

The Shadow of Anodos: Alchemical Symbolism in *Phantastes*

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Because it is heavily reliant on symbol, interpretative approaches to George MacDonald's *Phantastes* have varied widely. Some critics, such as a reviewer in London's *Athenaeum* at the time of the novel's release, have seen it as a "a riddle that will not be read" (Cowan 51), while others have been anxious to wade into the sea of imagery and symbol that washes through the novel. Freudian or Jungian interpretations have been especially popular and have come to interesting, though somewhat anachronistic, conclusions. Though MacDonald likely did not intend that Anodos's fearsome nemesis, the Ash tree, be interpreted in oedipal terms, he probably would not have objected.¹ In his opinion, "The truer the art, the more things it will mean" ("The Fantastic Imagination" 317). For many critics, however, a subjective symbolic experience is the extent of what can be gained from a reading of *Phantastes*. The novel is accused by many, including Robert L. Wolff, Richard Reis, Colin Manlove, and William Raeper, as having little to no structure (Reis 89; Manlove 75; Gunther 43-59).² However, this interpretation must be questioned because of the allegorical structure provided by several symbols that arch through the whole of the narrative. One such central symbol, which has yet to be properly understood, is the shadow that attaches itself to Anodos in the Ogress's church of darkness (48). Many scholars have attempted to decipher the shadow, but most arrive only halfway. Salvey, for example, sees the shadow as merely a "negation of good," thus drawing MacDonald's theodicy into a sharp dualism, even though MacDonald himself stated that even evil is ultimately good (20). This paper will interpret the shadow in the light of MacDonald's cosmology and theology, as both are vital for an understanding of this powerful symbol. This interpretation will show that Anodos's shadow is drawn from the alchemical symbols of the *nigredo* and the black sun, which MacDonald uses to represent separation from the divine spirit immanent in creation. When the alchemical significance of the shadow is identified, *Phantastes* emerges as an alchemical fable in which Anodos, the subject of transmutation, undergoes a journey toward reunification with an immanent God.

Christian Pantheism: MacDonald's Immanent God

In order to examine the shadow as an active symbol of separation from God in Nature, which I will refer to as disenchantment, it is necessary to first establish MacDonald's ideal of unity with the Divine, or enchantment. Stephen Prickett states that MacDonald is a "temperamental Platonist, only interested in the surface of this world for the news it gives him of another, hidden reality" (193). However, while MacDonald's cosmology is certainly Platonic, he does not devalue the external world. His view is more similar to forms of Neo-Platonic emanation in which all of Nature is divine by virtue of the one indivisible God's immanence in creation. The universe is God, though in a lower form of gradation. For MacDonald, this Neo-Platonic emanation takes place through the divine Imagination. In his essay "The Imagination," MacDonald states: "As the thoughts move in the mind of a man, so move the worlds of men and women in the mind of God . . . for there they had their birth . . . Man is but a thought of God" (8). The universe is created and sustained through divine Imagination, but man also participates in creation through his own imaginative faculty. Just as God envisioned the world and it was so, man also constructs his own world through participation with symbols present in Nature that indicate spiritual facts and entities which are otherwise hidden from the view of the material senses. There is thus a creative correspondence between the Imagination of God and the imagination of humans: "The imagination . . . is that faculty in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has, therefore, been called the *creative* faculty, and its exercise *creation*" ("Imagination" 8).³

MacDonald sets up a cosmological triangle in which God imagines both man and woman and nature into being, while humans participate in the eternal act of creation by recalling forms with their own imagination that God has placed in their mind with which to engage nature. Nature is sustained by the same divine Imagination as humans, and, by virtue of the fact that it is created from the Imagination that is God, is itself divine. If this sounds like pantheism preached with the pen of a devout Christian who was raised as a Calvinist and always saw himself as a minister without a pulpit—it very nearly is. MacDonald unabashedly gives the name "Christian Pantheism" to his belief that "God is in everything, and showing himself in everything" ("Wordsworth's Poetry" 182). To be clear, MacDonald did not believe that spirit and body were the same thing. His pantheism sees the two as intertwined in a constant process of creative imagination. Though the world is seen as constructed the divine Imagination that is God, it is not itself

synonymous with God. It is therefore more suitable to speak of MacDonald's cosmology as panentheism.

