

To “Go Out” and See the World through Innocent Eyes : The View of Life and Death in George MacDonald’ s “The Day Boy and the Night Girl”

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To “Go Out” and See the World through Innocent Eyes: The View of Life and Death in George MacDonald’s “The Day Boy and the Night Girl”

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Introduction

In George MacDonald’s last fairytale “The Day Boy and the Night Girl” (1879), Watho, a witch who “desired to know everything” (304), raises Photogen and Nycteris to make them incarnations of Day and Night respectively. Previous studies have generally discussed Watho’s dividing attitude and the importance of embracing opposites that are represented by Photogen the Day Boy and Nycteris the Night Girl.¹ On the other hand, some scholars have discussed this radical division from the point of view of gender.² In either case, previous studies consistently considered Photogen

¹ MacDonald’s works are sometimes discussed by focusing on various kinds of oppositions such as Christianity/Paganism, body/soul, and reality/the fantastic world, and so on. Especially, Stephen Prickett discusses oppositions by pointing out that MacDonald creates two worlds in many of his works, and the importance of uniting them. As the title shows, there are obvious oppositions in this story: day/night and boy/girl, and previous studies have tended to focus on and discuss them. Bjorn Sundmark says that “one of the themes of this story surely is that dualities must be embraced, and that synthesis can only be attained through the productive clash of thesis and antithesis” (13). Rolland Hein describes Watho’s experiment as “The evil effect of a purely rationalist approach to life” and states that “The story underscores MacDonald’s eclectic spirit towards inadequate views of reality, systems in conflict because their concerns are confined only to what fits neatly into pat mental structures.... Rationalist frictions are reduced in importance, and people may find underneath them a basis for mutual understanding” (182-83). Cynthia Marshall also states the importance of uniting oppositions by saying that “the narrative point of the story is the necessary *joining* of Photogen’s daylight realm with Nycteris’s moonlight one” (65-66).

² For example, Osama Jarrar discusses Victorian norms of gender, sexuality, and sex roles (43-46). Kerry Dearborn states that in this story “MacDonald humorously exposes the falseness of Victorian gender stereotypes” (30). Bonnie Gaarden says that “These children [Photogen and Nycteris], presumably as a result of their upbringing, exhibit extremes of traditional gender difference” and she concludes that “MacDonald isolates and emphasizes their differences in order to stress their complementarity” (182). Roderick McGillis states that Photogen and

and Nycteris as oppositions of equal status. However, Nycteris, growing up in the tomb, knows nothing about the outside world—she knows neither day nor night—and so we must give attention to the fact that she is not entirely a binary opposition to Photogen. Moreover, although Watho’s dividing attitude was paid attention to and connected to science or pragmatism, previous studies did not consider what she wanted to know and divide into, which this paper will give attention to.

MacDonald, who believes in the fuller life after death, depicts his view of life and death in his many works.³ His notion about death tends to be paid attention to exclusively, and significantly J. R. R. Tolkien claims that “Death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald” (68). At all events, it is not going too far to say that the view of life and death is the most important theme in discussing his works, but “The Day Boy and the Night Girl” has not been examined from this point of view.⁴ The purpose of this paper is revealing the author’s notion about life and death by focusing on the intention of Watho’s experiment and the above-stated fact that Nycteris is not a perfect contrast to the Day Boy—although she is called the Night Girl, in fact she does not know night or day. The key phrase is “go out”. These words are used many times and equivocally, which indicates their importance in this story.⁵

Nycteris “illustrate that the male is dependent upon the female (and vice versa) in MacDonald’s fairy tales: such interdependence reflects the tales themselves. For MacDonald, the fairy tale’s very form is dependent upon the mutual dependence of reality and fantasy, clarity and translucence, meaning and mystery” (97).

³ We can say that life after death is a suitable notion for Christians, but in the case of MacDonald, there is an important factor that forms his belief other than his religion. The factor is the influence of Novalis (1772-1801), a German Romantic poet and novelist. Novalis believes that “Death is at the same time an end and a beginning,” and “Perfect life is heaven... What we here call death is a consequence of absolute life, of heaven... Hence the perpetual destruction of all imperfect life... Everything must become heaven” (Wolff 22). MacDonald encountered Novalis’ works while he was still a student. He has been deeply influenced by them and his biographer William Raeper points out that “MacDonald found a glorious liberation in the thought that death was merely a higher form of life and that the soul, shuffling off the fetters of the body, would rise free and unbounded to bliss” (107).

⁴ Although what Nycteris says to Photogen at the end of the story: “a day as much greater than your day” (341) is often related to MacDonald’s belief in “the fuller life after death” (Cf. Waki 133, Ando 60, Marshall 64), previous studies did not consider the view of life and death except these Nycteris’ words. This paper will show further explanation for this point of view.

