

North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies

Volume 35

Article 31

1-1-2016

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Recommended Citation

Burt, Michael (2016) "Phantastes and the Development of the Imagination," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*: Vol. 35, Article 31.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol35/iss1/31>

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Phantastes and the Development of the Imagination

Michael Burt

Since its publication in 1858, George MacDonald's *Phantastes*¹ has perplexed scholars. Some have asserted that the novel is without order, describing it as "remarkably unstructured," "entirely episodic," "a riddle that will not be read," or even without any plot whatsoever.² Such conclusions are not entirely without merit. *Phantastes* was George MacDonald's first work of prose, and being written in "two months . . . without any close work," its apparent disharmony may conceivably be explained as the production of an amateur hand.³ Critics more convincingly bolster these conclusions by pointing to the text itself, which seems to consist of a series of fragmented episodes tied together only by the loose narrative of Anodos' travels through Fairy Land and the spontaneous recurrence of faintly similar imagery along the way. One leaves the story feeling much like the knight, who after hearing the peculiar tale of the winged girl described it as "hearing a child talk in its sleep . . . [He] could not arrange the story in [his] mind at all, although it seemed to leave hers in some certain order of its own" (222). The question is, did *Phantastes* leave George MacDonald's mind with "some certain order of its own" too, even though many have failed to arrange it in theirs? And if so, can that order be traced out? Other scholars, suspecting an underlying structure, have challenged these conclusions of disorderliness and tried their hands at tracing out *Phantastes* structure.⁴ A detailed interpretation of the work as an orderly, cohesive whole has remained elusive.

There seems to be a better explanation for the novel's apparent lack of structure than amateurishness, haphazardness, stream-of-consciousness, or any of the other explanations given to support such conclusions. In this paper, I will argue that *Phantastes*' structure is intentionally disjointed, and that this structure is a literary device employed by MacDonald and connected to both his understanding of the nature of the fairy story and his theory about the imaginative development of an individual, concepts which are themselves interconnected. I will then trace two parallel themes through *Phantastes*, Nature and Books, which are central to MacDonald's theory of imaginative development. Ultimately, I will argue that both the structural form and the content of *Phantastes* tend to the same end: to carry the reader with Anodos

on an elevated spiritual pilgrimage, along a path of imaginative development, out of a rationalism-dominated perspective. As the fairy stories Anodos encounters in *Phantastes* facilitate his imaginative development, so does MacDonald craft *Phantastes*, in both structure and content, to facilitate the development of the imagination of the reader, in accord with his theories on the nature and development of the imaginative faculty.⁵

The first clue that MacDonald intentionally crafted *Phantastes* with a certain disorder is tucked into the excerpts of Novalis with which he prefaces the novel. These describe the ideal fairy story as being simultaneously connected and disconnected, mirroring the paradox MacDonald perceives to be inherent in Nature, sonatas, and dreams. Fairy stories ought to be *ohne Zusammenhang* and yet *zusammenhängend*: “without rational cohesion . . . and without rational connections,” yet simultaneously “a harmonious whole of miraculous things and events,” “filled with associations,” and with “everything . . . interrelated” (3).

In these prefatory texts, the first and second paragraphs are quoted verbatim from Novalis’ *Magische Fragmente*.⁶ These two paragraphs are consistent, describing fairy stories as *unzusammenhängend* and *ohne Zusammenhang*, unconnected and without connection. The last paragraph, however, departs from Novalis’ original text.⁷ This paragraph contradicts the preceding two, describing fairy stories as being *zusammenhängend*, or connected. This was undoubtedly an intentional modification, and it reveals something about *Phantastes*’ structure. It is thus MacDonald himself who creates this paradoxical definition of the fairy story, that it ought to be both connected and unconnected, *zusammenhängend* yet *unzusammenhängend*. It is not coincidental then that the fairy story *Phantastes* which follows these excerpts embodies this definition.

Given the inclusion of these quotes in the preface of *Phantastes*, the title of the work as *A Faerie Romance*, and the content of the story itself, it is obvious that George MacDonald intended to write a fairy story. Therefore it is necessary to explore his understanding of the fairy story as a literary form, beyond the fact that it ought to embody this paradoxical structure. MacDonald describes the ideal fairy story as unconcerned with definiteness: its purpose is not to produce logical conviction or present an explicit point to be understood. Rather, the aim ought to be “to move by suggestion, to cause to imagine . . . to assail the soul of [its] reader as the wind assails an aeolian harp.” The fairy story should seek not to impose upon the reader explicit things to think about, but “to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make

him think things for himself” (“The Fantastic Imagination” 319).

