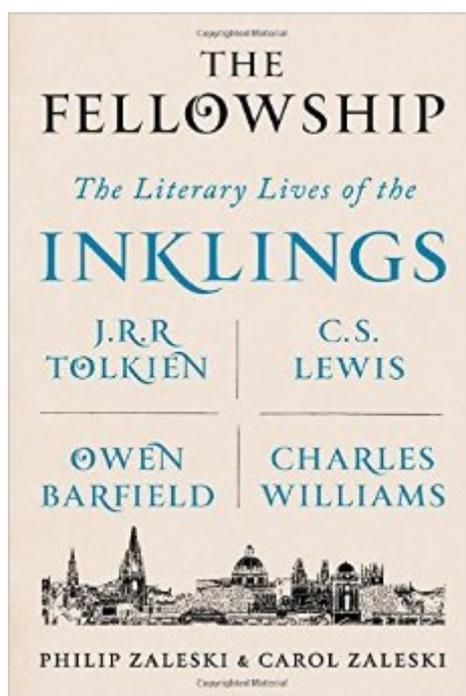


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# The Fellowship: The Literary Lives Of The Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams



## Synopsis

Best Book of June 2015 (The Christian Science Monitor) Book of the Year by the Conference on Christianity and Literature C. 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 Tangey 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 habitués 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 Magdalen every Thursday evening after dinner...The ritual of an Inklings was unvarying.

During the 1930s and 1940s a small group of intellectuals at Oxford University held twice weekly gatherings to unwind, chat, discuss the news of the day, and most importantly to hear, read, and criticize each other's writings. Never formally organized, without bylaws and officers, the men (no women were allowed to attend) sparked debate and discussions among themselves that were to have long lasting and ongoing consequences for our world and culture. They were the Inklings, and their stories have often been told separately or in some combinations. The Fellowship is a lengthy, copiously referenced, and enjoyable group biography of four of the most important Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. Other Inklings like Major Warner Lewis, Hugo Dyson, Nevil Coghill, Lord David Cecil, and others are covered as well. The Zaleskis

emphasize that most of the Inklings were of an age to have been directly affected by World War I, and that much of what was to come from them was influenced by that conflict. Another major influence was Christianity. The four Inklings most thoroughly covered here were deeply religious men: Tolkien the Roman Catholic, Williams the Anglican mystic, Barfield the Anthroposophist, and Lewis, who went from early belief to atheism and then returned to Christian faith. The Inklings were also united in their devotion to Northern mythologies and so-called "high style," in counterpoint to post-war modernism and the influence of Bloomsbury. Thus their Thursday evening meetings in C.S. Lewis' rooms at Magdalen and the Tuesday morning continuations at The Eagle and Child pub both enhanced and strengthened their desire to revive and give new life to ideas that were in danger of being lost.

The group's name, the Inklings, had at least two meanings: they would write, both academically and fancifully, hence they worked with ink, as writers did in those days; and each had an inkling of higher realities, mythic truths, and the love that conquers fear --- fear that some of them had experienced up close, in the gore and horror of a world war. In this dense, fact-filled examination, editor Philip Zaleski and Professor Carol Zaleski have joined forces (as they did with *PRAYER: A History*) to bring the interwoven stories of four remarkable men to a new generation. The result is a tapestry both colorful and magical, as befits its heroes. Four men --- Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, C. S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien --- met at Oxford and formed a club, gathering weekly from the early 1930s to 1949, most often at a local pub where they read their works to one another and diligently discussed life's meaning, with no rules of order or membership rolls. Though there were other Inklings, these four were by far the most prominent. All were Christian, each in his own way, and all were brilliant intellectuals whose thought processes took them far outside the realm of the usual literature of the times. It was fantasy that united them, that "inkling" • that everything from warfare to sexual attraction to the divine could be cloaked in symbols and given deeper meaning. Williams was a novelist and poet, a chastely devout man with a somewhat tormented passion for pageantry and the occult, "a swirling mass of contradictions" • whose writing caught the eye of C. S. Lewis and earned him a place with the Inklings. Barfield, battling a stutter that he attributed in part to his fear, as a teenager, of World War I, delved into the cult of Austrian philosopher/mystic Rudolf Steiner.

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