

### FREUD AND LEWIS ON JOKES, HUMOR AND LAUGHTER A Preliminary Study

By Terry Lindvall



In the off-Broadway play, *Freud's Last Session*, Freud quotes American humorist E. B. White's classic aphorism about humor: "Humor can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind." The line is a fitting set-up for this reflection, for I plan to dissect the poor amphibious concept while trying not to kill it in the process.<sup>1</sup>

In his superb PBS series, *The Question of God*, Dr. Armand Nicholi compared the lives and thoughts of Viennese psychologist Sigmund Freud and Oxford don C. S. Lewis. Nicholi contrasted the views of these two 20<sup>th</sup> century seminal thinkers on such topics as life, death, God, morality, and sex. His presentation was as perfect as the Venus de Milo. Everything he sculpted and covered was stunning and brilliant. However, one very useful and necessary item of their differences was neglected, one distinctively human topic ignored, one essentially cosmic theme overlooked, one tremendous trifle of the human condition abandoned: Nicholi passed over their ideas on wit, jokes, and humor with all the solemnity of a Harvard professor. Unarmed with their contributions on laughter, Nicholi left them standing as cold colossal statues in a museum, but without the colorful graffiti of their laughter.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a marble statue of a torso was unearthed in Rome from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The fundamentalist Cardinal Carafa, notorious for his fig-leap campaign of covering up the genitalia of Michelangelo's painting of the *Last Judgment*, allowed locals to plaster this statue with Latin epigrams, which quickly inspired mischievous Italian wits to paste their own naughty satire onto the statue. These attached ditties became known as pasquinades, witty verse lampooning the Pope and government. Pasquino became the name of this "talking" statue, decorated with light, vernacular, and earthy verses.

This is my task here. To cover these two great monuments with bits of jocular graffiti, with their own words on jokes and humor, in order to not let them stand as stone idols, but be recognized as "talking statues" for a more vulgar aspect of life, namely human laughter. In studying these two icons of the twentieth century, I hope to outline some of their key ideas of the nature and functions of laughter and to set forth some of their examples of humor, as well as some old jokes that as Aristophanes said, never fail to make his audience laugh.

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Of course, obeying the dictum of Cicero regarding comedy, I recognize that to make your audience laugh at the end, you must make them cry at the beginning, or at least bore them for a brief season.

Following his seminal work on the interpretation of dreams, Sigmund Freud found fallow ground in the relation of jokes to the unconscious. Six years after publishing his classic *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899, Freud wrote *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), pointing out similarities between dreams and jokes.<sup>2</sup> He found that both dreams and jokes use the same techniques to disguise meanings and mask motives through representation, condensation, and displacement, and both require cognitive analysis to interpret their latent meanings. Freud asserted that “jokes, like dreams and slips of the tongue, bear the traces of repressed desires.” While Freud did have a sense of humor, and as psychologist Stephen Parker noted, “was not altogether the somber person he appears in most photographs, he also was generally pessimistic about human kind.”

On the other hand, C. S. Lewis explored the phenomenon of laughter throughout his discursive and fictional writings. Central to the creation of his fantasy world of Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew* is the creation of the first joke, wherein an old Jackdaw (Jack Lewis himself, perhaps) speaks loudly when everyone else has fallen quiet, making an utter fool of himself, but becoming renowned as having made the first joke and being the first joke simultaneously.

Lewis wove humor throughout his writings, including his most serious ones, and spent one entire diabolical letter on the varieties of the causes of laughter. In his 11<sup>th</sup> epistle of *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis would outline his categories of the risible and offer reflections on what makes us laugh.

My pasquinades upon these two will primarily describe what they thought about laughter and then suggest how their conceptions of the comic arise from particular understandings of the nature of the cosmos, and sex.

#### *Origins and Purposes of Repressed Laughter*

Freud's investigation into the “purely human origin of the regulation and precepts of civilization” led him to see projected father figures in monotheism and wish-fulfillment in dreams. Examining the evolution of human phenomena, he would also delve into the varieties of laughter.<sup>3</sup> For the psychoanalyst

(though not psychologists in general), a fundamental axiom is that at the root of all experience are neuroses, caused by anxiety and we humans are in a constant struggle to deal with this problem, expending enormous amounts of psychic energy. Laughter functions as a primary vehicle to help us avoid such a mental workout.

Freud began with the topic of jokes, which he defined as “funny anecdotes designed to make another person laugh” and are constructed (just like dreams) to help us “circumvent one or another form of censorship or prohibition.” And of course, the inhibitions we want to escape are usually sexual or aggressive, or what Freud would call *tendentious*. Every joke is thus a victory over inhibition and taboos, allowing us to escape the censors of our rational mind and society.

Thus jokes allow us to attack our enemy, express our hostile aggressiveness, so that we “*evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible...*” Tendentious jokes enable us to show aggression towards those in exalted positions (the great, the dignified, the mighty, and lawyers) who claim authority and who are usually protected by both internal inhibitions and external circumstances, our laughter becoming “a rebellion against that authority and liberation from its pressure.”

Against the mammoth institution of marriage, for example, Freud offers the story about a *Schadchen*, or traditional Jewish marriage-broker, negotiating an arranged marriage:

The bridegroom was most disagreeably surprised when the bride was introduced to him, and drew the broker on one side and whispered his remonstrances: “Why have you brought me here?” he asked reproachfully. “She’s ugly and old, she squints and has bad teeth and bleary eyes...”

“You needn’t lower your voice,” interrupted the broker, “she’s deaf as well.”<sup>4</sup>

In a world of arranged marriages, and the limits of freedom, this joke for Freud speaks of the forbidden, our own rejection of others, even our spouses; the ridicule falls upon parents, society, wives, and others in authority, ridiculing those who “think this swindle is justified in order to get their daughter a husband, upon the pitiable condition of girls who let themselves be married upon such terms, and upon

the disgracefulness of marriage contracted on such a basis... The popular mind... knows the sacredness of marriages after they have been contracted is grievously affected by the thought of what happened at the time when they were arranged.”<sup>5</sup> In the need to escape the prohibition of our desires to rebel, this joke thus offers a brief opportunity to ignore the reality principle of power and to splash about in the pleasure principle.

*Lewis and the Comic Art of Incongruity*

Jokes, for Lewis, could fit into Freud’s categories. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis’ astute devil recognizes the tendentious tendency of jokes, but also sees more positive uses as well. After defining the “Joke Proper” as a bit of wit that “turns on sudden perception of incongruity,” Screwtape advises his junior tempter, Wormwood, to think more critically on its nature. He warns that only second-rate tempters rely upon indecent and bawdy humor. Lewis’ division borrows slightly from Freud’s in that Screwtape recognizes the nature of jokes about sex, especially among male British friends who drink and smoke in pubs. Here Lewis does not reduce all sexual humor to escaping the censor of repressed desires, but notes that humans practice and receive such naughty bits in diverse ways. For those to whom “no passion is as serious as lust,” indecent stories quench lasciviousness as they become funny. For others, laughter and lust are excited simultaneously. As Lewis observed, one group jokes “about sex because it gives rise to many incongruities; the second cultivate incongruities because they afford a pretext for talking about sex.”<sup>6</sup>

While Lewis’ proper jokes were not quite that funny, records reveal at least two jokes about sex. As he gathered with a group of men of the Inklings at the Eagle and Child, he would apologize profusely if anyone might be offended.

There was a new waiter being instructed in a hotel by an old waiter as his duties who finished up, “and the most important thing, my boy, is tact.”

“How do you mean...tact?” Asked the new waiter.

“Well, I’ll give you an example, said the old waiter, a few days ago I went up to the bathroom to leave a fresh cake of soap and there was a lady in the bath, who had forgotten to lock the door, so I said ‘fresh cake of soap sire,’ and went

straight out as if nothing were wrong.”

A week or two later the two waiters were again talking and the old waiter said: “and how are you getting on—particularly in the matter of tact?”

“Oh splendidly!” answered the young waiter. “Just a few mornings ago I took a tray of tea into the bridal suite, and there were the bride and bridegroom in bed together... So I put down the tray by the bed and said as I turned to go: ‘your morning tea, gentlemen.’”

Lewis also regaled friends with the “lovely jest” of the Bishop of Exeter to demonstrate how meanings of words change and provide incongruous wit. The Bishop was giving prizes at a girls’ school. After a performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, “the poor man stood up and made a speech and said (piping voice): ‘I was very interested in your delightful performance, and among other things, I was very interested in seeing for the first time in my life a female Bottom.’ (Guffaws)”<sup>7</sup>

Such turns of phrases, remarkably tame by today’s standards, yet point to how an “uninvited semantic guest” can provoke a sudden transition from one meaning to “another obscene intruder.”<sup>8</sup> Both Lewis and Freud agree with a diagnosis of the human condition that something is not as it should be. Or as Michael Scott in the Office says, “that’s what she said.”

For Lewis, one of the purposes for such obscene humor is to function as a sign of the existence of a supernatural reality. In fact, the coarse joke proclaims, not that we were repressing anything, but that in humans we “have here an animal which finds its own animality either objectionable or funny. Unless there had been a quarrel between the spirit and the organism, I do not see how this could be: it is the very mark of the two not being ‘at home’ together. But it is very difficult to image such a state of affairs as original—to suppose a creature which from the very first was half shocked and half tickled to death at the mere fact of being the creature it is. I do not perceive that dogs see anything funny about being dogs; I suspect that angels see nothing funny about being angels.”<sup>9</sup>

Angels may fly but not because they take themselves lightly. And dogs don’t laugh at being dogs, loitering around lamp posts, barking about naughty bits. Lewis explained that dogs are too literal to get

a joke, just as when one points a finger, they don't look at the object being pointed at, but they attend to and sniff the finger. Animals lack that sense of the incongruous. Woodpeckers don't do knock-knock jokes. Monkeys don't human around. No chicken laughs when another asks why the human crossed the road. And other chickens don't crack up when one chicken steps in chicken...stuff.

Lewis' conception of laughter is inextricably rooted in his understanding of human nature as seen from orthodox Christianity. Humor is rooted in difference, in the incongruity of our creation as two natures.

In the Creation, everything created *was good*. There exists no antithesis to the goodness, no equivalence of good and evil. No cosmic dualism. Evil must be viewed as falling short, not an opposite. Lewis saw laughter as a created gift, a gift created before the Fall. And laughter like any other gift can be twisted and bent. But laughter is first and foremost a good, created natural gift. Quoting his mentor George MacDonald, Lewis acknowledged that when we laugh alone, we are either sharing our laughter with the devil or with God. Laughter can travel in one of two directions. Within the act of Creation we stumble upon two splendid sources of laughter in Eden, suggesting that the comic existed before the Fall.

The first incongruity is our own created nature. We are a mix of dust and divine breath. God breathes into humus, earth, and presto we are that amazing oxymoron – a spiritual animal. Spirit and earth make one comic being. On one side we are related to the angels, the transcendent, the spiritual, Amish – on the other side cousins to jackals and weasels, skunks and lawyers. The heavens and the earth are married and the union is a marvel, a mystery, a matter for much mirth. “Of all living creatures,” wrote Aristotle, “only man is endowed with laughter.”

