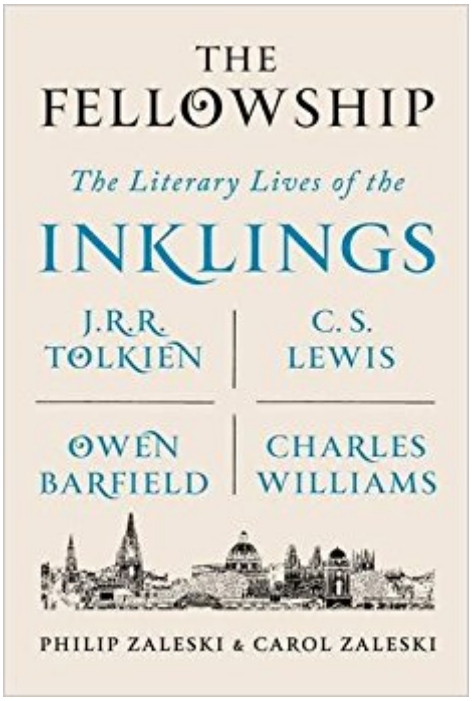
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The Fellowship: The Literary Lives Of The Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams



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Synopsis

Best Book of June 2015 (The Christian Science Monitor)Book of the Year by the Conference on Christianity and LiteratureC. S. Lewis is the 20th century's most widely read Christian writer and J.R.R. Tolkien its most beloved mythmaker. For three decades, they and their closest associates formed a literary club known as the Inklings, which met every week in Lewis's Oxford rooms and in nearby pubs. They discussed literature, religion, and ideas; read aloud from works in progress; took philosophical rambles in woods and fields; gave one another companionship and criticism; and, in the process, rewrote the cultural history of modern times. In The Fellowship, Philip and Carol Zaleski offer the first complete rendering of the Inklings' lives and works. The result is an extraordinary account of the ideas, affections and vexations that drove the group's most significant members. C. S. Lewis accepts Jesus Christ while riding in the sidecar of his brother's motorcycle, maps the medieval and Renaissance mind, becomes a world-famous evangelist and moral satirist, and creates new forms of religiously attuned fiction while wrestling with personal crises. J.R.R. Tolkien transmutes an invented mythology into gripping story in The Lord of the Rings, while conducting groundbreaking Old English scholarship and elucidating, for family and friends, the Catholic teachings at the heart of his vision. Owen Barfield, a philosopher for whom language is the key to all mysteries, becomes Lewis's favorite sparring partner, and, for a time, Saul Bellow's chosen guru. And Charles Williams, poet, author of "supernatural shockers," and strange acolyte of romantic love, turns his everyday life into a mystical pageant. Romantics who scorned rebellion, fantasists who prized reality, wartime writers who believed in hope, Christians with cosmic reach, the Inklings sought to revitalize literature and faith in the twentieth century's darkest years-and did so in dazzling style.

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Customer Reviews

Named Book of the Year by the Conference on Christianity and LiteratureÃ¢â ¬Å“The husband-and-wife team of Philip and Carol Zaleski bring to bear both extensive scholarship and a neatly interwoven narrative; this is a story about storytellers, and it shows . . . In The Fellowship, the authors never cease to feel for the Inklings, particularly sympathizing with their yearnings for spiritual and professional fulfillment, with occasional wry asides on the nature of their marriages and their politics to take note of shortcomings both personal and institutional. Taken together, it makes the overarching life of the group something greater than the sum of its parts.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Genevieve Valentine, The New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢â ¬Å“The Zaleskis have produced a major work of biography and criticism, and if you are a devotee of any of the Inklings, you will want to read it.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Michael Dirda, The Washington PostÃ¢â ¬Å“The Zaleskis deftly interweave the four stories [of Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Williams], showing how, when read together, these very different men can help us more clearly see the state of literary and religious culture in mid-century England and beyond.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Anthony Domestico, Christian Science MonitorÃ¢â ¬Å“A fascinating overview of this 'intellectual orchestra' . . . a captivating story of young writers finding their literary footing while trying to rectify competing desires for happiness, love, fame, and faith.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Ethan Gilsdorf, The Boston GlobeÃ¢â ¬Å“The Fellowship makes a convincing case that [the Inklings's] cultural legacy deserves comparison with that of the less Christian, more intellectually austere Bloomsbury group.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Lev Grossman, Time MagazineÃ¢â ¬Å“A gutsy, glorious adoration of the English fantasy and faerie traditions, which celebrates what sometimes seems like a fantastical time when religion didn't destroy art but created it.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Joshua Cohen, Harper's MagazineÃ¢â ¬Å“A highly readable group biography . . . The Zaleskis do an impressive job.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Elizabeth Hand, Los Angeles TimesÃ¢â ¬Å“This is a long overdue study of an abidingly fascinating and creative group of writers. There has not been a serious treatment of the whole group and their interactions for more than thirty years, and this excellent book brings together a great deal of new discussion and discovery in a lively, readable, sympathetic but not uncritical survey that allows these remarkable figures to emerge in all their human complexity and diverse gifts. The authors deserve warm congratulations.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury

and author of The Lion’s World: A Journey into the Heart of NarniaÃ¢â ¬Å“It’s difficult to overstate the influence of the two most famous Inklings, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, on varied fields including Christian apologetics and fantasy writing. The Zaleskis trace the history of this informal club of Oxford-educated, Christian intellectuals, which first coalesced in the early 1930s, by focusing on four of the most prominent Inklings: Tolkien, Lewis, mystic Charles Williams, and philosopher Owen Barfield. As scholarship, the book is immensely successful, describing its protagonists’ strengths and shortcomings with insight and facility.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Publishers Weekly (starred review)Ã¢â ¬Å“Like expert commentators at a fencing match, Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski give a sparkling account of how J.R.R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, those friendly duelists, and their eager teammates, Owen Barfield and Charles Williams, sharpened one another’s wits and dazzled the world with words. The Inklings were that rare thing, an elite with an inclusive spirit, and the Zaleskis share the same ethos, brilliantly mastering the details of their brief but never forgetting to be readable. Thorough, lucid, balanced, and well judged, this is literary biography of the very best kind.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Michael Ward, University of Oxford, author of Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. LewisÃ¢â ¬Å“[A] well-researched, consistently engaging group biography . . . richly detailed . . . A bountiful literary history.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢KirkusÃ¢â ¬Å“[A] prodigious work . . . [The Fellowship,] which is extensively researched, provides a fascinating look at British literary society during the first half of the 20th century. . . For all fans of Tolkien and Lewis, this excellent title will also appeal to readers interested in Christian scholarship and 20th-century British literature and history.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Erica Swenson Danowitz, Library Journal (starred review)Ã¢â ¬Å“The Fellowship . . . is a mental map, a religious journey, and the biography of a brotherhood. Plenty of distinguished Inklings came and went over the years . . . but the Zaleskis zoom in on (and out from) the primary axis of Tolkien, Lewis, Williams, and Barfield . . . . Christians all, these men formed what the Zaleskis call ’a perfect compass rose of faith’: Barfield the proto-New Ager, Tolkien the rather prim orthodox Catholic, Lewis the noisy and dogmatically ordinary layman and popular theologian, Williams the ritualistic Anglican with a taste for sorcery . . . . Who can compare with these writers? . . . . The Inklings . . . are still gathering steam.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢James Parker, The Atlantic

Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski are the coauthors of Prayer: A History and editors of The Book of Heaven. Philip Zaleski is the author of The Recollected Heart, coauthor of Gifts of the Spirit, and editor of the Best Spiritual Writing and Best American Spiritual Writing series, and Carol Zaleski is Professor of World Religions at Smith College and the author of Otherworld Journeys and The Life

of the World to Come.

Superb portrait of four seminal writer-thinkers, their milieu, their lives and works. Philip and Carol Zaleski have done a great service by writing this exhaustively researched book. It is analogous to that wonderful portrait of four American Catholic writers, The Life You Save May be Your Own, by Paul Elie. In the Zaleski's book, C.S. Lewis comes across as a dominant figure, but he is surrounded by, sometimes matched by, and occasionally surpassed by three other fascinating figures: Tolkien, Williams, and Barfield. We also get glimpses of other important writes such as Eliot, Auden, Dorothy Sayers, and Bellow. Other overlooked notables include Warnie Lewis. The authors make a convincing case for the centrality of the Inklings in literary, philosophical, and theological struggles during the 20th Century and their enduring legacy beyond. Despite its robust use of scholarly sources, this is a readable group biography and history of thought and well worth the reading.

They were a quartet of Christian scholars. They were all brilliant. They were all male and they all taught and studied at Oxford University from the 1930-1960s. C. S Lewis (1898-1963) the famous Christian author of The Screwtape Letters, A Grief Observed, Mere Christianity, the Narnia Chronicles and countless other novels was a prominent member of the group. Add to the List J.R.R. Tolkien the author of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. Anglican Charles Williams a famous novelist of fantasy fiction and Owen Barfield an expert on the English language was also a member of the group. These men were joined by others but are the four who get the most attention in this excellent examination of their storied lives and careers. Protestant,. Roman Catholic,. Protestant they all were united by their love of Jesus. This is a wonderful book on faith and scholarship in midcentury England. An excellent book which warmed the cockles of this veteran Presbyterian minister's heart. Highly Recommended!