This is not to say that the fairy story has no meaning and no truth, for a fairy story “cannot help having some meaning; if it have proportion and harmony it has vitality, and vitality is truth. The beauty may be plainer in it than the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give no delight.” For MacDonald, the fairy story has an infinity of meanings, contingent upon the idiosyncrasies of the nature and development of the one who reads it. This is because the fairy story does not drill ideas into the individual from the outside, but draws out a meaning from the deep reservoirs within each reader (“TFI” 319). Thus it is the connected-disconnected structure of the fairy story that is ideal in framing this indefiniteness and catalyzing this internal suggestion.

Interestingly, MacDonald describes Nature in identical terms as the ideal fairy story. This paradoxical quality of fairy stories is inherently a quality of Nature itself: “A fairy story is like a vision without rational connections, a harmonious whole of miraculous things and events—as, for example . . . *Nature itself* (emphasis mine)” (3). But the similarity between Nature and fairy stories goes beyond merely form: fairy stories ought also to mirror the highest purpose of Nature as designed by God. What is that purpose? The highest purpose of Nature, MacDonald argues, is to “put a man into that mood or condition in which thoughts come of themselves” (“Wordsworth’s Poetry” 254). Therefore, both Nature and the fairy story share this indefinite aim: to be mood-engendering and suggestive, to operate deeper than thought, stirring up the feelings and powers that underlie all thought (“TFI” 319). This suggestive quality draws out vague feelings—as Anodos continually experiences throughout his journey—which encourage the process of giving form to these unformed thoughts, an exercise of the imaginative faculty.

The inextricable connection between Nature and the fairy story, in both structure and purpose, is due to the fact that they are both products of the imagination. For MacDonald, Nature proceeded from the imagination of God as fairy stories proceed from the imagination of humans. The imagination of humans is entirely reliant upon the forms of Nature for its own imaginings: it is impossible for a person to imagine any form not entirely derived from those which God has created for him or her to perceive. God imagines new forms *ex nihilo*; one can only rearrange and modify the already-existing, divinely-imagined forms. As MacDonald describes, “it is God’s things, his embodied thoughts, which alone a man has to use, modified

and adapted to his own purposes, for the expression of his thoughts” (“TFI” 320). Therefore, even the most erratic and absurd imaginings of a human are but a combination and modification of the original imaginings of God. Further, since the imagination is designed in the image of the imagination of God, the operation of the imagination ought to imitate the operation of God’s imagination. The highest imaginative productions of humans are therefore those which come nearest in imitation to those of God in both purpose and in form: hence MacDonald’s ideal that the fairy story ought to mirror Nature in both its paradoxical structure and in its indefinite “mood-engendering, thought-provoking” aims. Naturally, the imagination is thus endowed with an inherent sanctity and importance, being so derived from the imagination of God.

There are, however, two ways in which the imagination of humans differs from the imagination of God. For one, as has been noted, the imagination of humans is completely derivative and therefore secondary to the imagination of God: there is an impassable gulf between the original creator of the materials and the workers who operate upon those materials (“The Imagination” 2-3). Secondly, unlike the imagination of God, the imagination of humans functions also as a discovering faculty. The purpose of the imaginative faculty in discovery is “to inquire into what God has made” beyond the reaches of pure intellect (“The Imagination” 2). The imagination builds upon the scaffolds of reason, probing the depths of the unknown, hypothesizing, drawing faint analogues and connections from distant realms, and in these operations driving humankind forward into greater understanding. It goes without saying that an omniscient mind cannot discover in this way.

Having explored MacDonald’s perspective on the nature of the imagination and its operations, it is necessary now to consider his theory of imaginative development. He describes the development of the imagination as analogous to the development of the body: like the body, the imagination’s growth is dependent upon food and exercise fitting to it (“The Imagination” 36). The foods most fitting to the imagination, according to MacDonald, are undoubtedly Nature and Books.⁸ The reason these are the most fitting foods of the imagination is the fact that they contain vast storehouses of forms which an individual can perceive and use to give form to their own moods and thoughts. Nature, consisting of divinely-created forms, is the primary repository of forms, and therefore contains those forms which are most evocative, suggestive, and analogous to the deep thoughts and feelings of

man. As MacDonald writes: “The world is—allow us the homely figure—the human being turned inside out. All that moves in the mind is symbolized in Nature” (“The Imagination” 9). Fairy stories, therefore, are the derivative repository of forms from which man can perceive new forms that have been rearranged and reshaped by the imaginations of other men and women.

