

Spring 2022

George MacDonald's *Phantastes* as a Bildungsroman of Spiritual Reality

Hannah O'Malley
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Malley, Hannah, "George MacDonald's *Phantastes* as a Bildungsroman of Spiritual Reality" (2022).
Senior Theses. 521.
https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses/521

This Thesis is brought to you by the Honors College at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

George MacDonald's *Phantastes* as a Bildungsroman of Spiritual Reality

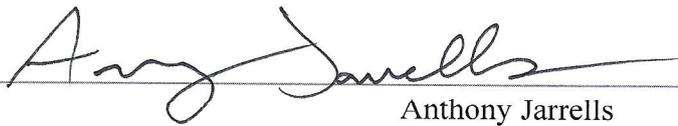
By

Hannah O'Malley

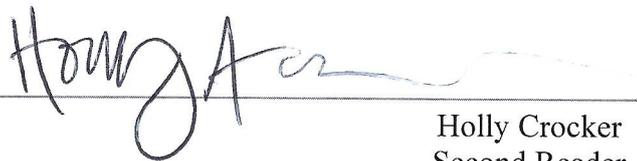
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

May 2022

Approved:



Anthony Jarrells
Director of Thesis



Holly Crocker
Second Reader

Steve Lynn, Dean
For South Carolina Honors College

Thesis summary

George MacDonald's 1858 novel *Phantastes* is one of the first fantasy novels written for adults, but it has received little attention in part because of its confusing structure. I argue that *Phantastes* is best understood as a Bildungsroman, a novel of formation. While the Bildungsroman is usually a realist novel of commercial society, *Phantastes'* fantasy elements allow the protagonist to grow up into a spiritual reality that contrasts with many commercial values. MacDonald uses the fantasy genre to show his protagonist's inner development as he learns humility, gains feminine and childlike virtues, and leaves behind the old self.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Structure of the novel	5
Bildungsroman.....	6
Fairytales genre	10
Manhood and knighthood.....	15
Relation to women	19
The Shadow	23
Childlikeness.....	24
Development through stories and song	27
The ever-changing self	30
Influence of the novel and conclusions	31
Works cited.....	32

Introduction

Phantastes, the first novel of Scottish Victorian-era author George MacDonald, has never made an appearance on modern bestseller lists. Chiefly forgotten and scarcely read except by specialists of the genre and by the most devout fans of CS Lewis, *Phantastes* has not attained the lasting fame of many of its contemporaries, such as the works of MacDonald's own close friend Lewis Carroll. When MacDonald and *Phantastes* are remembered, they are often viewed within the frame of CS Lewis' stated admiration for the two: Lewis famously referred to MacDonald as his "master" and credited the experience of reading *Phantastes* as integral in his spiritual development (Lewis). Perhaps in part because of Lewis' stated fondness for the author and the book, scholars tend to pass by MacDonald's novels, discounting *Phantastes* as an irrelevant predecessor with no value outside of Lewis' opinion.

Among those who are passingly familiar with *Phantastes* and MacDonald, however, a general understanding exists that MacDonald was an important pioneer of the fantasy genre and that *Phantastes* may be the first fantasy novel ever written for adults – a high claim that argues that the book merits more attention than it receives. The issue with a passing familiarity with *Phantastes*, however, is that the novel does not follow a traditional formula, neither for Victorian novels nor for fantasy stories as we know them today. When I try to convince others to give *Phantastes* a try, I am asked, naturally, "So what's it about?" and the question is difficult to answer. There is no clear plot with an overarching problem to solve, as one finds in *Phantastes'* literary successors: no White Witch to escape and defeat, no Ring to carry to Mordor. There is no clear Bunyanesque allegory, despite many readers attempting to find one, equipped with the knowledge that MacDonald was a preacher for a time and a writer of sermons. There is no comedic climax at the end of the novel when our main character marries the woman he loves: in

fact, Anodos, our protagonist, dies abruptly, and the woman he loves mourns at his grave alongside the knight who won her heart instead of Anodos!

To give a brief summary, the wandering, episodic plot of *Phantastes* is as follows: Anodos, whose name is the Greek word for *pathless*, has just reached his twenty-first birthday and has received the keys to his deceased father's study. When attempting to open a drawer in his father's desk, Anodos is greeted by a beautiful fairy woman, who scolds him for his disbelief in fairies. The next morning Anodos awakens to find himself inexplicably in Fairyland. He finds a cottage, the first of several, in which a kindly matron, also the first of several such figures, warns him of the murderous Ash tree. This tree stalks Anodos for a time, and he rests in a cave in which he finds a marble statue of a woman, whom he brings to life through song. The lady of marble flees from Anodos, and in his amorous pursuit, he is trapped by the Ash tree and the Alder tree, who takes the form of woman who is both beautiful and grotesque. In a distant part of Fairyland, the Knight strikes the Ash's trunk, unknowingly saving Anodos, who finds shelter with the motherly Beech tree. The subplot of Anodos' danger from the Ash tree thus concluded, more episodes follow: he finds his Shadow, which destroys life around him and warps his view of the world: he rests in the palace of the Fairy Queen and spends several chapters relating the stories he reads in the library; he comes to terms with his emotions and family at a cottage with four supernatural doors; he becomes a brother-in-arms with two princes and slays the giants terrorizing their kingdom; he swells with pride from his victory over the giants and becomes trapped in a tower, dreaming every night; and finally, humbled by his experiences, he becomes the lowly squire of the Knight whom the lady of marble loves and sacrifices his own life to save innocents from a hidden evil. After being "dead, and right content," Anodos wakes changed in the real world, and the novel ends.

The structure of the novel

Scholars have disagreed about how to interpret *Phantastes*' unorthodox structure. The novel's first critics found it dreamlike, incoherent, and disconnected, and that sentiment has often persisted. MacDonald himself believed that fairytales should be more of an experience and less of a structured argument: we will look further at MacDonald's view of the fairytale genre and how his literary theories manifest in *Phantastes*. Many past critics rely overmuch on interpreting *Phantastes* as an allegory with each character and event as a clear representation for some kind of argument. This approach of allegorical interpretation is not only something that MacDonald himself would have firmly disliked but also manages to create more confusion and remove the reader's pleasure. Seeing the allegorical approach as futile, modern critics often choose to focus on one aspect or another of *Phantastes* while setting aside the basic question of the meaning behind its structure.

