

The Riddle of Gollum: A Speculative Meditation on Tolkien's Sources

By Woodrow (Woody) and Susan Wendling



Of all the characters in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of the Rings*, the one I find most fascinating is Gollum. Why am I so attracted to Gollum? One reason is that he's a villain, an evil character. Bad characters are fascinating; these are the complex parts that actors love to play. A second reason is that Gollum is a character with whom we can sympathize. I can personally identify with Gollum as a person being tempted to sin.

Eric Wurthmann astutely noted, in his introduction to this talk, that the first riddle of Gollum is the whole problem of evil.¹ Why does evil exist? If God is good and all-powerful, why does he permit evil? What are the causes of evil? The Roman Catholic Peter Abelard (who knew something about temptation!) wrote, "There are three things that tempt us – the flesh, the world, and the devil."² Medieval Catholics considered these three to be "the Infernal Trinity."³ Pastor Charles Stanley summarized these three sources of temptation as "the internal, the external, and the infernal."⁴ Surprisingly, this trifold model of temptation can be applied to Gollum. Gollum's fleshly sin is his lust for the ring,⁵ his world is the ring itself, and the devil is Sauron (the servant of Morgoth).⁶ Sauron, like Gollum, also desperately desires to possess the ring. The ring is not only Gollum's world, but Sauron's world as well.

We would like to speculate on the riddle of Gollum. What was Tolkien's creative process that led to the creation of this fascinating character? What were Tolkien's sources for Gollum's name and character? As a start, it is likely that Tolkien's sources for Gollum were the same as his sources for ents. Tolkien wrote that "...Ents are composed of philology, literature, and life."⁶ Tolkien accordingly cites three sources – his love of word origins or linguistics (philology), literature (poetry and prose), and life (personal experience). We surmise that Gollum was created in the same way.

The Poem *Glip*

The precursor to Gollum in Tolkien's writings was a slimy little creature named "Glip." *Glip* is one of a series of poems called *Tales and Songs of Bimble Bay*.⁷ The poem is undated, but was probably written around 1928. Keep in mind that Tolkien first wrote the sentence, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit," late in 1929.⁸ Here is Tolkien's poem in its entirety:⁹

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Photo used by permission of
The Marion E. Wade Center,
Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL

Published bi-monthly for the subscribing
members of the New York C.S. Lewis Society
(Founded 1969)

Library of Congress ISSN 0883-9980

Subscription:
\$10.00 for six consecutive issues;
\$20.00 foreign

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Under the cliffs of Bimble Bay
 Is a little cave of stone
 With wet walls of shining grey;
 And on the floor a bone,
 A white bone that is gnawed quite clean
 With sharp white teeth.
 But inside nobody can be seen –
 He lives far underneath,
 Under the floor, down a long hole
 Where the sea gurgles and sighs.
 Glip is his name, as blind as a mole
 In his two round eyes
 While daylight lasts; but when night falls
 With a pale gleam they shine
 Like green jelly, and out he crawls
 All long and wet with slime.
 He slinks through weeds at highwater mark
 To where the mermaid sings,
 The wicked mermaid singing in the dark
 And threading golden rings
 On wet hair; for many ships
 She draws to the rock to die.
 And Glip listens, and quietly slips
 And lies in shadow by.
 It is there that Glip steals his bones.
 He is a slimy little thing
 Sneaking and crawling under fishy stones,
 And slinking home to sing
 A gurgling sound in his damp hole;
 But after the last light
 There are darker and wickeder things
 that prowl
 On Bimble rocks at night.

Many aspects of Gollum's persona, as seen in *The Hobbit*, are already established in the character of Glip:

* Where he lives – in “a little cave of stone,” “far underneath, down a long hole where the sea gurgles,” “his damp hole”

* Glip's lair is a deadly place. The mermaid draws many ships “to the rock to die.” “It is there that Glip steals his bones.”

* His invisibility – “inside nobody can be seen.” He “quietly slips and lies in shadow by.”

* An allusion to “golden rings,” but of the mermaid's wet hair rather than a ring on the finger

* What he looks like when seen – He is “a slimy little thing sneaking and crawling,” “slinking.” His eyes “shine like green jelly.”

* What he sounds like – singing “a gurgling sound”

The Philology of Gollum

In the first edition of *The Hobbit* (1937) Tolkien wrote that the name “Gollum” came from this “gurgling sound.” In Tolkien's words, “Gollum” describes “the horrible swallowing noise in his throat”, that Gollum makes when he speaks.¹⁰ Indeed, “That is how he [Gollum] got his name, though he always called himself ‘my precious.’”

Gollum's speech has two distinctive qualities. First is the snake-like sibilant “s”: “Where iss it? Where iss it? Bilbo heard him crying. “Losst it is, my precious, lost, lost! Curse us and crush us, my precious is lost.”¹¹ The sibilant “s” is reminiscent of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The second distinctive quality is the sound of being strangled: “What's the matter?” Bilbo called. “What have you lost?” “It mustn't ask us,” shrieked Gollum. “Not its business, no, gollum! It's losst, gollum, gollum, gollum.”¹² Smeagol had strangled his brother Deagol to possess the ring, reminiscent of Cain who slew his brother Abel (Genesis 4).

The sound of being strangled was Andy Serkis's inspiration for Gollum in the movie version of *The Lord of the Rings*: “I started to think about where [Gollum] would physically carry his pain, and decide that his throat could be deeply affected, constricted by subconscious guilt associated with killing Deagol, so that when he talked he felt like he was choking.”¹³ Andy Serkis's other inspiration for Gollum was a cat bringing up a hairball!

In *The Hobbit* “Glip” became a “gulp” – “Gollum.” In *The Lord of the Rings* backstory Gollum began as the hobbit Smeagol. Smeagol's brother was Deagol. Tolkien retained the first syllable in Gollum, “gol”, as the last syllable in their hobbit names (Smeagol and Deagol).

How do we tease out the riddle of Tolkien's sources? We speculate that Tolkien may have arrived at the name “Gollum” from at least six different literary sources: Old Norse Gold, the Jewish Golem, the Aramaic word Golgotha, the giant Goliath in the Old Testament, Gorbo or Golithos in E.A. Wyck-Smith's *The Marvelous Land of Snergs*, and the Golliwogg in the books by Florence and Bertha Upton.

Old Norse Gold

Did Tolkien get the name *Gollum* from Old Norse Gold? This is the hypothesis of Douglas

Anderson, who annotated *The Annotated Hobbit*.¹⁴ The Old Norse word *gull* means “gold.” In the oldest manuscripts it is spelled *goll*. One inflected form would be *gollum*, “gold, treasure, something precious.” It can also mean “ring,” as is found in the compound word *fngr-gull*, “finger-ring” – points that may have occurred to Tolkien.

Old Norse mythology was certainly one of Tolkien’s many sources for the riddle contest between Bilbo and Gollum. Word combats with deadly outcomes are common in Old Norse literature.¹⁶ A riddle contest with Odin is prominent in *The Saga of King Heidrik the Wise*.¹⁷ Old English literature is another source for the riddle contest. The largest manuscript of Anglo-Saxon poetry, *The Exeter Book*, contains 95 riddles. Bilbo’s second riddle, “sun on the daisies,” is a play on the word daisy, which was originally “day’s eye” (*dæges éage*) in Old English.¹⁸

Riddles are common in many literary traditions. Bilbo’s third riddle, describing an egg, is a condensation of a verse Tolkien credited to American nursery books.¹⁹ Bilbo’s fourth riddle, “no-legs”, is a variation on the riddle of the Sphinx in Greek mythology: What animal walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening? The answer, as given by Oedipus, is man.²⁰ Riddles are even found in *The Holy Bible*, involving Moses (Numbers 12:8), Samson (Judges 14), the psalmist (Psalm 49:1), Solomon (Proverbs 1:6), and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1, 2 Chronicles 9:1).

The Jewish Golem

An alternative hypothesis is that Tolkien got the name Gollum from the Jewish Golem.²¹ *Golem* comes from a Hebrew word that occurs once in the Old Testament (Psalm 139:16): “Your eyes saw my unformed *substance*,” the word root for substance being the consonants GLM in the Hebrew.²² Tolkien did have an interest in the Hebrew language. He reported being “immersed in Hebrew,” but in 1957, after *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were published.²³ Tolkien did translate the book of Jonah in *The Jerusalem Bible* (published in 1966), but “Not from the Hebrew direct!”²⁴

Was Tolkien aware of the Jewish legend of the Golem? The Golem was a creature of clay constructed to represent a human being and endowed with life, but without a soul. The legendary Golem protected the Jews in the Ghettos.²⁵

Did Tolkien read Gustav Meyrink’s *The Golem*, a famous fictional treatment of the Golem first published in English in 1928?²⁶ *The Golem*, a masterpiece of fantastic fiction, is a supernatural novel (probably more to Charles Williams’ taste!). Tolkien read little contemporary fiction, but he did read fantasy and science fiction.²⁷ Tolkien did not refer to Gustav Meyrink or the Golem in his writings (to the best of our knowledge); however, the Oxford Christian writers could be secretive about their sources. Michael Ward’s *Planet Narnia* is a case in point.²⁸

Gollum and the Golem have quite a few similarities, besides names that sound the same. They are both creatures of the earth. They are both imperfect beings. They both can become invisible; invisibility was a property of the Golem in some stories. Their magical power can be inactivated. In Gollum’s case, his invisibility is lost when he loses the ring to Bilbo.

