



The Oblate's Confession

William Peak

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England, the 7th century. Petty Anglo-Saxon kingdoms make war upon one another and their Celtic neighbors. Christianity is a new force in the land, one whose hold remains tenuous at best. Power shifts back and forth uneasily between two forms of the new faith: a mystical Celtic Catholicism and a newer, more disciplined form of Catholicism emanating from Rome. Pagan rites as yet survive in the surrounding hills and mountains. Plague sweeps across the countryside unpredictably, its path marked by death and destruction.

In keeping with a practice common at the time, an Anglo-Saxon warrior donates his youngest child to the monastery of Redestone, in effect sentencing the boy to spend the rest of his life as a monk. This gift-child, called an oblate, will grow up in the abbey knowing little of his family or the expectations his natural father will someday place upon him, his existence haunted by vague memories of a former life and the questions those memories provoke.

Who is his father, the distant chieftain who sired him or the bishop he prays for daily? And to which father, natural or spiritual, will he owe allegiance when, at length, he is called upon to ally himself with one and destroy the other? These are the dilemmas the child faces. The answers will emerge from the years he spends in spiritual apprenticeship to a hermit who lives on the nearby mountain of Modra nect – and his choices will echo across a lifetime.

The Oblate's Confession Details

Date : Published December 1st 2014 by Secant Publishing

ISBN : 9780990460800

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Format : Hardcover 416 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review The Oblate's Confession for online ebook

Melisende d'Outremer says

"This gift-child, called an oblate, will grow up in the abbey knowing little of his family or the expectations his natural father will someday place upon him ..."

England in the 7th Century was a turbulent period as the Anglo Saxon kingdoms peaked and waned. Christianity was not the dominant religion, and often was interspersed with periods of Pagan ascendancy.

Into this mix a child - an Oblate - is given to the Church (usually a Benedictine monastery) by their parents but were not professed monks.

And this is the background to Peak's "Oblate's Confession" and this is what intrigued me. And so, the premise of the book is the young monk Winwæd reflecting upon his life in the monastery and his time as the servant of a holy hermit.

Unfortunately, I had no empathy with the main character and his story failed to ignited my imagination. I found the storytelling to be rather long-winded and over-detailed. I skimmed through hoping that some phrase might catch me eye - but no. I could not continue to the end, even to find out if the child's dilemmas were resolved.

I may pick it up again to give it another go but not anytime soon. Pity - the subject matter interested me greatly.

Jane says

At a 7th century Northumbrian monastery an oblate, Winwæd, is writing down his remembrances through the years--

"I write under obedience: Father Abbot has ordered me to give an account of the events that led up to my sin."

Upon his arrival one snowy winter day, the shy child together with a priest build a snowman. Season follows season, each with its *ora et labora*. Winwæd becomes the servant of a hermit, living on a nearby mountain. They become friends; the hermit, Father Gwynedd, teaches him about the woodland creatures and how to track them. One day the boy's father arrives with a terrible story and request for him: to pray **against** their bishop who has done awful things. The novel brings out the unfortunate dissention between the Celtic and Roman Christians. Winwæd is torn--what should take precedence: loyalty towards his birth father or towards his bishop? His father gave him to the monastery, destined him for the coenobitic life, and has never visited

him up to now, when all he wants is something from the boy. The monks are closer to him than his biological father.

Lyrical and beautifully written, with vivid sketches of the monastery, monks, surrounding area, and the hermit. Outstanding were incidents involving a severe snowstorm, a cherry orchard, and the discovery of a vixen and her kits on the mountain. Winwæd's deep but wordy introspection brought him closer to me, but he was too hard on himself. Many unexpected events in the novel took it in directions I would never have imagined. The passages on how to pray in Chapters 18 and 21 that the hermit taught Winwæd, bear much reflection. I can't get them out of my mind. Highly recommended for those wanting a slow, thoughtful novel and for those wishing to learn something about 7th-century Benedictines.

LibraryThing sent me this novel as an ARC.

