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> One splendour, in particular, I remember – wings of deep carmine, with an inner down of warm gray, around a form of brilliant whiteness. She had been found as the sun went down through a low sea-fog, casting crimson along a broad sea-path into a little cave on the shore, where a bathing maiden saw her lying.[1]

This image is one of the most beautiful in *Phantastes*, and it is one that always comes to mind when the novel is mentioned to me. It is an extract from Chapter XII, where the protagonist, Anodos, meets creatures from a faraway planet in which women have angel wings instead of arms, while the men look like human men. The chapter in question is probably one of my favourite parts because it brings to mind many other texts that speak about love, soulmates and enchanted places. However, when attempting to analyse *Phantastes*, it is noticeable that scholars seem to disagree on the beauty and the importance of this scene. The novel itself has been controversial over the years, dividng readers into two camps. For some, the text is a powerful and beautiful fantasy novel, full of different aspects of fantasy: statues that are people, knights, fairies, evil shadows and enchanted species. At the same time, for others, it is just a very confused collection of short, disconnected stories. This feeling of disconnection between the stories that create the novel has encouraged some to single out Chapter XII as an unnecessary passage in which the angel creatures and their story have no meaning. Adrian Gunther contests Robert Lee Wolff, for example, who sees this chapter, and also Chapter XIII, as useless to the overall needs of the novel, believing that MacDonald should not have published them.[2] Similarly, Clayton Jay Pierson, as Susan E. Howard shows, believes that the stories are not important for Anodos because he just

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[1] George MacDonald, *Phantastes* (Whitethorn, CA, 1994), 139. Further citation given in text.

[2] Adrian Gunther, 'The Structure of George MacDonald's Phantastes', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 12 (1993), 43–59, (43).

reads them and does not really participate in them.[3]

Even if, for Wolff and Pierson, both chapters are not worthy of much attention, Chapter XIII has frequently been considered to exist as an almost perfect parallel with Anodos' story. Cosmo's story in Chapter XIII finds another man infatuated with a cursed woman, this time in a mirror/painting. Cosmo manages to free the woman from her curse, losing his life in doing so. His story allows Anodos to see what he must also do: sacrifice himself for his beloved. Thanks to the clear connection between the stories of the two men, Chapter XIII has been afforded closer attention from critics and readers. Chapter XII tends to be more obscure, having a fragmented structure, with alternation between poetry and prose, and a very short story about the customs of the angel-like creatures. It is exactly this that makes Chapter XII important to the understanding of the overall text of *Phantastes* and allows it to complement Chapter XIII as learning moments for Anodos and the reader. This paper aims to extend the analysis of Chapter XII, arguing that it is an integral part of the whole story and an insight into MacDonald's poetics on art and religion. The analysis will concentrate on an explanation for the fragmented structure of the novel and Chapter XII, identifying Novalis as a possible influence for this stylistic choice. It will also look into the concept of the novel as Anodos' *Bildungsroman* and his journey towards understanding love as a gift to give and not a selfish demand. Chapter XII is analysed in connection with Chapter XIII, with both examples showing the use of literature as a tool for teaching. In this case, the overall lesson being that love is sacrificial for the good of other fellow human beings, highlighting MacDonald's belief of love and God's love in contrast with those of the Calvinist church.

Stephen Prickett has argued that *Phantastes* is a difficult text to categorise generically.[4] This is due mostly to the great variety of different chapters and stories within the main story of Anodos. It is a fairy tale, with the length of a novel, which seems to combine different elements of classic fairy tales like the Ogress in the cottage, and the *chanson de gest* – as seen in the adventure of Sir Percival – and myths like the angel creatures in Chapter XII. The stories are so varied and different that they cannot be associated with a single genre. However, Prickett adds that, in general, scholars and readers have agreed in

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[3] Susan E. Howard, 'In Search of Spiritual Maturity – George MacDonald's *Phantastes*' *Extrapolation,* vol. 30, no. 3 (October 1989), 280–292, (280-281).

