REDEEMING ROMANTICISM: GEORGE MACDONALD, PERCY SHELLEY, AND LITERARY HISTORY

Jennifer Koopman

Department of English
McGill University, Montréal
August 2006

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-32200-0
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-32200-0

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines George MacDonald's preoccupation with his literary predecessor Percy Shelley. While eminently Victorian in many ways, MacDonald was equally a late Romantic, who was inspired by the Romantic poets and positioned himself as the heir to their radical tradition. While he channeled their visionary ardor, he also made it his duty to correct what he saw as their flaws. I read MacDonald through the figure of Shelley, with whom MacDonald seems to have personally identified, but to whose atheism MacDonald, a devout believer, objected. MacDonald's fascination with Shelley works its way into his fiction, which mythologizes literary history, offering fables about the transmission of the literary spirit down through the generations. Throughout his work, MacDonald resurrects Shelley in various guises, idealizing and reshaping Shelley into an image that is startlingly like MacDonald himself. This project contributes to MacDonald scholarship by offering a new approach to his work. It positions MacDonald, who is often portrayed as an ahistorical myth-maker, in an explicitly historical light, revealing him as a Victorian mythographer who was deeply invested in questions of literary criticism and historical succession.

Chapter 1 introduces MacDonald's concern with literary genealogy, and discusses how his work as a literary critic and historian idealizes Shelley. Chapter 2 examines how MacDonald's *Phantastes* portrays literary history as romantic quest, featuring Shelley as a heroic but fallen knight, and opening questions about literary fatherhood. Chapter 3 interprets the gothic tale "The Cruel Painter" as a myth about the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, in which MacDonald rewrites the story of Shelley's involvement with Mary Godwin and her father William Godwin. Chapter 4 considers *Sir Gibbie* and *Donal Grant*, works in which MacDonald explicitly critiques Shelley, and implicitly positions himself as the savior of the English literary tradition. Chapter 5 investigates MacDonald's later works, *The Flight of the Shadow* and *Lilith,* in which Shelley—and evil itself—become more complex entities. Throughout the dissertation, particular attention is given to the issue of repeating history *vs.* redeeming history, a tension that is reflected in MacDonald's use of vampire imagery to portray the unredeemed past.

RESUME

Dans cette thèse de doctorat, nous examinons les préoccupations de George MacDonald avec Percy Shelly son prédécesseur littéraire. Même s'il était un auteur éminemment victorien de bien des façons, Macdonald était également un des derniers écrivains romantiques. Inspiré par les poètes romantiques, il se considérait comme l'héritier de leur tradition radicale. D'un côté, il canalisait leur ardeur visionnaire, mais il s'est tout de même fait un devoir de corriger ce qu'il considérait comme leurs erreurs. J'ai lu MacDonald à la lumière de Shelley, à qui MacDonald semble s'être identifié. Malgré cela, MacDonald, fervent croyant, s'est toujours objecté à l'athéisme de Shelley. La fascination de MacDonald pour le travail de Shelley transparaît dans sa fiction qui mythifie l'histoire littéraire en offrant, à travers les générations, des fables sur la transmission de la pensée littéraire. Dans son œuvre, Macdonald redonne vie à Shelly sous plusieurs visages, tout en idéalisant et en remodelant Shelley en une image qui ressemble étonnamment à MacDonald lui-même.

Au chapitre 1, nous introduisons la préoccupation de Macdonald pour la généalogie littéraire et discutons comment son travail de critique littéraire et d'historien idéalise Shelly. Au chapitre 2, nous examinons comment *Phantastes* de MacDonald dépeint l'histoire littéraire comme une quête romantique mettant en scène Shelley en chevalier héroïque mais déchu et tout en initiant un questionnement à propos de la paternité littéraire. Au chapitre 3, on interprète le conte gothique *The Cruel Painter* comme un mythe sur la transition entre le Siècle des lumières et le romantisme, transition dans laquelle MacDonald réécrit l'histoire de l'implication de Shelley avec Mary Godwin et son père William Godwin. Au chapitre 4, on examine *Sir Gibbie* et *Donal Grant,* œuvres dans lesquelles MacDonald critique explicitement Shelley et se positionne implicitement comme le sauveur de la tradition littéraire anglaise. Au chapitre 5, nous nous pencherons sur *The Flight of The Shadow*, et *Lilith*, les dernières œuvres de MacDonald, dans lesquelles Shelley et le diable lui-même deviennent des entités plus complexes. Tout au long de cette thèse, nous porterons une attention plus particulière au problème de l'histoire qui se répète par opposition à l'histoire qui rachète, une tension qui

se reflète dans l'utilisation des images de vampires de MacDonald pour illustrer le passé irracheté.

Ce projet s'ajoute aux travaux MacDonald et présente une nouvelle approche de son œuvre. Il situe MacDonald, souvent dépeint comme un écrivain non historique, créateur de mythes, sous un angle explicitement historique en le révélant comme un spécialiste victorien du mythe qui s'est profondément investi dans des questions de critique littéraire et de succession historique.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

FOREWORD vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS viii

1. INTRODUCTION: LITERARY GENEALOGY 9
- 1.1. Overview of Criticism 9
- 1.2. Redeeming Literary History 14
- 1.3. MacDonald and the Romantic Poets 24
- 1.4. Early Revisions of Shelley: "Julian and Maddalo" *vs.* "Within and Without" 34

2. LITERARY HISTORY AS ROMANTIC QUEST: *PHANTASTES* 41
- 2.1. MacDonald's Romanticism: *Phantastes vs.* "Alastor" 41
- 2.2. Reflections of Shelley: Shelley as Knight 68
- 2.3. Further Reflections of Shelley: Cosmo's Story 77
- 2.4. Rewriting Shelley 84

3. REVISING THE SHELLEY-GODWIN TRIANGLE: *ADELA CATHCART* AND "THE CRUEL PAINTER" 99
- 3.1. The Story Within: "The Cruel Painter" 99
- 3.2. The Story Without: *Adela Cathcart* 123

4. THE RESTORATION OF ROMANCE: TYPOLOGICAL REPETITION IN *DONAL GRANT* AND *SIR GIBBIE* 137
- 4.1. The Problems with Romanticism: *Donal Grant* 137
- 4.2. Romance *vs.* Reality: *Sir Gibbie* 171
- 4.3. Repetition and Redemption 196

5. SHELLEY REDEEMED: SECRECY AND REVELATION IN *THE FLIGHT OF THE SHADOW* AND *LILITH* 205
- 5.1. Secrecy: Redeeming the Past Generation 205
- 5.2. Shelley Redeemed 232
- 5.3. The Limitations of Literature 244
- 5.4. Reuniting with the Father 249
- 5.5. Lilith and Romanticism 253

AFTERWORD 263

WORKS CITED 265

FOREWORD

This study examines the work of Scottish writer George MacDonald (1824-1905), whose career spanned the latter half of the nineteenth century, beginning in the mid-1850s and ending in the late 1890s. Literary discussion of MacDonald so far has been incisive, but limited in approach, having been dominated mainly by mythopoeic criticism that focuses on his fantasy work and fairy tales for children, for which he is best remembered today. Largely unexamined are his novels, which form the bulk of his *oeuvre*, as well as his literary criticism. My research aims to uncover one of the many understudied sides of MacDonald, namely, his contribution to debates about the evolution and history of English literature.

While eminently Victorian in many ways, MacDonald was at heart a late but enthusiastic flagbearer of Romanticism, who found his inspiration in the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. He seems to have seen himself as the heir to their radical tradition, someone who had inherited their revolutionary spirit, but whose duty was also to correct their flaws—or what he saw as their flaws. This study shows how he positioned himself as a literary historian and late Romantic, both explicitly and implicitly, in his critical writings as well as in his novels. Specifically, I read MacDonald through the figure of Percy Shelley, a poet with whom MacDonald seems to have particularly identified. Throughout his fiction, MacDonald resurrects Shelley in various guises, idealizing and reshaping the Romantic poet into an image that is startlingly like MacDonald himself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express appreciation to my colleagues, friends, and family for their encouragement at all stages in the production of this dissertation. This research was made possible by grants from McGill University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for which I am most grateful. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Maggie Kilgour, for her patience and wisdom in helping to shape my responses to MacDonald's work, as well as her unwavering confidence in the merits of this project. I also want to thank Dr. Monique Morgan and Dr. Tabitha Sparks for their perspective, advice and insight. Focusing on a single author for several years can induce a sort of literary myopia, so I am grateful to my friends and colleagues in McGill's Department of English, and in the Montréal Nineteenth-Century Reading Group, for their good humor and for reminding me on a regular basis of the world of literature that lies beyond MacDonald. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the George MacDonald Society for its warm support of this project, with particular thanks to Kirstin Johnson and John Docherty, whose enthusiasm for all matters MacDonald is truly infectious. For assistance in tracking down difficult-to-find documents, I am indebted to the staff of McGill's Interlibrary Loan department, as well as the staff of The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Many thanks also to Jules Gaulin for his translation help. I wish to thank my family for their ongoing encouragement, especially my aunt, Gretchen Longcore, who probably didn't realize what she had started when she gave me *The Princess and the Goblin* for my twelfth birthday. Heartfelt thanks to my mother, Penny Koopman, for her ever-cheerful presence and stalwart assistance with the preparation of the final drafts. Finally, on the homefront, John Bickle deserves special mention for his tireless patience, support and encouragement. I cannot thank him enough.

1

INTRODUCTION: LITERARY GENEALOGY

1.1. OVERVIEW OF CRITICISM

The early years of George MacDonald's critical revival in the mid-twentieth century was characterized by ahistorical approaches, following the lead of two works, C.S. Lewis's preface to the 1946 *George MacDonald: an Anthology*, and W.H. Auden's introduction to *The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald* (Noonday Press's 1954 reprinting of *Phantastes* and *Lilith)*. The next two full-length studies of MacDonald were largely psychoanalytical, with Robert Lee Wolff's 1961 *The Golden Key* offering a Freudian evaluation, and Richard Reis's 1972 *George MacDonald*, a discussion of symbolism and archetype. Scholarly consideration of MacDonald's historical significance became more prominent in the 1970s, in studies that tended to position MacDonald on the main trunk of the mythopoeic tree that would later produce C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and other twentieth-century fantasists. Fruitful criticism has emerged from this genealogical approach, with scholars upholding MacDonald as a Victorian grandfather who ushered in a golden age of children's literature and who begot modern forms of fantasy and science-fiction. As Manlove recently remarked, "MacDonald is no mere forebear, he is the fountainhead of modern fantasy!" (Manlove, "MacDonald – Tolkien's Master" 7).[1]

---

[1] See Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy* 55-98; *Scottish Fantasy Literature* 83-102; *From Alice to Harry Potter* 9, 11, 127 195; and "MacDonald and Kingsley" 140-162. See also

In general, studies of MacDonald in the context of his nineteenth-century contemporaries have been limited, though investigations into MacDonald's literary sources is an area of growing interest in MacDonald studies.[2] As Manlove, Robb, Raeper, and others have shown, MacDonald's work is firmly grounded in his Scottish heritage, with his work reflecting his upbringing in rural Aberdeenshire, as well as his ancestry in Scottish literature and lore.[3] Scholars such as Manlove, Prickett and McGillis have also begun to expose MacDonald's roots in German and English Romanticism, revealing him to be a "belated Romantic" whose "images, themes, and language derive from his great Romantic precursors" (McGillis 1991 150).[4] Much historical excavation remains to be done: as Robert Trexler's recent survey of MacDonald scholarship points out, MacDonald's interest in sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers, his indebtedness to the Hermetic/Alchemical and Kabbalistic traditions, his kinship to Blakean and

---

Roderick McGillis, *For the Childlike* 1-15; also Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* 150-197 and "George MacDonald and the Poetics of Realism" 82-89.

[2] Notable efforts to position MacDonald among his contemporaries include Wolff's *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England*; Stephen Prickett's *Romanticism and Religion*, John Docherty's *The Literary Products of the Lewis Carroll—George MacDonald Friendship*; and Lindskoog's "Mark Twain and George MacDonald."

[3] See David Robb, "George MacDonald's Aberdeenshire Fairytale" 205-216 and "Realism and Fantasy in the Fiction of George MacDonald" 275-290. See also Colin Manlove, "George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels" 68-88; Jamie Rankin, "The Genesis of George MacDonald's Scottish Novels" 49-67; Prickett, "The Two Worlds of George MacDonald" 14-23; and William Raeper, "Diamond and Kilmeny: MacDonald, Hogg, and the Scottish Folk Tradition" 133-144.

[4] See Stephen Prickett, "Fictions and Metafictions" 109-125, *Romanticism and Religion* 211-238, and *Victorian Fantasy* 150-197. See also Roderick McGillis, "Childhood and Growth" 150-167; and Colin Manlove,"Some Possible Sources for Phantastes" 5-8.

Swedenborgian mysticism, and his participation in nineteenth century theological and political debates, are all areas that invite scholarly exposition.[5]

Over the past twenty years MacDonald has also been embraced, primarily in North America, by an evangelical school of critics. Spurred on by C. S. Lewis's contention that MacDonald's devotional merits exceed his literary ones, this strain of criticism endorses MacDonald as a Christian fantasist—his unorthodox beliefs notwithstanding—and emphasizes the centrality of his Christian beliefs in his work.[6]

While MacDonald has enjoyed a recent resurgence in popular readership, he is often overlooked by mainstream literary scholarship. His failure to generate widespread critical interest is due in part to the fact that MacDonald, though known to his Victorian contemporaries as a lecturer, literary critic and novelist, is remembered today chiefly for his contribution to fantasy and children's literature, areas often considered to be peripheral to mainstream literary scholarship, even subliterary. C. S. Lewis may also be held to some account for the critical disregard of MacDonald. As John Pennington recently argued, Lewis had an unintentionally damning impact when he confessed that he was "concerned with MacDonald not as a writer but as a Christian teacher" (Lewis Preface 14). Lewis helped revive interest in MacDonald when he insisted that what MacDonald "does best is fantasy—fantasy that hovers between the allegorical and the mythopoeic" (Lewis, Preface 14). However, his declaration that MacDonald "has no place" (Lewis, Preface 14) in the "first rank" (Lewis, Preface 14) of literature, and

---

[5] For further discussion, see Trexler 9-11.

[6] See, for instance, Rolland Hein's *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald*, which focuses on how MacDonald's "imaginative prose is shaped by his theological convictions" (xvi).

"perhaps not even in its second" (Lewis, Preface 14) effectively demoted MacDonald to subliterary status.[7] The failure to read MacDonald's work under a rigorously critically light, is especially dangerous, Pennington emphasized, in light of the recent proliferation of bowdlerized abridgements of MacDonald's works, such as those produced by Bethany House and edited by Michael Phillips.[8]

Even before Lewis, MacDonald's early twentieth-century admirers tended to depict him in a mythical, ahistorical light. In 1901, G. K. Chesterton described the elderly MacDonald as the knight Great-Heart (whom MacDonald played in his family's dramatic stagings of *The Pilgrim's Progress),*[9] a heroic figure disengaged from history and time:

> The idea of Matthew Arnold in spangled armour, of professor Huxley waving a sword before the footlights, would not impress us with unmixed gravity. But Dr. MacDonald seemed an elemental figure, a man unconnected with any particular age, a character in one of his own fairy tales, a true mystic to whom the supernatural was natural. ("George MacDonald and His Work" 370)

---

[7] John Pennington discusses the implications of Lewis's comments in "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: The George MacDonald Industry and the Difficult Rehabilitation of a Reputation," which was presented at the 2005 Hammersmith Symposium on George MacDonald, and again at the 2005 Baylor University conference George MacDonald and His Children. See also Durie, "George MacDonald" 163-185.

[8] See Pennington, above, and also Docherty, "The Limitations of Reductionist Approaches to Thomas Wingfold, Curate," which discusses the problems of the modern evangelical abridgements of MacDonald's novels.

[9] For several years MacDonald family performed a stage adaptation of *Pilgrim's Progress* to entertain and edify (and raise the eyebrows of several of) their friends and neighbours. See Raeper, *George MacDonald* 264-65, 272, 338-339, 346, 350, 355, 385; also Rachel Johnson, "Pilgrims: The MacDonalds and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*" 15-25.

Chesterton's enthusiastic celebration of MacDonald as "a man unconnected with any particular age" captures the romantic otherworldliness that permeates MacDonald's writing. Nevertheless, it does MacDonald a disservice to remove him from his age and relegate him entirely to the mystical ether. Indeed, I would argue that MacDonald, for all his myth-making capacities, is profoundly concerned with matters of literary history.

My study is both a contribution to, and redirection of, MacDonald studies. I want to show that MacDonald, far from standing outside of literary history, is deeply preoccupied with literary lineage. A genealogical bias runs throughout his work, which is radically concerned with issues of literary descent. MacDonald envisions literary history as reaching a high point in his Romantic predecessors, particularly in the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge and especially Shelley, with whom he identified, and he yearns to restore literature to their visionary intensity. Yet Romanticism, for all its splendor, is a fallen tradition, which MacDonald seeks to redeem by detaching it from demonic influences, which are generally associated with Byron, and promoting a more Wordsworthian, nature-focused Romanticism. In so doing, MacDonald offers a history founded on a process of progressive repetition: history repeats itself, all the while moving forward toward transcendence, as MacDonald absorbs and creatively reworks the past, correcting and redeeming its spiritual flaws. MacDonald's critical concerns work their way into his fiction with astonishing frequency, appearing both on the literal level of his stories—with characters discussing writers and debating modes of representation—as well as on a more allegorical and symbolical level. The result is fiction that mythologizes literary history, offering fables about the transmission of the literary spirit down through the generations. MacDonald raises the job of literary critic to heroic heights, envisioning

the critic as the master and savior of literature, one who possesses the heroic capacity to rescue, transform, and redeem the past.

1.2. Redeeming Literary History

Nowhere is MacDonald's obsession with mastering literary history more explicit than in his anthology of poetry *England's Antiphon*, an ambitious, if esoteric, literary survey. Published in 1868, the *Antiphon* attempts to outline the course of English poetry by tracing the essence of "the lyric or song form" (*England's Antiphon* 2) from its purported origins in thirteenth-century sacred verse, down through the ages to Tennyson and the Victorians. According to the anthology's commentator (whom we can safely equate with MacDonald), poetry possesses sacred import, as it constitutes the artistic corollary to spiritual worship, "the highest human condition"(1). Poetic song is one of the earliest ways in which humans respond to God: as a nation's spiritual identity evolves, "poetry is the first form religious utterance will assume" (1). The *Antiphon*'s discussion of genre is overshadowed, however, by its preoccupation with spiritual genealogy: like a literary *Burke's Peerage*, *England's Antiphon* reveals the ancestral bloodlines of English poetry, which are decidedly more than aristocratic: they are divine.

MacDonald takes care to emphasize his leading role in this project, which appears most strikingly in the choral metaphor that dominates the book. From the outset, the anthology is framed by the overarching metaphor of the choir, beginning with the title's use of the choral term *Antiphon,* which, as MacDonald explains to his readers, "means the responsive song of the parted choir" (2). This concept of choral response reflects the devotional capacity of lyric as a means of praising God, a power extended to the book

itself, which MacDonald envisions as a literary chapel dedicated to the sacred purpose of communing with God:

> My object is to erect, as it were, in this book, a little auricle, or spot of concentrated hearing, where the hearts of my readers may listen, and join in the song of their country's singing men and singing women.
>
> I will build it, if I may, like a chapel in the great church of England's worship, gathering the sounds of its never-ceasing choir, heart after heart lifting up itself in the music of speech, heart after heart responding across the ages. Hearing, we worship with them. (2)

This metaphor of the choir is interpreted literally in the anthology's frontispiece, a black and white drawing that illustrates Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Sidney, Bacon, Herbert, Milton, Tennyson, and other dead literary greats lined up solemnly in a cathedral choir (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Frontispiece of *England's Antiphon.*

The image is evoked again in the book's concluding passage, which portrays the closing of the volume as the reader's exiting the chapel, where the "twilight has already embrowned the gray glooms of the cathedral arches, and is driving us forth to part at the door" (332).

MacDonald's position *vis à vis* this most accomplished chorus is remarkable. He does not—or dares not—situate himself within the ranks of the choir: yet neither does he

position himself below them, as a cathedral guide or humble amanuensis. Instead, and far more audaciously, he establishes himself as *Kappelmeister*, in charge of directing the entire show, as he declares, "There is a sense in which I may, without presumption, adopt the name of Choragus, or leader of the chorus" (3). The qualifying lead-in of this sentence, "There is a sense," appears to proffer genuine modesty, yet the anthologist's tone becomes increasingly confident as he goes on to assert his power of command: "I must take upon me to order who shall sing, when he shall sing, and which of his songs he shall sing" (3). Certainly, in terms of words on the page, MacDonald's presence dominates the anthology, with his extensive introductions and commentaries occupying as much space on the page as the poems themselves. This model of literary history, in which MacDonald is the leader, will be enacted throughout his work.

The self-elevating anthologist of *England's Antiphon* illustrates the subtle way in which MacDonald manages to fashion his position in literary history. Though attention is focused ostensibly on his literary forebears, it is really all about MacDonald, as he shapes history in such a way that he may play a starring role. This kind of unassuming promotion, whereby the humble anthologist becomes the leader of the chorus, is characteristic of MacDonald, and is reflected in his fiction's tendency to feature protagonists of lowly origin, who claim no ambition to rule, yet who go on nevertheless to marry heiresses (as Harry Walton in *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* does) and/or acquire estates (as Richard Lestrange in *There and Back*, Malcolm in *The Marquis of Lossie*, Sir Gibbie, and Donal Grant all do), or even kingdoms (as the miner boy Curdie does in *The Princess and Curdie*). MacDonald's choirmaster persona also endows the literary historian with great authority, placing him in a position of significant leadership.

That history should be in need of ordering and directing points to another facet of MacDonald's vision: that history, in order to move forward, must first be redeemed.

Overtones of the Christian resurrection in *England's Antiphon* hint at the redemptive nature of MacDonald's project. The book implicitly compares reading and resurrection in the volume's final promise to reawaken the famous authors who lie entombed (or entomed) within "the gray glooms of the cathedral arches" (332) of the book:

> But the singers will yet sing on to him that hath ears to hear. When he returns to seek them, the shadowy door will open to his touch, the long-drawn aisles receding will guide his eye to the carven choir, and there they still stand, the sweet singers, content to repeat the ancient psalm and new song to the prayer of the humblest whose heart would join in England's Antiphon. (332)

The ambiguous pronoun *he* in this passage is suggestive: on one level, it refers to the imagined reader of the anthology, who will metaphorically resurrect England's choir of poets every time he or she opens the book. On another level, the pronoun *he* suggests Christ, in his capacity to open tombs and raise the dead—a theme already evoked one page earlier, in the final poem anthologized, Tennyson's "In Memoriam" XXXII, which, MacDonald informs us, draws on "the gospel tale [in which] Mary has returned home from the sepulchre, with Lazarus so late its prey, and her sister and Jesus" (331). (An illustration—one of the few in the book—features Mary unwinding tomb cloths, while, through the window, a crowd stands and points at the opened tomb.) The final passage's use of the phrase "the singers will yet sing on to him that hath ears to hear" recalls Christ's polyptotonal line, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," which is repeated in

Matthew 11.15, 13.9, Mark 4.32, 7.16, Luke 8.8, 14.35. MacDonald's phrase also endows his vision with apocalyptic intensity, suggesting the raising of souls at the end of time, as it echoes the epiphoric refrain, seven times repeated in the book of Revelation 2-3, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith. . ." (Revelation 2.7, 2.11, 2.17, 2.29, 3.6, 3.13, 3.22). The linking of reading and eschatology elevates the significance of the anthology: no mere literary textbook, *England's Antiphon* follows a trajectory similar to the Bible's, beginning with the genesis of poetic song, and ending with revelation and transcendence. The book participates in a multifold resurrection, first, as MacDonald unearths the voices of the past, again as the reader reawakens them through repeated reading, and finally in the promise of spiritual resurrection on Judgment Day.

Death and resurrection is a theme so widespread in MacDonald's work that it constitutes the ur-plot of virtually all his writing: his novels are filled with sermons and discussions of Christ's resurrection, and several conclude with the protagonist actively anticipating death and heavenly rebirth. What is remarkable about *England's Antiphon* is the way it applies this theme to literary history, as MacDonald depicts poetry itself as being in need of redemption. In particular, MacDonald portrays literature as suffering from the depredations of misguided thinking, which, according to the anthology, reached a dangerous pitch during the Enlightenment. While MacDonald finds much of merit to fill the chapters on medieval, renaissance, and seventeenth century song, he is at pains to fill the section on eighteenth-century verse. According to the *Antiphon,* the Augustan age was a fallen one, in which "the poets of England, with John Dryden at their head, ceased almost for a time to deal with the truths of humanity, and gave themselves to the facts and relations of society" (267-268). Characterized by a "flatness of spirit, arising from the

evanishment of the mystical element" (277), this period marks the flooding of the shadows of spiritual mystery by the bright lights of human reason and knowledge. As a result, humans, fascinated by their own power, turned away from God.

Much of MacDonald's criticism of the Augustan age demonstrates a common Romantic reaction to what Romantics saw as excessive reason, artifice and showiness: MacDonald rejects the "flamboyant style" (285) of Pope's *Messiah* as "detestable" (285), Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* as "absurdity in the garb of sobriety" (280), and refuses to include in his survey any long examples of heroic couplet or blank verse, because "[t]hey would only make my book heavy, and destroy the song-idea" (285). Instead, MacDonald, as if to demonstrate his allegiance to the Romantic ideals of humbleness and authenticity, includes such pieces as the simple, lyrical meditations of John Byrom, and Charles Wesley's "Wrestling Jacob," a plodding fourteen-stanza Methodist hymn. His rejection of rational elucidation, and his embracing of holy darkness and mystery, further marks MacDonald as Romantic (a preference derived generally from Novalis, whose *Hymns to the Night* (1799) MacDonald translated in the 1850s).[10] For MacDonald, imagination always trumps scientific thought, and chaotic creativity is preferable to the "decline" (278) of fixed, rational systems. Most importantly, the focus should be on God, God's immanence in nature, and the possibility of transcendence, rather than enlightenment thinkers' mistaken focus on the world of man. The *Antiphon* represents rationalist pursuits as ostensibly progressive, but in fact degenerate. MacDonald laments this spiritual devolution, which he depicts as a slipping back to the "swampy level of the

---

[10] MacDonald was largely unsuccessful in inspiring his Victorian audience, however. As William Raeper notes, his translations "did not sell, and twice MacDonald brought out the Spiritual Songs at his own expense [. . . .] he would never become popular with more than a faithful, influential few" (Raeper 108).

time" (283), until the final low point is reached in the French Revolution, when, as he puts it, "the wild beast in man breaks from the den" (303). The French Revolution marked the inevitable outcome of misguided scientific thinking, when the "supreme regard for science" (303), joined with "the worship of power" (303, 277), broke out "in its crude form [. . .] as brute force" (303).

The idea that Romanticism revived a world exhausted by the Enlightenment is a central Romantic myth that MacDonald firmly believed. According to the *Antiphon,* deliverance arrives with the emergence of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, who cures the rationalist blight by redirecting attention from vain human affairs to God's divine power in nature. MacDonald represents Wordsworth as England's spiritual savior, as he reads the redemption of poetry through Wordsworth's personal transformation, from high hopes at the outset of the French uprising, to "the terrible disappointment that followed" (303), consequent disillusionment—"for a time, he believed in nothing" (304)—and finally, to revelation and reawakening. The *Antiphon* credits divine inspiration for Wordsworth's post-revolutionary poetry—"But the power of God came upon Wordsworth" (304)—as God revealed himself to Wordsworth through "the benignities of nature" (304). This spiritual rebirth, which "restored peace and calmness and hope" (304) in Wordsworth's heart, had not just a personal effect, but also broader implications for English literature, as "The divine expressions of Nature, that is, the face of the Father therein visible, began to heal the place which the worship of knowledge had bred" (304).

The dark night of the soul is a necessary part of the progress toward transcendence, as it sets the conditions for spiritual rebirth. As MacDonald's character

Ian explains in *What's Mine's Mine*: "It was Wordsworth's bitter disappointment in the outcome of the French revolution [. . .] that opened the door to him" (*What's Mine's Mine* 217). The trajectory is familiar. As Roderick McGillis points out, this plot, which constitutes "the basic pattern of nearly all of MacDonald's novels and fantasies [. . . .] is also paradigmatic of much Romantic narrative, the circuitous yet progressive self-education and self-discovery" ("Childhood and Growth" 159). This pattern of progressive circularity, evoked repeatedly in MacDonald's work, becomes the dominant mode of historical progress, as MacDonald envisions history as needing redemption not just once, but multiple times. Wordsworth's redemption of literature is not the final event, but rather a type to be repeated, and which would be repeated by MacDonald, as he positions himself as the next savior of literature. Much as the Enlightenment was redeemed by Wordsworth, so Romanticism will be redeemed by MacDonald, who depicts Romanticism as a glorious but fallen tradition, led astray from Wordsworthian ideals by the flaws of Coleridge, Shelley, and, especially, the incorrigible Byron.

By revisiting the past and correcting the flaws of the Romantic poets, he makes creative improvements on the past, and so transforms it. Although the impulse may seem regressive, in that MacDonald is trying to repossess a former state, it is ultimately progressive, as the revised version of the past moves toward perfection (or at least improvement), and ultimately transcendence. This creative repetition corresponds to the regenerative, restorative power of the Biblical resurrection, in which the dead Christ is raised, but in a transfigured state. To this extent, C. S. Lewis is quite apt in declaring that MacDonald's work is pervaded with "a certain quality of Death, *good* Death" (Lewis, Preface 21): what makes death good is that it does not mark an end, but rather a rebirth.

This progressive mode of repetition finds a parallel in Biblical typology, as Christ offers the perfect antitype, fulfilling the many types that precede him in the Old Testament. As we will see, MacDonald's work can often be read typologically, as he repeats certain figures over and over again, such as Sir Gibbie, who finds his typological fulfillment in Donal Grant.[11]

MacDonald's creative repetition of the past, however, is haunted by the threat of a darker form of repetition, static repetition, which merely repeats the past, flaws and all.[12] This form of repetition offers no true rebirth, but rather a parody of resurrection. Throughout MacDonald's work, this negative form of repetition is associated with necromancy, the dark art of reviving the dead that produces no new life, but only ghostly, faded images of the past. It finds its most threatening form in the figure of the vampire, which appears in many of MacDonald's novels and tales. A soulless corpse reanimated, the vampire incarnates the destructive power of false resurrection, showing it to be a monstrous state of decadence and depravity. The vampire in MacDonald's work is a demonic shadow of what MacDonald himself is doing in repeating and revising history.

---

[11] My use of the term typology extends beyond the strict sense, in which, figures and events of the Old Testament are types that foreshadow the antitypes of the new Testament. MacDonald's typological universe involves a broader interpretation of the concept: he offers a world that is charged with spiritual meaning, with objects and events functioning as cosmic symbols of the divine order at work. See Miner ix-xi and Keller 275-279 for a discussion of broad vs. strict typology, and especially Landow 315-44, in which he discusses more generally the Victorians' use of typology in literature.

[12] This model of historical progress resembles that outlined by David Quint, who makes a similar distinction between modes of repetition in *Epic and Empire*. Quint shows how these two types of repetition "conform to the two modes of psychic behavior that, for Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, comprise the *repetition compulsion*. The victim of an earlier trauma may neurotically reenact his victimization over and over again. Alternatively, he may replay the original traumatic situation in order to create a new version of it, a situation of which he is now master, rather than victim, thereby "undoing" the past and gaining some control over his psychic history" (Quint 50).

As this study will show, MacDonald's vampires are particularly linked to darker forms of art, which MacDonald wishes to reject. The stark dualism of MacDonald's division of the world—possibly a lingering effect of his Calvinist upbringing—might explain his attraction to gothic types. Gothic types, particularly the dark double, offer simplicity, but also illustrate the difficulty of distinguishing between good and evil, which frequently resemble one another. Much of MacDonald's work involves discerning godly art—generally associated with Wordsworthian Romanticism—from its demonic counterpart, which MacDonald associates with eighteenth century rationalism, and even more so with the darker aspects of Coleridge, Shelley, and especially Byron, this last of whom becomes the mythological repository of everything gone wrong with Romanticism. MacDonald reworks and idealizes the Romantic poets he likes, demonizes and purges the ones he doesn't (which includes mainly Byron), and thus renews and improves the Romantic tradition.

1.3. MacDonald and the Romantic Poets

In his judgment of Romantic poets, MacDonald's preferences are highly idiosyncratic. Wordsworth requires no improvement. According to MacDonald's protagonist Wilfrid Cumbermede, "Wordsworth will recede through the gliding ages until, with the greater Chaucer, and the greater Shakspere, and the greater Milton, he is yet a star in the constellated crown of England" (*Wilfrid Cumbermede* 507). After him, MacDonald ranks Coleridge, of whom he is generally approving. In *England's Antiphon*, MacDonald hails Coleridge as Wordsworth's equal— "Coleridge is a sage, and Wordsworth is a seer" (*England's Antiphon* 307)—and even as his superior— "when the

sage sees, [. . .] when feeling and sight are one and philosophy is in abeyance, the ecstasy is even loftier in Coleridge than in Wordsworth" (*England's Antiphon* 307). Wordsworth owed much of his thinking to Coleridge's influence, as MacDonald recognizes:

> Coleridge had much to do with the opening of Wordsworth's eyes to such vision; as indeed, more than any other man in our time, he had opened the eyes of the English people to see wonderful things. (*England's Antiphon* 307)

Certainly, in terms of poetic theory, critics generally agree that MacDonald is heir to Coleridge's idea of the symbol, with its emphasis on dual planes of experience, as well as his concept of the imagination as the faculty which unifies these two planes.[13] Furthermore, Coleridge "acted as a prism through which" were filtered the ideas of the German Romantics Schelling, Schlegel, Fichte, Kant, and Schleiermacher, many of whose works MacDonald had also read (Raeper 239-240).

In terms of Coleridge's poetic output, MacDonald was obsessed with his ballad "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which appears in at least half a dozen of MacDonald's novels: characters read the "Rime" in *Guild Court, Robert Falconer, Malcolm, Castle Warlock, Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood,* and finally, *There and Back,* where MacDonald, in a startling digression into literary criticism, devotes an entire chapter to a comparative discussion of the 1798 and 1817 editions, plus a third, undated

---

[13] Stephen Prickett discusses MacDonald's inheritance of the Coleridge's idea of the symbol in *Romanticism and Religion* 230-231, and "The Two Worlds of George MacDonald" 21; see also Hein 149-150; and Raeper, *George MacDonald* 110-112, 238-42.

version (*There and Back* Chapter 22, 119-138).[14] Stephen Prickett suggests that Coleridge's "Rime" offered an important model for MacDonald, as the Romantic fable "stoutly resists demythologizing" (Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* 257) and remains difficult to classify, like much of MacDonald's work. No doubt the poem's imaginative focus on spiritual redemption also appealed to MacDonald's preoccupation with death and rebirth; as Barbara and Richard in *There and Back* exclaim, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is "'the loveliest poem [. . .] ever heard'" (*There and Back* 131), one that "'with the strangeness of its speech, with the loveliness of its real, and the wildness of its invented pictures'" (122), requires that "'a man know something of repentance before he can understand'"(122) it. I would suggest, furthermore, that Coleridge's "Rime" provides a model for MacDonald's project of redeeming Romanticism. Like the ancient mariner, who is obsessed with telling his tale over and over again, MacDonald is obsessed with repeating the history of the Romantic poets, especially Shelley, in numerous versions in an attempt to correct and redeem them.

There is a darker edge to Coleridge, however, that seems to suggest MacDonald's misgivings about the power of the imagination. In *There and Back*, Richard and Barbara's discussion leaves Richard wondering whether Barbara is a "salamander or sylph, naïad or undine, oread or dryad" (129) "weaving a spell about his soul" (129). For MacDonald, as for many Romantics, "'Romance' was an ambivalent mode, [. . .] because its charms were indistinguishable from its snares" (Parker, *Inescapable Romance*

---

[14] MacDonald's son Greville remarks in *George MacDonald and His Wife* that MacDonald was fascinated with Coleridge's poem in real life: "My father was fully aware that a poet's emendations were not always satisfactory. He would enlarge upon this when lecturing on *The Ancient Mariner*, and insist upon our comparing the first and final versions" (Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* 540 n1).

163). Literature's capacity to enchant remains a point of anxiety throughout MacDonald's writings: while he celebrates its ability to transform a reader, this power is an ambiguous one, equally capable of guiding a person to right ways of thinking, as seducing him or her away from reality. Though by and large MacDonald seems to approve of the *Rime*, of Coleridge's darker strains MacDonald seems more dubious. The effect of "Christabel," for instance, on Richard is less "sadder and wiser" ("The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" 624) and more "of sense forlorn"(623): he was "never again [. . .] so keenly aware of disappointment as when he came to the end" (*There and Back* 121) of that poem. Like "Christabel"'s Geraldine, the poem has seductive powers that leave the reader disappointed. Though MacDonald does not draw an explicit connection, Geraldine is clearly an ancestor of MacDonald's vampiric Alder Maiden and Lilith, who both embody the seductive allure of Romantic art, as will be discussed further in Chapters 2 and 5.

The ambivalent nature of Romanticism is particularly reflected in Coleridge's addiction to opium. Although MacDonald admired Coleridge's work, he was dismayed to learn of his drug use. Chapter 4's discussion of *Donal Grant* shows how Coleridge's addiction is projected onto the vampiric villain, who likens himself to Coleridge in his dependency. The temporary madness of opium is a stimulation of the imagination *via* unnatural means, and reveals the darker side of Romanticism, which MacDonald associates with living death and obsessive repetition.

At the very bottom of MacDonald's ranking of the Romantic poets lies Byron, who, without exception, figures badly throughout MacDonald's writing. As the Romantic poet who, more than any other, was heir to the Augustan spirit of the

Enlightenment, Byron embodies everything MacDonald detested in poetry. While MacDonald had little use for Byron, he certainly had use for his widow's pocketbook: Lady Byron was a generous patroness and friend of the MacDonalds during the 1850s, and left them a £300 legacy upon her death in 1860.[15] While it is impossible to say precisely what it was about the MacDonalds that appealed to Lady Byron, Raeper suggests that MacDonald took the place of the preacher F.W. Robertson, whose friendship Lady Byron had made in Brighton and whom she missed greatly after he died (Raeper 132). Certainly, the MacDonalds' scrupulous Christian morality would have appealed to her, and their indignation at her plight would have bolstered her carefully maintained persona of "all-forgiving angel," as David Crane describes her (*The Kindness of Sisters* 268). Both MacDonald and Lady Byron, moreover, shared in a belief in the possibility of universal salvation, a position that even her biographer Harriet Beecher Stowe had difficulty sharing. During their brief but intense friendship, Lady Byron recounted in detail to MacDonald and his wife Louisa the sordid history of her married life, and although for years Lady Byron had to fight the criticism of many detractors, MacDonald clearly took her side: to the end, his novels are unrelentingly harsh on Byron. In *Guild Court: A London Story* (1868), Byron provides the model for the undeserving seducer Tom Worboise, who bears a Grecian profile like Lord Byron (20), and assumes an attitude of world-weary depression "in order that he might flatter himself with being in close sympathy with Lord Byron" (6), a volume of whose poetry he carries in the pocket of his frock-coat. In *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872), the patroness and philanthropist Lady

---

[15] Greville MacDonald offers a fuller discussion of the MacDonalds' involvement with Lady Byron in Chapter 5 of his biography of his father, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 300-313.

Bernard—a superlatively flattering tribute to Lady Byron—laments the failure of her dissolute and most Byronic grandson, "who was leading a a strange, wild life," and who, for all her hopes that he might "turn out a Harry the Fifth," dies unrepentant and unredeemed (164). In *Sir Gibbie* (1879), as we shall see in Chapter 4, Donal Grant attacks Byron's *Childe Harold* in a startling defense of godliness and truth in poetry.

The most scathing indictment of Byron, however, occurs in what is generally considered to be the most autobiographical of MacDonald's novels, *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), where reading Byron is the hallmark of immaturity, linked to romantic disappointment and sexual failure. While studying medicine at college, young Alec discovers that his favorite, Kate Fraser, and her friend Miss Warner are fond of reading Byron. He acquires a copy and "for days studied Byron and anatomy—nothing else" (207). The power of Byron is temporary, however; like opium, the intoxicating effects of which wane with regular use, the effect of Byron does not last: "Most of those who make the attempt are surprised—some of them troubled—at the discovery that the shrine can work miracles no more" (207). The narrator goes so far as to compare Byron to an adolescent illness:

> The Byron-fever is in fact a disease belonging to youth, as the hooping-cough to childhood,—working some occult good no doubt in the end. It has its origin, perhaps, in the fact that the poet makes no demand either on the intellect or the conscience, but confines himself to friendly intercourse with those passions whose birth long precedes that of choice in their objects—whence a wealth of emotion is squandered. (207)

Alec, Kate, and Miss Warner squander emotions aplenty while flirting over their copies of Byron. However, unlike Coleridge, to whom MacDonald is happy to devote entire chapters of discussion, Byron is pointedly excluded, as the novel includes neither examples nor discussions of his verse:

> I will not weary my readers with the talk of the three young people enamoured of Byron. Of course the feelings the girls had about him differed materially from those of Alec; so that a great many of the replies and utterances met like unskillful tilters, whose staves passed wide. (208)

The comparison of unsuccessful conversation to the suggestively phallic sport of *tilting* underscores Alec's double failure, in both literary taste and sexual pursuit. Kate rejects Alec and eventually succumbs to the charms of "the cunning Celt" (307) Patrick Beauchamp, a ne'er-do-well aristocrat who upstages Alec by reading Kate the works of Percy Shelley, "which quite overcrowed Byron" (307). MacDonald further deflates Byron by adding that it is somehow unenglish to like Byron too much: full of anti-French prejudice, the narrator suggests that people's misplaced admiration for Byron's sensual poetry damages their national image abroad: it is love of Byron "in virtue of which the French persist in regarding Byron as our greatest poet, and in supposing that we agree with him" (208). That the lucky suitor Patrick Beauchamp is a Scotsman with a French name further suggests the foreign taint associated with Byron and his admirers. The failure of Alec, Kate, and Miss Warner to "tilt" skillfully or successfully in their discussions of Byron implies the difficulty of being a good English knight in the face of Byron's foreign depravity. Unlike Wordsworth, "the constellated crown of England" (*Wilfrid Cumbermede* 507) holds no place for Byron.

MacDonald's unflattering opinion of Byron reaches its most gothic pitch in *Donal Grant*'s portrayal of Lord Morven, a vampiric, drug-addicted, atheist madman bent on murderous plots. Morven's name recalls Ruthven, the name of Byron figures in the works of Polidori and Lamb. Morven functions as a spectre on whom MacDonald can project all the evils of Romanticism—not simply Byron's cruelty and perversity, but Coleridge's drug addiction and Shelley's atheism, too—and so purge them from the tradition. This demonizing of Byron is consistent with contemporary treatment of the poet, whose wild life troubled the decorous sensibilities of Victorian audiences and critics alike. However, MacDonald's savage assessment of Byron particularly contrasts with that of his fellow critic Matthew Arnold, with whom MacDonald, on other issues, generally tended to agree. Arnold declared in his 1881 essay on Byron that the world was on the verge of awakening to the greatness of Byron's poetry (Arnold, "Byron" 364-65, 383-84), and paired him with Wordsworth as "first and preeminent [. . .] among the English poets of this century" (Arnold, "Byron" 384). By contrast, for MacDonald, Byron is beyond contempt, and possibly even beyond salvation. Like Arnold, however, MacDonald sets up Byron in opposition to the other *enfant terrible* of Romantic poetry, Percy Shelley, with Byron playing the fallen demon to Shelley's beautiful angel.

MacDonald's impulse to represent historical figures in his own image can be seen most clearly in his treatment of Shelley, who reappears in MacDonald's work with unexpected frequency. MacDonald's fascination with Shelley finds its most explicit expression in the entry on Shelley he wrote for the 20th edition (1860) of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The essay (later reprinted in *A Dish of Orts*) christianizes Shelley, as it attempts to reconcile Shelley's radical atheism with MacDonald's devout

beliefs. MacDonald demonstrates a surprising affinity for his revolutionary predecessor, and is at pains to excuse Shelley's apostasy. The entry depicts Shelley as a sort of Christian *manqué* who needs MacDonald to complete him. MacDonald decribes Shelley as a well-meaning but misguided atheist whose "character [. . .] has been sadly maligned" ("Shelley" 101) by an unsympathetic public. Lamenting "how ill he must have been instructed in the principles of Christianity!" (102), MacDonald places the blame squarely on Shelley's miseducation and lack of proper spiritual models, and imagines "what a Christian he would have been, could he but have seen Christianity in any other way than through the traditional and practical misrepresentations of it which surrounded him" (102). In Shelley's poetry, MacDonald perceives an innate goodness, evidence to MacDonald that "Shelley's own feelings toward others [. . .] seem to be tinctured with the very essence of Christianity" (102); and he concludes that Shelley's particular brand of atheism is "the next best thing to Christianity" (102) and of negligible threat to the faith of the true believer.

Besides excusing the "misunderstood [. . . and] misrepresented" (104) Shelley for his atheism, MacDonald manages also to overlook the more notorious events of Shelley's life, which had horrified earlier audiences: Shelley's expulsion from Oxford on charges of atheism; his elopement with Harriet Westbrook; his abandonment of Harriet so he could run away with Mary Wollstonecroft Godwin, the daughter of his estranged mentor William Godwin; their adventures in the Swiss Alps with Byron (who was already a notorious character); Harriet's suicide; the suicide of Mary's half-sister; the many infants who died; and finally Shelley's own suspicious drowning on the Bay of Spezia in 1822. On these darker aspects of Shelley's life, MacDonald casts a most forgiving eye.

MacDonald's tendency to idealize Shelley is in keeping with a more general movement in the literary world to mend Shelley's image. This impulse was led by Mary Shelley's shaping of her late husband's reputation in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1839), which she edited. In the preface to the first volume, she skirts over the troubling aspects of Shelley's behavior by declaring her intention to "abstain from any remark on the occurrences of his private life; except, inasmuch as the passions which they engendered" (Preface vii). She portrays her late husband as a semi-divine being whose errors ought to be forgiven implicitly: "Whatever faults he had," she argued, "ought to find extenuation among his fellows, since they proved him to be human; without them, the exalted nature of his soul would have raised him into something divine" (Preface viii). A similar optimism pervades Robert Browning's laudatory "Essay on Shelley" (1852). Browning in particular demonstrates a Christianizing tendency that anticipates MacDonald's, as Browning maintains that "had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians" (Browning 147). Arnold took a slightly different approach, as he insisted that Shelley's angelic image would ultimately outweigh any revelation of his wrongdoing: Arnold's 1888 essay "Shelley" proposes "to mark firmly what is ridiculous and odious" in Shelley, and "then to show that "our beautiful and lovable Shelley nevertheless survives" (Arnold, "Shelley" 389). This emphasis on the good Shelley is mirrored in MacDonald's encyclopedia entry, and is developed further in his other works.

1.4. Early Revisions of Shelley: "Julian and Maddalo" *vs.* "Within and Without"

Beyond the encyclopedia article, Shelley finds his way into several of MacDonald's works of fiction. From MacDonald's early work in the 1850s, to his final writing in the 1890s, the figure of Shelley reappears in various guises, providing the lens through which MacDonald examines questions of good and evil, and challenges notions about literary merit. MacDonald's first published work, the fantastical verse drama *Within and Without* (1855), introduces many of the images and themes that characterize MacDonald's preoccupation with Shelley, such as the question of his atheism, and the impropriety of his elopement, themes that become more compulsive as MacDonald's career plays out over the subsequent four decades. No previous study has noticed how *Within and Without* offers a creative response to Shelley poem's "Julian and Maddalo," a dialogue poem published posthumously in 1824 that was based on recollected conversations Shelley (the "rather serious" Julian [preface page 113]) and Byron (the sanguine Maddalo) had on their 1818 trip to Venice ("Julian and Maddalo" page 112 n.1). In Shelley's poem, the aristocratic Julian, "a complete infidel and a scoffer at all things reputed holy" (preface 113) goes on a sunset ride with Count Maddalo along the Venetian riverbank, where, as vesper bells ring, calling "the maniacs each one from his cell" (110) to pray, the two discuss philosophical matters "Concerning God, freewill and destiny: / Of all that earth has been or yet may be, / All that vain men imagine or believe, / Or hope can paint or suffering achieve" (42-45). The next day Maddalo, in order to persuade Julian "How vain are [his] aspiring theories" (201), proposes they visit a maniac, "one like" (195) the atheist Julian, but "now gone mad" (198) from his foolish thinking. The maniac, whose mysterious history involves his being left by an anonymous

"Lady" (245) from France, expounds on the nature and extent of his suffering, and Julian and Maddalo are sobered by their visit, though privately Julian wonders to himself whether he might cure the maniac, "by patience find / An entrance to the caverns of his mind, / I might reclaim him from his dark estate" (572-574). Years later, Julian returns to Venice and learns from Maddalo's daughter that the maniac's health had failed, and the "Lady who had left him, came again" (599)—and then left him again. Julian's eagerness to resolve the mystery and learn the reasons for their parting—"Something within that interval which bore / The stamp of *why* they parted, *how* they met" (610-611)—are answered by Maddalo's daughter—"she told me how / All happened" (616-617); however, Julian does not record these reasons, and ends the poem with the impenetrable declaration that "the cold world shall not know" (617).

Within and Without illuminates this mystery, offering a strange and fantastical response to Shelley's poem that is part tribute and part corrective. MacDonald retains the name Julian for his protagonist, who is also an atheist, though he transforms his Julian from an Englishman to an Italian nobleman, the Count Lamballa. Most significantly, MacDonald compresses the two characters of Julian and the maniac, who are separate people in Shelley's poem that share a special connection. Byron is absent, and there is no counterpart for Maddalo—perhaps a reflection of the fact that Lady Byron had not yet come into the MacDonalds' lives, or, alternatively, a reflection of MacDonald' desire to write Byron out of Shelley's story. Thus MacDonald's verse drama opens on Julian alone in his convent cell, as the vesper bells ring at sunset, and he meditates in terror on his inability to find God: "Blindly I stretch my arms and seek for him: He goeth by me,

and I see him not" (1.1; 4)[16]. Like Shelley's maniac, Julian has suffered an unhappy love affair, though MacDonald is much more forthcoming with the details, as the poem informs the reader that Julian—"Turned from the lady's door, and knocked at God's" (1.1; 7)—had fled his illegitimate affair with the beautiful Lilia to seek refuge in the monastery. In detailing the illegitimacy of Julian's affair with Lilia, MacDonald seems to be projecting onto the character of his doubting monk the substance of Shelley's love affair with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Like Shelley, Julian runs away with his beloved—though, in an inversion of Shelley and Mary's elopement to the continent, Julian and Lilia escape the continent (and the convent) to move to England, where they raise their illegitimate daughter Lily in exile. Julian's physical description, moreover, might equally apply to Shelley: he is "tall" and "moody" (11), a "long, lank, threadbare man" (4.14; 100), notable for his "strange look of mingled youth and age" (1.2; 11).

Even more remarkably, MacDonald seems to be simultaneously projecting his *own* life onto Julian, making Julian a curious blending of MacDonald and Shelley. *Within and Without* is dedicated to MacDonald's wife, Louisa, in a prefatory sonnet that emphasizes the connection between MacDonald, the work, and his wife: "I and it are thine," "I took my ways / Into a solitude, [. . .] there thought and wrote, afar, and yet with thee." The love song that Julian reads to Lilia in 4.1 (79-80), "Love me, beloved," further establishes the identification of MacDonald with Julian, for, as Raeper notes, it is the same poem that MacDonald gave to his wife on their wedding day (Raeper 120). In a further conflation of literature and real life, the names *Lily /Lilia* echo the name of MacDonald's eldest daughter Lilia (b. 1852), who was often called Lily. In addition,

---

[16] The standard edition of *Within and Without* (Johannesen) does not number the lines of the work, so references are given here by act, scene, and page number.

MacDonald seems to project his dissatisfaction with conventional religion onto his doubting protagonist. Julian is no great success as a monk, as the monks murmur against him for his questioning views and plot to imprison and punish him. It is a situation that suggests both Shelley's religious misgivings, and also MacDonald's own recent failure as a clergyman at the Congregationalist church in Arundel, where his unorthodox views on animal immortality, salvation for the heathen, and his ties to German thinking were viewed with suspicion by church officials, until the gradual lowering of his salary at last drove him out.[17] Finally, like MacDonald, Julian is an idealist, who loves "A life for what it might become, far more /Than for its present" (2.16; 41): he sees in the failing Lilia "a germ in her / Of something noble, much beyond her now" (2.16; 41)—a tendency to idealize that is reflected in MacDonald's own glowing portrait of Shelley in the Encyclopedia entry.

Within and Without offers a happy ending both to Shelley's life and to his poem. MacDonald redeems Shelley's bereft maniac from a life of madness, shame, and silence, by curing the atheist of his spiritual malady, and reuniting him with his beloved, for whom is invented a convoluted and most romantic history involving blackmail, rescue, murder, elopement, separation, temptation, and finally, heavenly reunion and divine forgiveness. To summarize: after Julian escapes the monastery, he returns to Lilia, rescues her from her threatening creditor, the evil Count Nembroni, whom he kills, and he nurses Lilia through illness. Lilia is dismayed to discover that her lover is a monk, but agrees to run away with him to England, where for five years they live quietly with their illegitimate but angelic daughter Lily. Julian finds God, but his marriage with Lilia

---

[17] See Raeper, *George MacDonald* 84-95.

weakens and their love turns cold. Eventually, Lilia is overcome with guilt, and leaves Julian. Lilia is tempted to marry Lord Seaford, but ultimately refuses. Nevertheless, Julian mistakenly believes Lilia to have eloped with Seaford. The child Lily dies, and the anguished Julian resolves to wander the world in search of his lost Lilia; however, he falls deathly ill instead. Lord Seaford discovers Julian on his deathbed, and assures him of his wife's innocence: "Your wife is innocent. I *know* she is" (4.25; 125). The fifth and final act takes the drama beyond the grave, to "*'A world not realized'* " (5.1; 125). Julian, Lilia, and Lily are all reunited, and Julian confesses his own guilt in tempting Lilia into a life of sin, admitting to Lilia that "I, thy husband, / Sinned more against thee, in believing ill, Than though, by ten times what thou didst" (5.2; 127). The final scene elevates them to a mountain peak, where, gazing upward to God, they "the three are clasped in an infinite embrace" (5.3; 131).

