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Trickster Turned Sadist: Tradition and the Breakdown of Tradition in 'The Carasoyn'

Per Klingberg

George MacDonald published his fairy tale 'The Fairy Fleet – an English *Mährchen*' in the April issue of the periodical *The Argosy* during 1866. Four years later, the story was included in the author's ten-volume work *Works of Fancy and Imagination* (1871). As the story migrated from periodical to book, however, it was also subject to some drastic changes. Not only did MacDonald rename the story 'The Carasoyn', but it was also substantially expanded through the addition of a second part, making it almost twice as long as the original text. While the first part of the story depicted a young Scottish boy named Colin's struggle to rescue a human girl who had been taken by mischievous fairies, the revised version of the story was given a continuation that stretches well into the protagonist's adulthood. Now a married man and a father of three, Colin is once again visited by the vindictive fairies who abduct his son, forcing him to undergo a series of trials similar to those he faced as a young boy. This second part of the story makes for a reading experience that is at the same time weirdly familiar and unsettlingly strange. Although the plot structure is an almost exact reproduction of the first part, the tone of the story is now decidedly darker, especially in the portrayal of the fairies: originally portrayed as mischievous tricksters, prone to pinch their human captives for fun, they have now turned into truly malevolent creatures, threatening to maim Colin's son. Paradoxically, MacDonald increasingly emphasises the *Scottish* nature of the tale in this second part while changing the setting of the story from Scotland to Devon, drawing more clearly on a folkloric tradition.

Scholars discussing 'The Carasoyn' have tended to view this second part as either an entirely superfluous addition, adding nothing to our understanding of the story, or at worst an unfortunate revision that spoils a perfectly good text. While Robert Lee Wolff, for instance, *does* pay attention to the second part, he does so primarily in order to criticise, stating that whereas the original version was 'by far MacDonald's most successful fairy-tale since *Phantastes*', the second part was 'a major lapse in taste' and an expression of 'savagery' on MacDonald's behalf. In Wolff's view, the stylistic and thematic change

undermines the qualities of the first part, leading him to conclude that '[t]he story has been spoiled' by these revisions.[1] Richard Reis, on the other hand, seems to have only the first part of the story in mind when he describes it as 'a delightful trip through a world of toy ships and brownies into which a child is suddenly projected'.[2] In his article 'Maturation and Education in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales', Dieter Petzold explicitly dismisses the importance of this second part of the story, stating that he will forego discussion of it entirely, since 'the maturation theme is merely reduplicated and blurred in the second part'.[3] It is not necessary to share Wolff's negative assessment of the second version of the story in order to agree with him that the continuation is to be understood as something more than a pointless repetition. Here, everything seems to have taken a sudden turn for the nasty. As Wolff puts it, '[t]he fairies and goblins have always been mischievous; but they are now sadistic. Colin has always been dreamy, but he is now passive and incompetent. The old woman has always been blind, but she is now terrifying'.[4]

The aim of this article, however, is not so much to evaluate the changes that MacDonald made to his story as to examine and discuss them as compositionally motivated, suggesting that they serve an artistic purpose. What is the significance of the repetitive element of the second part and why is it so much darker than the first part? This essay will trace how MacDonald's revisions serve to create a text that more emphatically highlights the Scottish theme and more explicitly draws on an older folkloric tradition in its portrayal of the fairies, rather than the playful figures of contemporary children's fiction. This increased reliance on folkloric figures and motifs is, in many ways, congenial to the significantly darker tone of this second part. As Carole Silver has pointed out in her seminal study of Victorian fairy faith, *Strange and Secret Peoples* (1999), works of folklore had a degree of freedom unknown to other literary works produced in the Victorian era:

> Unlike the revised or composed fairy tales Victorians read in such profusion, the folklore they gathered was filled with sex and violence. Less expurgated than much Victorian fiction, permitted to be 'crude'

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1 Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key* (New Haven, 1961), 132–3.

2 Richard H. Reis, *George MacDonald* (New York, 1972), 80.

3 Dieter Petzold, 'Maturation and Education in George MacDonald's Fairy Tales', in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 12 (1993), 10–24, (21).