Another possible source for Tolkien’s conception of Gollum is the monster in *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) is recognized as the first fully achieved science fiction novel.²⁹ Literary scholarship is divided as to whether Mary Shelley was aware of the Golem legend or not.^{30,31} Surprisingly there are many echoes of *Frankenstein* in Tolkien’s description of Gollum. Tolkien uses the same words to describe Gollum, “miserable” and “wretched”, that Mary Shelley uses again and again to describe both Frankenstein and his monster. The monster begs Frankenstein to have pity. As an aside, Saruman’s creation of the Uruk-hai is eerily reminiscent of Frankenstein’s creation of his monster.

Golgotha and Goliath

Regarding the philology of the name Gollum, did Tolkien have Golgotha in mind? The English word “Golgotha” comes from the Aramaic word for “Place of the Skull.” Gollum’s cave in *The Hobbit* was certainly a place of death. According to the Gospel accounts,³² Jesus was crucified between two thieves. My favorite line in *The Hobbit* is Gollum’s last line: “Thief, thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it, we hates it, we hates it for ever!”³³

Or did Tolkien have the giant Goliath in mind?³⁴ David had a deadly one-on-one encounter with Goliath. David was only a boy (hobbit-like) relative to the giant Goliath.

Gorbo or Golithos

Did Tolkien have Gorbo or Golithos in mind when he thought up Gollum? Gorbo and Golithos are two characters in *The Marvellous Land of Snergs*, a children's book by E.A. Wyke-Smith published in 1928.³⁵ The story concerns the adventures of a Snerg named Gorbo. Snergs are "a race of people only slightly taller than the average table but broad in the shoulders and of great strength."³⁶ Another character is Golithos, a giant ogre who has become a vegetarian but is being tempted to eat children once again. (Wyke-Smith probably had the giant Goliath in mind when he coined the name Golithos – "Gol" + *lithos*, stone.)

Tolkien admitted in a 1955 letter to W.H. Auden that *The Marvellous Land of Snergs* was "probably an unconscious source-book! for the Hobbits, not of anything else."³⁷ But this statement fails to convey the esteem Tolkien once held for the book. In the drafts for his famous lecture *On Fairy Stories* he wrote, "I should like to record my own love and my children's love of E.A. Wyck-Smith's *Marvellous Land of Snergs*, at any rate the snerg-element of that tale, and of Gorbo the gem of dunderheads, jewel of a companion in an escapade."³⁸

The Golliwogg Books

Did Tolkien have the "Golliwogg" books in the back of his mind when he thought up Gollum? These children's books, illustrated by Florence Upton and written in verse by her mother Bertha, were published from 1895 to 1909.³⁹ Tolkien was born in 1892, so the Golliwogg books may have been among the first books Tolkien read as a child! The "Golliwogg" sparked an industry of dolls and publishing in Great Britain. The Robertson's Jam Company even used the Golliwog as their logo. C.S. Lewis mentions a Golliwog lawn ornament in *The Four Loves* (1960).⁴⁰ Unfortunately the meaning of "golliwogg" changed through the 20th Century, taking on the connotations of a racial stereotype. The word "golliwogg" came to mean "a grotesque black doll" or "a grotesque person."⁴¹ Gollum is certainly "a grotesque person." Also, the word "golliwog" sounds like pollywog (Gollum is a somewhat aquatic creature.) and scalawag (Gollum is a rascal.).

Regarding the riddle of Tolkien's sources for Gollum's name, perhaps Tolkien should have the last word: "Nevertheless one's mind is, of course, stored with a 'leaf mould' of memories (submerged) of

names, and these rise up to the surface at times, and may provide with modification the bases of 'invented' names."⁴²

Grendel

Surely the monster Grendel in *Beowulf* was a source for Gollum. The first edition of *The Hobbit* was published in 1937, while Tolkien's lecture on *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* was in 1936. *Beowulf* is at the top of Douglas Anderson's list of probable sources for *The Hobbit*.⁴³ Tolkien claimed that *Beowulf* was among his "most valued sources," but also that it was "not conspicuously present" in his mind as he wrote *The Hobbit*.⁴⁴

The Hobbit is modeled on *Beowulf*; both are quest romances ("there and back again"). Grendel is said to descend from the race of Cain.⁴⁵ Cain, like Gollum, killed his brother. Grendel is the first of three monsters that Beowulf has to face. Gollum is the first of three monsters that Bilbo faces in *The Hobbit* (followed by the spiders and the dragon Smaug). Both Grendel and Gollum live in lairs. Charles Beach noted that both are associated with caves and water and seen as pitiable.⁴⁶

Professor John M. Bowers has claimed that without Grendel, "we wouldn't have Gollum."⁴⁷ Tolkien "liked to believe, in a sense, that the stories he was telling were true stories that had passed along in oral tradition, to surface later in the earliest literature."⁴⁸ When he wrote *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien imagined that he was "writing that lost prehistory of the English people out of the evidence that was passed along in oral tradition, surfacing in the earliest literary accounts..."⁴⁹ When Tolkien "reads Beowulf and sees the character Grendel, he imagines that this character is based ultimately on Gollum. So his Gollum, he imagines, is the original type, the source for the literary Grendel."⁴⁹ Grendel was Tolkien's source for Gollum, but the reverse might also be said to be true. In Tolkien's mind, Gollum was the source for the Beowulf poet's Grendel!

Just as it has been said that without Grendel we wouldn't have Gollum, it is also possible that without Gollum we might not have Puddle-glum. The marsh-wiggle Puddle-glum, a major character in C.S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair*, was modeled on Lewis' gardener at the Kilns, Fred W. Paxford.⁵⁰ Lewis got the name Puddle-glum from an old translation of Euripides' Hippolytus, which included the phrase

“Stygian puddle glum”; Lewis reproduced the phrase in his *Oxford History of English Literature* volume.^{51,52} Donald E. Glover has noted that Puddle-glum was also modeled on Gollum.⁵³ The similarity in their names is obvious. Both are aquatic, lean, frog-like, and cold-blooded. Of course, Puddle-glum is the hero of *The Silver Chair*, while Gollum is the villain of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Christian Gospel

Another certain source for Gollum was the Christian Gospel, as expressed by the frequent appeals for mercy in the Catholic Mass. The Mass often repeats each appeal three times:

- *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy)
- *Christe eleison* (Christ have mercy)
- *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy)

The Catholic mass was Tolkien's predominant source for the great theme of pity and mercy that starts with Gollum in *The Hobbit* and then runs throughout the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.⁵⁴ One can even make a merciful acronym from Gollum's name: GOD Loves U(You) Mercifully!

To understand Gollum, Tolkien's Christian faith must also be taken into account. Tolkien was “a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic.”⁵⁵ Tolkien said of *The Lord of the Rings*, that it “is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision.”⁵⁶ In the original edition of *The Hobbit* (1937), Gollum is clearly not a hobbit: “I don't know where he came from or what he was.”⁵⁷ Only when Tolkien came to write the sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, did he have the inspiration to make Gollum a hobbit.⁵⁸

Tolkien extensively revised the Gollum narrative in the second (1951) edition of *The Hobbit*, so as to emphasize the wretchedness of Gollum and the pity of Bilbo.⁵⁹ In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien gave Gollum a back history. Gollum had been a hobbit. He had killed his own brother to get the ring. Gollum was a fallen hobbit (an everyman, or if you will, an “everyhobbit”) in need of pity and mercy, just as we are all sinners in need of God's pity and mercy.⁶⁰

Pity and mercy become major themes of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Hobbit* Bilbo has the chance to kill Gollum, but out of pity he is merciful toward Gollum and spares him. “A pity mixed with horror” stays his hand.⁶¹ In *The Lord of*

the Rings Frodo follows Gandalf's advice, feels pity and shows mercy toward Gollum, and again spares him. Frodo is enabled to complete his quest on Mount Doom, but only because he repeatedly spared Gollum beforehand.