In order to encourage the exercise of the imagination, the paradoxical connected-disconnected quality of Nature and the fairy story is ideal. This paradoxical quality stifles the shallow inquiries of reason, simultaneously catalyzing the far-reaching imagination to probe, “observing vital phenomena, putting things together, speculating from what [is seen] to what [is not seen].”⁹ Therefore, the more fully the fairy story embodies this paradox inherent in Nature, the more room it creates for the imagination to be exercised; and accordingly, the greater its contribution to the reader’s imaginative development. It is in works like *Phantastes*, where connections are only vaguely perceived, where cohesion is elusive, that the imagination is most greatly tried, and therefore, most greatly developed. On the other hand, in stories in which the individual elements of the story are neatly tied together, with the structure and connectedness of the plot perspicuous, the imagination need not be so thoroughly exercised.

In light of his theories about the imagination and its development, it is my suggestion that MacDonald intentionally crafted *Phantastes* with an abstruse structure, mirroring Nature’s paradox, in order to join into this divine purpose of the education of humankind. This paradoxical structure, in addition to the multitude of natural and fantastical forms which fill *Phantastes*, facilitate the development of the imagination of readers, who are carried along in their own developmental pilgrimage by *Phantastes* just as Anodos is furthered in his imaginative development by the fairy stories and feeling-inducing forms of Nature he encounters in his travels. Turning to *Phantastes*, I will now trace these two foods of the imagination, Nature and Books, typified in water and fairy stories, as parallel themes through the novel.

Nature in *Phantastes*

The first and greatest food of the imagination is Nature, as MacDonald says, “No doubt the best beginning [to imaginative development], especially if the child be young, is an acquaintance with Nature” (“The Imagination” 2). In *Phantastes*, Anodos’ relationship with Nature progresses from remote to immediate. Anodos’ first acquaintance with

Nature occurs the evening before his pilgrimage into Fairy Land, when he beholds a remote vision out of his bedroom window of “a whole heaven of stars, small and sparkling in the moonlight. Below lay a sea, still as death and hoary in the moon, sweeping into bays and around capes and islands, away, away, I knew not whither” (5). This vision quickly dissipates, but Anodos is immediately assured by a low sweet voice that such an ocean really exists in Fairy Land. The next morning, when he wakes up, his room transforms into a natural scene on the edge of the forest. Through it runs a stream, which he washes in before embarking upon the path leading into Fairy Land (7-8). This washing is his first encounter with water, which appears again and again throughout his journey until his complete immersion into it. Awakened and washed, Anodos then enters upon the path to Fairy Land and travels the entire day (9-10).

After a day of traveling, Anodos grows hungry, but he worries that the forest of Fairy Land contains nothing to meet his human necessities (11). A peculiar encounter immediately follows. He arrives at a cottage where a mother and daughter live “on the borders of the fairies’ country.” The mother tells him, after looking into his eyes, that he is of such a constitution that he needs to eat from Fairy Land, although his “education and the activity of his mind” have kept him from realizing this need. This seems to signify his developmental immaturity, and it is an immaturity that is outside of his education and rational experience (12). Here it is hinted that eating and hunger have multiple connotations, and may be connected to the imagination, an allegorical allusion which MacDonald has suggested in other places.¹⁰ This immaturity is further suggested by his inability to discern the movements of the ash tree and his inability to perceive the faeries (19). Continually throughout his journey, Anodos’ developmental progression will be demonstrated in a few ways: he will abandon a firm adherence to rationalistic thought patterns, his ability to perceive forms will increase, and he will become increasingly childlike in his relations to the motherly figures he encounters.

