The Ideal and the Shadow: George MacDonald's *Phantastes*

Chris Brawley

"Man is but a thought of God"
—George MacDonald

"The one principle of Hell is 'I am my own"
—George MacDonald

"To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination" (*Orts* 2). With these words, George MacDonald, for many the grandfather of mythopoeic fantasy, shows his considerable debt to the formulations of the imagination put forth by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. For MacDonald, the imagination is regarded as the faculty which "images" or makes a likeness of something. It is that faculty which most closely resembles the activity of God, for just as God is the primary creator, creating the universe through his power, so the artist imitates this creative act in the formation of the secondary worlds created. Agreeing with Coleridge's distinction between the imagination as offering new versions of old truths, and the fancy as mere inventiveness, MacDonald was an important figure in furthering the function of the imagination as a vehicle to apprehend the sacramental nature of the world. By embodying old truths in new versions, MacDonald was foundational for the mythopoeic artists who attempt to revise the perception of the world by infusing it with a sense of the numinous.

Although MacDonald wrote realistic novels, children's fairy tales, essays and sermons, perhaps his theories of the imagination are best realized in his two "adult" fantasies, *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1898). A reading of either of these books reveals the extent to which MacDonald relied on the unconscious as a vehicle for the expression of God. Heavily influenced by the German Romantics, especially Novalis, MacDonald believed that "the greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended," (*Orts* 319) and that the closer a piece of art was to the truly dreamlike or chaotic state of mind, the closer this piece of art would mirror God's own creative impulse. When these works of art embody a sense of chaos, the emphasis is placed on the emotive rather than the intellectual. MacDonald felt that fantasy was the appropriate vehicle for the chaotic, and, if a work was successful, it would

elicit a certain response within the reader. As MacDonald states: "It is there not so much to convey a meaning as to wake a meaning" (*Orts* 317). What MacDonald means by this statement is that images from the imagination must work unconsciously on the reader; if the art is true to its nature, it will be associative, working more like a symbol which has many potential meanings rather than a sign where meaning is limited. This lends the reader some interpretive freedom in any text, but this is the key to the imagination's workings. What "wakes" one reader might be different from what "wakes" another (as is often the case). Thus whoever really "feels" a given story will read into it only what accords with his or her own nature. One will read one meaning, while another will read something entirely different. MacDonald here espouses his theory of art: "A genuine work of art must mean many things; the truer the art, the more things it will mean" (*Orts* 317).

Lest this theory of the imagination sound too decentered, MacDonald provides the reader with an analogy which is important in understanding his concept of the imagination: music. As anyone who enjoys music knows, music has an affect on the listener not on the intellectual level but on the emotional level. A particular piece of music lends access to the feeling-oriented dimension of ourselves but, again, as in art, no two people will agree on any "meaning" a piece of music may have. MacDonald employs the analogy of the sonata to explain this difference. Although two people may have similar feelings about a piece of music, neither would agree on any meaning. As MacDonald says, "the best way with music, I imagine, is not to bring the forces of the intellect to bear upon it, but to be still and let it work on that part of us for whose sake it exists" (*Orts* 321).

MacDonald's idea of music as a means of waking up meaning is one that is discussed in Rudolf Otto's treatment of the numinous consciousness. Although Otto is careful to point out that musical "feelings" and the sense of the numinous are not perfectly analogous, they do share the same emotive response in the subject, both inculcating in the subject a certain disposition of mind which includes the dimension of the non-rational. For Otto, music is an effective expression of the balance between the rational and the non-rational, both mutually penetrating one another. For example, in certain musical pieces there is the verbal text that which expresses natural emotions such as joy or grief. On the other hand, there is also the emotive or non-rational aspect of music, and it is the stress of this non-rational aspect which closely allies it with the numinous. It represents the "wholly other," and is the basis of the indescribability which is both characteristic of the religious and, for the

present thesis, the mythopoeic imagination. Music, for Otto, "releases a blissful rejoicing in us, and we are conscious of a glimmering, billowy agitation occupying our minds, without being able to express or explain in concepts what it really is that moves us so deeply" (48). The indescribable nature of the feelings brought forth in music, as in the numinous consciousness, is what is central to mythopoeic fantasy's ability to recover the sacramental vision in order to revision the relationship to the natural world.

Thus, the connection between the products of the imagination, or music, or the numinous, is similar. They all are emotive rather than intellectual, and the more the unconscious or non-rational is made accessible in any of these forms, the closer one may apprehend divine truth. For MacDonald, this divine truth involves knowing what a thing is rather than what it means. For example, in his *Unspoken Sermons*, MacDonald states, "To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it" (350). Thus the function of the imagination is to provide images which are powerful in themselves, regardless of any inherent meaning. MacDonald's belief was that this state of knowing can be "awakened" by the imagination and not by mere intellect. MacDonald found this to be the case with the fairy tale, music, or even nature herself: "A fairytale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away: do you begin at once to wrestle with it and ask whence its power over you, whither it is carrying you?" (*Orts* 319). For MacDonald, the answer to this question would be "no."

