

## North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies

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Volume 23

Article 4

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1-1-2004

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#### Recommended Citation

Soto, Fernando (2004) "Mirrors in MacDonald's Phantastes: A Reflexive Structure," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*: Vol. 23 , Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol23/iss1/4>

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# Mirrors in MacDonald's *Phantastes*: A Reflexive Structure

Fernando Soto

## 1. Introduction: *Phantastes* and Present Scholarship

“The Soul of Man,” says my father in the unpublished Seekers and Finders, “is the world turned outside in”; and in *Paul Faber* he speaks more poetically of a little child being a “mirrored universe.” (Greville MacDonald 404)

How much Gibbie even then understood of the lovely, eerie old ballad, it is impossible for me to say. [...] Certainly it was the beginning of much. But the waking up of a human soul to know itself in the mirror of its thoughts and feelings, its loves and delights, oppresses me with so heavy a sense of marvel and inexplicable mystery, that when I imagine myself such as Gibbie then was, I cannot imagine myself coming awake. [...] When by slow filmy unveilings, life grew clearer to Gibbie, and he not only knew, but knew that he knew, his thoughts always went back to that day [...]. Then first he saw nature reflected, Narcissus-like, in the mirror of her humanity, her highest self.

(*Sir Gibbie* 97)

MacDonald's *Phantastes* had remained a type of literary “black box” for nearly one hundred and forty years. Ever since its introduction to the public, little had surfaced regarding two interrelated aspects of importance for an understanding of this puzzling book: its meaning and structure. Because few instances of solid internal meaning or direct references to outside sources were easily extracted from MacDonald's complex book, many reviewers and later scholars, it seems, concluded that *Phantastes* had neither plot nor structure, and/or that it was loosely written.<sup>1</sup>

The critical tide began to turn a little more than a decade ago, after John Docherty and Roderick McGillis convincingly argued for the existence of a structure in *Phantastes*. Their general conclusions, however, tended to divide scholarly opinion. There still appears to be little accord among some of the most influential and active MacDonald scholars regarding the type(s),

of structure(s) in *Phantastes*.<sup>2</sup>

Without a general, coherent, and persuasive structure for readers to follow, few relevant examples and references are likely to surface from the enigmatic and complex world of *Phantastes*. Too general, too disconnected, or overly conjectural examples and references appear to breed discordant and unconvincing possible structures, and this formidable dialectical circle, externally perceived, continues to prevent a confident entrance to the inner sanctum of MacDonald's complex masterpiece.

In this article I will attempt to present a coherent central structure underlying *Phantastes*, and some inter-textual examples as well as extra-textual references reflecting and supporting this structure. Outlining some internal examples of the book's reflective or looking-glass nature, ultimately focused on Cosmo von Wehrstahl's Magic Mirror, permits analysis, delineation, and explanation of the "reflective" structure in the book. Using this structure as a guide, I examine further external reflexive references used by MacDonald. Ultimately, this provides a coherent, descriptive structure of *Phantastes* that should withstand critiques likely to emerge [27] from the various "camps" in the somewhat discordant present scholarship devoted to MacDonald.

Before proceeding to some of the complex examples of mirroring and the mirror structure these reflect, some background and a short history of MacDonald's interests and education should be presented. Greville MacDonald, in the biography of his parents, mentions that his father received his MA, in Chemistry and Natural Philosophy (i.e., Physics), and that he was very interested in working with the famous German biochemist, Justus von Liebig (68).<sup>3</sup> The only impediment that kept MacDonald from joining Liebig in Germany was lack of money (Broome 89). However, this did not keep him from studying Liebig's works. Nor, perhaps, did pecuniary reasons keep him from hearing Liebig speak in Glasgow in 1840.<sup>4</sup>

It seems MacDonald's study of Liebig's theories proved fruitful for the budding novelist, at least in his gaining of contemporary knowledge in regards to scientific discoveries, theoretical models, and their possible meanings:

Liebig [...] was prone to making "chemical analogies"—as was MacDonald, who made Swedenborgian transformations of chemical equations for his classes at Bedford College—and provided the process which led to the silvering of mirrors, an important image in MacDonald's works. (Broome 90).

MacDonald's interest in Liebig and chemistry may thus have led him directly toward the subject of mirrors and reflections.

## 2. Reflections on Mirrors, Images and Inversions.

Why are all reflections lovelier than what we call the reality?—not so grand or so strong, it may be, but always lovelier? Fair as is the gliding sloop on the shining sea, the wavering, trembling, unresting sail below is fairer still. Yea, the reflecting ocean itself reflected in the mirror, has wondrousness about its waters that somewhat vanishes when I turn toward itself. All mirrors are magic mirrors. The commonest room is a room in a poem when I turn to the glass. (*Phantastes*, 123).

Because mirrors give the appearance of the existence of two related worlds, or because reflecting surfaces seem to divide the world in two (the “real” and the “reflected”), they are of great interest to MacDonald. (Broome 90; Prickett, *Worlds* 17-29).<sup>5</sup> Reflections or images in a looking glass, however, portray to the observer the object(s) reflected and something quite different—the perceived reversal of the object(s) in the image. In *Phantastes*, MacDonald's awareness of these optical phenomena (the perceived repetition and “inversion” of objects) is evident. This awareness is partially understood by considering the relationship between mirrors and the imagination, two crucial components of this and many of MacDonald's other books. MacDonald provides many detailed and imaginative passages about mirrors and the imagination in *Phantastes*. For example:

What a strange thing a mirror is! and what a wondrous affinity exists between it and a man's imagination! For this room of mine, as I behold it in the glass, is the same, and yet not the same. It is not the mere representation of the room I live in, but it looks just as if I were reading about it in a story I like. All its commonness has disappeared. The mirror has lifted it out of the region of fact into the realm of art (161-62).

In *Phantastes*, MacDonald is also cognizant of the optics involved with more complex types of mirrors and reflecting surfaces. For instance, Anodos narrates a “strange [28] thing” regarding the focal distance between himself and the inhabitants of a village he visited in Fairy Land:

I observed, that whenever I came within a certain distance of any one of them, which distance, however, varied with different

individuals, the whole appearance of the person began to change; and this change increased in degree as I approached. When I receded to the former distance, the former appearance was restored. The nature of the change was grotesque, following no fixed rule. The nearest resemblance to it that I know, is the distortion produced in your countenance when you look at it reflected in a concave or convex surface—say, either side of a bright spoon (115-16).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it may be gathered that MacDonald's interest in all types of mirrors and reflections is an important component of this and other of his books.

The centrality of the mirror is an intellectual and a material structural component of *Phantastes*. MacDonald presents the reader with the above explicit, theoretical descriptions of the three types of mirrors (plane, concave, and convex), and with many actual instances of mirrors, reflecting surfaces, and literary "reflections." In addition, a very important component of the story is the special "place" given to Cosmo's Magic Mirror. This mirror is found in the middle chapter of *Phantastes*, very near the actual centre of the book. Consequently, the Magic Mirror intellectually and physically bisects the story, and structurally reflects both sides of *Phantastes* in almost equal proportions.

Some of MacDonald's individual examples of reflectivity are superficial, while others are found deep below the more exterior aspects of *Phantastes*.<sup>7</sup> Easily identifiable instances of reflection occur in chapters 1 and 10. The first examples of two related "images" are found when Anodos refers to the scent of rose-leaves and the colour of a ribbon curiously having departed together: "in one corner lay a little heap of withered rose-leaves, whose long-lived scent had long since departed; and in another, a small packet of papers, tied with a bit of ribbon, whose colour had gone with the rose scent" (15-16).

