



Book Talk

George MacDonald, the Scottish novelist and essayist, was considered a significant literary figure in his own time, but many readers today may only recognize him as a

major influence on C. S. Lewis. MacDonald's fantasy stories, from children's tales such *The Golden Key* (1871) and *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and his more challenging narratives such as *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), evoke dream-like worlds, rich with psychological and spiritual symbolism.

Readers who seek help in unraveling the meanings and allusions in MacDonald's creative works need look no further than the guides written by Rolland Hein (1932-2023), revered professor in Wheaton's English Department from 1970 to 1997. Hein's last book on MacDonald, *Doors In* (Cascade, 2018), provides background and insight for readers at every level.

The title of the book refers to a phrase from MacDonald's *Lilith* about how every door out can also become a door in, and how leaving the world of the senses can lead to discovery of the worlds of imagination and faith. MacDonald did this in fiction, and Hein did it as well, both in scholarship and in his teaching.

After retirement Hein taught informal classes at the Wade for years, beloved by all who attended. His death this past year is a loss not only to MacDonald scholarship, but also to the Wheaton community.

Encouraging Young Scholars: The William George Shuster Research Grant

Not long after the Downings came on board as co-directors in July 2018, they met Bob Shuster, an archivist for Wheaton College. With joy in the midst of his sorrow, Bob shared that the will of his recently deceased brother, William George Shuster (class of '68), provided funds that might encourage students, from high school age through graduate school, to study at the Wade. An earnest follower of Christ powerfully influenced by Lewis, Sayers, and Tolkien, W. George Shuster, through his estate gift, has already helped raise up the next generation of Wade scholars.

The first William George Shuster Grant was awarded to Sarah Waters, a British doctoral student seeking to research Lewis's interest in Shakespeare. Since her initial visit, Sarah has returned to the Wade, her Shuster Grant helping launch her teaching career at Britain's University of Buckingham, which now pays for her research visits. Delighted with the idea of encouraging more Christians to teach in the secular academy, the Wade has awarded three additional Shuster Grants, this summer hosting two graduate students working in the "medical humanities": Kelly Chittenden (Baylor University), studying medical terminology in Lewis and Tolkien; and Sarah O'Dell (University of California, Irvine), writing a book on Lewis's physician and fellow Inkling Robert Havard. **W**



2023 Shuster Scholar awardees Kelly Chittenden (above) and Sarah O'Dell (below).

For more about the William George Shuster Research Grant



Marion E. Wade Center

Wheaton College | Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Phone: 630.752.5908 | Email: wade@wheaton.edu



wheaton.edu/wade



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Walking with C. S. Lewis and Friends at the Marion E. Wade Center

Lewis exulted in multi-day walking tours through England's countryside, especially when accompanied by people he loved, such as his brother Warnie and J.R.R. Tolkien. Echoing Lewis's delight in natural scenery is artist Ardythe Noorlag Tiesenga, a 1956 graduate from Wheaton's nursing program, who seeks to capture what she calls "God's great gift in nature" through her paintings.

To our joy and honor, Ardythe donated one of those paintings to the Wade. Appropriately titled "Where C. S. Lewis Walked," her gift now hangs in the Wade Seminar Room, fitting both room décor and Wade mission. After all, Lewis's effectiveness as a Christian author arose from his ability to walk with friends: not only physically through "this magnificent world," as Ardythe describes it, but also intellectually, imaginatively, and spiritually through their books and conversation. In fact, it was while walking among nature's beauties that Tolkien and another friend, Hugo Dyson, broke down Lewis's intellectual resistance to belief in Christ. Convinced that Christianity was just one among many "dying God myths," Lewis was stunned when his friends argued that "myth became fact" through the Incarnation: an actual event in history that all such myths anticipate.

Lewis, of course, walked with others beforehand, preparing him for his final conversion to Christianity.



Painting in Wade Seminar Room.

While a 17-year-old atheist, Lewis read George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, which, as he proclaimed, "baptized my imagination," enabling him to accept the possibility of something that transcended scientific materialism. Almost



Artist Ardythe Noorlag Tiesenga (right) and son, Dr. Frederick Tiesenga, (left) present "Where C. S. Lewis Walked."

a decade later, Owen Barfield, a former classmate at Oxford University, convinced Lewis that high-powered intellectuals can still believe in the existence of God. That prepared him for the famous walk through nature with university colleagues, a walk that transformed him into one of the most effective Christian apologists of the 20th century.

The Wade Center, then, specializes in authors who walked with Lewis: not only those who walked him to faith, but also writers whose works mentored him spiritually, like George MacDonald and G. K. Chesterton. Lewis, in fact, walked with Dorothy L. Sayers for 20 years, rereading every Easter week until he died her BBC radio plays about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: the historical fulfillment of all dying-god myths.