J. says

"The Oblate's Confession" by William Peak is a work of historical fiction set in Seventh Century Northumbria. It is the tale of Winwæd, whose father gave him to the service of Redestone Monastery when he was a small child. Such a gift child is called an oblate. As the title indicates this is his confession; written from the perspective of old age and recounting his life in the monastery and the great sin he committed. The book is obviously a work of love for the author. It is smooth in style, filled with keen observations on prayer, man and God. But it is also tedious at times. What shines through are the small stories of Winwæd's interaction with other actors in his life: his father, Ceolwulf, an Anglo-Saxon warrior; Father Gwynedd, the hermit on the mountain; Victricius, master iron monger; Eanflaed, a girl he meets in the orchard; Stuf, the charcoal maker and pagan hill man; Father Dagan, his teacher. These little vignettes are strung across the book's 414 pages like bread crumbs in a fairy tale, luring the reader ever on to the next chapter. For most of the book I did not much like Winwæd, he was by his own account awkward with others. That changed as the story drew to a close. I then began to see him in a new light as he comes to know the enormity of his error and where he stands in the fullness of time.

In total "The Oblate's Confession", though finely crafted, is not a joy to read, so, unless you have an interest in that period, or in monastic life, I recommend that you eschew it altogether.

I received an advance reader's copy of "The Oblate's Confession" from NetGalley, for which I am appreciative.

For the publisher I have two complaints: The Adobe Digital File that I received the book in did not work like other such files I have gotten from the same source. Response to my input was sluggish at best and it functioned at a glacial pace in the first pages where there are illustrations. This greatly contributed to the tedium of reading the book, as did my general dislike of Winwæd.

I also think that injecting the Bubonic Plague into a story about Seventh Century Britain is wrong. That malady did not show up there until the middle of the Fourteenth Century, as I am sure the author and publisher are well aware. Why go to all the trouble citing historical figures, or the Venerable Bede, or Tacitus, or the archaeologist if you are just going to make it up out of whole cloth anyway? Why obsess over details at all when you are just going to make a disease that won't occur in Northumbria for another 700 years a central part of the story? The falsity of it was just a bit too jarring.

5 October 2014

The paragraph immediately above is completely wrong. The plague was present in the Seventh Century and it is a matter of historical record that it affected the monasteries of that time. Thanks to Ron Sauder of Secant Publishing for the correction and for the excellent references.

That information has caused me to change my rating from one star to two stars. Unfortunately, my error does not alter the nature of "The Oblate's Confession" nor my opinion thereof.

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

I'm not sure what I expected from William Peak's *The Oblate's Confession*, but the book proved a pleasant surprise. I found the introspective tone of the narrative intriguing, but I felt Peak's decision to write from a child's perspective a stroke of genius. The questions Winwæd asks about faith and the things that capture his interest within the monastery are fascinating, but watching him piece these concepts together as his understanding matures allowed me unique insight to his situation.

On that note, I really appreciated Peak's treatment of religion. I feared the subject might overwhelm the narrative, but was delighted to discover the author's subtle handling of the material allowed it to flow naturally through the story as easily as the social hierarchy of the monastery or the politics of the day. I was similarly impressed with the Winwæd's inner conflicts and appreciated the authenticity in his emotions over the course of the narrative.

Peak's writing was a little difficult for me to get into and the pacing was tad slow for my particular tastes, but I certainly enjoyed the time I spent with this story. *The Oblate's Confession* isn't my usual fare, but it is a thought-provoking piece that I'd certainly recommend to fans of medieval fiction.

Elsi says

My Thoughts

The story in *The Oblate's Confession* is delivered in first person by Winwæd, an elderly monk, who says, "I write under obedience: Father Abbot has ordered me to give an account of the events that led up to my sin." And thus his story begins with Winwæd's arrival at a small monastery in Northumbria. He's been delivered to the monastery as a gift from his parents. Such a gift child was referred to as an *oblate*, and shared the life of the monks.

William Peak has written an exquisitely crafted novel. Although set in a wild and remote area of northern Great Britain and a dark period in medieval history, it shines with the richness of detail in the seemingly unimportant daily activities in the monastery. The pace of the book is slow and thoughtful. So slow that at times I set it aside to read something else and then returned later. But as I got into the story more, I saw that the slowness was deceptive. Like a slow-moving river, there were depths to Winwæd's narrative that needed time to sink in.

The elderly oblate tells of his early years in the monastery, and eventually comes to the great sin which he committed. Along the way, we meet those who played such a prominent part in his life, especially Father Gwynedd, the hermit living on the mountain above the monastery. “Prayer and work, the monk’s simple call; but Gwynedd’s work is his prayer.” Winwæd becomes servant to Father Gwynedd, carrying supplies and prayer requests to the hermit once a week.