⁵ The words ‘go out’ are ordinarily used to express a variety of meanings, and in this story, these words have three meanings. In addition to the literal meaning “going out of some place to the

Paying attention to the process in which Nycteris *goes out* of the tomb and knows night and day, this paper will show the author's view of life and death—especially life which previous studies have tended to pay less attention to than death⁶—by seeing the world through Nycteris' innocent eyes, which let us experience birth and death vicariously.⁷

I. The Witch's Experiment: Detaching Life from Death by Creating the Day Boy and the Night Girl

One day Watho invites two pregnant women to her castle. Aurora, a young lady gives birth to a splendid boy, but Watho tells a malicious lie to his mother—she says that “[her baby] never cried but once, dying the moment he was born” (306). Overcome with grief, Aurora leaves the castle and Watho raises the boy to make him an incarnation of Day with a view to filling her desire “to know everything”. She names him Photogen. On the other hand, Vesper, who is a blind young widow, bears a baby girl and at the same time this mother dies. Watho names the baby Nycteris and tries to make her the Night Girl.⁸ Watho brings up Photogen and Nycteris in an extremely dichotomized way. Watho sees that Photogen “should not know darkness” and trains him “until at last he never slept during the day, and never woke during the night” (306). All day she saturates him with the full splendor of the sun. In contrast to him, Watho thoroughly deprives Nycteris of the sunlight by shutting her in the tomb. And she trains “her to sleep during the day, and wake during the night” (307).

other”, ‘go out’ are used with light—the light *goes out*—and used as the meaning of dying. And this phrase is used so many times that we can say that ‘go out’ holds the key to this story.

⁶ As Tolkien's words which I quote typify, previous studies have tended to pay attention to death in discussing MacDonald's works. This paper will focus on not only death but also life which has been overlooked until now.

⁷ In this paper, I use the word “innocent” as “not having the experience of the world”. She does not have any knowledge or preconception of the outer world. Therefore we can see the world with a fresh mind by seeing it through Nycteris' eyes. Her innocent eyes give us the first impression of the world, which we may have forgotten and cannot describe any more.

⁸ U. C. Knoepfelmacher annotates these children's names. He says that Photogen means “light's offspring” and Nycteris means “night creature” (354). Watho seems to give children suitable names for her intention—creating the Day Boy and the Night Girl.

The way in which Watho brings up two children—one is exposed to the sun and the other is kept from it—suggests a control experiment on plants' photosynthesis. It reveals her grotesqueness and cruelty that the objects of the control experiment she carries out are human babies. Bonnie Gaarden and Sundmark connect her cruelty to an attitude of science.⁹ In the Victorian era, the British society industrialized so rapidly that as Gaarden and Sundmark have stated, the author may describe his anxiety about social change or resistance to the overestimation of science through the form of Watho's cruel characterization. However, this paper rather focuses on this story's earlier draft. William Raeper points out that:

Similar cruelty is found in an early draft of 'The History of Photogen and Nycteris,' though it was later excised: the witch Watho 'who desired to know everything', slits open a pregnant woman while she is asleep in order to peer at the workings of the embryo (Raeper 316).¹⁰

That Watho tries forcibly to see life before birth—she slits open a pregnant woman!—implies that what she wants to know is an unfathomable thing about life and death which mortals cannot attain. Therefore her experiment can be regarded as a taboo against mortality: she meddles with life and death.

Obvious contrasts between their mothers support the assumption that Watho separates life and death. Before Watho launches the dichotomized upbringing, their

⁹ Gaarden regards Watho as "an experimental scientist" (182). She describes the witch's desire as "a 'maniac thirst for knowledge,' similar to '[a] maniac thirst for wine or for blood,' which leads scientific 'investigators' to torture animals in vivisection" and she says that "Watho goes the vivisectionists one better in that she experiments on children" (182). Similarly, Sundmark states that in this story "MacDonald uses the witch Watho to perform a scientific experiment on a boy and a girl—an experiment, it may be added, which is carried out without the benefit of ethical considerations.... There is something of doctor Mengele over Watho's scientific experimenting on live human beings" (11). In addition, he says that "Watho represents the sterility of a science which uses others as objects and which cuts up the totality of experience and creation in separate parts" (12).

