



4-15-2017

***The 'Great War' of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis: Philosophical Writings 1927-1930, edited by Norbert Feinendegen and Arend Smilde / Joy and Poetic Imagination: Understanding C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield and its Significance for Lewis's Conversion and Writings, by Stephen Thorson***

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**Recommended Citation**

Fitzsimmons, Phillip, "*The 'Great War' of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis: Philosophical Writings 1927-1930, edited by Norbert Feinendegen and Arend Smilde / Joy and Poetic Imagination: Understanding C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield and its Significance for Lewis's Conversion and Writings, by Stephen Thorson*" (2017). *Faculty Articles & Research*. 65.  
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**THE 'GREAT WAR' OF OWEN BARFIELD AND C.S. LEWIS: PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS 1927-1930.** Edited by Norbert Feinendegen and Arend Smilde. *Inklings Studies Supplements*, vol. no 1. Oxford: Journal of Inklings Studies, 2015. 178 p. ISSN 2057-6099. £15.98.

**JOY AND POETIC IMAGINATION: UNDERSTANDING C.S. LEWIS'S "GREAT WAR" WITH OWEN BARFIELD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR LEWIS'S CONVERSION AND WRITINGS.** Stephen Thorson. Hamden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2015. 271 p. 9781935668107. \$18.50.

TWO BOOKS ABOUT THE "GREAT WAR" DESCRIBED BY C.S. Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* were published in 2015. The first reproduces the writings that Barfield and Lewis exchanged during their dispute; the second is a history of the event. Both are first-rate contributions to Inklings studies. Together they provide the primary sources and an engaging presentation of the Barfield and Lewis "Great War."

*The 'Great War' of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis* reproduces all of the surviving primary documents of the debate that was so important to the development of both men. In this debate, Barfield's contention was that human imagination contributes to the existence of the material world. This is a part of his system of thought about the evolution of consciousness, an idea that he discovered before studying Anthroposophy. Contrarily, Lewis held to a belief in the world as existing independent of any contributions of human imagination. He subjected all of the ideas shared between them to rigorous rational analysis. All of the far-ranging subjects discussed lead back to the original dispute about the existence and our knowledge of a God.

This is a demanding book. Yet, any determined reader will finish with a sense of the nature of the dispute Lewis described as "The Great War." However, a strong background in western philosophy will help the more specialized reader to follow the thread of thought that begins with the question of God's existence, ranges over forms of ontological and epistemological materialism and idealism, and then leads to questions of free will, ethical responsibility, and aesthetics. The exploration digs into the nature of imagination and its possible role in the continuing creation of the world around us.

This *Inklings Studies Supplement* includes forty pages of introductory essays by the editors that do a great job of providing the context and explaining the ideas contained in the writings. The writings themselves display the intellectual gifts, education, and high spirits of their two young authors as they

argue philosophical points that range across religion, psychology, and philosophy.

THORSON'S *JOY AND POETIC IMAGINATION: Understanding C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield and its Significance for Lewis's Conversion and Writings* provides a more accessible treatment of the material than is found in the *Inklings Studies Supplement*. Thorson provides a rigorous but humanizing account of the story, personalities, and ideas involved—humanizing in the sense that Thorson's presentation of the material in the form of a very good story connects us to Barfield and Lewis as young men. Thorson's narrative moves from their different backgrounds, to their Oxford friendship of common literary and intellectual interests, including atheism, to Lewis's verbal and written attack on his friend's new monotheism and interest in Anthroposophy. Thorson's writing is an engaging blend of storytelling and explanation of the ideas discussed. He shows how these arguments led Lewis from atheism to monotheism and made Barfield into a more rigorous thinker.

In the interest of disclosure to Barfield fans, the book provides a fair and accurate presentation of the contributions of both Barfield and Lewis. However, the author admits that his presentation weighs in Lewis's favor because he believes Lewis is right and because he is more interested in him than in Barfield. Therefore, Barfield fans may find that the tone of the book suggests that Lewis's ideas are the ones that are correct and to be believed. While Barfield is handled respectfully, the author apparently sees him as only an important but mistaken foil to Lewis and as an instrument in his development. Barfield is not shown to be of substantial value or worthy of study because of his merit alone.

With that said, I highly recommend *Joy and Poetic Imagination* to any reader interested in Owen Barfield, C.S. Lewis, or the Inklings. The book will contribute to a reader's understanding of any of the three. Lewis fans will find that the book contributes to their understanding of Lewis as an intellectual, fleshes out his references to the "Great War," and shows the intellectual narrative of the first stage in his passage from atheism to monotheism. Also, despite its Lewis-centric bias, it is still one of the better books published about Owen Barfield. The reader gets a sympathetic and accurate treatment of one of the many important moments in Barfield's intellectual life. This book is appropriate for public libraries, undergraduate work, or independent study. Each chapter ends with "Questions for Further Reflection," and the author provides very nice diagrams for clarification of ideas throughout the text.

Both of the books in this review are to be recommended. *The 'Great War' of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis* will interest the academic reader and is to be commended for bringing together all of the written "Great War" material into one volume. Also, the introductory essays by the editors are very useful for

understanding the writings themselves. *Joy and Poetic Imagination* makes this literary event accessible to the general reader and does a remarkable job of answering questions about what the “Great War” was and showing why it was so important to both men, but especially to Lewis. This reviewer recommends that both books be read together for the reader to see the primary sources and their historical treatment. However, both books can be read alone and are worthy of study on their independent merit.

—Phillip Fitzsimmons