During my readings on *Phantastes*, I found only one interpretation of the novel's structure which satisfied me somewhat. MacDonald scholar Roderick McGillis claims that *Phantastes* has "a structural pattern that turns out to be poetic rather than psychological," in which "structure reflects image and... is a way of communicating meaning" ("The community of the centre" 55). Each episode of Anodos' journey "not only repeats ideas but also clarifies them," with the same minor themes returning again and again – which accounts for the lack of rationality that one often feels with the movement of the story, as well as the difficulty in creating different allegories for each part of the journey. McGillis argues that this chief repeated theme of *Phantastes* is an idea of "the community of the centre," quoting the phrase from MacDonald. This "centre" refers to the multiple dimensions at work in MacDonald's fantasy works, especially the spiritual dimension which is made most manifest in community and

relationships, especially in learning to live unselfishly. In *Phantastes*, the “community of the centre” means a continual cycle of breaking outside of one’s Self through imagination, grief, and sacrifice to discover Romantic rebirth.

According to McGillis, *Phantastes* echoes this circular concept through its structure: we see Anodos grow over the course of the book, with the ending showing that he has learned selflessness, but there is also a less traditional, more circular structure in which the key theme of *Phantastes* is expounded upon in the centre of the book itself, in the thirteenth chapter out of twenty-five, which itself tells a different story which Anodos is reading in the library in the fairy queen’s palace. This story centers on a man named Cosmo who dies in order to save the woman he loves, who is cursed to dwell in a mirror every night. Just as Cosmo goes out of himself by sacrificing himself to save his beloved, Anodos must go out of himself. The chapters surrounding the thirteenth chapter all take place in the palace of the Fairy Queen, which is “an ideal,” in which Anodos “is fed and refreshed... through literature and art” (“Community of the centre” 62). Having interacted with ideals and encountered the moral idea most praised by the novel, Anodos must leave the palace and travel once again, leaving behind an ideal for a time to journey and once again struggle against his own Shadow. In McGillis’ reading of *Phantastes*, and to some extent in the work of other critics, the novel is structured around Anodos’ inner development, which means that *Phantastes* can be understood as a Bildungsroman, a novel of formation.

The Bildungsroman

I argue that *Phantastes*’ unclear, episodic structure is one of several qualities that makes it a Bildungsroman, and when we read the novel with the Bildungsroman frame in mind, we will

have a greater understanding of how the novel functions and how MacDonald was able to make it so effective. By focusing on his central character instead of a plotline, following him from minor adventure to minor adventure, MacDonald clearly delineates the way Anodos grows or regresses at every point of the story. Because the story takes place in Fairyland instead of Victorian England, MacDonald is able to not only excite the imagination but also cause Anodos to grow in ways that he would not have been able to grow in Victorian commercial society. Along the course of Anodos' meandering journey, the various escapades and trials of Fairyland teach our central character the value of humble manhood, selfless love, feminine gentleness, and childlike imagination – values that would have been discouraged in the real world. Bit by bit, we see Anodos develop into not a knight but a good man, and this focus on inner development makes the story an ideal Bildungsroman.

The Bildungsroman is a difficult genre to define, despite being explained to high school students and laypeople simply as a “coming-of-age novel.” Typical qualities of the Bildungsroman include a young protagonist reaching adulthood and being guided into their place in society, especially commercial society. The emphasis on moving into commercial society stems from the Victorian period in which the first Bildungsromane were written; this period represents the advent of many aspects of capitalist commercial society, and the path from countryside to urban area that Bildungsroman protagonists frequently take in these novels reflects the increase in commercial urban living during this period. This transfer to commercial life appears in the prototypical Bildungsroman, Goethe's 1796 novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, and a more commonly known example, Dickens' 1861 novel *Great Expectations*. Each Bildungsroman protagonist must learn to take their place in a realist society: *Phantastes* clearly does not fit this exact category. However, even while *Phantastes* is not a

realist novel, Anodos is growing in a way that is deeper than merely becoming fit for society: he is becoming a man in reality itself, gaining moral and spiritual characteristics that excel beyond the values of commercial society.

We can claim *Phantastes* as a Bildungsroman in part because the boundaries of the genre tend to vary from critic to critic. Some critics argue that only *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and a few other novels truly belong in the genre, while others argue that the Bildungsroman could be understood to be any protagonist-centered story, with more novels than not thus falling within the bounds of the genre.¹ Others argue that we can identify the Bildungsroman on multiple levels of varying specificity, ultimately focusing on the protagonist's development and this single character's right to be labeled as the protagonist.²

Early prototypes of the Bildungsroman set this pattern of a strong focus on the development and autonomy of the protagonist. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* centers on a young male protagonist who displays a conventionally feminine lack of initiative, finding his place in society through "drifting with events rather than driving them," which is a description that easily applies to Anodos (Duncan 14). In contrast, Germaine de Staël's 1807 novel *Corinne, or Italy*, gives the role of the "universal human representativeness" to a female protagonist who reaches full development through the arts (Duncan 15). Staël's work rejects the traditional path and plots of a novel, focusing instead on the protagonist's growth through art, history, and idealism; this pattern of growth is far more similar to *Phantastes*, as we will see in MacDonald's use of art and song as instruments of Anodos' development. Along this journey of inward growth, *Corinne* argues that suffering "is the authentic, inward stigma of development," a theme which appears in *Phantastes* as well (Duncan 18). The protagonists of both these classic

¹ Frow et al

² Ornsbee

novels find their place in a realistic society that is quite unlike the Fairyland of *Phantastes*, but the intense focus on the protagonist's inner development is the same. Ultimately, the key point of the Bildungsroman is that it

proclaims and foregrounds the individual and individuality, and reveals the psychological and emotional complexity and spiritual insight of the human being, who is capable of changing and acquiring a distinct identity, of emerging, becoming, and completing formation. (Golban 312)

This description fits Anodos and *Phantastes* perfectly. In fact, this emphasis on the “psychological and emotional complexity” is a closer fit to *Phantastes* than many of the titles of “conventional realism” that come to mind when we consider the *Bildungsroman*. For instance, in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, which was published about three years after *Phantastes*, we follow the growth and development of a young man in partially episodic fashion, but while there is a more rational and coherent plot, there is less of a window on the abstract, internal changes of the protagonist. One can argue that while Dickens' work may more closely imitate the realist form of the original German *Bildungsroman*, MacDonald's novel “is the truest expression of [the genre's] spirit” (“Fictions and Metafictions” 123). Anodos' inner development is more explicit than the development of more traditional protagonists: the fantastic nature of the book allows MacDonald to use clear symbols, to continually move the plot to situations which are designed for Anodos' growth, and to listen in to Anodos' thoughts about his inner self.