While MacDonald's aesthetic theories of the imagination are central to the thesis that the element of wonder is the most important defining characteristic of the mythopoeic imagination, certain flaws in his theories have been examined by critics. In his book *Modern Fantasy*, Colin Manlove argues that there are inconsistencies in MacDonald's aesthetic thinking. Manlove believes that MacDonald has "two minds over his material" (79), an imaginative side and an intellectual side which Manlove sees as at war with one another. For example, Manlove points out that MacDonald's attempts to theorize about the nature of fairy tales is in direct contradiction to his views that fairy tales are meant to be incomprehensible. How can one provide a theoretical background to a genre which is has as its defining characteristic that which cannot be theorized about? The problem, for Manlove, revolves around language. While Manlove argues that language may indeed have both an emotive side and a meaningful or intellectual side, he believes MacDonald would disagree. For MacDonald, the important aspect of language is its

ability to allow access to the emotional dimension, and this is the function of the fairy tale. However, what Manlove points out is that the fairy tales themselves cannot be separated from the language element which does imply that meaning is possible. Thus, for Manlove, MacDonald's attempts to associate the fairytale with music is faulty: while music does have the ability to affect just the emotions, language by definition also affects the intellect. Manlove concludes:

> MacDonald is what one might call a would-be "exclusive" modern fantasist: he wants to have to do with the world only as a house full of mystic symbols, and with only the unconscious and imaginative side of the mind. But though he tries to shut out the conscious selves of science and law, intellect and will, they keep coming back to interrupt the proceedings. (98)

Manlove also questions the ability of mythopoeic art to offer a sacramental religious experience. If, in MacDonald's theories, the imagination is the dwelling place of God, and the products of the imagination are symbolic of the eternal (divine immanence), how does one arrive at proof of this? Are the fantasy worlds really products of God or are they merely from MacDonald's own mind? One can never be certain. On the other hand, Manlove does admit that certain images in a particular work may awaken a sense of longing (*sehnsucht*) for heaven. In MacDonald's case, images such as jewels, flowers, and stairs were manifestations of God, and Manlove concurs that "the images in MacDonald's fantasies must thus work sacramentally and the reader may have a form of religious experience through them" (97).

Regardless of any flaws in MacDonald's aesthetic theories, his point still has value and what is of concern here is the defining characteristic of mythopoeia, that of a sense of wonder which may be awakened so that the divine element present in the world is recovered. The fact that many of the mythopoeic authors refer to the indescribable nature of these works shows that what is more important is not particular words used but images portrayed. Although Manlove cannot accept that mere patterns of events or images can be the defining element of mythopoeia, the focus must be on what the authors themselves believe is the defining element of the genre. In his "Introduction" to *Phantastes*, the book which "baptized" his imagination, C.S. Lewis offers what he feels is the unique gift of MacDonald, one that serves as the central element of mythopoeia:

> It goes beyond the expression of things we have already felt. It arouses in us sensations we have never had before, never anticipated having, as though we had broken out of our normal mode of consciousness and

> 'possessed' joys not promised to our birth: it gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passion, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives. (xi)

MacDonald's theories of the imagination have interesting consequences for the thesis that mythopoeic fantasy attempts to "revise" reality, as Kathryn Hume would express it. As with other fantasy authors, MacDonald's fantasies were not attempts to "escape" reality, but by emphasizing the emotive aspects of the genre, he was asking readers to look deeply into his world to realize the eternal through the temporal or, as he says, to think things "as God thinks them" (*Orts* 27) The only proper vehicle for seeing the eternal through the temporal is the imagination, which for MacDonald is the best guide one may have:

> For it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully; undefined, yet vivid visions of something beyond, something which eye has not seen nor ear heard, have far more influence than any logical sequences whereby the same things may be demonstrated by the intellect. (*Orts* 28)

This view of the eternal working through the temporal is one developed by Coleridge and shared with Lewis and Tolkien; it is the worldview which posits a combination of two types of reality, one material and one mystical, neither of which may fully account for the full scope of reality. Thus fantasy becomes an important means whereby these two realities may intersect, and, according to Stephen Prickett in *Victorian Fantasy*, MacDonald shows his debt to the Platonic tradition: "MacDonald is a temperamental Platonist, only interested in the surface of this world for the news it gives him of another, hidden reality, perceived, as it were, in a glass darkly" (193).

In order for the eternal to be perceived through the temporal, an act of imagination is required. For MacDonald, this was the primary function of art, to provide the reader with a means of experiencing these realities. Just as Coleridge thought that our sensibilities were dulled by the "lethargy of custom," so MacDonald thought that the boredom of everyday life could bar us from seeing the world sacramentally. For MacDonald, as with our other mythopoeic authors, art was the means whereby the sacramental vision could be awakened. This theory of art is clearly illustrated in a passage from MacDonald's *Phantastes* and deserves to be quoted in full:

> But is it not rather that art rescues nature from the weary and sated regards of our senses, and the degrading injustice of our anxious every-day life, and, appealing to the imagination, which dwells apart,

> reveals nature in some degree as she really is, and as she represents herself to the eye of the child, whose every-day life, fearless and unambitious, meets the true import of the wonder-teeming world around him and rejoices therein without questioning? (89-90)

Thus, whether it is Coleridge's "lethargy of custom" or MacDonald's "weary and sated regards," what these authors share is a rejection of the way normative modes of perception limit the possibility of seeing the religious dimension which underlies the mundane world. This world view is shared by Lewis and Tolkien, the latter formulating his own response to this dilemma in his argument for "recovery" as the main function of fantasy literature. Tolkien argued that as reality is "appropriated," we run the risk of knowing our world too well, and once the world is intellectualized, that childlike sense of wonder, which is the defining element of mythopoeia, is lost. In the view of MacDonald, the ideal reader for fantasy is one who may recover the childlike wonder of the world, the vision which allows one the ability to perceive the numinous.

