

J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and O. Barfield were the members of an informal literary group called the Inklings or the Oxford Inklings (of which another significant member was a novelist and poet Charles Williams). The group was meeting regularly, twice every week in Oxford from the mid-1930s until C.S. Lewis moved to Cambridge in 1954, reading their literary works aloud and discussing a wide range of topics. The project wants to address two important scholarly issues: first, the way in which the friendship and synergy between the members of the Inklings influenced their individual work and the extent to which they were a coherent group of authors; second, the earliest stage of their literary and philosophical development, before they became the Inklings. The key hypothesis is that what united Tolkien, Lewis, and Barfield from the earliest stage of their friendship and what is the key feature of their work from its onset is Platonism. Platonism in the project is conceived very widely, following the recent work of L.P. Gerson and D. Hedley, as an internally diverse philosophical position, opposed to materialism or naturalism. Its main tenet is that all being, apart from the First Cause, is an image of a higher archetype, produced by this archetype which is present in its products, while they, in turn, participate in it. The common features of all forms of Platonism are the single First Cause or Creator, the existence of the Platonic Forms, of the spiritual world of intelligent creatures, and the incorporeal and immortal nature of the intellect or soul. The research team will study the earliest published works of the Inklings as well as some unpublished archival materials in order to show that Platonism was the key, uniting element of “the Inklings before the Inklings”. The period which will be studied is 1917-1933, from the moment Tolkien began to write about his Middle Earth to the publication of the first Lewis’ Christian book, *Pilgrim’s Regress*. The team members will study the individual authors as well as their mutual relationship and influence, and the whole team will cooperate to create an integrated understanding of the earliest writings of the Inklings. The team will go for research stays in the most important academic centres linked to the Inklings, that is, Oxford and Cambridge. The research results will be disseminated at conferences and, finally, in a special issue of the *Journal of the Inklings Studies*, which will summarize the outcome of the project. The project will influence not only the scholarship on the Inklings, but it will enrich our understanding of Platonism and it will shed some light on the possible causes of the “crisis of meaning” that the Western society goes through in the recent years.