It is Father Gwynedd's lessons on contemplative prayer which touched me most. I kept highlighting passages that I wanted to return to later.

When you pray—when you pray as I am teaching you to pray—you must warm the wax of your mind, allow the heat to erase your thoughts, allow it to erase your thoughts one by one. And then you must wait. You must wait quietly, absently, while God writes what He will. And what He wills, of course, is Himself. What you will read, encounter, is God.

The Oblate's Confession was one of the first books which I received from NetGalley. I think one reason why it caught my eye was because I had recently discovered the *Brother Cadfael* Medieval mysteries and was enjoying reading about this period in English history. While totally different in tone and pace from Brother Cadfael, this book did not disappoint.

When I first finished reading *The Oblate's Confession*, I felt very confident that a rating of three stars was the right assessment. But as I had time to think more about the book and look back at some notes as I was writing this review, I realized that it was deserving of a stronger endorsement. I'm raising my rating to four stars.

Note that I received a free copy of *The Oblate's Confession* from the publisher via NetGalley in return for an honest review.

Gill's Great Book Escapes says

My Review:

A written confession of a monk of his sin; a child’s view of living his life in a monastery, his view of all those around him, and his surroundings as far as he could see. His religious instruction, his questioning, his learnt understanding of human behaviour clearly shows Peak is a master of introspection, but to me the novel felt disjointed in time and flow.

What I found GREAT about the book?

I loved the idea of an adult recounting his childhood with the understand that as he grew his memories could change. There is a real tenderness in which Peak talks about the relationships within the Redestone.

I found this to be a wonderful philosophical book that is an instruction into deconstructing held beliefs, examining them and reconstructing them with a greater understanding, and this is the part of the book that was a real pleasure to read. In this William Peak excites me in his writing.

The opening chapter gives us the start in mime, simple pleasures of making a snowman with a small boy to indicate that the monks do not speak but use sign language, so using sign language Peak starts his tale.

Brilliant!

There are some lovely lines from a child perspective, simple memories: A child's thinking, with an adult understanding:

I thought about the place at table where I sat. I thought about my bed. I thought about the spot along the church wall that on sunny mornings grew warm and rosy in the light.

Simple pleasures in a child's world.

When Winwæd is instructing the younger oblate Oftfor about who is who in the abbey, listing the hierarchy of Fathers Oftfor asks "Are there any mothers?" What a sad line. Peak shows a deep understanding of the scale of someone's compact world - our world can be only what we see, but when we venture further past that distant view, we discover that a picture in our mind is only a picture and the reality can be terrifyingly magnificent. This is conveyed whilst Winwæd is high up on a crag looking down on Redestone. I enjoyed how this book is focussed around one small place as if there was nothing outside of it, even in their imagination.

In a complex way he shows that although the monks appear to blindly follow a man (Bishop Wilfred) who stole Winwæd's father's lands and makes demands of them, each monk has their own story and personal secrets. They keep something for themselves, they do things considered wrong by their rules, but it is really part of natural curiosity. I also love the way Peak has a wonderful manner of digging down the deepest level of questioning, forcing the reader to really think about held beliefs, showing all sides of blind faith and no faith.

Instruction for young oblates includes the history of Cumbrogi monks who also felt they were doing God's will in their heathen ways, and invites thoughts about how religion has been shaped by powerful men and followed blindly because of being taught that there is only one path to God.

I enjoyed how Peak challenges with suggestions how memories can be shaped and false. As he is writing, Winwæd reminds himself that his memory may not be correct.

The questioning is brutal - What if religion is nonsense?

What if suffering is just suffering? What if the one who suffered finds neither nobility nor reason in his pain? What if there is only confusion, hurt, loss? We do not expect a horse to learn from its suffering, a cow....

There is also offered a solution to the oblate, that God does not exist but you can create a peace within yourself which you can call God eventually, and that is God (I think!).

What for me was not great?

Now I will qualify this part of my review to my Britishness!

The main problem for me was that the language style of this book did not take me back in time. I felt like I was reading about modern day when I really wanted to be transported to the 7th Century. I expect this is

because I am in love with historical language!

The overuse of modern words (*e.g. Truism, lunacy, explosion, recondite, antiphone*), many of which the origin stems back to the 17th Century spoilt the enjoyment for me, turning into irritation which I have to admit that is a particular bugbear of mine!

Then there is the line "*You take care of yourself*" - which seems spoken in such a modern way that it shouted out - wrong to me!

