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# The Gravity of Resistence: Willful Subjects and the act of Subversion Through George MacDonald's The Light Princess

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# The Gravity of Resistance: Willful Subjects and the act of Subversion Through George MacDonald's *The Light Princess*

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Master Thesis - Cultural Analysis: Literature and Theory

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# Introduction:

Fairy tales, throughout their enduring history, have consistently depicted, represented, and shaped the cultural structures and foundations that permeate society. The diversity in themes, characters, imagery, and language, establishes fairy tales as a unique literary genre, capable of addressing all segments of society. My interest in fairy tales lies in this diversity, in the endless possibilities and avenues that open up when we read a fairy tale. In this thesis, I carry forth the tradition of looking at fairy tales. I analyze George MacDonald's (1824-1905) *The Light Princess* (1864) to explore its contemporary value and significance, engaging it with current cultural and philosophical discussions.

As I will argue below, George MacDonald's fairy tale pushed the boundaries for its time, and challenged the conventional, didactic style of fairy tale writing. Within the context of Victorian England, MacDonald utilized the fairy tale genre as a medium to question what was accepted as the norm, taken at face-value. Victorian society assigned a significant amount of value and partiality towards men, and this relegation of gender roles was usually left unquestioned (Jarrar, Language, Ideology, and Fairy Tales 43). Through a reversal of roles, by empowering female characters, and using his narrative voice, MacDonald encouraged readers to be critical of Victorian society.

In reading *The Light Princess* within a more contemporary light, I wanted to look at the ways in which central characters from the fairy tale challenge, question and subvert these norms. I take Sara Ahmed as my guide, a scholar within feminist and cultural studies who traces the presence of 'willful subjects' in literature, as well as in social and historical contexts. In light of her work, I ask the following question: *How does George MacDonald's The Light Princess employ the concept of 'willful subjects' to subvert and critique Victorian societal norms, particularly regarding gender roles and individual agency?* I argue and demonstrate

that two central characters namely Princess Makemnoit, who is defined as a witch in the story, and the light princess, who is the protagonist, both resemble and embody Ahmed's conception of the willful subject. This thesis explores how the relations and development of the two subjects within the narrative of the story, portray acts of willfulness, which in turn serves as the means through which these characters are able to express their opposition to societal norms.

In order to carry out this analysis, I first conduct a literature survey that provides context regarding MacDonald, focusing especially on his religious and social background. Furthermore, I provide a literature survey regarding *The Light Princess,* looking at the existing scholarly debates and arguments that have been developed in relation to the different themes of the story. Themes of religion, gender, and class are addressed here. Finally, I also look at the importance of the fairy tale to MacDonald himself, as a medium that he employed to address not just children, but adults as well.

In the second chapter of the thesis, I carry out a narratological analysis of *The Light Princess.* I specifically use Mieke Bal's theory of narratology, where I look at a multitude of different elements such as structure, character development, and the use of time and space. This exploration will illuminate the functional relationships between the two central characters, who are pivotal in shaping the story's progression and dynamism.

This narratological analysis highlights the crucial elements of the story, while also establishing the foundation for the final chapter, where the concept of 'willful subjects' is further explored – a concept central to understanding the subversive nature of *The Light Princess* within the context of Victorian society. Thus, in my final chapter, I place the story of *The Light Princess* in conversation with Ahmed's concept of the willful subject to demonstrate precisely this: MacDonald's fairy tale actively questions and subverts Victorian society, by creating two unique and distinct female subjects, who embody and represent the willful subject.

# Chapter One: George MacDonald and *The Light Princess:* Background and Literature Review

George MacDonald was a Scottish writer and a former congregational minister of the Calvinist branch in Scotland. *The Light Princess* was one of George MacDonald's first ventures into the fairy tale genre. The style, tone, and content faced resistance and critique from his peers, notably from fellow author and friend, John Ruskin. Ruskin particularly opposed the allusions of sexual expression that MacDonald instilled within the fairy tale, which Ruskin believed were normally intended for younger audiences (Knoepflmacher xiii; Pennington 88). Still, the success of his tale lives on today, and continues to open new avenues of exploration for its readers. As seen in *The Light Princess*, among many others, MacDonald was a prolific writer for his time. Not only were his stories rich in content and plot, but his writing more importantly addressed the social and religious underpinnings of Victorian society (Jarrar, "Victorian Middle-Class Ideology" 14). MacDonald did not fully comply with the longstanding traditions and practices that were prevalent in Victorian society, and was determined to challenge and explore the bounds of Victorian society through his storytelling. Thus, in MacDonald's work, we are able to find hints of his personal beliefs and critique of society, where he addresses themes of gender, class, and religion. *The Light Princess* follows the story of a king and queen who are (finally) blessed with a baby girl. When the king forgets to invite his sister, princess Makemnoit, to his daughter's christening, it sets off a chain of events: Makemnoit, who is also a witch, casts a spell on the princess, depriving her of both her physical and emotional gravity. Ultimately, acts of true love and will-power are the cure to these 'problems.' Not only does it save the kingdom from its doom; but the princess regains her gravity, and lives happily ever after with the prince. In order to better understand how MacDonald addresses dominant themes within *The Light Princess*, it is fruitful to first understand some of the social, religious and cultural practices that existed during his lifetime.

With regard to the religious context, MacDonald disagreed with Calvinist doctrine, a stance that eventually led to his removal as a congregational minister. (Zipes, "Inverting and Subverting the World with Hope" 110). Jack Zipes, a renowned fairy tale scholar, notes that MacDonald's religious beliefs emphasized self-reflection and compassion. Zipes explains: "As a Christian mystic, MacDonald believed in the perfection of humankind and maintained that each individual could achieve a supreme state in this world. MacDonald preached not just "divine individualism" but the necessity to develop compassion for other human beings and nature." (Zipes, "Inverting and Subverting the World with Hope" 112); thus, he wanted to highlight the importance of agency and self-growth in children (and adults) as a way to be closer to God. It is important to note here that MacDonald's religious views indicate a movement away from the Enlightenment notion of individualism. As seen in his fairy tales, MacDonald advocated for the agency and equality of all beings, regardless of rank and position, while still emphasizing mutualistic encounters and interdependency as a way to come closer to a 'path to perfection' (Zipes, "Inverting and Subverting the World with Hope" 112; Jarrar, "Victorian Middle-Class Ideology" 16). Furthermore, as explained by Brian Roberts in "The Atonement in *The Light Princess*" (2014), MacDonald did not favor the Christian notion of atonement, of being punished for that which one is innocent of. Roberts argues that "For MacDonald, then, the atonement is meant to both demonstrate love and to inspire love" (88). In the case of *The Light Princess,* Roberts demonstrates that the end-scene of the fairy tale where the prince's sacrifice for the princess, and then in turn, the princess's rescuing of the prince, both demonstrate acts of atonement that MacDonald supported, whereby the princess learns to love through the prince's sacrifice (90). Thus, although the fairy tale is not explicitly religious in its message, we can still see that in exploring areas such as the relationship between the prince and the princess, the theme of lightness, the characterization of the king and queen, and so forth, MacDonald is able to encourage readers to find embedded hints of ridicule, irony

and critique within the fairy tale, subtly indicating his disagreement or puzzlement with the prevalent religious practices of the Victorian era.

Scholars have shown that the popularity of fairy tales declined in England around the 18th century, particularly when compared to the booming popularity of the genre in France and Germany (Zipes, "The Fairy Tale in Victorian England" 143; Schacker 3). During this period, the decline in the popularity of fairy tales in England was also influenced by class issues: "The denigration of the fairy tale in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was in stark contrast to the cultivation of the tale in France and Germany, where it gradually came to express a new middle-class and aristocratic sensibility and flourished as an avant-garde form of art" (Zipes, "The Fairy Tale in Victorian England" 145). With the Enlightenment as well as the rise of the Industrial Revolution, society began to experience bouts of change and transformation, and this change did not go unnoticed in the literary sphere:

> "If the Industrial Revolution had turned England upside down on the path towards progress, then these writers believed that English society had to be revolutionized once more to regain a sense of free play and human compassion. The remarkable achievement of Dickens, Carroll, and MacDonald lies in their artistic capacity to blend their regressive urges with progressive social concerns, without succumbing to overt didacticism." (Zipes, "The Fairy Tale in Victorian England" 154).

As a result, we begin to see a rise in the interest of fairy tales, where writers used this genre as the preferred medium through which they could address a wide range of people, while exploring the constraints and limits of society through an imaginative outlet. As Osama Jarrar argues, "The subversive and aesthetic potential of fairy tales may be said to cause a kind of resistance on the part of children. Such resistance is the primary purpose writers of fairy tales

want to establish in order to make children question the value system upheld by the dominant socializing process." ("Language, Ideology, and Fairy Tales" 34). With this, we can see that there is an urgency to bring about change not only amongst the adults, but in children as well. This provides us with a better understanding of why MacDonald, and other writers of his time, felt drawn towards the fairy tale genre.

