



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

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

Volume 36
Number 1

Article 13

10-15-2017

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Recommended Citation

O'Dell, Sarah (2017) "Robert E. Havard: A Closer Look at the 'Medical Inkling' (Note)," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 36 : No. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol36/iss1/13>

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Abstract

A preliminary study on under-examined Inklings Robert E. Havard.

Additional Keywords

Havard, Robert E.—Biography; Inklings—History—1939-1945

ROBERT E. HAVARD: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE “MEDICAL INKLING”

SARAH O'DELL

PHYSICIAN AND RESEARCH SCIENTIST ROBERT EDOLYN HAVARD (1901–1985) has long been recognized as one of the most regular attendees of Inklings meetings, as well as considered a “skilled and prolific writer” (Glyer 12) who was “well-read and keenly interested in the processes of literature and in theology” (Sayer 151). Despite this characterization, Inklings scholarship has long been limited to his appendix to Lewis’s *The Problem of Pain* and several memoirs on fellow Inklings, namely C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. When asked about his own writing during a 1984 interview with Lyle W. Dorsett, Havard remarked that “I have never written anything very much [...] I’ve never been a writer in the ways the others were” (Oral History). He mentions “some reviews for *The Tablet* sometimes, and one or two papers—some occasional efforts at first with Lewis’s help, but only one erupted into print” (Oral History), the last presumably in reference to the appendix of *The Problem of Pain*.

Of course, Havard is widely recognized to have authored and co-authored a variety of biomedical research articles, published in journals as diverse as *Nature*, *The Lancet*, the *Biochemical Journal*, *The Journal of Physiology*, *The British Journal of Radiology*, and the *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology*. His publications in *The Tablet* include articles of his own commentary regarding medical practice in twentieth-century Britain, and reviews of medically-oriented texts. Such publications are not necessarily surprising, as Havard’s “double qualification” (Oral History) of having both a scientific degree and a medical degree identifies him with the modern physician-scientist; his dual training allowed him to mediate between biomedical research and clinical practice.

What is surprising, however, is that Havard’s estimation of his own creative and literary output—“I have never written anything very much”—has long been taken at face value. Recent exploration of his papers reveals a far more striking portrait of this “medical Inkling.” In reviewing Robert E. Havard’s poetry, memoirs, and essays, one finds a man of extraordinary insight: a devoted husband and father; a thoughtful physician-scientist; a dedicated Catholic concerned with the interplay between art, theology, and culture. The scope of Havard’s intellectual interests is equally evident: his writings display a preoccupation with subjects as varied as apologetics, naval medicine, aesthetics, and general relativity.

AN UNEXPECTED POET

While an in-depth study is needed to dispel myths surrounding this relatively lesser-known Inkling, the following review of his poetry illustrates themes that extend far beyond the confines of the scientific. Of the over thirty

poems represented in *The Robert Havard Papers*, the majority of his polished verse was produced between 1940 and 1955. Of these poems, a considerable number have been carefully typed and appear at some point to have been presented in packet or booklet form as the "Collected Verse of R.E. Havard." Most, if not all, of Havard's poetry is written in rhymed iambic verse. While the particular rhyme scheme varies, a sizeable number are Shakespearian sonnets.

One such poem, "Sonnet in memory of the conjunction of the Moon and Venus" appeared in a 1952 issue of *The Tablet*. This poem demonstrates a common theme in Havard's verse, namely the distinction and relationship between human and divine love; just as the planets' radiation depends on the light of the sun, so "The fickle light of human love is won, / By faltering reflection, from the Sun" (lines 13-14), "sun" presumably a play on Christ as "Son."

Other themes also emerge from a consideration of Havard's poetic repertoire. Havard demonstrates a fascination with nautical elements: water, particularly rivers and the sea. These constitute both a reflection of his time in the Navy and a demonstration of his (geological) interest in rivers; the latter is further evident in his (unpublished) memoir fragments. Several poems are reflective of his profession as a physician: "Medical Board" recounts his experiences while serving as a member of an Army Medical Board (1941), while "Fort Wallington" (1944) presents a medically-minded imitation of Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter."