MacDonald's views on the relationship between God and nature are not always clear. At times he uses language that can support dualistic interpretations. An example of such language is found in "The Imagination": "The outward, commonly called the material, is *informed by*, or has form in virtue of, the inward or immaterial—in a word, the thought" (17). Here we see the thought of God enchanting the material, in the same way that "our spirit informs, gives shape to our bodies" ("Mirrors" 221), but for MacDonald the relationship between spirit and matter is not so simple as the inward giving substance to the outward. The imagination of God enchants, or sustains, a body, but it has also created that body and, in an emanative sense, *is* that body: "This world is not merely a thing which God hath made, subjecting it to laws; but it is an expression of the thought, the feeling, the heart of God himself" ("Wordsworth's Poetry" 182). The person who chooses to see the phenomenal as lifeless, rather than as a repository of signifiers enriched by Imagination, is "living in the outer court, not in the *penetralia* of life" ("Individual Development" 52). Nature, properly viewed by humans, is enchanted by its connection to the spirit of the divine through Imagination. Humans exist in a state of unity with nature and God when they recognize this enchantment.

Disenchantment and the Shadow

When the shadow attaches itself to Anodos in the Ogress's dark church, it removes Anodos from this ideal state of enchantment by changing his perception of nature to a limited, materialist view. Shortly after the shadow has attached itself, Anodos lies down to rest in "a most delightful part of the forest, carpeted with wildflowers." When he rises, he sees that his shadow has desecrated the ground: "The very outline of it could be traced in the withered lifeless grass, and the scorched and shriveled flowers which stood there, dead, and hopeless of any resurrection" (51). As if this insidious effect weren't enough, the shadow gains in power:

One day, having come out on a clear grassy hill, which commanded a glorious prospect, though of what I cannot now tell, my shadow moved round, and came in front of me. And presently, a new manifestation increased my distress. For it began to coruscate, and shoot out on all sides a radiation of dim shadow. These rays of gloom issued from the central shadow as

from a black sun, lengthening and shortening with the continual change. What wherever a ray struck, that part of earth, or sea, or sky, became void, and desert, and sad to my heart. On this, the first development of its new power, one ray shot out beyond the rest, seeming to lengthen infinitely, until it smote the great sun on the face, which withered and darkened beneath the blow. (51)

The symbolic power of the black sun lends itself well to psychological readings. William Gray, for example, connects it to the black sun motif of Freudian psychologist Julia Kristeva (885). It is possibly more instructive, however, to look to the work of Carl Jung, as he takes his black sun from the symbolic vista of alchemical tradition—likely the same sky in which MacDonald saw his own black sun. Compare the passage above with this description of the nineteenth picture of the *Splendor Solis*, the 16th Century alchemical text by Salomon Trismosin:

It is a most dismal and curiously dark weird-like subject. A bleakish stunted landscape, with black blighted withered trees in foreground. A MONSTER BLACK SUN (sic) is in great part sunk below the ground, yet visible and partly rising above the ground at the center of the landscape—or middle distance. The rising of this pall-like bristly black sun, overspreads and hides totally the body of the true sun, which lies beyond; for; behind—is to be seen golden radiations of the true sun, which illuminates with its golden tinted light a nice landscape in the extreme distance. (60)

It would be hasty, based on this comparison, to state that MacDonald read *Splendor Solis* or saw one of many different sets of images based on it, but there are interesting similarities. In MacDonald's description the shadow itself adopts the "pall-like bristly" character of Trismosin's sun before it blackens the actual sun, but in both descriptions the black sun ultimately renders the landscape "bleakish." Trismosin's description ends with a hopeful vision of a true sun lying beyond, with a "nice landscape in the distance," while MacDonald's description ends in despair, but, as I will discuss further on, MacDonald's black sun/shadow carries its own hope for the future. Whatever the case, the black sun of *Phantastes* can be safely connected to the black sun of alchemy.