We can claim that MacDonald was participating in the Bildungsroman genre in part because we know he was strongly influenced by German romantics, as is readily apparent from the frequent quotations of Novalis and Goethe which preface many chapters. MacDonald scholar Stephen Prickett argues that MacDonald used “not just... individual motifs and elements culled

from Goethe, but a whole way of structuring experience, part fantasy, part realism, which go to make up the origins of the German *Bildungsroman*” (“Fictions and Metafictions” 117). Unlike the realist *Bildungsromane* of Goethe and other German novelists, MacDonald achieves this concept within the medium of fantasy, exploring the possibilities of fantasy to use the motifs and irony of formation and growth to a greater extent.

However, the clear fantasy aspects of *Phantastes* appear to contradict an understanding of the novel as a *Bildungsroman*, given that the genre was originally focused on young people growing up specifically in commercial society. An imaginative fantasy novel seems to be the opposite of a serious novel of inner development in a commercial society. In order to reconcile the two genres and understand the argument of *Phantastes*, we have to look at how MacDonald understood fantasy and what he intended to accomplish with fairytales. Anodos is certainly not developing into a rational young man fit for commercial society, but MacDonald firmly believed that fairytales could be used to access truths far more important than society norms – namely, that in fantastical works, we can learn about spiritual reality as well.

Fairytales

MacDonald’s fairytales retain the “basic narrative formula” of classic fairytales, but he used elements of the classics as “a new vessel capable of containing the wine of his own message” in the process of individualization that first began to occur in children’s literature around this period (Mendelson 34, 35). Not only does MacDonald individualize his fairytales to convey spiritual and ideological meanings, whether the shorter stories for children or his longer fantasies, but he also writes with a unique voice that is both fatherly and comical.

MacDonald was not the first to adapt the fairytale genre in this way, but MacDonald scholar Michael Mendelson argues that

no one... employs as fully or as effectively as MacDonald the fundamental elements of this very ancient genre; its one-dimensional, stock characters; its conventional locales of wood, castle, cave, and cottage; its paratactic narrative line; and above all, its evocative sense of the fantastic, but the fantastic set within the everyday (45)

These elements are equally present in MacDonald's stories for children and his adult fantasies, both *Phantastes* and *Lilith*. As the modern drive for individualization in literature increased, many of these features fell into disuse: for example, the fantasy authors who would be later influenced by MacDonald did not use one-dimensional characters to the same degree or efficacy. MacDonald combined these ancient elements and Romantic ideas into a new kind of creation that can be understood both as the roots of modern fantasy and as a masterpiece in itself.

MacDonald wrote his 1893 essay, "The Fantastic Imagination," to argue for the worth of fairytales for more than just young children, and he begins by arguing that the term "fairytale" cannot be fully defined, and certainly should not be defined as a tale containing fairies: "That we have no English word corresponding to the German *Mährchen*," he begins, "drives us to use the word *Fairytale*, regardless of the fact that the tale may have nothing to do with any sort of fairy" (5). Instead, to MacDonald, a fairytale is the result of the human desire to "invent a little world of [one's] own, with its own laws," laws which must be perfectly obeyed within the work, for "Law is the soil in which alone beauty will grow; beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed" (6). These two aspects of beauty and truth sum up MacDonald's great aims in a fairytale, whether in his adult fantasies like *Phantastes* or his many children's fairytales like *The Light Princess*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, etc. However, his

emphasis on truth and consistency of laws within the fairytale do not lead him to the didactic morality found in most other Victorian-era fairytales.

MacDonald's career began "in one of the bleakest periods for children's books," a time which "had the deepest possible distrust of the imagination" (Avery 126). This stereotypical Victorian coldness left no room for the writing of truly imaginative fairytales. What few fairytales were circulated at the time relied heavily on the chastisement of evil characters, but MacDonald was one of a very limited number of writers who "succeeded in presenting the beauty of holiness" and not solely the horror of immorality (Avery 132). He succeeded in this effort partially because he prioritized the story itself over its message: "Unlike the allegorists he was far more concerned with imagery and invention than a consistent didactic line" (Avery 135). While the didactic writers were concerned with morality so that children would become good members of society, MacDonald was concerned with something far deeper: he wished to inspire deep emotion and spiritual good that blessed the souls of his readers.

We may consider meaning in a children's story as a dull moral at the end, and MacDonald was not above morals as a preacher and writer of sermons; but while his essays and romances have been accused of dullness, the same has not been said of his fairytales. Imaginative and invigorating, his fairytales and fantasies continue to capture imaginations with their emotion and color, yet he writes that a fairytale "cannot help having some meaning." This assertion seems to contradict a common experience reading *Phantastes*, in which the reader ends the book with a sense of otherworldly awe yet has trouble delineating a meaning, and MacDonald himself acknowledges that such a situation may arise: "The beauty may be plainer in [a fairytale] than the truth," he writes, "but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give no delight." This assertion has echoes of cold Victorianism about it, in

which the art and literature of Dickens, Gaskell, and their contemporaries includes clear-cut moral arguments about the social reality of the Victorian era. However, in this case the meaning is necessary not for the literature to be morally acceptable but rather to make it beautiful and delightful, and so the meaning does not need to be a clear-cut moral or even a singular message. In fact, MacDonald expects that different readers will read different meanings into a fairytale, claiming that “A genuine work of art” – and MacDonald clearly believes fairytales fall into this category – “must mean many things; the truer its art, the more things it will mean.” These meanings ought not to be too overdone, nor should they have to be explicitly stated: children reading fairytales “find what they are capable of finding, and more would be too much.” MacDonald adds, “For my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five” (“The Fantastic Imagination” 7). This idea of gradual meaning that must be discovered matches with the inner progress of a Bildungsroman: the protagonist does not develop in terms of succinct moral phrases but in organic growth.

MacDonald’s idea of the fairytale combines well with the Bildungsroman not only in the realm of meaning but also when it comes to structure, or lack thereof. MacDonald’s aim in writing fairytales is not “logical conviction” but rather “to move by suggestion, to cause to imagine.” He would have neither the fairytales he reads nor the fairytales he writes be too thoroughly analyzed; he stands with his predecessor Wordsworth in decrying the modern urge to “murder to dissect” (Wordsworth), writing, “We spoil countless precious things by intellectual greed.” His final goal, then, is not to convey a specific meaning or allegory, but to bring emotion and to awaken meaning within the hearer: “If any strain of my ‘broken music’ make a child’s eyes flash, or his mother’s grow for a moment dim, my labour will not have been in vain” (“The Fantastic Imagination” 10).

