



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 21
Number 4

Article 4

1997

Hugo Dyson: Inkling, Teacher, *Bon Vivant*

David Bratman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bratman, David (1997) "Hugo Dyson: Inkling, Teacher, *Bon Vivant*," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 21 : No. 4 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol21/iss4/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

Biographical background on “minor Inklings” Hugo Dyson and account of his profound influence on other members of the group.

Additional Keywords

Dyson, Hugo—Biography; Dyson, Hugo—Influence on Inklings; Inklings; Lewis, C.S.—Relation to Hugo Dyson; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Relation to Hugo Dyson

HUGO DYSON

INKLING, TEACHER, *BON VIVANT*

DAVID BRATMAN

Far too often the Inklings are thought of as consisting of their three great fiction writers, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. Some scholars have pressed the claim of Owen Barfield to be considered as the philosophical engine that drove the group. But whether there were three principal Inklings or four, the Inklings were more than their principals. If we assert that to understand Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams fully we must understand the Inklings context in which they worked, we must deal with the full context, which includes the so-called "lesser" or "minor" Inklings. Humphrey Carpenter, in *The Inklings*, lists nineteen persons known to have attended Thursday evening Inklings gatherings in Lewis's or Tolkien's college rooms in a regular capacity, that is, not as a guest (255-59). Some of these only attended briefly or were philosophically alien to the Inklings' collective spirit or in some other way left little recorded impact. But ten or twelve of them, including the principals, can be considered a rough core group in the sense that, as would musicians playing a variety of instruments in an orchestra, each contributed his distinctive tone to the collective style that we think of as characteristic of the Inklings. One of these men said in a lecture on Shakespeare that "Mind lives in a context of minds. Much of the importance of Shakespeare's minor characters consists in their providing such a context." Thus observers are "aware of a world which cannot be identified with the outlook of any one character, a shared world, in which the characters meet and modify each other's privacy" (Dyson, "Emergence" 88). So too with the Inklings. It is time for Inklings scholarship to look at the contributions, and the effect on the group as a whole, of the "minor" Inklings.

My contribution in this paper is to attempt a brief biography of that lecturer, H.V.D. "Hugo" Dyson. Dyson has intruded himself on my attention because he was perhaps the most colorful of the Inklings, and his influence on the group was profound and relatively easily traced. His influence is a subject of some controversy: there is a popular impression of Dyson as a flashy, uncontrollable *bon vivant* whose preference for witty conversation, with himself as chief conversant, single-handedly killed off the group's original role as a writers' workshop. There is truth in this image, but the full story is more complex and more interesting. It shows, at one stage, more friendship and affection among the Inklings than the popular summary admits; at another stage, it hints at a possible deeper hostility than previously suspected.

The year 1996 is an appropriate occasion to discuss Dyson, as it is the centenary of his birth. If the Tolkien centenary is worth an entire *Proceedings*, then the Dyson centenary is surely worth at least one article. By learning something about him, we can increase slightly our understanding of what manner of men the Inklings were.

Henry Victor Dyson Dyson was born on Tuesday, April 7, 1896, in Hove, Sussex, the son of Philip and Henrietta Dyson. Like many academically trained Englishmen of his generation (including, of course, both Lewis and Tolkien), he came to be known by his initials, signing all of his academic work H.V.D. Dyson. Somewhere along the way he became known to his friends as "Hugo," which had become his settled nickname by the time he came to know the Inklings in his 30s, if not long before.

In 1909, at the age of 13, young Hugo went to a nearby public school, Brighton College, and stayed there until 1915, when he was 19. Dyson was then sent to Sandhurst, Britain's military academy. Though he had a club foot, the deformity was not serious enough to keep him from military service. The previous year, Warren Lewis (later to be an Inkling himself), who was one year Dyson's elder, had undergone Sandhurst's wartime accelerated nine months' officer training course (W.H. Lewis, *Brothers* xiii, hereafter cited as WHL). Dyson was presumably put on the same course, and in December 1915 he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Queen's Own Royal West Kent regiment. In the following August, having completed his service training, he went on active service with the regiment's First Battalion in the British Expeditionary Force along the Western Front, into the thick of the horror known as World War I.

Dyson's battalion, which formed part of the Fifth Division of the Third Army, had a typical run of World War I battle service in French Flanders, alternating turns in the front lines with periods in support trenches, with intervals of recuperation and training. At the time Dyson joined the battalion, they were serving in the Battle of the Somme, along with the regiment containing J.R.R. Tolkien. They then spent six months in the winter of 1916-17 manning swampy, water-logged support trenches southwest of Lille, and then were called into the Battle of Arras in April (Atkinson 227, 243-44). After spending the summer on trench duty near Douai, in October they were called again into battle duty in the Third Battle of Ypres, which was pronounced "wipers" by the British soldiers. This engage-

ment, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele, had already been raging for two months and was to continue for another two: one of the longest and bloodiest battles in a long and bloody war. At one point the battalion was down to seven unwounded officers out of a normal complement of about 20 (Atkinson 295). During his battalion's last tour of battle duty there, in early November, Dyson received serious injuries which precluded him from further active service, and he was sent back to England. He was promoted to full Lieutenant at the end of the year and formally discharged in June of 1919 (Atkinson 295, 302-03; *Great Britain War Office Weekly Casualty List*, 13 Nov. 1917, page 6).

Dyson made a full recovery from his wounds, though he was permanently affected by his war experience. Over ten years later C.S. Lewis was to describe him as "a burly man, both in mind and body, with the stamp of the war on him" (letter to WHL, 22 Nov. 1931, *Letters* 293). Even in his last years, when he was crippled by arthritis, he carried himself so as to convey the impression that it was really a war wound (Medcalf 15). Unlike some of his fellow veterans, Dyson was clearly more built than shattered by the experience. Indeed, perhaps he was most struck by the proximity of the quiet greenery of England to the muddy scenes of death in France and Belgium. Many years later he was extremely amused to greet a pupil who had arrived directly at Oxford from service in the Korean War, and took to reminding the student, "We took you from the trenches! the trenches!" (qtd. in Kavanagh 124). It was really his own trenches in 1917 that he was thinking of, and with considerable retroactive enthusiasm.

Dyson matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, in the fall or Michaelmas term of 1919, as a commoner, a fee-paying student as opposed to one with a scholarship. He was then 23, an age when in peacetime most students would already have graduated from college, and took a shortened course which gained him his B.A. with distinction in 1921. He read English under the tutor Thomas Seccombe, a critic and editor then in his 50s, best known for introductions to selections of noted authors' works, and for a well-regarded survey, published 20 years earlier, of *The Age of Johnson*. Both of these scholarly activities of Seccombe's prefigured those of his pupil Dyson.

The pupil worked hard, and won the college's Skeat Prize, the same English prize that Tolkien had won in 1914, for Chaucer scholarship. In 1920 he was first runner-up for the Charles Oldham scholarship, the test for which consisted of an oral exam in knowledge of Shakespeare. (Owen Barfield, a future Inkling, won the Oldham the following year.)

After his graduation, Dyson then embarked on the then comparatively rare course for an English major of taking the advanced research degree of B.Litt. Owen Barfield was working on one at about the same time, but no other Inkling whose field was English took this degree. It was not a highly regarded degree in the English faculty at the

time: one joke had it that there were three classes of students, the literate, the illiterate, and the B.Literate. Dyson's strongest interest at this time was in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, and he wrote his thesis on John Ford, the Jacobean dramatist best known for the lurid tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. He completed his B.Litt. in 1924, and was granted the standard honorary degree of M.A. in 1925 (after the usual 3 or 4 year wait after receiving his B.A.).

Besides working for his degrees by writing essays for his tutor and for prize competitions, and his thesis, Dyson also devoted his attention to the usual extracurricular activities of an academically-minded student. Two of these seem to foreshadow the characteristic activities of the Inklings: reading aloud in college quarters, and gathering for friendly chats in pubs.

During Dyson's first year at Exeter he joined the college Essay Club, an interest he shared with another student, a friend three years his junior, who had entered the college one term earlier: an Anglo-Irish baronet's son named Nevill Coghill (Chavasse 17). A few years later Coghill would become a friend of C.S. Lewis and from there would become an early important member of the Inklings, as well as an English tutor and later professor at Oxford and a notable producer for the Oxford University Dramatic Society. (He would also remain a lifelong friend of Dyson's, dedicating a book to him in 1964.) But at this time, Coghill was the secretary of the Exeter College Essay Club, and one day in early 1920 he approached an Exeter alumnus, a pre-war student who had served in France during the war, and was now back in Oxford writing definitions for the *New English Dictionary*. "Oh, Captain Tolkien," said Coghill, "would you be so kind as to read a paper for us to the essay club?" (qtd. in Grotta 61).

What Tolkien actually read on the evening of March 10, 1920, was not an essay but the revised "Tuor B" text of "The Fall of Gondolin" from *The Book of Lost Tales* (Tolkien, *Book 147*; Tolkien, note to Letter no. 163, *Letters* 445). This was perhaps the first but certainly not the last occasion Tolkien would try out one of his stories on an undergraduate club. It's a very significant occasion in the history of the Inklings for two reasons. Although C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield already knew each other at this time, they had apparently not yet begun to show their poetry to each other,¹ so this may well have been the very first occasion at which an Inkling read aloud his creative work to another Inkling, and Lewis was not at all involved. Second, since Dyson was present, the future disruptor of Inklings readings was evidently willing to sit and listen to a story at this stage.²

As there was an equivalent to Thursday night Inklings meetings in Dyson's undergraduate life, so also there was an equivalent to the Bird and Baby. This was a pub called The Jolly Farmer, in Paradise Street, where a select group met weekly for beer and talk. Dyson's entry into this circle was perhaps due to the offices of the Merton Professor of English Literature, Sir Walter Raleigh, who took a liking

to the young man's conversational style, rather similar to his own. They both, according to one observer, had a "gift for sudden surprises of phrase and insight when talking of books and poetry" ("Mr H.V.D. Dyson" 17). Occasional guests in this gathering included John Masefield, W.B. Yeats, and T.E. Lawrence (whom C.S. Lewis once met in the All Souls College buttery). All of these distinguished names were acquaintances of Raleigh's, and all happened to be living in Oxford at the time.

During his undergraduate years Dyson also had the opportunity to look into the most renowned literary circle of the day, the Bloomsbury Group, when he was invited on several occasions to the parties of their great hostess, Lady Ottoline Morrell. Being such a young man, he was intimidated to the point of "a kind of terror" by the august guests, feeling himself "shy and insignificant" in their company. He was greatly relieved that Virginia Woolf never did happen to speak to him (qtd. in Carpenter, *Inklings* 97n).

