

Book Talk

Tolkien fans and scholars celebrated the arrival of a revised and expanded edition of The Letters of J.R.R.

Tolkien at the end of 2023. The Letters were originally published in 1981, then republished with an expanded index in 2000. This new edition includes 154 new letters, an updated index with 50,000 additional words, and revises 45 existing letters. The expanded text is the original content editors Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien intended to include in the 1981 edition but needed to redact at the publisher’s request to keep the volume at a more manageable size and affordable price for the common reader. The original numbering of the letters remains, with new content adding a letter after the number (ie: “282a”). More letters means more glimpses into Tolkien’s life in his own words, and that is indeed a wonderful gift.

Citation: Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien. William Morrow (US) / HarperCollins (UK), 2023.

2024 Hansen Lecture: A Student’s Perspective

By: Cecily Lambert, Wade Center Student Worker

In this year's Hansen lectures, Dr. Richard Gibson focused on Dante and three Wade authors: C. S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Charles Williams. The *Inferno* lecture focused on “Hell Outside Your Front Door” and the reality that hell is a state of mind, an inner reality, something we carry with us even in this life. The *Purgatorio* lecture focused on the “Ascent of Love” and discussed Dante as not a “poet of Hell” but rather as a love poet, a light poet, and a liturgical poet. Finally, the *Paradiso* lecture focused on “The Problem of Glory” and discussed how to write a story without celebrating, Beatrician encounters, patterns of glory, and a great, eternal dance.

As a student worker at the Wade Center, a member of Dr. Gibson’s class, and an English writing major enamored with great literature of all kinds, I am perhaps the ideal audience for such a series of lectures. I fully expected to be academically stimulated. However, I gleaned more from Dr. Gibson’s talks than I initially thought possible.

Listening to these lectures, I grew in my understanding of poetry, literary motifs, how to “steal” as an artist, and the huge influence the great poets and great friendships can have on your work. This last lesson was the most poignant. Not only did Williams, Lewis, and Sayers build off of each other’s—and Dante’s—work, but in each lecture an artist built off of Dr. Gibson’s work in response. It was both beautiful and, as Dr. Gibson said at the end of the third lecture, necessary. Artists must respond to each other. Artists must work to understand, to accept, and to make accessible great poetry, art, literature, song, dance, and theatrics to the rest of us.

However, perhaps more impactful for me was the spiritual feeding I received. We truly passed through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise with some of the greatest minds to put pen to page. I saw the stars. I saw the Mountain looming huge and frightening with the burden of sanctification and the climb of cleansing. I saw Paradise, ringed with angels and seraphim, light and love spilling from the dance of the saints. I saw what Dr. Gibson would call patterns of glory rippling through Dante’s work into that of Lewis, Williams, and Sayers. I remembered hope even in the depths of hell and sin; we will come out to see the stars. We must simply wait, guide each other, and keep climbing. **W**



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Faculty Discuss Tolkien’s Recently Published Translation of “The Battle of Maldon”

“Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder, spirit the greater as our might lessens.” These stirring words of ageless valor come from a 10th-century poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, about the Anglo-Saxons’ failed attempt to fend off Viking invaders from establishing a foothold on the English continent.

J. R. R. Tolkien was not only the creator of an epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*, but also a distinguished scholar of Anglo-Saxon language and literature. Tolkien’s translation of *The Battle of Maldon* from Old English into modern English was published last year by Harper Collins, and Wheaton’s own specialists in Old English were quick to assess his accomplishment.

On February 1, the Wheaton College Tolkien Society and the Wade Center co-sponsored a lecture by Dr. Ben Weber, Associate Professor of English, titled “Dreaming in the Margins.” The respondent was Dr. Jim Beitler, Professor of English.



Dr. Ben Weber and Dr. Jim Beitler answer questions..

Before the lecture, members of Wheaton’s Tolkien Society staged a light-hearted dramatization of the Battle of Maldon, complete with prop cloaks and swords. In the students’ version of this encounter, the Anglo-Saxons allowed the Vikings to cross over from an island to the English mainland simply

because the invaders asked politely, even to the point of saying “please.”

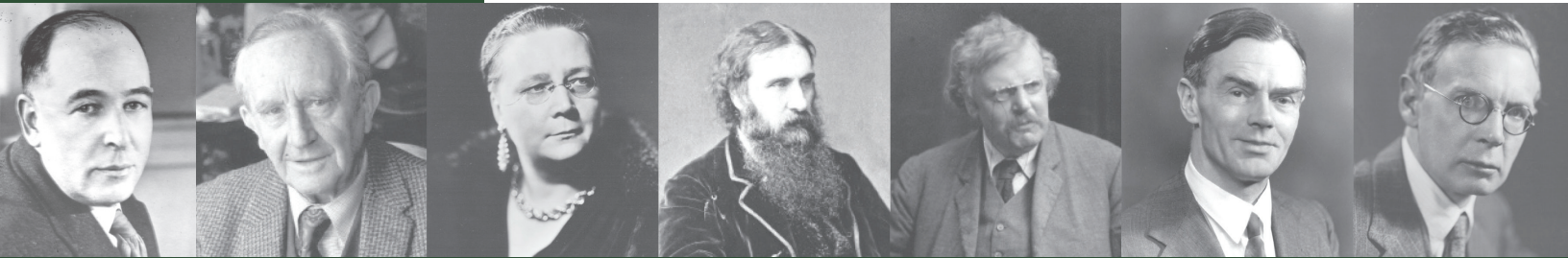


Tolkien Society students

Dr. Weber noted that the Tolkien Society’s skit was actually accurate in its basic plot summary. He went on to discuss key Anglo-Saxon words in the text and how Tolkien chose to translate them. Tolkien regularly gave lectures on Old English, and he seems to have come up with his own version of the poem in order to help students acquire a reading knowledge of ancient texts such as *Maldon* and *Beowulf*.