This type of direct association among; colour, scent; and roses: is recalled in chapter 10:

Roses, wild roses, everywhere! So plentiful were they, they not only perfumed the air, they seemed to dye it a faint rose-hue. The colour floated abroad with the scent, and clomb, and spread, until the whole west blushed and glowed with the gathered incense of roses (121).

MacDonald, therefore, presents the reader with two events that reflect each other, yet mirror-like, the two "images" are inverted in terms of the existence

and non-existence of the main entities involved.

Among the “hidden” similarities within the above examples is Anodos’ awareness of the reflecting “images” surrounding the two rose-colour-scent episodes. In chapter 1, it is immediately after Anodos opens the last door into Fairy Land that he perceives the scentless rose-leaves and the colourless ribbon. It is the opening of this last chamber that allows the tiny woman to emerge and “invite” him to enter Fairy Land—something Anodos later does by following the stream/rivulet whose source is in his overflowing wash basin (20-23).

By continuing to follow Anodos’ stream of consciousness presented in chapter 10, the reader finds “deeper” correspondences between the above two related sections [29] of *Phantastes*. In chapter 10, Anodos follows a river to a castle, which he enters through “a wide gateway, but without gates.” In the castle he finds “a large fountain [...] throwing up a lofty column of water [...] into a basin beneath; overflowing which, it ran in a single channel towards the interior of the building” (127). He follows the “stream from the basin of the fountain” to a “great open door, beneath the ascending steps of which it ran through a low arch, and disappeared” (128). He ceases to follow the stream by going through this doorway, and once inside, encounters “a great hall, surrounded with white pillars” (129). He then finds himself in a darkening hall and later in a dark corridor—with “seemingly innumerable pillars.” Then, while searching for a “hospitable chamber,” he locates exactly what he requires, a chamber that perfectly mirrors his own bedchamber. While he reflects on this “strange” coincidence, he correctly intuits a part of the reflective nature of what is occurring: “But what surprised me more than all, was, that the room was in every respect a copy of my own room, the room whence the little stream from my basin had led me into Fairy Land” (130).

These above events and insights give the strong impression that Anodos is retracing his steps—following a river across the landscape of Fairy Land to his own castle, walking beside the stream which is now flowing back to his basin, through his secretary, and back to his own chamber (20-23; 120-131).<sup>8</sup> As shown above, the finer points of this “mirror-image” are not lost on Anodos: before he encounters the roses and their colour/smell, he is aware of the similarities when he exclaims: “I felt as if I were entering Fairy Land for the first time” (121). Given the many close correspondences between both episodes, this “insight” (and the one related to him finding a “copy” of his own bedroom) should not be surprising for the reader or Anodos. Indeed, there are many reasons for the second event to feel like a mirror-reflection of

Anodos' first entrance to Fairy Land. MacDonald likely intends some readers to make this connection when he includes the verse which heads chapter 10:

From Eden's bowers the flail-fed rivers flow,  
To guide the outcasts to the land of woe:  
Our Earth one little toiling streamlet yields,  
To guide the wanderers to the happy fields (119).

However, as may be expected, the above order inherent in the quotation is reversed: Anodos had first followed a streamlet out of his chamber, whereas in chapter 10 he follows a river back to his point of origin.

There are many other "reversals" in some of the above reflecting sections of the book. The most obvious individual inversion is where a lack of rose scent and colour of the roses in the chamber of the secretary in chapter 1 are reflected by the overabundance of the roses' colour and scent in chapter 10. The same is generally true regarding the light available for both events: the first occurs in the morning and the second at night. The "opposite" times of day also allow for Anodos to be first awakened to "consciousness" by the sound of the running water emerging from his basin, while it is once more the sound of water, from the mirror-image of this basin, that lulls him to sleep in the second episode. One "image" shows the negative and the other the positive in relation to roses and colour and scent, the time of day, and the changes of consciousness (in this case, brought on by listening to the sound of water) [30] that usually occurs in the morning and at night (20; 231). And mirror-like, the first episode relates to Anodos' entrance to Fairy Land, and the second to his exit.

Another revealing example of mirroring becomes apparent by considering the two following episodes of *Phantastes*. Soon after Anodos enters Fairy Land in chapter 3, he reflects upon the difference between the creatures of the day and those of the night:

Then I remembered that night is the fairies' day, and the moon their sun; and I thought—Everything sleeps and dreams now: when the night conies, it will be different. At the same time I, being a man and child of the day, felt some anxiety as to how I should fare among the elves and other children of the night who wake when mortals dream (26).

While Anodos is imprisoned in the tower in chapter 22, he completely reverses most of his previous conclusions:

But as soon as the first faint light of the dawn appeared, instead of shining upon me from the eye of the morning, it stole like

a fainting ghost through the little square hole above my head; and the walls came out as the light grew, and the glorious night was swallowed up by the hateful day. The long dreary day passed. My shadow lay black on the floor. [...] Thus night after night passed away. I should have died but for this. Every night the conviction returned, that I was free (280).

This reversal within Anodos is partially explained by considering that dreaming and wakefulness had also been inverted for him by this point in the story. The mirror-reversal of these two states of consciousness is further inferred from the *Phantastes* passage prior to the above:

I sat down on the floor, in listless wretchedness. I think I must have fallen asleep, and have slept for hours; for I suddenly became aware of existence, in observing that the moon was shining through the hole in the roof. As she rose higher and higher, her light crept down the wall over me, till at last it shone right upon my head: Instantaneously the walls of the tower seemed to vanish away like a mist. I sat beneath a beech [...] I thought with myself, "Oh, joy! it was only a dream; the horrible narrow waste is gone, and I wake beneath a beech-tree" (279).

The above example presents the reader with a type of mirror-image—where Anodos' conceptions regarding the "reality" of wakefulness and the "fictitious" nature of dreams are reversed. Also, the "positivity" regarding day and the "negativity" of night are again inverted from one image to the other, as dreaming and wakefulness had similarly been reversed. The reversal or confusion of the dream and waking states is an important theme and perhaps a major psychological aim of *Phantastes*. This is reflected in one of MacDonald's favourite aphorisms of Novalis (used in key sections of *Phantastes* and other of his books, notably at the very end of *Lilith*): "Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will" (315).

Another such mirroring and reversal of similar events occurs with the deaths of two primroses. These floral deaths are respectively found in chapters 3 and 24. In the first instance, a flower fairy, the Pocket, bites the stalk of a Primrose and hastens its demise. The events surrounding the death of the first primrose are partly described as:

During the latter part of the song-talk, they had formed themselves into a funeral procession, two of them bearing poor Primrose, whose death Pocket had hastened by biting her stalk, upon one of her own great leaves. They bore her solemnly



along some distance, and then buried her under a tree. Although I say *her* I saw nothing but the withered primrose-flower on its long stalk (40). **[31]**

The mirror image of this incident is found after Anodos is killed by the warrior-priests, and, like the first primrose, is buried beneath some trees. In this episode, a disembodied Anodos momentarily “inhabits” a primrose:

They buried me in no graveyard. They loved me too much for that [...] but they laid me in the grounds of their own castle, amid many trees; where, as it was spring-time, were growing primroses, and blue bells, and all the families of the woods.