What is man, O Lord? that Thou should crown him with glory, and bathe him in folly? When we said that God as His own critic declared everything in Creation to be good, we were wrong. There was one condition that God did not pronounce good – there was one joke which was not yet good enough to share. It is not good, He said, that man should be alone. That's only half of a very good joke; thus, the second joke of creation is that God split His image in two: that He made man and woman in His own image. The comic possibilities about and between male and

female have yet to be exhausted. Comedy resides in the creation of genders, of two beings so divinely alike and yet so frustratingly different. What, for example, makes women like my wife laugh at a joke like this?

A husband and wife went to visit his doctor. After the physical, the physician asked to see the wife alone, and confided to her: “Your husband,” he intoned solemnly, “is in critical condition. But if you are willing to fix him three nutritious meals a day, make love to him every night, and serve his every need, he will live to a healthy old age.”

When she came out of the doctor's office, the husband asked: “Well, what did the doctor say?”

“He said you're going to die.”

Or consider the old wheeze of the couple that went to a counselor.

As the husband sat in a chair, bored and resistant, the wife complained and cried and wailed to her Freudian psychiatrist. “He never communicates with me; all he ever does is sit there and not respond.”

The counselor got up and walked over to the woman. He picked her up, bent her over and gave her a long passionate kiss. She sat there stunned and breathless.

Turning to the husband, he advised: “She needs **that** at least twice a week.”

The husband looked up and said: “Okay, how about I bring her in on Tuesdays and Thursdays?”

It is amazing that God would create such creatures as us. But as Søren Kierkegaard wrote in his *Journals*: “God creates out of *nothing*. Wonderful, you say. Yes, to be sure, but He does what is still more wonderful: He makes saints out of sinners.”

Lewis found the differences between genders to be the source not only of their laughter, but also of their love. At the end of his fantasy novel, *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis creates a gendered community of both love and laughter. When the goddess Venus descends

at the end of the novel, bringing all matter of revels and sexual play, couples find their private and comic intimacy in recognizing each other in their differences. Jane Studdock comes upon the marriage chamber where her estranged husband Mark had returned, a humbled and restored husband, one who recognized all the clown and clod-hopper of his nature, how he had been a coarse, male boor with horny hands, but now awakened and chastened. Jane hesitates to move the latch of the room. Then she notices that the bedroom window is open. "Clothes were piled on a chair inside the room so carelessly that they lay over the sill; the sleeve of a shirt—Mark's shirt—even hung over down the outside wall. And in all this damp too. How exactly like Mark! Obviously it was high time she went in."<sup>10</sup> The woman must correct and civilize the man, especially through the discipline of good humor.

And, likewise, at the end of his children's fantasy, *The Horse and His Boy*, Aravis and Prince Cor have "many quarrels" but they "always made it up again: so that years later, when they were grown up they were so used to quarrelling and making it up again that they got married so as to go on doing it more conveniently."<sup>11</sup>

In his classic study on *The Four Loves*, Lewis goes even farther to connect the mysteries of laughter and love and sex. His own sexual temptations notwithstanding, Lewis found sex funny, where Freud found it behind most every cigar or banana or rose garden. Lewis did not disagree that such objects were comic reminders of the sexual instinct, but that they were much more. He liked rose gardens not because they reminded him of sex, but because they presented him with roses. Of course, Freud did concede, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, but most of the time, it's all about oral pleasure, such as the pleasure the infant derives at the mother's breast (although Freud did once liken the addictive quality of smoking to masturbation—which he called the "primal addiction." As the Episcopal priest queried, "whatever could that mean?") (Psychologist Stephen Parker observed that "although all pleasure has sexual overtones for Freud, the negative implications in the comments about cigars have as much to do with the "infantile" or "regressive" nature of such behavior as about the "sexual" pleasure that may be attendant.")<sup>12</sup>

These two created incongruities, being made animal and spirit and being formed in the image of God as male and female, provide a Divinely-ordained

condition of humorous juxtaposition. What they also give us is what Lewis defined as humor: "that sense of proportion and a power of seeing yourself from the outside."<sup>13</sup> However, being created comic and good did not last. A second orthodox doctrine helps to explain how our laughter did become, in Freud's terms, tendentious.

The second doctrine of the Fall explains the disease and dangers of laughter. Laughter like cheese, eggs, oysters, and blind dates can go bad. Human laughter can be wicked because the human heart is wicked. "The human being is the only animal that blushes – or needs to," Twain tartly noted. "But you have to remember that we were made at the end of a week's work."

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis explored the relations between the fallen human condition and humor. We are given that ability to look objectively at ourselves and see ourselves from the outside. The comic muse teaches us to humbly see ourselves as others see us, to have a perspective outside our own myopic view. We will be happier when we see and confess our sins. H. Allen Smith defined a humorist as a "fellow who realizes, first, that he is no better than anybody else, and second, that nobody else is either"<sup>14</sup>

The reason for the Fall is the sin of pride – where every one takes himself or herself too seriously. Satan – Chesterton reminded us – fell through force of gravity. He took himself too seriously. Thus, we picture Hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment. In short, a university faculty meeting. As Garrison Keillor, "Some people think it's difficult to be a Christian and to laugh, but I think it's the other way around. God writes a lot of comedy – it's just that He has so many bad actors."

Grace arrives for Christians in the Incarnation, and it arrives with a Body. The Incarnation strikes a staggering, preemptory blow at the Pharisees, the Gnostics, and those who would deny the value of the physical world or those who try to be more spiritual than God. It is significant that, for Augustine, the Devil and the bad angels are without bodies.

The medieval carnival exploded out of the Incarnation. Even the early Corinthian Eucharists celebrating the Body and Blood of Christ tended toward excess. There are, and should be, checks upon that carnality. But the Body itself was created good

and redeemed in joy. Like Brueghel's painting, the Saint teeters in a Battle between Carnival and Lent. We might fall to the side of either promiscuity or prudery, and most of us fall both ways.

Yet, for the Hebrew and the Christian, the comic spirit is one of new life, feasting, banqueting, eating, drinking and playing. This Paradise is regained where Heaven is described like a wedding feast in Cana or a sumptuous banquet.

God established Israel herself on a foundation of Laughter. In the fresh tradition of Lewis, Frederick Buechner captured this genesis in all its wild, holy and hilarious splendor in his *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale*: "The place to start is with a woman laughing. She is an old woman, and after a lifetime in the desert, her face is cracked and rutted like a six-month drought. She hunches her shoulders around her eyes and starts to shake. She squinnies her eyes shut, and her laughter is all wheeze and tears running down as she rocks back and forth in her kitchen chair. She is laughing because she is pushing 91 hard and has just been told she is going to have a baby... The old woman's name is Sarah, of course, and her old man's name is Abraham and they are laughing at the idea of a baby's being born in the geriatric ward and Medicare's picking up the tab... Maybe the most interesting part of it all is that far from getting angry at them for laughing, God told them that when the baby was born he wanted them to name him Isaac, which in Hebrew means laughter. So you can say that God not only tolerated their laughter, but blessed it and in a sense joined in it himself."<sup>15</sup>

And Sarah's laughter at 90 years old was not only uncontrollable, but earthy. "Do you mean to tell me," she grinned at God's messenger and poking Abraham in the ribs, "that I will once again have the pleasure of this old man?" One joke left out of my book by the Baptist editors was when old Abraham comes home and announces to Sarah: "oy vay, since we have waited so long, God has promised us Supersex tonight."

"Ah," said Sarah, "at your age, take the soup."

#### *Forms and Categories of Laughter*

Freud distinguished among three overlapping categories of laughter. Three kinds of anxiety evoke these three kinds of laughter. For painful emotions, Freud offers humor. Jokes release the tension we have stored from early inhibitions; and the comic or nonsense provides a pleasure in difficult thinking.<sup>16</sup> The pleasures that we experience are thus based in the

economy of saving energy that we would have to use to deal with our messed up lives.

Freud had collected many Jewish anecdotes, but his fascination with jokes, like his wife, was not easily satisfied, so much that twenty years after he had published his primary work on jokes, he wrestled with another topic on what the Germans solemnly intoned as "**Der Humour**."<sup>17</sup> In August 1927 he published an additional essay on this "rare and precious gift."<sup>18</sup>

Freudian scholar Jay Martin found four functions of humor in Freud's work: First, humor is "not resigned; it is rebellious," asserting its own way and achieving pleasure in its battles. Second, it is intentionally designed as a "weapon of defense," in which a person adopts a humorous posture in order to "ward off possible suffering."<sup>19</sup> Humor could thus either attack or defend, with both fulfilling the role of a weapon.

Third, in a principle that Lewis will affirm in his observations of friendship, one finds a mutually shared enjoyment from an audience, who can fit the humor to his or her pleasure. Of this mutual contract, Freud writes:

When, to take the crudest example, a criminal who was being led out to the gallows on a Monday remarked, "Well, the week's beginning nicely," he was producing the humor himself; the humorous process is completed in his own person and obviously affords him a certain sense of [rebellious and defensive] satisfaction. I, the non-participating listener, am affected as it were at long-range by this humorous production of the criminal; I feel, like him, perhaps, the yield of humorous pleasure.

A pleasure of mutuality is shared by the audience (as it realizes it is in no danger of hanging), but recognizes the humor of the situation. According to humorist George Meredith in his tribute "To the Comic Spirit," humor creates a "sacred chain / Of man to man."<sup>20</sup> A social bond is established among the laughers.

Finally, humor for Freud involves a "contribution of the superego," which actually reassures the fragile ego like a parent. In the psyche, the superego represents the parental agency, acting like a consoling parent to the threatened ego; it repudiates the reality of danger and produces the comforting illusion that the fearful ego is acting like a weak child, saying,

in effect, “Look! here is the world, which seems so dangerous! It is nothing but a game for children—just worth making a jest about!”<sup>21</sup> However, Freud’s idea of laughter as one of the last natural defenses against the traumas of childhood may have its own built-in contradiction, as one must ask how much of this is merely wishful thinking or a delusion?

In his study on *The Jokes of Sigmund Freud*, author Elliot Oring argues that Freud often identified with the object of his jokes, that many jokes did express his own psychology and mental state.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, in the 2002 C. S. Myers lecture, Michael Billig asked the question: Did Freud in his analysis of jokes reveal his own repression of being Jewish during an era of anti-Semitism? He speculates that Freud’s shame at his own financial indebtedness (to his old Hebrew teacher, Samuel Hammerschlag) may have led Freud to collect numerous *Schnorrer* (Jewish beggar) jokes. In a letter to his fiancé Marthe Bernays, Freud stressed that he was resolved not to feel a sense of personal obligation to his benefactor; however, he thinks he protests too much.

One of Freud’s most famous and oft repeated jokes concerned a *Schnorrer* who borrowed 25 florins from a prosperous man to whom he protested of his dire circumstances. That same day his benefactor found the beggar in a restaurant eating an expensive dinner of salmon mayonnaise.

His benefactor reproached him: “What! You borrow money from me and then order yourself salmon mayonnaise? Is *that* what you’ve used your money for?”

“I don’t understand you,” replied the beggar, “if I haven’t any money I *can’t* eat salmon mayonnaise, and if I have money I *mustn’t* eat salmon mayonnaise. Well, then, when *am* I to eat salmon mayonnaise?”

As Freud explained it, the logic of the beggar’s illogic shows that the beggar refused to act as one without any obligation to his benefactor, even as the joke exposes how one might escape the shameful emotion of indebtedness by deflecting the fact that the beggar has not been prudent with the money.