Tolkien emphasizes in his letters that pity and mercy were essential to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*: “It is the pity of Bilbo and later Frodo that ultimately allows the Quest to be achieved...”⁶² Frodo “(and the Cause) were saved – by Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury.”⁶³ “The ‘salvation’ of the world and Frodo's own ‘salvation’ is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury.”⁶⁴ Because Frodo was consistently merciful, always sparing Gollum, he receives mercy and is spared at the moment of his final temptation at the Crack of Doom. At the very end Frodo fails in his quest to destroy the Ring, and Gollum becomes the means of Frodo's salvation. Frodo and Middle Earth are saved. The ring, Gollum, and Sauron (the infernal trinity) are destroyed all at once. Tolkien would describe this event as a *Eucatastrophe*,⁶⁵ a “good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’” representing a “miraculous grace, never to be counted on to recur”.⁶⁶ Two other synonyms for Tolkien's *Eucatastrophe* might be what C.S. Lewis described as “a severe mercy”⁶⁷ and another Inkling, Charles Williams, described as “a terrible good.”⁶⁸

Summary

We have tried to solve the riddle of Tolkien's sources for Gollum. We have hypothesized that Gollum, like the ents, was “composed of philology, literature, and life.” Gollum got his start in Tolkien's writings as a creature in his poem, *Glip*. Gollum got his name from his “gurgling sound,” the “horrible swallowing noise in his throat.” We speculate that Tolkien may have arrived at the name “Gollum” from at least six different literary sources: Old Norse Gold, the Jewish Golem, the Aramaic word Golgotha, the giant Goliath in the Old Testament, Gorbo or Golithos in E.A. Wyck-Smith's *The Marvelous Land of Snergs*, and the Golliwogg in the books by Florence and Bertha Upton. Two more definite sources for Gollum are the monster Grendel in *Beowulf* and the Christian Gospel, as expressed by the frequent appeals for mercy in the Roman Catholic mass.

On hearing this presentation, James Como quipped, “I can easily imagine Tolkien listening to you and saying, ‘Is that where I got all that?’”⁶⁹ Our

speculations might have left Tolkien scratching his head: “Do you mean to say I was thinking that?” What was Tolkien’s answer to the riddle of his sources? Tolkien believed that “...only one’s guardian Angel, or Indeed God himself, could unravel the real relationship between personal facts and an author’s works. Not the author himself (though he knows more than any investigator), and certainly not the so called ‘psychologists.’”⁷⁰ In the words of Fleming Rutledge, “Much of the saga, as Tolkien himself says, ‘wrote itself,’ – a phenomenon acknowledged by many writers of fiction, but especially emphasized by Tolkien in his letters because he believed that God was the writer of the story.”⁷¹



Woody and Sue Wendling are longtime members of the Society. They are pictured here with their cats, Merry and Pippin.

Notes

- 1 This talk was presented to the New York C.S. Lewis Society on the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.
- 2 <http://www.abaelard.de/abaelard/050511expositio.htm> (Translation by Dr. Stevens Heckscher). See also *The Holy Bible*, Ephesians 2:1-3.
- 3 Edmund Spenser, *The Fairie Queene*, ed. by Thomas P. Roche, Jr., London: Penguin Classics, 1987, p. 1086.
- 4 Personal sermon notes
- 5 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002, p. vii.
- 6 J.E.A. Tyler, *The Tolkien Companion*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976, p. 422.
- 7 Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981, p. 212.
- 8 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*. Revised and expanded edition annotated by Douglas A. Anderson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

- Company, 2002, p. 119.
- 9 Leslie Ellen Jones, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003, p. 83.
- 10 *The Annotated Hobbit*, p. 119.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 14 Andy Serkis, *Gollum: How we Made Movie Magic*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, p. 4.
- 15 *The Annotated Hobbit*, p. 120.
- 16 William H. Green, *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995, pp. 76-77.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
- 19 *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 110.
- 20 *The Annotated Hobbit*, p. 126.
- 21 Woody Wendling, *The Riddle of Gollum: Was Tolkien Inspired by Old Norse Gold, the Jewish Golem, and the Christian Gospel?* Inklings Forever (Volume VI): A Collection of Essays Presented at the Sixth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis and Friends. Taylor University, May 29-June 1, 2008, pp. 135-138.
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- 23 Christina Scull, Wayne G. Hammond, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide: Reader’s Guide*, Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006, p. 468.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 468.
- 25 Elie Wiesel, *The Golem: The Story of a Legend*. New York: Summit Books, 1983, pp. 45, 103.
- 26 Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*. Translation by Madge Pemberton, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928. Republication by Dover Publications, Inc. (Mineola, NY), 1976.
- 27 Colin Duriez, *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*, Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2003, p. 213.
- 28 Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia*, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008.

- 29 Eric S. Rabkin, *Masterpieces of the Imaginative Mind: Literature's Most Fantastic Works, Part 2*. Chantilly, VA: The Great Courses, 2007, p. 22.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.22.
- 31 Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, *The Monsters: Mary Shelley and the Curse of Frankenstein*, New York: Back Bay Books (Little, Brown and Company), 2006, p. 321.
- 32 *The Holy Bible* (Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27, Luke 23:32-33, John 19:18).
- 33 *The Annotated Hobbit*, p.134.
- 34 *The Holy Bible*, 1 Samuel 17.
- 35 E.A. Wyke-Smith, *The Marvellous Land of Snergs*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928. Republication by Dover Publications, Inc. (Mineola, NY), 2006.
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- 37 *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 215.
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- 48 John M. Bowers, *The Western Literary Canon in Context, Part 3 of 3*. Chantilly, VA: The Great Courses, 2008, p. 173.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 173.
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- 55 *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 288.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 57 John D. Rateliff, *The History of The Hobbit Part One: Mr. Baggins*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007, p. 166.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- 59 *The Annotated Hobbit*, pp. 128, 133.
- 60 *The Holy Bible* (Psalm 51, Luke 18:13,38-39).
- 61 *The Annotated Hobbit*, p. 133.
- 62 *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 191.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 251-2.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 234.
- 65 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984, p. 153.
- 66 Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien: Man and Myth*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1998, p. 104.
- 67 Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977, p. 210.
- 68 Charles Williams, *Descent Into Hell*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1937, p. 19.
- 69 *Report of the September 9, 2011 Meeting*, p. 15.
- 70 *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 288.
- 71 Fleming Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle-earth*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004, p. 198.

Jack and the Bookshelf No. 19

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Histories of the Kings of Britain

by Dale Nelson

Lewis's Arthurian novel *That Hideous Strength* was published on 16 August 1945. Writing to I. O. Evans in Sept. 1945, Lewis listed a few sources about Merlin, leading with Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. He told Evans that he "would get something more in Geoffrey of Monmouth," available in a Temple Classics edition. This 1904 book appears to be the same translation, by Sebastian Evans, that was added (1920?) to the Everyman's Library series as #577, in a blue binding because it was classified as Romance.

Geoffrey's book, dating to the twelfth century, begins with praise for the natural richness of this "best of islands" and a note of regret for its political decline; once it was "graced" by twenty-eight cities, but some are now "fallen into decay." The narrative commences with the story of Brute the Trojan, who led his people at last to Albion, which at the time was inhabited by a few giants. New Troy was founded; it was later called London. Geoffrey says that, at this time, Eli was priest in "Judaea" – an anachronistic name for ancient Israel. The newly colonized island is divided into Loegria (England), Albanact (Scotland) and Camber (Wales), with Brute's henchman Corineus founding Cornwall.

About sixty-nine percent of the book is concerned with brisk accounts of numerous pre-Arthurian kings and their wars. There is less of the marvelous than one might have expected, although we read of one king, Bladud, who practiced "nigromancy," but fell to his death when the wings that he had fashioned failed him. In Geoffrey's way of telling it, King Lear divided his realm between the two daughters who flattered him, but Cordelia lived to inherit the rule, and killed herself when she lost her kingdom. Geoffrey's kings are often bloodthirsty, but when he deals with the time of Julius Caesar's invasion, he laments the decline in British valor that has occurred since then.

About twenty percent of the book is given over to King Arthur's era, but what may strike most readers will be what is absent here as compared to Malory's later and more familiar account. In Geoffrey's book, there are no knights of the Round Table, no Grail quest, no adultery of Guenevere and Lancelot. In general, Geoffrey is not interested in women. The usurper Mordred is Arthur's nephew, not his son by

incest with his half-sister. Arthur commits governance of the realm, while he is away at war, to Mordred and Guenevere, and while he is gone Mordred marries Guenevere and takes the crown. When Arthur's forces return to Britain, Guenevere flees to Wales and takes the veil – and whether she had married Mordred willingly or not is unclear. If unwillingly, why did she not wait to see if she would be delivered? Out of shame? If Geoffrey thought there was a story there, he didn't tell it. Geoffrey notes that Gawain, as a lad, was a page at the court of Pope Sulpicius – an unrecorded pope.

