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Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis: Friends in Co-Inherence by Paul S. Fiddes

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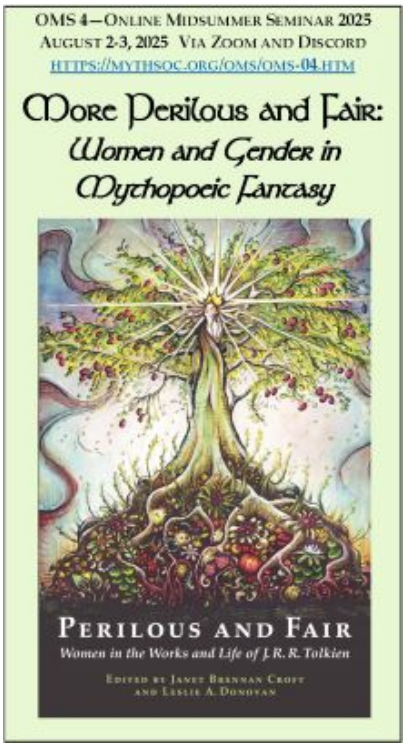

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Abstract

Book review of *Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis: Friends in Co-inherence* by Paul S. Fiddes

Additional Keywords

Trinity; co-inherence

Friendship is not merely useful, not merely the means to an end, but is the end or *telos* itself.

Casagrande's study is wonderful and illuminating in several areas in addition to the ones already explored above. It does, however, suffer from a few noticeable problems. First, there are numerous spelling, grammar, and style problems which, while they seem to have more to do with the processes of translation (e.g., certain ideas or syntaxes not translating over well into English), do make the road more difficult than necessary. A second, updated edition could easily amend and remedy these problems. The second problem is a structural one. While Casagrande offers us a thorough and exciting reading of both the books and the film, many of the chapters cover and recover the same material, at times repeating material and arguments already covered, at others concluding lines of thought begun (and paused) sections earlier. For readers who desire a more straightforward analysis, the arrangement Casagrande has chosen may prove at times difficult to follow.

Though there is nothing novel in deploying Aristotle and Aquinas to limn Tolkien's works, Casagrande brings to such a project a renewed energy. Perhaps the work of making sense of Middle-earth by way of Thomistic categories hasn't merely been left unfinished, perhaps it hasn't even gotten into full swing. The work that new and emerging voices in Tolkien scholarship like Casagrande are doing is not a mere identical repetition of older projects, but a confection, a ripening and sweetening of the work they build from; a repetition that exceeds what has come before. In particular her work demands that we attend to that important thing that lies at the heart of *The Lord of the Rings,* which we have ignored precisely because of how obvious and unobtrusive it is: friendship. How very much like hobbits friendship is: there the whole time and yet constantly overlooked until at last it is brought to our attention by those who esteem it rightly—like Gandalf, or Cristina Casagrande.

—Mark A. Brians II

Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis: Friends in Co-Inherence. Paul S. Fiddes. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2021. 432 p. 9780192845467. $115.00.

Though the book's title is *Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis: Friends in Co-inherence*, the author Paul Fiddes spends more time on Williams than Lewis. Fiddes approaches his subject as a professor of theology and offers textual analysis at times similar to a literary critic. He explores co-inherence as the overarching theme throughout the book and shows how Williams develops the

idea of co-inherence in his works even though Williams does not use the term co-inherence until 1939 near the latter part of his life (3). According to Fiddes, "Co-inherence is—briefly—the conviction that human persons inhere or dwell in each other so that they exist in a mutual interdependence, and that at the foundation of this relational reality the 'Persons' of a triune God permeate one another in love" (3). This concept is not the easiest to grasp by definition alone, and Fiddes helps the reader attain better understanding of co-inherence through his deeper analysis and examples from Williams and Lewis, especially through the metaphor of dance. Divided into five parts, the book discusses the friendship of Williams and Lewis, their collaboration and influences, several of their literary and theological writings, and a theologically oriented conclusion.

The first three chapters span the years that Williams and Lewis were friends (1936-1945), along with Lewis's involvement with writings by and about Williams after the latter's death in 1945. Fiddes points out how the two friends had similarities and differences especially regarding romantic love and spiritual topics that they wrote about, as well as some ways that the friends mutually influence or benefit from each other. However, Williams believed "that Lewis was indebted to him for various ideas for which he was not receiving sufficient credit" (52). Fiddes also introduces the image of the dance that both Williams and Lewis use in their fiction, which he sees as an expression of co-inherence and deals with later in more detail (53).

Following the groundwork Fiddes establishes for his subject matter in part 1, the next two chapters examine Williams's use of co-inherence as "generally the concept that all human beings are connected with each other and with God, and that all persons are dependent on each other" (85). Fiddes then turns to Lewis and co-inherence in chapter 6 and the metaphors, such as dance, that Lewis uses. He believes that "Lewis adds the very dimension to co-inherence that seems lacking in Williams—that is, something like an 'indwelling' of finite beings in the infinite Trinity" (132). Here, the Trinity refers to the Christian doctrine of one God as three eternal, equal persons: God as Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit. In the following chapter 7 (and last in part 2), Fiddes writes that "Lewis appears to have an intuitive leaning towards co-inherence" because of his use of "metaphors of dance, drama, begetting, and immersion, with the concepts of 'participation' and 'co-existence' [the latter as evident in Williams's writings too]" (159). As examples of the above, Fiddes evaluates some of Lewis's fiction, such as *Perelandra*, *The Last Battle*, and *Till We Have Faces*.