Allegedly one reason Freud felt compelled to investigate this phenomenon of joking was that a reader of *The Interpretation of Dreams* protested that the dreams were replete with what appeared to be puns and jokes. (“Ah,” said the Episcopal priest, “I dreamed that the steeple of my cathedral fell off this morning. What can it mean?”) Like Lenny Bruce, Freud compiled his collection of Jewish anecdotes

both as data and as personal security.

Freud railed against novelist Jean Paul Richter definition of “joking as the disguised priest who weds every couple,” and philosopher Theodor Vischer’s clever aphorism: “He likes best to wed couples whose union their relatives frown upon.” Freud rejected the simple explanation of a playful incongruity of people finding similarities between dissimilar things. Freud wanted to extend these explanations into a psychological discovery that connects to other fields. But such a tendency would be, if you would excuse the term, to project one’s own neuroses onto jokes. Lewis once quipped that to talk about “Freud’s psychology” has the double meaning of discussing his ideas of the psyche or of probing the neuroses of Freud himself, a topic, “some would say, has been examined too little.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Techniques and Taboos*

Freud’s book first tackled techniques of eliciting laughter. (Realize that one of his favorite jokes was the knee-slapping *Der Humour*, “Traduttore—Traditore!” a punning play on the linguistic similarity of the “translator is a traitor,” a couplet that got the quick cheap laughs among authors who had seen how translators had massacred their words (like Jimmy Carter’s blooper telling the Polish people that he had deep affection in his heart for them which came out something like I have lust in my bowels for you.) While Freud looked at the linguistic techniques of jokes, he chose to see through the joke rather than enjoying the joke. He found jokes like “old people are inclined to fall upon their anecdotage” to be laced with traces of disparaging judgment behind a condensation/fusion of thought (like an enthymeme), which led to the comic.

Behind each joke lay the compressed force of a thought of condescension in the “*forced relations*,” as the phrase “vanity is one of his four Achilles heels” implies that the fellow is an ass. This forced relation of jokes contrasts the same psychical processes (manifest and latent content) that occur in the interpretation of dreams. For Freud, “a joke says what it has to say, not always in few words, but in too few words . . . It may even actually say what it has to say by not saying it.”<sup>24</sup>

For Freud, there are non-tendentious jokes, but these are mostly puns and wordplay. For example, he played on homonymic French words *roux* (red-haired) and *sot* (silly) and the name Rousseau. Puns or *Kalauer* were for Freud the lowest form of verbal jokes, yet were quite efficient: Two Jews met in the neighborhood of

the bathhouse. "Have you taken a bath?" asked one of them. "What?" ask the other in return, "is there one missing?"

The displacement or diversion of train of thought from one meaning to another allows for multiple interpretations. A horse dealer was recommending a saddle-horse to a customer. "If you take this horse and get on it at four in the morning, you'll be at Pressburg by half-past six." "What should I be doing in Pressburg at half-past six in the morning?"

Freud would employ nonsense syllables "Daldaldal, daldaldal," which meant one would solicit her solicitor. Such psychological glossolalia may have formed the bases for Diane Keaton's "La di da" and Seinfeld's "yada yada." In *Seinfeld*, George has a girlfriend who employs the vacuous and banal phrase "yada, yada, yada" to cover everything else to be said about a topic. (Jerry tries to defend her saying that she is merely succinct, like dating *USA Today*.) However, in true Freudian fashion, *yada* is a Hebrew term which implies relational and sexual connotation, meaning to know in an intimate sense.

A more recognizable Freudian form is the double entendre, the double meaning of a joke, usually sexual. Leaving a man's wife's bedside, a doctor told the husband: "I don't like her looks." "I've not liked her looks for a long time either," the husband hastened to agree. Herein the key technique is condensation, towards economy of expression, where brevity sits as the soul of wit. The double entendre of places he passed on his walking tours amused Lewis as well, names of places called Cuckold's Green and Shapley Bottom.

Forced relations lead to new and unexpected unities. One of the most common was the play upon the name *Serenissimus*, a moniker given to royal persons by comic periodicals. The king Serenissimus was making a tour through his provinces and noticed a man in the crowd who bore a striking resemblance to his own exalted person. He beckoned to him and asked: "Was your mother at one time in the service in the Palace." "No, your Highness," was the reply, "but my father was."

After discussing "The Technique of Jokes," Freud again delved into their purpose, explaining that the "pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an *economy in expenditure* upon inhibition, the pleasure in the comic from an economy in expenditure upon ideation (upon *cathexis*) and the pleasure in humor from an economy in expenditure upon feeling." All

laughter is derived from expending an economy of energy.

In techniques, Freud defines what he calls the "forced relations," of a joke, which is essentially a form of incongruity. What distinguishes it from Lewis' conception is that for Freud, these forced relations focus primarily on two forms of tendentious humor, namely hostile and aggressive laughter and sexually obscene laughter. "Forced relations" thus sound more like rape than cognitive flirting.

Freud excused his own reticence of telling a religious joke (about a Roman Catholic priest being an employee in a wholesale business and a Protestant being a retail merchant), because he feared some would be offended. He then defined a characteristic of jokes that the difference in hearers' reactions to them would depend on "*namely whether the joke was an end in itself or served an aim.*" If the latter, the joke became "*tendentious*," and served some darker purpose. (As we mentioned non-tendentious jokes he calls innocent. Spoonerisms are playful innocent jokes, as are nonsense statements like "not only did he disbelieve in ghosts; he was not even frightened of them." However, innocent jokes, writes Freud, "scarcely ever achieve the sudden burst of laughter which makes tendentious ones so irresistible.")

The real purpose of a joke deals with its substance rather than the envelope that carries it. There are only two purposes of tendentious jokes: *either a hostile joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defiance) or an obscene one (servicing the purpose of exposure)*. The latter, smut, bringing the sexual into prominence, is "directed to a particular person, by whom one is sexually excited and who, on hearing it, is expected to become aware of the speaker's excitement and as a result to become sexually excited in turn." In one of his more controversial and inane explanations of smutty humor, Freud proposes that the joke may lead to shame or embarrassment, which is "only a reaction against the excitement and in a roundabout way, *is an admission of it.*" [The self-contradiction of the statement becomes ridiculously evident in that any response is due to sexual excitement. Any response shows that the other is eager for sex.] Freud essentially sees smutty jokes as an attempt at seduction. According to Freud, even though a woman doesn't realize it, such obscene wooing excites her.

For Freud, sexual material also covers or contains the excremental, because in childhood the two are indistinguishable (and much German humor that

deals with poop and dirty underwear). As my father-in-law used to say, at my age, a good bowel movement is to be preferred over other activities. According to Freudian psychology, the original motive of smut is to expose sexuality, to see the organs peculiar to each sex an original component of our libido. A woman's inflexibility is the first condition for the development of such naughty humor, as one can tell in inns of the humbler sort that smut doesn't occur until the barmaid or innkeeper's wife appears. The rise in educational and social levels of women makes them more repressed, such as in the case of Queen "we are not amused" Victoria.

On such tendentious excremental humor, Lewis did imitate Voltaire once ("I am sitting in the smallest room of the house. I have your letter before me; it will soon be behind me.") in a letter to his good friend, Arthur Greeves, where he wrote: "Can meditation be combined with emptying of the bowels. What a saving of time, especially for a constipated man like you."

For Freud in the straight society of Vienna, the power that makes it difficult or impossible for women to enjoy undisguised obscenity is termed "*repression*." Tendentious jokes enable one to release inhibitions, like a 19<sup>th</sup> century steam engine, the libido's investment in psychosexual energy builds up until it finds an alternative outlet for release. Thus trains become Freudian symbols as well.

Freud's sees the liberating power of joke, particularly within institutions that oppress. A dream or joke basically functions in the same way, understood as pleasant wish fulfillment. For a moment there is a release of repressed drives, a rebellion against the pressures of thought and reality. People laugh because a "sum of psychical energy which has hitherto been used for cathexis is allowed free discharge." Laughter enables people to unburden themselves, particularly in the often strained relations between religious groups.

For example, Freud wrote about three things a priest couldn't stand about the Jews: "the way you wander around in the synagogue in such an undisciplined way, your noisy prayers, and your disorderly funerals."

The rabbi answered: "We wander around in the synagogue because we feel at home there. We pray loudly because our God is old and hard of hearing. And as for funerals, I too prefer the Christian ones."

Likewise, a priest and rabbi are sitting on a train.

The priest tells of his dream about Jewish paradise; it was full of dirt, and rubbish, and very noisy.

The Rabbi said: "Ah, how true, but I too dreamed of a Christian paradise: splendid place, full of flowers, scents and sunshine, but not a soul to be seen."<sup>25</sup>

For Freud, laughter is rooted in hostility and sexual repression and general dirtiness of the human condition. Rather than a theory of the comic as difference, he marks it as deficit, of a lack (such as in penis-envy perhaps?) While elements of truth exist in his theories, little of his comedy resides in the neighborhood of the good or the beautiful. Thomas Hobbes, too, quarantined laughter to the cruel garbage heaps of culture—of course, in Hobbes' world, all humanity was aggressively hostile and competitive. His description of the life of man in his *Leviathan* as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" was not one to inspire sanguine optimism.<sup>26</sup>

Freud's economic theory of laughter focuses upon how the natural human being can expend as little psychic energy as possible, how people can save themselves from painful emotions (humor), costly inhibitions (jokes), and difficult thinking (the comic perspective) through the discharge of laughter. Like the body's ability to resist infection and heal itself, so the mind finds laughter as a way to deal with the pressures and pains of living. The energy "used to repress sexual and hostile feelings" is saved through the agency of laughter. Facing intellectual challenges or difficulties, the comic enables us to overcome them with the release of cognitive energy into laughter. And humor deals with the saving of emotional energy by treating a painful situation "non-seriously."

Critics such as Noel Carroll and John Morreall question his idea of energy management (making a logical connection between expressing pent-up energy versus repressing it). They point out, rightly in my opinion, that in Freud's world, the most repressed and inhibited people would laugh the loudest. Experience suggests that these people don't really enjoy joking. Such a theory also assumes that as psychic energy finds a release in the physical action of laughter, any laughter will be explained by an excess of nervous energy.

Freud's explanations do explain certain categories of jokes, but not all. Jokes can disclose secret fantasies, rid us of some moral inhibitions, make us conscious of some taboos, release aggression, or rattle the rigid steel bars of life. But such a contaminated motive behind all jesting and humor misses the nature of humor itself.

*Lewis on Freud*

C. S. Lewis would agree with much of Freud's cognitive understanding of jokes, and would recognize similar problems of sexual tension and hostility in some causes of laughter, but not in all. Lewis, in fact, described his early life as influenced by Freudian thought, but after his conversion and with the publication of *Pilgrim's Regress* in 1933, Lewis exposed what he saw as the intellectual inanity of Freud's thought. As the offspring of the vain and old Mr. Enlightenment, Sigismund asserts that every vision of the Island is a wish-fulfillment that ends with desire for the brown girls.<sup>27</sup>

Thrown into Sigismund's prison, the pilgrim John sees all humanity as bundles of complexes, he sees through everything and sees nothing. Even dropping his head in despair, he only sees all the muck of "the workings of his own inwards." When the giant jailor brings food to the dungeon, a meal of eggs and milk, the jailor cracks a few mean jokes about how they were eating the menstruum of a verminous fowl or the secretions of a cow. It is this last revelation that shocks John into realizing that the jailor is talking nonsense, trying to make his auditors think that milk is the same as sweat or dung. John is rescued by a Titanesque, sun-bright virgin clad in complete steel who is the personification of *Reason* herself, who with her riddles and her sword slays the giant of the age. Rather than explain away laughter, Lewis will protect it by attaching it to this supernatural faculty of Divine Reason.

