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**CLYDE KENNETH HYDER: SCHOLAR,  
TEACHER, FRIEND**

Arthur A. Adrian

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“He’s brilliant!” exclaimed a fellow graduate student when I inquired about the young professor scheduled to teach the Chaucer course for which I had just registered. “I understand that when he took his Ph.D. orals at Harvard, his committee dismissed him after a half hour because he knew everything.” Such, I was to learn, was the reputation of Clyde Kenneth Hyder, who had joined the English Department at The University of Kansas in 1930. As I was to find out later, it was actually a grueling three-hour examination in which he had distinguished himself, with emphasis on linguistics as well as literature. At that time Harvard still had a rigorous program that included Old and Middle English, Old French, and Gothic. According to a member of Hyder’s committee, it was the first time that a candidate had answered every important question to the examiner’s satisfaction.

A recent college graduate with one year of high-school teaching behind me, I was earning my M.A. in summer sessions. It was fortunate that my first term introduced me to a professor who, as teacher and scholar, would serve as a model in my search for a place in academe. The Chaucer course delighted me. Hyder’s conduct of class discussions was leavened by humor. His command of literary background was impressive. From his vast store he drew fascinating illustrations, sometimes obscure or esoteric to us students. There was emphasis, to be sure, on such mechanical matters as language and pronunciation, but never to the exclusion of Chaucer’s literary craft. From his continuing research Hyder repeatedly introduced us to newly uncovered knowledge. Often he enlivened his critical comments with amusing tidbits certain to titillate those who appreciated subtle humor. In short, “gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.”

After my first rewarding summer I enrolled for another course with Hyder the following year, nineteenth-century English poetry. This time his scholarship and erudition impressed me so much that I decided to make Victorian literature my area of specialization. I have never regretted that decision, for I have had Hyder’s continued encouragement and advice. My high regard for him has been reinforced by testimony from other students. One in particular praises him as a “genuinely learned man” who always “maintained his integrity and intellectual honesty. Unlike some professors,” continues this student, “even brilliant ones, he never allowed his judgment to be warped by current

Arthur A. Adrian

11

critical theories and passing intellectual fashions. He refused to compromise his brilliance by a lazy pretense to knowledge" outside his ken. Above all, he was patient and understanding, never begrudging the time when students stopped after class to discuss points raised in his lectures.

Once I had completed the requirements for an M.A. and was offered a three-year instructorship in English at The University of Kansas, I had an opportunity to observe Hyder as a colleague. Though he was not one to monopolize departmental meetings, he occasionally injected just the right remark when discussion bogged down. I respected his judgment and always felt free to turn to him for suggestions when I presented new materials to my introductory classes in literature.

In later years, as my articles and books materialized, I often turned to Hyder for help. By this time I had consulted enough bibliographies to be impressed by the frequency with which his name appeared in the Victorian sections. For, with the publication of *Swinburne's Literary Career and Fame* in 1933 (reprinted, 1963), to be followed in 1937 by *The Best of Swinburne* (with Lewis Chase), he had early earned a reputation as a leading authority on Swinburne. The first book filled a pressing need at the time, for it examines the critical traditions which had beclouded Swinburne's fame and summarizes his own reaction to that criticism. In 1962 Hyder expanded the subject of the poet's reaction to personal criticism in *Swinburne Replies*, where he restored some of the passages actually written by Swinburne and identified the allusions. Recognition of his reputation as a leading authority on Swinburne was indicated by his being asked to write the chapter on the poet for *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research*, edited by F. E. Faverty (Cambridge, 1956; revised and enlarged, 1968); and by the comments in Kirk H. Beetz's "Introduction" to *Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Bibliography of Secondary Works, 1861-1980* (1982).

While I was still at The University of Kansas, one of Hyder's articles in *PMLA* won considerable praise from his colleagues: "Wilkie Collins and *The Woman in White*" (1939). A pioneer in exploring Collins's secret liaisons and their relationship to his fiction, it was to blaze trails for such probing biographers as Kenneth Robinson and Robert Ashley. In 1958 a special seventy-fifth anniversary issue of *PMLA* listed this article as one of the sixteen most useful and influential to have appeared in its pages.

In the forty-five years since leaving The University of Kansas, I have continued to enjoy the benefits of Hyder's friendship. Only someone with his patience and interest in former students could have responded so graciously to my repeated requests for recommendations whenever I applied for grants and fellowships. In addition, often volunteering to read my article and book manuscripts before they were

submitted for publication, he tactfully suggested revisions or called attention to sources that I had overlooked.

