

ABSTRACT

WARE, STEPHANIE LYNNE. Sexuality and Coming of Age in Two Works by George MacDonald. (Under the direction of Leila S. May.)

This study attempts to follow George MacDonald as he engages in the strange juggling act by which he simultaneously idealizes women and releases them from the grasp of idolizing males, proclaims their purity and concerns himself with their healthy maturation into sexuality. A comparison of *Phantastes* and *Adela Cathcart* reveals the complicating role of sexuality in the coming of age process of both males and females. The male protagonist of the fantasy work *Phantastes* is asked to learn to control his sexuality and to abandon selfishness in love, and he does so in part by understanding that women, too, have sexual natures. In *Phantastes*, however, MacDonald hesitates between idealizing, and thus desexualizing, women and accepting sexuality as part of women's nature, as Anodos's continuing celibacy upon his return from Fairy Land illustrates. The realistic setting of *Adela Cathcart* compels MacDonald to address women's sexuality. The novel demonstrates that a woman can fulfill her traditional angelic role even while confronting the demands of her sexuality. Women are fallen angels who must be taught how to live in their fallen bodies without compromising their angelic calling. In order to become the "angel in the house," the moral center of the home, individual women must undergo a coming of age process similar to that of the males who struggle so much with handling their sexuality. To mature successfully, and to stave off the selfishness that is threatening to manifest itself in her, Adela, like Anodos, embarks on a journey through fantasy, though she will be borne there through the imagination and words of others. Taken together, these two works by MacDonald manifest both the importance of the image of women's natural innocence in the nineteenth century and a growing awareness of the inadequacy of that image.

**SEXUALITY AND COMING OF AGE
IN TWO WORKS BY GEORGE MACDONALD**

by
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BIOGRAPHY

I was born in France to missionary parents and began my schooling in the French public schools and then attended high school at Black Forest Academy, an international Christian school in Germany. After receiving my English BA in 1993 from Houghton College, a Christian liberal arts college in rural New York, I worked for two years for a Christian non-profit organization, followed by a three-year stint as an English and French teacher at Black Forest Academy. Having been secluded in a Christian environment for quite some time, I found my years at North Carolina State University afforded me the first opportunity to systematically examine not only the current perception of the Christian faith in America but also the larger social and historical perspective on the nineteenth century roots of evangelicalism, a tradition I closely associate with, both because of my personal faith and because of my parents' continuing involvement in modern world missions. MacDonald's novels are still read in evangelical circles today, and he remains an important Christian literary figure. My desire in discussing his work has been to avoid the aggressiveness displayed towards the author by those who either wish to psychoanalyze him or who find his views objectionable without making my thesis an apologia for his beliefs or his obvious personal eccentricities. I read several MacDonald works as a child, including the two Curdie books, the fairy tale "The Day Boy and the Night Girl," and several novels. My interest in rediscovering MacDonald was sparked by taking two courses in Victorian literature at NCSU. Though I admire the fantasies of both C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, I am not a fan of the genre in general. I turned to *Phantastes*, and originally to *Lilith* as well, because of its importance in the MacDonald canon and only stumbled upon *Adela Cathcart* in the course of my research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

George MacDonald was born December 10, 1824 in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. The two most significant facts regarding his childhood are that he was steeped in the Scottish brand of Calvinism and that he lost his mother, Helen MacKay, in 1832 when he was eight years old. As a result of these early life experiences, MacDonald would later re-examine his beliefs regarding the nature of God and the nature of death. He gave his reformed views repeated expression throughout his extended writing career. Richard H. Reiss cautions against the assumption concerning MacDonald's childhood religious milieu "that MacDonald's own family was conventionally Calvinistic: his father was a nonsectarian Christian of the sort which values the Bible more than what anybody says about it" (20). In that respect, father and son were very similar as George MacDonald would eventually form his own, sometimes eccentric, always very strongly held views on the teachings of the Bible. The loss of his mother influenced him strongly as well, as it was the first of many such familial losses that together caused MacDonald to spend much time thinking about what awaits us beyond the grave. However, many critics claim the loss of his mother had a much more particular impact than the losses that were to follow; they see MacDonald as having engaged in a life-long quest through the literature he created to fashion a mother figure for himself. MacDonald's obsession with mothers is actually part of a larger preoccupation with women, and his writings afford us a much more expansive understanding of his thinking than this limited critical approach discloses.

The extent to which his writing served MacDonald's own psychological needs remains a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, it is certain that, in the absence of the daily

experience of a mother's love, MacDonald used his keen sense of the importance of the lost relationship with a mother to express his conviction of the importance of a restored relationship with God. MacDonald's fascination with women as mothers, and also as lovers, does bear spiritual significance. In a letter to his father dated October 16, 1850, the author states: "In all things I hope God will teach me. To be without him is to be like a little child, not learning to walk, left alone by its mother in Cheapside—and far worse than that faint emblem" (*Expression of Character* 36). As Glenn Edward Sadler observes of this excerpt, such "images from childhood experiences" provided "evidences to support his belief in personal immortality" (3). However, much remains of this fascination that is not strictly spiritual. As we examine the process of "coming of age"¹ in *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance* and *Adela Cathcart*, the influences of the opposite sex upon that process in MacDonald's works will be clear. At the same time, we will see that MacDonald adds to his usual emphasis upon the maternal instinct in women a decided stress upon female sexuality, the recognition of which plays a role in the maturation of both men and women.

From MacDonald's letters, it is evident just how important it was for him to be surrounded by the love of women: of wife, surrogate sister, and eldest child. His correspondence not only includes letters to his wife but also many letters to a Mrs. Cowper-Temple. Lord and Lady Mount-Temple first became friends with the MacDonald couple in 1867 (Sadler 138). In October 1877, MacDonald writes Mrs. Cowper-Temple, as she was then known, from his sick bed with a request for help. At the time, his wife and several of their children were enjoying a vacation in Italy (Sadler 256) paid for by the Cowper-Temples

¹ According to Roderick McGillis, "coming of age" is what *Phantastes* as well as the turn-of-the-century work *Lilith* "are about" ("*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom" 31). Kelly Searsmith likewise sees *Phantastes* as a "coming of age tale," though not "a story of specifically masculine development" even if it does set forth an "idealistic, even heroic, masculine identity" (58). See also Colin N. Manlove, *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* 73.

(Sadler 268). In his plea for help, MacDonald states: “It would be like a fairy story to have you to take care of me. [. . .] It is much much to ask, but what are you my sister for if I am going to be doubtful before you[?]” (*Expression* 258-59). Writing to his wife on October 29, 1877, MacDonald refers to Mrs. Cowper-Temple as “the angel-sister” (*Expression* 260), and in November 1877, once he has rejoined his wife in Italy, he opens a letter to Mrs. Cowper-Temple with these words: “At last I am set down at my table to write to my great-great princess grandmother” (*Expression* 269). Sadler correctly identifies this address as “an allusion to his book *The Princess and the Goblin*” (271), which had been published in 1872. The miner boy Curdie in that children’s book is brought safely through many moral and physical perils by the intervention of his friend the princess’s great-great grandmother. MacDonald therefore mixes two contemporary images of women’s roles within society—angels and sisters, or “angel-sisters”—with his own vision of women as dwellers in the realm of fairy tales, endowed with particular influence therein. Women, both in and out of fantasy, ideally are benevolent forces in men’s lives that intervene in times of trouble.

If the sister-friend, Mrs. Cowper-Temple, easily turns into a grandmother, the metamorphosis to the maternal also occurs with wife and daughter. In a July 13, 1855 letter to his wife, MacDonald extols “the friendship of the Scotch” and, lest his British wife take offense, adds: “I don’t speak of individuals, you know. How could I, with your great big heart, which is big enough for me to lie down in and go to sleep, so warm and safe. . . .” (*Expression* 93). MacDonald’s language here evokes the image of an infant sleeping in its mother’s arms, though he is describing his emotional tie to his wife. Even Lilia Scott, or Lily, MacDonald’s eldest child, born just ten months after MacDonald’s wedding, is praised by him for her mother-like qualities. In 1861, he writes to reassure his wife of the household’s

safety and comfort during her absence and praises the then nine-year-old Lily: “The children are very little trouble. . . . Lily is just a mother to them all—seeming to think of everyone before herself. . . .” (*Expression* 134). Later, on March 7 of that year, he again writes Louisa: “You need not be uneasy about us. Lily is a host of Gideon—and as sweet as any ordinary angel. But it will be very jolly when you come back” (*Expression* 134-35). If Mrs. Cowper-Temple is an “angel-sister,” Lily is an angel-mother.

While MacDonald, on a personal level, appreciated nurturing and protective traits in women, his views of women in society were relatively progressive. In 1859, he became professor of English literature at “the first institute of higher education for women,” Bedford College (Sadler 131). In a communication to friend A.J. Scott soliciting a letter of recommendation, MacDonald proclaimed himself very interested in the position, tentatively professing himself to “have considerably more than the ordinary power of interesting young people” (*Expression* 131). He evidently deemed the students to be worthy of his time and effort since he added he “should be useful and feel happily employed in this way” (*Expression* 131). Furthermore, MacDonald also revealed himself as supportive of women’s rights. In May 1871, he writes American Dr. Josiah G. Holland, whom Sadler identifies as a “novelist and editor of *Scribner’s Magazine*” (177). He describes their “ways of thinking” as “much alike” and continues: “I have especially noted what you say on the *woman question*” (*Expression* 176).² According to Sadler, “Holland had written in favor of women’s rights, and MacDonald was sympathetic toward his views” (177).

While the social condition of women is of some interest to MacDonald, the interactions of men and women in the marital relationship, and particularly the spiritual implications of that relationship, are endlessly captivating. In 1851, George MacDonald

² Throughout thesis, emphasis in original unless otherwise indicated.

married Louisa Powell. On October 23 of 1848, the year of his engagement to Louisa, MacDonald wrote to her:

Oh Louisa, is it not true that our life here is a growing unto life, and our death is being born—our true birth? If there is anything beautiful in this our dreamy life, shall it not shine forth in glory in the bright waking consciousness of heaven? And in our life together, my dear dear Louisa, if it please God that we should pass any part of our life together here, shall it not still shine when the cloud is over my head? I may see the light shining from your face, and when darkness is around you, you may see the light on mine, and thus we shall take courage? (*Expression 26*)

Human conjugal love is heavenly in nature, and thus the nature of that love is not fully comprehended until “our dreamy life” is traded for “the bright waking consciousness of heaven.” However, such love can move us closer towards heaven and spiritual truth. As for death, it is a passageway into a fuller, richer life. These tenets form the basis of the fantasy world MacDonald created in *Phantastes*. If love, by its beauty, partakes of the heavenly, it ought to be an unadulterated, perfect love. Earlier in this same letter, MacDonald expresses the desire for his and Louisa’s love to be increasingly authentic: “Is love a beautiful thing, dearest? You and I love: but who created love? Let us ask him to purify our love to make it stronger and more real and more self-denying” (*Expression 26*). The titular character in *Adela Cathcart* is asked to progress towards a love that is more real and more self-denying, as is Anodos in *Phantastes*.

MacDonald’s faith inspired his thought and directed his writing. However, MacDonald did not always have the steadfastness of belief that would later characterize him.

In 1845, having earned an M.A. degree in chemistry and natural philosophy from King's College in Aberdeen, MacDonald moved to London where in 1848, after time as a tutor, he continued his education at Highbury Theological College, a Congregational school. He graduated two years later, in 1850 and, that same year, began pastoring a church in Arundel, Sussex. While a tutor in London in 1845, he writes his father: "I think I am a Christian although one of the weakest. [. . .] My greatest difficulty always is 'How do I know that my faith is of a lasting kind such as will produce fruits?' I am ever so forgetful and unwilling to pray and read God's word—that it often seems as if my faith will produce no fruit" (*Expression* 11). In 1847, a year before entering Highbury College, he writes once more to tell his father that he wishes to delay his entrance into theological school a year: "[. . .] I feel as if I could be of use in [God's] vineyard, from the difficult paths in which I have been led. I love my bible more. I am always finding out something new in it. [. . .] All my teaching in youth seems useless to me. I must get it all from the bible again [. . .]" (*Expression* 17). The result of this work of reconstruction was a set of convictions so strong that MacDonald held to them and articulated them despite the fact that it cost him his first pastorate at Arundel, following a charge of heresy. According to Sadler, David Holbrook, and Reis, he "was forced to resign" (46; 34; 24). As Holbrook explains, "he had shocked them by his unorthodoxy, declaring that the heathen could be saved, and even that animals might be allowed into heaven" (34).

The loss of his pastorate at Arundel effectively launched MacDonald's writing career, though his public success at first was limited. In time, however, his significance as an author would be such that he would be granted a Civil List Pension (Sadler 265): "[. . .] the Queen has given me £100 a year. Isn't it nice?" he writes his wife on November 2, 1877 (*Expression*

261). Prior to 1850 when he began pastoring at Arundel, he had already written and anonymously published a poem entitled “David,” in 1846. In 1851, MacDonald translated *Twelve Spiritual Songs of Novalis*, a mystic by whom he was greatly influenced, and circulated it among his friends.³ After his 1853 resignation from Arundel,

he resolved to earn a living as a writer if he could and to incorporate into his works the urgent religious message which he felt called upon to disseminate, pulpit or no pulpit. For most of the rest of his life he had to live by writing, supplementing his slender income with whatever odd jobs and subsidies he could find. (Reis 24)

In 1855 came the “poetic drama” *Within and Without* (Sadler 48), which won him the patronage of Lady Byron (Reis 24). He wrote his father in August 1855: “I have heard several things about my book since I returned—the principal of which is the interest Lady Byron, the widow of the poet, has taken in it. It seems to have taken a powerful hold on her” (*Expression* 100). This was fortunate, for according to Reis, “her gifts and bequests to the MacDonald family actually kept them from starvation until the father’s writing began to produce an income of sorts” (24).⁴ He published *Poems* in 1857 and finally *Phantastes* in 1858, the latter of which “occasioned so little public interest that publishers were reluctant to issue any more of his works” (Hein, *Heart of GMD* xiv). His prospects no doubt looked bleak. MacDonald had lost a brother in 1853 and a half-sister in 1855, and in the year in which *Phantastes* was published, he lost another brother and also his father.

³ Reis indicates Novalis is “the pen name of Friedrich von Hardenburg” (27).

⁴ After meeting Lady Byron, he wrote his father again in June 1857, saying: “She is the most extraordinary person, of remarkable intellect, and a great, pure, unselfish soul” (*Expression* 122). The equation of purity with selflessness appears in both *Phantastes* and *Adela Cathcart*, where the outcome of the struggles of both protagonists is greater purity.

Meanwhile, his own family had been expanding. Two months after his resignation from Arundel in 1853, Mary Josephine had been born. MacDonald eventually became father to five daughters and six sons. Holbrook calculates that for Louisa this meant: “Of 181 months of marriage between 1851 and 1867 [birth of first and last child] she was pregnant for 99” (44). MacDonald was to live to see the deaths of many of these children. Mary Josephine was the first of the children to die, in 1878, followed by son Maurice in 1879, Caroline Grace in 1884, and finally the favorite child, Lilia Scott, in 1891, along with a granddaughter that same year.⁵ MacDonald struggled greatly to support such a large family, though he finally did meet with literary success. The failed publication of *Phantastes* was a lesson not wasted on MacDonald: “Sensing the possibility of conveying his convictions to a larger popular audience by writing novels, MacDonald worked persistently until in 1863 he was at last successful in finding a publisher for *David Elginbrod*. Its success among the reading public marked the beginning of his prolific novel-writing career, in which he published some thirty” (Hein, *Heart of GMD* xiv). According to Sadler, “*The Times* called the novel ‘the work of a man of genius,’ and even the *Athenaeum*, which had been critical of MacDonald’s poetry, gave the novel three columns in review” (139).⁶ *Adela Cathcart* was published just a year after *David Elginbrod*, but MacDonald was not to write another adult fantasy like *Phantastes* until 1895, when *Lilith* was published. Though he wrote so many novels, “from time to time,” explains Reis, “whenever he got far enough ahead of his bills to afford a sure failure,

⁵ Reis attributes their deaths to tuberculosis, though he states they died “in childhood” (23) when only Maurice, who died at 15, could perhaps be said to have died in childhood. Lily died at 39, Caroline grace at 29, and Mary Josephine at 24. MacDonald was subject to “tubercular attacks” as well (23). In addition, “MacDonald’s father died of a tubercular bone infection; his two beloved brothers succumbed while young [. . .]” (23).

⁶ MacDonald’s correspondence includes an interesting anecdote regarding Margaret Oliphant’s reaction to the novel. According to Sadler, she “was influential in getting *David Elginbrod* published” (146). MacDonald writes Louisa in August of 1865: “Simpson at Blackwood’s says it is absurd to hear Mrs. Oliphant’s worship (!) of me. ‘What is it for her to be writing novels when such a man, etc.’ Isn’t it funny? . . .” (*Expression* 146).

he indulged his less popular taste for fantasy, and he went on writing fairy tales for children which are still classics” (25-26).

In 1898, MacDonald experienced a stroke that rendered “speaking difficult, if not impossible” (Sadler 332).⁷ Then, in January 1902, a little less than two months before their fifty-first wedding anniversary, his wife Louisa died, causing “a blow from which MacDonald really never recovered” (Sadler 332). MacDonald followed his wife on September 18, 1905. In his foreword to Sadler’s collection of letters by George MacDonald, G. B. Tennyson writes: “All the leading literary journals took extensive note of his passing. G. K. Chesterton [. . .] was among those writing laudatory obituaries, and in the year following MacDonald’s death an appreciation by Joseph Johnson was published” (x).⁸ However, posthumously MacDonald’s fame was short-lived: “[. . .] by the end of the First War, MacDonald had been cast into the literary dustbin reserved for those Victorians whom bright young things called ‘eminent’ as a term of contempt, and that included almost all the Victorians, especially if they were earnest, religious, hortatory, and wore beards” (Tennyson x).⁹ Finally, towards the middle of the century, C. S. Lewis began drawing attention back to MacDonald’s works, “one of the most staggeringly large and varied bodies of work of any English author of any age, even allowing that Victorians in particular tended to be prolific” (Tennyson xi). Today, it is the two adult fantasies, *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, as well as the children’s works that receive the most attention. This study will focus on the first of these two fantasies and on a novel that is interspersed with fantasies: *Adela Cathcart*.

⁷ Reis lists the date as 1900 (26).

⁸ He had been well known in the United States as well, where he had delivered a series of lectures in 1872 after Dr. Josiah Holland had written him to propose the idea (Sadler 140). Reis sets his profit from the trip at “over a thousand pounds” (25).

⁹ MacDonald commented on his reason for wearing a beard in a letter to his father in June of 1854: “[. . .] believe that I feel nearer to nature by doing so. Having been an advocate for it from boyhood, I hope ere I die, when my hair is as grey or white as this paper, [. . .] to wear it all just as God meant it to be, and as men wore it before some fops began to imitate women. . . .” (*Expression* 79).

Phantastes (1858) and *Lilith* (1895) are commonly seen as complementary works. Colin N. Manlove, for example, sees these “dream-romances” (*Modern Fantasy* 55) as visions of “the Christian First Things” and “the Last” (*Christian Fantasy* 179). Anodos in *Phantastes* “partakes in the story of man in Paradise” and later “is able to re-enact something of the life of the Second Adam, or Christ” (*Christian Fantasy* 180). Mr. Vane’s own experience in *Lilith* partakes rather “of the Last Days when all the sleeping dead will arise and go into heaven” (*Christian Fantasy* 180).¹⁰ While Manlove is examining how MacDonald “creates a sense of God” (*Christian Fantasy* 177) and “a sense of approaching promise” (*Christian Fantasy* 175), other critics have emphasized gender issues within both works since so many of the key characters with which each protagonist interacts in the fantasy world are female. Though genre and content thus tie *Lilith* and *Phantastes* together, more useful observations about gender relations in MacDonald can be derived from a comparison of *Phantastes* and its male protagonist with *Adela Cathcart* and its female protagonist, particularly since the two texts were published within six years of each other. Though not written in the same genre as *Phantastes*, *Adela Cathcart* (1864) does contain a series of fairy tales and short fantasies told to Adela to bring her out of a depression that has lasted already several weeks and is ravaging her health and her faith. The protagonists of these two books have in common not only a transforming encounter with the fantastic, whether direct or mitigated, but also their age, their upper-class background and the loss of one or both parents. At twenty-one years of age, they are therefore left to negotiate the passage into adulthood without the help of this parental presence.