[...] I rose into a single large primrose that grew by the edge of the grave, and from the window of its humble, trusting face, looked full in the countenance of the lady. I felt that I could manifest myself in the primrose; that it said a part of what I wanted to say [...]. The flower caught her eye. She stooped and plucked it, saying, “Oh, you beautiful creature!” and, lightly kissing it, put it in her bosom. It was the first kiss she had ever given me. But the flower soon began to wither, and I forsook it (312-13).

This is the opposite of the relationship of flower fairies to their flowers. During Anodos’ description of his early encounter with flower fairies he comments that “the conclusion I arrived at from the observations I was afterwards able to make, was, that the flowers die because the fairies go away, not that the fairies disappear because the flowers die” (36). We learn nothing more about these later observations.

These two curious botanical incidents share many similarities: both events take place in the late evening, both primroses are occupied by living entities, both flowers “wither” and are forsaken by their inhabitants, both entities are buried under trees soon after their “funerals,” and so on. Identification and analysis of one of the main reversals, however, begins by considering that the gender of the inhabiting entity is changed from female in the first instance to male in the latter. The first primrose is a female—described by the pronoun “her”—whereas Anodos remains a male throughout the story (even as he becomes a disembodied entity). Another reversal may be considered in relation to the actions performed by the mouths of the Pocket and the Marble Lady. It is an envious bite that hastens the death of the first primrose, whereas a loving kiss may quicken the death of the flower Anodos temporarily inhabits. Hate and jealousy, in the first instance, are replaced by

love and faithfulness in the second.

The examples of mirroring presented thus far give some idea of the reflective complexity of *Phantastes*; however, there are many other highly abstract examples to consider regarding this important structural component of the book. For example, the Alder-maiden has her wooden, mirror-counterparts in the latter sections of the book. Here is how Anodos describes the Maid of the Alder in chapter 6:

I woke as a grey dawn stole into the cave. The damsel had disappeared; but in the shrubbery, at the mouth of the cave, stood a strange horrible object. It looked like an open coffin set up on one end; only that the part for the head and neck was defined from the shoulder-part. In fact, it was a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree. It had arms, which were only slightly seamed, down from the shoulder-blade by the elbow, as if the bark had healed again from the cut of a knife (84).

The counterparts of the Maid of the Alder are the wooden men who keep the little beggar girl from gathering her butterfly wings in chapter 23. These wooden men are described by the little maiden whom they tread underfoot as being “like great men, made of wood, without knee or elbow-joints, and without any noses or mouths or eyes in their faces” (297)<sup>9</sup>. [32]

Later, the knight describes the first wooden man he sees: “This being, if being it could be called, was like a block of wood roughly hewn into the mere outlines of a man; and hardly so, for it had but head, body, legs, and arms—the head without a face, and the limbs utterly formless” (300).

All three of the above descriptions of the evil wooden creatures are very similar. Complementing these shared characteristics are some implicit similarities within MacDonald’s accounts of both types of wooden images. The curious way in which MacDonald describes the “set up” of both wooden creatures is one of these more hidden correspondences. In the first of the above accounts, MacDonald conveys to the reader that the Maid of the Alder “looked like an open coffin set up on one end.” This “set up” reflects the clever method by which the knight first subdues a wooden man: “I tripped one of them up, and, taking him by the legs, set him up on his head” (300). In case the reader did not mark the importance of this method of “setting up” the wooden men, MacDonald has the knight repeat it: “Whenever one appeared, I followed the same plan—tripped him up and set him on his head.” The similar descriptions and “set up” of both wooden creatures tend to

make both events and wooden characters closely mirror each other. The main reversals are: the actual physical inversion of the latter wooden creatures (the Alder maid is “set up” pointing up and the wooden men are “set up” pointing down); the shift from concentrating on the facial beauty of the Maid of the Alder compared to the lack of any aesthetic features where the face ought to be on the wooden men; and finally the reversal of the gender of the creatures under question (58).

The Ash, like the Maid of the Alder, has his wooden counterpart in a later section of *Phantastes*. Before proceeding, one important identifying attribute or description of the Ash ought to be mentioned: this tree-spirit’s voracious nature. The Beech-tree woman describes the Ash as wanting to bury Anodos at the foot of his tree because: “this one has a hole in his heart that nobody knows of but one or two; and he is always trying to fill it up, but he cannot. That must be what he wanted you for” (58).

The reader encounters the mirror-image of the Ash in chapter 23. As Anodos and the knight enter the yew-tree enclosure, where the human sacrifices are taking place, they encounter something strikingly reminiscent of the Ash. The relationship between both the evil things becomes simple to detect by considering Anodos’ actions in the presence of this “wooden image”:

I walked right up the stairs to the throne, laid hold of a great wooden image that seemed to sit upon it, and tried to hurl it from its seat [...] I strained with all my might; and, with a noise as of the cracking, and breaking, and tearing of rotten wood, something gave way, and I hurled the image down the steps. Its displacement revealed a great hole in the throne, like the hollow of a decayed tree, going down apparently a great way (307-8).

Supplementing the above description, Anodos claims to have previously witnessed the pushing of a boy into the hollow beneath the throne:

The company ascended to the foot of the throne, where they all kneeled for some minutes; then they rose and passed round to the side of the pedestal upon which the throne stood. Here they crowded close behind the youth, [...] and one of them opened a door in the pedestal, for the youth to enter. I was sure I saw him shrink back, and those crowding behind pushed him in (305). [33]

After witnessing the same type of sacrifice performed with a girl, Anodos appears to conclude that the priests are attempting to fill the deep

hole at the foot of their wooden image. This fact, and the descriptions of both wooden entities, certainly reflect what the reader already knows of the insatiable nature of the Ash, and his custom of burying young people in an attempt to “fill up” the hole in his heart. Moreover, most of the people witnessing the sacrifice, including the knight, seem unaware of the nature of the sacrificial part of the ceremony. Hence, it seems that while more than one or two priests know what is occurring to the young man and woman, the secret of the hole in the heart of the Ash is still not known widely by this point of the story.

Again, there are many reversals in this latter reflection of the first meetings of Anodos and the Ash ogre. It is a cunning Anodos who now attacks the immobile image of the Ash ogre, and kills its wolf-spirit by a method learned from the grasping, knobbly handed, Ash-ogre itself. Anodos strangles the wolf-spirit with one, and, only one, hand. By directly attacking the Ash effigy and exposing the brutal nature of the ceremony Anodos “saves” the knight. This action reflects the way the knight had previously saved Anodos by his timely assailment of the tree inhabited by the Ash spirit. The situations are further reversed when we consider that the Ash had attempted to attack Anodos with his bare hand (in the grotto of the Maid of the Alder), and that the knight had saved Anodos by attacking the Ash tree with an axe (241-2). In the latter episode it is Anodos, leaving his axe behind, who attacks the Ash-idol, and the idol’s wolf-spectre with his bare hand(s). He has learned from overhearing the conversation between the Knight and the White Lady that “earthly arms availed not against such as” the Ash’s spectre and perhaps suspects a similar foe here. His unarmed state allows him to approach the idol, but then it allows the priests easily to kill him with their swords.