[4] Stephen Prickett, 'Fictions and Metafictions: 'Phantastes', 'Wilhelm Meister', and the Idea of the 'Buildungsroman" in William Raeper (ed.), *The Gold Thread – Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1990), 109–125, (109).

calling the novel a *Bildungsroman*.[5] The German term can be translated as a novel of growth or, as Prickett writes 'the novel of self-cultivation' in which the story is usually constructed around a single character who will learn throughout their adventures, and situations.[6] Usually the novel has a character whose choices are dictated by selfish behaviours or inexperience, naivetés that will cause them some form of fall or unpleasant situation. Thanks to these experiences and the lessons learned while failing, the character should arrive at the end of their story having grown as a person and often are seen to become a member of the society. In *Phantastes,* Anodos is represented as an adult only in age, but he shows immediately within the first encounter with his fairy grandmother that he has no control over his impulses and is internally very immature. The lack of discipline and the egocentricity of his behaviours are the main reasons for his misfortunes. He also lacks a form of empathy and respect for other people, always putting himself first, and with no knowledge of what it means to feel true love, friendship and respect for other beings. One of the main characteristics of Anodos is his constant incapability to control his desires, especially sexually, which lead him to try and possess the women he likes without too much consideration of each woman's desires. Anodos must learn what love really is and the difference between sexual desire and love for another person that is selfless and pure.

In a *Bildungsroman* it is important that the growth of the character is well considered in each passage and there must be a series of ups and downs, growths and failures, to make the character realistically capable of improvement. Each chapter should be calculated to allow for this growth over the course of the text. At first, it seems that the fragmented structure of *Phantastes* slows down this linear action of the *Bildungsroman.* One of the biggest critiques of *Phantastes* is its composition as a series of disconnected stories, which have discouraged and confused more than one reader. In his essay 'The Structure of George MacDonald's *Phantastes'*, Gunther explains how, even if there are many separated stories, they do have a structure of 'parallels and key transition points […]' which makes the text a coherent journey in Anodos' growth.[7]

Gunther's analysis, for example, highlights the fact that Chapter XII and Chapter XIII are at the physical centre of the novel: the text is composed of twenty-five chapters in total and thus the two chapters share the centre of the book. Their content cannot be dismissed as unimportant, as their parallel nature

[5] Ibid., 117.
[6] Ibid., 117.
[7] Gunther, 43.

can be used to analyse the novel itself. In fact, Chapter XII mirrors, in a smaller way, the structure of the text and its meaning over all; while Chapter XIII uses Comso's story to directly illustrate Anodos' personal journey from selfish love to a sacrificial love. Thus, it makes Chapter XII and XIII both parallel and complement each other, as smaller versions of the novel as a whole. In his analysis, Gunther focuses more on Chapter XIII, where Anodos shares with the reader a story he has read in the fairy palace: Cosmo's story. This recalls clearly the story of the main protagonist Anodos. Both men are in love with a lady who has been cursed and who they then free. At the end of Chapter XIII, Cosmo dies to save his love, sacrificing himself for her life. This is a 'premonition' of what Anodos must do at the end of the novel to save a loved one. Anodos sacrifices his life not just for the Marble lady, but also for the Knight, her partner, and Anodos' dearest friend. This kind of sacrifice is possible because Anodos has internalised the lesson learned through not just his adventures and mistakes, but through the example set by two of the texts he reads in the library of the fairy palace which are told in Chapter XII and XIII.

While Chapter XIII represents Anodos' story itself, Chapter XII encapsulates the whole book both in its fragmentation and meaning. This is done through the dream-like atmosphere and fragmented structure which, in turn, is also the area of praise or critique for the novel as a whole. Chapter XII is, in fact, the story which Anodos reads in the fairy palace and it is about the angel creatures who live on a planet which is not Earth but something beyond. The story is told in a way that is as fragmented as the novel itself. Chapter XII, for example, starts with a poem about nature and time and how it' [y] et blow and roll the world about;/ Blow, Time – blow, winter's Wind!' (133). Nature and time are what makes the world keep moving, they are two of the main creators and creations of it. The chapter, however, contains another two poems, not directly connected with each other, alternating three poems to three moments of prose, again not directly connected. No other chapter presents as many changes of pace and focal points as this one. It is as though MacDonald continually pushes us forward and slows us down and then pulls us again, like the wind that blows and blows in the poem which opens the chapter. After the first poem about the wind, the chapter opens with a reflection not about nature in general but the nature of man:

> All that man sees has to do with man. Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship. The community of the centre of all creation suggest an interradiating connection and dependence of the parts. (134)

This passage is important both for Anodos's journey and for the reader's experience. In fact, it suggests that all that people do and think about is related to humanity itself. Art, philosophy, science and even religion are all man's activities and fundamentally they speak about man itself. People as single individuals are little worlds that need to be in a relationship with others, and there is no possibility to really be alone; man is not made to be alone. At the same time, MacDonald may also refer to mankind as a world and nature and God as the other relationship humans must consider. Everything, no matter what scale, is based on relationships and mutual belonging, connection, and dependence. So is the novel itself. All the parts seem fragmented, but they are fundamentally all related, and important. Every single adventure or story that Anodos faces relates to love, as either negative possession or positive selfless love. It also addresses the love of people for their community and families both positive, like the two brothers, or negative like the worship of the fake idol at the end of the novel. Every fragment is a small example which a reader can either understand or not, but there is at least one chapter important for each reader, where the message about love that Anodos must learn is shared with the reader as well.

Chapter XII shows, in a smaller version, the fragmentation of the whole novel, as if MacDonald wanted to ensure the reader was paying attention; this could be linked to MacDonald's admiration of the philosopher Novalis. It is no accident that MacDonald borrows the notion of fragmentation and a dreamlike atmosphere from Novalis, whose words open the novel itself. As Prickett quotes in his essay, the fragment is Novalis' definition of fairy tales and poetry in which the German philosopher writes: '[a] fairy story is like a disjointed dream-vision, an ensemble of wonderful things and occurrences'.[8] As in a dream, the reader can understand that there is a meaning and a vision, even if at the time the experience is not fully clear. As Kristin Gjesdal suggests, Novalis claims that the nature of reality is a fragmentation of thoughts and feelings; it is not a linear and strict event, but a series of events experienced in different ways.[9] Throughout the text, and Chapter XII as its smaller example, the author wants to propose a story not for entertainment's sake, but as something which mimics the way in which reality can be interpreted and vocalised by humanity. MacDonald does this with literature throughout his life, and it is not a coincidence that he uses literature as the key means by which Anodos learns

[8] Prickett, 109.

[9] Kristin Gjesdal, 'Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis]' in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2009; substantive version 2014) < https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/novalis/ >

his greatest life lessons; Anodos' reading of stories mimics and parallels the position of the reader who is reading the text as a whole. The structure of the text and the chapter is then a mirror on how humans, like Anodos, experience life; it is a series of experiences which make us who we are even if sometimes we do not understand why they happen. Overall, *Phantastes* is a *Bildungsroman*, a story about the growth and education of the main character, Anodos, but also of the readers themselves. The two chapters at the centre show him, in a very focused way, what he has to learn through the whole experience in Fairy Land: it is up to Anodos to understand what the stories are telling him, as it is up to us to understand what MacDonald is trying to tell us through the story of Anodos.

Chapter XII is not just important for its internal structure but also for the story of the angel creatures visited by the human man. The first part of the chapter seems concerned with establishing the importance of community and connection not just between people but between worlds. MacDonald writes: '[a]ll that man sees has to do with man. Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship' (133). Humans seem to obey a law of interconnections because they are social beings, interested both in understanding humanity and their surrounding world. The importance of community and individual self-reflection is not an accident in the work of a deeply religious author:

> No shining belt or gleaming moon, no red and green glory in a self-encircling twin-star, but has a relation with the hidden things of a man's soul, and it may be, with the secret history of his body as well. (134)

The stars, the souls and the bodies are all connected; even if a scientific or poetic solution cannot be given at the time, MacDonald seems to suggest that faith can still do it. The creatures in Chapter XII arrived in their world in a mysterious way. They as individuals are a miraculous creation. They also embody the importance of community. The moment in which the baby is discovered is very important because it shapes the appearance and temperament of the future adult. While the males have a normal appearance, the females have wings instead of arms. At the moment of their founding, the male is influenced internally by the time and season of their discovery, the females' wings retain the colours of such moment:

> Those that are born in summer have wings of a deep rose-colour, lined with pale gold. And those born in autumn have purple wings, with a

rich brown on the inside. (138–9)

The Angels' appearance, the colours and temperaments they have are characterised by the natural and temporal moment in which they are found by the maiden, not when they are born. It is not the moment in which they are created, but the moment in which they are discovered that counts. It is the moment in which they enter the community that shapes them. It is the experience with the world and the people around them, with nature and their kind, that shape those creatures and so the same can be said of humans. Peoples' behaviours are shaped by their experience and the conditions and circumstances in which they are born and accepted make them different from each other.