It is also worth noting that MacDonald refers to this act of the imagination as having the ability to reveal nature "as she really is." It is here that MacDonald's aesthetic theories intersect with concerns for the environment. In his essay "The Imagination" in *A Dish of Orts*, MacDonald discusses the culture of imagination which he argues "must be an ordering of life towards harmony with its ideal in the mind of God" (36). MacDonald's Christian ideology, infused as it is with Romanticism, reveals an immanent idea of God. One who is in harmony with nature is really one who is searching out the things of God. Again, this form of "knowing" nature is not an intellectual pursuit; instead, it is an emotive response to the natural world which engenders a certain feeling of wonder which is, according to such critics as Attebery, Manlove, and Tolkien, the defining element. This notion of the mood-engendering ability of nature is one which MacDonald believed was shared both with music and fairy tales. Since nature does not just wake one thought but many, so must the fairy tale in its dreamlike and chaotic images awaken many meanings. Thus for MacDonald, the less the intellect has a part in the act of perceiving, whether it be in nature or art, the more one comes closer to perceiving the numinous. This is the highest function of art, to wake readers into an awareness of the numinous so the world may be revisioned. As MacDonald states: "The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him" (*Orts* 319).

It is interesting to note that MacDonald's basis for his aesthetic theories, that of the imagination's ability to wake up meaning, is also shared with Otto in his discussion of the numinous consciousness. Otto defines the numen as that sense of the holy minus both its moral component and its rational component. It evokes an original feeling-oriented response which only later accretes the moral and rational. However, as Otto states throughout his book, this numinous consciousness cannot be taught but must be "awakened from the spirit." Although this is different from the moral dimension of religion which may be passed down from generation to generation, "what is incapable of being so handed down is this numinous basis and background to religion, which can only be induced, incited, and aroused" (Otto 60). One may wonder how this process of awakening, both for MacDonald and Otto, may be achieved. For MacDonald, it is achieved through the imagination as a means of engaging the unconscious. For Otto, it is achieved through the use of associated feelings. For example, if one posits the numinous as experience X, then one may compare and contrast this feeling with others to arrive at an understanding of what experience X really is: "In other words our X cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened" (Otto 7).

One of the clearest examples of MacDonald's aesthetic theories of waking up what Otto would call the numinous consciousness is in *Phantastes*. The book traces the journey of Anodos (Greek for "pathless") through fairyland, a journey through which he must learn to let go of his ego, which seeks to possess, in order to experience the numinous. Following MacDonald's own theories that a fairy tale must offer up dreamlike images directly from the unconscious, which he believed was the dwelling-place of God, the book contains episodes which are largely chaotic in themselves, at times even containing stories within stories. However, as Colin Manlove has pointed out, although *Phantastes* is the most disconnected of all of MacDonald's novels, it is bound by two connected themes which relate to the present study: the Ideal, which Anodos awakens and pursues throughout the book; and the Shadow, which Anodos acquires in a cottage inhabited by an ogress. Both of these themes relate to a reawakening of the numinous consciousness for a revisioning of the relationship to the natural world.

As Manlove argues, these themes all revolve around possessiveness. The quest for the Ideal in the form of the White Lady (which is a surrogate for the divine presence modeled after Novalis's Sophie) leads Anodos to an over-reliance on the self or ego which, in turn, dissociates him from an experience

of the numinous; similarly, the shadow which Anodos acquires is that projected aspect of himself which dissociates him from an experience of wonder, which is the defining aspect of mythopoeia. In effect, then, both the Ideal and the Shadow must be given up in order for Anodos to experience the numinous consciousness. This sacrificing of the self or ego in order to facilitate an experience of the numinous is what connects MacDonald to Coleridge, since the death of the self was present in MacDonald's own theories as well as his predecessor's. As he states in his *Unspoken Sermons*, "the one principle of Hell is— 'I am my own" (493). As with Coleridge, this clinging to the ego is what keeps us from experiencing that which is beyond words. Although Coleridge is considered a Romantic and MacDonald is considered a Victorian, both these authors express a distrust of empiricist or rationalist modes of thought. In their theories as well as their works, these authors look to another source of truth, that of the unconscious, which leads to the reawakening of the numinous.

The Ideal

The first theme which is related to possessiveness is the figure of the Ideal. In MacDonald's fantastic fiction, female characters often are means for male characters to achieve a higher spiritual state. Usually in the form of a wise old woman (Grandmother) or a form of ideal beauty with whom the male character must be initiated, these figures are feminine aspects of divinity, and the main hero must encounter this female in order to experience the numinous. One of the clearest cases for a progressive acceptance of the numinous is in the figure of the Ideal in *Phantastes*. In this theme, the hero Anodos pursues an ideal woman with whom he has fallen in love and, because of his love for her, he quests through three stages of love which are connected to Romantic Love and a form of love-death. The three stages are possessiveness, self-denial, and union upon death. It is through these stages which Anodos must journey in order for a recovery of the numinous consciousness and a subsequent revisioning of the relationship to the natural world.