MacDonald's optimistic reworking of Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo" weds MacDonald's life with Shelley's, raising issues about doubt, faith, and the capacity for redemption. It highlights MacDonald's tendency to identify with his favorite poet: as he rewrites and fictionalizes Shelley, he is also fictionalizing himself. *Within and Without* sets the stage, moreover, for a career that would be increasingly preoccupied with the Romantic poet. In the chapters that follow, I will show how MacDonald's handling of Shelley evolves over the decades. This early work, together with his next book, *Phantastes* (1858), both offer rewritings of Shelley's work. *Phantastes*, discussed in Chapter 2, revises and corrects Shelley's bleak visionary poem "Alastor," promoting a more optimistic Romanticism that is God-centered rather than self-centered. Like the encyclopedia entry and *Within and Without, Phantastes* demonstrate an enthusiastic

tendency to overlook Shelley's failings and recast him in a more positive light. "The Cruel Painter," a story published in 1864 in *Adela Cathcart*, continues in this vein, as MacDonald retells in gothic caricature the story of Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's courtship, and their involvement with Mary's father William Godwin. Chapter 3 examines how this tale incorporates MacDonald's suspicion of Godwinian rationalism, to offer a myth about the transition from Enlightenment rationalism to Romanticism.

MacDonald's fascination with Shelley continues in later work, although there emerges a tendency to confront and critique Shelley's flaws more overtly. Chapter 4 considers how MacDonald's novels *Sir Gibbie* (1879) and *Donal Grant* (1883) challenge Shelley's thought, and examine the problems of his fellow Romantics Byron and Coleridge. *Donal Grant* demonstrates that Romanticism, for all its redemptive power, is not without its darkness, and it mythologizes MacDonald's attempt to purge it of its cruelty, excess, and violence. The relationship between *Donal Grant* and *Sir Gibbie* also suggests MacDonald's typological view of history.

In the final years of his career, MacDonald seems to approach an acceptance of the darkness of Shelley's past, which Chapter 5 explores in two of MacDonald's last works, *Lilith* (1895), and *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891). *The Flight of the Shadow* offers a doppelgänger tale about literary genealogy that uses Shelley as a locus for examining questions of good and evil; however, here the focus is not on rewriting Shelley's work, correcting Shelley's life, or critiquing Shelley's ideas, as MacDonald's previous works did. Instead, *The Flight of the Shadow* investigates how later generations—such as MacDonald's—may redeem a shadowy past. MacDonald's final version of Shelley occurs in MacDonald's *magnum opus Lilith: a Romance.* Mr. Raven,

the bird-librarian with a shadowy past who plays Vane's Virgilian guide to the realm of the dead, is an incarnation of the redeemed Shelley. *Lilith* suggests MacDonald's ambivalence about Romanticism, as well as more general misgivings about the capacity of literature to transform and redeem.

In its attempt to trace out lines of literary descent, this study offers a dual genealogy, one that takes place both "within and without" MacDonald's much understudied *oeuvre*. On the broader historical scope, this study shows that literary history is a central preoccupation for MacDonald, and reveals how he positioned himself in this history, as the descendant, critic, and redeemer of the Romantic poets. Within the bounds of his work, this study traces the mythological development of the Shelley figure, from his genesis in MacDonald's early writing as an idealized poet, to his final apotheosis as the fallen and redeemed Adam.

2

PHANTASTES: LITERARY HISTORY AS ROMANTIC QUEST

2.1. MACDONALD'S ROMANTICISM: *PHANTASTES VS.* "ALASTOR"

MacDonald's first novel, *Phantastes: a Faerie Romance* has historical significance as one of the first modern fantasy novels.[18] Inspired by Spenserian romance (from which the title is derived)[19] and German Romanticism (especially the work of Novalis and Hoffmann),[20] MacDonald's novelized *Künstlermärchen* equates artistic calling with chivalric vocation, illustrating MacDonald's belief "that true knights are also true poets" (Raeper, *George MacDonnald* 211). Set in the context of the dreaming imagination,[21] *Phantastes*'s fantastical tale of *there and back* (to borrow from the title of

---

[18] See Manlove, *Modern Fantasy* 55-98, Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* 150-197.

[19] Spenser's Phantastes is a character that occupies the tower of Alma's castle in 2.9 of the *Faerie Queene*. MacDonald's more immediate source for the title is Phineas Fletcher's 1633 poem *The Purple Island*, a couplet of which forms the epigram for *Phantastes*'s title page: "Phantastes from 'their fount' all shapes deriving, / In new habiliments can quickly dight." Wolff points out that MacDonald misquotes Fletcher's couplet (*Golden Key* 41). For further discussion of *Phantastes*' Spenserian influences, see Wolff 46, 59, 100, Reis 1972 87, 90; and Docherty, *Literary Products* 19-73.

[20] Wolff discusses the influence of Novalis and Hoffmann on *Phantastes* in *The Golden Key* 42-44, 45-54, 71-88, 108; for a more recent study of the influence of German Romanticism, see Prickett's "Fictions and Metafictions" 109-125. Shaberman 31-34 also discusses Hoffmann's influence.

[21] The dream setting and dream-like quality of MacDonald's fantasies have inspired a wave of psychoanalytic interpretations of MacDonald, the most important of which include Robert Lee Wolff's 1961 *The Golden Key*, Richard Reis's 1972 *George MacDonald*, and more recent studies such as Rosemary Jackson's "Narcissism and Beyond" 45-53.

MacDonald's 1891 novel) is equally a story of *within and without* (to borrow again from his store of titles), one that explores the transcendent capacity of the imagination, as it superimposes the structure of quest romance upon the protagonist's trajectory of artistic development. This internalization of romance marks *Phantastes* as peculiarly Romantic, and specifically as a late addition to the early-century efforts to revive romance. [22] Harold Bloom's description of the work of Shelley, Wordsworth, and Coleridge could be applied equally to MacDonald's work as well, as he, like his Romantic predecessors, "takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the movement of the poet himself from poem to poem" (Bloom, *Ringers in the Tower* 15). *Phantastes* may be even better characterized as a *response* to English romance. While its fairy setting, chivalric plots, and stark demarcation between good and evil figures recalls the romantic world of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the book is also a tribute to the Romantic poets, whose work forms several of the epigraphs that introduce each of the book's twenty-five chapters, and informs the book's examination of the theme of imaginative development.

Phantastes is the self-narrated story of Anodos, who discovers and develops his poetic vocation over the course of the book. Shortly after his twenty-first birthday, he discovers his ancient fairy grandmother in his late father's writing desk, and wakes the next morning to find his bedroom transformed into the woods of Fairy Land. His adventures there are numerous and episodic, and they include much time spent reading

---

[22] See Chandler's *A Dream of Order* for a detailed discussion of how the medieval ideal was "invoked as a corrective to the evils of the present" (1) by nineteenth-century writers. See esp. 122-151.

books and hearing ballads. Key events include his meeting Sir Percivale, the fallen knight of the rusty armour, with whom Anodos forms a special bond. Sir Percivale warns Anodos to beware the Alder maiden, who had brought about his own downfall. Later, Anodos, inspired by the story of Pygmalion, awakens a statuesque white lady from an alabaster block, by singing spontaneously inspired verses. The white lady flees, and Anodos follows in ardent pursuit. Next, Anodos succumbs to the wiles of the Alder maiden, who is disguised as the white lady. She delivers him into the clutches of the wicked Ash, a vampire. Anodos is saved when Sir Percivale chops down the Ash's tree. Shortly thereafter, Anodos unwittingly unleashes from a cupboard his Shadow, a gloomy spectre that haunts him continually, darkening his vision and corrupting his behavior. Later, Anodos happens upon a boat that takes him to the Fairy Palace, an episode that occupies seven chapters in the middle of the book. He reads several absorbing volumes in the palace library, notably the story of Cosmo in Chapter 13. Cosmo's tale warns of the danger of becoming too enamored with the visionary world, and Anodos is much affected by it. In another chamber of the palace, he rediscovers his white lady, who is veiled, and he sings her into life once again. She flees for a second time when he tries to touch her. Anodos exits the Fairy Palace and proceeds to journey through a dull underworld and wasteland, until finally, awash in despair, he throws himself into the sea. Washed ashore, Anodos finds refuge in a cottage with magical doors that open onto parts of his past and other dream-like realms. Moving on, he helps two princes save their land from giants, becomes imprisoned in a tower, and at last divests himself of his Shadow. He encounters Percivale again, on whose armour no trace of rust remains. He becomes Percivale's squire and saves him from the jaws of a terrible wolf, but in the process is

himself killed. The peace of the grave affords him special vision, in which he learns that the white lady is Sir Percivale's wife. Accepting this reality, and learning the true meaning of love, Anodos sinks back into the real world, where his family is elated to rediscover him after a three-week disappearance. To Anodos, however, the absence was twenty-one years. His adventures leave him puzzled, ambivalent, and yearning to return to the visionary realm.

Phantastes's fanciful, episodic adventures recall the conventions of chivalric romance. The book not only participates in the revival of romance, but also offers an implicit criticism of Romanticism. In particular, *Phantastes* mythologizes MacDonald's relationship with the poet Percy Shelley, whose apocalyptic yearnings MacDonald shared, but to whose atheism his Christian conscience objected. The book opens with an explicit reference to Shelley, as Chapter 1 begins with an excerpt from lines 479-489 of Shelley's poem "Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude":

> *"A spirit . . .*
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *The undulating woods, and silent well,*
>
> *And rippling rivulet, and evening gloom,*
>
> *Now deepening the dark shades, for speech assuming,*
>
> *Held commune with him; as if he and it*
>
> *Were all that was."*
>
> SHELLEY'S Alastor

(13)[23]

Numerous scholars have observed in passing the resemblance of Anodos's quest to the hero's journey in "Alastor."[24] In particular, Roderick McGillis points out that both works articulate a fear of solipsism, and he identifies the spectral shadow that haunts Anodos as Shelley's "Spirit of Solitude," warning of the danger of idolatry:

> Although MacDonald values the imagination, he also follows Shelley in stressing the dangers inherent in the pursuit of the image for its own sake. MacDonald is quick to seize on the implications of Shelley's *Alastor*; he focuses on the danger of 'the Poet's self-centered seclusion' which Shelley speaks of in the preface of *Alastor*. The avenging spirit of the poem is the self, and in MacDonald's romance Anodos' Shadow play the same role. (McGillis, "Phantastes and Lilith" 39)

Both MacDonald and Shelley target "self-centered seclusion" (39) as the danger of the dreaming imagination, yet they portray this threat in distinctive ways. *Phantastes* offers an optimistic corrective to "Alastor"'s nihilistic gloom. On a broad structural level, this difference is reflected in their handling of the romance quest plot. "Alastor" is a truncated quest, offering, as Harold Bloom puts it, "a dead end, as any poem of a ruined quest must be, for it closes in a wasteland from which no salvation is possible" (*Visionary Company* 290). Shelley's hero, "[b]lasted by disappointment, [. . .] descends to an untimely grave" ("Alastor" Preface), the result of his having forsaken the social world to

---

[23] The passage, taken from lines 479-488 of "Alastor," is slightly misquoted: line 484 ought to read "*But*, undulating woods, and silent well" (emphasis added).

[24] Details noted include *Phantastes* and "Alastor"'s similar tempo (Wolff 46), use of Romantic setting (Wolff, *Golden Key* 55-56; Docherty, *Literary Products* 29, 37-38), loss and pursuit of an elusive female spirit (Wolff, *Golden Key* 56, 86), and symbolic river journey. (Wolff, *Golden Key* 92, 94; Manlove, "MacDonald and Kingsley" 142; Docherty, *Literary Products* 32). In both works, the female spirit remains unattained.

pursue his visionary image. By contrast, *Phantastes*'s Anodos, though he, too, experiences disappointment and death, completes the quest cycle to return home, transformed and improved by the adventure. Noting this difference, John Docherty suggests that *Phantastes* "refutes Shelley's attitude expressed in Alastor[sic], that there is no real alternative to the outlook of Wordsworth and Coleridge but submitting to one's daemon" (Docherty, *Literary Products* 72), and offers a regenerative alternative: "MacDonald demonstrates that these are not the only options for the soul. Another possibility is repeated death and rebirth" (Docherty, *Literary Products* 21). *Phantastes* might, indeed, be read as MacDonald's response to Shelley's version of Romanticism, much in the way that "Alastor" offers Shelley's response to Wordsworth and Coleridge's Romanticism.

In his rewriting of "Alastor," MacDonald takes a Shelleyan moment and reinterprets it for his own purposes, recasting the problem of artistic solitude as a spiritual matter. In *Phantastes*, self-destructive visionary isolation is not a poet's irrefutable lot, but rather a danger that hinges on whether one has a right relationship to art, and, by association, to God. Specifically, MacDonald redeems Shelley's flawed thinking, as he revises the quest-journey of Shelley's poem "Alastor" by replacing Shelley's dark vision of self-destructive solipsism with an optimistic narrative of spiritual renewal. Furthermore, *Phantastes* fictionalizes MacDonald's relationship to his Romantic predecessor. In so doing, MacDonald unseats Wordsworthian nature as the privileged site of revelation, and makes literature the locus of spiritual revelation—and spiritual peril. Without simplifying the books into the rigid sort of allegory that MacDonald

disliked,[25] one can read *Phantastes*'s story of the callow youth Anodos and the fallen Sir Percivale as an imaginative account of MacDonald's encounter with the work of Percy Shelley. Structured about a Shelleyan core, *Phantastes* envisions Shelley as a redeemed father figure with whom the MacDonaldian protagonist is intrinsically intertwined, and whom he is ultimately responsible for saving. In terms of MacDonald's later work, *Phantastes* is a crucial text, introducing themes and imagery that MacDonald would develop over the course of his career, as he continually revised and enriched his mythologization of the Romantic poet.

Phantastes illustrates MacDonald's belief that art is an implicitly divine undertaking. For MacDonald, the artistic impulse involves a peculiarly Christianized form of natural supernaturalism, derived largely from Wordsworth, in which the poet's function is to unveil the transcendent truth lying hidden in the natural world. MacDonald's undated essay on Wordsworth portrays him as being inspired by "a Christian pantheism" ("Wordsworth's Poetry" 245),[26] as Wordsworth celebrates God's immanence in nature:

> 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] saw God present everywhere; not always immediately, in his own form, it is true; but whether he looked upon the awful mountain-peak, sky-

---

[25] As MacDonald emphasizes in "The Fantastic Imagination": "A fairytale is not an allegory. There may be allegory in it, but it is not an allegory. He must be an artist indeed who can, in any mode, produce a strict allegory that is not a weariness to the spirit. An allegory must be Mastery or Moorditch" (317).

[26] Roderick McGillis identifies MacDonald's Wordsworth as "a distinctly Blakean Wordsworth" (150), and discusses how MacDonald christianizes him in "Childhood and Growth"150-1967.

> encompassed with loveliness, or upon the face of a little child, which is as it were eyes in the face of nature—in all things he felt the solemn presence of the Divine Spirit. By Keats this presence was recognized only as the spirit of beauty; to Wordsworth, God, as the Spirit of Truth, was manifested through the form of the external world. ("Wordsworth's Poetry" 246-47)

As Stephen Prickett points out, this discovery of divinity in nature invokes a paradox, "at the very centre of Wordsworth's poetry" (Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* 161), that turns on the philosophical opposition between Naturalism (which locates truth in nature) and Platonism (which locates truth in a transcendent realm of absolute forms). Prickett suggests that MacDonald "was perhaps the first Victorian critic to point out that this 'contradiction' in Wordsworth mirrored the classic Christian paradox of God as *both* immanent in Nature *and* transcendent over and beyond it" (Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* 161-162). This contradiction "was to baffle Blake, and, at times, even Coleridge" (Prickett 161); however, MacDonald embraced it, expressing the paradox "not as an escape into neat verbal formulae, but as an acute existential tension" (Prickett 162). It is a tension that fuels many of MacDonald's works, none more so than *Phantastes*. With its cottages, cupboards, and fairy pools that contain, like Hamlet's bounded nutshell, the infinite space of inner vision, *Phantastes*'s magical geography reflects the Wordsworthian paradox that "the mind of man is greater far than this earth in which he dwells, and yet this world is all there is" (McGillis, "Childhood and Growth" 155). The danger, of course, is in the bad dreams, which it is Anodos's task to learn to avoid.

MacDonald's discussions of the imagination identify God as the source and ultimate object of all artistic endeavour. His concept of the imagination is laid out most

explicitly his 1867 essay "The Imagination: Its Functions and its Culture," which argues that "To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination" (2). Humans invent nothing on their own, not even their own thoughts, for "Everything of man must have been of God first" ("The Imagination" 3). Indeed, man *is* "but a thought of God" (4), in whose divine mind "the imagination of man lives and moves and has its being" (3). As such, humans cannot create *ex nihilo*, but only *in imitatione* of God, the ur-artist, employing the materials that God has already put in the world, which is *his* great work of art. Given this limitation, MacDonald objects even to the use of the word *creation* to describe humans' inventive faculty, arguing that "It is better to keep the word *creation* for that calling out of nothing which is the imagination of God; except it be an occasional symbolic expression, whose daring is fully recognized, of the likeness of man's work to the work of his maker" ("The Imagination" 3). A more fitting descriptor for human inventiveness, he argues, is the word *imagination*, which "means an *imaging* or a making of likeness" (2), and so conveys the mimetic quality that is its primary characteristic. To illustrate how human minds are subordinate to God's mind, MacDonald often uses the image of the book: as Donal explains it to his pupil Davie in *Donal Grant*, the human imagination is all part of God's great "'Think-Book'" (*Donal Grant* 62), that lives "'in no library'" (62), but is "'the book God is always writing at one end, and blotting out at the other'" (62).

If the world is a work of art, it is a decidedly self-referential one, one that constantly draws attention to the source of its creation, God's authorial presence. That is to say, the human imagination not only comes from God; it also points back to him, as it reveals the divine truth hidden in the world. Though the human mind cannot produce

wholly original thought (which only God can do), like God, the human mind "does put thought into form" ("The Imagination" 7). These forms are provided in the materials of the earthly world, which offer man the "outward figuration of the condition of his mind; an inexhaustible storehouse of forms whence he may choose exponents—the crystal pitchers that shall protect his thought and not need to be broken that the light may break forth" (5). MacDonald's world is radically symbolic, filled with signs of divinity that connect humans to God.[27] In a typical MacDonaldian paradox, interior and exterior become reversed: "The world is [. . .] the human being turned inside out. All that moves in the mind is symbolized by Nature [. . . .] the world is [. . .] an inexhaustible wardrobe for the clothing of human thought" (9). Yet objects in nature do not simply "stand for" the poet's subjective inner state, or some abstract idea. Rather, in MacDonald's peculiar brand of Platonism, forms in nature initiate a communion in which the poet's mind transcends nature, and reaches the divine. Mortal and immortal minds meet in art, when the human imagination represents, in words or concrete artistic medium, the likeness of something in the world, and in so doing reflects or reveals God's thought.

While earthly symbols are humans' best hope for glimpsing the divine during mortal life, neither the natural symbols which the poet employs, nor the (equally symbolic) words he uses *are* the truth; they are simply vessels that contain and convey it. Symbols are doomed forever to fall short of the reality they represent because the things of the earthly world are finite: they may be imbued with the spark of divinity, but they cannot wholly contain the infinite fullness of God. MacDonald's work is full of this awareness of the limitations of symbols. How exactly a mortal symbol goes about

---

[27] MacDonald is particularly given to portraying nature as a great book full of signs, an approach he inherited from late medieval and Renaissance thought (see Curtius 319-20).

clothing eternal truth without actually being that truth remains unclear in his work. The ineffability of the connection between earthly materials and spiritual truth is suggested in *Phantastes*'s discussion of the relationship between flower fairies' souls and the flower that houses them. The mortal flower signifies to the human eye the nature of the fairy within, with the consequence that the flower will wither and die without that spark of divine life. Nevertheless, the flower is not the fairy; it does not possess full representative capacities, and "cannot be wrought into an equal power of utterance" (*Phantastes* 36) of the spirit inside. Anodos is at a loss to explain the relationship between the two: it is a "oneness [. . .] which you could not describe, but which described itself to you" (*Phantastes* 36). The connection is essentially mystical, and has overtones of the miraculous—a significant quality for MacDonald, who believed in the value of divine mystery.

Imperfect as it may be, the human imagination is essentially revelatory. Though man and God are separated by an "unpassable gulf" (5) (unpassable for humans, that is; God can go where he pleases), the gulf is "teeming with infinite revelations" (5) which people may glimpse. Heir to the medieval idea of *deus absconditus*, MacDonald depicts mortal life as a cosmic game of hide and seek: as the narrator of Donal Grant describes it, "The delight of creation is verily in secrets, but in secrets as truths on the way. All secrets are embryo revelations" (*Donal Grant* 7). For MacDonald's poet protagonist Donal Grant, all of nature participates in this game of concealment and revelation: "the river rippled and shone as if it knew something worth knowing as yet unrevealed" (*Donal Grant* 6-7). A poet, then, is better called a *Trouvère* or a *Finder*, since the poet's task is not to create, but to *uncover* the divine truth already embedded in nature ("The

Imagination" 20). MacDonald often describes revelation as a process of illumination or unveiling: "The man has but to light the lamp within the form: his imagination is the light, it is not the form. Straightway the shining thought makes the form visible, and becomes itself visible through the form ("The Imagination" 5).

While earthly life may grant humans brief glimpses of the divine, ultimate revelation lies only in death, "the destroying revealer" ("The Imagination" 6) that pulls away the mortal veil once and for all. MacDonald shares this longing for death with his predecessor Shelley, and he uses Shelley's "Adonais" to illustrate his concept of "death as the revealer of secrets" ("The Imagination" 6). Dying has reassuring connotations for MacDonald, as the shedding of mortal trappings permits a truer vision of the eternal:

> The one remains; the many change and pass;
>
> Heaven's light for ever shines; earth's shadows fly;
>
> Life, like a dome of many coloured glass,
>
> Stains the white radiance of eternity,
>
> Until death tramples it to fragments.
>
> (Shelley, "Adonais" quoted in "The Imagination" 6)[28]

Death is a positive figure for MacDonald (as it was also for Shelley), as death functions as the bestower of ultimate, ultra vision, "the destroying revealer, walking aloft through the upper region, treading out this life-bubble of colours, that the man may look beyond it and behold the true, the uncoloured, the all-coloured" (6). Rather than signifying the end

---

[28] MacDonald also uses this passage from Shelley to illustrate the poetic imagination's combining capacity, as he highlights how Shelley unites "the inventions of his fellow-men, in glass, in colour, in dome" (6) together with the sky, "the true symbol of eternity" (6), which he "enriches by the attribution of whiteness, or unity and radiance" (6), and to which he adds the figure of death presiding over all.

of consciousness, death brings about its glorious expansion. MacDonald emphasizes the freeing capacity of death in his depiction of death as the happy collapse of "the human tent": "we didn't put it up, and we haven't to take it down; and when it falls in a heap above us, it will not smother us, for we shall get out of its folds into the great wide room—and somehow, I trust, nearer to God himself" (George MacDonald to Charlotte Godwin, 20 Jan. 1889, Beinecke 103.1.4.167). Unlike the atheist Shelley, MacDonald connects the transcendent eternal realm is specifically to a Christian God.

The promise of heavenly revelation informs virtually all of MacDonald's writing: from his fairy tales to his literary criticism, there is scarcely a work in which death is not upheld and celebrated as a consummation devoutly to be wished. As J. R. R. Tolkien declared, "Death is the major theme that most inspired George Macdonald" ("On Fairy Stories" 62), an observation shared by readers before him and since. Although MacDonald's appetite for death may strike some as excessive (even by the standards of the death-obsessed Victorians), in the context of his Christian beliefs, his fixation can be understood as more than morbid extravagance. Far from constituting an end, death initiates entrance into the transcendent realm. Playing on this idea of mortal life as heaven's waiting room, MacDonald remarked in a birthday card to his soon-to-be sister-in-law, "Death is not an end—but a fresh beginning, the grandest day of all, the getting out of the lobby and into the theatre" (George MacDonald to Caroline Powell, 10 Dec. 1850). In another letter, he calls death our "one transcendent birthday, far off it may be, but surely to come—the moment when we know in ourselves that we are one with God" (George MacDonald to Lily MacDonald, 22 Dec, 1872). C. S. Lewis recognized the

positive connotations of Death when he described *Phantastes* as possessing "a certain quality of Death, *good* Death" (Lewis, "Preface" 21).

The process of death and rebirth is associated with the idea of spiritual conversion. Lewis articulated this connection explicitly when he identified *Phantastes* as having inspired his personal spiritual conversion: "What it actually did to me was to convert, even to baptize (that was where the Death came in) my imagination" (Lewis, Preface 21). The baptism of Lewis's imagination rests on the idea that an imagination could be fallen in the first place, and in need of redemption. In a telling moment, Lewis ties his imaginative fall specifically to Romanticism. A chronic doubter who seems to have shared MacDonald's anxiety about the wilder, savage, untamed impulses of Romanticism, Lewis—again, much like MacDonald—constructs a genealogy of Romanticism in which MacDonald is Romanticism's redeemer. For Lewis, *Phantastes*'s "cool, morning innocence" (Lewis, Preface 21) contrasted to the darkness of other Romantic works, and he credits *Phantastes* with steering him away from these fallen artistic forms: "I had already been waist deep in Romanticism; and likely enough, at any moment, to flounder into its darker and more evil forms, slithering down the steep descent that leads from the love of strangeness to that of eccentricity and thence to that of perversity" (Lewis, Preface 20-21). Lewis's positioning of *Phantastes* as an innocent alternative to Romanticism, capable of redirecting the errant imagination to higher moral ground, is no accident. Rather, I want to argue that rescuing Romanticism is one of the fundamental drives of the book. *Phantastes* shows that Romanticism, for all its visionary heights, possesses demonic, soul-destroying depths. Returning to an older, chivalric mode of romance, *Phantastes* dramatizes the perils of Romantic vision, and attempts to

administer a spiritual corrective. Certainly, Lewis found such a remedy in it. I maintain that transforming atheist writers is by no means a coincidental side-effect of *Phantastes*. Indeed, it is one of the book's chief functions, as MacDonald's visionary romance strives to redeem and transform that most notorious of Romantic apostates, Percy Shelley. In *Phantastes,* Shelley dies to give life to George MacDonald, whose imaginative world is a redeemed and glorified revelation of Shelleyan vision.

Phantastes can be read as a statement of MacDonald's belief in the divine nature of art. In particular, in its explicit adaptation of the Pygmalion myth, the book illustrates MacDonald's ideas about art's natural-supernatural essence and revelatory capacity. In the fifth chapter, Anodos discovers, in a cave, the form of the White Lady encased in alabaster. The cave is decorated with "a strange, time-worn bas-relief" that Anodos "concluded to represent Pygmalion, as he waited the quickening of his statue" (65). Inspired by Ovid's "lovely story" (66), Anodos sets about sculpting "an ideal woman" (66) from an adjacent alabaster block. Anodos's artistic effort, however, differs substantially from his classical model. In Ovid, the sculptor Pygmalion creates the idealized form of a woman, but requires Venus's aid to bring the statue to life (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10). By contrast, Anodos does not actually make the statue, because her idealized form already exists in the rock: "I saw before me with sufficient plainness [. . .] a block of pure alabaster enclosing the form, apparently, in marble, of a reposing woman" (68). Rather than creating something original—which, according to MacDonald's mimetic understanding of the imagination, cannot be—Anodos's artistic task involves uncovering and reviving her preexisting form. Her form offers a concrete embodiment of the human ideal, as it is the "visible body" of "the thought already clothed with form in

the unseen hall of the sculptor's brain" (66). Human ideals originate in God, however, with the consequence that Anodos's artistic act brings the regular mortal world into contact with a transcendent, idealized realm. Although the mortal artist is real, the work of art is more real still: so Pygmalion's statue is depicted as being more intensely alive than he is, as "the sculptor sat more rigid than the figure to which he eyes were turned" (65). This union of the ideal and the actual is articulated in terms of death and rebirth, as Anodos wakes the lady from the "antenatal tomb" (69) of the cave, out of a state that was (as the white lady herself later describes it) "worse than death" (242). Her revival from the tomb is overlaid with shades of Christ's resurrection: "a white form, veiled in a light robe of whiteness, burst upwards from the stone, stood, glided forth, and gleamed away towards the woods" (71).

The episode emphasizes the connection between poetry, nature, and divine revelation.[29] The cave in which he finds the lady evokes poetry specifically, as Anodos's ekphrastic description of the cave's ferns recounts how their "forms, and groupings, and shades wrought in me like a poem" (65). The connection between greenery and poetry is significant, as Anodos's poetic impulse emerges—as it did for many Romantic poets—out of his communion with nature: his newfound "rejoicing in song" (69) is inspired by his drinking "the elixir of life" (65) from a natural fairy pool, and eating Fairy Land nuts and fruit, which "operated in such a way upon my senses that I was brought into a far more complete relationship with the things around me" (62-63). This enhanced sense of

---

[29] Significantly, the episode shifts the emphasis from sculptural art to verbal art, which MacDonald believed to be preeminent among all the arts. Anodos, after all, does not sculpt, but rather *sings* the lady into life with spontaneous, inspired verse (70-71). In *England's Antiphon*, he argues that the sacred song of worship is "the highest human condition" (1), and poetry "the first form religious utterance will assume" (1).

connection to his surroundings grants revelatory power, as it enables him to understand "in some degree what the birds meant in their songs" (63), as well as to see more clearly: "human forms appeared much more dense and defined; more tangibly visible, if I may say so" (63). The revelatory function of poetry is further emphasized in Anodos' second encounter with the white lady, which occurs in the Fairy Palace. Here, she appears as a statue, "revealing itself by successive stages of imbodiment" (201) as Anodos sings her into visibility once again: "ever as I sang, it was as if a veil were being lifted up from before the form, but an invisible veil, so that the statue appeared to grow before me, not so much by evolution, as by infinitesimal degrees of added height" (201).

Anodos's encounters with the white lady portray poetic inspiration as an experience of revelation and resurrection, a depiction that accords with MacDonald's Christian ideas about the divine function of the imagination. His rewriting of Ovid also rewrites Shelley, as Anodos's involvement with the lady recalls but contrasts with "Alastor"'s wild and passionate dream of the "veiled maid" ("Alastor" 151). The dream experienced by Shelley's poet-hero is suspiciously dark: far from bringing clarity and revelation, it "Involved and swallowed up the vision" (189) of Shelley's poet with "blackness [. . .] and night" (188). Like Shelley's poet, Anodos is drawn irresistibly after his ephemeral beloved, and, as Wolff notes, "again like Alastor" he loses her twice (Wolff, *Golden Key* 86). Anodos's episodes of being "withdrawn from the notice of men" (66) in the poetic cave and the Fairy Palace echo the visionary seclusion of Shelley's hero, who "lived [. . .] died, [. . . and] sung, in solitude" ("Alastor" 60); yet *Phantastes* lacks "Alastor"'s self-destructive overtones. *Phantastes* does not simply gloss over of the dark bits of "Alastor" with a revisionary brush, however. Rather,

MacDonald re-presents "Alastor"'s ambivalent figure of the visionary woman by splitting her into two characters. In a hearkening to his romance roots, MacDonald projects all the good poetic inspiration onto the white lady, and saves all the darkness and destructive solipsism for her demonic counterpart, the Duessa-like Alder maiden.

In the episode of the Alder maiden, MacDonald sets the Pygmalion myth in opposition to another of Ovid's stories, the myth of Narcissus.[30] Overtones of Narcissus are also present in "Alastor"'s Poet, whose

> eyes beheld
> Their own wan light through the reflected lines
> Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depths
> Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
> Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
> Sees its own treacherous likeness there. ("Alastor" 469-474)

The danger of falling in love with one's "own treacherous likeness" is projected onto the Alder maid. A monster of narcissism, she embodies the poetic impulse that is not divinely inspired, but which finds its source and center in the self. The song that summons the Alder maiden originates not in wonderstruck communion with nature, but in Anodos's self-congratulatory delight at his heroic deeds, as he flatters himself by recalling how his "songs had called [the white lady] forth into the outer world" (78), and envisions a self-serving fantasy in which the lady would come "to meet and thank her deliverer" (78) for his service rendered. His fantasy promotes concealment rather than

---

[30] J. Hillis Miller, in *Versions of Pygmalion*, observes the similarity between Pygmalion and Narcissus in Ovid. He suggests that Pygmalion's creation of Galatea, "the mirror image of his desire" (4) is Narcissus' dream come true, "as if Narcissus' reflection in the pool had come alive and could return his love" (5).

revelation, as Anodos pictures the lady "in a twilight which would veil her confusion" and the "whole night" as "one dream-realm of joy, the central form of which was everywhere present, although unbeheld" (78). What he gets is indeed concealment, albeit not in the way he expects, as the Alder maiden's "dim white figure" (79) is a superficial imitation of the white lady, a counterfeit appearance that veils the rottenness of the Alder maiden's true form. Anodos's self-regard is reflected and amplified in the Alder maiden's narcissism. Her love is characterized by extreme self-focus: as the farmwife later describes it, "'although she loves no man, she loves the love of any man'" (90) which makes her "'conscious anew of her own beauty'" (90). This narcissism is further manifested in the Alder maiden's self-centered storytelling, "which, at every turn and every pause, somehow or other fixed my eyes and thoughts upon her extreme beauty; seeming always to culminate in something that had a relation, revealed or hidden, but always operative, with her own loveliness" (83). Her self-absorbed art does not lead outward to a transcendent realm, but inward to solipsism, as she and Anodos expand to become the entire world: "I listened till she and I were blended with the tale; till she and I were the whole history" (83).

In contrast to the White Lady, who was associated with transcending selfhood and glimpsing divinity, the Alder maiden's self-absorption leads to a ghoulish state of living death. Her deathly nature is embodied in her sepulchral form, which is "like an open coffin set up on one end" (84), "a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree" (84). The allegiance of this "walking Death" (86) to the vampire Ash, who is also "alive, yet not with life" (52), further emphasizes the self-destructiveness of solipsistic narcissism. The Ash, variously

described as an "ogre" (25) and a "goblin" (50) with a "Gorgon head" (85), "ghastly face" (85), "ghoul-eyes" (85), hollow heart (58), and beastly claws (51, 85), brings neither rebirth nor revelation, but exists in a self-consuming state of predatory undeath: "A gnawing voracity, which devoured the devourer, seemed to be the indwelling and propelling power of the whole ghostly apparition" (52-53). Failing to escape the bonds of mortal selfhood results not in death (for death would bring eternal rest) but in eternal dissatisfaction and implacable appetite.

In the episode of the Alder maiden, MacDonald rewrites Shelley's "Alastor" by transforming the more ambigious Spirit of Solitude into something outright demonic. The setting of the Alder maiden's grotto is telling: "And we had met at last in this same cave of greenery, while the summer night hung round us heavy with love, and the odours that crept through the silence of the sleeping woods were the only signs of an outer world that invaded out solitude" (83-84). The pensive atmosphere, enclosed setting, and erasure of the boundaries of personal identity echo the excerpt from "Alastor" that opens *Phantastes*, in which "Alastor"'s dream maiden appears in the forest darkness and communes with the poet:

> A spirit . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The undulating woods, and silent well
>
> And leaping rivulet, and evening gloom
>
> Now deepening the dark shades
>
> Held commune with him, as if he and it
>
> Were all that was. ("Alastor" 484-487; in *Phantastes* 13)

In "Alastor," this meeting is an ambivalent communion, one for which the poet yearns profoundly, though ultimately it leads to his demise. *Phantastes* emphasizes the destructiveness of such a communion in the episode of the Alder maiden and Ash. It also accelerates the pace. Whereas "Alastor" draws out the poet's slow decline over several hundred lines, *Phantastes* speeds up the process, as Anodos wakes two sentences later to the "succeeding horror" (84) of imminent death in the clutches of the Ash. In "Alastor," the dying poet more or less fades into the landscape, his blood beating "in mystic sympathy / With nature's ebb and flow" ("Alastor" 652-53). Similarly, *Phantastes* depicts death as an absorption into nature—the Ash is, after all, a tree. In contrast to Shelley, however, MacDonald describes such a fate in horrifying, visceral terms, as he portrays the Ash as a devouring, predatory beast who suffers from a secret "hole in his heart" (58) that he is "always trying to fill [. . .] up, but he cannot" (58). To this end, the Ash would have "dragged [Anodos] to its roots, and buried [him] like carrion" (88). For the atheist Shelley, absorption into nature is all very well, but MacDonald's goal is heavenly rebirth. His duplicitous, carnivorous trees offer a nightmare vision of organic incorporation without transcendence that is a far cry from natural-supernatural communion.

With *Phantastes*, MacDonald's stark dichotomy of good and evil presents a contrast to Shelley's more nuanced handling of the problem of artistic isolation in "Alastor." This dualizing tendency suggests a discomfort with the ambiguity of Shelleyan Romanticism, and might be seen as an attempt to abandon the gray shades of Romanticism for a form of romance in which black is black and white is white, and never

the twain shall meet. Fairy Land, as Sir Percivale describes it, is held in a tension of opposing forces:

> "Somehow or other, [. . .] notwithstanding the beauty of this country of Faerie, [. . .] there is much that is wrong with it. If there are great splendours, there are corresponding horrors; heights and depths; beautiful women and awful fiends; noble men and weaklings. All a man has to do, is to better what he can." (295)

Percivale's declaration that man's duty is to "better what he can" (295) suggests MacDonald's project of revising and improving Romanticism, in which *Phantastes* is a key work. The white lady/Alder maiden split allows MacDonald to correct Shelley's poem—in which inspiration and self-annihilation are hopelessly blurred—by offering a more Christian form of transcendent art as an alternative to self-destructive solipsism. The presence of moral alternatives permits his characters the important capacity of choice, and consequently recasts what is at stake in artistic vocation. In "Alastor," the Poet's arguably biggest decision is whether to forsake the social world of "fireside" and "home" ("Alastor" 76) in order to "seek strange truths in undiscovered lands" ("Alastor" 77). For the Poet, however, there is really little debating the matter, as the Poet's "wandering step" ("Alastor" 106) is simply "Obedient to high thoughts" ("Alastor" 107) as he is drawn onward. In *Phantastes,* by contrast, heeding the poetic calling is more complicated, in that the artist becomes responsible for discerning the good and the true from evil and falseness, with no less than eternal salvation at stake.

MacDonald's revision of Shelley suggests that *Phantastes* is a pilgrim's progress through literature. Anodos's progress might thus be read as MacDonald's fictionalized

response to the romance tradition—and especially the Romantic tradition—that came before him. *Phantastes* portrays how literature becomes internalized, as its setting suggests an imaginative voyage taking place entirely within the protagonist's head. In contrast to the hero of Shelley's "Alastor," in which the social-domestic world stands in isolated opposition to visionary nature, and the hero must quit the "the unimaginative man's lonely gregariousness" (Bloom, *Visionary Company* 285) in order to pursue "Nature's most secret steps" ("Alastor" 81), Anodos never leaves home at all. His departure for adventure involves no physical displacement, but consists, rather, of the fluid transformation of his bed chamber into faerie forest, as the furniture of his room comes to life, turning into trees, grass, flowers, and a stream (20-23). The book's dream frame and heavily interiorized setting suggest that Anodos has gone nowhere, and is instead wandering only into the far reaches of his dreaming imagination.[31] With its chapters framed by epigraphs drawn from medieval, metaphysical, and Romantic writers; filled with ballads, stories, fairy tales, legends, and myths; and peopled with characters from those very stories (such as Sir Percivale of Arthurian legend, and the farmwife descended from the princess of Madame d'Aulnoy's tale "The White Cat"), *Phantastes*' world is resoundingly literary. As Anodos moves across Fairy Land, he voyages through stories: he is constantly reading books, hearing tales, or listening to ballads. The reader's progress imitates Anodos's progress, insofar as the reader also has to go through epigraphs and ballads to make his or her way through the book.

---

[31] Adrian Gunther observes that this is complicated by the fact that *Phantastes'* dream-frame is imperfect: Anodos apparently goes to sleep and dreams—but when he reawakens in the real world, it is some distance from home. See Gunther 32-43.

Even more radically, *Phantastes* fictionalizes how readers internalize literature, emphasizing how reading brings a book to imaginative life. This phenomenon is depicted as a literary Pygmalionism, as it testifies to the capacity of literature to escape the bounds of the aesthetic realm and enter the living world. The way reading shapes imaginative perception is evoked most explicitly in Anodos's temporarily becoming the protagonist of whatever book he is reading:

> If [. . .] it was a book of metaphysics I opened, I had scarcely read two pages before I seemed to myself to be pondering over discovered truth. [. . . .] Or if the book was one of travels, I found myself the traveler. [. . . .] I walked, I discovered, I fought, I suffered, I rejoiced in my success. Was it a history? I was the chief actor therein. [. . . .] With fiction, it was the same. Mine was the whole story. For I took the place of the character who was most like myself, and his story was mine; until, grown weary with the life of years condensed in an hour, or arrived at my deathbed, or the end of the volume, I would awake, with a sudden bewilderment, to the consciousness of my present life, recognizing the walls and room around me, and finding I joyed or sorrowed only in a book. (140-41)

Reading initiates a metamorphosis, a coming to life of the words on the page. To the extent that reading animates inanimate objects, it is akin to the Pygmalionesque revival of the white lady, and the transformation of Anodos's bedroom from lifeless furniture to living wood. Furthermore, reading involves transcending the limits of selfhood. In contrast to the Alder maiden's narcissistic stories, which centered entirely on the listener's identity, never escaping the bonds of the self, the books in the Fairy Palace library allows the reader to transcend his or her self by transforming the reader into

someone else. Anodos's transfigurative experience of reading embodies the optimistic Romantic idea that art can and will alter reality—a principle encapsulated in MacDonald's dictum from Novalis, quoted in *Phantastes* and in other works, that "*'Unser Leben ist kein Traum, aber es soll und wird vielleicht einer werden'*" (Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will, 315).[32] Though he always returns to himself, Anodos's identity is nevertheless changed—and improved—by what he reads: "I trust I have carried away in my soul some of the exhalations of their undying leaves. In after hours of deserved or needful sorrow, portions of what I read there have often come to me again, with an unexpected comforting" (187). The dynamic of his reading is described in similarly Pygmalionesque terms as the White Lady's awakening, as MacDonald evokes images of resurrection: Anodos is repeatedly "buried and risen" (187) in the books. Anodos's journey to and from Fairy Land replicates this pattern of burial and resurrection, dislocation and transformation, on the outer layer of the book. It is a disorienting experience— "I had been gone, they told me, twenty-one days. To me it seemed twenty-one years" (317)—and one that alters him irrevocably: "Thus I, who set out to find my Ideal, came back rejoicing that I had lost my Shadow" (318). Finally he is, literally, buried in the faerie world before he reawakens in the real one.

As a *Künstlerroman* tale of artistic growth, *Phantastes* demonstrates one of the ways in which MacDonald diverges from Wordsworth, as literature ultimately supercedes nature as a shaping force of development. In general, MacDonald admired and agreed with Wordsworth's identifying nature as a locus of spiritual transcendence. However, as Roderick McGillis observes, he did not share Wordsworth's emphasis on nature as the

---

[32] The same line from Novalis occurs in translated form at the end of MacDonald's 1864 novella *The Portent* (29), and is the concluding line of his 1895 *Lilith: A Romance* (398).

"constant focal point" of spiritual development (McGillis, "Phantastes and Lilith" 157): "MacDonald grants nature a large share in the child's development, but it is only, he realizes, incidental" (McGillis, "Phantastes and Lilith" 157). Not everyone has access to nature; other influences matter. In the case of *Phantastes*, it is literary influences that are crucial to spiritual-artistic development.[33, 34]

MacDonald's replacement of Wordsworth's nature with literature is reflected in his use of trees, which are thoroughly literary. In general, trees dominate *Phantastes*'s "textual landscape" (Richardson 44). They are associated particularly with tales, as the Beech literally sings Anodos a ballad (58-59), and the Alder tells him stories (83). In

---

[33] To be fair, it is perhaps overstating the case to say that Wordsworth discounts literature's shaping force entirely, as storytelling does form part of his metaphorical landscapes. As Alan Richardson points out, "the organicized text is a common trope throughout Wordsworth's poetry and criticism" (Richardson 44). In *The Prelude*, "traditional tales are presented as a literal "second nature," a landscape through which Wordsworth and Coleridge freely wandered as children" (44):

> wandering as we did
> Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales
> Rich with indigenous produce, open ground
> Of fancy, happy pastures ranged at will.
> (Wordsworth *Prelude* 5.234-37, in Richardson 44)

Seen in this light, *Phantastes'* story-filled setting might instead be read as an extension of Wordsworth's idea of the "textual landscape" (Richardson 44), as Anodos too wanders "Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales" over the course of his journeying.

[34] The educational impact of reading imaginative literature features in MacDonald's other works. As we shall see later, for instance, *Donal Grant* emphasizes the benefit that reading romance may have on the minds of the young: young Davie, whom Donal teaches the virtues of chivalric obedience, reads "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia" (*Donal Grant* 38), and Donal recommends he try next the more recent romances of Sir Walter Scott. By contrast, Davie's dissolute (and disobedient) brother Percy Forgue rejects such "'dull old romances'" (*Donal Grant* 38) as "'Horribly dreary'" (38). His novels recognize, moreover, how the patterns of fairy tale and romance shape human consciousnesses: Hugh Sutherland in *David Elginbrod* "is living in the midst of a romance" (380), and Donal Grant sees himself as a fairy tale character, "'like ane o' the youngest sons i' the fairy tales, [. . . .] The warl' afore me's my story-buik'" (*Donal Grant* 6).

other episodes he reads books in cottages constructed of trees, such as the Four-Oak cottage, in which he reads the volume of Arthurian legend (32-3); the oak-timbered farmhouse, with its copy of Madam D'Aulnoy's "The History of Graciosa and Percinet" (93);[35] and the Cypress cottage, where he reads from a dark book of doom (102). Arboreal imagery reemerges in the Fairy Palace library, from which Anodos declares he has "carried away in my soul some of the exhalations of [. . . the] undying leaves" (187) of the library books—a pun on "undying leaves" that evokes the more organic leaves of his earlier sylvan encounters, while also reminding us of the concrete materials of literary production. Back in England, trees serve to recall his literary adventures: as he lies beneath the "great, ancient beech-tree" (319) outside his family home, he fancies he hears once again the voice of the ballad-singing woman "in the cottage that was four-square [. . .] between two hoary branches of the beech overhead" (319). Intrinsically bound to literature, trees illustrate the necessity of readerly caution. The importance of distinguishing the good trees from the bad is the first warning Anodos receives upon arriving in Fairy Land: "'trust the Oak, and the Elm, and the great Beech. Take care of the Birch, for though she is honest, she is too young not to be changeable. But shun the Ash and the Alder; for the Ash is an ogre [. . .] and the Alder will smother you with her web of hair'" (25). MacDonald's catalogue of trees suggests the importance of moral

---

[35] Madame d'Aulnoy's fairy tale "The History of Graciosa and Percinet" was published in the 1715 anthology *Contes de Fees*. The *–net* suffix of Percinet's name makes it similar to Percivale's *–vale*; both names suggest the image of the veil which pervades *Phantastes*. D'Aulnoy's tale mirrors MacDonald's preoccupation with death and rebirth, as the story concludes with the princess Graciosa being buried alive by the evil stepmother queen, and living happily ever after with Prince Percinet in his magical crystal palace beyond the grave.

discernment in art[36]—not all trees are good—a lesson that is emphasized in Anodos's encounter with the Alder maiden. That literary matters are at the heart of *Phantastes* is suggested by the fact that Anodos's entire adventure is framed by trees. The story begins with Anodos's investigation of his father's writing desk, made of ancient oak: he ventures into "the dark oak cabinet" (14) in the hopes of learning "how my father, whose personal history was unknown to me, had woven his web of story; how he had found the world and how the world had left him" (14). The oak desk also houses his tiny fairy grandmother, who announces to Anodos that he will find himself in Fairy Land shortly. This connection between paternity, writing, and Fairy Land implies that Anodos's search for his origins is of a particularly literary nature.

Specifically, Anodos's looking into a dark object in search of his father suggests MacDonald looking for his literary father, Percy Shelley. While Anodos does not find his literal father in Fairy Land, he does find a father-figure in Sir Percivale, who bears an astonishing resemblance to MacDonald's literary forebear Shelley. Anodos's journey through Fairy Land and involvement with Sir Percivale suggests MacDonald's journey through literature, in which Shelley functions as a quasi-father figure, who inspires and leads MacDonald on his own literary path.

2.2 Reflections of Shelley: Shelley as Knight.

Percivale is Shelley, or at least, as the final syllable of his name suggests, he is Percy Shelley with the idealizing veil of fiction drawn over him. He is first in a line of

---

[36] The catalogue of trees also recalls older forms of romance, as *Phantastes'* monitory list evokes in particular Spenser's list of trees in the *Faerie Queene* 1.1.8.5 – 1.1.9.9, which discussed the moral attributes of various trees.

Percies who will appear in MacDonald's work—Percy Cathcart, the dissolute suitor in *Adela Cathcart* (1864); his counterpart in corruption, Percy Forgue in *Donal Grant* (1883); the idealized painter Charles Percivale in *A Seaboard Parish* (1868) and *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872); and twin brothers Uncle Edmund and Uncle Edward in The *Flight of the Shadow* (1891), who, though not named Percy, are said to be the spitting image of Shelley (*The Flight of the Shadow* 13). *Phantastes*'s Percivale is a romanticized improvement on the real thing. The final syllable of Percivale's name, which suggests the Latin imperative *vale*, or "be well," is a pun that hints at *Phantastes*'s attempt to make Percy Shelley well and whole. This fictional enhancement of Shelley is in keeping with MacDonald's belief about the ameliorative power of art, which is alluded to in *Phantastes*. In *Phantastes*, Anodos discusses how art is a mimetic mirror that reflects the world in idealized rather than actual form: thanks to the transformative capacity of art, the image is "lovelier than what we call the reality" (123). Art contains overtones of the miraculous, as "All mirrors are magic mirrors. The commonest room is a room in a poem when I turn to the glass. [. . . .] In whatever way it may be accounted for, of one thing we may be sure, that this feeling is no cheat [. . .]. There must be a truth involved in it, though we may but in part lay hold of the meaning" (123-124). *Phantastes*'s depiction of partial mirror vision adds apocalyptic overtones to the idea that art improves reality, as it evokes 1 Corinthians 13.12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known." Anodos's discussion of art's power to enchant also echoes Shelley's claim, in his "Defence of Poetry," that the mirror of poetry possesses the corrective capacity to make "beautiful that which is distorted" (485). Certainly, *Phantastes* attempts to render the distortions of

Shelley's life beautiful through the heroic figure of Sir Percival, the rusty-armored knight.

Anodos's relationship with Percivale mythologizes MacDonald's encounter with Shelley, offering a wishful fantasy in which the two writers' fates are intrinsically intertwined, as each becomes the heroic savior of the other. Like MacDonald reading Shelley, Anodos first reads of Percival, discovering him in the volume of Arthurian tales he reads in the Four Oak Cottage (29). In the book of legend, Percivale (MacDonald spells his name both with and without the final *e)* is a fallen knight, a condition that hints at Shelley's own life of error. The victim of "the damosel of the alder-tree" (32), whose "fair words and false countenance beguiled him" (33), Percivale displays his scarlet shame for all to see, on his reddened armor, "wondrous rosty to behold" (32), and on his ruddy horse, "whose trapping were all to-smirched with mud and mire" (32). Anodos's reading of the tale is interrupted by the stirrings of the evil Ash outside, "almost awake, [. . .] and greedier than usual" (33). Logically speaking, Anodos's reading and the Ash's awakening is a coincidence; however, in *Phantastes*'s dream world, "ein Traumbild ohne Zusammenhang" ("a vision without rational connections"; MacDonald, quoting Novalis, 13), causation is implied: it is as though Anodos, in reading of Percivale's sin, has made it come alive (as seems to happen to many inanimate things in Fairy Land), suggesting the implicit danger of becoming involved, even imaginatively, with romantic pursuits.

Percivale and Anodos share a mysterious connection that suggests MacDonald's peculiar identification with Shelley. The problem with Percivale, according to Anodos, is that Percivale is simply too good: "Incapable of evil himself, he could scarcely suspect it in another" (305), a quality that leaves Percival prey to the deceptions of others.

Anodos's perception of Percival is strongly reminiscent of MacDonald's Arnoldian reading of Shelley in his *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry. The 1860 essay makes a concerted attempt to excuse the ineffectual angel, emphasizing Shelley's "noble aims and hopes" (104), and his "wide sympathy and lofty hope for his kind" (104). "[S]adly maligned" (104) by an unsympathetic public, "Whatever faults he may have committed [. . .] were not the result of sensuality" (101), but of a heart "full of love" (102), overlooked and unappreciated by the society he wished to save. Anodos is similarly forgiving of Percivale. Beneath Percivale's "soiled armour" (290), Anodos recognizes the true knight, noting that his fallen face, "sad, even to gloominess," and drooping frame, "bowed as with an inward grief" (75), are but the trappings of shame that conceal his true countenance, which is "lofty," "noble and high, though thus beclouded" (75). The book's penultimate sentence, "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" (320), might just as easily have occurred in MacDonald's apologetic *Encyclopaedia* entry. Like Anodos, MacDonald is able to see beyond the veil of sin: both his essay on Shelley and *Phantastes*'s glowing portrayal of Percival are propelled by a similar idealizing impulse. *Phantastes* offers something that the encyclopaedia essay cannot, however: self-mythologization. *Phantastes* fictionalizes the role that MacDonald himself plays—or wished to play—in the process of redeeming the fallen poet. The result is more than just a revising of Shelley; it is self-mythologizing, as MacDonald fabricates a world in which Shelley and MacDonald are inextricably bound together, with MacDonald playing Shelley's inheritor and redeemer.[37]

---

[37] My reading rests on an equation of MacDonald and Anodos, which is grounded in

The relationship between Anodos and Percivale involves a reciprocal doubling. Anodos mirrors the knight's redemptive progress, as he follows (sometimes literally) in Percivale's footsteps, serving as his squire and apprentice, and eventually becoming his heroic saviour. Both men love the white lady, who regards Anodos as "the moon of my night" and Percivale as "the sun of my day" (242). Each falls prey to the Alder maiden's "fair words and false countenance" (33), and bears the mark of his sin in his physical appearance, Percivale in his rusted armour, Anodos in his gloomy shadow. Each ultimately saves the other: Percivale saves Anodos from the vampire Ash by chopping down his tree (85, 242); and Anodos saves Percivale from the devouring wolf in the wooden temple (306-308). Indeed, Anodos's heroic role in serving (and saving) Percival is obliquely prophesied in the fallen knight's determination to seek redemption. As Percivale declares:

> "I that was proud am humble now. [. . . .] Never [. . .] shall this armour be furbished, but by the blows of knightly encounter, until the last speck has disappeared from every spot where the battle-axe and sword of evil-doers, or noble foes, might fall; when I shall again lift my head, and say to my squire, 'Do thy duty once more, and make this armour shine.'" (76)

Keeping Percival's armour bright thus becomes a mutual endeavour. Initially, it is Percivale who must restore his armour's brilliance through heroic deeds. Yet Anodos also contributes to its upkeep, when, as Percivale's squire, he "tended his horse; [. . .]