4 Wolff, 134.

> because authentic, Victorian folklore collections provide a set of insights into the ways in which a culture sought to externalize evil.[5]

For an author intent on using the fairy tale as a vehicle for a serious discussion of moral questions and the problem of evil, the use of folkloric motifs could serve as a means by which to achieve greater artistic license and intellectual freedom. Emphasising the *Scottish* nature of the fairies serves a similar purpose. As Silver points out, there was a broad consensus among fairy-versed Victorians that Celtic fairies were particularly dangerous:

> Anglo-Saxon and Celt alike agreed that the slaugh (the host), the sidhe (mainly perceived as female), and many of the other fairies of Ireland and Scotland were neither harmless nor playful - unlike some of the elfin peoples found in other parts of England.[6]

It bears pointing out, however, that 'The Carasoyn' is not a merely passive reflection of a tradition: although MacDonald is an author with a profound understanding of the traditions of the genres that he works in, he is not subservient to them. On the contrary, he is rather prone to employ the conventions of genre in unconventional ways, thus achieving unexpected and unsettling effects. As John Patrick Pazdziora aptly describes it, MacDonald 're-appropriated [traditional fairy-tales] to his own ends; with his deep understanding of not just literary fairy tales but the folklore behind them, he seems to have seen himself in a living, ongoing storytelling tradition'.[7]

While 'The Carasoyn' makes more extensive use of folk traditions than its predecessor, it is *also* a decidedly less traditional text. In the second part of the story, MacDonald subtly undermines a series of fairy tale conventions, and traditional tropes are used to portray the fragility of the societal order that they depend on, at times seemingly at the verge of falling apart, confronted with exile, moral degeneracy and modernity. In other words, highlighting and discussing how and when the text departs from and breaks with convention is just as important a task as to identify the conventions that the text draws upon.

The premise of the story, in 'The Fairy Fleet' – as well as in 'The Carasoyn' –

[5] Carole Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples* (New York, 1999), 149.

[6] Ibid., 149.

[7] John Patrick Pazdziora, 'How the Fairies were not Invited to Court' in Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora & Ginger Stelle (eds), *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, Occasional Papers 17 (Glasgow, 2013), 254–73, (256).

is fairly simple: as a boy, Colin lives a rather lonely life with his shepherd father in the Scottish countryside. Having decided to alter the course of a brook, so that it will run through their cottage, Colin is at first delighted to discover that a fairy fleet now sails through their house at nighttime until he learns that the fairies have kidnapped a human girl. The fairy queen agrees to set the human girl free if Colin is able to bring her a magic concoction known as the Carasoyn. Initially, Colin is at a loss as how to achieve this, but suddenly recalls how he, at a very early age, lost his way on the Scottish moors, and suddenly found himself standing outside a cottage, in which a mysterious wise woman resided – a figure that, of course, ought to be very familiar to any reader of MacDonald. She helped him find his way home then and, surely, she will be able to assist him in his task. Any conscious attempt to find the wise woman is in vain, however: only when Colin has lost his way on the moor does he find himself outside of the cottage once again. The woman explains to Colin that he will face three trials over the forthcoming nights: only if he is able to dream three days without sleeping, work three days without dreaming and finally both work and dream for three days, will he be able to find a bottle of Carasoyn. Through the assistance of the woman, who tells him wonderful stories for three days, and a goblin blacksmith, who sets him to work for three days, Colin is able to achieve all three feats and to bring the mysterious concoction to the fairy queen.

However, the potion that the queen so desires do the wicked fairies no good, causing them instantly to age rapidly. They depart from Colin's cottage, lamenting bitterly. But more importantly, for Colin, the girl is released from her captivity. The family takes her in, and having grown up and earned himself college degree, Colin marries her, and they move to a little cottage in Devon, to 'get away from the neighbourhood of a queen who was not to be depended upon'.[8] This is where 'The Fairy Fleet', an upbeat and all-in-all rather conventional fairy tale, ends. In short, the text reads as a straightforward depiction of a boy's coming of age, in which he overcomes hardships and temptations in order to gain true love in the end.

In the second part of the story, MacDonald reveals what took place after the pair left Scotland. As it turns out, the wickedness of the fairies has forced them into exile from their Scottish habitat, and they *too* have taken up residence in the south of Devon. Discovering that Colin's family are moving into the region, they decide to seek vengeance, snatching away the youngest of Colin's

[8] George MacDonald, *The Complete Fairy Tales* (New York, 1999), 208. Further citation given in text.

children. Once again, Colin, now an adult and father of three, must seek the assistance of the wise woman in the cottage, and once again he must undergo nine nights of trials before he is able to face the fairy queen. On the ninth night he receives some wax and an awl from a helper known as the Goblin Cobbler – using the wax he is able to seal the fairies into the basin, known as the Kelpie's Pool, in which they are fond of swimming. Boring a hole in the rock with the awl, he threatens to empty the basin entirely of water, causing the captured fairies to panic. The fairy queen reluctantly returns Colin's son and swears never to hurt his family again.