In *The Nature of Love*, Irving Singer describes Romantic Love as love which transforms selfish desires into an unselfish oneness. This unselfish oneness is viewed as a oneness with the divine presence in the form of a female. Although this love has its expression in such figures as Keats, Shelley, and Blake, its origins can be traced even further back in time. From Plato and the neoplatonists, Romantic Love valued a purity which

transcended sexual relationships; from Christianity, especially in the form of ecstatic mysticism, it inherited an interpersonal love which allowed one to participate in divinity; and, from Courtly Love, it borrowed the idea that the relationship between a man and woman is comparable to religious love (283). The combination of these elements into Romantic Love allowed the lover to awaken a desire for the beloved which was primarily based on feeling rather than reason and would lead the lover to an experience of the numinous.

One important feature of Romantic Love, which was especially important to Keats and Blake, was the connection between imagination and the desire for oneness. For example, Blake believed that God and man existed within each other, as well as in the world, and this oneness could only be experienced through an act of the imagination. Blake states that "through the imagination we participate in God's being as the creator of such unity" (Singer 287). This transformation occurs through a process of "sympathetic identification," where one identifies with another in the process of love and, at the same time, perceives the unity behind the appearance of the two people, as well as the unity of all things.

A key concept in this expression of unity is merging. Whether it is merging with another person, nature, or God, these aspects all imply a merging into the totality of being. Since Romantic Love is a "metaphysical craving for unity," this unity can be reached through a variety of vehicles (Singer 288). Once the merging has occurred, and the unity experienced, all sense of ego is dissolved. To realize the nature of divinity present in all things is to realize that one is not an individual who is separate from the world but one who is combined into the totality of everything. It is through love that one loses this sense of self and merges into another. Love is the impetus for this experience of unity and, according to Singer, "Romantic Love—whether it is religious or secular, involving man and God or just human beings—finds its divinity in the act of loving" (293).

An important sub-mode of Romantic Love is its connection with the theme of love-death, a form of love reflected in the writings of Goethe, Novalis, and many other of the German Romantics. In contrast to Romantic Love, where the lovers are granted union, love-death affirms the position that a true union can only occur in death. In this view, death is seen as a superior state, and it is through death that an awareness of unity is comprehended. According to Singer, "The two lovers will consummate their love for one another after death in a way that nothing on earth can equal" (443).

It is significant that one of the main proponents of this type of love is the

German author Novalis, a major influence on the thought of George MacDonald. For Novalis, everything experienced sensuously, whether it is nature or a human being, is a manifestation of divine love. He experienced this love with a thirteen year old girl named Sophie, who tragically died two years after they met. In his poem *Hymns to the Night*, Novalis "portrays Sophie as an emanation from God, and he celebrates the phenomenon of death as the goal for which all life has been created" (Singer 442). In MacDonald's *Phantastes*, this theme of love-death, set within the broader aspects of Romantic Love, is effectively painted in the love of Anodos for his ideal beauty.

It is difficult to summarize the plot of *Phantastes* due to its dream-like structure. MacDonald believed that "the greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended" and that true fantasy should be fundamentally chaotic with only a small surface level of coherence (*Orts* 319). Thus both of his adult fantasies, *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, are filled with surrealist motifs, and the novels are more streams of chaotic images than structures containing plot lines. In *Phantastes*, the hero Anodos wakes up one morning to find that his room has transformed into Fairyland. As Manlove states, this transformation highlights MacDonald's presentation of fairyland as a projection of a different mode of reality, a "change from one mode of being to another, mirroring the collapse of the empirical mode of presentation and entry into the unconscious mind and the world it perceives" (60). On his journey further into fairyland, Anodos enters a cave, and it is here that he discovers and wakens a beautiful woman in a marble tomb whom he desires to possess. She flees from him, and throughout the novel, in various adventures, sometimes adventures within adventures, Anodos pursues his "marble lady" in order to experience a love which will ultimately lead him to a higher spirituality.

The first form of love Anodos embodies is extremely possessive, a love opposite the goal of Romantic Love. Before he enters Fairyland, a small figure resembling a Greek statue appears from a cubby hole within a secretary to tell Anodos of his upcoming quest. After the figure transforms into a life-sized woman, Anodos is overtaken with the desire to possess her and reaches out to embrace her. She rebukes his advances, stating that she is actually two hundred and thirty seven years old and implying that she is his grandmother. Rolland Hein, in *The Harmony Within*, points out that the episode reflects Anodos' confusion between two types of desire: sexual desire (which he is now pursuing), and a joyous desire for an experience in a supernatural world (which he should be pursuing) (58). Since Anodos is in a

low spiritual state, he does not see his potential for spiritual growth which contact with Fairyland can fulfill. Instead, he acts upon base sexuality which shows that the trip into Fairyland might be beneficial.

Once inside Fairyland, Anodos has experiences which further show that his love at this state is possessive. He is hunted early on in the novel by an evil ash tree who represents an all-consuming, possessive desire, and who wants to destroy Anodos. Just as he is about to be overtaken by the ash, he falls at the foot of a beech tree, which transforms into a woman, embracing and protecting Anodos from the evil ash. Through rescuing Anodos, the beech tree represents the opposite of the ash's possessiveness. She gives of herself to protect Anodos and, even though she loves him, lets him continue on his quest. These two trees, the ash and the beech, reflect the dichotomy of the two loves present in the novel: the selfish and the selfless. They also symbolize the potentials at war within Anodos' self. What Anodos does not realize at this point is that the beech tree, which values loving rather than being loved, is the spiritual goal which Anodos seeks.

