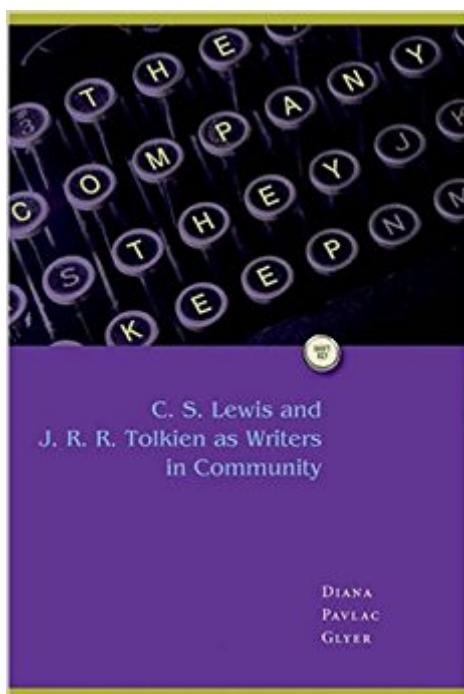


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# The Company They Keep: C. S. Lewis And J. R. R. Tolkien As Writers In Community



## Synopsis

The creators of "Narnia" and "Middle-earth", C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien were close friends and professional colleagues. They met frequently with a community of fellow writers at Oxford in the 1930s and 1940s, all sharing their works-in-progress. The group became known as the Inklings. This important study challenges the standard interpretation that Lewis, Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, and the other Inklings had little influence on one another's work, drawing on the latest research in composition studies and the sociology of the creative process. Diana Glyer invites readers into the heart of the group, examining diary entries and personal letters and carefully comparing the rough drafts of their manuscripts with their final, published work. Her analysis not only demonstrates the high level of mutual influence that characterized this writers group but also provides a lively and compelling picture of how writers and other creative artists challenge, correct, and encourage one another as they work together in community.

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## Customer Reviews

"In her book-length study, Glyer stands on the shoulders of giants, and yet with balance, style, and sheer hard work she manages to dwarf them. In particular, she completes nearly twenty years of work by updating and even surpassing Humphrey Carpenter's *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends*. In so doing, Glyer has crafted an eminently readable and thoroughly scholarly book. She explores in depth and in careful detail the ways that Lewis and Tolkien and their friends wrote in community, and points to collaboration as a key not only to

understanding the Inklings but also to comprehending their several writing processes." --Unknown

--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

"This is an admirably balanced overview of the web of intellectual and literary interactions of the Inklings. I found myself captured by her engaging writing style, the breadth of her research, and the cogency of her argument. Her own work will itself influence the texture of Inklings scholarship for years to come. It's good, very good indeed." --Verlyn Flieger, author of *Splintered Light, A Question of Time, and Interrupted Music* "The Company They Keep is an astonishingly thorough work, lucidly and boldly illuminating the collaborative writing processes of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien and their colleagues during the most fruitful period of their careers. Diana Glyer's impressive achievement immediately supersedes in scope and authority all previous treatments of the Inklings in extant biographies and encyclopedia." --Bruce L Edwards, author of *Not-a-Tame Lion, Further Up and Further In, and A Rhetoric of Reading*

I have books I keep on my bookshelves, and I have books I keep on my desk -- within arm's reach. *The Company They Keep* is in the latter category. I doubt if I go more than a couple of weeks without referring to this must-have book with my lovingly dog-eared pages and favorite highlighted passages. (Some months ago I misplaced it and found it in my laundry room; I'd literally been flipping through it while pulling clothes from the dryer. Personal disclosure: I work from home.) Here's why I value this book so much. I'm fond not just of solid research and fascinating information -- I'm fond of truly exceptional writing. This author sets a new standard for excellence in organization, accessibility, depth -- plus rich, lively, and satisfying detail. She puts her readers "there" -- into the lives and minds and hearts of Lewis, Tolkien and other Inklings. I treasure *The Company They Keep*. I recommend it to fans as well as scholars.

A lot has been written about C.S. Lewis, and his connections to his friends, particularly those in the circle called the Inklings. A lot has been written about how J.R.R. Tolkien socialized with the other Inklings, but was apparently not influenced by them much. But for any writer who has been in a close-knit circle of writerly friends, the idea that the members of the Inklings didn't influence each other much will feel odd. It's just not possible. Diana Pavlac Glyer's book delves into the interactions of the Inklings very thoroughly, and demonstrates that the interactions of the group did indeed affect the works of the members. As a history or "group biography" **THE COMPANY THEY KEEP** would be a valuable addition to any collection of books by and about the Inklings. But it is more than that. It

also shows you, through the interactions of the Inklings, how true collaboration and "influence" works in a group dynamic. The prose is clear and lively, and will keep you engaged in the subject. It will fascinate and encourage any writer, and in fact, any reader. I highly recommend it!

It has been widely and vehemently put forth that the Inklings, a group comprised mainly of writers (including J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams) who met regularly to read their works to each other over the course of more than fifteen years, was simply and solely a social club. Biographers, scholars, and in some cases the Inklings themselves have denied that the members of the group either exerted influence over or were influenced by the others. Glyer, however, presents a convincing argument that it is a gross error to take such statements at face value. In *The Company They Keep*, Glyer defines and delineates a number of areas in which the various Inklings did indeed have an impact not only on each other—*as personal lives as friends, but also on their professional lives and works as colleagues*. Exhaustive evidence is provided to support these claims, demonstrating how these men acted and reacted upon each other as resonators, encouragers, sometime opponents, editors, collaborators, and referents. Additionally, in the course of proving the influence of the Inklings on one another, Glyer makes a strong case for the importance of community in the life of every writer. P.S. Don't skip the footnotes - they contain excellent content in themselves!

This book was a perfect bridge between academic research interests, as a religious studies scholar, and my longtime personal fandom for Tolkien. Browsing through the book should make this self-explanatory, but the Buddhist (Tendai, perhaps, in spirit if not in fact) monastic saying quoted at the head of one of the chapters always stuck in my head as a great summary for the value of collaboration (alternatively explained by musicians like Herbie Hancock as the "ethics of jazz"):*"When a tree grows by itself, it spreads out, but does not grow tall. When trees grow together in the forest, they help push each other up towards the sun."*

I read this book originally when it was virtually steaming hot off the press and was breath taken immediately with the fine writing, depth of scholarship particularly using primary source material, and the stunning insights offered. Brave, profound, meticulous and brilliant. While we are enriched as readers by some tremendous scholarship in this field, Glyer offers the field of Inkling studies not only the results of more than 20 years of research, she offers an extraordinary new understanding of the nature of collaboration itself. Glyer demonstrates a rare ability to make solid scholarship equally

readable and to present ideas about working in community refreshingly clear and tangible.

The Company They Keep is a balanced and well-researched exploration of the writing group the Inklings (which included C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams) and their writing process. Disputing the myth of the “solitary genius,” Glycer brings to light the vibrant, interactive writing community that produced monumental works like The Lord of the Rings. She argues that the Inklings thrived not because of their individual abilities alone but because of the way they interacted as a group. TCTK highlights, in a pleasantly readable way, the deep level of mutual influence evident in the Inklings’ body of writing to illustrate how writers and other artists impact one another creatively--and how absolutely necessary the process of creative collaboration is to the writer at any level. The Company They Keep is a must-read for any writer (or creative group), whether academic or amateur, who is interested in the Inklings or would like to learn from the practices of some of the most productive and popular authors of the 20th century.

Highly recommended!

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