness […].

13 Cf. George MacDonald, "Cross Purposes," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 115.

14 George MacDonald, "Nanny's Dream," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 165.

15 George MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 208.

16 George MacDonald, "The Light Princess," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 31.

17 MacDonald, "Cross Purposes," 106.

18 George MacDonald, "The Shadow," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 54.

19 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 55-56.

20 MacDonald, "Cross Purposes," 103.

21 MacDonald, "Cross Purposes," 104.

22 MacDonald, "Cross Purposes," 111.

23 George MacDonald, "Little Daylight," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 150.

When [Makemnoit] was angry, her little eyes flashed blue. When she hated anybody, they shone yellow and green."[24] "[Watho] was tall and graceful, with a white skin, red hair, and black eyes, which had a red fire in them."[25]

What sets these two characters apart from their folk predecessors is the complexity of their character. Makemnoit is a very intellectual person, well acquainted with philosophy and natural laws, and hence has no problem with destroying the gravity of the protagonist.[26] She derides "the modes in which offended fairies and witches have taken their revenge" in the past.[27] Hence, her magic is innovative and totally her own. Makemnoit meddles with natural laws, and even manages to conjure a living creature - a snake.[28] Her magic is not rooted in superstition but has a scientific element to it.

With the evil witch in "The History of Photogen and Nycteris", MacDonald goes even a step further. Watho has a Faustian personality, as she desires "to know everything."[29] She kidnaps two babies to carry out experiments on them. Watho is not a magician; she is a scientist. She does not cast spells or conjure. Compared to Makemnoit, who is motivated merely by revenge, Watho is much scarier because she is driven by an unlimited cruelty. MacDonald exposes the darker part of the human self.

The witch considers both children to be her creation. When they fall ill, she decides to kill them for not meeting her expectations: "Ill, indeed! After all she had done to saturate him with the life of the system, with the solar might itself! He was a wretched failure the boy! And because he was her failure, she begun to dislike him, grew to hate him."[30] The disgust the witch feels towards her creation reminds us events in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*[31]. Victor Frankenstein manages to create a living being from the parts of dead bodies. In his experiment he goes much further than Watho. Victor describes his creation as follows:

> I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. […] but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. [32]

Watho and Victor both feel betrayed; they have invested so much energy into their creations, but it has not paid off. Moreover, Victor's experiment has disastrous consequences, as his monster kills members of his family.

In the beginning of his career MacDonald's witches display qualities of the traditional folk tale personages; as he continues these characters begin to develop rationalist characteristics of scientists. A similar change can be seen in his fairies. In his earlier tales, MacDonald employs very conventional fairy characters, which come to a royal christening in order to give the infant a magical gift ("Little Daylight", "The Light Princess"), or take care of trees and flowers ("Cross Purposes", "Little Daylight"). In contrast, in "The

Carasoyn", which is chronologically the last tale including fairies, MacDonald introduces a new type.

"The Carasoyn" is set in Scotland. A motherless boy, Colin, does all the housework for his father, who is a shepherd. One day Colin turns the course of a brook which had been flowing through a cow-house. The water of the brook now becomes clear, as it passes directly through Colin's house. The same night Colin is visited by a fleet of fairies. On one of their ships a little girl is hiding. She asks Colin to rescue her from the fairies, who kidnapped her seven years ago. Thus, when the queen offers Colin a reward for cleaning the brook, he chooses the little girl. The queen is angry and not willing to keep her promise. She demands from Colin a bottle of Carasoyn, a magical wine, in exchange for the girl.

On the next day, Colin sets out to look for Carayson. An old woman explains to Colin that he must complete three tasks in order to rescue the girl: "dream three days without sleeping", "work three days without dreaming", and "work and dream three days together."[33] Colin completes all three successfully; hence, the queen must keep her promise. The girl Fairy remains at the shepherd's house. In the second part of the story, Colin and Fairy get married, and later their son is kidnapped by the same tribe of fairies. Colin must complete three more tasks to rescue his son.