The latter is particularly fascinating, as it is not the only imitative poem Havard wrote; "Freshwater Bay" (1968) presents his re-telling of William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." Here, Havard's interest is geological: Wordsworth's "golden daffodils" (line 4) are replaced by cliffs in which "aeons of Earth's story lie" (line 6). Other examples include "The Havard Tale," a re-casting of the gloomy "Ten Little Soldiers" to tell the joyful story of Havard's own family, and "Full Many a Glorious Woman," in which Havard utilizes Shakespeare's Sonnet 33 and skillfully subverts the Bard's themes to voice his own experience of bereavement. Throughout, Havard takes the form—both structural and conceptual—of a well-known poem and uses it as a medium to relay an aspect of his own understanding.

AN ADVOCATE FOR BEAUTY

Havard's interest in aesthetics extended beyond his own poetic expression. A series of three essays published in the *Franciscan Annals* (1947), cumulatively titled "The Uses of Diversity," illustrate his outlook on the human need for beauty. In the first essay, Havard mourns the current "ugly age" (188) and suggests that a life without beauty is necessarily "miserable [...] narrow, imperfect, and undeveloped" (188). The following two essays detail his

proposed solution to such a fate, considered from a Christian (Catholic) perspective.

Having diagnosed such aesthetic malnourishment, in "Part II" Havard proposes a cure. He asserts that beauty must be *sought*, and outlines several sources through which beauty can be experienced. He identifies the (medieval) architecture of England as one such well of beauty. Through gazing at these "marvels of beauty enshrined in stone" (229) the observer beholds more than the mere beauty of an object:

But it is not simply the physical beauty of stone that we see. Someone has thought of it, planned it, worked patiently over long months and years to realise his plans before a result could be achieved such as to be encountered in Salisbury spire or Magdalen tower or in many ancient buildings [...] *We are looking at men's thoughts* and we can see and sympathise with some of the beauty that they saw and loved. (229, emphasis added)

Such aesthetic time-travel requires an exercise of the sympathetic imagination. Havard continues this vein of thought, stating that "there is beauty in men's minds which has, at times, been recorded and enshrined in literature, poetry, art, and music" (230). He continues, describing the particular magic of poetry:

By [...] clothing a situation with beauty, the poet makes it a living thing to us. Not only do the poets see further than most of us, but they have the art of making us see with them, and we see, moreover, in an especially vivid way. For they bring not only intellectual knowledge; they stir feelings and emotions: they educate our hearts. (230)

"And," he writes, "if poetry is a world, literature as a whole is an entire universe" (230). His musings on the "universe" of literature echo Lewis's conception of literature as "a series of windows, even of doors" (Lewis, *Experiment* 138) that enables an "enlargement of our being" (Lewis 137), allowing us to "see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own" (137). Havard describes the expansive qualities of literature:

Some of the greatest achievements of the human race are preserved with literature. We can resurrect and enjoy them when, and as often as we please. We can meet with and converse with the greatest human minds not only of our own days but of all ages. We can escape from the narrow confines not only of our town and city, but of our own time as well. We are free to range over all historic time and the whole world. Literature will take us into the homes and lives of the wealthy and the poor; to the

mind stored with learning and to the mind rich only in the experience of suffering. The whole pattern of humanity is there for our study and delight. (230-231)

While his musings resonate with Lewis's characterization of story in *An Experiment in Criticism*, Havard's rendition of this concept contains its own particular beauty.

The final and third installment of "The Uses of Diversity" contains the practical side of Havard's prescription for modern malaise: "for the proper enjoyment of this wealth, we, most of us, need an instruction and a guide" (254). Havard presents the Christian God as "the fount whence all beauty springs" (255) and the Catholic Church as the greatest manifestation of this bounty; the "supreme example of beauty in the world" (255). Accordingly, he calls the reader to study the "full riches of Catholic truth and beauty" (258). Beyond this education, however, he asserts the essential role of the artist, commenting on the need to "produce writers, painters, [and] musicians who can present the wealth of truth and beauty that is our heritage" (258). He characterizes this task as one of "compelling urgency" (258), an assessment that remains relevant today.

