

Book Talk

Surprised by Oxford: A Memoir

A book quite literally talked in October when the

Wade sponsored a film adaptation of Carolyn Weber's memoir, *Surprised by Oxford* (2011), which recounts the author's journey to faith. The movie includes a close-up on *Surprised by Joy*, in which C. S. Lewis recounts his own faith journey, a memoir that contributed to Weber's transformation while attending Oxford University. *Surprised by Oxford* is a love story on multiple levels: the love of Oxford and of conversations with friends and professors, all pointing to the Love Who Created us all.

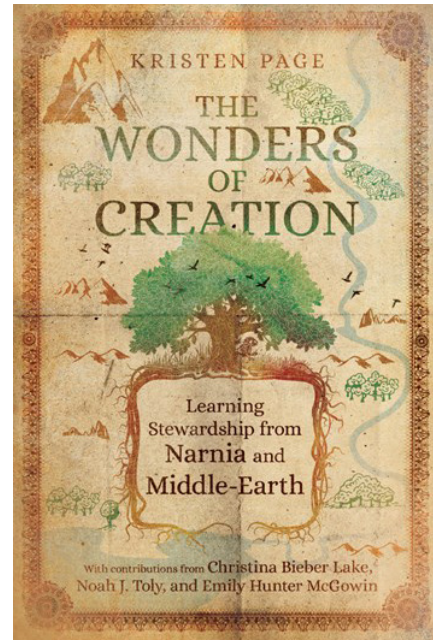
Following the film, Weber was joined on stage by the film's director, Ryan Whitaker, and producer, Ken Carpenter, to answer questions from the audience (many of whom stayed until 11 p.m. to talk to the author and filmmakers). The Wade thanks the Muriel Fuller Endowment for the Imagination and the Arts for making the much-lauded event possible.

Wonders of Creation Book Launch

Readers have long been drawn to the beauty of nature as shown within the literary worlds of Middle-earth and Narnia. In *The Wonders of Creation*, Kristen Page, Professor of Biology at Wheaton College, explores the delights of these fictional landscapes in order to discover what we can learn from J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. As Gary Selby (author of *Pursuing an Earthy Spirituality: C.S. Lewis and Incarnational Faith*) declares: "[Page] shows how losing ourselves within [these] imaginary landscapes can awaken our capacity for ecological wonder and humility, leading us to extol the glory of God and respect the imago Dei in all of creation."

A book talk and signing for *The Wonders of Creation*, the sixth volume in the Wade Center's Hansen Lectureship series, will be held in the

Bakke Auditorium on Wednesday, November 30. We look forward to enjoying Dr. Page's insights as well as her enchanting nature photography as she invites us to look more deeply at the beauty and fragility of the created world in which we live. W



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

C.S. Lewis's vibrant imagination is of the most compelling qualities that draws readers into his stories as well as to his apologetic works. In our 8th Hansen Lectureship series on "C.S. Lewis and the Romantic Imagination," Dr. Jeffrey Barbeau, Professor Theology at Wheaton College, will explore this significant aspect of Lewis's writings in a series of three talks. Please join us in the Bakke Auditorium on January 26, February 23, and March 23 at 7 p.m. or enjoy the video recording afterwards on the Wade Center's website.



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Ministering to Refugees Through the Wade Authors

Not long after Russia invaded the Ukraine, Wade researcher and George MacDonald specialist Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson had a flash of genius: perhaps the Center could email digital copies of audio books by Wade authors that have been translated into Russian, a language that most Ukrainians understand. Her request resulted from connections to a family forced to flee Russian bombs that were wiping out schools and grocery stores. Like most refugees, the family slept in makeshift locations with very few resources.



Saddened that the Wade had no Russian resources to offer, Crystal Downing suddenly remembered another George MacDonald specialist: Olga Lukmanova, a Fulbright Scholar from Russia who had graciously joined the Downings for a Wade Center podcast during their first year as co-directors. Olga had been trained to think of Lenin

as her savior, as did Ukrainians who grew up under Communism, learning not only how to use a Kalashnikov rifle as part of her basic military training, but also how to duck for cover in case Americans dropped the A-bomb on the USSR. After the demise of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, however, Olga became a Christian, largely due to reading parts of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* that a student had given her.

Proceeding to read additional books by C.S. Lewis as well as by other Wade authors that American Christians were bringing into Russia, Olga made a commitment to Jesus Christ that she has maintained through her thirty

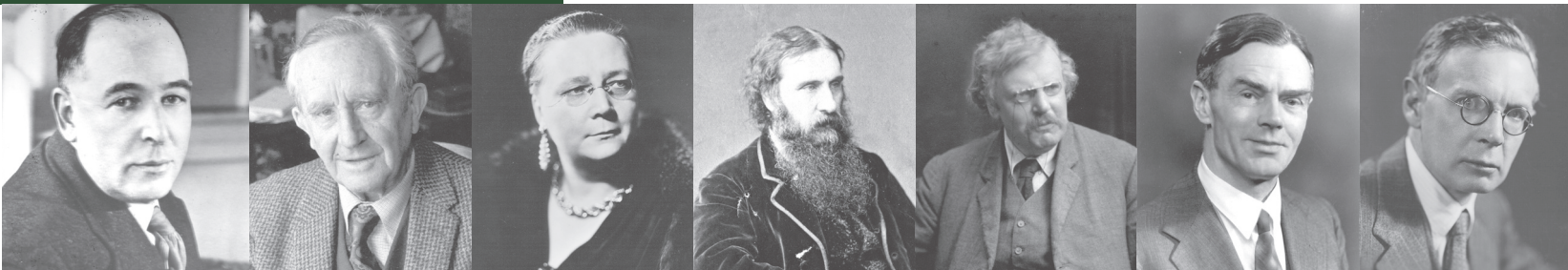
years as a university professor, focusing her scholarship on George MacDonald while translating his novels and fairytales into Russian.

