

Book Talk

Wade Co-Director David Downing has collected Lewis's advice on writing and his opinions on particular writers in a new book published by

HarperCollins last November, *C. S. Lewis on Writing (and Writers)*.

This literary miscellany was recommended by two different reviewers for the *New York Times*, and it reached the *Times*'s Bestseller List in mid-March. The book was also listed as #1 Amazon Bestseller in the category of Books and Reading. For the book launch on March 15, David and Crystal took turns reading excerpts from Lewis's witty and wise observations about the art of writing, about literary classics, and about some of Lewis's pet peeves in contemporary literature.

C. S. Lewis published nearly forty books in his lifetime, nearly all of which are still in print. Apart from the Narnia stories, which have sold over one hundred million copies, Lewis excelled in many genres—science fiction, fantasy, literary criticism, and lay theology. So when Lewis took time to comment on the art of writing, his observations are well worth heeding.

Lewis comments range from complete essays on science fiction and children's stories to terse, one-sentence reviews. Lewis said of Jane Austen that his only complaints were that her novels were "too few and too short." By contrast, he pronounced T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* to be the product of a "sad, shabby little mind." In general, this collection of Lewis's insights and opinions is certain to illustrate the old adage that good writing should both delight and instruct.

Wonders of the Wade: Video Vignettes

When locals ask the Downings about their jobs, many are amazed to hear about "the most comprehensive archive in the world for materials by and about C. S. Lewis and six of his influencers," often responding, "Why have I never heard of this extraordinary place before?" Such comments explain why the co-directors started the Wade podcast, which communicates the riches of the Wade to thousands of ears around the world.

Now the Downings are ready to reach both ears and eyes. Following the suggestion of Wade Board member Graham Shea, they are creating five-minute video vignettes about "The Wonders of the Wade" that will be uploaded to YouTube sometime this summer. Filming one unique object for each vignette, they will discuss museum pieces, such as the Lewis family wardrobe and Tolkien's desk, before moving on to rare books and unpublished correspondence. They also have invited Wheaton faculty and administrators, as well as visiting researchers, to select their favorite item archived at the Wade and discuss its impact both personally and professionally. Such explanations will communicate how the Holy Spirit ministers through the extraordinary Wade holdings.

Helping start the project was student Elizabeth Church, President of the Wheaton College Tolkien Society, who volunteered to do the filming of the vignettes. Significantly, *vignette* means "little vine" in French, reminding us that

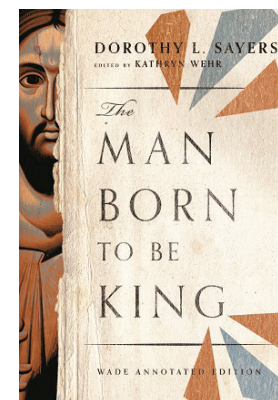
Christ is the Vine and we are the branches. We branch at the Wade hope these video vignettes will help draw people to the Vine that nurtures us all.

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The Launching of Sayers: A New Annotated Edition

During World War II, Dorothy L. Sayers caused the Japanese attack on Singapore. That, at least, is what some Christians argued in 1942. For them, the fall of Singapore was God's retribution for *The Man Born to Be King*, Sayers's BBC radio plays about Jesus. After all, her scripts did not use King James English. Worse, Sayers put working-class slang into the mouths of disciples, some of it American slang! Protesters launched a censorship campaign, which inspired skeptics to turn on their radios to see what all the fuss was about. And what they heard was the Gospel message in language they could understand. Sayers told CS Lewis that she received thousands of letters telling her how *The Man Born to Be King* changed their lives.



whose doctoral dissertation at Scotland's St. Andrews University focused on Sayer's radio plays. For the Wade edition, Wehr placed results of her research next to Sayers's scripted lines, illuminating not only Biblical and historical contexts but also reasons why certain passages generated controversy.