In 1924, the same year that he received his B.Litt., Dyson accepted a permanent teaching position in English literature. Although he would obviously have preferred to stay in Oxford, he was not so fortunate as Lewis to be able to do so. Yet he was fortunate enough to be reasonably nearby, a piece of luck that was to have a profound effect on *Inklings* history. Dyson's new post was as a lecturer in the Department of English Literature at University College, Reading. This college functioned administratively as a branch campus of the University of London, and the town of Reading was located on the Thames about halfway between London and Oxford, a 30 mile train ride from the latter.

Dyson quickly settled down to his new career. In 1925, the year after taking up his post, he married Margaret Robinson, daughter of a canon from Wantage. It was a quiet, happy union which was to last fifty years until Dyson's death. Early in the marriage, Margaret was described by a first-time visitor as "slim and very fair, rather pretty and pleasant, but too anxious to make one at home to be quite successful" (WHL 99). The Dysons had no children, but like many other academic couples they collected books (Dyson was very fastidious with his treasures; C.S. Lewis (hereafter cited as CSL), letter to WHL, Nov. 22, 1931, Letters 293) and kept cats. In 1926, the year after Dyson's marriage, he and his colleagues were rewarded with a new status when their college achieved independence from London, and was chartered as the University of Reading.

During the ensuing years, while up in Oxford newly-appointed Professor Tolkien was putting his stamp on English teaching at the older university, Dyson was putting his on the newer school. Reading being a smaller university, all the humanities teachers were grouped together in a single Faculty of Letters, so Dyson's influence as a teacher spread over a broader field. He essentially co-invented interdisciplinary studies at Reading, and he did so through the characteristically *Inklings* medium of conversations between friends. In the faculty common

room, Dyson struck up a friendship, marked by friendly but forceful clashes of ideas (much like C.S. Lewis's and Owen Barfield's friendship in their undergraduate days at Oxford), with a young philosophy don named H.A. Hodges. In 1930 Dyson and Hodges introduced a Combined Honours course in their two subjects. Within ten years it was twice as popular as the regular Philosophy course, and it was followed by numerous other Combined Honours courses between a wide variety of pairs of subjects (Holt 49). Dyson also encouraged the development of an active School of Fine Arts. The Professor of Fine Arts, J.A. Betts, joined Dyson and Hodges in organizing informal evening interdepartmental seminars of their three departments, which ran from about 1935 up to the start of World War II. In an interview years later, Hodges described how they worked: "We would miss our dinner, meet in the Art School, take potato crisps and things and have an alfresco meal, and then one of us would hold forth on some topic. A student audience from the three departments would join in" (qtd. in Holt 87-88). Dyson also was the "driving force" behind a faculty dining club of twelve members who "enjoyed good fellowship, good food and wine and the pleasure of inviting distinguished visitors as guests" (Holt 79).

As a lecturer, Dyson was one of the most dramatic at Reading. One of his students in the early 1930s described his teaching style thus: "Of the English lectures we enjoyed Mr Dyson's most. One agreed that he was brilliant and stimulating but one argued as to whether he taught us anything. Personally I believe that he did. He wrapped his gown dramatically about him and threw his whole self into his oratory. His discourse usually defied summary but was full of bon mots and suggestion" (Vera Willis, qtd. in Holt 91). "To the end of his life," we are told in his *Times* obituary, Dyson

was a star lecturer, of the kind that offers a vigorous flow of seemingly spontaneous, organic ideas, memorably phrased, upon some chosen theme, almost without a note, having the quality of a continuously inspired improvisation; he was at his most illuminating on Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope and Dickens. These lectures were, in fact, very carefully grounded in scholarship and personally meditated; united with his natural energy they seemed to explode from him.

A later description of Dyson's lectures conveyed their intensity: "He would stare out over the heads of his audience as if seeing another world, sink himself in the cross-currents of Shakespeare's mind, and himself, sometimes, become one of Shakespeare's images" (Medcalf 16). Dyson's knowledge of Shakespeare in particular struck some non-academic observers as "amazing" in its depth, particularly in his ability to weave apposite Shakespeare quotes into his conversation (WHL 193, Wilson 192).

It was during his period at Reading that Dyson prepared most of his few scholarly publications. These too were perhaps more notable for their turn of phrase and their characteristic style than for sheer force of argument. Though Dyson's first academic interest had been in Eliza-

bethan and Jacobean literature, he established while he was at Reading a specialty in the 18th century, and all his published work from that period reflects that specialty. (He was also interested in the period in between, and after first seeing W.H. Lewis's book collection, emphasizing late 17th century France, told C.S. Lewis that that was his "special period"; CSL to WHL, Nov. 22, 1931, Marion E. Wade Collection. Dyson did in fact share W.H. Lewis's interest in the Louis XIV period of France, as did Charles Williams, which the three of them would discuss at Inklings meetings in, as C.S. Lewis reported, "a fashion with which the rest of us could not compete;" Preface vi.)

Dyson's first publication was an edition of selected poetry and prose by Alexander Pope, together with essays on Pope by several later writers, to which Dyson contributed an introduction and notes. It was published by the Clarendon Press, the on-campus academic branch of the Oxford University Press, in 1933. Dyson's interest in Pope, at least at this time, extended to writing a learned and allusion-filled pastiche of him (WHL 99). In 1945 Dyson published perhaps his finest essay, interpreting William Wordsworth, usually considered one of the first Romantics, as the culmination of many characteristics associated with 18th century literature. Dyson writes,

That strong awareness of the artistic, social, and spiritual significance of everyday commonplace people and affairs, the intricate elaboration of emotional sensibility, the preoccupation with moral issues, the deep sense of discipline and order and respect for traditional ways of life are all found in [Wordsworth], freshly presented and with a new impetus, and moving in new directions ("Old" 238).

To illustrate his thesis of Wordsworth's unification of a conservative reverence for established culture and a dynamic, prophetic view of society and civilization, Dyson uses the poem "The Old Cumberland Beggar," which was first published poised on the century's edge in 1800, and which he argues is fully typical of the best 18th century English poetry. Appropriately, considering Dyson's other interests, he compares Wordsworth's views of society and the artist with Pope's outlook, and with Shakespeare's in *King Lear*.

Dyson's magnum opus as a scholar also dates from his Reading years and also reinforces his specialty in the 18th century. This was a volume in a historical/bibliographical series on English literature edited by Bonamy Dobrée and published by the Cresset Press. It is perhaps indicative of Dyson's concentration on lecturing and tutoring rather than on writing that it was the last of the five volumes of the series to be published, appearing in 1940. It was titled *Augustans and Romantics, 1689-1830*. Dyson wrote an introduction on the social background, and three chapters giving an overview of the literature of the Augustans (particularly Addison, Swift, and Pope), the age of Johnson (including the pioneering novelists Richardson, Fielding and Sterne, the poets Gray, Cowper, Burns, and Blake, and the non-fiction writers Burke and Gibbon), and the Romantics (emphasizing the great poets Wordsworth, Col-

eridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and allowing a section to prose writers, notably the essayist Charles Lamb and the novelist Jane Austen — not as much attention, one suspects, as would be devoted to Austen in a similar work today). Altogether these chapters, Dyson's longest published work, total 88 pages: about 33,000 words. His collaborator (and co-author on the title page), John Butt, a lecturer in English at Bedford College, London, prepared the 150-page narrative bibliography of the creative literature of the period and the secondary literature about it; and three other scholars contributed chapters on the philosophy, art, and economic background of the period. The first of these was written by Dyson's Reading friend and colleague, H.A. Hodges. It was Butt's bibliography, rather than the narrative chapters, which was revised for two later editions of the book in 1950 and 1961.

As is customary in survey works of this kind, such as the *Oxford History of English Literature* for which C.S. Lewis wrote a volume on the 16th century, the coverage is intended to be systematic (though not, at least in Dyson's overview chapters, as comprehensive as in the *Oxford History*) without suppressing the scholar's individual views and broad generalizations. Especially in the introduction, Dyson stresses the unity that can be found in the period, although he warns that "It is dangerous to generalise, and there is good reason for stressing the oddity and extravagance that meets us everywhere" (40). He follows this observation with a particularly characteristic quick pen sketch of a variety of writers:

The period produced the profoundest English satirist in Swift, who conceals his full horror at what he sees by the simplicity of his statements; the most perverse sentimentalist in Sterne, who tells us so often that he's only fooling that we begin to believe him; Blake, whose sense of prophecy was so powerful that he invented a new mythology in which to restate ancient traditions; Shelley, the last poet to sing of redemption by suffering (40).

Opinions differ as to whether we can find the voice of Dyson's lectures in his writings. His pupil Stephen Medcalf felt "He could never capture himself in a book ... [and] his few writings ... only give echoes and phrases of Hugo as he was in tutorial and lecture" (16). Edith Morley, Dyson's colleague at Reading as Professor of English Language there, was highly enthusiastic about the style of *Augustans and Romantics* if not the content:

He is so quotable and so convincing that it requires some courage to differ from his conclusions which are by no means always those of others whose judgement also merits consideration.... The danger of this type of book, condensed as it must necessarily be, is intensified when the writer possesses the merits which make Dyson's chapters so readable (202).

Professor Morley's judgement is, one trusts, uncontaminated by Dyson's remark, when he came to teach at Reading, that he was glad to discover that being a passenger in her car was not one of the conditions of his appointment (Holt 88-89). The anonymous reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* — clearly a friend of Dyson's since he is

referred to as "Hugo," a name he never put in print - shares some of Morley's mixed feelings about Dyson's ability to carry a questionable point on the strength of his rhetoric, but is generally more positive:

He writes with great liveliness, without allowing an obvious verbal exuberance to distress his judgment. He is admirably original and yet soberly just in writing with brevity, even on the great names.... [But] at times his writing has a brilliant, epigrammatic quality which may lead some readers to grow suspicious.

The reviewer concludes on a plaintive note with a desire that was never to be fulfilled: "Mr. Dyson writes so well that one wishes that he had written more, or that he would write more." As with Tolkien, Dyson's scholarly legacy comes to us largely through his pupils. *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* by Anne Righter (Barton) (London: Chatto and Windis, 1962) and *The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme* by Alun R. Jones (London: Gollancz, 1960) are two books by Dyson pupils particularly indebted to his inspiration and help.