The sources and scope of MacDonald's interest in alchemy are unclear, but we know from Greville MacDonald that his father was familiar

with alchemy to some degree. He describes a conversation with his father about his other novel of symbolic fantasy, *Lilith*, in which Mr. Vane bathes Lilith's near-dead body in "the river of life," which his father said was made up of the four elements of medieval alchemy: water, air, earth, and fire. In alchemical terms, the "river of life" can be read as corresponding to the quintessence—the original element from which the material elements were created and to which the substance being transmuted must return. It could also refer to the elixir of life, one of the primary goals of alchemists, and a substance often connected to the quintessence in alchemical texts. Reis, trusting Greville MacDonald's word, states that MacDonald simply borrowed the alchemical imagery from Jacob Boehme (108). Indeed, Boehme was a significant influence on MacDonald, both directly and through Romantics such as Novalis, Coleridge, and Schelling,⁴ but Boehme never refers to the black sun. Moreover, while MacDonald's romantic roots lead him to focus more on moon symbolism, Boehme gives symbolic precedence to the sun, the "similitude" of Christ (104). While Boehme was likely an influence, MacDonald must have encountered other alchemical texts as well.

In light of its connection to the black sun, the shadow can be identified with what is known to alchemists as the *nigredo*, the black colour, representing death, which a substance takes on during the transmutation of base matter into the philosopher's stone. In the alchemical tradition, the philosopher's stone can be seen as a substance (equivalent to the quintessence) that transcends the material elements and thereby has the power to manipulate them, or as a human being that has completed a process of spiritual regeneration and has become unified in spirit with the divine, as in the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions. This process goes through many different stages that vary according to the alchemist or alchemical tradition in question, but a process consisting of at least the three main stages of putrefaction, coagulation, and sublimation is usually followed. The *nigredo* is part of the process of putrefaction, or dissolution. "This dissolution," says Trismosin, "Is nothing but a killing of the moist with the dry, in fact a PUTREFACTION, and consequently turns the MATTER black" (38). The "moist," in this context, can be the spirit in a substance or in humans. The "dry" can be seen as elemental matter, separated from spirit (Principe 13). The *nigredo*, then, is the result of the separation of spirit from matter, usually seen as mutually present in phenomena. In MacDonald's symbolic conception, a human under the spell of the *nigredo* is a disenchanting human, a material human, reminiscent of the scientific naturalism that reigned in

Victorian Britain at the time of the writing of *Phantastes* in 1858.

Indeed, we soon see that the shadow has transformed Anodos into a rational materialist from the enchanted young man able to see the spirit in things when he first entered Fairy Land, symbolized by his ability to see fairies enchanting the flowers. The “most dreadful” part of this development is that soon he begins to welcome the shadow’s disenchanting presence. “In a land like this, with so many illusions everywhere, I need his aid to disenchant the things around me. He does away with all appearances, and shows me things in their true colour and form. . . . And if I live in a waste instead of a paradise, I will live knowing where I live” (53).

MacDonald uses the sun to symbolize this disenchanting way of knowing. Though the shadow is not dependent on Anodos’s position in relation to a particular light source, it shows up blacker in the sunlight, while it is not visible by moonlight (146). In the full light of day Anodos experiences Fairyland as the mechanistic workaday world of industrial Britain. Enchantment, or awareness of the spirit essential in nature, is much more difficult. In other forms of light not connected to the shadow, such as dawn, twilight, and sunlight filtered through trees, Fairyland is revealed as it is beneath the moon—a panentheist world in which both external and internal meanings are seen in the symbolic repository of Nature. Moonlight is a symbol of knowledge reflected between the self and Nature through Imagination, a guiding light beneath which the enchanted nature of matter is more visible. Moonlight is thus directly connected with a fairy, or dream, or as a way of knowing. “Night is the fairies’ day, and the moon their sun” (8). This symbolic structure matches with the role played by the sun and moon in medieval alchemy. In alchemical texts the sun is often related to fire and sulphur, while the moon is connected to water and mercury. Mercury, seen as a literal metal, but even more importantly as a primal element representative of water and earth, is the principle of fusibility, while sulphur, seen as representative of air and fire, is the principle of combustibility. Mercury gives permanence to metals, while sulphur corrupts them (Haage 19). The sun of *Phantastes* is symbolically applied to Anodos in order to begin the alchemical process through a combustible process of putrefaction—a function of sulphur—while both water and the moon elevate him through coagulation—a function of mercury.