Since *The Light Princess* is a fairy tale, in that it follows the general structure and tropes that constitute a fairy tale, there is a common assumption that it is only meant for children. However, in his essay "The Fantastic Imagination" (1893), MacDonald explicitly addresses the importance of fairy tales not only for children, but adults too. As explained by Ulrich C. Knoepflmacher, "For the Victorians, the tendency to segregate childhood "innocence" from adult "experience" was too entrenched to admit questioning or reconstruction." (xii-xiii). MacDonald however, disagreed with this, and sought to challenge this separation between the ages in his work. To him, all individuals, regardless of their age, are capable of transformation and gaining new perspectives of the world when reading a fairy tale. MacDonald's essay is mainly directed to the adults who are skeptical and anxious about the weight and responsibility they hold in transmitting meaning to their children. In order to address these fears, MacDonald answers the following questions in his essay: ""How am I to assure myself that I am not reading my own meaning into it, but yours out of it?" … "Suppose my child asks me what the fairytale means, what am I to say?" … "But surely you would explain your idea to one who asked you?"" (7-9). These questions allow MacDonald to convey a key point to his readers: "Words are live things that may be variously employed to various ends… If a writer's aim be logical conviction, he must spare no logical pains, not merely to be understood, but to escape being misunderstood." (10). Thus, for MacDonald, it is precisely the multiplicity of meaning that makes fairy tales and storytelling so important and valuable. With this in mind, we can better understand where the richness of MacDonald's writing comes from: he aims to address a wide

audience, and in doing so, explores themes that are light and whimsical, but grave and heavy at the same time. MacDonald does not imply that children cannot understand the weight of deeper issues; on the contrary, he wants the adults to embrace the lightness of things, to be 'childlike' (7). *The Light Princess,* being his first venture into fairy tales is a perfect example that demonstrates the balance and fine line he is working with in his explorations of the fairy tale as a genre, but also in addressing cultural occurrences within his society.

Beyond this, fairy tales also served as a medium to convey topics of morality and society in ways that were not didactic. Greg Levonian, in his text, "A Royal Pain: The Comic Spirit in George MacDonald's "The Light Princess"" (2010), explores and argues for the use of comedy in MacDonald's work. He says, "Through comedy, MacDonald possesses a means to convey his rich (and deep content) …without falling into excessive didacticism, which would certainly subvert the work's aesthetic quality." (66). Similarly, Osama Jarrar, in his paper, "The Carnivalesque in George MacDonald's *The Light Princess*" (2016), through Bakhtin's theory of the 'carnivalesque,' demonstrates that MacDonald uses laughter, hyperbole, and play in *The Light Princess* as a tool to express this subversion from traditional Victorian society and encourage social reform (83). Thus, MacDonald's expressions of subversion in his fairy tales were a direct result of his desire to transform social structures within the Victorian society in a manner that was not prescriptive, but instead allowed for individuals to determine their own path and find their own value in these stories.

MacDonald's fairy tale, in exploring a multitude of themes, has garnered attention and acclaim within the academic sphere. This thesis takes a closer focus on issues of gender, specifically through the lens of Sara Ahmed's 'willful subjects.' However, before delving into the main analysis of this paper, it is important to relate my approach to how others have dealt with issues of gender in *The Light Princess*. Jacqueline Harris, in her paper, "George MacDonald's Frightening Female: Menopause and Makemnoit in The Light Princess" (2014),

explores the ways in which the female's reproductive function directly influenced the high standards and expectations that governed women in Victorian society. A woman who either could not, or chose not to partake in this inhibited vision of womanhood, was consequently deemed unworthy and outcast from society. Thus, Harris argues that "MacDonald's representation of the female coming-of-age body, and aging, menopausal body reveal how his modern fairy tale both utilizes and exposes long-standing social codes imposed on females' reproductive capacity." (21). Furthermore, Harris argues that Makemnoit, in depriving the princess of her gravity, "casts a spell she hopes will make the young princess just as much of a social outsider as she… The witch's spell relegates the Light Princess' body to the realm of female deviancy, the vilified space females inhabit when their bodies deviate from acceptable roles for women in Victorian Society." (25). In Harris' reading, then, we can see that Makemnoit's choice is intentional and calculated: she has transformed the physical and bodily functions of the princess. In turn, this implicates the ways in which the princess is treated within the social realm, causing the ultimate form of 'social death' (30). Although Harris is fairly critical of MacDonald's perpetuation of gendered stereotypes within his fairy tale, she also acknowledges that the tale offers a space to raise awareness, and inform the readers of the unequal treatment of all, but especially female figures during the Victorian era (31).

Contrary to Jacqueline Harris, several authors have written about, and agree on the fact that MacDonald's writings provide a space for female characters to express their agency and subvert traditional gender norms. Roderick McGillis, in his paper, ""A Fairytale is Just a Fairytale": George MacDonald and the Queering of Fairy" (2003), instead of looking at the ways in which the female characters exercise their agentic value and power, turns the focus towards the male characters instead; McGillis argues that "these tales present a vision of the male that subverts the manly figure…MacDonald's vision is, in a sense, "queer," rather than strictly feminine." (87). Queer within this context refers to "that which is puzzling or confusing,

…We might say that queer connotes a border condition, neither one thing nor the other, neither one place nor the other." (88). According to McGillis, the very nature of the stories that MacDonald creates resembles a kind of queerness: from the worlds he builds to the characters we meet, all culminate to create a world that is "strange and provocative, out of the ordinary, even against the grain" (90). McGillis, like other thinkers, does not believe that MacDonald is trying to completely overturn the value systems that are in place within his society; still, MacDonald, in queering and mystifying his characters, brings to question the systems that are in place, and challenges gender roles within the context of Victorian England.

A unique take on *The Light Princess* comes from Danielle E. Price who claims "that the princess functions as a disabled character…and unlike many fairy tales where disabled heroines lose their agency, the light princess retains hers. She enhances this agency by finding her own curative space and keeping it." (1-2). Price, like Harris, also accounts for the ways in which the female body was viewed only for its corporeality: "The perfect Victorian woman was supposed to be light in body and conversation… Victorian women were "the Sex," defined as bodies, destined for reproduction…The princess is not simply an impaired person but an impaired female" (2-4). That being said, Price, unlike Harris, argues that MacDonald's story is progressive for its time, and provides an outlet for the light princess to not only exercise her own agentic powers (as argued by McGillis too), but to claim a space (namely the lake) where she can allow her disabled body to be free of the social and physical constraints that govern her body: "What does swimming give the princess? Swimming provides her with agency, allowing her a freedom she does not have when on land, where the king has increasingly curtailed her mobility." (10). Furthermore, Price argues that the role of the prince is unique in this tale, where the princess's transformation is not for the prince:

> "In a pleasing role reversal, he imagines turning himself into a merman, rather than changing the princess…The obligatory prince who appears in the tale is

> exemplary because he does not try to cure the princess or make her join him on land—he is resigned to her love of water…
>
> …the prince loved the princess before she found her gravity, and we are glad for this, and also for the compensation that remains: "that she could tumble into the lake as often as she pleased." Significantly, she does not have to choose between the prince and the water. The princess and prince continue to swim together and the lake only gets deeper." (10-13).

It is important to acknowledge that although we can see a reversal of roles and the challenging of Victorian propriety, perhaps we could still argue, and as Harris has already shown, that MacDonald ultimately conforms back to Victorian sensibilities by restoring the body back to its 'normal' and more importantly, reproductively-able state. Ultimately, the princess does regain her gravity, and the tale ends in celebration of her returning to a 'normal' state. Thus, although Price demonstrates that the prince is willing to change his state for the princess, we never see this actualize within the story.

Another crucial aspect touched upon by Jacqueline Harris, is the association of princess Makemnoit as a 'witch'. What connotations does the word 'witch' hold in Victorian society, and how does this inform our reading of the fairy tale? As explained by Knoepflmacher,

> "Magical women…predominate in [MacDonald's] tales. Whether mortal or immortal, fairies or sorceresses, these figures are endowed with extraordinary powers. They can be nurturant…or harsh and punitive…They can even be demonic…or vindictive like Princess Makemnoit in "The Light Princess." But even in her most unsavory incarnations, this potent figure is enlisted to reshape youngsters who might otherwise grow up into adults as bland and incomplete as their satirized elders." (xi).

