

Did William Morris Start MacDonald Writing Fantasy?

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William Morris' early prose romances (1856) may be both the stimulus for MacDonald's turning from poetry to prose writing, and a particular source for Phantastes (1858). Phantastes shares with Morris' romances an interest in medievalism, in dreams and dream structures, in the relation of the reader or dreamer to art or life, and in such topics as death, sex, impulsive passion and the after-life. This indebtedness remains likely even though MacDonald is ultimately a mystic, concerned with the next world, whereas Morris' gaze is always turned back to this one.

In December-January 1857-58, George MacDonald began writing *Phantastes*, his first long piece of prose fiction, a dream-romance about a wanderer in a quasi-medieval Fairy Land. Throughout 1856, William Morris, in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* he had helped to found, published what are now known as his early romances in prose, all seven of them set in a medieval context, and many of them involving dream narratives. Until 1855 MacDonald had thought of himself as a poet, and he cannot have been discouraged by the reviews of his first substantial book of verse *Within and Without* in that year—not the least of which reviews, hailing him as a “genius,” came from the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* itself (724-32). Nor was he unable to write narratives in poetic form, as *Within, and Without* amply shows. Nevertheless he would have been aware as a struggling writer that prose fiction could call on a fair larger reading public (Raeper 125).

MacDonald was already well acquainted with prose dream-romances by German Romantic writers, particularly Novalis, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué; and he had certainly read the fantastic stories of Poe and Hawthorne. Until Morris, however, the only significant English dream-narratives had emerged from the poets Coleridge [*The Ancient Mariner* (1798, 1816)] and Tennyson [in *Poems* (1842)]. It is therefore quite possible that Morris was the stimulus for MacDonald's turning to prose fantasy. The transition to prose is not quite complete, for *Phantastes* is still studded with poetry, whether in the epigraphs to each chapter or in the ballads and lyrics that thread the narrative itself. But then the same can be said of Morris himself, for several narrative poems by him accompany the prose

romances in the *Magazine*, and these are later included with a great many more similarly dream-like and ‘medieval’ poems in his famous collection *The Death of Guenevere* in 1858.

Is Morris then to be considered as no more than a stimulus? Is there anything that MacDonald owes directly to his narratives? Certainly several of Morris’ [61] stories have many of the disconnections and shifting scenes of a dream—“Lindenberg Pool,” “A Dream,” “The Story of the Unknown Church,” “The Hollow Land”—and are closer to MacDonald’s idiom than the work of any other previous writer. For if we consider MacDonald’s other possible ‘dream’ sources, Blake, Novalis, Hoffmann, Shelley and even Poe, we find that only in Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), which dramatises the struggle between reason and the unconscious mind, is to be found quite that disconnectedness which Novalis himself proposed as the true idiom of both nature and art: “Ein Märchen ist wie ein Traumbild ohne Zusammenhang [...] die Natur selbst”; “hier tritt die Zeit der Anarchie, der Gesetzlosigkeit, Freiheit, der Naturstand der Natur.” These words formed part of extracts from Novalis’ *Die Fragmente* (1798-9) which MacDonald used as the epigraph for *Phantastes*. Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800) is a German *Rasselas*, the story of a Württemberg youth in search of his desire; but only in stories told by characters whom Heinrich meets is there anything of fantasy, and then it is in the form of allegorical vision rather than of dream. Hoffmann’s stories, such as “Der goldne Topf” (1814) or “Der Sandmann” (1816-17), involve not dreaming but moving between rational and imaginative visions of things. Shelley’s *Alastor* (1816), often taken as a source for *Phantastes* merely because MacDonald quotes from it, is a coherent picture of a wanderer in nature who pays with his life for his solitude. Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) invites a debate between rational and supernaturalist interpretations of reality. However, the house here is a symbol of the mind, and entry to it involves exploring the unconscious, the incoherent character of which here may be partly expressed through these opposed views of the events.