Unlike Malory, Geoffrey provides a dozen pages of Merlin's prophecies. There are many obscure passages. If there was once a key to them, it seems to have been lost. However, the meaning of some of the prophecies is clear enough: "The wild deer shall have peace, but humanity shall suffer dole" – eventually, as Geoffrey records, Britain was depopulated by war, famine, and plague. "Women shall become serpents in their gait, and all their steps be full of pride. The castles of Venus shall be builded anew, nor shall Cupid's arrows cease to wound." The origin of Stonehenge is revealed – Merlin devised a way for the men of King Aurelius to bring the Giants' Dance from Ireland. It becomes a burial site for British kings. Geoffrey's Merlin is more prominent before the time of Arthur than during Arthur's reign.

About eleven percent of the book deals with kings who reign after the severely-wounded Arthur goes to Avalon to be healed, the first of these kings being Constantine (AD 542). King Malgo is "hateful in the sight of God, for his secret vices." Because of the divine wrath against its anointing of cruel kings and its greed, lust, and false religion, Britain is conquered – by Africans and other invaders. Surviving Britons withdraw into Cornwall and Wales, preserving the saints' relics. The last king in the line of the Britons is Cadwallader, who dies in 689 – another rare date in Geoffrey's histories. An angelic voice tells him, in exile in Brittany, not to try to retake Britain; rather, he is to go to Rome, where he will die. The Britons will reign again in Briton when they bring his relics to the island and the hidden relics of the saints are revealed. The Britons degenerate, however, and come to be known as the Welsh. The Saxons who have settled in England, by contrast, improve their land.

After Charles Williams died, Lewis issued his late friend's unfinished *Figure of Arthur*. Williams devotes several pages to Geoffrey. He says that

REPORT OF THE MARCH 9, 2012 MEETING

The New York C. S. Lewis Society met on March 9, 2012 at Ascension Church Parish House, 12 West 11th St. in Manhattan. Mary Gehringer called the meeting to order.

Bill McClain read our monthly Lewis reading, from "Religion: Reality or Substitute?" from *Christian Reflections*: "There is nothing we cannot be made to believe or disbelieve. If we wish to be rational, not now and then, but constantly, we must pray for the gift of Faith, for the power to go on believing not in the teeth of reason but in the teeth of lust and terror and jealousy and boredom and indifference that which reason, authority, or experience, or all three, have once delivered to us for truth."

Marilyn Driscoll volunteered to do the April reading. We had no new attendees. Through a series of unfortunate events, the announcements were not recorded. They did include the announcing of upcoming meetings: "Oxbridge 2011" with John Morrison on 4/13, "C. S. Lewis and Forgiveness" with Sister John Sheila Galligan on 5/11, and Charles Williams' *The Forgiveness of Sins* with Charles Beach on 6/8.

Mary introduced our speaker, Jennifer Woodruff Tait. Jennifer is a long-time member of the Society and its long-distance recording secretary. She teaches church history for three different institutions (Asbury Theological Seminary, Huntington University, and United Theological Seminary), is an editor at *Christian History Magazine*, and the mother of a 5-year-old Narnia fan.¹

Jennifer's paper, "Learning to 'Speak the Tongue of the Holy Ghost': An Introduction to the Poetry of Charles Williams," will be published in a future *Bulletin*. It attempted to introduce Williams' poetry to those unfamiliar with his writings (its origin was in a panel discussion at the Taylor University CSL Colloquium which also introduced people to CW's fiction and his plays.) Jennifer argued that two things were necessary for making one's way through CW's poetry; some knowledge of the Arthurian legends on which it is based and some knowledge of Williams' particular theological emphases, especially the theme of co-inherence. She discussed several different ordered and disordered loves in the poem cycle, and

¹ At the time of the meeting, I was also pregnant with child #2, born on May 31st. We don't know yet how she feels about Narnia.

then looked in detail at the poem "Bors to Elayne: On the King's Coins."

Discussion themes included

- The issue of Christ speaking "words of power"
- The historical context of the poems
- The consistent theme of co-inherence in his work (JWT: "anyplace you pick up CW you're going to get a bunch of the stuff I just talked about").
- Lewis's poem on CW's death (JWT: "my two favourite poems in the *Collected Poems* are Lewis's poem on the death of CW and his poem on the death of Joy. I'm sorry these people died, but man, he wrote some gorgeous poems about it").
- The idea (raised by Joe Sweeney) that the Arthurian legends are a "whitewash" of early English history (JWT: "If there's a whitewash, it's Malory's whitewash.") Joe also argued that Anglo-Catholics such as CW should not be claiming the name "Catholic" or claiming to believe in the Real Presence (a comment with which both Sue Wendling and JWT disagreed).
- Whether Ransom in *That Hideous Strength* was modelled on Williams ("whoever he is in the first two books") and how the community at St. Anne's represents the community surrounding CW, or at least Lewis's idea of the one he would have liked around him ("there is even an agnostic there as the court jester, because that's part of the web of exchange").
- Lewis's essay describing CW as the preface to *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, especially his statement that his idea of death changed when CW died.
- CW's dynamic personality.

The fact that both Lewis and Sayers revered Williams (Maggie Goodman: "That's what makes me persevere"...JWT: "He's like Wagner, he has wonderful minutes and terrible half-hours").

- Connections between Williams and Chesterton, especially their idea of community and how that appealed to Lewis
- The image of the city in CW ("that was

REPORT OF THE JANUARY 13, 2012 MEETING

The New York C. S. Lewis Society met on Friday, January 13, 2011 at Ascension Church Parish House, 12 West 11th St. in Manhattan. Mary Gehringer called the meeting to order.

Marilyn Driscoll read our monthly Lewis reading, from *Christian Reflections*: “How many of the freshmen who come up to Oxford...have been argued out of it....mere change of scene...examples closer to the Christian problem...the conflict is not between faith and reason but between faith and sight.”

We had six new attendees, Pamela Bauder, Sherrie Murphy, Dorollo Nixon, Jr., Greg Stringer, Gabriel Zeno, and Sonita Sadio, whose first or favourite books included *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity*.

Eric announced the availability of cassette tapes of all meetings for \$2 (contact Bill McClain). Maggie Goodman announced the availability of six of Dorothy Sayers’ plays in single-volume editions. She had a flier with more information.

Upcoming meetings include “C. S. Lewis and Spiritual Direction” by Will Vaus on 2/10; “Learning to Speak the Tongue of the Holy Ghost: An Introduction to the Poetry of Charles Williams” with Jennifer Woodruff Tait on 3/9; and “Oxbridge 2011” with John Morrison on 4/13. Tonight’s meeting is “God in the Dock” by John Martin, a long-time member of the Society who is an author and playwright.

John’s talk will be in a future *Bulletin*; he expanded his title when he got up to “God in the Dock and C. S. Lewis for the Defence.” He focused on the collection of essays published as *God in the Dock* as representing some of the best of Lewis’ writing and thinking, and as focusing on the defence of God against various groups. He opened by setting the scene as though it was in a British courtroom, and moved on to summarize and interweave four of the essays (“briefs”) from this dramatic perspective: “Miracles,” “Myth Became Fact,” “What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ,” and “Mediation in a Toolshed” (“one of my favourite essays ever written by anyone, anywhere”), as well as to mention several of his other favourites, including “Man or Rabbit” and “Bulverism,” as worthy of special attention. He concluded, “I urge all those who haven’t read them to read them, and those who have read them to read them again...I suppose people will ask questions and I will answer them,

though there are much better answers in the book.”

David Kornegay opened by asking a (mostly inaudible) question about a book with only thirteen essays from Lewis. John: “The Readers Digest version.” Pamela Bauder wanted to know again what John’s favourite essay was. Jim Tetreault commented that in his edition he has a copy of a blurb (the author was inaudible) taken from the dust jacket, which warmly recommends the essays as “marvellous for clearing the mind” even if you are not of Lewis’ perspective. (John: “Isn’t he still alive and about 105 years old?”) Maria Marcus noted the way in which *The Last Battle* illustrates some of these themes. John: “Had I but known that in time....” John Morrison cited a passage from George MacDonald: “Seeing is not believing, it’s simply seeing,” and pointed out Uncle Andrew’s failure to “see” in *Magician’s Nephew*. He also said that Lewis seems to be markedly consistent in his style of argument in everything he says. Finally, Mary Gehringer asked if GITD was John’s favorite book. He said “Yes, closely followed by *Till We Have Faces*—sorry, I meant to endorse it more heartily than that.”

Attending the meeting were Eric and Susan Wurthmann, Mary Gehringer, John Martin, Maggie Goodman, Helene DeLorenzo, Zina Michajliczenko, Trudy Friedrichs, Mary Pixley, Jim Tetreault, Bob Trexler, Sherrie Murphy, Zoe Blake, Dorollo Nixon, Jr., Greg Stringer, Rob Clere, Pamela Bauder, Clara Sarrocco, Christopher Iasiello, Eileen O’Connell, Dorothy Fabian, Rose Marie Barba, Lorraine Collazzo, Charles Abraham, Maria Marcus, Marc Burkhalter, Diana DiStasio, Charlotte Patton, Gabriel Zeno, Jim Bash, Sonita Sadio, John Morrison, David Kornegay, and Marilyn Driscoll.