Petzold, who has discussed the fairy tale in the monograph *Das englische Kunstmärchen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (1981) as well as in his article, has stressed how the theme of maturation is central to the story. If MacDonald in this tale lies closer to the rustic folk tradition than the more moralistic and rationalistic *conte de fées*-school, it is, Petzold argues, congenial with the author's aim, since the folk tale is commonly understood as a depiction of the individual's inner maturation rather than insight gained from outward education.[9] There is no reason to question Petzold's reading of 'The Fairy Fleet', rather than 'The Carasoyn', as a depiction of inner maturation, with the quest being a symbolic representation of a boy's initiation into adulthood. It is, in fact, quite easy to find passages in the text that lend support to such a reading. The changeling girl tells Colin that she longs to grow into a woman, something that is impossible among the fairies that, as Petzold puts it, act as 'personifications of childishness and immaturity, mental states to be overcome by growing up'.[10] The fact that the fairies refer to humans as 'the big people' is surely not only a reference to their physical size – nor is it a coincidence that Colin notes that the fairy queen cries 'like a spoilt child, not like a sorrowful woman' (192, 195).

The static world of Faërie, perpetually caught on the threshold between childhood and adulthood, is precisely what must be rejected in order to achieve maturity. The fact that the girl, once saved, takes over the domestic chores in the cottage, as Colin assumes his father's position as a shepherd is a clear indication that this has happened by the end of the story – Colin and Fairy, as they have taken to calling the girl, have been integrated into the Victorian ideal of the nuclear family. In much the same vein, the potion of the Carasoyn seems to function as a representation of aging and maturation: the

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9 Dieter Petzold, *Das englische Kunstmärchen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert,* Buchreihe der Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie 20 (Tübingen, 1981), 201.

10 Petzold, 'Maturation…', 16.

fairy queen explains that she wants the potion, since she longs for 'something that I neither like nor please – that I don't know anything about' (195). As it happens, this turns out to be the fairies' introduction to the concept of aging.[11] In 'The Fairy Fleet', then, MacDonald emphatically highlights the importance of growing up as well as the dangers of resisting adulthood in a way that distinguishes him from other male fairy tale writers of the time, whose works are marked by a strong tendency to regression.[12]

The inclination to identify fairies with the childish, however, is something very typical of the Victorian period. Diane Purkiss has convincingly shown how the Victorians came to project the romantic notion of the innocent child on the fairy figure, something that turned them into more asexual figures than they were previously perceived.[13] Nicola Bown makes a similar observation in *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (2001) and discusses it as a possible reason why the Victorian fairy mania was primarily a male phenomenon – as women were struggling to be perceived as adults in the first place, the fairy figure could function as a way for men to escape the pressure of adulthood.[14] Silver, in turn, shows how the golden age of children's literature increasingly relegated the fairies to the nursery. The fairies lost their moral ambiguity, something that Silver states as a possible reason for the declining interest in fairies at the end of the nineteenth century:

> As the elfin peoples became staples of children's literature, the perception grew that they themselves were childish and that interest and belief in them fitted children only. Some of the tales promoted a false set of conventions, one that made the fairies tiny and harmless – moral guides for children or charming little pets – and a tradition of sentimentalization and idealization developed. In this literature, fairies were conflated with angels or further miniaturized into toys. In addition, fairies and witches were increasingly polarized: fairies grew purely good and sprouted wings, losing their demonic energy and power.[15]

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11 Unsurprisingly, Wolff opts for the most Freudian reading possible, insisting that the Carasoyn symbolises 'defloration, which always leads to trouble and grief', 133.

12 Cf. U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago, 1998).

13 Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London, 2000), 220.

14 Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-century Art and Literature,* Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-century Literature and Culture, vol. 33 (Cambridge, 2001), 4.

15 Silver, 187

When the fairies are introduced in 'The Fairy Fleet', they come across very much as children of their time. Although the fact that they are dressed in green is a homage to folk tradition,[16] MacDonald's detailed description of the bobbing fairy fleet and the activities of the playful fairies reads more like an ekphrasis (i.e. a literary description of a work of art) of the work of a contemporary fairy painter such as sir Joseph Noel Paton:

> The sailors were as busy as sailors could be, mooring along the banks, or running their boats high and dry on the shore. Some had little sails which glimmered white in the moonshine-half-lowered, or blowing out in the light breeze that crept down the course of the stream. Some were pulling about through the rest, oars flashing, tiny voices calling, tiny feet running, tiny hands hauling at ropes that ran through blocks of shining ivory. On the shore stood groups of fairy ladies in all colours of the rainbow, green predominating, waited upon by gentlemen all in green, but with red and yellow feathers in their caps. The queen had landed on the side next to Colin, and in a few minutes more twenty dances were going at once along the shores of the fairy river. (192)