Throughout the book history is told in such a way to the child oblate who appeared not to entirely understand.

"You haven't any idea what I'm talking about, have you?" I shook my head

I shook my head, I had to agree, I also found it difficult to follow the lesson. The history feels like it has been superficially added to tell a background to the novel, without weaving it into the story.

I found it a bit hard to follow the timeline of the memories and marry the events being recounted and the ages of the young oblate. At the end of the book I was no nearer understanding what prompted it or when the confession was being written. No matter though the journey was good.

Would I recommend it? - Yes definitely, especially if you are one of those people who like history told in a modern way.

Is it worth reading? - Yes without hesitation - I love a good challenge

This is William Peak's debut novel, and I really look forward to him growing as an author of novels.

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Many thanks to the Publisher for an advanced copy of this book via NetGalley for an honest review.

9th October 2014

I originally gave this 3 but change it. However, on reflection my honest opinion is that it warrants 3 stars. I did like the book and my review above stands.

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## **Megan says**

I'd give this book a 3.5 star rating if that were possible. While I was not very familiar with the period of history in which the story was set, I found myself interested in the tale and finding out what the oblate's confession would be. The pacing for the story is deliberate and caused me to slow my reading pace to best absorb the overall mood. An oblate is a "gift-child" from a warrior to a monastery. In effect, this child will be sentenced to a life as a monk, regardless of the child's desire. Each chapter was narrated by the oblate of the title who is reflecting back on his life. Set during the 7th century in England, the backdrop for the story is war among the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and with their Celtic neighbors. Emerging Christianity is up against long-held, enduring pagan beliefs. While the inhabitants of Redestone monastery are somewhat sheltered from the war outside their doors, they are not completely immune from the outside world. Throughout his



life, the oblate (Winwæd) struggles with the question of which father deserves his loyalty -- the warrior father who gave him to the monastery or the fathers who have raised him in Redestone. These struggles are put to the test when his warrior father, Ceolwulf, visits Redestone unannounced and asks his son for an impossible favor. The years of research that went into writing this book were clear and the story felt authentic as a result. This was an impressive first novel and was by far one of the most unique and eloquently written tales I've read in quite some time.

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## **Danielle Tremblay says**

I received this book through GR Giveaways in exchange for an honest review.

First, I am a little sad to see that many readers do not give more stars to this story and complain about this and that, often indiscriminately.

A reader complained that he did not know how to pronounce the names of the main characters while another wanted this novel to be written in 7th century English! How to reconcile these two requirements? Impossible!

Personally, I don't pronounce the words I read, so what's the matter with names' pronunciation?

Besides, do you know just how people speak and wrote during the 7th century? It was damn complicated.

Old English [of that time] was a very complex language, at least in comparison with modern English. Nouns had three genders (male, female and neuter) and could be inflected for up to five cases. There were seven classes of "strong" verbs and three of "weak" verbs, and their endings changed for number, tense, mood and person. Adjectives could have up to eleven forms. Even definite articles had three genders and five case forms as a singular and four as a plural. Word order was much freer than today, the sense being carried by the inflections (and only later by the use of prepositions)."

The following sentence is an example:

"Ðunor cymð of hætān & of wætān. Seo lyft tyhð þone wætān to hire neoðān & ða hætān ufan."

This translates into today English:

"Thunder comes from heat and from moisture. The air draws the moisture to it from below and the heat from above."

(From the website: <http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/hi...>)

Would you really like to read in such a language? What would it change that the author wrote in the 18th century's English, for example? This is not the way one talked and wrote in the 7th century anyway, far from it. Better to write it in today's English, isn't it?

As for the story itself, it tells us much about how religions were implanted, how they seized power and minds and tried to keep their lambs in their ranks, even at the cost of falsity and threats (what is hell if not a threat of eternal sufferings?). And what matters more to me in this novel is the questioning of the Catholic Church's dogma by a monk of that time, who lived his entire life immersed in religion.

This monk has good reasons to question the truth and value of what he was taught. He has the audacity to put all this into question at his risk and peril. But he was forced to write his autobiography, to see and show everything that led him to commit this "terrible sin", which is not to be blind or deaf, and to be lucid enough to see lies, deceptions and half truths. Does God exist? Nobody can tell for sure. NOBODY! And this is the one and only truth about it. So why not to live with this truth instead of making our lives a big lie, to comfort our "soul" (if such a thing exists)?