The connection of the sun to the industrialized Britain of MacDonald’s day represents a critique that is clearly in line with the views of Romantics like Coleridge, Shelley, and Wordsworth, for all of whom he

professed deep admiration. MacDonald went beyond the Romantics with his pantheist cosmology however, as his thought remained primarily theological. His ideas were ultimately a product of the minister without pulpit, rather than the Romantic writer of fairy tales.⁵ To truly understand the shadow as a symbol of the disenchantment resulting from materialism, we should look past the Romantics and focus on MacDonald's ultimate goal for humans. It is important for humans to view phenomena as living symbols so that they will be aware of their essential unity with Nature, and thus begin to glimpse the face of God. The materialist path is therefore the path away from unity, and for MacDonald, "Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity. Life parted from its causative life would be no life; it would at best be but a barrack of corruption, an outpost of annihilation" ("Individual Development" 57). MacDonald has often been accused of being vague, but he is very clear on this point: a disenchanted state, such as that symbolized by Anodos' shadow, is death.

The Four Vices of the Shadow

In addition to the black sun, Anodos' shadow is connected to three other symbolic characters in *Phantastes*, who represent four vices that keep the self in a permanent state of disenchantment. The vices of fear, greed, lust, and pride are represented by two evil dryad characters—the Ash and the Alder—and by the shadow's assumption of Anodos's vain image of himself as Galahad. MacDonald leaves clues for the shadow's connection to each of these characters, but they have generally been missed by previous scholarship. The Ash, for example, is usually interpreted as a manifestation of Anodos's psyche, and its connections to fear and greed are often observed, but its direct correspondence to the shadow has not been noted. However, the Ogress in the dark church where Anodos finds his shadow tells him that he has already met it in the forest (50). Indeed, when Anodos meets the Ash in the forest, we see that it is also a projection of Anodos's shadow self, or *nigredo* state. He sees the shadow of the Ash on the ground, but nowhere between the moon that casts the shadow, and the ground upon which it is projected, can he see its source (21). The reason, of course, is that Anodos himself is casting the shadow. The Ash is even described in terms of a shadow rather than a material entity. When Anodos first meets the Ash it is as a "shadow as of a large distorted hand" passing over the blinds of the window as he reads the story of Sir Percivale (11). Even when the Ash materializes, it is as "the strangest figure; vague, shadowy, almost transparent in the central

parts, and gradually deepening in substance towards the outside” (21).

The presence of the Ash is brought on when Anodos begins to feel a sensation of fear, which he is “unable to associate with any definite object whatever.” This fear, he says, “Continued and deepened, until all my pleasure in the shows of various kinds that everywhere betokened the presence of the merry fairies vanished by degrees” (20). This function of fear is exactly parallel to the disenchanting effect of the shadow. The “merry fairies” are those that live in flowers, which die without the presence of their requisite fairy, and are thus directly analogous to the spirit aspect of matter. The Ash is thus parallel to the motif of the “Dweller of the Threshold,” developed by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his novel *Zanoni*, released six years before *Phantastes*. Bulwer-Lytton’s Dweller manifests itself as a spectral figure that frightens the individual from pursuing paths to higher knowledge. The Ash performs the same function by removing knowledge and awareness of the immanent God in Nature and in the self.