---

previous criticism. Wolff, among others, "venture[s] to read autobiography into *Phantastes*" (*The Golden Key* 104). Holbrook, in his Oedipal analysis of *Phantastes*, goes into further autobiographic detail, as he identifies the letter and lock of hair that Anodos finds in the oaken cabinet with an actual the lock of MacDonald's mother's hair, which he kept for his whole life, along with a letter telling of her maternal grief at a too-swift weaning of young George (Holbrook 29-30).

cleaned his armour; [. . . and] repair[ed] it when necessary" (301), all the while burning "to do something more for him than the ordinary routine of a squire's duty permitted" (301). Anodos's maintenance of the armour makes him a participant in Percivale's image, evoking MacDonald's historical role in helping to restore Shelley's tarnished honour with such works as the *Encyclopaedia* entry. Anodos's desire to "do something more" for the noble knight hints at MacDonald's barely concealed yearning to save the besmirched poet. Anodos's final act of devotion is most suggestive: by sacrificing his life to save Percivale from the devouring wolf, he not only preserves the Christ-like knight, he *becomes like* the servant-savior whose "eyes burned on like a holy sacrifice, uplift upon a granite rock" (293).

The doubling of Christlike characters indicates the grandeur of MacDonald's vision, and suggests the typological patterns that shape his vision of literary history, as well as his own writing. In a typological view of the world, history repeats itself, not in static repetition, but in progressive fashion, as each type reflects and improves on the previous image, moving ever closer to apocalypse and transcendence. As McGillis points out, this is a common Romantic pattern: "M. H. Abrams has taught us to read Romantic works as spiral journeys beginning where they end, but ending on a higher plane of consciousness" (McGillis, "Community of the Centre" 61). Typological concerns are evoked particularly in *Phantastes*'s use of the shadow, an image that recurs throughout MacDonald's subsequent writing, and which becomes integral to MacDonald's developing *mythos* of Shelley. In a vision, Anodos sees himself reflected in Percivale: "now the armour shone like polished glass; and strange to tell, though the mirror reflected not my form, *I saw a dim shadow of myself in the shining steel*" (240, emphasis added).

Anodos's reflection in Percivale's armour suggests, on a psychological level, Anodos' personal identification with the knight; on another level, it hints at MacDonald's glowing admiration for, and arguable attempt to identify with, Percy Shelley. The mirrored armour recalls Anodos's earlier discussion of art's capacity to improve as it reflects, and also evokes the typological structure that MacDonald imposes on literary history. Reflections are prophetic, as the reflection in Percivale's armour prefigures Anodos's eventual transformation into a Percivale-like hero. The relationship between and Percivale and Anodos, who first follows Percivale's example, and finally saves him, is the model of MacDonald's relationship to Shelley: MacDonald is the fulfillment of Shelley, whose footsteps he follows, repeating Shelley's progress in improved form.

The progressive nature of history is encapsulated in Anodos's name. One way to translate *Anodos* is as *upward*, or *way up*, from the Greek *áno-* ("up," "upper," or "upward") + *hodós,* ("way," "path," or "road"). Plato uses this term to describe the ascent in his allegory of the cave, another myth about the journey toward transcendence.[38] In *Phantastes,* Anodos's direction is, in a broad sense, upward, as he strives to improve himself—often moving literally upward—and has transcendent experiences that raise him out of himself, such as with the white lady and in the library. Typology's structure of progressive repetition, ever moving upward, shapes *Phantastes*, and also MacDonald's larger *oeuvre*, as shades of Shelley and MacDonald (among other figures) recur throughout his novels in characters that more or less resemble one another. Literary history, as MacDonald constructs it, resounds with mirror images, typological reflections

[38] Frank Riga discusses the MacDonald's adaptation of Platonic imagery in "The Platonic Imagery of George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis" 111-132.

that allow MacDonald to position himself as successor to and savior of his shadowy predecessor Shelley.

Typology has its own dark double, however, as progress is shadowed by the possibility of regress. This threat is also captured in Anodos's name, which can be translated, alternatively, as a pun on *pathless,* from the Greek *an-*, meaning 'not,' or 'without' + *hodós*, meaning a 'way,' 'path,' or 'road.' Pathlessness also characterizes Anodos, who loses his direction almost as soon as he arrives in Fairy Land, when he diverges from the footpath "without any good reason: and with a vague feeling that I ought to have followed its course" (23).

This dark side of typology, the fear of regress, is embodied in the idea of the shadow. On one hand, the word *shadow* evokes the idealized reflections of art's enchanting mirror, and suggests the ameliorative direction of typological progress. Yet, at the same time, the term *shadow* carries darker signification, evoking the demonic specters that haunt Anodos and Percival. One of the great concerns of Anodos is to divest himself of his Shadow. Anodos's Shadow, an "evil demon" (109), possesses the realist tendency to "disenchant the things around" (112) Anodos, and consequently counteracts art's transcendent capacity. The Shadow reduces beautiful vision to the everyday, as he "does away with all appearances, and shows [. . .] things in their true colour and form" (112), turning, for instance, "a lovely fairy child" (110) into "a commonplace boy" (110). MacDonald's objection to realist art is stated more explicitly in *Sir Gibbie*, where, as we shall see later, the narrator decries realism, "the representation of that grade of humanity of which men see the most" (*Sir Gibbie* 49), and calls for writers to represent instead "the noble, not the failure from the noble" (49), since

this is "the true human" (49). Anodos's Shadow embodies this principle of realism—which MacDonald saw as regressive—that beclouds visionary wonder and diminishes the divine essence in the world. In MacDonald's cosmology, the shadow seems to represent the principle of concealment that divides humans from perfection and veils them from God; it must be overcome, or pulled away in order for revelation and rebirth to occur. Sir Percivale embodies this principle of hiddenness, both in name, *Percy + veil,* and in appearance, as his rusted armour darkens his countenance and conceals the essential nobleness of his spirit.

The demonic shadow appears in even more threatening guise in the figure of the ghoulish Ash, the predatory corpse who is repeatedly described as a *shadow* (33, 50, 51, 54) or as *shadowy* (51), and who stalks both Anodos and Percival until Percival hews him down. Like Anodos's shadow, that emits "rays of gloom [. . .] as from a blackening sun" (109), the Ash is not a natural shadow, the passive result of the casting of light upon an object. Rather, he embodies an active principle of darkness, which is reflected in his face, which "throbbed with fluctuating and pulsatory visibility—not from changes in the light it reflected, but from changes in its own conditions of reflecting power, the alterations being from within, not from without" (52). As discussed earlier, shades of the Ash appear in the deceptive Alder maiden, with her decayed body and dead eyes. Both are reflected in the episode of the monstrous wolf, a beastly conflation of the two whose penchant for devouring humans recalls the Ash, and whose wooden temple, a "great hole, [. . .] like the hollow of a decayed tree" (308), recalls the Alder maiden's rotten body.

There are thus two kinds of shadows. On one hand, the shadow is the mirror's reflection, embodying art's idealizing, prophetic capacity. Its darkness offers the promise

of holy mysteries to be revealed upon death. On the other hand, the shadow is the veil of darkness and sin that conceals or distorts truth, and distances humanity from God. It is the horror of death without rebirth and revelation. For the most part, MacDonald distinguishes these opposing principles through his use of romantic doubles. However, at the center of *Phantastes* stands an ambiguous core, where the two sides do meet, and are not divided. This merging occurs in the story that lies at the heart of *Phantastes*, the tale of Cosmo, a man who "loved a shadow" (173) in a mirror. Anodos reads the story in the Fairy Palace library, which marks the mid-point of his adventures, and which occupies all of Chapter 13, the central—and lengthiest—chapter of MacDonald's twenty-five chapter book.

2.3. Further Reflections of Shelley: Cosmo's Story

Cosmo's story is a microcosm of the of book as a whole, as it warns of the danger of aestheticism and the perils of solitude. In tone it resembles Shelley's "Alastor" more than any other part of *Phantastes,* and the character of Cosmo recalls "Alastor's" hero, as well as Anodos and Percival, and, to some extent, MacDonald as well. Certainly, Cosmo resembles Sir Percivale, as his family name, von Wehrstahl, German for "steel defence," evokes Percival's armour, as well as Cosmo's fondness for collecting weapons. The lady in the mirror, for her part, offers a reflection of Anodos and Percival's white lady, as is suggested by her name, the Princess von Hohenweiss, or "white heights," and by her appearance in a "robe of white" (166), with a "form more like marble than a living woman" (185). As we shall see later, Cosmo, who is a "student at the university of Prague," anticipates Karl Wolkenlicht, another student of Prague and a Shelleyan double

who will appear later in *Adela Cathcart's* story "The Cruel Painter." Cosmo especially reflects Anodos's preoccupation with exploring family history, as the old antique shop in which he finds the mirror turns out to be the storehouse for many of his father's belongings. As the goblinish shopkeeper tells Cosmo, "I see your father in you. I knew your father very well, young sir. I dare say in some odd corners of my house, you might find some old things with his crest and cipher upon them still" (160). Cosmo's stumbling upon his father's past mirrors Anodos's peering into his father's writing desk, though Cosmo's story endows the endeavor with a far more sinister character: the shopkeeper who knew his father is decidedly devilish, with his "hooked nose" and "withered" appearance (158) evoking "a kind of repugnance" (159) in Cosmo. Like Anodos, who is looking for his father, but finds Sir Percivale instead, Cosmo does not uncover the remnants of his literal father's past, but rather something near to it. Their relationships to the past both suggest MacDonald's relationship to Shelley: not actual patrilineage, but a close connection nonetheless. However multifold the resonances, Cosmo stands as a figure whose self-centeredness is of tragic and heroic proportions.

Cosmo embodies the danger of aestheticism, offering a clear echo of the poet-hero of "Alastor."[39] In "Alastor," the translation of the patterns of art onto life leads to self-destructive solipsism, what Shelley denominated the "Spirit of Solitude," and what Harold Bloom calls "[t]he high cost of Romantic internalization" (*Ringers in the Tower* 16) or the "shadow of imagination" (16). MacDonald reinterprets this Shelleyan moment, however, adapting the warning tale to his own more Christian beliefs about the necessity of artistic submission to God. Like Shelley's hero, who "lived, [. . .] died, [. . .

---

[39] McGillis also discusses the problem of Cosmo's solipsism and aestheticism in "The Community of the Centre" 61-62.

and] sung in solitude" ("Alastor" 60), Cosmo is a solitary creature: he has "no companions," and no one "had ever crossed the threshold of his lodging in the top of one of the highest houses in the old town" (154). As is reflected in his name, Cosmo *is* his entire world. Finding total satisfaction with his inner life, he resists interaction with the outer world, viewing it solely through the lens of art: "When he looked from his window [. . .], not a maiden passed by but she moved in a story [. . . .] When he walked in the streets, he always felt as if reading a tale, into which he sought to weave every face of interest that went by" (156); "He saw them all as on the ever-changing field of a *camera obscura*" (174). While possessed of a poetic spirit, he does not write poetry, a dangerous combination. Unlike the visionary waters of Faerie land, which trickle into the everyday world, "as through the hard rock go the branching silver veins; [and] into the solid land run the creeks and gulfs from the unresting sea" (154), Cosmo's visionary spirit is cut off from society: "He was a poet without words; the more absorbed and endangered, that the springing waters were dammed back into his soul, where, finding no utterance, they grew, and swelled, and undermined" (156). The aural similarity of "damming" and "damning" hints at the spiritual consequences, suggesting that Cosmo's failure to let his poetry flow into the world will imperil his soul. The moral danger of pursuing inner vision to the exclusion of the social world is reflected in Cosmo's physical decay. Like Shelley's hero, he deteriorates physically, a degeneration rendered in seasonal terms: Cosmo's "interest [. . .] blossomed into love, and his love—shall I call it *ripened*, or *withered* into passion" (170), an image of autumnal decadence that recalls the "wild eyes" ("Alastor" 264), "scattered hair" ("Alastor" 248), "withered skin" ("Alastor" 251),

"withered hair" ("Alastor" 413), and "decaying flame" ("Alastor" 247) of the "autumn of strange suffering" ("Alastor" 249) endured by Shelley's hero.

MacDonald's Hoffmanesque tale and Shelley's "Alastor" both contain Faustian overtones, as they expose visionary pursuits as the ambitious but forbidden undertaking of a hero who "overleaps the bounds" ("Alastor" 207) of his mortal lot. Like the "inspired and desperate alchymist" ("Alastor" 31) described by Alastor's speaker, who "mixed awful talk and asking looks / With [. . .] most innocent love [. . . to make] / Such magic as compels the charmed night / To render up its charge" ("Alastor 33-37), Cosmo turns to sorcery to summon up his beloved, employing "powerful incantation" (177) and "ingredients [. . .] scarcely fit to be mentioned" (175) to release the lady from her mirror. Cosmo likes to read authors, moreover, favoured by that other great Romantic overreacher, Victor Frankenstein: "in a secret drawer lay the works of Albertus Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa" (155; cf. *Frankenstein* 22, 23, 25). MacDonald's story differs somewhat in emphasis, however, from either of the Shelleys' works. Shelley's poem suggests that the hero's overreaching folly may stem from a transgressive desire to know the secrets of nature, the "Great Parent" ("Alastor" 45) and "Mother of this unfathomable world" ("Alastor" 18), and it hints that a narcissistic absorption with the "treacherous likeness" ("Alastor" 476) of one's reflected self might also play a role. Cosmo's tale, however, ignores entirely the question of nature's divine secrets, and concentrates solely on the narcissism, refining and qualifying the problem of solipsism by defining it as an issue of creative control and spiritual selfishness.

Cosmo errs not in his desire to know his visionary ideal, but rather in his wish to possess complete mastery over it. He sees the princess as his prized object, a "secret

treasure" (168) to be hidden from the world: "The miser has his golden hoard; the virtuoso his pet ring; the student his rare book; the poet his favourite haunt; the lover his secret drawer; but Cosmo had a mirror with a lovely lady in it" (168). His attempt to conjure her from her mirror is motivated not so much by love, as by his fear of her independence, which manifests itself in his anxious thought that "She has a lover somewhere" (173) beyond his purview. Unlike Anodos's awakening of the white lady, which frees her from her alabaster prison, Cosmo's conjuring of the lady from the mirror is an "exercise of unlawful and tyrannical power" (175) that does *not* release her from the mirror of which she is "but a slave" (178); quite the contrary, it magnifies her enslavement by binding her in further service to Cosmo's will. In love with his own power, and fearing to annihilate "the one window that looked into the paradise of love" (179), Cosmo refuses her plea that he "'break the mirror'" and "'set me free; even from thyself'" (179).

Cosmo's error illustrates MacDonald's belief that creative inspiration does not originate in humans, but in God. His story highlights the danger of attempting to claim inspiration for oneself, and as such it offers another negative analogue to Anodos's revival of the White Lady, a narcissistic, anti-Pygmalion myth warning of how *not* to pursue artistic endeavors. His flaw is not only the transgression of overreaching, but also the failure to reach anything outside his self. His inability to transcend solipsistic boundaries and grasp the divinity beyond is hinted at in the story's repeated echoes of 1 Corinthians 13.12, which MacDonald evokes in his descriptions of Cosmo's blinded condition: the story "had a double meaning. Sometimes it seemed only to represent a simple story of ordinary life, perhaps almost of universal life; wherein two souls, loving

each other and longing to come nearer, do, after all, but behold each other as in a glass darkly" (154); "the two figures in the mirror could not meet face to face" (165); "how many who love never come nearer than to behold each other as in a mirror; seem to know and yet never know the inward life; never enter the other soul; and part at last, with but the vaguest notion of the universe on the borders of which they have been hovering for years?" (171). For all his efforts, Cosmo cannot achieve the kind of revelation promised in Corinthians, the meeting "face to face" (13.12) beyond the reflective glass.

The way through the glass, of course, is *via* death, as is suggested in the paradox "'Who lives, he dies; who dies; he is alive'" (172). Cosmo's misunderstanding of this principle of life through death finds concrete reflection in the skeleton that he keeps in his chamber. A conventional emblem of death, the skeleton provides a symbolic index to the failure of Cosmo's vision. Initially, Cosmo keeps the skeleton displayed "half-leaning against the wall, half-supported by a string about its neck" (155), with its hand resting "on the heavy pommel of a great sword that stood beside it" (155). With its empty sockets offering vision "only for the unseen, like a watch-tower looking across all the water of this busy world into the quiet regions of rest beyond" (162), the skeleton stands as a reminder of the eternal world to which Cosmo, totally enwrapped in his own inner life, has no access. When he brings the mirror home, its enchanting reflection endows the skeleton with a glimmer of life and the promise of death: "that old battle-axe [on which the skeleton's hand rests] looks as if any moment it might be caught up by a mailed hand, and, borne forth by the mighty arm, go crashing through the casque, and skull, and brain, invading the Unknown with yet another bewildered ghost" (162-163). However, Cosmo, rather than embracing the possibility of death and rebirth, rejects it, after he notices that

the lady dislikes the skeleton, and seems to wish to deny its existence: "her eyes fell upon the skeleton, and he saw her shudder and close them. She did not open them again, but signs of repugnance continued evident in her countenance" (165). He helps her avoid death further by removing the skeleton, and observing her subsequent approval and improvement: "Her eyes sought the corner where the skeleton had stood, and a faint gleam of satisfaction crossed her face, apparently at seeing it empty. She looked suffering still, but there was less of discomfort expressed in her countenance than there had been the night before" (168). Conflicted about the mirror, he attempts to destroy it by seizing the skeleton's "sword by the steel scabbard" (179); however, the blow misses, which reflects his ambivalent desire to keep the glass and control the woman within. Unable to wholeheartedly embrace death, Cosmo is reduced to a skeletal, spectral existence, when the mirrors abruptly disappears. "Seized with a brain fever" (180), he becomes "like an anxious ghost, pale and haggard" (182)—a condition he shares with "Alastor"'s hero, who is also reduced to a "shadowy frame" (416) of his former self. As was the case with the Alder maiden, narcissistic self-enchantment leads to living death. The story has a happy, if rather morbid, conclusion: when Cosmo at last relocates and breaks the mirror in order to free to the lady from its spell, he dies once and for all in her arms. In many ways, the end seems as nihilistic as "Alastor"'s bleak conclusion. However, in keeping with MacDonald's belief that death is simply a happy rebirth, the story concludes on a note of paradoxical joy, as Cosmo's "wan dead face [. . .] smiled on in the spectral moonbeams" (187).

What sets Cosmo's story apart from the rest of the book is the ambiguity of its central female figure. The princess is neither clearly good, like the marble lady, nor

overtly deceptive, like the Alder maiden. She remains, for the duration of the story, a shadowy, ambivalent figure. It is never clear, for instance, why Cosmo's skeleton makes her shudder. Even more provokingly, we never find out the extent to which she is complicit in her enchantment. On the one hand, she describes herself as "'but a slave'" (178) to the mirror's spell, possibly the result of her having slighted a wicked sorceress, as well as personal vanity. As a friend reports, "'it is said that she gave offence some eighteen months ago to an old woman who had held an office of trust in the family, and who, after some incoherent threats, disappeared. This peculiar affection followed soon after. But the strangest part of the story is its association with the loss of an antique mirror, which stood in her dressing-room, and of which she constantly made use'" (183). Yet the merchant who sells Cosmo the mirror implies that it is the lady herself who initiates the episode, as he murmurs of her active involvement: "'Sold for the sixth time! I wonder what will be the upshot of it this time. I should think my lady had enough of it by now!'" (160). The opacity surrounding the lady's character and motives, plus the general vagueness regarding ownership of the mirror, are a contrast to other women of *Phantastes,* to whom MacDonald clearly assigns moral standing. In the middle of the book, however, the veil remains resolutely in place, and the image is both bright and dark, as the shadow is granted full ambivalent play. Cosmo's murky, suggestive tale is more evocative of Shelley's "Alastor" than any other part of *Phantastes.*

2.4. Rewriting Shelley

Cosmo's story forms the structural and thematic core of *Phantastes*, providing a Shelleyan center around which Anodos's entire quest revolves. As stated above, it

occurs in the middle of the seven-chapter Fairy Palace episode (chapters 10 to 16), which itself comprises the broader center of the twenty-five-chapter book.[40] Although Cosmo's tale functions as a Shelleyan anchor to the Fairy Palace episode, the Fairy Palace is also where Anodos reaches a place most like home, as here he rediscovers his familiar bed chamber, a safe haven where his demon shadow "dares not come" (130). Reminders of Anodos's identity, and echoes of Shelley both become more intense—Anodos is most truly Anodos here; yet Shelley is also everywhere present at the same time. In effect, as Anodos progresses toward the center of the book, his identity is overlaid with that of Shelley. This development can be seen in three distinctive stages during the Fairy Palace episode. First, on his boat journey to the palace, his motions begin to imitate the progress of "Alastor"'s hero. Next, in the palace, he reads Cosmo's story, full of Shelleyan ambiguity, and for the duration of his reading, he "becomes," at least imaginatively, the story's hero. Finally, Anodos's transgressive behavior in the hall of statues causes him to be ejected from the palace, which leads to a suspiciously Shelleyan suicide attempt at sea.

Anodos's boat journey to the Fairy Palace offers some of the clearest echoes of "Alastor." In "Alastor," the hero, consumed with loneliness and longing for his visionary beloved, wanders along "the lone Chorasmian shore" ("Alastor" 272), "a wide and melancholy waste / Of putrid marshes" (273-274), where he discovers "A little shallop floating near" ("Alastor" 299). Impelled to "meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste" ("Alastor" 305), he climbs in. The boat speeds off over the black water "Like a torn cloud before the hurricane" ("Alastor" 315), taking him to a tangled green world deep

---

[40] McGillis discusses the structural importance of Cosmo's story and the Fairy Palace episode, which he reads as embodying "the theme of centre and circumference" ("Community of the Centre" 61-62).

amid the Caucasus mountains, "Nature's dearest haunt" ("Alastor" 429) and the cradle of humankind, where vines, like "restless serpents" ("Alastor" 438), "twine their tendrils with the wedded boughs" ("Alastor" 444) above. Anodos's boat journey mimics "Alastor"'s fantastic boat trip. Like Shelley's hero, Anodos, haunted by his Shadow, wanders about longing for death, until he happens on "a little boat" (*Phantastes* 122) lying at the edge of a river. Like "Alastor"'s boat, it takes Anodos through a landscape rife with vernal and serpentine imagery, as Anodos describes the river as "a silver snake" (*Phantastes* 124) that "twisted and twined" (*Phantastes* 124) through a wood "gloomy with the weight of [the] overhanging foliage" (*Phantastes* 122) of "[g]igantic forest trees" (*Phantastes* 124).

Both Shelley and MacDonald feature maternal landscapes that mingle womb and tomb imagery: "Alastor"'s boat takes the poet to "Nature's dearest haunt, [. . .] Her cradle, and his sepulchre" ("Alastor" 429-430), and *Phantastes*'s fairy boat is a "cradle" (*Phantastes* 123) for Anodos, "in which mother Nature was rocking her weary child" (123). Nature in this portion of *Phantastes* does not loom nearly as darkly as she does in "Alastor" (not to mention the earlier parts of *Phantastes*, where the Ash was constant danger). In spite of this difference, Anodos's desire for revelation and death is reminiscent of the Shelleyan poet's desire to know the "inmost sanctuary" ("Alastor" 38) of the "Mother of this unfathomable world" ("Alastor" 18). As Anodos declares, could he "but see the Spirit of the Earth, as I saw once the indwelling woman of the beech-tree, and my beauty of the pale marble, I should be content. Content!—Oh, how gladly I would die in the light of her eyes!" (*Phantastes* 121). Like the "silver vision" ("Alastor" 316) of "Alastor"'s boat journey, Anodos's boat ride occurs in a deathly, dream-like

haze, mingling dream and reality: where "Alastor"'s hero cries "Vision and Love! [. . . .] Sleep and death / Shall not divide us long!" ("Alastor" 366-368), Anodos describes the experience of the boat ride as being "as if I had died in a dream, and should never more awake" (*Phantastes* 124). Overall, *Phantastes*'s portrayal of death in this passage is far less sinister than in "Alastor"'s: *Phantastes* lacks the sense of sinister trespass that accompanies "Alastor"'s journey into nature; instead, it offers a benign vision of maternal comfort.

All of these Shelleyan echoes create an impression of mirroring. In a remarkably self-referential turn, *Phantastes* acknowledges that it is a double reflection, itself a work of art mirroring another work of art (i.e. "Alastor"). The book alludes to its dual mirroring in Anodos's discussion of how one mirror may reflect and transform another mirror. Anodos's example features a mirror reflecting the ocean: "Yea, the reflecting ocean itself, reflected in the mirror, has a wondrousness about its waters that somehow vanishes when I turn toward itself" (123). Appropriately, this meditation on the reflective capacity of mirrors takes place on the boat voyage that mirrors the boat voyage of "Alastor"'s hero—and in reflecting, presumably improves on it.

The overlapping of Shelleyan and MacDonaldian identity becomes especially pronounced in Anodos's transgressive behavior in the Fairy Palace. Before he reads Cosmo's tale, Anodos demonstrates a fine sense of propriety and restraint amid the temptations of the Fairy Palace library. A kind of a literary Xanadu, the library is portrayed as a bookish pleasure dome, its bejeweled galleries "lined from floor to roof with books and books" (138), and filled with exotic bibliophilic diversions. Forbidden zones beckon temptingly, as "Over some parts of the library, descended curtain of silk of

various dyes, none of which I lifted while I was there; and I felt somehow that it would be presumptuous in me to look within them" (139). At this point, Anodos's sense of decorum prevails; some veils are better left unlifted. There are still plenty of delights to savor, in which Anodos indulges with a sensual passion that runs to erotic: "day after day I came to the library, threw myself on one of the many sumptuous eastern carpets, which lay here and there on the floor, and read, and read, until weary; if that can be designated as weariness, which was rather the faintness of rapturous delight" (139). The raptures of his reading suggest the peculiar form of literary communion that occurs when Anodos reads, as each book temporarily frees him from the bonds of his personal identity, and allows him to experience imaginative transcendence by becoming the protagonist of his book.

Following his reading of Cosmo's ambiguous tale, however, Anodos's decorous behavior changes, as he loses his former inhibition, and his transgressions lead to attempted suicide, an act that evokes Shelley's drowning at sea. The forbidden object this time involves not veiled books, but the white lady herself, whom Anodos discovers (for the second time) in a hall of dancing statues. Despite the warning "TOUCH NOT!" (192) emblazoned in gold letters on the lamp above, Anodos, "unable to restrain" (206) himself, flings his arms around the white lady "in defiance of the law of the place" (206), and she immediately flees. His attempt to follow her leads him swiftly out of the palace and onto a desolate "waste windy hill" (207), where, like Keats's bereft knight-at-arms, there is little to do but ponder his own misery. As his identity changes, his progress from this point becomes decidedly downward: he descends to an underworld full of goblins, and contends with a "whole pandemonium of fairy devils" (211), among other

grotesqueries. Added to his earlier swelling of self-centered pride is now the same illness that beset Cosmo, a self-righteous sense of *ownership*: "Besides being delighted and proud that *my* songs had called the beautiful creature to life, the same fact caused me to feel a tenderness unspeakable for her, accompanied with a *kind of feeling of property in her*; for so the goblin Selfishness would reward the angel Love" (218-9, emphasis added). The narrowing and distorting of Anodos's perspective of his relationship to the lady is projected onto his surroundings, as his literal vision becomes clouded by a "gray mist [. . .] gathered behind me" (219), and the surrounding rocks "began to close" (219) about him, forcing him to crawl though a narrow, low passage. It is as though reading the story of Cosmo has infected Anodos with its darkness, suggesting that the "exhalations of [. . . the library books'] undying leaves" (187) may have contained unwholesome as well as healthful air. Reading changes Anodos, reshaping his identity and causing him to shape his life after the fiction he consumes.

He emerges from the tunnel on the shore of a "wintry sea" (220), where his suicidal despair is portrayed as an Alastorean merging with the landscape, as he is reduced to "a human imbodiment of the nature around me" (221).[41] The seashore, swept by a "cold, deathlike wind" (221), is a chaotic zone in which nothing is either black or white, only unending gray: "nothing for the eye but mingling shades of gray; nothing for the ear but the rush of the coming, the roar of the breaking, and the moan of the retreated wave" (220). A dim moment of vision occurs, as "A dark curtain of cloud was lifted up, and a pale blue rent shone between its foot and the edge of the sea" (221), which propels Anodos into action. Unwilling to be "tortured to death" (222) in the "tumbling chaos"

---

[41] David Robb identifies other literary echoes, as he suggests that that this episode may offer "a recollection of Arnold's 'Dover Beach'" (*George MacDonald* 80, also 81-83).

(222), Anodos decides to "meet [. . . Death] halfway" (222), and hurls himself "headlong into the mounting wave below" (222). It is an act that seems specifically to evoke Shelley's drowning, on his fatal boating expedition on the Bay of Spezia in 1822. It is as though Anodos, in following the progress of "Alastor"'s hero, has somehow become the poet himself, suggesting a fear that art may come to life and repeat a tragic history.

Yet MacDonald redeems this Shelleyan moment of suicidal despair by transforming it into an act of salvation. He describes Anodos's attempted drowning as a return to the mother: "I felt as if once more the great arms of the beech-tree were around me, soothing me after the miseries I had passed through, and telling me, like a little sick child, that I should be better tomorrow" (223). Indeed, he is better the morrow, as "a little gay-coloured boat [. . .] covered with glistering scales like those of a fish" (223) comes to his rescue and carries him ashore. The image of the boat is a very Shelleyan one, which MacDonald especially associates with Shelley generally. In the *Encyclopaedia* essay, MacDonald remarks on Shelley's fondness for boats, as he lists among "Several little peculiarities in Shelley's" (102) tastes "his passion for boat-sailing" (102). This was a passion shared by MacDonald, who, from an early age, longed to go to sea (a career decision that was firmly vetoed by his father).[42] MacDonald also notes the fanciful quality of Shelley's literary boats: "all the boats he describes in his poems are of a fairy, fantastic sort, barely related to the boats which battle with earthly winds and

---

[42] The young MacDonald wrote: "My dear Father, It is now time for me to be thinking of what I should betake myself to, and tho' I would be sorry to diplease you in any way, yet I must tell you that the sea is my delight and that I wish to go to it as soon as possible, and I hope that you will not use your parental authority to prevent me, as you undoubtedly can. I feel I would be continually wishing and longing to be at sea. [. . . .] O let me, dear father, for I could not be happy at anything else" (dated 1836? in Sadler 7).

waves" (102). With *Phantastes*'s glimmering fish boat, it is as though MacDonald is offering one more magic boat, one with the power to undo—or at least to redo—Shelley's foolish final venture at sea, by rescuing him, and guiding him to salvation. The boat's fishlike appearance particularly evokes the conventional piscine emblem for Christ (which reappears in other works by MacDonald, such as "The Golden Key"), endowing his rescue with overtones of the resurrection.[43] As the boat carries him to shore, he is restored by happy memories and dreams of his youth, waking "with the feeling that I had been kissed and loved to my heart's content" (225), a description of Death in keeping with his portrayal of death as the lap of maternal comfort. This replaying of Shelley's fate in altered form offers a vision of how MacDonald himself would take on Shelley's mantle, repeating and replaying his life in idealized, redeemed form, a gesture that would continue beyond *Phantastes* and into his subsequent work.

The movement toward the Fairy Palace involves the conflation of MacDonaldian and Shelleyan identities. This merging of identity replicates, in particular, the pattern that characterizes Anodos's reading, in which he would take on the identity of the protagonist of his book. At the same time, Anodos's suicidal drive suggests the danger of simply becoming Shelley and repeating the past. His journey away from the Fairy Palace back to the to the peripheries of the book and the end of his adventure involves separation and

---

[43] In his mystical fairy tale "The Golden Key," which recounts the journey from death to resurrection, fish seem to function as an emblem of sacrifice and rebirth, as their greatest wish is to be killed for the pot and reborn as aeranths. As the lady explains to Tangle, "'In Fairy Land, [. . .] the ambition of the animals is to be eaten by the people; that is their highest end in that condition. But they are not therefore destroyed. Out of the pot comes something more than the dead fish, you will see'" (*The Golden Key* 25).

differentiation, as Anodos returns to his own identity and learns to establish a correct relationship between himself and his knightly ideal Sir Percival. The magical boat takes Anodos to an old woman's cottage, where he listens to her songs and experiences powerful visions, as he revisits portions of his past through magical doors. This series of songs and visions, which are all closely intertwined, acknowledges the similarity between Anodos and his knightly ideal, while also establishing their difference. The heavy use of veil imagery in this section emphasizes the boundary between Anodos and the visionary world, while also providing an image connecting to earlier themes of revelation as a form of unveiling.

The eerie ballad of Sir Aglovaile and his relationship with the ghost of Adelaide, a maiden he had wronged, is full of suggestive hints of both Sir Percivale and Percy Shelley—and suggests a ghostly mirror of Anodos's recent past. The implied background to the ballad is that Aglovaile had deserted Adelaide and her illegitimate daughter, but, in a morbid domestic reunion typical of MacDonald, Adelaide's ghost manages to visit the repentant knight every night and while away the weary hours with him, thanks to St. John the apostle who frees her up by providing heavenly childcare till dawn: "In St. Peter's Church she is playing on, /At hide-and-seek, with Apostle John" (231). Aglovaile certainly hints at Sir Percivale, in his repentant persona as well as in the similarity of their names, *Percy + veil* and *aglow + veil.* Aglovaile's mistreatment of Adelaide, whose child has died with her, more than hints at Shelley's indecorous romantic past, evoking his abandonment of his first wife Harriet Westbrook, and his improper relationship with Mary Wollstonecroft Godwin, and their infants who died.

Phantastes only hints at the latter connection; however, the issue of Shelley's love life is taken up in more detail in MacDonald's later work "The Cruel Painter."

What is crucial in terms of Anodos's development is that this ballad also mirrors, to some unspecified degree, Anodos's mistreatment of a woman he loved, and so becomes another link between Anodos and romantic figures of the past. The ballad is followed by Anodos's visiting, in invisible form, mysterious scenes of his own past, which he enters *via* a magic door: "Suddenly I saw approaching me [. . .] a form well known to me [. . .] in the years when I thought my boyhood was left behind, and shortly before I entered the realm of Fairy Land. Wrong and Sorrow had gone together, hand-in-hand as it is well they do. Unchangeably dear was that face. It lay in my heart as a child lies in its own white bed; but I could not meet her" (245). His inability to act in the vision reminds us of the impossibility of changing the past. As the vision proceeds, however, the prospect of death becomes a comfort. The door to the anonymous girl's bed chamber leads to a church tomb, where, it is implied, the wronged girl, like Aglovaile's beloved, has found final rest: "The bed was a tomb" (246). In the same tomb Anodos discovers the form of his knightly ancestor: "I felt for the left hand and a certain finger; I found there the ring I knew: he was one of my own ancestors. I was in the chapel over the burial-vault of my race" (246). Anodos's chief dismay is that he cannot join his departed loved ones, but remains separated by the veil between mortal and eternal life: "He lay in his noble rest, and I lived on in ignoble strife" (246). Yet he is comforted by a ghostly hand that "reached out of the dark and grasped mine for a moment, mightily and tenderly" (247), and he comforts himself to think that "the veil between, though very dark, is very thin" (247). The vision's shift from the wronged girl to the noble ancestor is

telling, as it suggests both Anodos's desire to identify with Percivale (his name is particularly suggested by the emphasis on veils), as well as MacDonald's yearning to be like Shelley. The final scene, with its longing for death, might be considered a wishful fantasy of the promise of reunion beyond the grave.

While the juxtaposition of the ballad of Aglovaile and the vision of Anodos's wronged girlfriend emphasize points of identification between Anodos and his knightly ancestor, establishing difference is also crucial. Distinction is drawn between Anodos and Percivale in yet another vision, which takes Anodos to Percivale's house, where he discovers that the marble lady is actually Percivale's wife, and not of his own possessing (241-243). The text emphasizes the impossibility of Anodos's crossing over to their world: while he can see himself dimly reflected in Percivale's armour, he does not appear at all in their mirrors: "I saw that my form had no place within its depths" (239). In contrast to his earlier attempt to grasp the white lady in the marble palace, this later episode finds Anodos understanding that he cannot cross over into the visionary realm. Instead, he accepts that he and Percivale occupy different planes of existence: "the fact that I could not enter the sphere of these living beings kept me aware that, for me, I moved in a vision, while they moved in life" (243). Anodos's sojourn in the magical cottage with its visionary doors enables him to recover from his near-drowning, and to carry on his journey. His direction at this point becomes notably upward, suggesting a gradual return to his identity as *Anodos*, a way up, as he moves up the peninsular isthmus, to "a lonely tower, built on the top of a little hill, which overlooked the whole neighbouring country" (251). The heroic promise of his character is reflected in his helping to rid a country of evil giants (265-274); however, this feat functions in the book

more as a setting up of Anodos's next and more difficult task, purging his demon shadow.

Anodos's final encounter with his Shadow fictionalizes the danger of hubris, and hints at possible misgivings MacDonald may have had at the thought of aligning himself with his literary superiors. The entire episode emphasizes overtly the need for modesty in self-perception, as Anodos explicitly tells us that the shadow is his self-centered pride (286-87). Prior to their showdown, Anodos congratulates himself on having helped defeat the giants in a nearby kingdom. In particular, he dares to rank himself among the knights of Arthurian legend: "I rejoiced, and counted myself amongst the glorious knights of old; having even the unspeakable presumption—my shame and self-condemnation at the memory of it are such, that I write it as the only and sorest penance I can perform—to think of myself (will the world believe it?)—as side by side with Sir Galahad!" (276). Sir Galahad had appeared at the outset of Anodos's journey, in the book of Arthurian tales he read in the Four Oak cottage. The book of tales depicted Galahad and Percivale as a pair who were pursuing the same quest, but became separated, until they "rencountered in the depths of a great forest" (32). Galahad, riding his white horse and dressed in silver armor that "shone like the moon" (32), is the lunar companion to Percivale, with his red, sun-like image, a pairing that accords with the White lady's later characterization of Anodos as "'the moon of my night'" (242), the subordinate twin to Percivale who is "'the sun of [. . . her] day'" (242).

The Shadow-knight embodies the demonic nature of Anodos's self-centered fantasy, as he immediately appears—no longer a shadow, but now evolved into a full-bodied threat in knightly regalia. Significantly, the Shadow-knight's silver armor and

white horse match both Galahad's appearance, and Anodos's: "I could trace, line for line, the correspondence of the inlaid silver to the device on my own. His horse, too, was like mine in colour, form and motion" (276)—only the Shadow is a dark force, "greater and fiercer than his counterpart [. . . .] he was evil" (276-77). As with Percivale's armor, Anodos can see a dim shadow of himself on its surface: "I saw the reflection of my countenance in the centre plate of shining steel" (277). The doppelgänger knight offers a negative image of what Anodos could become, warning of the self-destructive danger of his narcissistic orientation. Unwilling to slay his Shadow-self, Anodos becomes imprisoned in a tower instead. The unhappy isolation of Anodos's physical imprisonment is a concrete reflection of his solipsistic self-centeredness. Significantly, this imprisonment is not a punishment bestowed externally, but is a self-generated fate, as it is his own self—his Shadow as knight—who casts him into his prison. As the tower has neither lock nor keeper, Anodos's imprisonment is entirely voluntary.

Anodos divests himself of his Shadow with neither violence nor altercation, but by shedding the trapping of his idealized self-image, as he casts off his armor and all pretence of calling himself a knight: "I might do for a squire; but I honored knighthood too highly, to call myself any longer one of the noble brotherhood" (286). The one weapon he does keep, "a short axe" (286), seems a modest appropriation of Percivale's regalia (not to mention a practical necessity in a wood of sometimes dubious intent). He recognizes explicitly the error of his self-centeredness: "In nothing was my ideal lowered or dimmed, or grown less precious; I only saw it too plainly, to set myself for a moment beside it. Indeed, my ideal soon became my life; whereas, formerly, my life had consisted of a vain attempt to behold, if not my ideal in myself, at least myself in my

ideal" (287). Like his predecessor Milton, MacDonald seems to be aware of the hubris of his own enterprise, and the altercation with the Shadow, which stresses the need for modesty, might be seen as an attempt to chasten himself.

MacDonald returns to images of death and resurrection to represent Anodos's shift in spiritual orientation: "Another self seemed to rise, like a white spirit from a dead man, from the dumb and trampled self of the past" (287). Anodos predicts that the entire cycle will recur: "Doubtlessly, this self must again die and be buried, and again, from its tomb, spring a winged child; but of this my history as yet bears not the record" (287). Anodos's recognition of the difference between his fallen mortal state and his high chivalric ideals permits Sir Percivale to return to the story, with Anodos taking his correct position, not as Percivale's equal, as he had formerly envisioned, but as his servant. Anodos's becoming Percivale's squire is a gesture of humility, yet one that paradoxically permits his character to rise to the even greater, Christlike heights. Like the servant-savior Christ, Anodos sacrifices himself to save another, then rises from the grave. In particular, his "Sinking from such a state of ideal bliss, into the world of shadows" (315) of everyday life suggests the Incarnation, in which Christ is born into the world as a mortal man. The "world of shadows" suggests the fallenness of the natural world and its darkness, while also evoking the typological pattern that shapes history, wherein figures reflect and improve on previous types, as they move forward toward apocalypse. The promise whispered in the beech tree outside his home, "'A great good is coming—is coming—is coming to thee, Anodos'" (319), hints at transcendence wrapped in natural-supernatural mystery. Anodos's sacrificing of himself for Percivale also seems a gesture of tacit wish-fulfillment on MacDonald's part. While Shelley was gone long before

MacDonald began his career in redeeming the fallen poet, Anodos is able to hear Percivale and the lady as they weep over his coffin and declare that "'He has died well'" (309), approval that causes him great satisfaction: "My spirit rejoiced" (309).

MacDonald uses *Phantastes* to make sense of his relationship to Percy Shelley, and to give shape to literary history. The book's portrayal of Shelley as a knight of Arthurian romance is a highly idealized vision, one that situates Shelley amid legendary English heroes. In particular, *Phantastes* positions MacDonald as Shelley's spiritual inheritor and typological reflection. At the same time, it emphasizes how typology cannot be mere a repetition of the past—while there may be similarity, difference is also needed, in order for progress and improvement to occur. It suggests that MacDonald, however strong his admiration and desire, cannot simply replay Shelley's life, though he may imitate and even improve on it. The book also demonstrates the importance of approaching literary history with humility, as it recasts Romantic solipsism as a problem of spiritual self-centeredness, and raises literature to a matter of grave spiritual importance. In delving into literature's romantic past, MacDonald discovers the patterns of his future, as the writer's development becomes structured as a heroic passage through the imaginative forests of literature. More importantly, MacDonald uncovers in the past his literary forefather, Percy Shelley, the figure whose shadow will inspire and direct his literary career.

3

REVISING THE SHELLEY-GODWIN TRIANGLE: *ADELA CATHCART* AND "THE CRUEL PAINTER"

3.1. THE STORY WITHIN: "THE CRUEL PAINTER"

MacDonald's obsession with Percy Shelley finds one of its more peculiar embodiments in his gothic fable "The Cruel Painter," which appeared in his 1864 novel *Adela Cathcart.* "The Cruel Painter" has been generally overlooked by scholars, who do not seem to know what to make of the lurid tale. Certainly, its chilling focus on torture, vampirism, and violence sets it apart from the more fanciful stories upon which MacDonald's reputation generally rests. From the beginning, as Nancy Mellon recounts, "The Cruel Painter" "has been much denigrated by critics," and she suggests that its reprinting in his 1871 story collection *Works of Fancy and Imagination* was "probably against MacDonald's better judgment" (Mellon 37). Faced with "The Cruel Painter," Richard Reis's penchant for psychoanalytic interpretation quite escapes him, and he dismisses the story as being "entirely without symbolic resonance" (Reis 85). William Raeper calls the story a "problematic tale [. . . .] of cruelty and mock vampirism, whimpering out in a rather pathetic joke" (Raeper 316), and suggests that its uncovering of "the dark side of the psyche, adapted from German romanticism, reveal[s] an unexpected element of violence in MacDonald's imagination" and offers "a salutary reminder that even in a man as humane as MacDonald such elements have a powerful existence" (316).[44] The most detailed criticism to date is in source studies: Wolff touches

[44] Robert Lee Wolff discusses the problem of physical violence in MacDonald' novels, though he does not include "The Cruel Painter" in his survey of troubling tales, probably

on "The Cruel Painter" in his discussion of MacDonald's German influences, in which he observes the story's indebtedness to E. T. A. Hoffman's tales, particularly his 1816 story *Der Artushof* (Wolff 117, 120-23, 398, 409). McGillis observes the similarity of the story to Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" ("George MacDonald and the Lilith Legend" 6). Coleman Parsons discusses MacDonald's use of an earlier English source, a tale of ghostly apparitions that appears in the Cambridge Platonist Henry More's 1655 religious tract *An Antidote Against Atheism*, from which MacDonald transplants several sizeable excerpts (Parsons 180-183). (This last borrowing is made clear in the novel *Adela Cathcart*, as the character who tells the story, Harry Armstrong, acknowledges that he has "taken the liberty" (*Adela Cathcart* 415) of adapting Henry More's *Antidote* for his own storytelling purposes.) More recently, Susan Ang, in her plenary address at the 2005 centennial conference for George MacDonald, has suggested that MacDonald scholars begin to address the gothic elements of this most troubling tale.

"The Cruel Painter" has never been considered in what I believe to be its most revealing light, as a Victorian fable that offers a myth about literary history, as it recounts in gothic mode the transition from eighteenth-century Enlightenment to nineteenth-century Romanticism. Above all, "The Cruel Painter" contributes to MacDonald's evolving myth of Percy Shelley, as it reworks Percy and Mary Shelley's love story, something that has never been noted before. Featuring William Godwin brought to diabolical life as the sadistic "cruel painter" Teufelsbürst (or Devilsbrush), the tale is a fanciful rewriting of the Shelley-Godwin triangle in idealized form, as MacDonald alters

---

because the story does not, in the end, celebrate violence in the way that such novels as *Paul Faber* and *Sir Gibbie* do—rather, the *Grand Guignol* of Teufelbürst's paintings is symptomatic of his diseased conscience (*Golden Key* 306-314).

and removes the indecorous elements of Shelley's real-life abandonment of his wife Harriet Westbrook, elopement with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and subsequent estrangement from her philosopher father. Instead, the Shelleyan hero Karl von Wolkenlicht becomes the Godwinian villain's redeemer, saving him from his wretched existence, and marrying his daughter with parental approval and due decorum. "The Cruel Painter" fictionalizes how Percy Shelley rose to become the inheritor of Godwinian ideals of freedom and justice, a transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism that MacDonald endows with all the miraculous resonances of the Christian resurrection. It also hints that MacDonald is the inheritor of the Romantic tradition.

"The Cruel Painter" has earlier analogues in the reactionary anti-Godwinian movement that arose around the turn of the nineteenth century. Following the Reign of Terror, disillusioned writers singled out philosopher William Godwin as the ideological source of everything that had gone wrong in France. The decade from approximately 1795 to 1805 saw a flourishing of works— pamphlets, lectures, sermons, drama, and fiction (both satirical and sentimental)—that lambasted Godwin, parodying him, dismantling his doctrines of radical anarchism and his optimistic theory of the perfectibility of man, and in general reversing the Enlightenment association of Godwin with clarity, hope, and reason. Instead, many of these texts demonize him, aligning him with forces of darkness, representing him as a ruthless, depraved, and villainous Machiavell.[45]

---

[45] See Pamela Clemit's *The Godwinian Novel* 134, and especially B. Sprague Allen's article "The Reaction Against William Godwin," in which he offers an inventory and discussion of anti-Godwinian narratives.

MacDonald's "The Cruel Painter" was first published in 1864, which by anyone's reckoning makes it several decades too late to belong to the post-revolutionary anti-Godwinian furor. However, it is perhaps appropriate that MacDonald, as a late Romantic, should, in his own time, offer a literary response to the Revolution, which he would discuss later more directly in his 1868 anthology *England's Antiphon.* (By comparison, Wordsworth had published his anti-Godwinian drama *The Borderers* quite late himself, in 1842.)[46] For all its tardiness, "The Cruel Painter" possesses the advantage of historical perspective: unlike the earlier anti-Jacobins, MacDonald knew that post-revolutionary disenchantment would find new energy in Romanticism. Specifically, he knew that Godwin's "expiring cause" (Allen 75) would find "a new, young disciple" in Percy Shelley, a poet who, as B. Sprague Allen describes him, "was destined to embody the sophistries of *Political Justice* in forms of intense, imperishable beauty" (Allen 75). MacDonald captures this succession in "The Cruel Painter," evoking, in Wolkenlicht's involvement with Teufelsbürst, Shelley's renewal of Godwin's visionary ardour.

In the "The Cruel Painter" and other works, MacDonald portrays this historical transition as a process of spiritual renewal, in which Romanticism comes to the rescue of the degenerate Enlightenment. *England's Antiphon* features a similar portrayal, describing Wordsworth's poetry as the divine cure sent by God to "heal the plague" (304) of a world ravaged by revolution and misguided scientific thinking. In "The Cruel Painter," the passage from Enlightenment to Romanticism takes on the miraculous

---

[46] Wordsworth's *The Borderers* was begun much earlier, however, in 1796. A full account of the manuscript's history can be found in Robert Osborn's detailed edition (1982).

overtones of the Christian resurrection, as MacDonald presents the Shelleyan hero as the risen saviour of and heir to his fallen Godwinian mentor. He weaves two other myths of animation or reanimation into his tale of artistic redemption: the classical myth of Pygmalion, and the gothic myth of the vampire, both of which were evoked in *Phantastes* as models for MacDonald's artistic enterprise. The vampire, a reanimated body without a soul, is the demonic inversion of the Christian resurrection, and is associated with Teufelsbürst's devilish art. By contrast, the story's adaptation of the Pygmalion myth suggests the Christian resurrection, and celebrates art's capacity to come to life and transform the world. All three myths become mingled in the pseudo-vampiric resurrection of Karl Wolkenlicht in the creator's studio. MacDonald's comic merging of Christian rebirth, Pygmalionesque vivification, and vampiric reanimation, undoes, transforms and redeems the vampire myth, fictionalizing the Romantic belief that art can and will alter reality, and creating a optimistic myth of renewal for post-revolutionary society.

Set in Prague of the 1590s (the time at which tale of More's *Antidote* was also set), "The Cruel Painter" recounts the love story of Karl von Wolkenlicht, a brilliant and handsome university student, and Lilith, the fetching daughter of the titular "cruel painter," Teusfelsbürst. His name, which means Devilsbrush, reveals his characteristic perversity, which is to paint scenes of beautiful men and women undergoing hideous tortures. In all his paintings, he includes a lovely woman, who floats about in pristine detachment from the surrounding horror, and whom is generally taken to be the figure of either his daughter Lilith, or his late wife, who was also named Lilith. Wolkenlicht first meets young Lilith in the cemetery, where she goes to sit and weep on her mother's

gravestone, and where Wolkenlicht instantly falls in love with her. In order to gain entrance into her house and win her heart, he applies to study painting under the tutelage of Teufelsbürst, who accepts the new pupil for sadistic reasons of his own. The apprenticeship is a sham on both sides: what Karl really wants is to get close to Lilith, and what Teufelsbürst wants is a subject on whom he can carry out secret drug experiments, which he proceeds to do every evening by drugging Karl's wine. As time passes, Teufelsbürst relishes observing Karl's gradual deterioration, while Karl, in spite of the drugs, falls increasingly in love with Lilith, who remains aloof. About the same time, reports of vampire activity emerge in the city, including the unfortunate case of their (un)dead next door neighbour, Alderman Kuntz, who appears to have risen from the grave, and to be wreaking murder and mayhem about the town.

One dark and stormy night, Karl collapses from the accumulated effects of the drugs. Teufelsbürst, believing his pupil to be dead, sets to work encasing Karl's body in plaster, so as to make a mould of his attractively proportioned body. With fearful thoughts of vampires on his mind, Teufelsbürst is primed for terror, and, when a blast of lightning shakes the studio, he abandons his work and flees to the safety of his chamber. The electrical storm also succeeds in reviving Karl, who was not dead after all, but only in a coma. Understandably, however, Karl, disoriented by the drugs, the storm, the plaster chrysalis, and the black velvet pall draped over him, believes himself to be dead, or, rather, a newly awoken member of the undead. Resigned to his fate as vampire, he sets off to find Lilith, dragging his velvet pall behind him. Upon discovering her, his feelings of hot-blooded love convince him that he is not a vampire, but alive after all. Nevertheless, he continues the charade, haunting the house in the guise of a supernatural

visitant. During his hauntings, he secretly alters Teufelsbürst's paintings, erasing Lilith's presence from every picture, and adding Teufelsbürst as the chief torturer of each gruesome scene. Lilith discovers Karl's secret and becomes his collaborator in the gothic farce. Teufelsbürst's horror at having a vampire loose in his house reduces him to a state of complete anguish. When one morning Karl walks into the room, well and truly alive, the shock is so immense that Teufelsbürst gives up art altogether. After a season of inactivity, he resumes painting, only his work is transformed, now appearing wholly "without evil or suffering" (414). His art has a prophetic—and a pygmalion—effect: his first new painting, which features Karl and Lilith living together in domestic bliss, comes to life, as Karl and Lilith confess their love and marry at last. The final passage of the story finds Teufelsbürst transformed into a jolly grandfather "half smothered in grandchildren" (414).

If it is not enough that the hero, a brilliant university student, romances the unhappy heroine on her dead mother's grave, and that the heroine should be lonely and neglected by her crabbed, cynical, outcast, and authoritarian father, there are numerous other details in text that point to the parallel between "The Cruel Painter" and Percy Shelley's involvement with the Godwin household.