When Anodos enters into a cave and discovers a lady encased in marble, he states: "What I did see appeared to me perfectly lovely; more near the face that had been born with me in my soul, than anything I had seen before in nature or art" (36). He sings a song which is effective in releasing the marble lady, but she immediately flees from Anodos and continues her journey in Fairyland. Anodos feels that his power to awaken the marble lady is a part of his imaginative act to bring her to life, and his possessive love for her leads to his referring to her as "my lost lady of the marble" (42).

In discussing the role of ideal beauty in *Phantastes*, Rolland Hein states: "The marble lady appears to symbolize the spirit of the Ideal, or the Perfect, and, as such, is in MacDonald's thought a surrogate for the divine Presence" (61). This idea is equated to the function of Romantic Love, in which the beloved represents a part of the lover, as well as a divine source, where all must be unified into a totality. However, as Anodos continues on his quest, he cannot experience this totality because of his egotistic desire to possess the marble lady. In fact, this mode of love is present throughout most of the novel, and Anodos continuously sees her only as property, not a path to an experience of the numinous. What Anodos fails to realize is that true merging can only occur when the ego is denied, and the love is giving rather than taking in nature.

One of the first insights readers get in relation to MacDonald's vision of true Romantic Love, where one must die to the self, is in a story Anodos

reads in the Fairy Palace. It must be remembered that MacDonald's fantasies often employ stories within stories and, in this case, what Anodos reads is, in a dream-like fashion, somewhat related to his own quest.

The story he reads centers around a figure named Cosmo, a university student who has a fascination with magic and the occult. While helping a friend judge the value of an old suit of armor in a store, Cosmo is overtaken by a desire to possess an old mirror which happens to be in the corner. He purchases the mirror and, upon taking it home, notices that at certain times of the day, a beautiful woman appears within it. This, again, is the theme of the ideal beauty, but what is revealed is an alternative form of loving. Through the suggestion of the lady in the mirror, Cosmo learns that he cannot truly love her until she is freed from the enchantment of the mirror. He is told to break the mirror at the risk of never seeing his ideal again. After much inner conflict, Cosmo finally breaks the mirror, and after subsequent adventures, ends up dying in his lady's arms.

What occurs within the story is an act of renunciation, where in order to love his ideal, Cosmo must break the mirror. There is a love-death element present as Cosmo must destroy the image in order to gain a deeper love based in reality; also, he must literally die for his love at the end of the story. Thus, here, if one reads the psychological dimensions of the novel and its dream imagery, Cosmo's tale represents a similar potential as that of the two trees: a growing awareness in Anodos of a new form of love, one that is not possessive and dominating, but one which is self-denying.

This form of love which is self-denying, and connected with the Romantic love-death ideal, was present in George MacDonald's life. Viewing fantasy as an inner projection of unconscious thoughts, it is easy to see the figure of Anodos as a projection of MacDonald's own unconscious self. In a letter to his wife Louisa, he wrote: "Is love a beautiful thing? You and I love but who created love? Let us ask him to purify our love to make it more real and more self-denying" (26). It was only through this self-denial that MacDonald believed that one could experience God. In fact, it is so self-denying that MacDonald often used the terms of *death* to convey a sense of it. In writing on what is called "daily death" he says, "We die daily. Happy those who daily come to life as well" (qtd. in Lewis 121). This view is also present in the Cosmo story. In the middle of the narrative, added in separately as an independent thought, it states: "Who lives, he dies; who dies, he lives" (95). These various references to death reflect MacDonald's view that to love another is to die to the self, and it is through death that one can

experience the unity of God and the world.

Upon completion of the Cosmo tale in the Fairy Palace, Anodos still has not learned the advantage of self-giving love. In fact, when he see his marble lady again as a statue on a pedestal, many of the earlier episodes are replayed. He tries to bring her to life again with his songs and, upon his success, tries again to grasp her. She flees from him, only to be pursued through the Faerian landscape. When Anodos' attempts to capture her fail, he jumps from a rocky promontory in a suicide attempt. However, as he becomes submerged in the water, he experiences a new sense of joy. (The reference to water is one of the clues which symbolizes Anodos' changing attitudes.) In MacDonald's work, water represents death and rebirth. More specifically, it symbolizes Anodos' loss of ego, which has, up to this point, dominated his possessive love for the ideal. Now that Anodos has experienced this loss of ego, he can fully learn the joy of a self-denying love.

For MacDonald, this self-denying love is best realized and employed in action. After Anodos survives his suicidal sea episode, he finds a cottage which is inhabited by a wise old woman. In her cottage she has four mysterious doors, all of which lead Anodos to some aspect of his former life. One of the most important doors is the door of sighs, where Anodos learns that the marble lady whom he has been pursuing is in love with a knight, Sir Percival, and the best course of action that Anodos can follow is to learn to serve his marble lady and release her. After this lesson is learned, Anodos returns to the cottage where the old woman tells him that he must go and do something worthwhile.

Now that Anodos has realized the importance of being humble and serving his lady, he sets out on many quests to prove his service. He helps two knights destroy giants who are plaguing their town, helps a girl destroy wooden men who keep her from finding her way home, and he saves sacrificial victims in a forest church service. This latter adventure is of the most importance because Anodos gives up his life for others. He dresses as one of the sacrificial victims and walks to the altar where he had witnessed the others disappear. He destroys one of the religious images and, as a result, a huge monstrous brute emerges from where it stood. After a fight, both the creature and Anodos die.