In particular, each work raises the issue of adult relations between members of the opposite sex. In *Phantastes*, MacDonald acknowledges the sexual nature of woman while

¹⁰ See also Manlove’s *Impulse* (74) for this comparison of *Phantastes* and *Lilith*.

also manifesting a desire to separate the sexual from the ideal woman; in *Adela Cathcart*, he accepts the essential oneness of the sexual and the good woman but remains troubled by its implications. For Anodos, whose interest in the opposite sex is always clearly evident, the fairyland experience emphasizes the danger of misapprehending the nature of a woman: one who is thought to be the ideal woman turns out to be monstrous instead. At the same time, this vision of monstrous femininity in *Phantastes* is balanced by the vision of a pure, ideal womanhood, the perfect wife and prospective mother. She is a manifestation of the Victorian “angel in the house,” the moral guide of the family who directs by example and whose image is virginal, though she has a cultural obligation to be abundantly fertile. In *Phantastes*, the two polar representations of women form an uneasy cohabitation. The sexual woman and the virgin have a tendency to blur, as indeed they do, albeit in a culturally acceptable fashion, in the “angel in the house.” MacDonald’s awareness of woman’s sexuality leads him to question the reality of the ideal woman by maintaining her within the realm of fantasy and leaving his protagonist celibate. In turn, this celibacy illustrates MacDonald’s reluctance to deal with the blurred, good-but-sexual woman he knows exists in the real world. *Adela Cathcart*’s importance to my thesis comes from the fact that, by placing his female protagonist in the real, not the fantastic, world, MacDonald must address the best way for women to manage the sexuality he, as author, has granted them. He demonstrates how a woman might fulfill her traditional angelic role even while confronting the demands of her sexuality. I intend to argue that what makes Adela’s transition into adulthood so difficult is that in her, too, the ideal woman and the sexual woman are deliberately blurred. To exist in the world, and to safely mature, this good-but-sexual woman must, like Anodos in

Phantastes, embark on a journey through fantasy, borne there through the imagination and words of others.

MacDonald attempts a compromise in that, if he is willing to admit the sexuality of both his male and his female protagonists, he is intractable in requiring of them that, to counter the tendency of the sex drive itself, their love be selfless and thus pure. However, in his literary treatments of human sexuality at least, it appears the compromise is still unsatisfactory. The question of how to deal with one's own sexuality can be internally resolved, and must be resolved as part of the coming of age process, but it is much more difficult, of course, to confront human sexuality in the context of an ongoing, and thus successful, relationship. It is this successful relationship that Anodos, dependent as he is upon his vision of idealized womanhood, fails to forge. If, unlike Anodos, Adela manages to make a successful match, it is because Victorian domestic ideology did not require the same absolute innocence of men that it did of women, and, just as importantly, because her future husband is certainly not intimidated by female sexuality. As he confronts his beliefs about sexuality and the coming of age experience for males and females, MacDonald seems to hesitate between idealizing, and thus desexualizing, women and accepting sexuality as part of women's nature. One sign of this hesitation, as we have already seen, is MacDonald's awareness that the idealized women of his fantasy, though yearned after, will never cross the boundaries of fantasy, that the women who populate the earth possess, indeed, a very different nature from those who populate his fantasies. Significantly, what MacDonald begins to confront in *Adela Cathcart* is the fact that women have no inborn angelic nature, that they are sexual beings, and that to become "angels in the house," nurturing to their children and protective of the spiritual and mental well-being of their husbands, women must

undergo a coming of age process similar to that of the males who struggle so much with handling their sexuality. While on the surface MacDonald seems to embrace the view of women as angelically innocent, *Adela Cathcart* belies his apparently facile espousal of this ideal, as does *Phantastes* on a smaller scale. Taken together, these two works manifest both the importance of the image of women's natural innocence in the nineteenth century and a growing awareness of the inadequacy of that image. *Adela Cathcart* presents MacDonald's most balanced look at female psychology and sexuality, for Adela is neither good nor evil. She has the potential to become the ideal woman while she flirts with evil through her possession of a trait MacDonald vilifies above all others—self-centeredness, especially self-centeredness in love. In this study, I will attempt to follow MacDonald as he engages in the strange juggling act by which he simultaneously idealizes women and releases them from the grasp of idolizing males, proclaims their purity and concerns himself with their healthy maturation into sexuality.

This thesis will therefore position itself within the body of works of gender criticism on MacDonald's writings. Critics who discuss the representation of women in MacDonald's fiction, namely his fantasies and fairy tales, tend to focus on the frequency with which mother figures appear. The mother figures in *Phantastes* act as moral guides to Anodos, helping him interpret his life or leading the battle against evil. These wise and powerful mother figures therefore represent idealized womanhood. Inevitably, the critics who deal with these figures refer to two events in MacDonald's life to aid them in interpreting the importance he placed upon mothers: his sudden weaning and the early loss of his mother. David Holbrook makes constant reference to these two events in his book-length examination

of MacDonald's fairy-tales, *A Study of George MacDonald and the Image of Woman*.¹¹

According to Holbrook, the longing for death manifested in these works stems not from MacDonald's aspiration towards the Christian heaven but from his desire to be reunited with his mother.¹² While Holbrook uses the Oedipal framework to discuss MacDonald's relationship with his mother and the image of this relationship in his depiction of female characters in his fairy-tales, he departs from a strictly Freudian interpretation in that he does not see MacDonald as necessarily sexually attracted to the mother. Instead, Holbrook looks at the psychology of identity formation in early childhood and claims that the sudden weaning as well as the early death of MacDonald's mother prevented him from completing the process of identity formation. MacDonald's writing is, therefore, an effort to seek again that perfect unity with the mother that precedes the formation of a separate identity and allows the individual to transfer the feelings of trust and comfort from the mother to the world. Ultimately, then, it is a new relationship with the world that is sought. Unfortunately, because Holbrook sees MacDonald's writing as driven by this intense need to find the mother again, the same pattern is applied to all the works examined and the literary criticism becomes an effort to psychoanalyze the author and provide a case study of the importance of the mother in identity formation. Every female comes to represent the mother, and breast symbols in particular become tremendously important, as well as incredibly common.¹³

¹¹ Holbrook includes *Lilith* and *Phantastes* in his study under the heading "fairy tales," though he also writes of them as fantasies. Manlove calls both these works adult fantasies (*Modern Fantasy* 55). They are not included as subjects of discussion in Judith Gero John's article as she focuses on children's works. I will be referring to *Phantastes* as an adult fantasy, following Manlove's example, since I am comparing it to the novel for adults *Adela Cathcart*.

¹² Holbrook's bias against MacDonald and his low estimation of MacDonald's emotional stability are evidenced in his attributing to "depression" what was actually the effect of MacDonald's stroke on his powers of communication (35, 43). Sadler's own account is based on the authority of MacDonald's grandson, Colonel Maurice MacDonald.

¹³ The year MacDonald turned fifteen, seven years after his mother died, he gained a stepmother, Margaret McColl. Sadler claims she was a woman to whom "MacDonald seems to have transferred readily his affections"

Judith Gero John, a feminist critic, also focuses on mother figures in MacDonald's work and therefore mentions the weaning and the death of the mother in her short article, "Searching for Great-Great-Grandmother: Powerful Women in George MacDonald's Fantasies." She attributes MacDonald's depiction of "beautiful, powerful women" in his children's fantasies to his need for "a mother strong enough to remain with her child—over the objections of the father," for it was partly through the intervention of her husband that Mrs. MacDonald had weaned her son early (28). The mother figures in MacDonald's children's fantasies are derived from the author's own early relationships with women: "In his fantasy the strong grandmother who raised him combined with the beautiful mother who died young [. . .]" (28). In all this emphasis on the author's needs and early childhood experiences, however, I am led to wonder whether a simpler, though partial, answer for MacDonald's fascination with mother figures has not been overlooked. The cult of the mother was, after all, a widespread phenomenon. In addition, a children's fairy tale ought to be adapted to children, to whom both parents are often all-powerful figures. Gero John, however, is less interested in why MacDonald's "mothers, especially great-great-grandmothers, are ageless, powerful, and eternal" than in obtaining "some insight into the male understanding of the female mystique" (28). If, according to Gero John, MacDonald's women fulfill all the expectations held for Victorian mothers in preparing girls for marriage (29-30) and shaping the morals of boys (30), they also participate in "a female bonding ritual" (31), "a sisterhood of shared experience" (33) between mother and daughter figures. In comparing MacDonald's children's fantasies to such tales as *Snow White* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, where women stand divided against each other or are, at best, neglectful of

and with whom he corresponded "as if she were his real mother, even after his own father's death" (2). MacDonald's grief over his mother's death does not appear to have left him as psychologically damaged as Holbrook and others believe.

each other, Gero John finds MacDonald “offered to women characters that which we have been denied—women who care for and genuinely like each other” (33).

If George MacDonald began to re-conceive not women’s roles so much as the relationships between women, the question remains whether he also took steps to re-examine the ways in which men and women relate to each other, particularly young adult males and females. A healthy relationship between an adult male and a surrogate mother is not sexual, and therefore, despite the clear idealization of women as mother figures, these relationships do not provide fertile material for exploring how the idealization of women might be maintained in the context of a potentially sexual relationship or whether such idealization is, in fact, a function of asexuality in women. According to John Pennington, MacDonald clearly did re-envision the relationship between the sexes, at least for the young protagonists in his fairy tales: “MacDonald suggests that there needs to be a symbiotic relationship between the male and female, that there needs to be a healthy interaction between the sexes, and his tales are populated with heroes and heroines who succeed in their quest because they work for their common goal together” (102). This is, for example, the case in “The Day Boy and the Night Girl,” “the last short fairy tale that MacDonald published” (143), and in “The Light Princess,” a fairy tale included in the novel *Adela Cathcart*. In discussing both of these tales, Pennington writes of “the equality of the sexes” that MacDonald portrays (150, 158).¹⁴ MacDonald apparently “reach[es] across barriers” (Gero John 33) in more ways than Gero John has imagined, not only in perceiving the positive interactions between women across generations but in conceiving of changed relations between boys and girls as well. Boys and girls mature through “shared experience” too. Girls, and thus perhaps young women, have a

¹⁴ Pennington’s dissertation, *Thematic and Structural Subversion in the Fairy Tales and Fantasies of George MacDonald*, explores the fairy tales as “thematically subversive” (7) but the adult fantasies as “structurally original” and “structurally subversive” (8).

much more prominent role to play in the maturation experience of boys, and perhaps men, than critics' prior ubiquitous emphasis on mothers has acknowledged. MacDonald's treatment of female characters is therefore much more complex than Holbrook's Freudian analysis allows.

When one turns to MacDonald's adult fantasy, *Phantastes*, however, the complexity stems more from the number of female figures than from the individual complexity of any one. The plethora of female characters is comprised of the totally good, totally evil, or totally helpless, the majority of women being good, and being also helpless only when they are not mother figures. Evil itself is defined for women as sexual aggressiveness combined with a complete lack of true passion. Good women are shown to be so usually either by being good wives or good mothers. In addition, the question of the relation between the two sexes has shifted from a concern for equality in the fairy tales and children's fantasies to a concern for the male's response to feminine charms and to his responsibilities towards women in the adult fantasy. In learning to interact with adult women, MacDonald's male protagonist resorts initially to the infant-to-mother model of relationship. Anodos does seem often to seek shelter in the arms of a mother figure. However, these mother figures are fewer than Holbrook suggests, and the focus of the work is not on regression to the infant-mother relationship but on progression to a mature adult male-female relationship (and thus still a relationship with a prospective mother). MacDonald, in fact, has explained his passion for inserting mother figures into his work through the lines of *Adela Cathcart*. In a story the preacher tells, the narrator says of the character Elsie that "when she looked forward to heaven, it was as much a reverting to the old heavenly times of childhood and mother's love, as an anticipation of something yet to be revealed. Indeed, without some such memory, how

should we ever picture to ourselves a perfect rest?" (115). MacDonald was searching for a human archetype through which to represent heaven to his readers. The preoccupation with motherhood can also partially be attributed to the Victorian conceptualization of masculinity: "Sexual potency was, implicitly if not explicitly, an essential aspect of all the Victorian and Edwardian definitions of manliness. The ability to create, to be a molding influence in the world, was inextricably connected with the idea of man as the dominant sexual partner. To be a man, virtually by biological definition, was to sire offspring" (Oppenheim 164).

By becoming a mother, a woman enables a male to be a man. This is a definition that MacDonald himself, as father to eleven children, followed.

Phantastes in part measures the male's progress towards accomplishing the transition from the infant model of relationship to an adult one. However, the transfer of affection from mother to mate somehow still fails, just at the time Anodos becomes eligible for marriage. Though it is possible, and no doubt the author intended, for *Phantastes* to be read as a vision of spiritual progress, it also raises many questions about MacDonald's conception of human sexuality. Anodos is twenty-one, and orphaned. As the story begins, he has just undergone "ceremonies investing [him] with [his] legal rights" (5). He is owner of a "castle" (183) and has reapers working for him (185). This very eligible heir travels through an essentially feminine world yet never does acquire the companionship of a young woman. Instead, he must relinquish his claim to the woman he loves, perhaps as a lesson in self-control. According to Kelly Sears Smith, "Anodos has the sense that he has the unquestioned right to go where he likes [. . .]; to take and touch what he wishes [. . .]; and, by extension, to possess the women he desires" (60). Sears Smith finds in "Anodos's pursuit of the white lady [. . .] a condemnation [. . .] of the eroticizing masculine imagination" (60). In the end, Anodos learns

much about taming his sexuality so that he neither harms nor is harmed by it, yet for added safety woman must remain an idealized, unreachable figure. MacDonald is not concerned here with female sexuality but with male sexuality and its expression.¹⁵ Only the idealized but non-sexual mother figure's presence continues to be felt outside the realm of fantasy.

In any case, the transition from youth to adulthood seems fraught with danger regardless of gender. Adela needs the assistance of three individuals to pull herself out of her general despondency. She does not experience the sympathetic sisterhood that Gero John discovered in MacDonald's children's fantasies; instead, an adopted uncle, a preacher, and a doctor – a *male* triad – help her through this transition by way of fairy tales and sermons, just as numerous women assisted Anodos. At twenty-one also, her own experience with Fairy Land, or at least with fairy tales, concludes not only with a return to physical and mental health but also with marriage. Despite the importance of paternity to the definition of Victorian manhood, the importance of Adela's role as potential wife and mother is even greater so that she seems to be rescued from depression and death to fulfill that role. Nevertheless, she is the female counterpart to Anodos: they are both members of the landed gentry, and while he is orphaned, she has lost her mother. Just as Anodos must learn to manage his sexuality, the proper management of her sexuality is one of the primary complicating factors in Adela's coming of age. In Victorian ideology, "women's virtues were functions of their very bodies, which were without sexual desire but replete with maternal feeling" (Searsmith 67). Adela's body, however, is not virtuous. Such, at least, seems to be one of the many messages of the fairy tale told at the first official gathering of the "story-

¹⁵ Despite his personal adherence to the concept of manhood Janet Oppenheim describes, MacDonald seems to have been influenced by a competing ideology as well: "Many middle-class males of the second half of the nineteenth century had come to regard their marital duty as a burden and their own occasional spasms of erotic need as an indication of personal weakness" (Dijkstra 68).

club” convened to help cure Adela: “The Light Princess.” Since the tale clearly seeks to move a young lady from carelessness in the treatment of her sexuality to an understanding of the true feelings of love, confusion over how to deal with her sexuality is therefore, I would suggest, an important but overlooked element in Adela’s depression. If the Light Princess in her extreme self-centeredness is not an exact portrait of Adela at twenty-one, she is a picture of what Adela might become. At the same time, and in contrast, traces of the “angel in the house” mentality are evident throughout the novel as a whole. I intend to argue that MacDonald, in fact, sees women as fallen angels who must be taught how to live in their fallen bodies without compromising their angelic calling to nurture family life and be the moral center of the home. To fulfill that calling, they must be pure and perfect in their love, resisting all self-centered urges to capitalize on their sexual appeal. Their own sexual yearnings, however, are integral to their humanity and need only be submitted to the bonds of perfect love. Such is the basis, according to MacDonald, of a mature understanding and management of female sexuality. Women’s symbolic fall from angelhood simply endows them with their physical nature and remains unconnected to that other fall into immorality taken by the nineteenth century’s “fallen women.”¹⁶

U. C. Knoepfelmacher notes the conflicting attitude towards marriage in MacDonald’s adult fantasies and “The Light Princess,” a contrast which might easily be extended to *Adela Cathcart* itself: “Whereas a this-worldly union proved impossible in MacDonald’s adult fantasies, ‘The Light Princess’ follows the format of traditional fairy tales [. . .] by closing with the marriage of a matured royal couple” (132). According to Knoepfelmacher, the inclusion of marriage in the plot originated from “George MacDonald’s attachment to living

¹⁶ I am taking for granted here that the reader understands there is no reason to believe MacDonald accepted “perfect love” as the only measure of a person’s readiness for sexual self-expression. While male fascination with female sexuality is obvious in his work, he would have reserved sex for the marriage relationship.

children [which] acted as a much-needed counterweight to his desire for union with a maternal essence beyond “Time and Space” (132). These children, then, helped MacDonald somewhat in the same manner Knoepflmacher claims the prince helped the princess, “by grounding his beloved in the actuality she has tried to evade” (132).¹⁷ However, since the dates of publication of *Phantastes* (1858) and *Adela Cathcart* (1864) are only six years apart, MacDonald’s willingness to conclude both “The Light Princess” and *Adela Cathcart* with the promise of a marriage is more likely related to the gender differences of his protagonists, Anodos and Adela, than to his having finally acquired a “grounding in actuality.” Indeed, the first attempt to publish “The Light Princess” itself came in 1862, four years after the publication of *Phantastes* (Knoepflmacher 125). Furthermore, in *Lilith*, which is unfortunately outside the scope of this study, MacDonald’s male protagonist once again fails to marry, for his ideal woman not only belongs to the world of fantasy but also has passed from that world to the next through death so that she is twice removed from his presence. MacDonald’s “grounding in actuality” through his children is therefore certainly not permanent.

Finally, MacDonald receives Gero John’s praise for his “attempt to enter into a female bonding ritual” in his children’s fantasies (31), but in the novel *Adela Cathcart*, no trace of this property can be found. Instead, Dr. Armstrong, his brother the curate, and the narrator bond as they study and treat Adela. In the process, however, MacDonald offers the portrait of a male character very similar to Anodos: the narrator and old bachelor John Smith. Both are puzzled over the blending of beauty and cruelty. The narrator gazes at the moor with its heather and “cold wells of brown water” (314). While the heather can “mak[e] the desolate place [. . .] rejoice” (314), the wells can make a man drown. One tends towards

¹⁷ See also Knoepflmacher 130.

welfare and the other towards destruction, yet both are facets of the same moor: “How smooth yet cruel it looked in its thick covering of snow!” (314). The heather and the wells represent two different types of women: “And I thought of Adela when I thought of the heather; and of some other woman whom I had known, when I thought of the wells” (315). The close association of these two different types of women is disturbing in the same manner as the juxtaposition of the beautiful heather with the dangerous, cruel wells is disturbing. Anodos wonders in similar fashion regarding the Alder-maid: “—How can beauty and ugliness dwell so near?” (48). *Adela Cathcart*’s narrator, Smith, displays the same tendency to want to revive a woman as Anodos displays in reviving the “white lady,” as he refers to her (44). And he ultimately surrenders her to the doctor to marry just as Anodos must surrender the white lady to the knight. Smith, a grown-up version of Anodos, has met his lady of the well, just as Anodos has met his Alder-maid. Their struggle represents the struggle of the century to come to terms with the nature of “woman,” as evidence of female sexuality grew concurrently with the vision of the “angel in the house.” The confusion of these two male protagonists is only a reflection of the greater confusion of the times, while MacDonald’s honesty leads him at least to link the idealism of these characters and their status as bachelors. In the fantasy world, the women Anodos pursues are split into the evil seductress and the good virgin. In the quasi reality of Victorian fiction, however, the good virgin has traces of the evil seductress in her. Like her male counterparts, she has passions in her that she will need to learn to control before she can be a responsible adult.

Chapter 2

Phantastes and the Unattached Man: Loving on, Loving Always

The process of coming of age and the issues of gender relations and sexuality as factors in that process are clearly brought to the foreground from the very beginning of *Phantastes*. The story of Anodos begins the day after his twenty-first birthday (5). His father has been dead “many a year” (5), and Anodos is now donning his “legal rights” (5) as male successor to the family estate. He receives “the keys of an old secretary” belonging to his father (5). Musing on its possible contents, he anticipates the discovery of his father’s “personal history,” with which he is unfamiliar, or possibly “only the records of lands and moneys” of “strange men,” his forefathers (6), but his investigation of the secretary uncovers instead a representative of his female ancestry: “[. . .] suddenly there stood [. . .] a tiny woman-form, as perfect in shape as if she had been a small Greek statuette roused to life and motion” (7). She chides him for “know[ing] something of your great-grandfathers” while “know[ing] very little about your great-grandmothers on either side” (8). Like the “withered rose-leaves” and “small packet of papers, tied with a bit of ribbon” that Anodos finds in a secret compartment in his father’s secretary just before this tiny woman appears (6), the female members of the family have fallen prey to “the law of oblivion” (7). U. C. Knoepfelmacher calls the lady “a foremother” and remarks that Anodos “has uncovered a suppressed female lineage” (120). However, as far as can be ascertained, though Anodos meets a series of mother figures, he does not meet either mother or grandmother of his in Fairy Land and gains no concrete knowledge of his family’s female lineage. Through these mother figures, however, female influence is slowly allowed to penetrate his life. In addition,

as he repeatedly finds himself enfolded in women's nurturing arms, these mothers enact for him the very love of God, while the lover's embrace continually eludes him.

