

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

NO. 3, AUTUMN, 1976

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COUNCIL

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NEW MEMBERS (October, 1976)

Miss Elizabeth M. Bell, 13 Terrapin Road, London, S.W.17.

The Revd. Richard Buck, 7 Elsworthy Road, London, N.W.3.

David & Dulcie Caro, 50 Drayton Gardens, London, S.W.10.

Mr. & Mrs. Jared W. Haslett, 1320 West Melrose Street,
Chicago, Illinois 60657, U.S.A.

Prof. Thomas Howard, 130 Blueberry Lane, South Hamilton,
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Lt. Col. C. E. Jarvis, Payne's Cottage, Broadwell, Moreton-
in-March, Glos.

Philip Mason, Hither Daggons, Alderholt, Nr. Fordingbridge,
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Stephen Medcalf, 61, New Road, Lewes, Sussex.

Fernandode Mello Moser, Rua Correia Teles 25-20, Lisbon 3,
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Miss A. L. Phillips, 57, Woodside, Wimbledon, London, S.W.19.

Mr. & Mrs. Donald A. Roberts, Box 1077, Vineyard Haven,
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Mrs. Wendy Robinson, 51, Oakthorpe Road, Oxford.

Thelma Shuttleworth, 36 Walton Road, Frinton-on-Sea, Essex.

Mrs. J. Statham, 13 Fabyc House, Cumberland Road, Kew,
Richmond, Surrey.

(The Society now has sixty-four members)

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

The meetings will be held at the Institute of Christian Studies, 84 Margaret Street, London, W.1. on Saturdays at 2.30 p.m., and will be followed by discussion and tea. The Institute is five minutes' walk from Oxford Circus underground station, up Upper Regent Street, second turning on the right, and on the right hand side near the far end.

- 30th October, 1976: Readings from Charles Williams' poetry, mature, middle and early; Alice Mary Hadfield in charge.
- 12th February, 1977: Subject: "Explaining Poetry by Poetry: Charles Williams' Literary Criticism"; Sue Harris in charge.
- 23rd April, 1977: Subject: Charles Williams' novel, Many Dimensions; Richard Wallis in charge.
- 11th June, 1977: Annual General Meeting (please note change of date). This will be followed by a talk, "Is Charles Williams a Contemporary?", to be given by Anne Ridler.
- 23rd July, 1977: Subject and speaker to be announced.
- 15th October, 1977: Subject and speaker to be announced.

Please bring copies of the books to be used at a meeting, if possible. There is no fee for members, but 50p must be paid for a guest (members can bring one guest each) and handed to the person in charge of the meeting.

LONDON READING GROUP

The following meetings have been arranged:

- 9th October, Saturday, at 7.30 p.m. in Richard and Joan Wallis's house, 30 Wallorton Gardens, S.W.14. Continuing The Figure of Beatrice in connection with Dante's Purgatorio.

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7th November, Sunday, at 1 p.m. in David and Dulcie Caro's house, 50 Drayton Gardens, S.W.10. Continuing Taliessin Through Logres. Please bring sandwiches.

15th January, Saturday, at 7.30 p.m. in Charles and Alice Mary Hadfield's house, The White Cottage, 21 Randolph Road, W.9. Continuing The Figure of Beatrice with Dante's Purgatorio.

27th March, Sunday, at 1 p.m. in Peter and Anne Scott's house, 25 Corfton Road, Ealing, W.5. (near Ealing Broadway station). Continuing Taliessin Through Logres. Please bring sandwiches.

These meetings are open to all without charge, whether or not they are members of the Society.

THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY LIBRARY

Librarian: Mrs. Anne Scott, 25 Corfton Road, Ealing, London, W.5 2HP (Tel: 997 2667).

A list of the Library's contents was printed in Newsletter No. 1. In addition to the acquisitions listed in Newsletter No. 2, the following have been received:

1. Six Xeroxed copies of Religion and Love in Dante by Charles Williams (8½p).
2. Mary McDermott Shideler: Charles Williams: A Critical Essay (8½p).

Mary McDermott Shideler: The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study of the Writings of Charles Williams (20p).

(These two books were kindly presented to the library by Miss Agnes Sibley)

3. The Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams: a Dissertation presented to the University of New York, and kindly given to the library by the author, Mrs. Dorothy Fitzgerald (47p).