Who were the "Inklings"? Briefly, the name refers to an informal discussion group that met weekly, founded by a student in University College at Oxford University, Edward Tangye Lean, in the early 1930s. Its purpose was to have compositions (i.e. works-in-progress) read and discussed. Membership consisted of students, teachers, and others with some manner of association with the University. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien joined, as did Owen Barfield and Charles Williams. Later, the group met in Lewis' quarters in Magdalen College. In this volume, Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski focus primarily on Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Williams.Moreover, "they also could be seen

regularly on Tuesday mornings, gathered for food and conversation in a side nook of a smoky pub at 49 St. Giles', known to passersby as the Eagle and Child but to habituÃƒÂ©s as the Bird and Baby." They explain how and why, during several decades, these four and their associates discussed literature, religion, and ideas; read aloud from works-in-progress; took philosophical rambles throughout the woods and fields nearby; shared companionship and constructive criticism; and in process, rewrote the cultural history of their times.When Warren Lewis, C.S. Lewis's brother, realized that the Inklings had "already passed into literary legend," he felt obliged to explain the group's nature: "Properly speaking it was neither a club nor a literary society, though it partook of the nature of both. There were no rules, officers, agendas, or formal elections -- unless one counts it as a rule that we met in Jack [C.S. Lewis]'s rooms at Magdelan every Thursday evening after dinner...The ritual of an Inklings was unvarying. When half a dozen or so had arrived, tea would be produced, and then when pipes were well alight Jack would say, 'Well, has nobody got anything to read us?' Out would come a manuscript, and we would settle down to sit in judgment upon it -- real unbiased judgment, too, since we were no mutual admiration society; praise for good work was unstinted, but censure for bad work -- or even not-so-good work -- was often brutally frank."These are among the dozens of passages of greatest interest and value to me, also listed to suggest the scope of the Zaleskis' coverage in the first ten chapters:o "Friendship to the Nth Power" (Pages 26-28)o The Pudaita Bird (36-38)o The Banks of the Styx (43-49)o Introduction to J.R.R. Tolkien (57-72 and 123-143)o Introduction to C.S. Lewis (72-98 and 144-172)o Introduction to Owen Barfield (99-122)o The Evolution of Consciousness (105-107)o The "Great War" (110-114)o Opening a New World (124-129)o Benedictus Qui Venit in Nomine Domini (137-143)o Introduction to C.S. Lewis (72-98 and 144-172)o Realism...And Idealism (156-162)o Duties and Pleasures (167-172)o "The Fire Was Bright and the Talk Good" (176-185)o The Pilgrim's Regress (189-191)o The Hobbit (202-209)o The Extraordinary Ordinary (209-213)o Introduction to Charles Williams (221-230)o The Theology of Romance (232-233)I was especially interested in what the Zaleskis have to say about the artistic maturation of several Inklings, notably Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Williams. Fantasy was in the Oxford community's blood "and it is no wonder that the major Inklings experimented in so many fantastic subgenres (myth, science fiction, fable, epic fantasy, children's fantasy, supernatural thriller, and more). They chose to be fantasists for a variety of reasons - or, rather, fantasy seemed to choose them, each one falling in love with the genre in youth...For all the leading Inklings, however, the rapture of the unknown pointed also to something more profound; it was a numinous event, an imitation of a different, higher, purer world or state of being."It should be added Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Williams, especially, did not indulge fantasy independent of their

ideas; rather, as David Cecil suggests, "it was fantasy [begin italics] about [end italics] their ideas. Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski concur: "The Inklings, then, constituted `Oxford's nearest recent approximation to a school'...a school of ideas expressed through adventurous but learned fantasy.' Whatever the Inklings may have been during their most clubbable years, today they constitute a major force, a movement of sorts. As symbol, inspiration, guide and rallying cry, the Inklings grow more influential each year."

I have read several books on the Inklings, but this one was far and away the most detailed and focused. While the title says this is about the literary lives of the Inklings (and it does a great job looking at the writing made by this incredible circle of friends) it also is a wonderful biography, rich in detail. I learned so much from reading this. I don't think you will be disappointed.

I have been a fan of C.S. Lewis for over 25 years and couldn't wait to have the chance to read about him and his famous Inkling friends. This book did not disappoint! I very much felt like I was part of this small circle of incredible people while reading this book and was delighted by the level of detail contained in the volume. You really feel as if you are getting to know these men and appreciate not only their fantastic talent but also their wonderful friendships. If you are a fan of the writing of any of these men, I highly recommend reading this book. It will give you a new appreciation for both the authors themselves and their works.

Loved it! An astounding amount of research and skillful weaving together of the four lives in focus. Which makes some elementary errors all the less excusable. "Eustace's Uncle Andrew?" The "BADGER" family that greeted the Pevensie children in LWW? As well as some questionable judgments where I know the territory--potentially calling into question judgments made in less familiar territory, ie, the lives of Barfield and Charles Williams. Looking forward now to reading the Zaleskis' other work.

This book can't decide if it is written for lay people or academics. Some sections are a real slog (summaries of the writings of Charles' Williams are gibberish), but if you are a fan of Tolkien & Lewis, it is worth reading the parts of the book that discuss them. It seems odd that the authors felt a need to give complete summaries of books like the Narnian Chronicles. I did finish it - even looked through the end notes - but wish it had been something it was not. I'll keep looking.

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