Anodos's lack of exposure to the world of women due to the loss of his mother has left him largely unable to understand women or progress to a mature adult relationship with a woman, notwithstanding the existence of sisters. Through the cast of female characters he meets in Fairy Land, Anodos modifies his current evaluation of the relations between the genders. He needs to gain a practical understanding of women's world. Rolland Hein takes a metaphorical approach to the lady's criticism of Anodos, concluding: "Apparently, male ancestors symbolize the concerns of the everyday and commercial world; female ones symbolize the less known, mysterious side of experience" (*Harmony Within* 58). The "commercial world" and his male ancestors may have received more of his attention, but he nonetheless does not seem particularly interested in recovering the documents that would allow him to trace the development of the family fortune. On the other hand, the women in *Phantastes* do represent the unseen, spiritual realm. Significantly, though, in journeying with these women, Anodos learns to more adequately undertake the male role. He must form a more appropriate understanding of his relation to the opposite gender in order to enter into his manhood. With his eyes locked on the lady's, Anodos "remembered somehow that [his] mother died when [he] was a baby" (8).¹ He has been deprived of a motherly influence and will need to experience this fundamental relationship with a woman before he is ready for that other fundamental relationship as a woman's lover. However, becoming a lover preoccupies him both prior to and during his time in Fairy Land. When the tiny lady becomes "a tall, gracious lady, with pale face and large blue eyes" (7-8), Anodos gazes in admiration

¹ Based upon the fact that Anodos states the lady's eyes "filled me with an unknown longing" (8), Colin N. Manlove comments that "it is desire that in a sense takes Anodos into Fairy Land in the first place [. . .]" (*Christian Fantasy* 177). Manlove discusses the role of desire in *Phantastes* at length. See footnote 38.

on “her form” (8). He attempts to touch her, prompting a rebuke: it seems she is his 237-year-old grandmother, or a great-grandmother in any case, “and a man must not fall in love with his grandmother, you know,” she cautions (8). Indeed, part of Anodos’s business in Fairy Land will be to learn whom it is appropriate to fall in love with, and then to determine what the nature of love itself is.

The portrayal of the women in *Phantastes* is an indication of Anodos’s own mindset towards women. According to Colin N. Manlove, “the landscape [. . .] of *Phantastes* [. . .] is usually felt to be an extension of the mind of the solitary hero Anodos” (*Impulse of Fantasy Literature* 90).² Much of the fantasy is comprised of the story of Anodos’s hopeless infatuation with the white lady who “represents the conventional female wish-fulfilment of heterosexual men” (Searsmith 60).³ Thus, it is natural to also attempt to explain Anodos’s relationship to the mother figures as a function of wish fulfillment, more precisely an Oedipal impulse. The frequently cited 1961 study by Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key*,⁴ offers “plausible evidence of Oedipal conflict,” according to Max Keith Sutton (11). However, the Oedipal interpretation fails to account for “certain differences between the youth’s behavior toward the maternal figures and his behavior toward the women he pursues” (Sutton 11). In the first case, “Andos [sic] behaves like a child,” and in the second, “he takes an active masculine role [. . .]” (Sutton 11). The Oedipal interpretation is thus at odds with the evidence regarding the role Anodos adopts in relationship to the mother figures. Sutton expands his analysis of Anodos’s childhood beyond the Freudian focus on the mother to

² In *Christian Fantasy*, Manlove mentions Anodos’s “dream-like entry to Fairy Land” in support of this view (179).

³ The second time he rescues her, Anodos has been haunting “the white hall of Phantasy” where “the unseen filled [his] brain” (111). His mind constructs her to alleviate his loneliness: “[. . .] lonely trod my soul up and down the halls of the brain” (111).

⁴ *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961).

examine also the impact of the emotional withdrawal of the father in terms of the “psychology of the self” propounded by Heinz Kohut (12).⁵ Sutton comments: “By keeping himself so remote that the boy learns nothing of his ‘personal history,’ he deprives his son of the chance to idealize him as a ‘parental imago’ and thus take the first step toward developing a firm sense of ideals and purpose” (12). Left also without a mother, Anodos develops “an ‘enfeebled self’ and reveals the symptoms of narcissistic disorder” (Sutton 12).⁶ This narcissistic young gentleman, then, creates non-threatening females, surrogate mothers, to cater to his emotional, not sexual, needs.⁷

As Manlove points out, Anodos is a character driven by “random impulse” (*Impulse* 77). His name in Greek means “pathless,” “having no way” (Manlove, *Impulse* 77). His first day in Fairy Land, he is warned by his hostess not to travel by night as he plans (15), yet he does so and meets the Ash-tree, from whom he is rescued by the motherly beech-tree. He tarries with her only until morning because his “unfinished story urged [him] on” (32). Anodos describes himself journeying on “as if new-born” after hugging and kissing the beech-tree good-bye (32). Feeling “a vague compunction, as if [he] ought not to have left her” (33), the new-born Anodos has indeed departed prematurely. He approaches his first amorous relationship with an infant’s mindset. According to Manlove, this mindset makes

⁵ Sutton cites *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (NY: Int’l Universities P, 1971), and *The Restoration of the Self* (NY: Int’l Universities P, 1977).

⁶ *The Analysis of the Self* (28); *The Restoration of the Self* (286).

⁷ Sutton also makes use of Jungian theory, focusing particularly on “the long inward journey toward wholeness in the process called individuation” (15). Anodos lacks wholeness and meets “the representatives of his incompleteness” (15). He cites the Ash-tree (or “shadow”) and the Maid of the Alder (or “negative anima”), both of whom have an empty cavity inside (15; cf. *Phantastes* 30, 46). The Ash-tree and the Alder-maiden respectively enact “destructive greed” and “narcissistic impulses” (16). Manlove feels the Ash-tree is “a passive victim” of his hunger for “possession” (*Impulse* 83). For Hein, he signifies “the spiritual disaster” caused by “a selfish sensuality” (*Harmony* 60). Roderick McGillis describes the Ash in light of its partnership with the Alder-maiden, the first symbolizing “the grasping desire to possess, the will to power” and the second “a sexuality based on violence” (“*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom” 41).

the intervention of mother figures necessary, leading to their multitudinous presence in the fantasy: “Because most of his acts of seizing are impulsive and childlike rather than actively malignant, he is frequently being mothered. But when he learns to be a separate individual, he learns also to let things be separate from him” (*Impulse* 83). “Greed and pride” in particular, he realizes, “are functions of infancy” (*Impulse* 83). In Manlove’s opinion, Anodos finally outgrows the need for a mother: “[. . .] the history of Anodos is one of gradual removal from over-dependence on mother-figures and a condition of unthinking passivity” (*Impulse* 82). In the meantime, however, even after discovering the white lady, the creature in whose pursuit he is to compose his “story,” he has the attention span of an infant: “[. . .] his search for her lasted little further than his unhappy confusion of her with the Maid of the Alder” (Manlove, *Impulse* 78).⁸ The Alder-maiden seduces Anodos with the intention of delivering him over to the Ash-tree he has just evaded. Anodos does, however, progress ever so slightly following this incident, for the lady whose house he spends one night in after leaving the Maid of the Alder calls him “my poor boy” (48), whereas to the beech-tree he was but “baby” and “child” (30).⁹

In response to “the motherly kindness of the word” with which his hostess addresses him, Anodos “burst[s] into tears” (48). Anodos greets the mothering overtures of the women of Fairy Land with a corresponding willingness to be mothered. His experiences in the fantasy world recreate the effects of parental guidance in the shaping of character in the

⁸ Manlove notices the development in Anodos of “more sustained desires and sequences of motive and act” later in the fantasy, coexisting “with the previous unconscious mode” (*Impulse* 78). This new maturity is manifested in his obsession with the white lady: “[. . .] when he makes her both visible and mobile in the fairy palace[,] he sets off in a pursuit of her which becomes an intermittent motif during the remainder of his experience in Fairy Land” (*Impulse* 78).

⁹ This hostess also issues a warning, this time about “the house of the ogre” (54). Anodos ignores “a vague misgiving” in order to follow “an irresistible attraction” pulling him into a certain “hut” (55), the dwelling of an ogress, and there he acquires his shadow. Manlove calls the shadow a “false consciousness [. . .] which is a symbol of intellectual and materialist modes of perception” (*Impulse* 77). “True consciousness” appears to exist to the degree in which “a decision and an act” are one’s “own” (*Impulse* 79).

formative years. Much parental effort is spent helping infants and young children learn to rein in their impulses. Some coveted objects belong to others; a few are sources of danger. Likewise, Anodos gains self-control by learning that some women belong to others, while a few are sources of danger. As an adult male the “objects” he covets are women, towards whom his strongest desires are directed. When, in chapter XXV, he returns to his castle, the length of his absence is proportional to his age: “I had been gone, they told me, twenty-one days. To me it seemed twenty-one years” (183). Hein comments: “[. . .] having reached physical and legal maturity, he is brought by his adventures to moral and spiritual maturity as well” (*Harmony* 56-57). The women of Fairy Land tend to his soul, as the Victorian “angel in the house” tended to the souls of her husband and children.

The narcissism present in Anodos prevents him from entering into the kind of mature relationship with a woman that he seeks. Instead, when he discovers the woman in the alabaster, the white lady, she becomes an “extension[] of himself” (McGillis, “*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom” 41).¹⁰ As a “new-born,” Anodos is not prepared to wait for the fulfillment of his desires, and his choice of a woman herself fresh from the ““antenatal tomb”” as object of his desire is ill advised (37). Just prior to his encounter with the Maid of the Alder, he is still in the infancy stage: “Earth drew me towards her bosom; I felt as if I could fall down and kiss her. I forgot I was in Fairy Land, and seemed to be walking in a perfect night of *our own old nursing earth*” (42; emphasis added).¹¹ At this point, Anodos is only prepared for a relationship in which he is at the center, just as an infant is necessarily the focus of the mother-child relationship. It is a night “of dreamy undefined love and longing” as he proceeds, “still hoping to find [. . .] [his] lost lady of the marble” (42). He finds,

¹⁰ Hereafter in chapter 2, this article will be referred to as “Femininity.”

¹¹ Kelly Sears Smith omits the reference to nursing and so argues that “Anodos portrays the Earth as having seduced him, creating in *him* the desire to kiss *her*. He projects his own eroticism onto the feminine [. . .]” (62).

instead, the evil Alder-maiden, but Anodos confounds Maid of the Alder and white lady, just as he confounds Earth and Fairy Land.¹² The story through which the Alder-maiden enchants Anodos “brings back a feeling as of [. . .] lovers parted for long, and meeting at last [. . .]. I listened till she and I were blended with the tale; till she and I were the whole history” (46). The narcissism of the creature he has drawn to himself matches Anodos’s own narcissism. Anodos’s hostess the next night explains: “[. . .] although she loves no man, she loves the love of any man; [. . .] [she wants to] gain his love [. . .] that she may be conscious anew of her own beauty [. . .]” (49). Anodos too is in love with being in love, a weakness the Alder-maiden exploits through her story, until “he becomes ecstatic as he surrenders himself to self-centered imaginings” (Hein, *Harmony* 63). His resemblance to the Alder-maiden is confirmed in a brief exchange between Anodos and the husband of his hostess regarding his time in the forest. To the husband’s “I dare say you saw nothing worse than yourself there?” (51), Anodos’s silent answer is “I hope I did” (51).¹³

Even when no trap is laid for him, Anodos demonstrates his inability to properly negotiate a relationship with a member of the opposite gender. His actions towards women are criticized rather than lauded throughout the book. Roderick McGillis feels that “the book's interest [is] in freeing the female from male domination and formulation [. . .]” (“Femininity” 43). He notes that in *Phantastes* “women have no room to roam, but rather are

¹² At the opening of the fantasy, Anodos was ready to fall in love with his grandmother; he is still incapable of correctly appraising the women before him. His ignorance is, in fact, proven by his summoning the “*Queen of Night*” in his song to draw out the white lady (43). When he “asks to be secluded with her in a night of love,” Hein concludes that he “is showing the same animal sensuality that he showed in the opening chapter toward his ‘grandmother’ from Faerie” (*Harmony* 62). Hein here intimates that Anodos summons different women based on the nature and content of his song (*Harmony* 62-63). McGillis also draws attention to the title “Queen of Night” in this “paean to illicit love” (“Femininity” 43). According to McGillis, Anodos views “woman as dominated or dominating” (“Femininity” 43). While searching for the white lady, Anodos orchestrates his own demise when he “falls prey to the only other vision of the female he can imagine: the fatal woman” (“Femininity” 43).

¹³ To Sutton, who cites this passage as support, both the Ash-tree and the Alder-maiden are clearly “reflections” of Anodos (16). See also footnote 7.

confined to cottages, to blocks of alabaster, to infancy, or to the ground” (“Femininity” 42). It is after being rescued by the beech tree that Anodos is able to return the favor by rescuing one of these confined ladies, the white lady. However, his motive is not one of liberation. Inside “a rocky cell,” Anodos sees a bas-relief of “Pygmalion, as he awaited the quickening of his statue” (35). Though Pygmalion has lovingly and painstakingly sculpted his statue, he does not lay hold of her: “The sculptor sat more rigid than the figure to which his eyes were turned. That seemed about to step from its pedestal and embrace the man, who *waited rather than expected*” (35; emphasis added). This description freezes the male and ascribes mobility and choice to the female. Like Pygmalion, Anodos calls a woman to life from a block of stone, but the posture of the artist and the condition of his lady are very different in the cave than on the bas-relief. The lady Anodos calls to life is doubly immobilized, first, by the alabaster in which she is enclosed and secondly, by sleep. As for Anodos, it is his attitude that is faulty, not his actions. All elements conspire to move Anodos towards the action he takes.¹⁴ The example of Pygmalion, of course, directs his imagination, as does his remembrance of the beech-tree’s belief she would one day become a woman (37). The singing with which he calls the lady forth itself is preordained. “Eat[ing] of the fruits of the forest” had caused him to sing once already that day, and he perceives an “increased impulse to sing” after quenching his thirst from a well in the cave (37). Nevertheless, Anodos does err in expecting the lady will love him just as Pygmalion’s creation loved him. His expectation is reinforced by the fact that her face was “more near the face that had been born with me in my

¹⁴ Nonetheless, Manlove cites this chapter when he points out the degree to which Anodos is guided by “random impulse” (*Impulse* 77). However, he writes elsewhere that Anodos is “a creator” (*Christian Fantasy* 180), “capable of giving her [the white lady] life out of the forces in his unconscious, expressed in song” (*Christian Fantasy* 178). This unconscious is “divine” (*Christian Fantasy* 177) so that “through him the divine awakens Eve from mere matter” (*Christian Fantasy* 180). Hein perceives Anodos here “possessed by desire or love in its highest and purest form” (*Harmony* 61). With the Alder-maiden, he is possessed instead “by base sensuality,” whereas in the fairy palace he simply “wants to retain this revelation of glory he is receiving” (*Harmony* 71).

soul, than anything I had seen before in nature or art” (36). She is his “personal image of the desirable” (Manlove, *Impulse* 90). He wishes “to appropriate her for himself” (McGillis “Femininity” 42). Unlike Pygmalion’s statue, however, the white lady does not fly into his arms but flees from him, though not without cause since “Anodos’ desire, the male desire, is to free the female in order to reconfine her to his wishes” (McGillis “Femininity” 42).

Anodos undergoes a program of sensitization towards women. First, he is exposed to woman as mother in the shape of the beech-tree. She calls Anodos “baby” and “my child” upon learning he is only twenty-one (30). In part, she is a projection of his mental image of women. According to McGillis, “the Beech [. . .] represents the male ideal of woman as self-sacrificing nurturer. MacDonald tries to overcome the stereotypes of angel and whore, but first he must confront them” (“Femininity” 41). The beech-tree asks Anodos to cut her hair so that she can twine it around him for protection from the Ash-tree. The next morning, he finds it has become “a girdle of fresh beech-leaves” (32). Women’s hair is a sexually charged object in the literature of the nineteenth century, and in making the request the beech-tree tells Anodos, “You men have strange cutting things about you” (31). The possibility of an Oedipal reading is therefore opened up.¹⁵ However, as Anodos translates the “feeling” of the song she sings immediately after he has cut her hair, the thoughts she expresses are closer to those of a mother who has just given birth. Their acquaintance is brief, “*But love, and help, and pain, beautiful one, / Have made thee mine, till all my years are done.*” (31) Through love and pain, she has granted him his life, and he is “new-born,” swaddled in her hair. As he lies in her arms and is sung to, Anodos claims: “At one time I felt as if I was wandering in

¹⁵ McGillis’s description of the beech-tree has just such a Freudian slant. She is “the maternal breech [sic] tree that protects Anodos from the horrid and paternal Ash early in the story” (“Femininity” 35). Nonetheless, McGillis elsewhere rejects Wolff’s application of the Oedipal theory to Anodos, specifically in relation to the events of chapter I in *Phantastes* (“Femininity” 40).

childhood [. . .]” (31). Indeed, under the effects of this lullaby, he is soon sleeping. Her example serves as a contrast to Anodos’s mode of love: “Love that gives of itself—that helps another though that help means personal pain—unlocks the secret of life and bliss. [. . .] It is a far cry from the love that desires to possess another for the satisfaction of selfish passions” (Hein, *Harmony* 61).

Even while formulated on Anodos’s vision of mothers, the beech-tree is thus capable of issuing a challenge to Anodos’s own process of self-definition. In fact, this motherly beech-tree begins to reeducate Anodos about women. She does not merely function as the mothering creature Anodos needs at the time but reveals the passions of woman as lover as well. Though she protects and comforts, she also displays desire for the male, for her affection for Anodos certainly has sexual overtones. This yearning of hers, not Anodos’s supposed desire for her, is the point of the story of their encounter. The very first and last words Anodos hears from her are: “I may love him, I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech-tree” (29, 32). Indeed, she only assumes the motherly role when she discovers his age. Anodos describes her as “quite content, but waiting for something” (29), anticipating the day she will be changed from a beech-tree into a woman. She keeps her hair when she becomes a woman, “and always when the rain drips from” it does she “feel like a woman” (30). “Perhaps it may never be of any use again,” she remarks as it is about to be cut, “—not till I am a woman” (31). By cutting her hair, Anodos inflicts pain on her: “When I had finished, she shuddered and breathed deep, as one does when an acute pain, steadfastly endured without sign of suffering, is at length relaxed” (31). The association of her hair with the feeling of pain and with drops of water, possibly tears, indicates that her life as a woman will expose her to more pain. The beech-tree asks Anodos: “Shall I be very happy when I am

a woman: I fear not; for it is always in nights like these that I feel like one. But I long to be a woman for all that” (30). In this episode, MacDonald acknowledges that women’s greatest suffering derives from her fulfillment of the roles of wife and mother. The beech-tree thus communicates two important facets of the female experience to Anodos: intense desire for the male, or the presence of sexual feeling, and the pain that comes from a relationship with a man. Anodos is forced to consider a subject to which he has not given much thought: what does it feel like to be a woman? “I now told her that I could hardly say whether women were happy or not. I knew one who had not been happy [. . .]” (30).

The strength of women’s sexual passion is the subject of another story in *Phantastes*, one that seems to be included purely to address the sentiments of women regarding the experience of love. In the library of the fairy palace, Anodos “read[s] of a world that is not like ours” (76):

Now the children, there, are not born as the children are born in worlds nearer to the sun. For they arrive no one knows how. A maiden, walking alone, hears a cry [. . .] and searching about, she findeth, under an overhanging rock, or within a clump of bushes [. . .] or in any other sheltered and unexpected spot, a little child. This she taketh tenderly, and beareth home with joy [. . .]. (78)

The women are devoted to motherhood, for not only is it true that “the same woman never finds a second, at least while the first lives” (79), but they also are not burdened with the care of a husband: “After they grow up, the men and women are but little together” (79). Having no relations with men, these women are in essence angels: “The men alone have arms; the women have only wings. Resplendent wings are they, wherein they can shroud themselves from head to foot in a panoply of glistening glory” (79). The introduction to the narrative

suggests the possibility that the state of affairs in this other world is a reality humans might experience prior to birth or after death:

Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship. [. . .] The blank, which is only a forgotten life, lying behind the consciousness, and the misty splendour, which is an undeveloped life, lying before it, may be full of mysterious revelations of other connexions [sic] with the worlds around us, than those of science and poetry. (77)

And there is just such a connection between this world of angel-women and Anodos's world, for when Anodos writes of the death of both the angel-women and the men of this planet, he speculates "that thereafter they are born babes upon our earth" (81).

However, the story does not teach that women ought to be more like these angel-women of another planet, who were living the Victorian ideal of the mother, pure and innocent as a virgin. That the condition of women on earth is ultimately superior to that of these angel-women is confirmed by the fact that the narrator feels "that their wings, glorious as they are, are but undeveloped arms" (82). Thus, the angel-women are inferior not only to the women of the earth but also to the men of their planet. In order to become earthly women, the women of this world must first become fallen angels, like the "one [who] spread out her rosy pinions, and flashed from the promontory into the gulf at its foot" upon hearing sexual relations between earthly men and women described (81). Anodos, who has so entered into the story that he tells it in the first person, describes the scene:

One evening in early summer, I stood with a group of men and women on a steep rock that overhung the sea. They were all questioning me about my world and the ways thereof. In making reply to one of their questions, I was

compelled to say that children are not born in the Earth as with them. Upon this I was assailed with a whole battery of inquiries, which at first I tried to avoid; but, at last, I was compelled, in the vaguest manner I could invent, to make some approach to the subject in question. Immediately a dim notion of what I meant, seemed to dawn in the minds of most of the women. (81)

Though the men's reactions are not recorded, several women are receptive to this new knowledge. In contrast to those women who were "offended, and stood erect and motionless" (81), the response of these women is positively portrayed. "A great light shone in the eyes of one maiden" before she went off to die (81). Quite plainly, these angel-women die in order to experience sex and give birth. The visitor to this planet has accidentally discovered a customary facet of these creatures' existence: "The sign or cause of coming death is an indescribable longing for something, they know not what, which seizes them, and drives them into solitude, consuming them within, till the body fails. When a youth and a maiden look too deep into each other's eyes, this longing seizes and possesses them [. . .]" (81). The youth and maiden soon "die of their desire" (81). As sexual desire is awakened in them, they are enticed to abandon their angel-nature and die into a new form of life, one dependent upon the expression of human sexuality, male and female, for its continuance. In MacDonald's view, women are to be aware of, and motivated by, their sexuality.