CHARLES WILLIAMS COLLECTION

The Society hopes soon to find a home for a reference collection of Charles Williams' works. Meanwhile, in addition to the collection which Ralph Binfield gave the Society, (see Newsletter No. 2), material has been generously given by Anne Scott, Thelma Shuttleworth and Jo Harris.

CHARLES WILLIAMS' ARTHURIAN POEMS

C.W.'s Arthurian poems in Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars may give difficulty to many readers. Useful help is available in Arthurian Torso, but the Council feels that something more is needed and so hopes to publish, as a four-page supplement to each future Newsletter, a line-by-line commentary on these poems, starting at the beginning of Taliessin Through Logres.

This will be compiled by a group of members who have long experience in reading the verse, and who were able to talk to C.W. about it. This commentary will not, of course, claim to say all that is to be said on any line or word, but it should serve as a useful guide.

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"An Introduction to Charles Williams"

Some copies of this book by Alice Mary Hadfield are still available. They can be obtained from the author @ £2-20. per copy or £2-50. post free (of which £1-00. goes to the Society's funds).

Apply to The White Cottage, 21 Randolph Road, London, W9 1AN.

CHARLES WILLIAMS AS I KNEW HIM

by Anne Scott

This is the second contribution in a series of personal recollections. The first appeared in Newsletter No. 2.

At the beginning of my second year at Oxford, and also of the Second World War, I went to a meeting of the English Club to hear a talk on The Image of the City in English Verse. The name of the speaker, Charles Williams, meant nothing to me, so I was much surprised to find that he was somebody I knew by sight as "the man who always sits in the same place at C.S. Lewis' lectures and laughs at all the jokes". He had thick grey hair emphasising and emphasised by a high brown forehead; spectacles with very thick lenses; an extremely mobile, expressive mouth; and a tall, thin figure.

When he began to speak, at first I could hardly understand what he was saying. All his vowels seemed to be diphthongs; his "rs" were not exactly "ws", but were slurred and softened; and he spoke with extreme rapidity and energy, and with extremely rapid and energetic changes of tone, volume and pitch. He would be almost shouting one minute, almost whispering the next, and when he quoted passages of poetry, which he did with every other sentence, he marked the metre and rhythm so strongly that he chanted rather than spoke. But in spite of all this it was quite obvious that he was neither affected nor speaking for effect. He was not in the least interested in the impression that he made, but he was passionately interested in what he was saying. And what he was saying was not in the least like anything I had ever heard before. To listen to him was like finding oneself in a place where everything was a different colour and shape and size, and lit by a different light.

I came away from the talk quite certain that the only thing I wanted to do was to listen to him again. Consequently on the morning of C.S. Lewis' next lecture I arrived early, sat down in the seat next to the place that was always his, and when he appeared, gave him as large a smile as I could manage. He smiled back, and immediately began to talk, exactly as if he were picking up a conversation which had been briefly interrupted a few minutes previously.

From then until his death I had the privilege of being counted among his friends, a breath-taking and sometimes nerve-racking privilege for a very green and ignorant undergraduate. He used to read the essays I wrote for my tutors, and I remember one being returned with the comment "You ought to write out twenty times 'Sacred poet, forgive me'."

He always assumed that the person he was talking to was as intelligent, quick-witted and sincere as he was himself. There was never the faintest suggestion of patronising or talking down. And for all the unending flow of ideas, illustrations, quotations and verbal fireworks, the second that one even began to feel like saying something the stream was instantly shut off and one had his whole eager attention.

POETS ON POETRY

by Sue Harris

Near St. Valentine's Day in 1977, we shall be thinking about Charles Williams' literary criticism. It is his least interesting work; yet it is fascinating. Because the essays are difficult to find (I have borrowed them from the Society's library) I have introduced below some of the material which we shall be considering at the February meeting of the Society.

"Poetry is a good game - let us take it lightly.
But it is also 'liberty and power' - let us
take it seriously."

Thus commands a poet on poetry. Only a poet could get it so right; or, rather, so satisfactorily. And here is Williams centring down on Wordsworth:

"There fell upon him a conflict of sensations
without name. Things were changed into their
contraries."