This novel is a kind of *The Name of the Rose* without the crime investigation of the novel by Umberto Eco. And this story is set in an older period of time. But above all, this book is a much deeper and richer story than that of Eco.

I am a happy winner, because I got a chance to read this book. So I give 5 stars to this marvelous novel.

P.S. I love the cover too.

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## **Kimberly says**

This book is the written confession of a 7th century Northumbrian monk or his sins. Winwaed is a servant of a hermit when he first arrives. The hermit, FATHER Gwyneed show the boy many woodland animals, as well as how to track them. His father shows us soon and asks the boy to pray against the bishop who has been doing terrible things. The book shows the tensions between the Celts and the Roman Christians. The boy become unsure what to do, this father, who he has not seen since he dropped Winwaed off years before.

I loved the way William Peak presented this dissension between the religions and loyalty. The author covers many of the events that take place throughout the book plus the personal events that happened to Winwaed, such as when the hermit taught him how to pray. This is a novel that will stay with the reader long after they put it down.

I was given this book by NetGalley and Secant Publishing in exchange for my honest review.

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## Mieneke says

In the materials I was sent along with *The Oblate's Confession* there was a mention of a connection to the work of the Venerable Bede. This link to Bede, whose work featured in some of my Old English classes at university drew me to this work. Yet it wasn't the straight historical fiction novel I was expecting. Instead it included a huge amount of philosophical passages about the nature of prayer and faith. It made for an interesting, yet at times slow, read. I do have to say that I think that the book would have worked better for me if I'd gone in with different expectations. I expected an interesting, politically driven or at least struggle for dominance-driven plot and I got a character study interlaced with theological and philosophical reflections. Had I known this before-hand, I would have probably not picked up the book, but I'm not sorry that I did. Winwæd's tale is interesting and there were parts of the book that were compelling.

Even though the passages expounding on the nature of prayer and faith were interesting, they did feel quite numerous and often made the pace feel like wading through treacle. This philosophising combined with the style of narration – the narrator often gets somewhat sidetracked, especially by his more contemplative passages – gave the book a somewhat meandering feel. However, it wasn't just the inclusion of these contemplations that slowed the pace, it was also the structure of the plot. While we get building stones for the larger arc dropped in early on, it took almost half the book before the larger plot actually kicked off. What I did appreciate about the narrative – in addition to its meticulous research – was how true Peak stays to the nature of his form; Winwæd writes his story as a confession and a penance and as such he is brutally honest, painting himself in what cannot be considered a flattering light. Yet while this made it hard to sympathise with him at times, it also makes him human and relatable.

What made the story shine for me were Winwæd's bonds with his various mentors, Father Gwynedd, the hermit on Modra nect, Father Dagan, the Prior, and Brother Victricius, the furnace master. The most important of the three and my favourite was Father Hermit, a priest learned in the Celtic version of the Rule and the biggest influence on Winwæd's spiritual education. I enjoyed the time he spent with Father Hermit and the way the hermit's way of praying actually rather resembled classic meditation techniques. The closest thing Winwæd has to a true father figure is Father Dagan, who takes him under his wing on the day he arrives at the monastery. There is a moment late in the book where Dagan and Winwæd have a long talk about monastic life and the spiritual freedom obedience to the Rule brings Dagan. The tone of that discussion was beautifully written, with genuine affection and appreciation for each other. Winwæd's time with Victricius is all about the practical and I really liked this grumpy old Brother. The time they spent together while snowed-in was special, especially when Victricius shares his history with Winwæd.

Though I ultimately enjoyed *The Oblate's Confession*, I think this book would probably not be to every reader's taste. Who then would I recommend this too? To readers interested in the history of monasticism in England or to people interested in the philosophy and teachings of the Catholic faith. If you're looking for a straight historical fiction read, this isn't the book for you. If you're looking for a book delving deeper into matters of faith and the spiritual and don't need a super-fast plot development, I think *The Oblate Confession* might very well be a book you'd enjoy a lot.

This book was provided for review by the publisher as part of a blog tour.

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## Patty says

This was a very different type of book and it's one of those books you are either going to love or hate. I happened to love it. This period in history fascinates me – there is not much known so I have a world of respect for an author who can build a rich story out of little snippets. It was a time when Christianity is just starting to take hold in England and its tenets are sometimes at odds with the “old ways.”