In *The Light Princess,* the presence of this 'magical woman' is present in the character of Princess Makemnoit, the King's sister. The importance of Makemnoit's character will be discussed in greater depth later on. However, what is clear is that, in being cast as a 'witch,' Makemnoit has been immediately distinguished as an evil and 'vindictive' character. Silvia Federici, in her book, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), through a feminist lens, historically analyzes the shift from a feudalist to a capitalist society to demonstrate that the foundation of capitalism entirely rests upon the subjugation and exploitation of women, who in reality, act as the backbone which allows capitalist societies to run (8). Thus, "*Caliban and the Witch* shows that the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor." (16). Federici, in carrying out a historical project on this subject, extensively explores the discourse surrounding witches. According to Federici and other fellow feminist thinkers as stated in her book, "It is generally agreed that the witch-hunt aimed at destroying the control that women had exercised over their reproductive function and served to pave the way for the development of a more oppressive patriarchal regime. It is also argued that the witch-hunt was rooted in the social transformations that accompanied the rise of capitalism." (14). This ties back to Jacqueline Harris's analysis of the reproductive body in Victorian society. Like Federici, Harris demonstrates that the "the Victorian era inherited, exacerbated, and complicated these attitudes frequently using aged women's bodies to mark them as Other." (23). The era created a discourse which viewed the female body as merely a site for reproduction, and allowed for the strengthening of a patriarchal society. In the fairy tale, we are never told what Makemnoit does to be disagreeable to her father and the rest of the family. What we do know, however, is that she was removed from her father's will: "But she had made herself so disagreeable to the old

king, their father, that he had forgotten her in making his will." (MacDonald 16). When we tie this back to Harris and Federici's arguments, we can see that Makemnoit, in being a witch, is actively removed from her father's will. As a result, she is excluded from participating in society and no longer has the legal right to own property. She can no longer exercise the rights that her brother, the king, is fully entitled to.

Although Federici's study does not delve deeper into the Victorian era, we can still see that the attributes imbued upon princess Makemnoit continue to resemble and produce a discourse that deems witches as social outcasts, forbidden to participate as active members of society. To contextualize the discourse surrounding witches during the Victorian era, we can turn to Owen Davies, and his book, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture: 1731-1951* (1999), which develops an account of the occurrences of witchcraft and magic in 19th Century England and Wales. With a stronger focus on real-life events and folklore (as opposed to fictional or literary interpretations), Davies demonstrates that the rhetoric and characteristics of witches in 19th century England followed standard conventions: "Gender, age, physical appearance and peculiar manners were all significant characteristics in the popular portrayal of witches… By far the most frequently mentioned physical distinction of the witch was the possession of unusual eyes or an uncanny gaze." (174). Furthermore, as explained by Davies, it appears that "some supposed witches consciously conformed to stereotypical characteristics by deliberately dressing and acting the part in order to exploit their reputations for begging purposes." (175). But why did they resort to begging purposes in the first place? What made them outcasts at all? Perhaps Federici's argument proves useful here, and demonstrates that older women, especially those who refused to act in accordance with Victorian traditions, were marginalized from participating within a capitalist structure of society, and thus sought alternative ways of preserving their independence.

These papers provide a glimpse into the literature that already exists in relation to George MacDonald and specifically, *The Light Princess.* What is clear, is that in addressing children *and* adults, MacDonald engaged with a medium whereby he could explore, expose and challenge the social constraints of Victorian society in a manner that allowed for all individuals to think critically for themselves, and imagine a world beyond the possibilities of traditional Victorian society.

# Chapter Two: Unravelling Narrative Dynamics: Mieke Bal's Narratology in George MacDonald's *The Light Princess*

Chapter One provided a foundation through which we could better understand the context in which *The Light Princess* was written, and how it has already been received within the scholarly sphere. This chapter zooms in on the fairy tale itself, providing a close reading through the framework of 'narratology' as theorized by Mieke Bal. Narratology, as defined by Bal, "is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events – of cultural artefacts that tell a story. Such theory helps us understand, analyze, and evaluate narratives." (3). Thus, a narratological analysis will allow different elements of the story to come to the forefront, revealing important patterns, motifs, and themes. In applying Bal's theory to *The Light Princess*, I will analyze how different elements within the narrative structure and character interactions reveal MacDonald's interest in challenging traditional fairy tale conventions, as well as addressing themes of agency and independence. This thesis will utilize Bal's narratological method as demonstrated in her foundational book, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2009). In this chapter, I will argue and demonstrate that there is an occurrence of dual subjectivity in this fairy tale. Here, dual subjectivity refers to how both princesses establish independent narratives which highlight their own goals and desires, impacting the story's direction and thematic development. Not only is the light princess central to the story; Princess Makemnoit, the king's sister and witch, is also a key figure in this tale. The contrasting behavior between princess Makemnoit and the light princess creates a dynamic which exposes different forms of willfulness and their consequences within the fairy tale's structure. Both princesses, in their behavior and determination to achieve their goals, are crucial in driving the narrative structure of the story. Carrying out a narratological analysis will reveal important character functions and relations, which will later guide my argument that both characters embody what Ahmed calls the 'willful subject.'

Bal's narratological analysis is relevant and insightful to this thesis because it emphasizes the dynamic potential that each character, event, and perspective can have on a story. Bal's guide to narratology appears structuralist in its prescriptions of definition and construction, but this is not her goal. Instead, her use of a structural framework acts as tool to demonstrate the interpretive and changeable potential of a narrative:

> "This book presents an exposition of a coherent, systematic narratology and of the concepts pertaining to it in this sense. Readers are offered an instrument with which they can describe, hence interpret, narrative texts. This does not imply that the theory is some kind of machine into which one inserts a text at one end expects an adequate description to roll out at the other. The concepts that are presented here must be regarded as intellectual tools for interpretation." (Bal 4).

As we will see in *The Light Princess,* this framework provides room for an interpretation and description whereby I can define both the light princess and princess Makemnoit as distinct subjects within the narrative. Furthermore, a narratological analysis can help address how underlying elements within a narrative can point to inequalities in power relations, particularly gender roles: "Narratological analysis, in helping to disentangle these, helped to do justice to otherness. It also, albeit implicitly, has made it easy to see the nature of the otherness in sameness, that is, to what extent these modern translations are informed by an ideology that is male and, thus, represses female concerns." (Bal, "The Point of Narratology" 737). Thus, through a narratological and feminist lens, we can explore and expose the perspectives, angles, and character relations that are taking place within this fairy tale, to better understand how the characters embody and express their positions as central characters. In this chapter I will analyze the fairy tale as a whole, while also close-reading specific extracts from the fairy tale. In doing so, I hope to reveal important relations and perspectives that can inform us about the

centrality of the female characters within this fairy tale. These characters not only drive the narrative but also challenge and subvert the societal norms of their time.

Having established the importance of a narratological approach, we can now turn to the 'fabula' of the story. The fabula as explained by Bal can be defined as "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors." (5). The following fabula provides an overview of *The Light Princess:*

1. A daughter is finally born to the king and queen of Lagobel.
2. The king sends out invitations for the princess's christening. He forgets to invite his sister (and witch), princess Makemnoit.
3. Makemnoit decides to go anyway and casts a spell on the little princess to seek revenge on her brother.
4. The spell causes the princess to lose all forms of gravity: she cannot express and feel complex emotions; she only laughs. Her physical body is also affected: when unattended, she floats up in the air and is weightless.
5. Her parents try to solve this problem by seeking help from the court metaphysicians and philosophers to no avail: the king and queen do not know what to do about the princess's condition.
6. The princess falls into Lake Lagobel one day. Here they learn that the princess regains her gravity when in water. The princess experiences a sense of freedom when she is in the water: she does not need to be watched because there is no fear of her flying in the air, and her emotional demeanor is subdued when in the lake. From this day forth, the princess finds any opportunity to be in the lake.
7. A prince, in search of a princess, travels far and wide. He stumbles upon the lake where the princess goes to swim and is instantly captivated by the princess, despite learning

of her curse. They frequent the lake together, and the prince falls in love with her soon after. The princess, however, is unable to comprehend and reciprocate these feelings.

8. One day, the princess notices that the water level in the lake is depleting. This is caused by Makemnoit who is furious when she hears of the princess's joys of being in the water. Ultimately, the lake is barren, and the princess is devastated.
9. As the water level depletes, a golden plate at the bottom of the lake reveals a prophecy which states that one must voluntarily give up their life by placing themselves into the hole that has drained the lake of its water.
10. The prince, madly in love, offers himself up to the king on one condition: that the princess be with him at the lake during the sacrifice.
11. The prince, as he places himself in the lake, begins to drown as the water level rises. The princess, who is initially unaffected by the prince's state, can no longer let the prince sacrifice his life for her. She does everything in her power and ultimately saves him.
12. The princess regains her gravity, the lake water is restored, and the prince and princess live happily ever after. Makemnoit, in seeking revenge, dies on her own accord, and is forgotten.