MacDonald's style of fairytales ties closely to the quote from Novalis that he places at the beginning of *Phantastes*:

One can imagine stories without rational cohesion and yet filled with associations, like dreams... A fairy-story is like a vision without rational connections, a harmonious whole of miraculous things and events—as, for example, a musical fantasia, the harmonic sequence of an Aeolian harp, indeed Nature itself..

Phantastes does indeed read like a dream, irrational yet harmonious. MacDonald would not have yet been too cliché for his time had he ended with novel with Anodos awakening to have found it was all the dream of one night; instead, upon reawakening to reality, Anodos finds that he has been missing for twenty-one days – a day for each year of his life so far – and that he has been greatly missed. Not only do the twenty-one days suggest the idea of Anodos' development in Fairyland being necessary for him to take his place in reality, but this specificity also enforces the idea that his experiences were more than a mere dream.

Although the events of *Phantastes* are not a dream, the novel feels dreamlike because of its wandering plot and emphasis on imagery. MacDonald used this kind of “dream realism,” as W.H Auden called it, in several of his works (Pierson 165). This dreamlike quality extends the power of the fairytale as MacDonald understands it: the rules of the world we know are left behind and replaced with dream logic, but the new, fantastical world that is created can be used as a vessel for deeper meanings. The dreamlike aspects of *Phantastes* emphasize that although Anodos' adventures take place in Fairyland, they are “just as real and psychologically more real than the events in the world we know” (Pierson 167). What seems unreal in *Phantastes* communicates intangible truth concerning reality – a reality which Anodos as Bildungsroman protagonist is growing up into, and a reality that far supersedes any commercial society in

importance from MacDonald's view. G.K. Chesterton, who wrote that MacDonald was "a Scot of genius as genuine as Carlyle's," believes that MacDonald "could write fairy-tales that made all experience a fairy-tale," transporting the reader from the hustle and bustle of society and into the grand space of a more spiritual reality (Chesterton 152).

MacDonald's view of fairytales stems from the *Kunstmarchen* written by Romantic authors, who "were fascinated by the mysteries of experience, the dark places of the mind, and the world beyond the finite." Like these authors from which he drew inspiration, MacDonald believed that the fairytale is "a perfect vehicle for exploring our confrontation with the unknown" (Mendelson 32). By moving from the known world to a world of fantasy, MacDonald interacts with psychological concepts that would normally be confined to the unknown and unseen. These imaginative ventures into the unknown allow us to move beyond the limits of human rationality and to discover greater spiritual truth, to "climb the window stair of consciousness" (Mendelson 34). This is the reality that Anodos is growing up into, a reality which is more spiritual and more profound than merely a profession or a set of societal rules.

Manhood and knighthood

Were *Phantastes* a more traditional Bildungsroman, we would see Anodos ascend to his place as a man in commercial society. Indeed he begins the novel by having just become a man according to the laws of the real world, and although we learn very little about his life and personality before his adventures in Fairyland, he seems to be an adequate adult: he ventures into his late father's office to begin work in commercial society, he appears respectable, and he loves his young sister well enough to listen to her reading bedtime stories, although, like any good

adult, he does not believe in them. We learn next to nothing else about his life outside of Fairyland.

If Anodos is not intended to become a man of commercial society like a typical Bildungsroman protagonist, our first assumption may be that he is to become a knight: after all, he is wandering in Fairyland, which is full of knights and beasts. MacDonald subverts our expectations here by raising Anodos up to knighthood and then bringing him back down again to be a lowly squire, a role in which he finds purer joy. Had MacDonald been content to have Anodos peak as a knight, we may have been satisfied to see the novel as an allegory for the society he has left behind – a medieval society in which a man must achieve the upper social echelon of knighthood and marriage to a fine lady. As we know, MacDonald had no such interest in societal development. Even in the context of Fairyland, Anodos' development must be unorthodox for him to reach his true place in reality.

Although Anodos is then not destined to develop into an ideal knight, *Phantastes* still relies heavily on the image of knighthood as a potential outcome of inner development. One of the clearest examples of prior literature being reused in *Phantastes* is the character of the knight who is modeled after Sir Percival. Very few characters appear more than once in the novel, and the Knight reappears more than any other character, displaying minor character growth himself but chiefly acting as a mirror against which we compare Anodos' development, for better or worse. Following the novel's pattern of stories within stories, the knight enters *Phantastes* from a book that Anodos reads in the first cottage he visits within Fairyland. Anodos reads the tale of Sir Percival, whose "armor was wondrous rosy to behold, ne could he by any art furbish it again." In this story, Sir Percival had just escaped "the demon lady," and was "in nowise cured of his fault, yet bemoaning the same," and fell again to the wiles of the malicious lady of the

alder-tree (*Phantastes* 16). After Anodos has left the cottage, been hunted by the Ash tree, and awakened the lady of marble, he encounters a knight with rusted armor reminiscent of Sir Percival. The Knight asks Anodos if he has ever read the tale of Sir Percival and the Maiden of the Alder-tree, and warns Anodos to “take heed,” galloping off into the distance without any further detail (*Phantastes* 41). Anodos thinks himself well-warned and tells himself, “I shall not be ensnared by any beauty, however, beautiful. Doubtless, some one man may escape, and I shall be he” (*Phantastes* 42). Clearly, Anodos thinks of himself as a knight in his own right, wiser and stronger than Sir Percival. But soon after he forms his resolve, Anodos meets a beautiful woman whom he mistakes for the lady of marble, and he follows her into her grotto and falls asleep. When he awakens, the woman is revealed to be the monstrous Alder-tree, who has summoned the Ash-tree to tear Anodos apart. Just when Anodos had “given [himself] up to a death of unfathomable horror... the dull, heavy blow of an axe echoed through the wood,” and the Ash fled, wounded. The axe blows at the base of the Ash that saved Anodos were later revealed to be struck by the knight himself. Anodos grieved: “The Maid of the Alder-tree had befooled me—nearly slain me—in spite of all the warnings I had received from those who knew my danger” (*Phantastes* 47). From the first encounter with the Knight and the subsequent danger from the Alder-tree, MacDonald sets up two lines of development that continue throughout the novel: the idea that Anodos wishes to be a knight, and a wiser one than the Knight he encounters; and the idea that Anodos, unlike a standard hero, frequently requires saving and help. The outcome of these two lines of development sees Anodos humbled, neither a knight nor free of the need of the help of one, but by coming to this realization he quite possibly becomes a better man than the Knight whom he admires and resents.