In his preliminary study on *Miracles*, Lewis limns the differences between naturalist and supernaturalist views of reality. Early in the book, he lambasts Freudianism for violating a rule of logic by asserting that "no thought is valid if it can be fully explained as the result of irrational causes."<sup>28</sup> Lewis identifies the tendency to attack the source of an argument rather than an argument—as in the one who would argue that two and two are four does so because he is a mathematician—as Bulverism. Thus, Freud's explanation of the irrational causes of human behavior (all human behavior is the result of repressed and displaced motives) would have to apply to his particular thought as well, thus discounting its validity. "Thus the Freudian proves that all thoughts are merely due to the complexes except the thoughts which constitute this proof itself."<sup>29</sup> There must be some external supernatural validity to Reason itself

for our reasons to have legitimacy.

For Lewis, the joke honors the Divinely-made rational mind, in that it recognizes a basic incongruity to all of life. "Rational creatures are those to whom God has given wit," Lewis argued in *Studies on Words*.<sup>30</sup> To lose one's wits, one becomes witless or irrational. However, even when the joke mocks rationality, it does so by placing it in the hierarchy of being human. Reason cannot answer or solve all mysteries, puzzles, riddles, paradoxes, or jokes. Rationality has limits. Thus, it too can be mocked. Chesterton once joked that a man trying to fit an understanding of the whole world in his head would most likely find his head exploding. So too one can understand why "the hatter is mad because he had to measure the human head."<sup>31</sup> But jesting is first and foremost an acknowledgement of obedience and service to the goddess Reason.

*Four Kinds of Laughter*

In the eleventh epistle from Screwtape to his diabolical nephew Wormwood, he penned his opinions regarding laughter. There are four causes of laughter, he explained: "Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy."

**Joy** is the laughter of heaven, the secret of the Christian life. Woven out of sorrow and woe, from the crucibles of suffering, absence, and separation, comes the deep, abiding laughter of joy, without tears, promising health, wholeness and reunion. This laughter percolates as thanksgiving and praise. Enjoyment bubbles up and overflows with gratitude, with a rejoicing that is robust, virile, and spontaneous. In fact, praise is verbal laughter. Whenever a husband praises his wife, a reader praises a book, that praise completes, consummates the joy. Wasn't that a good meal, talk, walk, evening? The praise is a blessed reminder of our love and laughter.

The ultimate laughter of joy is in the reunion. In Narnia, whenever the children return, there are hugs and kisses and laughter all around, celebrating reunion. So our great Reunion with God Himself, in Heaven, conjures up images of a fun and festive wedding feast, a giant banquet, never an interminable church service or academic lecture, even on laughter.

The second category Lewis defines is **Fun**, the laughter of the earth, of our bodies. It is laughter of Play in its best sense. The Westminster Catechism reminds us that our chief end is to glorify God and

*(Response to "Letter to the Editor" found on page 23)*

Dear Professors Carnell, Huttar, and Schakel,

Thank you for your letter regarding my publication of the petition objecting to the NRSV Bible translation used for the *CSL Bible*. I will be sure to include it in the next issue of the bulletin along with an explicit explanation that it was never claimed, nor was its publication intended to imply, that the opinions expressed in the petition extended to the membership of the Society or was in any way an "official" position of the Society.

I will also explain that, as the editor, I believe the petition qualified as news and therefore deserved space in the bulletin. It can hardly be assumed that our worldwide readership subscribes to *Christianity Today* or had alternative means to learn about the petition. On the other hand, it seemed highly appropriate for a publication specializing in C.S. Lewis to make this news available. Had anyone submitted a good article about the controversy, I almost certainly would have published it. Since I did not receive an article, and since I did not have the time or inclination to write one myself, I published the petition. However, having received your letter, I believe that publishing the petition served its intended purpose - to provide information and stimulate discussion about an important issue.

Finally, thank you for your kind words about the "high standards and congenial fellowship" that the Society has provided for over 40 years. I am conscious of that reputation and I will, to my best ability, maintain those values during my tenure as editor of its Bulletin.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Trexler  
 Editor, *The Bulletin of the New York C.S. Lewis Society*

**FUTURE MEETINGS**

<p>Nov. 11    "CSL, DLS, and the BBC"                  Margaret Goodman</p> <p>\</p> <p>Dec 9      A reading of "He That Should                  Come" by Dorothy L. Sayers                  Coordinated by Margaret Goodman</p> <p>Jan 13     <i>God in the Dock</i>                  John Martin</p>	<p>Feb 10     "C. S. Lewis and Spiritual Direction"                  Will Vaus</p> <p>Mar 9      "Learning to Speak the Tongue of                  the Holy Ghost: An Introduction                  to the Poetry of Charles Williams"                  Jennifer Woodruff Tait</p> <p>April 13   Oxbridge 2011                  John Morrison</p>
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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.

[continued from page 10]

to enjoy Him forever. Enjoy! What a delightful task to be set before us. Like Eric Liddell in *Chariots of Fire* expressed it: “I feel God’s pleasure when I run.” So when we laugh in enjoying God, we know His pleasure.

The laughter of fun has its roots in humus and humere, in the earth and moisture of our lives, where humor dwells with the lowly, the common, the vulgar, and all the animals in the manger. Humor, humanity, humility—all find similar roots. The fact that man was made from the dust of the earth seems to imply to me that our humor thus will be earthy. The fact that women were created from a rib, above the waist and nearer the brain, seems to suggest a different kind of laughter.

All this laughter of fun creates cheerfulness. And as the proverb prescribes: “A cheerful heart is good medicine.”

The third cause of laughter Lewis identified as the **Joke Proper**. As we mentioned, the joke proper functions on the principle of incongruity, of comic difference, such as between men and women, or any pairing. As Chesterton observed, we laugh at three things: jokes about bodily humiliation, jokes about things foreign, and jokes about bad cheese.<sup>32</sup>

We laugh at different perspectives. One of my students from Kenya, Enoch, once blew his nose by closing off one nostril and discharging the contents onto the ground. I laughed at him, but he responded with even more laughter. “Oh yes, and you Americans blow your noses into a cloth and then place it in your pocket. What kind of person would want to save that kind of mucus?”

For Lewis, a divine incongruity exists in our nature as spiritual animals. For Lewis, the oldest joke there is, is that we have bodies. It makes us into buffoons; it humbles us when we try to be too dignified or too spiritual. And for Lewis, whatever claims reverence, also risks ridicule. Try and lift up some person or idea onto a pedestal, and find that God mocks. He laughs from the heavens at our silly pride.

St. Francis called his body Brother Ass. “Exquisitely Right!” observed Lewis, “because no one in his senses can either revere or hate a donkey. It is a useful, sturdy, obstinate, patient, lovable and infuriating beast; deserving now the stick and now a carrot... . So the body. There’s no living with it till we recognize that one of its functions in our lives is to play the part of the buffoon.” The dignified courtly lover in the medieval poem *Romance of the Rose* tried

to speak more cleanly and spiritually than God. He was offended about certain parts of the human body and complained that even if God did make sexual organs, He did not name them.

Contemplate your own body. You cannot reflect too long without being filled with wonder, despair and then hilarity. An apocryphal story regarding the debates between G. K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw centered on Chesterton’s body. Shaw thumped Chesterton on his overripe belly and teased: “What are you going to name it when it’s born, Gilbert?” To which Chesterton replied: “If it is a boy I shall call him John; if a girl, I shall name her Mary; but if it’s gas I shall call it George Bernard Shaw.”

Another apocryphal anecdote deals with Neil Armstrong who first walked on the moon from his Apollo spacecraft. The world heard his famous words: “One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.” Yet a story circulated about Armstrong making another remark, one much more enigmatic: “Good luck, Mr. Gorsky.” He never explained the significance of that wish until July 5, 1995 in a Tampa Bay newspaper interview.

He responded that Mr. Gorsky had finally died and he felt free to share the background story. When he was a kid playing baseball, a foul ball landed in the Gorsky’s yard. As he retrieved it beneath their bedroom window, he overheard Mrs. Gorsky ranting: “Sex! You want sex? You’ll get sex when the kid next door walks on the moon.” Good luck, Mr. Gorsky.

Three clergymen and their wives died and were standing before St. Peter. To the first, an Episcopalian, Peter admonished: “you were such a sot and drunkard, always getting into drink that people joked that wherever you found four Episcopalians, you would find a fifth. In fact, you devoted yourself so much to drink that you even married a woman named Sherry.”

To the second, a Baptist, Peter rebuked: “you were so greedy, always collecting and hoarding money, making tithing your only sacrament; in fact, you worshipped money so much, you even married a woman named Penny.”

The Pentecostal preacher turned to his wife and muttered: “Fanny, I think we better get out of here.”

Finally, Lewis warned of the laughter of **Flippancy**. Flippancy jokes about goodness, virtue, justice. Of all Lewis’ causes of laughter, it is closest to Freud’s conception of tendentious humor. It is cruelty disguised as joking. Our throats are like open

sepulchres, graves where dead laughter exists. The weed of flippancy grows in the soil of superiority and pride. Its grubby root is in meanness, as in South Park. Over a cup of coffee and a sneering wink, we mock others. We laugh, but know we should be repenting.

It is here that Lewis can be distinguished from Freud again. Laughter, first, is a good gift, but like any other good gift bestowed by God, it can be corrupted, bent, spoiled, ruined. It can become tendentious. Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeks. Laughter begins to be a demon the moment it begins to be a god. If we make laughter a god and worship it, it takes its own revenge upon us. It dies. Like Kierkegaard wrote: "I was the life of the party; wit poured from my lips; everyone laughed at my jests. I went home and wanted to kill myself." Laughter is not enough to sustain us. It must be recognized as a simple gift; not the gift of life itself.

For Lewis, one character in *That Hideous Strength*, personifies flippancy. The silver-tongued Lord Feverstone has an extremely virile and infectious laugh. He fits what Screwtape described as the kind of person who has a subtle play of looks and tones and laughs by which he asserts his superiority over others and over what is considered good. Lewis denounced flippancy so thoroughly because it was so close to his heart. It was his thorn. He knew its power, of wink-wink, nudge-nudge, know what I mean smirks toward others, living in what he called his own great puddle of naughtiness and meanness toward others. Thus he wrote:

From all my lame defeats and oh! Much more  
From all the victories that I seem to score;  
From cleverness shot forth on thy behalf  
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh  
From all my proofs of Thy divinity  
Thou, who would give no sign, deliver me.

