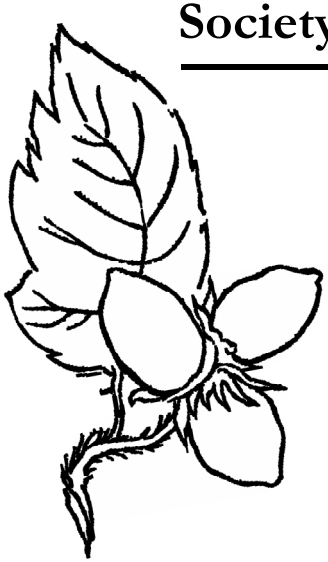
The Charles Williams Society



Newsletter

No. 100 Autumn 2001

The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams's sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society's meetings which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at King's College London.

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For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda Boughton, tel: 01865 515589.

The Charles Williams Society

No 100 Autumn 2001

From the Editor

Welcome to CW # 100 which, as it turns out, is quite a bumper issue if only because I felt disinclined to split Stephen Medcalf's paper into two parts and was certainly not up to abridging it. Having said that, however, the paper originally included extensive quotes from T. S. Eliot's work which I have either omitted entirely or cut severely. This was partly in the interests of space and partly to avoid irritating Faber; I have in all cases indicated the full extent of the quote thus treated. At the beginning of the paper Stephen indicates that the reader should begin by reading *Burnt Norton* in its entirety, and to this I would add that a copy of Eliot's *Collected Poems* should be to hand as reference will need to be made to the other *Quartets*, *Ash Wednesday*, and *The Waste Land* in order to follow the argument fully.

As it seemed appropriate to have something by Charles Williams himself in this issue I have included his review of *Boethius* dating from 1940. This stands up on its own as a short note on the philosopher as much as an assessment of Helen Barratt's book which, I imagine, is no longer in print.

Ruth and Geoffrey Tinling have informed me that the delegates from the C. S. Lewis Foundation (see last issue's News & Notes) have been swelling their congregation at Headington church, and have been made welcome there. They are, apparently a very nice group. In conversation with them Geoffrey was told that there is a Charles Williams society in almost every State of the US which, if true, is encouraging. Word has also reached us, separately, of a reading group in Mas-

sachusetts. Taken together with the recent publication of the *Masques* by the Mythopoeic Society these are suggestive of a lively interest in Charles Williams in America.

Edward Gauntlett

The New Christian Year

I would like to share with members the value to me of CW's little book, *The New Christian Year*. For a Protestant Dissenter like me – a 'Liberal Evangelical', if that definition be acceptable today – this is a book to come back to often, and one that I prefer above all other devotional texts on my shelves. Each day it brings new openings, always free of any denominational slant; there is challenge, spiritual guidance, and the certainty of grace. Would that there might be a new edition – my copy is increasingly the worse for wear.

John Hibbs

Council Meeting Report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 8 June 2001 at St Matthew's Church Room, Bayswater

A stone commemorating Michael Williams is now in place at his parents' grave though his ashes will not be interred until later.

It was proposed and carried that Stephen Barber and Richard Jeffrey would be elected to serve as Treasurer and Ordinary Member of the Council respectively. This leaves one vacancy for an Ordinary Member.

The Secretary reported that there was a possibility of Avalon Films making a film of one of the novels; treatments of *War in Heaven* and *Many Dimensions* had been submitted, but any decision on them was probably well in the future.

Kent State University Press is preparing to publish CW's letters to Michal. The Chairman thanked all those who had been involved in the distribution of *The Masques* and it was suggested a similar arrangement might be made to obtain copies of the letters.

In November the Diocese of Oxford is to issue a Calendar of names for local commemoration, and Charles Williams will appear in it.

The Membership Secretary reported that we now have 114 members: 84 in the UK and 30 overseas.

It was unanimously agreed that the Society's accounts be moved to the Charities Aid Foundation.

The Chair reported the sad death of Georgette Versinger.

Richard Sturch

Society News & Notes

The Library

Brian Horne has let us have the following update.