Augustans and Romantics has not been updated since 1961, though it and the other volumes of the series are occasionally still used by students of the periods. In part its disappearance is due to the natural life cycle of such books, as factual knowledge increases and authorial reputations rise and fall (an author writing today about the Romantic period would be likely to say relatively less about Lamb and Hazlitt and more about Austen, and be less likely to stuff Austen into the corner of a chapter mostly devoted to the Romantic poets), but it is also due to the fact that the entire gentleman-scholar tradition of sweeping generalizations, emphasizing the similarities between authors, has fallen into disrepute. Although, as quoted above, Dyson acknowledges the variety and dissimilarity to be found, his emphasis is on common links and the broad view. The more recent scholarly emphasis on dissimilarities is prefigured ironically by the conservative Tolkien, who, though he recognized the occasional usefulness of doing so, disliked to "try to sum up a period in a lecture, or pot a poet in a paragraph," as he put it ("Valedictory" 224), which is what Dyson here does. Dyson also believes in using literature to study society, as when he writes that through Smollett's and Fielding's novels "about the everyday life, tastes and habits of ordinary people... we can learn what manner of people inhabited this country in the days of William Pitt" (*Augustans* 64). Here, perhaps due to the fact that the details of social history are not as easily graspable as those of great literature (certainly not to a literary scholar), Dyson's instincts occasionally lead him astray. More recent social historians who doubt whether it's meaningful to speak of an "Augustan" period at all are liable to be skeptical of sweeping Dysonian statements such as that though the 18th century mob was "turbulent and ready to riot on slight provocation," there seems "to have been a rude good-nature in their violence" (*Augustans* 22; see Tripathi 181).

So this is Dyson at Reading: a dramatic lecturer, an

influential organizer of the curriculum and extracurricular academic activities, and a scholar of note, with at least a few publications to his name. It was an important side to his life mostly ignored by those who have studied him as an Inkling. During his twenty years at Reading, he was one of the dons who set the tone for the fledgling university, dominating what younger faculty members, looking back, came to remember as a golden age. During his period it struck one new arrival as a "cozy, civilized, middle-class institution" (qtd. in Holt 79). "The atmosphere was that of an academic club. It was strictly non-political, even as the country moved from Munich into war" (Holt 99-100). In this as in perhaps other ways, it resembled the Inklings.

Yet Dyson was not satisfied with Reading: he gravitated back towards Oxford. Hodges had felt the same initially, but came to feel that he had a vocation for teaching the plainer students of Reading (Holt 88). He eventually became Professor of Philosophy there; given Dyson's dominance of the English department, it is quite possible that had he stayed at Reading he would have been appointed Professor of English when the incumbent retired in 1949. But he did not stay. He had other teaching interests besides his work at Reading, giving lectures and classes to the Workers' Educational Association, a *noblesse oblige* interest he shared with Charles Williams. And from early on in his career at Reading, he kept a finger in the Oxford pie by lecturing in the University's Extension Courses in the summer and examining there. A.N. Wilson states that Dyson frequently visited Oxford because he was anxious to get a job in the Oxford English faculty (124). This supposition is supported by the occasion in 1934 when Lewis "asked Dyson if he was thinking of putting himself forward as a candidate for the Birmingham [English professorship], to which he replied very emphatically that he was not," despite the fact that it would certainly have vastly increased his income (WHL 166). Was this because of an inherent dislike for the city or the university, or because he did not want to be sent further away from Oxford than he was already? Based on the evidence at hand, we might guess the latter.³ But throughout his time at Reading, Dyson would find any excuse to come to Oxford: teaching, attending Inklings meetings or visiting Lewis, examining in the English school (WHL, diary 3 June 1934, Wade Collection), attending conferences (Charles Williams to Michal Williams, 18 April 1945, Wade Collection), or just bookshopping at Blackwell's.

Evidently Dyson was introduced to C.S. "Jack" Lewis in 1930 by their mutual friend Nevill Coghill (Carpenter, *Inklings* 42). It was this which was to bring Dyson into the Lewis circle which later became the Inklings. Coghill and Dyson had, as described earlier, been friends and fellow undergraduates at Exeter College just after the war. Coghill had met Lewis in a seminar class in their undergraduate years; he was now teaching English at Exeter and Lewis was doing the same at Magdalen. Lewis liked Dyson immediately, and had both his friends over to Magdalen

for dinner on July 29, 1930, feeling that since Dyson was only in Oxford briefly for the summer term, that they had better stay up late "with the feeling that heaven knew when we might meet again and the new friendship had to be freed past its youth and into maturity in a single evening." Lewis described Dyson as "a man who really loves truth: a philosopher and a religious man: who makes his critical & literary activities depend on the former - none of your damned dilettanti." He noted Dyson's

vivacity & quickness of speech [and] honestly merry laugh.... How we roared and fooled at times in the silence of last night — but always in a few minutes buckled to again with renewed seriousness (letter to Arthur Greeves, 29 July 1930, *They* 372).

This is exactly the sort of companionship Lewis liked best, and it quickly established Dyson in Lewis's pantheon as what he called "one of my friends of the second class": those to whom he did not bare his soul but whose company he thoroughly enjoyed and whose intellectual and aesthetic tastes were fully compatible with his own. In this class at this time he also put Tolkien (letter to Greeves, 22 Sept. 1931, *They* 421). Lewis began to see Dyson "about four or five times a year," and began to introduce Dyson to his other friends. In the Wade Collection there is an undated note from this period⁴ in which Lewis invites Owen Barfield to meet Dyson at dinner with the two of them at Magdalen: the note is exuberantly written in alliterative verse. As described earlier, it is likely that Dyson knew Tolkien from his undergraduate days at Exeter, but even if they did not remember each other from then, they certainly renewed acquaintance through Lewis's offices.

Dyson stayed with Lewis at Magdalen on the weekend of September 19th and 20th, 1931, perhaps the most significant weekend of Lewis's life. On Saturday night, in keeping with Lewis's principle that three friends bring out more in each other than two (*Four Loves* 92), he invited Tolkien to join them for dinner at Magdalen. Afterwards, traversing the water walks on Magdalen's spacious grounds, they began one of the meaty intellectual conversations that the Inklings found a chief joy in life. Lewis wrote afterwards to his closest friend, Arthur Greeves:

We began (in Addison's walk just after dinner) on metaphor and myth — interrupted by a rush of wind which came so suddenly on the still, warm evening and sent so many leaves pattering down that we thought it was raining. We all held our breath, the other two appreciating the ecstasy of such a thing almost as you would. We continued (in my room) on Christianity: a good long satisfying talk in which I learned a lot: then discussed the difference between love and friendship - then finally drifted back to poetry and books.... Tolkien ... did not leave until 3 in the morning: and after seeing him out by the little postern on Magdalen bridge Dyson and I found still more to say to one another, strolling up and down the cloister of New Building, so that we did not get to bed till 4 (letter to Greeves, 22 Sept. 1931, *They* 421).

The next day, Dyson came out to Lewis's home, The Kilns, in the suburb of Headington, for lunch with him and his

housemates, the anomalous Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen (then 25).⁵ After lunch, they all drove him back to Reading: "a very delightful drive with some lovely villages," Lewis reported (letter to Greeves, 22 Sept. 1931, *They* 421-22). Dyson's visit to the Kilns is significant because as Lewis's social life turned more and more towards his academic friends, whom he usually saw in college, he was less likely to invite them to his home (Green and Hooper 121; Lady Dunbar (interview, Wade Collection) indicates that Dyson stayed over at the Kilns once). In early November, Lewis returned the visit, staying with Dyson and his wife Margaret in Reading. He wrote, "We had a grand evening. Rare luck to stay with a friend whose wife is so nice that one *almost* (I can't say quite) *almost* regrets the change when he takes you up to his study for serious smoking and for the real midnight talking" (letter to WHL, 22 Nov. 1931, *Letters* 292-93).

Lewis's discussion of Christianity that Saturday night in September with Dyson and Tolkien was a key element in the final stage of his slow conversion to becoming a full believer. He mulled over what they had told him, and a week later "passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ — in Christianity" (letter to Greeves, 1 Oct. 1931, *They* 425). The arguments that his friends had presented to him had made a deep impression in his mind. The fullest account of them is in Tolkien's poem "Mythopoeia", which he wrote to record and express his thoughts. The most succinct is in a letter from Lewis to Greeves:

What Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind it at all.... In Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant'. Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened* (letter to Greeves, 18 Oct. 1931, *They* 427).

Dyson left no known account of the evening, but his presence was crucial. "Dyson and Tolkien," Lewis says more than once when explaining it, calling them "the immediate human causes of my own conversion" (letter to Dom Bede Griffiths, Dec. 21, 1941, *Letters* 363; see also *Surprised* 216, and previously cited letters to Greeves.) Lewis's summary has been said to have Dyson's flavor to it (Medcalf 15).⁶

Up until now Dyson's Christianity has played no role in this survey of his life and work. After he comes more under the influence of the Inklings, this will change.

At the end of 1932, Warren Lewis, C.S. Lewis's brother, retired from the Royal Army Service Corps and came to live at the Kilns, and Dyson made a new friend. Warnie Lewis spent his days in his brother's rooms at Magdalen, editing the family papers and later writing books on 17th-century France, but he was never loath to be carried off by Dyson to a pub for beer and good talk. Warnie cherished the time he spent with his brother, and tended to resent intrusions, but Dyson's personality made up for it. On one

occasion Warnie wrote, "I had an interrupted morning, but as the interrupter was Dyson, I really couldn't regret it" (WHL 165). Dyson's first appearance in Warnie's diary, and probably their first meeting, was on February 18, 1933. Warnie identifies him as "[Jack]'s friend Dyson from Reading" and describes him as

a man who gives the impression of being made of quick silver: he pours himself into a room on a cataract of words and gestures, and you are caught up in the stream - but after the first plunge, it is exhilarating. I was swept along by him to the Mitre Tap in the Turl... where we had two glasses of Bristol Milk apiece and discussed China, Japan, staff officers, Dickens, house property as an investment, and, most utterly unexpected, 'Your favorite reading's Orlando Furioso isn't it? (deprecatory gesture as I got ready to deny this). 'Sorry! Sorry! my mistake' (WHL 97).

One must not expect that Dyson's cataract of words totally dominated the conversation, since Warnie was particularly knowledgeable on several of these topics — he had been a staff officer in China, for instance — and we can be sure he was at least able to get some words in edgewise. Often the two of them would talk while Jack Lewis was occupied tutoring a pupil. On one such occasion Dyson

burst [in] in his most exuberant mood.... He began by saying that it was such a cold morning that he would have to adjourn almost immediately to get some brandy. I [Warnie] pointed out that if he was prepared to accept whiskey as an alternative, it was available in the room. Having sniffed it he observed 'it would indeed be unpardonable rudeness to your brother to leave any of this' and emptied the remains of the decanter into the glass. After talking very loudly and amusingly for some quarter of an hour, he remarked airily 'I suppose we can't be heard in the next room?' then having listened for a moment 'oh, it's all right, it's the pupil talking — your brother won't want to listen to him anyway'... He next persuaded me to walk round to Blackwell's with him, and here he was the centre of attraction to a crowd of undergraduates. Walking up to the counter he said 'I want a second hand so and so's Shakespeare, have you got one?' The assistant: 'Not a *second hand* one sir, I'm afraid.' Dyson (impatiently) 'Well, take a copy and rub it on the floor, and sell it to me as shop soiled' (WHL 124-25).