Dr. Weber also noted that Tolkien’s admiration for the Nordic ideal of valor, even in defeat, can be seen in his own creative works. A character such as Boromir in *The Lord of the Rings* is literally willing to fight to the death, but his pride in his own prowess leads ultimately to his demise. Weber focused on the Anglo-Saxon word *overmod*, an overmastering pride that may lead a warrior to his undoing.

In his response, Dr. Beitler complimented Dr. Weber on his incisive analysis and also for his intellectual modesty. Scholars as well warriors can be guilty of *overmod*, an overweening pride in their expertise. In their lectures, both professors exemplified a welcome balance of proficiency and humility. **W**



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DIRECT FROM THE DIRECTORS

Crystal and David C.
Downing

Because the Wade Center is entirely self-funded, we take speaking engagements only when hosting institutions pay our expenses. Fortunately, that has not impeded our travels, giving us the opportunity to meet thoughtful Christians around the country who passionately want to learn from Wade authors. This past March we experienced an extra bonus by traveling to Houston for a conference about C. S. Lewis held at the Mark Lanier Theological Library.

Not only has Lanier put together the nation's "second most comprehensive collection of Lewis materials" (the first, of course, being at the Wade), but he has collected other items relevant to the history of Christianity. In the library, we relished seeing one of the jars in which the Dead Sea Scroll were discovered, as well as a first edition of the 1611 King James Bible. Furthermore, Lanier has modelled buildings and rooms on his property after those of famous colleges at Oxford University.

In fact, David and I performed our dramatic reading of letters between Sayers and Lewis in a hall built to the exact proportions of one at Christ Church College. Several of the conference sessions were held in The Stone Chapel, in which Lanier has reproduced a Byzantine church built in Turkey during the early sixth century. Covered with frescos depicting stories from the Bible, the chapel reminded us that we are part of a great cloud of witnesses that has been testifying to the glory of God Incarnate for over two thousand years.

Wade Center Hosts the Inaugural Gathering of “The Inklings Project”

The Wade Center hosted the first-ever conference of “The Inklings Project” on Saturday, March 16. This all-day workshop brought together college professors from around the country, and around the world, to discuss how to create or refine courses on C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and other Inklings on their own college campuses.

This inaugural meeting included college faculty from as nearby as Lake Forest and Loyola here in Chicagoland to as far away as Northern Ireland and the Ukraine. Those attending, called Inklings Project Fellows, have received \$1500 grants to create or expand courses on Lewis, Tolkien, and other Inklings on their own campuses, in disciplines as diverse as literature, linguistics, history, philosophy, and even biology and business. With the Downings acting as consultants, the conferees discussed the most teachable texts by the Inklings authors, as well strategies for innovative pedagogy, such as historical re-enactments or creating simulated texts by Lewis or Tolkien. (There seems to be no shortage of ideas about updated *Screwtape Letters* or new episodes for *The Great Divorce*!)



David and Crystal Downing with members of The Inklings Project in the Clyde S. Kilby Reading Room.

The Inklings Project was founded by Dr. Tim Flanigan at The project was initiated by Dr. Timothy Flanigan at Brown University in Rhode Island. Though he is a physician who teaches mainly in the medical school, Dr.

Flanigan volunteered to teach a C. S. Lewis course to undergraduates, and his course became an instant success on campus, adding new sections for three years in a row.

A longtime deacon in the local Catholic church, Flanigan is a great admirer of Lewis's “mere Christian” approach to faith. As Flanigan expresses it, “Christian faith is not about institutions. It is about learning to love Jesus and to walk in His will.”

Recognizing the impact of his C. S. Lewis course at Brown, where he says “the hostility to religion is intense,” Dr. Flanigan began thinking about how to share the joy and hope of the Inklings on other campuses around the country, especially at secular schools where students may find few supports for their faith apart from a small Christian student club or two. After consulting with the Downings at the Wade Center, Flanigan reached out to Dr. Leonard DeLorenzo, director of the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. The two of them agreed that the best way to nurture new Lewis/Tolkien courses on campuses around the country was to provide annual grants of \$1500, as well as to create a new website full of resources on the Inklings, including advice from seasoned teachers on course content, pedagogy, and even about creating new student clubs and reading groups on campuses.

The first meeting of Inklings Project leaders and fellows was a resounding success and a harbinger of what all of us hope can become a movement with national influence and impact. The day's scheduled events included a tour of the Wade Museum space by Crystal Downing and an orientation on Inklings research at the Wade by Jill Walker. There was also plenty of time for individual consultations with Inklings Project Fellows, including those who have already won teaching awards on their own campuses, as well as those who have already published books on the Inklings or those with books in progress. **W**

For more information, please visit www.inklingsproject.org.



Crystal Downing (above) gives members of The Inklings Institute a tour of the Wade Museum, including C.S. Lewis's wardrobe!



(Above and below) Members of The Inklings Institute participate in workshops in the Wade classroom.