Anodos's description of his reading experience in the library makes it clear that he perceives the events described as an immediate experience, "writ[ing] as if [him]self had visited the far-off planet, learned its ways and appearances, had conversed with its men and women" (82). Though brief, this experience can thus stand on the same footing as his other adventures and encounters in Fairy Land. "Quite simply," explains McGillis, "the story

warns us that unfulfilled desires breed pestilence. The lives of the people of this planet are long, lonely, and tedious” (“Community of the Centre” 51). “Sex is a joy!” he exclaims (“Community” 52). The story candidly publicizes the importance of sexual passion to women. Anodos discovers it is this very passion that makes them women, rather than angels or tree spirits.¹⁶ A longing for the experience of love transforms the angel-women into earthly women. Hein properly recognizes that they “die in order to [. . .] know *physical* love” (*Harmony* 68; emphasis added) but concludes his paragraph saying that “MacDonald does not hesitate to champion the role of sex, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a higher form of love, and hence, *spiritual* well-being” (*Harmony* 68; emphasis added). However, Anodos’s reading material seems geared more toward teaching him about the nature of women than toward imparting him with a sense of the spiritual dimension of human love. Not only Cosmo’s story, as Hein discusses (*Harmony* 69), but also that of the angel-women, which Anodos relates before telling Cosmo’s, show that Anodos must cease perceiving women as objects to satisfy his desire and view them as independent creatures, free to give or withhold their love, and, as the angel-women illustrate, able to match his passion with their own. Anodos does, indeed, become “buried and risen again in these old books” (104). McGillis accurately describes the impact of Anodos’s reading:

The quest in *Phantastes* is to slay the phallus, to relinquish the desire for ownership. [. . .] The first half of the book presents attempts on the part of phallogocentric desire to take control of Anodos: the Ash tree's attack, the coming of the Shadow. The second half, after Anodos' stay in the Fairy Palace

¹⁶ Unfortunately, McGillis fails to notice that sex is a joy for the women also, and so he concludes: “The story teaches Anodos that desire need not be ugly, but that it may be ugly, and certainly it will be so perceived by angelic women, white ladies, and the like” (“Community” 52). Indeed, McGillis claims “the angel-woman [. . .] dies because she will not accept the desire that brings us out of ourselves [. . .]” (“Community” 53).

where he reads stories which concern desire and its perversion, presents Anodos' attempts to quell phallic desire, to overcome the will to ownership and property. ("Femininity" 44)¹⁷

Anodos's possessiveness towards women has already caused some harm in his life. There are several indications that Anodos had a disastrous love affair resulting in the death of the loved one. In his conversation with the beech-tree, Anodos indicated that he "knew one [woman] who had not been happy [. . .]" (30). In the second half of the book, before he arrives at the cottage with four doors, Anodos is at sea on a boat where, "vaguely revealed beneath the wave, [he] floated above [his] whole Past" (127). There, he meets those he has wronged and is shown mercy:

In dreams of unspeakable joy—of restored friendships; of revived embraces; of love which said it had never died; of faces that had vanished long ago, yet said with smiling lips that they knew nothing of the grave; of pardons implored, and granted with such bursting floods of love, that I was almost glad I had sinned—thus I passed through this wondrous twilight. (127)

Anodos is being prepared for his experiences behind the third door of the cottage, "the door of Dismay" (141), where he finds himself "upon a crowded street" (141), perhaps one of "the streets of great cities where [he] had dwelt" and which he has just seen "beneath the wave" (127). While in his boat, he had remarked that "at times, a beloved form seemed to lie close beneath [him] in sleep [. . .]" (127). Now in this street, he once more discerns "a form" (141), clearly female, which he describes as "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" (141). He

¹⁷ See footnote 16 for McGillis's interpretation of the story of the angel-women. In my opinion, the story of Cosmo (Chapter XIII, 84-105), which McGillis mentions here, clearly treats of "desire and its perversion"; the angel story does not.

and she had been in a relationship in which “wrong and Sorrow had gone together [. . .]” (141). In acknowledging that he was then still in his boyhood, Anodos implies that he had not reached the level of maturity required for involvement in a romantic relationship. He attempted to rush through the closing stages of his boyhood just as he prematurely departed from the beech-tree, obtaining the same result—a failed romance. His city romance ended catastrophically in the death of his beloved. The lady behind the third door walks to her tomb and lays herself upon it. Anodos finds “the face and the hands and the feet” to be “cold—they were marble, but [he] knew them” (141-42). The marble suggests a connection with the white lady, making Anodos’s sense of entitlement in regards to her relevant to this prior relationship.¹⁸

Through Anodos’s interaction with the lady who dwells in the cottage with four doors, we gather further intimations of his past conduct towards women. The lady of the cottage sings him several songs, one of which Anodos reproduces for his readers. A knight fell in love and, unbeknownst to him, fathered an illegitimate child. First the child and then his mother, Adelaide, die. When the knight, Sir Aglovaile, meets Adelaide again in a graveyard, he perceives that she has been transformed from “*a village maid*” to “*an angel lady white*” (131). Before he recognizes her, Sir Aglovaile concludes from her sorrow that she has been wronged and offers to perform his duty as a knight and “*set it right*” (131). Adelaide, however, knows better than to place her confidence in her former lover’s efforts at self-improvement: “*Thou seest that Death for a woman can / Do more than knighthood for a man*” (132). She calls herself “*weak*” for accepting him once more but determines if “*some*

¹⁸ Sears Smith has a similar understanding of the implications of Anodos’s experiences behind that door: “[. . .] not long before coming to Fairy Land, he seduced a woman and then abandoned her” (60). She adds as well, regarding the ballad discussed in the paragraphs below, that “readers [. . .] are encouraged to find Anodos’s and Sir Aglovaile’s stories alike” (60).

further woe” follows, she “*will bear it,*” “*For thou lovest me yet—though but as a man*” (132). Man’s love for woman remains by its nature imperfect, and cannot be made perfect by adhering to a man-made code, even the code of knighthood.

Sir Aglovaile’s failure, even in his knighthood, to love Adelaide properly is a clue to the source of Anodos’s continuing bachelorhood at the close of the fantasy. Adelaide and Sir Aglovaile rendezvous many nights in his chamber, but the knight’s attitude remains self-serving. He rejoices “*to have a ghostly wife,*” for she will not be disturbed by the danger he encounters while practicing his profession: “*She will only hearken, amid the din, / Behind the door, if he cometh in*” (133). Adelaide serves his need for love while providing him freedom from responsibility, since even his death would not be able to hurt her. Even while physically cut off from her, Aglovaile still is concerned with what he can obtain from the relationship. One night when he dreams Adelaide is taken from him, he holds her to him, touching him as she had advised him not to do, and she is transformed back into a corpse. His need to possess Adelaide kills her. She clearly blames him, and his love, for each of her passages into the grave: “*Will he love me twice with a love that is vain? / Will he kill the poor ghost yet again?*” (131). As Anodos just sang while journeying under the earth following after the white lady in chapter XVII, love cannot be primarily self-seeking if, paradoxically, it is to be rewarded:

Do not vex thy violet

Perfume to afford:

Else no odour thou wilt get

From its little hoard. (122)

Sir Aglovaile and Anodos have had parallel experiences. Adelaide (132) and the white lady (107, 117) are both associated with an interdiction against touching. Just as Sir Aglovaile failed to rid himself of his selfishness after his first loss, Anodos remained unchanged after the death of his lover, the lady he saw behind the third door. He is allowed another chance to learn the lesson of sacrifice and selflessness in Fairy Land. As Kelly Sears Smith contends, “what readers might take as Anodos’s singular obsession with a particularly ideal woman is revealed to be a pattern of behaviour [sic] for him as well as other men” (60). By repeating the same error, he is being forcefully educated in restraining his lust. The origin of his experiences in Fairy Land lies in his character flaws.

This process of education through repetition is similar to the form of treatment recommended by Kohut for narcissistic patients. “In Kohut’s view,” explains Sutton, “any progress toward healing depends less upon interpreting the old experiences than upon ‘repeatedly’ reliving them” (14).¹⁹ Sutton points to one of the possible meanings of Anodos’s name, “a way back,” along with the remarkable correspondence between his twenty-one days in Fairy Land and twenty-one years of life, as evidence of the relevance of this psychological principle to Anodos’s experiences in Fairy Land (14). Anodos’s frequent failures work together for his good: “Only by acting out his impulses can Anodos discover what he can and cannot achieve; by learning his limits, he may gain a clearer sense of who he is” (Sutton 13). Sutton then abandons Kohutian theory as his interpretive framework because *Phantastes* leaves unaddressed “how the narrator comes to terms with the mortal world” whereas “the climax should demonstrate the achievement of ‘self-cohesion’ through productive work and creativity” (14).²⁰ Since *Phantastes* is “open-ended,” he instead proceeds with a Jungian

¹⁹ *Restoration of the Self* (30).

²⁰ *Restoration of the Self* (158).

analysis because of Jung's "sense that individuation never teaches completion" (15).²¹

Nevertheless, Sutton feels that Anodos ultimately does make "progress toward individuation" (17). Citing another meaning commonly ascribed to the name "Anodos," Sutton concludes: "Because Anodos encounters figures of wholeness and finally acts in accordance with their examples, his journey eventually ceases to look 'pathless' or regressive ('a way back'). From either a Jungian or Kohutian viewpoint, it can be seen as progressive ('a way up')" (18).²²

The singer of the tale of Sir Aglovaile is one Jungian "symbol of wholeness [. . .] in her four-square cottage with its four doors of vision" (Sutton 17).²³ She is also the principal mother figure in the fantasy, a character with "the sweetest voice" (128) and "a woman-face, the most wonderful" (129). Immediately before Anodos records the tale of Sir Aglovaile for his readers, he provides a description of the reception given him by the lady of the cottage:

I felt like a boy who has got home from school, miles across the hills, through a heavy storm of wind and snow. [. . .] I could not help laying my head on her bosom [. . .]. She put her arms round me, saying, 'Poor child; poor child!'

As I continued to weep, she gently disengaged herself; and, taking a spoon, put some of the food [. . .] to my lips [. . .]. She went on feeding me like a baby, with one arm round me [. . .]. (129)²⁴

²¹ From a Jungian perspective, Sutton identifies as the principal problem in *Phantastes* Anodos's final dismissal of his shadow "in its most dangerous form as the wolf-monster" (17), because "rejecting the Shadow is a negative act, detrimental to the goal of psychic wholeness [. . .]" (17). Sutton, however, aligns himself with Marie-Louise von Franz, a "disciple" of Jung, in her advocacy of the patient's choice "to repress or accept" the shadow, particularly since Anodos's shadow is "a destructive aspect of his character" (17).

²² Richard H. Reis and Hein both attribute the rendering of Anodos's name as "pathless" to Wolff in *The Golden Key* (Reis 87; Hein, *Harmony* 56). Reis states the name is "usually interpreted as meaning 'a way back'" (87). Hein himself proposes "having no way," "rising" based on a reference work (*Harmony* 56).

²³ Sutton explains: "Four is the Jungian 'number of totality,' the number of the functions of the psyche" (17), citing page 2 of Barbara Hannah's *Striving towards Wholeness* (NY: GP Putnam's Sons, 1971). See also McGillis, "Community" 56, which discusses "wholeness" in relation to the four doors of the cottage. In his first endnote, McGillis also ties these doors "to Blake's four levels of existence" ("Community" 63).

²⁴ After hearing the tale of Sir Aglovaile, Anodos states he "felt as if she could give me everything I wanted" and imagines himself able to "be content to be sung to and fed by her, day after day, as years rolled by" (134).

As a result of his time in her cottage, Anodos experiences dramatically accelerated growth, carrying him from psychological infancy to adulthood. During his stay, Anodos enters three of the doors of her cottage, slipping into another time and place, but after he enters a fourth, forbidden door, he is banished from the cottage. As Anodos and the lady say their farewells, Anodos indicates he “felt as if [he] were leaving [his] mother for the first time [. . .]” (144). Significantly, Manlove observes that the lady of the cottage is the last of the “mother-figures” Anodos will encounter (*Impulse* 82).²⁵ He has, in a sense, been weaned: “After Anodos leaves the island cottage, his journey is no longer connected with water or baths, symbols both of the womb and of the melting of one’s identity in an infant state of dependency on the mother [. . .]” (*Impulse* 82).²⁶ In fact, Anodos at this point grows into not only his individuality but also his masculinity. The cottage will be under water for a year because of his action, but Anodos will “escape the rising waters” (144), symbolic of femininity. He is pronounced ready for man’s realm, the realm of action outside the home. The lady sends him off “with the words, ‘Go, my son, and do something worth doing,’” and shuts herself in her house (144).

Anodos passes through the fourth door against the lady’s wishes, but it is unlikely that this impulsive, defiant act is the source of his growth. It is possible that Anodos matured by facing his own death, since he crossed the threshold of what the lady calls “the door of the Timeless” (144). As she informs him, he “would never have entered again” into her cottage

²⁵ Drawing on Jungian theory, he notes one exception in the text: “In his death [. . .] he [Anodos] enters that higher childhood of union with earth [. . .] which the earlier mothers have in part prefigured” (*Impulse* 82).

²⁶ Hein comes up with another interesting interpretation of MacDonald’s use of water in *Phantastes*, pointing out that “each association with water in Anodos’s adventures marks his emergence onto a higher plane of spiritual existence [. . .]” (*Harmony* 72). In a footnote, he alludes to Jerome Hamilton Buckley’s study, *The Victorian Temper* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951) and its brief exploration of “the Victorians’ inventive use of water symbols to suggest the spiritual new-birth” (*Harmony* 73). In light of this cultural context for MacDonald’s work, Hein’s further assertion that “Scripture, not Freud, is the safer guide to his [MacDonald’s] meaning” makes a convincing argument (*Harmony* 73).

aside from her intervention (144). However, it is more likely that his action is merely the cause of his banishment, while his experiences behind each of the other three doors lead to his growth. While the lady may act the part of a mother in “accepting his temporary return to infancy” (Sutton 13), her object is to assist Anodos in his maturation (Sutton 13-14). For instance, “she directs his mind toward his adult crisis by singing the ballad of Sir Aglovaile, whose double loss of a beloved woman through impulsive action mirrors the experience of Anodos” (Sutton 13). Because she “help[s] him deal with his past,” the lady of the cottage of four doors, more than anyone, “acts like a therapist” to Anodos (Sutton 14).²⁷ Far from simply being the mother who is at last cast off, she is the most significant of all the characters Anodos has encountered.²⁸ Back on his property after his time in Fairy Land, Anodos still has contact with her. Resting beneath a beech tree, he detects the lady’s “voice” in “the sound of the leaves overhead”: “A great good is coming—is coming—is coming to thee, Anodos” (185). As part of her therapy, she addresses the primary question that arises in the wake of suffering: Why? Before sending Anodos away from her in chapter XIX, she promises him that, “in whatever sorrow” later befalls him, there will always exist “something [. . .] that would quite satisfy [him] about it, even in the worst moments of [his] distress” (144). When he hears her voice in the leaves, he affirms that he “know[s]” the truth of what she has spoken, “that good is coming to me – that good is always coming [. . .]” (185).²⁹ He concludes his narrative with a theory on suffering, representing his intuitive formulation of the “something” spoken about by the lady of the cottage: “What we call evil, is the only and

²⁷ She thus avoids perpetuating “a state of infantile regression” so that he can “function as an adult” (Sutton 18).

²⁸ According to Sutton, this is because “Anodos is to carry with him this image of the Self as the wise ‘inner friend,’ ready to help [. . .]” (18).

²⁹ The ultimate good that is always coming is, of course, heaven. On April 16, 1892, he writes his cousin, Helen MacKay Powell: “[. . .] we shall be glad when our time comes to go after our children. I hope and trust more and more as I grow older” (*Expression of Character* 349-50).

best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good” (185). Pain, which Anodos has experienced in the form of rejection by the white lady, is sometimes needed for an individual to progress and improve. The lady of the cottage has therefore been a successful therapist in so far as she has enabled Anodos to resolve to use his pain productively.³⁰

Whether the role of the lady of the cottage is to be a therapist or a mother to Anodos, the text at this point begins to provide much-needed male role models. However, critics often read *Phantastes* in terms of Anodos’s evolution from paternal to maternal ways of thinking, focusing on the fantasy’s exaltation of mother-figures. McGillis, for example, claims that, through death, Anodos has an “experience of the mother,” as Anodos himself describes the earth in which he is entombed in chapter XXIV (“Femininity” 35). He forsakes “the masculine power associated with ‘lands and moneys’ (Chapter I, [6]), with the grasping voraciousness of the Ash, and with the desire to touch, to possess and own [. . .]” (“Femininity” 36). Instead, he adopts a motherly “notion of power based on renunciation” (“Femininity” 36).³¹ McGillis sees Anodos’s central task as being that of “breaking circles of selfhood” to “enter centres of community” (“Community” 53).³² The purpose of his contact with his female mentors in Fairy Land would presumably be to equip him to accomplish this

³⁰ Her incursion into Anodos’s world at the end of the fantasy is also consistent with her role as a mother, as McGillis describes it: “Mothers remain centres of emotion and understanding for children even while they teach them independence” (“Community” 56-57). Her symbol, the “open circle” that guides Anodos back through the doors of her cottage, “suggests embrace, but not enclosure” (McGillis, “Community” 56).

³¹ McGillis contends this is not MacDonald’s final message, for “his books press towards a vision of mutuality in which the divisions of masculine and feminine, life and death, body and spirit are no more” (“Femininity” 32). They do not achieve this vision because “the idea of androgynous thought was for MacDonald impossible to maintain in an imperfect world” (“Femininity” 37). Sears Smith has a better understanding of MacDonald’s ambition regarding the interplay of masculinity and femininity. See below, in text.

³² McGillis contrasts “the community of the centre” to “self-centeredness” (“Community” 53). It requires “the willingness—indeed, the desire—to embrace others, yet the refusal to bind them to us” (“Community” 56). As “a mother,” for example, the lady of the cottage represents “a centre that does not restrict” (“Community” 56). See also MacDonald’s words regarding “the community of the centre” (*Phantastes* 77).

task.³³ As McGillis writes in a discussion of the first chapter of *Phantastes*, “feminine thinking takes us out of the self and into the joy of participating in all things” (“Femininity” 40). It competes against the masculine thinking that threatens to gain the allegiance of Anodos, who “is about to enter the male world, the world of finance” (“Femininity” 40). The mother figures thus provide the feminine counterbalance to the masculine *modus operandi*.

MacDonald’s point, however, is not that men ought to be more like women but that they ought to reclaim the full measure of their manhood, recovering the traits previously deemed feminine. At twenty-one, Anodos must determine what being a man entails. Sears Smith describes two schools of thought informing MacDonald’s vision of masculinity. She describes Anodos “as a conventional, young squire who comes to emulate both middle- and upper-class styles of the new gentleman” (54). The upper class favored the “chivalric” model; the middle class championed Christ-likeness, promoting its vision of a man “physically and morally strong yet as gentle and sentimental as a woman” (Sears Smith 53). MacDonald, who admired his own father for his tenderness towards others,³⁴ satisfies both ideals in the person of the knight whom Anodos serves at the end of *Phantastes*.³⁵ After the knight slays a dragon, Anodos, who has become his squire, describes his “countenance” as he converses with the father of the girl he has rescued: “Loving-kindness beamed from every

³³ In “*Phantastes and Lilith: Femininity and Freedom*,” only the lady who appears in Anodos’s bedroom before he enters Fairy Land (39-40) and the maiden with the globe (43-44) are presented as functioning as more than “the male ideal of woman” (41). In a later work, McGillis discusses the lady of the cottage as a significant influence on Anodos. See footnote 32.

³⁴ On July 15, 1855, MacDonald writes to his wife from his father’s home: “How careful my dear father is of everyone. I have just heard him calling in at the kitchen window to the servant to go and open the children’s window, for it had been shut for the rain [. . .] and it would be very hot. He shuts my windows himself lest I should hurt myself. . . .” (*Expression of Character* 94). He goes on to call his father a “manly, straightforward man” almost without “equal” (94).

