



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 39
Number 2

Article 12

4-23-2021

***Crossing a Great Frontier: Essays on George MacDonald's Phantastes*, edited by John Pennington**

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Recommended Citation

Martin, Tiffany Brooke (2021) "*Crossing a Great Frontier: Essays on George MacDonald's Phantastes*, edited by John Pennington," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 39 : No. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol39/iss2/12>

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CROSSING A GREAT FRONTIER: ESSAYS ON GEORGE MACDONALD'S PHANTASTES. Ed. John Pennington. Hamden CT: Winged Lion 2018. 492 p. 9781935688167. \$18.99.

CROSSING A GREAT FRONTIER'S ESSAYS on George MacDonald's *Phantastes* follows Winged Lion's 2017 publication of *Phantastes by George MacDonald: Annotated Edition* co-edited by John Pennington, which this author reviewed in *Mythlore* issue 37.1 (Fall/Winter 2018). As mentioned in the previous book review, *Phantastes* (1858) is a key fantasy text, often highlighted for its influence on C.S. Lewis, that became more popular in the 1900s, long after its initial publication. Editor John Pennington's introduction provides some background on MacDonald and the "anxiety of critical influence created by Lewis and [Robert Lee] Wolff" (10) in their evaluations of the novel. The essays fall into broad categories analyzing the text through the lens of religion, structure/themes, psychological approaches, or culture/genre (11). This collection is the first to concentrate on *Phantastes* as the main text, and the 21 pieces of fairly recent literary criticism are in chronological order of their original publication ranging from 1972 to 2013.

While much is covered throughout the pages, the interpretations or readings may not be too surprising for MacDonald scholars, or possibly familiar through previous encounters from their original publications. The usual psychological criticisms (e.g., Jung) of MacDonald are there, along with allegorical explanations and essays that consider historical or cultural influences or contemporaries (e.g., Charles Dickens). Several essays overlap in their ideas or areas of focus to various degrees; for instance, many of them comment on the meaning of the protagonist's name Anodos (usually defined as "a way back" or "pathless") as part of their textual interpretation. Some also respond to other essays in the collection. Symbols are another link between most of the essays, with the meaning of mirrors more predominantly surfacing throughout several analyses. Fernando Soto's essay "Mirrors in MacDonald's *Phantastes*: A Reflexive Structure" offers insights on this imagery and connections with chemistry and energy. Quite a few of the authors also discuss MacDonald's other, later fantasy novel *Lilith*. The essay "*Phantastes* and *Lilith*" by David S. Robb is a notable one to refer to for those interested in both novels' similarities and differences.

Two of the essays near the end stand out as among the more intriguing contributions. Courtney Salvey's "Riddled with Evil: Fantasy as Theodicy in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *Lilith*" explores evil and self, and subsequent shadow imagery, from an Augustinian viewpoint (393). Death, a major theme of MacDonald's, also ties in with significant moments in his novels as a great good that does not have to be accepted as a necessary evil: "To die in

the right sense is to *be* more fully than a person has ever been” as part of the self’s journey in life (402), which resonates with his other work. Appropriately following Salvey’s essay, Aren Roukema in “The Shadow of Anodos: Alchemical Symbolism in *Phantastes*” goes beyond the view that Anodos’s shadow is “merely a ‘negation of good’” (407) or “a symbol of darkness” (421). Instead, the author evaluates *Phantastes* “as an alchemical fable in which Anodos, the subject of transmutation, undergoes a journey toward reunification with an immanent God” (407). This approach casts new light on understanding elements of the novel, and it can help readers see “the novel as a cohesive whole rather than the collection of scattered dream scenes it has been accused of being” (421).

Because the essay collection is large, it would have been helpful if Pennington had included short abstracts, or even some keywords if space was an issue, to summarize each essay and its approach. That way, readers could have a quick highlight of the content to know whether an essay’s particular angle or main themes might interest them beyond the general subject of *Phantastes*, as well as whether the subject matter was similar to other essays in the collection. Otherwise, reading through several essays on the same topic can get overwhelming or tedious, unless the reader is interested enough to read them all from start to finish in due course. Though affordable, this book will likely have limited appeal, primarily for those in the field of fantasy or curious to read more perspectives on MacDonald, his novel, and select works related to it. The collection could also provide teaching examples for applying various forms of criticism to the same text, which could be more illuminating after students have read *Phantastes* first.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin



RE-ENCHANTED: THE RISE OF CHILDREN’S FANTASY LITERATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. Maria Sachiko Cecire. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. 336 p. 978-1-5179-0658-0. \$27.00.

TO TELL THE COMPELLING STORY about the relationship between fantasy and modernity’s construction(s) of childhood that she does in *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children’s Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Maria Sachiko Cecire first posits and then centers an “Oxford School” of children’s fantasy writers. This “school” would include the famous dons Tolkien and Lewis as the foundational figures, but also four authors from the next generation who, while