Repeatedly, the text calls attention to the diminutive features of the fairies: not only are they sailing with 'little sails', they are also described as 'tiny' trice. In comparison, the fascinated Colin is described as a 'glowering ogre' in relation to the fairies. The miniature-sized fairies are a motif that stems from a literary tradition, rather than folk tradition, implying a distanced attitude in which fairies are viewed as entertaining mischief makers rather than a possible threat.[17] 'The Fairy Fleet', then, is mostly written in line with a *literary* fairy-tale tradition, where the childish and diminutive traits of the fairies are stressed, something that will change in 'The Carasoyn'. The difference between the two versions should not be exaggerated, however – as Silver has pointed out, MacDonald belonged to a minority of Victorian fairy tale-writers who 'created characters and situations that were both freshly original and consonant with

[16] In his article 'The Making of the Early Modern British Fairy Tradition', historian Ronald Hutton lists the colour green as one of the "motifs which were to be enduring components of fairy lore", citing texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ronald Hutton, 'The Making of the Early Modern British Fairy Tradition', *The Historical Journal*, 57.4 (2014), 1135–56, (1138).

[17] Silver,188; Purkiss, 174.

the broader folklore tradition'.[18] MacDonald's knowledge of folk traditions is on display in 'The Fairy Fleet' as well.

The most striking example of how MacDonald draws on these sources is given at the ending of the first part: in order to save the human girl, Colin must hold her in his embrace, even as she shifts into numerous animal shapes. The motif is, of course, derived from the Scottish ballad of *Tam Lin*, where the female protagonist saves the namesake of the ballad in much the same way. There are two important differences, however: here, it is a boy, rather than a young woman, who is the acting part and the rather explicit sexual themes of *Tam Lin* are played down in MacDonald's fairy tale. Several versions of *Tam Lin* portray both rape and attempted abortion and the female protagonist who wants to win a father to her baby must first see him turn into a series of threatening animals, such as a snake and a bear, and finally a rod of hot iron.[19] Small wonder, that this imagery has been interpreted as a young woman's first meeting with a (possibly threatening) male sexuality. Colin's trial, however, is aimed at male protectiveness rather than the fear of a young woman: although the girl in MacDonald's story at first turns into 'a great writhing worm' in Colin's grasp, she then turns into a series of animals that evoke compassion rather than fear, such as a rabbit in pain and a frightened dove, begging to be set free (206).[20] And even if Colin, like the protagonist of *Tam Lin*, endures the trial and earns the hand of a woman, the immediate connection between trial and outcome has been weakened through the insertion of a nine-year long interlude in which Colin is educated – Petzold is surely right to view this as a rationalistic concession to Victorian conventions in dealing with a sexually charged motif.[21] It also bears pointing out that the fairy queen of *Tam Lin* is a truly frightening creature, who in several versions of the ballad intends to sacrifice her former lover as a tithe to hell: there is no indication in MacDonald's story that leads us to assume that the changeling girl is in similar danger. The handling of a folklore motif in 'The Fairy Fleet', then, is still done in such a way as not to undermine the assumptions that a Victorian

[18] Silver, 186.

[19] The best-known version of the ballad is found in the first volume of James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898), indexed as 39A. It bears pointing out that the versions differ greatly as to whether the sexual encounter is a consensual one; version 39G depicts how Tam-a-line, as he is called in this version, 'got his wills of her/His wills as he had taen', in Francis James Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols (Boston, 1898), I, 349.

[20] Petzold makes a similar observation. See Petzold, 200.

[21] Petzold, 201–2.

reader would bring to a contemporary literary fairy tale: it is still a benign and, ultimately, a fundamentally safe text in this respect.

As the story moves to Devon, however, the fairies now become more distinctly Scottish than the generic pan-British figures of 'The Fairy Fleet'. The difference is not an unimportant one. Without exaggerating the regional differences or claiming the existence of any absolute dividing lines, it is possible to state that there is a broad consensus that Scottish fairies have been perceived as decidedly more dangerous than their English counterparts. For instance, Katherine Briggs writes in *The Anatomy of Puck* (1959):

> On the whole the fairy picture is gloomier in the Highlands than in the south. We have many familiar features, the changelings, the fairy ointment, the aristocratic state, the fairy hills, the theft of corn, the power of invisibility, the dislike of being watched, the brownie labours, the boggarts; but we have little of the fairy mirth, the dancing or the gifts to favourites. […] The Highland fairies are fiercer, more independent, more dangerous than the Southerners, but even here Prospero could have found his fairy familiar, though it would have needed all his power to coerce it to serve good ends. It is no surprise to find that the Scottish fairies held intercourse with the witches.[22]