As Anodos journeys further into Fairy Land, the forms of Nature which he encounters become increasingly complex. First, at the aforementioned cottage on the borders of faerie country, he enters the little garden and beholds “the young children of the flower fairies.” In this episode, Anodos appears still thoroughly of a rational state of mind, contemplating the nature of cause and effect in the flower faeries’ habitation in the flowers. He seems to be developing, however, when he admires the knowledge of the

mother in the cottage, acknowledging that “intercourse with the faeries is not a bad education” after all (19). Later on, Anodos will again recognize this truth, that interaction with Fairy Land seems superior to his wholly rational education. In the second cottage, for instance, he ponders on the fact that in the motherly woman, “as in the woman [he] met on [his] first entering the forest, there should be such superiority to her apparent condition” (60).

The evening after arriving at the first cottage on the border of Fairy Land, Anodos departs and embarks again on his pilgrimage, crossing into the forest of Fairy Land. He wanders into the outskirts of the woods and observes the strange habits of the small shrubs and creeping creatures of the forest floor. He again shows development out of his purely rationalistic understanding when he describes the motions of the beetles in their pursuit of the glowworms. After realizing he had encountered something which he “could not account for,” Anodos reflects that “it is no use trying to account for things in Fairy Land; and one who travels there soon learns to forget the idea of doing so” (27). Instead, Fairy Land teaches one to live as a child, full of wonder and amusement. This childlikeness is a state of being of which MacDonald’s fondness is well known.¹¹

Another sign of Anodos development is his increasingly childlike relationship with the women he encounters in the cottages. In the first cottage, he remains relatively aloof from the woman and her daughter, ignoring their counsel (14). In the second cottage, he appears much more accepting of being dependent, and of being perceived as a youth. The mother in this second cottage calls Anodos a boy, which leads him to reflect, “I should have ill endured, the day before, to be called *boy*; but now the motherly kindness of the word went to my heart; and, like a boy indeed, I burst into tears. She soothed me right gently . . . (58). Then, in the third cottage, Anodos’ relates to the woman like an even younger child, feeling “like a boy who has got home from school,” laying his head on her bosom, weeping, and allowing her to feed him like a baby (165).

As Anodos continues deeper into the forests of Fairy Land, he has the feeling that larger forms move about all around him, though he notes that “*as yet* I could discern none of them” (28). Wandering deeper into the forest, he soon is troubled by the shadow of the Ash-tree’s hand, which lingers over him as he walks (29). In accord with MacDonald’s theory of Nature, this form of Nature produces in him vague feelings that operate below the level of thought. Unable to perceive the form of the enemy, Anodos throws himself on the ground and looks towards the moon. In this way he beholds its terrible

form, but reflects that the sensation is indescribable and cannot be translated, “just as one cannot translate a horrible odour, or a ghastly pain, or a fearful sound, into words” (31).

Anodos spends that night in the woods, protected in the arms of the Beech-tree (36). The next morning, he continues traveling deeper into the woods. He soon grows hungry again, and is surprised to come across plenty of strange foods and nuts he had never seen before (39). This time, he decides to eat from the food of the forest, which affects him beyond satisfying his physical appetite. The food operates upon his senses, bringing him into a “more complete” relationship with Nature, and immediately allows him to perceive more clearly the vague forms which he had felt around him but could not yet perceive. As he describes, “the human forms appeared much more dense and defined; more tangibly visible, if I may say so. I seemed to know better which direction to choose when any doubt arose. I began to feel in some degree what the birds meant in their songs, though I could not express it in words, any more than you can some landscapes” (39). This feeling, however, is soon diminished as he walks out of the forest into a treeless, desert region where he is dampened by thirst.

Luckily, Anodos stumbles across a small stream, which he follows out of the desert and into a small cave. It is worth noting in passing the pattern of streams guiding Anodos throughout his journey, from the beginning of his departure out of his room, to his floating on the stream to the Fairy Palace. Upon entering into this cave, he beholds the harmony of a cluster of ferns, which “wrought in [him] like a poem” (41). He also immediately quenches his thirst by drinking from a small well of clean water. This drinking, like his eating from the forest, causes effects beyond the satisfaction of physical satisfaction of thirst. It also increases his ability to perceive forms, although this time the forms are clearly internal forms of the imagination. Immediately after drinking the water, Anodos lays down on a rock as his imagination runs rampant, “in a delicious reverie for some time; during which all lovely forms, and colours, and sounds seemed to use my brain as a common hall, where they could come and go, unbidden and unexcused. I had never imagined that such capacity for simple happiness lay in me, as was now awakened by this assembly of forms and spiritual sensations, which yet were far too vague to admit of being translated into any shape common to my own and another mind” (35).