The “most awful of the features” of the Ash, however, are its voracious eyes. “These were alive, yet not with life. They seemed lighted up with an infinite greed” (22). This greed has two forms—possession and lust. The Ash as a symbol of possession can be seen as another critique of industrial Britain, a society obsessed, in MacDonald’s view, with obtaining knowledge of Nature not to perceive higher realities, but to push toward human acquisition and technological progress. The shadow is also directly connected to greed. It appears each time Anodos experiences a desire to gain empirical knowledge of an object that he initially experiences with a sense of childlike wonder and mystery. An example is Anodos’s encounter with a young maiden who possesses a crystal globe that Anodos is not allowed to touch—“Or if you do, it must be very gently.” When Anodos touches the globe it produces magnificent harmonies. The spherical shape of the object suggests that it is directly symbolic of the earth and indirectly of Nature itself. Anodos, however, is not content to merely enjoy the beauty of the globe and its harmonies. His desire to possess and empirically know the globe leads him to try and steal it from the maiden. In the process of the attempt, the music grows discordant and the globe begins to vibrate and heave until it bursts. A black vapour breaks from it, a substance so black that it envelops the maiden and makes even the shadow indiscernible. Again the *nigredo* of alchemy is called to mind. The maiden flees from Anodos, crying, “My globe is broken!” MacDonald has her repeat the cry many times, no doubt to accentuate the sense of violation brought upon the innocent maiden by Anodos’s forced

disenchantment (54).

The second form of greed connected to the shadow is lust. When Anodos is reading the story of Percivale, the Ash's shadow falls across the window just at the moment that he reads of the knight's seduction by the "damosel of the Alder tree." At this point, he is unable to continue reading (11). The Alder tree appears shortly after in Anodos' own story as a personification of lust—a twisted mockery of the Beech tree, who symbolizes pure, selfless love. The Alder ensnares Anodos with her false beauty and attempts to give him over to the Ash. Her association as the Ash's helper, in addition to the fact that the Ash appears in Anodos's perception when she appears on the pages of Percivale's tale, deepens the connection between Alder, Ash and shadow as representative of lust.

The shadow himself manifests as the *doppelgänger* knight, a symbol of Anodos's pride. When Anodos successfully slays a giant, he feels a surge of pride and the shadow arrives in its usual form—lying black upon the ground. Later, while riding through an enchanted forest, he thinks back again on the killing of the giant and counts himself "amongst the glorious knights of old . . . side by side with Sir Galahad." The moment the thought appears in his mind, the shadow manifests as a *doppelgänger* of Anodos himself, except larger, fiercer, and malevolent. This shadow knight then locks Anodos in a tower. The interesting part of this experience is that the door of the tower is not actually locked, and even the tower's existence is a matter of perception. Each day the sun peaks through a window near the ceiling and lights the inside of the tower and Anodos is aware of his shadow lying beside him, "black on the floor." At night, the moon comes out and he becomes "suddenly aware of existence." The walls of the tower melt away: "The open country lay, in the moonlight, for miles and miles around me." When the sun comes out, he becomes aware again of the walls of the tower around him. "Every night the conviction returned, that I was free. Every morning I sat wretchedly disconsolate. At length, when the course of the moon no longer permitted her beams to touch me, the night was dreary as the day" (144-6). The dichotomy between the sunlit view of scientific rationalism and the moonlit dream seeing of the inner eye is clearly illustrated in this scene, as is the shadow's direct connection to that sunlit materialist view. Chris Brawley follows Robert L. Wolff in seeing the shadow of the tower scene as different from earlier versions of the shadow, which, in Wolff's view, previously represented "the intellectual skepticism that withers the imagination, later represented "consciousness of self," and has now come to represent pride,

“or a misconception of one’s true role in the world” (Qtd. in Brawley 109). As the relation of the shadow to fear, greed, and lust shows, however, the shadow’s representation of pride is simply another illustration of a cause of the separation of the self from the divinity that is in nature. Thus, the shadow in its Ash form plays the same function as the shadow manifested as the doppelgänger knight.