This episode clearly connects *Phantastes* with the love-death component of Romantic Love. What Anodos discovers is that death is a joyous event, and he becomes one with nature. After being buried, he states, "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 feeling one with her own life, her own essential being and nature" (181). Thus it is only after this literal death that Anodos has a connection with the earth. He has undergone a transformation similar to what Bonnie Gaarden describes as the Romantic spiral journey, a sort of "ethical evolution." Within this spiral journey, there is an original unity which is lost once the ego separates from what is non-ego, mirroring the dissociative process between the human and non-human. The final goal, however, is the achievement of this original unity on a much higher, spiritual level (6). This is the journey undertaken by the Mariner in Coleridge's poem as well. Referring to this process as a form of Christian pantheism, Gaarden says, "God's heart expressed in nature communicates to man's heart more significant truth about deity than any doctrinal system could possibly convey to the intellect" (6). It is this movement from unity to dis-unity and to a higher unity which Anodos undergoes, and it is this process which gains him access to the numinous and allows him a revisioning of his relationship with nature. In fact, in one of his transformations, he becomes a primrose in his marble lady's garden, and when she notices its beauty, she plucks it and gives it a kiss.

Anodos realizes that death has brought him closer to his love than in life. In the most important passage in the book, Anodos verbalizes what he has learned in his Fairyland quest:

> I knew now, that it is by loving, and not by being loved, that one can come nearest the soul of another; yea, that, when two love, it is the loving of each other, and not the being beloved by each other, that originates and perfects and assures their blessedness. I knew that love gives to him that loveth, power over any soul beloved, even if that soul love him not, bringing him inwardly close to that spirit; a power that cannot be but for good; for in proportion as selfishness intrudes, the love ceases, and the power which springs therefrom dies. Yet all love will, one day, meet with its return. All true love will, one day, behold its own image in the eyes of the beloved, and be humbly glad. This is possible in the realms of lofty death. (18)

These final episodes, and this final speech on love, highlight important aspects of the love-death relationship in Romantic Ideal Love. In Romantic Love, as noted earlier, the emphasis is on merging, either between two lovers or with nature or God. Whatever one merges with involves a unity which is experienced between all things. Thus love acts only as a vehicle to achieve this higher sensibility. In Anodos' case, he merges with nature and, through

it, realizes the oneness of the world. Because he must die in order for the merging to occur, the death imagery employed by MacDonald cannot be overemphasized. Death is not a negative state but one in which humans have the ability to realize what is higher than the finite self. It is a state which brings one closer to nature, to God and closer to the beloved. For followers of the love-death tradition, it is only in death that a true consummation occurs. This value of death is true in MacDonald's text as well. Anodos anticipates the day when the death of his beloved will reunite him with her on another level.

Phantastes shows a continuous progression of love through the character of Anodos. He begins his adventures with a possessive love which reflects his physical needs. As his adventure continues, he realizes that true love can only come through a death of self, where claims to possession are supplanted by a joy only experienced by serving another. As the old woman in the cottage sings, it is better to be a well giving water than an impure cistern only receiving for itself.

Many critics have pointed out the heavy emphasis on female figures within *Phantastes*. In fact, the form of love MacDonald advocates through Anodos' quest for the Ideal is equated with feminine thought. In his essay "*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom," Roderick McGillis states: "Feminine thinking takes us out of the self and into the joy of participating in all things" (40). This is exactly the love-death component of Romantic Love. Through loving the woman in all her fantastic forms in the novel, Anodos leaves the possessive side of himself for a love that is humble, serving and connected to God. Manlove argues that the theme connected with females is the renunciation of the mother figure, where to achieve unity within the divine, as well as unity with the earth, the female must be removed. Thus the final union with nature is brought about only by Anodos' willingness to give up his quest for the Ideal. However, it is this act of renunciation which allows Anodos to sacrifice his life for others and upon his literal death, "he enters that higher childhood of union with earth, of solid self with solid self, which the earlier mothers have in part prefigured" (Manlove 66). So, whether it is his Ideal, or the beech tree, or the wise woman of the four-square cottage, these images of the female culminate with the final encounter with the ultimate mother, mother earth.

However, final death is not to be Anodos' lot. In the last chapter of the book, Anodos awakens back to an earthly existence and finds that he has left fairyland behind. He returns to his castle and the love of his sisters, but he is

still haunted by his strange experiences in fairyland. He doubts whether his adventures may be translated into common life. From time to time though, he often thinks of his adventures, and even looks about for the mystical red sign, which he believes will lead him back to the four-square cottage upon his final death. The last image readers are presented with is Anodos lying underneath the shadow of a beech tree, resting. He hears a faint voice which tells him, "A great good is coming-is coming-is coming to thee, Anodos" (185). He opens his eyes and fancies he sees the old woman from the four-square cottage speaking to him through the trees. It is these images of the mother which conclude the novel: "All images of motherhood: the earth, the beech tree, and the wise woman herself come together harmoniously at the end of life" (Wolff 108).