Anodos' relationship with the Knight throughout *Phantastes* follows repeated patterns of imitation, rescue, and disappointment. Although the Knight is not exactly Sir Percival, he remains a kind of mythic ideal, living the life that Anodos wants to live. Although the Knight had been deceived by the Alder-tree in the same way Anodos later was, he is able to redeem himself by slaying the Ash-tree. When Anodos becomes entangled with his own Shadow, the Knight has no such struggle. In a surprising turn from the fairytale norm, Anodos does not win the love of the lady of marble in the end, but she becomes the wife of the Knight. Anodos himself loses his life in Fairy Land not as a self-sufficient knight but as the Knight's squire, and the Knight and the lady of marble weep together over his tomb.

The Knight's former struggle with the Alder-tree foreshadows Anodos' own eventual development, but by falling from knighthood Anodos eventually surpasses the Knight in goodness. During their first encounter, the Knight tells Anodos, "I that was proud am humble now," because he had fallen to the wiles of the Alder-tree (41). Although Anodos commits this same error and weeps for it, Anodos does not learn humility and his errors continue: he soon opens the door to his Shadow and later is entrapped, both literally and figuratively, in a tower of his own pride. Anodos' humbling comes towards the end of the novel: having been freed from the tower by a young woman, he puts off his armor, deciding that "it is better, a thousand-fold, for a proud man to fall and be humbled, than to hold up his head in his pride and fancied innocence," and that "he that will be a hero, will scarcely be a man; that he that will be nothing but a doer of his work, is sure of his manhood" (*Phantastes* 166). It is only when Anodos sets himself to being a doer of his work by faithfully serving the Knight as a lowly squire that he becomes truly a man, sacrificing his own life to save innocents. As the Knight tells Anodos, "All a man has to do, is to better what he can... [for] even renown and success are in themselves of no

great value” (*Phantastes* 171). The pride and the leadership that society praises as primary values in a man turn out to be insufficient in MacDonald’s view of reality, and we see Anodos’ inner development lead him to a pure, sacrificial submission that exceeds the Knight in goodness.

Attitude toward women

Every fantasy story with knights tends to have ladies as well, and *Phantastes* is no exception. We find “the usual Romantic and Victorian set of angel women and demon women” (“*Phantastes and Lilith*” 41) with female characters falling into the categories of pure ladies, innocent girls, kind matrons, or genuine monsters, but the narrator’s perspective on Anodos’ encounters with these stock figures breaks from Victorian norms. The contrast set up between the lady of marble, whom Anodos wishes to love and thereby possess, and the maiden of the Alder-tree, who controls Anodos and nearly kills him, shows that in the first half of the novel, Anodos “can only conceive of woman as dominated or dominating,” but this controlling masculine nature is clearly judged as evil (“*Phantastes and Lilith*” 43). Instead of reaffirming Anodos’ desire to possess the lady of marble and blaming her for her recalcitrance, the novel clearly shows that the two are not a good match because of Anodos’ need for further inner development.

In writing *Phantastes*, MacDonald drew on the classical myth of Pygmalion, but while the classical myth ends with the goddess Aphrodite giving life to the sculpture so that Pygmalion can marry his love, there is no such resolution between Anodos and the lady of marble. Anodos first meets the lady of marble when he rests in a cave, having recently escaped the Ash-tree, and finds a statue of Pygmalion gazing upon a block of marble. He investigates the block of marble further and finds it to be a marble statue of a sleeping woman, encased in alabaster. Anodos

thinks of the stories he has read before: “Numberless histories passed through my mind of change of substance from enchantment and other causes... of the Prince of the Enchanted City, half marble and half a living man, of Ariel, of Niobe, of the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (*Phantastes* 36-37). Having convinced himself that the statue will awaken to be a real woman, he first tries to kiss her to life, but when there is no effect, he decides that “Sweet sounds can go where kisses may not enter” and sings to awaken the lady in marble (*Phantastes* 37). The song, which frequently compares the statue’s sleep to death, causes the woman first to faintly breathe, and then to rise all at once. Instead of thanking Anodos for waking her, the woman immediately flees before he can say a word.

The scene of the revival of the lady of marble may come across as romantic, with Anodos as her selfless savior, but Anodos sings to awaken the lady in marble out of covetousness and selfish desire. He decries repeatedly through his song, “I have found thee; wake for me,” and again, “Awake! or I shall perish here” (*Phantastes* 38-39). There is nothing blatantly abusive to his song, and the lady of marble later expresses her gratitude that he sang her from her enchanted sleep, but the self-centered bent of his song remains, as does a feeling of ownership that he feels he has over the lady of marble because he has chosen to love her. At this early point in the novel, Anodos views women, most of all the woman of marble, as “extensions of himself, property upon which he may perpetrate his designs” (“*Phantastes and Lilith*” 41). To an extent, the women of *Phantastes* do indeed fulfill the function of being extensions of Anodos, being representations of whom he ought or ought not become and revealing his inner state through his interactions with each of them, but the same can be said of the other male characters, who are equally two-dimensional.

Anodos' desire to own the lady of marble never manifests in reality, but both Anodos and the reader take time to come to the realization that he will not have a fairytale happily ever after with the woman whom he loves. Much of Anodos' maturing comes while he stays in the palace of the fairy queen, reading stories of self-sacrificing lovers, and when he leaves the palace through an underground path, he finds himself taunted by goblin-like creatures that he compares to the Kobolds of German folklore, who say,

“You shan't have her; you shan't have her; he! he! he! She's for a better man; she's for a better man; how he'll kiss her! how he'll kiss her!” The galvanic torrent of this battery of malevolence stung to life within me a spark of nobleness, and I said aloud, “Well, if he is a better man, let him have her” (120)

Anodos' “spark of nobleness” indeed does not last, and he struggles again with grief and envy over the love of the lady of marble, whom he himself never stops loving. Many trials remain before he comes to release his desires to possess the lady of marble, but MacDonald clearly views this eventual surrender as the mark of a good man. Instead of Anodos becoming more of a man by pursuing or rescuing the lady of marble, we eventually see Anodos become more of a man by wanting what's best for her, even if that's the love of the Knight instead of himself.