¹⁰ This story has two titles: "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" and "The History of Photogen and Nycteris" owing to the two versions. In this paper, I use the more common title: "The Day Boy and the Night Girl".

mothers have been already divided into life and death: in fact Watho's experiment began when she chose these pregnant women. Photogen's mother, Lady Aurora has an abundance of yellow gold hair and eyes "of the blue of the heavens when bluest" (305), which suggests a sunny day. Besides her features are delicate but strong, and she always smiles: she is a very lively person, who is suitable for life-filled Day Boy. On the contrary, Vesper, the mother of Nycteris, lacks liveliness. She is a blind young widow whose husband has lately died. Both her hair and eyes are black, which may be reminiscent of night. Her feature is exquisitely formed and she is a lovely lady, but this loveliness results "from sadness" (305). She is a sorrowful person, who may fit for the mother of the life-deprived Night Girl.¹¹ That Vesper's blindness is connected to death is especially important and will be also referred to in section III.¹²

In addition, Watho gives them obviously unequal treatments. She lets Aurora have "the musical instruments, books, pictures, curiosities, with the company of Watho, who made herself charming, precluded all dulness" (305). The witch devotes herself to keeping Aurora lively. As for Vesper, Watho "played to her mournful tunes, and caused wailful violins to attend her, and told her sad tales, thus holding her ever in an atmosphere of sweet sorrow" (306). Furthermore, the witch lodges these two women in different parts of her castle, and so they "[do] not know of each other's existence" (304). Aurora occupies a spacious apartment of several large rooms in the topmost story of Watho's castle. Aurora's rooms have "airy spaces, the brilliant landscape and sky, the plentiful sunlight" (305). Unlike Aurora, Vesper lives in the tomb, which completely lacks sunlight. And later, the children succeed to their mothers' residences: Photogen dwells in the bright rooms, and Nycteris in the gloomy tomb.

¹¹ Aurora is the name of the Roman goddess of dawn. Vesper means evening in Latin, and it is also associated with Hesperus, the evening star. Watho has chosen pregnant women who are suited for her experiment of creating the Day Boy and the Night Girl.

¹² It can be said that Vesper's blindness is connected with death because she is described as "a young widow whose husband had lately died, and who had since lost her sight" (304). The death of her husband makes her blind and after that, she behaves as if she were dead—"she always looked as if she wanted to lie down and not rise again" (305).

The scenes in which these two women give birth to their babies are remarkably distinct. The birth of Photogen is closely connected to light—life: “a splendid boy was born to the fair Aurora. Just as the sun rose, he opened his eyes” (306). Very different from this birth-scene, a death-filled atmosphere pervades when Vesper gives birth to her baby girl.

Five or six months after the birth of Photogen, the dark lady [Vesper] also gave birth to a baby: in *the windowless tomb* of a blind mother, in *the dead of night*, under the feeble rays of a lamp in an alabaster globe, *a girl came into the darkness with a wail*. (307, emphasis mine)

Death-like words such as “the tomb” and “the dead of night” are used, and Nycteris, who “came into the darkness with a wail” instead of seeing the light, is already in a death-like state at the moment she is born.

Day—light and the sun—is commonly suggestive of life, and what is more, Photogen says that “[the sun] is the soul, the life, the heart, the glory of the universe” (325) and so in this story, we can say that day is closely connected with life. Moreover, when he becomes ill because of his fear of darkness—his first impression about night—Watho raves that “Ill, indeed! after all she had done to saturate him with the life of the system, with the solar might itself!” (330) Therefore it can be said that Watho equates the sun with life and she considers day as the world of life and night as one of death. Creating incarnations of Day and Night, she wants to see the thing which is full of life and one which is deprived of life.

Watho tries to make Photogen’s body and soul full of life.

In the hottest of every day, she stript him and laid him in it, that he might ripen like a peach; and the boy rejoiced in it, and would resist being dressed again. She brought all her knowledge to bear on making his muscles strong and elastic and swiftly responsive—that his soul, she said laughing, might sit in every fibre, be all in every part, and awake the moment of call. (306)

Watho concentrates her whole mind on making Photogen full of life and ignorant of night, the world of death and to her great contentment, Photogen grows into a life-filled boy. Seeing his appearance and demeanor, Fargu, his master of hunting, says to his mistress Watho that "So full of life was he [Photogen]... that he was more like a live thunderbolt than a human being" (308). On the other hand, as opposed to him, Nycteris is deprived of the glory of the sunlight by Watho.

Watho, with the help of Falca [the witch's servant], took the greatest possible care of her [Nycteris]—in every way consistent with her plan, that is,—the main point in which was that she should never see any light but what came from the lamp [in the tomb where she grows]. (307)

In addition to the difference of light-bestowment, the degree of Watho's care is different between these children. Although Watho carefully makes Photogen burst with energy, she is indifferent to Nycteris: she merely teaches the girl music, and "scarcely anything else" (307).¹³ Watho never cares about having the girl's body animated. Watho, who regards the sun as life, tries to detach life from death by dividing this life into day and night: by creating the Day Boy and the Night Girl.