Ardythe's lovely painting, "Where C. S. Lewis Walked," reminds us that the Wade Center has walked many people through the works of Lewis and six of his Christian comrades, enabling readers to better understand and communicate how the Creator of "this magnificent world" took on flesh and walked upon it. **W**



**DIRECT FROM
THE DIRECTORS**

Crystal and David C.
Downing

In July we were privileged to take part in the 2023 European Summer Study Program (ESSP), in which sixteen scholars and influencers from Eastern Europe came to Wheaton for six weeks of advanced study.

Sponsored by the Domanada Foundation here in Wheaton, the conference brings together visitors from a host of post-Communist countries including Hungary, Czechia, Romania, and Slovenia. These scholars have the option to study Theology or Biblical Studies, but they may also branch out into the arts, writing, social media, or counseling.

Among the participants this summer were Rodica and Liviu Mocan. Rodica is Professor of Cinematography and Media at a university in Romania, and Liviu is an internationally known sculptor. Two of Liviu's creations are prominently featured in the Marjorie Lamp Mead art gallery in the lobby of the new Armerding Center for the Performing Arts on Wheaton's campus.

This year conferees at the European Summer Study Program heard from a number of Wheaton notables including Mark Noll, Amy Peeler, Theon Hill, Jerry Root, and Jill Baumgartner. The Wade Center hosted a tour of our museum space and the Clyde S. Kilby Reading Room. The Downings also spoke about the "Feisty Friendship" of Dorothy L. Sayers and C. S. Lewis, from Sayers's controversial "Man Born to Be King" radio plays to Lewis's reluctant journey to faith.

David also spent time with an aspiring writer, Brane Zelenjak from Slovenia. Brane would like to extend the reach of his InterVarsity ministry in his home country through writing, so he and David met several times to talk about journalistic forms, including print articles, blogs, social media pages, etc.— in both English and Slovenian!

In general, we felt privileged to play a small part in the work of the ESSP, teaching and learning about the work of the Kingdom around the globe.

Come and Visit the Peace and Beauty of Aslan's Garden: A Glimpse of God's Glory

A highlight of this past April was the dedication of Aslan's Garden, which was attended by a number of Friends of the Wade and Wheaton College colleagues. It was a time to express heartfelt gratitude for the generosity of the donors who, in honor of Marjorie Mead, gave this garden for the enjoyment of Wade Center visitors, the Wheaton College community, and the surrounding neighborhood. Following blueprints created by landscape architect John Staab, a team from the College, including Jay Bieszke, Randy Norbeck, Bruce Koenigsberg, Whitley Grey, and Britta Wallbaum, oversaw the details of the garden project, including installation of the hardscape, lighting, and water features.



The extensive plantings in Aslan's Garden are a botanist's delight, with 130 different varieties of trees, shrubs, and flowers. Each one of these myriad plantings was expertly chosen by Tom Trayser, Wheaton College Landscape Designer, who, along with the help of his team, carefully placed them into picturesque beds tucked among lovely stone walking paths. All of this adds up to a feast of color, shapes and sounds for the enjoyment of appreciative visitors. A charming fountain adds soft splashes of running water to accompany the rich bird song that echoes from tree to tree, while a multitude of vibrant blossoms provide sustenance to the many bees and lovely butterflies that gracefully flit from flower to flower.

Aslan's Garden has already become a favorite spot for many desiring a peaceful place of beauty and refreshment. Garden visitors often choose to linger on one of the carefully located wooden benches where they can read, talk to a friend, or just soak in the wonder. In fact, each bench bears a small plaque inviting guests to "Look + Listen + Settle + Wait + Walk the paths + Rest a while + Contemplate": an invitation for all who choose "to be still and listen for the whispers of Aslan."

Around the year 200, Hippolytus wrote a prayer for the Early Church to use in worship that contains this line: "We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation." This is exactly what we hope visitors to Aslan's Garden experience: a place of blessing and restoration where everyone is welcome and where they may perceive in the garden's splendor a glimpse of God's glory. As C. S. Lewis declared in *The Four Loves*: "Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and of infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word glory a meaning for me. I still do not know where else I could have found one." **W**



2024 Hansen Lecture Series with Richard Hughes Gibson

"The Way of Dante: Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers, and C. S. Lewis Journey through *The Divine Comedy*"

7 PM | Bakke Auditorium:

- January 18, 2024 - "Inferno: 'Hell Outside Your Front Door'"
- February 15, 2024 - "Purgatorio: 'The Ascent of Love'"
- March 14, 2024 - "Paradiso: 'The Problem of Glory'"

The Hansen Lectures are free and open to the public. Visit our website for more information.