Young Winwaed has been donated to the Monastery by his father in a burst of enthusiasm in a run up to a battle. It was apparently the thing to do. But Winwaed has no idea of why he came to be an oblate only that it is his life. He only learns it when his father comes to visit him; the only time he will have a memory of the man. His father tells him his history, the history of the land and a somewhat different history of the monastery than what Winwaed has been taught. It leaves him in a bit of a dither as his whole world has been turned upside down. No one seems to care that he is just a child.

The repercussions of this visit are long lasting and in some ways unrealized until much later in Winwaed's life. He goes back to his normal but with many questions that he cannot ask, nor would he receive the answers he needs. His only solace is the Hermit he serves – a monk who lives on the mountain. He teaches Winwaed about life in ways that will serve him

I will admit it took me a little to get used to the rhythm of the book. It is written in a somewhat literary style and we all know I am not the most introspective reader. But once I found my balance I was hooked. I found myself quite involved in the monk's lives as they tried to survive in times of plague, poor harvest and other difficulties. I struggled with Winwaed as he tried to understand his world and I wanted to protect him when I felt that he was being treated unfairly. I can't say I would want to live in this Dark Ages world but I'm certainly happy I visited it through the talented pen of Mr. Peak.

4.5

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### **Sarah Freeman-langford says**

This was a Goodreads Giveaway so as I always do I will start with a big thank you to the author and publisher for the copy. It was received very quickly and in perfectly pristine condition. The copy I received was a pleasing soft back edition and I would just like to say how much I love the cover. The artwork fits absolutely perfectly with the theme and feel of the story.

Onto the nitty gritty of the actual review. The tale itself is a first person account from an 'apprentice' monk in the 7th century. The elderly monk is writing his confession of his young misdemeanours as he remembers them. He very often reflects that his memory may or may not be accurate and some of what he remembers may not have happened at all. The story itself doesn't come to any thrill seeking all revealing ending so if you are looking for a romping, rollicking read with a big climax then this isn't for you.

What it actually achieves is a very gentle but extremely thought provoking look at very early medieval life from inside a monastery and the life that a child would experience. It was quite common in this era for a child to be gifted to the monks and this makes an intriguing backdrop to the tale.

The story itself is a slow burner and I didn't get to grips with either the tale or the writing style for a while, then all of a sudden I clicked with the whole concept and then I was drawn in. William has a lovely descriptive style of writing and this added to the whole ambience of the book. It was a truly beautiful read and I thoroughly enjoyed it right to the end. By the time I had finished it I found I really appreciated the

whole experience and realised just how much work, effort and most importantly thought went into the writing of this tale by the author.

Overall I would recommend this book as a must read for all lovers of early historical fiction but also to those readers who enjoy and appreciate reading beautifully written books.

Well done to the author I really hope you find this novel achieves big success.

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### **Bryn Hammond says**

A small-press gem, and a definite addition to Anglo-Saxon fiction – or my experience thereof. It's slow and psychological, and it's set in a monastery. It won't win action fans (although its one war scene, done in the same style, exhibits a high realism). I myself, heathen that I am, had my surfeit in the passages on prayer. But I loved its inwardness and its attention to language. In the animal scenes I thought of TH White, for their charm and knowledge. I admired an epic encounter between our oblate and his dad, because that stuff knocks me out: he's a dab hand with interaction, as with psychic processes.

I'm fussy with Anglo-Saxon fiction, out of an old fondness for *Beowulf* and the elegies; if they don't agree with me about the atmosphere I cannot enjoy. I understand this is a matter of interpretation more than accuracy. Both Bernard Cornwell and Nicola Griffith seem to me too modern-minded – but then I'm wedded to Tolkien's old essays, which were a different sensibility. None of this may be relevant to a review, unless perchance you nodded along to the foregoing.

I don't usually comment on the package, but this is a small-press book and I'm concerned for its chances: I can't see the cover catching eyes; and I'm not ready for double punctuation.

Free Advance Reader Copy for review. Sorry for review's eccentricity.

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### **Annette says**

Summary:

Set in 7th century England, *The Oblate's Confession* tells the story of Winwaed, a boy who – in a practice common at the time – is donated by his father to a local monastery. In a countryside wracked by plague and war, the child comes to serve as a regular messenger between the monastery and a hermit living on a nearby mountain. Missing his father, he finds a surrogate in the hermit, an old man who teaches him woodcraft, the practice of contemplative prayer, and, ultimately, the true meaning of fatherhood. When the boy's natural father visits the monastery and asks him to pray for the death of his enemy – an enemy who turns out to be the child's monastic superior – the boy's life is thrown into turmoil. It is the struggle Winwaed undergoes to answer the questions – Who is my father? Whom am I to obey? – that animates, and finally necessitates, *The Oblate's Confession*.

