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Review of The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams

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in her long description of the Greek and Roman myth of Psyche and Cupid [144], or her mistaken explanations of the English Interregnum [75, 77-8] and *mappae mundi* [126]) and too little (as in her citation of Stanley Grenz's distinction between word and image quoted earlier). In several cases, the author detours from the main points at issue in chapters to discuss side issues that are interesting but not germane to the main argument (as is the excursus on the Apostle Paul's rhetoric [48-49]).

The volume also seems beset by issues of translation, both cultural and linguistic. It is possible that the mode of argumentation from authority (including the use of quotations as shorthand proofs of the author's general statements) is a cultural practice; as well, some passages with syntactically ambiguous sentences and paragraphs, incoherent in English, may be the result of a lack of copy-editing by a native English speaker, since the book is self-published.

In short, the volume needs comprehensive structural and copy-editing to enhance the coherence of its arguments. Though the author presents a welcome non-Western perspective on Lewis and postmodernism as well as some interesting insights about Lewis's fictional and nonfictional works, these are embedded in an often-incoherent structure and mode of expression.

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Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015). 644 pages. \$17.00. ISBN 9780374536251.

Many scholars have written excellent biographies of C. S. Lewis, chief among them George Sayer's *Jack* and Devin Brown's *A Life Observed*, which makes one wonder why we need another biography. But the Zaleskis have taken us in one of the directions that most biographies must go until someone writes the last, great biography of Lewis (probably in multiple volumes), perhaps enabling us to "get to the bottom of him," as Tolkien stated. Either writers will have to produce careful studies of a brief period

(such as his atheistic years, his Cambridge years, or his undergraduate years) or an aspect of Lewis's life (such as his walking tours or his military service), or they will produce a biography that intersects with other contemporaries. *The Fellowship* has done the latter, showing how C. S. Lewis related to three of his closest friends, Inklings all—J. R. R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. That means, of course, that this book is far more about Lewis than about any of the other three.

In addition to being well written, one of the strengths of this book is the familiarity of the authors with the latest in Lewis research, including the redating of Lewis's conversion to theism as 1930 rather than 1929, as well as the wide range of Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Williams scholarship. Since the book apparently began about three decades ago (611), one is not surprised. Certainly we find the Zaleskis retracing much of the familiar ground that previous biographies have covered, which detracts only in minor ways and only for those who are quite familiar with the story of Lewis. But this book, named the 2015 Book of the Year by the Conference on Christianity and Literature, captivates the reader with its prose (for example, stating that the name Edward Tangye Lean "rides the seesaw between cuteness and cloying"), with a description of the literary context of these Inklings, and with new insights into the four subjects of this biography (for example, the explanation on 254 for the origin of the name Elwin Ransom, the leading character in *Out of the Silent Planet*). The Zaleskis fill in much of the context of the lives of these four men, including, for example, the involvement of two of Tolkien's sons with the RAF during World War II and the escape from a Catholic institution of higher education in Rome as the Nazis were sweeping to the south and west (269).

Occasional tidbits of information supplement the narrative, providing more context for the story of the Inklings, such as the role of Edward Tangye Lean in the forming of the Inklings, the turning of the tide against narrative poetry at the very time that Lewis was writing *Dymor* (155), the departure of Magdalen College Dean of Divinity and later Professor of Poetry Adam Fox for Westminster Abbey in 1942, and reactions of former students of Lewis, among other notes. The authors also explain the decline of participation by both Barfield and Williams due to the distance they had to travel from London (247, 249)—Barfield because of his legal work in London and Williams because of his work at the London offices of Oxford

University Press. The Zaleskis provide numerous other insights, such as Lewis calling himself “a slippered pantaloan” in a 1962 letter to Tolkien, a reference to Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. The authors seem to have read nearly everything they comment on, from Barfield’s *Saving the Appearances* and *Worlds Apart* to Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* to nearly everything that Lewis and Williams wrote.

One of the more startling revelations is the dabbling of Charles Williams in some occultic practices. While Williams kept this largely hidden from the Inklings, Tolkien’s lesser appreciation of Williams (he did enjoy Williams’s company and value his expertise, 268) may explain a comment he wrote in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. Lewis wrote that Williams “gave to every circle the whole man,” and Tolkien wrote in the margin, “No, I think not” (269). Williams’s unusual relationship with Lang-Sims (280-2) revealed his latent sadistic tendencies, repressed, but still present. The portrayal of Williams’s star as “never very bright” is undoubtedly accurate, even though contradicted by Lewis’s over-appraisal of Williams’s Arthurian poems as “among the two or three most valuable books of verse produced in the century” (372). Subsequent opinions on Williams (432-5) seem accurate, even if this reviewer is not competent enough on the topic of Williams to offer an opinion on their assessment.

Also helpful is the depiction of tensions between Tolkien and Lewis, including Tolkien’s letter of apology after criticism of Lewis during an Inklings meeting (356f.), Tolkien’s unhappiness with *Letters to Malcolm* (483f.), and a fuller depiction of “Dyson’s Roar,” i.e. Dyson’s loudness, his criticism of *The Lord of the Rings*, and his general rudeness (357-9). While the same could probably have been learned from the letters of J. R. R. Tolkien, the various descriptions provided—of Tolkien’s attempts to find a publisher for *The Lord of the Rings* (397-401) as well as nearly everything in Chapter 17, “The Long-Expected Sequel,” the story of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and the public’s reaction—are much appreciated. Among its many memorable passages, this summary statement stands out for its description of *The Lord of the Rings*: “a distinctively Christian vision of history as a movement from types and figures toward fulfillment in the incarnate Redeemer who recapitulates all things past and future in his own Person” (418).

No book is perfect, but the imperfections are minor, few, and mostly

excusable. For example, the Zaleskis write, “We can only guess at what it was about the *Hippolytus* that affected [Lewis] so deeply” (163). However, Lewis tells us directly in *The Lewis Papers*¹, a passage that Devin Brown apparently read for the writing of his Lewis biography, *A Life Observed*. Nor will most readers agree with their assessment of *The Screwtape Letters* as “terribly clever but a bit sophomoric” (296). *A Personal Heresy* is actually *The Personal Heresy* (473). Additionally, the reference to a badger family in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is no doubt intended as a reference to the beavers (388).

Still, the book is eminently worth reading, captivating, containing many additional insights, and carrying extensive notes, bibliography, and index. Its final chapter, an Epilogue, captures the nature of the Inklings as characterized by erudition, fantasy, and Christianity (508). Far beyond their characteristics is their influence—for starters, the inspiration for *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Harry Potter*, and even the anti-Lewis Philip Pullman (510). For Philip and Carol Zaleski, the four Inklings returned “to the fundamentals of story and explor[ed] its relation to faith, virtue, self-transcendence, and hope,” thereby addressing “modern anxieties and longings” (512).

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¹ *The Lewis Papers*, vol. 8, 191.