II. The Birth of Nycteris: Night

i) Before Birth: the Miniature Night World

Watho raises Nycteris to make her an incarnation of Night in contrast to the Day Boy, and so previous studies have regarded the two children as equal oppositions. However, strictly speaking, they are not. Watho tries to keep Nycteris away from the sun so completely that she raises the girl in the tomb instead of the outside night. As

¹³ This may be related to the education of girls at that time: girls had much fewer learning opportunities than boys. See Kagawa 129-31, 135-38. Interestingly, Watho intends Nycteris to have little education. She educates the girl by word of mouth, and "Not meaning she [Nycteris] should have light enough to read by, to leave other reasons unmentioned, she [Watho] never put a book in her hands" (309).

I have stated in the introduction, in fact these two children are not completely binary oppositions: Photogen knows day, but Nycteris knows neither day nor night. Following Watho's intended division—day as life, night as death—Nycteris knows neither life nor death. In addition, no one in the world except Watho and her servant Falca is aware of the existence of this girl: socially speaking, she is, as it were, invisible and non-existent. Though I have stated in section I that Nycteris is already in a death-like state at the moment she is born, it may be more accurate to say that she had never been born entirely—she remains as having never really been born.¹⁴

In the tomb where Nycteris grows, there are “the coloured bas-reliefs on the walls” which represent “various of the powers of Nature” (309). The carpet on which Nycteris lies is painted with many plants and flowers. And the pale lamp hanging from the ceiling substitutes for the moon. This tomb is, as it were, a miniature night world. Watho creates this miniature world which thoroughly lacks sunlight and shuts and raises the girl in it, not letting her know the outer world.

Confined in the tomb, Nycteris has little freedom and her life lacks almost everything, but Nycteris is not unhappy. She knows nothing of the world beyond the tomb where she dwells, but she has some pleasure in everything she does. She is so gratified with the lamp, which is fixed high overhead and in the center of everything, that she does not know much about shadows. This may show that she does not care about others. She is confined in the tomb not only bodily but also mentally: she is limited to herself, satisfied with the lamp that gives her everything. Nycteris' state seems similar to the first stage of growth in MacDonald's essay “A Sketch of Individual Development” (1880). In this stage, a person (MacDonald assumes a baby) is satisfied with the status quo because his mother gives him everything, and “The source, the sustention, the defense of his being, the endless meditation betwixt his needs and the things that supply them, are all one” (24). Like Nycteris, the person in

¹⁴ Marija Gimbutas refers to a Neolithic belief that “the tomb is a womb.” She says that old European Neolithic tombs are egg- or uterine-shaped, and bodies sprinkled with red ochre, the color of blood, life, and rebirth. See Gimbutas 281. They seem to think that lying in the tomb means returning to the womb for rebirth. Nycteris, who remains as having never really been born, may be still in the womb/tomb, and she waits for the true birth.

this stage is limited to himself: "His waking is full of sleep, yet his very being is enough for him" (25). However, he begins to grow by directing his eyes to others.

By degrees he has learned that the world is around, and not within him—that he is apart, and that is apart; from consciousness to self-consciousness. This is a second birth, for now a higher life begins. When a man not only lives, but knows that he lives, then first the possibility of a real life commences. By *real life*, I mean life which has a share in its own existence. (MacDonald, "Individual Development" 25)

Like the person in this essay, Nycteris must learn that the world is around, and commence a real life: she, who has been limited to herself, had to turn her eyes to the outside and know things which has been deprived of.¹⁵ She, who is doubly ignorant and remains as having never really been born, *goes out* of the grave and she experiences simulatively "birth" and "death" which we mortals cannot describe. Moreover we can have a vicarious experience of these indescribable things by seeing the world through her innocent eyes.¹⁶ And the discrepancy between her descriptions of the outer world and the aforesaid division made by Watho—day as life, night as death—holds the key in this paper.

ii) The True Birth: The Outside Night

¹⁵ MacDonald describes girls who are deprived of something in other works, too. In "The Light Princess" (1864), the wicked witch-aunt deprives the Princess of all her gravity at the ceremony of christening. In "Little Daylight", an episodic story in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), there appears Princess Daylight, who is forced to sleep all day long because of a wicked fairy's curse: Daylight is kept away from the sunlight like Nycteris. And how they recover their lost things plays a pivotal role in these works, as it does in this story.

¹⁶ According to Sally Mitchell, around 1880, "the concept of girlhood as a separate stage of existence with its own values and interests was only beginning to take shape" (1). (She assumes girlhood as "the girl from 8 to 18" (1)) Moreover, the number of stories for girls or stories whose protagonist is a girl began to grow at that time (Mitchell 1-4), and this story may be counted as one of them. And we can say that it is beneficial to pay attention to how girls are depicted in these stories.