### **3. Mirrors, Chemistry and Life-force**

To appreciate better the depth and meaning of the next mirroring example, it must be recalled that MacDonald was interested in the more theoretical aspects of his era’s Science.<sup>10</sup> Hal Broome argues convincingly that Justus von Liebig particularly influenced MacDonald with some of his own and adopted bio-chemical and bio-electrical theories. Liebig’s conclusions which interested MacDonald include: i) “life force was analogous with electricity”; ii) “[l]iving things were endowed with ‘vital force’”; iii) “vital force” was of two types—the “vegetative” and the “animal”; iv) females had more “vegetative” force; v) the life-force

within the individual changed with the amount of light available to him/her” (Broome 89-92). In addition, Broome claims that Müller, to a lesser degree than Liebig, also influenced MacDonald with his related biochemical theories. Broome argues that it was Müller who first presented the theory—of interest and use to MacDonald—that “men were more likely positive and women negatively electrical” (Broome 94). But is any of this biographical and “scientific” material reflected in *Phantastes*?

In chapter 3 of *Phantastes*, the reader is provided with a comical scene that at first appears to hold little meaning or justification. One daytime prank of the flower fairies involves adhering to a cat, holding it in place, and proceeding to remove sparks from the feline. MacDonald, through Anodos, describes this electrical process: [34]

by this time the party which had gone towards the house, rushed out again, shouting and screaming with laughter. Half of them were on the cat’s back, and half held on by her fur and tail, or ran beside her, till, more coming to their help, the furious cat was held fast; and they proceeded to pick the sparks out of her with thorns and pins, which they handled like harpoons. Indeed, there were more instruments at work about her than there could have been sparks in her. One little fellow who held on hard by the tip of the tail with his feet planted on the ground at an angle of forty-five degrees, helping to keep her fast, administered a continuous flow of admonitions to Pussy (41).

In addition, the fairy that held the tip of the cat’s tail provides a type of “altruistic” and “scientific/psychological” reason for the fairies’ actions:

“Now, Pussy, be patient. You know quite well it is all for your good. You cannot be comfortable with all those sparks in you; and, indeed, I am charitably disposed to believe” (here he became very pompous) “that they are the cause of all your bad temper; so we must have them all out, every one; else we shall be reduced to the painful necessity of cutting your claws, and pulling out your eye-teeth. Quiet! Pussy, quiet!” (41-2).

Near the end of this charged episode, the female cat manages to escape from her “helpers”: “But with a perfect hurricane of feline curses, the poor animal broke loose, and dashed across the garden and through the hedge, faster than even the fairies could follow” (42).

The above, by itself, holds some possible similarities with Liebig’s

and Mailer's theories. However, by including the literary mirror-image of the above event—found in chapter 17—many of the possible similarities become actualities.

Chapter 17 has many explicit and implicit references to things electrical. One possible reference to Liebig's theories is given when Anodos, while pursuing the Marble Lady, descends into a dark chasm and has to "quit the sunlight" (209). As Anodos leaves the daylight behind, or above him, and unsuccessfully pursues the Marble Lady, he enters an "underground country" lit by "sad sepulchral illumination" (217). In this underground cavern "instead of trees and flowers, there were only fantastic rocks and stones" (210). Like the above-ground fairies who inhabited the flowers, the underground creature whom Anodos first encounters emerges out of, or from behind, one of the rocks that had "replaced" the flowers:

At length I began to find that these regions were inhabited. From behind a rock a peal of harsh grating laughter, full of evil humour, rang through my ears, and looking round, I saw a queer, goblin creature, with a great head and ridiculous features, just like those described, in German histories and travels, as Kobolds (211).

In the semidarkness of this underground country, it is this Kobold who first refers to Anodos' bio-electrically charged state: "Honoured sir, vouchsafe to withdraw from thy slaves the lustre of thy august presence, for thy slaves cannot support its brightness" (211).

It is directly following this bio-electrical reference that a "whole pandemonium of fairy devils" joins the first Kobold in mocking Anodos. They attempt to insult Anodos through verbal and gesticulatory acts very reminiscent of the above-ground fairies' theatrics, although there it is the cat they torment that is described as a "demon" (30) The woman there tells Anodos that the fairies are "very amusing, with their mimicries of grown people and mock solemnities. Sometimes they will act a whole play through before my eyes" (34). These "amusing mimicries," "mock solemnities" and "whole plays" are all present in Anodos' meeting with the [35] underground "goblins." Though the woman looks upon such antics positively, Anodos understandably reacts negatively to the goblin's pranks. So they resort to more direct methods in their attempts to injure him: "Inexpressible laughter followed, which broke up in a shower of tiny stones from innumerable hands" (212).

The tiny stones are too small to cause Anodos much damage. As he

attempts to run away, however, the fairies grab hold of him in almost the exact fashion as the cat had been seized:

I attempted to run away, but they all rushed upon me, and laying hold of every part that afforded, a grasp, held me tight. Crowding about me like bees, they shouted an insect-swarm of exasperating speeches up into my face, among which the most frequently recurring were—"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!" (212-13).

As the above-ground fairies that Anodos sees are connected with flowers, it is interesting that he compares the goblins to bees and interprets their shouts as an "insect swarm." But, given the electrical nature of the whole episode, he may be hearing the buzzing of a growing electrical build-up.

It is directly following this outpouring of verbal and physical abuse that the more explicit references to Anodos' electrical state emerge: "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'" (213).

Thus, by being held down and "rubbed the wrong way," Anodos reacts (just as the cat had) by releasing a "spark." It is directly after this conduction of "electrical" energy (i.e. the biochemical, bio-electrical "spark"), that the underground goblins, mirroring the above-ground fairies, allow Anodos to escape: "They instantly let go their hold of me, and fell back a step or two, with a whole broadside of grunts and humphs, as of unexpected and disappointed approbation" (213-14).<sup>12</sup>

To reiterate and analyse these two important "electrical connections" (between the treatment of the cat and Anodos), let us review these two parallel events and sets of characters side by side: Both the cat and Anodos are held tight by many fairy beings grasping at "every part that afforded a grasp," both are forced to release "sparks," and both are admonished for their supposed rectification. On the other hand, while this "electrical reading" of the episode clearly joins the cat and Anodos, MacDonald appears to want also to convey some information regarding the cat's and Anodos' distinct "polarities."

Before breaching the topic of polarity, however, let us pay closer attention to the outcome of Anodos' "treatment" when he states: "The galvanic torrent of this battery of malevolence stung to life within me a spark." This interesting outburst strongly implies that Anodos and the cat are,

or become, types of galvanic batteries, which when “rubbed” or “stimulated” tend build up a galvanic torrent (stream/current?). This build-up, it is implied, naturally produces sparks. Also, when the cat and Anodos discharge the sparks, they can escape. The release of the sparks directly leads to then-own release from the fairies. The consequences of these electrical releases are, however, different for those who receive the sparks. As the “demon-like” cat is being relieved of her “negative” sparks, the “good” fairy at the receiving end of the tail becomes “pompous.” With Anodos’ “positive” electrical release the “fairy devils” become much more civil. [36]

Of further interest is MacDonald’s brilliant electrical expansion of the name ‘Anodos.’ By recalling an electrical word, coined by Faraday, MacDonald gives the readers of *Phantastes* an important dimension of the protagonist’s name and a positive” identification of the hero:

**Anode** [...]. 1841. {ad. Gr. Anodos, way up.} Elect, strictly: the path by which an electric current leaves the positive pole, and enters the electrolyte, on its way to the negative pole (Faraday), loosely: the positive pole in both senses, opp. cathode (Onions 70).