That Hyder would ultimately distinguish himself as scholar and teacher was already apparent during his boyhood. Born 4 January 1902, he spent his early years on a farm near West Plains, Missouri. There, stimulated by the magazine *American Boy*, ordered for him by an aunt, he read everything his home and school libraries had to offer. One book to make a lasting impression was Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which he still regards highly. By the time he was ready for high school his parents had moved to town. Here he was influenced by his classes in English and Latin. Hoping to make journalism his vocation, he wrote for the school paper and briefly substituted as editor of the local newspaper. On his graduation from high school at the age of sixteen he won a scholarship to Drury College in Springfield, Missouri.

In college he continued his journalistic activities, editing the *Drury Mirror* and the yearbook, as well as contributing to various periodicals, two of his pieces appearing in the humor magazine *Judge*. As an undergraduate assistant in the English Department he graded student papers while carrying the usual schedule of courses and extracurricular activities. In spite of this formidable load, he still somehow made time to experiment with intricate forms of artificial French verse, and to pursue unassigned reading of the literary masters.

After graduating from college in 1924, having lost one full year because of emergency surgery, he taught English in high school for two years. Though his teaching load was heavy, six large classes the first year (including one course in ancient history and one in vocational civics), he carefully marked all theme assignments. He stressed writing skills and held his students to high standards.

Money saved from teaching enabled him to enroll for graduate studies at Harvard University on a St. Louis Harvard Club Scholarship. There were further grants and scholarships to bolster his finances, like the summer travel grant that paid his way to England, where he worked in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library. The example of a distinguished cousin, Hyder E. Rollins, who did not join the Harvard faculty until Hyder had completed most of the courses required, had helped him to decide to become a university teacher. Though not one of his professors, Rollins often gave him valuable advice and encouragement. Other notable professors to influence him were George Lyman Kittredge, with whom he studied Shakespeare and the popular ballad; F. N. Robinson and J. S. P. Tatlock, who shared the teaching of Chaucer and Middle English; and John Livingston Lowes. Lowes later directed Hyder's dissertation. Oliver Elton was a visiting professor who taught principles of criticism. Hyder heard the lectures of Irving

Babbitt, as well as those delivered by another visitor, Gilbert Murray, the classical scholar.

After a year as Instructor in English at The University of Texas, Austin (1926-27), Hyder returned to Harvard to finish his graduate work. Though he had completed his dissertation before accepting a position at The University of Kansas and departing for a summer in England, he decided not to take his orals until he had done further reading. As has been shown, that was a sound decision.

Hyder was to continue his career at The University of Kansas until 1968, when he retired early to nurse his wife during her lingering last illness. She was a former graduate student whose Master's thesis he had supervised.

A considerable portion of his tenure Hyder devoted to editorial work. As chairman of the Graduate Committee he was the logical choice to edit (1935-67) the *Humanistic Studies*, a series published by the University. From 1942-44 his teaching was interrupted by service with the U. S. Army Air Force, most of which he spent in Australia as a cryptographer. On his return to the University in 1945 he was offered the editorship of the newly founded University Press. From 1953 until his retirement he was both editor and director. The magnitude of his responsibilities would stagger many a scholar today. In addition to assuming major responsibility for the Press, he continued to teach two courses each semester (later reduced to one), read papers submitted for undergraduate honors, chair the Library Committee, and supervise graduate work in investigation and conference. He even found time to serve as special consultant to the *New Century Cyclopaedia of Names*, as editorial consultant for a few years for *PMLA*, and for a longer period as a member of the advisory board for *Victorian Poetry*.

To attract authors for the Press, Hyder consulted MLA directories and the annual lists of Guggenheim fellows, inviting scholars with promising projects to submit their manuscripts. From the first he resisted any pressure to build the reputation of the Press by increasing the number of titles published. He insisted that the books meet high standards, firmly rejecting manuscripts that did not measure up, even when it was not politic to do so. A press catering to someone's need for tenure, he believed, had abused its true mission of contributing to knowledge. Like Matthew Arnold he was averse to "the grand name without the grand thing."

Limited space permits the mention of only a few titles published by The University of Kansas Press during Hyder's editorship: Bertram Colgrave's translation, with notes, of *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, by an anonymous Monk of Whitby; John E. Hankins's *Shakespeare's Derived Imagery*; Alan Dugald McKillop's *Early Masters of English Fiction*; Katherine L. Mix's *A Study in Yellow*: The

*Yellow Book and Its Contributors*; Harold Orel's *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*; Robert Riegel's *American Feminists*; Ralph Wardle's *Oliver Goldsmith*; Kathleen Williams' *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise*; and Carl R. Woodring's *Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt*. Among publications on non-literary subjects were W. C. Stevens's *Kansas Wild Flowers*; and *The Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*, edited by Raymond C. Moore and brought out in collaboration with the Geological Society of America.