Before we find out whether Anodos is able to attain the love of the lady of marble, he must first learn to recognize real virtue and beauty. This is an example of inner growth which could be understood as required for society – how do we recognize who we can trust, and what kind of woman should a man desire to marry? – but Anodos' education here also applies to spiritual reality, because he is required to learn what real virtue looks like and to imitate it himself. The lady of marble is the ideal of Anodos' affections, beautiful and pure in appearance and in inner self. We hear very little dialogue from the lady of marble herself; we are told about

her goodness and purity more than we really get to experience her as a fully-fledged character, but instead of coming across as flat and objectified, the readers believe in her goodness alongside Anodos, in part because most characters are structured similarly, as a fairytale ideal instead of an autonomous character. Her authentic beauty is contrasted with the twisted beauty of the maiden of the Alder-tree, who is initially appealing but is revealed to be rotten and twisted on the inside; Anodos must learn the difference between the two.

Between the lady of marble and the Alder-tree, MacDonald uses the Victorian dichotomy of the pure woman and the fallen woman. Instead of praising or condemning each for their choices, he lets each be known by their nature, and any praise or condemnation rests with Anodos as the dynamic character while learns how to properly react to each woman. The responsibility to make moral choices rests on Anodos, not the women.

Anodos' primary struggle as he matures in *Phantastes* is a conflict between selfless love for others as compared to the selfish desire to be loved by another. The selfish desire to be loved is exemplified in the maiden of the Alder-tree. When Anodos wonders how she was so beautiful to him despite being murderous and cruel in this world where appearances and reality are straightforward, we are told that she is made beautiful by the fact that,

...although she loves no man, she loves the love of any man, and when she finds one in her power, her desire to bewitch him and gain his love (not for the sake of his love either, but that she may be conscious anew of her own beauty, through the admiration he manifests), makes her very lovely—with a self-destruction beauty, though, for it is that which is constantly wearing her away within, till, at last, the decay will reach her face, and her whole front, when all the lovely mask of nothing will fall to pieces, and she be vanished for ever (*Phantastes* 49).

The lady of marble, as the contrast to the maiden of the alder-tree, shows no such desire to be loved: she flees Anodos' attentions, and her later relationship with the Knight is emotionally equal. Anodos mirrors this desire to be loved, and the horrific reality behind the alder-tree threatens that if he does not develop into a man who loves selflessly, he too will be "vanished for ever."

The Shadow

One of the most psychologically transparent occurrences of spiritual reality in *Phantastes* is the story of Anodos and his own Shadow. After finding rest and advice in many cottages along his path, Anodos enters a cottage inhabited by a woman with a "sallow and slightly foreboding" face. The cottage has a door in a corner, and the woman warns Anodos against opening the door, but "the prohibition... only increased [his] desire to see," and he opens the door to find a long corridor leading to a starry sky (*Phantastes* 56). As Anodos gazes at the sky, a dark figure appears, running down the corridor toward Anodos, and after he turns aside to let the figure pass, he sees it no more. The dark figure is his shadow, which clings to his feet and "was so dark, that [he] could see it in the dim light of the lamp, which shone full upon it, apparently without thinning at all the intensity of its hue." The woman, who is revealed to be a sharp-toothed ogre, tells Anodos, "Everybody's shadow is ranging up and down looking for him. I believe you call it by a different name in your world; yours has found you" (*Phantastes* 57). The shadow's power over Anodos disturbs his mind and memory, dampens his spirit, leads him to be unkind to others whom he meets, and even harms the physical environment around him. The Shadow is not a villain outside of Anodos but is rather a representation of the worst of the Self within him, the Self which must be denied for him to truly love and be happy. The Shadow "presents others as

objects, dark fragments of a universe detached from the self. Anodos is at the centre of his world and everything else is outside and useful only as it can gratify his desires” (“The community of the centre” 54). The Shadow’s power remains over Anodos for much of the novel, increasing or decreasing in importance depending on his mental state and the influences around him, and it is not until he is humbled by being trapped in a tower of his own pride and the Shadow is finally defeated.

When Anodos is at his worst, overcome by the influence of his Shadow, he meets a young girl whose prized possession is a glowing globe that she carries with her, and although she begs him not to touch it, he touches the globe and breaks it, an incident which multiple scholars equate to symbolism of sexual assault. The girl, now a woman, resurfaces later in *Phantastes* to sing Anodos free from his imprisonment in the tower. Instead of further accusing him of breaking her prized globe, she says, “Perhaps I owe you many thanks for breaking it” (*Phantastes* 164). She tells him that she took the shards of her globe to the Fairy Queen, and although her globe could not be fixed, she can now sing. She much prefers her new power of song, and wherever she travels, “[her] songs do good, and deliver people” (*Phantastes* 164). As Anodos frequently does, she experiences personal growth out of the damage others did to her.

Childlikeness

From the traditional perspective, *Phantastes*’ Bildungsroman plot runs counter to reason. Having arrived in Fairyland, Anodos becomes not a knight but a humble man, learns to relate to women in counter-cultural ways, and now also we see his maturing being equated to becoming more childlike. The beginning of *Phantastes* makes it clear that the story will involve Anodos growing up: after all, the story begins the day after Anodos’ twenty-first birthday, when he has

just reached legal manhood. The night before his younger sister had read him a fairytale, and when she asked him if there was any such place, he replied, “I suppose there is, if one could find the way into it,” which is to say, he did not believe (*Phantastes* 8). Such rational beliefs are quickly set aside when he meets his first fairy, but Anodos struggles between that desire for sober adultlikeness and imaginative childlikeness, having to relearn what it’s like to be childlike, like his younger sister (Knoeflmacher xi).

