

## Book Reviews

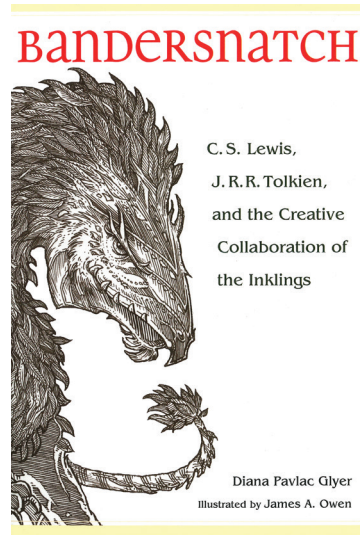
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**Diana Pavlac Glycer, *Bandersnatch: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Creative Collaboration of the Inklings*. (Kent: Squirrel Books, 2016), \$18.95 (softcover).**

For those who love the Inklings the proverb can certainly be said, “Of the books on the Inklings there are too few”, and so this same audience will be most grateful to have in their hands the second book by Diana Pavlac Glycer on this Oxford writing group, *Bandersnatch: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Creative Collaboration of the Inklings*. Glycer—whose first book, *The Company They Keep*, earned rave reviews—here reworks much of that material for a wider audience. However, it is not just a popularization of *The Company They Keep*. Rather, with a sharpened focus, as noted in the title, it is an exploration in “creative collaboration.” Therefore in many ways *Bandersnatch* is a hybrid work, containing both new and old, with all the challenges that go with such an endeavor.

The inspiration for her work is a desire to learn of the creative relationship between the various members of the Inklings and the effect this made on their literary productions. She writes: “What did these writers talk about when they met to discuss their works in progress? And what difference did these conversations make to the books they were writing” (3)? Her work is intended not only for Inklings enthusiasts but all the more so for those writers who seek to find creative practices for further inspiration. How does one create the conditions for creative literary expression? As a test case she puts before the reader the creative work of *Bandersnatch* itself which contains new illustrations by fantasy illustrator James A. Owen of *Mythworld* fame, stating, “This is a book about collaboration, and from start to finish, it was created collaboratively” (Xvii). It seems for Glycer, the evidence for her claim regarding collaboration and creativity, is in the pudding itself; the very creation of *Bandersnatch*.

The title of her book takes its inspiration from an offhand comment C.S.



Lewis made when asked about his creative relationship with Tolkien. He famously replied: "No one ever influenced Tolkien—you might as well try to influence a Bandersnatch." An opaque reference to some, a Bandersnatch is a reference to a temperamental mythic character found in the writings of Lewis Carroll. Adding greater description within the poem "The Hunting of the Snark", Carroll writes, "[the Bandersnatch] merely extended its neck and grabbed ... again and again ... without rest or pause—while those frumious jaws went savagely snapping around." With Lewis' description made plain, Tolkien is seen to be given the additional representation of someone who actively and ferociously seeks solitude in creative matters; and whose snapping jaws seek to achieve it! Glycer also might aim to extend this creature's description to solitary writers who are listening in and who's insecurity keeps those who might collaborate with them at bay.

For those familiar with the stories of the famous Oxford writing group the Inklings there will be warm reunions found here. Many beloved stories are recounted within these pages for the delight of the reader such as the wager made between Lewis and Tolkien which eventually birthed *Out of the Silent Planet* and *The Hobbit*, as well as descriptions of the playful and irenic spirit of Charles Williams and his own influence within the group. Humorous stories of Tolkien's obsessive compulsive nature, Lewis' penchant for frank "banter" and "war" with Owen Barfield, and Williams' dense and "impenetrable" writing style are all given great description. Lesser known Inklings also come into focus such as Christopher Tolkien's immense contribution of translating his father's legendarium and intentions, Dr. Robert E. Harvard's significant input on *The Problem of Pain*, and the heavy accusation levied at Hugo Dyson as the instigator for the disintegration of the group by his trenchant criticism of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: "There is a difference between conflict and contempt. Dyson delivered an ax blow to the root of the tree" (70). For an Inklings audience, a strong indictment indeed, and for those who think severe criticism is helpful to collaboration, a warning.

However, the lore of the Inklings is simply the means to a greater end: to discern through this particular creative group gleanings of aid for those who seek to become more creative in their own writing. To this purpose Glycer ends each chapter with a pulling together of such nuggets entitled "Doing What They Did." Pithy advice from "creativity itself is a messy business" (9) to "the rhythm of routine creates a safe place to discuss daring possibilities" (27) could be helpful or negligible to an aspiring writer. Also added is the final chapter, "Doing what the Inklings Did" which seeks to give specific advice (such as Start Small, Meet Often, Embrace Difference, etc.) to those who seek a plan of action. In the main, her insights are insightful, simple, and generous in spirit, and they invoke a spirit of encouragement to those who seek to follow them.

It is difficult to separate the creative act itself from the creative geniuses whose work is an act of providential inspiration or to put it differently; to create a *Lord of the Rings* one might need a Tolkien more than his practices. But on the whole, this work gives helpful nourishment, and attempts what most books on the Inklings fail to do; to seek an application of their fellowship for our own creative birthing. In viewing the breathtaking descriptions of such beautiful vistas as Middle Earth, Narnia, or Malacandra, one is indeed inspired to find such enchanted places for oneself. In the end, there is a strong sense that friendship itself is the greatest catalyst for creative collaboration; that and respect. In the creation of such respectful friendships, I believe Glycer is saying, the creation of the most sublime beauty is within reach. There is hope that the Bandernsatch within all of us may be tamed through the gentle and firm bonds of others. It is a beautiful insight indeed.

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