The Shadow

The second figure related to the theme of possessiveness is the Shadow. Midway through his pursuit of his Ideal, Anodos comes to a small hut inhabited by a woman. Entering her hut, he finds her reading from a book certain stanzas which deal with the theme of darkness. Anodos' curiosity is activated when he see a cupboard in the hut, and he immediately decides that he will look in it. When he approaches it, the woman, without looking up from her book, voices her prohibition: "You had better not open that door" (56). However, as in the typical folktale motif "the forbidden thing," Anodos opens the cupboard, despite her warning. After noticing a few household tools, he sees that the back of the cupboard opens up onto the night sky. He sees a dark figure, a sort of shadow, running towards him. It immediately enters the hut, but Anodos is unaware of its exact location. He asks the shadow's whereabouts and the lady responds, "there on the floor, behind you." Anodos is perplexed as to the nature of the shadow, and why it is attached to himself. Upon asking the lady its meaning, she states, "It is only your shadow that has found you...everybody's shadow is ranging up and down looking for him" (57). As Anodos leaves the hut, he realizes the lady is an ogress, and he knows his shadow will have a negative effect on his subsequent adventures in fairyland.

The effects of the shadow are detailed, for the most part, in chapter nine of the book and require full attention because it is here that MacDonald's emphasis on the theme of wonder, which is the characteristic of mythopoeia, is fully developed. The first two incidents which involve the shadow relate to its ability to affect nature. Upon awakening from a rest, Anodos notices that

although the flowers he had lain upon were down- trodden, the one which his shadow fell were "scorched," "shriveled," "dead," and "hopeless of any resurrection" (59). In a similar manner, when the shadow actually moves to a position on front of Anodos, it shoots forth rays of darkness and "wherever a ray struck, that part of the earth, or sea, or sky, became void, and desert, and sad to my heart" (59). Thus, given MacDonald's emphasis on the imagination's ability to perceive nature "as she is," as a manifestation of the numinous, the shadow is that part of ourselves which cuts us off from any experience of the beauties of the natural world.

That the shadow destroys wonder is evident in Anodos' encounters with others as well. In one encounter, he see a fairychild who has two toys which are described in the following manner: "The one was the tube through which the fairy-gifted poet looks when he beholds the same thing everywhere; the other that through which he looks when he combines into new forms of loveliness those images of beauty which his own choice has gathered from all regions wherein he has traveled" (59). The description of these toys is largely reminiscent of MacDonald's own theories concerning the imagination, especially as it relates to the numinous. Beholding "the same thing everywhere" is the ability of the imaginative mind to perceive the eternal behind the temporal, while combining "into new forms of loveliness" mirrors MacDonald's Coleridgean views of the imagination's ability to create new forms. However, what is of interest is that once Anodos realizes the nature of these toys, the shadow embraces the fairychild, who then becomes a mere "commonplace boy, with a rough broad-brimmed straw hat" (60) whose toys now become a multiplying glass and a kaleidoscope. Again, the shadow's function is to destroy the imaginative wonder by which the world may be perceived in its most sacred manner.

What is perhaps the most interesting is that, during the course of these encounters with the shadow (and there are more), Anodos begins to welcome its disenchanting power. He states: "I will not see beauty where there is none. I will dare to behold things as they are. And if I live in a wasteland instead of a paradise, I will live knowing where I live" (61). As many critics have pointed out, the shadow, by denying the central element of wonder, represents an intellectual or materialistic mode of perception. Its function is to destroy any numinous perception of the world and appropriate reality so that it is "known," thus negating any possibility of recovery or revision within the context of the sacramental vision. As Robert Lee Wolff points out in *The Golden Key*, "The shadow represents pessimistic and cynical

disillusionment, the worldly wiseness that destroys beauty, childish and naive pleasures, the delight of friendship and love; it is a foe of innocence, of openness, of optimism, of the imagination" (67). It is this shadow which Anodos must lose.

There is one more important episode with the shadow which is relevant to the thesis of the shadow's ability to dissociate from the numinous: his encounter with the maiden with the crystal globe. In this encounter, Anodos travels for three days with a maiden who has a crystal globe as her playtoy. As with the previous episode with the ogress of the hut, the maiden voices her prohibition concerning the globe: "you must not touch it, or if you do, it must be very gently" (61). Again, Anodos' curiosity proves too much. He touches the globe which then emits a sweet sound, increasing to a low harmony as he continues to touch the globe. Eventually, however, the shadow reappears and enwraps the maiden along with her globe. Although the shadow has no power to change the maiden, as with the "commonplace boy," it implants within Anodos an irresistible desire to touch the globe again, this time with disastrous results: the globe bursts and emits a black vapor which descends over both the maiden and the shadow. Distraught, the maiden picks up the fragments of the globe and escapes into the forest. All Anodos is left with are her parting words, "You have broken my globe!" (62).

This episode is important because when Anodos meets the maiden in a subsequent chapter, he learns the most important lesson concerning the perception of the numinous: the death of the self. The shadow does show up in other places in the text, for example in his adventures in the fairy palace; however, it is Anodos' imprisonment in the tower which directly relates to the theme of the death of the self. After he encounters the lady of the four-square cottage who tells him "Go, my son, and do something worth doing" (144), Anodos comes upon two brothers who are preparing to wage a battle with three giants who are threatening their country. Anodos proves to be the third knight prophesied for battle and, after much preparation, the three knights meet and battle the three giants. Unfortunately, the two brothers are killed in the battle but not until they have successfully killed two of the giants. The last giant Anodos kills, and when his pride surfaces as the result of his victory, the shadow appears again.