In this fabula, there are several ‘elements’ to explore:

Bal first emphasizes the importance of recounting key ‘events’ in the fabula. Since events refer to an act of transition from one state to another, Bal emphasizes that “trying to establish which sentences in a text represent an event is the beginning of a fabula analysis.” (Bal 189). Thus, the first part of this analysis tries to point out the main events of the fabula. There are several key events in this fairy tale. At first glance, the christening acts as the main event: the royal family introduces the new heir to their subjects and loved ones at an important religious ceremony. However, what precedes and follows are of equal, if not greater

importance. First, the king, in forgetting to invite his sister, acts as an important event in the fabula, without which Makemnoit would not have been upset. As a result, Makemnoit decides to act against this injustice, and goes to the christening anyway. What follows is also a crucial event, that which sets the tone for the rest of the fairy tale: as a way to seek revenge, Makemnoit casts a spell upon the princess, who proceeds to lose all form of gravity. The location of the christening is of importance, because it alludes to another important event in the story; the princess learns that she regains her gravity only when she is in water:

> "Whether this was owing to the fact that water had been employed as the means of conveying the injury, I do not know...With a burst of delighted laughter she disappeared in the lake. A cry of horror ascended from the boats. They had never seen the Princess go down before. Half the men were under water in a moment; but they had all, one after another come up to the surface again for breath, when—tinkle, tinkle, babble, and gush! Came the princess's laugh over the water from far away. There she was, swimming like a swan. Nor would she come out for the king or queen, chancellor or daughter. She was perfectly obstinate." (MacDonald 29)

This acts as another important event within the fabula, because it is here that we begin to learn the consequences and intricacies of the curse upon the princess. The lake, therefore, is not simply a location where an event occurs; instead, the lake can be defined as a 'space':

> "spaces function in a story in different ways. On the one hand, they are only a frame, a place of action... In many cases, however, space is thematized: it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake. Space thus becomes an acting place rather than the place of action." (Bal 139).

Not only does the princess feel a certain affinity to the water, but the way she acts and interacts with others when in the lake is different than when she is on land. Although her demeanor becomes “more sedate than usual,” she continues to remain “obstinate.” (MacDonald 29). As a result, the lake plays a significant role in the story and can be viewed as a thematized space in the fairy tale.

Finally, another significant event within the fabula occurs towards the end of the tale, where the prince saves the princess by willingly sacrificing himself for her. In doing so, he fulfills the prophecy that will save the kingdom from losing all its water:

> “It happened one day that a party of youngsters found themselves on the brink of one of these pools in the very center of the lake…A little boy jumped in and dived for it. It was a plate of gold covered with writing…Its writing amounted to this:-- “If the lake should disappear, they must find the hole through which the water ran. But it would be useless to try to stop it by any ordinary means. There was but one effectual mode—The body of a living man could alone stanch the flow. The man must give himself of his own will; and the lake must take his life as it filled. Otherwise the offering would be of no avail. If the nation could not provide one hero, it was time it should perish.”” (MacDonald 43-44).

The prince’s sacrifice is regarded as valiant and brave and could be considered the ultimate heroic act. However, I argue that the ultimate act of saving is done by the princess, who, unable to see the prince suffer any longer, dismisses the prophecy and chooses to save the prince from his demise (MacDonald 50-51). Here, we see a reversal in roles, where the ultimate act of ‘rescuing’ is done by the princess instead of the prince; what's more, it is through saving the prince, and performing an act of true love, that the princess regains her gravity. Thus, we can

see a chain of events causing influence on one another within the fabula. These events highlight the fact that both Makemnoit and the light princess, play pivotal roles in the fabula.

Following the importance of certain characters within the fabula, Bal emphasizes the need to look at the 'actors' within a story, to gain a better understanding of the relations at play. This is a crucial feature within *The Light Princess*, where a closer look at the similarities, differences, and complexities of relations between different actors, can inform us of the dual subjectivity that is at play within this fairy tale. Key actors within this fabula are the light princess, princess Makemnoit, the prince, and the king (and queen, although her role is similar to, but less prominent than the king). Adopted from Algirdas Julien Greimas' 'actantial' model, Bal introduces the concept of 'actants,' defined as "a class of actors that shares a certain characteristic quality. That shared characteristic is related to the teleology of the fabula as a whole." (202). Thus, there is an explicit end-goal or aim shared by certain actors, who seek to achieve a shared objective within the frame of the story. The light princess acts as an object-like figure to three different subjects: princess Makemnoit, the prince, and the king (and queen). Even when the princess is not directly the object, she is instrumental in achieving the object. Thus, all subjects have separate goals that they wish to achieve, but their goals are all directed towards the light princess in their own ways. For example, the king and the queen's object is to rid the princess of her 'lightness', while the prince's love for the princess drives him to do whatever he can for her happiness. Ultimately, we can see that the prince's object coincides with the king, since both wish to fix the lake for the princess. Makemnoit's role, however, is interesting: while the light princess acts as the object through which Makemnoit seeks revenge on her brother the king, she achieves her goal by making the light princess her own subject, one with her own goals and aims. Furthermore, in providing the light princess with the ability to fly, Makemnoit has created a witch in the light princess, a character that resembles Makemnoit itself. Thus, the light princess acts not only as an object within the fabula, but she

is also a distinct subject: in remaining ‘obstinate,’ and in refusing to act in a manner that is expected of her within the societal context, we can view the light princess as an independent subject in herself.

When looking at the actors within a fabula, Bal takes influence from Greimas in yet another category, ‘competence,’ which can be divided into three categories: “the determination of will of the subject to proceed to action, the power or possibility, and the knowledge or skill necessary to execute the aim.” (210). Actors who possess any one of these ‘competencies’ allow them to reach closer to their goal. Each actor is competent in their own way. For example, the king is competent because of his powerful position as the sovereign of Lagobel, allowing him to exercise his agency and carry out his goals. Similarly, the prince's determination to save the love of his life allows him to endure a potentially harrowing death. Princess Makemnoit is also a competent actor:

> “But what made it highly imprudent in the king to forget her was—that she was awfully clever. In fact, she was a witch, and when she bewitched anybody, he very soon had enough of it; for she beat all the wicked fairies in wickedness, and all the clever ones in cleverness.” (MacDonald 16)

Within this context, not only does Makemnoit have the determination and will to achieve her goal; but by characterizing Makemnoit as a powerful and clever witch, she also possesses the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve her goal.

The importance of Makemnoit's character can be made even more visible through this narratological framework. Bal emphasizes the importance of looking at ‘anachronies,’ which are experiences of flashbacks or flashforwards within a fabula (89). We see one crucial flashback or ‘retroversion’ take place, one which shapes Makemnoit's character arc for the rest of the tale:

> "But she had made herself so disagreeable to the king, their father, that he had forgotten her in making his will." (MacDonald 16).

This quote is important in several ways. First, it demonstrates what Bal calls an external retroversion, which occurs "whenever a retroversion takes place completely outside the time span of the primary fabula." (Bal 89). External retroversion provides the reader with clues that may allow them to infer how a past situation can influence the events that occur within the fabula. Learning about Makemnoit's past provides us with clues about her present character. In learning that she is a disagreeable character, we may understand that it is in her nature to seek revenge, and to make her family "miserable, like a princess as she was" (MacDonald 16). We can even make inferences about Makemnoit based on the physical will itself: in forgetting Makemnoit from the legal and socially constructed will, Makemnoit takes it upon herself to create her own will. Makemnoit's father, could easily exercise his agency because of his patriarchal and monarch status as king, while Makemnoit could not exercise such liberties as easily. Instead, in 'making herself disagreeable,' she exercises her own will, one which functions against societal bounds and frameworks.

This flashback also leads to another point that Bal emphasizes, that of 'ellipsis,' or what is *not* said in the fabula. In *The Light Princess,* we never actually know what Makemnoit has done to be omitted from the will, only that she "made herself disagreeable." Similarly, another instance of ellipsis occurs in relation to Makemnoit's character:

> "When she was angry, her little eyes flashed blue. When she hated anybody, they shone yellow and green. What they looked like when she loved anybody, I do not know." (MacDonald 16).

For each scenario that Makemnoit expresses a different emotion, we are presented with a color that corresponds to that specific emotion. Makemnoit's character is negatively reflected in this

scene: the author does not know what she looks like when she loves somebody; but this does not mean that she has *never* loved before. Furthermore, her emotions are portrayed as straightforward rather than multifaceted, limited to feelings of anger, hate and happiness: “Her eyes, however, shone pink, which was a sign that she was happy.” (MacDonald 22). This cannot fully represent the entire scope and true depth of her emotions: sadness, fear, love, pity, and so on. Thus, in intentionally omitting certain emotions, we create a picture of Makemnoit that presents her in a negative light. This image of Makemnoit is further emphasized in her characterization as both a princess and a witch. As seen in Chapter One, the term ‘witch’ during the Victorian era had negative connotations associated with it (Silvia Federici, Jacqueline Harris). Thus, when we as readers learn that the princess is also a witch, it immediately changes the reader's perspective of the character: even though we do not really know what Makemnoit has done to make herself disagreeable to the king, the sympathy that the reader may have had for princess Makemnoit declines upon finding out that she is a witch. Not only is she from royalty, which is highly regarded within Victorian society (Jarrar, “Victorian Middle-Class Ideology” 21); but the active removal of Makemnoit from the will, and Makemnoit's intentional distance from dominant societal institutions greatly shapes the characterization of Makemnoit. Not only does Makemnoit have negative relations with her family, but she also “beat all the wicked fairies in wickedness, and all the clever ones in cleverness.” (MacDonald 16). Not only is she a social outcast, but she has also set herself apart from other figures who reside within a similar social sphere to her.