It is only as we approach Tennyson in such poems as “The Kraken” (1829) or “The Lady of Shallott” (1830), that we truly begin to get inside the unconscious, and disconnected thoughts and unintegrated images become more noticeable in literature. In *Wuthering Heights* (1847) we are inside an often chaotic and jagged narrative, reflective of the pull of the unconscious, here expressed in the dead Cathy. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), the unconscious, imaged in Thornton’s caged first wife, is seen as dangerous, and Jane

will only have a Thornton who is wholly purified of his dark self. In the 1840s and 1850s English literature in general becomes more reflective of a new interest in the subconscious and in the nature of dreams in the young discipline of psychology: it is at this time that we see the beginnings of an interest in writing literary fantasy, in such writers as F.E. Paget, Dickens, Ruskin, Browning and Thackeray. The super-realism of the Pre-Raphaelite programme would not seem suited to such an interest, but in fact the Pre-Raphaelites often apply their realism to fantastic narratives with an obsession that makes individual items stand out from their contexts with surreal and disruptive force. Their pictorial realism did not extend to subject-matter, for most of their work portrays medieval or biblical subjects. Morris, however, stands out among them for his interest in dreams—an interest he announced as early as 1856: “My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another” (*Letters* 17). [62]

In Morris’ dream stories we find that the unconscious becomes primary as it has not done before. In Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher” the narrator escapes with his questioning reason intact; and Browning’s “Childe Roland” (1855) has a direction and purpose even while it moves through a landscape of nightmare. In Morris’ “Lindenberg Pool” however, the narrator “Morris” describes himself reading a story in Thorpe’s *Northern Mythology*, and then beginning “whether I would or no” to amplify it; and what he then begins with, is a narrator for his own version who is already, in a sense, in a dream. This narrator has come by night to the dismal tarn Lindenberg Pool with rope and leaded plumb line to fathom it (there is nothing of this in Thorpe): in other words his actions make no sense, and he himself questions them, until he baldly says that it was on this night ten years previously that he killed a man. We are left to translate this at another level as a man trying to plumb the depths of his own unconscious mind. When this nineteenth-century ‘investigator’ finds himself going through a leafless wood in which living leaves are falling about him; when from lying down he finds himself moving, and then riding on a mule, in a sapling-filled landscape; when he finds himself dressed in long black clothes instead of “the serviceable broadcloth of the nineteenth century”; and when he accepts that he is now a thirteenth-century priest taking the sacrament to a dying man, the mental adjustments he makes are so perfunctory as to suggest the rapid transitions of dreams.

I shall go mad—I am mad—I am gone to the Devil—I have lost my identify; who knows in what place, in what age of the world I am living now? Yet I will be calm; I have seen all these

things before, in pictures surely, or something like them. I am resigned, since it is no worse than that I am a priest then, in the dim, far-off thirteenth century, riding.... (*Romances* 152)

This passage of gradual transitions from the nineteenth-century world to a fantastic one almost certainly helped to suggest the one in *Phantastes* where Anodos awakes from sleep to find his bedroom slowly transforming itself to a glade in Fairy Land (compare also E.T.A. Hoffmann, 42, 55, 68-9).

MacDonald does not however describe the shifts of Anodos' mind, but subsumes them in the changes of his room, so that when they are complete he accepts that he is in Fairy Land. But what is common to both MacDonald and Morris is the way both narrators are in a dream: when Anodos wakes in Fairy Land we know he is truly dreaming. —*Phantastes* is the only story of MacDonald's apart from "The Golden Key" in which the narrator so completely surrenders to the dream, and lets it carry him where it wanders will. In the *Curdie* books reason and order are values; in *At the Back of the North Wind* young Diamond oscillates between the strange world of North Wind and his own Victorian one in London; and in *Lilith*, Vane will not give up control over his own actions and lie down to sleep. In Morris the surrender is complete, as when the narrators of "A Dream," "The Story of the Unknown Church" and "The Hollow Land" become sucked into their stories and reveal themselves as having long been dead, writing from amid the fantastical dreams beyond the walls of the world. [63]

Particularly in Morris' dream romance "The Story of the Unknown Church" the result is similar to the kind of narrative disconnection later found in *Phantastes*. The master-mason who tells the story of his friend Amyot and his daughter Margaret, is throughout their lives carving the stonework of a new church. His mind constantly drifts, in a sort of stream of consciousness, so that the whole story of the two others becomes perfunctory, even while it is created about them, like his own carving or a tapestry. Three of its eight pages have passed in description of the church as it was six hundred years ago, with its garden and surroundings and the visitors who sometimes passed by, until we have the first passing mention of Margaret; and we have gone through more than half the tale before we hear of Amyot. After these reveries, there is a series of dreams, in which the mason describes himself in several strange places with Amyot. In one, he stands by a river of waving weeds amidst a flat land, and Amyot appears beside him transfigured with light. Next, the narrator finds himself in a small boat beneath a tall basalt cliff on top of which is a castle which is being seized: the castle banner is thrown down, and he watches