The imagery used in this passage about the common hall of his brain and the assembly of forms forebodes his later entrance into the Common Hall

of the Fairy Palace where he beholds the assembly of forms (134-140). This interpretation is further supported by the emphasis of the palace of Phantasy as being made, just like the stone in the grotto, of the whitest marble (84). These connections suggest that, perhaps, the hall of Phantasy represents the imaginative faculty of his own brain, and his entrance into Fairy Palace is an allegory of his entrance into the depths of the imaginative faculty. This interpretation is supported by MacDonald's included quotations from Fletcher's *Purple Island* and Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, including the title *Phantastes* itself; the clear influence of these works on him; and the reference to this allegory by Greville MacDonald in his preface to the 1905 edition of *Phantastes*. Such an allusion is also explicitly made by Anodos himself, as he exults, "But how have I wandered into the fairyland of the soul, while as yet I only float towards the fairy palace of Fairy Land!" (83).¹²

When he awakes from his reverie, Anodos notices a marble structure and begins to reflect on the story of Pygmalion, whom he describes as moulding "into a visible body the thought already clothed with form in the unseen hall of [his] brain" (42). Like Pygmalion, Anodos gives form to his thought, clothing his vague perceptions in a fitting form "more near the face that had been born within [him] in [his] soul than anything [he] had seen before in nature and art" (43). The result is the creation of the beautiful white marble lady, whom he brings to life by means of a song. Pygmalion and Anodos here typify the use of the imagination, "that faculty which gives form to thought" ("The Imagination" 2).

It is worth noting that Anodos' development is not entirely linear, but instead includes both progressions and regressions. One of these regressions procures an effect directly contrary to that which he experienced after eating the food and drinking the water in the forest. The Maid of the Alder lures him into spending the night with her in a dark cave by appearing to him in the likeness of the beautiful white lady of the marble. Immediately resulting from this deceptive encounter, he experiences a compunction and disconnection from Nature, as he describes: "The birds were singing, but not for me. All the creatures spoke a language of their own, with which I had nothing to do, and to which I cared not to find the key anymore." An additional consequence of this encounter is a complete loss of appetite, for both food and water, demonstrating the interpretation already suggested, that Anodos' development and appetite go hand in hand (57-58).

Another regression occurs due to his introduction to the skeptical husband in the second cottage, whose countenance makes him disbelieve

in Fairy Land and attribute all of his experiences to “the wandering dream of a diseased imagination” (60). Nature restores his belief in Fairy Land the next morning, as he looks out of the window of the daughter’s room into the forest beyond. As is common throughout the novel, Anodos here describes Nature in oceanic imagery, “The trees bathed their heads in the waves of the morning, while their roots were planted in deep gloom; save where on the borders the sunshine broke against their stems, or swept in long streams through their avenues, washing with brighter hue all the leaves over which it flowed” (66, 74).

Immediately following Anodos’ stay in the second cottage is his experience in the Church of Darkness, where he attains his shadow, which seems to be antithetical to his spiritual development. As the series of episodes regarding the shadow’s influence which follow demonstrate, the shadow “de-fairies” what it falls upon, is in opposition to the sun, and continually leaves Anodos feeling gloomy and shameful (75-80). It also gradually diminishes his ability to perceive “the fairies of the higher orders” until his arrival at the fairy palace (86). After departing from the village of perceptual distortion, Anodos soon arrives at a desert region populated by goblins. He walks hopelessly and spiritless through this arid region, until, once again, he is restored by a stream. Here he drinks and he then follows the stream in a new direction (80). The stream guides Anodos back to a region on the bank of a river where trees and shrubs live, and his joy and belief in Fairy Land are restored (81). On this river, he boards a little boat which carries him to the Fairy Palace (82).

In the center of the Fairy Palace, he discovers his own room, still exactly the same but now deemed “The Chamber of Sir Anodos” and located in the heart of the Fairy Palace. Notably, here he eats and drinks more “heartily and joyfully” than ever since entering fairy land (88). Anodos then plunges into the Fairy Bath in the middle of the Palace, which “clothed [him] with a new sense and its object both in one,” again increasing his capacity to discern the forms around him (92). This is a progression from his previous contact with water, as he describes, “the waters lay so close to me, they seemed to enter and revive my heart.” Immediately following this bathing, as expected, Anodos ability to perceive forms increases, and he “began to discern faint, gracious forms here and there throughout the building” (92). He continues to bathe in this bath daily, and as a result is little bothered by his demon shadow (93).