In a discussion on Elizabethan fairy faith, Purkiss contrasts English and Scottish attitudes in a similar fashion:

> The result is that most, though not all, English encounters with fairies are tonally different from Scottish accounts. To meet a fairy in Scotland is at best an equivocal experience, and can be downright disastrous. In England, fairies are still risky, but the sense of risk is defrayed by an even clearer and more optimistic sense of the possible benefits.[23]

Purkis notes that whereas many of the Scottish fairy stories of the time are found in the protocols of witch trials, and relates of menacing figures, English fairies are more prone to appear as the helpers of the story, for example leading poor men to find hidden treasures. Silver also notes that Scotland was 'famous for its witch trials and for the particularly grotesque and horrific nature of its supernaturals' – and, unlike their English counterparts, Scottish

[22] Katharine M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck* (London, 1959), 32.
[23] Purkiss, 124.

fairies tended to be more clearly linked to witchcraft and dark magic.[24] It bears pointing out that when the fairies are reintroduced to the reader in the second part of the story, they are portrayed in line with such a darker tradition – they are no longer to be read as manifestations of childishness and irresponsibility. The contrast with the first part is striking: rather than dwelling on the diminutiveness of the playful figures, the text now repeatedly underlines the frightening and wild nature of the fairies. Colin sees 'a few grotesque figures', dancing 'furiously' and 'more wildly than ever', egged on by a violin wailing 'just like the cry of a child', a simile that is used two times in a short passage of text: whereas Colin in the first part observed the fairies with wide-eyed fascination he now views them 'filled with horror', listening to a song in which the fairy Peterkin describes how they have maimed his son bit by bit (213–14). This cruelty is further accented near the end of the story, when the fairies mock Colin's demand that they return his son, by showing him 'a dreadful object', 'like a baby with his face half eaten away by the fishes, only that he had a huge nose, like the big toe of a lobster' (222). Although this is not the child, as they claim, the reader is offered no reassuring answer as to who or what it was that the fairies showed Colin. The fairies now come across as malevolent and possibly dangerous, rather than as childish pranksters.

In this second part of the story, MacDonald is also increasingly referencing both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic folklore. Discussing 'The Fairy Fleet', Wolff praises MacDonald for having kept 'to a minimum folklore themes such as the changeling and her repeated transformations into animals at the end'. While Wolff suggests that MacDonald 'has skillfully worked them into the framework of a basically original tale', he implicitly criticises the author for not doing the same in the second part of the story.[25] One does not have to share Wolff's conviction that a sparing use of folklore themes makes for an evident criterion of literary quality to see that the observation itself is true – one need only to refer to the cobbler's song, a flashy display of erudition, where MacDonald not only references generic fairy tale-creatures such as mermaids, ogres and fairies, but also more specifically Celtic creatures such as the kelpie, the pookie and the brownie. The mention in the last verse of the mysterious Boneless seems to be a reference to a passage from Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), where Scot mentions 'old Boneless' as one

[24] Silver, 174.
[25] Wolff, 132.

of the creatures he was frightened with as a child.[26] This is a rather obscure reference, well beyond the usual *par de course* for the casual reader of fairy tales. More examples could be given, but perhaps it suffices to say that 'The Carasoyn' is written by an author who is very much aware of the tradition that precedes him.

However, the fairies of the second part are not only more Scottish in the sense that they are portrayed in a darker fashion. It is now also made clear that they are explicitly connected with the Scottish landscape. While it is true that the fairies, like Colin, now reside in Devon, they have not chosen to do so freely – as the story increasingly references folk traditions, it is also made clear that this tradition is in decline. Cruel as the fairies of folk tradition may be, they are bound by a certain set of rules and, importantly, they are obliged to keep their word when dealing with mortals. However, we now learn that this is no longer the case: the fairies that Colin encounters are in grave moral decline and have started to disregard the rules that govern the interactions between mortals and fairies. MacDonald tells us that these fairies

> had played many ill-natured pranks upon the human mortals; had stolen children upon whom they had no claim; had refused to deliver them up when they were demanded of them; had even terrified infants in their cradles; and, final proof of moral declension in fairies, had attempted to get rid of the obligations of their word, by all kinds of trickery and false logic. (209)

Consequently, they have been dealt one of the worst punishments imaginable for a fairy – they have been banished from 'that part of the country where they and their ancestors have lived for more years than they can count' (209), driven by an involuntary wanderlust and unable to feel at home wherever they attempt to settle down. The motif of the departing fairies is a well-established one in literature: the reason given for the departure has varied over the centuries however, from the christening of the British Isles to the negative impact that the factories had on the beauty of the landscape.[27] Here, the reason given is a moral degeneracy in the fairies themselves, something that, as far as this author has been able to gather, lacks a clear precedent in tradition,

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[26] Qtd. in Purkiss, 159–60.

