



The Oxford Inklings: Their Lives, Writings, Ideas, and Influence

Colin Duriez

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A unique account of one of history's most intriguing literary groups, which will find itself on the reading list of every serious Tolkien, Lewis, or Inkling fan.

The Inklings were an influential group, along the lines of the Lake Poets or the Bloomsbury Group. Acclaimed author Colin Duriez explores their lives, their writings, their ideas, and, crucially, the influence they had on each other. Examining the clear purpose behind the group while celebrating its diversity and lack of formality, Duriez explains how this eclectic group of friends, without formal membership, agenda, and minutes, could have a program that shaped the publication and ideas of the leading participants. The Inklings met weekly for many years in Oxford, to discuss and read their writings—conversation was as important to them as writing—and so the city of Oxford, and its pubs where conversations were borne out, feature, as does the Christian faith of the defining members, which influenced them greatly. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were at the group's center, but who else was involved, and why do Owen Barfield and Charles Williams matter so much? *The Oxford Inklings* explores the complex and fascinating interactions of the group, including the women on the fringes, such as Dorothy L. Sayers and Lewis's wife, Joy Davidman.

The Oxford Inklings: Their Lives, Writings, Ideas, and Influence Details

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Author : Colin Duriez

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John says

A well-written book. I was looking for more of the philosophy of the writers. In particular, I was interested to learn more about how they were in a sense, a counter-cultural force against modernism by reaching back to medieval values and ideas to elevate fantasy literature to a respectable genre. Likewise, I wanted to learn more about the views that one can achieve knowledge through the imagination. I am not an avid fantasy reader nor an avid Lewis or Tolkien fan. I am familiar with them and found this book based on a recommendation from a recent World War I novel I had read relating to Lewis and Tolkien. What this book offers is an in-depth collection of primary and secondary source information about who the Inklings were, when they met, where they met, and how those meetings may have influenced each other's writings. My interest was not fully satisfied, but I do not think my comment discredits the author. As it turns out, there is not a lot of material recording the substance of the Inklings' discussions. What Mr. Duriez has compiled is an excellent source for the factual evidence of the Inklings meetings.

Garrett Cash says

The Oxford Inklings may not be the award winner for originality in this topic, but Duriez does an astonishing job at compiling and refreshing the important facts in a way that makes us think differently about them again. It's as if Duriez is a friend you have who's gone over all the material and is brilliantly summing up and tying all his acquired information together to achieve a lucid and compelling argument. I would recommend it to anyone who knows nothing of The Inklings, and those who do a thing or two.

Justin Wiggins says

An amazing book written by a hero of mine that has changed my life. My favorite fellow Inkling is an amazing woman in my life named Holly Beverly. She was excited about me getting to meet Colin Duriez at the C.S.Lewis and Inklings retreat where I bought this book. It has inspired me to become a scholar on Tolkien and Lewis, and I really hope to eventually teach a class on their works. That would be an honor indeed! There is much reading, reflecting, writing, and much that is yet to experienced, and I look forward to it with joy!

Janet Croft says

A good, solid history of the Inklings, with some very useful insights. A complement and needed update to Carpenter's *The Inklings*, incorporating more recent findings and research, but not groundbreaking like Diana Pavlac Glyer's *The Company They Keep* -- but then it's a general study, and Pavlac's book had a particular focus on the Inklings as a writing group.

Krysta says

Nothing really new here. The information can be found easily enough in other books about the Inklings. A nice overview for newcomers, though.

Edoardo Albert says

A friendship is an elusive beast, being made of the affections and interests and shared histories, so how much more difficult is it to write a biography of a group of friends than it is to write a biography of a particular person. In *The Oxford Inklings*, Duriez attempts to tell the story of a most singular group of friends, the miscellaneous bunch of academics, plus an assortment of solicitors, soldiers and doctors, that made up the Inklings, the most significant literary group of the 20th century. While the Bloomsbury Set garnered more column inches during their existence, as did the Algonquin Round Table, in terms of sales and influence, the Inklings leave all other literary coteries in the dust of deleted books. For people knew to the study of Tolkien, Lewis and their circle, Duriez does a good job of relating the parts the less attested Inklings played in the life of the group, particularly Owen Barfield. Lewis wrote, with both philosophical passion and writerly detachment, on the nature of friendship and it is clear that his analysis stems from the central role that friendship, particularly male friendship, as much based on debate and disagreement and mutual, good humoured derision as it is on beer and companionship, played in his own life and work. Without the Inklings, neither Tolkien and Lewis would have achieved half of what they did achieve. So thank Eru and Aslan for the Inklings – the literary circle whose conversations I would most wish to have been invited to hear.