At the beginning of the story, the fairies are introduced as well-dressed; they are dancing, and gambolling in a very playful manner at Colin's house.[34] However, a little girl warns Colin to be careful because according to her the fairies are silly. They are referred to as a crowd, with only the queen being introduced as an individual character, one who resembles a spoilt child who has everything and still longs for more. For example, she explains to Colin: "I want something that I neither like nor please – that I don't know anything about. I want a bottle of Carasoyn."[35] From this we may conclude, that the queen represents a materialist person, who, having everything, does not have any dreams, wishes or intellectual aspirations.

In "The Carasoyn" MacDonald addresses an issue that is still relevant today: mounting materialism which causes moral decay. The text explicitly refers to "moral declension" in the fairies, who begin to steal children, scare babies and harm adults. The fairies in "The Carasoyn" became so wicked that they must leave their country. After their departure "Everything is common-place. Everything falls short of one's expectations."[36] Together with the fairies the magic disappears from the country. There is a parallelism between "The Carasoyn" and "The Shadows", in which MacDonald points out the same problem, a decline in morals triggered by materialism.

The Shadows are humanoid characters, a category which includes those supernatural beings whose appearance or qualities resemble humans. Ralph, the new king of Fairyland who is in poor health, is visited by his new subjects the Shadows on the evening of his coronation. They invite him to visit their church on Iceland. Taking Ralph's liminal state of health into consideration, it appears very unlikely that he would be able to travel long distances. As the text gives us many references to his "nearly falling asleep"[37] and having eyes half shut,[38] the threshold he crosses is one of consciousness.

24 MacDonald, "The Light Princess," 16.

25 George MacDonald, "The History of Photogen and Nycteris," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 305.

26 MacDonald, "The Light Princess," 16.

27 MacDonald, "The Light Princess," 16.

28 MacDonald, "The Light Princess," 40.

29 MacDonald, "The History of Photogen and Nycteris," 304.

30 MacDonald, "The History of Photogen and Nycteris," 330.

31 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin Books), 1994.

32 Shelley, *Frankenstein, 55.*

33 MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 197.

34 MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 192.

35 MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 195.

36 MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 211.

37 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 55.

38 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 56.

In his dream, Ralph twice visits the church of the Shadows. During the second visit, the Shadows present him with following petition: "[O]ur very existence is in danger. The various sorts of artificial light, both in houses and in men, women and children, threaten to end our being. The use and disposition of gaslight [...] blind the eyes by which alone we can be perceived."[39]

The Shadows have neither printing nor writing, which means that the industrial revolution has not penetrated their magical world. Their complaint about the artificial light which blinds their eyes can be understood as an allusion to electricity and technical progress as such. An association can be made with a preoccupation with material things, the Shadows causing the "worldly man" and frivolous woman"[40] to forget about the importance of spiritual values. The Shadows are forced to leave the towns because too much artificial light is there. People do not see their own shadows any more. What the Shadows are afraid of is what MacDonald was according to Rolland Hein fighting against: "secularism and the false religion". Stephen Prickett refers to MacDonald's fairy tales as wholly condemnatory of the business ethics of his contemporaries.[41] As an alternative to the material world, MacDonald offers nature. In nature God resides. [42]

The Shadows play an important role in this critique of the society of the day, but their part in the story should not be reduced only to this. Introducing themselves as "human Shadows"[43] and denying the common belief that they are only cast from light; the Shadows claim an independent existence. The human shadow is an important concept in analytical psychology, particularly in the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Their concepts of shadows shall be examined here to provide an interpretation of MacDonald's Shadows.

