

Book Reviews

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Clyde S. Kilby, *A Well of Wonder: Essays on C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Inklings*, Edited by **Loren Wilkinson and Keith Call**. (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2016), \$28.99 (hardcover), 348 pp.

English professors are the best writers; an English professor writing about English professors, therefore, makes a potent combination. Add to this writers of wide appeal (like Lewis and Tolkien) as the subject, and have the writer (Kilby) be someone who knew the subject well, and you have an even more potent combination. No one should be surprised, then, to discover that this very readable collection of essays will both inform and delight.

This collection of essays, all of them written by Clyde S. Kilby, is not simply about Lewis, even though Lewis is the subject of the first of three sections. Kilby also knew Tolkien, the subject of the second section. As a professor of English, Kilby was also familiar with the writers of the third section, some of whom had died before Kilby ever got to the United Kingdom. The three parts of the collection are: (1) C. S. Lewis on Theology and the Witness of Literature (with a poetic tribute to Kilby by Luci Shaw at the start of the book and an Introduction by Loren Wilkinson immediately following the tribute); (2) J. R. R. Tolkien on Story and the Power of Myth; and (3) The Inklings as Shapers of a New Christian Imagination. The book is edited by Loren Wilkinson, Professor Emeritus at Regent College and a former student of Kilby. Each chapter begins with a brief abstract of the material to follow, enabling the reader to understand the significance of the chapter.

Many know that Clyde Kilby was one of those acquainted early with C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, both of whom he met, and other writers. His interest led him to establish The Marion E. Wade Center, and his name is memorialized in the Clyde Kilby Reading Room, a place of research and study for many people interested in the writings of Lewis, Tolkien, and the other Wade Center authors. Those who don't know the story of how the Wade Center originated will enjoy reading "The Wade Collection and the Preservation of a Legacy" (Chapter 24).

Kilby wrote about Lewis at a time when Lewis was far less known than he is today. But reading Kilby shows us how many insights we can miss when we read Lewis in a distracted manner. Among the many insights, we learn that praise is the sign of healthy understanding (23), that Lewis was "never failing in his opposition to theological modernism" (29), the Christian's vocation is not mainly to spread Christianity "but rather to love Christ" (30), reason is "the spearhead of the Supernatural" (73), and Lewis disliked hymns

of the last century and a half (91). On Tolkien, Kilby reminds us that without the encouragement of Lewis, Tolkien would not have completed *The Lord of the Rings* (183), *The Lord of the Rings* is “one of the genuinely imaginative works of mankind” (236), grace is “at work abundantly in the story” (247), the secret of poetry is the metaphor and the secret of metaphor is imagination (233), and much more. In “Literary Form, Biblical Narrative, and Theological Themes” Kilby tells us of the Christian associations of Eärendil, the brightest star in Middle-earth, which is both a counterpart to our planet Venus and an allusion to the birth of Christ (Lk. 1:78) (246). In addition to Lewis, Tolkien, and the Inklings, we also read about Delmar Banner, a famous 20th century English painter who, “has a portrait, for instance, of Beatrix Potter . . . hanging in the National Gallery in London” (302). We also learn that imagination, as Einstein once said, is “more important than knowledge” (236).

This book contains so many gems one can hardly choose which to highlight. Since my primary interest is Lewis, I especially enjoyed the personal recollection in “My First (and Only) Visit with Mr. Lewis” (Chapter 2). That meeting took place on July 1, 1953. In that meeting, Lewis told Kilby that the relation between Christianity and art was the same relation as “between Christianity and carpentry” (17). Also, having written about C.E.M. Joad, I was interested to learn that during their meeting Lewis said that he sat up and talked with Joad for most of the night on two occasions. Lewis’s influence on Joad was one of the reasons why Joad came back to faith late in life and wrote about that story in his book *The Recovery of Belief*.

Kilby writes not simply about what these Inklings wrote and said, but also what he saw in them. For example, each of these writers saw the world “as a genuine hierarchy” (331), and the writers featured at the Wade Center “never lost their sense of hierarchy. You can’t read any of them without seeing that right off” (332). Perhaps Thomas Howard says it best: “Next to the Inklings themselves, I would place Clyde Kilby and his work on the topmost echelon of those who fully understand—and share—the outlook of Lewis and Tolkien and all of the Inklings” (back cover).

In spite of the occasional flaw—Lewis was nine, not ten, when his mother died (5); the Fox spoke to Orual, not Psyche (138); the typos on 82 and 86; etc.—this collection of Kilby’s essays will both delight and educate the reader and more than repay the investment of time. Thanks are due to Marjorie Lamp Mead, the Wade’s Associate Director, and Keith Call, Special Collection Assistant in Wheaton College’s Special Collections department, for bringing this book to publication.

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