Not attending the meeting was recorder Jennifer Woodruff Tait, who also likes *God in the Dock* a lot, but so wishes Hooper had not decided to call that essay “Priestesses in the Church.”

[continued from the bottom of page 8]

Geoffrey is the first known source to present Arthur as a king, and that he “gave us the name and supernatural strangeness of Merlin” the wizard. Geoffrey assigns Merlin a father who would not have been acceptable to the later Middle Ages: “certain spirits there be betwixt the moon and the earth, the which we do call incubus daemons.” Williams comments: Merlin “came from those other beings, faerie rather than diabolic, strange and comely, capable of high knowledge and sensuous delight.”

All these things being said, one must add that Lewis admitted to “decided contempt” for Geoffrey of Monmouth. In a remark easy to overlook (in “The Genesis of a Medieval Book”), Lewis praised La3amon* as a far better author than Geoffrey, although his *Brut* is indebted to the *Histories*. Geoffrey exasperated Lewis with his accounts of Arthur’s empire-building wars and “the insufferable rigmarole of Merlin’s prophecies!”

* See the next column for information on the yogh character represented here with the number 3.

From a SUNY Buffalo listserv regarding the modern spelling of the medieval author Layamon:

“And now a comment on the letter “3,” or “yogh,” which is found in older English and Scottish, but is not used today. (Aren’t you glad you have a language buff on the list?) It is written like a “z” with a curved tail down below the line, as in the “z” of an old German typeface. It is often hand-written with the tail sweeping off to the right. Priscilla Tolkien says that on one occasion her father, JRR Tolkien, was talking with some friends in a bar in Ireland, and said, “The tail of a properly written yogh goes off like this!” He made a dramatic sweep with his hand and struck the nose of the man next to him, a complete stranger. He turned to the man and said, “Oh, I’m so sorry, I hope you are not hurt, I was just explaining that the tail of a yogh goes off like this.” He then hit the man in the nose again. Fortunately, according to Miss Tolkien, the Irish find it quite reasonable that scholars should be a little crazy, and the man was quite understanding. In modern English, a word formerly written with a yogh is now usually written with a “g” or a “gh” or a “y”. [...] You will see the mediaeval author “Geoffrey de Layamon” with his name so written in most books, but if the reference is by a scholar and the typesetting facilities permit, it may appear as “Geoffrey de La3amon.” When you see a “gh” in modern English, there is a chance that it was once written with a yogh.”

FUTURE MEETINGS

Oct 12	“C. S. Lewis and the Angel Hierarchy” Sue Wendling	Jan. 11	“C. S. Lewis, Michael O’Brien and the Apocalyptic Imagination” John Morrison
Nov. 9	“A Friend’s Death: Lewis vs. Augustine” Jason Lepojarvi	Feb. 8	“C. S. Lewis and Contemporary Catholic Theology.” Michael Canaris
Dec. 14	A Reading of Dorothy L. Sayers’ “Kings in Judaea” from <i>The Man Born to Be King</i> Coordinated by Margaret Goodman	Mar. 8	“C. S. Lewis, First Class Christian Communicator, Writer, Speaker” Joe Sweeney

We meet at 7:30 in the Parish House of The Church of the Ascension at 12 West 11th Street, Manhattan. Call 1 (212) 254-8620 after noon on the meeting day if there is a question of possible cancellation. On the block of the Parish House, on-street parking is legal all day (alternate side rules apply). On some nearby blocks, parking becomes legal at 6:00. Nearby subway stations are at 14th Street and 6th Avenue (F train) and 14th Street Union Square (many trains 4, 5, 6, N, R, L, Q). The Strand Bookstore, dealing in second hand books, is nearby. ALL ARE WELCOME.

BETWEEN FRIENDS: George Sayer's Communications with Stephen Schofield. Part 2.

edited by Mark Koonz¹

*This is the second of a four-part series focusing on George Sayer, friend and biographer of C.S. Lewis, taken from the archival files of **The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal** [listed below as CJ], now defunct. This collection contains Sayer's correspondence with Stephen Schofield, the founding editor, along with book reviews by Sayer. Part I contains memoirs of visits to his home by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Part II includes book reviews. Part III gives Sayer's review of A.N. Wilson's book on Lewis. Part IV offers a series of letters from Sayer to Schofield.*

In this section we present four book reviews which George Sayer wrote, as well as a review of a conference. The first presentation concerns Lewis' response to Roman Catholicism. The final one shows Sayer's great concern over the loss of traditional English poetry in education (British and American). This was also a major concern to C.S. Lewis. Sayer presents the poetry of Sheldon Vanauken as a ray of sunshine.

#1: **Why not Roman Catholic?** by George Sayer, in review of Christopher Derrick's *C.S. Lewis and the Church of Rome* (Ignatius Press), is taken from *CJ* no. 37 (Winter 1982), p.17:

This is one of the two most interesting of the six new books on Lewis that have been sent to me in the last two months. One reason is that Mr. Derrick knew Lewis and can write about him from personal experience: another is that his subject is a new one. What was Lewis's conception of the Church? Why didn't he become a Roman Catholic? He believed in the doctrine of Purgatory, repugnant to many Protestants, had a spiritual director to whom he made regular confessions, numbered several Catholics among his friends.

His doctrinal objections do not seem to have been very serious. Dr. R. E. Havard and I once asked him straight out why he wasn't a Catholic?

"Because of your heresies," was his reply.

"Which heresies?" we asked eagerly.

"Your worship of the Virgin Mary. The superstitious attitude of many of your members towards the saints. Indulgences."

Then he most firmly changed the subject.

In fact his repugnance was emotional. When his brother wrote from Drogheda that he was thinking of being received into the Roman Church, Jack dashed over to prevent it. He once just succeeded. As Mr Derrick tells us, Warnie's (W H Lewis) view was that Jack (C S Lewis) by no means always came out on top in argument with the local parish priest.¹

The source of his emotional revulsion was probably his childhood in Belfast. His clergyman grandfather was as violently anti-Catholic as the Revd Paisley², and Jack imbibed the dislike with his mother's milk. Later he became a member of a gang that waged war on Catholic boys. Boys in Belfast played not Red Indians but Prots and Popes. Tolkien wrote in a letter to me that he thought hatred of the Blessed Sacrament was at the bottom of his attitude.³ Certainly he was uneasy on the only occasion I got him to go with me to a Catholic Church. But "too emotional for me," was all he said about it.

I think it is lucky for us that he was not a Roman, nor for that matter an Evangelical. The fact that he was lay member of a very broad Church made it much easier for him to state the doctrines common to all Christians in the masterly way that he did.

#2: The following is a book review from *CJ* no. 60 (Autumn 1987), page 15:

A GOOD, PAINSTAKING STUDY GEORGE SAYER

[review of] Joe E. Christopher, *C.S. Lewis*
(Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987)

This book is not a biography. It is a survey of almost all of Lewis's prose writings. These are grouped together and discussed by genre, in relation to each other and to Lewis's moral, religious and aesthetic concerns at the time he wrote them.

This sometimes works well as in the chapters entitled "The Apologist" and "The Autobiographer", but some of the other groupings seem strange. Thus *The Screwtape Letters* is linked with *Reflections on the Psalms* and in a chapter called "The Christian Essayist", *The Great Divorce* with the science fiction

novels in “The Romancer (I)” and *Till We Have Faces* and the Narnia Stories in “The Romancer (II)”.

The literary influences and parallels that Professor Christopher finds in the books may provide an explanation of these groupings. Thus the Lewis of “The Romancer (I)” was in the author’s view very much influenced by Charles Williams and Dante, and “The Romancer (II)” by Tolkien and Dante.

Although the book is only a short one of 150 pages, perhaps too short for the author’s ambitious plan, a great deal is packed into it.

Good use is made of some of the essays such as the *Reply to Professor Haldane*.

Most of Lewis’s ideas are clearly stressed and the success of his books evaluated. *Till We Have Faces* is put forward as the best of Lewis’s books, but Professor Christopher considers that he also achieves greatness in the Narnia Stories (especially in *The Silver Chair* and *The Last Battle*), in *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Four Loves*. “*Surprised by Joy*, if nothing else, should claim a minor place in Irish literature for its description of a Belfast childhood.” Although too concentrated to be easy to read, this is a good book, based on a wide reading and a painstaking study of Lewis’s writings.