And, according to the diary, Dyson goes on generating similar anecdotes at a tremendous pace before Warnie decides he'd better say he has to go and catch a bus. This incident (especially the bit about the shop soiled Shakespeare, a suggestion which the assistant declined) became a favorite anecdote of Warnie's, which he continued to tell years later (Tolkien, Letter no. 42, *Letters* 47).

On his first meeting with Warnie, Dyson invited him and his brother to dinner in Reading a month hence. Unaffected by the Lewis brothers' preference for exclusively male company, Dyson included in the dinner party not only his wife Margaret but a woman from the Reading English department (whom Dyson greeted "boisteriously... and proceeded to upset a glass of sherry over her frock without in the least impairing his own self confidence") (WHL 99).

Further social evenings followed, some of them in the

more academic and all-male confines that the Lewises preferred. In general when reading of the Inklings-to-be in the late 1920s and early 1930s, I am struck by the amount of activity in their social lives, the intensity and exuberance and fun of it all. In this they contrast with the often equally enjoyable but more subdued middle-aged Inklings of the post-World War II period. In the later period the pleasure was like a fine whiskey, not necessarily rare but to be savored, while in the earlier period it flowed like wine without a hint of melancholy. In the 1930s Dyson was already the main engine of riotousness, but it fit in with the general atmosphere. After the war he didn't change but the company did, and his behavior began to clash with the other Inklings' perception of the group. Certainly in the 1930s good fellowship was the rule. No hint of any later friction between Dyson and Tolkien can be found in the private dinners the two of them jointly hosted in Exeter College, their mutual alma mater, for their friends. Two of these, in 1933 and 1934, are recorded in Warnie's diary (WHL 105-07; WHL, diary 19 July 1934, Wade Collection). The Lewis brothers were there, of course; Nevill Coghill was also at both dinners; and other dons attended. C.L. Wrenn, who assisted both Tolkien and Lewis in Anglo-Saxon lecturing and tutoring, attended at least the second dinner, and was later invited to the Inklings. Dyson's exuberance was generally catching, particularly on Tolkien. One of Tolkien's best quips was at Dyson's expense: when Lewis read to the Inklings from *The Great Divorce*, a story about Hell, which he was then titling *Who Goes Home?*, Tolkien "suggested [it] should have been called rather *Hugo's Home*" (Tolkien, Letter no. 72, *Letters* 83). Jokes aside, the esteem in which Tolkien held Dyson in the early years is shown by Dyson being, along with C.S. Lewis, one of the guests at the "modest supper party" that the Tolkiens held to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary in 1941 (John and Priscilla Tolkien 71).

When discussing the Inklings' social lives, one must always remember that it all went on within an academic context, and that the conversation had a heavily literary and scholarly bent. This could have its effect in publications as well as in more perishable settings like dinners and meetings, and this can be traced in their acknowledgments pages. Dyson found Lewis's proofreading and other help with *Augustans and Romantics* to be almost incalculable (9); and Lewis in turn talked over with Dyson much of what went into his books, particularly *The Allegory of Love*, on which he was working when they met. Lewis was grateful to Dyson's "untiring intellect... and the selfless use he makes of it" (*Allegory* viii).

C.S. Lewis met Charles Williams, then working at the Oxford University Press offices in London, in 1936, and gradually brought Williams into his Oxford circle. Since Williams was tied to an office in a way the dons were not, it was typical for Lewis to take the train to London for the day and meet Williams for lunch at his favorite restaurant, Shirreff's, near the OUP offices. On Monday, July 4, 1938, Lewis brought his brother and Hugo Dyson with

him for a gathering which remained in Lewis's memory as one of his most joyous experiences of Friendship. He mentions it in his memoir of Williams, in such a way as to suggest it could not be captured on paper, describing it only as "a certain immortal lunch... [and] the almost Platonic discussion which followed for about two hours in St. Paul's churchyard" (Preface viii; date from Hadfield 164-65).

Both Lewis brothers enjoyed taking brisk country hikes of several days. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s C.S. Lewis met with a group of walking companions, mostly friends from his undergraduate days (including Owen Barfield), for an annual spring outing. He tried to introduce some of his Oxford friends to this activity without much success. Tolkien went on one or two, but his preference was for rambling with attention focused on the passing botany. In April 1940, the Lewis party's walk in Somerset happened to coincide with a visit Dyson was making to his in-laws at Minehead in that county, so he met with them for dinner one evening, and then came along for a day's walk but couldn't keep up. Lewis's condescending conclusion was that Dyson "naturally had no idea of walking." At dinner Lewis was greatly amused by seeing Dyson for once out-talked. The agent was another of the party, W.O. Field, a prep-school teacher with passions for anthroposophy and for the eccentric economic theories of Major C.H. Douglas. "Somewhat to my surprise," Lewis wrote,

Field and Dyson took to one another amazingly, and that despite the fact that Field unloaded the whole Douglas scheme on him. It was a novelty to hear Dyson reduced to comparative silence. Whenever he attempted to speak, Field, though having held the floor ever since we finished dinner, interrupted him with some such expression as 'If I might just put *one* word in.' All the same he seemed to like it (CSL to WHL, 11 April 1940, Wade Collection).

A more extensive trip came in 1939, but it did not work out quite the way it was planned. To quote Humphrey Carpenter in *The Inklings*,

Warnie Lewis had acquired a small two-berth cabin cruiser... which he called Bosphorus. In August 1939 he arranged to take Jack and Hugo Dyson on a short holiday up the [Thames] river. But war now seemed likely, and when the time came Warnie... was obliged to report for army duty. Jack and Dyson had no wish to cancel their trip, but neither of them felt able to manage the practical side of a motor boat; so they enlisted the Lewis family doctor, R.E. Havard, as navigator, he being a man... who would cheerfully allow Lewis to engage him in a philosophical conversation when they were supposed to be discussing medical symptoms.

As they headed upstream, "Dyson tried to pin Lewis down to a date for the onset of the Renaissance [and] did his best but was talked down in the end" by Lewis, who considered the whole concept a retroactive invention by historians (67-68). Havard found that "The argument was less dry and academic than you might suppose, lit by flashes of wit and imaginative reconstruction of events." Much of this discussion took place in numerous riverside pubs. On the way back downstream the engine broke down, and Lewis and Dyson took turns towing the boat by

rope from the riverbank, with Havard at the wheel as they quickly discovered he was the only one who could keep it from grounding while being towed. The trip was enjoyable, until on their return to Oxford they learned of the outbreak of war with Germany (Havard, "Philia" 218-20).

So far we've been gathering a list of names of Dyson's "Oxford" friends and acquaintances: Coghill, Tolkien, Lewis (minor and major), Wrenn, Williams, Barfield, Havard. The retrospective significance of these names is obvious: they are all part of the Inklings, and together with Dyson they make up a good half of the group. The process by which these friends and acquaintances formed this group is very obscure. It is well-known that the term "Inklings" was originally applied to an undergraduate writers' group in the early 1930s, of which Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were the senior members, and (according to Tolkien) after "the usual year or two of undergraduate societies, the name became transferred" (*Treason* 85) "to the undetermined and unelected circle of friends who gathered about C.S.L., and met in his rooms in Magdalen" (Letter no. 298, *Letters* 387-88). According to George Sayer in his biography of Lewis, an already established trio of the Lewis brothers and Tolkien became a group in 1934 by the addition of Dyson and Havard, but he provides no evidence for such an orderly process or for the establishment of a group either out of these particular persons or at this date (150-51). Havard himself recalled having been invited to the Inklings in early 1935 and finding Dyson there. He provides an interesting analysis by reporting that Tolkien "spoke relatively little. It was Lewis and Dyson who were in perpetual competition, if not conflict, in the mutual struggle to hold the floor" (Havard, "J.R.R. Tolkien" 61; see also "Philia" 215-16). Havard's recollections, working entirely from memory, are in other respects chronologically shaky, so his dates should not be accepted without question. Unfortunately documentary evidence for this period is quite sparse, and the Inklings only emerge into the full light in late 1939 when W.H. Lewis left them on being recalled to the Army, and his brother wrote him letters. The group was already fully active at this point. Williams became a regular attendee when his offices were moved to Oxford at the outbreak of war; the best list of the other regular members at this time is in Green and Hooper's biography of Lewis: the Lewis brothers, Tolkien, Coghill, Dyson, Barfield, Havard, and Adam Fox (173). Barfield lived and worked in London and was able to attend so rarely that he did not even really consider himself an Inkling (McGovern 2). If Barfield is excluded then as a special case, what makes Dyson stand out in this list is that he is the only one who did not live in Oxford: and even from the most complete list of Inklings there is only one other who attended while not living in Oxford.⁷ An even more striking indication that Dyson was of Oxford even though he wasn't in Oxford was his membership in another Lewis-Tolkien club, the Cave, an occasional dining club organized specifically for congenial dons in the Oxford English school. In March of 1940, for

instance, Dyson paid a visit to Oxford to attend a Cave dinner and stayed over for dinner the following night with Lewis and the Havards (CSL to WHL, 17 March 1940, Wade Collection). The geography is important in two respects: first, Dyson's status as the most active and long-term member of the extremely select group of out of town Inklings demonstrates his close ties to the central members - the way in which friendship must have been strong to overcome distance; but at the same time, if he had not been fortunate enough to be so close to Oxford that quick overnight trips were feasible, it would probably not have been possible for him to be an Inklings at all.

Dyson could not of course attend constantly — it is clear that nobody except Lewis himself turned up all the time — but of the 27 Inklings meetings during the war years of which we have record (published or unpublished), Dyson is known to have attended 10, and was definitely not at 8. For the remaining 13 he is neither mentioned nor is there a complete list of attendees with him not on it. So if this sampling — largely from letters of C.S. Lewis to W.H. Lewis, of Tolkien to his son Christopher, and of Williams to his wife — is representative, though it probably is not, Dyson was present about half the time. Whatever his attendance rate, though, Dyson was definitely a full and active member of the group. When Lewis set out a list of the Inklings in 1941 in a letter to his former pupil Dom Bede Griffiths (explaining his dedication of *The Problem of Pain* to them), he identified them as his brother, Tolkien, Williams, Havard, and Dyson (21 Dec. 1941, *Letters* 363).