At last comes the climax of his contact with water, when he

plunges himself into the gray ocean foreseen in the vision that preceded his pilgrimage into Fairy Land. As he describes, “I stood on the shore of a wintry sea, with a wintry sun just a few feet above its horizon-edge. It was bare, and waste, and gray. Hundreds of hopeless waves rushed constantly shorewards, falling exhausted upon a beach of great loose stones, that seemed to stretch miles and miles in both directions” (159). Anodos plunges himself into the waters, “I stood one moment and gazed into the heaving abyss beneath me; then plunged headlong into the mounting wave below. A blessing, like the kiss of a mother, seemed to alight on my soul; a calm, deeper than that which accompanies a hope deferred, bathed my spirit” (160). Following this immersion, he has a series of unspeakable visions of fantasy and dreams of joy, as he floats on a boat away from the Palace of Fairy Land (161-162). The presence of Nature in Anodos’ journey is abruptly diminished after this immersion, and the focus of the narrative changes, until he is unified through death with the Spirit of Nature itself (231-232).

Books in *Phantastes*

George MacDonald describes that, besides Nature, “books, although not the only, are the readiest means of supplying food convenient for [the imagination]” (“The Imagination” 2). In *Phantastes*, Anodos’ relationship with books follows an almost identical trajectory as his relationship with Nature, beginning with a remote experience and progressing into a complete immersion. Anodos’ relationship with books progresses in two ways: for one, the complexity and length of the texts he encounters increases; secondly, his relationship to the stories themselves deepens.

Anodos has his first remote contact with books the night before his pilgrimage into Fairy Land, as he listens to his younger sister read a fairy story to him. She asks him if there is a fairy-country, to which he responds, “there probably is somewhere, if we only knew the way into it” (5). The next morning, when his room transforms into a natural scene, he follows a stream flowing out of his room and finds the way into Fairy Land (7). When he arrives in the first cottage with the mother and her daughter on the borders of Fairy Land, he discovers a book of tales and reads the whole afternoon. Here he remains separate from the story in the text and still on the borders of Fairy Land (15). His next encounter with stories comes when he is contemplating the marble lady in the grotto, and he reflects on the many “histories” of Fairy Land which tell of the transformation of substances, and which encourage him in his endeavor to bring the marble form to life (42). After he leaves

the grotto of the white marble lady and re-enters the forest, he encounters Sir Percival, whom he read about in the cottage, indicating a progression in his relation to fairy stories (48). Books appear again when he arrives at the cottage of the skeptical husband. Though his belief in Fairy Land disappears due to his encounter with this skeptical man, his belief in Fairy Land is restored when he sees the skeptical's daughter reading a book of fairy stories (61).

It may be noted in passing that books also appear able to have a negative effect on Anodos' development. Heading out of the second cottage and back into the forest of Fairy Land, he once again refuses to heed a warning, and is soon drawn into the house of the ogre.¹³ Entering the Church of Darkness, he is negatively affected by the ogre's reading of a story of the primacy of darkness over light (86). This experience, like the encounter with the Maid of the Alder and the skeptical husband, causes him to doubt Fairy Land, ruins his appetite, and lessens his ability to perceive the forms around him.

The most significant bulk of Anodos' contact with books, as with water, occurs after he arrives at the Fairy Palace. Following his immersion in the Fairy Bath, he is immediately immersed in the Palace library: he reads and reads for days on end (93). Here his imagination reaches the height of its exercise, as it operates upon the books, and he further progresses in his relation to the stories he reads (95). In the middle of recounting the first story about the world of maidens, Anodos abruptly slips himself into their world, suddenly acting alongside the characters of the story (102). In the second story, the story of Cosmo, Anodos is immersed even further in the story, uniting with the main character himself: as he describes, "while I read it, I was Cosmo, and his history was mine" (106).

Further supporting this interpretation is the baptismal, resurrection language which MacDonald uses in concluding Anodos' experience in the library, that in it he was "buried and risen again in these old books" (132). As expected, this literary immersion brings his imagination to be exercised in greater strength than before, as he says, "[I] sometimes sat in a chair and dreamed deliciously . . . sometimes I acted within myself a whole drama...sometimes walked deliberately through the whole epic of a tale . . . sometimes ventured to sing a song . . ." (135). Anodos has here progressed from a remote relationship to books to a complete immersion in them: he has progressed from not knowing the way into Fairy Land, to becoming its main character.