Not knowing that she is confined in the tomb, Nycteris is satisfied with her limited world¹⁷, but she awaits some change vaguely. Although she does not know what she wants exactly, the nearest she can come to expressing her desire to herself is “more room” (309). This desire is caused by her seeing the lamp.

And besides the operation of the light itself after its kind, the indefiniteness of the globe, and the softness of the light, giving her the feeling as if her eyes could go in and into its whiteness, were *somehow also associated with the idea of space and room*. (310, emphasis mine)

This lamp makes Nycteris desire more space and room, but she is gratified with the idea of space and room which it gives, and she does not try actually searching for them. The lamp, which “was never permitted to go out—while she was awake at least” (310), in a sense keeps her from going out.

One day a change finally comes. When there is an earthquake, “the lamp dropped from the ceiling to the floor with a great crash, and “she felt as if both her eyes were hard shut and both her hands over them” (310). Nycteris’ lamp goes out, leaving the tomb in utter darkness. She is bewildered for a little while, but suddenly she remembers that she has heard “Falca speak of the lamp *going out*” (311). Although Nycteris has scarcely known what *out* means and never thought of going out, the girl, taking Falca’s words literally, thinks that the lamp goes out of the tomb and decides to find it: “The desire to go out grew irresistible. She must follow her beautiful lamp! She must find it! She must see what it was about!” (311)¹⁸ Because “seeing the light”

¹⁷ Dearborn says that the confinement of Nycteris implies the repressed, underrated state of femininity and imagination at that time. She states that “[Nycteris] is placed in constant darkness from her infancy, which says something about the Victorian approach to women and to the imagination itself” (29), and by letting her go and depicting her virtues, “MacDonald is urging us to rethink femininity and that which is associated with it—the night and the imaginative” (30). There is some truth in this, but this paper takes Nycteris’ confinement as representing a state before birth—remaining in the womb.

¹⁸ This lamp, though beautiful and giving pleasure, can be seen as a hindrance to growth in a way. A kindred thing appears in *Phantastes* (1858): the Maiden’s globe. The globe, which is

means "coming into being", it can be said that Nycteris, who seeks to see the lamp's light, is trying to be born by herself.

At last Nycteris *goes out*, and this first experience in the outside world gives her the supreme pleasure.

[She] stood in a maze of wondering perplexity, awe, and delight.... Before her was a very long and very narrow passage, broken up she could not tell how, and spreading out above and on all sides to an infinite height and breadth and distance—as if space itself were growing out of a trough. It was brighter than her rooms had ever been.... She was in a dream or pleasant perplexity, of delightful bewilderment. She could not tell whether she was upon her feet or drifting about like the firefly, driven by the pulses of an inward bliss. (312-13)

Besides that, Nycteris, who "had been from her very birth a troglodyte, stood in the ravishing glory of a southern night, lit by a perfect moon" (313) and stands motionless in silent ecstasy. Her first experience of going out is described as being like "a resurrection—nay, *a birth itself* to Nycteris" (313, emphasis mine). Nycteris, who has remained as having never been born, comes into being by going out of the tomb. It is her true birth.¹⁹

Going out, Nycteris considers everything she sees animate. When the wind blows, she thinks that she is embraced and fondled, and describes it as "a woman's breath" (313). And she does not doubt that the river is alive, and she is a little afraid of this

beautiful and gives a sweet sound, is her great treasure, but it needs to be broken for her growth. Similarly, Nycteris's lamp must be crushed for her growth—her true birth.

¹⁹ As I state in the introduction, previous studies have tended to focus on how MacDonald depicts his notion of death in his works. However, it must not be overlooked that he has shown a deep interest in birth. For example, he states that we cannot know at the moment of birth and before it, and he shows the desire to know those moments at the beginning of "A Sketch of Individual Development". And he writes about people existing before birth episodically in *Phantastes* (Chapter XII) and *At the Back of the North Wind* (Chapter XXV: Diamond's Dream). Moreover, in *Lilith* (1895), there is an old prophecy that the birth of a child will be death of Lilith, a demonic and mysterious woman, and this prophecy holds the key in this work. These examples may display MacDonald's deep interest in birth, and in "The Day Boy and the Night Girl", Nycteris' first experience of going out of the grave can be interpreted as birth.

“swift rushing serpent of life” (317). When the moon is covered with clouds and the rain begins to fall, Nycteris takes the rain as “the tears of the moon, crying because her children [clouds] were smothering her” (317). What she likes the best is flowers, and she regards them as wonderful live creatures.