As members of the Society will be aware I shall be retiring from my lectureship at King's College, London at the end of September 2001. Hitherto the two libraries have been kept in my room in the College. My retirement means that new homes will have to be found for them. The lending library can (just) be accommodated in my own London flat, but the flat is too small to accommodate both it and the much larger reference library. I have been in touch with a number of libraries both in London and Oxford and it seems, so far, that the best place for our collection might be the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The principle English archive of Charles Williams is already there and, if suitable arrangements can be made, it would seem to be the obvious place. It should be made clear that we, the Charles Williams Society, will not be relinquishing our ownership of the reference collection, but it would be on a kind of permanent loan and available to members of the Society and visiting scholars.

However, nothing has yet been decided and if members have any better ideas about locating the collection I should be grateful to hear them. The Council hopes to discuss this whole question at our next meeting in October.

Marion E Wade Center

Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois is opening and dedicating the new Marion E Wade Center on Saturday 8 September at 7 pm at the Barrows Auditorium, Wheaton College. The evenings events will include readings, music, and address by Barbara Reynolds. Members of the Society are invited to attend and there will be an opportunity to tour the new facility at the corner of Lincoln and Washington Streets from 2 till 5 pm. For further information call 001 630/752– 5908.

Chalk Farm Gallery

There will be an exhibition of Tolkien

related art by Ted Naismith from 21 September to 28 October. Details can be obtained from their website at www.chalk-farm-gallery.co.uk.

New Reading Group

Sarah Thomson has informed us that she has started a reading group in Amherst, Mass. USA, meeting from 3 – 4 on Saturday afternoons at LAOS bookstore in Grace Episcopal Church.

Anyone in the area who is interested is welcome to join them. Details can be obtained via email:

sarah.thomson@library.umass.edu

Olga Markova

has generously donated a copy of the Russian translation of *The Greater Trumps* to the Society's Library, and we extend our thanks to her for this gift.

Dorothy L Sayers Letters

Dr Barbara Reynolds has (quite correctly) picked me up on not printing the publishing details of the letters as reviewed by Toby English in the last issue. I am grateful to her for providing the information which is:

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, edited by Barbara Reynolds. Volume 1 is available in hardback and paperback from Hodder and Stoughton. Volumes 2, 3, and 4 are available from Carole Green Publishing, 2 Station Road, Swavesey, Cambridge CB4 5QJ.

In her letter, Dr Reynolds notes that booksellers have exhibited a tendency to state these volumes are unobtainable and wishes it to be made quite clear that this is not the case.

[It has to be said that the larger chains in this country have a reprehensible policy of not stocking, or even acknowledging the existence of, books by small independent publishing houses. – Ed.]

New Members

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members of the Society:

Stephen Hayhow, 129 Essex Road, London E10 6BS

Dr. Victor Hill, PO Box 11, Williamstown, MA 01267, USA.

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- **Saturday 13th October 2001**
  A reading of *The House by the Stable.* In the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church, St. Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, London W2 at 2.30 pm.

- **Saturday 23 February 2002** Angelika Schneider will speak on 'CW, economics and "On the King's Coins"' (a late reply to the November 1992 paper given by John Hibbs) in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church at 2.30 pm

- **Saturday 15 June 2002** The Annual General Meeting will be held in Pusey House, St Giles, Oxford. Speaker to be confirmed.

- **Saturday 2 November 2002**
  Stephen Barber will speak on 'Metaphysical and Romantic in the Taliessin Poems' in the Church Room, St Matthews Church, Bayswater.

The Dance Along the Artery: T. S. Eliot and Charles Williams

The following paper was delivered by Stephen Medcalf at the Charles Williams Society Conference on 17 June 2000.

(I began this talk, in that pleasant, sunlit room in Stepney where the conference of June 2000 was held, by reading the whole of T. S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton*. I think the reader would find it helpful to do so too.)

> The dance along the artery
> The circulation of the lymph
> Are figured in the drift of stars

So sings T. S. Eliot in *Burnt Norton*, continuing more gravely a few lines later with the words "At the still point of the turning world … there the dance is…"

It is a commonplace among commentators on *Burnt Norton* that T. S. Eliot took the image of the dance in the second passage from Charles Williams's novel *The Greater Trumps*, for Charles Williams told Helen Gardner that it was so, and Eliot confirmed it. Not every commentator, not even Helen Gardner, remarks that "the dance along the artery" must be part of the same borrowing: and no one, to my knowledge, has made anything of it. It is in fact the only thing certainly known of influence, in either direction, in the creative work of Williams and Eliot, although both wrote a number of criticisms of each other.