The section above has demonstrated the ways in which Makemnoit's character is significant to the fairy tale, where acts of defiance and disagreement with societal norms are embedded in her characterization. We can now look at the similarities that Makemnoit bestows upon the light princess after casting a spell on her at the christening. The characteristics of the light princess reveal traits that go against the grain of Victorian etiquette: she is unable to see

the serious side of things, and laughing is her only response. We can see this in her relationship with her parents, the king and queen:

> "Nor, thoughtless as she was, had she committed anything worse than laughter at everybody and everything that came in her way... She never could be brought to see the serious side of anything. When her mother cried, she said, —
>
> "What queer faces mamma makes! And she squeezes water out of her cheeks! Funny mamma!" And when her papa stormed at her, she laughed, and danced round and round him, clapping her hands, and crying— "Do it again, papa. Do it again! It's such fun! Dear, funny papa!"" (MacDonald 23)

The light princess is unmoved by the authority of her parents, both as guardian figures, and as monarchs. She constantly disobeys her father's orders and, to add humiliation to the injury, she even laughs at him (while a king is not to be laughed at). Thus, the nature of the princess's actions compels further action from the king and queen: the princess's condition is a 'problem' that requires solving. Not only is her emotional character alarming to her parents, but her gravity-less body also raises concern.

Makemnoit, in removing the princess's physical gravity, has created a figure whose bodily functions do not conform, especially regarding her reproductive potential:

> "The king returned disconsolate. The queen tried to comfort him. "We will wait till she is older. She may then be able to suggest something herself. She will know at least how she feels, and explain things to us." "But what if she should marry?" exclaimed the king, in sudden consternation at the idea. "Well, what of that?" Rejoined the queen. "Just think! If she were to have children! In the course of a hundred years the air might be as full of floating children as of gossamers in autumn." "That is no business of ours," replied the queen.

> "Besides, by that time they will have learned to take care of themselves." A sigh was the king's only answer." (MacDonald 20)

The prospect of the princess's future is of great concern to her parents. Not only do they fear what her children will be like, but they worry if she will ever marry at all. The king and queen do not listen to the princess's wants and feelings; in fear for her future, their care and consideration for her is directed towards solutions that do not really seek to determine what the princess wants herself. In fact, when the king asks: "Would you not like to be able to walk like other people?" (MacDonald 25), she replies by saying: "No indeed, I should think not. You only crawl. You are such slow coaches!" (MacDonald 25). Thus, even when she expresses her satisfaction in her present state, it is not taken seriously and undermined. Instead, they seek help from the court metaphysicians to find a solution to her state.

In bewitching the light princess, Makemnoit has created a subject who is able to express her own agency and will, by going against the grain of what is required or necessary. As we see in the princess's relationship with her parents, she does as she pleases and is not swayed to act in a manner that abides by the orders of those in a hierarchical position above her. Similarly, the princess's relationship with the prince also demonstrates acts of disobedience, where the princess exercises her own will. This is evident in one of the main 'scenes' of the story. According to Bal, a scene can be viewed as the main event, that which influences the rhythm of a story: "A scene is often a central moment from which the narrative can proceed in any direction." (104). This scene depicts the moment that the princess rescues the prince from drowning:

> "The water rose and rose. It touched his chin. It touched his lower lip. It touched between his lips. He shut them hard to keep it out. The princess began to feel strange. It touched his upper lip. He breathed through his nostrils. The princess

> looked wild. It covered his nostrils. Her eyes looked scared, and shone strange in the moonlight. His head fell back; the water closed over it, and the bubbles of his last breath bubbled up through the water. The princess gave a shriek, and sprang into the lake... Love and water brought back all her strength. She got under the water, and pulled and pulled with her whole might, till at last she got one leg out... Coming to herself, she seized the oars, kept herself steady as best she could, and rowed and rowed, though she had never rowed before...
>
> "But the lake, your highness!" Said the chamberlain, who, roused by the noise, came in, in his nightcap. "Go and drown yourself in it!" She said... They tried everything for a long time without success. The princess was nearly distracted between hope and fear, but she tried on and on, one thing after another, and everything over and over again. At last, when they had all but given it up, just as the sun rose, the prince opened his eyes." (MacDonald 50-51)

This scene is crucial to the fabula. Here, we see several instances where the princess establishes her position as a subject with distinct aims and goals: to save the prince from his death. Her determination to save the prince, despite the prophecy and societal expectations, exemplifies her resistance to the roles imposed upon her. Even though she is aware that saving the prince from drowning could lead to her eternal unhappiness, she dismisses the prophecy, and chooses to do whatever she can in that moment to save the prince. Thus, this scene takes a turn when the princess decides to go against the curse and save the prince. This act of defiance is further emphasized through Bal's exploration of 'time.' If we are to look at the duration of this scene, it is a rapid event, one where we see the princess's demeanor change at every instant that the prince's face submerges into the water. Bal makes a distinction between 'development,' where a longer period of time is required for the story to progress, while 'crisis,' is defined as a rapid compression of events (214). The general build-up of the princess's relationship with the prince

could be viewed as ‘development’, while the duration of this scene depicts ‘crisis.’ The rapid succession of events in this scene is further emphasized through the use of repetition, and what Bal calls ‘frequency.’ Bal adopts the concept of frequency from Gérard Genette, which refers to “the numerical relationship between the events in the fabula and those in the story.” (Bal 109). Five categories of frequency are established:

> “1F/1S: singular: one event, one presentation
>
> nf/ns: plurisingular: various events, various presentations
>
> nf/ms: varisingular: various events, various presentations, unequal in number
>
> 1f/ns: repetitive: one event, various presentations
>
> nF/1S: iterative: various events, one presentation.” (Bal 111)

In the passage above, we can see a clear presentation of ‘1f/ns: repetitive: one event, various presentations.’ One main event is occurring, i.e., the prince is drowning; however, this is depicted multiple times, through different perspectives and at different stages of his submersion under water: at every instance that the prince's face submerges, we see the princess's reaction change and intensify. Thus, the repetitive nature of this passage allows for a build-up of intensity, emphasizing the importance of this scene within the fabula, while establishing the princess as a key subject within the narrative of the fairy tale.

We can see another instance of repetition occurring within the story, this time to emphasize the determination of the princess to save the prince's life. In ‘trying on and on,’ doing ‘one thing after another,’ and trying ‘everything over and over again,’ the narrative emphasizes that the princess does whatever she can to achieve her goal. Ultimately, as we learn in the passage above, the prince lives and wakes up. The princess, in choosing to act against the prophecy and the wishes of the prince and her parents, is what ultimately saves the prince from his demise, and leads to a happily ever-after ending.

Thus, as demonstrated above, we can see that Makemnoit, in casting a spell upon the light princess, has created a subject who is obstinate and determined in fulfilling her goals. Both princesses deviate from traditional Victorian forms of etiquette, and act as problem figures to those around them. That said, the characterization of the two princesses is still distinct from one another, where each express their rebellion and will-power in different ways. Makemnoit, as a princess-turned-witch, has actively shaped her future and subsequent removal from dominant societal structures. In the case of the light princess, she is imbued with a 'curse,' one which actively aims to create problems for those around her. Thus, we can further explore how both princesses' roles as 'subjects' differ from one another. Makemnoit can be characterized as what Bal calls the 'anti-subject':

> "Some fabulas have different subjects who are in opposition: a subject and an anti-subject. An anti-subject is not an opponent. An opponent opposes the subject at certain moments of the pursuit of his or her aim... An anti-subject pursues his or her own object, and this pursuit is, at a certain moment, as cross-purposes with that of the first subject. When an actant has his or her own program, his or her own aims, and acts to achieve these aims, s/he is an autonomous subject." (209)

Princess Makemnoit appropriately embodies the characteristics of an anti-subject. If we are to view Makemnoit's main objective as seeking revenge on her brother the king, we can see that Makemnoit's goal is independently motivated, one that is carried out autonomously, without aid from other actors. Although Makemnoit could also be viewed as an 'opponent,' where she actively seeks to remove the princess's source of happiness, she can be more suitably defined as an anti-subject because she does not directly oppose the goals and aims of the princess itself; rather, Makemnoit is more interested in obstructing the King's happiness and goals. Furthermore, Makemnoit and the light princess never actually encounter and come into conflict

with one another. The only point of interaction between the two subjects is during their first meeting, at the christening.