[Nycteris thought that] What wonderful creatures they were!—and so kind and beautiful—always sending out such colours and scents.... It was their talk, to show they were alive, and not painted like those on the walls of her rooms, and on the carpets. (322)

Nycteris’ idea of nature as living is similar to primitive people’s conception of nature: an I-thou relationship.²⁰ Ironically, thanks to Watho’s experiment, Nycteris can have this mysterious experience: seeing the world as animate with her innocent eyes.²¹

Seeing the outside night world, now Nycteris realizes her limited knowledge and how inanimate her life in the tomb is: “What a little ignorance her gaolers [Watho and Falca] had made of her! Life was a mighty bliss, and they had scraped hers to the bare bone!” (314). At this scene, her innocent eyes are described as “the eyes made for seeing”, which let her see “what many men are too wise to see” (313).

What the vast blue sky, studded with tiny sparks like the head of diamond nails could be; what the moon, looking so absolutely content with light—why, she

²⁰ This term is taken from the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. And Robert A. Segal comments that “An I-it relationship one is detached and intellectual. An I-Thou one is involved and emotional”, and so “To say that primitives experience the world as Thou rather than as It is to say that they experience it as a person rather than a thing” (41). Nycteris’ experience in the outside world can be seen one as an I-Thou relationship. In contrast to her, Watho’s attitude might be considered as an I-It one. She sees the world as an object for her experiment and divides it into day and night. Moreover, she may regard children (and their mothers) as “it”—as things rather than persons. Dearborn also refers to Watho as “encased in ‘I-it’ relationships....—in which one treats everyone else as a means to an end, an object for one’s use or discarding” (33).

²¹ As in this paper, Sundmark says that Watho’s experiment lets Nycteris view the world in this miraculous way. He states that “her [Nycteris’] nightly predicament has not ‘benighted her,’ rather it has sharpened her perceptions beyond the ordinary. She can appreciate nature in ways that people normally do not do.... Nycteris would not have made this existential realization, without Watho’s experiment” (13).

knew less about them than you and I! but the greatest astronomers might envy the rapture of *such a first impression* at the age of sixteen. Immeasurably imperfect it was, but false the impression could not be, for she saw with *the eyes made for seeing, and saw indeed what many men are too wise to see.* (313, emphasis mine)

Nycteris perceives the world is filled with life, and this first impression might be what we have seen or felt at our birth and we cannot describe any more.

'Go out' is a euphemism for 'die' in this story, and in Watho's experiment, night is assigned for death, but Nycteris' first experience of going out is, as it were, her true birth. This discrepancy may imply MacDonald's belief in the fuller life after death. Moreover, she lets us experience birth vicariously. Her true birth shows that coming into this world is full of pleasure, and through her innocent eyes, we can see life as "a mighty bliss" (314).

III. Pseudo-Death for Nycteris: Day

i) The Day as Death for Nycteris

In this section, I will examine a counterpart of the unknown world for Nycteris, who goes out of the tomb—the Day. For Nycteris, who knows only the half of this life, the day is so heterogeneous that she regards it as "death".

Before referring to Nycteris' experience in the day world, I must mention Photogen. When Fargu talks about a nocturnal animal by mistake²², Photogen begins to desire to know what will happen after the sun is down. Therefore he convinces people that he returns to the castle before sundown, and remains in the valley to see the night. However, darkness, which he has never seen, makes him terribly afraid.

²² While hunting, Photogen calls a young lion which escapes from him a coward. In order to reprove the boy for his arrogance, Fargu says that "He [the lion] is one of the creatures the sun makes uncomfortable. As soon as the sun is down, he will be brave enough" (318). Since Watho commands Fargu that he should never let Photofen out after sundown, and wake in him the desire of seeing what is going to happen, Fargu regrets his honest mistake deeply. After that, the boy breaks the witch's prohibition: seeing night.

The moment the sun began to sink among the spikes and saw-edges, with a kind of sudden flap at his heart a fear inexplicable laid hold of the youth... When the last flaming scimitar-edge of the sun went out like a lamp, his horror seemed to blossom into very madness. Like the closing lids of an eye—for there was no twilight, and this night no moon—the terror and the darkness rushed together, and he knew them for one. (319)

He flees straight for the castle, but before reaching it, he loses his senses in sheer terror and falls in the garden within the enclosure.²³ Then, Nycteris, who goes out at times without Watho's noticing, finds him lying senseless and nurses him until he recovers consciousness. All night long, she protects him who has become frightened of darkness: he makes her remain outside at break of day, when she is usually asleep, for the first time. When she sees the day world and the sun, its symbol, she is struck with sheer terror, which is just like death.