These interconnections and the power of shaping each other links to Novalis' poetics. Novalis wrote the concept of *Bildung* (education) as something fundamental both for the individual and for the community in which the individual lives. *Bildung* needs art, philosophy, and religion to be completed. Novalis claims, as Gjesdal explains, that philosophy is a form of conversation with oneself through the act of questioning.[10] For Novalis, doing philosophy 'is a conversation with oneself', which 'takes place through the encounter with the other'. As Gjesdal puts it, then, to 'do philosophy is a challenge to the real self to reflect, to awaken and to be spirit'.[11] It is possible to consider philosophy as inclusive of art and religion if we consider that for MacDonald all three were components of the same message that he wanted to pass both to his readers, through novels and essays, and to his sermons audiences in church. If that is taken into consideration, then the meaning of Chapter XII is not just a linear story of his creatures, but a philosophical example of his understanding of the world and the human condition. People need other people to thrive, to grow and to learn what love is. None of those are achievable alone. Philosophy, art and love are all acts which are best when built on the connection achieved through community and shared, to allow everyone else to experience new things. Novalis clarifies that the act of growth is achievable when we look not just inside ourselves, but when we take into consideration the other's point of view. The encounter with the other is fundamental because the self can understand itself through confrontation with the other. Art is the perfect medium for the *Bildung* to happen because it allows humans to see themselves in stories and in questioning the art, they

[10] Gjesdal, 'Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis]'.

[11] Ibid.

question themselves. Arising through the act of reading stories, Chapter XII and XIII are a way for Anodos, and the reader, to see himself as human through the angel creatures, and himself as an individual through Cosmo.

As Courtney Salvey writes in her essay, 'Riddled with Evil: Fantasy as Theodicy in George MacDonald's Phantastes and Lilith', Anodos acquires his dark, evil shadow in the cottage of the Ogress who is reading about evil and darkness.[12] Salvey suggests that what the Ogress reads is false, arguing that even if solemn and read in a book, her vision of the world as something dark and evil is not the vision of MacDonald himself. But Anodos still does not know this yet and, breaking another rule, he opens a door he should not have and gets cursed with the dark shadow. This shadow, however, does not have power in the fair palace, which is a positive space. A place where Anodos belongs and where he can learn something, this time not by listening to a false prophet, the Ogress, but by reading himself and gaining his own interpretations. He reads many books, but he only remembers and tells the reader the stories of the angel creatures and Cosmo. Anodos wants to learn and to know and through this he can slowly but steadily start to understand his journey.

Chapter XII and XIII each contain that part of the *Bildungsroman* which openly explores the idea of love as a form of giving instead of possessing – the lesson that Anodos must learn in order to achieve spiritual growth. Both Howard and Gunther agree on this reading. In her essay, Howard suggests that the lesson that Anodos must learn from the example of the two stories is 'love: not sexual love, but *caritas,* the self-sacrificing love […] similar to the one of Christ.'[13] While it is possible to see the sacrificial attitude of Cosmo, who dies to save his lover, the angels and men do not seem to die as a voluntary act. It is mostly an impulse, a desire for something so new and so powerful that they can only react by sacrificing themselves. When Howard uses the parallel with Christ, again, there is a difference between dying as an act done with agency, which the creatures do not really seem to have:

> The sign or cause of coming death is an indescribable longing for something, they know not what, which seizes them, and drives them into solitude, consuming them within, till the body fails. (141)

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[12] Courtney Salvey, 'Riddled with Evil: Fantasy as Theodicy in George MacDonald's Phantastes and Lilith' in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, vol. 27 (2008), 16–34, (22).

[13] Howard, 282.