its slow progress down the cliff; a knight then appears on the battlements and throws down a bunch of wall-flowers; and then this knight reveals himself as Amyot, looking sorrowful. Again the scene shifts, and the narrator is walking with Amyot in a music-filled garden with beautifully coloured birds in the trees: but just then he turns his head away from looking at Amyot and the whole scene disappears, and he is back chipping at his church. This ‘inner wandering’ is what we find in *Phantastes*, where Anodos is inside the Fairy Land of his dreaming mind, which takes him where it will—whether it be to a fairy palace, another planet, a wild sea or a woodland church. The difference is that Morris’ narrator is weaving a centrifugal design, in which Amyot and Margaret are leitmotifs, whereas Anodos’ seeming ramblings have a hidden purpose and direction.

In both Morris and MacDonald, the protagonist is uniquely helpless, first or last: either he acts and then is the slave of his act, or else he is driven by events until he is able to act for himself. Because they kill Queen Swanhilda, the men of the House of Lilies in “The Hollow Land” suffer defeat, death and purgation in the afterlife. Possibly through murdering another man, the narrator of “Lindenberg Pool” is at the mercy of his unconscious; but in the end he is able to defy its demons and escape. Because the lovers in “A Dream” dare to enter the strange “Red Pike” they have to endure separation for centuries, he in a cold little ivory house and she in various guises on earth, until they can finally meet beyond death. The master-mason who narrates “The Story of the Unknown Church,” while carving the beauties of the world and those in it, cannot influence, only commemorate them; and like the characters he loves, he too is dead. So too in MacDonald’s *Phantastes*, where Anodos, who can at first only ‘act and wander,’ has things happen to him, such as his encounters with the benign Beech Tree or the predatory Alder and Ash, or his discoveries of fairy cottage or palace; or he acts on blind impulse, as in singing to release a lady from an alabaster block, opening a cupboard and meeting his evil shadow, or seizing a little girl’s singing globe. [64] Towards the end of his story Anodos begins to make choices, if often mistaken ones: and at the last he is able both to yield up his beloved white lady to another, and to give his life to save the worshippers in a forest church from danger. The whole of Anodos’ journey is in a sense to learn how to be property passive, in the sense not of self-surrender but of willed self-denial. This is the point where what has been a kind of sleep becomes death into new life.

Death, the ultimate form of passivity, is a recurrent theme in both Morris and MacDonald. “Lindenberg Pool” centres on a supposedly

dying man in bed; “The Story of the Unknown Church” is about the death of all things, and even their memorials; “A Dream” describes a purgatorial afterlife followed by a final death; “The Hollow Land” also portrays a land of purgatory after the deaths of the men of the House of Lilies. In all Morris’ early romances, both the dream narratives and the stories of heroic action, “Gertha’s Lovers,” “Svend and his Brethren” and “Golden Wings”—and in the poems that follow them in *The Death of Guenevere* (1858)—we see the protagonists finally cut away from the world they loved. Death for Morris at once heightens and cancels life: it is a sort of orgasm. “Golden Wings” ends with the unarmed hero cut to pieces in front of his beloved; the hero king of “Gertha’s Lovers” is killed in battle at the point of triumph; the impassioned lovers of “A Dream” never come back from the Red Pike. In “The Story of the Unknown Church” the happy town that sent a hero to war receives him back again on the point of death. Men and women fall on the dead bodies of their loved ones, and die themselves in “Gertha’s Lovers,” “The Story of the Unknown Church” and “Sven and his Brethren.” Death is the ultimate passivity, the reduction of all activity to helpless silence. This is the way that MacDonald’s heroes see it too; yet not as piteous, but as a welcome calm:

The hot fever of life had gone by, and I breathed the clear mountain-air of the land of Death. I had never dreamed of such blessedness. [...] I lay thus for a time, and lived as it were an unradiating existence; my soul a motionless lake, that received all things and gave nothing back; satisfied in still contemplation, and spiritual consciousness. (*Phantastes* 314)