The protagonist Karl von Wolkenlicht offers a glowing, air-brushed image of actual descriptions of Percy Shelley, both those given by MacDonald in his 1860 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry, and by contemporary biographers of Shelley. A "somewhat careless" (380) university student noted for his "mental agility" (380) and fondness for logical propositions, Wolkenlicht resembles Shelley of the *Encyclopaedia* entry, who "dressed well but carelessly" ("Shelley" 103), and was "especially fond of

logical discussion" at Oxford ("Shelley" 101). Wolkenlicht is also a pronouncedly feminized figure, as he displays a "softness of muscular outline" (380), "gentleness of manner and behaviour" (380), and "such a rare Greek-like style of beauty" (380) that he is "known throughout the university by the diminutive of the feminine form of his name" (381), *Lottchen*. At the same time, Wolkenlicht displays manly athleticism, in his "corporeal excellence" (380), "remarkable strength" (380), and success in "all games depending upon the combination of muscle and skill" (380). Wolkenlicht's girlish good looks echo MacDonald's descriptions of Shelley, whose "complexion was delicate; his head, face, and features, remarkably small [. . .] in expression, both intellectual and moral, wonderfully beautiful" ("Shelley" 103). MacDonald's portrayal resembles descriptions of Shelley given by his contemporaries Edward Trelawny and Thomas Hogg. Trelawny depicts his friend as a "mild-looking beardless boy" (Trelawny 13-14), "blushing like a girl," with his "flushed, feminine, artless face" (Trelawny 13), and Hogg describes Shelley as possessing "'a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness'" (Hogg, in Arnold, "Shelley" 388). Though Shelley's "head was remarkably small, and his features [. . .] expressive of great sensibility and decidedly feminine; his softness of expression and mild bearing were deceptive," as "you soon found out he was a resolute, self-sustaining man" (Trelawny 149). Wolkenlicht's embodiment of Shelleyan opposites extends to his German surname, which translates as "cloud light," and suggests Karl to be a kind of walking, talking incarnation of Shelley's Mont Blanc, with its "cloud shadows and sunbeams" ("Mont Blanc" 15), or the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"'s "clouds in starlight" (9).

In dark contrast to Wolkenlicht's glowing perfection stands Teufelsbürst, in whom Godwin's scientific rationalism is demonized. In real life, Godwin became the target of popular fear and loathing in the years succeeding the French Revolution. In his own account, "after the excesses in France had started a violent reaction against those principles of the Revolution which were held responsible for the crimes committed to the cry "Liberty and fraternity," many of his friends deserted the cause of freedom, and he, alone having remained faithful, had found himself the object of criticism, at first respectful and judicial, and later by degrees more bitterly hostile and insulting" (Godwin, in Allen 57-58). Public outrage was further stirred with the publication, in 1798, of *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Godwin's biography of his late wife Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. The *Memoirs* shocked readers and shattered literary decorum in their unstinting depiction of Wollstonecraft's love affairs, suicide attempts, and the gynecological details of her death following childbirth. As Richard Holmes explains, while Godwin's "frankness and sincerity were of course nothing less than revolutionary at the time [. . . .] aris[ing] directly from the anarchist principles of sincerity and plain-speaking which he enshrined in *Political Justice*" (Holmes 44), his laying bare of Wollstonecraft's life damaged her posthumous reputation, and undermined what little respect remained for their political cause. Eventually, public hostility and personal disappointment grew so great that Godwin retired from public life.

"The Cruel Painter" evokes Godwin's popular prominence in the public nature of Teufelsbürst's identity. Like Godwin, the painter is a figure "Belonging [. . .] to the public" (384); yet—again like Godwin—his reputation has fallen, as the citizens of Prague "had taken the liberty of re-naming him [. . . .] Teufelsbürst, or Devilsbrush"

(384). Godwin's bitter state—William St Clair describes him as "prickly and truculent" (St Clair 476)—is further reflected in Teufelsbürst's "hate of humanity" (385) and in the "dreary, desolate aspect" (383) of his home. Teufelsbürst's lurid paintings, which reflect high ideals gone awry, suggest the failure and deterioration of Godwin's grand ideas. The figures the artist paints "were all beautiful in the original idea" (384), but are marred deliberately, as upon their "original beauty the painter had directed the artillery of anguish to bring down the sky-soaring heights of its divinity to the level of a hated existence" (384). The story hints also at Godwin's *Memoirs* in the circulating rumours about Teufelsbürst's late wife: "Some had said [. . .] that she had been false to him; that he had killed her; and, finding that that was not sufficing revenge, thus half in love, half in deepest hate, immortalized his vengeance" (386) by his inserting her image into every one of his grisly paintings.[47] The supreme indifference of the woman in his paintings to the surrounding torture victims—"She did not hate, she did not love the sufferers" (385)—seems to suggest the emotional detachment and perceived heartlessness of Godwin's writing style. What offended readers about Godwin's memoir of his wife was not simply the kinds of intimate details Godwin was willing to divulge; equally shocking was his unembellished, unsentimental language. Today's readers, accustomed to minimalist writing styles, are quick to grasp the anguish contained in Godwin's understated prose; however, readers of the 1790s, used to sentimental overwritten melodrama, were horrified by Godwin's dry, rational style. The emotional removal of

---

[47] Blaming Godwin's madness on his wife's sexual misconduct is in keeping with earlier anti-Godwinian texts, such as Charles Lucas's *The Infernal Quixote* (1801), which describes Godwin's *Memoirs* as the "History of the Intrigues of His Own Wife," and Mrs. Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), in which the wife's adulterous liaisons drive her philosopher husband to insanity (see Allen 61, 72-73).

the mystery woman in Teufelsbürst's paintings, caught "smiling over a primrose or the bloom on a peach" (386) while beside her "the red blood was trickling drop by drop from the crushed limb" (385-86), suggests the chillingly distant tone of rational, objective writing.

Beside provoking public suspicion, Teufelsbürst's art has a more immediate effect on the familial level, as it reduces his daughter Lilith to a state of isolated misery. Lilith is the fictional version of Godwin's actual daughter (and later Shelley's wife), Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. The mystery woman in her father's paintings, while initially thought to be Lilith's mother, is later identified as Lilith the daughter: "Some had said that she was the painter's wife, [. . . .] But it was now universally understood that it was his daughter" (386). The mother-daughter similarity hints at Mary Godwin's resemblance to her mother, with whom she shared the same name. Karl's discovery of Lilith "seated upon [her mother's. . .] new-made grave, [. . .] with her face in her hands, [. . .] and weeping bitterly" (382), further recalls Mary's encounters with Percy Shelley, who romanced her at her mother's gravesite prior to their elopement. As the indignant Godwin reported in 1814, "On Sunday, June 26, he [Percy Shelley] accompanied Mary, & her sister, Jane Clairmont, to the tomb of Mary's mother, one mile distant from London; & there, it seems, the impious idea first occurred to him of seducing her, playing the traitor to me, & deserting his wife" (Godwin to John Taylor, 1814, in *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin* 11).

Lilith is depicted as existing in a state of suspended being, a condition of stasis that is tacitly attributed to her father's art. Lilith's appearance in Teufelsbürst's paintings as a figure "of placid and harmonious loveliness" (385) accurately reflects her real-life

beauty, yet the paintings also depict her as withdrawn, a characteristic that reflects her real-life social isolation: she "went nowhere, [. . .] knew nobody, [. . .] was never seen at church, or at market; never seen in the street" (383). More chillingly, the paintings depict her as emotionally detached: her impassive image in Teufelsbürst's paintings, which portray her as heedless to the surrounding horror, earn Lilith the popular reputation for being "a beauty without a heart" (386). In real life, her emotional development has been thwarted: she is a frozen flower, "in the condition of a rose-bud, which, on the point of blossoming, had been chilled into a changeless bud by the cold of an untimely frost" (389); "She seemed like one whose love had rushed out glowing with seraphic fire, to be frozen to death in more than wintry snow" (391), "a frozen bud, [. . . that] could not blossom into a rose" (391). The story blames her father for her unhappiness, suggesting that his artistic treatment has reduced her to this heartless state, as "The power of the painter had not merely wrought for the representation of the woman of his imagination; it had had scope as well in realizing her" (389). His real-life treatment of her is no better. Forbidding her to speak of her deceased mother—"'Child! [. . .] you have no mother. Put no name in my hearing on that which is not'" (391)—Teufelsbürst is shown to be, in every way, responsible for Lilith's emotional frigidity, a dynamic that seems also to hint especially Mary Shelley's lonely and emotionally deprived childhood.

In his eponymous cruelty, Teufelsbürst is the figure onto whom MacDonald projects misgivings about scientific rationalism. In general, MacDonald upholds Romantic mystery over rational inquiry, a preference typical of many thinkers of the time, who found the pursuit of scientific knowledge to be a dubious enterprise, and agreed with Wordsworth that "we murder to dissect" ("The Tables Turned" 28).

MacDonald's mistrust of science is articulated in *England's Antiphon* and elsewhere, and is reflected especially in MacDonald's depiction of Teufelsbürst's demonic art. His suspicion of rational systems seems to have emerged quite early on. As a student at King's College, Aberdeen, where he studied Natural Philosophy (what we would now call physics), MacDonald wrote to his father in 1851 that "We are far too anxious to be definite and to have finished, well-polished, sharp-edged systems—forgetting that the more perfect a theory about the infinite, the surer it is to be wrong" (15 April 1851; in *George MacDonald and His Wife* 155). Teufelsbürst, for all his artistic leanings, is equally a scientist. The execution of his wicked art is cold and logical: his work is both well-polished and sharp-edged, as he paints with scientific precision, working "in perfect accordance with artistic law, falsifying no line of the original forms" (384). Wolkenlicht goes to him not to learn the *art* of painting, but rather to "grind his colours" and learn "the mysteries of the *science* which is the handmaiden of art" (386, emphasis added). Like any good scientist, Teufelsbürst loves to conduct experiments, and relishes the chance to use Wolkenlicht as an unwitting subject:

> His opportunities of seeing physical suffering were nearly enough even for the diseased necessities of his art; but now he had one in his power, on whom [. . .] *he could try any experiments he pleased for the production of a kind of suffering of which he did not consider that he had yet sufficient experience*. He would hold the very heart of the youth in his hand, and torture it to his own content. (388, emphasis added)

This passage describing Teufelsbürst is nearly paraphrased four years later in *England's Antiphon*, in MacDonald's disapproving description of eighteenth-century rationalists:

"The worshippers of science will themselves allow, that *when they cannot gain observations enough to satisfy them upon a point in which a law of nature is involved they must, if possible, institute experiments"* (316, emphasis added). The horror of scientific experimentation is developed in "The Cruel Painter," in Teufelsbürst's actual drug experiments on Karl, and also in his painting a scene that depicts Karl being vivisected, "just beginning to recover from a trance, while a group of surgeons, unaware of the signs of returning life, were absorbed in a minute dissection of one of the limbs" (407).

It is not sheer scientific thinking that has led Teufelsbürst astray, however. For MacDonald, who, as we saw earlier, believed in the primacy of the imagination above other more intellectual faculties,[48] it is not the scientific mind itself that errs. The real problem is the perverted imagination behind it. Teufelsbürst's scientific technique is subordinate to the decadent imagination it serves. His inspiration emerges from distinctly Romantic visions, as his ideas come "In the moments that precede sleep, when the black space before the eyes of the poet teems with lovely faces, or dawns into a spirit-landscape" (384). Instead of lovely faces, however, the visions of Teufelsbürst's "evil fancy" (384) are of pain, as "face after face of suffering, in all varieties of expression, would crowd, as if compelled by the accompanying fields, to present themselves, in awful levée, before the inner eye of the expectant master" (384). Teufelbürst's drug experiments further reflect both MacDonald's preoccupation with imaginative

---

[48] Cf. to the narrator's comment in *Castle Warlock* (1882): "In the history of the world the imagination has oftener been right than the intellect, and the things in which is has been right are of much the greater importance; only, wherever Pegasus has shown the way through a bog, the pack-horse which follows has got the praise of the discovery; while many of the blunders made by the latter are attributed to the misleading influences of the former" (*Castle Warlock* 46).

experience, and his Romantic concern with the nature and state of the dreaming mind. The concoction that Teufelsbürst slips into Karl's drink is designed specifically to affect the imagination, as it is capable of "exercising specific actions upon the brain, and tending to the inordinate excitement of those portions of it which are principally under the rule of the imagination" (391). Drugs enhance the imagination's natural function by unnatural means, an issue we will encounter again in *Donal Grant*: "By the reaction of the brain during the operation of these stimulants, the imagination is filled with suggestions and images. The nature of these is determined by the prevailing mood of the time. They are such as the imagination would produce of itself, but increased in number and intensity" (391-392). Teufelsbürst's evil scientific pursuits and his art are part and parcel of the same bad package: a diseased imagination. Karl's consequent physical deterioration from the regular ingestion of drugs further reflects the degenerative impact of Teufelsbürst's methods.

Teufelsbürst's demonic art has a counterpart in the plague of vampirism that descends upon the city. The person thought to have originated the plague is not Teufelsbürst himself, but the next best thing, his former next door neighbour, alderman John Kuntz. Kuntz is an adaptation of More's *Johannes Cuntius*,[49] a Germanification that is close enough (for English ears at least) to the German *Kunst*, or "art," to suggest that the vampire Kuntz embodies Teufelsbürst's art, come alive and ravaging the town.[50] Appropriately, Teufelsbürst is affected more than any other character by the reports of vampires: "the philosopher himself could not resist the infection of fear that was literally

---

[49] See Parsons 180-183.

[50] Ang also noted the pun on the word *Kunst/Kuntz* in her address to the 2005 MacDonald conference.

raging in the city; and perhaps the reports that he himself had sold himself to the devil had sufficient response from his own evil conscience to add to the influence of the epidemic upon him" (394).

The vampire plague suggests the extreme outcome of Godwinian thinking: the French Revolution. Like many critics, MacDonald believed the revolution to have been the natural outcome of misguided enlightenment thinking, the "supreme regard for science, and the worship of power" (*England's Antiphon* 303) gone terribly wrong:

> the antidote to the disproportionate cultivation of science, is simply power in its crude form—breaking out, that is, as brute force. When science, isolated and glorified, has produced a contempt, not only for vulgar errors, but for the truths which are incapable of scientific proof, then as we see in the French Revolution, the wild beast in man breaks from its den, and chaos returns. (*England's Antiphon* 303)

MacDonald describes vampire activity as an infectious illness: vampires are an "epidemic" (394) that "infested" (394) the city with an "infection" (394) of fear; yet the spectral plague manifests itself not in any conventional signs of pestilence, but in violence, murder, and mayhem—conditions that are more suggestive of revolutionary disorder than of plague. The vampire Kuntz:

> strangled old men; insulted women; squeezed children to death; knocked the brains of dogs against the ground; pulled up posts; turned milk to blood; nearly killed a worthy clergyman by breathing upon him the intolerable air of the grave; and, in short, filled the city with a perfect madness of fear. (394-395)

The description of the revenant's poor civic manners is taken, with only the barest modification, from Henry More's account of spectral violence, and the language of decay and disease is typical of vampire literature. In More's account, the spectre's noxious smell is emphasized (More describes it as a "grievous," "pestilently noysom," "cold," "intolerable" and "malignant stink"),[51] whereas in MacDonald's version, the offensive odour is diminished, and the emphasis is on the vampire's violence and disruptive activity, as well as the widespread fear he generates. MacDonald's use of a vampire epidemic to describe revolution also echoes earlier depictions of the French Revolution, such as those of Edmund Burke, who, as Pamela Clemit observes frequently "drew on images of monstrosity and disease to bring home the revolutionaries' perversion of the natural order" (Clemit 149).[52] At this point in the story, when all hell literally seems to be breaking loose, MacDonald, hinting strongly at Godwin, stops calling Teufelsbürst a painter, and calls him outright "the philosopher" (394).

Whereas Teufelsbürst is associated with the unhallowed raising of the dead, his daughter is associated with the inability to come alive. In a return to the imagery of *Phantastes*, Lilith's transformation is portrayed as a Pygmalionesque release from the soulless aesthetic realm and into life and love. Her transformation is not as simple as that of the white lady, however, as MacDonald emphasizes the necessity of death as part of the process of resurrection. When Karl supposedly dies, she is plunged into morbid

---

[51] See More, in Parsons 182.

[52] In Burke's own words: "Out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed, spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man [. . . .] the poison of other states is the food of the new republic" (Burke, "Letter on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France" [1796], in Clemit 149).

thoughts, as she considers how death has taken all her loved ones— "the earth could not bear more children, except she devoured those to whom she had already given birth" (397)—and fantasizes about meeting Karl in the realm of the dead: "What if men and women did not die all out, but some dim shade of each, like that pale, mind-ghost of Wolkenlicht, floated through the eternal vapours of chaos? And what if they might sometimes cross each other's path, meet, know that they met, love on?" (397). Lilith's gloomy sentiments echo Mary Shelley's own preoccupation with death,[53] as well as MacDonald's yearning for transcendence.

In a farcical play on the idea that death leads to reunion in the afterlife, Karl's symbolic death brings about new life for Lilith. While carrying out his vampire charade, Karl erases Lilith from her father's paintings. Observing the change in the paintings, Lilith suspects Karl's vampirism to be sham, and abandons her former passivity, a transformation that reflects his freeing her from the frozen world of art. Springing from frozen passivity into action, Lilith, determined to "match Karl Wolkenlicht at this game" (411), disguises herself as a ghost in order to surprise the pseudo-vampire in his hauntings. Together, ghost and vampire fool her father into believing the "that he had been the sport of some evil power, and had been for the greater part of a week utterly bewitched" (414). It is significant that they carry out the macabre charade together, as their union represents the regenerative capacity of redemption: having passed through death (or in this case pseudo-death), they are reborn together, bringing new life. Evoking

---

[53] As Maggie Kilgour observes, "Mary was haunted by death and loss since her birth" (Kilgour, "'One Immortality': The Shaping of the Shelleys in *The Last Man*" 564) and longed to rejoin Shelley in the afterlife. Her yearning for reunion finds its way into her novel *The Last Man*, which is "filled with examples of the Romantic *liebestod*" in which "Death brings together those whom life has torn asunder" (Kilgour, "'One Immortality'" 564).

conventional oppositions of sterility *vs.* fertility, this change is reflected in Teufelsbürst, whose transformation is depicted in seasonal terms, as "the ice of silence and inactivity was broken, and [. . .] the spring of his art flowed once more" (414). It is also reflected in Karl and Lilith's literal proliferation, as they produce enough babies to keep Teufelsbürst "half-smothered in grandchildren" (414).

MacDonald's fable about the Godwins and the Shelleys evokes another—and far better known—story about the Shelley-Godwin family, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*,[54] which "The Cruel Painter" reworks to achieve a rosier conclusion. Karl's mock-vampirism is overlaid with images of Shelley's tale about "the enticements of science" (*Frankenstein* 33). The parallels are numerous, beginning with fact that each creator appears in the work's title. While Shelley's tale explicitly evokes the myth of Prometheus, both it and MacDonald's story address the dark side of Ovid's myth of Pygmalion, as they depict the horror of having one's art come to life. Key scenes from *Frankenstein* are mirrored in MacDonald's story: Teufelsbürst encases Karl's body alone, at night, in his studio, during a raging electrical storm, a scene strongly reminiscent of *Frankenstein*'s "dreary night of November" (*Frankenstein* 38). Like Victor Frankenstein, whose employment is "loathesome in itself," but bears "an irresistible hold" on his imagination (*Frankenstein* 37), Teufelsbürst is at once absorbed in his work, delighting "in the artistic enjoyment of a form" (399), and terrified of it, as the "gnomes of terror" (399) set to work in his brain. Moreover, like Shelley's fearful creator, Teufelsbürst flees at the moment of the creature's awakening (399). The electrical storm

---

[54] See U.C. Knoepflmacher's "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters" 88-119, which discusses how *Frankenstein* is a response to Mary Shelley's family situation; see also Kilgour's *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* 190-92, 202, 216.

that revives the comatose Karl offers another nod to Shelley's novel: MacDonald, who would have known from Shelley's introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* of the Shelleys' interest in Galvanic experiments, attributes Karl's revival to the "influence of the electric condition of the atmosphere" (400).[55] Both creators, moreover, consider their creatures to be vampires, who, in both cases, provide an image for the destructiveness of their creator's power: while Victor regards his monster "nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave and forced to destroy all that was dear to me (*Frankenstein* 57), Teufelsbürst believes he has created a real vampire in Karl. Both creatures are projections of their creator's self-loathing. Frankenstein's creature reflects the "horrors" of Frankenstein's "secret toil [. . .] among the unhallowed damps of the grave" (*Frankenstein* 36), and is a work of "filthy creation" (*Frankenstein* 36) that causes Frankenstein to succumb to anxiety and ill health. Similarly, Teufelsbürst becomes "disgusted at the abortions of his own mind" (407) and begins to "experience a kind of shrinking from" (407) his artistic employment. Both men are haunted by their dark art, a theme developed in both works through the use of window scenes in which the creator finds himself to be the object of his creature's observation. The moment in Shelley's novel when Victor looks up to see, "by the light of the moon, the dæmon at the casement" (*Frankenstein* 252), is echoed in a similar scene of "The Cruel Painter": "The moon was shining clear, and in its light the painter saw, to his horror, the pale face staring in at his window" (402). That both Teusfelsbürst's faux-vampire and Frankenstein's creature believe themselves to be fearful, solitary monsters reinforces the similarities—Wolkenlicht believes himself to be "the last-born vampire of the vampire

---

[55] See Mary Shelley, "Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition (1831)," in *Frankenstein* 193-197.

race" (400), and Frankenstein's unfortunate creature is filled with self-hatred from beginning to end.

MacDonald's tendency to rewrite and correct the work of Percy Shelley extends to Mary Shelley as well. "The Cruel Painter" is no mere copy of *Frankenstein*, but a happy undoing of Shelley's dismal fable. Wolkenlicht's trajectory is comedic rather than tragic: unlike Frankenstein's unhappy creature, Karl discovers that he isn't a fiend, but a legitimate once-born mortal. Moreover, the story ends with plenty of joking about as he saves his master, gains a wife, and lives happily ever after in domestic bliss with lots of children—all inversions of *Frankenstein*'s story of revenge, isolation, and exile. Furthermore, unlike Frankenstein's monster, who deliberately models himself after Milton's Satan, Wolkenlicht becomes a Christ figure who redeems the tale's satanic star. Certainly, Wolkenlicht follows a Christlike pattern in his descent into a death-like state, and resurrection a half-week later. MacDonald even evokes Christ's legendary harrowing of hell in Karl's vampiric visit to the home of his fellow-student, Heinrich *Höllenrachen*, or "Hell's Jaws" (404), where he and his friend sit down and plot out how best to trick Teufelsbürst: "somehow or other the old demon-painter must be tamed" (404). Karl's entombment in the plaster mould further evokes images of resurrection, as MacDonald describes it as an "awful white chrysalis" (399), a picture that hints at the butterfly/Psyche imagery conventionally associated with the Christian resurrection. The story also employs images of seasonal regeneration, depicting Karl's plaster tomb as a "huge misshapen nut, with a corpse for its kernel" (399), that looks as "if dropped from some tree of chaos, haggard with the snows of eternity" (399). While the images of the giant chrysalis and deformed nut are certainly grotesque, they are both symbols of

redemption: the cocoon will give way to the butterfly, the nut will yield a tree. Unlike *Frankenstein*, monstrousness is not a permanent condition, but a temporary state that heralds the advent of change and improvement.

"The Cruel Painter"'s redemption of a satanic figure enacts one of MacDonald's pet heresies, his preoccupation with the possibility that the devil himself might (at least in theory) achieve salvation. MacDonald never explicitly professed such a belief; the closest he came was to suggest, as his son later reported, "that some provision was made for the heathen after death" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 178), which become one of the chief reasons for which he was squeezed out of the pulpit of the Arundel Congregationalist church in the 1850s. Nevertheless, the possibility of satanic redemption is hinted at in other works of the 1860s, such as his novels *Robert Falconer* (1868) and *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), both of which demonstrate sympathy for the devil. In *Robert Falconer*, Eric Ericson, a devout and mystical older brother figure to young Robert, declares to him that, "'If God was as good as I would like him to be, the devils themselves would repent'" (*Robert Falconer* 101). Robert's emotional response to *Paradise Lost* is distinctly Shelleyan, in that he "could not help sympathizing with Satan, and feeling—I do not say thinking—that the Almighty was pompous, scarcely reasonable, and somewhat vengeful" (*Robert Falconer* 93). [56] In *Alec Forbes*, MacDonald goes even further, launching an intellectual argument through the figure of Cosmo Cupples, the visionary but alcoholic librarian. Cupples challenges the troubled

---

[56] Cf. to Shelley's "Defence of Poetry": "Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who is in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments" (498).

Calvinist Thomas Crann (whose predestinatory doctrine has the devil damned from the beginning) to "'jist suppose [. . .] gin the de'il war to repent'" (*Alec Forbes* 422). His argument follows the reasoning that one cannot be absolutely sure whether Satan is damned or not, because the Bible does not tell us one way or the other. He suggests that God might be leaving the matter vague for the good reason that "'Maybe, whiles, he [God] doesna tell's a thing jist to gar's think aboot it, and be ready for the time whan he will tell's'" (*Alec Forbes* 422). Whether the cruel painter's fate arises out of MacDonald's Romantic sympathy for the devil's party, out of his post-Calvinist resistance to predestinatory doctrine, or (most likely) out of a combination of the two, the story offers a striking parable about the possibly of infinite grace, grace that hinges on the prophetic capacity of art to change the living world. Certainly, MacDonald seems to be attempting to bring the anarchic Godwin into the fold—the pun on his name, *God win*, was surely not lost on MacDonald—and along with him his lost sheep of a son-in-law Percy Shelley, and, though perhaps not Mary Shelley herself, then at least her forlorn Frankensteinian creature. While Mary Shelley may not need redeeming, "The Cruel Painter" at least grants her the happy ending she lacked in real life, a stable marriage and placid home life untainted by the premature loss of husband or infants.

"The Cruel Painter" captures faithfully many of the details of Percy and Mary Shelley's romance (idealized dead mother, authoritarian philosopher father, neglected daughter, brilliant suitor, graveyard romance); however the new world revealed at the end fails to follow through, even metaphorically, with the reality of the Shelley-Godwin story—there is no abandonment, elopement, estrangement, suicide, dead babies, or drowning. Instead, the tale ends with a complacent vision of Victorian domestic bliss.

The tale illustrates best MacDonald's tendency to Christianize Shelley, suggesting a desire to correct and redeem the indecorous elements of his personal history.

Even more suggestively, MacDonald redeems Shelley and Godwin in a way that identifies both men with MacDonald. With the tale concluding in a family castle with heaps of children running about, the vision looks increasingly like MacDonald's life (he and his wife had eleven children of their own, plus two adopted).[57] While MacDonald, a mystical writer of theological fairy tales, may seem worlds apart from Godwin the radical atheist philosopher, there are numerous similarities. Both Godwin and MacDonald were educated by strict Calvinists, an upbringing against which both rebelled, although this did not stop either from becoming ordained in the church. Both, moreover, later gave up the ministry, and turned to writing to earn their livelihoods. Both suffered from debilitating diseases as they struggled to support their families. Both were prolific writers who produced books for children. Both possessed a certain naivety and disingenuousness. From a letter written to his wife in 1853, we know that MacDonald was surprised to discover that Godwin had attended the same theological school as himself:[58] he writes of having read Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams*, but was "more interested in the fact that

---

[57] The redeemed Teufelsbürst with his castle full of children has a counterpart in the good painter Charles Percivale in *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872). Percivale's name suggests he is an idealized version of the Shelleyan artist. He also resembles MacDonald. Besides having a large family (as MacDonald did), Percivale has a studio that mirrors two of MacDonald's studies. With a "ceiling marvellous in deep blue [. . .] with a multitude of gold and red stars upon it" (*Vicar's Daughter* 24), Percivale's studio resembles MacDonald's study at The Retreat in Hammersmith, which also had "a dark blue ceiling with scattered stars in silver and gold" (Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* 386), as well as MacDonald's study at Halloway House in Hastings, which was "papered, painted, and decorated with stars" (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 271).

[58] In 1848 MacDonald entered Highbury Theological College, "which had been founded in 1825 to continue the work of Hoxton Academy" (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 63), the school Godwin had attended in his youth.

Godwin the writer and father of Mrs. Shelley was at Hoxton Academy then Unitarian in his youth, but himself a Calvinist and preached like the other students in the dissenting chapel than in the powerful story about London" (George MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald, 4 Oct. 1853). To what extent MacDonald might have identified with Godwin beyond this fact is impossible to say. On the whole, MacDonald could be said to have handled life's adversity with more grace than Godwin, but then MacDonald never faced quite the slings and arrows that Godwin did—there was no Percy Shelley swooping into his life and running off with his daughters—nor did he tempt public disapproval by writing inflammatory political works. While I would not want to make too much of the parallels between MacDonald and Godwin, the similarities are very suggestive. "The Cruel Painter" is a story of succession that recounts more than just Percy Shelley's transformation of William Godwin's revolutionary legacy. As Shelley's story becomes MacDonald's story, the tale positions MacDonald as the heir apparent to their visionary tradition.

3.2. The Story Without: Adela Cathcart

So far I have treated "The Cruel Painter" as an independent topic; however, it becomes increasingly interesting as the narrative layers surrounding it are considered. While "The Cruel Painter" has been repeatedly anthologized independently, it appeared originally in the novel *Adela Cathcart.* The novel's narrative frame amplifies the Shelleyan resonances and complicates the issue of artistic redemption. *Adela Cathcart* combines the domestic romance plot of the Victorian three-volume novel with a Boccaccian frame story, as the book recounts the numerous tales told by a "story club"

formed by Colonel Cathcart and his friends over the Christmas holiday. The story club's purpose is not simply to provide social diversion, but to cure Adela, Colonel Cathcart's twenty-one-year-old daughter, who is "dying of ennui" (376)—a malady that her physician, Harry Armstrong, believes to be of a spiritual rather than a physiological nature. Significantly, the story club is not Armstrong's suggestion, but the idea of the Colonel's friend John Smith, who is the narrator of the novel. However, Dr. Armstrong quickly seizes on the story club's curative potential to "'furnish a better mental table'" (52) for Adela, and offer "'good spritual food'" (53) that will "'set her foraging in new direction for the future'" (52). Though the stories of *Adela Cathcart*'s story club are told by multiple characters, the storytellers are all pronouncedly MacDonaldian. As Nancy Mellon points out, John Smith the narrator, for all his conspicuous anonymity—he introduces himself as an undistinguished middle-aged bachelor who is "none the worse" (5) for the anonymity of his name—is "an obvious portrait of George MacDonald" (Mellon 29) (minus marriage and children, of course), and the various male members of the story-club, Dr. Armstrong included, "are exaggerated portraits of different types of person [sic] whom MacDonald himself might have become" (Mellon 29). The resemblance of Adela Cathcart's storytellers to MacDonald suggest that MacDonald's fiction might be viewed as having a curative, or at least a transformational potential. MacDonald's fictional self-projection, in which he splits himself into different types, also allows him to identify with particular people whom he admired, as I have shown above in the discussion above of Godwin and Shelley.

While MacDonald's self-projection allows him to identify with certain people, it also allows him to repress the less desirable characteristics of his favorites. One male

character alone stands out as distinctly unMacDonaldian—and strongly Shelleyan: Percy Cathcart, Adela's ne'r-do-well cousin. Percy is in love with Adela and hopes to marry her, in accordance with Colonel Cathcart's wishes (242); yet he scarcely shows his affection, "paying ten times the attention to the dogs and horses" (376) than to her. He attends the story club sessions, but never contributes a tale, dismissing it as "'all a confounded bore. They're nothing but goody humbug, or sentimental whining'" (277). His attendance is primarily motivated by the fact that the story club enables him to stare all evening at Adela (243), as well as to keep his eye on his rival for her affection, Harry Armstrong the physician. Like Percy Shelley in MacDonald's *Encyclopedia* entry, Percy Cathcart resists Christianity, a rebellious stance that (as with Shelley) is implicitly attributed to his poor upbringing: as Percy explains, "'My old mother made me hate [going to church]'" (23).[59] Unlike the accomplished poet, however, the "common-place [and] selfish" (14) Percy is an irreverent boor, who sprinkles his conversation liberally with *devil* and *damnation*, declares Sundays to be "a horrid bore" (23), and skips church services (17)—yet is haunted continually by the feeling that somehow he "ought to be there" (23) and lingers in the churchyard so he can catch Adela on the way out (21). Faced with Percy's "repellent" (8) countenance, "reddish" (276) eyes, and the "self-approving tone" (8) of his "drawl" (8), the narrator Smith is tempted to reduce him to caricature, but resists the impulse, because he finds "the production of caricature has unfailingly a bad moral reaction upon myself. I daresay it is not so with others, but with

---

[59] Cf. MacDonald's *Encyclopedia Britannica* essay, in which MacDonald excuses Shelley's atheism on the basis of his misguided religious upbringing: "one can hardly help feeling what a Christian he would have been, could he but have seen Christianity in any other way than through the traditional and practical representations of it which surrounded him" (102).

that I have nothing to do: it is one of my weaknesses" (8). Smith may succeed in resisting caricature in his narrative, but it is an impulse that *MacDonald* certainly fails to resist in writing "The Cruel Painter," as Percy Cathcart offers the darker, more realist counterpart to the fabular perfection of "The Cruel Painter"'s Karl Wolkenlicht.

The wintry state of both Percy Shelley and Percy Cathcart's souls are connected to the winter landscape. On Christmas Day, Smith observes the "wintered countenance" (16) of the world, and is reminded of verses by Crashaw, who "always suggested to me Shelley turned a Catholic Priest" (16). MacDonald would later echo Smith's opinion in *England's Antiphon*, in which he muses that Crashaw, "reminds me of Shelley, in the silvery shine and bell-like melody both of his verse and his imagery" (*England's Antiphon* 238); like Shelley, Crashaw "belongs to that class of men who seem hardly ever to get foot-hold of this world, but are ever floating in the upper air of it" (*England's Antiphon* 238). Smith's retrospective reading of Crashaw through the figure of Shelley echoes the strategy of "The Cruel Painter," in which Shelley's life is superimposed on More's seventeenth century *Antidote Against Atheism.* This reading of past literary figures through Shelley suggests the great importance Shelley held for MacDonald: he becomes the lens through which all literary history is read, and is the goal toward which all history is leading.

The book's portrayal of winter is a particularly is fitting image for Percy Shelley and Percy Cathcart's apostasy, as it contains the implicit promise of seasonal renewal. As in "The Cruel Painter," which depicts Teufelsbürst's conversion and Lilith's transformation as a process of vernal regeneration, the promise of spring accompanies *Adela Cathcart*'s descriptions of winter. Smith sees snow as a symbol for the chief error

of Shelley's poetry, which destroyed the truth even as it tried to beautify it. Gazing at the landscape, he muses on how "This white world is the creation of a poet such as Shelley, in whom the fancy was too much for the intellect. Fancy settles upon anything; half destroys its form, half beautifies it with something that is not its own" (312). To restate matters in the language of veiling and revelation that both MacDonald and Shelley use in other works, Shelley's poetic veil, like the snow, concealed and distorted, rather than revealed. The fancifulness of Shelley's vision prevented his imagination from exercising fully its regenerative power, as Smith recognizes: "the true creative imagination, the form-seer, and the form-bestower, falls like the rain in the spring night, vanishing amid the roots of the trees; not settling upon them in clouds of wintry white, but breaking forth from them in clouds of summer green" (312). Smith's placing of Shelley amid images of seasonal change suggests that even Shelley might be transformed and renewed. It also recalls Shelley's evocations of changing seasons in his "Ode to the West Wind," which concludes with the hopeful question that "If Winter come, can Spring be far behind?" (70).

The hope of seasonal change is further extended to Percy Cathcart's fortunes, and is amplified by its associations with Christ's birth. On the way to church for the Christmas Day service, Smith's observes signs of spring in the "green grass [. . .] peeping up through the glittering frost" (17). The promise of cyclical regeneration is continued at church, where winter provides the focal image for the curate Ralph Armstrong's Christmas sermon, as he uses the metaphor of seasonal change to suggest how human sin and error are all part of God's ultimate plan to redeem the world:

> "It is not high summer alone that is God's. The winter also is His. [. . . .] Winter [. . .] does not belong to death, although the outside of it looks like death. Beneath the snow, the grass is growing. Below the frost, the roots are warm and alive. Winter is only a spring too weak and feeble for us to see that it is living. The cold does for all things what the gardener has sometimes to do for valuable trees: he must half kill them, before they will bear any fruit. Winter is in truth the small beginning of spring." (18-19)

Winter is particularly associated with childhood, as Armstrong characterizes it as "'the childhood of the year'" (19), resonances that connect winter to the coming of Christ—"'Into this childhood of the year came the child Jesus'" (19). In typical MacDonaldian inversion, beginning and end are reversed in Armstrong's sermon, so that winter, conventionally associated with age and death, marks instead the infancy of spiritual rebirth:

> "into this childhood of the year must we all descend. It is as if God spoke to each of us according to our need: My son, my daughter you are growing old and cunning, you must grow a child again, with my son, this blessed child. You are growing old and careful; you must become a child. You are growing old and distrustful; you must become a child. You and growing old and petty, and weak, and foolish—you must become a child—my child, like the baby there, that strong sunrise of faith and hope and love, lying in his mother's arms in the stable." (19)

During Armstrong's highly MacDonaldian sermon (MacDonald's novels often provide a virtual pulpit for the decommissioned clergyman), Percy Cathcart lounges outside in the graveyard in the hopes of seeing Adela, "standing astride of an infant's

grave, with his hands in his pockets and an air of condescending satisfaction on his countenance" (21). Percy's rebellious posture reflects his cavalier rejection of the Christmas miracle, and situates him literally in the realm of death, while also hinting that the infancy of his own spiritual birth may be at hand. His graveyard loitering recalls especially Karl Wolkenlicht's romancing of Lilith on her mother's tomb, and the men appear, respectively, as dark and light replayings of Shelley's cemeterial romancing of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. From such an angle, Percy Cathcart could be seen as embodying the unsaved, degenerate Shelley, providing a dark double of Karl Wolkenlicht, who is a glorious projection of the redeemed Shelley: as Wolkenlicht's name suggests, the clouds do not conceal his vision, but rather illuminate it. Bad as he is, however, Percy Cathcart is not beyond redemption, as MacDonald endows his Percy with a promising sense of uncertainty. For all Percy's desire to reject his mother's church-going ways, he "'can't get it out of my head that I ought to be there, even when I'm driving tandem to Richmond'" (23), a state of doubt that is reflected in the vernal promise of the thawing landscape.

Percy Cathcart faces a more palpable double in the figure of his rival Harry Armstrong, who embodies, in name and physique, MacDonald's muscular Christian ideal. A magnificent horseman, with "well-opened hazel eyes"(21) and a "fine, frank, brown, country-looking face" (21), Armstrong possesses, as Colonel Cathcart recognizes, a true Christian heart: "'A fine muscle is a fine thing; but the finest muscle of all, keeping the others going too, is the heart itself. That is the true Christian muscle'" (424). Armstrong's Christianity marks him as unusual in the medical field: as Mr. Bloomfield the schoolmaster recognizes, Harry stands out in his possessing "'queer notions'" (29) of

belief, "'for a medical man. He goes to church, for instance'" (30).[60] Significantly, "The Cruel Painter" is Harry Armstrong's story, and it is situated at a crucial turning point in Adela's cure. While Mrs. Bloomfield and Mrs. Cathcart dislike Armstrong's tale for its lurid sensationalism and superstitious foundation—it "made [. . . Mrs. Bloomfield's] flesh creep" (415) and Mrs. Cathcart "could not see any good in founding a story upon a superstition" (415)— Adela's response is quite the opposite: "her expression showed plainly enough that it was not the horror of the story that had taken chief hold of her mind. Her face was full of suppressed light, and she was evidently satisfied—or shall I call it *gratified*?—as well as delighted with the tale. Something or other in it had touched her not only deeply, but nearly" (416). With "The Cruel Painter," Adela's waning health at last tilts toward improvement, and the story is the last but one in the novel. In a book in which storytelling is prescribed as a medical cure for spiritual ailment, it is fitting, perhaps, that the Christian physician's tale should be the one with the more decisive impact. Following the story, moreover, the weather begins to change in earnest, reflecting the improvement in Adela's spiritual health: a "slow thaw set in; and before many days were over, islands of green began to appear amid the "wan water" of the snow [. . . .] The graves in the churchyard lifted up their green altars of earth, as the first whereon to return thanks for the prophecy of spring" (419). The curative power of Armstrong's story tacitly amplifies the significance of MacDonald's career choice, suggesting that a life devoted to writing fiction is as useful as—and possibly better than—the physician's career. While the medical man may cure a diseased body, the writer can do something even more exalted: he can save the ailing soul.

---

[60] Armstrong is a marked contrast to Paul Faber, an atheist country surgeon whose tale MacDonald tells in the 1879 novel, *Paul Faber, Surgeon.*

"The Cruel Painter" is also positioned at a significant point in Percy and Harry's relationship, as it marks not only the turning point in Adela's health, but the beginning of Percy's redemption as well. In the chapter that precedes "The Cruel Painter," Chapter 5 of Volume 3, titled simply "Percy," Percy and Harry engage in an altercation, in which the identities of the two suitors, for all their differences, nevertheless begin to merge. The chapter opens with Percy accosting Harry, and consists of each challenging the other to confess that he is in love with Adela. Nearly the whole chapter is in pure dialogue form: while John Smith's narration frames the chapter, his voice disappears in the middle, and Percy and Harry's interaction is presented in a form closer to dramatic dialogue, with quotation marks but lacking Smith's reportorial narrative. As a result, Percy and Harry's voices become practically indistinguishable, save for Percy's profane interjections of "'how the devil'" (377), "'By Jove'" (376), "'By Jupiter'" (376) and "'Damned if I do!'" (378). Though Percy is ready to admit (resentfully) that Armstrong has the upper hand in the courtship game, Armstrong points out that they are, in fact, in similar positions, in that neither man has presented a story in the Story Club yet: "'You forget that I am in disgrace as well as yourself on that score, for I have not read a word of my own since the club began'" (377). Each concedes that the other is, after all, a gentleman, and Percy begins to realize that his motive for wanting Adela is greed rather than love: "'I believe it was her money, after all, I was in love with'" (378). This merging of identities, together with Smith's framing commentary, implies that Percy, for all his dissolute behaviour, may indeed come to some good. Smith introduces Percy and Harry's dialogue with a retrospective comment that hints of ameliorative potential: "I learned afterward that something of an understanding had also been arrived at between

Percy and Harry; ever since learning the particulars of which, I have liked the young rascal a great deal better" (375). In a similar spirit of improvement, the chapter ends with a return to images of seasonal regeneration, evoking again the possibility of transformation: "the poor fellow [Percy] looked grave enough as he went away. And I trust that, before long, he, too, began to reap some of the good corn that grows on the wintry fields of disappointment" (378). MacDonald's pun on *grave* implies the necessity of death in the process of rebirth, evoking the sepulchral themes of "The Cruel Painter."

This breaking down and reconstitution of identity is similar to what happens in "The Cruel Painter"'s vampire farce, and suggests a process whereby one person may influence, and even transform the other. The hope of Percy's reformation is matched by his rival's symmetric but opposite movement downward, as Armstrong begins to inch off his pedestal. In Volume 3, Chapter 7, the chapter immediately after Armstrong tells the story of "The Cruel Painter" and two chapters after his altercation with Percy, Harry commits a serious indiscretion, as he attempts to steal a kiss from Adela in the drawing-room—without her father's approval of the match—and is "caught [. . .] in a perfect trap of converging looks" (442) when the Colonel and his guests discover them. This moment marks Armstrong's fall from grace, as the Colonel forbids their marriage, not wanting to have a country surgeon for a son-in-law. "The Cruel Painter" thus functions as the fictional centre about which the two opposing Shelley figures turn and meet: the bad Shelley improves, the good Shelley gets worse, as both characters' fates wind about the fable embedded in the narrative. This breakdown of identity recalls *Phantastes,* in which Anodos and Percivale's identities converge in the story of Cosmo. However, while the story of Cosmo is a warning tale of the danger of artistic pursuits, embedded in a

chivalric romance, "The Cruel Painter" offers an idealized account of Shelley's life, set in a realistic narrative of complex characters. "The Cruel Painter" may offer a glossy version of a redeemed Shelley; however, the more realistic story that surrounds suggests that in real life redemption is a more complicated affair.

In a return to concerns about literary transformation, *Adela Cathcart* shifts the emphasis away from the characters and onto the narrator, as the novel's conclusion grapples obliquely with the possibility that Shelley might never be saved. Though the *"elixir vitae"* (376, 377) of Smith's Story Club may work its renewing magic on Adela's health, Smith admits the limits of his power to improve Percy: "I have my eye upon him, but it is little an *old fogie* like me can do with a fellow like Percy" (378). These words form the concluding sentence of the Chapter 5, "Percy," and might be read as a reminder of the limits of MacDonald's efforts to redeem Shelley. John Smith's comment on the efficacy of the Story Club suggests further the impossibility of measuring the precise effects of literature. He imagines the questioning reader, asking him, "'Pray, Mr. Smith, do you think it was your wonderful prescription of story-telling, that wrought Miss Cathcart's cure?'"(459). His answer is equivocal: "'How can I tell?" [. . . .] Whether *I* have succeeded or not is of no consequence, if I have tried well. [. . . .] Except in physics, we can put nothing to *experimentum crucis,* and must be content with conjecture and probability'" (459).

For all Smith's claims that an old fogie like him could do little with a fellow like Percy, MacDonald seems to know exactly what an old fogie could do—on paper, at any rate—to improve a life like Percy Shelley's. Yet the novel's open-ended conclusion undercuts, or at least seriously qualifies "The Cruel Painter"'s fanciful reworking of

Shelley, as it closes with an atmosphere of general indeterminacy. The outcome of the marriage plot remains uncertain, but, as with Percy, things look promising. The Colonel, having forbidden Armstrong and Adela's match, promptly loses his entire fortune on a speculation, and reconsiders the union: their final scene finds both Adela and Armstrong "standing by the bedside, and the old man holding a hand of each" (459), hinting at the likelihood of future marriage.

Smith's concluding dream evokes even more explicitly the fallibility of revisionary artistic endeavors, while simultaneously amplifying their prophetic power. Resuming the Pygmalion theme that informed "The Cruel Painter," Smith dreams that he is a "great sculptor" (460), in a "cemetery in a pine-forest" (460)—an image that anticipates the graveyard world of *Lilith.* Upon every grave he has placed "a marble altar, and upon every altar the marble bust of the man or woman who lay beneath" (460)—an image that recalls the marble perfection of *Phantastes*'s white lady. Smith's sculptures, like MacDonald's stories, are improvements on the real thing, as he designs them "each in the supreme beauty which all the defects of birth and of time and of incompleteness, could not hide from the eye of the prophetic sculptor. Each was like a half-risen glorified form of the being who had there descended into the realms of Hades" (460). This vision recalls MacDonald's Christlike Shelley figures Sir Percivale and Karl Wolkenlicht, whom MacDonald has sculpted into images of quasi-divine perfection. Smith's dream next shifts out of the cemetery world and into "a great market-place" (461) in the realm of the dead, where he discovers, to his dismay, that eternity has not improved his loved ones after all. Quite the contrary, he "saw that the faces of my fathers and brothers, my mothers and sisters, had not grown nobler in the country of the dead, in

which I had thought them safe and shining. Cares, as of this world, had so settled upon them, that I could hardly recognize the old likeness; and the dim forms of the ideal glory which I had reproduced in my marble busts, had vanished altogether" (461). Smith turns doubter, as he bemoans the apparent lack of perfection, and wonders whether there was "then no world of realities—only a Vanity Fair after all?" (461). His Bunyanesque vision casts doubt on the redeeming power of art, emphasizing the *perhaps* in Novalis's line "Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will," and suggesting uncertainty in MacDonald's artistic attempts to rework Shelley's life for the better.

The outcome of Smith's dream underscores the artist's ultimate subordination to God, who alone possesses the capacity to create and to redeem. For all the vanity of the fallen world, Smith nevertheless sees flickers of promise, as "Side by side with a greedy human face, would shimmer out for a moment the ghostly marble face; and the contrast all but drove me mad with perplexity and misery" (461). At last, a mysterious stranger arrives, "head and shoulders taller than anyone there" (461), with a "pale face, with an infinite future in it" (461), at whose feet Smith throws himself, sobbing, "'I have lost them all. I will follow thee'" (462). Smith's anonymous but suspiciously Christlike guide completes the job that Smith's sculptures could not, as he transforms the people's faces "into the likeness of my marble faces" (462). Smith is drawn back to the graveyard, where his "white marbles glimmered glorified on the altars of the tombs" (462), before it all vanishes, and he reawakens in the real world, at which point the book ends. Smith's dream highlights the prophetic power of art, as it envisions how Christ, in a kind of reverse Pygmalionism, will transform people into the perfect forms anticipated by humans' artistic vision. Art can inspire the ideal, but God alone can realize it. Life will

turn into the artist's dream, as in Novalis's formula, but it requires God to make it come true. Moreover, Smith's dream reechoes *Phantastes*'s concern with artistic humility, as it emphasizes that art's transformative power comes ultimately from God rather than from the mortal artist. At the same time, the conclusion of Smith's dream tacitly suggests the audaciousness of MacDonald's art, implying that MacDonald's artistic vision is not simply his subjective dream of how the world ought to be, but it reflects and anticipates *God*'s will and ultimate plan.

The outer frame of the novel *Adela Cathcart* provides a counterpoint to the rosy revisions of "The Cruel Painter," complicating and qualifying MacDonald's project of rewriting Shelley. "The Cruel Painter" redeems Shelley and offers a myth about the transformational capacity of art. The surrounding novel of *Adela Cathcart* comments on this fictional endeavour, addressing more directly the inner state of the artist who would attempt this sort of artistic redemption. It illustrates the speculativeness and ambivalence of such a venture, and emphasizes the artist's ultimate dependence on God.

4

THE RESTORATION OF ROMANTICISM: TYPOLOGICAL REPETITION IN *DONAL GRANT* AND *SIR GIBBIE*

4.1. THE PROBLEMS WITH ROMANTICISM: DONAL GRANT

MacDonald's 1883 novel *Donal Grant* has never received a sustained critical assessment. Frequently mentioned but seldom discussed in detail, *Donal Grant* is generally considered to be one of MacDonald's less satisfying novels, the lacklustre sequel to the far more successful *Sir Gibbie*, which appeared in 1879. Robert Lee Wolff has nominated it "one of the worst" (*Golden Key* 288) of MacDonald's novels, one that offers "a mere farrago of worn-out themes from MacDonald's earlier books: somnambulism, irrationally brutal noblemen, preposterous machinery" (*Golden Key* 294).[61] Early reviewers also remarked on the book's derivativeness, *The Spectator* identifying the titular protagonist as an "almost odious" (91) copy of David Elginbrod (who appeared in the 1863 novel of the same name), and *The Dial* calling the story a "mere imitation" (138) of *Malcolm* (published in 1875). The book has been further criticized for its relentless preaching. *The Dial* admired MacDonald's "pure and lovely doctrine" (91), but conceded that his fiction is best read "solely as sermons" (138); in a similar frame of mind, *The Spectator* wondered whether it be "too late to hope that Dr.

---

[61] Wolff is certainly correct in stating that *Donal Grant* re-uses many of MacDonald's familiar figures and themes. The book also borrows extensively from gothic sources, as its haunted castle, mysterious music, opiate visions, nightmares, vampiric aristocrat, secret passageways, storm, shipwreck, murdered aunt, and den of horror recall the gothic trappings of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Polidori, among others. William Raeper observes especially that the abduction of Lady Arctura seems to borrow from Wilkie Collins' sensation novel *The Woman in White*, published in 1860 (*George MacDonald* 197). Though a comprehensive study of literary echoes in *Donal Grant* will not be taken up here, it is a matter that merits further discussion.

MacDonald may give us a Scotch story the characters in which will refrain from preaching, and from wearing their ethical theories on their sleeves" (91). More recently, Richard Reis has identified the "didactic precepts" (46) of *Donal Grant* and other novels as "the root of MacDonald's general inferiority as a realistic novelist" (47). Certainly, Donal possesses that blend of virtue, verbosity, and meddling shared by MacDonald's other pious protagonists, Malcolm and Robert Falconer, the latter of whom Mark Twain described as "a self-righteous humbug, devoured with egotism" (Twain, in Lindskoog 1992). William Raeper is perhaps kindest, positioning the book as "pure romance" (*George MacDonald* 209), one that characterizes the shift in MacDonald's prose from earlier realist stories "where romance and reality jostle side by side" (209), to later works in which "romance appears to take over reality" (209). Most recently, Rebecca Thomas Ankeny includes *Donal Grant* in her examination of books, storytelling, and literacy in MacDonald, though she does not offer a full reading of the novel (see especially Ankeny 87-98).

For all its artistic imperfections, I would argue that *Donal Grant* is one of the most conceptually ambitious of MacDonald's books. While it may be flawed as a novel, as a narrative about literary history it is a remarkable testament to the breadth of MacDonald's parabolic vision. *Donal Grant* revisits MacDonald's preoccupation with literary history, offering his myth about the fall and redemption of romance at the hands of nineteenth-century writers. In its capacity as literary fable, the novel, while nominally the sequel to *Sir Gibbie*, could also be positioned as a mythological companion to the history begun in *England's Antiphon*, MacDonald's anthology of lyric. As we saw in Chapter 1, in *England's Antiphon* MacDonald depicted Wordsworthian Romanticism as

the revival of the true spirit of English poetry, which healed "the plague which the [Enlightenment] worship of knowledge had bred" (*England's Antiphon* 304). *Donal Grant* continues the saga, albeit in fictional form, as it investigates the dark side of Romanticism, the savage, violent, untamed impulses that *England's Antiphon* did not discuss. *Donal Grant* recounts romance's dangerous turn away fromWordsworthian nature worship, and toward the corrupting influences (in MacDonald's mind) of Coleridgean drug addiction, Byronic perversity, and Shelleyean atheism. The darkness of Romanticism is depicted as a degenerative slide into the violence, excess, and madness of the gothic mode, and is reflected particularly in Graham's Grip, the gothic castle that is at the center of the novel. Wrapped in a devilish past, concealing hidden dens of horror, haunted by the strains of a lost Aeolian harp, and run by the mad, vampiric, opium-addicted murderer Lord Morven, the castle is romance, stalwart and grim amid the abominations committed by centuries of its inhabitants, functioning simultaneously as the subject of and setting for debates about the revival of its ancient form. MacDonald sees transformative possibilities in the very mode he wishes to purge: counterposing the gothic myth of the vampire to the Christian myth of the resurrection (as he did in "The Cruel Painter"), MacDonald attempts to rehabilitate a diseased tradition from within, by driving out gothic darkness, recovering romance's ancient form, and restoring it to right—that is to say, to MacDonaldian—leadership.

