



# Friends of the Wade

The Marion E. Wade Center

Wheaton College

## J.R.R. Tolkien on Art and Faith

In September 1944, J.R.R. Tolkien received a request from *The Dublin Review* for a story that would be “an effective expression of Catholic humanity.” In response, he sent “Leaf By Niggle,” a short story he had written a year or two earlier. Its publication, in January of the following year, went almost unnoticed. Today, relatively few are aware of its existence, and fewer still have actually read it. This neglect is extremely unfortunate, for in “Leaf by Niggle” Tolkien brings together his sense of art and theology with a beauty and economy found nowhere else in his writing.

Less than 7500 words from beginning to end, “Leaf By Niggle” exemplifies Tolkien’s ideas of *subcreation* and *eucatastrophe* as explained in his essay “On Fairy-Stories.” (Tolkien arranged with his publisher, Allen & Unwin, to have the story and the essay printed together in one volume in 1964 and suggested the title *Tree and Leaf*.) In brief, *subcreation* refers to the art of creating another world with such a degree of “inner consistency of reality” that it creates in the reader the kind of belief we give to the real world. This creative impulse, Tolkien believed, was the mark of the image of God in humanity: “I tried to show allegorically how that might come to be taken up into Creation in some plane in my ‘purgatorial’ story *Leaf By Niggle*



... to make visible and physical the effects of Sin or misused Free Will by men.”

*Eucatastrophe* is a moment of deep and abiding grace, or “gift” as the character Niggle calls it. It is the “good catastrophe,” and in its fairy-tale setting, says Tolkien, it is “a sudden and miraculous grace” that in

the midst of much sorrow and failure denies “universal final defeat.” As such, it provides an example of *evangelium*, that is, “a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”

By referring to this “fleeting glimpse of Joy” as *evangelium* (the Latin word for gospel), Tolkien would have us understand that the true significance of *eucatastrophe* is ultimately not to be found in its fairy-tale setting but in our world. In the epilogue of “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien shared his belief that this idea was at the heart of the Christian gospel:

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian Story from this direction, it has long been my feeling ... that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect ...

“I have claimed that *Escape* is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and ... I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which ‘*Escape*’ is now so often used. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home?”

—J.R.R. Tolkien



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

In the last few months, I have consulted with ministries, taught a graduate course on C.S. Lewis's theology, led reading groups on George MacDonald's *The Wise Woman*, lectured in California and locally, and assisted researchers from Australia and Germany. The rest of the Wade staff have likewise been working at numerous projects, such as processing the Joy Davidman papers, preparing a major website update, and creating new museum exhibits. I share about this work because these are the kinds of programming and services that will be reduced if we cannot overcome our current deficit, in spite of reducing our budget for the last three years.

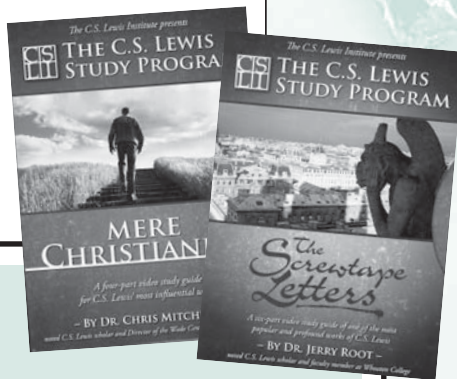
There is good news, however. We are launching a Wade Center Capital Campaign to address our operational deficit and enable our long-term goals and programs. While Wheaton College does not financially support the Wade Center, it values what we do and the development department will be assisting us in our fundraising. You have invested in our work, and more than anyone, you recognize the life-changing value of the works of the seven Wade authors. As we organize this campaign, I will be giving you information about how you can participate, most especially by passing on your enthusiasm for this work and inviting others to become Friends of the Wade. Thank you for your ongoing support.

WITH ALL GOOD WISHES,



## Did You Know?

Recordings of live teachings by Chris Mitchell and Jerry Root are available on DVD at the Wade Center gift store, or can be ordered from the Wade Center by phone or email. Dr. Mitchell teaches in four hour-long sessions on *Mere Christianity*, and Dr. Root teaches about *The Screwtape Letters* in six half-hour sessions. Within the next few months, teachings by Marjorie Mead on C.S. Lewis and prayer will be released as well. Each DVD set costs \$19.95 plus tax and comes with a printed study guide, making them an excellent resource for personal use or group studies. **W**



## Tolkien on Art and Faith

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: “mythical” in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy.