This struggle between childlike belief in the fairytale and adult sensibility is exemplified in the family living in the cottages where Anodos spends the night after falling to the wiles of the Alder and nearly being slain by the Ash. The matron of the house comforts Anodos when he arrives and tells her his story, but she asks him “not to say a word about these things” when her husband arrives home, telling Anodos, “I must believe my senses, as he cannot believe beyond his, which give him no intimations of this kind. I think he could spend the whole of Midsummer-eve in the wood and come back with the report that he saw nothing worse than himself” (*Phantastes* 49). This husband, though disbelieving, indeed seems like a loving man when he arrives home. Anodos finds that the man’s “benevolent face... produced such a reaction in [Anodos], that, for a moment, [he] could hardly believe there was a Fairy Land; and that all [he] had passed through since [he] left home, had not been the wandering dream of a diseased imagination.” But a single glance at the couple’s young daughter reading a book by the fireplace causes the effect to fade, and Anodos “believed in Fairy Land again” (*Phantastes* 50). The young girl’s brother, however, imitates his father in disbelief but not in kindness: when his sister speaks earnestly of fairies, the boy laughs, but “his laugh was very different from the old man’s: it was polluted with a sneer” (*Phantastes* 51).

This family of four shows a set of different reactions to fairytales, and they represent different stages of Anodos' development. Over the course of the novel, Anodos is at his best when he is naïve and joyful like the daughter, who encapsulates childlike innocence, not having yet learned to keep quiet about magic in front of those who do not believe. Although the father does not believe in magic, he is a good and kind man, quite like Anodos at the beginning of the novel. The son is twisted and prideful in his disbelief, like Anodos under the influence of his Shadow, which makes all beautiful things look common and crude. The matron, mature and wise in her love of fairytales and magic, represents who Anodos ought to be, and indeed by the end of the novel he grows to become like her in wisdom and peaceful imagination.

We can examine MacDonald's argument on children and childlikeness through contrasting *Phantastes* with the work of his more famous contemporary and personal friend, Lewis Carroll. Carroll's enduring classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* approaches the development of childhood becoming adulthood through the lens of nonsense and discomfort, as in the scene in which Alice alternately grows and shrinks by eating and drinking, distressed all the while by the way her body seems to be rebelling against her. The preadolescent Alice finds herself in a world where nothing makes sense, the education she has received previously doesn't hold up, and authority figures enact senseless decrees but fail to control their underlings. Alice, who would very much like to live according to reason and rationality, is unable to offer any wisdom or help to a befuddled reader. In contrast to Carroll's Alice, MacDonald uses the character of a young girl on the brink of adolescence as a source of wisdom: Anodos' younger sister still believes in the supernatural and possesses a clarity and joy that Anodos himself must journey through Fairyland to find, and more than one young girl that Anodos meets in Fairyland itself seems to know deep things that other characters do not know. Indeed, the girls of Fairyland

often appear to commune more deeply with the reality of Fairyland than anyone else. The first inhabitant of Fairyland that Anodos meets is the wandering “country maiden” who tells him to “trust the Oak, and the Elm, and the great Beech... But shun the Ash and the Alder,” and although this advice sounds as nonsensical as something Alice may be told in Wonderland, Anodos finds great practical use in this advice during the first phase of the story as he flees the murderous Ash tree and eventually finds shelter with the kind Beech tree (*Phantastes* 11). And as we have already noted, the daughter of the family of four possesses a deeper knowledge of the reality outside her family’s cottage than her father does. Overall, MacDonald’s purpose in focusing on childlikeness is clearly very different from Carroll’s: the children, rather than being confused by the real world, possess great wisdom about what is real and true.

Development through stories and song

Not only is Anodos called to be childlike, but he is required to grow in terms of poetic imagination, thereby accessing knowledge of spiritual and aesthetic reality. MacDonald packs *Phantastes* with other stories, whether referenced for a few lines or narrated for multiple chapters. This pattern begins when Anodos reads the tale of Sir Percival near the beginning of the novel and soon encounters a knight who is living that tale as reality. In the palace of the fairy queen, he spends days reading novels in the library that seem to draw him in as if he himself were the central character. From these novels, we hear of two stories: first a summary of a story of a society of winged women who find babies instead of bearing them, which teaches Anodos about profound longing; and next, over the course of several chapters, Anodos recounts a story he read about a young man called Cosmo who fell in love with the woman cursed to spend her nights in the magic mirror he bought. The man in the story must grow past his selfishness and

eventually die to free the woman he loves, and this is the same journey that Anodos takes over the course of the novel. Anodos learns virtue in part from reading this tale.

While reading stories in the palace of the Fairy Queen, Anodos “discovers that he participates in” what he reads (“The community of the centre” 52). While reading he forgets himself and believes himself to be a part of the story; while reading the story of Cosmo, he believes himself to be Cosmo. Anodos learns about selflessness and love through the story, but his participation in the story also teaches Anodos and the audience about the value and power of imagination; McGillis argues that the story of Cosmo and all of *Phantastes* itself teaches us “to know that literature brings us out of ourselves and into a community of shared images, themes, [and] characters,” and that the “knowledge gained through story... is the result of imaginative sympathy and imaginative understanding” (“The community of the centre” 52). As MacDonald also argues in “The Fantastic Imagination,” *Phantastes* and the shorter stories within it posit that “What stories attempt to reveal is beyond the capability of language to articulate” (52). The spiritual ideas that undergirded MacDonald’s fantasies can neither be expressed in concrete language nor in imagery, but poetry nonetheless “attempts to articulate that deep truth which is imageless. But this entails reducing the imageless to the image, and consequently poetry always fails to present deep truth; it must mediate vision” (“The community of the centre” 53). Shared imagination breaks the bounds of Self which Anodos must learn to reject.

Along with the multiple stories found within *Phantastes*, Anodos and other characters sing songs frequently from chapter to chapter, and although poetry was not truly MacDonald’s forte, he clearly intends for the songs to be an important part of the novel’s atmosphere. Not all songs have power or move the plot forward, such as the flower fairies’ song during Anodos’ first few hours in Fairyland, but MacDonald included these interludes as part of his argument for the

value of imagination and art nonetheless. Anodos tells us that he “had never been gifted with the power of song, until [he] entered the fairy forest,” but spending time in Fairyland and eating the fruits from its trees gives him the urge and ability to sing with “words and tones coming together” (*Phantastes* 37). Anodos’ first song wakes the lady of marble from her sleep, and we see several other instances of songs having real power, such as when the young woman whose globe Anodos has broken sings to release him from his imprisonment in the tower. The songs and poems are presented in much the same light as the stories that Anodos reads, especially in the palace of the fairy queen; they have power to bring life, to teach lessons, to set free from imprisonment.