This sounds like Alice in Wonderland, or The Tempest. In fact, it is Wordsworth himself communicating something about the universal "developing powers of poetry" in his autobiographical Prelude. From Shakespeare's Prospero or Puck or Hector through Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Charles Williams notes that the great common preoccupation of poets is with the process of poetry itself. And, in Dante, this Genius - or Muse(ic) is most perfectly imaged by Beatrice, a figure rooted in the very streets of 13th century Florence. She, in turn, the centre of a City, is the unsurpassable image of man's soul. So we are alerted to Williams' (and Wordsworth's and ...) belief that Poetry and the Soul are interchangeable - interchangeable, that is, in the Augustinian sense of "this is Thou, Neither is this Thou". As such, Poetry and the Soul are the most accurate translators, or interpreters of one another.

To listen to poets on poetry is to overhear men catching into words the rhythms of our "secret places of power" - the tensions and contradictions of the heart and its "mystery of reconciliation". Perhaps Keats' On First Reading Chapman's Homer is the most popular clue to what Williams seeks in his

criticism. He wants us to feel in the blood and along the heart what the experience of poetry itself is to the men who write it down and hand it on to us completed.

Williams thought of himself as a poet before he thought of himself as a theologian, critic, editor, novelist or even dramatist. His most ambitious undertaking was the creation of Taliessen, the poet of Arthur's Logres. So it is as a poet that Williams "guards" other poets and indicates how they are themselves echoing other poets who are, in turn, echoing the Poetic Genius, a Spirit wholly dedicated to imaging man's "wondrous architecture" - and its overthrow, or "subversion". Like a lesser Commedia, Williams' criticism is a great re-collection of co-inhering material, imaging circles, reflecting mirrors: Troilus and Cressida alongside The Prelude; Juliet's nurse alongside Milton's Satan; Coriolanus alongside Timon - these act as illuminators of one another. And Beatrice's reiterated words to Dante, "Look, look well ...", express, also the maxim of the Poet who must "explore terror to its utmost, by noting detail and using detail". This, in both cases, is the "scandal of particularity":

"To begin with a flea and end with God
is almost the habit of English verse."

In such a manner do the great theological "doctrines" which Williams expounded and lived become integrated with his apprehension of poetry. The exchange of love through time and space is a fact of poetic experience and expression. In his Nightingale, Keats enters the recesses of Ruth's solitude "amidst the alien corn" and passes that solitude on to us. Wordsworth, confronted with the Leech Gatherer, moves us to the edge of Jacob's encounter with his angel with all its awed endurance. This is not unlike E.M. Forster in his critical work, The Aspects of the Novel, who places two quite different authors, 18th century Richardson and 20th century James, next to one another at the round table of shared vision.

In such ways the stunning dance by which the acts of giving and receiving sustain the universe are caught in poetry. They are the Poetic Way, the Way of Images. And it is Williams' job as a critic to help us receive that Way into our lives -

"in the blood, along the heart":

"Donne spoke of the lady whose body thought;
but his own mind felt. His own intellectual
emotion discovered her corporeal intelligence."

There is very great adventure in the contemplation of this remark by Williams on John Donne. It has more to offer to, for example, the debate on the ordination of women than any other remark I have heard yet. What is more important, it warns one of the kind of attention Donne's poetry demands and elicits.

With co-inherence in mind, I keep thinking Charles Williams is also Phaedrus - not only Plato's Phaedrus, but Phaedrus, the Ghost (Holy?) in Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. Such fantasies ("Poetry is a good game ...") Williams would encourage: Classicism interacting with Romanticism does, indeed, produce "Quality", or "Ripeness". And that is the "mystery of reconciliation", the work of the City and its Poets ("let us take it seriously").

See C.W's critical works:

The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante, Faber & Faber,
1943.

The English Poetic mind, O.U.P., London, 1932.

Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind, O.U.P., London, 1933.