Unlike Makemnoit, we can view the light princess as a subject who uses her own agency and will to go against the wishes of the prince, the prophecy, and her parents, while being supported and aided by actants in the story:

> "By this time her people were on the shore, for they had heard her shriek. She made them carry the prince to her own room, and lay him in her bed, and light a fire, and send for the doctors...But both he and the queen were fast asleep. And the chamberlain went back to his bed. Somehow, the doctors never came. So the princess and her old nurse were left with the prince. But the old nurse was a wise woman, and knew what to do." (MacDonald 51)

The princess's determination to save the prince supersedes the etiquette of Victorian propriety: when the princess saves the prince, she immediately orders to send him to her own room, to place him on her bed. These orders, directed by the princess, are carried out by other actors within the story. Thus, we can see that the princess, unlike Makemnoit, is supported by actants. For example, the support of the 'old nurse' is significant, because she is a recurring character within MacDonald's novels and stories: "as Makemnoit's foil, the nurse assumes the role of good fairy that MacDonald assigns to wise older women in stories such as "The Carasoyn," "The Golden Key," and, of course, "The Wise Woman."" (Knoepflmacher, "explanatory notes" 345). Here, the old nurse is even described as Makemnoit's 'foil,' or opponent character, that who has characteristics opposite to the antagonist of the story.

Thus, we can view the light princess as a subject, while Makemnoit is characterized as an anti-subject: both subjects have a specific goal that they set out to achieve; Makemnoit's goals are carried out independently of the light princess, autonomously, without the aid of other

actants in the fabula; the light princess on the other hand, with the help and support of actants in the fabula, acts as a figure who is successfully able to achieve her goal. Although Makemnoit and the light princess have separate goals, their lives and actions are still intertwined in the achieving of these goals: the light princess acts as the means through which Makemnoit seeks revenge upon the king, while the light princess in saving the prince and regaining her gravity, brings an end to Makemnoit's plans.

In conclusion, this chapter has analyzed *The Light Princess* through a narratological framework to demonstrate the significance and centrality of the two female characters, namely Makemnoit and the light princess. A comparative analysis of the characters demonstrated that Makemnoit and the light princess are similar in their desire to go against the grain of Victorian society. However, we can also observe the ways in which both characters express this rebellion in different ways from each other, through the relations they forge and the goals that they seek to achieve.

# Chapter Three: Willful Subjects in *The Light Princess*

In Chapter Two, I have demonstrated the ways in which two central characters, namely the light princess and princess Makemnoit, are crucial to the shaping and dynamism of the story in *The Light Princess*. Both characters, in their own ways, exercise their agency and own will in order to achieve goals which do not always please those around them. Makemnoit sets out to displease her brother by casting a spell on the princess, while the light princess, in her gravity-less state, defies the authority of her parents and saves the prince. Their actions are carried out in the pursuit of their own wants and needs, and in doing so, produce tensions that address broader societal conflicts, especially in regards to the reception of women within Victorian society. Thus, in their strength and determination, these characters question and oppose the social and cultural norms which govern Victorian society.

In this final analysis, I argue that the two central characters of *The Light Princess* embody what Sara Ahmed refers to as 'willful subjects.' Willfulness, as described by Ahmed, is "persistence in the face of having been brought down, where simply to "keep going" or to "keep coming up" is to be stubborn and obstinate. Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience." (*Willful Subjects* 2). In *The Light Princess,* both characters exhibit this form of willfulness by persistently pursuing their goals despite societal expectations and personal setbacks. In her book, *Willful Subjects* (2014), Ahmed formulates what she calls a 'willfulness archive,' which accounts for and traces instances where individuals have been 'charged' as willful characters: "A willfulness archive would refer to the documents that are passed down in which "willfulness" comes up, as a trait, perhaps even as a character trait" ("A Willfulness Archive" 2012). In looking at thinkers from philosophy, self-help literature, literary fiction, and so on, Ahmed demonstrates that subjects who will against that which is dominant in the

social realm, face the consequence of being cast as willful and are consequently perceived under a negative light.

The importance of fairy tales as a means to trace acts of willfulness cannot go unstated. In fact, Ahmed commences her exploration of the willful subject by looking at a Grimm fairy tale:

> "There is a story called "The Willful Child."
>
> Once upon a time there was a child who was willful, and would not do as her mother wished. For this reason God had no pleasure in her, and let her become ill, and no doctor could do her any good, and in a short time she lay on her death-bed. When she had been lowered into her grave, and the earth was spread over her, all at once her arm came out again, and stretched upwards, and when they had put it in and spread fresh earth over it, it was all to no purpose, for the arm always came out again. Then the mother herself was obliged to go to the grave, and strike the arm with a rod, and when she had done that, it was drawn in, and then at last the child had rest beneath the ground." (qtd. from Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* 1).

In Ahmed's book, this story is not just a beginning; it serves as a thread through which she explores topics of gender, queerness, the body, morality, and of course, willfulness ("A Willfulness Archive" 2012). Through this story of the willful child, along with all the other instances of willfulness that she accounts for in her archive, Ahmed demonstrates that willfulness is more nuanced than meets the eye: it is not simply a trait or a characteristic that one possesses. Rather, it is socially imposed upon certain individuals, who in turn, receive the charge of willfulness: "In assembling a willfulness archive, it is important we do not assume that willfulness simply describes a disposition…We are following a depositing rather than

finding what is deposited." (Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive" 2012). Thus, in looking at willfulness within the context of the *Light Princess,* I am interested in looking at how Makemnoit and the light princess, embody the willful subject because they "are willing to turn a diagnosis into an act of self-description." ("A Willfulness Archive" 2012).

In this chapter of my thesis, I argue and demonstrate that princess Makemnoit and the light princess are *both* willful subjects; Makemnoit, who is already an outcast to her family, and the society she lives in, seeks revenge against her brother by creating a willful subject in his daughter, the light princess. In attributing willfulness to both characters, the light princess and princess Makemnoit demonstrate an opposition to the dominant and unequal power structures within the context of Victorian society. Furthermore, the casting of a willful child is crucial; in doing so, we are invited to understand how willing and obedience are taught as a means of control and 'straightening' of the child, so as to conform to a 'general' or 'collective' will. Finally, by investigating how these characters reaffirm the tropes of the willful subject, I also show that MacDonald's portrayal of the willful characters goes beyond a conventional dismissal or removal of the willful subject: in his character portrayal of the light princess, we see that MacDonald indeed encourages acts of willfulness, and does not aim to entirely rid a subject of their own subjective will.

Before looking at the ways in which Makemnoit and the light princess portray the willful subject, it is important to get a grasp of the material at hand, and understand the context in which Ahmed is addressing the willful subject. The willful subject exists in a wider linguistic discourse, as insistent, stubborn, disobedient, obstinate; the list goes on. Ahmed's interest in the willful subject arose from her personal experiences of being attributed as such, as well as through her study of the 'feminist killjoy': "It was another figure, or perhaps even a relation, a kind of kin, that of the feminist killjoy, who first sparked my interest in this pursuit…Feminist killjoys: willful women, unwilling to get along, unwilling to preserve an idea of happiness."

(*Willful Subjects* 2). Here, we can see that Ahmed's interest lies in the attribution of willfulness to subjects who are usually othered by hegemonic forces, subjects who must step up and stand out in order to achieve their goals. The feminist killjoy, in speaking out and acting willfully, is cast as a problem figure. It is this 'problem' figure that Ahmed seeks to study, to trace and contextualize in her work: "To be identified as willful is to become a problem. If to be willful is to become a problem, then willfulness can be understood as a problem of will. And it is the will that points us back in the direction of happiness, which has been consistently understood as the object of the will." (*Willful Subjects* 3). Thus, in her book, through her development of this willfulness 'archive,' she assembles a history that traces the willful subject in dominant literature and culture, so as to locate, but also redirect the uses and misuses of willfulness as an attribution of character. *The Light Princess,* within its own context, can provide a framework through which we can better understand how willfulness is manifested and expressed in its central subjects.

First, we can take a closer look at how Makemnoit, in her very characterization, can be considered a willful subject. Ahmed in her paper, "Willful Parts: Problem Characters or the Problem of Character" (2011), looks at how we can understand the concept of willfulness through fictional characters, as a way to address how the will is used as a tool for control. Learning about fictional characters can help us identify real-life instances of willfulness. According to Ahmed, fictional figures are given 'profiles' with which we can characterize and form opinions about the nature of their character ("Willful Parts" 233). However, in creating a character profile, we make associations and consequently set boundaries of what a character can do, and what they act like. In doing so, they fade into the background: "Of course, when characters are convincing, we might attend to them less, or attend less to what makes them a character." ("Willful Parts" 233). Thus, it is here where Ahmed begins to trace willful

characters, those whose profiles do not match the actions that they perform, those who stand out.