The book's theme of resurrecting the past contains strong Arthurian overtones. I argue that *Donal Grant*, together with its prequel *Sir Gibbie*, can be read as a veiled Arthuriad, in which English romance, embodied in the hapless heroine Lady Arctura, is itself the victim to be rescued. The heroism that *Donal Grant* portrays is suggestively

literary, as the book offers in Donal a vision of the heroic man of letters, heir to a great tradition, whose coming brings rescue and redemption. A rustic cowherd who both writes Shelleyesque poetry and is a critic of Shelley, Donal is a compound figure who combines the aspects of Shelley that MacDonald idealized, together with MacDonald himself. As in his other works, the book suggests an identification of MacDonald with Shelley, making MacDonald Shelley's true heir, a scholarly master and critic who will embrace the good and excise the bad, ensuring the healthy continuance of English literature.

Underlying both the overt gothic plot and the allegory about literary history is the story of the Christian resurrection. The recurring pattern of death and rebirth provides the *basso continuo* that gives texture and direction to the overarching storylines. The repetition of this pattern can be understood typologically, as a fundamental motif that unifies the novel, and also connects it to MacDonald's other books, which are similarly preoccupied with death and resurrection. In such a reading, Donal Grant can be identified as the typological fulfillment of an earlier character, Sir Gibbie, the saintly Christ figure who was the protagonist of the book's prequel. The books suggest, moreover, that MacDonald is the typological fulfillment of Shelley. On a broader level, MacDonald's use of the resurrection as a unifying pattern and basic principle of historical progress connects his *oeuvre* as a whole to Christian history, imbuing MacDonald's story of literary history (in which he himself is a key participant) with deep spiritual significance.

In his representation of death, rebirth, and history, MacDonald juxtaposes two models of historical progress: (1) repetition of past events that is creative and progressive, because it is repetition that improves on the past with each subsequent variation; and (2)

repetition that is mere static repetition, without change, making it compulsive, destructive, and regressive. *Creative repetition*, which repeats the past with alterations to improve on it, corresponds with the regenerative, restorative power of the Christian resurrection. It is thus similar to typology, which also links historical progress to a form of repetition in which later events repeat and fulfill earlier prefigurations, yet advance forward toward apocalypse and transcendence. As we will see later, typology also underlies the relationship between *Sir Gibbie* and *Donal Grant*. The echoes of the earlier work in the later one—that caused critics to condemn the latter book as mere recycling—set up a complex relationship between the two novels that reflects MacDonald's view of history. Donal, a character who has a right relationship with God, and who appears as the typological fulfillment of Sir Gibbie, embodies this form of creative, progressive repetition.

Compulsive repetition, on the other hand, is associated with necromancy, the dark art of reviving the dead that produces no new life, only ghostly, faded images of the past. This false form of resurrection is embodied par excellence in Lord Morven, whose vampiric nature reflects the failure to break from the past, a failure that results in mad, destructive repetition. MacDonald's allegory of literary history is shaped by the tension between these two modes, as Donal, who is a force of progress and righteous resurrection, struggles against Morven's demonic vampirism. The novel narrates this struggle, and also participates in it, insofar as the book itself is an attempt to redeem the past, as it rewrites and re-presents Romanticism in general, and Percy Shelley in particular, but with differences that correct and improve on past errors.

In *Donal Grant*, MacDonald's evolving myth of Shelley becomes more complex, as the novel moves away from MacDonald's earlier, uncritical laudations of Shelley, to question explicitly elements of his ideas about liberty and autonomy. As in *Adela Cathcart*, the figure of Shelley is split into two, as MacDonald projects all the good Shelley onto the characters Stephen Kennedy and especially Donal Grant, and all the bad Shelley onto Percy Graham, Lord Forgue, and his father, the earl of Morven (the latter of whom incarnates not simply Shelley's errors, but all manner of Romantic badness).

Donal Grant recounts the adventures of Donal, a former shepherd and recent college graduate, who sets off to seek his fortune, and finds employment at the castle Graham's Grip, as tutor to Davie Graham, the youngest son of the earl, Lord Morven. The castle does not belong to Lord Morven, but rather to his orphaned niece Arctura, who also lives at the castle and has recently come of age. Arctura is intended to marry Lord Morven's elder son, Percy, Lord Forgue, though she does not care for him. While Donal enjoys an excellent relationship with Davie and Arctura, his relationship with Percy is strained, not only because of Arctura's obvious preference for the young tutor's company, but also because Donal keeps interfering with Percy's attempts to seduce young Eppy Comin, a village maid and the granddaughter of Andrew and Doory Comin, Donal's shoemaker friends. Through all this, Lord Morven remains a shadowy creature, of reputedly bad health, who is seldom seen, though he is often heard moaning and sleepwalking at night. The earl's nocturnal perambulations seem to be brought on by mysterious music that wafts through the castle on windy nights. Donal, Arctura, and Davie form a search party to explore the castle and uncover the source of the mysterious music, which they believe may be connected to the legend of a secret room hidden

somewhere in the castle. After much exploration of the rooftops, they locate the source of the music, which turns out to be an Aeolian harp hidden in a chimney.

In the meantime, the earl attempts to befriend Donal; however, his real motive is to conduct secret drug experiments on the unsuspecting tutor. Donal's tainted wine grants him incredible visions, which range from blissful to terrifying, and he learns that Lord Morven is an opium addict who undergoes regular bouts of madness. During one of his ravings, he reveals that Percy and Davie are illegitimate sons, and that Percy must marry Arctura or starve, as he possesses neither fortune nor trade to preserve himself. Against everyone's wishes, Percy continues to pursue Eppy Comin, turning her attention away from her other suitor, the upstanding fisherman Stephen Kennedy, who, awash with the anguish of unrequited love, perishes in a storm at sea.

Donal and Arctura discover a hidden passage leading from Arctura's bedroom to a secret chapel, long sealed off from the rest of the castle. The chapel, located at the center of the castle, at the bottom of the chimney containing the Aeolian harp, has become a den of horrors, where they discover the rotted corpse of Percy and Davie's mother chained to a bed, her dead baby upon the altar, and, in a closet, the remnants of her diary penned in blood. The earl, determined that the bastard Percy should inherit the castle, if not by marriage to his cousin, then by her death, sends everyone away from the castle except Arctura, so that he may dispose of her uninterrupted. Donal returns to the castle in the nick of time to rescue Arctura from the same fate that her aunt suffered. Arctura takes possession of her lawful property, and orders extensive renovations to be carried out on the castle, namely tearing down the chapel walls to restore it to light and life. To Percy's disgust, Arctura has also fallen in love with Donal. Her adventures have

left her in ill health, however, and so it is only upon her deathbed that she and Donal marry, and she dies before morning. Meanwhile, the earl goes raving mad, as Donal implements a programme of drug withdrawal. Just before he dies, he regains his sanity long enough to seek God's forgiveness and Donal's friendship. Donal, having usurped Percy's position by taking his intended bride, title, and property, rather than accepting the inheritance, passes the property over to Kate and Hector Graeme, cousins of the family whose innate dignity and nobleness incarnate all the virtues of old-fashioned chivalry. Donal moves into Morven House instead, the family's town house, which he turns into a school for boys.

As a myth about Romanticism, the novel suggests the power of literary criticism to turn literature away from self-worship and atheism, and toward God. As we have seen in earlier works such as *England's Antiphon*, *Phantastes*, and his essays, MacDonald upheld Romantic ideas of poetry as a communion of the human mind and the divine. Poetry is a moment of revelation, which MacDonald portrays variously as having the regenerative capacity associated with Christian rebirth, or, in the classical template, with the myth of Pygmalion. *Phantastes*' Alder Maiden and Ash warned, however, of the danger of narcissism, and portrayed self-involved art as a corrupt form, associated with vampirism and living death. *Donal Grant* explores further this demonic side of Romanticism, as the book portrays artistic degeneration as divorce from God, a state of satanic rebellion embodied *par excellence* in the Earl of Morven. Morven's threat to Arctura is a threat to English literature in general, and the romance tradition in particular, as characters' names evoke the legendary figures of Arthurian romance. The name *Arctura*— "'a hathenish name for a lass!'" (40)—suggests a feminized form of Arthur,

while *Morven* recalls Morganna LeFay, Arthur's half-sister, as well as the child Mordred, who was born of Arthur and Morganna's incestuous union, and eventually brought about Arthur's defeat. Certainly, the similarity of *Morven* to the Latin word for death, *mors*, implies the fatal threat he poses to Arctura. Morven's attempt to set up his illegitimate son Percy as the heir to the estate—either by his marriage to Arctura, or *via* her death—is a corruption of the bloodline which suggests a romance tradition gone awry. The Arthurian overtones extend to the prequel as well. As we shall see later, a Guinevere figure appears in the earlier novel, *Sir Gibbie*, in the character of Ginevra Galbraith. The Arthurian nomenclature connects the *Sir Gibbie-Donal Grant* cycle to England's mythical past, and suggests that it may be read as an allegory about the trials and tribulations of the English literary tradition.

At the same time, the figure of Morven recalls the more recent history of romance, as he is a compound figure of Romantic perversity onto which the vices of Shelley, Coleridge, and especially Byron are projected. In the gothic excesses of his villainy, Morven evokes in particular Byron, whose influence on gothic romance was solidified as he himself became a gothic figure in romantic fiction. MacDonald's Lord Morven continues this tradition of fictionalizing Byron, as the name *Morven*, in its similarity to *Ruthven*, recalls Lord Ruthven of Polidori's 1819 story "The Vampyre," who was modeled on Byron, as well as Caroline Lamb's Ruthven in her 1816 novel *Glenarvon*. As discussed in Chapter 1, Byron figures badly throughout MacDonald's writing, reaching a sensational apex of infamy in *Donal Grant*. Morven's sadistic torture and murder of his children's mother, whom, it turns out, he never married, hints at Byron's savage behaviour toward his wife, Annabella Milbanke. Following her

separation, Lady Byron, in an effort to clear herself of the taint of her involvement with her wayward husband, actively cultivated her image as abused saint, or, as David Crane describes her, as an "all-seeing, all forgiving angel of compassion and death" (Crane 268)—an image that was further promoted by Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1870 biography, *Lady Byron Vindicated.* As MacDonald's son Greville reports, when Lady Byron befriended the MacDonalds in the late 1850s, she shared with them the story of her marriage and separation,[62] events that seem to be fictionalized in *Donal Grant's* tale of the unhappy relationship between the earl and his mistress.

The masochistic suffering of the boys' nameless mother suggests the torments of the saintly Lady Byron. The mother endures "sorest humiliations" and "bodily tortures" "for his sake" (296), begging only that Morven "would not make my heart bleed so" (306). Incest, the crime for which Byron was ultimately exiled from England, is also hinted at in Morven's attempt to murder his niece Arctura. His chaining her to the mouldering bed on which her aunt earlier met a similar end is suggestive, especially given MacDonald's preoccupation with hands (as well as feet), which, as Raeper notes, he habitually "charges [. . .] with an intense eroticism" (Raeper 204), [63] The violence with which Morven thrusts Arctura's hand into the manacle leaves "her hand [. . .] swollen, and the skin abraded" (355), leading the shocked Donal to exclaim at how the earl "'forced'" and "'must have hurt'" (355) her. His injuring of her hand, with its overtones of the stigmata, suggests at least a metaphorical violation, and also echoes the injury he inflicted on her imprisoned aunt, whose hand bled uncontrollably, according to

---

[62] See Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* 300-313.

[63] See Raeper for a discussion of MacDonald's "preoccupation with hands and feet" (*George MacDonald* 204).

her grisly record, written in the blood from her wound (306). While MacDonald's decorousness would have precluded him from depicting incest directly, Morven's attempt to replay the aunt's fate with his niece—on the same bed, no less—hints at the incestuous nature of Byron's wrongdoings, as well as, more generally, his disastrous marriage.

If Morven's perverse sexuality recalls Byron, his drug use evokes Coleridge, as the book explores the spiritual ramifications of the Romantic preoccupation with heightened vision. As noted in Chapter 1, MacDonald was dismayed to learn of Coleridge's opium dependency, writing to his wife of his surprise to learn of how this "miserable weakness" lead Coleridge to commit such execrable acts as "lying." MacDonald comforted himself with the fact that opium "was a passing madness" for Coleridge, and not a permanent state. (George MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald, 12 Sept. 1853). In *Donal Grant*, the earl, "'a slave to his medicines'" (266), who "had been long in the habit of using narcotics and stimulants" (370), explicitly compares his addiction to that of Coleridge, describing himself as an innocent beguiled by deception and temptation: "'how, like poor Coleridge, I was first decoyed, then enticed from one stage to another'" (292). Although Morven commits crimes much worse than lying while under the influence, like Coleridge's insanity, his is also a passing madness, one that comes and goes with the (suggestively Romantic) wind blowing through the castle's (even more suggestively Romantic) Aeolian harp, which, as Arctura recognizes, "'has something to do with uncle's madness'"(197).

Morven's alchemical adventures suggest the spiritual destitution of drug-induced vision. Like Teufelsbürst of "The Cruel Painter," the earl is not simply a drug connoisseur, but an armchair scientist who enjoys experimenting on others—"There was

hardly any sort of narcotic with which he did not at least make experiment" (227)—and he uses Arctura, and later Donal, as his unwitting subjects. However, whereas "The Cruel Painter" targets rationalist, scientific thinking in its Godwinian villain, *Donal Grant* seems to be critiquing the Romantic preoccupation with drugs as a means of intensifying imaginative experience. Donal's drug trips follow a trajectory familiar to many Romantic drug narratives, such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," or DeQuincey's *Confessions*, beginning delightfully, rising swiftly to dizzying heights (or sinking to perilous depths), and concluding with remorse. His initial experience, for instance, is described as "a long and delightful journey he had made on horseback with the earl—through scenes of entrancing interest and variety,—with the present result of a strange weariness, almost misery" (147). In keeping with contemporary thought, the book characterizes drug use as a moral vice,[64] yet it goes even further, to portray it as a *spiritual* failing, one that drives a wedge between humans and God. Even though Donal suffers no addiction, commits no wrong deeds, and "did not feel he was to blame" (148) for the "accident" (148) of his drug episode, the "something akin to shame" (148) he feels afterward has a distinctly spiritual cast, which he can only describe as the feeling of having "a lack of faith in God" (148). Certainly, the earl, for whom "there were millions of spiritual miles betwixt him and the image of God" (377), suffers from a want of faith

---

[64] Like many Victorians, MacDonald subscribed to the belief that addiction is "not a physical disease, but a moral vice" (Virginia Berridge, *Opium and the People* 155), which "undermine[s] the moral nature" (*Donal Grant* 294), leading to "moral decay" (*Donal Grant* 370) and finally "moral madness" (*Donal Grant* 372). Donal's urging the earl to overcome his addiction and consequent madness through the vigorous exercise of his will (292) is also in keeping with the wisdom of the day: as Elaine Showalter observes, "Whether drunkenness or excitement was the cause, Victorian doctors believed that in most cases insanity was preventable if individuals were prepared to use their willpower to fight off mental disorder and to avoid excess" (*The Female Malady* 30).

that renders him morally and spiritually destitute. The story of Teufelsbürst's conversion made a similar connection between drugs and spiritual degeneration; however, *Donal Grant* elaborates more fully how exactly drugs cloud and distort spiritual vision.

As the novel shows, drugs offer a demonic parody of the divine vision, and are a false means of achieving transcendence. True inspiration, as MacDonald had argued in his essays, can only come from God. Donal's night on the moor in Chapter 2 of the novel exemplifies this ideal natural-supernatural communion. The sky above him, "God's high, star-studded night, with its airy curtains of dusky darkness" (13) initiates an edifying revelation: when Donal wakes, he is spiritually uplifted: "it seemed to him no less than to Jacob that he must have slept at the foot of the heavenly stair" (13). Literally, he is inspired with God's breath, as "The wind came round him like the stuff of thought unshaped, and every breath he drew seemed like God breathing afresh into his nostrils the breath of life" (13). Similarly, the view from the "aerie" (113) of his tower room, of the rural splendour below— "The wide country [. . .], the winding road [. . .], the meadow with its stripes [. . .] and the sea, shining in the sun like a diamond shield" (50)—is a "glorious sight" (51) that glimmers with transcendent promise: as the butler reports, "'when I first looked out there I thought I was in eternity!'" (51).

Drugs, by contrast, are a nightmare inversion of this process of revelation and communion. Drugs remove God from the artistic process, endowing the user with vision that is only a grim imitation of divine inspiration and holy communion. Under their influence, Donal experiences not a oneness with God, but a disorienting blurring of self and other. Inner thoughts—Donal's as well as those of others—are projected outward, with the result that "whatever the earl said, and whatever arose in his own mind, seemed

to have outward existence" (147). All minds appear to lie open, so that Donal "seemed, in some inexplicable way [. . .] to see things which had their origin in the brain of the earl" (147). Even the minds of animals are laid bare, as Donal (formerly a shepherd), is transported into his past, where he "seemed to be reading the thoughts of his sheep around him" (154).[65] This melding of minds is neither comforting nor edifying. In contrast to the spiritual uplift of Donal's divinely-inspired vision on the heath (12-13), drug-induced vision opens the door to monstrosity and chaos. The dissolving of the boundary between self and other, inner and outer, and nature and eternity, instead of generating a transcendental communion with God, leads to chaos, madness and self-destruction, a condition reflected in Donal's irresistible pull to the stormy sea: "It was drawing him to the sea, whether in the body or out of the body he knew not; He was but conscious of forms of existence: whether those forms had relation to things outside him, or whether they belonged only to the world within him, he was unaware" (155). Donal's discovery of what he believes at first to be a dead body, rolled out of the sea (155)—it turns out to be a lump of fishing net—is a symbolic drowning that recalls Shelley's drowning. It is repeated in the actual drowning of another Shelley figure, the fisherman Stephen Kennedy, whose body later washes ashore in the same place, "cast on the sands close to spot where Donal dragged the net from the waves" (254).

The earl experiences an even more maddening and permanent disorientation, as drugs destroy his grip of reality. As one who "moved and acted in a world of subdued fact and enhanced fiction" (364), "hardly knowing the difference between dreaming a

---

[65] F. Hal Broome suggests that Donal's visions are caused by hashish, "which was known to produce a 'mental hallucination, with some degree of control over the train of thought—a sort of half-waking dream' according to James Braid's *Observation on Trance; or, Human Hibernation*"(Braid, in Broome 106n59).

thing and doing the thing" (345), Morven loses all moral, existential and temporal bearings. Initially, his drug use stemmed from "'the necessity [. . .] for escaping my past self'" (292), as he attempted to blunt his unhappy memories of his murderous history with medications. However, their influence soon produced the opposite effect: rather than numbing his brain to thoughts of the past, the drugs stimulate it, causing his "roused imagination" (370) to reawaken memories and project them outward. Increasingly unable "to distinguish between the real and the unreal" (350) and "whether things were or were not projections from his own brain" (364), Morven, far from escaping the past, is forced to repeat it: in particular, he mistakes Arctura for her aunt, returned from the grave to forgive him for his crimes (365-66). By comparison, temporal confusion affects other characters who ingest mind-altering substances. Donal's past and present merge, as drugs transport him into his bucolic past: "although he knew he was sitting at a table with the earl and lady Arctura, he was uncertain whether he was not at the same time upon the side of a lonely hill, closed in a magic night of high summer, his wooly and hairy friends lying all around him" (154). Similarly, albeit more deliberately, the alcoholic Sir George in *Sir Gibbie* took advantage of the power of the "necromantic whisky" (*Sir Gibbie* 24) to revive the "faded ghosts of [his] ancestral dignity and worth" (*Sir Gibbie* 24), so he could relive in his mind past glories.

While drugs prompt and exacerbate Morven's mad conflation of past and present, within and without, the more fundamental problem is his guilty conscience, the murderous secrets of which he will reveal to neither human nor God. The earl is impenetrable, refusing even the physician's stethoscope, as he declares he will allow "'no spying into my heart!'" (370). Morven has attempted to bury the past, literally, by

walling up the evidence of the dead mother and child, and figuratively, by refusing to address his dark history. In the death-obsessed world of MacDonald's novels, the greatest good is to embrace death and be with God. For Morven, however, who seeks to avoid both God and death, the past, though buried, remains undead. Suppressing history renders Morven unable to transcend it, with the result that he is caught in an interim state of living death, a condition reflected in his vampiric countenance: his face "cadaverous (265), with "eyes more like those of corpse than a man among his living fellows" (136), and a voice "terrible as a voice [. . .] from an unseen world of sin and suffering" (190), Morven wanders about "in the anomalous condition of neither ghost nor genuine mortal" (337). His alchemical experimentation becomes part of this effort to resist death, as the housekeeper portrays his drug use as the Faustian ambition of a Romantic scientist who would overleap the bounds of mortality: "'He's taen a doze o' ane o' thae drogues he's aye potterin' wi'—fain to learn the trade of livin' for ever, I reckon!'" (260). Unwilling to submit to God and put his past to rest properly, Morven is doomed to repeat it, in the frenzied ravings of his mind that haunt him every time the "ghost-music" (348, 353) of the Aeolian harp rings out on stormy nights, and in his compulsive attempt to repeat the aunt's murder on Arctura. In keeping with common vampire lore, with which MacDonald was evidently familiar,[66] Morven's undead condition is contagious, as he threatens others with his own fate. Like *Phantastes*' vampiric Ash who would bury Anodos at his roots, preventing the resurrection of his soul, Morven threatens Arctura with live burial. She predicts this fate in a nightmare, in which Morven beckons her

---

[66] In "The Cruel Painter," the narrator offers a lengthy explanation about how the vampire is "a body retaining a kind of animal life" (395), and that "whoever died from the mouth of the vampire [. . .] must in turn rise from the grave, and go forth a vampire, to suck the blood of the dearest left behind" (395).

down into "the mould of the ancient dead" (251), a fearful vision that is literalized in his later attempt to wall her up in the chapel.

The novel thus features two kinds of burial. Morven's repressive, false form of burial is a bad form of death, as it leads only to ghostly reanimation, indicating a failure to truly die. By contrast, godly burial is good death, as it leads to heavenly rebirth. Arctura's great fear is that her murdered aunt and baby cousin failed to achieve heavenly resurrection. Once their bodies are properly buried by Arctura and Donal, however, she dreams of their joyful reunion in heaven. In the dream, the child is taken "off the cold stone" (317) and granted the "gorgeous and great wings" (317) of a butterfly, an image that combines the stony image of Christ's entombment and resurrection with the classical image of lepidopteral rebirth. Arctura's dream offers the hope that ghostliness need not be a permanent condition, and that true death can overcome and redeem Morven's efforts to avoid it.

Ultimately, the earl's madness is a symptom of his apostasy, which the book characterizes as misguided autonomy leading to spiritual disobedience. Morven rejects God's supremacy: claiming allegiance to no one but himself, "He believed neither like saint nor devil; he believed and did not obey, he believed and did not *yet* tremble" (227). Instead, Morven worships himself. Like Moloch, to whom his "pride of self-love and self-worship" are compared (296), Morven styles himself as "his own king" (191), one "who had made himself a god—his own god!" (192). Morven's narcissism is tainted with an especially Moloch-like destructiveness: like Moloch, who demanded child sacrifice, he has murdered his daughter for his own pride. As with the Alder maiden, whose narcissism is reflected in her rotting coffin body, Morven's extreme self-regard is

represented as a state of decay and decomposition: as the narrator declares, "Self is as full of worms as it can hold; God deliver us from it!" (334).

Morven resists any such deliverance, however. A staunch defender of his free will, Morven rejects as "'dreary doctrine'" (290) Donal's belief that the only true freedom comes from obeying God: Donal insists that "'the sole way for a man to know he has freedom is to do something he ought to do, which he would rather not do. [. . . .] There is no free will save in resisting what one would like, and doing what the Truth would have him do'" (290). The irony, of course, is that Morven, for all his protestations otherwise, has already lost his free will to drug dependency, becoming, as the butler points out, "'a slave to his medicines'" (266). To right this wrong, Donal urges Morven to recover his personal will by following God's will, and confessing his sins, so that he may "'resist the devil [and] . . . give up the evil habit that is dragging [him] lower and lower'" (295). Addiction and rebellious self-worship are part and parcel of the same demonic plot, as Morven eventually realizes: "' It was those cursed drugs that wiled the soul out of me, and the devil went in and took its place!'" (374). (With regard to Morven's lack of belief in Satan, Donal points out that the devil hardly cares whether humans believe in his existence or not, as long as a person "'does what the devil would have him do'" (292).) Morven in his megalomania is repeatedly likened to Satan, who is characterized as the *ne plus ultra* of self-absorption. Donal sees the devil as being fundamentally deranged by extreme narcissism: "' the devil must be mad with self-worship! Hell is the great madhouse of creation!'" (356). Arctura further senses the satanic nature of her uncle's derangement: "'When the wind blows so angrily [causing Morven to fall into fits], I always think of that passage about the prince of the power of

the air being the spirit that works in the children of disobedience'" (197). To deny God's supremacy and follow one's own selfish will is, in *Donal Grant,* a form of narcissistic madness, albeit one about which the sufferer has some measure of choice and control.

The book's sensational depiction of atheistic rebellion as the delusions of a madman functions as a commentary on a real-life atheist, Percy Shelley. Before Morven even enters into the story, Donal critiques Shelley for his erroneous ideas about liberty and autonomy. In Chapter 2, Donal, resting barefoot and homeless by the roadside, volume of Shelley in hand, is confronted by the clergyman Mr. Carmichael about the spiritual danger of reading Shelley. Carmichael attacks Shelley for his atheism, insisting that Donal's reading places him "'on the brink of perdition. That book will poison your very vitals!'" (10). Donal trots out MacDonald's standard defense of Shelley in a scene that reads practically as a dialogue version of MacDonald's 1860 encyclopedia entry: Donal protests that while Shelley may have been an infidel, he was "'not of the worst sort. It's the people who call themselves believers that drive the like of poor Shelley to the mouth of the pit'" (10), and he insists that "'In spirit Shelley was far nearer the truth than those who made him despise the very name of Christianity without knowing what it really was'" (12).[67] Donal even reads Carmichael five stanzas about embracing freedom and resisting tyranny from "The Mask of Anarchy," which the uncomprehending

---

[67] Compare this to MacDonald's description of Shelley in his 1860 *Encyclopædia Britannica* entry (also discussed in Chapter 1): "how ill he must have been instructed in the priciples of Christianity! [. . . .] So far is he from being an opponent of Christianity properly so called, that one can hardly help feeling what a Christian he would have been, could he but have seen Christianity in any other way than through the traditional and practical misrepresentations of it which surrounded him. [. . . .] Shelley's own feeling toward others, as judged from his poetry, seem to be tinctured with the very essence of Christianity" ("Shelley" 102).

clergyman dismisses as "'Sheer nonsense'" (11). Yet after Carmichael departs, Donal rereads Shelley, and suddenly sees problems that force him to reassess the poet. As he

> held more talk with the book-embodied spirit of Shelley, [. . . he] saw more and more clearly how he was misled in his every notion of Christianity, and how different those who gave him his notions must have been from the evangelists and apostles. He saw in the poet a boyish nature striving after liberty, with scarce a notion of what liberty really was: he knew nothing of the law of liberty—oneness with the will of our existence, which would have us free with its own freedom. (12)

The trouble with Shelley, Donal decides, is that Shelley followed his own will, instead of seeking God's will, and in so doing mistakenly believed himself to be at liberty. Donal's criticism of Shelley is significant, as it offers the only example in MacDonald's writing in which Shelley's shining perfection is seriously called into question. While Donal may not be equated with MacDonald exactly (although his protagonists do generally function as mouthpieces of the author), Donal's change of heart certainly suggests a rethinking on MacDonald's part. *Donal Grant* enriches MacDonald's portrayal of Shelley, as the book demonstrates a readiness to examine the errors of Shelley's thinking in greater depth and explicitness than any of MacDonald's previous, more laudatory works. Donal's discussion of Shelley serves as an introduction to Morven, whose self-worship is the monstrous projection of Shelleyan atheism amplified to its furthest extent, as his deranged delusions of autonomy illustrate the sheer madness of replacing God with misguided ideas about personal freedom. Moreover, *Donal Grant* suggests how the role of the literary critic is key, as the critic can identify and correct Shelley's errors. It

leaves open the possibility for Donal—and MacDonald himself—to progress beyond Shelley's model, ensuring that they do not simply repeat the past, but improve on it.

While Shelley's spiritual errors are projected onto Lord Morven, his carnal improprieties are reserved for Morven's son, Percy, Lord Forgue. With his "rather tall and slender" (37) form, Percy resembles his namesake Shelley physically (a characteristic that numerous Shelley-figures in MacDonald's work share). A characterless youth akin to Percy Cathcart in *Adela Cathcart*, Lord Forgue beats his horses, disobeys his father, and courts his cousin Arctura while simultaneously seducing the village maid Eppy Comin. While he is free of his father's demonic atheism, his behavior nevertheless suggests Shelley's romantic indiscretions, as snippets of the Shelleys' lives dot Percy's clandestine courtship of Eppy Comin. Their "trysting place" (234), Morven House, is the former residence of a family monster, a cannibal who is explicitly compared to Victor Frankenstein's creature: as the earl notes, he "'must have been more like Mrs. Shelley's creation in *Frankenstein* than any other'" (229). The drowning of Eppy's upright suitor, Stephen Kennedy, in a great storm at sea evokes Shelley's death, suggesting a good version of Shelley dying with Kennedy, leaving only the dissolute Percy to triumph. Fortunately, Donal lives on, providing another, better version of Shelley, and suggesting the passing on of the Shelley mantle. Donal's desire to rescue what he thinks is a drowning man (in the same location where Kennedy's body would later wash up) recalls MacDonald's other literary attempts to rescue the dead poet. Certainly, Donal's meddling in Percy and Eppy's affair—Donal self-righteously proclaims himself "'his brother's keeper'" (123), and makes it his duty to discourage the match—hints at

MacDonald's attempt in "The Cruel Painter" to correct Shelley's improper involvement with Mary Godwin.

The degenerate, self-destructive side of Romanticism in general, and Shelleyan Romanticism in particular, is suggested in the novel's account of the Red Etin, the Graham family's cannibal ancestor. "[O]f gigantic size, with coarse black hair" and a "huge, shapeless, cruel, greedy mouth" (229), the Etin is a monstrous evolutionary throwback, "a veritable savage" (229), "out of no darkest age of history, but from beyond all record—out of the awful prehistoric time" (229). The earl's story of the Red Etin, who attempts to eat a little girl, reveals the primordial evil flowing through the family blood, and functions as a sensational ancestral precursor to Morven's infanticide, suggesting how corruption can persist through family history. The story of the Etin also articulates anxiety about literary degeneracy, as the eating of children suggests a genealogical line that will self-destruct. Donal's horror at the tale is generated not just by its gruesome history of events, but also by the persistence of such bloodthirstiness in the family, as is evident in the disturbing decadence of the earl's manner of narration: "Donal went away wondering at the pleasure his frightful tale afforded the earl: he had seemed positively to gloat over the details of it! These were much worse than I have recorded: he showed special delight in narrating how the mother took the body of her child out of the [cooking] pot!" (231). Concerns about literary devolution are drawn to the foreground, as the fictional Graham family history converges with the Shelleys' literary history. Morven, who "'often [. . .] wondered whether Mrs. Shelley could have heard of'" (229) the Etin, speculates that the family monster might have been Shelley's real-life inspiration for Frankenstein's creature. The site of debased horror becomes the location

of corrupt reproduction (appropriate given the *Frankenstein* reference), as Morven House, where the Etin formerly lived, is where the bastard Percy presumably impregnates the unwed Eppy Comin.

The degeneration of the family line is further reflected in Arctura's alienation from her property. Aged twenty-three, Arctura has reached the age of majority; however, her uncle Morven has not relinquished control of the estate, a condition that is reflected in her physical orientation within the castle. Her chamber, difficult to find (and totally unknown to Donal until she shows him the labyrinthine way), possesses an oubliette-like quality about it, in the sense that it is dark, half forgotten, and inherently tomb-like: "one of the oldest in the castle, [. . .] It looked an afterthought, the utilization of space accidentally defined by rejection, as if every one of its sides were the wall of a distinct building" (261-62). That each wall of the chamber belongs to a different building, each, presumably of a different age—the castle, like many, is comprised of various wings "of differing dates" (44)—has multiple resonances. On one hand, it suggests Arctura to be a creature of all ages, the spiritual source of the castle, much in the way that Arthur can be considered the spiritual source of English romance. Yet it also hints that she is trapped, walled in by the past—a condition that is suggested in her dream of being pulled into the grave by her uncle, and which is literalized when her uncle actually tries to entomb her alive. From a slightly different angle, the fact that her living quarters are defined by *rejection* implies that she is not so much shut in as shut out, as the forgotten quality of her chamber suggests an heiress who has been exiled from the castle's formal rooms of state.

Morven's corrupt stewardship is also reflected in the castle, as its form embodies his militant autonomy, rebellion against God, and aversion to scrutiny. Before he has

even met the earl, Donal's first view of the castle reminds him of a "self, with no God to protect from it, a self unrulable, insatiable, [that] makes of existence to some the hell called madness" (37)—a description that anticipates later portrayals of the earl's madness and apostasy. In its defensive position *vis à vis* the landscape, the castle suggests the earl's alienation from the natural-supernatural power of God. Unlike most of MacDonald's castles, cottages, and cathedrals, which tend to merge in harmonious union with the earth, Graham's Grip stands on guard against nature: rising up on the hillside like a soldier ready for battle, "like a helmet the gray mass of the fortress" (44), the castle appears as "an athlete stripped for the fight" (36), as it soars above the surrounding trees, which "seemed climbing up to attack the fortress above" (52). Like the secretive Morven, its hulking form is nearly impenetrable, its walls heavily fortified, and its entrance concealed; only after much searching does Donal finally locate a "small door" in a "deep recess" (44) between sections of the bulwarks. The prison-like interior further suggests the inaccessibility of Morven's soul. The castle's entrance hall is "a mere entry, a cell in huge walls, with [. . .] a low, round-headed door, like the entrance to a prison" (44). The prison image is echoed in Arctura's chamber, which was literally the anteroom to the earl's hidden office and the concealed chapel-dungeon, later cut off by the plastered-up door behind her wardrobe (264). The desecrated chapel, its horrors hidden in the heart of the building, offers concrete evidence of the earl's criminal past, as well as a symbol of his spiritual deficiency, as its sealed openings suggest his improper, ungodly burial of the past. Morven has withheld his heart from God; yet his murderous history, for all his efforts at secrecy, cannot be suppressed. Instead, through the "prisoned chords" (246) of the Aeolian harp (hidden in the chapel's air shaft), his unredeemed past

returns to haunt him with remorse, forcing him to relive the past continually. Such ghostly music cannot transform and redeem past injuries, however, but only exacerbates his maddening torment.

Although the castle reflects Morven's many sins, it also contains a force of resistance that seeks to combat Morven's attempt to smother and bury the past—a force that is connected specifically to literature, and its power to resurrect and redeem. Literature offers a form of resurrection that resembles but transcends ghostly reanimation. Literature truly can revive the dead, Donal stresses, as he argues that "'writing and printing have done more to bring us into personal relations with the great dead, than necromancy [. . .] could ever do. For do we not come into contact with the being of a man when we hear him pour forth his thoughts [. . .] into the ear of the universe? In such a position does the book of a great man place us!'" (102). In a similar fashion, stories possess the power to rise from slumber and come to life: Miss Graeme remarks on the curious facility of tales to fade and reappear, noting "'how superstition seems to have its ebbs and flows'" (103), and how legend "'will go to sleep, and after a time revive with fresh interest'" (103). This process of sleeping and waking recalls the revival of *Phantastes*' White Lady rising from her enchanted slumber (another image of art coming to life), as well as *England's Antiphon*, which depicted lyric poetry as following a similar pattern of slumber and revival, subsiding during the spiritual desert of the Enlightenment, and reemerging with renewed energy with the Romantic poets.[68] Donal identifies his age as one ripe with tales, citing the Romantic practice of gathering folk stories popularized by Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm: "'There are now [sic] in many countries trying to get

---

[68] See *England's Antiphon* 332, and also discussion above, Chapter 1.

together and store the remnant of such tales: possibly the wind of some such inquiry may have set old people recollecting, and new people inventing'" (103). He suggests that such stories resurface in accordance to an audience's spiritual readiness, appearing "'when the tale comes to ears fitted for its reception'" (103). This last comment of Donal's in particular recalls the final passage of *England's Antiphon*, in which MacDonald, evoking the phraseology of Revelations, describes the dead poets of the anthology as rising from their tombs to sing "on to him that hath ears to hear" (*England's Antiphon* 332). The idea that literature sleeps and wakes, dies down and is resurrected again, has an important bearing on Morven's castle, since it is literally a container of Romantic literature. Besides offering a "whole ancient library" (212) stocked with centuries of texts, Castle Graham is the seat of numerous legends, ghost stories, and superstitions—which seem to be suspiciously in the process of reviving, and which MacDonald intersperses throughout the novel.

The castle's central legend, which concerns the existence of a lost room, testifies to the capacity of literature to resurrect the past, despite Morven's attempts to conceal it. The story is a stock tale warning of the danger of irreligious behavior. It recounts how an earl, "a certain recklessly wicked wretch" (104), played cards all night, refusing to stop even when the bell tolled the Sabbath. For his sins he was punished by being forced to sit at his gambling table forever: "The clock stopped" [. . . and] There [in the secret room] the wicked earl and his companions still sit, playing with the same pack of cards, and waiting their doom" (105). The story offers a veiled account of Morven's crimes, as the secret room suggests the castle's actual hidden chapel, the earl's blasphemy echoes Morven's degenerate spiritual condition, and the halting of the clock and unending game

of cards fictionalize his compulsive replaying of past wickedness. Indeed, as Donal later discovers, the story is not an old one, but a recent myth that arose just ten years earlier, in response to the earl's sealing up of the passage in Arctura's chamber. As Morven himself admits, the story's supposed ancientness is illusory—"'Once a going, it would immediately cry back to a remote age'" (320)—and he challenges Arctura to "'Prove that any one ever spoke of it before the building of that foolish wall'" (320). The tale's pretense of fictionality is overthrown when Donal and Arctura discover the actual lost room adjacent to the chapel, complete with "two drinking vessels [. . .] and a mouldering pack of cards" (300). The tale reveals the castle's dark secret, in spite of Morven's attempt to stifle it.

Against the earl's cloud of secrecy, Donal appears willing to grapple with the past. Indeed, he insists on a thorough knowledge of prior events in both his personal and literary encounters. His first meeting with Percy and Davie introduces him as a teacher who believes in the importance of examining prior tradition, especially in literature. Davie asks Donal to help him understand a phrase in Sidney's *Arcadia*, but Donal (to Davie's puzzlement) moves further back on the page, explaining that he "'must know something of what goes before it first'" (38), if he is ever to explain the passage to Davie. The need to be conversant in earlier passages of literature in order to illuminate later ones is applicable also to the human mind: in their first lesson, Donal portrays Davie as a book that Donal must read: "'You are a book God has begun, and he has sent me to help him go on with it; so I must learn what he has written already before I try to do anything'" (59). Donal's immediate response to the tale of the lost room is to inquire into its origins, as he wonders "'what the ground of it is! It must have had its beginning!'" (105).

Donal's desire to locate the origin of the castle's mysterious music, which he guesses might be tied to the existence of a legendary lost room (247), and his organizing a search party to uncover it, mirrors his attempt to untrammel the human mind—specifically, Morven's mind.

Donal's obsession with origins also suggests MacDonald's impulse to understand literary history. Perched in his tower room high above the castle, forever combing the rooftops in search of the lost Aeolian harp, Donal offers an image for MacDonald's scholarly attempt to trace the origin of English poetry in *England's Antiphon.* Indeed, the impulse to uncover ancestral history is a driving force behind much of MacDonald's fiction, not just *England's Antiphon*, but also such works as *Phantastes* (in which Anodos' adventures are initiated by his search for documents that will unveil his father's history), and *Lilith* (in which Mr. Vane actually does discover a manuscript recounting his father's shadowy adventures). Donal's delight that books provide access to the thoughts of his literary forbears is paralleled in his desire to understand how the inside and outside of the castle fit together. Like a book that contains the writer's soul—offering "'personal communication'" (101) that "'places in your hands a key to their inmost thoughts'" (101)—a house also reflects its maker, as it is an object onto which "'the builders have more or less transmitted their nature'" (262). Donal explicitly compares the building to the complex tangles of the human psyche: "'I feel almost as if I were trying to understand a human creature. A house is so like a human mind, which gradually disentangles and explains itself as you go on to know it. It is no accidental resemblance, for, as an unavoidable necessity, every house must be like those that built it'" (262). His yearning "after a complete idea of the building, for it was almost a passion

with him to fit the outsides and insides of things together" (135) parallels his desire to understand Lord Morven; yet it also suggests MacDonald's attempt to understand literary ancestry, both the individual thoughts of his literary predecessors, and the overall shape of their lineage, at the end of which he positions himself.

Donal calls for a balanced relationship between the past and the future. The past must not swallow the future, as the Etin's devouring of the little girl and Morven's murder of his infant daughter threaten to do. Nor should the future deny and repress the past, for this, as the novel suggests, is an unhallowed burial, leading only to regressive repetition of the past. Rather, the future must redeem the past. The power of the past to influence—and the power of future generations to redeem—is underscored in Donal's discussion with Arctura of the nature of her castle. A home, like a book, embodies and reflects the spirit of the soul who made it. The character of a home goes on to influence subsequent occupants, shaping their malleable characters, as Arctura describes it, "'as the shell fits the snail'" (262). This relationship is reciprocal, as the home will also take on the character of its inhabitants. Something similar could be said about the power of literature to shape and be shaped by its readers: Shelley may be dead, but his undying work certainly possesses the power to mould his readers' minds, as Mr. Carmichael the clergyman fears when he worries that Donal's reading Shelley will poison his mind and ruin his soul. Fortunately, the influence of the past is by no means absolute. Donal introduces Arctura to the radical idea that individuals possess the ability to redeem the past and atone for the sins of their ancestors. With reference to ancestral homes and the influence they exert on their dwellers, he argues that "'The relation of outer and inner is there, but there is given with it an infinite power to modify'" (262). In other words,

Arctura need not be irrevocably defined by her ancestors' vices; she has the power to change things,[69] much as she has the power to alter the structure of her castle (which she does, pulling down the chapel walls to let the light shine in again). Arctura's dream of her aunt's resurrection in heaven seems to confirm this belief that the younger generation is indeed able to redeem and transform their ancestors' history.

A similar belief in the capacity of individuals to modify history seems to govern MacDonald's revisions of Shelley's work and life, as he attempts repeatedly to alter literary history and draw the atheist poet back into the Christian fold. Certainly, Donal's optimistic assessment of human evil echoes MacDonald's readiness to forgive Shelley's errors: as Donal reminds Arctura, "'nothing in its immediate root is evil; [. . . and] from best human roots worst things spring'" (263). The object, Donal stresses, is to focus on the positive, minimizing human fallenness by maximizing God's divine perfection: "'Everyone is born nearer to God than to any ancestor, and it rests with him to cultivate either the *goodness* or the selfness in him, his original or his mere ancestral nature. The fight between the natural and the spiritual man is the history of the world'" (262). It is a progressive view of history in which MacDonald takes an active part, as a critic and mythologist, at least. The goal is redemption, Donal asserts, and it can be attained by subsequent generations: as he declares, "'The man who sets right his faults inherited, makes atonement of those who went before him; he is baptized for the dead, not with

---

[69] Cf. to MacDonald's letter to his son Greville, in which he urges him to "Remember, we carry about with us all we have inherited from our ancestors in body and in mind. Of course medical remedies may aid. But in the long run there is only one cure, and that is a spiritual one" (MacDonald to Greville MacDonald, in *George MacDonald and His Wife* 507). See also MacDonald's 1888 novel *The Elect Lady*, in which the narrator discusses spiritual inheritance, arguing that "what we call degeneracy is often but the unveiling of what was there all the time" (*The Elect Lady* 22).

water, but with fire'" (262). Donal's belief in the capacity of individuals to redeem a fallen ancestral past articulates explicitly the implicit hope behind MacDonald's repeated evocations of Shelley: that in repeating Shelley's work in corrected, revised form, the literary tradition—if not Shelley himself—will be redeemed (or at least move closer to godly perfection).

The redemption of the Graham family involves reestablishing a healthy connection to the past. Legally, their renewal is signified at the novel's conclusion when Donal, now Arctura's widower and the estate's new heir, foregoes his right to the family property and instead passes it on to Factor Graeme and his sister Kate Graeme, cousins with an ancient connection to the family. The difference in the spelling of their name is significant: *Graham*, as the cobbler Andrew Comin explains to Donal, was simply a newer spelling of the old family name *Graeme* (33-34). The Graemes' acquisition of the estate marks a return to the past, but with changes to improve on the Grahams' dark history. Unlike the Grahams who tried to repress the past, Hector and Kate Graeme openly celebrate their historical connection. Their relationship to the past is reflected in their house, with its "low-ceiled, old fashioned drawing room, smelling of ancient rose-leaves" (94), and its "old-fashioned garden" (99), an Edenic enclosure full of "old-fashioned flowers" (99), which evoke "all the gentleness of old-fashioned life" (99-100). Yet the Graemes are equally grounded in the present, as is suggested in the figure of Kate, who is "not ancient like the garden, but young like its flowers, light-footed, and full of life" (95). The power of the Graemes' home to unite present and past carries over to others. Donal's visit initiates a visionary return to his personal past, as he is drawn to the garden "as by the enchantment of one of childhood's dreams" (94), and is delighted with

its "wonderful sense of vanished life" (98). The transfer of estate ownership to the Graemes suggests a return to a healthy balance between the present and the past, one that bodes well for the future.

It would be appropriately symbolic at this point (and in keeping with the conventions of the Victorian novel) if, at the novel's conclusion, either Kate or Hector (or both) would marry, and from their unions bring forth virtuous new Graemes to populate the earth. Yet the book offers no such promises of regeneration.

Instead, education, not procreation, is the solution of *Donal Grant*, as Donal is granted the function of filling the world with honorable men. Donal's request that the Graemes grant him Morven House to use as a school seems modest, given that he is freely giving them the rest of the estate; yet it also marks his role as renewer of the family, as he becomes responsible for instructing future generations. Once the dwelling-place of the degenerate Red Etin, later the site of Percy's dishonorable pursuit of Eppy, and finally the location of Donal's school for boys, Morven House could be seen as being on an upward trajectory of spiritual and reproductive improvement. The Red Etin's anthropophagy was the worst debasement of all: devouring children is not only monstrous; it is counter-regenerative. The allusion to Frankenstein's creature further associates the Etin with destructive forms of reproduction. Percy's ungentlemanly seduction of Eppy seems downright civilized by contrast, although their relationship is nevertheless illicit, stems from selfishness and carnal vice, is carried out in disobedience to parental wishes, and results in illegitimate offspring. Donal reverses and redeems Morven House's ugly past by turning it into a school where honour and goodness may flourish in new generations, a place where, "if a boy stayed, or rather if he allowed him to

stay with him long enough, he was sure to turn out a gentleman" (396)—and better still (if less appreciated by worldly parents), a true man of God. Certainly, Donal is credited with Davie's spiritual development: following Donal's tutelage, Davie becomes an officer in the Indian army, where he is "beloved of his men, [. . .] exercising a most beneficial influence on his regiment" (396). Davie's power spreads, moreover, as "The things he learned [. . .] went out from him, finding new ground in which to root and grow. In his day and generation he helped the coming of the kingdom of truth and righteousness, and so fulfilled his high calling" (396). Donal's effect on Davie is clear: he has righted the family wrongs by nurturing the younger generation's yearning for goodness, an influence that will perpetuate throughout the world. Donal's final role as teacher hints at MacDonald's real-life role as a teacher, lecturer, and preacher. MacDonald lectured and taught widely, and at one point advanced a scheme to teach pupils in his home, though the plan did not work and no students appeared (Raeper 141). Donal's idyllic school for boys might be seen as a projection of the kind of educational influence MacDonald wanted to have. [70]

In contrast to Davie's happy end, the fate of Davie's elder brother Percy remains suggestively inconclusive. As in *Adela Cathcart*, in which MacDonald leaves Percy Cathcart's fate hanging, in *Donal Grant* Percy Graham—no longer Lord Forgue—is left to his own devices. Toward the end, there are hints that Percy may improve: "He had left the place a mooning youth; he came back a man of the world—easy in carriage,

---

[70] Besides giving countless public and private lectures, MacDonald was a professor at Bedford College for Ladies from 1859 to 1867, although his salary was extremely modest (see Raeper, *George MacDonald* 162, Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* 304, 307). He also lectured at King's College in the Strand from 1866-68 (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 231-32, Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* 366).

courteous in manners, serene in temper, abounding in what seemed the results of observation, attentive but not too attentive, jolly with Davie, distant with Donal, polite to all" (323). Yet something is also lost: as Donal observes, "there was no restoration of the charm which had at first attracted him; that was utterly vanished. He felt certain he had been going down hill, and was now, instead of negatively, consciously and positively untrue" (323). Worldly polish has erased Percy's authentic, original spark, and with it, the possibility of imminent redemption. Significantly, Percy admits from the very start that he would have benefited from Donal's teaching, as he declares at their first meeting that he "should have done better" if he "had had a tutor like" (38) Donal to guide him. [71] Yet he rejects Donal's every attempt to steer him in the right direction, and his final gesture, when he learns that he has been displaced by Factor Graeme, is to utter "an evil word" (395) and stalk away from his father's funeral. The narrator states outright that Donal could have saved him: "If he had had any faith in Donal, he might have had help fit to make a man of him, which he would have found something more than an earl. [. . . .] It would have been the redemption of his being" (244).

Although Percy's fate is left uncertain, Donal succeeds and replaces him as an improved Shelley figure, one who has a correct relationship to the past. The right way to address the past ultimately involves relinquishment, a necessary preliminary to redemption. History must not be suppressed, hidden, or denied, as Morven's example illustrated, nor should it be selfishly clung to, as the castle's name "Graham's Grip" implies. To do so will only result in a past that comes back to haunt and destroy. The

---

[71] Cf. to the encyclopædia article, in which MacDonald cites Shelley on the ineptitude of Shelley's teachers,"'I have known no tutor or adviser (*not excepting my father*) from whose lessons and suggestions I have not recoiled with disgust'" (Percy Shelley to William Godwin, in "Shelley" 102).

proper procedure, *Donal Grant* suggests, is to give the past back to God, since only God has the ability to resurrect and transform it. As we shall see, the right handling of the past is apparent in Donal's relationship to his personal history. Donal's relationship to his past is mirrored, moreover, in the novel's connection to *its* past, that is, to the prequel, *Sir Gibbie*, with which it has a typological relationship.

4.2. Romance vs. Reality: *Sir Gibbie*

Donal models this principle of relinquishment in his handling of his personal past, which is portrayed as dying and rising again to new, transformed life. The book opens with Donal struggling to overcome recent romantic disappointment (recounted in *Sir Gibbie*, in which Ginevra Galbraith, the girl he loved, rejected Donal for his best friend Gibbie). Vowing to put his youthful hurts behind him, Donal begins the sequel by striding off from his family home toward an unknown future, a direction reflected in his orientation to the landscape: "he had never before gone down the hill with the feeling that he was not about to go up again" (1). Although he knows he must turn away from "the dreary thought of the past" (1), the temptation to dwell in it is nevertheless strong, as he can "scarce avert his eyes" (1) from the "world of dreams" (1) behind him. Unlike Morven, however, who buried his past within, and so became trapped by it, Donal delivers his past back to God, with the expectation of later retrieval—"His past had but crept, like the dead, back to God who gave it; in better shape it would be his by and by!" (2). He comforts himself with the idea that "He who turns his back on the setting sun goes on to meet the rising sun; he who loses his life shall find it" (2)—typically MacDonaldian wisdom about death leading to rebirth.

Seizing on the principle that "'the cure o'a' ill's jist mair life! That's it!'" (5), Donal consoles himself with the promise that the "'hert-brak'" (5) of his unrequited love for Ginevra will bring transformation, and can be considered a natural part of spiritual development, "'jist ane o' the throes o' my h'avenly birth—in the whilk the bairn has as mony o' the pains as the mither'" (5). Donal's determination to start "'a fresh life frae this minute'" (6) forward results in a marked rejuvenation of his vision. Following his decision, he finds that "the old mysterious loveliness, now for so long vanished from the face of the visible world, had returned to it " (6). In "the new childhood of a new world" (7), nature is imbued with greater meaning, reflecting Donal's transformed state:

> The scents that wind brought him [. . .] seemed sweeter than ever wind-borne scents before [. . . .] The wind hovered about him as if it would fain have something to do in the matter; the river rippled and shone as if it knew something worth knowing as yet unrevealed [. . . .] The world, like the angels, was rejoicing [. . .] over a man that had passed from a lower to a higher condition of life—out of its earth into its air: he was going to live above, and look down on the inferior worlds! (6-7)

The nearness of revelation reflects MacDonald's belief in nature as a seat of divine communion, and indicates Donal's ascendancy to a new plane of existence. Donal's renewal and consequent recovery of meaning and purpose offers a positive model of handling history, one that contrasts to Morven's denial of the past and attempt to conceal his secrets.

Yet the full extent of Donal's rebirth is revealed only implicitly, in the contrast between his initial appearance in *Sir Gibbie* as a country boy struggling with class issues,

unrequited love, and his literary vocation, and his reincarnation in *Donal Grant* as confident tutor and master. The relationship between the two books is key to illustrating the principle of resurrection that dominates MacDonald's thinking. *Donal Grant* and *Sir Gibbie* have a typological relationship to one another, something that has not been noticed before by critics. Like the Bible, they can be read as two parts of one larger story, or they can be read as two books telling different, but similar stories. Much as the New Testament can be read as the revelation and fulfillment of prophecies and types from the Old (with personages of the Old Testament offering spiritual prefigurations of Christ), so *Donal Grant* offers the fulfillment of promises made in *Sir Gibbie*. Gibbie, the angelic and idealized hero, becomes the *figura*, or type, for which Donal in the sequel offers the antitype, as he is reborn with new spiritual intensity. Of course, a chief difference between the Bible and MacDonald's novels (besides the fact that Donal, though he may save English literature, is no Christ—and MacDonald is no God) is that Donal is a character in both books, whereas Christ only appears in the New Testament, fulfilling the prophecies of the Old. Nevertheless, in the earlier book, there is a pervasive sense throughout that Donal is a stranger out of place, one who belongs to a different world, and cannot enter into Gibbie's social and spiritual realm. In the sequel, Gibbie is scarcely mentioned; instead, Donal undergoes a transformation that allows him to incorporate Gibbie's character into his own, so that he becomes an incarnation of Gibbie, his Christlike goodness brought to new life.