#3: In *CJ* no. 64 (Autumn 1988), pages 5-6, Sayer wrote “The Clean Sea Breeze” as a review of the Oxford Lewis Institute. Here are relevant excerpts:

One’s first thought is that no writer of this century and perhaps no writer of any other century could have inspired this event. Consider what happened. For a fortnight in July well over a hundred people flew to Oxford from all parts of North America and occupied St. Hilda’s College. C.S. Lewis, in whose honour they came, would have liked their varied and non-sectarian composition. They were all Christian, but members of quite different Churches. There were among them evangelicals, Episcopalians, Lutherans and Roman Catholics. They were of all ages, with about as many young as old. There were many academics, but again about as many who were not. There were about as many men as women. They were there basically to attend, study and discuss a remarkable programme of lectures, the object of which was to convert and transform University society⁴.

The title and theme of the first week’s lectures was THE UNIVERSITY, A CALL FOR INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL. That of the second was THE CHRISTIAN, A CALL FOR

PERSONAL RENEWAL. The theme of the whole was the Christian in Contemporary Society. It was relevant to everyone there because Christian Wisdom and the University had become divorced. The University had been to a large extent a Christian institution. But now the University seemed to hold the Christian “in contempt or worse”, and the Christian felt “alienated from the aims, vocabulary and apparent self sufficiency of the University.”

The object of the lectures was to examine this rift and then consider ways of bridging it. For these lectures Oxford’s Playhouse Theatre was taken over for the fortnight. The lecturers came from England and Scotland as well as North America and like their audiences were varied in their church allegiance. As the list printed in the Summer Journal shows, they were men and women of real distinction . . . On most days there was time for reading and reflection and on nearly every day a number of Great Books Seminars.

The page of the programme introducing these seminars began with a quotation from Lewis’s essay “On the Reading of Old Books”: “Keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through your minds . . . by reading old books.” The books read included selections from Plato’s *Meno* and *Republic*; the Bible, St. Augustine’s *De Magistro* and *Confessions*; St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*; Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* and C.S. Lewis’s *Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*.

In the opinion of many who attended them, these seminars were to a large extent successful in their object which was to present some of the intellectual foundations for the dialogue which ought to be taking place between the Christian and the modern University.

. . . The organization responsible for this remarkable fortnight was the C.S. Lewis Foundation for Christian Higher Education in conjunction with the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society. What, you will ask, is the C.S. Lewis College Foundation of Redlands, California, of which Dr. Stan Mattson is President? This has recently joined forces with the Kilns Association, the object of which was to restore and preserve the house in which Lewis spent much of his working life. To judge from the success of Oxford ’88 the future is bright. It is planned to hold a similar summer institute next year, probably at Keble College, Oxford.

#4: The following is a book review which Sayer wrote and sent to Schofield⁵.

THANKS BE TO GOD. Prayers from around the World, selected and illustrated by Pauline Baynes. Lutterworth Press, [1990] L6.95

The very first thing I did after having read through the “review” copy of Pauline Baynes’s most lovely book of prayers, THANKS BE TO GOD, was to ring up my bookseller to order copies for our grandchildren and god-children. For, although it will delight people of any age, it will be most useful as a book for children. And for children of any race, sect or religion. It is truly ecumenical, as acceptable for Moslems and Hindus, as for Christian children. The prayers, all of which are simple, are collected from many countries. Several will be fresh to almost any reader. An example is the prayer of an African schoolgirl:

Oh thou great Chief,
light a candle in my heart,
that I may see what is therein,
and sweep the rubbish from thy dwelling
place.

Every page is marvelously illustrated in colour with pictures that glory in the beauty of creation. Here for our enjoyment are the flowers, plants and animals of the English countryside plus charming and often amusing scenes of life in India, Japan and other countries.

Fifty years ago, Pauline Baynes illustrated admirably THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE⁶. Since then, her art has matured and deepened. I am sure that many of the children who receive the book as a present this year will treasure it for the next fifty.

5: “A Poet in the Great Tradition”: *Mercies: Collected Poems* by Sheldon Vanauken (Christendom Press, 61 pp.), reviewed by George Sayer and reprinted [with permission from *Crisis Magazine*, June 1989] in *CJ* No. 69, Winter 1990, pages 7-8.

A Poet in the Great Tradition

CALIPH: Ah, if there should ever arise a nation whose people have forgotten poetry, or whose poets have forgotten the people. . . though their cities be greater than Babylon of old, though they mine a league

under earth or mount to the stars on wings—what of them?

HASSAN: they will be a dark patch upon the world.

– James Elroy Flecker, *Hassan*

C.S. Lewis liked to say that the purpose of literature was to make the reader better, wiser, or happier. He believed that this brief definition summarized all that was of value in many books of literary aesthetics. Until the Second World War many people read poetry because they enjoyed it and because it gave them a touchstone of beauty, wisdom, and morality. This was true of all classes of English society. My grandmother, a woman of little education, was made to learn passages of poetry at school, read it for pleasure afterwards, and often quoted the major English poets for enjoyment or at times of crisis. I have no doubt at all that these lines that she often declaimed, and that I learned from her, helped her very much throughout a difficult marriage:

*Love is not love
That alters when it alteration
finds. . . .
Love's not time's fool. . .
Love alters not with his brief
hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the
edge of doom.*

C.S. Lewis himself once told me that he had been “preserved many times” by recollection of another sonnet:

*Th'expense of spirit in a waste
of shame
Is lust in action. . .*

Earl Wavell, who was a Commander-in-Chief of British Forces during the Second World War and then Viceroy of India, compiled an anthology of poems which he could repeat aloud. It is a substantial book of over 400 pages.⁷ He tells us in his introduction that “Winston Churchill has stored in his prodigious memory much poetry which he declaims on apt occasions.” He adds, “I have a great belief in the inspiration of poetry towards courage and vision and in its driving power. And we want all the courage and vision at our command in days of crisis when our future prosperity and greatness hand in the balance.”

The value placed on the book by many is shown by the fact that it went through nine printings in the

first eleven years of its life. The poetry which provided this inspiration is metrical. It rhymes and scans in the great tradition of English poetry, a body of poetry from before Chaucer to this century which is one of the main contributions of England to world civilization. The writing of it flourished in the nineteenth century and in the first part of this, thanks to the work of, among others, Masfield⁸, Chesterton, Yeats⁹, Bridges¹⁰, and de la Mare¹¹. Until about 20 years ago it was generally taught in English schools. There has been a revolution since then. It is now possible for boys and girls to go through school without meeting, apart from a play of Shakespeare's set for an exam, any substantial piece by one of the great English poets. They have been replaced by anthologies of "living poets" or "new poetry."

The important figures in the early development of the "new poetry" were of course the Americans Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Since then the movement has been in a continual state of change. An historian of the movement describes it as being "savage with gang-warfare which, at a distance, can be dignified as disagreements between schools of verse." As far as one can generalize about it, it is unsuitable for declamation, difficult to learn by heart, almost never melodious and rarely the sort of writing to make one better, wiser, or happier. The usual themes are the meaninglessness and disintegration of life. The experiences conveyed by some of the most acclaimed poets are those of horror. Thus Sylvia Plath's "Childless Woman":

*The womb
Rattles its pod, the moon
Discharges itself from the tree
With nowhere to go.*

The verse prompts the question: why isn't it printed as prose?

Verse of this sort will often make completely ordinary prose sentences. I will quote an example from a book of religious poems that I have been recently sent to review:

*What we see now is
Growing accord
At grass roots level.
And we like what we see
And we recommend
That you get on with it.*

The "new poetry" has been practiced for about 80 years and has on the whole got nowhere in the affections of the general book-reading public. It has

failed the people, although it is widely taught. Its advocates and readers are mainly academics and the poets themselves. To those who love the great poets of the past it is clear that poetry has taken the wrong turning. If this is so, there is nothing to do but to go back to the crossroads to rejoin and work again in the great tradition of English poetry. The importance of Sheldon Vanauken, a Virginian poet, is that he does just that.

And he does it very well. His poetry combines technical ability of an order quite unusual today with real lyricism and something of his own to say. Here are two verses from one of his tender, purely lyrical love poems:

*O love! do you remember?
country bus
And England, meadows and
blue sky?
The drowsy-sweet lost summer
calling us
To walk there, you and I?
A country stop. A glance. And
out we went
With joy to walk knee-deep
in heather,
To drink with summer, holiness: content
To be in Christ together.*

The poems are unusually varied—there are even some very funny limericks—but perhaps Vanauken is at his best in his religious sonnets. In them the lyrical beauty is combined with a sharp intelligence and the sort of intellectual surprises that we enjoy in the seventeenth-century poetry of George Herbert and Andrew Marvell. An example is the beautiful Petrarchan sonnet that he puts in the mouth of Our Lady:

*Dear sister, I was human, not
divine,
The angel left me woman as
before
And when, like flame beneath
my heart, I bore
The Son, I was the vestal and
the shrine.
My arms held Heaven at my
breast—not wine
But milk made blood, in which
no mothering doubt
Prefigured patterns of the pouring out,*

O Lamb! To stain the world incarnadine.