All four vices represent a selfish, possessive perspective that stands in the way of seeing Nature and the self as enchanted. Reis comes close to this view in connecting the shadow to lust, vanity, and fear, but ultimately comes to a moral conclusion: “The Shadow represents the guilt which comes from not doing one’s duty” (92-93). This would seem a logical conclusion, given the usual moral associations of such vices, but the shadow’s connection to these vices is far more metaphysically important for MacDonald than a mere representation of guilt. For MacDonald the four vices result in disenchantment, an evil far worse than failure to do one’s duty. MacDonald speaks of this in “A Sketch of Individual Development”:

Take the eternal thought from the heart of things, no longer can any beauty be real, no more can shape, motion, aspect of nature have significance in itself, or sympathy with human soul. At best and most the beauty he thought he saw was but the projected perfection of his own being, and from himself as the crown and summit of things, the soul of the man shrinks with horror. (48)

The shadow knight is not the only vision of himself as the monstrous summit of things that Anodos shrinks from. The Ash and Alder are also monstrous representations of Anodos’ own self that come to dominate his view and lead him to focus thought on himself rather than the “eternal thought.”

The Great Work

The connection between these four vices and the disenchantment of the shadow faces us with a logical quandary. MacDonald believed that nothing was ultimately evil: “What we call evil, is the only and best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good” (167). In MacDonald’s theology, all beings eventually move toward oneness with God. Where then does the vice-tainted experience of the shadow fit? The answer may sound odd at first, but for MacDonald the experience of the shadow is ultimately a positive one, just as the *nigredo* of

the alchemists, though it represents death and putrefaction, is a positive stage on a journey toward ultimate perfection.

It is important to see Anodos's journey through Fairyland as symbolic of alchemical transmutation, as the claim for the shadow as a positive symbol rests on its association with spiritual regeneration. In order to illustrate that *Phantastes* is an alchemical fable, I will look back over the basic plot progression of the novel and treat Anodos as though he were a base metal. Recall that alchemists often sought to transmute base metals in order to produce the philosopher's stone, which, in the case of the self-transformation sought by alchemists with more spiritual goals, symbolizes unification with the Divine.

Anodos's transmutation begins with his first experience of *nigredo* during his fear-stricken encounter with the Ash, which represents an experience of putrefaction because of its connection to the shadow. Following the Ash encounter, he experiences his first coagulation, or, in the language of spiritual alchemy, his first experience of illumination. Leaving the dryad of the Beech tree after she has rescued him from the Ash, Anodos discovers a cave in which there is "a little well of the clearest water." He drinks this water and says, "[I] felt as if I knew what the elixir of life must be" (29). The "elixir of life" is an alchemical term used to denote a substance that gives healing or extended life. MacDonald's use of an alchemical term in this context is likely not accidental. Having drunken of the water, Anodos is thrown into a "delicious reverie . . . during which all lovely forms, and colours, and sounds seemed to use my brain as a common hall, where they could come and go, unbidden and unexcused" (29). The water allows Anodos's imagination to function in an unconscious manner, free of the restrictions of disenchantment. While it does not give him eternal life, it gives him consciousness of the divine Imagination, which is both eternal and life generating. Water, as we have seen, is commonly related to the symbols of the moon and mercury in the alchemical tradition, thus reinforcing the association of this cleansing bath with the alchemical stage of coagulation.

Following this initial process of purification, however, Anodos is thrust back into putrefaction, this time more strongly than before, when he succumbs to the temptations offered by the Alder/Lust. When he arrives in the Palace of Fairyland, however, he gets another chance at coagulation. Anodos's entire experience in the palace can be read as an experience of illumination—he spends most of his time in the library, reading books as though he were himself the main character: "Was it a history? I was the

chief actor therein . . . With a fiction it was the same. Mine was the whole story” (66). These reading experiences indicate a greater connectedness with all things through the operation of the imagination. MacDonald also uses alchemical imagery to link the palace itself with coagulation. Anodos states that in the palace “silver seemed everywhere preferred to gold” (63), an image that reflects the common alchemical association of silver with the moon and gold with the sun (Haage 19). This is another example of MacDonald privileging the dream knowledge represented by the moon over the materialistic knowledge represented by the sun. The palace also contains a “fairy bath,” in which Anodos swims each day. The hall in which the large pool of water is found is “spangled with constellations of silver stars.” The pool itself appears quite deep, and is filled with “the purest, most liquid and radiant water.” In addition to employing water symbolism to connect the pool to coagulation, MacDonald leaves a hint of alchemical colour symbolism to tie the pool to coagulation, as the sides of the pool are paved with white marble. While black is the colour of putrefaction, and red the colour of sublimation in alchemy, white (and sometimes yellow) is the colour of the tincture that is added to the base metal after putrefaction to result in coagulation.

