

The Importance of Chesterton, Tolkien and Lewis

[Editor's Note: Joseph Pearce recently granted the following interview to The Whetstone, a student newspaper of Montreal College, North Carolina.]

What do you see as your role, your calling, and how does it correlate with your work as a scholar?

I am trying to serve as a cultural catalyst, evangelizing the wider culture with the beauty of Christian culture. My work as a cultural apologist is to seek to evangelize through the power of beauty. *What were your favorite parts of growing up in England? What influenced you to move to the United States?*

I have very fond memories of the English countryside and English villages. There's nothing quite like the English landscape. I moved to the United States as a consequence of my marrying Susannah, a wonderful American lady, originally from California.

What role did Chesterton play in your conversion to Roman Catholicism? How does your faith and love of Chesterton continue to play a role in your research?

It would be no exaggeration to say that, under grace, Chesterton was the biggest single influence on my conversion. My faith is central to all that I do, and the Chestertonian sense of grateful wonder in the Divine Presence in Creation animates everything I do.

From my research, I see that you've written numerous biographical works on several literary (and Catholic) figures. What is the favorite one work you have written and why is it your favorite? What is the main focus of your research and how does this relate to your faith

as a Roman Catholic?

My favourite of all my own books is ironically one of the least known. It's a biography of the poet, Roy Campbell. He's a fascinating character who lived an action-packed life. Researching and writing his life was an exhilarating roller-coaster ride!

The main focus of my research is Christian literature and Christian literary figures. My love for great Christian literature is inextricably woven into my life as a Catholic Christian.

Why do you think students should continue to read Lewis, Tolkien, and Chesterton today? How do such people of the past help us to understand our faith today?

Lewis and Tolkien are two of the most influential and popular writers of the past century, impacting the culture in which we live in ways too numerous and manifold to mention. Chesterton's popularity is also in the ascendant, though not as popular as Lewis and Tolkien. One of the reasons he is so important is because of his huge influence on Tolkien's and Lewis' work, and his influence on Lewis' conversion to Christianity. If it hadn't have been for Chesterton, we might not have had Middle-earth or Narnia. All three of these writers enunciate timeless truths which are perennially relevant to all times and cultures.

What in your opinion is the greatest book of all time? Since this is a little ambitious a question, what is the most underrated of Chesterton's works?

The greatest book of all time is obviously the Bible! Other great books would be the works of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Augustine, Dante, Thomas Aquinas, and Shakespeare.

As for the most underrated of Chesterton's books, this is more difficult. I'd say that they are all underrated, but then I'm

biased! His book on Thomas Aquinas is important, as is his book on Francis of Assisi. His most underrated novel, *me judice*, is [The Ball and the Cross](#).

Why is Chesterton important to a study of the works and philosophies of Lewis and Tolkien? Tell me about [The Everlasting Man](#) and the role it played in the conversations between Lewis and Tolkien that helped lead to Lewis's conversion.

Tolkien grew up devouring the works of Chesterton. Lewis discovered Chesterton while serving in the British Army in World War One. At the time, Lewis was an atheist. Lewis credits his reading of *The Everlasting Man* as being a crucial milestone on his journey towards Christian conversion. Chesterton's chapter, "The Ethics of Elfland," in his book [Orthodoxy](#), had a profound impact on the mythopoeic vision of both Tolkien and Lewis, so much so that it could be said to have baptized their imagination.

If you could describe Lewis, Tolkien, and Chesterton in one word each, what would the three words be?

Lewis: Clarity

Tolkien: Rooted

Chesterton: Childlike

—

[This Imaginative Conservative article](#) was republished with permission.

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on

Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!