I want to make this image of the dance the centre of an argument that, when the two first met, Eliot exclusively advocated the negative way of the mystics as the right path to God: that Williams influenced him much more deeply in his writing of *Burnt Norton* than in this single image, and was, not uniquely but very largely, responsible for his allowing the affirmative way to play a part in that poem: and that therefore Williams is largely responsible for Eliot's turning to the affirmative way

increasingly through the *Four Quartets* and absolutely in his last poem *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees.*

Of course my evidence is not confined to the image of the dance nor to *Burnt Norton*, but depends on the whole context of their friendship, which I shall now try to say something of.

When they first met is uncertain. Eliot wrote (in 1948) in an introduction to *All Hallows' Eve* that it was in the late twenties and that it was Lady Ottoline Morrell who made him "read Williams's two first novels, *War in Heaven* and *The Place of the Lion*, and at the same time, or a little later, invited me to tea to meet him." This cannot be right, for *War in Heaven* was not published until 1930, *The Place of the Lion* not until 1931, and *Many Dimensions* had come between, also in 1931. Moreover, Alice Mary Hadfield quotes letters from Williams to Eliot written in 1929 and early 1930 which suggest some degree of familiarity: and Anne Ridler tells of a lunch arranged by Montgomery Bélgior so that the two could meet, which ended in one of the classic mutual misunderstandings when Williams, to round off a discussion about tautology, deliberately misquoted the last line of *Lycidas* by way of farewell: "Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new", and Eliot solemnly corrected "fields" to "woods". Anne also thinks Eliot wrote a gracious note to Williams about the latter's essay on him, published early in 1930 in *Poetry at Present*.

Eliot's confusion, I think, says something interesting about Williams. For Eliot goes on in the same essay to remark that he "can think of no writer who was more wholly the same man in his life and in his writings." And what above all he means by that, beyond a certain charm and eloquence, is that for Williams "there was no frontier between the material and spiritual world. Had I ever had to spend a night in a haunted house, I should have felt secure with Williams in my company." And specifically of Williams's novels, Eliot says that "He knew, and could put into words, states of consciousness of a mystical kind, and the sort of elusive experience which many people have once or twice in a lifetime. (I am thinking of certain passages in *The Place of the Lion*, but there is no novel without them.)"

The fact that it was evidently *The Place of the Lion* that struck Eliot most strongly may account for his thinking, in 1948, that it was part of his introduction to Williams's work: I shall return to this. But more importantly, I think that Eliot did know Williams in the late twenties: but that Williams, before he wrote the novels in the form in which we have them now, was not yet the preternatural figure whom Eliot remembered from the thirties and forties, so that all the *éclat* of meeting him was transferred in memory to a meeting which was not in fact their first. (Assuming that Eliot is right in thinking that Lady Ottoline had made him read a couple of novels before "introducing" them in 1931 or later.) My main reason for thinking this is that my father, who knew Williams slightly in the twenties but not I think thereafter, gave me the impression that Williams was certainly a lively and interesting person, but never suggested any of the preternatural quality which Eliot and many others saw in him. My father had shared the last years of the First World War in the Pioneer Corps with Fred Page, who shared an office with Williams in the twenties. He told me of an occasion when he joined Page and Williams in selecting poems for one of Williams's collections of the twenties, I do not know whether *Divorce* or *Windows of Night*, and remarked to Williams on his harshness about his own work, that he might be King Solomon about other peoples' poems but was King Herod to his own. To this Williams said: "You know, that's an epigram." And he said that Page sometimes found it a trying experience sharing an office with Williams because it became a centre for the whole University Press while Page really wanted to work undisturbed. This is apparent in Williams's *Masque of the Manuscript* where Colin, who represents Page, laments:

> You disturb and distract me from Samuel and Jane,
> O quickly release me! I hanker again
> For clues in the water mark, clues in the grain.

Nothing here of the preternatural man. To make the contrast in a different way, I am very touched to remember that in Fred Page's last days, when his wits were wandering, it was my father, his "dear brother Jim", whom he said that he was going to see. My father was a very nice man.

So, no doubt, was the Charles Williams of the twenties whom Eliot perhaps first knew. But what about the man who would be able to manage a haunted house, and

who could put into words those experiences which happen once or twice in a lifetime? I am not proposing that those were merely literary qualities, or that Eliot, and many others who saw them in him, were only reading his novels into him. I rather think that somewhere about 1930 the "extended spiritual sense", which is another phrase of Eliot's for what he recognised in Williams, deepened and strengthened.