What is most striking about finding Dyson's name in these lists is that he was one of the few members of this supposedly writers' group who was not a creative writer. C.S. Lewis, Tolkien, Williams, Barfield, Coghill, and Fox were all poets, and the first four wrote fiction as well. W.H. Lewis, Havard, and Dyson were not (Dyson's early Pope pastiche seems never to have been followed up on), though later when W.H. Lewis began writing popular nonfiction he read from it to the Inklings, and Havard read one paper which became the appendix to C.S. Lewis's *The Problem of Pain*. Though there were other, lesser Inklings who were not writers, or who wrote only scholarly treatises, none match Dyson and Havard for both the silence of their pens and their continuing importance to the group. The "big three" and Barfield can be studied through their published works; W.H. Lewis's diaries are the most important documentary source for the group's history and leave a vivid impression of his personality; but Dyson and Havard are in a sense the hidden Inklings: vitally important to the group, but hard for a latter day viewer to capture in mind. There are two ways in which we can catch a glimpse of what they meant to the collective Inklings personality: through anecdotes reported in others' diaries and letters, and through the unique lens of Tolkien's *The Notion Club Papers*.

One of Dyson's unique and characteristic contributions

to the Inklings was Robert Havard's nickname, Humphrey. This came about because Dyson momentarily forgot Havard's name and called him by the similar-sounding "Humphrey" instead. It stuck, and despite other occasional contenders it became Havard's permanent nickname in the group. (The best account is the interview of Havard by Lyle Dorsett in the Wade Collection.)

The first published reference to the Inklings by name is in a letter from Jack to Warnie Lewis describing a meeting of November 9, 1939. Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams read works. Lewis wrote, "I have never in my life seen Dyson so exuberant — 'a roaring cataract of nonsense'" (11 Nov 1939, *Letters* 328). Some of Dyson's comments from around this time are preserved, particularly about Williams: he is quoted as describing Williams's over-rich writing as "clotted glory from Charles" (CSL to Griffiths, 21 Dec. 1941, *Letters* 363). Lewis reports that Dyson, "on being told of Williams' Milton lectures on 'the sage and serious doctrine of virginity', replied 'The fellow's becoming a common chastitute'" (CSL to WHL, 3 March 1940, *Letters* 341). Williams and Dyson became friends, and Williams was grateful for the part Dyson, as well as Lewis and Tolkien, played in getting him accepted by the academic community. Dyson's most helpful contribution was to take Williams' son Michael (then 17) under his wing, using his connections at Blackwell's to help Michael get a job at the bookstore (Williams to Michal Williams, 17 March 1940, Wade Collection). Dyson also used Williams' writings in his teaching, as did Lewis (Williams to Michal Williams, 18 April 1945, Wade Collection).

But despite his continued exuberance and wit, Dyson found the home front in World War II to be a trying experience. By early 1940, Tolkien found him "looking changed and ill" (CSL to WHL, 3 March 1940, *Letters* 341), and Lewis thought that Dyson was one of his friends who was holding up least well under the strain (CSL to WHL, 20 July 1940, Wade Collection). Dyson himself said that reading the war headlines made him "feel as if [he'd] had a delightful dream during the last war and woken up to find it still going on" (qtd. in CSL to WHL, 18 Sept. 1939, *Letters* 326). By 1944 Tolkien could indulgently describe Dyson at an Inklings meeting as "rather tired-looking, but reasonably noisy" (Letter no. 72, *Letters* 83). This description prefigures a number of accounts of Dyson at post-war Inklings.

The year of 1945 was one of tremendous change for the Inklings. Charles Williams died in May. The war ended. And Dyson finally achieved his goal of a fellowship at Oxford, something that happened less through the influence of the Inklings (whose power in Oxford elections was on the wane) than through that of one of his other acquaintances in the English faculty, David Nichol Smith, Merton Professor of English Literature, hardly a friend of the Inklings. Dyson was elected English tutor and fellow at Merton College, and was officially admitted at the start of the Michaelmas term in October. Tolkien, who had traded in his Anglo-Saxon professorship for one in English Lan-

guage and Literature attached to Merton, was installed on the same day. He was a bit irritated to find that Dyson had laid claim to the rooms he himself had hoped for, with a huge bay window looking over the meadows in back of the college (Tolkien, Letter no. 103, *Letters* 116; Kavanagh 124).⁸ Nevertheless the two friends took advantage of being together in the same college to walk around the grounds together the day after their election, and then went off to the Inklings meeting at Magdalen (Tolkien, Letter no. 103, *Letters* 116). The next week they did so again: Lewis was away, so the party consisted of the two of them, Warnie Lewis, and Havard, which proves that however much C.S. Lewis acted as the unifying force for the Inklings, his presence was not absolutely necessary for social bonding between its members.

How often Tolkien and Dyson continued to walk over to Magdalen together is unknown, and in any case it was sometimes unnecessary, as meetings were occasionally held in Tolkien's rooms at Merton in this period. Neither of them actually lived in the college, the Dysons having taken a home in Holywell Street, closer to Magdalen than to Merton. But in practice Dyson seems not to have attended meetings any more often once he was in Oxford than he had when he had to come from Reading. Of the 32 post-war Inklings meetings of which we have record, Dyson was known to have attended 8 and was definitely not at 18, leaving 6 for which he was neither mentioned nor is there a complete list of attendees with him not on it. If our sample is representative, then, he was only present about a third of the time. Warnie Lewis found out why one day in 1946 when he was Dyson's guest for dinner at Merton prior to a meeting. (Tolkien was at the meeting, but apparently not at the dinner in Merton hall.) Dyson's exuberance had grown to the point of a distraction. "I saw tonight why Hugo rarely gets to an Inkling," Warnie wrote.

He was in high spirits when I met him, and his spirits rose steadily for the rest of the evening.... Every one he meets after dinner he engages in earnest conversation, and tonight, even with steady pressure from me, it took him forty minutes to get from Hall to the gate (WHL 193).

At least on occasion Dyson actively ignored the Inklings: Warnie records one astonishing occasion when he and Jack went to Tolkien's rooms for a meeting, hearing as they arrived at Merton "Hugo's voice... booming through the fog in the Quad, inviting a party of undergraduates up to his rooms" (WHL 218). But Dyson did not come over to the meeting. Yet he was still in evidence often enough that John Wain, Lewis' pupil who attended some postwar meetings, considered him one of the most important members (Noad 10). George Sayer, another former Lewis pupil who attended some meetings at this time, reported that Dyson was neither rarely nor usually present, but somewhere in between (interview, Wade Collection).

The Inklings thought Dyson had become fidgety, and Tolkien waspishly attributed it to the greater pressure of work at prestigious Oxford than would have been the case

at a place like Reading where a don could presumably live by whim and do practically no work at all (WHL 195). This fidgetyness grew to the point where it became irritating to some of the other Inklings, though they still often found him enjoyable. Warnie's diary records some of these mixed feelings. Of one meeting at which Dyson was present, Warnie wrote, "Not the sort of evening I much enjoy, mere noise and buffoonery: though Hugo as improvisatore was very funny at times" (WHL 193). On the occasion mentioned above when Dyson made himself audibly present though not attending, Warnie commented, "He really can be very irritating at times" (WHL 218). Possibly Dyson's most irritating behavior occurred at one of the Inklings dinners held in Lewis's Magdalen rooms, featuring a ham sent him by an American admirer (such luxuries being then hard to get in England). Warnie recorded the story because he thought it too good to be forgotten. "H[ugo] bellows uninterruptedly for about three minutes, and as he shows no sign of stopping, two guests at the bottom of the table begin a conversation: which being observed by Hugo, he raises his hand and shouts reproachfully - 'Friends, friends, I feel it would be better if we keep the conversation *general*'" (WHL 230). It is perhaps not surprising that Dyson was not always invited to the ham suppers (Tolkien, Letter no. 132, *Letters* 161). Yet Warnie, and the other Inklings, could still enjoy Dyson's company in other settings, as we shall see later.

If Hugo Dyson is remembered for one thing by Inklings readers, it's as the guy who didn't like *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien wrote the book in spurts, and at various times a chapter would be a regular staple of Inklings meetings, along with works by others. Having returned to *The Lord of the Rings* after being side-tracked on *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien apparently resumed reading the book to the Inklings in the fall of 1946. Though Dyson had shown no recorded objection to readings in earlier years, he did clearly object, at least by now, and at least to this, going so far as to exercise a veto on the book. Once Dyson arrived just as Tolkien was starting, so he had to stop (WHL 200). Dyson was clearly not the only Inkling who didn't care for *The Lord of the Rings* — indeed, John Wain particularly liked him because he made Tolkien stop reading! (Noad 10; see also the Tolkiens' annoyance at an interruption by Wain and David Cecil, WHL 211) — but there were others who did like the readings, particularly both Lewis brothers. A.N. Wilson paints a gruesome picture of the net result:

Aware that some of his audience were unappreciative, J.R.R. Tolkien mumbled and read badly. [His son] Christopher... took over the task. But he could not be sure that his readings would not be interrupted by Dyson, lying on the sofa with his club foot in the air and a glass of whisky in his hand, snorting, grunting and exhaling — 'Oh f***, not another elf!' In such an atmosphere, it was not surprising that the Tolkien readings were discontinued (216-17).

But if this, or Humphrey Carpenter's flat statement that Tolkien ceased reading *The Lord of the Rings* to the Inklings

after October 1947 (*Inklings* 225), gives the impression that Dyson by brute force humiliated Tolkien into silence, that's not quite the case. What Tolkien read in the last week of that October was the last chapter he had written so far, and no more were in the immediate offing (WHL 212). Warnie's diary does not indicate what this was, but Christopher Tolkien's research into the chronology of writing indicates that Book V had been completed or largely completed by the end of 1946, and that 1947 was largely unproductive. Book VI was not written until 1948 (Tolkien, *Sauron* 12-13). So it appears that in his 1946-47 readings to the *Inklings* Tolkien was living largely off of stored fat, and eventually simply ran out. That was the immediate reason the readings stopped. If, as it appears, Tolkien did not resume reading Book VI when he wrote it in 1948, that may well have been because of Dyson's and others' antipathies, and certainly they put a damper on *Inklings* readings in general. Book V (if that is what Tolkien had been reading), being largely war and turmoil, is perhaps not the part of *The Lord of the Rings* best designed to appeal to an already unsympathetic ear. But Dyson did not singlehandedly silence Tolkien. Indeed, two weeks after his last *Lord of the Rings* reading Tolkien "read a rich melancholy poem on autumn" (admittedly without Dyson present) (WHL 214-15). Although the *Inklings* began more and more to rely entirely on talk (they had always been talkers, but in the past also readers), as late as 1949, the last year of regular Thursday *Inklings* meetings, there were still readings, at least when Dyson was not present. Even Dyson was interested in readings if they were related to a literary discussion: at one meeting a discussion of T.S. Eliot led to Lewis reading one of his poems aloud. He read well, "but broke off in the middle, declaring it to be bilge." Dyson, more sympathetic to modern literature than Lewis, defended the poem (WHL 209).