Sigmund Freud provides two different conceptions of the shadow. In the earlier of these, the shadow is explained as a "Doppelgänger" of the body. While the body is mortal, and can not be preserved forever, the soul is immortal and serves as a protection of the 'I' against destruction after death. The later conception describes the "Doppelgänger" (shadow) as an isolated part of 'I', commonly known as the conscience, and thus serves as a censor for all the parts of the 'I'. [44]

There are a great many images of death in "The Shadows", but there is no hint to the Shadows serving as a protection against death. Ralph does not refer to any of the Shadows as his own and he is the only person in the story who is hovering between life and death. The stories show no evidence of preserving the souls of the sinners from their destruction after death. The second of the two conceptions can be better applied to the story. The Shadows can be seen as an embodiment of the human conscience, as they make the people aware of their sins and vices. In the story about the fashionable mother, the Shadow made a little coffin on the wall and that made the mother confess.[45] When we look at them from this point of view, the Shadows can be understood as externalizations of the qualities which the people wish to hide and repress.

Another explanation for the relationship between person and shadow can be provided using Carl Gustav Jung's theory.[46] The Shadows offer an assertion for the concept of the collective unconscious once they introduce themselves as human shadows.[47] Moreover the theory of constructive and destructive aspects of the shadow enables us to solve the mystery of "the other Shadows". "[A]nd the king begun to see several of those stranger Shadows, with human faces and eyes, moving about among the crowd. [...] And what their eyes said to him, the king only could tell. And he did not tell."[48] The first time the other Shadows appear in the text is when Ralph travels to Iceland. Passing a dark passage in a forest, he catches a glimpse of them.[49] Ralph says that the other Shadows had lovely faces, but they were scaring the first Shadows and made Ralph feel uneasy.[50] There is no further explanation to this statement in the text and the reader has to fill in the information gap for himself.

At the end of the fairy tale the other Shadows appear again. They frighten the Shadows, and Ralph seems to know something about them that he is not willing to tell. This causes tension in the reader and raises the same question again: What are these stranger Shadows with human faces? Rosemary Jackson uses the term "nameless things" to refer to that "which can have no accurate articulation except through suggestion and implication." [51] She describes the gap that exists between a sign and its meaning. In many Gothic stories there is a certain something that can not be articulated; here it is the other Shadows. There is a gap between their name (if we can understand it as such) and the significance thereof which stays open throughout the text, and there are no textual clues to help the reader to bridge this gap.

Returning to Jung's theory of destructive shadows, the other Shadows can be understood as having a deconstructive nature as well. When they appear in text they are described as lovely in their appearance, which would according to Jung mean that they are shadows of people of evil character. This assumption is affirmed by the text, because the Shadows and Ralph as well are obviously scared of them. The story ends with Ralph's physical and spiritual awakening and reintegration into the society.

The next humanoid character to be discussed is the magical woman. According to Knoepflmacher, these characters "predominate" in all of MacDonald's fiction, not only in his fairy tales.[52] In contrast to Knoepflmacher, who does not differentiate between witches, fairies, and other supernatural female characters, we will stick to our division of folklore and humanoid characters. Thus, speaking about magical women, we will exclude witches and fairies, which have already been discussed.

Though having different names, for example "grandmother" ("The Golden Key"), "motherly old woman" ("The Carasoyn"), and "wise woman" ("The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess"), all these characters have the same characteristic features. They live alone in a wood, their residence being a very simple cottage which can be found only when the protagonists get lost. These women are beautiful, omniscient (always knowing in advance that the protagonist will visit them.), ageless, and very kind. They provide

39 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 62.

40 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 62.

41 Rolland Hein, *Christian Mythmakers* (Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 2002), 82.

42 Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* (Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2005), 87.

43 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 61.

44 Siegmund Freud, *Psychologiche Schriften*, Band IV (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1970), 258.

45 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 66-67.

46 Carl Gustav Jung, *Aion*, Gesammelte Werke, Band IX (AG Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1976), 17-19.

47 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 61.

48 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 79.

49 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 59.