"A Collaboration in Co-Inherence" (part 3) comprises one chapter that focuses on romantic (courtly) love and Arthurian myth as key topics for both Williams and Lewis, and how they differ and converge on similar subject matter (174). Fiddes spends time on Williams's Arthurian poetry and his elements of

kabbalism, whereas Lewis has a Neoplatonic approach toward co-inherence and its expression, witnessed in his novel *That Hideous Strength*.

Part 4 "Further Studies in Co-Inherence" is the longest section with six chapters. The first four chapters (9-12) focus on Williams and William Blake, Williams and Karl Barth, and Williams's seven novels. Chapters 9-10 elaborate on the lectures Williams gave on Blake and Barth and how their writings influenced his thinking. Then Fiddes moves to a brief analysis of each of Williams's novels in two more chapters, which provides an interesting reading of the ideas Williams wrote about through his plots and characters. Eventually, Fiddes returns to Lewis in chapter 13 focusing on "the Great Dance" and its metaphorical power in *Perelandra* as well as the other two novels in Lewis's space trilogy. This chapter is particularly intriguing in its analysis and also looks at Williams's use of dance in his novel *The Greater Trumps*. Fiddes claims Lewis achieves something that Williams does not, which is "the centre of the cosmic dance *is* that centre where everything is 'at'. Lewis has fused the two kinds of centre together, in an imaginative vision that we cannot find in Williams" (325). These ideas draw on some medieval and Christian traditions that both Lewis and Williams employ, but Lewis takes further through his metaphor pointing to all of creation and the Trinity. For Williams and Lewis, the Trinity is an important subject though they approached it from somewhat different views. Chapter 14 reviews Lewis's thoughts on the poet Thomas Traherne and the subject of desire that "takes the shape of the sensation of something unknown" (346) and its connection with co-inherence.

The concluding chapter (part 5 of the book) about co-inherence and the Trinity was somewhat unsatisfactory with areas that felt incomplete or minimally explored/explained from a theological perspective (e.g., on page 391, unclear whether the subject applies only to believers in Christ the Son of God or applies to all people regardless of belief). Fiddes provides an informative background about the meaning and use of the term co-inherence and its relationship to the Greek word *perichoresis* (also discussed previously in the book) that some authors use to speak about the Trinity (366). Fiddes also claims to be "developing a modern doctrine of the Trinity" (367); it is potential cause for concern that he thinks the doctrine needs development or modernization especially when he does not use the Holy Bible as support for any of his argument for a "modern doctrine." Furthermore, some of what he says about the Trinity already seems to be consistent with mainstream doctrinal teaching. The book's final sentence about Williams and Lewis, with the author's subsequent parting words to readers, did not provide a satisfying end to the book for me as a reader (though others may feel otherwise). The statement felt exaggerated and maybe only relevant to some, not all readers, by saying that "we who read them [i.e., Williams and Lewis]" are "friends in the co-inherence"

(391), apparently by merely reading them, which is not a guaranteed outcome for all readers to be "friends" in a concept and agree with or like the authors or co-inherence. Despite some detracting points, the book as a whole is of scholarly value and can be useful for those interested to learn more about co-inherence and how Williams and Lewis employ this in their writings, and may lead to greater understanding of these authors. The hardcover book's cost at $115 could be prohibitive and not worth the price for many readers, so procuring an available copy may be best through a library or similar resource.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin

THE WRITER'S MAP: AN ATLAS OF IMAGINARY LANDS. Huw Lewis-Jones. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press. 2018. 256 p. ISBN 9780226596631. $40.33.

Writers are world builders, whether they are setting their writings in the known world or in worlds of their own imaginations. Huw Lewis-Jones, the editor of this book, has collected essays that cover the maps of imaginary places that writers developed that were published in their books, the maps that the writers created during the writing process, and the maps that inspired their works. In the prologue, Philip Pullman shares his desire for creating a map of Razkavia, a country he created in the novel *The Tin Princess*. This, as all good prologues do, prepares us for the rest of the book. There are essays providing an overview of the history of maps in literary works in Part One: Make Believe. This section includes two essays, the first written by Huw Lewis-Jones and the second by Huw Lewis-Jones and Brian Sibley. In the first essay, Lewis-Jones speaks of his long-time love of maps, both for the ability to find your way with a map and the ability to get lost in the map. The second essay includes the suggestion that the first work of fiction containing a map was Thomas More's *Utopia* and serves as an excellent overview of the maps connected with such works of literature as *Pilgrim's Progress, The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe,* The Chronicles of Narnia*, Winnie-the-Pooh, The Hobbit,* and, of course, *Treasure Island*.

Part Two: Writing Maps contains essays on how authors create maps for their stories, as well as their background with maps. Cressida Cowell describes her creation of the Isle of Berk, the setting for *How to Train Your Dragon*. Robert Macfarlane writes about Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and how the drawing of the map for a bored stepson inspired the writing of the novel, as well as some of the ways indigenous people create maps. Frances