Yet above it all, Lewis acknowledged that among Christians, there has been a great deal of false reverence about spiritual matters. We are flooded with too much solemnity and speaking in holy tones, in religious and political discourse. A sour religion is the devil's religion, wrote John Wesley. In *The Four Loves*, Lewis articulated insights on sex and laughter:

For I can hardly help regarding it as one  
of God's jokes that a passion so soaring,  
so apparently transcendent, as Eros,  
should thus be linked with a bodily  
appetite which, like any other appetite,  
tactlessly reveals its connections with  
such mundane factors as weather, health,

diet, circulation, and digestion. In Eros at times we seem to be flying; Venus gives us the sudden twitch that reminds us we are really captive balloons. It is a continual demonstration of the truth that we are composite creatures, rational animals, akin on the one side to the angels, on the other to tom-cats.

While sex as well as eating are serious – both have sacramental and moral aspects – Lewis believed that we take Venus, the sexual act itself, too seriously; – at any rate, with a wrong kind of seriousness. Levity is given us to keep Eros from becoming too divine, and subsequently too demonic. Freud and his heirs approach the subject with the rapt intensity and solemnity of those who seek to establish or restore a religion of sex. Lewis imagined some young couples so intent on performing its rites that they would have the complete works of some psychologist spread out near their bed.

Against this clinical and intense focus on performance as if it were the basis for self-esteem and mental health, Lewis recommended that what we "need most is a roar of old-fashioned laughter. We must not be totally serious about Venus. Indeed we can't be totally serious without doing violence to our humanity. It is not of nothing that every language and literature in the world is full of jokes about sex. Many of them may be dull or disgusting and nearly all of them are old. But we must insist that they embody an attitude to Venus which in the long run endangers the Christian life far less than a reverential gravity.

We must not attempt to find an absolute in the flesh. Banish play and laughter from the bed of love and you may let in a false goddess....The mass of the people are perfectly right in their conviction that Venus is a partly comic spirit.

Venus herself is a mocking, mischievous spirit, far more elf than deity, and makes game of us. When all external circumstances are fittest for her service, she will leave one or both lovers totally indisposed for it. When every overt act is impossible and even glances cannot be exchanged—in trains, in shops, and at interminable parties—Venus will assail them with all her force. An hour later, when time and place agree, she will have mysteriously withdrawn; perhaps from only one of them. What a pother this must raise—what resentments, self-pities, suspicions, wounded vanities and all the current chatter about

“frustration”—in those who have deified her! But sensible lovers laugh. It is all part of the game; a game of catch-as-catch-can, and the escapes and tumbles and head-on collisions are to be treated as a romp.

It is a bad thing not to be able to take a joke. Worse, not to take a divine joke; made, I grant you, at our expense, but also (who doubts it?) for our endless benefit.<sup>33</sup>

In *That Hideous Strength*, the very pious Mrs. Dimble is able to kneel devoutly at an altar one moment and then make Shakespearian jokes about cod-pieces the next.

Nothing is falser than the idea that mockery is necessarily hostile, especially to a wedded couple. Until they have a baby to laugh at, lovers are always laughing at each other.

### *The End of Laughter*

This does not mean we must choose between being serious and comic. The opposite of serious is not comic, but trivial. The opposite of comic is not serious, but tragic. Thus, solemn teenage romantics like Shelley deplored the “withering and perverting spirit of comedy.” They preferred romantic tragedy. Not so the Christian. Our gigantic serious secret is joy. We must share it. As Mark Twain observed: the best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer up somebody else.

Both Freud and Lewis recognized laughter as innately human responses to the world we live in. Both recognized that repression or sin contaminate laughter, making it aggressive, tendentiously sexual, or simply mean, flippant, and crude.

But while Freud sees some humors as non-tendentious, at best, and generally as covering or correcting a deficit in human nature, Lewis echoes the jolly mirth of a Chestertonian universe, recognizing in our play and joy and even some of our jokes, bright reflections of God’s glory. The contrast between the two great thinkers can best be summed up in that for Freud, laughter is a medicine to adjust our neuroses and the deficit of our natures; for Lewis laughter is an integral part of our natures, celebrating differences. In a paragraph stolen from Chesterton himself, one glimpses a bit of the mystery of this Christian view of laughter.

“Joy, which is the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian. One thing God hid from us when He walked upon the earth,”

Chesterton wrote. “He did not hide His tears as when he looked down upon Jerusalem and wept. He did not hide His anger with the moneychangers and the Pharisees. The one thing he hid when he was on this earth, the one thing that was too great for us bear in this life, was his mirth.”

*Freud’s Last Session* closes with an anecdote about a pastor who visits the village atheist, an insurance agent, on his death bed. They talked and quarreled throughout the night, and in the morning the village atheist died, and the pastor left fully insured. Freud at that point mutters: “if only there were such a thing?” “Humor?” asks Lewis. “No, Insurance,” replies a weary and suffering Freud, with wan hope that what Lewis has espoused would be true. One more frog was dissected; the whole possibility of God’s grace was sublimated into a humorous story.

The pasquinades I have scribbled here do no damage to the statues, but hopefully they add a little color and character to these two great thinkers. Hopefully, they also make us better thinkers and more mischievous characters.

Perhaps the final question is how each might respond to the joke about the wife who returned to her husband after seeing her trainer for weight loss. “The trainer said that my stomach and hips were looking much thinner.”

“What,” mocked the husband, “did he say about your fat ass?”

“Oh,” she responded, “your name didn’t come up.”

I suspect they would both laugh.

One final wheeze, as Lewis’ father called old humorous stories, will close our session. A wealthy baron invited a group of workers to his estates to show off his antique automobiles, his priceless works of art, and his exquisite jewels. But he took the group to his back yard where he had an Olympic sized swimming pool filled with alligators.

“What I value most,” he proposed, “is courage and initiative, and if any of you will swim across this pool I will give you whatever you want.”

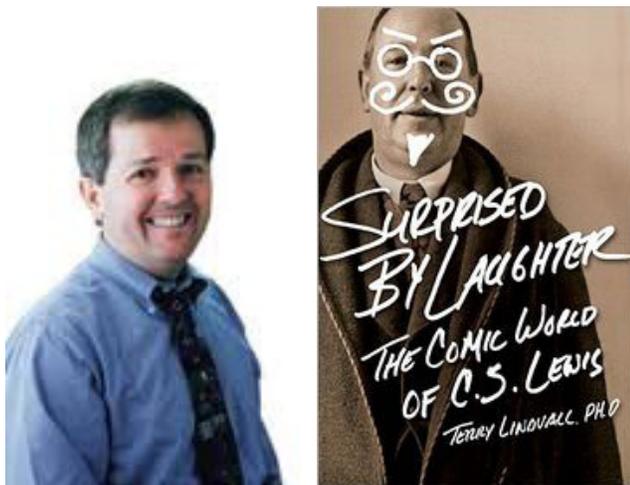
The crowd laughed nervously, and then suddenly, one young worker was immersed in the pool of ravenous reptiles. Alligator jaws were snapping at his heels. His arms thrashed and splashed the water furiously. Finally, he made it to the other side and emerged, wet and shaking and shivering.

“Amazing!” exclaimed the baron. “That was astounding and incredible. What can I give you?”

What do you want?”

“I want,” said the young man, “I want to know who pushed me in.”

In this world of suffering, sin and repression, a world filled with alligators, Freud might laugh nervously with the crowd, but Lewis knew Who threw him in. In the sovereignty of God’s grace, we swim with the alligators and laugh.



Terry Lindvall is C. S. Lewis Chair of Communication and Christian Thought at Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk, Virginia. Previously he taught at Duke University’s Divinity School and was the Walter Mason Fellow of Religious Studies at The College of William and Mary and the former president of Regent University. He is the author of *Surprised by Laughter: The Comic World of C.S. Lewis* (paperback, January 2012) among other works.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The Marjorie S. Deane Little Theatre produced the play from Mark St. Germain’s script (inspired by Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, Jr.’s “Question of God,”) by dramatizing an apocryphal (although tantalizingly possible) meeting between Freud and Lewis on September 3, 1939.
- 2 One of the primary concerns is with definition. A translation of Freud’s *Witz* connotes more than “wit” and spills into the category of jokes. Lewis, on the other hand, devoted an entire chapter on the linguistic evolution of the word “Wit” (with *Ingenium*) from mind, intelligence, and good sense to its “dangerous sense” of being clever repartee. See *Studies in Words* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 86-110
- 3 Freud, Sigmund *The Future of an Illusion in The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Volume XXI, (Hogarth Press, 1973), 53
- 4 Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) Volume VI (translated James Strachey) (Norton, 1960), 103
- 5 *Ibid.* 147-51
- 6 Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters* (Macmillan, 1961), 50-51
- 7 Lewis, C. S. *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (Harcourt Brace, 1966), 96 In the same conversation, Lewis mocks those who take “extraordinary pride in being exempt from temptations that you have not yet risen to the level of! Eunuchs boasting of their chastity! (Laughter).”
- 8 Lewis, C. S. *Studies in Words* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 11-12
- 9 Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (Macmillan, 1947), 132
- 10 Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (Macmillan, 1946), 382
- 11 Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (Macmillan, 1954), 216
- 12 Correspondence with Dr. Stephen Parker, Graduate Counseling Professor (April 1, 2011)
- 13 Lewis *The Screwtape Letters* *op. cit.* ix
- 14 Cited in Lindvall, Terry *Surprised by Laughter: The Comic World of C S Lewis* (Thomas Nelson, 1996),
- 15 Buechner, Frederick *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (HarperCollins, 1977)
- 16 Capps, Donald *A Time to Laugh: The Religion of Humor* (Continuum, 2005); Freud, Sigmund “Humour” (1927) in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (translated by James Strachey) (Hogarth Press, 1973), 159-166
- 17 Capps *op. cit.* 7
- 18 Martin, Jay “Introduction” “Humor in Economic Depression” in *Studies in American Humor* Volume 3, Numbers 2&3 (Summer/Fall 1984)
- 19 *Ibid.* 162, 164
- 20 Meredith, George “To the Comic Spirit” (*Poems*, 1892), 69, 86, 91
- 21 Martin, *op. cit.* 101
- 22 Oring, Elliot *The Jokes of Sigmund Freud: A Study of Humor and Jewish Identity* (Jason Aronson, 1997)
- 23 Lewis, *Studies in Words* *op. cit.*, 20
- 24 Freud, *Jokes* *op. cit.*, 44
- 25 Kuschel, 105
- 26 Hobbes, Thomas *Leviathan* XIII “On the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning their Felicity and Misery”
- 27 Lewis, C. S. *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (), 59-60
- 28 Lewis, C. S. *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (Macmillan, 1947), 21
- 29 Lewis *Miracles* *op. cit.* 23
- 30 Lewis, *Studies on Words* (), 86
- 31 Chesterton, Orthodoxy 18
- 32 Chesterton, G. K. *All Things Considered* (Dufour, 1969), 14
- 33 Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 141-142

## REPORT OF THE APRIL 8, 2011 MEETING

The New York C. S. Lewis Society met on Friday, April 8, 2011 at Ascension Church Parish House, 12 West 11th St. in Manhattan. Eric Wurthmann called the meeting to order.