The creatures seem to die because they do not know what to do with the feeling which has taken possession of them. However, what they do is the exact opposite of Anodos' attitude towards love, even if they do not have a name for this kind of love. Anodos has so far acted in a possessive way towards the women he has some interest in. It happens with the Marble Lady, and also with the girl with the globe. After being seized by a desire to possess the girl's singing globe, Anodos ends up breaking the globe, deaf to the begging of the girl to not touch what belongs to her. The creatures of this planet are different: they prefer to die without hurting the object of their love. Their lesson is to feel love has something connected with giving not taking. They do it instinctively showing the pureness of their heart. However, Anodos can still learn and understand this lesson of love.

The angels and men of the planet are, according to Howard, a negative example of love. They are sterile because they are not connected with each other; their love produces death and not life.[14] This idea of a sterile love between the angel creatures is unsatisfying given the message they have about the idea of love. The creatures do not need to make babies because someone creates them; they are found and loved regardless of their origin. They do not create them but 'do the maidens go looking for children, just as children look for flowers' (136). Those creatures are childlike in spirit, finding each other is like a game and the love they have is as pure as the one between a child and its parents. Howard claims that they are disconnected from each other; however, their appearance is modified according to how they are found, and how they are introduced to each other. Also, the moment of their finding is fundamental for understanding the future of the babies and their inclinations, and sometimes they are found in unfavourable circumstances. However, the maiden will take care of them: '[b]ut no sooner is a child found, that its claim for protection and nurture obliterates all feeling of choice in the matter' (136). They are still cared for, even if sexual love did not create them, they do evoke love in the hearts of the others who will protect them and love them. Howard condemns the creatures for their incapacity to create babies, life, but their act of caring for each other is as important as life itself.

Similarly, Gunther claims that those creatures are undeveloped because of their lack of understanding of both love and carnal love, arguing that their physical and emotional lack of sexuality characterises them as negative examples. In fact, Gunther even suggests that narrator/Anodos is the spiritual

[14] Ibid., 282.

guide of the creatures; it is by Anodos's telling the angls how babies are made on Earth that allows the angels and men to understand what their act of dying leads to: a re-incarnation. Their 'indescribable longing' is the last thought they hold and the one that 'controls the form (and presumably the world) of their next incarnation.'[15] Interestingly, he claims that after Anodos reveals how babies are born, two of them leave to die 'in order to hasten this next stage which they now understand to be their direction.'[16] However, this is inaccurate. Only one maiden dies due to the story Anodos tells them. The death allows the narrator to explain the costume of those people surrounding the act of dying. When a maiden and a man look into each other's eyes and they fall in love, their feeling pushes them far away from each other, leading them to find a solitary place and die. The act is performed without knowing what the feeling is or why it happens. This next incarnation privileges a hope that love can be reciprocated between the two creatures who have fallen in love and re-born on our realm.

At the same time, the idea that the Angels die voluntarily, in the pursuit of sexual love destroys the meaning of these creatures. Rolland Hein is another critic that, like Gunther, believes some of the creatures 'long to die in order to be born into this world where they may know physical love.'[17] However, he later argues that 'MacDonald's doctrine' suggests 'self-denial', in which a person should be able to restrain themselves from too much indulgence in pleasures which will destroy the real essence of the pleasure itself.[18] It is not possible then to agree that the creatures die to fulfil their need for pleasure and still consider MacDonald's idea that death is a passage to a positive further existence. In the first case, the Angels are represented in a way similar to the myth of the Rider and the two Horses written by Plato in *Phaedrus*. One horse is a white horse who runs towards the divine or spiritual world, whereas the black horse drives towards the world of materiality and pleasure; the rider, who is the mind or soul, has to balance the two horses. When the black horse wins his battle against the other horse and the rider, the whole group fall to Earth and acquire a body in which the soul is now trapped until death. In suggesting that the angel creatures die to re-incarnate in our world and be able to enjoy the pleasure of physical love, associates them with the black horse in Plato's myth.

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15 Gunther, 50.