Perhaps a developing antipathy between Dyson and Tolkien was responsible for a curious incident that occurred in August of 1946, over a year before the *Lord of the Rings* readings stopped. Tolkien had a habit of bringing prospective *Inklings* to meetings without asking first if they'd be welcome, and on this occasion he brought along a research fellow who was assisting Lewis with English tutoring at Magdalen. This man is disguised under the initial "B." in the published edition of W.H. Lewis's diary, but it is not difficult to guess that he was J.A.W. Bennett, a guess that is verified by the manuscript diary (WHL 193-94; WHL diary, 22 Aug. 1946, Wade Collection). Warnie viewed Bennett's advent with dismay, "for two reasons," he said: "firstly that he is a dull dog, and secondly that he is an R.C. I don't mind his being one in the least, but Hugo, who has puzzlingly strong views on the matter, has several times lately threatened that if any more Papists join the *Inklings*, he will resign" (WHL 193). This is a very curious statement. It does not reflect well on Warnie, willing to cave in to a friend's prejudice, but what does it say about Dyson? Dyson was a High-Church Anglican, close to the Catholics in their religious practices, and per-

haps for that reason particularly anxious to distinguish himself from them (Wilson 124). He was such an effervescent and burbling talker that it's impossible to tell whether he meant his threat seriously, but it's certain that Tolkien, a devout Catholic, would have felt the insult to his religion deeply (for an example, see Carpenter, *Inklings* 51-52). Could it be possible that Tolkien was *trying* to make Dyson resign? It would certainly be startling if he were.

Whatever the case, Dyson did not resign from the *Inklings*. Nor was there a total break of relations between him and Tolkien, as becomes clear when we look at the morning pub sessions at which the post-war Dyson was at his best. Dyson rarely attended the Tuesday gatherings at the "Bird and Baby" which appear to have grown out of morning pub sessions the Lewis brothers, Tolkien, and Williams had during the war, and which became larger and more formalized around the war's end. But he was indefatigable at finding other occasions to meet with the *Inklings* in a pub. Dyson and Tolkien arrived together at Magdalen one Saturday morning in October 1947 to escort Warnie Lewis to the "Bird and Baby" for an extracurricular meeting, telling amusing college gossip as they sat in the pub. Warnie found "Hugo in excellent and steadily improving spirits, which reached a climax in the Bird, where I thought he was going to have hysterics" (WHL 210). As they left, Dyson shouted "at the top of his voice, 'I must go to Blackwell's and buy a large Hoare'" (WHL, diary 4 Oct. 1947, Wade Collection). (This ribald joke was probably a reference to the longer edition of Alfred Hoare's *Italian-English dictionary*.) Dyson was more frequently to be found in *Inklings* company at the King's Arms, a pub at Holywell Street and Parks Road, a favorite of Lewis's during the summers in the late 1940s when he was researching his *Oxford History of English Literature* volume in the Bodleian nearby. Dyson was usually present at these gatherings. Tolkien, his son Christopher, and Lewis's former pupil (and future biographer) Roger Lancelyn Green were also frequent visitors. During the lunch hour they "would settle themselves in the yard behind the pub for loud and merry discourse and argument" (Green and Hooper 158; see also Green 6-8). Dyson and both Lewis brothers had dinner at the King's Arms one evening in early 1948 before attending a university production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Lewis and Dyson both evaluated the show in their capacities as Shakespeare scholars, condescending to find "many parts of it good" (WHL, diary 24 Feb. 1948, Wade Collection). Warnie's diary records another Dyson-initiated visit to the King's Arms a couple of months later.

Under the influence of his second pint, Hugo's spirits rose prodigiously: then Tollers [Tolkien] turned up and *volunteered* a round: whereupon Hugo became the Hugo of twenty years ago.

He leaned across the table and addressed the stranger sitting there

with an almost servile deference — 'you will pardon the

liberty, Sir; I trust you don't think I presume: but I shall call you Fred. You look the sort of man who ought to be called Fred.'

And he made tasteless jokes about the man's large size: "You'll excuse me sir, but am I looking at your full face or your profile?" Warnie's conclusion was that it was "an idiotic but amusing morning" (WHL 220). Dyson knew the effect that he had on some people, and cheerfully introduced himself, "I'm Hugo Dyson: I'm a bore" (qtd. in Medcalf 15).

Although not always invited to private gatherings, Dyson remained a regular part of the Lewis social circle so long as Lewis remained at Oxford. He canvassed voters in Lewis's unsuccessful race for Professor of Poetry, reporting to Lewis, in his usual effervescent manner, that "If they offer you sherry, you're done, they won't vote for you: I had lots of sherry." (More soberly, he was able to report on the vehemence of the anti-Lewis feeling in some Oxford circles.) (WHL 239-40) He went to lunches to meet Lewis's writer friends Ruth Pitter (CSL to Pitter, 27 Sept. 1946, Wade Collection) and Joy Davidman (Wilson 240), the latter, of course, eventually becoming Lewis's wife. He was present at the English faculty's farewell dinner when Lewis accepted a professorship at Cambridge in 1954 (WHL 243). He even went on a couple of vacations with the Lewis brothers. The first was in 1946, when Jack participated in a "brains trust" in Liverpool. Warnie and Dyson came along for the ride. On the train ride north Dyson kept wandering off and getting lost, and Liverpool's tourist attractions proved to consist largely of ferry rides, for which Dyson quickly developed a passionate interest, but the trip achieved its purpose, Dyson told dirty jokes, and he and Lewis had fierce, enjoyable arguments "on the distinction between Art and Philosophy" (WHL 186-88). The second occurred the following year, when Dyson joined the Lewises at one of their regular vacations at Malvern, exchanging homes with Maureen Moore and her husband. The Lewises took Dyson on a brisk walk, which to their surprise he survived very well, and then went out to dinner, at which Dyson's spirits rose under alcoholic influence "to a prodigious extent," wrote Warnie.

To my horror in College Road he burst into the 'Red Flag', and when we got back to the Lees I began to be seriously alarmed, for he treated the place as a rather unusually noisy Inklings. What [Maureen's French factotum] Bernard made of the spectacle of a grey haired 'professeur' roaring out 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-dy-ay' with appropriate high kicks I don't suppose we shall ever know (WHL 200).

Lewis's continuing fondness for Dyson can perhaps be best understood in the context of another group they formed together. In June of 1946 the two dons started up a dining club with four undergraduates: Derek Brewer and Tom Stock (both of Magdalen), pupils of Lewis's; Philip Stibbe (of Merton), and Peter Bayley (of University College), both pupils of Dyson's.⁹ The club dined together once a term for at least a year and a half, at what Lewis

called an *eranos*, a communal meal, held either at one of the colleges or at the upper room of the Roebuck in Market Street. All four of the undergraduates had had their education interrupted by service in World War II, so Dyson and Lewis, who had both been in a similar situation in World War I, felt a special empathy towards their fellow veterans coming up or back to the university after a war. Bayley recalled "Dyson's incredible energies of wit, word-play, and conversation" and that both dons "threw themselves wholeheartedly into merriment, and we had glorious evenings of anecdote, literary talk, and laughter, and even, sometimes, sang soldier songs" (79-80).

The club also had a more serious, and even specifically Christian, side. Lewis was in a deeply disturbed mood when the club met on February 4, 1948. Two days earlier at his debating society, the Socratic Club, Lewis had, as he saw it, been defeated in a debate with the philosopher Miss G.E.M. Anscombe over his apologetics book *Miracles*. All of the club members were sympathetic. Brewer recorded in his diary that "Dyson said — very well — that now [Lewis] had lost everything and was come to the foot of the Cross - spoken with great sympathy" (59). Here we see a glimpse of Dyson's religious sensibilities, which also appear in a comment he made on the day of Charles Williams' funeral a few years earlier. "It is not blasphemous," he said, "to believe that what was true of Our Lord is, in its less degree, true of all who are in Him. They go away in order to be with us in a new way, even closer than before." Lewis quoted this in the letter of sympathy he wrote to Williams's widow (Carpenter, *Inklings* 204). Dyson's pupil Stephen Medcalf described his Christianity as "luminous" and noted that "even his party conversation was liable to be started by remarks like 'Would you say that Hell is God's unconscious?'" When Dyson was ill, Medcalf visited him in the hospital, and was struck by Dyson's comparison of the swimming bath in which Communion services were celebrated there to the pool of Siloam (Medcalf, letter 16).

This visionary and mystic side of Dyson, which sometimes emerged in his lectures and conversation (Medcalf 16), can be glimpsed in the distorting mirror of Tolkien's incomplete novel of the mid-1940s, *The Notion Club Papers*. Tolkien identified the character of Arundel Lowdham with Dyson, and Lowdham's persistent inappropriate, but amusing, interjections in Part I of the story are certainly typical of what Dyson could be like at Inklings meetings, though their content is probably more typical of Tolkien's own sense of humor (as was inevitable from the fact that this is Tolkien's story). Christopher Tolkien speculates that there is something of Dyson also in the character of Philip Frankley, especially in Frankley's dislike of Nordic and Germanic culture, which he calls his *horror borealis* — a quip Dysonian in content as well as manner (Tolkien, *Sauron* 150-52, 159). Lowdham is a philologist, with academic interests identical to Tolkien's and completely alien to Dyson's, which demonstrates the extent to which all of the characters are really aspects of Tolkien's own personal-

ity and only dimly reflect real people. The Notion Club is not the Inklings, but an idealized Inklings from Tolkien's own point of view and thus with his interests. Yet while the content of the Notion Club's discussions are pure Tolkien, their style and manner probably capture the spirit of the Inklings better than fragmentary glimpses in diaries and letters, or reconstructed conversations based on writings.

In Part II of *The Notion Club Papers*, the story departs from the Inklings altogether and moves into the territory of Charles Williams novels. The most surprising transformation is that of Lowdham from a jokester to a passionate mystical visionary with a supernatural link to the lost Atlantean island of Númenor. The reader may well feel that Tolkien would have had to cement the two sides of Lowdham's character more closely together if he'd ever finished and polished the story, but remembering Dyson's capacity for intellectual excitement and volubility, and after reading Medcalf's reference to Dyson's "luminous Christianity," we can realize that there was something of Lowdham's mystical side in Dyson as well, and that Tolkien knew whereof he wrote when he made the initially unlikely figure of Lowdham his gate for the spiritual.