³⁵ Sears Smith actually presents the “artist” as the realization of the middle-class new gentleman and the “knight” as the fulfillment of the upper-class new gentleman (63). She writes: “Anodos’s adopted roles of artist, with its feminizing influence, and the knight, with its compensating manliness, are each presented as fairly efficacious modes of masculine heroic agency” (64). However, because they cannot “provide unwavering manhood, Anodos turns toward the child,” “grow[ing] less childish” but “more childlike” (65).

line of his face” (169). His compassion is shown in act as well as attitude as he tends to the girl: “He took the little thing in his arms, and, with the mother’s help, undressed her, and looked to her wounds. The tears flowed down his face as he did so” (170). The knight’s “tender” and “powerful hands,” deems Anodos, operated “if possible even more gently than the mother’s” (170). While he is capable of “indulging in all the gentleness of a womanly heart” (169), at rest his “face grew stern and determined, all but fierce [. . .]” (170).

Searsmith cautions: “The effect is not a blending of masculine and feminine traits, neither is it an equal balance between the two. It is, rather, an aesthetic appreciation of masculine power that gives way to feminine gentleness when it need not do so, and an admiration for the sentimental and chivalric virtue that so inclines it” (64). The presence in the text of this gentle knight might, in some ways, make the inclusion of the mother figures redundant, since his example alone could serve to impress upon Anodos the characteristics that will enable him to become a “new gentleman.”³⁶ However, the knight is, throughout most of the fantasy, engaged himself on a journey of self-development that leaves him generally just a few steps ahead of Anodos.³⁷ Though it is by associating with nurturing, compassionate women that Anodos moves closer to fulfilling the new gentlemanly ideal, MacDonald intends nothing less for him than the superlatively masculine role of knighthood.

³⁶ Besides the knight and mother figures, other characters contribute to Anodos’s gentlemanly development. McGillis feels that the brothers in chapters XX and XXI and the maiden with the globe have the task of showing Anodos that “ministering is not the prerogative of angelic womanhood” (“Femininity” 44). According to McGillis, the maiden’s “suffering” enables her to minister (“Femininity” 43). She stands as “an example of the female poet” to Anodos, who is a poet himself, and her globe is “the globe of poetry and faith” (“Femininity” 43). For more on Anodos as artist, see Searsmith 63-64; Hein, *Harmony* 61-62; Manlove, *Christian Fantasy* 179-80; and for Anodos as poet see McGillis, “Community” 52-54 and McGillis, “Femininity” 33. McGillis labels *Phantastes* “a *Kunstmärchen*, a fairy tale that depicts the unfolding of artistic potential within the mind of a young person” and compares it to Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (“Femininity” 39).

³⁷ Sutton denies the knight represents “a father” and argues he is only “a more experienced peer of the youth” (12). He calls him “a potential image of the Jungian Self” whose “glory is in eclipse from his own seduction by the Alder-Maiden” (15).

At the end of the fantasy, however, Anodos himself wonders about his ability to “translate the experience of [his] travels there, into common life” (184), and his performance in Fairy Land is far from impressive: “This pattern of error brings to the surface the tension inherent in the patterns upon which he has modeled himself: a heroic masculinity that remains inevitably linked to treacherous, male impulses” (Searsmith 65). Unlike the typical writers of “new gentleman’s narratives,” whose “new gentleman [. . .] could not conceive of violating his own inward standard of respectability” (Searsmith 56), MacDonald keeps human nature in sight. He offers “a tenuous, symbolic resolution” to “an inherent ideological contradiction” originating in part from the fact that the new gentleman’s “model character was still housed in a man’s body [. . .] within him were always the traitorous seeds of sexual desire [. . .]” (Searsmith 58). He still loved with a man’s love. MacDonald simply discards Anodos’s “complicating maleness” when he is temporarily but “literally disembodied” at the end of the fantasy to become “a masculine angel,” “twin to the feminine ‘angel in the house’” (66). Anodos writes: “I lay thus for a time, and lived as it were an unradiating existence; my soul a motionless lake, that received all things and gave nothing back; satisfied in still contemplation, and spiritual consciousness” (180). In contrast to women, whose “virtues were functions of their very bodies, which were without sexual desire but replete with maternal feeling,” “the source of men’s virtue [. . .] would be in their spirits [. . .]” (Searsmith 67). Even after he is back on his land, he describes himself as “a ghost, sent into the world to minister to my fellow-men [. . .]” (184). Searsmith attributes his apprehension at resuming his regular life to the fact that “he has not been to heaven itself” (67). He understands that his days must be lived out “in a world [. . .] where even a gentleman may only hope to *imperfectly* regulate his own desires through serving others rather than satisfying himself”

(67; emphasis added). He is left with the simple task of “be[ing] a better man than he had been before” (67). However, his mandate for doing so is now strengthened several fold: “If women naturally constituted the domestic sphere, and by extension the nation and empire, the angel in the cosmos revealed men’s *potential* to constitute a universal sphere of benign patriarchy” (Searsmith 68; emphasis added).

In *Phantastes*, Anodos, like Adela in *Adela Cathcart*, is undergoing a cure: through the development of his soul, his outward acts are to be reformed. Anodos appears to be advanced in age as he writes, for he “cast[s] no more of a shade on the earth, than most men who have lived in it as long as [he]” (184), but he makes no mention of having found a woman reminiscent of his white lady. Instead, he dwells on his memory of the lady of the cottage, and shares a vision of her with his readers in his final paragraph. MacDonald was writing in a tradition in which narratives “regularly,” though not always, “culminated in marriage,” which “for the new gentleman [. . .] functioned purely as reward; he was not in any danger of slipping” (Searsmith 56). If MacDonald had fully conformed to the pattern of these narratives, Anodos’s lack of romantic success would not have been so disturbing, but Anodos *is* in “danger of slipping.” Nevertheless, MacDonald refuses to use a woman either as a “reward” or as insurance against immorality and, instead, assigns women a truly sacred purpose. A second literary context becomes important in comprehending the spiritual import of male-female relations for MacDonald. Hein explores the impact of German Romanticism upon MacDonald’s philosophy of love: “To them [German Romantics], the most important aspect of man’s inner being is his yearning after the eternal and the infinite—a type of spiritual love which draws man toward the divine. This love finds its counterpart in the love of man for woman, so that passionate love mirrors spiritual love” (*Harmony* 7-8). For

MacDonald, in turn, “love of woman, a fuller experience of what love is, becomes a means of loving God better” (*Harmony* 11). In *Phantastes*, the white lady acts as “a surrogate for the divine Presence,” giving expression to “perfect beauty and ultimate truth” (*Harmony* 61).

In the beginning, many of Anodos’s troubles stem from the fact that he does not know whom to love or how to love. Hein returns to chapter I and Anodos’s brief encounter with his “great-grandmother.” He describes “three mistakes” exhibited by Anodos (*Harmony* 57), the last being of most interest: “[. . .] what is physically attractive must be immediately possessed, an assumption made by sensual people” (*Harmony* 58). As the lady resumes full stature, Anodos feels “an attraction irresistible as incomprehensible” (8). However, after his reaching “arms” prompt her rebuke, he is able to see beyond “the presence of a beauty” that “overcome[s]” him, beyond the physical reality briefly to a hidden, mystical world (8). The lady invites him to “look in [her] eyes,” and he experiences “an unknown longing” (8) which, as Hein states, is “for Fairy Land” (*Harmony* 58). Through the “vision of the maternal sea” which “exists in Fairy Land,” comments McGillis, she “displaces the erotic urge from body to imagination,” “set[ting] up a tension between physical and spiritual desire” (“Femininity” 40). That encounter elucidates how Anodos’s sojourn in Fairy Land is expected to impact him and why the white lady features so prominently in his adventures:

Two types of desire—the one for sexual gratification, and the other for joyous experiences in the supernatural world—follow rapidly one upon another, and both are associated with the same woman. MacDonald suggests that, for man in a low state of spiritual development, these two desires are not all that different from each other. Anodos must learn to distinguish carefully between them and handle each one correctly. (Hein, *Harmony* 58)

Having noted the resemblance, in MacDonald's mind, between sexual and supernatural desire, Hein further elaborates on the source of their commonality. Because women are represented as "guarding truth and guiding men to it," men's romantic yearnings can be used to convey their "longing to possess a knowledge of ultimate truth," as long as their passion is "kept chaste and tastefully expressed" (*Harmony* 59). By the time Anodos meets the lady of the cottage with four doors, he has succeeded in learning to differentiate the two types of desire: "[. . .] the beauty that Anodos now responds to is spiritual rather than physical, residing in her eyes and voice [. . .]" (Hein, *Harmony* 73). Learning how to "handle" the love that is co-mingled with sexual interest will prove more difficult.

Anodos finds a younger woman to fall in love with, rather than a woman his senior by many decades, but MacDonald is not interested in his "sexual gratification." The desire with which he is filled must yet still be focused on a different object. The journey to "ultimate truth" is paramount. Anodos's "self-imposed quest for the white lady has been superimposed upon some greater transformative schema. [. . .] Yet, she is not the grail itself, nor can his love of her quench a pilgrim's yearning" (Searsmith 61).³⁸ Her effectiveness in pointing Anodos to the actual grail can also be called into question. After all, it is rather easier for Anodos to receive spiritual enlightenment through his relationship with a grandmotherly figure, an "ancient dame" (142) whose "eyes were very incarnations of soft light" (129), than in relationship with a youthful, sexual white lady. Once he is back on his property outside of Fairy Land, Anodos draws his inspiration from the lady of the cottage, not from the white lady. Regardless, MacDonald does not appear to believe that a carnal experience of love can

³⁸ Anodos claims he "set out to find [his] Ideal" in Fairy Land (184). While Manlove recognizes this goal is reflected in Anodos's pursuit of the white lady, he implies God is the definitive Ideal longed after (*Impulse* 90-91). In the end, he feels Anodos "never directly encounters God, who is the ultimate source of his desire or *Sehnsucht*, immanent in, but not to be identified with, the white lady he for long tries to possess" (*Impulse* 91). For more on *Sehnsucht*, see Manlove in *Modern Fantasy* 95-98 and in *Christian Fantasy* 177-79.

actually lead to an expansion in one's individual spirituality, though Hein makes precisely that claim. After first stating that men's yearnings are "symbols," Hein alleges MacDonald maintains "two attitudes toward sexual desire. In its baser form as lewd and promiscuous desire, he condemns it as being a certain evidence of need for moral and spiritual development. But in its higher expressions—regulated according to Christian principles—it is an aid to moral and spiritual development" (*Harmony* 59).³⁹ While Anodos is not granted the right to give physical expression to his sexual desire for the white lady, he does eventually give "higher expression" to his love for her by mentally releasing her to the knight. However, there is no evidence of spiritual progress in Anodos's life as a result of his loving the white lady, save for this: his love itself is purified.

The principal problem with Anodos's love is that it is tainted with possessiveness. In evaluating his relationship with the white lady, Anodos admits to "a kind of feeling of property in her; for so the goblin Selfishness would reward the angel Love" (124). Falling in love with the white lady, and giving her up, is just a step in the process of coming to terms with the realities of life. To the extent that "*Phantastes* is geared to mortal [. . .] existence," "Anodos has to learn to live the dialectic of desiring without seeking to possess" (Manlove, *Impulse* 91).⁴⁰ Anodos finally shuts the white lady out of his thoughts when he learns of her

³⁹ In interpreting the story of Sir Aglovaile, Hein describes this "baser form" of love as "physical love, when it is only an appropriation of the beloved for self-centered pleasure" (*Harmony* 75). Elsewhere, he identifies three categories of love, "lust," "sexual love," and "ideal love," and states that the story of Cosmo illustrates for him that "sexual love [. . .] may augment spirituality" but is not "ideal love" (*Harmony* 68), because "the limitations inherent in the human condition" prevent "ideal love" from being realized on earth (*Harmony* 70). See also McGillis, who discusses sexuality within the context of art, not of spirituality. In the fairy palace, Anodos "brings the lady to life through the power of song, but he drops poetry for sexuality and loses her. [. . .] By reducing art to sensual life, we profane it" ("Community" 62).

⁴⁰ According to Manlove, Anodos's shadow and the white lady represent "different aspects of possessiveness. The Shadow is the evil [. . .] self which seeks to have, and destroys in having [. . .]" (*Modern Fantasy* 77). Seeing the effect of this shadow causes "Anodos not to demand a return of his love for the White Lady" (*Modern Fantasy* 77). See also Manlove in *Modern Fantasy* 95-98 and in *Christian Fantasy* 177-79, where he develops and applies C.S. Lewis's concept of the "dialectic of desire" to MacDonald's fantasies. C. S. Lewis,

relationship with the knight. What Anodos witnesses beyond “the door of Sighs” (137) in the ancient lady’s cottage where he makes this discovery is similar to what the Alder-maiden had described in her story. It is a reunion of lovers: “[. . .] in a lordly hall,” there “sat a lady, waiting, I knew, for some one long desired” (137). Now, though, Anodos is not at the center of the story: “It was not for me she waited” (137-38). It was for the knight.⁴¹ In that hall, Anodos hears the lady confess to the knight: “He [Anodos] woke me from worse than death; he loved me. I had never been for thee, if he had not sought me first. But I love him not as I love thee” (139).⁴² Her words provide confirmation that Anodos did not err in waking her up but only in expecting that she would then become his.

When Anodos returns through the door of Sighs to the cottage, “the ancient woman” (140) sings him a song about love. Love departs,

*But what is left for the cold gray soul,
That moans like a wounded dove?
One wine is left in the broken bowl—
'Tis—To love, and love, and love. (140)*

The lady of the cottage now tells him that it is better to help create love than to receive love:

*Better to sit at the waters' birth,
Than a sea of waves to win;
To live in the love that floweth forth,
Than the love that cometh in. (140)*

The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism, 3rd ed. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943) 10.

⁴¹ In McGillis's opinion, the challenge for Anodos is admitting to himself “that the marble [white] lady is, in fact, a lady of flesh and blood complete with a lover” (“Community” 62-63).

⁴² Through the knight, we learn that the white lady had been in “the death-sleep of an evil enchantment” (138) when Anodos sang to her and freed her, both in the cave and later in the fairy palace in chapter XVI.

Anodos is to be “*a well of love*,” not “*a cistern*” (141). Being pure in love goes beyond the merely physical to the attitude of the heart, and it precludes selfishness: “*For a cistern of love, though undefiled, / Keeps not the spirit pure*” (141). This distinction will become important in *Adela Cathcart*. The love thus created is a better form of love, even when it is not reciprocated: “I rose from the earth,” says Anodos when the song is over, “loving the white lady as I had never loved her before” (141). Once dead, in chapter XXIV, Anodos reaffirms his conviction of the truth of that lesson: “[. . .] I could love without needing to be loved again. [. . .] I knew now, that it is by loving, and not by being loved, that one can come nearest the soul of another [. . .] in proportion as selfishness intrudes, the love ceases [. . .]” (181).

In 1 Corinthians 13, which speaks to the importance of love, the Apostle Paul writes: “When I was a child, [. . .] I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 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 also I am known” (11-12). If, indeed, MacDonald is using the love of a man for a woman to portray man’s desire for and need of God, which cannot be fully satisfied until heaven, it is logical for him to deny Anodos his white lady. Manlove adopts this view in his 1992 work *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present*, which includes a chapter on MacDonald. The white lady “has begun to become part of the great good that will one day come to him [Anodos], part of the larger love that lights the world. [. . .] The pattern of the story is one whereby Anodos learns what true desire is, and begins to see beyond the lady to that larger love of which she is a part, a manifestation” (178). Interestingly, though, MacDonald is not willing, finally, to deny Anodos his lady. Back behind the door of Sighs, Anodos had remarked that, “though the mirror reflected not [his] form, [he] saw a dim

shadow of [him]self in the shining steel” of the knight’s armor (138).⁴³ Death will accomplish the final transition whereby Anodos becomes the knight and finally weds his white lady, who is the knight’s wife (174).⁴⁴ Heaven will provide the perfect fulfillment of humankind’s desire for love, apparently for MacDonald not only in the believer’s relationship with God, as is taught in 1 Corinthians 13, but also in the love of man and woman. Anodos is confident that, in time, his love will be reciprocated: “Yet all love will, one day, meet with its return. All true love will, one day, behold its own image in the eyes of the beloved, and be humbly glad. This is possible in the realms of lofty Death” (181). Not surprisingly, Hein finds the passage from 1 Corinthians 13 “echo[ed]” in the introduction to the story of Cosmo and feels that the story, when examined side by side with the story of the angel-women, points to the possibility of a “more complete” form of “the love relation” existing “in a succeeding world” (*Harmony* 70). Anodos will wait for heaven.

The impression left upon readers as they close the pages of the fantasy remains that women grasp the nature of love and are able to grant their love more fully than men. More precisely, his time in Fairy Land has prompted in Anodos a new love for the human race, but the temptation to selfishness lingers within the intimate love that exists between individual men and women. Such, at least, is the most likely cause of Anodos’s dread that, whatever benefit he has reaped over the past twenty-one days, he will need to “live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men [. . .]” (184). In

⁴³ With Jungian theory in mind, Sutton sees the knight and lady as “a union of opposites [. . .] represent[ing] the wholeness of the Self” and interprets the passage cited as promoting the belief “that he [Anodos] will find his true being in the Self [. . .]” (17).

⁴⁴ Sears Smith provides two corroborating details establishing Anodos’s eventual knighthood, though she does not argue the white lady will also be awarded to him. First, she observes that “Anodos dies out of Fairy Land attempting to act as a knight [. . .]” (65). Secondly, she points out that, in chapter X, Anodos sleeps in a room in the fairy palace, the door of which is marked with “the words, *The Chamber of Sir Anodos*” (65; *Phantastes* 70). She adds that “the rusty knight’s teachings [. . .] imply that men universally mature into wisdom in the same way he has” (65).

what Sears Smith describes as his angelic condition, Anodos imagines his future as servant to the human race: “But, O pale-faced women, and gloomy-browed men, and forgotten children, how I will wait on you, and minister to you [. . .]” (182). To all appearances, his time in Fairy Land has been orchestrated so that he might learn that very lesson, for immediately after he forms this resolution, he feels “a pang and a terrible shudder” and is “conscious of a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life” (182). And he has learned it, as his “strange feeling” of acting as “a ghost, sent into the world to minister” testifies (184). He speaks of his ministry extending in general terms “to [his] fellow-men” and to “the world” (184), but he is too aware of what he calls his “darkness” (184) to express the desire to love and cherish, to have and to hold, a woman. Indeed, how could he minister to those closest to him when his hopes of making a difference are confined, in a caveat, to “those portions [. . .], where [his] darkness falls not” (184)?

The shadow is not simply a picture of the sinful nature resulting from Adam and Eve’s fall; instead, it is a philosophy of hopelessness, a belief in the inexorable spreading of darkness and the exact opposite of the philosophy of hope espoused by the lady of the cottage with her faith in good’s final triumph. Hein proposes a series of descriptions for the shadow, including Anodos’s “cynical self,” “a lower self,” a “negative underside,” and “doubt, rooted in rational analysis” (*Harmony* 65-66).⁴⁵ The woman living in the “hut” in which Anodos encounters his shadow studies “an ancient little volume” celebrating the power of darkness, which is “eternal” and “infinite” (55). Not only does light carve out no more than a small

⁴⁵ He connects the shadow to “the theme of the possibility of many selves” which are “not man’s true person” and discusses the discovery of one’s shadow as part of a process of growth in “MacDonald’s doctrine of becoming: each of the successive possibilities of inferior selfhood must be met and successfully denied as one journeys spiritually toward oneness with God” (*Harmony* 65). He is remarkably positive about the shadow, interpreting its original appearance as a sign “of Anodos’s spiritual growth” because “his true self is beginning to be aware of a lower self that [. . .] negates good and works harm” (*Harmony* 65).

section of darkness (55), but evil exists even in enclaves within it (56). However, Anodos observes that the knight, who “had met the Alder-maiden,” was accompanied by “no shadow” (60). Instead of “enter[ing] the dark house” and “open[ing] the closet door” as Anodos did, the knight performed “mighty deeds” (60). In other words, guilty of sin himself and plagued with a sinful nature, he had refused to dwell on his failures and so develop hopelessness. Indeed, “the channelling [sic] of desire into work” has brought the knight freedom from besetting sin: “The Knight has conquered his male energies so thoroughly that each new combat strikes some of the tarnish from his armour—a reminder of [. . .] his own tryst with the corrupt Alder-maiden [. . .]” (Searsmith 64). Men are thus able to redeem themselves and stave off despair, and indeed Anodos is hard at work in his fields in the fantasy’s final scene. Work may have been an adequate solution for men, whose proper role was action in the world, and a reasonable one for a Victorian to suggest, but what were women to do when desire overtook them in their journey towards adulthood? Though despair also afflicts Adela as she enters adulthood, her gender, with its natural receptivity to good, lends much more optimism to this next work, and marriage, predictably, becomes women’s response to the awakening of desire within them.