A PHYSICIAN AND STORYTELLER

While much of his work remains unpublished, Havard presents a distinct figure, joyfully caught in the rich interplay between Christian theology, the arts, and the sciences. Indeed, it seems that a helpful way to understand Robert E. Havard's writing is through his tendency toward the interdisciplinary. Havard not only serves as an example of the physician-scientist and the Christian poet, but also embodies the ideals of the medical humanities long before the inception of the field (so named) in the 1970s. Broadly, the medical humanities are concerned with the intersections between the arts, the humanities, the social sciences, and the practice of medicine. More specifically, the interdisciplinary study of medicine and literature seeks in part to illuminate the ways in which the engagement of literary narratives can transform the clinical encounter; by studying literature, physicians are better primed to recognize, interpret, and respond to the stories of their patients. It seems reasonable to speculate that Havard's dedication to the humanities nourished his ability to serve as, in the words of J.R.R. Tolkien, a physician "who thinks of people as people, not as collections of 'works'" (quoted in Carpenter 130).

Today, the medical humanities are often concerned with the stories of those who experience and suffer illness, termed "illness narratives." It is then especially prescient that one of R.E. Havard's unpublished short stories fits within this genre. "One Crowded Hour" tells the story of Peter Thompson (although the reader is notified that this is not the hero's real name), a thirteen-year-old boy who is eventually revealed to have hemophilia. His classmates'

lack of understanding that the slightest altercation could prove deadly for Peter results in the perception that he is a coward; both this implicit label and the outward taunts it produces causes Peter significant pain. When a final confrontation with the bully Muggins results in a fistfight, Peter finally feels as if he has regained his honor. Only when it is apparent that Peter is in significant danger—the fight has caused uncontrollable bleeding—do the boys reconcile. A distraught Muggins and a pale, weakened Peter eventually find their way back to Peter's home. As the tale comes to a close, Havard writes,

I wish [very] much indeed I could say here that Peter, after lying at death's door for a day and a night, was eventually saved by a transfusion of [blood] from Muggins. But this is a true story and facts must be told. In spite of all the efforts on the doctor's part Peter died early next morning. His Mother knew he must as soon as she saw him; and Peter, I think had also realised it on his way home. (5)

While the resulting grief of Peter's parents is "too sacred to dwell upon" (5), the narrator offers a final comment on Peter's fate:

As for Peter I think he was happier dying so, [than] eking out a precarious life for a few more years and at last falling a victim to a pin prick or a nail in his boot. People so easily forget that the joys and sorrows of boys are far keener than those of men. Peter, with his honour vindicated and his courage acknowledged, [died] completely and entirely satisfied in a way he would never have known again had he lived to be a hundred. (6)

The story ends with the final quotation, "One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name" (6).

By describing the social and emotional world of a young boy living with a blood disorder, Havard both underscores the tragedy of Peter's condition and the differing ways in which his illness is perceived. Without glossing over the difficulty of the situation, Havard both valorizes the reality of Peter's transitory triumph and acknowledges the disastrous consequences fostered by a misunderstanding of his disease. Here, Havard's appreciation of the human condition suggests an increased capacity for understanding the lived stories of illness and providing empathetic care.

In sum, reconsideration of the writings of Robert E. Havard reveals a well of creative intellect and, to echo Lewis's description of his friend, an "*anima candida*" (Lewis, *Letters* 3.23). This is revealed through even a cursory overview of his poetry, essays, and fiction. In my future and ongoing studies, I look forward to an in-depth examination of his poetry and Christian writings, a deeper consideration of his role as an Inkling, and a re-examination of his "Appendix" to *The Problem of Pain*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Havard family, especially John Havard, for their permissions. Archival material quoted in this article is © John Havard and used with his permission. I would also like to acknowledge Br. Thomas Mann, whose help in acquiring the full text of "The Uses of Diversity" was greatly appreciated.

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