As there is little chance that MacDonald is not aware of the word “Anode” and its meanings, due to his scientific education and training in Chemistry and Physics, it is safe to say that he includes this electrical aspect of the Word “Anodos” in his brilliant narrative. Furthermore, this reading (of Anodos as an Anode) is supported and in turn supports/reflects the identity of the negatively charged, sparking female cat. Here is the definition of an important word and mirror-image of Anode:

**Cathode**...Also Kath-. 1834. {ad. Gr. ; see prec.} Electr. The path by which an electric current leaves the electrolyte and passes into the negative pole; the point or surface in contact with the negative pole. opp. to anode. (O.E.D.)<sup>13</sup>

Brilliantly, the cat becomes the Cat(hode) in this electrical reading of the above highly charged and meaningful episode.<sup>14</sup> Thus MacDonald directly, yet covertly, uses the then modern scientific meanings attached to the derivative Anode from the Greek Anodos, and cat from the Greek word Cathodos.<sup>15</sup> These electrical words and meanings directly reflect each other, and similarly represent the exact polar reversals in MacDonald’s imaginative mirror/book. Thus MacDonald introduces “outer” scientific words and meanings which reflect and support numerous dimensions of his mirror structure in *Phantastes*.



Given the above information, we can proceed to examine the polarity of the Cathode and Anode as represented by the female cat and the male protagonist, Anodos. Of course, anyone with a basic knowledge of Chemistry knows that the Cathode is the negative pole and the Anode is the positive pole by which electricity enters an electrical device. This must be the motive for MacDonald, the biochemist writer of fantasy and student of Liebig's and Müller's works, to make the cat into a female negative pole, while keeping the male positive pole for Anodos. Furthermore, MacDonald is very specific regarding the amount of light available for both short-circuiting events. The female cat is assailed in the evening, as the outer light and her energy became weaker, while Anodos is treated to a similar fate, for similar reasons, in the semi-darkness of the underground caverns. In addition, the cat, by being a female, possesses more vital or "vegetative" force, and can therefore release many sparks. Anodos, the male protagonist, on the other hand, is only capable of generating one spark or outburst of this curious bio-electrical energy.<sup>16</sup>

MacDonald is creatively following and expanding upon Liebig's and Müller's biochemical or bio-electrical theories.<sup>17</sup> The cat's sparks are caused by the static electrical build up within the feline, while in Anodos' case, it is a biochemical, "ego-centred" spark that must be released. The forced release of his "too positive" egocentric spark allows Anodos to begin to love without needing to possess—a "positive" [37] outcome.<sup>18</sup> It is stated in the narrative that the release of the cat's negative sparks will be beneficial in curbing her aggressive and "negative" impulses. The procedure of removing the cat's sparks is done to reduce her "bad tempers"—otherwise she would need to have her claws and eye-teeth removed.

By considering the above examples and the mirror structure these complex examples reflect, we may begin to use this structure to detect the deep connections between Anodos and Cosmo von Wehrstahl—Anodos' mirror-image in the world of "fiction" within the "reality" of *Phantastes*. Cosmo (i.e. the Greek word Kosmos or "world") is literally a mirror image of Anodos in this other "world" reflected in the Magic Mirror. And, as stated earlier, Cosmo's Magic Mirror is situated in the middle of *Phantastes*, thus marking the centrality of the mirror motif and mirror structure for MacDonald's book.

Another story Anodos read, of which he tells fragments in chapter 12, is the shadow precursor and complement of the Cosmo chapter.<sup>19</sup> The planet there described does not appear to have any reflecting surfaces other than the men's and women's eyes and a distant, distorting sky. It is only on

the rare occasions when the inhabitants reflect (by looking into each other's eyes or by questioning Anodos) that they begin to long for a more meaningful life and they mature enough to be able to leave their "unreflective" existence behind.

#### 4. Phantastic Mirroring and St. Paul

Anodos sees himself reflected in three figures in *Phantastes*: in the polished armour of the knight in the knight's own castle where Anodos, invisible, perceives this in chapter 19; in the polished armour of the evil knight whom Anodos recognises as his own shadow in chapter 22; and in the story of Cosmo von Wehrstahl. "Von Wehrstahl" means "of the steel arms" and he "was considered an authority in every matter pertaining to arms, ancient or modern."

It is in the centre of *Phantastes*, in the middle chapter of the book, that Anodos perceives himself reflected directly in Cosmo. Anodos and Cosmo, unlike the other characters (and episodes) so far considered, stand directly across from each other in the opposite sides of the Magic Mirror.<sup>20</sup> The connections that MacDonald makes between mirrors and books here play a crucial part Anodos reads about Cosmo in a book that acts as a mirror, joining and reflecting both protagonist's lives. Thus, it is no surprise that Cosmo's and Anodos' lives and loves parallel each other so very closely.<sup>21</sup> In general terms, both men love "ideal" women; "attract" these ideal women; lose them due to their "masculine" selfishness; gain the women's love by overcoming their own possessiveness; receive one and only one kiss from their lovers; and, lastly, die violent deaths by the sword. It is perhaps for these and many additional reasons that MacDonald has Anodos begin chapter 13 by comparing some things, persons, and concepts of crucial depth and importance for *Phantastes* (his fairy book) and for its readers:

In the fairy book, everything was just as it should be, though whether in words or something else, I cannot tell. It glowed and flashed the thoughts upon the soul, with such a power that the medium disappeared from the consciousness, and it was occupied only with the things themselves. My representation of it must resemble a translation from a rich and powerful language, capable of embodying the thoughts of a splendidly developed people, into the meagre and half-articulate speech of a savage tribe. Of [38] course, while I read it, I was Cosmo, and his story was mine. Yet, all the time,

I seemed to have a kind of double consciousness, and the story a double meaning. Sometimes it seemed only to represent a simple story of ordinary life, perhaps almost of universal life; wherein two souls, loving each other and longing to come nearer, do, after all, but behold each other as in a glass darkly (153-4).

MacDonald borrows much of the above imagery, concepts, and language from an important external literary source, Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, and their deep relationships are easier to identify and analyse if we refer to Paul's statement:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as 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.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Cor. 13. 11-13).

The original Greek upon which this "translation of a rich and powerful language" is based (i.e. either the Greek or the "language" of the Holy Spirit) also translates as:

When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and see things as a child does, and think like a child; but now that I have become an adult, I have finished with all childish ways. Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am myself known. As it is, these remain: faith, hope and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love.

By identifying and analysing the full Biblical passage, and the surrounding texts and different translations, the reader of *Phantastes* may begin to appreciate the meaning of these paramount words for Anodos, and the importance of maturity and true love found at the core of the story.<sup>22</sup> Anodos must put away childish things and become a man, just as the "little maiden," on the verge of physical maturity, is also forced to put away her globe after Anodos breaks it and the Fairy Queen refuses to repair the broken toy. (Without her globe, the maiden is forced to come of age and later to conclude that the loss was necessary for her growth and for her understanding of her life's mission.)

By coming upon the Fairy book/Magic Mirror, Anodos has to learn, by seeing himself reflected in Cosmo, that he must, like Cosmo, become a man. Cosmo, like the little maiden, must discard his childish toys—the skeleton, dried bat, porcupine skin, and stuffed sea-mouse (along with his dark magic, jealousy and possessiveness)—before he can begin to love Princess Hohenweiss with a mature, honourable love. He twice wishes to see the Princess, “face to face,” instead of only as a reflection in a mirror, and ultimately realizes this wish—in the middle of this central and crucial story—in the personal interview that allows him to begin to love in an unselfish way.