Morris’ interest in death takes other forms too. There are occasions when he intends death to be a judgement on past behaviour, as in the destruction of the castle of scorners in “Lindenberg Pool” or the slaying of the men of the House of Lilies for their killing of Queen Swanhilda in “The Hollow Land.” Yet it is not so much for their impiety as for their mocking and shaming of the priest-narrator—possibly a horror to the young Monis-Hthat the inhabitants of the castle in “Lindenberg Pool” are destroyed: Morris deliberately misses out the element of divine judgement in his source (the bible floating in the pool that closes over the castle). And in “The Hollow Land” Morris clearly enjoys describing the death scenes, as when Swanhilda runs about the chamber in frightened defiance of her executioners, or falls grovelling and crying for life; or in the picture of Florian clinging to the yielding bush near the top of the cliff that falls into the Hollow Land, whilst above him, his enemy Red Harald looks at him, smiling. [65]

Morris looks at death from the vantage point of life and its loss. But MacDonald looks forward to dying, whether in spirit or in fact, as the only route to new and better life. And yet Morris is perhaps the first modern English writer to describe other worlds beyond death, whether in “The Hollow Land” or in the cold little ivory house under the moon where the knight of “A Dream” must pass the centuries till he can be reunited with his love. He is possibly the first English writer of ‘secondary world’ fantasy. MacDonald may well have drawn on him for the Fairy Land Anodos enters at the beginning of his story, or the posthumous world he inhabits at the end. Stories about life in other worlds reached through sleep or death become relatively frequent in fantasies of the 1860s—Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), A. and E. Keary’s *Little Wanderlin and Other Fairy Tales* (1865), Jean Ingelow’s *Mopsa the Fairy* (1869). They reflect contemporary concern with the existence and nature of life after death—particularly the issue, first raised by F.D. Maurice in his *Theological Essays* (1853), of whether under a loving God punishment could be everlasting in a hell, or whether it was limited to a purgatory. But where MacDonald as a Christian is interested in afterworlds as involving the spiritual transformation of the newly dead, Morris sees them more as another chance to gain or regain the things of life. The separated lovers of “A Dream” serve their time helping humanity throughout the ages so that they may be finally re-united; Florian in “The Hollow Land” must spend long ages painting the judgements of God so that he may enter paradise with his beloved. MacDonald’s Anodos, by contrast, does not gain anything save insight into himself and hope for a “good” he is told is coming to him: he is sent back abruptly out of Fairy Land to learn how, or if, he may translate his wonderful experiences into his ordinary life; and be happy not in getting, but in losing something—”Thus I, who set out to find my Ideal, came back rejoicing that I had lost my Shadow” (322).

MacDonald looks forward beyond life, to what is coming; Morris looks back to life, and to the past. The medieval settings of Morris’ romances may well have influenced MacDonald in giving *Phantastes* a context of knight-errantry, even if he employs a range of monsters and giants Morris is without. Morris, however, uses such settings partly because he has a passion for the middle ages and wants to bring them to life, and also to give a sense of the utterly past. Several of his romances are in effect elegies, but elegies that have to use time-travelling or six hundred year-old narrators to be so. Their actors and actions are dead and gone, yet Morris for a moment tricks

them into life, all me more to heighten this.

So the rain-drops felt in showers on their armour as they passed,
from the low tree-boughs brushed by their crests and lowered
spears; the moon flashed on the wet leaves that danced in the
rushing sea-wind; with whirr of swift wings the wood-pigeon left
the wood. (*Romances* 211)

We are brought close to the scene and the characters to feel shock at their vitality and their pastness together. Here again Morris brings life and death into collision. MacDonald, however, has no such interest in pastness. That a nineteenth-century youth is being shown walking through a landscape of knights and chivalry has no [66] interest for him; he is no Mark Twain, with his *A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur* (1889). He is not even much concerned with the presumed shock of entering Fairy Land from a nineteenth-century bedroom, and nor is Anodos, who simply sets out on his wanderings without much ado. The only kind of shock MacDonald suggests is between a wash-basin and a forest-stream, and that is an amusing one, a kind of metaphysical conceit. The knightly setting affords MacDonald, as it did in Spenser in his Fairy Land, a way of dramatising universals, and a flexible mythic medium in which the imagination may be fully deployed. It is also used for the code of values it enshrines—devotion in love, heroism, loyalty, humility, self-sacrifice—as a context in which to view Anodos’ behaviour. Anodos’ story involves him learning that true devotion in love can mean self-sacrifice, and that real heroism means the readiness to lay down one’s life in the service of others. But while *Phantastes* is part of that growing interest in things medieval and Arthurian that obsessed mid-Victorian culture, the knightly past itself has no emotional interest for MacDonald. The whole orientation of *Phantastes* is towards the future and Anodos’ development. MacDonald, however, has no such interest in pastness. There is not even one moment in *Phantastes* when Anodos looks backwards to adventures he has been through.