In “Leaf By Niggle,” Niggle is a painter—not a very successful one, the story tells us—who has a long journey to make. Niggle makes no preparations for it, and when the time comes for him to go, he is hustled off in a carriage to a train without a thing for the journey and without having finished his picture. What

happens next I leave you to discover. But I will say that the journey leads from sorrow and failure to joy and to a redemption that involves far more than Niggle alone—and it is all “gift.”

Friends of the Wade can find “Leaf by Niggle” in various collected works of J.R.R. Tolkien, including the numerous editions of *Tree and Leaf*, *The Tolkien Reader* (short fiction and essays), and *Tales From The Perilous Realm* (collected stories). **W**

*A version of this article by Christopher Mitchell appeared originally in Issue 8 of Mosaic, an e-zine of the Stoneworks Art Initiative, and is also available at <http://stoneworks-arts.org/stoneworks/archives/1271>.*

# Up Close

## Steering Committee: Alex Balc

As the longest-serving member of the Wade Center Steering Committee, Alex Balc has seen firsthand the changes at the Wade Center over the last thirty years. He envisions the Wade Center



as a place that offers access to life-transforming imaginative literature in service to Christian communities, to academia at large, and beyond. Steering Committee members, Alex states, provide support and encouragement to the staff, and help to maintain the Wade Center's integrity of purpose.

Alex's interest in the Wade authors dates back to his time as an employee at ServiceMaster, Inc. with Marion E. Wade, who founded the company. In basing ServiceMaster on Christian principles, Mr. Wade sought to train and inspire employees for all areas of their life, not just the workplace. ServiceMaster used the latest in management theory and motivational techniques, but also brought managers and supervisors together twice yearly to consider a piece of literature that would provoke the imagination and challenge the soul. The goal was to view creation and individuals as God views them and to live out personal and professional responsibilities based on this illumination. Often, the literature featured would be that of a Wade author—MacDonald, Lewis, Chesterton, Sayers—and therefore Dr. Clyde S. Kilby and the C.S. Lewis Collection (as it was called then) served as resources for ServiceMaster's development seminars.

Having joined the Steering Committee in 1980, Alex has had the opportunity to collaborate with each of the Wade Center's directors. He remembers Dr. Kilby's determination to preserve the seven authors' works, and to convey them to young people in memorable ways. Alex describes how subsequently, Lyle Dorsett worked

to give the collection a firm place in academia by shaping it into a Center, and how Chris Mitchell has since built on this foundation to make the Wade Center widely known and influential in circles of academia and Christian ministry. Throughout the last thirty years, Alex has also seen how Marjorie Mead, Associate Director, provided interim direction and continuity that brought the Wade Center through each transition and supported each director in accomplishing the Wade's objectives.

As we seek to shape the Wade Center's development in a way that honors the vision of Dr. Kilby and the intentions of the founders of the Marion E. Wade endowment, we deeply appreciate the perspective that Alex brings to the Steering Committee. We are also grateful for the support of his wife Kathy. In their partnership, Alex and Kathy have supported the Wade Center in myriad ways, both tangible and intangible. Much of that happens behind the scenes, but many of you have surely enjoyed the beautiful arrangements that, thanks to Kathy, grace our garden urns throughout the summers.

It takes partnerships of all kinds to continue the work of the Wade Center. We extend our gratitude to the Balcs, and to each one of you who joins them in helping maintain and develop our archives, building, and programming. **W**

## Reading Recommendations

### *Sir Gibbie* and *The Wise Woman*

One of the Wade authors who has influenced Alex Balc is George MacDonald, to whom he was introduced at a ServiceMaster management seminar through the novel *Sir Gibbie*. This story of an impoverished child who, regardless of circumstance, exemplifies generosity, forgiveness, and respect to all people allows a reader to recognize how Christ-like qualities can be lived out. Alex says, "You can enjoy the story in itself, or dig like an archaeologist into its deeper layers." *Sir Gibbie* is a challenging read due to its length and Scottish brogue, so Alex and Kathy often recommend *The Wise Woman* to friends of all ages as an introduction to MacDonald. **W**

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## Highlights

### Tolkien Reading Day & Society

On March 25, 2011, over 70 guests gathered in the Wade Center museum to celebrate Tolkien Reading Day with individual and group readings of selections from *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, and other works by J.R.R. Tolkien. This event was particularly focused on the Wheaton College student body, but several college staff and faculty members attended, as well as friends from the community.



Wade Center archivist Laura Schmidt also announced the inauguration of the Wheaton College Tolkien Society, a student-led activity group for which she will serve as staff advisor. The new Tolkien Society, while not officially a Wade Center program, is supported by the Wade in its efforts to learn about, celebrate, and promote the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, and to build community on and off campus. **W**