The reason which Williams himself would probably have given for this is an experience which both he and Eliot had, and to which they both attached overwhelming importance, but which they interpreted somewhat differently. It is the Beatrician experience, the experience of being in love which enabled the Italian poets of the thirteenth century to write such lines as Eliot quoted from one of them in his lectures on Metaphysical Poetry in 1926:

> Who is she coming, whom all gaze upon,
> Who makes the air all tremulous with light?

This is the beginning of a sonnet by Dante's friend Guido Cavalcanti; but the greatest exponent of this experience is, of course, Dante himself. And one can find abundant castings back to Dante in Charles Williams's letters and other writings in relation to his experience of two women: his wife Florence and his colleague at the Oxford University Press, Phyllis Jones. In his love for both he found something supernatural; but I think it is only in relation to Phyllis Jones that this sense is expressed as something visionary, indeed visual, in relation to her body. This would seem to have begun about 1928; a few years later he wrote to Phyllis that matter

> ought to be the *significant* presence of God … (Why does) to many people romantic love seem so intolerably *significant*? There are many loves and many friendships and places of beauty and delight – but this one shining *meaning* occurs very rarely – once in a lifetime perhaps, I mean literally once, even with the beloved. But that is what all matter ought to be, everywhere and at all times…

It is perhaps that experience he is thinking of when he offers reasons in his book *Witchcraft* why people have believed in magic, and speaks of occasions when

> a thing, being wholly itself is laden with universal meaning. A hand lighting a cigarette may seem like the rock of existence. Two light dancing steps by a girl may seem to be what all the schoolmen were trying to express. It is (only one cannot quite catch it) an intellectual statement of beatitude.

In his poem *Bors to Elayne: The Fish of Broceliande* Sir Bors makes the fish both the symbol of the unity of divinity and matter in the Mass, and the expression of what he sees in Elayne –

> *accipe*, take the fish.
>
> Take; I have seen the branches of Broceliande.
> Though Camelot is built, though the King sit on the throne,
> yet the wood in the wild west of the shapes and names
>
> probes everywhere through the frontier of head and hand;
> everywhere the light through the great leaves is blown
> on your substantial flesh, and everywhere your glory frames

I do not suppose that this experience was the only source of Williams's sense of the presence of the supernatural in the natural: but I think it focussed that sense and I suspect Williams himself would have said that it was its centre.

In August 1930 a second and contrary experience followed. He discovered that Phyllis Jones was in love with another colleague at the Press, Gerard Hopkins. The effect of this on him he described most directly, under the protection of literary criticism, in 1932 in *The English Poetic Mind*. He compares the sensations of Troilus seeing Cressida in the arms of Diomed, in Shakespeare's play, to those of Wordsworth, in the *Prelude*, when he hears that England has declared war on revolutionary France.

> The crisis which Troilus endured is one common to all men; it is in a sense the only interior crisis worth talking about. It is that in which every nerve of the body, every consciousness of the mind, shrieks that something cannot be. Only it is.
>
> Cressida *cannot* be playing with Diomed. But she is. The Queen *cannot* have married Claudius. But she has. Desdemona *cannot* love Casio. But she does. Daughters *cannot* hate their father and benefactor. But they do. The British government *cannot* have declared war on the Revolution. But it has. The whole being of the victim denies the fact; the fact outrages his whole being.

Since it is "the only interior crisis worth talking about", Williams suggests that all poets are likely at some point to deal with it. One possible response is symbolised by Milton in Satan's soliloquy on Mount Niphates, to reject the good that is denied to you:

> …all good to me is lost;
> Evil, be thou my good…

For Williams, the opposite reaction became one of the cornerstones of his moral sense: to accept both the goodness that one has experienced, and the fact that it is denied to one's present experience. "We must not deny in the darkness what we have known in the light" said Coventry Patmore: Williams enlarges this dictum to insist, as Anne Ridler puts it in the introduction to his essays, that the whole universe must be known as good.