For the book launch, however, Dr. Wehr realized that a scholarly lecture would not capture the excitement generated by the live broadcasts. So, in collaboration with the Wade, she invited Wheaton theater professors Mark Lewis and Andy Mangin to recruit theater students and alumni to do a dramatic reading of excerpts immediately after she explained the background of each. In addition, fifth-grader



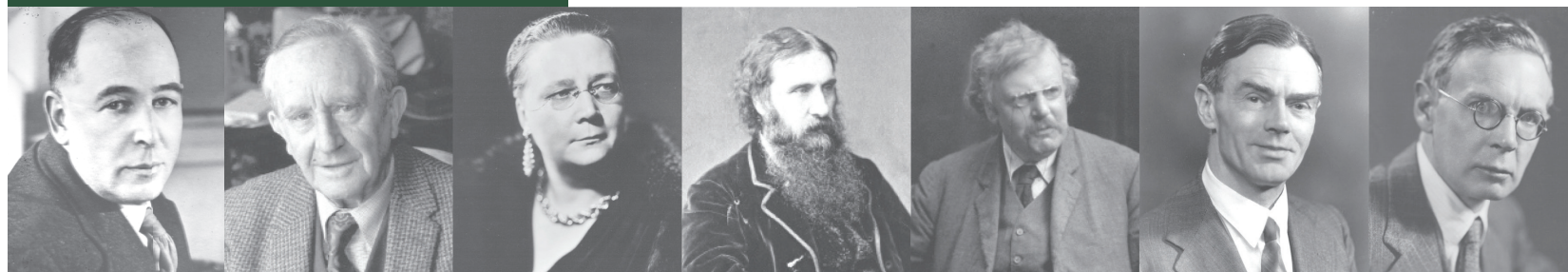
Kathryn Wehr

Charlotte Gibson read a child's part while her mother, Dr. Alison Gibson, voiced the Virgin Mary's celebration of the Incarnation. Especially stunning was alumnus and Broadway actor James Yaegashi, who read the part of Jesus, all made possible by the Muriel Fuller Endowment for the Imagination and the Arts.



Listeners reported catching humor and profundity that they had missed while reading the plays— subtleties that are explained in Dr. Wehr's superb annotations for *The Man Born to Be King*. Friends of the Wade are entitled to a 25% discount for an autographed copy by emailing

wade@wheaton.edu and mentioning this article. W



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**DIRECT FROM
THE DIRECTORS**

*Crystal and David C.
Downing*

In one week last April, 467 grade-school children and parents entered the Wade to watch a George MacDonald story performed by the Wheaton College Tolkien Society. Inspired in past years by these annual plays, we decided that the Wade needed to expand its educational mission with more programs for K - 12. Stan and Jeanette Bakke, long-time Friends of the Wade, shared our vision, knowing that most believers make their commitment to Christ before age 20. And then God provided a sign. Soon after they initiated the Bakke Endowment for Youth Education, a gifted local teacher, Matthew Dominguez, asked us if he might schedule classes at the Wade. Having taught for more than 20 years in local Christian schools, Matthew suggested he might take advantage of our resources to help students think through their faith more fully.

As a result, and with the aid of his own book, *Inklings on Philosophy and Worldview* (Tyndale, 2020), Matthew has been mentoring home-schooled adolescents at the Wade, helping them to identify the worldviews and values that undergird the literature they read. One parent raved to us about the effect of Matthew's classes on her child: "All of my family are atheists who totally discount my faith. Recently, though, my daughter spoke up about the problems with their attacks on Christianity, and they all listened to her, shocked that a 14-year-old had such cogent arguments, all learned from Mr. Dominguez!"

Lewis, Tolkien, and "Northernness"

The Wade Center recently acquired Lewis's personal copy of *Heimskringla* (Norse for "The Round World"), a collection of Scandinavian myths and legends produced in about 1230 A. D. The book was originally compiled by Snorri Sturluson, the same Icelandic scholar who produced *The Prose Eddas*, tales of Norse gods and heroes. Tolkien borrowed freely from the *Eddas*, not only names such as Gandalf, Thorin Oakenshield, and other dwarf names, but also cultural practices such as creating burial mounds, called hofs, for fallen kings and heroes.