Gary Smith says

Not for everyone, but it was an interesting and mostly readable account of the friendships between an important group of writers.

Meagan says

Certainly a well-researched deep dive into the Inklings! However, I found it a bit too deep at times, and as others have mentioned, repetitive. I was skimming by the end, just to legitimately (as best I could) say I finished it. So much information, that often read like a textbook...it's not for the faint of heart or casual observer of the Inklings.

Paul says

Good starting point to learn more about the men who conversed with Tolkien during his writing of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*. Avoids getting into academic arguments and tangents.

John Hubbard says

This book was a Christmas gift. The author was polemic and repetitive. He seemed unwilling to make a statement beyond a well known history that he just rehashed.

Lisa-Michele says

This was a terrific book to read right before traveling to Oxford and re-tracing the steps of C.S. Lewis. It presents the lives of Lewis, Tolkien and others as they relate to Oxford. You can't help but love the idea of brilliant, eccentric men ensconced in a pub meeting weekly to discuss God and writing. It just works. I enjoyed the insights into what kept the group going, and why it fell apart. I learned how obstinate C.S. Lewis was about his beliefs, both his doubts and his certainties. I went to the same pub when I was in Oxford – the Eagle and Child – or as the Inklings called it “The Bird and Baby.” It was perfect. Very quaint. Very evocative.

Fantasy Literature says

J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis had an influence on modern fiction, especially speculative fiction, that is still felt to this day. In their prime, at Oxford, they saw themselves as champions of myth and meaning, bringing back the “old Western” literary values, elevating myth and “fairy stories” into a place of prominence in an academic world that was increasingly valuing modernism. The two friends surrounded themselves with British writers and thinkers of the time, a group they nick-named the Inklings, and that group’s influence on the writing of the time still cannot be calculated. The Inklings capture our imaginations just as deftly as LORD OF THE RINGS or Out of the Silent Planet do. Colin Duriez’s non-fiction The Oxford Inklings introduces us to that large circle of writers, thinkers and influencers, and tries, once again, to quantify the impact the group had on the writing and thinking of Tolkien and Lewis.

4 stars from Marion, read more at FANTASY LITERATURE

Barnard Madsen says

The name “Inklings” fairly describes what Lewis called the “inconsolable longing” we feel in this world for a world we knew before - and which he defined as Joy (in Surprised by Joy). After Lewis’s conversion, each member of the group shared two things: Christianity (thought not necessarily the same denomination or views) and a desire to write. The result of their friendship and interaction was the creation of imaginative myth (Lord of the Rings, The Narnia Chronicles, among others) as a medium to teach ancient truths to modern readers. (Although enjoyable, this book could have been helped by a skillful editor: seemed patchwork and repetitive in places).

vicki risinger West says

A comprehensive study on a most intriguing topic.

Readnponder says

Humphrey Carpenter wrote the first major biography of the Inklings in 1978. Since then, more materials have become public making Carpenter's book somewhat dated. (For instance, we now have all of C.S. Lewis's letters in the 3-volume collection edited by Walter Hooper.) Duriez's work is more recent and serves as a quick survey to the major players within the Inklings. For a more comprehensive treatment, go to *The Fellowship* by the Zaleskis. He includes helpful appendices including short bios of each member and a chronology.

The first few chapters were slow; however, the pace picked up once the men came together in Oxford and formed the Inklings--almost as if the synergy they drew from each other transferred to the page, quickening the narrative for the reader. Not an exhaustive treatment of the Inklings, but a good starting place.