Sir Gibbie recounts the story of the friendship between Donal, the adolescent cowherd, and Gibbie, an angelic street urchin who is discovered to be the lost baronet Sir Gilbert Galbraith. Donal loves to read and is a budding poet who writes verse "with a

slight flavor of Shelley" (410); Gibbie, by contrast, cannot speak at all, though his blue eyes blaze with otherwordly eloquence, and his golden hair haloes him like a medieval image of the Christ child. The novel narrates the life of the saintly hero, which, for the first half of the book, consists mainly of misfortune. Gibbie's father, the noble but fallen cobbler Sir George Galbraith, dies of alcoholism, leaving Gibbie orphaned, homeless, and barefoot; Sambo the sailor, his temporary foster-father, is brutally murdered before Gibbie's eyes; and Mistress Croale, his former landlady and the closest thing Gibbie has to a mother, turns to drink and depravity. Driven to the country, Gibbie takes up residence in a hay-rick, establishing for himself a reputation as supernatural brownie who performs nocturnal good deeds about the farm. When his presence is discovered, however, and he is brought before the local laird, Gibbie's only reward is cruel punishment, as the laird sentences the small boy to be whipped by Angus the gamekeeper. The savage act almost kills tiny Gibbie, and leaves him with a huge cruciform welt on his back. Fleeing naked and bloody to the hills, Gibbie is discovered by Janet and Robert Grant, kindly shepherds who tend to his wound, teach him to read and write, and raise him alongside their other children, including Donal, with whom Gibbie forms a close friendship.

When a massive flood destroys the countryside, Gibbie saves the lives of several animals plus the wicked laird's beautiful daughter Ginevra Galbraith. Holding no grudges, he saves Angus the whip-wielding gamekeeper as well. Mistress Croale, now a dissolute alcoholic, reappears on the scene and confirms the boy's identity as Gilbert Galbraith, lost son of Sir George Galbraith and heir to title and fortune. Gibbie is taken away to the city to be educated, an arrangement to which he concedes only on the

condition that Donal be permitted to go to college with him. In the city, Gibbie is educated in the ways of gentlemanly behaviour, an education that only makes more painfully obvious the rustic awkwardness of his shepherd friend Donal, who is busily pursuing his poetic vocation. They reacquaint themselves with Ginevra (who was also sent away to school), and both secretly begin to fall in love with her. Here the novel becomes more realistic, as MacDonald describes with convincing poignancy Donal's inability to conform socially, sartorially, or linguistically to the standards of his gentle-born friends, and the mingled hopefulness and despair of his doomed desire for a woman above his station. While Ginevra appreciates Donal's poetic genius, she prefers Gibbie, and Donal, humiliated by her rejection, flees to his mother's house in the hills. The final chapters of the novel hurriedly recount Gibbie and Ginevra's confession of love, her father's objections, their clandestine marriage, setting up of household, curing of Mistress Croale's alcoholism, and embarking on a life of goodness and philanthropy.

Robert Lee Wolff's description and diagnosis of *Sir Gibbie*'s central failing is apt: "The later parts of *Sir Gibbie* drag. MacDonald's imagination could not rise to deal with the problem he had set himself: what does the Christ-child do in the real world when he grows up? Young Diamond, MacDonald had killed off; the ancient child who is the Old Man of the Fire in "The Golden Key," inhabited a myth. All that Gibbie does (or can do) is settle down and become a prosperous but virtuous landowner. The concept of the hero of a novel as Christ proves effective only so long as the hero is a child, or until he can die or be crucified" (Wolff, *Golden Key* 294). I agree with Wolff that Gibbie's fate as an adult is of little interest to the reader; however, I would argue that all is not lost in the second half of the novel. Rather, the narrative interest shifts from Gibbie to Donal, in his

struggle with his emerging desire for Ginevra. Indeed, I would argue that *Sir Gibbie* is not really about Gibbie, but rather about Donal, whose story the narrator muses he might "one day tell" (318), and which MacDonald actually tells in *Donal Grant*. The whole of *Sir Gibbie* becomes an elaborate set-up for the (much less successful) novel that MacDonald would write four years later.

While Gibbie shines as a fairy-tale pauper-to-prince figure, he remains resolutely one-dimensional. His muteness flattens him out; we only know his inner thoughts through the narrator's omniscient gaze, and the occasional passage of scripture that Gibbie writes on his trusty slate. Donal, by contrast, possesses full novelistic depth, speaks both Doric (the dialect of MacDonald's native Aberdeenshire) and the Queen's English, writes poetry besides, and anguishes lengthily and eloquently about it all. Even though he is not officially the novel's central character, he is certainly the most compellingly *realistic* character—not to mention the one who is most like MacDonald, who shared with Donal the experiences of a rural upbringing,[72] struggles at college,[73]

---

[72] MacDonald was born and raised near Huntly, Aberdeenshire, on a rural property where his family ran a bleachworks; see Raeper, *George MacDonald* 24-40; Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* 19-24, 54-66.

[73] Rather like Donal's, MacDonald's college years (and indeed, much of his subsequent life) were plagued with poverty, and he frequently required financial assistance. As he wrote to his father in 1847, "I do not expect to save anything in my present situation. You have no idea what it is to live in London. I have paid £7 for boots & shoes since I came, and not a pair but you would say is worn to the last" (George MacDonald to George MacDonald Sr., 12 Jan 1847); see also Raeper, *George MacDonald* 43, 44; Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife* 68.

and—if Wolff's theory is correct—unrequited love for a woman above him.[74] In spite of the novel's title, MacDonald seems much more deeply invested in Donal than in Gibbie.

The greater appeal of Donal as a character is particularly curious given the narrator's insistence on the superiority of idealistic, romantic modes of representation over naturalist depictions of real life. In Chapter 8, seemingly out of nowhere, the narrator suddenly strays from his story and leaps to defend his glowing descriptions of the superlatively virtuous Gibbie. His digression, which continues for a page and a half, amounts to a MacDonaldian manifesto, one that condemns realism in novels as vulgar and self-satisfied, claiming that it "marks the commonness, narrowness, low-leveled satisfaction of the age" (49). Calling for a halt to literature that focuses on the earthly and the fallible, the narrator upholds "the noble, not the failure from the noble" (49) as "the true human" (49). He concedes that the imperfect may be represented, but only with an eye to eventual perfection: "if I must show the failure, let it ever be with an eye to the final possible, yea, imperative success" (49).

The narrator's unexpected detour to offer a disquisition on modes of fictional representation is startling, to say the least, and has generally been overlooked by scholars, who seem to brush off such circumlocutions as instances of MacDonald's "interminable

---

[74] Wolff argued that "the heartless jilts who appear so often in the libraries of his imaginary mansions" (Wolff, *Golden Key* 17), are veiled retellings of MacDonald's early romantic disappointment. He bases this notion on Greville MacDonald's 1924 biography, positing that in 1842, when MacDonald spent the summer cataloguing a castle's neglected library, he "fell in love, with a girl somewhat older than he, a member of the family that owned the castle and the library. She led him on a certain distance, and then rejected him because she felt him to be of an inferior social class. Again and again in his writing we shall find George MacDonald recurring with pain to these crucial events of the mysterious summer of 1842, giving a different turn to each of his fictional accounts of the affair, striving to exorcise his own anguish and humiliation" (Wolff, *Golden Key* 16-17).

sermonizing" (Wolff, *Golden Key* 378). [75] Indeed, passages such as the one described are frequently edited out in modern abridgements of the novel—Michael Phillips's revised version of Sir *Gibbie,* entitled *The Baronet's Song*, for instance, drops this section entirely. The less patient of MacDonald's readers might be forgiven for breezing through the narrator's wandering, for while *Sir Gibbie*'s narrator, like *Tom Jones*'s, has no qualms about rambling lengthily on matters of literary form, he lacks Fielding's airy good-humor and irony, employing instead the deadly earnestness of MacDonald's sermons, from which his critical digressions can scarcely be distinguished. Nevertheless, these passages are significant, for they illuminate MacDonald's unusual approach to novel writing, and they must be considered in critical assessments of his work.

Sir Gibbie's impromptu essay on romance *vs.* realism in the novel supports G.K. Chesterton's observation that MacDonald's contribution to the Victorian novel was to draw out its romance characteristics. Chesterton argued that MacDonald was unwilling—possibly even unable—to view the world in the nuanced fashion of conventional realist writers: "Dr. MacDonald sees the world bathed in one awful crimson of the divine love; he cannot look through the green spectacles of the cynic even for a moment. He can no more describe the cynic than Shelly [sic] could have described a Baptist grocer or Keats a city merchant"(Chesterton 373). Consequently, MacDonald's books are often a strange hybrid of fairy tale and novel, as his "tales of real life are allegories, or disguised versions, of his fairy tales" (Chesterton 370). Chesterton admits that this is often to his fiction's detriment, certainly by standards of novelistic realism; yet he maintains that MacDonald's novels nevertheless possess the fairy tale's strength of

---

[75] As Wolff laments, MacDonald's "twenty-three novels [. . .] are all sermons, more or less" (Wolff, *Golden Key* 305).

endowing the world with reassuring clarity, order, and purpose. He notes, for instance, that "all the faults" of *The Marquis of Lossie* "are the virtues of a fairy tale. The clearness of the ethical issue, the unclouded war of light against darkness, with no twilight or skepticism or timidity; [. . .] the stainless heroism of the heroes, the patent deformity of the evil characters; all this shows a spirit which looks out upon the world with the young and innocent and terrible eyes of Jack the Giant-Killer" (Chesterton 371). His description of *The Marquis of Lossie* could apply to any number of MacDonald's novels, including *Sir Gibbie* and *Donal Grant*, in which the heroes and villains are of a similar fairy tale-like caliber.[76]

In *Sir Gibbie* especially, the tension between romance and realism is particularly fraught, and provides the driving force of the novel. The narrator's explicit preoccupation with promoting romance over realism becomes the basis of the distinction between Gibbie and Donal. They are generically coded characters, Gibbie in his effortless virtue belonging to the realm of romance, full of divine transcendent marvels, and Donal, to the flawed world of everyday life. Donal is propelled by a desire to transcend his mundane existence, and achieve Gibbie's idealized state, and his early failures to attain such perfection are relentlessly catalogued. The distinction between romance and reality is connected also to typology, as MacDonald portrays, more broadly,

---

[76] Cf. to Prickett's observation that for MacDonald, realism and fantasy were not in opposition, but "are two sides of the same coin: that realism is as much an arbitrary and literary convetion as fantasy, and that fantasy is as dependant on mundane experience as realism" (Prickett, "Fictions and Metafictions" 122). Prickett argues that *Phantastes* questions the superiority of realist modes: "By showing the limitations of conventional realism in its portrayal of vital aspects of human growth and development, MacDonald [. . .] obliquely and ironically suggested a profound critique of genre and, incidentally of contemporary assumptions about 'realism'" (Prickett, "Fictions and Metafictions" 123).

reality as a state that is continually advancing toward the higher perfection of romance, which is associated with divine transcendence.

The differences between the two boys are pronounced, as Gibbie lives a life that is socially, spiritually, and linguistically elevated far above Donal's workaday world of herding and books. Socially awkward and sartorially challenged, Donal belongs to the here and now, which he seeks to escape in the romances he reads and in the poetry he writes. Looking "very queer" (336) in his rustic "blue coat and fustian trousers" (342), Donal is "simply a clodhopper" (336) and "a treasure of poverty-stricken amusement" (336) to Ginevra's schoolgirl companions, who titter uncontrollably whenever he opens his mouth. Unable to understand Donal's "broad Scotch" (340), the girls prefer Gibbie "because he could not speak, which was much less objectionable than speaking like Donal!—and funny, too though not so funny as Donal's clothes. And then he had such a romantic history! and was a baronet!" (340). Gibbie, a charismatic "foundling of the universe" (216) with a "romantic history" (340) as lost-and-found baronet, has no need for poetic words, since his very life is a living romance, "the very stuff out of which poems grow" (82). As his surname "Galbraith" suggests, he is the gale-breath of Romantic inspiration—an image that is subsumed into the Aeolian harp of the sequel.

Gibbie's muteness in particular marks him as a heavenly creature who exists in a state of supralinguistic unity with the transcendent divine. MacDonald suggests that language is a symptom of the post-lapsarian condition, a result of the break from original unity with God. In MacDonald's Christian cosmology, heaven is a transverbal realm where language is no longer necessary, since communion with God eradicates the need for words. Remnants of this perfect communion remain in ancient tongues and dialects.

As the mystical shoemaker Andrew Comin argues in *Donal Grant*, if one could venture back far enough on the evolutionary tree, one would find a language so pure and direct that it would cease to look like language at all: "'gien we could work oor w'y back to the auldest grit-gran-mither-tongue o' a', I'm thinkin' it wad come a kin o' sae easy til 's, a't wi' the impruvt faculties o' oor h'avenly condition, we micht be able to in a feow days to haud communication wi' ane anither i' that same, ohn stammert or hummt an' hawt'" (*Donal Grant* 27-28). Ironically, Andrew Comin's thick Doric makes him one of the most difficult characters of all to understand. This idea of heaven as a supralinguistic realm has Augustinian origins: in his *Confessions*, Augustine writes of heaven as "the intellectual heaven, where the intellect is privileged to know all at once, not in part only, not as if it were looking at a confused reflection in a mirror, but as a whole, clearly, face to face" (*Confessions* 12.13). Augustine describes the experience of divine wisdom, moreover, as a fleeting moment of communion moving beyond all speech. [77] M. H. Abrams further identifies such translinguistic communion as the "experience of eternity in a moment" (Abrams 385) that is "of common report among the philosophers and poets of the Romantic generation" (Abrams 386). It is one of MacDonald's peculiarly Romantic traits: as McGillis observes, "MacDonald's notion of language and literature as "things" active and immediate derives from Romanticism's eager desire for a language that can repair the separation of subject and object" (McGillis, Preface ix). To be with

---

[77] Augustine describes a moment of fleeting translinguistic communion with his mother: "As the flame of love burned stronger in us and raised us higher toward the eternal God, [. . . .] And while we spoke of the eternal Wisdom, longing for it and straining for it with all the strength of our hearts, for one fleeting instant we reached out and touched it. Then with a sigh, leaving *our spiritual harvest* bound to it, we returned to the sound of our own speech, in which each word has a beginning and an ending—far, far different from your Word, our Lord, who abides in himself for ever, yet never grows old and gives new life to all things" (*Confessions* 9.10.197-98).

God is to be beyond language, and *vice versa*: more than his golden halo of hair and eyes of celestial blue, Gibbie's muteness is the primary sign of his transcendence.

Ginevra shares Gibbie's freedom from language. Also a Galbraith or Gale-Breath (in spite of her father's insistence that their line of Galbraiths is unconnected to the good-for-nothing Gibbie's), Ginevra is able to escape the bounds of mortal language when she marries Gibbie. As their marriage waxes, their need for language wanes, until "their communication was now more like that between two spirits: even signs had become almost unnecessary" (446-47). A comparable marriage of minds exists in *Donal Grant's* Andrew and Doory Comin. A pious "pair of originals [. . .] that lived close to the simplicities of existence" (*Donal Grant* 25), the Comins' boundaries of selfhood are so blurred that they need not speak to communicate: "as they sat it seemed in the silence as if they were the same person thinking in two shapes and two places" (*Donal Grant* 22-23). The Galbraiths and the Comins offer examples of marital union in its most idealized state. A similar union appears, as we shall see later, in the brotherly bond of Edmund and Edward Whichcote in *The Flight of the Shadow*.

While wordless communion is certainly something for which to strive, for ordinary mortals, and especially for poets such as Donal, language is still necessary. Nevertheless, certain forms of language approach this divine state of spiritual unity better than others. Poetry is more effective than prose, MacDonald argues in "The Imagination," because poetry is the original language out of which all prose is derived: "No poetry comes by the elevation of prose; but the half of prose comes by the "massing into the common clay" of thousands of winged words, whence, like the lovely shells of by-gone ages, one is occasionally disinterred by some lover of speech, and held up to the

light to show the play of colour in its manifold laminations" ("The Imagination 9). Prose is concerned with things of the outside world, and poetry, the inner world: "Not merely in literature does poetry come first, and prose afterwards, but poetry is the source of all the language that belongs to the inner world" (9).

Rural dialects are better than the Queen's English. MacDonald idealizes the perceived primitivism of local dialects as being more authentic, spiritual, and "true." In this MacDonald is carrying on the tradition of his Romantic predecessors Wordsworth and Coleridge, whose *Lyrical Ballads* eschew the excessive artificiality of Augustan language, favoring what Wordsworth would call the "plainer and more emphatic language" (Wordsworth, Preface 424) of rustic people. In MacDonald's work, this includes Gaelic and Doric, the latter being the dialect of his native Aberdeenshire, which he uses in several of his novels. In *Sir Gibbie*, the narrator portrays Gaelic as an ancient, primitive, inherently noble, but rapidly disappearing poetic language, connected to nature: "that language, soft as the speech of streams from rugged mountains, and wild as that of the wind in the tops of fir trees, the language at once of bards and fighting men" (*Sir Gibbie* 152). Failing Gaelic (in which MacDonald sadly was not fluent), Scots dialect is the next best thing, as "the man who loves the antique speech, or even the mere patois, of his childhood, and knows how to use it, possesses therein a certain kind of power over the hearts of men, which the most refined and perfect of languages cannot give, inasmuch as it had traveled further from the original sources of laughter and tears" (*Sir Gibbie* 152). Whenever a character has something important to say, particularly if it is of spiritual import, he or she says it in his or her native tongue. The Grants' insistence that they pray only in Doric, at a time when "most Scotch people of that date tried to say

their prayers in English" (352), exemplifies a desire for linguistic purity that Donal and all MacDonald's good Scots characters share. MacDonald's elevation of dialect explains why Andrew Comin's talk of heaven is in Doric, and why, later, when defending the purity of English poetry, Donal lapses into his native speech. By contrast, Fergus Duff, a fellow student and Donal's rival, is condemned as showy and pretentious for rejecting his native dialect and speaking only proper English (*Sir Gibbie* 381).[78]

Similarly, children's speech is represented as more "natural" than adult speech because it contains vestiges of primitive, prelapsarian union with God. Andrew Comin's explanation that the "auldest grit-gran'mither-tongue" (*Donal Grant* 27) of humanity "wad be mair like a bairn's tongue nor a mither's" (*Donal Grant* 28), and his suggestion that in heaven "we micht be able in a feow days to had communication wi' ane another [. . .] ohn stammert or hummt an' hawt" (*Donal Grant* 28), describes a condition in which the boundaries of the self are unfixed, much like an infant who does not discern the difference between itself and its mother.[79] Certainly, Gibbie's muteness and illiteracy indicate a childlike lack of self-consciousness. Gibbie doesn't exist, in his mind, as a separate entity with independent thought until the day Donal reads aloud to him from a book of ballads: "When, by slow filmy veilings, life grew clearer to Gibbie and he not only knew, but knew that he knew, his thoughts always went back to that day in the

---

[78] Manlove discusses the social implications of MacDonald's use of Scotch dialect in "George MacDonald's Scottish Novels" 81-82.

[79] While no one has yet offered a psychoanalytic reading of Andrew Comin's comments (let alone the rest of *Donal Grant*), his idea of heaven as a return to a pre-verbal, pre-symbolic, infantile dissolution of self certainly invites this sort of interpretation, particularly given MacDonald's tendency to treat time as cyclical, with death bringing a return to the womb. Further discussion of Gibbie's muteness, illiteracy, and the human imagination is offered in Ankeny 31-34.

meadow with Donal Grant as the beginning of his knowledge of beautiful things in the world of man. Then first he saw nature reflected, Narcissus-like, in the mirror of her humanity, her highest self" (97).[80] MacDonald's upholding of children's speech as authentic and spiritually elevated was shared by his Romantic predecessors, particularly in Wordsworth and Coleridge in their *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as in Blake's earlier *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Sir Gibbie, with his angelic countenance and congenital muteness, incarnates the Romantic ideal of the child as an uncorrupted, pre-linguistic innocent.[81] Even grown up, he remains, linguistically, an infant, in the sense that the Latin *infans* translates literally as "not speaking." The primitive nature of his innocence is further reflected in his animal-like appearance: he is identified variously as a horse (6), a bird (63-64), a brownie (102), a pan (174), and a savage in skins (170-174).

In contrast to Gibbie, who is free from the earthly bondage of language, words are at the centre of Donal's blossoming identity as a man of letters. Donal turns to literature in an effort to escape mundane reality, yet he never succeeds in attaining the spiritual elevation that is Gibbie's natural state. Quite the opposite, literature is connected to Donal's *inability* to achieve transcendence. Indeed, his allegiance to literature suggests spiritual bondage, as the novel darkly hints. When we first meet Donal, he is a fourteen-year-old youth attempting to mind the cows while simultaneously reading a book of

---

[80] MacDonald's allusion to Narcissus in his depiction of divine glory reflected in humanity puts a positive spin on the image of mirror-gazing, suggesting an idealized, godly form of reflection. It contrasts to the more negative evocations of narcissism in *Donal Grant's* Morven, *Phantastes'* Alder maiden, *The Flight of the Shadow*'s Lady Cairnedge, and Lilith—all figures with an overwhelming regard for their own image, rather than with God.

[81] See Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, for a discussion of the romanticizing of childhood, 38-39, 47-9, 110ff., 119.

Walter Scott ballads. It is a failed attempt at multi-tasking—the cow gets into the corn—but not without the happy result that Donal makes friends with Gibbie, who, true to his Christlike nature, spots the wayward animal and dashes out in the nick of time to restore Hornie to the herd. The narrator attributes Donal's failure to the practical difficulties of pursuing booklearning in a rural environment, Jude-the-Obscure-like obstacles with which the rural-born MacDonald may well have been familiar: "He was more and more in love with books, and learning, and the music of thought and word; and he knew well that no one doing a man's work upon a farm could have much time left for study—certainly not a quarter of what the herd-boy could command" (206). Yet beyond logistical challenges of combining shepherding and reading, the episode also hints at the spiritual danger of literature. Hornie is more than just a wayward cow; she is evil personified, as MacDonald endows her with all the vices of a bovine Satan: "a certain black cow with short horns and a wicked look" (90), Hornie is portayed as a "malicious" (90) beast, "plunging into a mad revelry of greed, with all the haste [. . .] of one that knew she was stealing" (90) when she ventures into the forbidden corn. She is only stopped when Gibbie, "with a storm of fiercest blows, [. . .] drove her in absolute rout back into the meadow" (90). Donal, who would rather read a book, does not possess the knack of containing the devilish Hornie. That Hornie can be effectively tamed by Gibbie alone illustrates not simply Gibbie's Christlike penchant for routing the devil; her running amok every time Donal opens a book—she attempts another "trespass" (209) when Donal tries to read Ginevra poetry—also implies that there is a connection between spiritual fallenness and literature.

Donal's literary efforts are further coloured by a looming sense of alienation. imprisonment, and enchantment, feelings of dislocation characteristic of both adolescents and romantics—not that these are the same, although Donal certainly is both. While Donal earnestly desires poetic inspiration, when he actually finds it, the experience carries with it a sense of exile and entrapment. He sees himself as as a ghost, "come back to flit, hovering and gliding about sad old scenes, [. . .] his doom to live thus over again the life he had made so little of in the body; his punishment to haunt the world and pace its streets" (348); as a prisoner, "pining and longing for life and air and human companionship; that was the sun outside, whose rays shone thus feebly into his dungeon" (348); and as a prince, "in disguise, meditating how to appear again and defeat the machinations of his foes, especially of the enchanter who made him seem to the eyes of his subjects that which he was not" (348). Ghost, prisoner, and enchanted prince offer comfortingly maudlin expression for the alienation and self-division that Donal feels, and they allow him, moreover, to star in his own romantic reverie. Yet it is his desire to immerse himself in romance and be the center of his fantasies that gives him this sense of malaise and not-belonging in the first place. Offering both the cause and the relief of Donal's woe, literature becomes a solipsistic pursuit from which Donal, for all his declarations of free will, seems unable to escape.

Donal's gloomy experience of inspiration suggests more than anything his spiritual immaturity. While Donal's inspirational moments are notably drug-free— the narrator reminds us that Donal "needed no opium or such-like demon help; to set him dreaming he could dream at his will" (348)—his imagined roles as ghost and prisoner run perilously close to the condition of *Donal Grant*'s drug-addled Morven, who is also

portrayed as a ghostly visitant and a prisoner of his self. Donal may not be as far gone as the atheist Morven, but he has a long way to go yet. As the narrator describes him, Donal, for all his high romantic ideals, "had not yet begun to read his New Testament in the way Gibbie did" (348). His vision is ill-focused, as he "looked toward some goal dimly seen in vaguer grandeur of betterness" (348), and his "condition was rather that of eyeless hunger after growth than of any conscious aspiration toward less undefined good" (348). He lacks clarity of purpose in pursuing his vocation, as he "had not yet concentrated his efforts toward becoming that which he acknowledged the best, so that he was hardly yet on the straight path to the goal of such oneness with good as alone is a man's peace" (349). The potential for goodness is there, but requires development. While both of Donal's names, *Donal* and *Grant*, indicate his divine giftedness, it is a gift that he is not yet using right, as he spends his time imagining touching visions of himself, rather than aiming to glorify God.

Donal's self-centered pursuit of his vocation is further suggested in a dream that portrays him as the victim of his own literary enchantment, and emphasizes the fallenness of such a condition. In his dream, Donal is transformed into a serpent, doomed to remain wound three times around a tree until his saviour arrives with an equal number of kisses to dispell the charm. The dream is full of self-loathing: he is "'the oogliest, ill-fauredest cratur o' a serpent 'at ever was seen [. . . ,] jist laithly to luik upo'" (338). Even more suggestively, the serpent has gripped between it and the tree a book of ballads, key temptation and source of all his troubles. At first Donal is just looking at the snake, who is coiled around the book, but as he moves closer and closer to the serpent-wrapped book, Donal suddenly becomes the snake itself. Serpent and book are never separated in the

dream, suggesting on one level how literature is inextricably tied to the human fall. More than this, it marks the wrongness of Donal's desire to merge with romance entirely, and become part of it. Donal is responsible, in the end, for his own enchantment—no wicked fairies or evil wizards are to be seen. His cursed and miserable condition is of his own making.

The dream also helps to clarify Donal's position *vis à vis* Ginevra and the larger tradition of English romance. In the dream, Donal's rescuing knight is female, an image that Donal claims must have been inspired by his reading Spenser's *Faerie Queene* the night before. Unfortunately, however, his lady-in-arms fails to save him: though he tries to call for help, all he can do is hiss, and all the lady can do is stare and sob, until eventually she rides off, hanging her head. For all the Spenserian resonances, the lady, as Donal reports, "'wasna Britomart. She had a twistit brainch o' blew berries aboot her helmet, an' they ca'd her Juniper: wasna that queer, noo?'"(340). Rather, his dream is playing on *The Faerie Queene*'s other Arthurian resonances. Though Donal is not conscious of it, the lady is Ginevra, suggested by the juniper, which, as the narrator reminds us, is "the English of *Ginevra*" (340). What no one explains, but what many of MacDonald's readers might have understood, is that *Ginevra* and *Juniper* are both cognates of *Guenevere*, queen of Arthurian romance—traditionally, she is associated with juniper, with which she is often adorned in artistic representations. The identification of Ginevra as a Guenevere figure raises the stakes, suggesting that Donal's inability to communicate meaningfully with Ginevra—in the dream as well as in real life—is his failure to engage correctly with literature. It further solidifies, moreover, Donal's sense that Ginevra is not the girl for him, but for Gibbie, who is romance incarnate.

Donal's transformation into his true form begins when he recognizes the spiritual importance of making everything glorify God—not humanity—and rushes to the offense to promote this view. The defining moment occurs when he confronts Fergus Duff, his college rival, about the necessity of making all poetic symbols point to God. Their conflict centers on a passage in a Sunday sermon that Fergus is preparing, in which Fergus reflects poetically on how the ocean waves "'seem to be such a picture of the vanity of human endeavour [. . . .] Just as little as those waves would mind me, if I told them they were wasting their labor on these rocks, will men mind me when I tell them to-morrow on the emptiness of their ambitions'" (368). Donal objects strenuously to the Fergus's reading of the waves as a redundant force:

> "Hoots, Fergus!" said Donal again, in broadest speech, as if with its bray he would rebuke not the madness, but the silliness of the prophet, "ye dinna mean to tell me yon jaws [*billows*] disna ken their business better nor imagine they hae to caw doon the rock?" (368)

Fergus's error is that he sees the waves' action as useless, repetitive toil. In Donal's eyes, however, this is a serious misreading of natural symbols. In his teleological, God-centered universe, everything must have a purpose. In Donal's mind, though the waves may be repetitive, it is not static, unproductive repetition, but productive, progressive work, as they perform their duty of keeping the world clean:

> "Fergus! the jaws is fechtin' wi' nae rocks. They're jist at their pairt in a gran' cleansin' hermony. They're at their hoosemaid's wark, day an nicht, to haud the warl' clea, an' gran' an' bonnie they sing at it. Gien I was you, I wadna tell fowk any sic nonsense as yon; I wad tell them 'at ilka ane 'at disna dee his wark i' the

> warl', to say a whaul, for ilk ane o' thae wee craturs dis the wull o' Him 'at made 'im wi' ilka whisk o' his bit tailie, fa'i in in wi' a' the jabble o ' the jaws again' the rocks, for it's a' ae thing—an' a' to haud the muckle sea clean." (370)

Fergus defends his metaphor by arguing that he was simply speaking poetically, as he maintains that "'Personification is a figure of speech in constant use by all poets'" (369). However, Donal will have none of Fergus's babbling "'aboot poetic license, an' that kin' o' hen-scraich'" (368), as he insists that there is a difference between true poetry and false poetry: "'For the verra essence o' poetry is trowth, an' as sune's a word's no true, it's no poetry, though it may haw on the cast claes o' it'" (368). Donal claims that everything in nature has a teleological purpose, a "'rale design'" (370) and godly meaning must be interpreted like symbols in a book. [82] Poets unable to see the truth cannot write good poetry, but "blether" (370) and "'haiver'" (369) "'nonsence'" (370)—poets in whose company he would squarely seat the unfortunate Fergus Duff.

As their disagreement escalates from Fergus's error to false poetry in general, Donal leaps to the opportunity to denounce—perhaps not entirely unexpectedly—the work of Byron in particular. Byron, we learn earlier in the novel, is one of Fergus's favorite poets, whose work he tries to imitate after his own "halting" (150) fashion. As we have seen, however, he is not one of MacDonald's preferred poets, and he certainly isn't one of Donal's. Donal launches a full-out offensive against the third canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimmage*, in which Byron personifies (wrongly, according to Donal) an earthquake as mountains rejoicing in an elemental birth: "the glee / Of the loud hills shakes with mountain mirth, / As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's

---

[82] As McGillis reminds us, MacDonald operates in a world that is overwhelmingly textual: "What the book and nature have in common is textuality" (Preface vii).

birth" (Byron 3.93.7-9). Donal compares the "'nonsence'" (369) of Fergus's prosopopoeic "'seemiles'" (370) to Byron's metaphor:

> "Ow ay! bu there's true and there's fause personification; an it's no ilka poetry 'at kens the differ. Ow I ken! ye'll be doon upo' me wi' Byron. [. . . .] But even a poet canna mak less poetry. An' a man 'at in ane o' his gran'est verses cud haiver aboot the birth o' a yoong airthquack!—losh! to think o' 't growin' an auld airthquack—haith, to me it's no up till a deuk-quack!—sic a poet micht weel, I grant ye, be he ever sic a guid poet when he tuik heed to what he siad, he micht weel, I say, blether nonsence aboot the sea warrin' again' the rocks, an' sic stuff." (369)

This stunningly strange episode of critical aggression offers a perfect example of MacDonald's tendency to incorporate earnest literary discussion into his fiction. Certainly, Fergus is surprised by Donal's brandishing of his critical sword, and protests that he is at a loss to understand Donal's point, let alone his "vulgar Scotch" (369) dialect. Fergus is not the only one: for a non-Scottish reader, the Doric is a challenge to decipher. Even in MacDonald's day, the dialect of his Scottish novels appears to have been an obstacle, with such formidable readers as Henry Crabb Robinson complaining to MacDonald of his inability to understand the heavily inflected speech of *David Elginbrod* (1863), MacDonald's first Scotch novel.[83] The sheer difficulty of comprehension goes a long way toward explaining why this remarkable chapter in *Sir Gibbie* has never been discussed critically. The 1900 A. L. Burt edition (reproduced by photolithography in the 2000 Johannesen reprint cited here) offers a translation of two words, "jaws [*billows*]"

---

[83] See Robinson's letter to MacDonald of 3 Feb. 1863.

(386), and "cwite [*coat*]" (369), but these are drops in the proverbial bucket, as the onslaught of Doric proceeds almost incessantly for four pages.[84] While MacDonald's Scots novels abound in characters that speak Doric, he seldom features it for so long a discussion, much less one that focuses specifically on literary issues. The language strengthens Donal's discussion, however, as his switch to Doric, rather than lowering the tone of the discussion (as Fergus claims), heightens it, raising the matter from an earthly to a spiritual plane: while Donal "could speak very good English if he chose, [. . .] the affected tone and would-be fine pronunciation of Fergus Duff had given him the notion that to speak anything but his mother-tongue would be unmanly and false" (351). Given MacDonald's belief that rural dialects were a purer form of language, Donal's decision to conduct his literary debate with Fergus in Doric amounts to a defense of linguistic authenticity carried out in both the content and the manner of his speech.

In terms of Donal's development, his defense of truth in poetry marks the moment of his transformation when the serpent scales fall away and he stands revealed in his true identity as the chivalric defender of literature. Rustic trappings and awkward mannerisms are shed when he encounters Fergus and Ginevra (who observes the entire altercation): "not a mark of the midnight student about him, and looking very different, in town-made clothes [. . . .] He approached and saluted her [Ginevra] with such an air of homely grace as one might imagine that of the Red Cross Knight when, having just put on the armor of a Christian man, from a clownish fellow he straightway appeared the

---

[84] Michael Phillips's 1983 abridgement of *Sir Gibbie*, published as *The Baronet's Song* by Bethany House, understandably translates Scotch dialect throughout the novel into standard English; less forgivable, however, is his omission of nine-tenths of this scene, which he reduces to one sentence: "A good deal of discussion followed, most of it to Fergus's discomfort" (*The Baronet's Song* 145).

goodliest knight in the company" (366). His transformation from inarticulate enchantment to heroic eloquence marks the breaking of the earlier spell that bound him before, a change that is symbolized by his new ability to communicate effectively with Ginevra: following the showdown with Fergus, she and Donal go on to have "a good deal of talk about the true and false in poetry" (372) (though she still rejects him in the end). The image of Donal as the Red Cross Knight, defending truth in English literature, has suggestive biographical resonances as well. MacDonald's friends seem to have considered him to be a kind of literary St. George: a drawing by his friend and illustrator Arthur Hughes portrays MacDonald (along with his daughter Mary, dressed as Carroll's Alice) at his writing desk, in the position of St. George, lounging atop the prostrate body of the defeated dragon (see Fig. 2). As we shall see in the upcoming chapter, MacDonald's son Greville called his eschatological romance *Lilith* "the Revelation of St. George," (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 548), an appellation that pleased MacDonald and his wife Louisa both. Donal's critical skirmish with Fergus emphasizes the heroic significance that MacDonald attached to literary endeavours, illustrating his "equation," as Raeper describes it, that "true knights are also true poets" (Raeper 211).

Fig. 2. Undated drawing by Arthur Hughes, portraying George MacDonald and his daughter Mary MacDonald (as Lewis Carroll's Alice) (From William Raeper, *George MacDonald*).

That MacDonald saves the heroic glitter for a critical debate about literary representation suggests a new kind of heroism, in which the Romantic poet-hero (such as the hero of Shelley's "Alastor," and Anodos in *Phantastes*) is replaced by the Victorian *critic*-hero, a man capable of discerning the literary wheat from the chaff with rigorous intellect and righteous judgement. Donal's display of critical prowess could be read as a fictional response to Matthew Arnold's call for literary criticism, articulated in his 1865 essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." Arnold argued that the Romantic movement was a "premature" (Arnold 7) "burst of creative activity" (Arnold 7) that needed an intellectual, critical foundation to uphold it, and for lack of such a structure

"the power and value of English literature was thereby impaired" (Arnold 1). MacDonald knew Arnold's work, later befriended Arnold, and shared many of his ideas, writing in 1858 of how "I am surprised to find so many of my notions in Dr. Arnold's letters—only much enlarged and unified beyond my shelled-chicken peepings" (MacDonald to his father, 29 Dec. 1858).[85] We do not know which particular ideas of Arnold's MacDonald had in mind in the letter to his father; however, it seems fair to say that MacDonald shared Arnold's view of poetry as a high and sacred pursuit.[86] There is no way of telling whether Donal's critical outburst constitutes a deliberate response to Arnoldian ideas about literary criticism, or whether MacDonald's own ideas were simply running along a parallel course. Certainly, however, the episode in *Sir Gibbie* suggests the heroic import of literary criticism.

4.3. Repetition and Redemption

In the larger context of the *Sir Gibbie-Donal Grant* cycle, *Sir Gibbie* prefigures the sequel *Donal Grant*, anticipating and prophesying the sequel's allegory about rescuing the literary tradition from ungodly forces. The two books are also a tale of individual development, as *Sir Gibbie* narrates the education of the hero, in which Donal becomes aware of the spiritual responsibilities of his vocation as man of letters. The episode with Fergus signals a turning point in his understanding of the godly nature of

---

[85] See also MacDonald's letter to his father, 21 Dec. 1850, in which he inquires as to whether his father has "read Dr. Arnold's Life & Letters."

[86] In *Romanticism and Religion*, Stephen Prickett positions MacDonald in opposition to Arnold, as a figure embodying the mythologizing impulse that Arnold continually sought to debunk, "hailed by his own contemporaries as the prime creator of the very genre which Matthew Arnold felt could not longer be seriously entertained by an educated man, fairy stories" (Prickett 213-14).

literature, and marks his personal transformation from uncouth rustic to urbane college graduate. However, in spite of his heroic triumph over Fergus, Donal has only just begun his progress—there is no happy marriage for him at the end of the novel; Gibbie gets the girl instead, while Donal returns home humiliated and depressed. Gibbie is "already in the kingdom of heaven" (*Sir Gibbie* 168), and lives "in the holy carelessness of the eternal *now*" (*Sir Gibbie* 7), a state Donal desires, but which continues to remain frustratingly beyond the reach of his earthly toils. Hope remains, however, as the narrator of *Sir Gibbie* promises that Donal might one day attain Gibbie's heavenly state, though he warns that "Donal would have to suffer, before he would even begin to look about for the door by which a man may enter into it" (*Sir Gibbie* 168).

The sequel *Donal Grant* offers the fulfillment of *Sir Gibbie*, as Donal's prophesied suffering comes to an end, and Donal at last attains the heavenly kingdom, at least figuratively, as the events of *Sir Gibbie* fade to a mere memory of the past, and Donal replaces Gibbie. This transformation is implicit, only hinted at in the structure of the story. On an explicit level, Donal deliberately and consciously turns his sad past over to God for proper burial, expecting it to be returned to him "in better shape [. . .] by and by" (*Donal Grant* 2). The divine resurrection of his past occurs more subtly, as *Donal Grant* replays the events of *Sir Gibbie*. This is not the demonic, static repetition of the past that torments Lord Morven, however, but holy transformation that is founded on a principle of repetition and variation, and so redeems the past.

Donal's taking on of Gibbie's mantle is revealed in his repeating key elements of Gibbie's life. Literally, *Donal Grant* opens with Donal's stepping into Gibbie's shoes—or into his shoelessness, as it were. Young Gibbie always went barefoot, because

his alcoholic shoemaker father Sir George drank all of his daily earnings, and was never able to finish a pair of shoes before Gibbie outgrew them. The opening of *Donal Grant* also focuses on the feet, recounting how Donal, newly set forth from home to seek his fortune, struggles with his shoe, the sole of which persists in coming loose. Never mind the age gap—Gibbie is only eight at the start of the earlier novel, whereas Donal in the sequel is closer to twenty—shoes in this world are a father's responsibility, and Donal, like Gibbie, attributes his lack of proper footwear to paternal negligence: "Never had he left home for college that his father had not made personal inspection of his shoes to see that they were fit for the journey, but on this departure they had been forgotten" (*Donal Grant* 1). By the second page Donal gives up altogether on his "failing equipment" (1) and goes barefoot instead, much as we find Gibbie at the opening of his novel. However, Donal's feet are not like Gibbie's, whose soles "were very nearly equal in resistance to leather" (*Sir Gibbie* 35). Rather, his bare feet are, "like his shoes, weaker in the sole than was pleasant" (*Donal Grant* 2), a pun on *sole/soul* (repeated in his encounter with the mystical shoemaker Andrew Comin) that suggests that his problem is not just sartorial, but spiritual. His journey will toughen more than simply the soles of his feet; it will temper and strengthen his spiritual mettle as well. Shoelessness is joined by pennilessness, another trait that Donal shares with the impoverished Gibbie, and homelessness makes three, as Donal accepts a charitable bowl of milk, and prepares to spend the night on the moor, a replication of Gibbie's history of sleeping out-of-doors in haystacks and farmers' fields (*Sir Gibbie* 67-68).

The sorry state of Donal's sole/soul has a literary basis, as it is connected to his uncritical admiration of Shelley. Chapter 2, "A Spiritual Foot-Pad" (8), in which he

questions Shelley, marks (as the title suggests) the beginning of his soul's repair. Having freed his feet from his broken shoes and found the strength of his physical soles wanting, Donal sits down by the roadside, pulls out his Shelley, and discovers that his spiritual soul is equally in want, as he realizes that he had erred in his critical assessment of his favorite poet. The error is dual: Shelley is wrong in his ideas about personal autonomy, and Donal is wrong for having failed to see it. Donal's intellectual revelation and subsequent repentance brings about spiritual restoration, which is suggested by the ecstatic vision that follows immediately on the heel of Chapter 2.

Donal's transcendent vision of heaven in Chapter 3, "The Moor," is the spiritual reward of his renunciation of Shelleyan error. At the same time, it repeats the concluding vision of *Sir Gibbie*, and so is a resurrection of the past, in which Donal is spiritually reborn with Gibbie-like access to divine knowledge. The earlier novel ended with Gibbie rapt in speechless communion with his wife Ginevra, as they shared the glorious sight of "the stairs of Glashgar" (*Sir Gibbie* 448), the local mountain, a natural-supernatural stairway that leads "to the lonely peak dwelling among the lights of God" (*Sir Gibbie* 448). Donal experiences a comparable vision of ascent in *Donal Grant*, as he wakes upon the moor, and "it seemed to him no less than to Jacob that he must have slept at the foot of the heavenly stair" (*Donal Grant* 13). Donal's dream of spiritual ascent initiates the fulfillment of the promise made in *Sir Gibbie*, that Donal through many trials would follow Gibbie's footsteps—"Gibbie was already in the kingdom of heaven, and Donal would have to suffer, before he would begin even to look about for the door by which a man may enter into it" (*Sir Gibbie* 168). The fulfillment of this promise is reflected in Donal's vision, and also in his literal ascent, as he finds himself on a road that "For some

time [. . .] had been ascending" (12). Like Anodos's movement upward in *Phantastes*—as well as the movement across symbolic landscapes of characters in Dante, Spenser, and Bunyan (all favorite writers of MacDonald)—Donal's geographic progress is the spiritual progress of "a pilgrim on his way to his divine fate" (12), approaching ever closer to heaven's door.

The image of a door to the divine is literalized in Donal's subsequent befriending of the old shoemaker and his wife, Andrew and Doory Comin, in Chapter 5. Their names suggest Donal's arrival at his spiritual home *Comin* evoking the invitation to "come in," and *Doory* the door by which one enters a house. Their names also stand as an antithesis to the castle, Graham's Grip, a structure whose hidden rooms, blind halls, and sealed doors are the embodiment of closure and immurement. A village oddity, Andrew Comin is an eccentric divine, viewed by the townspeople as "a poor talkative enthusiast with more tongue than brains" (243), whose existence proves the "survival of the old mystics" (93).[87] "[O]ne of the inwardly inseparable, outwardly far divided company of Christian philosophers" (19), Comin's radical Christianity permits him to stay home from church on Sunday, where, significantly, he mends Donal's shoes, repairing the "'sair divorce o'sole an' body'" (20), which, as Donal puns, is "'a far better wark nor gaein' to the kirk'" (21), and one that further implies Donal's spiritual evolution toward unity, vision, and transcendence.

---

[87] Several scholars have suggested that MacDonald may have had mystical theosophist Jakob Boehme in mind as the model for the many shoemakers who populate his work. George Galbraith and Andrew Comin are just two of them: besides *Sir Gibbie* and *Donal Grant*, shoemakers occur in *Salted with Fire, Guild Court, Gutta Percha Gillie*, and *Adela Cathcart* (See Parsons 180-83, Greville MacDonald 557, Reis 1972 38, Hein 1982 46n, Wolff, *Golden Key* 320, and Raeper, *George MacDonald* 49, 73, and 257).

At the same time, the Comins offer an idealized and redeemed version of Gibbie's cobbler upbringing, and so offer another way for Donal to redeem the past. Their family life is what Gibbie's childhood should have been, had his mother remained alive and his father never turned to drink. Sober, humble, and industrious, Andrew Comin is everything that Gibbie's father Sir George was not, as his life of unusual godliness offers an inversion of Sir George's tragic fallenness. The Comins' home also mirrors Gibbie's castle, insofar as it functions as a humble extension of God's heavenly mansion: though simple and homely, to Donal their cottage "seemed enchanting" (23), "the most desirable shelter he had ever seen" (23), and can be considered an architectural continuation of God's "great beautiful chamber" (12). Their simple hospitality recalls one of Gibbie's charitable schemes, in which Gibbie disguised a portion of his castle as a cottage so that travellers seeking refuge in the night would not realize that they were staying in a massive, luxurious castle. (Both cases invert the old theme of mortals entertaining angels unawares: instead, it is the mortals being entertained *by* angels—or at least angel-like persons—unaware). [88] With Donal's acquisition of godly foster-parents, it becomes evident that he is not simply imitating Gibbie's life, but is in many ways improving on it. When, later in the novel, he explains to Arctura that people can indeed redeem others' fallen past, he is living what he preaches, as his life in the sequel is not just the redemption of his personal history, but the improvement of Gibbie's as well.

The opening chapters of *Donal Grant* suggest how the novel offers the typological fulfillment of *Sir Gibbie*. The early chapters, which occur before he has even

---

[88] The allegorical castle, a building of unknown boundaries designed by God the architect and encompassing the whole created world in which all mortals dwell, is an image that runs throughout MacDonald's work, with the best example being his extended allegory "The Castle: a Parable," which is the final story in *Adela Cathcart*.

met the Graham family, mark Donal's transformation to spiritual maturity, preparing him for the heroic deeds that follow. Further typological resemblances connect the two novels in ways that are less densely detailed, but nevertheless broadly significant, as they show how Gibbie's life is a foreshadowing of Donal's, and Donal's life a repetition and fulfillment of Gibbie's. Gibbie's curing of Mistress Croale's alcoholism, for instance, anticipates Donal's curing of Morven's addiction, and both fulfill the hope that never came to poor Sir George, who died early in *Sir Gibbie* after an alcoholic binge. Sir George's reliance on "necromantic whisky" (*Sir Gibbie* 24) to replay past glories prefigures Morven's addiction to similarly necromantic drugs. Both men's vices are reflected, albeit in less destructive form, in Donal's self-centered romantic fantasies of himself as "a ghost come back to flit [. . .] about sad old scenes" (*Sir Gibbie* 348), a flaw that is corrected and redeemed when he realizes that self-glorification should be abandoned for the glory of God. Donal appears as a force that will combat ghostly, false forms of resurrection, as he embodies the spirit of true rebirth and redemption. His defeat of Fergus Duff and Byron's metaphor in *Sir Gibbie* is a small-scale triumph that reveals Donal's potential as critic-hero, and foreshadows his far greater victory in *Donal Grant*, in which he fulfills his heroic calling by symbolically rescuing English romance from the compounded vices of Byron, Coleridge, and Shelley. A key distinction of Donal's latter success is that he gets the girl in the end, and so attains the symbolic closure that *Sir Gibbie* lacks. Ginevra, for her part, anticipates her counterpart Arctura, as their names evoke the legendary pair Guinevere and Arthur, endowing Donal's exploits with the mythical resonance of Engand's legendary history. Donal's initial appearance in *Sir Gibbie* as a would-be poet who writes Shelleyesque verse prefigures his later

transformation in *Donal Grant* into a Shelley critic, a far more powerful role, as he becomes a discerning literary master who will preserve the good in Shelley, and dispense with the bad—a role that suggestively approximates MacDonald's real-life attempts to redeem the troubling poet and correct the progress of literary history.

Typological interpretation offers a way of reading *Donal Grant* that is more productive than Wolff's dismissal of the book as repetitive and tired, "a mere farrago of worn-out themes" (Wolff, *Golden Key* 288). A typological view of history endows the admittedly repetitive themes and images of MacDonald's fiction with meaning and purpose: far from being the unoriginal product of an exhausted imagination, they become deliberate steps on the visionary path to apocalypse and transcendence, founded on the principle of self-denial and Christian resurrection. My reading of *Sir Gibbie* and *Donal Grant* resembles Colin Manlove's approach to *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, which he reads as interrelated works, arguing that "*Phantastes* deals with some of the First Things; and *Lilith* with the Last" (Manlove, "The Circle of the Imagination" 74), as MacDonald works "through the total pattern of Christian history" (Manlove "The Circle of the Imagination" 92), moving from mortal life "out of time towards eternity" (92). Michael Mendelson offers a similar reading in "George MacDonald's *Lilith* and the Conventions of Ascent," in which he connects MacDonald's writing to Northrop Frye's concept of romance, arguing that "MacDonald's romance is an invented myth based on a structure of Christian allegory in which the journey's goal is the return of mankind to its ultimate source in the creator" (198). As I have shown, such a view can be extended to his less fantastical works of fiction as well. *Donal Grant* and *Sir Gibbie* suggest how for MacDonald literature is an art form that is intrinsically bound up in the process of

renewal and redemption, as it progresses toward divine perfection. Literary romance is a microcosmic model of the greater romance that is ongoing in human history. As Donal explains it, the stories that people write all belong to an endlessly expansive book, one to be found "'in no library,'" as it is "'the book God is always writing at one end, and blotting out at the other'" (*Donal Grant* 62). MacDonald's positioning of literature as part of a much larger plot, the end of which is apocalypse and transcendence, endows his work with visionary drive and purpose.

5

SHELLEY REDEEMED: SECRECY AND REVELATION IN *THE FLIGHT OF THE SHADOW* AND *LILITH*

5.1. SECRECY: REDEEMING THE PAST GENERATION

In *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891) MacDonald returns to his storytelling roots, offering a doppelgänger tale about literary genealogy. As with previous works, *The Flight of the Shadow* explores questions of good and evil through the figure of Percy Shelley; however, here the focus is not on rewriting Shelley's work (as in *Phantastes*), correcting Shelley's life (as in "The Cruel Painter"), or critiquing Shelley's ideas (as in *Donal Grant*). Rather, *The Flight of the Shadow* considers how subsequent generations may escape a troubled past.

The story is the autobiographical account of the elderly Belorba Day (*née* Whichcote), as she narrates the history of her youth. Orphaned at birth, Belorba lives with her guardian uncle Edward, and his second cousin, Martha Moon. Tall, stooped, bookish and sad, Uncle Edward Whichcote is Belorba's Adam, her model of the ideal man. He is also the spitting image of Percy Shelley: "When first I saw a likeness of the poet Shelley, I called out 'My uncle!'" (14). However, the impression of likeness is only brief, as she "immediately began to see differences" (14). The issue of likeness *vs.* difference is crucial to the book, as it forms part of MacDonald's larger project of redeeming the literary past by repeating it with progressive changes to improve on it.

Belorba grows up on Whichcote Manor, near the village of Wittenage, on the edge of the moors. She spends her childhood exploring the moors on her pony, Zoe, or "Life," often in the company of her uncle, on his great horse named Thanatos, or

"Death." Belorba recounts three key episodes of her childhood. The first tells of how, as a young girl, she loses her way on the moors, and is rescued by a great lady, who takes her back to her house, where Belorba discovers a hall filled entirely with mirrors. Her uncle retrieves her and brings her home before they have time to reveal the identity of the grand lady, who has mysteriously vanished. In the next episode, Belorba makes the troubling discovery that her uncle conceals a sad secret, mysteriously connected to a ruby, which he keeps hidden in his study drawer. In a third episode, Belorba encounters on the heath a gaunt figure on a skeletal horse, who together appear to be the very image of her uncle and Thanatos, and she is much puzzled by the appearance of these doubles.

When Belorba is sixteen, she meets John Day, the young heir to Rising, a nearby estate. Falling into a momentary trance, she experiences a profound, intense vision of kissing him, and falls immediately in love. Fearing that John is a disruptive force hampering her perfect relationship with her uncle, Belorba at first conceals her love from her uncle, and is filled with anguish. When her uncle breaks his arm, she feels she is being punished for her concealment. She is much relieved when she at last confesses her love for John, and her relationship with her uncle (not to mention his arm) is mended.

John's mother, however, objects to the match. A powerful and evil woman, Lady Cairnedge—her name unsubtly evoking carnage—will stop at nothing, including even poisoning her own son, to prevent his marriage to Belorba. After the poisoning incident, John (who has also seen the uncle's mysterious double) takes refuge at Whichcote manor. In an attempt to forcibly retrieve her son, Lady Cairnedge travels to Whichcote, where she and Uncle Edward are horrified to discover that they already know one another. Lady Cairnedge attempts to blackmail Uncle Edward by threatening to denounce him as a

long lost murderer, while Edward maintains that the fault behind the murder is hers. Initially, Belorba's uncle counsels Belorba to abandon her love for John, but he abruptly changes his mind, delivers a manuscript to her outlining his history with Lady Cairnedge, and flees abroad, advising Belorba and John to marry as soon as possible. Meanwhile, his doppelgänger and horse continue to be spotted on the moors.