Both Lewis and Tolkien could read Old Norse, but both also owned English translations of this voluminous work. Lewis's copy was edited by Erling Monsen (Cambridge, 1932), and it contains a number of interesting annotations by Lewis—marginal notes, underlinings, and brackets to highlight key passages. This edition contains pictures of Norse ships, each with dragon's head carved into the prow. Lewis marked the name of one ship, "The Long Serpent," and one wonders if he recalled the picture when he described the "Dawn Treader" in his third Narnia story. Lewis also underlined two passages on the dangers of magic and how easily such powers can be turned to evil purposes. In all of Lewis's books, especially the Chronicles of Narnia, the words "magic" and "magician" have sinister connotations, except for the Deeper Magic that comes directly from Aslan.

Senior English major Emily Brabec completed her Senior Honors project with Dr. David Downing this year, exploring the different ways Lewis and Tolkien drew upon *Heimskringla* in particular and Norse mythology in general. As Downing commented, "It is always a delight when a new addition to the Wade's collection can quickly generate new scholarship and new teaching opportunities!" **W**



David C. Downing and Emily Brabec study *Heimskringla* in the Clyde S. Kilby Reading Room at the Wade Center.

Oral History Collection Named in Honor of Lyle and Mary Dorsett

The Wade Center is delighted to announce that our oral history collection has recently been named in honor of Lyle and Mary Dorsett in recognition of their tremendous work building this significant archival resource. When Lyle W. Dorsett began his tenure as the second Director of the Marion E. Wade Center in 1983, one of his main objectives was to conduct oral history interviews with those who had personal memories of one or more of the seven Wade authors. An accomplished historian and researcher, Dr. Dorsett came with a wealth of experience interviewing individuals for his own scholarly work.

With his wife Mary handling the video recorder and audio back-up, the Dorsetts embarked on their first interview trip to England and Scotland in the summer of 1984. Lyle credits Mary's support, not only in terms of serving as videographer, but also her help navigating often obscure back roads as being essential elements of their successful oral history trips. Equally important was Mary's winsome way with interview subjects, often helping to break through the nervous reserve of an interview subject, and thereby making a more personal and relaxed interview possible. In brief, the Dorsetts worked together as a team,

and the Wade Center's fledgling oral history collection grew by leaps and bounds as a result. Today our collection of 96 oral history recordings has at its heart the 44 key interviews that the Dorsetts made over six summer trips.

When next you visit the Wade Center, allow some time to listen to one of these recordings or read an interview transcript in the Kilby Reading Room. Spending time exploring the treasures found in the Lyle and Mary Dorsett Oral History Collection will give you a truly unique view of our seven authors that can only be found here at the Wade. **W**



Lyle and Mary Dorsett, Scotland, 1984

"C.S. Lewis and the Romantic Imagination:" 2023 Hansen Lecture Series



Hansen Lecture respondent Keith Johnson (left) and Hansen Lecturer Jeffrey Barbeau (right) answer questions from the audience after the final 2023 lecture.

In this year's Hansen Lectureship series, Dr. Jeffrey Barbeau, Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, engagingly demonstrated the profound influence of Romanticism on the writings of C.S. Lewis. To the delight of his enthusiastic audience, Dr. Barbeau offered fresh insights into Lewis's indebtedness to Romantic notions of imagination and subjectivity; opened new contexts for understanding memory and identity in Lewis's autobiographical writings; and finally explored theological conceptions of symbol and language that pervade Lewis's writings on Christian faith.

Making rich use of annotated volumes from C.S. Lewis's personal library at the Wade Center as well as a journal from Wheaton College's Special Collections, Dr. Barbeau accessed archival treasures to bring deepened understanding to the theological imagination as it pertains to Romantic Literature and Lewis.

This 8th Hansen series had a personal connection to the beginnings of the Wade Center since founder and English professor, Clyde S. Kilby, taught a much-loved course on Romantic Literature in the 1960s and '70s. As former student and Lewis scholar Thomas Howard declared, "[Dr. Kilby's class] had the effect of blowing open the universe for me, for all of us, I think."

If you weren't able to attend Dr. Barbeau's lectures in person, you are still able to enjoy the video recordings of each of his three talks on the Hansen page of the Wade Center's website. **W**