Morris and MacDonald may use similar techniques and topics, but they do so to quite different ends. Morris writes out of a personal liking for both passive dreams and active adventures, and out of a love for decoration and for the imagined medieval past. *Phantastes* also uses dreams, a quasi-medieval setting, considerable amounts of decoration and many adventures: but the dream is the way to insight, the fairy-tale setting is home to archetypes, the decoration is symbolic and the adventures are journeys of the spirit. Morris’ “Golden Wings,” for instance, is all pageant, with the beautiful

armour of the young knight, the tournament at the king's court, the set-piece siege and even the final tableau of the hero's almost ritual death. There is a seeming moral strand to the story, but it lacks energy. Golden Wings' pride at the tourney in front of the king's daughter is overthrown by his rival Sir Guy; and later it is Sir Guy who rescues him when he rashly takes on the evil lord of La Haute Garde and is beaten. Finding that the princess loves him after all and not Sir Guy, Golden Wings steals away with her to his castle, which is eventually broken into by Sir Guy's forces and he slain. The latent moral theme here, of intemperate pride punished, or else, symbolically, of juvenile rashness mastered by mature good sense, is however subdued by Morris' obvious enthusiasm for the young knight.

The story may well be the source for the tale of Anodos' reversals in *Phantastes*, when after helping to slay the giants and being lauded at court, he feels pride in his achievement: then on his way he encounters a knight who is the image of himself, and who overcomes him easily, like the knight at La Haute Garde in Morris' story. Thereafter he is shut in a tower for a long time, like Golden Wings, who finds himself alone and still weak in a high room of the king's palace. In both stories the young men hear a song from outside and have to strain to hear it. In *Phantastes* there is a theme of rivalry in love that is parallel to that in "Golden [67] Wings," with the great knight in rusty armour as the parallel to Sir Guy. But here the young knight Anodos has to accept that the lady in question loves the Sir Guy figure and not him. And rather than oppose this, he learns to accept it, and to yield his desire to another. This selflessness allows him to see through to the deeper and more holy desires of his heart. Such self-denial is alien to most of Morris' stories, where passions are allowed their full rein, even if they end in death. MacDonald is concerned, however, not with the removal but with the refinement of passion, whereby selfishness is expunged: after death the passions of his heroes are not gone but are transfigured:

If my passions were dead, the souls of the passions, those essential mysteries of the spirit which had embodied themselves in the passions, and had given to them all their glory and wonderment, yet lived, yet glowed, with a pure undying fire. They rose above their vanishing earthly garments, and disclosed themselves angels of light. But oh, how beautiful beyond the old form! (*Phantastes* 314-15)

One feels MacDonald could almost be criticising the feverish and mortal passions of Morris' heroes.

However we should be careful before we say absolutely that *Phantastes* is a spiritual analysis where Morris' romances are not. MacDonald's Anodos and Morris' heroes have in common an impulsiveness of behaviour, owing partly to their being young men. The knight in "A Dream" has just finished a discourse on reasoned motives for going to war being far preferable to mere impulse or the whims of paramours when his own lady challenges him to spend a night in the nearby Red Pike and he at once agrees (Romances 159-61). A strange impulse seems to have drawn the narrator of "Lindenberg Pool" to fathom the pool by night in winter, and no less of a folly appears to have led the castle revellers to play their evil trick on him. The knight in "Golden Wings" is, as we have seen, all hasty and unthinking action. A mere savage insult by Queen Swanhilda in "The Hollow Land" makes the men of the House of Lilies seek her destruction. Amyot in "The Story of the Unknown Church" had vowed to stay always with his friend the narrator of the story: but war-fever took him off to fight, and he came back only to die.