The holding together of these two experiences, that "a thing being wholly itself is laden with universal meaning" and that "every nerve of the body, every consciousness of the mind shrieks that something" – the same thing in a different state – "cannot be. Only it is" is the root of Williams's greater novels. One might note in particular his ideal portrait of Phyllis Jones as Chloe in *Many Dimensions*, written apparently at precisely the time when Gerard Hopkins revealed their love affair to him; and his powerful and painful portrayal of Lawrence Wentworth undergoing something like Troilus seeing Cressida in the arms of Diomed, and refusing to accept that it is happening to him in *Descent into Hell.*

To these two experiences one must add a third: that Williams and his wife Florence maintained their relationship throughout, under, one must suppose, extraordinary strains, and that when in 1942-3 he wrote, at T. S. Eliot's commission, *The Figure of Beatrice* it was his experience of his wife to which he returned to illuminate Dante's experience of Beatrice. It is from this threefold experience that Williams's preternatural air, and his supernatural wisdom I guess, evolved.

In this complex of experience, perhaps, is the centre of Williams's affirmation of images. Again, I do not mean that his understanding of things laden with significance, and so as epiphanies of the work and glory of God, was confined to these experiences of human love. Any object of experience might be experienced so. Eliot, in specifying certain passages in *The Place of the Lion* "is most likely to have had in mind the vision of the butterflies in the garden, an epiphany therefore in nature, and perhaps, as a more abstract and inward experience, the moment when Anthony Durrant experiences the landing on a staircase as a shaking cliff above an abyss, over which he presently achieves balance and flight among other hints and expressions of lasting things." But Williams's experiences do seem to converge on the experience, both positive and negative, of the human body: and what he saw in other bodies seems for some people to have been recognisable in him. The best sense, at any rate, that I have been given of what it was like to meet him was by Thelma Shuttleworth, when I asked her about the neurasthenic tremor of his hands which was a handicap, trivially in that it made it difficult for him to shave himself, more seriously in his daily work in the fatigue of writing. One didn't feel it as a handicap, she said, but as if he were "trembling with life." Later, writing to me, she quoted some lines from 'Taliessin in the Rose-Garden' about a moment when the "air was clear, as near as earth can to the third heaven":

> Only (what lacks there) it breathed the energy
> from Broceliande that ever seethed in Logres,
> the variable temperature of *mastering* Nature; Taliessin's
>
> senses under Nimue's influences stirred and trembled
> with the infinite and infinitesimal trembling of the roses.

> This is Charles, for me. As in a work of art, the moment of perfection can only be that if the movements to and from it are implicit. (Thelma's italics.)

That T. S. Eliot, when he quoted Cavalcanti's line about the lady coming "Who makes the air all tremulous with light" was describing something which he also knew from personal experience, we can be fairly sure. The only direct evidence is that when he and W. F. Stead were discussing the *Vita Nuova* he said shyly "I have had that experience"; but the indirect evidence of the Clark lectures on metaphysical poetry and of his essay on Dante in 1929 is strong. Of whom he had this experience we do not know. The strongest pointer is a curious insistence, in both writings, that when Dante describes his first encounter with Beatrice and the overwhelming epiphany which accompanied it as happening when he was nine, he was dating it *later* than is likely. With the support of a "distinguished psychologist" (I. A. Richards) Eliot adds a note to the French translation of the third lecture that "cet ordre d'experience est plus répandu à l'age de quatre ou cinq ans" which he advances in *Dante* to "five or six years of age." This sounds as if it must include autobiography, but not so obtrusively as to make one suspect Eliot of a self-protective obfuscation.

If we have any name to fit this evidence, it must be that of the girl whom he described as "the earliest personal influence" on him beyond his own family, his lively Irish nursemaid, Annie Dunne. His mind was certainly running on her in the years after his baptism, when he was writing his most Beatrician poem, *Ash Wednesday* – of how she first took him into a Roman Catholic church, and of how she explained to him the traditional proofs of the existence of God. And as Ronald Bush has observed, the fact that in a list of images from childhood written in the same year "spring violets" follow immediately after Annie Dunne making her devotions in the church, suggests that it is a vision of her in *Ash Wednesday* IV - albeit transfigured – "Who walked between the violet and the violet". Lyndall Gordon assumes that the lady of *Ash Wednesday* is Emily Hale, whom Eliot had fallen in love with before he left New England in 1914, and whom within a year of his marriage to Vivienne he had returned to, in memory and imagination,

as the real love of his life. But in view of the insistence on the childhood age of the lover of a Beatrice, this interpretation of his life sounds like what he condemns in the reading of the *Vita Nuova* as Pre-Raphaelite misinterpretation, a sentimentalising of the figure of Beatrice into an elegant and sexually mature young woman. Yet of course it may be that a childhood love had been repeated and enhanced for him in another woman. We do not know.

