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***Waking the Dead: George MacDonald as Philosopher, Mystic, and Apologist* by Dean Hardy**

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Waking the Dead: George MacDonald as Philosopher, Mystic, and Apologist by Dean Hardy

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Despite these and other shortcomings (many of which are not specific to this book in particular), I do recommend picking up a copy of *Journey Back Again*, and not just because I'm invested in supporting up-and-coming young scholars. It's a short, fun read that will not only inspire you to return with fondness to a longtime favorite, but will also encourage you to again look beyond both what lies visible on the surface of *The Lord of the Rings*, and your own, potentially calcifying ideas about what the book is and isn't. The experience may even inspire you, as it did me, to think back to your own early work on Tolkien, likely recalling that it was every bit as ambitious, earnest, and joyful as the chapters collected here.

Luckily for us, the Mythopoeic Society Press has agreed to republish *Journey Back Again* in order to bring it into wider circulation. The new edition is slated to release in the latter half of 2022, and, I hope, will inspire seasoned scholars to look again on a familiar tale, and a new generation of scholars to continue to cultivate the rich field of Tolkien Studies.

—Megan N. Fontenot

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WAKING THE DEAD: GEORGE MACDONALD AS PHILOSOPHER, MYSTIC, AND APOLOGIST. Dean Hardy. Hamden CT: Winged Lion Press, 2020. 231 p. ISBN 9781935688211. \$24.40.

WHAT IS THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND that informed the life and works of George MacDonald? This is the primary question Dean Hardy sets himself to address in his 2020 book, *Waking the Dead: George MacDonald as Philosopher, Mystic, and Apologist*. In the book, adapted from Hardy's PhD thesis, he asserts that while sufficient attention has been paid to MacDonald's literary and theological backgrounds, there is "a striking lack of exploration from the mystical, philosophical, and apologetic angle" (2). Hardy strives to amend this omission, ultimately in order to argue that "George MacDonald was an unprofessed philosopher, hesitant theologian, unique mystic, and an unconventional apologist" (189). As an exercise in reading upstream—that is, of chasing literary elements back to their source—*Waking the Dead* is an obviously meritorious project. Regrettably, some poor argumentation and doubtful conclusions trouble the book's potential.

Waking the Dead has a brief introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter sets the stage with a brief overview of nineteenth century Scotland, a statement on the background provided by MacDonald's family, and then shifts into a survey of influences that worked on MacDonald's thought (his schooling, "voracious" reading, time spent cataloguing a library, and certain of his friendships). In chapter two, Hardy shifts into an account of MacDonald's philosophy, arguing (in part) from MacDonald's frequent references to Plato that he "was a metaphysical realist who openly acknowledged that he operated under the shadow of Platonism" (39). (NB: Hardy's use of the technical term "metaphysical realism" bears little resemblance to its formal definition in philosophy, but rather serves as a kind of placeholder for whatever is not a fully Platonic metaphysic of idealism.) Hardy then queries MacDonald's opposition to creation *ex nihilo*, citing similarities with (but tracing no formal links to) both Origenist and Neoplatonic beliefs in emanationism (creation *ex-Deo*). In chapter three, Hardy turns to what he calls "Alethiology and Language," where he argues that MacDonald employs a "sacramentalist, archetypal symbolism," one that is drawn chiefly from Swedenborg's concept of correspondences (72). He associates this with Augustine's concept of signs and then illustrates it through MacDonald's prose. The fourth chapter examines MacDonald's epistemology, outlining MacDonald's doubts about the power of persuasive rhetoric, his critique of the demands of a sovereign reason, and the critical importance of duty in the process of understanding. This chapter contains an excursus on Victorian approaches to the authority of scripture. Chapter five inquires into what Hardy terms MacDonald's "mysticism," attempting to locate MacDonald's brand of mysticism within the broader corpus of those commonly recognized mystics of the church. The sixth chapter argues that MacDonald should be regarded as an apologist, attempting to situate him among various nineteenth century apologists and to draw lessons from his apologetic approach. The conclusion restates these findings, then argues for how MacDonald's apologetic might best be appropriated for today.

Background studies such as these can be immensely beneficial, illuminating the contours of thought for the author in question and enriching our understanding of a literary figure. In *Waking the Dead*, I particularly appreciated learning more about Swedenborg's theory of correspondences—the belief that "everything in this natural world corresponds to something in the spiritual" (67). This is a theory that clearly influenced MacDonald, one that through MacDonald would reach his later disciples.

Beyond this, however, there were problems in the book's argumentation. Hardy is given to extensive quotation, and this, often as not, without significant comment. An introductory sentence leads into a quotation that will fill the remainder of the entire paragraph. Formatting renders this

situation even more acute, because while certain long quotes were helpfully offset as block quotes, this was only done irregularly (see, for example, the block quote beginning on pages 140ff, 157). The sixth chapter is exemplary, and I would estimate that some 70% of its contents consisted of undiscussed quotations. An illustration of this might be found in Hardy's definition—or lack of definition—for a concept of mysticism (114ff). He sets out to define it, quoting Evelyn Underhill, Carl McColman, Chesterton, and Robert Wild. None of these definitions are discussed, compared, or clarified, nor do they coalesce into a unified whole; they are simply documented (through quotation), and then followed by the assertion, that “since our understanding of mysticism has been established [...]” (116). But a survey of definitions is not in itself a definition, and the result is that a reader may sometimes feel that she is perusing a set of unfinished research notes rather than a constructive argument.

Attentive readers of MacDonald may also note some conspicuous omissions in *Waking the Dead*. When MacDonald describes his own intellectual formation, he alludes to the importance of his reading of the German Romantics—very likely during his time cataloguing a library in northern Scotland. It is curious that Hardy, who has set himself to outline and illuminate MacDonald's philosophical background, fails to offer a more sustained study of, say, Goethe, or Novalis. This lacuna is especially in evidence when Hardy argues for why MacDonald offered an alternative to the worship of reason (77ff). Hardy presents this as purely an opposition to a pervasive rationalism, but surely it is also to be sourced in Goethe's books on optics, set in opposition to Newton's? Surely MacDonald, like William Blake before him, found in Newton a hardening into systems which limited the capacity of the mind to see and understand the fullness of the world?

The above is one example, but there were many others. Do the ideas of Platonism, Neoplatonism, and creation *ex-Deo* really summarize MacDonald's philosophy, or are there, perhaps, elements of Kant in the background as well—especially when treating MacDonald's approach to the primacy of the will (53)? Where is the discussion of Coleridge when documenting MacDonald's understanding of signs and symbols? Why document MacDonald's mysticism and make no mention of MacDonald's emphasis on staircases—a point made explicit in Greville MacDonald's biography of his father? Omissions such as these ones may lead a reader to the regrettable suspicion that Hardy has chosen his subject headings not because they best illuminate MacDonald but because they are convenient to his desire to bring MacDonald into the world of apologetics. *Waking the Dead*, in other words, appears to cherry-pick its evidence in order to rope MacDonald to a hobby horse of modern Evangelical apologetics.

Independent of these structural criticisms, a reader may still find Hardy's primary argument unconvincing. It is only in the most broad and

caveated sense that MacDonald may be considered an apologist. Preacher, yes. Theological provocateur, indeed. Visionary, certainly. But apologist? The shoe simply does not fit. Hardy admits that the fit is strange, noting that “MacDonald scholars will likely cringe at the prospect of even designating MacDonald an apologist [...]” Indeed, and inasmuch as I myself am an avid MacDonald reader, I do. But then Hardy proceeds to explain his reason for this hesitation, arguing that it is “simply due to the negative connotations of the word as well as the ‘baggage of rationality’ which the word brings along with it” (152-3). But this is simply not the case. The objection does not lie in prejudice but in terminology, and Hardy’s thesis appears to depend on a collapse of the offices of proclamation, evangelism, and apologetics into one. George MacDonald was a preacher, who through his novels, poetry, sermons, and fairy-stories attempted to draw people to life in the living God, and who eschewed hardened systems of theology and praxis that inhibited people from approaching God. The reader who would like to know *why* MacDonald inhabited such a disposition might do better reading elsewhere.

—Jeremy M. Rios



SPLENDOUR IN THE DARK: C.S. LEWIS’S *DYMER* IN HIS LIFE AND WORK. Jerry Root, ed.. Downer’s Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020. 240p. 9780830853755. \$20.00.

While C. S. LEWIS IS BEST KNOWN as the writer of both fantasy stories and religious texts, when he was young he dreamed of being a famous poet. *Splendour in the Dark* explores his second attempt at making his name as such, and is an excellent starting point for those who are interested in this phase of his writing career.

Over the last few years, the Wade Center at Wheaton College in Illinois has been publishing academic titles related to their seven authors. Until now, these have been two different series: The Wade Annotated Editions of C.S. Lewis’s previously published works, and the published Hansen Lectures, an annual lecture series in which professors at Wheaton College focus on the relationship between one of the seven authors represented at the Wade and their own research. This particular volume, however, combines the two into one: the first half is the Wade Annotated Edition of C. S. Lewis’s *Dymer*, while the second half presents lectures on *Dymer* given by Jerry Root as part of the Hansen series, each followed by a response from one of his colleagues.