We have seen the same sort of thing in *Phantastes*, though common sense dictates that this is hardly MacDonald directly following Morris, more a consequence of their shared concern with the evanescence of things. So it is that Anodos is "led by an irresistible impulse" to release the lady twice from stone form, to open the cupboard in the ogress' cottage, to seize the little girl's singing globe, or to dive into the pool in the fairy palace. The moral scheme is that his shadow is a kind of badge of his evil—like the more ambiguous one in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)—, which he must spend the rest of his time in Fairy Land in removing. By the end of the story he is seen as able at last to put himself aside and act truly for others.

But this is not quite the whole truth: *Phantastes* is not so unambiguously moral as this. One of the themes of Morris' stories seems to be how easily people can come to grief, and the same is true of *Phantastes*, as one of its poems insists: **[68]**

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain.
And life is never the same again. (235)

Indeed it often seems going too far to judge Anodos harshly for what happens to him. The impulse by which he opens the cupboard-door in the ogress' cottage does not seem categorically different from that which makes him sing to release the lady from the alabaster or even leap into the bath in

the fairy palace (127). The same goes for the behaviour of the pair in “A Dream” in entering the Red Pike, or in the rash challenge of the hero to the king in “Golden Wings.” The result is that both in Morris’ and to a lesser extent in MacDonald’s romances we find the scheme of moral censure and punishment somewhat at odds with the supposed crime. A good example of this in *Phantastes* occurs when, in the fairy palace, Anodos releases the lady from her second statuesque form by again singing. When she is free he tries to catch hold of her: at which she cries, “You should not have touched me!” and runs off, leaving him thereafter to suffer the consequences of his ‘sin.’ Of course, we can read Anodos’ behaviour as possessiveness, and mere was an injunction not to touch anything in the hall, but it is hard to say someone in love with a woman should not want to touch her. (This only at the literal level, of course: at the level of symbol we can see her as the soul, and Anodos as trying to possess her, rather like Marlowe’s Faustus (“Is not my soul mine own?”) Such is indeed MacDonald’s later moral, when Anodos tells us that he has come to learn that love exists in loving, and not in being beloved (316): but does not this moral itself seem rather strange, and does not God Himself look for a return by us to His love? It is in such a state of almost Manichean self-denial that we find Anodos by the end.

Both Morris’ and MacDonald’s romances show a concern with the theme of sexual love and its frustration. The loves of Golden Wings for his princess, of Olaf and Leuchnar for Gertha in “Gertha’s Lovers,” or of Ella and Lawrence in “A Dream” fill their stories with ecstasies, partings and jealousies, just as does the love of Anodos for his elusive white lady in *Phantastes*. Many of the love-relationships in Morris are cut off by death—death of Golden Wings at the height of his love, death of Gertha on the body of her slain lord, death of King Valdemar on the body of his Queen Cissela in “Svend and his Brethren,” death of Margaret on the corpse of Amyot in “The Story of the Unknown Church.” The lovers of “A Dream” are divided for long ages after entering the Red Pike. Leuchnar in “Gertha’s Brethren” courts Gertha long and in vain. In *Phantastes* the whole of Anodos’ journey is scattered with things he cannot do, and if he does them, he is thereafter punished for his transgressions. He can never come near enough the lady he loves to speak to her; he must see her given to a “nobler” man than he; he is dogged throughout by his blighting shadow that often cuts him off from the beauty of Fairy Land. He is not even allowed to practise his new-found belief, learned through death—that of loving other people without expecting love back—before he is abruptly returned to his own world: “a pang and

a terrible shudder went through me; a writhing as of death convulsed me; and I became once again [69] conscious of a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life”(318). The violence of this transition is in contrast to the easy gradation of his first entry to Fairy Land. Now he is forced to relearn in his own world the lessons he has learned in Fairy Land. There seems something hypercritical in MacDonald’s treatment of his hero which we also see in Morris. However we are not dealing here with Morris’ influence on MacDonald so much as their sharing a common vision that might additionally have drawn the one to the other. In fact we know that in 1856 the 22 year-old Morris was frustrated about the direction of his life (*Boos*, para. 11); while MacDonald had recently known much frustration from his illnesses and his attempts to house and make a living for his family. It is interesting that the theme occurs in MacDonald’s next significant fantasy, “The Light Princess,” which describes a child doomed to levity and a lover who cannot make her understand his feelings for her.