[27] An early example of this motif, mentioned by both Purkiss and Silver, is Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), where the Wife of Bath laments that the friars have replaced the fairies of old. Purkiss, 73; Silver, 185; Bown, 39.

but corresponds well to an increasingly pessimistic tendency in MacDonald's later writing. And yet, this departure is not only to be understood as a morally justified punishment, but also as a very tangible and irreversible loss for the Scots and the Scottish landscape itself. In the first section of the second part, MacDonald describes this disenchanted landscape at some length:

> Now that which happens to the aspect of a country when the fairies leave it, is that a kind of deadness falls over the landscape. The traveller feels the wind as before, but it does not seem to refresh him. The child sighs over his daisy chain, and cannot find a red-tipped one amongst all that he has gathered. The cowslips have not half the honey in them. The wasps outnumber the bees. The horses come from the plough more tired at night, hanging their heads to their very hoofs as they plod homewards. The youth and the maiden, though perfectly happy when they meet, find the road to and from the trysting-place unaccountably long and dreary. The hawthorn-blossom is neither so white nor so red as it used to be and the dark rough bark looks through and makes it ragged. The day is neither so warm nor the night so friendly as before. In a word, that something which no one can describe or be content to go without is missing. Everything is common-place. Everything falls short of one's expectations. (210–11.)

The banishment of the fairies, then, *also* means that existence has lost a higher dimension and feeling of inherent meaning, a state that the first part of the story was moving towards. But one can also note that the distinctiveness of the Scottish landscape is suddenly made clear in a way that lacks a counterpart in the first part of the story. 'In the splendour of their Devon banishment' with its exuberant beauty, the beauty of ''their bare Scotland', with 'the rocks and stones and rowan and birch-trees of the solitary burns' is made all the more clear for the homesick fairies. 'The country they had left might be an ill-favoured thing, but it was their own' (210). The fairies that the reader encounters are truly *Scottish* and the loss of values and the experience of exile are inseparable from each other. The wicked fairies are not whole without Scotland, but neither will Scotland ever be the same without its fairies – the paragraph reads more like a tragedy than a conventional morality.

One could argue that, as both the fairies and the story depart from Scotland, we also leave the enchanted world of fairytales behind: the conventions of the genre suddenly seem to be cast in doubt. There is a logic to this. As David

Robb has pointed out in a discussion of MacDonald's novels, Scotland, to the typical Victorian reader, was 'still a country known through books, reputation and myth rather than through direct knowledge, and was already being thought of as the domain of untold eccentricities […], a region where wonder and strangeness were domesticated'.[28] In the first part of the story, a mindset in which the miraculous belongs to real life is still valid, as made clear by the fact that Colin's father immediately accepts his son's explanation as to why he has been missing for nine days, 'as at that time marvels were much easier to believe than they are now' (204). This elegiac aside makes clear that such an attitude to the realities of the miraculous belongs to the past – and the second part of the story seems to have abandoned such a naïve acceptance, rather taking place in our disenchanted modernity.

To make the difference between the two versions as clear as possible, one may well linger at the depiction of the three nights that Colin spends at Stonestarvit Moss towards the end of 'The Fairy Fleet'. In sowing and harvesting the grapes that will turn into the Carasoyn, Colin experiences something akin to an epiphany:

> Those three days were the happiest he had ever known. For he understood everything he did himself, and all that everything was doing round about him. He saw what the rushes were, and why the blossom came out at the side, and why it was russet-coloured, and why the pitch was white, and the skin green. And he said to himself, "If I were a rush now, that's just how I should make a point of growing." And he knew how the heather felt with its cold roots, and its head of purple bells; and the wise-looking cottongrass, which the old woman called her sheep, and the white beard of which she spun into thread. (203–4)

The movement of 'The Fairy Fleet' is directed towards a pinnacle of higher understanding, in which everything is revealed, and every part of the landscape holds a deep significance. As we have already seen, the second part of the story immediately begins with a departure from this state, providing us no indication that this state can be recovered. And although the first and the second part of the story are deceptively similar as far as plot structure goes, the imagery of the second part, as we have seen, is decidedly darker and more troubling in nature. Furthermore, the conventions of the fairy tale are undermined in the

[28] David Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1987), 34.

second part of the story, a technique that is made clear in comparison with the first part. Despite remaining a simple story in terms of its plot, the text moves from transparency to opaqueness in the second part, resisting an easy translation into a moral schema.

