

THE ANGEL IN THE COSMOS:
PHANTASTES'S RECASTING OF THE NEW GENTLEMAN

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“O man of pride, / Come into the house, so high and wide.”
(The Woman Artist, *Phantastes* 164)

By the early nineteenth century, England's upper and middle classes had reinvented the gentlemanly ideal in their own images. His upper-class transformation into a modern-day knight was most influentially encouraged by Kenelm Henry Digby. Digby's *The Broad Stone of Honour* (1822), a contemporary courtesy book that became a bible for Young Englanders, described an England that was divided by politics and sectarianism and corrupted by mercantilism and the contagion of secularism. Digby wrote *Broad Stone* as a “counteracting force,” to unify and ennoble England through reforming its ideal of manhood (lv-lvi). Mark Girouard has distinguished Digby's contribution from Walter Scott's: “He brought chivalry up to date, as a code of behaviour for all men, not just for soldiers; he enabled modern gentlemen who had never been near a battlefield to think of themselves as knights ... Scott saw the knight ultimately developing into the gentleman, Digby used ‘knight’ and ‘gentleman’ as virtually interchangeable terms” (60). Men who patterned themselves upon his chivalric ideal would find their superior character gave them a new common ground, regardless of the allegiances that divided them. At the same time idealists of the upper class like Digby were forming the gentleman along chivalric lines, serious Christians of the middle class were remaking him in Christ's image. The old style of gentleman was displaced by this Christ-like model of a man who was physically and morally strong yet as gentle and sentimental as a woman. Like Digby's chivalric new gentleman, this middle-class version was defined not by his occupation, wealth, or social class but by his Christian character.

George MacDonald's *Phantastes* seems to have a mission similar to Digby's *Broad Stone*, for the romance posits that read or dreamed experiences affect readers as strongly as lived ones and presents these potentially transformative, vicarious experiences as the struggle of a privileged male to find a reformed identity that is