There is one other similarity between Morris’ early romances and *Phantastes*, and that is the concern of both writers with the subject of art. This need not suppose indebtedness on MacDonald’s part, as this was a common topic at the time, most recently seen in several of the poems in Browning’s *Men and Women*. However, we know that MacDonald was close friends with two artists linked to the Pre-Raphaelite circle—Alexander Munro the sculptor and Arthur Hughes the painter—and that he probably met Morris either before or after writing *Phantastes* (Raeper 165-6), and there are one or two moments in *Phantastes* that may reflect the obsessive realism of the Pre-Raphaelites, such as the elaborate account of the beetles that use glowworms as exploding rockets (36), or the description of the different colours of the women’s wings on the “loveless planet” (138-39), or the peculiar minuteness of the account of the butterfly-collecting girl menaced by invisible wooden monsters (299-304).

Phantastes is the only work by MacDonald concerned with the subject of art and artifice. We have the artefact that is Anodos’ Victorian bedroom transformed to nature when it turns into a glade in Fairy Land. Twice Anodos liberates his lady from stone: in the first case he is like a Michelangelo who sees the shape latent within the material before he liberates it: he sings the lady out of the alabaster block. In the second instance, in the fairy palace, his voice brings her out of statue form. In both cases the singing is the art that makes her. Although she comes to life and moves off in both instances, we may say that in the first act he is the artist who sees and makes form from the

formless, and in the second he is the artist as inspired creator—indeed he is analogous to the divine creator in Genesis, for as he sings each limb gradually becomes visible.—Interestingly C.S. Lewis uses the idea of God singing all life into being in his *The Magician's Nephew* (1955).—Other artefacts, or quasi-artefacts in *Phantastes* are the fraudulent Alder-maiden, the little girl's music and light-emitting crystal ball, the fantastically structured fairy palace, the fairy bath, library and halls of dancers, Cosmo's magic mirror, the four-doored submersible cottage in the ocean and the highly-ordered forest church. A contrast is developed between false art, which seeks to entrap and kill, and liberating, life-giving true art. [70]

And yet *Phantastes* has formlessness as both its epigraph and its idiom. But the truth is that while we must get away from man's possessive and self-oriented structurings of life, there are hidden patterns far beyond these. Anodos' songs are inspired, they come to him unbidden, he is sung rather than singing (58-61; 194-99); indeed, till he came to Fairy Land, he "had never been gifted with the power of song" (58). And so his own wandering story in Fairy Land is already planned for him in ways that he could not know. There is a "Chamber of Sir Anodos" ready for him in the Fairy Palace, itself anticipatory of another stage in his progress, for he is not yet a knight His progress so far is pointed out by magic to the two princes who are waiting for his journey to bring him to them to help fight the giants; and the old woman who shows them where he is will also be part of his journey. That journey, while not being a set course like Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is structured 'accidentally' as a spiritual education with one end: or, as Anodos is told,

Thou goest thine, and I go mine—
Many ways we wend;
Many days, and many ways,
Ending in one end.
Many a wrong, and its curing song:
Many a road, and many an inn;
Room to roam, but only one home
For all the world to win. (288)

This could equally be said of *Lilith*, but *Lilith* is not so concerned as *Phantastes* with the issues of art and order brought out of apparent chaos.

Many of Morris' stories are also greatly interested in art, but not in the same way, because Morris' art is a secular, not an ultimately sacred one. The master-mason who tells "The Story of the Unknown Church" describes how

during the lives of his beloved sister Margaret and her lover Amyot he was working on a church, and when they died, he worked on the carving of their tomb so obsessively that he eventually died beside it. While he shapes stone for the church, the more important story of Amyot is shaped by his mind. In "The Hollow Land" it is the accidental ruin of the regal artifice of Queen Swanhilda that initiates the whole story of revenge, one thread of which ends in the reduction of Swanhilda from Queen to terrified beast: here ruined art reveals the beast behind it. When Florian of the Lilies is in the Hollow Land, he has as penance to spend ages painting "God's judgements" (*Romances* 267): but this is not only a sign of penitence but also a guarantee of entry to a happy land with his beloved. Golden Wings in his beautiful armour is an artefact, but one of vanity, which in a sense is his undoing: he meets his death humbly without it. The schemers in "Lindenberg Pool" arrange an artifice to trick the priest; but the artifice that is their castle ends by being destroyed.