Chapter 3

Adela Cathcart and Marriage: A Free-fall into Love

A middle aged man, “not very far from fifty” (4), self-described as “nobody” (3) and bearing the nondescript name John Smith, the narrator of *Adela Cathcart* is, to all outward appearances, very different from Anodos. He certainly is not of the upper-class as Anodos is, for he arrives to visit the Cathcarts by train in a “second-class carriage” (3; 11). However, both are writers, and the “old bachelor” Smith (4) and Anodos do share some philosophies.¹ While riding on the train, he partakes in an imaginary debate. His opponent raises the issue of human “cruelty” and suffering (6), a seminal concern for Victorians believing in a world ruled by God’s providence. Anodos resolves the question of human suffering and wrong by stating that “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” (185). We can be assured that our suffering has a purpose, that there is a lesson to be learned which is of benefit to our character development and spiritual growth. Nothing should be added to or taken away from that experience to achieve the intended result, since the means whereby the lesson is imparted are perfectly tailored to us. Smith’s own response is similar in import to Anodos’s statement: “[. . .] my father has given my brother a beating. It will do him good. He needed it somehow” (6). Anodos, at the close of his adventures, almost believes he is “a ghost, sent into the world to minister to [his] fellow-men” (184). Smith, likewise disembodied through his description of himself as “nobody” [no body], expresses his calling to help his fellow men as “a resolution” to “make [himself] useful” (14). In *Adela Cathcart*, the primary way he fulfills his resolution is by devising a plan and collaborating with others to lift the spirits of a

¹ Anodos has authored at least one book, the account of his time in Fairy Land, while Smith appears to be a professional writer (426; 56).

young girl who, like Anodos, comes of age transported by the power of fancy. She will learn the lesson of hope. As Smith muses on the state of the world, his thoughts, by way of contrast, recall the despair-inducing words of the ogress on the power of darkness. “Darkness exists but by the light, and for the light,” asserts Smith, since the coming of “the first shadow” depended on the presence of light (6).

The depiction of a young woman assailed by a strange physical illness because of an internal moral struggle, which forms the essence of MacDonald’s novel, *Adela Cathcart*, is not unique to MacDonald. Bram Dijkstra observes the presence of such a figure in the works of “late nineteenth-century painters” and explains its cultural significance (23). He describes Victorian women’s “constant, necessary, tortured self-assessment” in which they compared themselves to the “angel of exemplary virtue” and searched within themselves for “vestiges of worldly desire” (23). Though this practice was ultimately “health-wrecking” (23), the illness of these women was proof of their goodness: “The more intense the struggle, the more impressive the triumph of true virtue. A healthy woman was therefore regarded with suspicion” (23). It is therefore to MacDonald’s credit that the focus of the efforts of the men in his novel is to restore Adela to health, and it is even more striking that their efforts are successful. MacDonald’s choice to preserve Adela’s life might be termed an act of rebellion against the chauvinism of his society since in it “death became a woman’s ultimate sacrifice of her being to the males she had been born to serve. To withhold from them this last gesture of her exalted servility was, in a sense, an act of insubordination, of ‘self-will’” (Dijkstra 29).

MacDonald’s deliberate rebellion against his society’s standard for women becomes further apparent in his rejection of his literary mentor’s model of femininity. Alfred, Lord

Tennyson, who was much admired by MacDonald,² celebrated the emotional frailty of women and their “intense need to be allowed to sacrifice themselves to chivalrous males” (Dijkstra 37). With the fulfillment of this basic need thwarted, Tennyson’s women would simply go “mad” (Dijkstra 37). In particular, he believed “the sacrificial impulse in woman was what he might have called, in the language of the time, the ‘sex-impulse,’ turned to civilized use and made subservient to woman’s role as housekeeper and resident polisher of the male soul [. . .]” (Dijkstra 37). In other words, sexual desire has no place in a woman’s life, and sexual passion is thus best redirected into domestic service. In a final twist, this complete negation of the self is accorded but small value. According to Dijkstra, Tennyson found the feminine impulse “pleasingly pathetic” since woman was only “the nominal keeper of virtue” and was otherwise so “obviously expendable” (38). Despite his appreciation of Tennyson’s work, MacDonald rejects the idea that the doctor, whom Adela later falls in love with, “ha[s] anything to do with” her illness (21), opting instead to connect Adela’s disease with the absence of mental and spiritual stimuli. In addition, he makes a woman’s steadily improving mental health the subject of his novel, pursuing the exact opposite of Tennyson’s favorite theme. Far from being expendable, women are portrayed in the novel as essential partners in interdependent male-female relationships. Finally, the feminine “sex-impulse” does not have to be disguised but is accepted as a facet of the character of civilized women.

Crucial to an understanding of male-female relationships in MacDonald’s work is an understanding of what he conceives women to be like. MacDonald’s patronizing admiration of women is glaring throughout the text of *Adela Cathcart*, and is expected of a Victorian. The doctor attributes his understanding of women to “reading Milton, and learning from him

² MacDonald wrote Tennyson a letter on August 25, 1865 in which he states “that, amongst the many who love you, I claim to belong to the necessarily smaller class of those who understand you” (Sadler 151).

a certain high notion about myself and my own duty. None but a pure man can understand women—I mean the true womanhood that is in them” (53). Purity is therefore a part of true womanhood. Also wrapped up in MacDonald’s concept of womanhood is the perception of masculine duty towards women. Women are defined, in part, by how men treat them. It is the male who awakens the female to her calling, just as Anodos awakens the lady of the marble. The schoolmaster tells the story of the loss of a firstborn child. In his story, “Birth, Dreaming, and Death,” the mother dreams she has become a bouquet of flowers sitting in a flower shop. Her husband selects her despite the greater attractiveness of several other bouquets. She is roused from her sleep by her husband’s kiss and feels “as if he had, in fact, like one of the old knights, delivered her from the transformation of some evil magic, by the counter-enchantment of a kiss, and restored her from a half-withered nosegay to be a woman, a wife, a mother” (142).³ The husband thus provides her not only with her roles of wife and mother but also with her very identity as a woman. Contemporary cultural views of women here resonate deeply in MacDonald’s work. She is a decorative flower in his life, and she prays that, in knowing and responding to God’s love, she will also be able to be the angel of the house: “a beautiful singing angel, singing to God, and comforting my husband while I sing” (143).⁴ Aside from as an exercise in spotting Victorian clichés, a gender-criticism reading of *Adela Cathcart* would thus be quite dull, were it not for MacDonald’s departures from the conventional literary treatment of women. In the symptoms of Adela’s illness comes

³ In quoting stories, I am treating them as separate texts in order to avoid the accumulation of quotes within quotes as much as possible.

⁴ The curate most vividly portrays the influence of woman as angel upon man as he talks about his wife with Smith. Long before their courtship had begun, she prompted his self-improvement: “I strove to write better, and to do better generally” (162). He refers to her as his “judge” (164). She is also “a woman-angel,” not to be ignored or “parley[ed] with” (165). This angel leads him to repentance: “I fell on my knees, weeping like a child [. . .]” (165). He adopts an attitude of prayer: “My head was bowed on my hands. I felt as if she could save me” (165). In addition, by having him make a priority out of paying his debt, the curate explains, “She made a man of me” (180). It appears, therefore, that the genders help define one another.

the first indication that MacDonald is aware of the oppression experienced by women in his society, and of its consequences to them.⁵

Like Anodos, Adela is of the gentry. She too is twenty-one.⁶ Her mother's death was "many years" ago (10) but, unlike Anodos, she still has her father, who is a colonel.⁷ Her illness modifies her perception of the world around her in much the same way as Anodos's shadow does for him. Anodos admits:

I began to be rather vain of my attendant, saying to myself, 'In a land like this, with so many illusions everywhere, I need his aid to disenchant the things around me. He does away with all appearances, and shows me things in their true colour and form. [. . .] I will dare to behold things as they are. And if I live in a waste instead of a paradise, I will live knowing where I live.' (61)

Adela describes the feeling as "an overpowering sense of blackness and misery. [. . .] It was as if I had waked in the middle of some chaos over which God had never said: 'Let there be light.' [. . .] I began to see the bad in everything—wrong motives—and self-love—and pretence, and everything mean and low" (25). She most resembles Anodos when she tells her "uncle," John Smith: "What if this should be the true way of things? It is better to know it, if it is" (26). MacDonald has manipulated the gender factor to examine its impact on the coming of age process in the lives of privileged youth. The disillusionment encountered during the process and the lessons learned at its end are similar. However, the method of

⁵ In the meantime, MacDonald has had his protagonist at least take a step in the right direction. "Birth, Dreaming, and Death" has a positive impact on Adela's self-worth, for after hearing it she sings a song in which the lover denies desiring a princess because of her father's wealth and power but affirms he loves her for who she is (151). Percy, her suitor, confesses to the doctor that his own interest in Adela is based on looks (376) and money (378). Adela wants to be loved for her own sake, not for the "very tolerable fortune" Smith indicates her aunt, Percy's mother, is after (109).

⁶ The narrator mentions that "she had called [him] uncle, since ever she had begun to speak, which must have been nearly twenty years ago" (10; cf. 450).

⁷ He married "the baronet's daughter" as a captain, Smith explains to the curate and doctor, "and was not even next heir to the property he has now" (447).

treatment for each character's condition differs slightly, and its success is more definite in the case of the female patient. Unfortunately, because Adela's entry into adulthood is more easily achieved than Anodos's, MacDonald leaves the impression that a greater natural goodness existing within women makes their problems easier to solve than men's. Once again, only in the details of Adela's illness, and not in the shape the story takes, does MacDonald apply a more discriminating eye to women's situation in his society.

One sign of Adela's condition is her inability to fill the role of "angel in the house." Dinner, on the occasion of Smith's first night in the house, is described as "gloomy" (12). She might have been "a ghost [. . .] in its shroud," spreading a "chill over the guests. She did her duty well enough; but she did not look it [. . .]" (12). Since it is Christmas Eve, it is the night, of all others, when she should not have failed to be the angelic bearer of gladness. Her primary physical complaint is that she is "tired," as her father reports she has told him (12). "What has she to tire her?" he wonders (12), and indeed the emptiness of her hours as a woman of the leisured classes no doubt contributes to her depression. Adela might find understanding in Mrs. Bloomfield who admits that at one point in her life she "did envy the servants, because they had work to do, and health to do it, and wages for it when it was done" (34). A song sung by the doctor for Adela recognizes the emotional impact of an empty life: "What is rest to me, I pray, / Who have done no labour all the day?" (47). Adela reveals to her "uncle" that she has difficulty sleeping and expects to die soon (24-25). Her father tells us: "Her mother died of a decline" (12), introducing the concept of innate feminine weakness. Emotionally, she suffers from "utter and careless hopelessness" (10). Smith even briefly considers the possibility that "some love affair" is to blame, though he rejects the idea

that “she is dying for” Percy, her cousin and suitor (12).⁸ He next suspects that Adela is in love with the curate’s brother, the doctor, who is “stealing glances at, certainly not from, [his] adopted niece, Adela” (21) as they sit in church. Again, he “dismissed the idea” (21). Though he discovers he “was right” to do so (21), the fact that he has twice introduced the possibility that she is pining away for love means that in some measure her feelings for the opposite gender are a factor in Adela’s illness. However, these feelings appear to be ones of generalized sexual interest rather than of love for a specific individual.⁹ As we shall see, love is not the cause of the illness. Indeed, it is the cure.

Janet Oppenheim’s discussion of depression in Victorian women explains how sexual interest might have been connected with Adela’s illness. Though William Acton, in his belief that women have no sex drives, is often presumed to be representative of Victorian opinion on this matter, Oppenheim disputes this conclusion since “Acton was not [. . .] a highly regarded member of the Victorian medical profession, and [. . .] did not speak for the majority of his colleagues” (201). Instead, Oppenheim claims:

[. . .] doctors typically expressed their belief that sexual relations within marriage were healthy for women by suggesting the damage wrought in their absence. [Thomas] Laycock’s remark in 1840 concerning ‘females who . . . suffer from repressed feelings in civilized communities’ betrayed an awareness of the toll taken on women’s health by the suppression of natural sexual instincts. Medical writers conveyed this viewpoint repeatedly throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras, *particularly stressing that*

⁸ Though he does not cause her depression, he does nothing to relieve it. The colonel confirms that Percy is the only person Adela’s age she might spend time with (24), but Smith judges he is only one more person “to get tired of” (24).

⁹ Smith evidently believes that a woman’s “dying for” love is a ploy, for he later claims that Adela “would scorn and resist” acting the invalid in order to get her father to agree to the doctor’s courtship of her (446).

*disappointed love and 'the mortifications of celibacy,' in [John] Conolly's phrase, gave rise to hysterical symptoms. (203; emphasis added)*¹⁰

She further declares: “Among the varied reasons doctors proposed for female hysteria, from menstrual irregularity through religious frenzy, many continued to find sexual abstinence the most plausible” (204). Sexual abstinence therefore becomes a likely contributor to Adela’s current state of mind. MacDonald’s solution is to relieve some of the burden of mental restraint by encouraging more frankness in dealing with human sexuality. When Doctor Armstrong is summoned out on a particularly stormy night to assist a woman giving birth, Adela entreats him not to go. He responds, “‘The woman is in labour,’ [. . .] forgetting, in the stern reality both for the poor woman and himself, that girls of Adela’s age and social position are not accustomed to hear such facts so plainly expressed, from a man’s lips” (237). The narrator seems pleased both with the doctor’s genuine openness about childbirth and with Adela’s ability to “simply accept[] the fact” (237), while Adela’s aunt Mrs. Cathcart, critical throughout the novel, calls it a “coarse speech” (241) and comments regarding the doctor’s attendance at the birth, “It was too good an opportunity to be lost” (241). She very clearly is thinking about the knowledge of female sexuality this almost thirty-year-old bachelor can thus obtain. In scenes and through comments such as these, MacDonald begins to trace out his position on human sexuality. Morality is not achieved through prudery.

Along with the emotional-biological component of Adela’s depression, there exists a spiritual element as well. MacDonald makes the point that Adela needs to develop trust in God’s active providence as well as a confidence in his mercy rather than a fear of his

¹⁰ Thomas Laycock, *A Treatise on the Nervous Diseases of Women* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840) 83+; J. Conolly, “Hysteria,” *The Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine*, eds. John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, and John Conolly, 4 vols. (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, Piper, Baldwin, & Cradock, 1833-35) 2:585.

judgment. The first story Adela hears, on the occasion of Christmas dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield, recounts how Mr. Bloomfield once saved a schoolboy from being discovered as the thief of another boy's watch by helping to redeem the watch, which had been sold, and return it to the owner, incognito. He and his wife are in mourning that Christmas day for the young man's death, "an honourable man and a good officer, only three months ago, in India" (29). The man had bequeathed Mr. Bloomfield a watch as "a memorial, not so much of his fault, as of his deliverance from some of its natural consequences" (29). Mrs. Bloomfield later tells Adela a story of her own regarding a woman she knew who had abandoned husband and child because of guilt over a great debt accumulated at the butcher's. Her husband appears to have been abusive and Mrs. Bloomfield refers to him as a "wretch" (32), but the point of the story seems to be the suffering of the woman who lacked a "stout heart[]" (32) to admit her debt to her husband and face up to his anger. Both stories thus deal with unconfessed guilt and its negative effects, and the first offers the promise of forgiveness and mercy.¹¹ Mrs. Bloomfield's next story addresses the need to trust in God. At a time when her "heart was troubled, and [she] could not feel sure that God cared quite so much for us as he did for the lilies" (33), she encountered a mentally-impaired boy named Davy. This boy thanks God for such things as his whiskers and his food and even expresses his faith in God to one day provide him with a kite.¹² "[. . .] Davy believed that God did care for his own children," explains Mrs. Bloomfield (38). Such confidence in God's care is what Adela feels

¹¹ The possibility of a relationship between guilt and depression in Adela is strengthened by the interpretation Dieter Petzold gives of "The Light Princess." According to Petzold, the function of fairy tales is to allay "guilt" in "the overly self-critical person" (19). In his article on maturation in MacDonald's fairy tales, Petzold describes the curse on the light princess generally as "the symbolic narrative concretisation of an experience [sic] which is typical of a pubescent child preoccupied with finding her own self" (19). The curse is further associated with the "vivid sense of self-criticism" that characterizes pubescence (19).

¹² Mrs. Bloomfield, who overhears this statement regarding a kite, provides a sixpence for Davy to purchase one with. When Adela questions whether "it was quite fair" to attribute to God what she herself had done, Mrs. Bloomfield replies, "I only said God sent it" (39).

she needs, for “things might be all right if one could believe that—thoroughly, I mean” (39). God’s Mercy and Providence must become her spiritual sources of hope.¹³

The doctor, to whom Adela is engaged at the end of the novel, himself emphasizes the role of the spiritual in causing and curing Adela’s illness. He diagnoses an unnamed affliction that frequently affects “girls at her age” (50). He suggests “a physical or a psychological cause” but hints at “a deeper cause” (50), which he admits to Smith a couple of hours later is “a spiritual one” (52). It appears women are prone to this type of affliction because of their sensitive spiritual natures. The doctor explains to Smith how he reached his diagnosis: “[. . .] I watched everything about her [Adela]; and interpreted it by what I know about women. I believe that many of them go into a consumption just from discontent [. . .]. The theological nourishment which is offered them is generally no better than husks” (52). Smith takes this belief further when he argues to Adela’s father: “My conviction is, that, near or far off, in ourselves, or in our ancestors—say Adam and Eve, for comprehension’s sake—all our ailments have a moral cause. I think that if we were all good, disease would, in the course of generations, disappear utterly from the face of the earth” (109-10).¹⁴ When the colonel inquires whether Smith thinks “that Adela has anything upon her conscience,” he denies that possibility but continues to assert that “there may be moral diseases that do not in the least imply personal wrong or fault. They may themselves be transmitted, for instance” (110). The fact that Adela’s mother died of a decline immediately gains in relevancy here.

The clearest description of the spiritual source of Adela’s illness comes immediately after she

¹³ Smith writes the purpose of life is to “learn the benignities of the universe,” “the one *genial* strength at the root of all life, resurrection, and growth—commonly called the Spirit of God” (420). In the schoolmaster’s story “The Castle: A Parable,” the siblings are criticized for their ingratitude for “unseen care and ministration, [. . .] as if help and progress and joy and love were the natural crops of Chaos or old Night” (429). As the story closes, the siblings live in “hope and expectation” of their Father’s eventual arrival (440-41). Adela too feels “hope, namely, and onward impulse” (441).

¹⁴ He later espouses the view that “all disease is from the devil [. . .]” (367).

has learned of her father's financial ruin, for she tells him her earlier feelings came from facing a world "with no God in it" (456). In other words, she is tempted by atheism, an incorrect worldview, according to MacDonald. "The Cruel Painter," the vampire story told by the doctor, is an especially effective part of her cure: "Something or other in it had touched her not only deeply, but nearly" (415-16). The story's origin explains its appeal, for some of its contents come from a book titled *Antidote against Atheism*, by Henry More (415). John Pennington notes that "the danger in the story resides in the fact that the characters may not be able to distinguish between illusion and reality" and describes them as "adrift on a sea of uncertainty" (185). The cathartic value of the story for Adela may thus come from the fact that, as Pennington observes, "any hesitation, ambiguity, or uncertainty is resolved at the end; truth and order—reality—are restored and all's well that end's [sic] well" (191).¹⁵ In other words, God's active presence in the world is confirmed.¹⁶ As her unusual treatment progresses, Adela acknowledges the improvement of both her spiritual and physical conditions: "I think Mr. Armstrong's prescription is doing me a great deal of good. [. . .] I sleep very well indeed now. And somehow life seems a much more possible thing than it looked a week or two ago. And the whole world appears more like the work of God" (218).¹⁷

The use of stories to cure depression is more than a ploy by MacDonald to publish his short stories. It is based on conventional contemporary approaches to promoting women's health. Oppenheim writes:

¹⁵ Pennington actually makes a different correlation between the tale and Adela's situation: "[. . .] the story deals with a parent's selfish attitude toward his daughter; Lilith loves Karl and Karl loves Lilith, but Teufelsbüst tries to keep them apart. In *Adela*, the Colonel attempts to keep Adela from falling for the middle-class doctor, and part of her illness is a result of her unrequited love for the doctor" (207).

¹⁶ MacDonald offers a way to reconcile the existence of immense suffering with God's involvement in earthly matters when the curate sings a song in which the Virgin Mary wonders how her child can smile in the face of the world's troubles. The smile is present because Christ, the "one who answers prayer" (154), works in the midst of tragedy. "Beyond this wild," he also perceives "God's will well done" and hears "men's songs" (154).

¹⁷ Smith provides a rather detailed account of what beliefs he hopes Adela will adopt in his ensuing discussion with her, *Adela Cathcart* 218-19.

The early Victorian medical profession [. . .] recommended that they invigorate their minds through the cultivation of moral wisdom and their drooping bodies through moderate exercise. Medical practitioners well understood what [Elizabeth Garrett] Anderson stressed in 1874—that an empty mind becomes a potent source of illness through sheer tedium. (200)¹⁸

Adela's boredom is so pronounced that, after the colonel has been ruined, she feels "strange excitement. There will be something to battle with and beat" (456). In the meantime, what better way to "invigorate" a mind than through the creativity of the minds of others? With Adela "dying of ennui" (376), the doctor describes to Percy the purpose of the story-club and its members' influence on Adela: "[. . .] here was the first one and then another turning each the flash of his own mental prism upon her weary eyes, and healing them with light [. . .]" (377). While the "moral wisdom" contained in the stories is the natural antidote for Adela's moral disease, "moderate exercise" is part of the doctor's prescription for Adela as well. On "a sunshiny day, with a keen cold air, and a thin sprinkling of snow," he encounters Smith who is on his way back from a visit with the schoolmaster, Mr. Bloomfield, and uses this opportunity to request that Smith take Adela outside for ten minutes: "What I want is to make the blood go quicker and more plentifully through her brain. She has not fever enough. She does not live fast enough" (135). Smith complies just moments later.