One winter night, Uncle Edward, apparently returned to England, is discovered collapsed in the snow, weakened with illness. Although his physical health improves under John and Belorba's care, his mental state remains in peril, and he appears to have lost his memory. They take him abroad to recover. While visiting the palace at Versailles, the uncle encounters his double in a long corridor, at first mistaking the double for his own reflection in a mirror. The truth unfolds: Uncle Edward has an identical twin brother, Edmund, though each had believed he had killed the other years before. Belorba and John had been rehabilitating the other uncle, hence his apparent confusion of memory.

The brothers' history is revealed: Edward and Edmund, inseparable as children and impossible to tell apart (as their last name, *Whichcote,* suggests), quarreled during their university years over a woman—now Lady Cairnedge. On a moonlit peak of a mighty waterfall in the Alps, the brothers wrestled. Each supposed the other to have gone over the falls and drowned. However, unbeknownst to one another, both survived. Uncle Edward returned to England to run the family farm and to raise his orphaned niece, Belorba. In the meantime, Uncle Edmund wended his way to Berlin, contracted brain fever, recovered partial health in an asylum, eked out a living copying legal documents, then returned to England, where a hermetic gypsy living in the wilds took him in and

taught him to earn his living through basket-weaving. Overcome with the desire to see his ancestral home, Edmund would hover about Whichcote manor on his half-starved horse, thus explaining the mystery of the uncle's double.

The reunited uncles return to England, never to be parted again, and live out their dotage on the farm. Lady Cairnedge, after spending all of her son's inheritance, flees to Tyrol, where she dies. The uncles die within weeks of one another, and are buried side by side. In its conclusion, the book self-consciously flouts its non-adherence to the Victorian three-volume convention, as the final chapter bears the title "End of the First Volume," and yet ends with the characters' actual or anticipated deaths. The implication seems to be that future volumes are to be written in heaven: indeed, Belorba and John seem more excited about dying than about being married, as the book concludes with the Whichcote brothers' tombstone engraving, "*THEY ARE NOT HERE; THEY ARE RISEN*" (337), and Belorba's response, " John and I are waiting" (337).

Like MacDonald's earlier works, *The Flight of the Shadow* investigates questions of good and evil though the figure of Percy Shelley. However, this later work reveals a progression emerging in MacDonald's treatment of Shelley, from what could be termed an early denial of Shelley's flaws, to a later questioning, and finally, acceptance of them. This development is accompanied by a growing incorporation of MacDonald himself into the Shelley myth, as Shelley's inheritor and redeemer. In *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891), MacDonald begins to move away from the easy dualisms of his earlier work, offering a fable that grapples with the problems of confronting a dark history. As in *Donal Grant*, the story focuses on the necessity of uncovering the past, in order for future generations to transform and redeem it. Ancestral evil can no longer simply be written

out or excised, it must be confessed, and absorbed into the larger identity. MacDonald seems to be moving away from the stark dualisms and flat characters of *Phantastes*'s fairy romance, and into the murkier waters of Romanticism, in which evil is more complex. Significantly, *The Flight of the Shadow* was written at the same time as MacDonald was working on *Lilith*, his most enduring and sympathetic depiction of evil, with which *The Flight of the Shadow* shares numerous overlapping details. *The Flight of the Shadow* grants evil a fuller psychological portrayal than in MacDonald's earlier works, as MacDonald harnesses his doppelgänger tale of two Shelleys to the *Bildungsroman* story of Belorba's development. Literature itself plays a part in this redemptive process, as storytelling offers a medium for expressing and correcting hidden truths.

In *The Flight of the Shadow*, as in *Donal Grant*, the process of redemption requires the revelation of past secrets. Secrecy is evil because it institutes a separation between the individual and God, as well as between individuals: "No one," the aged Belorba asserts, "who loves and chooses a secret can be of the pure of heart that shall see God" (2). The book in and of itself participates in this redemptive endeavor, as it enables Belorba to achieve her goal of perfect transparency: "I would that not God only but all good men and women might see me through and through" (1). Although the people of whom she writes are all dead, excepting herself and her husband, she claims that they, too, would wish the truth to out: "If they were alive to read as I record, they might perhaps now and again look a little paler and wish the leaf turned, but to see the things set down would not make them unhappy: they do not love secrecy" (1). On one level, the narrative is an attempt to redeem her family's history by revealing the story of her uncles'

sordid past, the "shadow" of the book's title. Technically, however, the flight of this shadow was already achieved years before the writing of the book, in Edward and Edmund's reunion, and Belorba's text is simply a recording of it for posterity. The secret truly at stake is considerably more nebulous and personal. Secrecy becomes a more complex issue than it was in *Donal Grant*, as Belorba struggles with the tension between identifying completely with her uncle, and needing to establish separation from him. Her puritanical desire for complete exposure is further complicated by her discovery that individuality requires establishing a private world of unshared thoughts.

While on one level *The Flight of the Shadow* is an unveiling of familial secrets, on a more personal level, it constitutes Belorba's attempt to reveal the secret of her sexual awakening, which neither she nor MacDonald is able to represent explicitly. Ostensibly, Belorba's reason for writing is to uncover her genealogy, so as to understand the origin of her "special delights" in "the natural ways of the world" (3). What exactly she means by this remains a little murky, though to help she offers two examples of the "things belonging to the simplest life" that arouse "the intensity of my pleasure" (3). Both are regenerative images. One is a conventional image of life bursting forth after the winter, typical for MacDonald. Belorba describes the joyous pang of witnessing spring growth, and how she is overwhelmed by "the tears which, now I am an old woman, fill my eyes [. . .] at the sight of the first year's primrose" (4). The other image is a mysterious reference to "that day in the garden" (4), when the teenage Belorba experienced a blinding sexual fantasy of her future husband, an experience which then, as now, she remains unable to articulate fully. From a post-Freudian perspective, it seems fairly obvious that Belorba is trying to understand sexual desire, which she can only represent

in veiled terms. She admits that some would argue that the source of her delight "lies in my nature, not in my ancestry" (4); however, Belorba feels otherwise, believing that tracing her family history will help her to understand the origin of her pleasure. She conceives of genealogy in natural terms, with the transmission of ancestral traits following a process of submersion and resurfacing: "Everything lies in everyone of us, but has to be brought to the surface. It grows a little in one, more in that one's child, more in that child's child, and so on and on—with curious breaks as of a river which every now and then takes to an underground course" (4). This image of a river buried and resurfacing evokes Biblical images of regeneration, such as Isaiah's prophecy of a parched land receiving life-giving water: "for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35.6); as such it is an appropriate image for Belorba, who functions as the redeemer of her family.[89] The image of underground rivers also suggests the unconscious mind of Belorba, whose love often lies buried and unexpressed, as her unspeakable experiences are represented primarily through the indirect media of storytelling and dreams.

Belorba's narrative can be understood along similar lines, as the recounting of two, interrelated stories: there is the surface story, the uncovering of her uncle's mysterious history, and, submerged beneath, there is the story of Belorba's sexual development, as she emerges from childhood and moves toward adult maturity. The stories are not parallel—Uncle Edward's history does not "stand for" Belorba's sexual awakening in any sense; rather, they are two parts of one larger story, as Belorba's personal growth, combining likeness and change, becomes the key mechanism whereby

---

[89] It is also an anticipation of *Lilith*, which features a parched wasteland under which runs an underground river.

her uncle's secret history is drawn out and redeemed, and the family line ensured continuance.

The Flight of the Shadow suggests most clearly that MacDonald's obsession with Shelley is part of a concern with working out how future generations may redeem the darker history of those gone before, by repeating it with improvements. The book hints particularly at how MacDonald may have regarded himself in light of his admired but fallen predecessor. Shelley was someone with whom he identified, but who was fallen, and whom he longed desperately to redeem. Certainly, Belorba resembles MacDonald. With a heart "given to expectation," and "tuned to long waiting" (76), Belorba, like MacDonald, is in a state of constant apocalyptic desire, as she views each event "not merely as a fact whose glory lay in the mystery of its undeveloped harmonics, but as the harbinger of an unknown event" (76). Moreover, she claims to have acquired this apocalyptic approach from "the higher mind" (75) of her uncle. While MacDonald does not explicitly state that his own yearning for transcendence is derived from Shelley, he certainly shares his predecessor's death drive and longing for divine vision.[90] Belorba's description of her forgiving attitude toward her uncle might well be used to describe MacDonald's attitude toward Shelley: "To me he was the best and most beautiful of men—the first man in all the world. Nor did I change my mind about him ever—I only came to want another to think of him as I did" (13).

Like MacDonald, whose biography and fictional reworkings of Shelley idealize and excuse Shelley according to MacDonald's esoteric view of him, Belorba, in her biography of her uncle, portrays her uncle through the bias of admiring eyes. Yet while

---

[90] See for instance, MacDonald's essay "The Imagination" 5-6.

she maintains a firm appreciation of her ancestors, Uncle Edward's history stands as a warning of how *not* to proceed in the business of growing up. Her story recounts the process of individuation, of acknowledging affiliation to her kin, but establishing her difference from the previous generation, and, in the process, redeeming the evils of those gone before. In order to establish this difference, evil must be acknowledged in the first place. Only by such admissions will future generations be able to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

The dangerous effect of concealing sin is emphasized in the book's portrayal of secrecy as a living death. Secrecy, because it involves a hiding from God, prevents the possibility of heavenly resurrection, which, for MacDonald, is the ultimate goal of everything. Without resurrection, one is condemned to the living death of a vampiric existence. This principle is largely a replaying of *Donal Grant*'s teachings on secrecy, as images of ghostliness and vampirism resurface as a warning about the life-in-death existence that results from humans' attempts to conceal themselves from God. Uncle Edward teaches Belorba that secrets are like parasites: "Never let anything that makes itself a nest in your heart, grow a secret, for then at once it will begin to eat a hole in it" (27). As a result of his warning, Belorba lives in "morbid terror at the very idea of a secret—as if a secret were in itself a treacherous, poisonous guest, that ate away the life of its host" (29). This imagery returns in Belorba's dream, in which her uncle and his horse Death battle a monstrous worm, "the worm that never dies" (211), who lurks hidden in a bottomless pool. In another, real-life evocation of the undead, Uncle Edward's secret ruby, the gemstone from his lost twin's ring, is portrayed as a "phantasm" (31). Uncle Edmund, the secret twin himself, is regarded as a "shadow"

(281), and his spectral appearance on his skeletal horse further suggests the haunting presence of a concealed past (69). The vampiric nature of secrecy is embodied par excellence in Lady Cairnedge, who is a walking "charnel-house" (315), "not a woman, but a live Death" (315), "pale as a corpse" (182), with "the staring eyes of one strangled" (315), and face that, when not veiled in a deceptive aspect of angelic radiance, "stiffened to that of a corpse" (315). Her love is represented as a "disintegration of life" (297), a "living death" (297), a state rooted in God but spoiled by " the old serpent, [. . .] the worm that never dies" (297).

As a child, Belorba experiences a taste of this death-like existence, though she emerges triumphant from it. When she peers covertly into her uncle's private drawer to see his hidden ruby, she portrays her deed as a death: "I realized it as it was—a vile thing, and I had lost my life for it [. . . .] the world had closed in upon me; the sky had come down and was crushing me! The lid of my coffin was closed! I should no more come out!" (34). Deliverance and resurrection come in the form of Belorba's confession and her uncle's forgiveness, which the story, in typical MacDonaldian inversion, depicts as killing something into life again. As Uncle Edward explains to Belorba, "As soon as a secret is told, it is dead. It is a secret no longer" (39):

> "Please, uncle, will you kill me!" I cried, through a riot of sobs that came from me like potatoes from a sack.
>
> "Yes, yes, I will kill you, my darling!" he answered, "—this way! this way!" and stretching out his arms he found me in the dark, drew me to him, and covered my face with kisses.

> "Now," he resumed, "I've killed you alive again, and the ugly secret is dead, and will never come to life any more. And I think, besides, we have killed the hen that lays the egg-secrets!" (41).

Though Belorba may glimpse the horror of living death, throughout the book she stands resolutely as a figure of redemption and rebirth. While her name, as she informs the reader, means "*Fair Orphan*" (9)—a suitable image for her parentless status—*Belorba* also suggests that *fair orb*, the sun, age-old emblem of hope and resurrection that rises daily from night's coffin. Her marriage to John *Day*, the heir to *Rising*, further emphasizes her connection to solar rebirth.[91]

In contrast to Belorba and her associations with light, life, and regeneration, the rest of the household at Whichcote Manor stands as a bastion of mute secrecy and darkness. In particular, Belorba's solar characterization stands in opposition to Martha Moon, her spinster second cousin whose lunar name reflects her chaste lifestyle: while Belorba embraces growth and marriage, Martha Moon "declared herself dead against marriage" (8). The moon's conventional associations with darkness and secrecy are further reflected in Martha Moon's characteristic silence: "a woman of few words" (12), gifted with "the rare power of silence" (8), Martha "had a regard for woman's dignity as profound as silent" (8). She is fundamentally passive, "moveless" (12) as she stands, "with a droop of the eye-lids that seemed to say she saw what it was, but saw also how

---

[91] The astronomical connotations of *Belorba* evokes a name that recurs in MacDonald's work, the name *Cosmo,* which appears as the name of characters in *Phantastes*, *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, and *Castle Warlock*, and to which *Belorba* seems to function as a feminine equivalent. MacDonald's fondness for using (and reusing) such suggestive names seems to spring from his allegorizing tendencies, which are at work in various capacities in all three of the "Cosmo" books, plus *The Flight of the Shadow*, in which the allegory is even more overt than usual.

little she could do for it" (12). While there is much good in Martha's silence—she teaches Belorba "something of the genuine human heart" (12)—her silence and passivity preclude the possibility of revelation, redemption, and change. The inability to renew life is further reflected in her barrenness and chastity.

Uncle Edward, by comparison, is equally secretive, but more actively so—which is ironic given his injunctions against secrecy. His secrecy is reflected in his relationship with the elements: though "in gloomy weather he went out often" (15), he purposely avoids the sunshine. His deliberate concealment of his past, emblematized by the ruby stashed in his study drawer, is further reflected in his living space. The study he built for himself lies hidden beneath the roof in such as way that "[w]ere you to see first the inside of the house and then the outside, you would find yourself at a loss to conjecture where within it could be situated such a room" (16). Access to the room, moreover, lies *via* a secret staircase, concealed behind a trick cupboard (21-22). The location of his retreat *vis à vis* the rest of the house is also significant: hidden in a new wing that joins the main house to an ancient outbuilding (19), the study reflects Uncle Edward's role as a mysterious link between the present and the past. The uncertain origin of the ancient outbuilding further suggests the shadowiness of Uncle Edward's history; the fact that the building had been used at various points as a chapel and as a brewery (19) hints at the high and low forces at work in Edward's youth.

Uncle Edward's peculiar blindness to the past is further reflected in his intellectual pursuits. His retreat, filled wall-to-wall with bookshelves, is literally a "tunnel of books" (22) that connects the present to the past. For Uncle Edward, who is "given to curious inquiries" (16), and who is "constantly reading" (14), books grant

access to history, and are treated as living creatures, which he probes for historical minutiae: "book after book, as if it were a live thing, in whose memory must remain, darkly stored, thousands of facts, requiring only to be recollected: amongst them might nestle the thing he sought, and he would dig for it as in a mine that went branching through the hardened dust of ages" (16). Uncle Edward is a narcissistic reader who seeks insight about his own family in books, reading "any old book whatever of English history with the haunting sense that the next moment he might come upon the trace of certain of his own ancestors of whom he specially desired to enlarge his knowledge" (17). Yet paradoxically, he often misses the point: "He read Shakspere as with a microscope, propounding and answering the most curious little questions. It seemed to me, sometimes, I confess, that he missed a plain point from his eyes being so sharp that they looked through it without seeing it, having focused themselves beyond it" (17). She explains these lapses in intellect as being the result of some unknown events of his youth: "I imagine his early history had affected his faculties" (18). His denial and concealment of his personal history become reflected in a more general inability to see what is before him.

Beyond the issue of secrecy lies the problem of evil itself. On the surface, the story falls back into familiar dualisms, as it heaps nearly all of the evil onto the villain, Lady Cairnedge, while Edward and Edmund are helpless innocents in the thrall of an evil temptress. Uncle Edward recognizes the sinfulness of keeping his past a secret, and attempts to exonerate himself by writing down his story for Belorba to read (221-222, 288-323); yet he refuses to accept responsibility for his attempted fratricide. MacDonald's handling of the issue of origins is curious. When Lady Cairnedge accuses

Edward of murder, he claims that "'[t]hat woman was the cause of the action for which she threatens to denounce me as murderer. I do not say she intended to bring it about; but none the less was she the consciously wicked and willful cause of it'" (223). This is a questionable position to take, given that Lady Cairnedge, "the woman who had just killed" (316) Edmund, was comfortably asleep in bed all the while Edmund and Edward wrestled atop the waterfall, yet it is a position that no one in the story questions. Indeed, Edward and Edmund accept virtually no responsibility for their having succumbed to Lady Cairnedge's flattery in the first place. According to Edward's recounting of events, Lady Cairnedge, as agent of "the Prince of Power of the Air," worked her devilish wiles upon two loving and defenseless twins, until she achieved her "devil-victory of alienating two brothers" (295). No one suggests that Edmund and Edward might be culpable in allowing Lady Cairnedge to stir their youthful hearts toward her and against one another; it is unequivocally granted that they were helpless against her tactics, which Edward refuses to detail, other than to assure his reader that "Suffice to say, such a woman has well studied those regions of a man's nature into which, being less divine, the devil in her can easier find entrance" (296). While the book never overtly blames the brothers for their susceptibility to Lady Cairnedge, their seeming absence of free will in the matter implies an inadequacy that must be transcended.[92]

The story's removal of all but the most cursory blame from the Whichcote brothers is reminiscent of MacDonald's treatment of Shelley in the 1860 essay, in which

---

[92] It is not the only time in which a questionable morality creeps into MacDonald's novels. A more discussed example is in *Thomas Wingfold,* in which the hero, Wingfold the curate, protects the young murderer Leopold from being formally charged, by blackmailing the victim's mother into silence (see Wolff 297).

he blames Shelley's atheism on his educators for misleading him about Christianity. MacDonald seems to be making the same flattering argument for the Whichcotes that he made for Sir Percivale in *Phantastes*—that such shining goodness is simply too innocent to detect evil in another.[93] Certainly, MacDonald's handling of Edmund and Edward does, in this respect, evoke MacDonald's general dualizing tendencies. Nevertheless, the Whichcote brothers stand out among MacDonald's Shelley figures in that at least they are permitted a dark past, and are complex human characters possessing mixed traits and decidedly human inconsistencies: Edward, for instance, while he is a Christlike figure who battles "the worm that never dies" (213) and lectures Belorba on the danger of secrecy, is equally a fallen angel, who keeps the biggest secret to himself, and who openly compares himself to Satan (219). By contrast, neither Karl Wolkenlicht nor Donal Grant possesses such a guilty history; and while Sir Percival in *Phantastes* is fallen, he is a flat fairy tale character who lacks any degree of novelistic complexity.

The Whichcote brothers' ostensible innocence is undercut, however, by the subtext of the story, a disjunction that suggests some conflict in MacDonald himself. Edward and Edmund's flaw is hinted at in the story's suggestion that their romantic misadventures are the result of the brothers' failure to outgrow their narcissistic, albeit innocent, attachment to one another, and establish themselves as separate individuals. Paradoxically, their flaw *is* their innocence, or rather, their failure to progress beyond a youthful state of non-individuation. Their narcissistic quality recalls MacDonald's brazen demons of narcissism, the Alder maiden, Lady Cairnedge, and later, Lilith; it also evokes the narcissism at the centre of "Alastor" and cited in *Phantastes*'s epigraph.

---

[93] Cf. *Phantastes*' Sir Percivale: "Incapable of evil himself, he could scarcely suspect it in another" (305).

However, MacDonald handles the brothers' narcissism very differently, portraying it as an experience of idyllic, if vulnerable, unity. Edmund and Edward's existence is Narcissus's dream come true. In their youth, the brothers are essentially one and the same person. Undistinguished to the point that they even call one another by the wrong name (288), the twins are completely interchangeable: when getting into scrapes, "the one accused always accepted punishment without denial or subterfuge or attempt to perplex: it was all one which was the culprit, and which should be the sufferer" (289-90). To the twins, this state appears eminently desirable, as they present themselves as "but one man to the world" (281). Nothing else is, as each one's need for love is totally satisfied by his mirror counterpart: "[e]ach seemed to the other created such, expressly that he might love him as a special, individual property of his own. It was as if the image of Narcissus had risen bodily out of the watery mirror, to be what it had before but seemed. It was as if we had been made two, that each might love himself, and not be selfish" (289). Their idealized union recalls Shelley's essay "On Love," in which Shelley depicts love as being founded on self-love and the search for "likeness" (473). Such love, according to Shelley, leads to a blissful state in which two souls unite "like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice" (474). The Whichcotes brothers' relationship seems to illustrate Shelley's idea of love, and, in a subtle way, MacDonald's novel critiques it, as *The Flight of the Shadow* shows this state to be a vulnerable one. The brothers, believing that their state gives them "double the base and double the strength" (291), find their unindividuated state empowering. However, others disagree. Their father, for instance, sends them to university in Germany because "'he would not have us insular!'" (290), a comment that suggests the

boys' position as English island-dwellers, as well as their self-contained complacency. Their friends in Germany likewise view the twins' likeness as a "serious disadvantage" (291), hypothesizing that "a terrible catastrophe might almost be expected from [. . .] such an unnatural relation" (291).

Literally and figuratively, Lady Cairnedge is that catastrophe. Tall, proud, and confident, with her Amazonian bearing (117) and hall of mirrors (54), Lady Cairnedge is a monster of narcissism who functions as the Whichcotes' doppelgänger. She infiltrates their insular world by preying upon their innocent self-involvement, which she twists into godless self-deification, "the foul worship of one's own paltry being" (298). Her *modus operandi* resembles the Alder maiden's, as she uses flattery to bolster a man's vanity and self-absorption: "She gets into his self-consciousness beside himself, by means of his self-love. Through the ever open funnel of his self-greed, she pours in flattery" (296). Her diabolical presence makes one into two, prompting opposition and sharpening the divide between the self and the other: "By depreciation of others, she hints of admiration of himself" (296). Her diabolical power to divide operates more broadly as well. She not only separates Edmund and Edward, but breaks their circle of friends "into two segments, one that liked the English lady, and one that almost hated her" (295). Her concept of love, moreover, is founded on disconnection, on the principle that love's "birth and continuance depended on the parties *not* getting accustomed to each other; the less they knew each other, the more they would love each other" (295).

Her narcissism has its source in the satanic desire to dwell apart from God: "she lived to separate, where Jesus died to make one" (15). As with earlier villains, Lady Cairnedge removes God from the equation, as "the silly soul [who falls in love with her]

becomes so full of his tempter, and, of himself in and through her, that he loses interest in all else, cares for nobody but her, prizes nothing but her regard, broods upon nothing but her favours, looks forward to nothing but again her presence and further failures. God is nowhere" (297). She is a figure of demonic motherhood, "not a mother" (118) but "a north wind[. . .] a Roman emperor [. . . .] an iceberg [. . . .] a glass tiger" (118), "a hyena, a shark, a monster [. . . .] a *devil"* (224), and "the mother of lies" (217). Technically she reproduces by giving birth to John Day; however, in her later attempt to poison him (159), Lady Cairnedge stands as a Lilith-like child-killer who is a force of monstrous destruction rather than of regeneration.

While the twins' innocent narcissism also proves to be unregenerative, it is less viciously so. Rather, their supreme closeness and subsequent break places them in a static, regressive condition. Their entanglement with Lady Cairnedge threatens to end the family line, as Edward, immediately upon losing his brother over the waterfall, receives news of the deaths of his father and other brother (who was Belorba's father) (318). In returning to his English estate, Uncle Edward flees from Lady Cairnedge's destructive sexuality to the opposite extreme of womanhood, Martha Moon's chaste sterility. Martha is motherly, good, and totally unthreatening; however, she will not marry, though Belorba implies that it would have been an appropriate thing for her uncle to marry her (9). Whereas Lady Cairnedge would marry a man only to destroy him and their progeny, Martha avoids the difficulty by shunning marriage altogether: "'What with the babies, and the headaches, and the rest of it, that's what it comes to—the husbands are not

happy! [. . . .] A woman can do better for a man than marry him!'" (10).[94] Only Belorba remains as a potential savior of the family, who can carry on the family line.

Belorba redeems the Whichcotes not by any special heroics on her part, but simply by avoiding the pitfalls of narcissism, and by undergoing the process of differentiating herself from her uncle and establishing herself as a separate person, who can grow up to participate in the regenerative process of marriage. The story of her development traces the process of her learning, first, that she exists a separate, private entity from her uncle, and second, that her erotic love for another, far from destroying her parent-figure, will instead save him.

Belorba's childhood is characterized by her close bond with her uncle, with whom, when she is not exploring the moors, she spends as much of her time as possible, in an earnest "desire to be near him—in spirit, I mean" (25). This spiritual nearness is achieved by her spending countless hours in her uncle's study, which she describes as her bower of bliss (22), an "enchanted ground" (45) where she delves into his extensive library. Her uncle's study *is* her uncle, in the sense that the room contains, in its bookshelves and drawers, the contents of his psyche. Belorba identifies completely with him, yet she senses that he is tormented by an unshared secret, "harassed with an undying trouble, that some worm lay among the very roots of his life" (27). She encounters his secret only symbolically, within the walls of his library, in the episode of the secret gemstone, as well as in an illustration in one of his library books. Encapsulating Edward's troubles is a "most bewitching" (23) "little green volume" (23), which contains

---

[94] The relationship between Martha Moon and Lady Cairnedge parallels the relationship between *Lilith*'s female rival, Mara, who, in another black-and-white pairing, is chaste, maternal, and associated with the moon, in contrast to Lilith, who is literally a man-eater and baby-killer.

an engraving depicting "a castle in the distance, a wood, a ghastly man at the head of a rearing horse, and a white, mist-like, fleeting ghost, the cause of the consternation" (23-24). Although she remembers this picture "in particular" (23), she does not interpret its meaning, which remains opaque to her childish mind, much in the same way that she can sense, but cannot identify her uncle's suffering—"It was as if a God were in pain, and I could not help him" (28)—but does not know why, or how to begin to comfort him. The reader, however, can interpret the picture by the end of MacDonald's book, as the book illustration offers an allegorical tableau of the source of Edward's distress: his ghastly history come back to haunt him in the form of the ghost, himself (or, alternatively, his brother; or both) condemned to a life-in-death existence as a result, while the horse, Death, attempts to put an honest end to the undying past. Belorba's identification with her uncle is further suggested by her portrayal of them both as children, who "sat at the table side by side" (25) "having our lessons together, as he phrased it" (25), "finding out together what it all meant" (25). Her uncle dissembles, however, for while he feigns childishness, he is long past Belorba's innocence and ignorance, and is caught, rather, in a regressive state from which he seems unable to escape.

The necessity of differentiating Belorba from her uncle is brought to the forefront in her discovery of his secret ruby, an episode that is set up as a version of the Biblical Fall. Belorba observes her uncle hide a red gemstone in a drawer, and, when he is gone, she peeps into the drawer herself. Riddled with guilt over her covert prying, Belorba likens herself both to Eve—"I got to my feet, saw a blaze of shining things, banged-to the drawer, and knew that Eve had eaten the apple" (33)—and to Adam—"I had sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression!—only I was worse, for neither serpent nor wife

had tempted me!" (36). Her self-concept begins to change, a transition from innocence to experience that she represents using Genesis's imagery of the knowledge of good and evil: "The eyes of my consciousness were opened to the evil in me, through the evil done by me. Evil seemed now a part of myself, so that nevermore should I get rid of it." The story further depicts this development through the theme of secrecy, in Belorba's dawning awareness that her uncle's secret, and her awareness of its existence, means that she herself possesses a similarly private self:

> the moment I knew that he had a secret, his secret—the outward fact of its existence, I mean—was my secret. And besides this secret of his, I had then a secret of my own. For I knew that my uncle had a secret, and he did not know that I knew. Therewith came, of course, the question—Ought I to tell him? (28-29)

Belorba's discovery of her secret is a happy fall, as it begins her progress toward individuality and maturity. Confession of her secret brings the redemptive bliss of being "killed [. . .] alive" (41) and restored to original unity again. She recognizes that this episode is a fundamental pattern—"That peep into my uncle's drawer lies in my soul the type of sin" (33)—a typological pattern that has both anterior and posterior parallels. It repeats her uncle's secrecy, and anticipates a subsequent episode of secret-keeping, her teenage encounter with John Day.

The question of whether Belorba ought to share her secrets with her uncle becomes increasingly fraught as she grows older. Like her earlier episode with the ruby, the encounter in the garden is a necessary stage of development that is replete with images of the Edenic Fall. Belorba first meets John at the edge of Whichcote Manor's

garden, while wandering through her favorite section, where the boundary between wilderness and domesticity is deliberately and artfully blurred: "The protecting fence enclosed a good bit of heath just as it was, so that the wilderness melted away into the heath, and into the wide moor—the fence, though contrived so as to be difficult to cross, being so low that one had to look for it" (83). Belorba's fondness for wandering in this ambiguous zone suggests her readiness to leave Edenic safety. Her first sighting of John Day causes her to fall into a blissful trance, during which she envisions herself kissing him (84-85). As she regains self-possession, she becomes aware again of a "new consciousness" (86) and is terrified by this change, for "I had never been to myself what I was now" (86). Fearful of this new self-knowledge, she flees to "the darkest part of the garden" (86), like Adam and Eve, who, having eaten the forbidden fruit, "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3.8).

In contrast to her response in the earlier episode, Belorba does not run to her uncle to share her experience, and she cannot understand this withholding of herself. A new distinction divides her from her uncle, as she is troubled by the question of to whom she should be united:

> "What has come to me," I said, "that I seek the darkness? Is this another secret? Am I in the grasp of a new enemy?"[. . . .] Must I go the first moment I knew I could find him, and tell my uncle what had happened, and how I felt? or must I have, and hold, and cherish in silent heart, a thing so wondrous, so precious, so absorbing? Had I not deliberately promised—of my own will and at my own instance—never again to have a secret from him? Was this a secret? Was it not a secret? (86-87)

Belorba's secret, having created "an impenetrable something separating us" (88), that "troubled the unity that had hitherto seemed a thing essential and indivisible" (129), has a divisive function similar to that of Lady Cairnedge's presence in the uncles' lives. To the extent that her secret involves a romantic relationship, Belorba would seem to be repeating the pattern of her uncle's history.

Yet Belorba's secret is different. The issue of secrecy is more complex than it was in MacDonald's earlier work, in which secrecy was an unmitigated spiritual danger. While breaking away from her uncle seems a fall, it also contains the possibility of redemption. She justifies maintaining secrecy with the argument that she has no idea how to articulate her new feelings of love:

> How was I to represent a thing of which I knew neither the name nor the nature, a thing I could not describe? [. . . .] I saw plainly that, if I tried to convey my new experience, I should not get beyond the statement that I had a new experience. It did not occur to me that the thing might be so well known, that a mere hint of the feelings concerned would enable any older person to classify the consciousness. (87-88)

While her withholding news of the incident ruptures her perfect union with her uncle, it equally constitutes a healthy step toward mature independence. Her inarticulacy hints that on some level she *should* not be sharing this experience; it is hers alone. Indeed, from a developmental perspective, secrecy is appropriate, as the intense erotic experience is better kept private than shared with her older male guardian. In terms of human development, it is normal for her to shift her intense attachment from her parent-figure, to her future spouse. Nevertheless, Belorba remains anxious about John Day's replacing her

uncle as the object of her affection, and seems to fear that her new love will destroy her uncle. This anxiety is played out the next day when Uncle Edward breaks his arm, an event that Belorba reads as the penalty for her secrecy, telling herself that "The punishment of my sin was upon me" (107). In the romantic, symbolically charged world of *The Flight of the Shadow*, in which unspoken fears are externalized and given concrete form, Uncle Edward's injury does seem to be the result of Belorba's secrecy, and John Day does indeed replace him as Belorba's rescuer when she later falls down in the garden. Uncle Edward with his broken arm cannot pick up her, but John Day can. The text draws attention to John's position as a replacement for her uncle, in Belorba's dismayed exclamation that "I've nearly broken your arms" (113).

In spite of her fear of destroying her uncle, Belorba's love for John is a regenerative force, and the possibility of losing him, a fatal threat. John offers Belorba the opportunity that her uncle missed in his own youth, the chance to progress forward into independence and sexual maturity. Thwarting this development would reduce Belorba to the static, regressive status of her uncle. When Uncle Edward suggests that Belorba bring her involvement with John to a halt because of the discovery of his mother's identity, the blow is "like death" (206) to her, in which her "life seemed to go ebbing" (207). Without John, Belorba, like Martha Moon, would remain with her uncle. Unlike Martha, however, whose state is one of barren chastity, Belorba's proximity to her uncle is an increasing sexual threat. Belorba's subsequent dream suggests the danger of symbolic incest that could result were she to forego marriage and stay with her uncle. In her dream, Belorba and her uncle ride out on Thanatos to visit the bottomless pool on the moor, in the depths of which supposedly lies the undying worm her uncle had killed. To

their dismay, however, they discover that it was not killed. In horror Belorba watches the worm emerge. The appearance of the "red worm" (231) is suggestively phallic: "A long neck, surmounted by a head of indescribable horror, was slowly rising straight up out of the middle of the pool" (213). Uncle Edward, who can "feel the worm rising" (213), realizes that it is Belorba's weight on the horse that "keeps poor Death from making any progress" (213) in slaying the worm, and he has her dismount. It crawls toward Belorba, and throws itself on her in a terrible "human embrace, the embrace of some one unknown that loved me!" (214). The dream ends, and the next day, Uncle Edward, in an unexpected change of heart, declares that Belorba must indeed marry John Day, as soon as he (Uncle Edward) has turned over to Belorba the manuscript detailing his sordid history, and has fled the country. Belorba's dream marks a turning point in the story, at which it becomes obvious that Belorba and her uncle must part in order for her to make progress and avoid repeating his history. That Uncle Edward must vacate the house and leave the country suggests how Belorba must become fully independent of him before she can proceed into adult maturity.

Belorba's planned marriage to John Day paves the way for redemption, as it inspires Edward to confess his past, a revelation that brings Lady Cairnedge's reign to a close. After Edward's departure from home, Belorba, unwilling to lose her uncle, determines initially to follow him abroad; yet, no sooner does she saddle Zoe and set off to rejoin him, than she runs straight into that demoness of thwarted development, Lady Cairnedge. Uncle Edward's confession disempowers Lady Cairnedge, because she can no longer threaten him with blackmail (to her supreme dismay). She loses power, as her great horse, emblem of her strength, becomes enmired in a swamp and drowns, with

Lady Cairnedge standing upon its sinking back (such equine abuse is a sure sign of villainy in MacDonald's novels). Furthermore, she is figuratively silenced, as her son John plans to "throttle" and "muzzle" her (243), by carrying forth his plan to marry Belorba. She flees to the continent and dies soon after. Unity is reestablished, as the reunited brothers, "[e]ach [. . .] to the other a Lazarus given back from the grave" (283), are resurrected into a double existence, this time not in a solipsistic world of narcissistic love, but in a God-centered one, as "[l]ike twin planets[,] they revolved around each other, and in a common orbit around God their sun" (282). Their separation was a necessary precursor to the greater union that awaited them, as Belorba explains: "Creative Love commonly differentiates that it may unite; in the case of my uncles it seemed only to have divided that it might unite" (282). While this "bog of metaphysics" (282) is "hardly intelligible" (282) to Belorba, her explanation suggests the spiritual principle that unity requires separation: mortal life involves becoming distant and distinct from God, until death ushers in the possibility of an even greater reunion in heaven.

The unwinding of Edward and Edmund's fate also shows how a future generation may redeem a prior one. In their movement from unity, to division, to improved reunion, the uncles are following a pattern that has already been set by their niece Belorba. Initially, Belorba follows her uncle's model of innocent unity that is broken by separation. However, whereas the uncles' progress becomes thwarted in the middle stage of separation, Belorba is able to complete the cycle by achieving reunion (in her case, with John Day). Indeed, her marriage to John and completion of the union-separation-union cycle are what enables the uncles to progress out of their static, regressive state, and be reunited in the end. Thus, though chronologically Belorba is born after her

uncles, her completion of the cycle of separation and reunion precedes theirs, and establishes a new pattern that the former generation may follow. In other words, her setting of a new pattern gets the whole family back on track, not simply for the future, but also retroactively. This feat involves a break from a temporal, deterministic model of history, in which the past is seen as shaping the present and the future, but not the other way around. The great anxiety is that Belorba will simply repeat history, replaying her uncles' mistakes and becoming enmired in a similarly static, regressive state. The twins' doubleness suggested the danger of mere repetition, and aligned them with destructive forms of narcissism. Yet Belorba manages to turn the direction of influence around: instead of history influencing her unidirectionally, it is she who redirects history. She introduces a temporal model in which past and present have a reciprocal relationship.

MacDonald enacts a similar pattern in his relationship to Shelley. *The Flight of the Shadow* is a fantasy that analogizes how MacDonald attempts to transform his literary forefather. Belorba's redemption of her uncles suggests MacDonald's yearning to redeem Shelley. Like Belorba, MacDonald is shaped by, but also shapes, the past, as he absorbs Shelley's influence and repeats Shelley's life, while making changes to correct Shelley's errors and set things right. *The Flight of the Shadow* suggests that MacDonald's role as Shelley's Romantic heir is not a passive one, but an active struggle to alter and improve literary history.

This process of historical redemption necessitates establishing both identification with and dissimilarity from previous generations. Belorba's early recognition that her uncle is like Shelley, but also decidedly different from him (14), suggests how important it is for MacDonald to establish kinship with Shelley, while also distinguishing himself.

In this process of identification, the character of evil becomes more complex. Belorba's growing apprehension of the darkness of her uncle's history suggests MacDonald's increasing willingness to expose and investigate the reality of his hero's flawed past. Unlike MacDonald's earlier Shelley figures, who tended to be flat figureheads of righteousness, *The Flight of the Shadow* allows for richer, darker, and more nuanced characters. Belorba's narrative tacitly emphasizes the role of literature in achieving redemption, hinting at MacDonald's role as Shelley's mythographer. Belorba's tale both tells her own story, and provides a frame in which her uncle's history and character may be displayed. MacDonald's work fulfills a similar function, as it shapes and reshapes the contours of Shelley's work and life, so that Shelley may be better understood, not simply on his own, but ever in relationship to MacDonald, his descendant, mythographer, and redeemer.

5.2. Shelley Redeemed

Where Shelley goes after *The Flight of the Shadow* is a matter open to conjecture. I would argue that he makes his way into MacDonald's enigmatic fantasy *Lilith: a Romance*, to which *The Flight of the Shadow* provides numerous parallels. Specifically, Shelley is absorbed into the character of Mr. Raven, the former husband of the vampire princess Lilith. As sexton of the underworld cemetery, in charge of guiding souls to their final rest, Raven is the incarnation of the redeemed Shelley.

Although no scholar has yet compared *The Flight of the Shadow* to *Lilith*, *Lilith* has received much attention in its own right. A "pioneering book" and "daring masterpiece" (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 384) that was "intended to be MacDonald's

equivalent of *The Divine Comedy*" (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 367), *Lilith*, with its complex and often troubling imagery, has puzzled and inspired readers since its publication in 1895.[95] It has been the focus of some of the best MacDonald scholarship,[96] and is one of the few of MacDonald's adult books (the other main contender would be *Phantastes*) that has found its way into broader literary discussions.[97] In particular, *Lilith* has prompted comparisons to the work of Blake,[98] and also Dante.[99] Conventionally

---

[95] McGillis reminds us that "*Lilith* was not one of MacDonald's most successful books," as it troubled MacDonald's family, friends, and early reviewers. It was no financial success, either: "*Heather and Snow*, published in April 1893, is not one of MacDonald's better novels, yet Chatto and Windus printed 7,500 copies of it and prepared a Colonial Edition. By December of 1895, two months after its publication, Chatto and Windus had printed only 3,000 copies of *Lilith*" ("The Sweet Bells Jangled" 98). For a summary of Lilith's initial critical reception, see also Raeper, *George MacDonald* 383-84.

[96] Key studies include Manlove's *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* 70-92; Prickett's *Victorian Fantasy* 87-88, 176, 180-2, 189-93; Wolff's *The Golden Key* 326--371, Reis' *George MacDonald* 86-87, 94-110, 117-23; Rolland Hein's *The Harmony Within* 85-111; and Cusick's "George MacDonald and Jung" For a fuller discussion of Lilith criticsm, see McGillis's "The Sweet Bells Jangled: The Reception of George MacDonald's *Lilith*" 95-107.

[97] See, for instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* 35 (a passage from *Lilith* also provides the prefatory epigraph), and Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* 149.

[98] Lilith's obscure imagery and personal mythology bear a strong resemblance to Blake's work. Greville MacDonald, in *George MacDonald and His Wife* 552-555, and Raeper, *George MacDonald* 368-369 both discuss briefly the influence of Blake; however, a detailed comparative study of Blake and MacDonald remains to be made. G. K. Chesterton compares MacDonald to Blake more broadly, suggesting that "Dr. George MacDonald will be discovered some day, as Blake, another man of genius, artistically faulty, has been discovered: until then he will be, like Blake, worried industriously by people who wish to borrow ideas" ("George MacDonald and His Work" 369).

[99] As Raeper explains, "Lilith was intended to be MacDonald's equivalent of *The Divine Comedy*" (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 367), and "owes much to his [Dante's] visions" (369). A comprehensive study of the influence of Dante on *Lilith* has not yet been undertaken, though numerous scholars note similarities in passing; see Hein 1982 92, 99, 129n; McGillis, "Phantastes and Lilith" 50; Wolff 341-42. MacDonald was much

depicted as the *magnum opus* toward which MacDonald's previous books are building, *Lilith* emerges at the apex of MacDonald's visionary power and the fulcrum of his imaginative genius, as his vision rises to apocalyptic intensity, while simultaneously teetering into obscurity, night, and madness.[100]

Much critical attention has been devoted to showing how *Lilith* summarizes and recapitulates the themes of MacDonald's earlier work. Manlove in particular makes the compelling argument that "*Phantastes* and *Lilith* together make up a single fantasy" (Manlove, "Circularity in Fantasy" 75), as *Lilith* transposes the brighter themes of *Phantastes* into a minor key, answering *Phantastes*'s preoccupation with waking, life, and light, with a focus on sleep, death, darkness, and finally, apocalypse. [101] Such a pairing was implicitly recognized two decades earlier by Noonday Press's 1954 reprinting of both texts under the title *The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald.* Attempts have also been made to outline the genesis of the Lilith figure within MacDonald's *oeuvre*, as well as in a broader nineteenth-century context. Raeper, for

---

preoccupied in general with Dante, who is widely agreed to be the inspiration for the character Durante in *At the Back of the North Wind*; see Wolff, *Golden Key* 151.

[100] MacDonald's sense of his failing mental powers comes through most strongly in his letters of the early 1890s, when he was working on *Lilith.* His letters complain of his "brain being tired" and of struggling with a "troublesome" memory (MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald, 13 Oct 1891) that is "constantly acting like a naughty dog that would not keep to heel but was always ready to run away" (MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald 27 Oct. 1891). With the "frosty invasion of old age" upon him (MacDonald to A. P. Watt, 11 June 1893, in Sadler 355), his grip on the world was beginning to loosen. He describes himself as being "so muddled that I hardly know for the moment whether I am in England or Scotland" (MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald 9 Oct. 1891), and declares his readiness for death: "I think we feel—Louisa & I at least—as if we were getting ready to go" (MacDonald to Helen MacKay Powell, 16 April 1892).

[101] See also Manlove, Scottish Fantasy Literature 90-102, "The Circle of the Imagination" 55-80.

instance, traces the genealogy of the Lilith figure through her earlier incarnations in such works as "The Cruel Painter" and *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (*George MacDonald* 366-67), and Wolff shows how the "cruel, child-hating, child-killing mothers" of prior novels "are all preparatory sketches" for the blood-sucking child murderess Lilith (*Golden Key* 316, see also 315, 161). McGillis positions MacDonald's Liliths more broadly, gesturing to Lilith's ancient origin as an Eastern goddess and Jewish demonness, and arguing that MacDonald preserves "the potency of the myth" in a century that tended to diminish Lilith's power (McGillis, "George MacDonald and the Lilith Legend" 3). More recently, John Pennington discusses questions of feminism and individuality in *Lilith.*[102]

The circumstances surrounding MacDonald's writing of the manuscript have become legendary. His production of *Lilith A*—as the original manuscript was later numbered by the British Library—diverged significantly from the care and emendations that characterized his usual writing process.[103] Approximately 50,000 words long, with no paragraph breaks, "little punctuation," and "scarcely a word altered" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 548), the first draft was written in an inspired state (and supposedly in a single sitting),[104] during which he "was possessed by a feeling [. . .] that

---

[102] See Pennington, "Of Frustrate Desire" 26-37.

[103] *Lilith* underwent eight manuscript versions, labeled A-H, now in the possession of the British Museum. See Raeper, *George MacDonald* 420-422 for a summary of Lilith A; McGillis offers a more detailed discussion of the progression from A-H, to the final published version, in "The Lilith Manuscripts," 40-57. Several of these earlier versions have since been made available to a wider readership: in 1994 Johannesen Press published a duplex edition of *Lilith* and *Lilith A*, which was followed in 1997 by a variorum edition of MSS B, C, D, and E, edited by Rolland Hein with a forward by Elizabeth McDonald Weinrich.

[104] See Weinrich's Foreword to *Lilith:A Variorum Edition*, vi.

it was a mandate direct from God, for which he himself was to find form and clothing" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 548). Greville at the time went so far as to call the manuscript "the Revelation of St. George" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 548), a moniker that testifies to the visionary significance of the work, and recalls other depictions of MacDonald as a literary St. George, such as we saw earlier in Arthur Hughes' illustration of MacDonald and the dragon (see Fig. 2 in Chapter 4).

While *Lilith* was published four years after *The Flight of the Shadow*, the two books seem to have been written during the same period, possibly even at the same time, as MacDonald spent over five years working on the manuscript of *Lilith*, producing the first draft on 28 March 1890, several months before the publication of *The Flight of the Shadow* in 1891. In contrast to *Lilith*, *The Flight of the Shadow* was not, as far as is known, inspired by divine mandate. Yet it is similar to *Lilith* in so many ways as to suggest that it is as close and important a predecessor to *Lilith* as is *Phantastes*, the "faerie romance" with which *Lilith* is so often paired.[105] While at first the story of *Lilith* may seem to have little to do with *The Flight of the Shadow*, they nevertheless share significant characteristics, even more than usually connect MacDonald's books. Both works—one hesitates to call them *novels*, at least in the conventional Victorian sense—mark a return to MacDonald's storytelling origins, as he abandons his usual habit of preaching. As Greville describes it, *The Flight of the Shadow* is "a surprising and fantastic tale" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 546) in which MacDonald "dismisses

---

[105] *The Flight of the Shadow* also echoes some of *Phantastes*' themes. In particular, Edward and Edmund's rupture recalls Anodos' dream of brotherly quarrel in *Phantastes*. In the vision, Anodos and his "favorite brother" (238) dispute and go to bed angry. The next morning, the brother dies while bathing in the river, their quarrel unresolved. *The Flight of the Shadow* might be seen as the happy alternative ending to Anodos's sad history.

his didactic and returns to the simple narrative style of *The Portent*" (546).[106] *Lilith* diverges from MacDonald's earlier work in a similar fashion, exchanging preaching for mythmaking, as Greville also recognizes: "Whereas a common complaint against most of my father's novels is that he over-loads his profound thought with ratiocination hardly needed by intelligent readers" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 548), *Lilith*, with its fantastic story and multivalent symbolism, "needs reading and re-reading before the heart of its magic is reached" (*George MacDonald and His Wife* 548). While *The Flight of the Shadow* is technically not fantasy, managing just barely to keep its foot in the realm of the explicable, its weird doppelgänger tale is closer to fairy tale than to realist fiction, demonstrating, along with *Lilith*, the tendency of "romance [. . .] to take over reality" (Raeper, *George MacDonald* 209) in MacDonald's later work. Indeed, *The Academy* reviewer found *The Flight of the Shadow* to exceed even romance's usual extravagances, complaining that the book's contrived ending is "a little too far-fetched and incredible even for the pages of romance" (226).

I want to position *The Flight of the Shadow* as a significant precursor to *Lilith*. Specifically, *The Flight of the Shadow* is a key link in MacDonald's genealogy of Shelley, one that connects his earlier incarnations of Shelley as an idealized heroic figure to his later, darker, more mature versions of Shelley as a fallen and redeemed old man. Whereas *The Flight of the Shadow* narrates the process of redeeming Shelley from his fallen past, *Lilith* envisions the post-redemption Shelley. My discussion of *Lilith* focuses on Mr. Raven, a figure who has been less often discussed, and who is remarkably like

---

[106] Although Greville does not discuss it, *The Portent* and *The Flight of the Shadow* also possess similar storylines, as each tale hinges on the consequences of a brotherly quarrel.

The Flight of the Shadow's Shelleyesque Whichcote brothers. I argue that *Lilith*'s mysterious librarian-bird Raven is the final apotheosis of Shelley.

Raven is a resolutely shadowy figure: sometimes appearing as a man, sometimes as bird, Raven is identified as Adam, the husband of Eve, and before that, the husband of Lilith. At the same time, Mr. Raven is the former librarian who haunts the family home of Mr. Vane, the book's protagonist. He has mysterious connections to Vane's late father, as well as to his grandfathers and great-grandfathers before him. Reported to have encouraged Vane's ancestor Sir Upward to read "strange, forbidden, and evil books" (13), Raven is widely believed to be "probably the devil himself" (13).[107] It is Raven who shows Mr. Vane the way through the looking-glass to the cemeterial underworld. Here, Raven is sexton over a different kind of library, a chamber of the dead that houses souls awaiting final resurrection. Raven functions as Vane's Virgilian guide to the realm of the dead, as he invites Vane to rest in his sepulchral chamber, and warns of the danger of failing to do so. Vane does not follow Raven's advice, and instead proceeds to make his own way through the underworld. Along the way he discovers the body of Raven's former wife Lilith lying nearly dead, and he revives her. Vane's involvement with the charismatic but cruel Lilith, who is a vampire princess, prompts a series of convoluted misadventures that include strange visions and nightmarish encounters with monsters, giants, corpses, serpents, skeletons, beasts, and of course, Lilith herself, who repeatedly sucks Vane's blood. Vane's great ambition is to save the Little Ones, a race of children

---

[107] While not discussed here, MacDonald surely owes a debt to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," another imaginative work that features a literary bird of ambiguous origin. Poe's influence on MacDonald has been little studied, although Manlove argues that Poe's 1840 *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* and his 1845 *Tales*—which are mentioned in MacDonald's novel *David Elginbrod*—may be a source for *Phantastes*. See Manlove, "Some Possible Source for *Phantastes*" 6.

led by Lilith's daughter Lona, who are hated and feared by the child-murdering princess. Vane organizes the Little Ones to storm Lilith's palace and defeat her reign. Eventually, Lilith is brought back to Raven's chamber and laid to rest. However, true sleep eludes Lilith because she will not submit to opening her hand, which she keeps resolutely clenched. At her request, Raven cuts off the offending limb, and Lilith at last sleeps. Vane buries her hand in the ground, from which a spring emerges to replenish the parched wasteland. Vane also lies down to sleep, together with the Little Ones. In the book's apocalyptic finale, Raven is referred to solely as "Adam" and "Father." When resurrection morning comes, Vane and the Little Ones awake, though Lilith, not yet fully redeemed, remains sleeping. Adam and Eve send them off joyfully to a city in the clouds, where they are greeted by companies of angels, deceased loved ones, and Christ himself. Full of hope, Vane ascends the mountain stair leading to the heavenly throne. However, just as he reaches the point of disappearing into the mist, a mysterious hand, "warm and strong" (395) lays hold of him, and draws him through "a little door with a golden lock" (395), which clicks behind him with the sound of "the board of a large book in the act of closing behind me" (395). He finds himself back in the library of his earthly home, where he ponders his dreams and awaits return to the transcendent realm.

Lilith's grand vision of death, resurrection and apocalypse clearly sets it apart from *The Flight of the Shadow* and from MacDonald's more prosaic novels. Nevertheless, they share numerous similarities, which converge in the figure of Raven. A librarian with a shadowy past, the tall, lean, shabby, melancholy Raven is a double of *The Flight of the Shadow*'s Uncle Edward. Physically, the two characters are nearly identical: Edward is noted for "how tall and thin he was. [. . . .] He had a rather a small head on the

top of his long body; and when he stood straight, which was not very often, it seemed so far away" (*Flight of the Shadow* 13). Raven is described similarly, as "above the middle height with a stoop, very thin, and wearing a long black tail-coat" (*Lilith* 22), "a slender old man, in a long, dark coat, shiny as from much wear" (*Lilith* 11), "a slight, stooping man" (*Lilith* 15), who was a "bookworm" (*Lilith* 36) in his youth. Both have a distinctive ornithic appearance. Raven literally becomes a bird, and in his human form resembles one, in his "shabby dress-coat reaching almost to his heel, the tails of which, disparting a little as he walked, revealed thin legs in black stockings, and wide, slipper-like shoes" (*Lilith* 15). Edward is also uncannily birdlike, as he moves "like a bird" (*Flight of the Shadow* 14), has gray hair "like ruffled feathers" (28), and looks down on Belorba "like a bird of prey" (28) yet with eyes that are "a dove's eyes" (28). Both men prefer going out on wet grey days, though for Raven this is for the practical purpose of better finding worms.

A pronounced ghastliness surrounds Raven and both Whichcote brothers. While MacDonald was obsessed with death from the start, in these later books he becomes increasingly preoccupied with the literal trappings of the grave, which are reflected his sepulchral portrayals of Edward, Edmund, and Raven. With Raven this is taken the furthest, as he is already past death, transformed into the underworld sexton of the cemetery "chamber of the dead" (*Lilith* 51). His face is skeletal, "so thin that it showed the shape of the bones under it, suggesting the skulls his last-claimed profession must have made him familiar with" (*Lilith* 46). Raven's ghostly character is anticipated in the Whichcotes: while Edward is merely slender, his twin Edmund, rather like Raven, is "worn but for his skin to skeleton" (*Flight of the Shadow* 155), and he is described as the

"shadow" (281) to Edward's "substance" (281). The three horses belonging to the three men further reflect their deathly quality, and might as well be interchangeable beasts. Raven's nineteen-hand horse is an equine vision of galloping death: he "looked a very skeleton, loosely roped together" (*Lilith* 245), and is "huge of bone, tight of skin, hard of muscle—a steed the holy Death himself might choose on which to ride abroad and slay!" (*Lilith* 245). Similarly, Edmund's "gigantic gray horse" (*Flight of the Shadow* 69) is all but "turned to a skeleton" (156). Edward's horse is better fed, yet he, too, is "large, big-boned, and powerful, with less beauty but more grandeur than a thoroughbred" (61), and is named, appropriately *Thanatos*, or Death.