Yes! yes! *it was coming death!* She knew it, for it was coming upon her also! She felt it coming!... *Anyhow, it must be death;* for all her strength going out of her, while all around her was growing so light she could not bear it! She must be blind soon! *Would she be blind or dead first?* (327, emphasis mine)

In the same way as her mother Vesper, blindness is connected to death in this scene too. And she continues: "What is this? It must be death! I don't wish to die yet. I love this room and the old lamp [the moon]. I do not want the other place" (327). The blinding sunlit day world is so heterogeneous for her that she considers it as not only death but also another place.

²³ Knowing only day, Photogen's experience at night is almost death for him, and so some may think that this must be paid attention to in this paper too. However, his experience accords with Watho's division—day as life, night as death. What holds the key in this paper is that Nycteris is doubly ignorant and the discrepancy between the witch's intention and Nycteris' experiences in the outer world. Therefore, I do not consider his experiences connected with the view of life and death.

In contrast to Nycteris, as the sun rises, the Day Boy recovers his strength and becomes life-filled as usual. In spite of her entreaty: "Don't leave me....I am dying! I am dying! I cannot move. The light sucks all the strength out of me. And oh, I am *so* frightened!" (328), he does not (and cannot) understand her agony and leaves her behind.²⁴ All around is like "a flaming furnace" (328) for Nycteris, and in despair and feebleness, she manages to creep back to her grave.

However, as I mentioned in section I, later Photogen becomes ill owing to his fear of the night. When Watho hears that he, who has been a life-filled boy in conformity with her intention, gets ill, she perceives that her plan has been foiled and becomes enraged. She calls him "a wretched failure" and "because he was *her* failure, she was annoyed with him, began to dislike him, grew to hate him" (330).²⁵ And noticing the failure of creating the Day Boy, Watho no longer needs his counterpart, the Night Girl. Therefore, in order to vent her anger, the witch plans to "set her [Nycteris] in the sun, and see her die, like a jelly from the salt ocean cast out on a hot rock" (332).²⁶

Therefore, one day a little before noon, Watho orders two male servants to carry Nycteris outdoors while the girl is in her deepest sleep. Jolted into wakefulness by the sunlight, she suffers from it again. She calls the sun "the death-lamp" (333) and is tortured by the fierce heat and the blinding light. Thanks to the shade of her abundant black hair, she recovers her sight a little, and she takes notice of a daisy right beside her in the midst of her agony. At first, as she knows only the night daisies in closed forms and does not perceive that this daisy is drinking life from the sun, she thinks

²⁴ Jarrar says that "MacDonald's fairy tales and fairy-tale novels question Victorian middle-class norms of gender and sexuality" (42) and he states that in this story "MacDonald questions the arrogance of the male characters and sides with female characters. He depicts the latter as persuasive, humble, and brave and the former as unconvincing, arrogant, and cowardly" (45). This episode in the garden is an apt illustration of Jarrar's opinion.

²⁵ Watho looks on Photogen "as a painter upon a picture, or a poet upon a poem" (330-31). And she, who hates Nycteris, is described as "a sick child weary of his toy" (332). The witch regards them as just objects rather than humans.

²⁶ Watho has considered the sun as life, and therefore that she tries to kill Nycteris by the sun may raise doubts. However, Nycteris has been intended to become an incarnation of night/death by her, and so Watho may think that the sun (life) will have a contrary effect on Nycteris, that is, causing her death.

that “Who then could have been so cruel to the lovely little creature [the daisy], as to force it open like that, and spread it heart-bare to the terrible death-lamp?” (333) However, she goes on thinking, and begins to see this daisy livelier than ones she has seen at night.

Nay, thinking about farther, she began to ask the question whether this, in which she now saw it, might not be *its more perfect condition*. For not only now did the whole seem perfect, as indeed it did before, but every part showed *its own individual perfection* as well, which perfection made it capable of combining with the rest into *the higher perfection of a whole*. (333, emphasis mine)

After that, in spite of her pain, she tries to understand the death-lamp by relating it to the daisy. She thinks that “The red chips [of petals] looked as if the flower had some time or other been hurt: what if the lamp was making the best it could of her—opening her out somehow like the flower? She would bear it patiently, and see” (334).²⁷ Nycteris’ experience in the day shows the fear of death which we all may have, and she tries to understand and compromise with it, instead of trying to avoid or merely fearing it.

ii) Uniting Day with Night—the Complete Life, and To “Go Out” of It

Photogen escapes from Watho’s castle and meets Nycteris in the garden again. Now he, who has been tortured by the fear of the night (darkness), understands her agony under the sun.²⁸ Hearing Nycteris say “I live under the pale lamp [the moon],

²⁷ Dearborn discusses the importance of imagination and she considers Nycteris imaginative. She says that “Nycteris, as a child of the night, embraces all that is around her,” (31) and at this scene “Nycteris works imaginatively to connect the tenderly enfolded night-flowers she loves and these same flowers in radiant fullness and to see the relation of this to her own need for the ‘lamp’ [sun] to perhaps ‘open her out somehow like the flower’” (33).