Though Dyson continued to be an effective lecturer at Oxford, as a tutor he received mixed reviews. Like C.S. Lewis, he tended to inspire in his students a reaction either of devotion or bewilderment. Some, like Bayley and Medcalf, were devoted to him. Others were more bewildered by this "ruddy, white-haired uncle in smart tweed" (Kavanagh 124) who would interrupt them constantly, saying things like "Yes, write an essay. Write an essay. Must have something to stop me talking" (qtd. in Medcalf 13). Medcalf recorded that "In tutorials he would begin by dispensing beer — 'Bring out the buckets, men' — yet he rarely drank it himself, wishing merely to raise his pupils to his own normal level of eloquence." This could be intimidating. One student, P.J. Kavanagh, was disarmed by Dyson's chat-between-equals style and attempted to suggest that perhaps a genuine chat would be more productive educationally than a cliché-filled essay, and was taken aback by Dyson's implication that this was merely a way to slack off. Yet Dyson was tolerant and gentle towards more serious manifestations of Kavanagh's undergraduate reluctance to buckle down (124-25, 127-28). This could take odd forms, though. Kavanagh tended to walk around in a withdrawn manner with his head down as a way of keeping his emotions wrapped up, and one day like this he accidentally walked right into Dyson. He

grasped me and stared while I struggled to bring his face into focus. Sudden, delighted comprehension was shining from it: 'My dear boy! You've just had an *experience!* Tell me! No! Not if you'd rather not... later perhaps?' He was quite excited, could hardly wait. It was clear what sort of experience he thought I'd had. Poor old fellow, what was going on inside me wasn't his worry, God knows, but he mightn't have jumped to so corny a conclusion (126).

Humphrey Carpenter's comment on all this is that "what Kavanagh failed to appreciate was that though Dyson used his wit like a broad-sword, roaring his jokes across the room in sheer exuberance, that wit was itself rapier-keen" (*Inklings* 213).¹⁰

Tolkien, as reported earlier, thought that Dyson was having difficulty dealing with the Oxford workload, though it's not clear how penetrating an analysis that actually is. Dyson, older and more settled in his ways than in the 1920s, did not make the splash at Oxford that he did in the smaller, lower-key environment of Reading. Intending to lecture on *Henry V*, he bombarded the Merton history tutor with questions about the period, explaining "What I want is not facts, but ideas." At this point another don interrupted with the comment, "An admirable summary of your disabilities, Dyson" (qtd. in WHL 230). Within a few years of his arrival he was suffering from arthritis, and carried a silver-topped stick. Medcalf wrote, "He could sometimes seem as he perched on his chair almost birdlike. But he still had the thrust and apparent mass of burliness" (15).

For whatever reason, after his translation to Oxford, Dyson wrote no more directly for publication, devoting all his academic energies to tutoring and improvisational lectures. He was hardly the only Oxford don to publish virtually nothing, but his case was particularly outstanding, and was the cause of a mordant quip from C.S. Lewis. Dyson's handwriting was hard to read, and Lewis was once asked whether it was more incomprehensible than Tolkien's mumbling. He replied, "Well, there's this to be said for Hugo's writing, there's less of it" (qtd. in WHL 235).

Dyson's most distinguished speaking occasion came in 1950 when he was invited by the British Academy to give the annual Shakespeare lecture. For years he had a book on Shakespearean tragedy somewhere in preparation, but he never completed it. Some of it came out in this lecture, "The Emergence of Shakespeare's Tragedy", which fortunately for the later reader was, like all the British Academy lectures, published in its *Proceedings*.¹¹ In this lecture, Dyson talks more about Shakespeare's tragedy in general than about the specific tragedies in particular. He speaks of the increasing significance of tragedy to the modern apocalyptic age, speculating that "what in a former age was known as a sense of sin has been replaced by a sense of tragedy" (73), and, more generally, that the moderns are turning to art as their chief interpreter of life. This has its advantages and dangers, which Dyson sums up with perhaps his most penetrating aphorism: "Man without art is eyeless; man with art and nothing else would see little but the reflections of his own fears and desires" (72). Dyson's awareness of the power of art as a reflector of a larger reality, both positive and negative, parallels Tolkien's insistence in his account of the 1931 Addison's Walk conversation that subcreation "'twas our right (used or misused). That right has not decayed: we make still by the law in which we're made" (Tolkien, "Mythopoeia" 99; see also Carpenter, *Inklings* 63).

Dyson defines staged tragedy as “the most vividly life-like of all the arts. It is the most powerful and the most relentless.... A play imposes itself on us in its own time” (75), yet despite its great emotional pressure we, the audience, are not called upon to act but only to contemplate.¹² Thus, he continues, great tragedies like Shakespeare’s present most clearly the contradictions and paradoxes of human experience. In describing the effects of this Dyson is perhaps giving us his most personal reaction to viewing Shakespeare, and his credo for the usefulness of art, filled with characteristic allusions to Shakespearean lines woven into the context.

We are all guilty creatures when sitting at a play. We have not, like Claudius, to look upon the very image of our own misdoings in order to see the secret deaths we daily give each other re-enacted. Touched by great art... we cease in the temporary release of that larger life to make terms with ourselves to maintain our self-respect, to try to persuade others that we are truly as our vanity would like them to think us. With the disappearance of everyday life has gone the necessity — as it so often seems — of evading bitter self-knowledge. Moved by the shared catastrophe enacted in the public theatre we find out our own trouble, and finding it we begin perhaps to end it. Shakespeare does not so much instruct us what to believe [here Dyson is replying to Dr. Johnson’s criticism of the Bard] as show us in flashes what in fact we do believe.... For all its intimacy and immediacy tragedy distances us so far from the pragmatic world that we can bear to look upon our own secrets — secrets of which both the world and ourselves are ordinarily quite unaware. ... Shakespeare’s sensibility has met and kindled our own (81).

Dyson emphasizes the importance of a tragic character rather than a situation as the center of the plays, apologizing in passing for having such an unfashionable interest in character study. He demonstrates the growth of Shakespeare’s mature tragedy out of the tragic situations in his history plays, particularly *Richard II*, and discusses the growth of “the tragic idea” out of the serious situations in the comedies, neatly and effectively treating *Romeo and Juliet*

not as a tragedy — indeed, none of the characters is of tragic stature in whose experiences we can share intimately - but as a comedy turned by ill chance and excess into tragedy, dying of its own too much (90).

Numerous other points on the tragedies, including the undercurrent of the Christian concept of evil, and the role of falsified character (as in *Lear*’s misunderstanding of his daughters, contrasted with simple disguised identity in the comedies) are also touched on in the lecture. At several points he contrasts Shakespeare with Wordsworth, testifying to his continuing interest in that other, very different poet.

Dyson retired from his fellowship at Merton in 1963, at the age of 67, and he and Margaret moved from Holywell Street to a house in the suburb of Headington. Curiously, his retirement marked a dramatic increase in his recorded academic activity. A former pupil of his, Patrick Garland, had become a producer for the BBC and felt that radio and

television were a natural medium for a scholar so oriented toward the spoken word. “For all his roaring,” said Garland, “there was fine judgement, and accurate perception” (117). More of Dyson’s unwritten book on Shakespeare came out in some unscripted talks he gave on the BBC Third Programme, which have been transcribed, and three of which were published in the BBC magazine, *The Listener*. The first two are on Shakespeare and death. Building a thesis out of specific examples and lengthy quotes — the opposite of the very generalized overview he used in the British Academy lecture — Dyson shows how the depiction of death in the plays changes over Shakespeare’s career.

In certain of the early plays death is almost one of the characters. In his hollow make-up he echoes the dominant tone in each play, filling the poetry with his scent and with his greed. He changes with the maturing of Shakespeare’s imagination. From an intrusive goblin he passes to bare non-existence, a terror in a dream, until towards the end he becomes a song, a vehicle of self-offering, an object of contemplation (“This Mortal” 586).

The third talk contrasts the heroic in *Henry V*, the anti-heroic in *Troilus and Cressida*, and the simply non-heroic in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, finding ironic echoes of each in the others. Dyson also introduced Garland’s 1965 television series *Famous Gossips*, a misleadingly-titled collection of one-actor shows on John Aubrey, the 17th-century anecdotal biographer, Laurence Sterne, author of *Tristram Shandy*, and Harriette Wilson, a kiss-and-tell demi-monde of the Regency. The series received a mediocre review but Dyson’s introductory talks were found “cheerful and knowledgeable” (Laws 301).

Dyson’s success on television led to his most widely-seen, if less personally publicized, screen appearance. Though he had no experience as an actor, he played a small part in John Schlesinger’s 1965 feature film *Darling*. Julie Christie won an Oscar for her leading role as Diana Scott, a model who schemes and bed-hops her way up the social ladder, ending up trapped as a rich but unloved Italian contessa. Her first lover is a radio and TV interviewer played by Dirk Bogarde, and he takes her along on a visit to a famous elderly writer named Walter Southgate, who is played by Hugo Dyson. Southgate charms and impresses the young lady by taking an interest in her and treating her in a courtly manner. Dyson in the role moves slowly due to his arthritis, but speaks clearly and emphatically. He only appears in the one scene, though Southgate makes enough of an impression on Diana that later in the film she attends his funeral. Dyson found that scene a little disconcerting. “That I was sorry about,” he said in an interview.

First of all I was not paid for it — you aren’t paid if you don’t appear — and second, well, there was Julie Christie saying what a lot I’d meant to her, you know, and I knew I hadn’t, and there was just a coffin brought on, and it was said to contain me, and I didn’t believe it did, you know (qtd. in Carpenter, *Inklings* 214).

It’s hard to tell exactly to what extent Dyson was joking

here. Of course he knew that he, Hugo Dyson, didn't mean that much to the person Julie Christie, but that's not the only level on which acting is going on. For despite Diana's declaration of how much Southgate had meant to her, it's quite clear in the funeral scene that, though she hides it, she has never read any of his books.

Dyson enjoyed his brief onscreen career, whether lecturing or acting. "I think I've never been happier," he said. "The mere fact of being on television or in the cinema is so enormously flattering to a vain man; and though a timid man I have my vanity. I did enjoy it; my *word* I enjoyed it" (qtd. in Carpenter, *Inklings* 214).

By this time the Inklings had ceased to meet altogether, the pub sessions, their last surviving manifestation, having ceased at C.S. Lewis's death in 1963. Dyson had seen little of the other Inklings after Lewis's departure to Cambridge in 1954, but he was coaxed out of isolation by Lewis's literary executor, Walter Hooper, who persuaded him to come to some of the Friends of C.S. Lewis parties which he hosted annually in the spring. Dyson was in his usual exuberant spirits on these occasions, despite his increasing age. Warnie Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Havard were frequent attendees. At the 1966 party Dyson happened to see Warnie and immediately began to reminisce about their common alma mater, Sandhurst (WHL, diary 22 July 1966, Wade Collection). Warnie last saw him and Margaret at the party in May of 1971, noting that though Dyson was now wearing a specially-fitted boot on his club foot, it did not seem to impair his spirits (WHL, diary 19 May 1971, Wade Collection). Those spirits were certainly in evidence when Roger Lancelyn Green, Dyson's former companion at the King's Arms, interviewed him for Radio Oxford the same month. Green was at the party as well.