When Anodos dives into the fountain, he says, “It clothed me as with a new sense and its object both in one.” He describes the experience in terms of a liquid entering him, just as a tincture might mix with the purified substance of the base metal following putrefaction: “The waters lay so close to me, they seemed to enter and revive my heart.” While looking at the pool from above, it had seemed to Anodos to be paved at the bottom with “all kinds of refulgent stones, of every shape and hue,” suggesting a deeper unity that leads him to say, “I came at last to feel as if not one little pebble could be displaced, without injuring the effect of the whole.” After diving in, however, Anodos sees that the pool does not have a bottom, indeed he can see for miles beneath the water and feels that were he to come to the surface he would find himself in the middle of a great sea. Rising to the surface, however, he finds himself in the same fairy bath that he had entered (63-4). Not only does Anodos thus experience a temporary illumination in which he is able to see the greater reality visible in the correspondent external appearance of reality, he is also permanently able to experience the “penetralia” of the “outer court” with his senses. This heightened awareness is highlighted by his newfound ability to see the forms of fairies that he had previously only been able to sense intuitively (64).

While in the Fairy Palace, Anodos comes close to reaching sublimation when he wakes the Marble Lady from her pedestal through song. The Marble Lady can be seen as symbolic of absolute beauty, and Anodos's love for her as symbolic of Romantic Love.⁶ An alchemical connection is suggested by the colour symbolism of the hall in which he finds the Marble Lady—he must proceed through red curtains from a central chamber with white pillars and a black floor and walls. Before he peeks behind the curtains he sits upon a red throne beside a white table and falls into a reverie of “images of bewildering beauty, which passed before my inward eye,” an experience he compares to his first experience of illumination in the cave (93). However, once more Anodos fails the test of selflessness that he must pass to go beyond the stage of coagulation. He attempts to touch and possess the Marble Lady and she flees from him. He attempts to follow her, but in doing so he passes out of the Palace of Fairyland into a dark chasm, an underworld in which he lives once more the disenchanting experience of the shadow. This time though, Anodos escapes the shadow by choosing the path of coagulation and illumination. He comes to the edge of a grey sea and throws himself into the “heaving abyss” (112). By doing so he accepts the death of his selfish shadow nature, choosing no longer to fear for himself, lust for himself, and claim his accomplishments for his own. The putrefaction of his selfish nature is successful. Anodos chooses to see himself in unity with God and nature, and as he hits the water he is illuminated: “A blessing, like the kiss of a mother, seemed to alight on my soul” (112).

Emerging from the water, Anodos alights on a green island where he meets a Mother Nature figure, representative of the immanent God, living in a pyramidal cottage in the middle of a great sea. The old woman's face is “older than any countenance I had ever looked upon,” while her eyes are “very incarnations of soft light” (115), a reference to the moonlit dream or soul knowledge of the hidden nature of phenomena discussed above. Anodos's arrival at the cottage is a sort of homecoming after all his travails in Fairyland: “A wondrous sense of refuge and repose came upon me.” Anodos is aware of the feeling of peace and unity he feels in her embrace, but he is not yet ready to ascend from coagulation to permanent sublimation through knowledge of his oneness with her and with creation. Just as in his encounters with the Beech tree and the Marble Lady, Anodos descends away from sublimation by choosing to leave Mother Nature on her island. Before he departs through one of the four doors in the four walls of her cottage, she instructs him to look for arrows of a certain colour whenever he is out in

the world and seeks to find his way back to her. These arrows are a deep red colour, the red of the philosopher's stone, the red of sublimation.