²⁸ After that dreadful experience at night, in fact Photogen goes outside at night many times in order to overcome fear of night, but, he fails in his attempt and conversely he becomes ill.

and I die under the bright one [the sun]”, he says to her that “Ah, yes! I understand now... I would not have behaved as I did last time if I had understood; but I thought you were mocking me; and I am so made that I cannot help being frightened at the darkness. I beg your pardon for leaving you as I did, for, as I say, I did not understand. Now I believe you were really frightened” (335). After that, they relate their own histories to each other and realize that they have known only half of this life. Noticing that their ignorance results from Watho’s experiment, they decide to get as far away as possible from the witch.

Assisting each other, they flee from Watho: during the night, Nycteris tends and protects Photogen, and after daybreak, he becomes her protector.²⁹ Then Watho looks through a telescope and sees them escape. She becomes infuriated by that sight, and so she changes into a wolf by some magic and chases them. Though blinded by the sunlight, Nycteris notices the approach of their enemy by her keen nose: “I smell a wild beast—that way, the way the wind is coming” (339). Thanks to her caution, Photogen can prepare for a battle, and kill the werewolf with an arrow. After that they get married and live happily ever after.

As Marshall thinks it doubtful that this work depicts “atypically, the brightness of the sun is Nycteris’s nemesis rather than her goal” (65), to describe the sun or light as death is, generally speaking, very odd. However, as I discuss in this section, her experience during the day shows a fear of death and an attempt to understand it. Moreover, a little after her marriage with Photogen, Nycteris realizes that day and night are not different places, but in fact the two sides of this life. Day and night are united to the complete life.³⁰ And Nycteris comes to love day, and see that day is

However, thanks to his illness, he comes to understand that Nycteris may truly fear the day as he does the night.

²⁹ MacDonald writes about men and women who mutually support each other in his other works, too. For example, Mossy and Tangle in “The Golden Key” (1867), Richard and Alice in “Cross Purposes” (1867), and Curdie and Princess Irene in *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie* (1883). It can be said that mutuality is one of the important themes in MacDonald’s works.

³⁰ Uniting day with night, or, in other words, understanding that we cannot detach one from another can be seen in the mysterious changing of the mothers’ eyes in their children. Strangely, Photogen’s eyes are described as being “as black as Vesper’s” (306). After his marriage with

livelier and greater than night. At the very end, Nycteris says to Photogen “But who knows... that, when we go out, we shall not go into a day as much greater than your day as your day is greater than my night?” (341) This “much greater day” can be interpreted as the fuller life after death, and her experience by day lets her nurse this notion. Death must be the most dreadful thing for mortals, and by seeing the sunlit day world through Nycteris’ innocent eyes, we can experience pseudo-death vicariously. Surely it is a terrible thing, but at the same time, that she realizes that day and night are linked to each other implies that life and death are continuous: we must try to understand or compromise with death instead of detaching it from life as Watho tries to do. Moreover, Nycteris shows that there is the fuller life after death by seeing day as a livelier and greater thing than night. We do not have to live feebly in the grip of an anxious fear of death: life continues.

Conclusion

In this paper, I paid attention to two overlooked things: the intention of Watho’s experiment of creating the Day Boy and the Night Girl and Nycteris’ double ignorance. In section I, I stated that the witch tries to detach death from life by dividing this life into night and day and creating their incarnations. However, in fact Photogen and Nycteris are not equal opposites and she remains as having never been born in the grave. And in section II and III, referring to the discrepancy between the planned division made by Watho and Nycteris’ experiences of day and night where she goes out of the grave, I showed MacDonald’s view of life and death. Nycteris’ description of night lets us understand how joyful coming into the world is, and that life is “a mighty bliss” (314). And her experience of day, though she feels a fear of death, demonstrates that we must live strongly with an understanding of death, and in fact

Nycteris, Photogen meets his parents again at the court. When Aurora sees her daughter-in-law’s eyes, she is very surprised by them: “Aurora saw in the lovely girl her own azure eyes shining through night and its clouds, it made her think strange things, and wonder how even the wicked themselves may be a link to join together the good. Through Watho, the mothers, who had never seen each other, had changed eyes in their children” (340).

life continues.³¹ By seeing the world through Nycteris' innocent eyes, we can experience vicariously birth and death, which mortals cannot describe, and receive the joy of and courage for life.

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³¹ In "Life", one of his sermons, MacDonald states that "When most oppressed, when most weary of life, as our unbelief would phrase it, let us bethink ourselves that it is in truth the inroad and presence of death we are weary of. When most inclined to sleep, let us rouse ourselves to live" (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* 165).

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