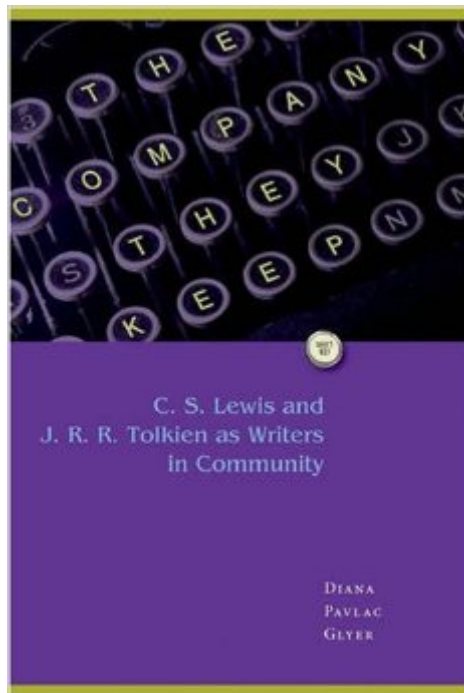


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# The Company They Keep: C. S. Lewis And J. R. R. Tolkien As Writers In Community



## 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

"This is an admirably balanced overview of the web of intellectual and literary interactions of the Inklings that is sure to become an invaluable resource for future readers and scholars. 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, professor of English, University of Maryland at College Park, Author of *Splintered Light* and *A Question of Time* "Not only does *The Company They*

Keep\_ provide a much-needed fresh look at the Inklings, but it also affords rich insights into the creative and collaborative process itself. There is much to learn and much to enjoy in this excellent volume. This engaging study deserves a place in the library of all those who value the works of the Inklings and is also a worthwhile volume for any who are interested in examining the craft of writing and the impact of creating within the community."Marjorie Lamp Mead, associate director of the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College"\_The Company They Keep\_ is an astonishingly thorough work, lucidly and boldly illuminating the collaborative writing process of Lewis, Tolkien, and their colleagues during the most fruitful period of their careers. Diana Glycer's impressive achievement supersedes in scope and authority all previous treatments of the Inklings and will perhaps become the new standard by which rhetoricians and literary critics should judge the cogency of subsequent research into the phenomenon of writing in community."Bruce L. Edwards, professor of English, Bowling Green State University

In 1978, Humphrey Carpenter published *\_Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends\_*. Although Carpenter's book is perhaps more a biography of C. S. Lewis than anything else, it remains an important and seminal work. However, if Carpenter erred in anything in his book, it was his persistent conviction that the Inklings did not influence one another. For instance, he states matter-of-factly, "It must be remembered that the word 'influence', so beloved of literary investigators, makes little sense when talking about their [the Inklings'] association with each other. Tolkien and Williams owed almost nothing to the other Inklings, and would have written everything they wrote had they never heard of the group" (160). Wholeheartedly disagreeing with Carpenter, Diana Glycer sets out in *\_The Company They Keep\_* to show how and why the Inklings did, in fact, influence one another. Her work is a conglomerate of biography, composition theory, and literary criticism. She not only illuminates your understanding of this remarkable writing group but also expands your concept of the word influence. She persuasively argues that through encouragement, opposition, editing, and collaboration, the Inklings influenced each other's writing in a rich and profound way. Had this been the book's only strength, I would say that Glycer's book had achieved more than any work written on the Inklings in the last three decades. However, the book's remarkable appeal does not stop there. Another great feat of this book is the amount of time and effort the author poured into her research. To say that the author was exhaustive in her research is perhaps an understatement. There are very few primary and secondary sources she leaves unexplored. In addition, there is a significant amount of previously unpublished material. To put this project in perspective, her Works Cited is 20 pages. Again, this would be enough to encourage most readers to purchase this book. However, I would add one final note. The beauty of this book lies in the clarity and eloquence of the author's

prose. It is one of those extraordinary academic works that is actually easy and enjoyable to read.

If you're interested in community, the writing process, or Tolkien and Lewis, this is the best book out this year. I have to be careful not to pick up the book when I'm supposed to be doing homework. It's entertaining reading full of fascinating facts and an inside look at how works like *Lord of the Rings* got written.

Glyer has put together an incredibly researched study of the relationships of "The Inklings," the social gathering that included C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien among others. "The Company They Keep" is not a casual read for the Narnia fan; it is a scholarly exposition of the influence that the Inklings had upon one another and the way that that influence appears in their works. Using a formula for determining influence created by another scholar, Karen Lefevre, Glyer analyzes the way the Inklings served as Resonators (encouraging voices), Opponents (thoughtful critics), Editors, and Collaborators (project teammates) for one another. She then adds her own fifth category, that they were Referents who wrote about one another and promoted one another's books to publishers and the public. Ultimately, Glyer rejects what Inklings scholarship heretofore has asserted: that the Inklings by their own admission did not largely influence each other. Glyer argues that such claims were aimed at acknowledging their independent credibility, but that in fact they had significant roles in shaping one another's works. So the book is important on two levels. It contributes notably to biographical scholarship on the Inklings. But it also makes thoughtful contributions to literary criticism, which traces and debates the nature of influence. Glyer is immersed in the field and defends her thesis well. It's a great book; not a "fun" read, but definitely a fascinating one for the serious reader. James W. Miller is the author of *God Scent: A Devotional*

This book shows scholarly intellect, hard work, dedication, and insightful thought that I have only achieved in lofty dreams. Diana Glyer presents interesting, insightful, and inspiring information about the Inklings that you will not find anywhere else. I have never read a book that so skillfully puts scholarship in such an accessible read. For anyone who is a fan of the Inklings, Lewis, Tolkien, Williams, or anyone remotely related to these men do yourself a favor and read this book.

Diana Pavlac Glyer does a great service to both the history and understanding of literature and to budding writers (and friends of writers), who may have been misled by previous theories about the interaction by the Inklings. The former gain a well-documented investigation of who the Inklings

were as well as how and when they influenced each other's writers. The latter gain a practical guide of the ways and means by which writers in community. As Glyer approvingly quotes Karen Burke LeFevre, "Certain acts of invention--or certain phases of the inventive acts--are best understood if we think of them as being made possible by other people." Glyer makes a good case that Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" might never have been written, let alone published had it not been for the support of other Inklings. "The Company They Keep" is a must read for writers as well as enthusiasts of the Inklings.

I teach an MFA class on critique & artist communities, and I have used this COMPANY THEY KEEP as a textbook for the last two. Others have commented on how well researched it is. I love it for the class because it so effectively challenges the myth of the solitary artist, AND because it gives some wonderful guidelines on how creatives support and critique each other. that those guidelines are based on research instead of wistful thinking is also a rare gift. Also, It's application transcends just the writing disciplines; it applies to visual artist communities as well.

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