50 MacDonald, "The Shadow," 59.

51 Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literaure of Subversion* (London, New York: Methuen, 1981), 38.

52 Knoepflmacher, "Introduction," xi.

the protagonist with food and shelter. Using Jung's theory of archetypes,[53] we could describe these characters as 'mother figures', an archetype which embodies motherhood and a source of sustenance.

Despite these common characteristics, each of these women is special in some way. The grandmother in "The Golden Key" has animal helpers which lead the lost protagonist to her. The "air-fish äeranth" is eaten and thereafter transformed into a higher form, an angel which protects the protagonist throughout the story.[54] The grandmother is dressed in "shining green", her clothes being covered in precious gems.[55] This description reminds us of Mother Nature; the green of her clothes may represent grass, and the gems can stand for the earth's resources. Nature is ageless and mysterious, and the grandmother has secrets as well: she claims that she is to busy to grow old, but does not reveal what occupies her time.[56]

The motherly old woman in "The Carasoyn" is blind. Nevertheless, she explains to the protagonist Colin that despite her blindness she can see more than he.[57] The woman is described as sitting "by a little fire spinning, after the old fashion with distaff and spindle."[58] Her blindness reminds us of characters from Greek mythology, the "Fates". These were three sisters, daughters of Zeus, which were believed to determine human destiny. Klotho was the one who "spinned the thread" of human life; in artworks she is usually depicted with a spindle.[59] The old woman in "The Carasoyn" may be modelled on Klotho, nevertheless, the thread she is spinning is more connected to storytelling and imagination: "But as soon as the spindle began to twirl, it began to sparkle all the colours of the rainbow, that it was a delight to see. [...] and the old woman kept telling Colin one story after another [...]"[60]

In "The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess" the two protagonists are supervised by the wise woman. In contrast to the other magical women, the wise woman is extremely punitive. Her appearance depends on who is looking at her. Wicked beings are not able to perceive her "real self".[61] The wise woman is a metamorphic entity with the ability to change into a dog or a little girl at will.[62] She is a very exclusive person, demanding moral perfection from people who wish to see her true appearance. According to Humphrey Carpenter, MacDonald's preoccupation with the grandmother figure can be related to the fact that he lost his mother at a very young age.[63] However, it is more likely that his grandmother Isabella Robertson, who had "passion for saving souls from eternal burning",

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[53] Carl Gustav Jung, *Über die Archetypen des Kollektiven Unbewussten* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), 80.

[54] George MacDonald, "The Golden Key," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 127.

[55] MacDonald, "The Golden Key," 125.

[56] MacDonald, "The Golden Key," 125.

[57] MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 197.

[58] MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 197.

[59] "Moirai", *Theoi Greek Mythology*, accessed October 16, 2007. http://www.theoi.com/Daimon/Moirai.html.

[60] MacDonald, "The Carasoyn," 198.

[61] George MacDonald, "The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess: A Double Story," in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999), 294.

[62] MacDonald, "The Wise Woman or the Lost Princess," 293.

[63] Humprey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens: A Study of Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 71.

was the primary source of his inspiration. MacDonald's son Greville argues that his father was very strongly influenced by his grandmother.[64]

The supernatural beings in MacDonald's fairy tales can be subdivided into folklore and humanoid characters. The folklore creatures are modeled on characters from folk tales, but their author endowed them with original qualities as well. The humanoid characters are very innovative. Many character types undergo a development from the first stories to later ones. For example, in the earlier tales the fairies are depicted in a stereotypical way as magical women who come to royal christenings to bring gifts. In contrast, the fairies in the later tales are materialist creatures, wicked and unpredictable. MacDonald's fairy tales should not be seen as mere imitations of traditional folk tales, but as daring experiments. The writer uses tradition as a starting point, as an overall framework which he fills with his own material: his artistic theory, his Christian ideology as well as the results of his ventures into other genres, particularly that of fantasy.

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