It is here that the shadow comes to represent Anodos' own pride and over-reliance on the ego, and it is this that dissociates him from any experience of the numinous. After defeating the giants, Anodos compares himself with the great knights of old, specifically Galahad, and as he travels

through the forest, his pride increases. He then encounters a knight who has the same armor and the same horse as himself. The knight has power over Anodos and commands him to follow. As they approach an isolated tower, Anodos realizes the connection between the knight and his own shadow: "I had a terrible conviction that the knight and he were one" (161). As Anodos enters the tower, he notices that the knight and horse have disappeared only to be replaced by the shadow which enters the tower with him. Wolff notices here a change in the nature of the shadow: "the shadow, which began as the intellectual skepticism that withers the imagination, and which later becomes conscience or consciousness of self, has now become personal pride, or a misconception of one's true role in the world" (103). Whether the shadow destroys wonder or mirrors Anodos' own pride, it is MacDonald's symbol for that which bars any recovery of the sacramental vision.

Imprisoned within the tower, Anodos notices the strange properties of his dwelling: when night comes, the walls of his prison vanish and he imagines himself free, while upon the coming of light, he is once again confined to his prison. After many days and nights, Anodos finally hears a sweet song outside his prison walls. When the song is completed, Anodos opens the door to his prison and realizes he was free to leave at any point. Upon leaving, he learns that his deliverer is none other than the maiden with the crystal globe. Apparently, the song brings Anodos to an epiphany because he realizes his pride and vows to be humble and lowly, to be a mere doer of his deeds. As Keith Wilson points out in "The Quest for 'the Truth,'" "The girl's song invites Anodos to come from his house of pride and be united with the spirit of the earth: he must lose the overwhelming sense of self and submit himself to a benevolent cosmic force" (150).

This loss of a sense of self comes to Anodos when he realizes the delight in being lowly, stating, "I am what I am, nothing more" (166). Upon this revelation, the shadow finally disappears. Thus the shadow has come to represent, symbolically, the disillusionment which prevents one from the recovery of the numinous in order for the revisioning of the world within the context of the sacramental vision. As Wilson further points out, the shadow "shackles him to the mundane" and "If the shadow is the foe of all delight in the natural, it is also the foe of God" (147). Once Anodos realizes he had lost his shadow, and that it is best to be humbled and lowly, he knows that with this 'death of the self' he can open to the possibility of an experience of something higher, that of the numinous. He reflects, "Self will come to life even in the slaying of the self; but there is ever something deeper and

stronger than it, which will emerge at last from the unknown abysses of the soul: will it be as a solemn gloom, burning with eyes? or a clear morning after the rain? or a smiling child, that finds itself nowhere, and everywhere?" (166).

The reference to the "slaying of the self" is what underlies the entire myth of *Phantastes*, incorporating both the theme of the Ideal and the Shadow. If these two themes revolve around possessiveness, as Manlove argues, then MacDonald's thesis posits that it is only this possessiveness that keeps one from the experience of the numinous and the subsequent revisioning of the natural world. The "death of the self" is also analyzed by Otto is his discussion of the mysterium tremendum. In contrast to the feeling of majestas, or "absolute overpoweringness," (Otto 21) the subject feels its own nothingness in the face of this overwhelming power, and this feeling inculcates religious humility. By contrasting what he terms "consciousness of createdness," the focus on the creature as being created, with the "consciousness of creaturehood," the focus on the nothingness of the creature, Otto posits that the latter is the most effective in emphasizing the superiority of a power other than the subject. This consciousness is akin to various forms of mysticism and stresses two foci paramount to our present thesis: the annihilation of the self, and its complement, the emphasis on the transcendent as the sole reality (21).

This annihilation of the self and the stress on the transcendent unite both MacDonald and Coleridge's mythopoeic visions. Through their works, the main characters only recover a sense of the numinous when they dissolve their separate selves and see a transcendent reality over and above the mundane. In a parallel manner, it is the loss of the self which brings about the revisioning of the natural world and a participation in the numinous. Both the Mariner and Anodos are on unique quests, to gain identities which reflect a higher sense of spirituality. As Roderick McGillis states of *Phantastes*, "the quest for identity is a quest for continuous becoming, not to imprint the self on the world, but to achieve that joy which is a going out of the self" (31).

Keith Wilson argues that George MacDonald is "the most apocalyptic of Victorian fantasists" (141), reasoning that the fundamental myth underlying *Phantastes* is *via negationis*, "the discovery of God or reality by the progressive stripping away of the veils of illusion" (141). (Wilson employs the term "apocalyptic" in its technical sense of "revealing" or "unveiling.") This is an accurate statement and is easily applicable to the authors

considered in the present study, although their means of projecting these apocalyptic visions differ. For Coleridge and MacDonald, the discovery of God or reality is achieved through an annihilation of the self, and it is the overemphasis on the ego which keeps one from the recovery of the numinous consciousness. It is also that clinging to the ego which dissociates one from total participation in the environment. This is precisely the thesis argued by Evernden, that the western stress on the ego denies interrelatedness and fails to recover or revise our original relationship to the natural world. For C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, on the other hand, our original relationship to the natural world is not to be recovered by any annihilation of the self. Their books offer the reader apocalyptic visions on a more epic scale. It is not a transcendence of the self which gives access to the numinous, but a transcendence of the entire world. Finally, it is not *here* in nature where the numinous resides. It is elsewhere.

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