What is certain is that if his illuminated vision concerned either of these women, it was part of a love which was in one way or another shut off from him, but without any of the painful division involved in Charles Williams's vision. This may partly account for what Eliot said in a conversation with Williams and John Hayward when

> we touched on the Troilus – Niphates crises. I referred to the moment when the thing by which we lived becomes poisoned – as Othello said – and Eliot said he didn't quite get it. So I said – 'O – Keats and Fanny Browne', and he said, so charmingly and seriously, 'Ah, I don't know that state.' But Hayward and I agreed that we did, only too well.

These loves of Eliot were distanced rather than contradicted. And although in a hard moral sense he might be said to have loved his wife Vivienne more than he did either Annie Dunne or Emily Hale – for he maintained his side of a nearly intolerable relationship for seventeen years – he concluded, it would seem quite soon after their marriage, not that their love was poisoned, but that he had never been in love with Vivienne. And it would seem too that whereas for Williams there was a sense of unity within the experience of falling in love between the illumined and the unillumined side, even if this sense of unity required over time a kind of faith to maintain it, for Eliot there was even at the beginning a gap between the two sides. *Ash Wednesday* only offers the vision, the illumined side, as it might be experienced in heaven: it is not, therefore, to be compared with the *Vita Nuova*, but with the *Commedia*. The passage in Eliot's work which most resembles the *Vita Nuova* is instinct with that peculiar sort of irony which is present in all his pre-Christian

poetry, and is clearly related to the sense of gap within his feelings. It is in *The Waste Land* I lines 35 to 41. Here the "Yet" following the faint vulgarity of "They called me the hyacinth girl", and perhaps of a remote echo in the previous line of the song "You called me Baby Doll a year ago", marks the gap in the original experience, not only in memory or a change of relationship.

In the Clark lectures, Eliot attributes Dante's ability to transcend this gap to the inheritance in his whole culture of the philosophy, and specifically the religious mysticism, of Aristotle. For Aristotle, the highest good is contemplation of the unmoved Mover, who contemplates Himself as perfection. This is God: and the relationship between the world and God is love, not, as in the Judaeo-Christian understanding, because God loves the world, but because every individual thing in the world is moved, directly or indirectly, by love for the perfection which is God. God moves the world as being loved. What is happening in the *Vita Nuova* is the interpretation of Beatrice and her effect on her lover in the light of this scheme: "the development and subsumption of emotion and feeling through intellect into the vision of God."

This is not the whole story even in the Clark lectures: Eliot calls the poetry of Dante and others in whom he is interested the poetry of the Word made flesh, in which phrase evidently is implicit the doctrine of the incarnation, and therefore of an active love on God's part. And this was one of the threads which led to Eliot's conversion. In the year after his baptism, and apparently the day he made his first confession, Shrove Tuesday 1928, he wrote to Paul Elmer More observing that there is a "void that I find in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations, and which there is only one thing to fill. I am one whom this sense of void tends to drive towards asceticism or sensuality, and only Christianity helps to reconcile me to life, which is otherwise disgusting."

In the blossoming of his poetry which happened in the three years after his baptism, in *The Journey of the Magi, A Song for Simeon, Ash Wednesday, Marina,* the fragments of *Coriolan*, Eliot seems to find the activity, the grace, of God, apparent in the incarnation and in moments of illumination which he regards as similar to the incarnation, but not at all in the world as secular and created. For the rest he continued to maintain the austere version of the way of negation