No reader ought to remain in doubt as to the significance of the first part of the story: it reads as a perfectly straightforward portrayal of a boy's coming of age, in which he overcomes hardships and temptations to gain true love in the end. In rescuing the girl, Colin faces three different trials, each one lasting for three nights and each one clearly linked to a certain set of virtues: in dreaming three full nights without sleeping Colin shows that he is capable of spiritual growth and imagination while he displays work ethic in working for three full nights, finally achieving a synthesis of both virtues in the last trial, harvesting the grapes of the Carasoyn. But there is also a logical progression to the trials that creates a coherency to the tale. As Colin works three nights in the smithy, the goblin helpers lift Cumberbone Crag, a feat for which they require the manufacturing of tools – something that Colin and the blacksmith provide through industrious labor. As Colin arrives at Stonestarvit Moss to plant the grapes, he realises that the lifting of Cumberbone Crag served to direct favorable winds over the moss, turning the soil fertile. The place where the work is to be commenced has been marked by an egg from the hen Jenny, whom he met in the first part of the story. In other words, at every point of the story a clear connection between action and outcome is established as well as an internal consistency – elements of the first two trials are present in the third trial.

Furthermore, this first part of the story is characterised by an extremely strict observance of one of the classic conventions of fairy tales: the importance of the number three. The most obvious example of this would be the fact that Colin's trial is given in the forms of three threes – but MacDonald uses this convention with strict consequence and a painstaking attention to detail. Jenny the hen lays three eggs after the first trial, Colin 'worked like three' in the smithy and processes 'a bar of iron three inches thick or so, cut off three yards' (201). Once Colin has managed to return the girl Fairy to the world of mortals, her recovery is given to us in a long number of threes: she sleeps for three days and then waits an additional three days before she starts to talk. After three weeks she is finally ready to eat human food again and within three months she can assume the domestic duties of the house. Having spent three times three years in school, Colin is finally ready to marry her.

This meticulous attention to detail has no real equivalent in the second

part of the story. Colin and Fairy have three children and the abducted son is three years old – but otherwise, three is not a recurring number on the micro-level of the story. And although Colin once again spends nine nights trying to retrieve a loved one from the fairies, it is no longer presented as a series of trials, lasting three nights each. Rather, Colin spends seven nights listening to the stories of the wise woman, one night to retrieve the cobbler's wax and awl which he is given promptly and, finally, one night to retrieve his son. Not only is this disposition strangely asymmetrical for a reader accustomed to the conventions of the fairy tale, it is also hard to ascribe any particular moral significance to Colin's experiences during the first eight nights where he remains a rather passive and hapless figure. There is no longer a clear connection between the three trials and no clear connection between action and outcome on Colin's behalf.

In fact, the repetitive element itself creates an unsettling effect: while the narrative structure is largely identical to the previous version it is now placed in a different framework. The maturation theme that is so important to the first part of the story is subverted by the fact that the protagonist is no longer a valiant boy but a respectable husband and father with a college degree. In fact, the repetitive character of the text carries a pessimistic implication for our understanding of the text as a coming of age-story: if a trial happily overcome can recur at any point later in life, it loses its character of painful but necessary initiatory experience, transforming the archetypical hero's journey into a futile endeavor. Whereas the first part of the story emphatically points out the importance of growing up and maturing, the other part of the story seems preoccupied with the depiction of a world in decline, a theme that is certainly not limited to the moral corruption of the fairies. Where the young Colin lived up to the criteria of a true hero, the adult protagonist has turned into that rare thing, a fairy tale hero with a penchant for procrastination, entirely at a loss as how to retrieve his son from the fairies. Only when the fairies themselves point out that only nine nights remain until the boy has been taken for seven years, meaning the next attempt at rescuing him will have to wait for an additional seven years, does Colin, rather reluctantly, begin to act. This ought to be contrasted with how the first part of the story stresses the young Colin's readiness to action: in the very first paragraph of the story, we learn that this Colin was 'never at a loss when anything had to be done. Somehow, he always blundered into the straight road to his end, while another would be putting on his shoes to look for it' (189). The fact that Colin at the outset of the story has no idea what the Carasoyn *is* or how one is supposed

to find it does not keep him from looking: "'[p]eople in fairy stories," he said, "always find what they want. Why should not I find this Carasoyn? It does not seem likely. But the world doesn't go round by *likely*. So *I* will try'" (italics in original, 196).