Anodos returns to an existence in which the immanent God is once more hidden, and once more experiences the return of the shadow with the rush of pride he feels after killing a giant. The shadow manifests as the doppelgänger knight and locks him in a tower. In the end, Anodos escapes the tower by simply choosing to open the door. The only lock keeping him in the tower had been his failure to see the world and himself as enchanted. By opening the door, he once more moves from putrefaction to coagulation. This time, however, he has become permanently able to resist lapsing into his shadow self. He will not need to return to the *nigredo* state in his journey toward reunification with the divine, but he does encounter it one more time near the close of his experience in Fairyland. Before Anodos can reach the final stage of sublimation, he must kill the selfish aspect that still lies dormant within him. The great beast that he throttles on the platform, surrounded by a multitude of its worshippers, carries several potential symbolic meanings, but it is most of all a symbol of Anodos's shadow self. MacDonald clearly describes Anodos's killing of the beast as a slaying of his self: Anodos throttles the beast, but as it dies he also loses consciousness, though he can "remember no blow" (161).

Now that he has killed his selfish self, Anodos achieves true sublimation, the state of being equivalent to the philosopher's stone, when the self realizes its unity with all things by virtue of its creation in the divine Imagination. Lying in his coffin, he perceives himself as one with the earth around him: "Now that I lay in her bosom, the whole earth, and each of her many births, was as a body to me, at my will. I seemed to feel the great heart of the mother beating into mine, and feeding me with her own life, her own essential being and nature" (163). This awareness of the correspondence between the body of the earth and his own body, of the essence of the earth and his own essence, is the end goal of imaginative seeing: "The end of imagination is *harmony*. A right imagination, being the reflex of the creation, will fall in with the divine order of things as the highest form of its own operation... will be content alone with growth towards the divine idea, which includes all that is beautiful in the imperfect imaginations of men" ("Imagination" 30). Unlike the experiences of putrefaction and coagulation, the alchemical imagery is limited in the description of sublimation. However, after Anodos achieves correspondence between himself and the whole earth, he sees a feathery cloud in the sky, illuminated by the "rosy" beams of

the setting sun. After the sun sets, the cloud remains red, for “it carried its rose-hue within” (163). Thus, we do see some colour connections to the red that represents sublimation. More important, however, is the clear thematic connection between alchemical sublimation and Anodos’s achievement of oneness with the panentheist God.

Conclusion

The name *Anodos* stems from the Greek for “the way back” or “the way up.” The importance of that name in light of the alchemical journey back, or up, to unity with the divine can now be seen. A non-alchemical interpretation of the shadow has resulted in critics missing the significance of this journey, which unites the novel as a cohesive whole rather than the collection of scattered dream scenes it has been accused of being. Like all the symbols in *Phantastes*, the shadow is open to the many possible interpretations of the reader’s imagination. Interpretations that miss or purposefully avoid the alchemical symbolism in the novel are therefore certainly valid. However, the long history of interpreting the shadow as merely a symbol of darkness or negativity in a dualistic theodicy results in an interpretation of the novel that lacks the allegorical depth that MacDonald intended. The shadow is symbolic of disenchantment, representative of a state of being in which the self sees phenomena as devoid of spiritual essence, even though all created matter is inextricably intertwined with spirit by virtue of its creation by the divine Imagination. The shadow functions as the first, ultimately positive stage of the alchemical transmutation of the self. MacDonald’s connection of the shadow to the *nigredo* of alchemy places Anodos in a paradoxical state of being in which he is stripped of his knowledge of the panentheistic God in order that he may, through further processes of transmutation, become more truly aware of him.

Endnotes

1. For a review of oedipal readings of the Ash tree, see Gray 880. The article provides a review of much of the Freudian and Jungian analysis that has been applied to *Phantastes*.
2. Gunther, siding with John Docherty, sees *Phantastes* as carefully structured.
3. MacDonald’s theory of imagination was influenced by the German and English Romantics, particularly by Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ideas of primary and secondary imagination. See Coleridge 9.5-17.
4. For a cautious approach to the influence of Boehme on MacDonald, see Nelson 24-36.

5. Before beginning his writing career, MacDonald was dismissed from his position as pastor of a congregationalist church at Arundel, England.
6. See Brawley's "The Ideal and the Shadow" for an excellent illustration of the connection of the Marble Lady to Romantic Love.

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