These poems and songs touch on the spiritual and emotional reality of *Phantastes* with contrasts with the society-driven rationality of a typical Bildungsroman. The quote from Novalis that MacDonald placed before the first chapter of *Phantastes* speaks of a kind of “true Poesie” that does not make rational arguments but instead is valuable because it is “merely lovely sounding, full of beautiful words, but also without rational sense and connections—with, at the most, individual verses which are intelligible, like fragments of the most varied things” (*Phantastes* 3). This idea of songs as fragments of meaning may be most manifest in the song which the Beech tree sings to Anodos after rescuing him from the Ash, which Anodos tells us was

...a strange sweet song, which I could not understand, but which left in me a feeling like this – “*I saw thee ne’er before, I see thee never more, But love, and help, and pain, beautiful one, Have made thee mine, till all my years are done*” (31)

The Beech tree’s care for Anodos, and his experiences with many other songs, play an integral part in his inner development as primarily emotional experiences.

The ever changing self

Having become unlike the men of his first society, served instead of imitated the Knight, relinquished power over the Lady, sacrificed himself in selflessness, and become like a child, Anodos has greatly developed over the course of *Phantastes*. After his self-sacrifice and a short period of “blessedness,” in which the “hot fever of life had gone by, and [he] breathed the clear mountain-air of the land of Death,” Anodos finds himself back in the real world, greatly changed (*Phantastes* 180). He lives in uncertainty that he will one day find himself back in Fairyland, but although he looks for signs of the fantastic, he sees only normal life around him. But he acknowledges that his fantastical experiences had great transformative power:

My mind soon grew calm, and I began the duties of my new position, somewhat instructed, I hoped, by the adventures that had befallen me in Fairy Land. Could I translate the experience of my travels there, into common life? This was the question. Or must I live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men, whose experience yet runs parallel to that of Fairy Land? (*Phantastes* 184)

Although Anodos asks this question, of whether or not he must once again undergo a cycle of inner development, there is a peace and hopefulness about his narrative thoughts in the final pages that certainly indicates he has been greatly changed. But neither is Anodos done changing and developing, nor will he ever be for MacDonald. “I know that good is coming to me,” Anodos tells the reader on the final page, “that good is always coming, though few have at all times the simplicity and the courage to believe it” (*Phantastes* 185).

A short time before Anodos’ death, when he sees that his Shadow is finally gone, he tells the reader that ever since the disappearance of the Shadow he has felt like a new self, not a

perfect self but one who still errs in other ways. Nor will this new self be his final, truest self, but there is always inner development in progress:

Self will come to life even in the slaying of self, but there is ever something deeper and stronger than it, which will emerge at last from the unknown abysses of the soul: will it be as a solemn gloom, burning with eyes? or a clear morning after the rain? or a smiling child, that finds itself nowhere, and everywhere? (*Phantastes* 166)

Influence of the novel and conclusions

Although *Phantastes* is mostly hidden from modern audiences, the effects of MacDonald's pioneering work in combining fantasy with the Bildungsroman reverberate down to cornerstones of popular culture today. We know of no previously written stories which combine fantastical imagery with "portrayal of vital aspects of human growth and development," which exposed "the limitations of conventional realism" and opened up doors for genres and works which we consider classics today ("Fictions and Metafictions" 123). C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, G.K. Chesterton, and many others have clearly acknowledged the debt their fantasy works owe to MacDonald. Perhaps even recent works like J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series would not have come about without MacDonald: after all, he was the first to combine the motif of a boy becoming a man with fantastical images and creatures. By placing the story of Anodos' growth in Fairyland instead of in the "real" world, MacDonald taps into greater potential for metaphor and image than stories of inner development had previously had.

Works Cited

- Avery, Gillian. "George MacDonald and the Victorian Fairy Tale." *The Golden Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, edited by William Raeper, Edinburgh UP, 1990, pp. 126-139.
- Chesteron, G.K. *The Victorian Age in Literature*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1913.
- Duncan, Ian. "Against the Bildungsroman." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 1, Mar. 2019, pp. 13–19. *Silverchair*, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-7247230>.
- Frow, John, et al. "The Bildungsroman: Form and Transformations." *Textual Practice*, vol. 34, no. 12, Dec. 2020, pp. 1905–10. Taylor and Francis+NEJM, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2020.1834692>.
- Golban, Petru. *A History of the Bildungsroman: From Ancient Beginnings to Romanticism*. Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/southcarolina/detail.action?docID=5530834>.
- Knoepflmacher, U.C. Introduction. *The Complete Fairy Tales*, by George MacDonald, edited by Knoepflmacher, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. vii-xx.
- Lewis, CS. Preface. *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, by George MacDonald, compiled by Lewis, Centenary Press, 1946. *Fadedpage.com*, www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20140910.
- MacDonald, George. "The Fantastic Imagination." 1893. *The Complete Fairy Tales*, edited by UC Knoepflmacher, by MacDonald, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. 5-10.
- . *Phantastes*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1858.

- McGillis, Roderick. "The Community of the Centre: Structure and Theme in *Phantastes*." *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*, edited by Roderick McGillis, Children's Literature Association, 1992, pp. 51-65.
- . Introduction. *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*, edited by McGillis, Children's Literature Association, 1992, pp. 1-15.
- . "Phantastes and Lilith: Femininity and Freedom." *The Golden Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, edited by William Raeper, Edinburgh UP, 1990, pp. 31-55.
- Mendelson, Michael. "The Fairy Tales of George MacDonald and the Evolution of a Genre." *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*, edited by Roderick McGillis, Children's Literature Association, 1992, pp. 31-49.
- Ormsbee, Michael. "Battle for the Bildungsroman: 'Protagonicity' and National Allegory." *Textual Practice*, vol. 34, no. 12, Dec. 2020, pp. 1955–68. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2020.1834704>.
- Pierson, Clayton Jay. *Toward Spiritual Fulfillment: A Study of the Fantasy World of George MacDonald*. University of Maryland, 1978.
- Prickett, Stephen. "Fictions and Metafictions: 'Phantastes,' 'Wilhelm Meister,' and the Idea of the 'Bildungsroman.'" *The Golden Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, edited by William Raeper, Edinburgh UP, 1990, pp. 109-125.
- . "The Two Worlds of George MacDonald." *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*, edited by Roderick McGillis, Children's Literature Association, 1992, pp. 17-29.

Raeper, William. Introduction. *The Golden Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, edited by Raeper, Edinburgh UP, 1990, pp. 1-11.

Robb, David S. *George MacDonald*. Scottish Academic Press, 1987. Scottish Writers Series

Wordsworth, William. "The Tables Turned." 1798. *Poetry Foundation*.

www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45557/the-tables-turned