Maggie Goodman read our monthly Lewis reading, from the essay “Religion and Science” from *God in the Dock* (“It was all so obviously invented by people who believed in a flat earth with the stars only a mile or two away.’ ‘When did people believe that?’ ‘Why, all those old Christian chaps you’re always telling about did. I mean Boethius and Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and Dante.’ ‘Sorry’, said I, ‘but this is one of the few subjects I do know something about.’...‘Did they really know that THEN?’ said my friend. ‘But - none of the the histories of science— none of the encyclopedias— ever mention the fact.’ ‘Exactly,’ I said. ‘I’ll leave you to think out the reason. It almost looks as if someone was anxious to hush it up, doesn’t it? I wonder why.’”) Chris Iasiello volunteered to do the May reading. We had six new attendees, Harold Buchholz, Terry Lindvall, Jeffrey Tindall, Elena Kornegay-Baez, William Brown, and Benson Fraser, whose first or favourite Lewis books included *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Abolition of Man*, *The Silver Chair*, *The Four Loves*, *Till We Have Faces*, and the play *Shadowlands*.

Eric announced the availability of cassette tapes of all meetings (contact Bill McClain). Bob Trexler noted that the *Bulletin* for March/April would be out at the end of April, and that it would include information on Lewis’ translation of the *Aeniad* (“some of those notes Walter Hooper saved from the bonfire,” <http://www.amazon.com/C-S-Lewis-Lost-Aeneid/dp/0300167172>) and on a collection of essays in honour of Walter Hooper on his eightieth birthday (Jim Como’s is one; <http://www.amazon.com/C-S-Lewis-Church-Essays/dp/0567047369>) He also wanted us to know of two new books from Winged Lion Press, one on early romantic poetry and one a memoir from the daughter of Roy Campbell (“a poet of some renown who converted to the Catholic Church and then his popularity plummeted.”) Finally, Eric reminded us of the Eldila meeting next month at 7:00 (“If you’re an eldil, you know who you are.”)

Upcoming meetings include *Tellers of Tales* by Roger Lancelyn Green (Robert Trexler) on 5/13; *He Came Down From Heaven* by Charles Williams (Charles Beach) on 6/10; and our annual “From the

Floor” meeting moderated by Jim Como on 7/8.

Tonight’s meeting is called “Another Repressed Question of God” by Terry Lindvall, who is a “20-year member” attending his first meeting. He lives in Virginia and is married with two children, and has taught at Duke, William and Mary, Regent College, and Wheaton. He is currently C. S. Lewis Professor of Communication and Christian thought at Virginia Wesleyan College (<http://facultystaff.vwc.edu/~tlindvall/>).

Terry opened with a few acknowledgements. He was happy to meet in person Geraldine Hawkins, with whom he has corresponded for over a decade; he also acknowledged friends from church and work who had travelled with him—Jeffrey Tindall, William Brown, Benson Fraser, and Harold Buchholz (the last has a new comic book out called *I Am a Wild Lion*).

Terry’s presentation will be in a future Bulletin. Briefly, although he enjoyed *Freud’s Last Session* as well as the *Question of God* film by Armand Nicolai on which it was based, he wished that Nicolai had compared their views on wit, humour, and laughter as well, and aimed in this talk to add some “pasquinades” to Nicolai’s description by discussing their views on the nature and function of humour, how these were affected by “their conceptions of the world—and sex,” and giving some examples. He began by noting the sources. Freud wrote a treatise on jokes shortly after he finished *Interpretation of Dreams* (and followed it up with another essay 20 years later) Lewis’ views appear throughout his writings, but the creation of Narnia and the eleventh *Screwtape Letter* are particularly good examples.

Freud thought that neuroses were at the root of all our experiences, and that laughter functioned to help us avoid an expenditure of psychic energy. He was particularly interested in the “tendentious” joke which gives victory over inhibitions, taboos, and censorship and allows us to attack our enemies. Lewis certainly viewed jokes in some of the same categories—Screwtape views some humour as tendentious, for example—but does not reduce sexual humour to the evading of repressed desire. (Terry shared two jokes Lewis was known to have told about sex and pointed out that they were “not really that funny.”)<sup>1</sup> For Lewis, though, obscene humour is a sign of the existence of the supernatural, since it indicates

<sup>1</sup> Here are some of the punchlines of the jokes and anecdotes Terry told (you’ll have to wait for the manuscript of the talk to read the jokes): “Your morning tea, gentlemen.”

that humans find our own nature “either objectionable or funny” (“woodpeckers don’t do knock-knock jokes.”)

Terry noted that “the comic existed before the Fall” for Lewis since it is connected to a) our created nature and b) our division into two genders (“the comic possibilities between men and women have yet to be exhausted.”) For Lewis, the difference between genders was a source of love as well as laughter. But, “being created comic and good did not last” and the Fall explains how our jokes became “tendentious.” *Screwtape* particularly explores this. Lewis (and Chesterton) argued that folks in Hell were concerned about their own dignity (“in short, a university faculty meeting”) whereas the comic spirit is one of new life. Israel itself is established on foundations of laughter in the story of Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac (“a baby being born in the geriatric ward and Medicare picking up the tab”).<sup>2</sup>

Freud distinguished three kinds of anxieties that were relieved by laughter: painful emotions (humour), tension from inhibitions (jokes), and difficulties in thinking (the comic). He also argued that humour serves four functions: it is rebellious rather than resigned; it is a weapon of defence; it creates a community of mutuality (Lewis would have affirmed this); and it is a way in which the superego reassures us. Terry pointed out that Freud often identified with the object of his jokes, and that this may have related to his own anxiety, both about his Jewishness and about his heavy debts.<sup>3</sup> He certainly may have felt compelled to investigate jokes because of their similarity to dreams. Freud also discussed the techniques of humour.<sup>4</sup> He pointed out that jokes work through forced relations (“A joke says what it has to say in *too* few words.”)<sup>5</sup> These forced relations lead to new unities. Freud also delved deeply into the purpose of jokes; they lead to shame or embarrassment only because we are repressed, which is why so much humour is obscene or excremental.) Lewis certainly explored some of this in his letters to Arthur Greeves.

While elements of truth exist in Freud’s theory Terry thinks that it does not deal with how laughter relates to the good and the beautiful. (Also, in Freud’s world, shouldn’t the most repressed people laugh the loudest? Yet they don’t.) While Lewis agreed with much of Freud’s understanding of the roles of sexual tension and hostility, he also explored how

2 “At your age, take the soup.”

3 “When am I supposed to eat salmon mayonnaise?”

4 “What should I be doing in Pressburg at 6:30 in the morning?”

5 “She is merely succinct—like dating *USA Today*.”

humour is attached to Reason (Terry noticed Lewis’ rejection of Freudianism in *Pilgrim’s Regress* and how John is rescued from Sigismund by Reason.) In the eleventh *Screwtape Letter* Lewis famously distinguishes four kinds of humour. The first is joy, the “laughter of heaven;” our praise of God is “verbal laughter.” Secondly there is fun, “the laughter of the earth, of our bodies, of play” through which God trains us to enjoy him.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, there is the “joke proper” which functions on the principle of incongruity, especially the difference between genders and the issues of our nature as spiritual animals.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there is flippancy, which comes the closest to Freud’s conception of tendentious humour and “grows in the soil of pride.” Lewis felt this was one of his primary sins, but he also pointed out that there is too much “false reverence” in Christianity and that we don’t have to choose between the serious and the comic: “our gigantic secret, as Chesterton said, is joy.”

In the end, both Freud and Lewis recognized laughter as a human response connected to the contamination of the human condition by sin and pride, but Lewis also sees in some forms of laughter something more that points beyond this world.<sup>8</sup>

Geraldine Hawkins opened the question period with a question not about jokes but about movies (Terry is primarily a film scholar). She had read an anecdote where Lewis asked who Elizabeth Taylor was, and was puzzled because Terry had once told her in an email that Lewis enjoyed movies. Terry said that Lewis went to a lot of movies early on in his life but “backed away” from them later. He loved *King Kong* (“he thought it was Freudian”) and he also liked parts of *Snow White*, although he hated the dwarfs. Taylor did not appear in movies until the 1940s (“before she married Conrad Hilton and everybody else”) and Lewis was busy writing and teaching by then. Geraldine asked why he didn’t like the movie *Calgate*? Terry said that he thought it was brilliant but artificial—a view of life that “everyone was celebrating like a sinking ship,” similar to early T. S. Eliot poetry.

Michael Canaris asked about Lewis’ opinion on his own Narnia books being made into movies. Terry said that he hated the idea of Disney animation for his works (“even though Tolkien hated his works and

6 “It’s 10:00; it’s coffee time, my friend.”

7 “If it is gas, I shall call it George Bernard Shaw”... “Good luck, Mr. Gorsky”.... “Wherever you found four Episcopalians you would find a fifth.”

8 “If there were only such a thing.—Humour?—Insurance.” (*Freud’s Last Session*)... “I want to know who pushed me in.”

thought they should be animated”) despite the fact that he liked aspects of it, such as the witch in *Snow White* who was “real, evil and frightful.” But he didn’t want cartoon adaptations. Terry recommended talking to Douglas Gresham further about this.

Harold Buchholz noted that the group had previously discussed Chesterton and Lewis, and wondered what the differences were between the two on the subject of humour. Terry said “I think Chesterton was a bit funnier man.” Lewis was witty, but Chesterton was “a man of the belly laugh; I read Chesterton and I laugh out loud; I read Lewis and I chuckle.” He particularly likes the famous Chesterton line about “anything worth doing is worth doing badly’...which relieves all fear. If it’s worth doing, do it. Love your neighbour even though you’re a klutz.”

Rose Marie Barba wanted to know if Lewis and Freud made each other laugh. Terry said that because Lewis was such a strong Freudian early in his life he explicitly rejected Freud later, but there are still many similarities between their ideas and there are many types of humour Lewis sees as “tendentious.” It is doubtful they ever met, although the play *Freud’s last Session* plays off of a notation from Freud’s diary that in 1939 an Oxford don visited him for a session. He doubts that Freud was aware of Lewis’ writings since Lewis did not really become famous until *Screwtape* was published in 1941.

William Brown asked Terry to expound on his theory of “holy mockery.” Terry said he is writing a book on the “history of satire in the church from the Hebrew prophets to Stephen Colbert.” He is interested both in how the church has used satire and how it has been used against the church, and pointed out that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were a number of excellent satirists—Chesterton, Evelyn Waugh, Ronald Knox,

and Hilaire Belloc” who helped “give us a healthy church as opposed to the people who were really uptight running it at the top.”

Geraldine said that she is surprised that Terry sees similarities between Freud and Lewis when “Freud sexualized everything while Lewis has a lot to say about purity and friendship.” Terry pointed out that in *Four Loves* in particular Lewis has a lot of wonderful things to say about sex and laughter. “Couples get all these copies of books by Freud and think that’s going to help their marriage—what helps is laughing at each other and being friends. It’s a great gift.”

He ended by saying, “You all meeting together and laughing like this is a great gift. The Lord bless you and make you laugh. Like the Cheshire cat, I hope the grin is the last thing to go.”

With that, discussion continued over refreshments. Attending the meeting were Claire Edwards, Maggie Goodman, Harold Buchholz, Helene DeLorenzo, Terry Lindvall, Charles Abraham, Geraldine Hawkins, Jeffrey Tindall, Bob Trexler, Bill McClain, Marilyn Driscoll, Mary Pixley, Trudy Friedrichs, Zoe Blake, Joel Daniels, David Kornegay, Elena Kornegay-Baez, Rose Marie Barba, Luisa Cruz, Christopher Iasiello, Woody and Sue Wendling, Michael Canaris, William Brown, Benson Fraser, Lori Pieper, Maria Marcus, Charlotte Patton, Dorothy Fabian, Frank Drollinger, Jerry Lamarca, Tim Ghali, John Martin, Clara Sarrocco, Eric Wurthmann, and Lorraine Collazo.

Not attending the meeting was recorder Jennifer Woodruff Tait, whose first favourite joke was “What’s worse than raining cats and dogs? Hailing taxicabs.”

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“Chaucer as Philologist.” Since the “AB Language” in which *Ancrene Wisse* is written is a specialty of Zettersten’s, he is able to evoke the two scholars’ shared enthusiasm for it. He records too their interest in the fragmentary poem *Waldere*. He conveys the “code-switching” quality of Tolkien’s mind, adapting a linguistic term for a rapid alternation “between two languages, or between two dialects or between two registers.” Thus, “Tolkien could suddenly flit between the primary and the secondary world without the slightest difficulty or doubt” (p. 113). Yes: Zettersten

really does seem to understand how Tolkien’s mind worked – although I’m still mulling his notion that Tolkien would have published a finished text of *The Silmarillion* in his lifetime if he had been able to work on the book with a word processor (p. 36). During his last visits with Tolkien, Zettersten perceived that Tolkien realized that he would not see *The Silmarillion* through to publication.

Other than institutions with special Tolkien collections, libraries do not need to purchase this book.

## Report of the May 13, 2011 Meeting

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

Chris Iasiello read our monthly Lewis reading, from Lewis' words on forgiveness in *Mere Christianity* ("If you had a perfect excuse, you would not need forgiveness; if the whole of your actions needs forgiveness, then there was no excuse for it. But the trouble is that what we call 'asking God's forgiveness' very often really consists in asking God to accept our excuses... . We are so very anxious to point these things out to God (and to ourselves) that we are apt to forget the very important thing; that is, the bit left over, the bit which excuses don't cover, the bit which is inexcusable but not, thank God, unforgivable. And if we forget this, we shall go away imagining that we have repented and been forgiven when all that has really happened is that we have satisfied ourselves with our own excuses... . There are two remedies for this danger. One is to remember that God knows all the real excuses very much better than we do.") Joe Sweeney volunteered to do the May reading. We had three new attendees, Gwendolyn Chambrun, Nessa Carter, and Burk Ohbayashi, whose first or favourite Lewis books included *The Great Divorce*, *Narnia*, *Till We Have Faces*, and the space trilogy.

Eric announced the availability of cassette tapes of all meetings (contact Bill McClain). Joe Sweeney reported that Clara Sarrocco has a "marvellous article" in *Touchstone* (it is in the May/June 2011 issue and is titled "Surprised by Awe: C. S. Lewis & Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*"). Bob Trexler announced that the latest book from Winged Lion Press is *Speaking of Jack* by Will Vaus, who has spoken here; it is a guide for starting a Lewis discussion group and includes discussion questions ([http://wingedlionpress.com/speaking\\_of\\_jack.html](http://wingedlionpress.com/speaking_of_jack.html)).

Upcoming meetings include *He Came Down From Heaven* by Charles Williams (Charles Beach) on 6/10; our annual "From the Floor" meeting moderated by Jim Como on 7/8; and "The Riddle of Gollum" by Woody Wendling on 9/9. There will be no meeting in August.

Tonight's meeting is on *Tellers of Tales* by Roger Lancelyn Green, and is given by Bob Trexler, a "long-time society member who is currently in independent publishing." Bob noted that every other talk he has

given to the society has been on George MacDonald, but when he read Roger's book he knew he wanted to talk about it ("not without reference to George MacDonald") and about Roger's life and friendship with Lewis.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Roger has never been the topic of an NYCSL meeting.

The book *Tellers of Tales* (best described by one of its subtitles, "*An account of children's favourite authors from 1839 to the present day, their books and how they came to write them, together with an appendix and indexes giving the titles and dates of these books*") was first published in 1946, revised in 1953, and reprinted in 1969. From 1945-50 Roger was a librarian at Merton College, and came to be recognized as a leading authority on children's literature. He was an undergraduate at Merton College in the late 1930s and then completed a B.Litt thesis on Andrew Lang with Tolkien, which he later developed into a full-length critical biography of Lang in 1946. His general mission was to "defend romance against critics who loved realism," and his work on Lang very much challenged the accepted criticisms of his time and made a space for romance and fantasy.

Roger first met Lewis when he attended Lewis' lectures on the medieval worldview in 1938-39 (later [1962] published as *The Discarded Image* and dedicated to Roger). They spent over seventy evenings together. Lewis' first known letter to Roger was in December 1938 in response to a letter praising *Out of the Silent Planet* ("I...wished to conquer for my own (Christian) point of view what has always hitherto been used by the opposite side"). Their next recorded letter was on September 16, 1945. By this point Lewis had read Roger's thesis on Andrew Lang. The letter critiques an early version of Roger's story "The Wood That Time Forgot" ("The talent is certain: but you have a sickness in the soul. You are too much *in* that enchanted wood yourself..."). Lewis kept the manuscript for over a year, but returned it with much good advice; Roger commented that the book was never published because it owed too much to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, although chronologically the influence seems to be the other way around.

In 1949, Lewis and Roger met for a dinner at

1 As Bob explained, due to RLG's status as a member of the nobility, his last name is properly styled "Lancelyn Green;" in an effort to be more succinct Bob referred to him as "Roger," and I will follow suit.

which he read part of what eventually became *The Magician's Nephew* to Roger, and Lewis later shared parts of *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Silver Chair* with Roger until Roger's move from Oxford in 1950. Roger moved because he had inherited his ancestral estate, Poulton Hall, from his father in 1947. The Lancelyns were supposedly one of only 450 families in England who can trace their lineage back to William the Conqueror, and the land has been in the family for over 900 years. Roger married June in 1948; they had their first son, Scirard, in 1949, and he then moved to Poulton, Wirral, Cheshire (about 180 miles NE of Oxford) to take up his duties with the estate.

About four months after Lewis and Roger's 1945 meeting and correspondence Roger published *Tellers of Tales*. Roger's rationale for doing so was that many fantasy authors do not appear in standard histories of English literature. Many on his list had also inspired C. S. Lewis: they included Rider Haggard, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, E. Nesbit, Robert Louis Stevenson, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and Beatrix Potter. Bob particularly enjoyed in the book Roger's ability to make connections between the authors and show the progress of ideas and themes. He was interested to find out that a popular author of George MacDonald's day (Mrs. Dinah Craik, author of *John Halifax, Gentleman*) helped GMD find a publisher for his first novel. She may also have been influential on him because she collected fairy tales.

Roger discussed many authors who are obscure today. They include Jean Ingle (whom Roger described as possessing "the seriousness that is the sign of a really good story"), Juliana Horatio Ewing ("She does not explain everything, nor does she stuff her work with text and morals."), and Mrs. Molesworth—next to Lewis Carroll, who was Roger's favourite 19<sup>th</sup>-century author, Mrs. Molesworth was his next favourite (Bob: "MacDonald was a close runner up but Mrs. Molesworth is better at avoiding the didactic.") Roger recommended starting her work with *The Carved Lions*.

Bob then divided Roger's career into three periods. During the first, 1945-55, he wrote about thirty fiction books, many retellings of myths. He also published poetry, two original children's novels, and biographies of Andrew Lang and Lewis Carroll. Bob read from letters written by Lewis to Roger during this period: 5/1/1952 ("I think the Bournemouth lecture was a success. One librarian said I had almost converted him to fairy tales...you were spoke of with

much respect"); 6/23/52 ("I took up from *The World's End* one night and re-read it"); 9/26/52 ("The books you fail to publish seem to me sometimes better than, and sometimes no different from, the ones you do.... Let me have her and your advice on the immediate problem which is the title of the new story [*The Silver Chair*]"); 7/10/53 ("Far more important is your *King Arthur*. I read every word and think you have done, in general, a very good job"); 9/15/53 ("just back from Donegal (which was as near heaven as you can get in Thulcandra)...Thanks very much indeed for the revised *Tellers of Tales* and the nice things you say about me"); and 2/22/54 ("I was relieved that *Polly and Digory* [*The Magician's Nephew*] got your *nihil obstat*.").

The second period, 1955-63, consisted of the last few years of Lewis' life and thus his friendship with Roger; this was also the era of Lewis' marriage to Joy and the growing friendship between the two couples. Bob read excerpts from Lewis' letters to Roger from this period: 9/23/56 ("I have to thank you both for a *Book of Nonsense* and for *Robin Hood*"); 5/17/57 ("Will you lunch with me in Magdalene and let me take you home to meet Joy for tea afterwards?"); 7/16/57 ("Oh, they've been cruel to you in *Mystery at Mycenae*...Joy continues apparently well"); 11/17/57 ("It was nice to see us appearing together in today's *Sunday Times*... how I have 'dwindled into a husband'"); 8/29/58 ("Turn up about 6:40. I shall assume this unless I hear to the contrary"); 11/25/59 ("It [the return of Joy's cancer] is like being recaptured by the giant when you have passed every gate and are almost out of sight of his castle....It is quite possible she may be able to do the Greek trip this spring." Joy, Lewis, Roger, and June did make the trip to Greece in April 1960, and Joy died in June. Letters following this included 8/20/60 ("of course I knew you would write when you did"); 2/1/61 ("Thanks also to both of you for your kind suggestions about a holiday..."); and 9/6/61, as Lewis was preparing for an operation which he did not in fact have ("I am in no pain and I quite enjoy the hours of uninterrupted reading").

The final period lasted from 1964 to the end of Roger's life (1987, though his last book was in 1978 and he suffered from Parkinson's in his later years; Bob said that Walter Hooper noted how, when Roger could no longer write, he would call and say "This is my letter"). Roger continued to collect and retell myths for modern readers just as Lang had done, and also translated plays of Euripides. In 1968 he gave the Andrew Lang Lectures. Bob felt that Roger

identified strongly with both Stevenson and Barrie among his subjects. He also noted that Roger had been for a while (1942-45) a professional actor; this was how he met June, who later taught drama and speech at the local grammar school. In 1971, their son Scirard opened Lancelyn Theatre Supplies, <http://www.lancelyn.co.uk/> (“Even lords and ladies need to earn money to keep up their properties”).

Roger and June had three children: Scirard (who later succeeded to the estate and lives there now), Richard, and Priscilla (Cilla). Richard became an authority on Arthur Conan Doyle and outfitted the attic at Poulton Hall as a replica of Holmes’ study. He died in 2004 under mysterious circumstances (“Some people think he staged his death because it would be so much like a Conan Doyle mystery;” there was also the fact that he was involved in a legal battle over Conan Doyle’s letters with some of ACD’s family members). June, who is still alive, was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2009. Some time ago she gave up her teaching and began to restore the gardens on the property; after Roger’s death she transformed one garden to a memorial to him, with every artefact and plant being related to one of his books. These include an Alice in Wonderland walk, an Excalibur Garden, and a Land of the Lord High Tiger garden.

Bob concluded that Roger and June seemed like wonderful people, “generous and full of fun,” but that in the end what would be remembered the most about Roger was the support he gave to Lewis in bringing *Narnia* to publication. He ended with Roger’s paragraph on Narnia from *Tellers of Tales*.

Mary Gehringer opened the question period by asking about the library at Poulton (which was pictured on Bob’s handout.) Bob said that the library dates to 1740. Roger’s father was an army major and catalogued it when convalescing after World War I; at that point there were 4000-5000 books. Roger did some antiquarian bookselling himself, as well as

being trained as a librarian.

Joe Sweeney noted that Roger would have been 21 in 1939 and wanted to know if he served in the military. Bob said that no; he was always somewhat weak, and was disqualified for health reasons. Jim Como reported that in 1974 he was able to meet Roger in the company of Walter Hooper, and remembered him saying that he considered the family to be descended from Sir Lancelot. Bob asked if Roger showed any signs of Parkinson’s at that point. Jim said no, but did note that he was “very slight” and he could believe he had been an invalid.

Bob shared some more material on Wirral and Poulton Hall he had found online. The town was originally called “Spital” (“what a great name!”) due to its being used as a leper hospital. In the thirteenth century some monks at Bebbington were given licence to use the woods at Spital for this purpose. Bob doesn’t know where the name Poulton Hall came from, but reported that the first building in the area was a small chapel built in 1183 and dedicated to the martyr Thomas à Becket. He showed an aerial view “where the castle used to be, but it’s disappeared.” The current house dates from the eighteenth century.

With that, discussion continued over refreshments. Attending the meeting were Eric Wurthmann, Maggie Goodman, Helene DeLorenzo, Bob Trexler, Trudy Friedrichs, Jim Tetreault, Bill McClain, Jim Bash, Gwendolyn Chambrun, Marilyn Driscoll, Mary Pixley, Zina Michajliczenko, Zoe Blake, Joe Sweeney, Christopher Iasiello, Nessa Carter, Burk Ohbayashi, Rob Clere, Jerry Lamarca, Frank Drollinger, Tim Ghali, Maria Marcus, George Sanseverino, Eric Sigward, John Martin, Mary Gehringer, Clara Sarrocco, June Weart, Dorothy Fabian, Jim and Alexandra Como, Lori Pieper, and Lorraine Collazo.

Not attending the meeting was recorder Jennifer Woodruff Tait, who wants to go to Poulton Hall now.

## Tolkien by a Colleague and Friend

by Dale Nelson

Arne Zettersten worked with Tolkien on the Oxford Early English Text Society's multi-volume edition of all seventeen manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse*. The first volume appeared in 1962; it was the final major scholarly work released in his lifetime by Tolkien. Zettersten saw the project through to completion in 2000. He has written *J. R. R. Tolkien's Double Worlds and Creative Process: Language and Life*, published 2011 by Palgrave Macmillan (xi + 243 pp; ISBN 978-0-230-62314-9; \$85).

The book is priced for the scholarly market but is poorly edited. It states that 9 August 1973 was two weeks before Tolkien's death, but Tolkien died 2 Sept. 1973. It refers twice to *Biographia Literaria* as being written by C. T. Coleridge (pp. 27, 233). Tolkien's secretary Joy Hill becomes Joe Hill (p. 35). An uncorrected misprint refers to the 1980s when the 1890s must be meant (p. 52). Tolkien's essay English and Welsh is English and Wales on p. 161, England and Wales on p. 200, and About the English and the Welsh on p. 232. We read of Niemor (for Nienor, a character in Tolkien's *Túrin* cycle, p. 35), buriel-mounds (p. 13), and the bookstore chain Barnes and Noble (p. 39), and that today's individual have [sic] lost a lot of historical knowledge (p. 221). The style bogs down: the new digital picture archive from the [Peter Jackson] film production [was used] for all kinds of digital manipulation. If we take into account the whole reception of Tolkien's ideas, we may adopt a different, and maybe unexpected, comprehensive view of his project, particularly if we take into account the effects of his ideas (p. 217). Few readers will assume with Zettersten that a radio or TV interview would have created a more relaxed setting [for Tolkien to speak in] than a social gathering at a pub, or a lively meeting with colleagues after dinner in his own college (p. 6). One frequently thinks that Zettersten is about to focus on one particular issue, but he draws off to something else. The book is repetitive. It was, apparently, first written in Swedish and the translation is not polished. *Ocb*, the Swedish word for *and*, appears on pp. 174 and 231. The book needed a good editor.

Readers may shrug off such defects if the book brings Tolkien the man close to them and if what it says about Tolkien's creativity is insightful. The book may be guardedly affirmed on both counts.

Having corresponded with him since May 1959, Zettersten first visited Tolkien in June 1961. He tells his first impressions of Tolkien's appearance ("surprisingly robust physique," "natural heartiness" of manner, hair parted on the left and thick in the back, bushy eyebrows, warm handshake, distinctive voice) and recounts his walk from the noisy center of Oxford to Tolkien's Sandfield Road residence in Headington. These early paragraphs are enjoyable, and it is pleasant in the middle of the book to glimpse Tolkien's conversational topics ranging from philology to his own subcreation to "various whiskies and their merits" (p. 113). So far as I know Zettersten is the only source in print for the list of eleven books from Tolkien's schooldays (p. 78). Almost everything that Zettersten says about Tolkien the man, however, is already known from Tolkien's published letters and books by members of the Tolkien family, John Garth, Peter Gilliver, Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond, Humphrey Carpenter, and others. Zettersten's book is a useful condensation of their many pages. Zettersten's affection for Tolkien pervades the book, but perhaps he waited too long to write it; his book mostly lacks the unique anecdotes that readers will have hoped for.

While many readers will welcome a book on Tolkien, a philologist, written by another outstanding philologist, some may fear that it will be too esoteric. It's not. For example, a nice explanation of "philology" appears on p. 79. (It could have appeared earlier in the book.) One might, again, fear that Zettersten would naturally emphasize philology at the expense of other elements contributing to Tolkien's creativity, but the book is reasonably balanced. We read of Tolkien being captivated by the Gothic, Finnish, and Welsh languages, but also of his prewar friendships, Tolkien's love for Edith and the importance of their son Christopher Tolkien as reader of *LOTR* as it was being written, Tolkien's Great War experiences, the stimulus of the Inklings, and the role of pictorial art and calligraphy. Zettersten doesn't let the philological perspective run away with him but uses it. Given his qualifications, one wishes he had commented on Tolkien's philological essays such as "Sigelwara Land," "The Devil's Coach-Horses," and "Chaucer as Philologist." Since the "AB Language" in which *Ancrene Wisse* is written is a specialty of Zettersten's,

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## Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

For more than 40 years the New York C. S. Lewis Society has rendered significant service in advancing the serious study of Lewis and his legacy. Lewis scholars are indebted to the vision of the Society's founders and those who have maintained its fusion of high standards and congenial fellowship.

It is in this context that we write to express our disappointment at the publication in your May/June 2011 issue, in a way that implies the Society's endorsement, of a round-robin letter attacking *The C. S. Lewis Bible*. We would hope to be assured that this does not in fact represent an official stance of the Society; but in the absence of an alternative identification (as a scholarly article, or a paid advertisement, or news [the letter is hardly that, having been in the public eye for several months]) we urge the journal to clarify the status of these pages (10-11). Lacking clarification, such a highly partisan statement cannot help but threaten the Society's fine reputation.

As we all know, one of the problems arising from Lewis' popularity from the beginning, in this country especially, has been the attempt by one party or another to claim Lewis' authority for their own special concerns (as distinct from what Lewis championed as "mere"—that is, essential—Christianity). Lewis of course was well aware that this could happen.

For several reasons, we consider the letter ill-advised and poorly argued. First, we wonder what statistical sources the author(s) of the letter might have for claiming that "the majority [of] Lewis scholars" support their view—let alone that there is anything close to a "consensus." We can think quickly of several prominent names in Lewis scholarship whose signatures are not to be found. Second, we question their facile assurance that they know with "certain[tly]" that Lewis would have insisted on the King James Version for Harper's project—in the face of repeated statements in Lewis' letters and publications implying the contrary—or that they know what Lewis would have thought of the NRSV had he lived to see it. Several issues are involved in the latter presumption.

For one, it seems quite odd to assert that "Lewis was firmly against gender-neutral usage," when the whole concept had barely risen above the intellectual horizon during his lifetime. Second, we know that Lewis could, and did, alter his views on various issues as his understanding matured; prominent among these was his view of the status of women. Who is to say that he wouldn't have approved the well-designed (and limited) aims of the 1989 translation? As the NRSV's

preface indicates, it is precisely not to be considered "gender-neutral" in the sense in which the letter appears to use that scare phrase, that is, in pursuit of a feminist theological "agenda" (another scare word). It is instead aimed at an accurate rendering of the original into an English that contemporary readers would understand—a language that had undergone rapid change in the later twentieth century particularly as regards the expression of gender-related terms for human beings. For many readers the "generic masculine" forms that used to include both sexes, accepted as normal for centuries, would no longer do; if both men and women were meant, that had to be specified. We can't, of course, know how Lewis would have responded to that aim, had he been alive in 1989—who in his right mind would make that sort of claim either one way or the other?—but some cautious speculation might be in order, some extrapolation from attitudes Lewis is known to have held. It might be useful for those who are offended by the Harper publication to read in its entirety the introduction Lewis wrote in 1947 for J. B. Phillips's *Letters to Young Churches* (reprinted in *God in the Dock*, pp. 229-33). After his careful explanation of why the Authorized Version is no longer the best choice, perhaps the immediately relevant part is Lewis' advice to "welcome all new translations . . . by sound scholars" (231). Moreover, it is abundantly clear that Lewis was acutely sensitive to matters of language, not only by professional study but through a long habit of observing the way people talked. Especially where spreading the gospel is concerned, this is evident from the colloquial mastery that marks his BBC wartime broadcasts. In a talk on "Christian Apologetics" he stressed the importance of "translat[ing] . . . into the vernacular" (*God in the Dock*, p. 98). Perhaps that is one reason that, a decade and a half later, though faced with serious medical concerns, he accepted the archbishops' invitation to help revise the Prayer Book psalter—and he proved to be by no means the most conservatively inclined member of that commission.

This is not a manifesto or a petition—simply a letter that we hope you will see fit to print. We haven't sought to accumulate a roster of supporting signatures. We submit our views, however, in the confident expectation of widespread assent.

Sincerely yours,

Corbin S. Carnell  
Charles A. Huttar  
Peter J. Schakel

*editor's response is printed on page 11*

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AND  
C. S. LEWIS AND INKLINGS SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MAY 31 – JUNE 2, 2012  
TAYLOR UNIVERSITY, UPLAND, INDIANA

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

ALAN JACOBS: CLYDE S. KILBY PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT WHEATON COLLEGE  
DAVID DOWNING: R. W. SCHLOSSER PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE  
RON REED: PLAYWRIGHT AND FOUNDER OF THE PACIFIC THEATRE

CALL FOR PAPERS

Paper are invited on topics that concerns C. S. Lewis and/or his friends: Owen Barfield, G. K. Chesterton, George MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams. Proposals should be 100-200 words long and should anticipate a 20-minute presentation time limit. Deadline for proposals is February 1, 2012. There is also a student essay contest with a \$500 cash prize plus an invitation to attend the colloquium free of charge. Please visit website [WWW.TAYLOR.EDU/CSLEWIS](http://WWW.TAYLOR.EDU/CSLEWIS) for further information

The C. S. Lewis and Inklings Society is sponsoring competitions (must be a CSLIS members to be eligible) for the best graduate student and the best faculty/scholar paper given at the conference. Winners will receive a monetary reward. Please visit the website for further details.