What then is Morris' view of art? Basically he sees it emblematically, somewhat as it was seen in the medieval time he so loves to depict. In contrast to MacDonald he can see it as freezing life into permanence. Several of his stories [71] end in a climactic tableau: one lover dead on the grave of another in "Gertha's Lovers," a city still full of the unburied slain after five hundred years at the end of "Svend and his Brethren," the dead monk lying beneath the completed tomb in "The Story of the Unknown Church," the set-piece of Golden Wings' slaying. Life is transformed to stone by the master-mason in "The Story of me Unknown Church," Golden Wings' armour casts him into a mould of destiny, Florian paints God's judgements. Nature is woven into art, as in the metal flowers that deck Golden Wings or Swanhilda, or the stone ones that wreath the tomb of the lovers in "The Story of the Unknown Church." Morris' preference is for painting and sculpture, arts that make life still. But MacDonald's is for the more mobile arts of dance and song: Anodos twice wakens his lady to life out of stone by singing to her, and the silent building that is the fairy palace comes alive when he finds its halls filled with dancers. The whole of *Phantastes* is a becoming, a process of change and movement, not a gradual revelation or completion of the nature of something. Where Morris' stories all end in a pedal point, a full close, *Phantastes* refuses this, throwing Anodos back into life in this world to wait in troubled hope for a "great good" that he thinks is coming, but is not yet.

Nevertheless Morris does not completely separate art from life, for he detests artifice designed to deceive the beholder, as with the plotters in "Lindenberg Pool" or with Queen Swanhilda, who presents an image of

serene beauty and majesty that is belied by her ugly soul, and symbolised in Arnald's accidental disarrangement of her canopy. This puts Morris closer to MacDonald, with his portrayal of the fraudulent Alder-maiden who deceives Anodos, and the ordered ceremony in the forest church which deceives its congregation. And there are one or two other features of Morris' view of art and artifice which MacDonald may have taken from him, such as the idea that a story may suck in its reader or its writer to become a participant in it. This is what happens to Anodos with the stories he reads in a book in the fairy library and with the narrator of "Lindenberg Pool" or the tellers of the story in "A Dream." Both writers are much concerned to reduce the insularity of a fiction, to make it not just a story being told, but a story telling its teller and its readers: this in a sense is what is happening with the narrators in "A Dream"; while in "Svend and his Brethren," a ship visiting the city centuries after the massacre of the inhabitants in the story, finds the streets piled with undecayed and bloody bodies. But on the whole it must be said that although both Morris and MacDonald show a considerable interest in art in their early work, MacDonald is as likely to have derived his own views from elsewhere—in Tennyson, Arnold, Ruskin, Thackeray, Browning, even in Dickens or Nathaniel Hawthorne—for the subject of art and the artist was one common in literature of the 1850s. Nevertheless the importance Morris gives to the topic in his stories may have led MacDonald to give as much attention to it in *Phantastes*.

Overall there thus are major differences between Morris in his early romances and MacDonald in *Phantastes*. Morris is concerned with this life and its values, and though he perfunctorily attempts some moral and religious themes, these are given [72] rather less centrality and force than they (ostensibly) possess in MacDonald's work. Morris puts human loyalty and love before all else. And because such things are transient and pass, his romances have about them a sense of elegy. They look to a medieval past which, brutal though it is, is seen as the source of heroes and great loves, of beauty and an unsullied natural world—a world where the worth of life was so great that heroes could renounce it, in contrast to a present where life was so uninspiring that people clung to it. But MacDonald uses a medieval context not for nostalgic reasons but because it allows the kind of fluidity of narrative and imagery of the mind that he is looking for. So far as his viewpoint is concerned, it is all towards making men new, and towards the future beyond death, not the past

Yet Morris has so many of the formal features we later see later in

Phantastes that it seems quite likely that MacDonald took much of his method and several of his themes from him—dream-transitions from one world to another: dream structures, hallucinatory descriptions; passivity, death, after-worlds love, impulsiveness, frustration; difficulties in condemning heroes' impulsive actions, the medieval setting; and a concern with art and its relation to life. He brings to these materials a vision quite unlike the outlook they serve in Morris, that is, he reinterprets them. And because the similarities of form and matter are so similar, and the visions so starkly opposite, we may almost suggest that MacDonald was reinterpreting Morris when he wrote *Phantastes*, rather as Shakespeare was reinterpreting Plutarch when he wrote his Roman plays. This would make *Phantastes* far more of a self-conscious and deliberate work than has often been supposed, as much the product of the critic as of the artist.

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