Dyson died in June 1975 at the age of 79, and was buried in St Cross Church cemetery in Oxford, near James Blish (the science fiction writer who died the same year) and Kenneth Grahame, and also not far away from Charles Williams, who had been laid there 30 years earlier virtually to the month. A bush planted on the grave has now grown up to nearly obscure the tombstone, but it can easily be located with the help of a sign guiding visitors to the notable residents of the cemetery. Dyson is remembered with fondness (mostly) by his surviving pupils, and while his place among the Inklings has been perceived somewhat two-dimensionally by Inklings scholars, I hope this centenary biography has served to present a fuller and more lifelike picture of H.V.D. Dyson. ❧

Acknowledgements

Previously unpublished material by W.H. Lewis is © 1996 the Marion E. Wade Center and printed by permission of the Wade Center. Previously unpublished material by C.S. Lewis © 1996 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. and printed by permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd.

Notes

1. Lewis apparently began to do so when he started *Dymer* in 1922 (Carpenter, *Inklings* 16).
2. It appears possible that Dyson and Tolkien may already have known each other by this time. Carpenter says they first met in 1919 (Tolkien 146).

3. Birmingham has a habit of showing up as a negative attractor in the Inklings' story. Lewis refused to apply for the Birmingham job either, and it came up again ten years later, at which time Charles Williams briefly considered applying for it, and also decided against doing so (letter to Michal Williams, 22 June 1944, Wade Collection). Birmingham was Tolkien's home town, and it's been suggested that the city contributed something to the more repellent landscapes in his work, even as its countryside certainly contributed to the more pastoral ones.
4. This letter is noted in the collection as "Spring 1930," but this is almost certainly wrong, as the letter to Greeves of 29 July 1930 indicates that this was the first Lewis had really got to know Dyson.
5. Lewis's friends talked about his mysterious relationship with Mrs. Moore behind his back. Dyson once summed it up with a wittily characteristic appropriation of a Shakespeare quotation, from *Othello*: "O cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor(e)," a quip which deeply annoyed Lewis when he heard about it (WHL 193; Wilson 233).
6. "The Coincidence of Myth and Fact" by Stephen Medcalf in *Ways of Reading the Bible*, ed. Michael Wadsworth (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1991), 55-78, is a lengthy theological analysis of the points Dyson, Tolkien, and Lewis discussed in their meeting.
7. That was John Wain, Lewis's pupil who continued to attend meetings for a while after leaving Oxford in 1947 for a post in the same University of Reading English Department that Dyson had left two years earlier.
8. Apparently Tolkien was able to get meadow-view rooms of his own (cf Havard, "Philia" 217).
9. University College then having no fellow in English, Dyson was tutoring the few undergraduates there who were reading the subject (Bayley 78-79; Green and Hooper 289-90).
10. The poet and novelist A. Alvarez and the Rhodes scholar Jonathan Kozol, noted for his critiques of the American school system, are two noted writers who found themselves dissatisfied with Oxford educations which included stints as pupils of Dyson's.
11. It reads smoothly enough that one presumes it was written in advance, but given the generality of its presentation and Dyson's speaking gifts, it is possible that the printed version may be a transcription, or an edited transcript, of an improvised talk.
12. A character in John Wain's novel *Comedies* makes the same point (345).

Works Cited

- Atkinson, C.T. *The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, 1914-1919*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1924.
- Rev. of *Augustans and Romantics*, by H.V.D. Dyson and John Butt. *Times Literary Supplement* 25 Jan. 1941: 46.
- Bayley, Peter. "From Master to Colleague." *Como* 77-86.
- Brewer, Derek. "The Tutor: A Portrait." *Como* 41-67.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.
- . *Tolkien: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Chavasse, Claude. "An Irish Setting." *To Nevill Coghill from Friends*. Ed. John Lawlor and W.H. Auden. London: Faber, 1968. 13-21.
- Como, James T., ed. *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*. New York: Macmillan, 1979.
- Darling. Dir. John Schlesinger. Embassy Pictures, 1965.
- Dunbar of Hempriggs, Lady. Interview, Marion E. Wade Collection, Wheaton College.
- Dyson, H.V.D., and John Butt. *Augustans and Romantics, 1689-1830*. Introductions to English Literature 3. London: Cresset Press, 1940.
- Dyson, H.V.D. "The Emergence of Shakespeare's Tragedy." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 36 (1952): 69-93.
- . "The Heroic and Unheroic in Shakespeare." *The Listener* 23 Apr. 1964: 671, 673, 675.
- . "'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and the Wordsworthian Unities." *Essays on the Eighteenth Century, Presented to David Nichol Smith in Honour of His Seventieth Birthday*. London: Oxford University Press, 1945. 238-51.
- Dyson, H.V.D., ed. *Poetry & Prose*. By Alexander Pope. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.
- Dyson, H.V.D. "This Mortal Coil." *The Listener* 9 Apr. 1964: 586-88; 16 Apr. 1964: 637, 639.
- Garland, Patrick. "David as Lecturer and Critic." *David Cecil: A Portrait*

- by his Friends. Ed. Hannah Cranborne. Stanbridge, Dorset: Dovecote Press, 1990. 116-23.
- Great Britain. War Office. *The Army List*, 1915-19.
- . *War Office Weekly Casualty List*, 13 Nov. 1917.
- Green, Roger Lancelyn, and Walter Hooper. *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974.
- Green, Roger Lancelyn. "Recollections." *Amon Hen* 44 (May 1980): 6-8.
- Grotta, Daniel. *The Biography of J.R.R. Tolkien*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978.
- Hadfield, Alice Mary. *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Havard, R.E. "J.R.R. Tolkien." *Mythlore* 64 (Winter 1990): 61.
- . Interview by Lyle W. Dorsett, July 26, 1984. Marion E. Wade Collection, Wheaton College.
- . "Philia: Jack at Ease." *Como* 215-28.
- Holt, J.C. *The University of Reading: The First Fifty Years*. Reading: Reading University Press, 1977.
- Kavanagh, P.J. *The Perfect Stranger*. 1966. St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1988.
- Laws, Frederick. "Drama and Light Entertainment." *The Listener* 9 Sept. 1965: 301.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Allegory of Love*. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- . *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1960.
- . *The Letters of C.S. Lewis*. Ed. W.H. Lewis. Rev. and enl. ed. Ed. Walter Hooper. London: Fount, 1988.
- . Letters to Owen Barfield, W.H. Lewis, and Ruth Pitter. Marion E. Wade Collection, Wheaton College.
- . Preface. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.
- . *Surprised by Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955.
- . *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 1914-1963*. Ed. Walter Hooper. London: Collins, 1979.
- Lewis, W.H. *Brothers and Friends*. Ed. Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982.
- . Diaries. Marion E. Wade Collection, Wheaton College.
- McGovern, Gene. "An Evening with Owen Barfield." *CSL* [New York C.S. Lewis Society] 31 (May 1972): 1-3.
- Medcalf, Stephen. "Hugo Dyson." *Postmaster* [Merton College, Oxford] (Jan. 1981): 13-17.
- . Letter. *Times* [London] 24 June 1975: 16.
- Morley, Edith J. "The Eighteenth Century." *The Year's Work in English Studies* 21 (1940): 187-205.
- "Mr H.V.D. Dyson." *Times* [London] 11 June 1975: 17.
- Noad, Charles E. "An Inkling Remembers." *Amon Hen* 36 (Dec. 1978): 10.
- Oxford University. *Oxford University Calendar*, 1919-25.
- Sayer, George. Interview by Lyle W. Dorsett, Oct. 10-12, 1990. Marion E. Wade Collection, Wheaton College.
- . *Jack: C.S. Lewis and His Times*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Book of Lost Tales*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Vol. 2. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984. 2 vols. 1983-84.
- . *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- . "Mythopoeia." *Tree and Leaf*. By Tolkien. 2nd ed. London: Unwin, 1988. 97-101.
- . *Sauron Defeated*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. The History of Middle-earth 9. The History of *The Lord of the Rings* 4. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.
- . *The Treason of Isengard*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. The History of Middle-earth 7. The History of *The Lord of the Rings* 2. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
- . "Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford." *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. By Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984. 224-40.
- Tolkien, John and Priscilla. *The Tolkien Family Album*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.
- Tripathi, P.D. "Literary 'Augustanism' in the Eighteenth Century: Questions and Hypotheses." *Literature and History* 8 (1992): 170-81.

Wain, John. *Comedies*. London: Hutchinson, 1990.

Williams, Charles. Letters to Michal Williams. Marion E. Wade Collection, Wheaton College.

Wilson, A.N. *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*. New York: Norton, 1990.



MYTHLORE NEEDS VOLUNTEER PROOFREADERS WITH FAXES

As technology continues to make advances that permits previously unimaginable things real, the production of *Mythlore* continues to make production improvements. The very first Society bulletins in 1967 were dittoed. By the time *Mythlore* was born, we had progressed to mimeograph (with full page art printed offset and collated in). It was a happy day when we were able to offset print an entire issue (*Mythlore* 5). It was still a long time before we could see computer generated typesetting, such as you see here. Then software such a Ventura and CorelDraw made it possible to lay everything in an issue except artwork. In the last year, a scanner was added to enable both processed artwork (no more stripping in) and to scan text with optical recognition software. There is one thing that technology has helped with, but not really solved: the need for careful proofreading. No spell checker can tell you that you should have used "their" instead of "there." (Yes there are grammatical checkers, but they say many repetitive things are very tedious with many pages of long text.

Nothing can do the job of proofreading better than a discriminating human mind and eye. *Mythlore's* problem has always been a tight production schedule that makes quick turn around on proofreading essential. If *Mythlore* had several people with faxes who were willing to be sent pages by fax to proofread and then fax them back with the corrections marked, it would solve a real problem and fulfill a real need. Those with proofreading experience and are interested in helping *Mythlore*, please fax the Editor at 818-458-8922.



NOTE ON "THE ELF-WARRIOR IS LOOSE!" (on the facing page) by Denis Gordeyev

... an orc came clattering down. Leaping out of a dark opening at the right, it ran towards him. It was no more than six paces from him when, lifting its head, it saw him; and Sam could hear its gasping breath and see the glare in its bloodshot eyes. It stopped short aghast. For what it saw was not a small frightened hobbit trying to hold a steady sword; it saw a great silent shape, cloaked in a grey shadow, looming against the wavering light behind; in one hand it held a sword, the very light of which was a bitter pain, the other was clutched at its breast, but held concealed some nameless menace of power and doom.

For a moment the orc crouched, and then with a hideous yelp of fear it turned and fled back as it had come. Never was any dog more heartened when its enemy turned tail that Sam at this unexpected flight. With a shout he gave chase.

"Yes, The Elf-warrior is loose!" he cried. "I'm coming. Just you show me the way up, or I'll skin you!"

— from "The Tower of Cirith Ungol,"
from *The Return of the King* by J.R.R. Tolkien.