

### Sørina Higgins

#### **How to Handle the Hallows: Editing a 100-year-old play for the 21st century**

On June 8th, 2012, I held in my hands a 100-year-old manuscript. No one else had touched it since it was deposited in the archives of the Marian E. Wade center at Wheaton College, Illinois, in 1973. It was *The Chapel of the Thorn: A Dramatic Poem*—a two-act play by Charles Williams, the oddest Inkling. This little drama is among the earliest of Williams's works, yet deals with the topic that would fill his writings all the way through his writings: How to handle a sacred relic, or, more metaphorically, how to respond to spiritual realities. In this way, *The Chapel of the Thorn* is “out of this world” (dealing with the supernatural). It is also a locus of traditional, Christian approaches to fantasy, and more specifically to matters on the edge of Arthurian legend: the Crown of Thorns in this play is a kind of metonym for the Holy Grail, which is in its turn a synecdoche for all objects and actions of Christ's passion, and characters' responses to these physical items are revelatory of their eternal salvific or damnatory condition. I intend to describe how I came upon this MS, the process of transcribing it, the story of finding and working with a publisher, the content of the play, its contents and quality, and its ongoing relevance for our times—and thus to take a topic that is out of this world and use it to argue for a reading of the Inklings in the 21st century.

*Sørina Higgins is a writer, English teacher, and Inklings scholar. She is not Danish, nor related to Kierkegaard, but added the slashed “ø” to her name to look more sexy. She serves as a preceptor at Signum University and teaches English at Lehigh Carbon Community College. She is working on two books about Charles Williams: an edition of his play *The Chapel of the Thorn* with [Apocryphile Press](#) and an academic collection entitled [The Inklings and King Arthur](#). She also writes the blog *The Oddest Inkling*. Sørina and her husband designed and built their own house, without experience or expertise, and it hasn't fallen down around them yet.*



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