THE NOVEL "MANY DIMENSIONS" BY CHARLES WILLIAMS

Charles Williams' novel Many Dimensions was first published in 1931 by Victor Gollancz. The theme, as in other novels by Charles Williams, is about the struggle between good and evil. Sir Giles Tumulty, a traveller and archaeologist, manages to acquire an august relic: the stone from the Crown of Suleiman ben Daood, King in Jerusalem, which has magical properties for travel in time and space and has the power to heal. He and others attempt to rule the Stone by dividing it and by using each individual stone to further their own desires. They are opposed by those who learn to serve the Stone, by Lord Arglay, the Lord Chief Justice of England and by his secretary, Chloe Burnett who becomes the instrument by which the unity of the Stone is restored and the evil desires of men defeated.

In this novel Charles Williams conveys a sense of mystery and terror, of physical and spiritual danger. In Lord Arglay he has created a noble and impressive character. But his "bad" characters are less convincing: Sir Giles Tumulty, despite the violence of his language and actions and his terrible end, remains something less than the figure of evil which Charles Williams wished him to be. In the lesser characters who seek to use the Stone for their own ends, Charles Williams shows us with clarity how the human soul, which pursues these desires, deteriorates.

This novel will be the subject for discussion at the meeting of the Society on the 23rd April, 1977. There are copies available on loan from the library of the Society.

Richard Wallis

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Members are welcome to send questions about Charles Williams and his work to the Editor. Questions will be answered personally by post, but those considered of more general interest will be printed in the Newsletter with their answers. Alice Mary Hadfield answers the following three questions.

I. Q. I have read that C.W. was of Welsh descent. Is this correct?

A. Suggestions have appeared in contributions to magazines, in theses and elsewhere that C.W. was of Welsh descent. A link with ancient Welsh literature (the Mabinogion), or David Jones and Dylan Thomas seemed to be looked for.

It is likely that the suggestion arose from one of several conversations of fantasy with C.S. Lewis. In this one C.W. was probably posited as a "descendant" of Taliessin. During my knowledge of him he never referred to any Welsh connection, but to London and Hertfordshire in his family history. I am a little Welsh myself, but I found his Arthurian poems showed little concern with ancient local involvement. The myth of King Arthur and the Holy Grail is used to discover the poetic, human and metaphysical significance of myths in poetry.

This was an important matter to settle. In August 1976 I wrote to Charles' sister Edith and asked for her ruling. The following is her reply, of 26 August 1976:

"So far as I know there is no 'Welsh descent' anywhere in the family. Mother's father was, I believe, West Country, Father's parents were London and the family had no connection with Hertfordshire until, Father having been told by a specialist that in order to preserve his sight for as long as possible he should live in green surroundings and Father having been thrown out of his job of foreign correspondent by the firm being 'reorganised' by an influx of a younger generation, they visited St. Albans, which they had always liked, and saw an empty shop opposite a disused Friends' burial ground which was laid out as a garden. Mother's brother, who was unmarried and

lived with the family in the Walthamstow area, helped with stocking the shop and lived with them for a time."

I would think that this clear statement can be taken as definitive.

II. Q. In C.W's poems, what is Broceliande, or what does it mean

A. It means, within the verse, the range of timeless natural instincts and functions, "the place of making" as he called it - a making of the spirit, of matter in nature and in man. It is presented as a forest area on the western seacoast of Logres. In the preface to The Region of the Summer Stars he says that within its region is Carbonek, place of direct vision "where the Grail and other Hallows" are present and can be known by men. C.W. said that with these powers "the place of making", without moral or other law except of its own nature, was dangerous, though necessary, to man. It suggests a field which, in our time, is the subject of much psychological, religious and scientific search. In the same preface C.W. says that the establishment of the fully good life requires the outward law and "powers of the Empire and Broceliande".

III.Q. Where can I find an explanation of co-inherence, substitution and exchange?

A. See for example: He Came Down From Heaven, chapters VI and VII; the pamphlet, The Way of Exchange, No. 2 in New Foundations ed. by R.H. Ward, published by James Clarke & Co., Ltd; The Image of the City, selected and edited by Anne Ridler; the pamphlet, Religion and Love in Dante, Dacre Paper 6, Dacre Press. See also: The Descent of the Dove, chapter II; The Forgiveness of Sins, especially chapter VI.

Please send a stamped, addressed envelope and write each question on a separate sheet.

Any information for the Charles Williams Society Newsletter should be sent to the Editor, Miss Xenia Howard-Johnston, 13 Princess Road, London, NW1 8JR.

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