Another sonnet, spoken by St. Veronica, has real dramatic force. Vanauken imagines that she is taken by her husband Mark, a military tribune of the Tenth Legion, to watch Christ go to his crucifixion. Here is the sestet:

*Mark's armour made the
crowd draw back a space.
Just there beneath his cross the
god limped by.
I saw his eyes and rushed into
the street
Through sudden stillness and I
wiped his face.
'My child,' he said and staggered on to die.
My girlhood lay in fragments at my feet.*

His lines to C.S. Lewis seem to me one of the finest of modern epitaphs:

*Jack knew his Master's
awesome tenderness
And tongue that slashed
through Pharisaic stress.
The willing servant grew more
like his Lord:
At once a lover and a genial
sword.*

My only criticism of this book is that it is too short. I hope that Vanauken will be encouraged by its reception to write a great deal more and that others will be inspired to work with him in reviving the great tradition of English poetry.

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ENDNOTES

1 Sayer, as a convert, was never ashamed of his Roman Catholic adherence, but his friendship with Lewis did not require agreement with all his beliefs or his church communion. He did not hold it against Lewis that Lewis never became a member of his church, as Tolkien seems to have done. However, if we take the words as they stand, Sayer seems to operate as a reductionist when he refers to Lewis' objections as emotional. For he has just noted that, in private conversation, Lewis raised specific points of disagreement objecting to certain Roman doctrines and common practices as "heresies." His evaluation of these doctrinal matters involved his intellect, however much they may have involved his emotions. His childhood evaluation of Rome may have been "merely" emotional, but that does not mean the mature Lewis never examined Roman claims with his intellect and judged their validity on more rational grounds. In the passage discussed above, Lewis listed three reasons. If Lewis ever wrote a book on the subject he might have listed more reasons and discussed them in depth. It is very possible that the three mentioned do not exhaust the range of Lewis' discontent. It is due to his reticence that we do not know his full views. That Lewis did not spend time detailing his objections to Rome, in print or in private discussions with friends, is probably evidence that he saw a greater need to engage in battle with secular and atheistic thought than fight in-house theological battles with fellow Christians. He saved his energy for the fight that mattered most, and would not endanger friendships with fellow Christians through theological disagreements. Be that as it may, elsewhere Sayer informs us that this "psychological" information is not based on guess work. He once heard Lewis say that he formed an emotional objection to Roman Catholicism in his youth. Cf. Lyle Dorsett's interview with Sayer (dated 10/10-10/12/1989, unpublished transcript available at the Wade Center). Even so, that admission on the part of Lewis does not remove or address the validity of Lewis' mature intellectual and theological objections.

2 Iain R.K. Paisley MP (b. 1926), is an outspoken politician and church leader in Northern Ireland. Sayer compares Paisley with Lewis' grandfather Thomas Hamilton. In *Jack* (1994), Sayer says that Hamilton regarded Roman Catholics as "literally possessed by the devil," and preached violent sermons against them. The comparison

may be strained, for though Paisley is against his grandchildren living under the teaching magisterium of Rome, some of his Roman Catholic constituents have affirmed that, as a Member of Parliament, he has worked in their interest as well as the interests of his Protestant constituents.

3 Perhaps it says more about Tolkien than Lewis that he should describe a difference of opinion regarding the eucharist as “hatred of the Blessed Sacrament.” The disagreement Tolkien refers to probably had something to do with the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation, which may be indirect proof that Lewis rejected it. Even so, as a member of the Church of England Lewis probably held a sacramental understanding of the eucharist, though differing from the Roman teaching, as opposed to a merely symbolical understanding. After his conversion, Lewis lived as a faithfully communing member of the Church of England. His practice shows he did not hate Holy Communion.

4 Sayer writes about the C.S. Lewis Summer Institute, held at Oxford University, July 19-24, and Cambridge University, July 26-31, 1988. It is not clear to this editor whether he attended the meetings at Cambridge as well as Oxford. Audio recordings of these Oxbridge 88 lectures may be available through The C.S. Lewis Foundation, Redlands, California.

5 The review is undated. Someone-Schofield? penciled in “1990,” though it seems he neglected to publish this review. Schofield usually published the portions of Sayer’s letters touching on literature, including book reviews, so this omission is unusual. The answer probably lies in the fact that 1990 saw Schofield increasingly involved in the debate over the authenticity of *The Dark Tower*. Lutterworth Press communicated that, according to their information, this review was never previously published. It is presented here for the first time in print.

6 Pauline Baynes (1922-2008). She illustrated more than 100 books during her career, including Tolkien’s *Farmer Giles of Ham* and Lewis’ seven Narnian books. Tolkien had encouraged Lewis to use her talents. In later years she graciously provided a decorative Masthead for *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*, which first appeared in Volume No. 88. Her symbolic design included many Narnian characters as well as Magdalen College, the young tempter Wormwood, Lewis’s pipes and beer stein, the Irish shamrock, a maple leaf and English rose.

7 Sir Archibald P. Wavell, First Earl Wavell (1883-1950) published *Other Men’s Flowers* in 1944, which went through several reprintings. Sayer thought highly of it and had spare copies on hand, for giving as gifts to younger people or visitors.

8 John Masefield (1878-1967), was a poet and novelist. Lewis read his collections of poetry and novels, as well as his popular stories for children, *The Midnight Folk* (1927) and *The Box of Delights* (1935), which Sayer classed with George MacDonald’s Curdie stories, Lewis’ Narnian Chronicles, and Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. He listed all of these on his recommended reading list (*A Holiday Book List*) under the heading *Better Late than Never* and wrote, “You should have read these long before you came to Malvern.” He recommended other Masefield books to older readers. Nevill Coghill was one of the Inklings with whom Masefield associated.

9 William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), an Irish poet with international acclaim. Lewis delighted in Yeats’ early poetry (pre-1920), and was twice invited to his home in Oxford, in March 1921, for evening conversations.

10 Robert Seymour Bridges (1844-1930), physician and poet, was a friend of Gerard Manley Hopkins and responsible for publishing Hopkins’s poems posthumously. Bridge’s *Milton’s Prosody* (1893) is considered a classic in English literary criticism.

11 Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), an author known for the eerie other-worldly qualities of his stories (“Seton’s Aunt” for example). Lewis read de la Mare and discussed his stories with friends.

Reflections from Plato's Cave: Essays in Evangelical Philosophy

Donald T. Williams, Lantern Press, 2012: 272 pp ISBN 978-0615589107

A Book Review by Jim Stockton
Lecturer in Philosophy, Boise State University

Reflections from Plato's Cave is an intriguing evangelical assessment of contemporary trends in philosophical analysis, literary criticism, and, most of all, Christianity. The majority of the work is wrapped around eleven contextual chapters and a conclusion that invite the reader to consider how ironic it is that "Too many Christians today are like ships drifting with the cultural tide, blown about by every wind of doctrine," and how much better it would be if Christian scholars chose to "sail against the wind, to transcend [y]our own generation and [y]our own times so that our Communities of Faith may be an island of sanity in this sea of chaos." Added to this are twenty four poems, both sincere and satirical, that offer the reader a progression of thoughtful interludes that challenge our politically correct and pedagogically approved habits—all of which makes for a contentious, but refreshing read.

Adopting Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* as his philosophical platform, Williams begins by offering a personal assessment of the history of Philosophy, championing faith-premised rationalism over secular empiricism. Such positioning serves Williams' evangelical agenda well, particularly so when making the point that it is Western civilization's obsession with factual knowledge (or what he refers to as, 'epistemological spelunking') that has driven us away from a well-reasoned leap of faith toward a greater truth. Moreover, as Williams wraps the first chapter up, he makes it very clear that Platonism can only take one so far, and that true revelation is gained by the acceptance of *Logos* and the Incarnation of Christ.

Chapter two brings forward a theological complement to the critical sentiments expressed in the first chapter, via Francis Shaeffer's apologetics. Williams does a good job of bringing Shaeffer's argument that "Christianity must be demonstrated both intellectually and practically through a life of faith," into the fold of his own religious sentiments by offering a terse account of Protestant fundamentalism—particularly so in relation to twentieth and twenty-first century controversies that have posed challenges for the Christian community. Just as interesting is Williams' argument for keeping Shaeffer's work in the faith-based curriculum—a point that deserves further discussion.