Although it is true that Colin must lose his way on the moor in order to actually enlist the aid of the wise woman, it is a disorientation that is the result of a heroic and determined search. In much the same way, the young Colin's readiness to action is intimately linked with his capacity to dream. It is striking how differently Colin approaches the problem, or rather avoids approaching the problem, as an adult. Even after the fairies have taunted him and threatened to maim his son, Colin's attitude is primarily that of resignation. Although he realises that he is in need of the help of the wise woman, he believes himself to know the moors of his childhood too well to lose himself there once again and seems to be content to leave it at that. This time, it is pecuniary problems rather than any attempt to emulate the behavior of the heroes of fairy tales that set him on the right track: after attempting to borrow some money from his friend, Colin happens to lose his way in Dartmoor and suddenly finds himself outside of the wise woman's cottage. What emerges in this second part of the story, then, is an alarmingly incompetent hero, crestfallen, resigned and at times prone to inexplicably foolish behavior. For instance, he does not heed the instructions of the wise woman to follow Jenny, who is to show him the way to the Goblin Cobbler, but rather lingers at her cottage to peep through her windows. As a result, he almost loses his way and consequently, almost loses his son. The fairies may not be what they once were, but the same seems to be the case with the fairy tale heroes of yore.

Unsettlingly enough, this holds true for the helpers of the story as well. When Colin seeks the aid of the goblin cobblers their first thought is not to assist him but to cut him into pieces, so that they can use his head for a 'good paste-bowl' and his sinews for 'good thread' (218). Only when the frightened Colin shouts that he is sent by the wise woman in the cottage are they able to rein in their violent impulses and agree to help him. It is true that there is an analogous scene in the first part, where Colin almost ends up in a fight with the goblins in the smithy, before mentioning the name of the wise woman – but now it is no longer a question of a squabble, but rather a mutilation of the human body, where the parts are to be used in industrial production. Rather than having being driven out by the ongoing industrialisation, then, these fairy tale-figures seems to have embraced the conditions of disenchanted modernity.

The moral order of the smithy was guaranteed by the Goblin Blacksmith,

an adult authority figure, handing out rewards and punishments to the younger goblins and Colin as he saw fit. The counterpart in the second part coincides with the three hundred thirteen cobblers who want to mutilate Colin – puzzlingly enough, the cobblers seem to simultaneously constitute a crowd and one individual. Colin notes that the movements of the cobblers are all made simultaneously 'as if they had been a piece of machinery' and when one of them approaches Colin to talk to him, the other disappear as if they were a mirage (218).

As Wolff has stated, even the wise woman comes across as terrifying in this second part. Although she remains a helping and comforting figure there is a certain ominous quality to her appearance this time around – that the woman is blind is made clear in the first part of the story, but now it is emphasised that 'there was nothing but wrinkles' where one would expect to see eyes (216). As Colin defies her instructions and peeps in through the window he can see that there is a fire burning in her eyes and he falls unconscious to the ground. Any symbolic significance of this particular scene aside, we may state that there is a frightening dimension to the woman that is missing in 'The Fairy Fleet'. It is also noteworthy that she has been given a new epithet: whereas Colin should state that he was sent by 'the woman with the spindle' to enlist the help of the Goblin Blacksmith, the same name falls on deaf ears when presented to the cobblers. Only when he evokes the name of the woman with the staff do they agree to help him. The woman may be the same, but it is another aspect of the woman that is important in this part of the story.

What at first sight could seem almost frustratingly familiar, then, is in reality quite different this time around. Throughout the second part MacDonald reuses motifs and figures, similar to those in the first part, but gives them new and disturbing meanings. If it at first glance may seem like a mirroring of the first part, it is given to us through a glass darkly, resulting in a more pessimistic and morally ambiguous story than the original. It is noteworthy that readers and interpreters seem to have had a hard time accepting 'The Carasoyn' as the authoritative version, preferring the more conventional version of 1866. Apparently, something about this later version strikes the readers as off. As this paper has shown, MacDonald has introduced a series of subtle changes in the second part of 'The Carasoyn', resulting in a story that is decidedly more different from the first part than the similar plot structure would have the reader believe. In much the same way that we are left baffled by the grim ending of *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), challenging our conceptions about proper fairy-tale endings, there is an unsettling quality to the second part of

'The Carasoyn', precisely because it does not add up. In a genre where we expect to meet enchantment, we are thrown into a disenchanted world; where we expect to meet valiant young heroes we are confronted with disoriented and disillusioned adults and instead of happy-ever-after, we are given an arduous repetition of yesterday's trials. 'The Carasoyn' does not necessarily make for a truly satisfying reading experience, in the sense that genre conventions are heeded, but it is a striking example of how MacDonald undermines literary conventions in order to craft confrontational and unsettling narratives, keeping the form of the fairytale relevant as a vehicle for serious discussions of existential questions and the ever-relevant topics of good and evil.

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