Considering these stories through this interpretive framework, their relation to the plot is clarified, and they become crucial elements of the story: they demonstrate the climax of Anodos' relationship to books, and concurrently, his progress in imaginative development. This naturally challenges the conclusions of those critics who have undermined these stories, describing them as useless additions, as ruining the structural integrity of the story, or as separate works better off cut out of *Phantastes* altogether and published as autonomous works.¹⁴ Just as with Nature, Anodos' contact with books is abruptly diminished following this final immersion. After these two complete immersions, in Nature and Books, Anodos' development changes course: having developed nobility in thought, he proceeds on to the development of nobility in deed.

There is general consensus that *Phantastes* is a story depicting a pilgrimage of spiritual development. There is no better evidence to support this interpretation than George's own son Greville, who describes *Phantastes* as a "spiritual pilgrimage out of this world of impoverishing possessions into the fairy Kingdom of Heaven."¹⁵ But for George MacDonald, the development of the imaginative faculty "is one of the main ends of the divine education of life with all its efforts and experiences," one of the crucial elements of an individual's spiritual pilgrimage ("The Imagination" 35-36). By interpreting *Phantastes* in light of MacDonald's theory of the imagination and its development, I have supported my belief that much of this spiritual pilgrimage depicted in *Phantastes* is the development of the imagination. Further, I have argued that by intentionally crafting *Phantastes* with the connected-disconnected, imagination-catalyzing structure of the fairy story, and by filling the narrative with the two greatest foods of the imagination, Nature and Books, the reader is carried alongside Anodos into the development of the imagination, not by means of definite meanings or literal presentations, but by the harmonious tumult of vaguely suggestive, mood-engendering imagery: *Phantastes*.

Endnotes

1. References are from the Everyman edition, published by J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, Bedford Street, London, 1940.
2. For example: Richard Reis (*George MacDonald*. New York: Twayne, 1972. p. 89) describes the plot as "remarkably unstructured"; Robert Lee Wolff (*The Golden Key*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1961. p. 50) describes it as "entirely episodic"; Colin Manlove (*Modern Fantasy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975.

p. 75) describes it as having a “highly disconnected character”; Gerald Massey in *Athenaeum* (580) describes it as “a riddle that will not be read”; and William Raeper (*George MacDonald*. Tring: Lion, 1987. p. 145) describes it as “a novel without a plot.”

3. *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p. 290.
4. See Docherty, John. “A Note on the Structure and Conclusion of Phantastes.” *North Wind* 7 (1988) pp. 25-30; McGillis, Roderick. “The Community of the Centre.” *For the Childlike*. Ed. Roderick McGillis. Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1992. pp.51-65.; Gunther, Adrian. “The Structure of George MacDonald’s Phantastes.” *North Wind* 12 (1993): 43-59.; Reis, Richard. *George MacDonald*, p.90-92; Manlove, Colin. *Modern Fantasy*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975.
5. The scattered songs (sonatas), which are also paired with the exercise of the imagination (see *Phantastes*, 44), and which are scattered throughout *Phantastes*, also suggest this interpretation. They too are listed in the prefacing quotes as paradoxical and contributing to the development of the imagination, though I chose not to discuss them in this paper.
6. See Novalis. *Magische Fragmente*, Kapitel 24.
7. I am indebted to R.L. Wolff (*The Golden Key*) for pointing out this discrepancy.
8. The emphasis will be on a peculiar type of Nature and Books: water and the fairy story, which have primacy in *Phantastes*.
9. See *A Dish of Orts*, p. 3,37; Hein, p. 150.
10. See, for example, *The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture*.
11. See “A Child in the Midst.” *Unspoken Sermons*.
12. Also, “My imagination filled my whole soul . . . in the midst of its white hall of phantasy” (158).
13. Both the Beech-tree and Sir Percival warn him, then woman in second cottage about the ogre (66), but he doesn’t heed any of them.
14. For example Wolff (*The Golden Key*, p. 78) says of the Cosmo story: “MacDonald would have been well advised to omit it from *Phantastes* and publish it separately.”
15. *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p. 299.

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