Raven and Edward's resemblance suggests that both men could be read as visions of Shelley in imagined old age. Certainly, their lean, stooped appearance and bibliophilic habits correspond to contemporary descriptions of Shelley, whom his friend Trelawny described as a "bookworm from childhood" (Trelawny 149) who was "tall—5 feet 11 inches—slim, and bent from eternally poring over books" (149). MacDonald's 1860 encyclopedia entry describes Shelley similarly, as "tall, slender and stooping" ("Shelley" 103), with a "delicate" complexion, and in "head, face and feature, remarkably small; the last not very regular, but in expression, both intellectual and moral, wonderfully beautiful" ("Shelley 103). Trelawny also notes Shelley's "remarkably small head" (149) and "long wild locks of hair" (Trelawny 150), traits that are echoed in Uncle Edward's feathery hair and diminutive features, which are "in fine proportion, though perhaps too delicate. Perhaps they were a little too small to be properly beautiful" (*Flight of the Shadow* 14). Raven, whose "*hair hung down long and dark, straight and glossy*" (*Lilith* 64), has a similar look. Even Raven and Edward's agedness is suggestive: while

Shelley never saw old age, drowning shortly before his thirtieth birthday, MacDonald describes him as "singularly combining the appearances of premature age and prolonged youth" ("Shelley" 103). The birdlike mannerisms of Edward and Raven hint, moreover, at the "energetic and rapid" movements (Trelawny 151) of the notoriously restless, hypersensitive Shelley. In all this, it is only Edward, of course, who is explicitly compared to Shelley, when Belorba cries out "'My uncle!'" (*Flight of the Shadow* 14) upon seeing Shelley's portrait. Yet Raven is so close to Edward, appearing at the same time in MacDonald's writing, and sharing Edward's distinctively Shelleyan traits, that it seems reasonable to read him as a Shelley figure as well.

Raven and Edward indicate a shift from MacDonald's earlier idealized Shelley figures. Donal Grant talked of necromancy, but was in blooming good health. Karl Wolkenlicht was a vision of Grecian beauty who put on vampire costume, but only in jest. Sir Percivale was fallen, but nevertheless heroic, and certainly, he was very much alive. The Whichcote brothers, by contrast, seem to have one foot in the grave already, and, in the case of Raven, both feet are already well past it. The latter three's connection to death reflects the fact that they are older, experienced characters, more complex than their glowing predecessors. Their darkness gives them mystery and depth, as MacDonald investigates the essence of their sins.

MacDonald's readiness to grapple with sin is suggested by that fact that both Uncle Edward and Mr. Raven are explicitly Adamic figures, albeit at different stages of spiritual development. As discussed earlier, Uncle Edward is Adam, "the best and most beautiful of men—the first man in all the world" (*Flight of the Shadow* 13); this characterization is echoed in *Lilith*, in which "Raven was indeed Adam, the old and the

new man" (234). However, whereas *The Flight of the Shadow* narrates the whole course of Edward's Adamic fall, pain of sin, and joy of redemption, *Lilith* portrays only the post-redemption Adam, "the old *and the new* man" (234, emphasis added). Edward and Raven's falls are nevertheless very similar. Edward's stems from his unhappy entanglement with the diabolical child-poisoner Lady Cairnedge; Raven has a similarly dark history involving the child-murdering, man-eating demoness Lilith. Each man's fallen past is depicted, moreover, using vermicular imagery that mingles evocations of the Edenic serpent, bookworms, and larval metamorphosis. Edward's youthful misadventures leave him "harassed with an undying trouble, that some worm lay among the very roots of his life" (*Flight of the Shadow* 27; cf. 212-213). Raven, like the bibliophilic Edward, used to be a self-described "bookworm" (*Lilith* 36). At the time of the book's action, Raven has already passed this larval stage: "'I was a bookworm then, but when I came to know it, I woke among the butterflies'" (36). While his past has not disappeared—Lilith has not repented, and traces of sorrow remain writ in his eyes, which "had a haze about them as if they had done much weeping" (46)—his identity has undergone a transformation. No longer "a reading man at present" (31), the new Raven is a librarian of souls, who, in his role as sexton, assists others on the path to rest and resurrection. His transformation from fallen man to redeemer is further reflected in the literal metamorphoses he initiates: no longer a worm himself, he now rescues worms from the earth and flings them into the sky, where they turn into butterflies (30-32). The depiction of fallenness as a wormlike state is further reflected in Lilith, from whose body serpents emanate (79), and who becomes a six-foot "great white leech" (166) in order to suck Vane's blood.

5.3. The Limitations of Literature

The growing darkness of MacDonald's Shelley figures is accompanied by an increasing ambivalence about literature itself. In both *Lilith* and *The Flight of the Shadow*, characters' fallen condition is associated with literature, a connection that indicates a development from MacDonald's earlier work. Prior novels had emphasized the danger of becoming preoccupied with books as material objects, since this could inflame avarice and materialism. In *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, for instance, the protagonist Walton is "foolishly fond of the bodies of books as distinguished from their souls" (241), collecting and even hoarding them like a miser (215), which renders them little better than "modern apples of Sodom" (215). Even the virtuous Donal Grant "has a strong inclination to accumulate and hoard" (*Donal Grant* 7) books, and regards them "among the *impedimenta* of life" (7), preferring, for his soul's sake, "the use of a library" (7) to "the means of buying them" (7). *Lilith* and *The Flight of the Shadow* develop further the idea that loving literature might be dangerous to one's spiritual health. Yet the risk is no longer materialistic greed: Edward lives amid his beloved book hoard, but does not appear to be a miser, and Raven was also surrounded by books, but could not be miserly about them since they were not his own. Rather, what is called into question is literature's power to reveal truth at all—books fail to advance spiritual development. In *The Flight of the Shadow*, books are ambivalent objects, as Edward's bibliophilia appears to be a laudable pursuit, yet is subtly revealed to have a darker side. Belorba admires her uncle for the devotion and respect he shows to his books, which he cherishes as practically human, searching "book after book, as it if were a live thing, in whose

memory must remain, darkly stored, thousands of facts, requiring only to be recollected" (16).[108] For Belorba herself, his study library is a paradise, "the bower of my bliss" (22). Yet like Spenser's bower, there is danger in Edward's library. While the library is a storehouse of knowledge where the buried past may be revived, it is equally the "hiding-place" (21) where Edward's guilty history, symbolized in the red gemstone stashed in a drawer, remains deliberately concealed. Edward's love of reading is similarly equivocal. His avid reading demonstrates an admirable desire to "to solve now one now another historical point" (16), and he is a committed researcher. Yet his constant hiding in his library also allows him to avoid confronting his personal history and the world at large. The implication is that the library must be transcended in order for redemption to occur. In illustration of this point, Edward must leave his library, home and England itself before he is reunited with his lost brother. Redemption comes not through *reading*, but through *writing* the confessional manuscript that details his past.

Transcending the library is even more of a focal point in *Lilith*. On a literal level, the book is all about getting out of the library, which is a quietly threatening place, having, "like an encroaching state, absorbed one room after another until it occupied the greater part of the ground floor" (*Lilith* 8). Literally, the library must be left behind, as the magic mirror that leads to the other world is located several stories higher, in the attic,

---

[108] Edward's treating his books as living beings can be compared to Donal Grant's understanding of books as the living souls of their dead authors. A similar perspective appears in MacDonald's 1891 *There and Back,* in which Richard argues that a book's paper is its body, its print the soul, and its meaning the spirit (*There and Back* 55); and also in the 1872 novel *Wilfrid Cumbermede*, in which Wilfrid explains that "'Books are very much like people, [. . .] There are not so many you want to know all about; but most could tell you thing you don't know. I want certain books in order to question them about certain things'" (*Wilfrid Cumbermede* 273).

nearer to heaven, while the books remain on the ground floor, suggesting earthly, mortal life. [109]

The admonition against becoming overly immersed in literature is made repeatedly and explicitly. Mr. Vane, whose name evokes his essential vanity, uses books as a vain substitute for human presence: "Hitherto I had loved my Arab mare and my books more, I fear, than live man or woman" (*Lilith* 87); "I [. . .] regarded with wonder my past self, which preferred the company of book or pen to that of man or woman" (132). Raven questions outright whether books can actually transform a person: though he "'went through all in your [Vane's] library'" (36), he "'came out at the other side not much the wiser'" (36). Like the library that is connected to the earth by its location on the ground floor, books are associated with the larval condition of earthworms. Much like Raven, whose redemption is signified by his conversion from bookworm librarian to bird-sexton, books are themselves transformed, as they metamorphose into the curious bird-butterflies that flutter about the novel. Their capacity to transform is suggested by the regressive transformation of one particular bird-butterfly. No longer a lowly worm, it flies in the air, a vision of transcendence; but when Vane seizes it, it turns into a dead book: "the instant I took it, its light went out, all was dark as pitch; a dead book with boards outspread lay cold and heavy in my hand" (*Lilith* 75). To get beyond the larval stage and be with the butterflies necessitates giving up books. In this way also, *Lilith* is the opposite of *Phantastes*: whereas *Phantastes* is about the pleasure of immersing

---

[109] Allegorical houses in which literal elevation indicates spiritual elevation appear frequently in MacDonald's fiction. Attic-dwellers are especially common, from *Alec Forbes*'s Cosmo Cupples and Annie Anderson, to Miss Clare in *The Vicar's Daughter*, as well as Wilfrid Cumbermede, Robert Falconer, and of course Donal Grant in his tower room.

oneself in literature, and recounts Anodos's joyful discovery of his literary vocation, *Lilith* is about abandoning the literary world to move beyond words—an idea that makes sense given MacDonald's belief in the supraverbal nature of heaven (as discussed in the previous chapter). What is most striking about *Lilith* is that books are repeatedly devalued, and are shown to be vain endeavours—they endow Raven with no wisdom, and merely distract Vane from the people in his life.

Lilith highlights the limitations of earthly books, suggesting that they fail to provide true spiritual sustenance, or offer it only in tantalizing portions. Vane draws particular attention to the sham books that are affixed to the back of a cupboard door, desgined to make the door appear as a regular bookshelf. Vane has "a great liking for the masked door" (10), which he considers a "harmless trick" (10). Yet his depiction of the faux volumes as a "flat of soulless, bodiless, non-existent books" (26) emphasizes their essential emptiness. Vane is particularly frustrated with one particular "mutilated volume" (11, 12, 26), cut to stick out from the door on an angle to "complete the illusion" (10) of reality. By bending the "reluctant jaws" (26) of its covers he can make out parts of verse, but never the whole page. His inability to see the whole book, together with the book's deformity and illusory nature, suggests a more general disappointment with literature, which is finally unable to provide the kind of revelation MacDonald desires. Significantly, Raven, who is already past death, *is* able to dislodge the book from the faux bookshelf. When Raven removes it, the book is whole, "entire and sound!" (226), to Vane's immense surprise. As Raven explains, the missing portion of the volume was "'Sticking through into my library'" (226). The episode implies that mortal books can

only offer partial vision at best, and that the full truth will be uncovered only in the afterlife.

On a biographical level, the "mutilated volume" suggests an edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* that MacDonald owned, which was in real life damaged. In an 1894 letter to his cousin Helen, he writes of his "mutilated copy of an old volume of the Lyr. Bal." that contains his annotations to Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (George MacDonald to Helen Powell, 4 Mar. 1894). He apologizes to Helen for sending her his damaged copy, and assures her that "when you come to see me I shall show you a perfect copy. I am afraid I can't promise to take it to heaven with me for you to see. But if we have not books there,—and I don't know—we shall at least have those who wrote them!" (George MacDonald to Helen Powell, 4 Mar. 1894). MacDonald's hope for reunion with the writers of books is particularly suggestive, given his repeated attempts to assure himself and the world that Shelley was indeed a good Christian who (presumably) would go to heaven. Whether MacDonald's mutilated volume of the *Lyrical Ballads* was the model for the mutilated book of *Lilith* remains a question. Nevertheless, Vane's bafflement at the damaged book suggests MacDonald's growing misgivings about literature in general, and perhaps Romanticism in particular, which finally cannot offer full revelation. Vane's delight that the book exists in whole form in Raven's house of the dead suggests MacDonald's eagerness to escape mortal life and get into heaven where revelation is not constrained by the limits of the fallen world.

Lilith's questioning of literature's power is comparable to John Smith's dream at the conclusion of *Adela Cathcart*, which I discussed in Chapter 3. Set in a pine wood cemetery that anticipates *Lilith*'s funereal wood, Smith's dream envisioned the artist's

frustration at the inefficacy of his art to redeem and perfect. He grieved that his glorious sculptures could not transform the people they represented. Art can anticipate and envision, but only Christ can actually redeem and transform. Similarly, Vane's sudden, involuntary return to the library, just as he is on the brink of attaining paradise, suggests that books offer only the shadowy image that anticipates the future; they are not themselves that fulfillment.

5.4. Reuniting with the Father

Like *The Flight of the Shadow*, *Lilith* is concerned with issues of identity and parental history. Raven emphasizes the importance of knowing one's ancestral past, reminding Vane that "'No creature should be allowed to forget what and where it came from!'" (31), and wondering himself where "'the worms come from'" (31) that he is so eager to raise to butterfly status. In his preoccupation with uncovering the history of his mysterious father, Vane resembles *Phantastes*'s Anodos, whose adventures also began with a search for paternal documents. At the same time, Vane's search for his shadowy father is reminiscent of Edward Whichcote's search for his shadowy twin: in *Lilith A*, Vane's father, like Edward's brother, "had become to me as a shadow, and an old shadow, of whom even the name was ~~nearly forgotten~~ seldom heard in the house" (*Lilith A* 408). While Vane and his father are not twins like *The Flight of the Shadow's* Edward and Edmund, his identity often seems to merge with his father's. As Raven's questioning of Vane suggests, their identities are neither stable nor separate: "'do you know that you are yourself? Are you sure you are not your own father?—or, excuse, me, your own fool?—Who are you, pray?'" (21). Vane and his father become further conflated, as

Vane's encounter with Mr. Raven and voyage through the mirror is a repetition of his father's nearly identical earlier encounter with the mysterious librarian, as recounted in the father's manuscript, which Vane discovers in Chapter 8. The murkiness only increases when the original *Lilith A* manuscript is taken into consideration. In the earliest draft, there is no separate paternal manuscript. Rather, the opening section of the story, in which Fane (as he was originally called) meets Raven, becomes, in later drafts, the father's manuscript.

All this blurring and repetition of father-son identity is further complicated by Raven's mysterious involvement with the Vane family patriarchs. Raven's acquaintance with the family stretches back several generations to Vane's ancestor Sir Upward, otherwise known as "Old Sir Ralph" (13) (a name that mirrors Anodos's old Uncle Ralph of *Phantastes*). Raven encouraged Upward in his suspicious scientific pursuits, and Sir Upward in turn taught Raven "a certain relation of modes" (61) between worlds—which Raven proceeded to teach to Sir Upward's descendants. The entanglement of Vane's family and the apparently immortal Raven is reflected in the similarity of their names: as many readers have noted, *Vane* and *Raven* are only one letter apart from being anagrams. In the final portion of the book, spiritual, if not literal, fatherhood is granted to Raven/Adam, as Vane stops calling him by his name, and instead calls him "Father" (368). Raven, in turn, calls Vane "my son" (369).

Raven's near-parental status suggests the quasi-paternal relationship of Shelley and MacDonald. Raven may not be Vane's actual blood relative, but he is inseparable from Vane's ancestry nonetheless. He first appears to Vane when Vane studies a "likeness". (9) of Sir Upward, which hangs in a "niche or little shrine" (9) in the library:

"for the first time I seemed to see it, and for the first time it seemed to respond to my look" (9). The "light reflected from" (9) the portrait causes Vane to look to the far end of the room, where he glimpses the "tall figure" (9) of Raven removing a volume from a bookcase. The episode of the portrait, which occurs in the opening chapter of the book, also recalls Belorba's account of seeing Shelley's portrait, early in *The Flight of the Shadow*. In both stories, family ancestry is mingled with visions of Shelley, either explicit or implied. Vane's curiosity about his ancestry, which results instead in his discovery of Raven, hints at the quasi-parental status MacDonald seems to have granted Shelley, who was not MacDonald's literal father, but rather his literary parent, related in spirit, though not by blood.

As in *The Flight of the Shadow*, *Lilith* is concerned with breaking out of chronological time in order to redeem the past, as later generations correct and save previous ones. The repetition and reciprocal influence of Vane's family history appears to have the goal of turning fathers into brothers. Vane never explicitly discovers his lost father in the published version of *Lilith*; however, in the original manuscript he does, in an episode that suggests MacDonald's desire to be positioned as Shelley's heir and equal. Near the end of the first draft, Fane is reunited with his father is a wish-fulfillment fantasy in which the two are transformed into brothers and equals who proceed to heaven together. Upon discovering his father, Fane is initially "in a certain awe of" (*Lilith A* 594) him, so that he cannot "begin the conversation" (594). When at last they do converse, Fane apologizes that he "'did not understand you better'" (*Lilith A* 595) in the past, and had failed to make it "'the aim of my life to serve you'" (595). His father's response revises their relationship from a parent-child relationship, to one egalitarian

fraternity, as he advises Fane that "'you and I will know that we are brothers, dearer than any brothers in the world that you have left, because I was your father there, and because now we know the father of us both'" (596). In the end, however, only the father is drawn into the "the whiteness" (600), while Fane, like Vane in the final version of Lilith, is pushed out of the clouds and back into his library. The brother-like reunion of Fane and his father is particularly reminiscent of *The Flight of the Shadow*, in which the conclusion hinges on the reunion of actual brothers, who, like Fane and his father, are drawn together with God as their spiritual center. The redefinition of Fane and his father as brothers also recalls *The Flight of the Shadow*'s transformation of genealogical influence from unidirectional to reciprocal. The whole scene suggests a wishful fantasy in which MacDonald and Shelley unite as equals in the afterlife.[110]

Unlike Fane in the original manuscript, Vane in the 1895 published version of *Lilith* does not ascend toward heaven hand in hand with his father. Although Raven becomes a father substitute, Vane never definitively finds his father at all. Instead, near the end of the book, on his way to Raven's house of death, Vane has a troubling encounter with a "grayheaded man" (354) whom he meets weeping on the sand. The old man longs to die, but for all his efforts, has not yet been accepted in the house of death. Vane, "heartily grieved" (354) by the old man's predicament, attempts to explain to him that he will not be accepted because he has "'not yet learned to die'" (355). He counsels

---

[110] Curiously, this fantasy of meeting one's literary forefather in heaven is repeated, even more explicitly, in C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*. In Lewis's novel, the protagonist arrives in heaven, where he meets, to his immense delight, George MacDonald himself. Lewis's great "Teacher" (*The Great Divorce* 60) appears as a "a very tall" "weather-beaten" man, "almost a giant," "one who might have been a shepherd," "with a strong Scotch accent" (*The Great Divorce* 59). The protagonist attempts to discuss *Phantastes* with him, and MacDonald acts as his tour guide through heaven.

the old man to seek out Mara, the Lady of Sorrows, and learn from her how to find death. Turning to Ravenesque (and MacDonaldian) paradox, Vane observes that "'no one can die who does not long to live'" (355). The old man rejects Vane's advice, however, praying him to "'cease your riddles'" (355), and Vane leaves the weeping man behind, all the while fearing that the old man "did not heed" Vane's advice. Vane's adoption of Raven's riddling speech—which earlier Vane found irritating—suggests that Vane has been, or is being, transformed into a likeness of Raven, a change that indicates his readiness to truly die. His attempt to help an older man recalls the principle of reciprocal influence that was illustrated in *The Flight of the Shadow*, by which a younger generation may redeem an earlier one. Vane's failure to succeed, however, is a reminder that ultimately an individual cannot ensure the redemption of another; as John Smith's dream in *Adela Cathcart* suggested, this is ultimately Christ's job. It suggests that MacDonald, for all his well-meant efforts, is finally unable to guarantee Shelley's salvation. The gray-headed man could be seen as Raven's double: if Raven is MacDonald's fantasy of the redeemed Shelley, the old man is Shelley whose salvation remains uncertain.

5.5. Lilith and Romanticism

Questions about redeeming Romanticism are especially concentrated in the figure of Lilith. Lilith is the final development of MacDonald's earlier diabolical females, such as *Phantastes*'s Alder maiden and *The Flight of the Shadow's* Lady Cairnedge. Like them, Lilith is a monster of narcissism who preys on men's self-involvement. Vane's revival of Lilith's dying body inverts Anodos's Pygmalionesque resurrection of the white lady in *Phantastes*, in an episode that suggests the dangers of self-centered art. The

awakening of the white lady occurs in a transcendent moment of inspiration, in which he is freed from his mortal limitations when he is overcome by a spontaneous overflow of poetic song. By contrast, Vane's attraction to Lilith is fueled by a fantasy of dependency, in which he "dreamed of finding a wounded angel, who, unable to fly, remained with me until at last she loved me and would not leave me" (160). In contrast to the white lady, who rises from her slumber and immediately glides off into the forest, Vane's imagined scenario involves binding an angel to the earth and to himself. Whereas Anodos's resurrection of the white lady is an edifying, spiritually uplifting experience, Vane's long, effortful revival of Lilith (who is also associated with white clothing) is a lonely and deflating experience, in which he learns "what solitude meant" (161), and begins to grasp the spiritual poverty of solipsism: "I saw now that a man alone is but a being that may become a man [. . . .] To be enough for himself, a being must be an eternal, self-existing worm!" (161). Vane's dream of female helplessness is also a long way from the reality of a wakened Lilith. Whereas the white lady is thankful for Anodos's help, Lilith offers "only ingratitude" (171), as she denounces Vane in her "white fury" (169) as a "'Dog of a fool!'" for having "'compelled [. . . her] to live, and [. . . put] her to shame'"(169), offences which she cannot pardon. As in MacDonald's earlier works, such as *Phantastes* and *Donal Grant*, selfishness and the denial of death are embodied in a vampiric monster, as Vane's ungrateful creation turns around to destroy him by sucking his blood. Like Victor's creation of the monster in *Frankenstein*, echoes of which pervade MacDonald's work, Vane's reanimation of Lilith is a Pygmalion project gone awry, unleashing satanic resentment and destructive vengefulness.

Like MacDonald's other vampire figures, Lilith aims to stop time and avoid death. "[I]n leagues with the Shadows" (181), having "so ensnared the heart of the great Shadow, that he became her slave, wrought her will, and made her queen of Hell" (233), Lilith rejects godly death and resurrection with satanic zeal, pursuing instead a programme of "ceaseless ripening" (204). Her overcoming of death is achieved through the literal devouring of life. She is the culmination of MacDonald's other monsters of appetite: *Phantastes*'s anthropophagic Ash, "The Cruel Painter"'s vampire, and *Donal Grant*'s cannibal Red Etin. She embodies the destructive energy that would consume its own creation. In her ambition to destroy all succeeding generations, including her daughter—"The birth of children is in her eyes the death of their parents, and every new generation the enemy of the last" (237)—Lilith recalls especially *The Flight of the Shadow's* Lady Cairnedge, who attempted to murder her own son, and *Donal Grant's* Lord Morven, who successfully murdered his infant daughter. Lilith is thus a monster of bad art who embodies the cruel, violent, and transgressive impulses of Romanticism.

However, in contrast to earlier works, *Lilith* offers a more complex portrayal of evil. MacDonald's monsters tend to be flat figures of unqualified evil: there is nothing remotely appealing in *Phantastes*'s Ash, whose bloated face and beastlike claws are a visceral vision of nature turned devourer. The Alder maiden, with her rotten, decaying body, is similarly revolting, and neither she nor the Ash is granted much of an inner life. Lady Cairnedge in *The Flight of the Shadow* is similarly one-dimensional: though she is human, she is portrayed in an unsympathetic light, and the book inquires little into her motivations—she is simply evil. Lord Morven in *Donal Grant* is something of an exception: he is granted noticeably more novelistic depth, as Donal strives to understand

the mad workings of his godless conscience. Nevertheless, he remains shudder-worthy in his ghastly appearance and behavior. A decided change occurs in *Lilith*, however, as evil begins to lose its repellent quality, and indeed, becomes increasingly attractive. This shift accompanies the increasing level of nuance in MacDonald's good characters as well, as good and evil become more complex in general, and less starkly polarized than in earlier works. A new shadowy quality enters into MacDonald's personal writings about himself at this time as well. Beset with illness and injury, mourning the premature deaths of three of his children, and concerned about the health of others, MacDonald jokes bleakly in an 1889 letter to his wife, "I believe after all I am the strongest of the family, and like a vampyre live on all the rest of you" (George MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald, Nov. 1889). His description of himself as a vampire reflects this increasing tendency to identify with the dark side.

Far from being a repulsive physical and mental horror like MacDonald's prior villains, Lilith, in her imperious power, beauty, and charisma, inspires awe, devotion, and desire. Like Milton's Satan, who, as Mario Praz reminds us, "assumes an aspect of fallen beauty" (Praz 58), Lilith remains glorious, even in her fallenness. In contrast to the Alder Maiden, whose beauty was a sham, "in the manner of the witches Alcina and Lamia, whose loveliness is a work of sorcery, an empty illusion" (Praz 58), Lilith's beauty, like Satan's, is no disguise, but a "permanent attribute" (Praz 58) that Vane seems on some level to desire. The passage in which she bites him is particularly replete with ambiguous pleasure:

> they [her arms] closed about my neck, rigid as those of the torture-maiden. She drew down my face to hers, and her lips clung to my cheek. A sting of pain shot

> somewhere through me, and pulsed. I could not stir a hair's breadth. Gradually the pain ceased. A slumberous weariness, a dreamy pleasure stole over me, and then I knew nothing. (174)

The fearful evocations of torture, pain, and paralysis are offset by the "slumberous weariness" and "dreamy pleasure" (174) of the encounter. Vane's almost enjoyable slipping into unconsciousness evokes in particular the Romantic pleasures of drug use, which MacDonald portrayed in a more critical light in *Donal Grant.* The reversal of conventional gender roles—Vane is put into the position of the passive female victim, ravaged by the penetrative "sting" of the "rigid" male (174)—is also suggestive. Like a fainting spells of a heroine in a sentimental novel, Vane's paralysis suggests an ambivalent cover that masks his secret gratification. Indeed, a lengthier version of this passage in Manuscript B describes Vane's desire to reciprocate her embrace, as he confesses that "My lips would have sought hers, but I could not move, so tight she held me" (*Lilith B* 103). Afterwards, Vane does not seek to run away, but persists in following her, even though she rejects his company, and strikes him on the head with the force of "a blow from an iron hammer" (175) in an attempt to discourage him.

Vane's reawakening of Lilith suggests MacDonald's attempt to revive Romanticism in all its grand, ferocious energy. It is an endeavor fraught with ambivalence, as Vane's yearning to know Lilith in spite of her evident evil suggests a conflict in MacDonald about the temptations of Romanticism. [111] Vane claims that he

---

[111] Cf. to Pennington, who interprets this aspect of Lilith as a struggle in MacDonald's Christian beliefs. He observes that Lilith, "at once repellent but fascinating, dangerous yet enticing, horrific yet erotic—overpowers the narrative space in such an aggressive way that MacDonald must eventually silence the temptress by imprisoning her in his Christian myth of redemption" (Pennington, "Of Frustrate Desire" 27).

"did not desire her society" (184), which "waked in me frightful suspicions" (184), yet he finds her unaccountably appealing: as he admits, "her presence had had a strange influence upon me, and in her presence I must resist, and at the same time analyse that influence!" (184). Vane's wish to resist and to analyze Lilith's impact suggests MacDonald's puzzlement over the attractiveness of a darkness his devout mind could not accept. Vane's obsession with knowing her is reminiscent of the Romantic fascination with forbidden knowledge, and evokes such overreaching figures as the poet of Shelley's "Alastor," who tried to plumb the "deep mysteries" ("Alastor" 23) of nature, or Victor Frankenstein, in his ungodly scientific pursuits. Lilith herself appears as a Romantic mystery that transcends human comprehension: "to understand something of her mode of being would be to look into marvels such as imagination could never have suggested!" (184). Yet the marvels are forbidden, as Vane recognizes that "In this I was too daring: a man must not, for knowledge, of his own will encounter temptation!" (184). Nevertheless, Vane is bound up with Lilith, since he is personally responsible for having resurrected her. Like Victor Frankenstein, he is fearful of the force he has let loose in the world: "I had reinstated an evil force about to perish, and was, to the extent of my opposing faculty, accountable for what mischief might ensue!" (185). Vane's mingled attraction to, fear of, and sense of responsibility for the destructive force he has unleashed reveals MacDonald's uncertainty about the nature and purpose of such resurrectionary endeavors.

Vane's attitude toward *Lilith* reflects further MacDonald's belief that redemption is a possibility even for the most blighted of souls. Vane possesses a deep-seated optimism regarding Lilith, as he refuses to believe she is wholly without good, and

maintains that her "'beauty must have a heart! However profoundly hidden, it must be there!'" (171). His hope that even Lilith, the devil's consort, may be saved recalls MacDonald's unconventional belief in the possibility of universal redemption, which I discussed in Chapter 3. *Lilith* articulates this notion more explicitly, as Mara declares that even Satan, the Great Shadow himself, might one day be saved: "'When the Shadow comes here [to Raven's house death], it will be to lie down and sleep also'" (344). Like Lilith, the Shadow must possess some spark of divinity in its core in order to exist at all, as Raven argues: "'Without a substance, [. . .] a shadow cannot be—yea, or without a light behind the substance'" (380). Nevertheless, redemption remains uncertain, and beyond representation: while Lilith's salvation seems imminent (once she submits to sleeping in Raven's house), the book cannot show directly either her or the Shadow's redemption.

Indeed, *Lilith*'s conclusion implies that the redemption of the Romantic imagination lies beyond the bounds of the book. As Vane approaches the heavenly gates, he gazes down into the "pellucid depths" of a hollow that is filled with monsters:

> A whirl-pool had swept out the soil in which the abortions burrowed, and at the bottom lay visible the whole horrid brood: a dim greenish light pervaded the crystalline water, and revealed every hideous form beneath it. (385)

Vane's description of the monsters suggests perverse, misguided art: the word "abortions" (385) recalls the tortured creations of Teufelsbürst's imagination, and their "sepian deformity" (385) further evokes the inky horror of demonic writing. Connecting them unmistakeably to literature, Vane observes that the "shapes" (385) are "more fantastic in ghoulish, blasting dismay, than ever wine-sodden brain of exhausted poet

fevered into misbeing" (385), a description that hearkens to stereotyped images of Romantic poets plumbing the depths of the imagination by unholy means. The bottom-dwellers exceed even the decadent excesses of Poe, as Vane tacitly compares the whirlpool to Poe's Maelstrom: "He who dived in the swirling Maelstrom saw none to compare with them in horror" (385).[112] The existence of the creatures, who "were not dead" (386), though "not one of them moved" (386), indicates evil that has been revealed but not redeemed. They anticipate the "horde of bats" (393) that appears in the next chapter "on the frontiers" (393) of heaven, with whom the angels are preparing to do battle. For Vane, they reflect the ongoing presence of infernal thought: "So long as exist men and women of unwholesome mind, that lake will still be peopled with loathsomeness" (386). This mix of infernal and celestial imagery suggests that Romanticism's salvation has not yet occured.

The title of the last chapter, "The Endless Ending," suggests a tension between openness and closure, as the book, on the brink of opening to eternity, abruptly returns to the earthly limits of real life. How to interpret the truncated resurrection and Vane's return to library remains a question among MacDonald critics.[113] David Robb describes

---

[112] See note page 238 n107 for a discussion of Poe's possible influence on MacDonald. Certainly, the relationship between MacDonald and Poe merits further study, as Poe's obsessions with the horrors of live burial and the theme of repetition mirror MacDonald's. The stories of both Poe and MacDonald, moreover, often address issues about literary representation.

[113] Vane's thwarted resurrection has an earlier analogue in novel *There and Back,* which appeared prior to *The Flight of the Shadow* and *Lilith*, in 1891. *There and Back* concluded with a similar disappointment, as Barbara enjoys an extensive dream of heaven, only to have it dissolve into "the old earth-pain" (*There and Back* 392) of "disappointment and longing" (*There and Back* 392) upon awakening. Her pronouncement, "*To have been there and to have come back,* was the misery" (*There and Back* 392), might equally describe Vane's state of mind upon returning to mortal life.

the ending as "shot through with tension, doubt, and sadness" (*George MacDonald* 107), as Vane waits amid his books, which sometimes "seem to waver as if a wind rippled their solid mass, and another world were about to break through" (*Lilith* 397). Prickett observes that the conclusion, with its emphasis on seeking the visionary sphere, demonstrates how 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, though a glass darkly" (*Victorian Fantasy* 193). Wolff, who finds that "the imagery of Lilith breaks down completely" (*Golden Key* 369) in the end, offers the most cynical interpretation. He reads the final chapter as a sign that MacDonald's faith had grown weary, suggesting "that the Christian myth had worn thin for MacDonald" (*Golden Key* 369) and "that something had gone wrong with Christianity" (*Golden Key* 371). I would argue, however, that if MacDonald's faith in anything has waned, it is not his faith in Christianity, but rather his belief in literature, which is finally incapable on its own to revive the dead in the manner MacDonald once hoped.

My reading of *Lilith* suggests that MacDonald at the end of his career remains preoccupied with Shelley and concerned about Romanticism. In interpreting *Lilith* as a fantasy about Shelleyan redemption and as an expression of MacDonald's ambivalence about Romanticism and literature itself, I have merely scratched the surface of his multivalent text, however. In MacDonald studies, the mysterious *Lilith* often takes on the stature of a great code that needs cracking; there is a sense that in it lies the key to understanding MacDonald in all his visionary complexity. Yet at the same time *Lilith* resists easy interpretation, and no definitive reading has yet been offered. The continual elusiveness of *Lilith*'s meaning is mirrored in its final chapters, as the abrupt descent

from celestial vision to earthly reality leaves the reader, like Vane, with only a tantalizing glimpse of revelation and transcendence. *Lilith* shows both MacDonald's project of resurrecting Romanticism, and his difficulty in achieving it. On one hand, *Lilith* is the climax and summation of all MacDonald's previous texts. On the other, it suggests that MacDonald's faith in his literary power is troubled by the uncertainty as to whether, in the end, it is not a vampiric art.

AFTERWORD

This study has attempted to demonstrate how MacDonald positioned himself as heir to the Romantic tradition, and particularly to Percy Shelley. MacDonald styled himself as more than just Shelley's inheritor, but as his saviour. His obsession with Shelley allows him to examine what went wrong with Romanticism, as well as what (in his opinion) went right. His multiple versions of Shelley allow him to continually revise and improve Shelley. This tendency to repeat Shelley—a repetitiveness that also occurs more broadly, as MacDonald's books frequently reuse the same plot, setting, characters, and themes—is not a lack of originality. Rather, this principle of repetition is fundamental to his vision of history. His variations offer progressive improvement, suggesting a historical model based on the idea of typological progress, which is characterized by a purposeful drive forward, toward apocalypse and transcendence. In this model, danger lies in the static repetition of the past with no variation to improve on it, a threat illustrated in MacDonald's devouring monsters who would swallow and destroy the future. By representing literary history as a typological journey, MacDonald charges the world with Christian values and significance.

In recuperating Romanticism, MacDonald is participating in an effort similar to that of Mary Shelley, who strove to salvage her husband's posthumous reputation. He may be aligned also with his fellow Victorians Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning, who demonstrated a comparable desire to Christianize (or at least idealize) the atheist

poet. At the same time, MacDonald is also helping himself, by asserting the power of reading and criticism to shape and reshape the past, a capacity that is illustrated in his recurring theme of sons saving father-figures. MacDonald's revisionary endeavours create a version of literary history that conforms to his vision of the world as engaged on an upward climb toward perfection and godliness. MacDonald seems to be aware of the potential hubris of his endeavour, as is suggested in his books' repeated condemnations of self-centeredness and solipsism, which contrasts to a laudable focus outward, on God. Yet he is nevertheless engaging in self-mythologization, as he invents a vision of literary history in which he himself plays a significant role. MacDonald understood from the beginning that literature could envision redemption, but only God could realize it. Toward the end of his career, in his last great work *Lilith,* MacDonald seems to doubt the usefulness of his literary endeavors.

My project contributes to MacDonald studies by expanding approaches to this understudied writer. In particular, my work can be situated among attempts to position MacDonald historically, as a late Romantic who drew heavily on previous writers, while also reshaping them. MacDonald's mapping out of literary history as a progression leading to himself indicates his profound concern for matters of literary succession. While MacDonald is steeped in an awareness of the literary history behind him, he is also responsible for creating that history. What I have offered is more than a source study; it is a study of how literary influence works. As I have shown, the past does not simply shape the present. The power of influence runs both directions, as the present is equally responsible for creating, definining, and redeeming the past.

WORKS CITED

Abrams, M.H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature.* New York: Norton, 1971.

Allen, B. Sprague. "The Reaction Against William Godwin." *Modern Philology* 16 (1918): 57-75.

Ang, Susan "George MacDonald and the Gothic." George MacDonald and His Children: The Development of Fantasy Literature. Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 18 Sep. 2005.

Ankeny, Rebecca Thomas. *The Story, the Teller, and the Audience in George MacDonald's Fiction.* Studies in British Literature 44. London: Edwin Mellen, 2000.

Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood A Social History of Family Life.* 1960. Trans. Robert Baldick. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.

Arnold, Matthew. "Byron." 1881. *Essays in Criticism.* New York: A.L. Burt Co, n.d. 364-384.

-----. "The Function of Criticism in the Present Time." *Essays in Criticism.* London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1865. 1-41.

-----. "Shelley." 1888. *Essays in Criticism.* New York: A.L. Burt Co, n.d. 385-408.

Auden, W. H. "Introduction". *The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald: Lilith, Phantastes.* Ed. Anne Fremantle. Noonday Press, 1954. v-x.

Augustine, *Confessions.* Ed. and trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin. London: Penguin, 1961.

Berridge, Virginia, Opium and the People Opiate Use and Drug Controle Policy in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England. Rev. ed. London and New York: Free Association Books, 1999.

Bloom, Harold. *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

-----. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry.* Rev. ed. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1971.

Broome, F. Hal. "The Scientific Basis of George MacDonald's Dream-Frame." *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald.* Ed. William Raeper. Edinburgh: UP, 1990. 87-108.

Browning, Robert. "Essay on Shelley." Ed. Donald Smalley. *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*. Vol. 5. Gen. Ed. Roma A. King. Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP and Wacom Texas, Baylor University, 1981. 135-151.

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt." *The Poems and Dramas of Lord Byron.* Chicago: Belford-Clarke, 1891. 168-234.

Chandler, Alice. *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Idea in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.

Chesterton, G. K. "George MacDonald and His Work." *George MacDonald in the Pulpit The 'Spoken' Sermons of George MacDonald.* Eds. J. Joseph Flynn and David Edwards. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen. 369-376.

Clemit, Pamela. *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Kubla "Khan." *English Romantic Writers.* Ed. David Perkins. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995. 546-57.

Crane, David. *The Kindness of Sisters. Annabella Milbanke and the Destruction of the Byrons.* London: Flamingo, 2003,

Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.* 1948, Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1953.

Cusick, Edmund. "George MacDonald and Jung." *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald.* Ed. William Raeper. Edinburgh: UP, 1990. 56-86.

d'Aulnoy, Marie Catherine. "Graciosa and Percinet." *Contes de fees.* 1715. *The Red Fairy Book.* 1890. Ed. Andrew Lang. New York: Dover, 1966.

DeQuincey, Thomas. *Confessions of and English Opium-Eater.* 1821. Ed. Alethea Hayter. London: Penguin, 1986.

Docherty, John. The Limitations of Reductionist *Approaches to Thomas Wingfold, Curate. North Wind* 19 (2000) <http://www.macdonaldsociety.org/NW19/nw19docherty.htm>

-----. *The Literary Products of the Lewis Carroll-George MacDonald Friendship.* Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1995.

Rev. of *Donal Grant. Dial* 4 (1883): 138.

Durie, Catherine, " George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis." *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald.* Ed. William Raeper. Edinburgh: UP, 1990. 163-184.

Fielding, Henry. *Tom Jones.* 1749. New York: Signet, 1963.

Godwin, William. *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, as narrated by William Godwin, with commentary by H. Buxton Forman.* Boston: Priv. print, 1911. 202-277.

-----. "Memoirs of The Author of 'The Rights of Women.'" 1798. *A Short Residence in Sweden and Memoirs of The Author of 'The Rights of Women.'* Ed. Richard Holmes. London: Penguin, 1987.

Gunther, Adrian. *"Phantastes:* The First Two Chapters," *Scottish Literary Journal* 21.1 (1994): 32-43.

Hein, Rolland. *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian College Consortium, 1982.

Holbrook, David. "George MacDonald and Dreams of the Other World." *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 4 (1983): 27-37.

Holmes, Richard. Introduction. *A Short Residence in Sweden and Memoirs of The Author of 'The Rights of Women.* By Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. 1796 and 1798. Ed. Richard Holmes. London: Penguin, 1987. 9-55.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion.* London and New York: Routledge, 1981.

-----. "Narcissism and Beyond: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Frankenstein* and Fantasies of the Double." *Aspects of Fantasy: Selected Essays from the Second International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film.* Ed. William Coyle. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986. 45-53.

Johnson, Rachel. "Pilgrims: The MacDonald and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress"North Wind* 21 (2002):15-25.

Keller, Karl. "Alephs, Zahirs, and the Triumph of Ambiguity: Typology in Nineteenth-Century American Literature." *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle ages to the Present.* Ed. Earl Miner. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1977. 274-314.

Kilgour, Maggie. "'One immortality': The Shaping of the Shelleys in *The Last Man.*" *European Romantic Review.* 16.5 (2005): 563-588.

-----. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel.* London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Knoepflmacher, U. C. "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters." *The Endurance of Frankenstein : Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel.* Eds. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of Califorina Press, 88- 119.

Lamb, Caroline, Lady. *Glenarvon.* 1816. Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.

Landow, George P. "Moses Striking the Rock: Typological Symbolism in Victorian Poetry." *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle ages to the Present.* Ed. Earl Miner. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1977. 315-344.

Lewis, Clive Staples. *The Great Divorce.* 1946. Glasgow: Collins, 1988.

-----. Introduction. *George MacDonald: An Anthology.* Ed. C. S. Lewis. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946. 10-22.

Lindskoog, Kathryn. "Mark Twain and George MacDonald: The Salty and the Sweet." *The Mark Twain Journal* 30.2 (1992). Rpt. in *Lindentree,* <http://www.lindentree.org/salty.html>

MacDonald, George. *Adela Cathcart.* 1864. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1994.

-----. *Alec Forbes of Howglen.* 1865. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1995.

-----. *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood.* 1867. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1995.

-----. *At the Back of the North Wind.* 1883. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 2002.

-----. "The Baronet's Song." *The Poet and the Pauper.* Ed. Michael Phillips. Bloomington: Bethany House, 1983. 15-178.

-----. "The Castle." *Adela Cathcart.* 1864. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1994. 417-443.

-----. *Castle Warlock.* 1882. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. "The Cruel Painter." *Adela Cathcart.* 1864. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1994, 379-416.

-----. *Donal Grant.* 1883. *Adela Cathcart.* 1864. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. *England's Antiphon.* 1868. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1996.

-----. "The Elect Lady." *Home Again and The Elect Lady: A Duplex Edition.* 1887 and 1888. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1992. 1-186.

-----. "The Fantastic Imagination." *A Dish of Orts.* 1893. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1996. 313-322.

-----. *The Flight of the Shadow.* 1891. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1994.

-----. "The Golden Key." 1867. *The Light Princess and Other Fairy Tales.* Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 172-215.

-----. *Guild Court A London Story.* 1868. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1999.

-----. "The Imagination." 1867. *A Dish of Orts.* 1893. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1996. 1-42.

-----. Letter to A. P. Watt. 11 June 1893. Sadler 355.

-----. Letter to Caroline Powell. 10 Dec. 1850. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.3.149. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Charlotte Godwin. 20 Jan. 1889. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.4.167. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to George MacDonald Sr. circa 1836. Sadler 7.

-----. Letter to George MacDonald Sr. 12 Jan 1847. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.3.147. Beinecke Lib, New Haven.

-----. Letter to his George MacDonald Sr. 21 Dec. 1850. George Maconald Collection 103.1.3.149. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to George MacDonald Sr. 15 April 1851. Greville MacDonald, *GMAW* 155.

-----. Letter to George MacDonald Sr. 29 Dec. 1858; George Maconald Collection 103.1.3.158. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Helen MacKay Powell. 16 April 1892. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.4.176. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Helen MacKay Powell. 4 Mar. 1894. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.4.177. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Lily MacDonald. 22 Dec, 1872. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.4.163. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Louisa MacDonald. 12 Sept. 1853. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.3.151. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Louisa MacDonald. 4 Oct. 1853. George MacDonald Collection 103.3.151. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Louisa MacDonald, Nov. 1889. George MacDonald Collection. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Louisa MacDonald. 9 Oct. 1891. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.4.174. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Louisa MacDonald. 13 Oct 1891. George MacDonald Collection 101.1.4.174. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. Letter to Louisa MacDonald. 27 Oct. 1891. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.4.174. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

-----. *Lilith.* 1895. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. "Lilith A: Transcription of the Original Manuscript of Lilith." *Lilith.* Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. *Lilith A Variorum Edition.* Ed. Rolland Hein. 2 vols. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1997.

-----. *Malcolm.* 1875. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1995.

-----. *The Marquis of Lossie.* 1877. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1995.

-----. *Paul Faber, Surgeon,* 1879. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women.* 1858. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. "The Portent." *The Portent and Other Stories.* 1909. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1999. 1-162.

-----. *The Princess and Curdie.* 1883. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. *The Princess and the Goblin.* 1872. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1997.

-----. *Robert Falconer.* 1868. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 2005.

-----. *Salted with Fire*. 1897. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1996.

-----. "Shelley." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 8th ed. Vol. 20. 1860. 100-104.

-----. *Sir Gibbie*. 1879. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 2000.

-----. *There and Back*. 1891. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*. 1876. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1996.

-----. *The Vicar's Daughter*. 1872. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

-----. *The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald*. Ed. Anne Fremantle. New York: Noonday, 1954.

-----. *What's Mine's Mine*. 1886. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1995.

-----. *Wilfrid Cumbermede*. 1872. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1997.

-----. "Within and Without." 1855. *Poetical Works*. 1893. Vol 1. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen,1996.

-----. "Wordsworth's Poetry." *A Dish of Orts*. 1893. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1996. 245-263.

MacDonald, Greville. *George MacDonald and His Wife*. 1924. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1998.

Manlove, Colin. "The Circle of the Imagination: George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *Lilith*." *Studies in Scottish Literature* 17 (1982): 55-80.

-----. *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*. London: MacMillan, 1983.

-----. *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England*, Christchurch, New Zealand: Cybereditions, 2003.

-----. "George MacDonald's Early Scottish Novels." *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays.* Ed. Ian Campbell. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. 68-88.

-----."MacDonald and Kingsley: A Victorian Contrast." *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald.* Ed. William Raeper. Edinburgh: UP, 1990, 140-162.

-----. "MacDonald – Tolkien's Master." *Orts* 69 (2006): 7.

-----. *Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey.* Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994. 83-102.

-----. "Some Possible Sources for Phantastes." *Orts* 61 (2002): 5-8.

McGillis, Roderick. "Childhood and Growth: George MacDonald and William Wordsworth. " *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England.* Ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991. 150-167.

-----. "The Community of the Centre: Structure and Theme in *Phantastes.*" *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children.* Ed. Roderick McGillis. Metchuen, N.J., & London: Children's Literature Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1992. 51-66.

-----. "George MacDonald and the Lilith Legend in the XIXth Century." *Mythlore* 6.1 (1979): 3-11.

-----. "George MacDonald—The *Lilith* Manuscripts." *Scottish Literary Journal* 4 (1977): 40-57.

-----. Introduction. *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children.* Ed. Roderick McGillis. Metchuen, N.J., & London: Children's Literature Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1992. 1-15.

-----. "*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom." *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald.* Ed. William Raeper. Edinburgh: UP, 1990. 31-55.

-----. Preface. *The Story, the Teller, and the Audience in George MacDonald's Fiction.* by Rebecca Thomas Ankeny. Studies in British Literature 44. London: Edwin Mellen, 2000. vii-xi.

-----. "The Sweet Bells Jangled: The Reception of George MacDonald's *Lilith.*" *Inklings-Jahrbuch* 13 (1995): 95-107.

Mendelson, Michael. "George MacDonald's Lilith and the Conventions of Ascent." *Studies in Scottish Literature* 20 (1984):197-218.

Mellon, Nancy. "The Stages in Adela Cathcart's Cure." *North Wind* 15 (1996): 26-43

Miller, J. Hillis. *Versions of Pygmalion.* Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard UP, 1990.

Miner, Earl. Preface. *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle ages to the Present.* Ed. Earl Miner. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1977. xi-xv.

Noble, J. A. Rev. of *The Flight of the Shadow. Academy.* 5 March 1892. 226.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses.* Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983.

Parker, Patricia A. *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode.* Princeton, N.J. and London: Princeton UP, 1979.

Parsons, Coleman. "George MacDonald and Henry More." *Notes and Queries* 188 (1945):180-183.

Pennington, John. "Of Frustrate Desire: Feminist Self-Postponement in George MacDonald's Lilith." *North Wind* 21 (2002) 26-37.

-----. "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: The George MacDonald Industry and the Difficult Rehabilitation of a Reputation." Hammersmith Symposium on George MacDonald. Temple Lodge, London. 29-30 July, 2005; and George MacDonald and His Children: The Development of Fantasy Literature. Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 16-19 September 2005.

Polidori, John William. "The Vampyre: A Tale." *Three Vampire Tales.* Ed. Anne Williams. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony.* 1933. Trans. Angus Davidson. Oxford, London New York: Oxford UP, 1970.

Prickett, Stephen. "Fictions and Metafictions: *Phantastes*, *Wilhelm Meister*, and the Idea of the *Bildungsroman.*" *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald.* Ed. William Raeper. Edinburgh: UP, 1990. 109-125

-----."George MacDonald and the Poetics of Realism." *The Victorian Fantasists.* Ed. Kath Filmer. London:Macmillan, 1991. 82-89.

-----. *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church.* London: Cambridge, 1976.

-----. "The Two Worlds of George MacDonald." *North Wind: Journal of the George MacDonald Society.* 2 (1983): 14-23.

-----. *Victorian Fantasy.* Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1979.

Quint, David. *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form From Virgil to Milton.* Princeton, N. J.: Princeton UP, 1993.

Raeper, William. *George MacDonald.* Tring: Lion Publishing, 1987.

-----. "Diamond and Kilmeny: MacDonald, Hogg, and the Scottish Folk Tradition." *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children.* Ed. Roderick McGillis. Metuchen, N.J., & London, 1992: Scarecrow Press, 1992. 133-144.

Rankin, Jamie. "The Genesis of George MacDonald's Scottish Novels: Edelweiss Amid the Heather?" *Studies in Scottish Literature* 24 (1989): 49-67.

Reis, Richard H. *George MacDonald.* Twayne's English Authors Ser. 119. New York: Twayne, 1972.

Richardson, Alan. "Wordsworth, Fairy Tales, and the Politics of Children's Reading." *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England.* Ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991. 34-53.

Robb, David. *George MacDonald.* Scottish Writers Series. Ed. David Daiches, 11, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987.

-----. "George MacDonald's Aberdeenshire Fairytale." *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century.* Eds. Horst W. Drescher and Joachim Schwend. Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York: Publications of the Scottish Studies Centre of the Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz at Germersheim 1985, 205-216.

-----."Realism and Fantasy in the Fiction of George MacDonald." *The History of Scottish Literature.* Vol 3. Ed. Douglas Gifford. Gen. ed. Cairns Craig. Aberdeen: UP, 1988. 275-290.

Robinson, Henry Crabb. Letter to George MacDonald. 3 Feb. 1863. George MacDonald Collection 103.1.3.124. Beinecke Lib., New Haven.

Sadler, Glenn, ed. *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. 1994.

Shaberman, Raphael. "George MacDonald and E. T. A. Hoffmann." *North Wind* 7 (1988): 31-34.

Shelley, Mary. Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition (1831). *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus The 1818 Text.* Ed. Marilyn Butler. Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford UP, 1994. 192-97.

-----. *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus The 1818 Text.* Ed. Marilyn Butler. Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford UP, 1994.

-----. Preface. *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* By Percy Shelley. Ed. Mary Shelley. Vol 1. London: Edward Moxon, 1847.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Alastor: or, the Spirit of Solitude." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Ed. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 69-86.

-----. "A Defence of Poetry." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 478-508.

-----. "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 93-96.

-----. "Julian and Maddalo." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 112-127.

-----. "Mont Blanc." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 89-93.

-----. "Ode to the West Wind." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 221-223.

-----. "On Love." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers. New York: Norton. 473-74.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980.* New York: Penguin, 1980.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene.* Ed. A. C. Hamilton. London and New York: Longman. 1977.

Spina, Giorgio. "The Influence of Dante on George MacDonald." *North Wind* 9 (1990): 15-36.

St. Clair, William. *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family.* London: Faber, 1989.

"Three Novels." Rev. of *Donal Grant, Annan Water,* and *Loving and Serving. Spectator* 57 (1884): 90.

Tolkien. "On Fairy Stories." *Tree and Leaf.* 1964. London, Sydney, and Wellington: Unwin, 1988. 9-73.

Trelawny, Edward John. 1858. *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author.* Rev. Ed. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1887.

Trexler, Robert. "George MacDonald: Merging Myth and Method." *Bulletin of The New York C. S. Lewis Society* 34.4 (2003): 1-11.

Weinrich, Elizabeth MacDonald. Foreword. *Lilith A Variorum Edition.* Ed. Rolland Hein. 2 vols. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1997. iii-ix.

Wolff, Robert Lee. *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England.* New York and London: Garland, 1977.

-----. *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1961.

Wordsworth, William. *The Borderers.* Ed. Robert Osborn. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.

-----. Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads. 1800. *English Romantic Writers.* Ed. David Perkins. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995. 423-434.

-----. "The Tables Turned." *English Romantic Writers.* Ed. David Perkins. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995. 300-301.