Anodos too must become aware of deceiving appearances, images, and words, and even as he loses faith and hope, he must trust in love. Then he can begin to truly understand, and see “face to face.” Thus, by getting to “know (Cosmo) just as fully as I am myself known,” and by understanding his mirror image’s sacrifice, Anodos can begin to incorporate the idea of unselfish, non-possessive love. This proves paramount for his moral and spiritual development in the Fairy Land of *Phantastes*. [39]

Anodos, exactly as Cosmo had done with the Princess, attempts to control what he thinks of as *his* Lady of the Marble. When he ignores the warnings “TOUCH NOT!” and attempts to embrace the lady she rejects his crude advances and chastises him with “You should not have touched me!” (207), reflecting the Princess’ rebukes of Cosmo. Like Cosmo, his loved one deserts him and he must learn the nature of loving without needing to possess. And soon he can claim that “I no longer called her to myself my white lady” (211).

The voyage to Fairyland, as many have intuited, is a “rite of passage” from childhood to adulthood both for Anodos and perhaps for readers of *Phantastes*.<sup>23</sup> Anodos is very aware of his coming of age, metamorphosis, and the putting away of childish things. After he sacrifices himself, by courageously destroying the idol and its evil wolf-spectre, a “dead” yet mature Anodos, inspired by Saint Paul, exclaims: “Ere long, they bore me to my grave. Never tired child lay down in his white bed, and heard the sound of his playthings being laid aside for the night, with a more luxurious satisfaction of repose than I knew” (310-12).

The scientifically and theologically trained MacDonald, by means of the above Pauline passage, can focus most of his book on the central Magic Mirror and add several dimensions to *Phantastes*. The reference to St. Paul’s mirror adds a great amount of external, traditional meaning and context to the story. This reference to Corinthians I also allows the reader

directly and indirectly to compare himself with many things: with Cosmo; with the women both men love; with “reality”; with “appearance”; everyday life with the universal (Kosmos’/Cosmo’s) life; as well as comparing word and thought, the types of consciousness reflected in the fairy book and its counterpart the looking-glass, childhood and adulthood, ego-centred love and other-centred love, and so on. As Cosmo reflects Anodos in the fairy book, MacDonald mirrors St. Paul in *Phantastes*.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from a reading of MacDonald’s other books that he was particularly attracted to St Paul’s words.<sup>25</sup> It is also apparent from his published letters that he was drawn to St. Paul, and particularly to the above passage from Corinthians I. MacDonald directly refers to and uses the relevant quotations from St. Paul at least three times in his published letters (69, 292, and 308). Two of these letters are written to Mrs. Cowper-Temple. In one he writes: “Some day God will, I trust, reveal himself to me as he has never done yet, and I shall be as sure as St. Paul” (292). A few months later he exclaims: “But God comes nearer and nearer I *think*. How can I be sure till he actually comes, and I know as I am known!” (308).

Thus, MacDonald was inspired by St. Paul and his famous passage from Corinthians I both in his “real life” and correspondence and in its reflection: his imaginative fiction, *Phantastes*.

## 5. Further Complex Imagery in *Phantastes*

It is in chapter 13 where most of *Phantastes* is reflected and where the most important parts of the book come into focus. However, perhaps the best method to visualize this reduction and inversion of *Phantastes* into chapter 13 is to use MacDonald’s idea, related to the optics involved with mirrors and reflections, of “the ever-changing field of a camera obscura.” This “scientific” model by which to understand the relationship between chapter 13 and the rest of *Phantastes* is supplied by MacDonald in the central [40] chapter of the book (174). To give a few examples of MacDonald’s *camera obscura* effect, it should be noticed that it is Anodos—in a conversation with his sister (narrated by his “Fairy grandmother”)—who originally wishes to enter Fairy Land: “Is there a Fairy-country, brother?” You replied with a sigh, “I suppose there is, if one could find the way into it” (18).

It must be recalled that between Anodos’ conversation with his sister and the emergence of the Fairy Grandmother, a whole night elapses (18-20). On the other hand, Cosmo’s identical wishes to “enter” the world

of the Magic Mirror are “answered” by a similarly described female almost instantaneously:

“I should like to live in *that* room if I could only get into it”

Scarcely had the half-moulded words floated from him, as he stood gazing into the mirror, when, striking him as with a flash of amazement that fixed him in his posture, noiseless and unannounced, glided suddenly through the door into the reflected room, with stately motion, yet reluctant and faltering step, the graceful form of a woman, clothed all in white (163-4).

Thus the time, place, and characters in this latter episode are reflected, reduced in “size” and inverted: the time that elapses is much shorter, the great expanses of Fairy Land are replaced by a room in Prague, and a mortal woman is substituted for the Fairy Grandmother. Nevertheless, it is from Cosmo’s “projections” in the Magic Book that Anodos must draw MacDonald’s and St. Paul’s lessons regarding self-knowledge, maturity and love. It is by means of Anodos immersing himself into the story of Cosmo that in the second part of the book he learns to think like a man, love unselfishly, and finally die the “good death.” This is exactly the self-reflective method MacDonald uses (through Anodos) to describe the process of reading fairy books (like *Phantastes*):

If, for instance, it was a book of metaphysics I opened, I had scarcely read two pages before I seemed to myself to be pondering over discovered truth, and constructing the intellectual machine whereby to communicate the discovery to my fellow men. With some books, however, of this nature, it seemed father as if the process was removed yet a great way further back; and I was trying to find the root of a manifestation, the spiritual truth whence a material vision sprang; or to combine two propositions, both apparently true, either at once or in different remembered moods, and to find the point in which their invisibly converging lines would unite in one, revealing a truth higher than either and differing from both; though so far from being opposed to either, that it was that whence each derived its life and power. Or if the book was one of travels, I found myself the traveller. [...] With a fiction it was the same. Mine was the whole story. For I took the place of the character who was most like myself, and his story was

mine; until, grown weary with the life of years condensed in an hour, or arrived at my deathbed, or the end of the volume, I would awake, with a sudden bewilderment, to the consciousness of my present life (140-41).

It is by means of this type of self-conscious passage that MacDonald continually underscores the complex reflective nature of his book, and invites the reader to reflect on and utilise its many brilliant devices, not least its mirror structure.

## 6. Conclusions

It is God who gives thee thy mirror of imagination, and if thou keep it clean, it will give thee back no shadow but of the truth. (*Paul Faber* 29) [41]

Docherty, McGillis and Gunther, were correct regarding the existence of structures in *Phantastes*. In this paper I identify and explain one such structure, while attempting to provide enough solid examples to convince even the more sceptical of readers of the relevance and coherence of the mirror structure embedded in MacDonald's early masterpiece. On the other hand, I hope this mirror structure paves the way for discoveries of further complex examples of mirror images, and/or other similarly complex structures. It must be remembered that their pioneering work provided us with examples that appear to mirror each other (the two pairs of cottages, the women inhabiting the cottages, the immature Globe Maid and the adult Singing woman into whom she grows, and so on). At the same time, the discovery of a mirror structure may help account for other "singular" examples found by theorists who cannot as easily account for them or locate them within their own conceptions of a unified structure or literary matrix.

I hope that some of the examples above, and the mirror structure they reflect and support, are enough to convince most rational scholars that *Phantastes* is an extremely abstract, sophisticated, and self-reflective book. But, although the book is perplexing, it is by no means beyond a critical understanding. Thus, while there are many further instances of mirroring, and more than one plot and structure in MacDonald's enigmatic book, we are well on our way to understanding some of its hidden secrets and mysteries. Certainly researchers must perform much more work if we are to further lift the veil of Isis from MacDonald's first masterpiece. But the feet, if not the

legs, of the work appear exposed! Let us henceforth be cautious and carefully chose our logical and poetic song to awaken the spirit of the book, instead of rushing at it with further conjectural conclusions that deny meanings and structures. Too many commentators may have been attempting to embrace possible meanings and structures, which in the light of reflection turn out to be somewhat wooden and disappointing. The significance of MacDonald's book, like that of his *Marble Lady*, is not easily grasped.

### **7. Postscript: Desparkings in *Phantastes* Mirrored in the *Lilith* Drafts**

It seems that the mirrorings found in *Phantastes* are not restricted to MacDonald's first romance, but also to its sequels, the *Lilith* Manuscripts. There MacDonald uses and greatly expands many of the ideas related to the release of ego-centred sparks and the importance of the mirror. This is particularly apparent once Lilith undergoes her "repentance" ordeal at Mara's house. First it must be noted that both Lilith and Mara have direct links to cats throughout the story. Once the relationship between Lilith and cats is made secure, it becomes much simpler to examine her desparking and the crucial role of the "unseen heavenly mirror" in *Lilith* and in "Lilith A," the original draft of the book.

Previous to Lilith's repentance, as she is assailed by the "Light of Life"—in the form of the worm-thing—the reader is informed that: "Her hair hung and dripped; then it stood out from her head and emitted sparks" (318), and that: "She ceased, and again came the horror in her hair, the sparkling and flowing alternate" (321). Some of this electric, charged state was perceived by the children in the next room as: "all the air [...] inside and out, was full of cats" (312). Moreover, it is directly after her desparking that she must face her true "image": **[42]**

before her, cast from unseen heavenly mirror, stood the reflection of herself, and beside it a form of resplendent beauty. [...] She knew the one what God had intended her to be, the other what she had made herself (322-3).<sup>26</sup>

In a much more restricted sense, in "Lilith A" there is found an episode which is an almost perfect mirror image of the desparking of the Cat in chapter 3 of *Phantastes*. Near the end of "Lilith A," Fane and the children are attacking Bulika, Lilith's city. Here they confront the cat-like Lilith as the cat of *Phantastes* had been assailed. When they come face to face with Lilith, Fane instructs the child on his shoulders to strike the Lilith/panther with the flat of a sword:



With a shuddering sigh “the lofty lady stood upright” And as she rose the panther shape seemed to wither off her, and all the spots to hurry in a dizzy swim up to her eyes and there settle in her dark flashing orbs, leaving her white as snow from head to foot, except for the mark across her shoulders left by the flat sword. Astarte fell down and began to lick her feet, but she turned to flee. Then as with one accord the children rushed upon her, grasping her wherever they could lay hold, and some climbing on the shoulders of the others to reach her neck. She stumbled on those about her feet and they crowded over her till I feared they would smother her, kissing and patting and behaving as if they had all and each found their mother (369).

The above description is obviously linked to both the smotherings and desparkings I have outlined in this paper, particularly that performed on the cat by the fairies in *Phantastes*. Here MacDonald directly uses the very first electrical episode in *Phantastes* to frame his last such literary episode in “Lilith A.” Just as in the de-sparking of the cat by the fairies, this episode requires some type of metal instrument to conduct the electrical charge away from Lilith, to change her negative “polarity.” This metal instrument (reminiscent of the fairies’ “pins, which they handled like harpoons”) is found by considering that the whole of the army has just one sword among them, and this is used directly as a type of electrical conductor by the child on Fane’s shoulders:

The boy on my shoulders made a blow with the sword at something I did not see, and through the very marrow of my bones went the shudder as of an electric, shock. The next instant there was a noise like a clap of thunder and all the doors of the palace seemed to fly open as with a furious blast of wind. The lady raised herself sitting, filled her arms with children and hugging them to her, burst into tears (“A” 370).<sup>27</sup>

In “Lilith A” this is all that is required for Lilith’s repentance: her physical desparking directly leads to her more positive moral state. And because of the spark emitted by Lilith, the child’s sword becomes “the flaming sword,” adding an interesting religious component to the event.

These electrical descriptions—of almost identical mirroring events—can hardly be in these related, mirroring narratives by accident. Moreover, it must be recalled that MacDonald appears continually to revert to this “scientific” bio-electrical type of psychological/physical cause to describe

the self-centred nature of some of his most memorable characters: too much positive or negative electrical energy. Once the electrical/psychical nature of these charged events is comprehended, it is not difficult to understand how the discharge of this “negative” energy allows for some of MacDonald’s characters to reach a type of desired equilibrium. On the other hand, when it comes to Lilith’s repentance, MacDonald in every version of the book, refers to one and only one type of “therapy” necessary for her cure, the purgation of her [43] negative psychic-electrical energy, followed by a direct confrontation with her “positive” self in the “unseen heavenly mirror.”

MacDonald seems partially to explain the nature of this electricity in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, where it is used to describe the state of the title character:

The spiritual fluid in which his being floated had become all at once more potent, and he was in consequence uncomfortable. A certain intermittent stinging, as from the flashes of some moral electricity, had begun to pass in various directions through the crude and chaotic mass he called himself. (50)

Thus, from almost the beginning, through the middle, till nearly the end of his career, MacDonald continues to use the bioelectrical theories of Liebig and Müller to frame, and add a “scientific” dimension to, his reflective narratives.

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## Notes

1. There is a general discussion of original reviews of *Phantastes* in McGillis (54).
2. Adrian Gunther followed Docherty's and McGillis' articles with two of her own papers on *Phantastes*. Graeme Muirhead, while presenting many insights, does not recognise the importance of some of these. And neither of these critics provide a possible structure for the book. Earlier, McGillis had mentioned a type of general structure centred on chapters 12 and 13 but not specifically on the mirror in chapter 13 (Femininity 34). He makes no references to any of MacDonald's many other more covert mirrorings. Gunther theorises that there may be more than one coherent plot in *Phantastes*. Colin Manlove continues to deny the existence of any coherent structure (*Modern* 55-98; *Impulse* 70-92; *England AT*, 65,93,122). For an account of another plot, co-existing with that described in the present paper, see Soto's "Chthonic Aspects of MacDonald's *Phantastes*."
3. For an autobiographical reference to Liebig and Chemistry, see *Warlock O' Glenwarlock* 326-27).
4. If MacDonald did not attend Liebig's lectures or "Report on the Present State of Organic Chemistry" in 1840, surely he heard about this report, and much more, from William Gregory. Gregory had studied with Liebig and later became editor of his main works in English. According to Broome, Gregory (while Professor of Medicine and Chemistry at King's College, Aberdeen for four of the five years spanning MacDonald's studies at Aberdeen) "was undoubtedly the man who encouraged MacDonald's attempts" to study with Liebig. For Liebig's and Gregory's influence on MacDonald, see Broome. For the state of Organic Chemistry in 1840, see Liebig's *Animal Chemistry*.
5. MacDonald's *Paul Faber, Surgeon* has vivid passages relating the human imagination and understanding to a mirror. See particularly pages 8, 29, 60, 106 and 138.
6. This example also presents the reader with an ironic device MacDonald uses in many sections of *Phantastes*. After providing several fixed rules that describe the above phenomena, Anodos goes on to claim that no such rules exist to explain these same phenomena.
7. McGillis is often close to identifying some of the mirror images in *Phantastes*. But he is mainly concerned with "the community of the centre" and "poetry" and does not explore the significance of the Magic Mirror at the centre of the story. While making the connection between the "community of the centre" and the imagination (51), he stops short of linking the imagination directly with mirrors. Gunther and Muirhead also identify the mirror as a theme in *Phantastes*, but fail to classify this important component as anything more than one theme among many.
8. A river appears again in *Lilith*. Its waters are rejuvenating; it flows down a "stair" and issues from a rock into a cave, then finds its outlet through the "door" of the cave.
9. The "descendants" of these wooden men seem to make their appearance in