16 Ibid., 51.

17 Rolland Hein, *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald* (1982; Eureka, CA, 1989), 68.

18 Ibid., 69.

However, MacDonald, as said before, does not believe in total abstinence and mortification of the body to achieve the divine. Even Hein suggests that 'MacDonald does not hesitate to champion the role of sex, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a higher form of love, and hence, spiritual well-being.'[19] The creatures do not know why they die; they do because the desire they feel has no name but is a consuming force. Instead of acting on it, as Anodos usually does, the angel creatures die, in self-denial and so they are rewarded. What the passage suggests is that dying is not a final event, but a new beginning which for these creatures is rewarded by experiencing a new type of love.

Chapter XII is a chapter of hope looking towards a love created by giving instead of abandoning one's self to a violent passion. MacDonald manages to create a new poetic love in a religious, harmonious way. He does not perceive the solution of greedy and violent love to be the 'Christian asceticism' marked by 'repression' and denial, but rather he allows us to imagine a new one.[20] What Howard and Gunther perceive as sterile or undeveloped, is not a negative state, but a positive one, a stage of learning. Mike Partridge suggests that MacDonald believed men and women to be the children of God, creating them from his heart, which is what happens in the story described by Chapter XII.[21] The state in which these beings are in is one of simple joy and love: they love each other as families without needing passion. Their connection with each other and the world around them is different, not inferior. As Hein suggests MacDonald wants the reader to enjoy and be transported by the images of the novel and to accept it as it is because 'some incidents will seem to convey moral and spiritual truths; others will remain incorrigibly enigmatic,' as in why the women creatures should have wings and the men do not.[22] The creatures of this planet do not know who creates them, and they do not know why they die in the way in which they do; they are very childlike. It is in their being honest, childlike, and faithful to the work of nature that they are rewarded with salvation, with being reborn again. This idea of salvation made MacDonald unorthodox for many theologians and critics of his time.[23] Salvation is not something that God gives only to chosen people,

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[19] Ibid., 68.

[20] Ibid., 79.

[21] Mike Partridge, 'George MacDonald's Theology' in *The Golden Key* (2013), <http://www.george-macdonald.com/articles/theology.html> [last accessed 17 November 2017].

[22] Hein, 55.

[23] Martin Dubois, 'Sermon and Story in George MacDonald', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 43, no. 3 (September 2015), 577–87, (577).

as in Calvinism, or something that is achievable with repressing our nature and needs, as in Catholicism. It is an act of connection between the worlds based on the understanding of what love is. Salvation is an act of love that is extended by God to his creatures. These angelic creatures should not be judged to establish if they are superior or inferior to humans. They are there as a symbol of something else, something that is 'lying beyond consciousness' (134). They are an example of true love, fraternal love and family love; all types of love that can be found in real life and which Anodos can finally understand. It is important that Anodos sees that his way of perceiving love, and wanting love, is wrong. Love is not something that can be demanded or taken from someone else. Love is organic and has many forms: it is a gift to give, even if it means we have to sacrifice all we have, as is demonstrated by Cosmo and ultimately by Anodos.

This paper has proposed several reasons why Chapter XII of *Phantastes* requires closes analysis by its readers. The chapter's position at the centre of the novel makes it a strategic point for the rhythm of the story and encapsulates the meaning of the story itself. With Chapter XII and XIII, the reader is at the heart of the novel and can see its essence and message. The story invites its readers to enjoy the fragmentation and dreamlike atmosphere as it swings between poetry and prose, between nature and supernatural beings. Chapter XII and Chapter XIII are texts within the text that highlight the philosophy and thoughts of MacDonald who believed strongly in the importance of literature and art, as a way to teach people. *Phantastes* is a novel that focuses on the idea of love, what love should be and can be, as a communal good and a gift. It is also something that can be learned, and which shapes the lives of men and women alike. Love is allows humans a second chance, something so far away from the straight and unforgivable Calvinist belief of grace and predestination to salvation or damnation. MacDonald gives a second chance to the angel creature to fulfil their love on Earth; and he gives a second chance to Anodos when he has finally understood what true love is. Love is a form of salvation for both individuals and communities. *Phantastes* is a text about the salvation and maturity of a young man, Anodos, who becomes the example of hope that MacDonald provides for his readers. It is an act of faith in the act of giving, in the act of loving and being loved, that is embodied by the angel creatures of Chapter XII.

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