Once the doctor makes it his prescription for Adela "to interest her in something, if possible—no matter what it is" (50), Smith introduces his plan for a story-club, based primarily on Adela's childhood love of stories (29). He explains to the colonel and doctor:

¹⁸ Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, "Sex in Mind and Education: A Reply," *Fortnightly Review* ns 15 (1874): n. pag. As the century proceeded, however, due to the implications for women's advancement of modifications to their process of education, "the medical profession qualified its earlier counsel that women should exercise their minds" (Oppenheim 200).

“She would eat better, and sleep better, and speculate less, and think less about herself [. . .]. It would be beginning from the inside, would it not?” (50-51). Father, “uncle,” and doctor having struck an agreement, Smith tells the first story, one he describes to the group as “a child’s story—a fairy tale, namely” (55). Perhaps because “The Light Princess” addresses human sexuality, Smith finds “it fitter for grown than for young children” (55), but U. C. Knoepfelmacher notes that MacDonald “read ‘The Light Princess’ to his own children as well as to Bedford College undergraduates who had expected to hear him lecture on *The Faerie Queene*” (118).¹⁹ Its composition predates the publication of *Adela Cathcart* in 1864 by at least two years, as indicated by a comment in Lewis Carroll’s diary in July 1862 revealing an attempt by MacDonald on the ninth of that month to have “The Light Princess” published (Knoepfelmacher 125). The fairy tale, itself MacDonald’s “first story for children” (Knoepfelmacher 125), was important enough to him to have it published again in 1867 “in his first full book for children, *Dealings with the Fairies*” (Knoepfelmacher 126).

MacDonald uses “The Light Princess” to point to the role of sexuality in Adela’s struggle with coming of age.²⁰ Smith fears the eventual development in Adela “of [a] beauty,

¹⁹ In “The Light Princess,” states Pennington, “MacDonald argues that children must be allowed to express themselves like adults, both intellectually, emotionally, and sexually” (160). Pennington’s meaning here is unclear, but certainly flirtatious behavior, such as the kissing of a page, does not need to be squelched. The intellectual, emotional, and sexual must find age-appropriate expression. However, MacDonald does not condone the removal of all restraints on sexuality. Pennington analyzes “The Cruel Painter” and argues that “MacDonald is using the vampire myth to discuss sexual passion, a passion which borders on the amoral, on the lustful, the uninhibited” (190). A difference remains between moral and amoral passion.

²⁰ Another application of the story to Adela’s situation is as a commentary on her relationship with her father. According to Knoepfelmacher, the parents embody the threat of “perpetual childhood” that the princess must overcome (133). Pennington, too, blames the parents for the princess’s shortcomings: “[. . .] her parents have not taught her properly” (124). He contends that *Adela Cathcart* cannot simply be considered “a novel with interpolated stories” and suggests that Smith’s three stories, “The Light Princess,” “The Shadows,” and “The Giant’s Heart,” develop “themes that hint at Adela’s mysterious illness,” with the “improper rearing” exhibited in “The Light Princess” highlighting Adela’s father’s own “aristocratic—snobby—parental attitude” (177). He also proposes “selfishness” and “class conflict” as “the probable causes of Adela’s illness” (177). The class conflict he refers to, between the doctor and Colonel Cathcart over Adela, only intervenes once Adela’s illness has been established, but Pennington finds Adela’s condition declining, not improving, throughout the novel and believes the increasingly dark tone of Smith’s three stories manifests her deteriorating condition (177).

which [. . .] would be mingled with the trail of more or less guilty sensuality” (313-14). The use of the phrase “more or less” implies that it is not sensuality itself which is “guilty” but rather a quality which, when it mixes into human sensuality, perverts it to varying degrees. The only observable sign of such negative sensuality in Adela at present is “her worldliness,” that is, her “selfish contentment, or selfish care” (313). As we shall see in “The Light Princess,” preoccupation with the self is thus the quality that threatens beauty and warps sensuality.²¹ As the first story-club tale and one of only three stories told by Smith, “The Light Princess” merits attention. It is also the only story in *Adela Cathcart* with a young woman as its main character. Because it seems directly aimed at Adela and takes up the subject of sexuality, I will deal with it at length.²² The story opens with a discussion between king and queen regarding the king’s desire to have children. In a reversal of the encounter between Anodos and the angel women, it is the man who is “sexually naive” (Knoepflmacher 132) and ignorant of how babies are made. While his daughter is still an infant, he worries about the fact that she might one day marry: “Just think! If she were to have any children! In the course of a hundred years, the air might be as full of floating children as of gossamers in autumn” (67). He thinks as a head of state, concerned for the society he rules. The queen, however, makes woman’s sexuality and role in reproduction a private matter, despite its implication for society: “‘That is no business of ours,’ replied the queen. ‘Besides, by that time, they will have learned to take care of themselves’” (68). As she grows up, the princess becomes “fond of the water” because “in it alone she enjoyed any freedom. [. . .] the king

²¹ Smith refers to worldly young women as “only half made yet” and wishes to “take refuge with some noble-faced grandmother, or withered old maid, whose features tell of sorrow and patience” (313). Apparently, Smith perceives an obligation to assist in the “making” of Adela.

²² F. Hal Broome states that, in each story, there is intended to be “a correspondence between the essential character of the tale and Adela herself,” though it might not “be direct,” and cites “The Light Princess” as an example of “MacDonald’s propensity for reversal,” for the afflictions of the princess and Adela are opposite (9).

grew more apprehensive with increasing years, till at last he would not allow her to walk abroad without some twenty silken cords fastened to as many parts of her dress, and held by twenty noblemen” (77). The source of the king’s apprehension, it shall be remembered, is his daughter’s ability to reproduce. The princess is therefore reined in by the masculine and aristocratic establishments whose interests she is eventually to serve as wife and mother. MacDonald here depicts the conflict between women’s rights as individuals and their function as biological agents of society.

When the prince manages to get rid of his courtiers while traversing a forest, the narrator comments that princes “have the advantage of the princesses, who are forced to marry before they have had a bit of fun. I wish our princesses got lost in a forest sometimes” (79). Marriage in itself is very desirable, according to MacDonald, but it threatens the freedom of women when it constitutes merely an arrangement to serve society’s needs. The light princess will have her fun and her marriage too, but as she loses herself in the water, and not the forest, she explores her sensual—and her sexual—ity. The next chapter in the fairy tale relates “an awkward accident” in which the princess runs towards her father to give him a kiss but kisses a page instead “when a puff of wind blew her aside” (69):

Now it was no great peculiarity in the princess that, once she was set a-going, it always cost her time and trouble to check herself. On this occasion there was no time. She *must* kiss—and she kissed the page. She did not mind it much; for she had no shyness in her composition; and she knew, besides, that she could not help it. (69)

As benign as the kiss may have been, it signals the princess’s growing maturity and readiness for a romantic relationship. However, love opens an individual up to experiencing pain

because of the emotional investment made in another person. With it comes a measure of sacrifice and selflessness. The princess is incapable of concern for others, and so “perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been falling in love” (75). Her self-absorption blocks her love, but love itself paradoxically will remove this hindrance to its own existence, and she will simultaneously be cured, regaining her gravity.

At present, the seventeen-year-old’s experience of love is such that “she did not even know that there was such a bee-hive of honey and stings to be fallen into” (75); nevertheless, the princess’s behavior is portrayed as highly sexual.²³ Once the princess falls into the lake, which Knoepfmacher calls “the only refuge for her [. . .] emerging femininity” (134), and finds she loses her weightlessness in it, “the passion of her life was to get into the water [. . .]. Any day, [. . .] she might be descried—a streak of white in the blue water [. . .]” (76). Whether it is the white of her body or the white of her clothes that is being seen is irrelevant, since either would be improper. The lake holds great attraction for her: “Indeed when she happened to wake in the moonlight, she could hardly resist the temptation” (76). The obscurity and reference to “temptation” in this sentence evoke the sexual. The princess meets the prince for the first time in “the gathering darkness” (79) and parts from him when it is “quite late” (82).²⁴ Just by being in the lake at evening time, the princess is toying with the forbidden, for as she complains to the prince, “They won’t trust me in the lake for a single night!” (82). MacDonald goes to some pains to emphasize the sexual tone of the encounter between princess and prince, with such details as the fact that “the condition of her [white] dress [. . .] compelled her to cling to him [. . .]” (81). The two jump back into the water and,

²³ If, as the theory of the day suggests, Adela’s emotional well-being is harmed through her sexual abstinence, incongruously, like the princess, she is not consciously aware of her sexual need. However, the doctor feels love would be beneficial, judging that “anything hearty will do her good” (53).

²⁴ It is always at night that the princess’s escapades with the prince take place (86).

following a long conversation about “falling in,” the princess declares, “It is the most delightful fun I ever had in my life” (82), even though it might “not be proper” (82).²⁵ Despite all this, the narrator affirms, “She seemed altogether more modest and maidenly in the water than out of it,” and the princess still is “puzzled” by the concept of love, which the prince is now anxious to discuss with her (87). In fact, when the lake begins to empty, she does not recognize the prince as the source of love but is preoccupied instead with the feelings of enjoyment created by love, feelings she associates with the lake: “However much she had enjoyed his company in the water, she did not care for him without it” (92). Her passion is love itself; it is a love without other object. Like Anodos, she is more interested in the experience of love than in the individual who brings love to her.

“The Light Princess” unequivocally establishes MacDonald’s efforts to provide literary legitimization of sexual passion in women’s lives. This “parable of puberty” teaches “acceptance” of one’s sexuality “for the sake of mature adulthood” (Reis 77). In coming of age, the princess must leave behind her old self, described by Knoepflmacher as “unfeeling, narcissistic, increasingly shallow” (133). So far is MacDonald from castigating sexuality in women that the princess’s playful, and controversial,²⁶ interaction with a member of the opposite sex becomes the means whereby she divests herself of these unwanted qualities:

²⁵ Adela reminds her aunt, who labels the swimming of the prince and princess “very improper,” that “nobody does what papa and mamma would not like here” (83).

²⁶ John Ruskin, whose acquaintance with MacDonald began in 1863 during the composition of *Adela Cathcart* (Broome 10), interceded by letter with MacDonald to have him revise “The Light Princess,” of which he had seen “the original manuscript” (Knoepflmacher 138). Out of concern for children, he requests that certain passages “be done in a simpler and less telling way” (qtd. in Knoepflmacher 138-39). MacDonald did not comply, according to Knoepflmacher, for either the story’s publication in *Adela Cathcart* or later publication in the children’s book *Dealings with the Fairies*: “Instead, he seems to have defended his position against censorship ‘on the question of passions,’ since, in an undated letter, Ruskin agrees: ‘I wholly feel with you that the harm of ignoring them has been fearful.’ [. . .] After the publication of *Adela Cathcart*, he complained [. . .] that MacDonald had actually assigned his objections to the heroine’s prudish aunt” (140). Knoepflmacher’s source for the first letter from Ruskin is a document dated 22 July 1863 stored at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University (139). The second Ruskin letter comes from the same library and is tentatively dated 1863 (140). On the connection between Ruskin and Mrs. Cathcart, see also Broome 10-11 and Knoepflmacher 142, where both quote yet another letter.

“When MacDonald stresses the unsuspected pleasure the Light Princess takes in her newly found swimming mate, he suggests that—though still childish and narcissistic—the young woman is capable of *a sexual maturation that will lead to her eventual emotional growth*” (Knoepflmacher 140-41; emphasis added). The idea that a woman’s sexuality could be positively connected to her character development is extraordinary. In his discussion of the eighteenth century novel *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson, Dijkstra states:

Gradually a woman’s physical inaccessibility came to be seen as the primary guarantee of her moral purity. Any public—or even private—display of levity or physical energy on the part of women was a clear indication of the spiritual frivolity of such women and their concomitant inability to serve as efficient vessels for the care and feeding of their husbands’ souls. (8-9)

However, it is in becoming physically accessible, first in the lake and then at all times, that the hitherto frivolous princess is able to become a loving, pure wife; MacDonald thus utilizes this eighteenth century concept of woman while also subverting it. When the motif of “the weightless woman” appears in paintings in the late 1800s and into the twentieth century (Dijkstra 89), like the princess she is indeed “sexual,” though the effect of her weightlessness is “to discourage any sort of participation on the part of the observer of her airy trajectory” (Dijkstra 90). In addition, she herself remains “passive” (Dijkstra 90). In contrast, MacDonald desires his heroine to enter into a physical relationship and so gives her gravity.

The drying up of the lake arrests the princess’s development, both sexually and emotionally. The princess's condition as the lake dwindles is similar to Adela's:

For the princess kept her room, with the curtains drawn to shut out the dying lake. [. . .] she felt as if her lake were her soul, drying up within her, first to

become mud, and then madness and death. She brooded over the change, with all its dreadful accompaniments, till she was nearly out of her mind. (91-92)

The change in her, as well as the change in the lake, can only be reversed by “*the body of a living man*” who “*must give himself*” in an experience combining love and death (93), as a text on “a plate of gold” found in the lake says (92): “Death alone from death can save. / Love is death, and so is brave” (92). The song the prince sings as the water begins to rise makes it clear that water is to be equated with love.²⁷ The first stanza compares the absence of love in the princess's life to the absence of well, stream, ocean, or rain from the world, and the remaining stanzas pick up the same theme (97-98). The prince's one wish as the song closes is for the princess to associate love with him, granting him even “one thought” that might be “a little well,” “Lest [her] loveless soul be found / Like a dry and thirsty ground” (98). Though the princess's aunt, the witch Makemnoit, is responsible for drying up the lake, the prince contends the princess's inability to love will render her soul dry as well.

Sexuality comes clearly to the forefront, according to Knoepfmacher, when the prince has died and is placed in the princess's bedroom. The king and queen are sleeping:

So the princess and her old nurse were left with the prince. Somehow, the doctors never came. But the old nurse was a wise woman, and knew what to do.

They tried everything for a long time without success. The princess was nearly distracted between hope and fear, but she tried on and on, one thing after another, and everything over and over again.

At last, when they had all but given it up, just as the sun rose, the prince opened his eyes. (101)

²⁷ Knoepfmacher argues that the water, in the Romantic tradition, is “an emblem of femininity” (141).

Knoepflmacher reads a sexual act into this scene: “Deliberately excluding the king and queen [. . .], MacDonald has her old nurse join the princess as they alone work over the young man's body. Their ministrations are handled with deliberate vagueness: [. . .] the task of bringing the prince back to life seems to devolve solely to the princess [. . .]” (145). With the return of the rain, “MacDonald links fecundity to the bedroom in which he has placed his young protagonists” (Knoepflmacher 145). If, on her first encounter with the prince, the princess learned to fall into water, in this encounter she learns a new kind of falling: “The princess burst into a passion of tears, and *fell* on the floor” (101). Sexual experience has transformed the princess: gravity exerts its pull on her once more. Though she still enjoys the lake, she enjoys it more now with the prince by her side: “[. . .] she could tumble into the lake as often as she pleased. Still, she preferred to have the prince jump in with her [. . .]” (103).

“With prophetic soul,” the queen in “The Light Princess” had early on proclaimed her unwillingness to reconcile herself to having a “light-headed” and so “light-minded” daughter (65). MacDonald’s light princess drifts out the window of a bedroom as a baby and ends up “under a rose-bush” (63) and winds up in a tree during her first encounter with the prince (80). Dijkstra devotes a few pages to the women “caught in the branches of trees” in the paintings of “the weightless woman” (93). Aside from sexual interpretations, Dijkstra offers up one interpretation that corresponds with MacDonald’s own association of weightlessness and light-mindedness. Dijkstra observes: “For Dante Gabriel Rossetti it was woman’s failure to keep her mind on the serious matters of the intellect which made her end up in the trees, as in his painting ‘The Day-Dream’ of 1880 [. . .]” (94). In the characterization of this princess whom Knoepflmacher calls “shallow,” we see the objectionable aspects of Adela’s character magnified. The doctor complains of her environment, with its lack of intellectual demands,

informing Smith that he “did not find one song that rose above the level of the drawing-room, or one piece of music that had any deep feeling or any thought in it” in Adela’s collection (53).²⁸ While the doctor raises concerns over Adela’s music, Mrs. Bloomfield brings Adela’s reading under suspicion when she apologizes to Adela for her first story, saying, “Well, there isn’t much of romance in it [. . .]” (31).

For the sustenance of women’s health, MacDonald calls for the development of their minds. He is perfectly in tune with the medical wisdom of the day, which held that “the overexcitement of the sensory organs, through music, perfume, and rich food, or the overstimulation of the emotions through sentimental literature, could indeed, as [Edward John] Tilt warned, ‘give an undue activity to the nervous system’” (Oppenheim 200).²⁹ In addition, since the doctor not only wanted to add “thought” to Adela’s life but also “deep feeling,” he accordingly provides his own interpretation of the “moral” of “The Light Princess”: “[. . .] no girl is worth anything till she has cried a little” (104).³⁰ The two philosophers, Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck, had predicted “that, if the poor afflicted princess could by any means be made to cry, she might recover her lost gravity” (77). Throughout the tale, the word “gravity” has had two meanings, for not only is the princess not affected by gravity in a physical sense “but she never could be brought to see the serious side of anything” (68). She is now capable of reflecting on life; she is vested in the life of another.³¹

²⁸ MacDonald would agree with the older brother’s philosophy in “The Castle: A Parable.” In all activities, the narrator explains, people ought to “seek for truth, and not for amusement, from the many wonders around them” (430). The light princess represents the extreme version of Adela’s disposition, for she cannot experience any emotion but amusement, regardless of the prompt.

²⁹ E. J. Tilt, *On the Preservation of the Health of Women at the Critical Periods of Life* (London: Churchill, 1851) 37.

³⁰ Smith shares the doctor’s goals, noticing on Adela’s face “the look that indicates abstracted thought and feeling” following the schoolmaster’s story (150). He is satisfied now with her “mental fare” (150).

³¹ As the prince is drowning, “the princess began to feel strange,” “looked wild,” “gave a shriek,” and “was frantic” (100), but not until gravity strikes does she shed tears (101). She cries after the prince has been revived and the prospect of loss is past, when the realization of her love for the prince emerges.

The story therefore shows Adela that this season of thoughtfulness is an important one in her personal development and that her newfound seriousness will manifest itself in tears. As Smith says, “We don’t want her merry all at once. What we want is, that she should take an interest in something. A grave face is a sign of interest” (109).

“The Light Princess” also helps clarify to what extent Adela is indebted to the male spiritual, medical, and literary mentors for her cure. Told at the first story-club gathering, “The Light Princess” advocates the value of “help from outside, as symbolised by the fairy-tale prince” (Petzold 19), perhaps in order to prepare Adela to accept help not only from her prince, Dr. Harry Armstrong, but also from the story-club and from God. Nevertheless, the princess, according to Dieter Petzold, “is not merely a passive object of redemption” (19) but gains “access to those forces within herself that allow her to free herself from the spell” when she takes care of the prince as he drowns himself for her (20). Likewise, Adela contributes to her own healing, for as she applies her mental energy to understanding and examining the stories, her self re-emerges to guide the will and emotions once more. If the princess frees herself, still Petzold makes clear it is the “relationship” with the prince that empowers the light princess (20). The story, therefore, does not depict man as savior but love as savior. At the end of the story, the princess has married and has served the state after all by providing heirs to the throne. Nevertheless, having ties to another person has freed her from herself. MacDonald’s focus is on the benefits of the marriage relationship, not the superiority of male over female, a distinction Jack Zipes best articulates. He states that, though “the princess seems to achieve her ‘gravity’ or identity through the male hero,” she “does not become dependent on the prince [. . .]. Rather she gains certain qualities through her relationship with him just as he benefits from the encounter. There is more sensitive interaction between two

unique individuals than traditional role-playing at the end of the tale [. . .]” (107).³² Such an interpretation is consistent with the non-traditional views demonstrated by MacDonald in the rest of the tale. It represents MacDonald’s expression of the ideal male-female relationship, which the competing ideal of the chivalrous male collides with and derails many times throughout the novel.³³

Adela is under an injunction to love only just such a modern knight. Part of Anodos’s education in Fairy Land had been learning whom it was appropriate to fall in love with. The men surrounding Adela Cathcart seem particularly anxious that she should learn that lesson as well, and the perfect man is one who fulfills the chivalrous ideal. Smith looks with favor upon the possibility that the doctor, in treating Adela, might begin to love her. He feels “that, if the blessedness of woman lies in any way in the possession of true manhood, she [. . .] would be a fortunate woman indeed, to marry such a man as Harry Armstrong [. . .]” (108). This manhood’s defining characteristic is strength. Elsie Scott, in the curate’s story, “The Bell,” possesses an “undefinable need” which the narrator renders as “an articulate prayer”: “Give me some one to love me stronger than I” (118). A man’s strength – of body, mind, and character – is the primary criterion Adela should use in determining his eligibility, for there exists, Smith states, “in the story of Elsie, some correspondence to her own condition and necessities” (128).³⁴ Smith describes the doctor, Harry Armstrong, as a person of “fine manly

³² “The Light Princess” may be planting in Adela the desire for true companionship in marriage, for, according to Zipes, this fairy tale and four others contain the same “pattern”: “There is never one hero, rather there are always male and female protagonists, who learn to follow their deep inclinations, respect each other’s needs and talents, and share each other’s visions” (105).