*Lilith*—in many ways a literary “mirror” image of *Phantastes*—in the form of the “bad giants” (94-95)! The “little ones” fear being stepped upon by these creatures, and Vane easily, trips them up. In *Lilith* “E” the connection between the wooden men and the bad giants is made even clearer. The giants are described as “a tribe of well-carved wooden dolls into which something that resembled a mind had [45] entered” (244); and Vane is told that a small child had in fact been killed by “a crush of one of [a giant’s] horrid, clumsy feet” (245).

10. Much of the following material dealing with the mirroring of two electrical episodes in *Phantastes* was published as “The Phantastic Spark that Binds all Life” in *Inklings* 20 (2002): 186-98.

11. For more information on the above biochemical theories, see Liebig’s *Animal Chemistry* 1, 11, 31, 219, 230, 233, 260 and so on.

12. McGillis is not only aware of some structural counterparts and the importance of “images,” but is also familiar with some types of polarity in *Phantastes*. Some of these insights are also explored and slightly pursued in Gunther (Structure 43-47). Docherty also is aware of connections between some above-and below-ground fairies (*Literary* 17-76).

13. The words “Cathodic” and “Anodic”—first recorded in 1852 and 1853 respectively—are described in the *O.E.D.* as used in medicine and physiology. Cathodic means: “Of nerve force: Efferent” and Anodic means: “Of nerve force: proceeding upwards.” These terms provide additional direct links to the biochemical and bio-electrical mirroring that MacDonald, with the help of Liebig and Müller, utilizes in *Phantastes*.

14. In *Lilith*. MacDonald uses, expands and reverses aspects of the cat-cathode/ Anodos-anode incidents. Vane tells us that “the cats were all over me in a live cataract, biting wherever they could bite, furiously scratching me anywhere and everywhere. A multitude clung to my body; I could not flee” (252). When he does struggle free he describes how: “They accompanied me in a surrounding torrent, now rubbing, now leaping up against me, but tormenting me no more.” Hence, in this complex electrical mirroring episode it is Vane (whose original name of Fane, in *Lilith* “A” means “Fairy”) who is rushed upon, and it is the cats that hold “every part that afforded a grasp.” However, he is not “held tight” Instead of holding Vane down and forcing him to release a spark, the cats force him to release kinetic energy: to “run” all night The outcome of this “lesson” administered to him by the cataract of cats is that Vane teams not to be so reckless in disregarding Mr Raven’s good advice.

15. For MacDonald’s extensive use of the Greek religious meanings of the words “Anodos” and “Kathodos,” see Soto (Chthonic 20-47).

16. This was pointed out to me by Clarice A. Kuhling.

17. MacDonald may have been expanding Liebig’s and Müller’s theories in the Swedenborgian direction of “correspondences.” Here is how Greville describes his father’s interests in this direction: “He knew enough of Swedenborg’s teachings to feel the truth of *correspondences*, and would find innumerable instances of physical

law tallying with metaphysical, of chemical affinities with spiritual affections (216).  
18. In *There and Back*, MacDonald describes the hero Richard watching a wholly positive type of bio-electric transfer from one young woman to another “it was a revelation to him as he watched the electric play of love that passed from the strong, tender child-like girl to the delicate, weary, starved creature to whom she was ministering” (165).

19. McGillis and Gunther periodically appear to view chapter 12 as the centre of *Phantastes*. However this neither ties up in a numerical fashion nor is there much support within the book for this reading other than a mention of a “community of the centre,” which McGillis interprets as “poetry.” Docherty sees a structural parallel with MacDonald’s chapters 12 and 13 in the play and the preceding mime at the centre of *Hamlet*; and also in the two books that Arthur and Sir Guyon read in the library of the house of Alma in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* 2.10 (*Literary* 48-49). Docherty, however, fails to perceive clearly that in each of these cases the more “shadowy” account

(or performance) is a necessary compliment to the more material one.

20. In *Lilith*, Vane’s first encounter with the Raven is “nose-to-beak” across the mirror that is no longer a barrier between them (8).

21. The connection between Cosmo and Anodos is found by once again analysing carefully the different *Lilith* manuscripts. In *Lilith* “C” it is Sir Cosmo’s portrait that hangs in the library (235-36). In most other versions it is Sir Upward (i.e. Anodos) who is depicted in the important portrait. [46] Moreover, it was Sir Upward who used two mirrors in his polarised light contraption to transport himself to Fairyland (*Lilith* 13; 61-65).

22. In *Lilith*, MacDonald uses the same biblical reference at a more advanced stage of his hero’s development, where Vane begins to feel he is near to seeing God “face to face” (370-71).

23. C. S. Lewis, who claimed MacDonald as his “Master,” appears to intuit some of this “Christian Message” when he claims that after a few hours of reading *Phantastes*, “I knew I had crossed a great frontier.” Unfortunately, he disdains the style and language used by MacDonald to such a degree that most of the profound and brilliant messages and lessons (primarily Classical/pagan and only secondarily Christian) in *Phantastes* were, it appears, completely lost on him. For Lewis’ bizarre understanding of *Phantastes*, MacDonald, and some types of literature and mythology, see the preface to his *George MacDonald: An Anthology* or his equally strange accounts in *Surprised by Joy* (Soto, Chthonic 45-46). When Lewis was not in preaching mode, however, but writing to his boyhood friend Arthur Greeves, he could write very perceptively upon MacDonald, as Stephen Prickett notes (Death 159-62).

24. Rolland Hein, in *The Harmony Within* (70), mentions—in parentheses—that “MacDonald is echoing St Paul in I Corinthians 13.12.” But, though his whole analysis is ultimately from a Christian perspective, he fails to pursue the crucial

implications of this biblical reference. This oversight may be partially explained by the fact that Hein claims that in *Phantastes*. “It is, of course, intuitive perceptions that MacDonald has in mind. Mere intellectual analysis alone tends to leave the spirit emaciated, not strengthened.”

25. St Paul is referred to in many of MacDonald’s books, particularly those novels where a clergyman is an important character. MacDonald alludes to this particular passage from I Cor. in *The Marquis of Lossie* (297).

26. In the five later versions of the story, Lilith is both de-sparked by the “sword serpent, worm thing, fire worm, and confronted by her image in the “unseen heavenly mirror”: (“B” 187-92; “C” 398-401; “D” 165-67; “E” 349-53; *Lilith* 317-23.) Note should also be taken of MacDonald’s enigmatic use of “electrical” terminology to describe these events. The terms include “positive,” “negation,” “a positive Negation,” “a Negation positive” and “an invisible darkness.”

27. The way Lilith here “raised herself sitting” is paralleled, when a lightening flash revives an apparent corpse in “The Cruel Painter” (399) and in *Salted by Fire* (245-

48). **[47]**