Surely, Olga might have audio translations of MacDonald, if not of other Wade authors! Indeed, within hours of receiving the Wade's request, Olga emailed dozens of links for Russian translations, stating that she and her students were so concerned about Ukrainian refugees that they would be willing to create even more audio files, reading whatever works the Wade desired. Furthermore, Olga knew of a family in the British Isles willing to take in a refugee family, so that Kirstin's Ukrainian friends are now safe in England, while many other refugees are listening to the same fiction that transformed Olga's life.



Photo Credit: Kamil Czański

Please join the Wade staff in prayer not only for the Ukraine, but also that Russian audio books by our authors might become like tongues of fire spreading through refugee camps, igniting the spirits of thousands, much as George MacDonald's book *Phantastes* "baptized the imagination" of a cynical atheist named C. S. Lewis, starting him—and others—on a journey to Christian faith. W



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**DIRECT FROM
THE DIRECTORS**

David C. and Crystal Downing

With the thawing of COVID restrictions, speaking engagements started sprouting like daffodils after a long cold winter.

In April, we were featured speakers for an Inklings Weekend in Montreat, NC, flying a week later to Chattanooga, where David delivered a lecture at the University of Tennessee. In September we returned to Montreat to join multiple speakers for a conference titled *From Shakespeare to the Inklings: The Bible's Impact on Creative Imagination*. Two weeks after that we spoke at Nashotah House Seminary in Wisconsin, flying to Arkansas five days later, where Crystal served as keynote speaker during a conference on Christianity and Literature held at John Brown University. It is inspiring to "take the Wade to the world" and to meet so many kindred spirits in faith, including Wheaton grads and parents of current Wheaton students.

Though a bit breathless, we have seen God's hand at work throughout. At one event a student told David, "I learned more during your lecture than I did in my entire first semester of college," and during another event Crystal was told, "I have been coming to this conference for 32 years, and you gave me more to think about than any keynote speaker before."

Credit, of course, goes to the amazing ways C.S. Lewis and D.L. Sayers can address issues that are as relevant today as 80 years ago—which, of course, is what the Wade is all about.

Summer Institute at the Wade

This summer Wheaton established the first-ever Wheaton College Summer Institute, a two-week summer class for high school juniors who are considering attending the College in a year or two. The College offered more than a dozen classes to over 100 students, offering two college credits that may be applied to a degree for those who choose to attend Wheaton in the future. The WCSI students who attended received a realistic preview of college life at Wheaton.

Apart from two 90-minute class sessions each day, students slept in the dorms, ate in the cafeteria, and attended chapel sessions. On the weekend, many chose to visit downtown Chicago or to go on other field trips. Among the classes offered were "The Fiction of C. S. Lewis" by David Downing, Wade Co-Director, and "The Fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien" by Dr. Jim Beitler, a Wheaton English professor and member of the Wade Center's Board. The two classes combined one evening in the second week to enjoy pizza and watch animated excerpts from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Return of the King*. The highlight of the evening was probably the appearance of singing orcs in the Rankin/Bass film released in 1980!



David's six students came from all over the country—Massachusetts, Virginia, Illinois, Texas, Kansas, and Oregon. They came very well prepared, and were lively and enthusiastic class participants. Unfortunately, there was a Covid outbreak in the second week of classes, and two students' parents asked them to fly home early rather than risk exposure. Both students stayed with the class, however, and so the second week featured four onsite students and two online students, still with laughter and lively discussions. The two-week term ended with an outdoor banquet, a chance to meet parents and answer more questions about life at Wheaton. Four of David's six students have already said they consider Wheaton their first choice for college in the future. Apart from several standing offers of lunch or dinner, we hope to see these students back at Wheaton in the not-too-distant future! w

Aslan's Garden

Thanks to the generosity of anonymous donors, a beautiful new garden is nearing completion on the north side of the Marion E. Wade Center on Wheaton College's campus. Named Aslan's Garden after the lion in C.S. Lewis's beloved *Chronicles of Narnia*, this exquisite space invites visitors to wander along creative stone walkways that circle through flowering beds in the midst of a variety of trees and shrubs.

Intended to be a quiet garden, guests may choose to linger by sitting on one of the scattered benches as they take in the beauty of the plantings or spend time in reflection. A focal point is a lovely water feature with its gently tumbling waters which adds to the restful calm.

Aslan's Garden is a welcoming space for the Wheaton College community, neighborhood and other visitors. A dedication will take place this spring once a few remaining details (a plaque with the Garden's name, new benches, and a black metal fence) are installed. w



Finding God in the Darkness: Spiritual Formation Through Depression and the Dark Night of the Soul



From L to R: Crystal Downing, Ruth Haley Barton, and Marjorie Lamp Mead.

In the inaugural lecture of the Stephen and Marjorie Mead Endowment for Spiritual Formation on April 20, 2022, Dr. Ruth Haley Barton, shared ways that spiritual formation practices, informed by insights from the writings and lives of the Wade authors, help to address the challenges of depression among Christians. She also offered "helpful guidance on how to distinguish between depression and "the dark night of the soul," a mystical concept coined by St. John of the Cross.

Dr. Barton is Founder of the Transforming Center, and has been a student, practitioner, and thought leader in the area of Christian Spirituality for over 20 years. She is the author of numerous books including *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* and *Sacred Rhythms*.

We are very grateful to the many generous Friends of the Wade who made this Endowment possible. A video recording of Dr. Barton's talk is available for viewing on the Wade Center's website. w