

Thomas Howard (1935 - 2020)

Thomas Howard, author and beloved mentor to many, was one of the early scholars working on both C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on Williams, eventually publishing it as *The Novels of Charles Williams* (1991). *The Achievement of C.S. Lewis* (1980), *C.S. Lewis: Man of Letters* (2004), and *Narnia and Beyond* (2006) are his books on Lewis. But perhaps Tom's greatest legacy in the world of Inklings studies was his friendship with Clyde S. Kilby, founder of the Marion E. Wade Center.

Tom studied under Dr. Kilby as an undergraduate at Wheaton College in the 1950s. In an oral history interview from 1993, recorded at the Wade Center, he described his initial encounter with the man he would later affectionately address as "Doctor":



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*Tom Howard (left) with George Sayer
while visiting Ledbury, England,
in July 1975.*

Photographer: Clyde S. Kilby.

I first became aware of Dr. Kilby when my oldest and closest friend began to sort of sputter and rave to me about a course that was called Introduction to General Lit. ... [So] I signed up for Dr. Kilby's Romantic Lit course. ... He would come in as though he were himself tearing his own hair over some question from Wordsworth or Coleridge, or about the imagination, or whatever. ... But I think the thing that really authenticated all this, was that these indeed were real questions for Kilby too. ... And they really had to do with the imagination, and the imagination as an authentic way of us mortals perceiving reality, which could not be come at via the analytic and discursive and propositional and verbalist and logical approach. ... [I]t had the effect of blowing open the universe for me, for all of us, I think. And as a matter of fact, I later on—many years later—dedicated one of my books to Kilby

with the line which I still repeat, you know, "For Dr. Kilby who took my arm and said, 'Look,'" and I really think that is what I would owe to him.

Tom's relationship with Kilby grew even closer after his graduation in 1957, and he was among those who first encouraged Kilby to read Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As Tom forged his own highly successful career in academia, Kilby began to look to him as his successor at the Wade Collection, but though offered the position, Tom eventually declined. Nonetheless, he remained a strong supporter of the Collection and did what he could to encourage Dr. Kilby in his work, even traveling overseas with him for a month in 1975.

As Tom explained:

[Y]ear after year, he went to England. ... [I]t was very much of a solo operation on his part. And one year, as he was getting older, and I knew these trips were grueling for him, I just said to him, "Look, I will come to England with you this summer, and just let me do the logistics. Let me drive for you and this sort of thing." So he accepted my offer. ... [A]nd of course it was wonderful to be with Kilby day after day after day [visiting people like Edith Williams, George Sayer, and Lady Dunbar]. ... I could go on and on with my recollections ... but Kilby was my mentor. Kilby opened my mind up, you know, and I felt, in many ways, in those days, that we were moving along through C.S. Lewis together and Tolkien.

A highly regarded writer, scholar, and prominent convert to Catholicism at age 50, Tom helped countless individuals understand literature and the Christian faith more deeply as a result of his writings as well as through his kind willingness to engage in thoughtful conversation that was filled with his lively humor and brilliant intellect. Tom died October 15, 2020, in Beverly, Massachusetts, at age 85, and is survived by his wife, Lovelace, and their two children, Gallaudet and Charles. Readers of the seven Wade authors are the richer today for Tom's significant contributions to scholarship related to Lewis, Williams, and the Wade Center, itself.

MARJORIE LAMP MEAD