While entirely a work of fiction, the novel's background is historically accurate: all the kings and queens named really lived, all the political divisions and rivalries actually existed, and each of the plagues that visit the author's imagined monastery did in fact ravage that long-ago world. In the midst of a tale that touches the human in all of us, readers will find themselves treated to a history of the "Dark Ages" unlike anything available today outside of textbooks and original source material.

### My Thoughts:

It is exciting for me to read a debut novel that sweeps me away, and I'm giddy with excitement for the author. "William Peak spent ten years researching and writing *The Oblate's Confession*." I feel the hard labor has sowed an excellent story.

There are several points which led me to give *The Oblate's Confession* 5 stars for excellent.

Winwaed is a character that not only tells me the story as narrator, he shares what he is thinking, he shares his fears, he shares his emotions, he shares his dreams. He is a character who I can relate in some manner to, because of his humanity brought forth through the story.

Winwaed because of the task his biological father has asked of him, is in a difficult situation. I was left wondering what decision he intended to make? And further, what the future held? How would his decision affect his soul? How would his decision affect his mental health? These were tantamount questions that the story revealed.

Winwaed had a father/son relationship with a hermit, also referred to as Father Gwynedd. The hermit lived on a mountain of his freewill. He is a man of prayer. A man of solitude and introspection. He is wise and a keen observer. Gwynedd becomes a mentor/teacher to Winwaed. He is a loving father figure for Winwaed. Their relationship is tested and this is an additional point of conflict for Winwaed.

I'm not Catholic, nor am I a mystic. I was not uncomfortable by the story but found it interesting. In the 7th century, Catholicism was the Christian Church. In the 7th century, the Celtic mystic belief in England was replaced (overshadowed) by the Roman Catholic belief and structure. The book does not define historically these events. Instead, the story lets the characters show how the change affected them.

I've read other reviewers remark on liking the voice in the story-Winwaed-because he is a boy. A child's voice brings innocence, a pure quality, and a freshness. I loved Winwaed's loving spirit. His emotions overtook him at times, but this endeared me to him even more. His youth propelled me to long for and be invested in his safety and health.

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### Joe Frazier says

William Peak's *The Oblate's Confession* is a beautifully written fictional study of an oblate (think Monk's apprentice) within a medieval monastery. It's essentially as series of loosely related vignettes in the life of Winwæd, son of Ceolwulf, as an oblate who is placed in some unique roles within the community at Redstone. The stories are from his perspective. Mr. Peak does a beautiful job, using Winwæd, to convey the life and times of a 7th century monastic community and the village and people around it while establishing its place in the Anglo-Saxon world. One of the aspects of his writing I love is his ability to provide empathetic, genuine-feeling characters and their perspective of the world. There is a thread of what Winwæd considers his great sin that is woven throughout the narrative which a more jaded author would present a negative light where it's silly of him to think his prayer had the impact it did. Mr. Peak takes his world in a serious manner, not belittling the characters who people it for having a medieval point of view nor does he belittle their life of faith. He does have his characters step back and assess their life but it's never simple dismissed *carte blanche*. [Note: I received an advanced review copy through Netgalley for an honest review. *The Oblate's Confession* will be available December 1st.]

There is a challenge Mr. Peak has given his readers, however. There is no overall story arc to which the narrative drives. There's no climax, no crescendo and no big reveal. No point to which the book drives. Like most of our lives, there are some smaller climatic moments, there are highs and lows and there are things we discover. While there may be a purpose to our lives, it's often not obviously written. So too for Winwæd. Now, the descriptions, vignettes, characters and writing are all worthwhile without having some big story to tell, but this is a heads-up to those of you who need that kind of story. I personally think that if there is

somewhere it all drives, it makes for a more compelling read and provides a framework to present the characters and places. I think Mr. Peaks next work could benefit from doing so. However, I want to be very clear: as it stands, this was a truly delightful book to read, I would recommend it to anyone who doesn't need a fast-pasted page-turner and knowing how it's structured, I would read it again. I also think there are a number of life lessons to be gleaned from Winwæd and his world.

For full review: <http://wp.me/p2XCwQ-12n>

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