³³ Pennington feels the relationship demonstrates “the equality of the sexes” (158): “[. . .] even though the princess is rescued by the prince, she in turn must rescue him from the rising water that is to drown him. The two become one, achieving a sort of symbiotic relationship in which one needs the other [. . .]” (159-60). Moreover, I feel that release from the curse is dependent on her actions, not his, since the prince does actually drown, and only once the princess brings him back to life does her gravity return. Pennington specifies that “he rescues her by instilling passion and emotion in her” since “tears give her gravity—and love” (159).

³⁴ Besides earthly love, Elsie’s other need appears to have been a heavenly home.

vigour” (43), as his name itself indicates, “full [. . .] of health and humanity” (105).

According to Smith, the colonel himself is deeply impressed by the doctor’s “manliness,” which he witnesses when the doctor rides his mare over a railroad crossing lying deep in a trench in order to reach injured workmen at a quarry (424).³⁵ Smith on that occasion “praised God who had made [. . .] a man with such a heart,” an organ he calls “the true Christian muscle” (424). In his possession of certain feminine traits, including compassion, Dr. Harry Armstrong, the strong, ideal man, resembles the knight in *Phantastes*: “Mr. Armstrong’s eyes looked you full in the face, as if he was determined to understand you if he could; and there seemed to me [. . .] something of tenderness about the droop of those long eyelashes, so that his interpretation was not likely to fail from lack of sympathy” (44).³⁶ Already, in “The Light Princess,” the prince had set the standard. Zipes describes him as “self-sacrificing and tender in the mold of traditional fairy-tale females” (106).

Dr. Armstrong is the perfect man to teach Adela how to love, for she seems to be deficient in her ability to supply love, particularly maternal love. Following the curate’s first sermon, on Christmas day, in which the curate at one point in his closing words tells “childless women, this infant is yours—wives or maidens” (20), Adela confesses to her

³⁵ After the doctor rides over the railroad crossing, Adela displays “such an enthusiasm as one would like every girl to feel in the presence of noble conduct of any kind” (425). Woman must encourage and help maintain goodness in man. “The Giant’s Heart” imparts the same lesson. Smith is thanked for the story by a little girl: “If I was a man, I would kill all the wicked people in the world. But I am only a little girl, you know; so I can only be good” (338). Man is outside the domestic sphere where he can take action, while woman is confined to the home where she cannot act but must simply “be.” Smith adds: “The darling did not know how much more one good woman can do to kill evil than all the swords of the world in the hands of righteous heroes” (338). Woman’s greatness comes in being good and approving good deeds.

³⁶ Broome remarks: “Attention is placed on the doctor’s eyes and on his health, the eyes being central to the transmission of mesmeric influence” (8). Broome notes the resemblance between MacDonald’s ideas regarding the curing of disease, as expressed by Smith, and mesmerism: “[. . .] the inner vitality is controlled, as mesmeric theory maintains, by the will [. . .]” (7). However, MacDonald “goes further in finding a moral cause behind this imbalance of body and soul” (7). Broome’s article goes on to consider the connection between mesmerism, sleep, and dreams and “the subject’s reaction to the fairy tale” (10). He concludes: “The tales are able to work on those two main areas which have close contact with the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems: the brain and the heart” (11).

uncle, as she describes her symptoms, that she feels no love towards that infant: “The baby he spoke about was nothing to me. I didn’t love him, or want to hear about him” (25). Smith inquires whether she “love[s] somebody” (25), but this effort to ascertain her feelings for Percy elicits only an utterance of despair over her failure to love others: “I hope I love my father. I don’t know. I don’t feel as if I did” (25).³⁷ Though there is, of course, spiritual significance to Adela’s lack of love for the Christ child, her sentiments are deficient in three of the primary relationships women maintain with men. Her denial of love encompasses love for man as infant, lover, and father. Perhaps, like the princess, a degree of self-centeredness, from which the experience of sorrow helps free her, keeps her from being able to love.

Adela’s lack of maternal feeling is treated as the most serious deficiency. Throughout the novel, MacDonald subtly emphasizes the bond between woman and infant. Not only is there the doctor’s dramatic journey through a storm to deliver a baby (235-40) but also Mr. Bloomfield’s tale of the loss of a firstborn son (143-48),³⁸ and the pregnancy of Lizzie, the curate’s wife (162, 181). In addition, in the story “The Shadows,”³⁹ there is an allusion to a “fashionable mother” who, as a Shadow explains, “might have been kissing a living child, when she followed a dead one to the grave” (201). This reference to infanticide illustrates MacDonald’s concern over the consequences of a lack of maternal feeling. It is crucial that Adela’s maternal instinct be awakened, for then not only can she be “doing her part to keep his [God’s] world going” (239), as was the woman giving birth during the storm, but she can also properly reflect God’s love to others. Indeed, the concept of the mothering nature of God

³⁷ Compare the weakness of Adela’s sentiments towards her father here to the tepid affections of the light princess, who “loved this lake more than father or mother” (75) and “seemed to have forgotten her father and mother too” (92) when the lake’s waters disappeared.

³⁸ Some of the details of the story have been modified from the facts of Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield’s life, for though they lost a child, it is not clear whether it was the first born. Mrs. Bloomfield talks about two boys, both alive at the same time, with one “not long out of heaven” (33).

³⁹ According to Broome, this story “shows how a person overcomes illness mentally, and with the aid of phantasms” (12).

is reprised throughout *Adela Cathcart*.⁴⁰ Finally, the princess's weightlessness itself in "The Light Princess" suggests that both she and Adela may need help in preparing to be mothers. In the works he studies, Dijkstra makes note of "the *antimaternal*, luxuriantly autoerotic implications of the theme of the weightless woman" (91; emphasis added). At the same time MacDonald provides the princess with gravity and ends her weightlessness, he also provides her with a male partner to whom she will eventually bear children.⁴¹ Though MacDonald's work predates the paintings Dijkstra examines, he displays great anxiety regarding women's roles as mothers. His ideas seem remarkably consistent with those expressed in the later artistic movement.

As a potential mother, then, Adela cannot be suffered to remain celibate. Sexual need is affirmed in both genders, and MacDonald's choice of marriage or celibacy for his characters is thus not based upon their sexuality or lack of it. Though the matrimonial outcome is different for Adela and Anodos, their journey in coming of age is remarkably similar, for through present sorrow and repentance for past misdeeds, both begin to believe and hope in the triumph of supreme good. Adela's depression and the hint of a burden of guilt parallel Anodos's great disappointment in love and his anguish over past wrongs. However, Adela makes a much more satisfactory entry into adulthood than Anodos, for as the novel ends there remains no trace of her illness and the reader is confident of her future

⁴⁰ One of the curate's sermons describes the tedious day of a boy whose "mother has gone out for the day" (182). Ralph Armstrong then compares the members of his congregation to that boy. They have, he says, "sick hearts, which nothing can restore to health and joy but the presence of Him who is Father and Mother both in one" (184). In the dream that closes the story "A Child's Holiday," the boy compares Christ's "face" to "his mother's" and "his father's" (363). In "The Castle," after the siblings accepted the older brother's rule, "they began to feel like the children of a household, when the mother is at home" (440).

⁴¹ After tracing the perceived incompatibility of women's sexuality and their roles as mothers portrayed in a painting taking up the "weightless woman" theme, Dijkstra quotes Caesar Lombroso and William Ferrero's work, *The Female Offender* (New York: Appleton, 1899). They argue that "in the ordinary run of mothers the sexual instinct is in abeyance" (153; qtd. in Dijkstra 91). MacDonald, instead, recognizes the great importance of sexual desire to procreation.

happiness as the doctor's wife. In *Phantastes*, the reader is assured, instead, that Anodos will face many more crises in which his character will be tested and developed. Furthermore, MacDonald is more sympathetic towards Adela, for his narrator cautions that her present "circumstances" create an image of her that is not "fair to her real character" (14). Here and elsewhere, excuses for Adela's behavior are made, while Anodos never gets the benefit of this mitigating voice. Most significantly, Adela is sick. While the capacity for evil can reside within a good woman, making her at once a complicated and interesting human being, her physical self lies in an abnormal state as a consequence. Once she is restored to health and the outpouring of her love is begun, Adela needs no more assistance. It is simpler to inculcate a new faculty than to correct a warped one. Anodos, in whom the urge to possess another is ingrained, will not find help and assistance from an earthly female partner. He needs something more—other-worldly, or divine, favor—as the narrator attests in the *Adela Cathcart* story "Birth, Dreaming, and Death": "For, though a woman's kiss may comfort a man to eternity, it is not all he needs" (148).

Chapter 4

The Gender Factor in the Coming of Age Process: A Final Look

Within a time span of six years, George MacDonald published two coming of age stories, one with a male and the other a female protagonist. Though his protagonists have similar backgrounds and must be cured of the same disillusionment, MacDonald fashions very different treatment methods for each based on their gender, thereby creating two works dissimilar in genre and outcome. Like the prince in “The Light Princess,” Anodos “gets lost in the forests” of Fairy Land; like the princess, Adela remains at home where men busy themselves trying to heal her. Though Anodos appears to be at advantage by the immediacy of his experience in Fairy Land, he must still discover how to apply the lessons learned there to real life; Adela, who vicariously experiences Fairy Land through the stories told her, is completely reintegrated into domestic life and about to be married. To some degree, the novel’s conclusion in marriage is, therefore, incidental to the fact that Adela never escapes from the domestic realm, woman’s proper domain. “Our highest blessedness,” writes John Smith, is the consciousness of our need for “kindness” and “love” – the state of “our necessity towards God” (420). Both Anodos, who loves selfishly, and Adela, who appears not to love at all, learn to love others by becoming recipients of love, one from mother figures, the other from her beau.¹ Love cures their spiritual ailments, “for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4.7).² Finally, as male and female mature spiritually and accept God’s goodness and sovereignty over earthly affairs, so

¹ Adela has learned to love her father too: “‘Papa! papa!’ she cried, ‘I will work for you; I will be your servant; I will love you and love you to all eternity’” (457).

² We “cannot do without Him,” determines Smith, and “are sent into this world” or, in this case, another “just to find this out” (420). In “The Castle: A Parable,” which is preceded by Smith’s comments, it is a sense of being loved that instills proper feelings in the older sister. The change in her perspective, as the “unsympathizing blaze of sunlight” (438) transforms itself into “heavens [. . .] bend[ing] lovingly over her,” is hailed by tears (439).

they mature physically and confront the power of their sexuality. Anodos learns to deny himself and control it, while Adela receives validation of its presence and affirmation of its role in the female psyche.

“Nothing is inexorable but love,” writes MacDonald in the sermon “The Consuming Fire” (337). In both *Phantastes* and *Adela Cathcart*, MacDonald relentlessly seeks to refine the character of his protagonists; “for love loves unto purity,” he continues in the same sermon, “that it may love more” (337). MacDonald’s attitude towards his young characters is similar to that of the schoolmaster towards his students in *Adela Cathcart*: “I kill in them all the bad I can. I nourish in them all the good I can. I send them across the borders of manhood [. . .]” (132) –or adulthood. The measure employed to “kill the bad” in both Anodos and Adela is suffering. Thus, if encounters with evil, as well as romantic disappointments, provide Anodos with his growing experiences,³ coping with depression provides Adela with hers. In the sermon “Justice,” MacDonald explains the purpose of hell and of suffering, taking spiteful words as an example of “evil”: “Sorrow and confession and self-abasing love will make up for the evil word; suffering will not. [. . .] But I may be saved from it [evil] by learning to loathe it, [. . .] to shrink from it with an eternal avoidance” (351). Prompted by suffering, both Anodos and Adela conquer their personal deficiencies through “sorrow” and “self-abasing love.” Adela’s love will be expressed in marriage, but if marriage awaits Anodos, it is yet a long way off. MacDonald’s focus in *Phantastes* is less on the restoration of the sinner than on his repentance. God, explains MacDonald in “Justice,” “is bound in Himself to make up for wrong done by His children [. . .] by bringing about the repentance of

³ Likewise Percy, who loses Adela to Dr. Harry Armstrong, will eventually “reap some of the good corn that grows on the wintry fields of disappointment” (378).

the wrong-doer” (353). Anodos determines to do good to others; his “desires can be satisfied indirectly through this service” (Hein, *Harmony Within* 55).

In *Adela Cathcart*, MacDonald has consciously defined a temporal, as well as a spiritual, affliction in his heroine. His quest, therefore, can become to establish a model for the treatment of depression and express his views on its causes in women. Essentially, he claims to have discovered the source of their unhappiness and to know the path to peace and contentment. To support these claims, he must assure Adela’s complete recovery, and because he has defined some of the causes of her depression as gender-related, in her fit state she must be able to perform *all* her womanly duties. Anodos, however, suffers from no affliction, except for a deficiency of character that is exposed during his time in Fairy Land. According to Rolland Hein, “the Christian concern arises because the natural process of seeking satisfactions for human desires is self-centered, and self-centeredness is spiritually destructive” (*Harmony Within* 55). The curate describes “selfishness” as “a coarseness [. . .] of the spiritual nature” (174).⁴ We see perfectly in Anodos what we cannot adequately perceive in Adela, the condition of the inner spirit. MacDonald, therefore, focuses on the inner spirit, not on social bonds, and leaves his protagonist the challenge of doing likewise.⁵

MacDonald’s construction of male and female character is at the root of his differing treatment of the coming of age process for each. He remains comparatively pessimistic about the potential for spiritual growth in men, who progress at great personal cost, forsaking their

⁴ It appears men have more of a propensity to that particular sin than women. Smith faults Colonel Cathcart, who “could hardly endure the thought of his daughter’s marriage” (242), for his “selfishness” in wanting to keep Adela all to himself (454). However, Smith is quite self-centered himself, mourning the fact that Adela “did not see what I saw, feel what I felt, seek what I sought” (313). The doctor and curate escape, or have overcome, this affliction of the masculine temper. They function in “fields in which MacDonald had failed” (Broome 7) but, like MacDonald, are destined to marry and have children.

⁵ However, in the sermon “The Truth,” MacDonald describes a person’s “relations with his fellow man” as “closer infinitely than with any of the things around him, and to many a man far plainer than his relations with God” (381). All three help to form “the very nature of a man” (381).

fondest wishes and desires. Women, on the other hand, suffer physically and emotionally for a brief time but, in the end, have their desires granted. Rather than having to go through their crises alone, they find supportive men, as well as women, all around, eager to make sure that the angel of the house does not fall. In addition, women's sufferings arise spontaneously and stem largely from spiritual causes, while men, it seems, have to be forced to begin their journeys and must face devastating experiences in order to evolve spiritually. While Anodos has to traverse certain experiences in Fairy Land, it is sufficient for Adela simply to have others' experiences narrated to her. One of the stories told her is simply a fictionalized account of the author's spiritual journey. The curate gives the testimony of his conversion to Smith, who reflects to himself: "Surely that would do Adela good now" (181). Soon the curate reads the story-club "The Broken Swords," regarding which Smith feels "that he had only embodied the story of his own life in other more striking forms" (270).⁶

"The Broken Swords" contains a plot outline for what MacDonald calls "Christian tragedy." *Phantastes*, in which the protagonist's flaw is excessive self-regard, follows the plot outline and concerns itself with Anodos's spiritual and moral development. Christian tragedy must imitate

the grand drama of the Bible; wherein the first act opens with a brilliant sunset vision of Paradise, in which childish sense and need are served with all the profusion of the indulgent nurse. But [. . .] night settles down upon the heart which [. . .] seeks knowledge and manhood as a thing denied by the Maker,

⁶ Like Anodos, the young man in "The Broken Swords" has lost his father (248). He fails as a soldier and falls in love with a woman whom he nurses back to health following an outbreak of the plague. He imagines himself "call[ing] forth her soul from where it sleeps, like an unawakened echo, in an unknown cave [. . .]" (263). However, he discovers she has a fiancé and departs. He later dies rescuing a woman from rape: "[. . .] and his spirit rose triumphant [. . .] above the stormy world, which at length lay vanquished beneath him" (269). For this soldier, as for Anodos, marriage is an impossible denouement: "[. . .] no man or woman that has fallen, can be restored to the position formerly held" (257). Instead, these men and women are to win "something better" and so "behold their former standing far beneath their feet" (257).

and yet to be gained by the creature; so [. . .] falls into the abyss. Then follows the long dismal night of feverish efforts and delirious visions, or, it may be, helpless despair; till at length a deeper stratum of the soul is heaved to the surface [. . .]. (250)

In chapter I of *Phantastes*, Anodos has his “vision of Paradise” as he gazes into the great-grandmother’s eyes. The mother figures throughout the fantasy “indulge” the “childish” in Anodos, but the shadow descends upon his heart⁷ and he pursues what he cannot gain, the beloved of another, a woman to help define his manhood. He literally “falls into the abyss” in chapter XVII, in pursuit of his white lady. “Helpless despair” and “delirious visions” are his throughout. At last, in his death, he enters a deeper communion with all things living: “[. . .] perceiving God by understanding what is, [man] becomes more of a man [. . .] he has relations with the universe undeveloped in him till then” (MacDonald, “Truth” 381). Anodos leaves Fairy Land, but his return to his estate is no mistake, for “far higher will the doing of the least [. . .] duty raise him” than grasping “the truth [. . .] of a thing” will (“Truth” 381). Still, the exhilaration of Christian tragedy gives way to the suffering of human tragedy as Anodos’s thoughts turn toward the evil that is to come while he remains in “the region of painful hope” (MacDonald, “Consuming Fire” 343). Anodos’s one comfort is that even there, in the “outward world [that] is but a passing vision of the persistent true,” “no desires are in vain, if only they be large enough,” as MacDonald writes in “The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture” (“IFC”) (421).

⁷ In “The Truth,” MacDonald states an alertness to “an opposition” within, thought of as an unwanted “*evil self*” but actually an area “where God is not,” is symptomatic of a person “beginning to come true” (382-83). The object is not to get rid of this area but to bring it “in right relation to the whole; for [. . .] it would then fulfil its part holily [. . .]” (383). Compare with Hein’s theory, in chapter 2, footnote 45, and contrast with Max Keith Sutton’s views on the shadow in chapter 2, footnote 21.

In *Phantastes*, MacDonald follows a predetermined outline representing his concept of the Christian life. His writings also shed light on the process used to cure Adela, the key to which lies in the inducement of certain moods. In “The Fantastic Imagination,” MacDonald states that a fairy tale should act upon individuals like Nature does: “—The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but [. . .] to make him think things for himself. The best Nature does for us is to work in us such moods in which thoughts of high import arise” (427). The stories help Adela believe in God because “to inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination” (“IFC” 416), seeking “the divine imagination in whose image it was made” (“IFC” 418). Since God made humanity, inquiring into human sexuality is within the proper domain of fairy tales. Anxious parents can, therefore, turn to fairy tales for the sexual education of their children, so that their “sons” and “daughters” “should see true visions” and “dream noble dreams”: “Cultivate the mere intellect as you may, it will never reduce the passions: the imagination, seeking the ideal in everything, will elevate them to their true and noble service. [. . .] Such out-going of the imagination [. . .] will do more to elevate above what is low and vile than all possible inculcations of morality” (“IFC” 422).

The role of the imagination in fostering spiritual inquiry has long been noted in MacDonald’s work. C. S. Lewis claims that his own interest in Romanticism would soon have sent him “slithering down the steep descent that leads from the love of strangeness to that of eccentricity and thence to that of perversity” (xi) had it not been for MacDonald’s *Phantastes*, through which his “imagination” was “baptise[d]” (xi), exposing him to “the divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic reality in which we all live” (xii). More than that, it formed a new allegiance in Lewis: “[. . .] what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness”

(xii). Years later, when he became a Christian, he realized “what he [MacDonald] was now telling me was the very same that he had told me from the beginning” (xi). Even one less dramatically affected by MacDonald, W. H. Auden, recognizes MacDonald’s “power [. . .] to project his inner life into images, events, beings, landscapes which are valid for all [. . .]” (vi). What becomes evident through this comparison of *Phantastes* and *Adela Cathcart*, however, is MacDonald’s confidence in the ability of the imagination to shape not only the human spirit but also a person’s sexuality. The one image Lewis appears to have been most struck with is the white lady, “that elusive Form which if once seen must inevitably be desired with all but sensuous desire” (xii). Indeed, MacDonald’s sentiments about “sensuous desire” have often been ignored, as they are by Lewis here. Desire has an important spiritual function, but MacDonald recognizes its emotional-physical function as well. “Symbolical sexual play and intercourse,” as Jack Zipes notes in discussing one of MacDonald’s fairy tales, assists in the development of “a wholesome union of the sexes” (109). As we probe ever further into the question of sexuality in the Victorian era, with its Christian influence, the concern of a Christian thinker over the healthy sexual maturation of young people should continue to be of interest. Surrounding that issue, however, lies the fascinating question of the Victorian appreciation of parental roles and responsibility in guiding children through puberty and into adulthood. MacDonald implies that, bereft of the parent of the same gender, children will have difficulty becoming successful lovers. The expression of this perception in his works begs further study. Finally, to the non-Christian reader without a penchant for fantasy or an interest in children’s literature, or in the “kaleyard school of realistic Scottish fiction” which MacDonald founded (Reis 72), MacDonald’s remaining appeal will be based on his very perceptible engagement with the cultural issues of his day.

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