In the third chapter, Williams returns to a more philosophical perspective by offering a ten premise argument for the existence of God. Drawing upon the cosmological reasoning of Thomas Aquinas, and

appealing to the Divine attribute of *Aesity* (God's self-existent state of absolute perfection), the argument has a cogent enough ring to it, but still wanders into contentious waters. Reminiscent of Anselm's *Proslogion*, the strength and weakness of Williams' argument resides within the first premise, "If anything exists, something must exist 'a se'." To go from the antecedent recognition of temporal existence to the acceptance of a consequential self-caused existence is a substantial metaphysical leap of faith. Although one can hear Kant's ghost screaming for his dinar, I am left with the distinct impression that Williams' point is the same that of Anselm, who prefaces his argument by claiming that one cannot know anything unless one is willing to believe in something. While it should be noted that this is a point that Williams makes in the last paragraph of his conclusion, it is a substantial enough of a concern that it should be delivered prior to, or at the onset, of the argument, if Williams wants us to assume that an uncaused cause is more than a distant possibility. Similarly so, the fifth premise is a tad bit too presumptive when claiming that "To make a meaningful judgment between thoughts I must be *free* to do so, which means that my reason must somehow stand above or outside the total interlocking system." To simply state that we are free to make judgments is not enough to dismiss the materialist counterpoint that we are nothing other than a sentient being. Logical word-smithing aside, Williams' appeal to a free will is also dependent upon those readers (like myself) who are willing to accept the validity of the first premise. The rest of the argument has a well-reasoned flow to it, and readers who are familiar with the Deistic arguments of the eighteenth century, or the now legendary Anscombe-Lewis debate of 1948, will find this section to be one of the more lively ones.

Chapters four through seven are best viewed as a quadratic critique that gives due attention to C. S. Lewis' contribution to contemporary Christian philosophy. In brief, chapter four offers a very good rhetorical analysis of Lewis' *Trilemma* argument for the deity of Christ. Williams isn't shy in taking on what he views to be fallacious objections to Lewis' position, offering a rather snappy response to an old debate. Collectively, chapters five through seven offer an apt introduction to Lewis' metaphysical views on the universal nature of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, an aesthetic and transcendental theme that has become a going concern amongst a

handful of Lewis critics of the last decade—giving rise to such publications as *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), or John Beversluis' *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Eerdmans, 2006). As similar as Williams' commentary might be to such prior publications, his own voice is clearly heard in his biographical assessment of Lewis' philosophical prowess, and the means by which he ties such into his own interpretation of the objectivity of goodness and the mystery of evil. Highlights of this assessment include a pointed analysis of the rhetorical fallacies behind the better known objections leveled against Lewis' *Trilemma* argument, a well-considered review of Beauty and Lewis' aesthetic perspectives in chapter five, and his explanation of Lewis' attitude and application of a moral and objective notion of the Good in chapter seven.

Chapter eight takes the preceding four chapters much further by exploring the nature of evil in contemporary discourse—or what Williams' cleverly refers to as “Satan's epistemology.” By reviewing ‘evil’ as a ‘philosophy’ onto itself, particularly so in the personification of Milton's Satan, Williams raises two questions that are all too often ignored in today's academy: 1) Where does evil come from, and 2) Why have we grown hesitant to discuss the nature of evil? It is also here that Williams takes on what he considers to be the condescending character of relativistic textual analysis and pedagogy that is guarded by the long arm of political correctness—a contemporary demon that is exposed in the next chapter by means of a very playful one-act play entitled *Revenge of the DWEMS* [Dead White European Males]. Given the title at hand, and with the characters being Socrates, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Novus Criticus, and Post Modernicus it doesn't take a wild-eyed imagination to see where Williams is taking his audience. The ‘twist’ at end of play makes for a fun read, and the critical concerns raised throughout the dialogue are thought-provoking and timely.

Having had a bit of fun, Williams rounds his more contemplative thoughts out in the last two chapters by making it very clear that gravest threat to twenty-first century Christian philosophy is the widespread acceptance of radical relativism; as such is pushed upon us by the post-modern tools of deconstruction, militant multiculturalism, and groupthink. As to be expected, salvation of the academy resides with the acceptance of universal truth and faith—reinforcing a sentiment that most Christian readers will find agreeable.

Although only four and half pages in length, the conclusion approaches upon one of the more controversial questions haunting literary criticism

and academic philosophy alike—have the analytical methods of the last century left Christians and moral realists marooned in a post-modern wasteland where glorified opinions are propped up by language games, and universality is cast aside in favor of juvenile tastes? Williams' answer is a resounding yes, and his resolution to what he views as a significant threat to Christocentric education is to accept God's grace as the first premise of whatever philosophy we might profess.

As is the case with any work of criticism, but particularly so reflective analysis, this book has its lesser moments. Williams' philosophical arguments call for a bit of polish, and are often cloaked in too much passion. While I found this passion to be spirited and telling, others might find the personal commentary to be distracting, even insignificant, to the premise(s) posed. Likewise, those who are still receptive to the skepticism of post-modernism, or charmed by the discourse of deconstructionism, might find Williams' attack upon either critical approach to be crass and dogmatic. To the first concern, it should be kept in mind that Williams isn't professing to be a philosopher, just someone who has been deeply affected by philosophy. As for the second concern, it appears to be the case that Williams wants to ruffle a few feathers (anyone who is worried that such a simple response on my part might commit the intentional fallacy, should jump ahead to page 174 of Williams' book). Next arrives the petty commentary crowd (and no review would be complete without them), who might be tempted to point out that Williams is too fond of clichéd puns and sarcastic depictions of opposing views. To this, there is little one can say, other than such is the discourse of a curmudgeon – which brings up the previously mentioned twenty-four poems. They are, as they should be, are written in a traditional fashion, replete with meter and rhyme, and a good dash of Romantic pathos. Williams' verse is one of the best features his book has to offer, and for those who agree with my humble assessment, I suggest that they take a look at *Stars Through the Clouds: The Collected Poetry of Donald T. Williams* (Lantern Hollow Press, 2011: 360 pp.; ISBN 1460906519; \$15.00). ;

Overall, *Reflections from Plato's Cave: Essays in Evangelical Philosophy* is an enticing first person testimonial that speaks best to a Christian audience. While it might pose a challenge for those who have little interest in faith-premised analysis, what can't be missed is that Williams says what is on the mind of many who are frustrated with the complacent acceptance of radical relativism. On this account, as well as many others, the book merits our attention.

continued from page 9

- harder for me as a Midwesterner”)
- The phrase “When the means are autonomous they are deadly” and its contemporary applications

Participants included Sue Wendling, Rosemary Mathews, Joe Sweeney, David Kornegay, Woody Wendling, Bill McClain, Maggie Goodman, and Bob Trexler. Jennifer concluded, “Williams is an acquired taste, but for me he’s a taste worth acquiring. I buy where he’s coming from about the Eucharist being the centre of Christianity and the centre of the web of exchange.....I think we can go eat tea and cake now.”

With that, discussion continued over refreshments.

Bits & Pieces

Crossroads Cultural Center, in conjunction with the American Bible Society, presents:

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Dr. Thomas Howard, Author

Readers:

Mr. Kenneth Genuard

Mr. Jeremy Rishe

Thursday, December 20, 7:00pm

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Newly released: *C.S. Lewis: His Simple Life and Extraordinary Legacy*, by Editors of Christian History & Biography (CT eBooks, 2012). A Kindle book for \$4.99 at Amazon.com

Attending the meeting were Mary Gehringer, Helene DeLorenzo, Bill McClain, Maggie Goodman, Barbara Zelenko, Michael Canaris, Pamela Bauder, Rob Clere, Bob Trexler, Sue and Woody Wendling, Jim Bash, Trudy Friedrichs, Marilyn Driscoll, Christopher Iasiello, Rosemary Mathews, Rose Marie Barba; Dorothy Fabian; Maria Marcus; Anne and Joe Sweeney; David Kornegay; Elena Kornegay-Baez; Clara Sarrocco; Conrad Turner and ...Jennifer Woodruff Tait.

An interview with Walter Hooper was recently published in the *National Catholic Reporter*. Hooper answers nine questions including this one about his opinion of the Narnia movies:

NCR: Have the Narnia films helped or hindered our understanding of Lewis?

HOOPER: Lewis didn’t expect his books to survive long after his death, so he would have been surprised by the films, as would Tolkien. As for the films themselves, these lack subtlety and have too many special effects. I think [director] Peter Jackson did a much better job with *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, combining a vision with great talent. Whereas Jackson generally stuck to what Tolkien wrote, the Narnia producers just changed the stories as they wished.

I was consulted, especially about the character of Aslan. It was always Lewis’ proviso that Aslan must be handled very carefully. He represents the Son of God, so you can’t blaspheme with him. I’ve read many screenplays of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, however, and almost all have portrayed Aslan as a comical character. Lewis would also have disliked the way human persons are placed inside his animals. He’d seen Walt Disney’s *Fantasia* and would have been thrilled to see what can be done now with computer-generated images. But it’s the scripts which always let us down. They should stick to what Lewis wrote, as with Shakespeare.

The complete interview is online at: <http://ncronline.org/news/art-media/cs-lewis-couldnt-touch-anything-without-illuminating-it>