Through Makemnoit's characterization we can see how she represents a willful subject. Initially, we learn that Makemnoit is a princess, who in many cultural representations are objects of desire, not subjects with a will. Her secondary status is first highlighted by her role as the 'sister' to the king of Lagobel. However, we learn soon after that Makemnoit is not just a princess; she is also a witch. In being cast as a witch, the viewer's perception of Makemnoit as a princess is juxtaposed with that of a witch: Makemnoit's character 'profile' deviates from the expectations that have been set up against her character. What is important here, is that Makemnoit is not only cast as a witch; instead, she takes ownership of this characterization, and it is this ownership and embodiment that establishes her position within the willfulness archive, as a figure who resists and subverts from societal expectations. When an individual is characterized as willful, it means that they have been 'charged' with that trait. According to Ahmed, we can reclaim this charge: "If we are charged with willfulness, we can accept and mobilize this charge. To accept a charge is not simply to agree with it. Acceptance can mean being *willing to receive.*" (*Willful Subjects* 134). Ahmed, in her exploration of the willful subject, presents a paradox to the reader: "Willfulness: a life paradox. You might have to become what you are judged as being. You might have to become what you are judged as being to survive what you are judged as being." ("Willfulness and Feminist Subjectivity" 82). Makemnoit in distancing herself from her role as a princess and embodying the characteristics of a witch, emphasize this ownership of a charge. In fact, as demonstrated in Chapter One of this thesis, Owen Davies explains that witches in 19$^{th}$ Century England were known to embody and play into the characterization that they were assigned and accused of (Davies 175). Also argued by Silvia Federici (referenced in Chapter One), the violence imposed upon witches through witch-hunts was a result of the threat that women posed to the patriarchal system. In

this way, they were able to establish their distance from the dominant social circles, and consequently live according to their own terms. That being said, the conditions and atrocities that witches had to endure were severe. This does not go unacknowledged by Ahmed: "It is not simply that you are charged with willfulness; you become conscious of the violence of the charge" (*Willful Subjects* 90). Thus, Makemnoit's character, in being cast as a willful character, simultaneously assumes this characterization as a willful subject.

Makemnoit can be understood as a willful subject when we look beyond her affective traits. From what the narrative of the story provides, we know that Makemnoit is unmarried and has no children. This is a crucial act of rebellion, one which Ahmed acknowledges: "To be willful is thus to refuse what we might call "the reproductive duty," as the duty of a part to reproduce the whole or at least to be willing to participate in reproduction." (*Willful Subjects* 114). Her physical body, in refusing to conform to societal expectations of marriage and having children, is an act of deviation in itself, because it eliminates the promise of extending the family line. In addition to her physical body, we can also note other instances where Makemnoit's character resembles a willful subject. Right from the start, she is attributed as a 'disagreeable' figure. What's more, she is responsible for putting *herself* in that position:

> "But *she had made herself so disagreeable* to the old king, their father, that he had forgotten her in making his will; and so it was no wonder that her brother forgot her in writing his invitations…and therefore, after waiting and waiting in vain for an invitation, she made up her mind at last to go without one, and make the whole family miserable, like a princess as she was." (MacDonald 16, italicized by me)

Here, we can see that Makemnoit's character is willful because, despite not being invited, she 'makes up her mind' to go anyway. In fact, Makemnoit resembles what Ahmed terms the

'feminist killjoy': "The willful subject shares an affective horizon with the feminist killjoy as the ones who "ruin the atmosphere."" ("Willfulness, Feminism, and the Gendering of Will" 259). Makemnoit decides to go to the christening even if it means causing misery and unhappiness to those around her. Furthermore, the narrator merely hints at the injustice carried out against Makemnoit: not only was she forgotten from her father's will; but in doing so, it provided a justification for her brother to forget his own sister. We can see here, that despite the narrator's hints, Makemnoit's brother and father are never scrutinized for their behavior towards Makemnoit. Instead, their actions are justified and naturalized as things one might 'forget,' while the charge of disobedience and unruly behavior is attributed to Makemnoit.

As a result, we can see how the passage above also emphasizes the gender inequalities that are at play:

> "We also learn about how gender works; to be willful is to refuse to align your will with the will of the family, but also the collective will; the general will. When a particular will is aligned with a general will, a part can recede, becoming part of the background. A willful part stands out. Willfulness then might not only be how some are judged; willfulness might bring into view what ordinarily recedes." (Ahmed, "Willfulness, Feminism, and the Gendering of Will" 253)

Makemnoit's character does not align with the family's will and she suffers the consequences of willing against the general, familial will. In doing so, she is actively cast aside when she is 'forgotten' in the will. This, as argued by Ahmed is crucial: "We can thus understand why willfulness is deposited in the figure of the child. The child is the one who *promises to extend the family line,* which requires the externalization of will as inheritance (to bequeath one's property is to write a will)" (*Willful Subjects* 113). What we see in this scene of *The Light*

*Princess* is the threat that the willful subject poses onto a patriarchal lineage: "The child's willfulness is that which threatens the continuation of the family line as a line of command: *the threat is required for an insistence on willing right*" (Ahmed, "Willful Parts" 244). Thus, we can see that Makemnoit, in refusing to comply with the general will (of the family and consequently the sovereign), is actively removed and separated from the familial unit as a result: in her bodily defiance, and in the character traits that have been attributed to her, we can thus characterize Makemnoit as a willful subject.

The light princess, like Makemnoit, is a willful character, although her willfulness is manifested and expressed in different ways. The light princess's position as a willful subject is unique and crucial in shifting the trajectory of the story, but also in supporting Ahmed's concept of the willful subject. According to Ahmed, the casting of a willful *child* is crucial and recurring within the literary culture: "The willful child as a figure is painfully familiar, appearing everywhere in our literary as well as scholarly archives, under the sign not only of willfulness but of the strong-willed, self-willed, or the spoiled child." ("Willful Parts" 240). This recurrence is no coincidence; in fact, the presence of a willful child is utilized to serve several purposes. The depiction of the willful child acts as a tool in moral pedagogy, where learning to will in the 'right way' is the key priority: "What we might call "the plastic child" thus became the object of moral education… The pedagogic aim is to achieve a *compliance of the will.*" (Ahmed, "Willful Parts" 236). How is this compliance achieved? Ahmed argues that literature plays a key role here, because the 'plastic' child, the reader of the story, can be coerced into willing what is considered good and right: the 'general,' dominant will. Creating a fictional willful subject thus acts as a warning to the real-life obedient child: "The willing girl does not appear, but she is the one to whom the story is addressed: the story is a warning of the consequences of not being willing to obey." (Ahmed "Willfulness and Feminist Subjectivity" 68). The case of *The Light Princess* is no different; not only is a willful child present within

the narrative of the story, but the creation of the willful child *within* the frame of the narrative emphasizes the importance of her character in the story.

Like Makemnoit, the light princess's willfulness is not simply an affective manifestation. When Makemnoit deprives the light princess of her gravity, her body literally refuses to act 'normal.' In fact, as argued by Danielle E. Price in Chapter One, her body may even be defined as a disabled body: "the princess functions as a disabled character— different from her parents, contravening social norms, unable, until the story's end, to walk unaided" (1). As explained by Ahmed, "Normalcy can be understood in terms of function: having a part that can do, and is willing to do, what is assumed for ("willing and able") … a body that is not whole, that has nonfunctioning parts, must be willing if not able, or willing to be able" (*Willful Subjects* 109-110). The princess's body rebels and stands out. She is unable, but also *unwilling* to 'comply.' The princess finds her condition amusing, and laughs at those who express concern for her state. The physical defiance of her body aligns with her emotional defiance:

> ""My dear child," said the king, "you must be aware by this time that you are not exactly like other people." "Oh, you dear funny papa! I have got a nose, and two eyes, and all the rest. So have you. So has mamma." "Now be serious, my dear, for once," said the queen… She had been trying to behave herself with dignity; but now she burst into a violent fit of laugher, threw herself backwards over the chair, and went rolling about the floor in an ecstasy of enjoyment." (MacDonald 25).

We can see here that the princess's body, although *unable* to comply, is paired with her *unwillingness* to comply: she does not accept that she is any different from the others; what's more, the princess has no desire to change or rid herself of this condition. This is again emphasized by Price: "The tale is remarkable for illustrating the difficulties of achieving

"normalcy" and for complicating the ableist idea that all people wish to be the same as others." (13). When the princess laughs at her parents, she threatens and challenges their authority. She wills against the will of the parents (and in this case, the sovereign), who traditionally possess authority over the child. And it is the will of the parents that must be followed: "The task is not necessarily to break the child's will, but to make the child align their will with the will of the parents" (Ahmed, "Willful Parts" 238). Thus, when the princess does not comply with the will of the parents, her emotional as well as bodily functions pose a problem, one which the king and queen go out of their way to try and 'fix.'