That virtually no typographical errors appeared in books published under Hyder's editorship must be attributed to his reading all final proofs at least twice. Not one to pass on tedious tasks to assistants, he always did such taxing work himself. Nor did he ask anyone to prepare indexes for his own books.

Authors published by Hyder invariably applaud his industry, as well as his accuracy. Typical is the following testimonial:

I was astonished at the painstaking care with which he checked out the accuracy of all footnotes (he did not spot-check; he went over them all, frequently looking up the original works to make sure there had been no misinterpretation of the sources). Later I learned that he did much the same for all manuscripts. Such diligence, of course, limited the number of books he could publish in a year, since he watched each manuscript through all the phases of production . . . . I think it is a reasonable conclusion . . . that all who worked with Hyder remember him as one of the great editors of their experience; for many (including myself), the greatest.

In addition to assuming full responsibility for seeing each work through the press, Hyder wrote two books of his own, both of them biographies. The first, *Snow of Kansas: The Life of Francis Huntington Snow, with Extracts from His Journals and Letters* (1953), was of special interest to the alumni of The University of Kansas, for Snow, a scientist, had been one of its first teachers and later became its chancellor. The suggestion for this biography came from Deane W. Malott, who was Chancellor of the University when Hyder began his connection with the Press. This biography introduces some interesting information about Snow's years at Williams College and during the Civil War. The second biography, *George Lyman Kittredge: Teacher and Scholar* (1962), covers a large amount of material gleaned from letters, diaries, and a vast repository of documents in the Harvard Library. Extracts from this book were carried in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*.

Since his retirement Hyder's productivity has continued impressive. Besides reviewing a number of books and publishing occasional notes of ancillary literary interest, he has brought out a major article on Matthew Arnold and two more books on Swinburne: *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage* (1970), recently reissued in paperback, and *Swinburne as Critic* (1972). Both books were published in London by Routledge & Kegan Paul. At present he is busy on a project that has already occupied him a long time and may keep him busy for several more years. Currently referred to as *A Book of Days*, its addition to the already staggering volume of scholarly books produced each year is justified in Hyder's own words:

I am keeping in mind what I could have been glad to know many years ago—something applicable to English and American life. Since works of literature often have a relation to calendar customs and since literature reflects life, I have not felt that what I am doing is irrelevant to literary study.

Interspersed with his scholarly activities is one which, he declares, has been "a delight and solace" since boyhood—gardening. For this he credits his parents' early training, which led him to value the double reward, nutritional and aesthetic, in the cultivation of plants. In season his letters never fail to mention his success with certain crops, raised in such abundance that they could well supply his whole neighborhood. Though he has recently given up his home in Lawrence, Kansas, and is now living with his daughter and her family in Greenwich, Connecticut, his physical exertions continue. With the vigor of a much younger man he has cleared tracts of roots and stones and converted them into productive plots.

Another pleasurable activity to which he devotes considerable time is his continuing correspondence with friends and former students. Not satisfied with mere notes, he types many single-spaced pages teeming with topics of current interest, critiques of articles and books recently read, and comments on human frailties and eccentricities that irk him. As prolific a correspondent as the Victorians and doubtless influenced by them through long association, he writes leisurely and entertaining letters, especially when he vents his indignation on those who would banish the generic *man* (under the presumption that it has a gender attribute) and substitute *person*, as in *chairperson*. The linguistic and historical ignorance of such rabid would-be reformers arouses his ire.

Another source of his indignation is the incompetence of those high-school English teachers who have been certified upon taking the required courses in education without mastering the subject they are to

teach. His impatience extends to university teachers as well. He believes that they must interpret literature with common sense, not as something "purely aesthetic." Many need to get rid of "their notions about literary theory, with its growing accretion of jargon (as if it were a science)" and see it "in relation to life, to the knowledge it embodies, its historical bearings, or any meaning from an ethical point of view."

When Hyder reminisces, he contrasts the past with the present. Life seemed much simpler when he was a boy, when even a trip to Colorado was an adventure, when the air was pure and there was no acid rain, when summer Chautauqua was the chief entertainment, when doctors would travel eight miles or more to visit a patient. But Hyder does not live in the past. Quite the contrary, for he is concerned with the current shortcomings of our national leaders, with our staggering national debt, with our loss of moral fiber. He enjoys watching his grandsons grow up in today's world. Routinely he keeps in touch with friends, both new and old. Many who know him can testify to the satisfaction he has taken in finding ways to cheer those in illness or trouble.

Former students, colleagues, neighbors—all value Clyde Hyder, not only for his wide-ranging achievements but for his tendency not to take himself too seriously, for his honesty in assessing his own career, for his philosophic acceptance of a changing world. He epitomizes Matthew Arnold's ideal, the "even-balanced soul/ . . . Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole."