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In *Hell and Beyond*, Michael Phillips dedicates his novel to MacDonald and Lewis: “worthy mentors with broad shoulders who paved the way.” Phillips has approached MacDonald through the lens of Lewis for much of his career. The cover of Phillips’s 1987 spiritual biography, *George MacDonald: Scotland’s Beloved Storyteller*, quotes from C. S. Lewis (“I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master”). In the Introduction to the biography, Phillips writes: “I make no apology for the fact that I trust George MacDonald, echoing C. S. Lewis’s sentiments when he said that though MacDonald was not error-free, he knew of no writer who was so continuously close to the Spirit of Christ.” Phillips claims on his website—<http://fatheroftheinklings.com>—that as an “author and editor of over 100 books, Phillips’s efforts helped ignite the MacDonald renaissance of recent years. As one of those responsible for the widespread renewal of MacDonald’s influence, Phillips is recognized as among the world’s foremost purveyors of MacDonald’s message, with particular insight into the Scotsman’s heart and spiritual vision.” It would be hard to disagree with that claim. One particular focus of Phillips to lead to that MacDonald renaissance, for example, includes Phillips’s redacting and renaming of MacDonald’s novels—mostly realistic novels—so that contemporary readers can better understand the messages that MacDonald evokes in his works. As I look at my bookshelf right now, I spy George MacDonald’s *The Curate of Glaston* (1986), an edited volume by Phillips that redacts *Thomas Wingfold*, *Curate*; *Paul Faber, Surgeon*; and *There and Back* into a unified story.

Hell and Beyond is a fantasy inspired by MacDonald’s *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, and by Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*, where MacDonald appears as a Virgilian spiritual guide. In fact, *Hell and Beyond* includes both MacDonald (known as the Scotsman) and Lewis (known as the Professor or Don) as guides to the first-person narrator. In a sense, *Hell and Beyond* uses the structural mechanism of the movement from the real world in a fantastic world—Hell, for example—that is influenced by MacDonald’s adult fantasies. In turn, it follows the pattern of Lewis’s work by making MacDonald a character in the fantasy, who can engage with the narrator in

spiritual discussions.

A reviewer of a work of fiction, of course, must be sensitive to the fact that readers do not want to know what happens in the work—no spoilers, so to speak. So I'll rely on the book description highlighted on Amazon.com:

A prominent atheist dies unexpectedly and goes to hell. Or so it appears . . . but nothing is what it seems in this engrossing allegorical novel about the afterlife. In the tradition of C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* and John Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Michael Phillips has produced a riveting tale of eternity. *Hell and Beyond* is a lively and fascinating trip through the afterlife—one that will inspire you to re-discover the significance of your life here and now.

What may be most intriguing about Phillips's novel, though, is his use of MacDonald's fantasy worlds that are central to *Phantastes* (fairyland) and *Lilith* (the realm of the seven dimensions). Once the narrator has crossed the threshold to that other world, he encounters an unknown realm that propels him on his journey to discovery, quite similar to Anodos in *Phantastes* and, in particular, Mr. Vane in *Lilith*. In the Final Word at the end of the novel, Phillips tells us that MacDonald's "contributions . . . are ubiquitous" to *Hell and Beyond*; in fact, often when MacDonald speaks in the novel, he is speaking words from MacDonald's own works, including "his sermons, *The Consuming Fire*, *Salvation from Sin*, *The Last Farthing*, and *Justice*, as well as a few from *Lilith*, italicized as the Scotsman's eternal song and description of the emerald river and the stairway up the mountain in the final chapters."

Hell and Beyond is certainly an intriguing fantasy novel, but it must be read in light of its purpose: to take readers on a spiritual Christian journey. By its nature, then, the novel is quite theological and, at times, didactic, particularly when MacDonald teaches the narrator about the importance of belief. Many MacDonald fans who gravitate to the author because of his spiritual teachings will no doubt enjoy Phillips's homage to MacDonald's fantasy works, as well as his homage to MacDonald's theological speculations. Those MacDonald fans who are more interested in MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasies, may find the didacticism somewhat off-putting. But I am sure that Phillips is prepared for such competing interpretations of *Hell and Beyond*. One thing is for certain: *Hell and Beyond* will force you to take notice of its Christian message—and force you to take notice of the importance of George MacDonald for contemporary readers.