Another reason for which the princess's condition poses a problem, is because like Makemnoit, her rebellious body acts as a threat to the family line, and in this case, the line of the sovereign, the king: "The child is the one who promises to extend the family line, which requires the externalization of will as inheritance." (Ahmed, "Willful Parts" 244). The actions of the king and queen, in their attempt to fix the princess, can be viewed instead as an act to eliminate the willful nature of the princess: "The willful character is the one who poses a problem for a community of characters, such that willfulness becomes that which must be resolved and even eliminated." (Ahmed, "Willful Parts" 233). In the narrative of *The Light Princess,* what we ultimately see, is the successful elimination of this willfulness. The curse cast by Makemnoit during the princess's christening is ultimately broken when the princess saves the prince from his death. Upon regaining her gravity, her body no longer defies gravity and is celebrated amongst the citizens of Lagobel:

> "Hearing her fall, her old nurse uttered a tell of delight, and ran to her, screaming— "My darling child! She's found her gravity!" … And there was rejoicing all over the country that rainy day. Even the babies forgot their past troubles, and danced and crowed amazingly. And the king told stories, and the queen listened to them. And he divided the money in his box, and she the honey

> in her pot, among all the children. And there was such jubilation as was never heard of before." (MacDonald 52)

The king and queen (and those who live under their rule) celebrate the princess's return to a 'normal' state. The problem that the princess possesses, namely her lack of gravity, but also her willfulness, has been eliminated.

But what of Makemnoit? Like the light princess, her willfulness has also been eliminated, although the elimination is far graver:

> "The only revenge the princess took upon her aunt was to tread pretty hard on her gouty toe the next time she saw her. But she was sorry for it the very next day, when she heard that the water had undermined her house, and that it had fallen in the night, burying her in its ruins; whence no one ever ventured to dig up her body. There she lies to this day." (MacDonald 53)

Makemnoit is eliminated, but also forgotten – for a third time. The demise of Makemnoit, like the willful child, also serves to teach a lesson: one must suffer the consequences of willing their own way, to want against the grain. As Ahmed argues, "Willfulness also teaches us about violence; how so much violence disappears from view… violence against those who are not willing to submit to an authority that is assumed by others… The one who is judged willful is certainly, as we have learned, at the receiving end of violence." ("Willfulness, Feminism, and the Gendering of Will" 259-260). Makemnoit's character faces the same fate as most willful characters, but it is justified as a moral tool, as a way to encourage "a healthy, happy, and good life." (Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* 62). This also brings up another crucial point by Ahmed: "Willfulness is thus compromising: it compromises the capacity of a subject to survive, let alone flourish. The punishment for willfulness is a passive willing of death, an allowing of death." ("Willfulness, Feminism, and the Gendering of Will" 246). Subjects like Makemnoit,

who actively accept their charge of willfulness, are also made to accept the erasure and violence that comes with this charge. Ahmed, in assembling a willful archive, intends to bring to the forefront these subjects, who are otherwise actively removed and eliminated from the social and political realm.

Thus far, I have demonstrated the ways in which MacDonald's story depicts two willful subjects, while also demonstrating how the figure of the willful character can cause influence to the reader. Although MacDonald's fairy tale critiques and questions aspects of Victorian society, it still appears as though he continues to follow the literary tradition of casting willful subjects as a tool to teach a moral lesson, where individuals must be discouraged from exercising their own will, and instead follow a general, dominant will. However, this is not the entire story. MacDonald's depiction of Makemnoit, and especially the light princess is nuanced and complex: he does indeed reinforce the conventional happily-ever-after ending of the fairy tale genre, while arriving to a conclusion that is tied to a moral pedagogy. However, MacDonald also successfully demonstrates that willfulness is necessary and crucial in subject formation. We can especially see this towards the end of the story, where the ultimate act of willfulness is carried out by the princess, in her attempt to save the prince from his death:

> "The water rose and rose. It touched his chin. It touched his lower lip. It touched between his lips. He shut them hard to keep it out. The princess began to feel strange. It touched his upper lip. He breathed through his nostrils. The princess looked wild. It covered his nostrils. Her eyes looked scared, and shone strange in the moonlight. His head fell back; the water closed over it, and the bubbles of his last breath bubbled up through the water. The princess gave a shriek, and sprang into the lake... Love and water brought back all her strength...

> "But the lake, your highness!" Said the chamberlain, who, roused by the noise, came in, in his nightcap. "Go and drown yourself in it!" She said... They tried everything for a long time without success. The princess was nearly distracted between hope and fear, but she tried on and on, one thing after another, and everything over and over again. At last, when they had all but given it up, just as the sun rose, the prince opened his eyes." (MacDonald 50-51)

What we see here, is the princess's decision to go against the command of the prophecy, which sought after a man who would willingly sacrifice himself in order to restore water to Lagobel. The princess in saving the prince from his death depicts an act of willfulness, in contrast to the prince's willing sacrifice. Choosing to save the prince from his demise undermines the authority of her parents. When the princess decides to take it upon herself to save the prince, she has accepted the charge of her rebellion, and is willing to accept the consequences of her actions, which could mean death. MacDonald, in his story, decides to celebrate the princess's act of willfulness and conclude with a happy ending. In doing so, we see that MacDonald encourages acts of self-will, where the princess's act of willfulness is what leads to her ultimate happiness. It is in scenes like this where we are able to see MacDonald challenge and question dominant structures in place within Victorian society.

In this analysis of *The Light Princess* through Ahmed's concept of the willful subject, it is important to acknowledge the different contexts within which both writers write. Ahmed's work is politically and socially charged, and is particularly interested in identifying how feminist, queer, and colonial discourses have avoided erasure within dominant narratives by willfully accepting the charge of willfulness, and the consequences that result from it. Histories of violence, inequality and injustice are brought to the forefront of our memory, so as to highlight how willful subjects have always existed, and continue to resist when faced with subordination. MacDonald's fairy tale is no less. Although MacDonald's fairy tale does not

explicitly address issues of class, race, and gender, in reading this story through the concept of willful subjects, we may be able to trace the ways in which MacDonald's characters, within the context of its time, does in fact challenge, question, and subvert from its norm. The fairy tale is successful, thus, in forging its own path of willfulness within the fairy tale genre.

# Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis has demonstrated that MacDonald's portrayal of the light princess and princess Makemnoit, not only questions Victorian gender norms but also contributes to Sara Ahmed's 'willfulness archive'. This archive is not just a collection of defiant characters; it serves as an affective counter-narrative to the historic silencing of defiant figures. Thus, in establishing the centrality and functionality of these characters through a narratological lens, I argue that both subjects, in their unique and distinct expressions of rebellion and defiance, embody and contribute to Sara Ahmed's theory of the 'willful subject'. Princess Makemnoit, who is unmarried and childless, actively separates herself from her role as a princess, and seeks revenge on her brother, the king, by creating another willful subject in the light princess. Subsequently, in creating a willful child, we are able to see the ways in which the princess's affective and bodily defiance poses a threat to the sovereign, because her body does not perform the reproductive and social functions that society has delegated for her. More importantly, what establishes these characters as willful subjects, is that they are *willing* to will against the general will of dominant society. In realizing and accepting this charge of willfulness, both subjects obstinately pursue their goals, regardless of the potentially violent consequences that may follow.

Thus, as demonstrated by Ahmed, historically, willful subjects have almost always been viewed as problem characters, as those who must be eliminated so as to prevent social disobedience. MacDonald's fairy tale, although initially subverting and questioning the societal restrictions that subjugated female figures, ultimately complies with this elimination emphasized by Ahmed: Princess Makemnoit's life is eliminated while the light princess's gravity is restored. However, I argue that this does not paint the full picture: MacDonald, in retaining a conventional fairy tale ending, actually empowers the willful subject. MacDonald,

in his narration, should not be seen as simply returning back to a normative tradition. Instead, he presents a story that is complex and layered in its narrative intention and interpretation. At the end of the tale, we are left with a conclusion that is not entirely didactic and straightforward; this is exactly what MacDonald wants to emphasize in his essay, "The Fantastic Imagination": "Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another… A genuine work of art must mean many things; the truer its art, the more things it will mean." (7). We see here that MacDonald's fairy tale aligns with the goals of Ahmed's archive, which calls to recognize and preserve the narratives of those who resist conformity. In creating characters who are complex, obstinate, and nuanced, readers are invited to question traditions that are otherwise accepted as the norm, or as the 'general will.' By standing out and standing up for their convictions, the light princess and princess Makemnoit encourage a broader conversation, one where all individuals, belonging to all walks of life, are able to ask questions within their own context. In creating a willfulness archive, Ahmed intends to eliminate the erasure that othered figures have had to endure historically, but even today. In MacDonald's fairy tale, we do not only recognize the complexities of the characters involved, but it also underscores the relevance of their narratives in contemporary contexts about gender and resistance. The potential of fairy tales as a tool for critique and conversation exceeds its original context, and can play a significant role in encouraging conversation within a contemporary setting. Fairy tales continue to hold their ground as a relevant and crucial literary genre, capable of exposing acts of subversion and resistance even within a present-day context.

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