which, before his conversion, he had taken from St John of the Cross as the epigraph for *Sweeney Agonistes*: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union until it has divested itself of the love of created beings." Christianity did, I think, provide him with a pull towards affirmation. Thus in the first draft of *Ash Wednesday* as a whole poem which he read to the Woolfs in 1929 there is a line near the end which expresses St John's thought directly: "Our life is in the world's decease" – and the whole ending is coloured by that feeling. In the published version there is no such line, and those loveliest of his verses which begin "…though I do not wish to wish these things" which some readers would still take as a rejection of the natural order, seem to me patient of a reading as a struggle for freedom from self-indulgent fantasies of remembered childhood experience. And I suspect that one factor in the cessation of his poetry after *Coriolan* was the inability to hold the way of negation together with his concern with Christianity as an active force in the world: for we know that the section which he intended to follow the completed first two sections, and their picture of a political leader caught between his leadership and contemplation of "the still point of the turning world" was to have been based on St John of the Cross. He did not write it then (when the final decision to part from Vivienne provided other causes for a breakdown) or later. And when he began to write poetry again we find in the praise of light in the last chorus from *The Rock* in 1934, and in the last chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935 – "All things affirm Thee in living" – a movement towards affirmation.

Nevertheless, on 17 April 1936 we find him writing to Bonamy Dobrée, who had expressed horror at the epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes*, thus.

> The doctrine that in order to arrive at the love of God one must divest oneself of the love of created beings was thus expressed by St John of the Cross, you know: i.e. a man who was writing primarily not for you and me, but for people seriously engaged in pursuing the Way of Contemplation. It is only to be read in relation to that Way; i.e. merely to kill one's human affections will get one nowhere, it would be only to become rather more a completely living corpse than most people are. But the doctrine is fundamentally true, I believe. Or to put your belief in your own way, that only through the love of created beings can we approach the love of God, that I

> believe to be UNTRUE. Whether we mean by that domestic and friendly affections, or a more comprehensive love of the "neighbour", of humanity in general. I don't think that ordinary human affections are capable of leading us to the love of God, but rather that the love of God is capable of informing, intensifying and elevating our human affections, which otherwise have little to distinguish them from the 'natural' affections of animals. Try looking at it from that end of the glass!

In what he says here, Eliot has clearly moved from the position he held when he set the epigraph from St John of the Cross on the fragments of *Sweeney Agonistes* in 1926 and 1927. He could be taken as repeating the doctrine of the Clark lectures, that if one has the right philosophical and religious standpoint, human affections can become a revelation of the divine by development through the intellect. Yet there seems to be a lack of connection between this austere doctrine and the actual response to the beloved as described by Eliot in the work of Cavalcanti and Dante, as in the hyacinth garden, and even in *Ash Wednesday*. Given this austere doctrine, one understands that the crisis that Williams knew, between what he did believe a revelation of the "significant presence of God" and the contradiction of it, would mean nothing to Eliot. But in *Burnt Norton* the awareness of the affirmation of God in creation is greater, and more involved in a sense of contradiction, though not as intense as that which Williams speaks of. I will now, therefore, turn to what I think was the part played by Williams in this turn.

Not long after the publication of the fragments of *Sweeney Agonistes*, Williams published an essay in his book *Poetry at Present* which shows him well aware of Eliot's negative bent. It ends with a deft sonnet proclaiming it:

> Put out the light and then put out the light
> quietly the faithful mind puts everything out…
> Emptiness and fullness wholly alike enjoyed,
> since enjoyment must be, even of bleakness and void…

The essay is frequently quoted as evidence of how difficult it was for Eliot's first readers to understand his earlier poetry, because Williams says that he professes

"a sincere and profound respect" for that poetry though he fails to understand it. But this failure to understand is a least in part a response to a bafflement which is intrinsically part of Eliot's poetic effect, and indeed relates through his irony to his negative bent. Much that Williams says shows that he understood Eliot not only more than those who rejected him, but at least as well as many who have claimed since to understand him. There are not many descriptions of that early work better than the sonnet just quoted, or than "Mr Eliot's poetic experience of life would seem to be Hell varied by intense poetry."

Nevertheless, there may be a sense in which Williams misses an aspect of, for example, *The Waste Land*, and perhaps one of the reasons why he found it as natural as Dante did to pass directly from human love to the love of God. This is, that he wrote from within the same culture and tradition as Dante did, and thought it therefore alive while Eliot found himself writing from outside it, at least in its fully believed form, and found it moribund.

Take Williams's comment on the last lines of Part II of *The Waste Land*. "Many of [Eliot's] readers must so have felt sounding within them the young freshness of lyric as they heard goodnights exchanged outside a public-house, so near are we to both."

It is a beautiful response, and a sensitive comment on those lines by themselves. But does it fit the context? – the very doubtful sweetness of the ladies in Part II, the echo of Ophelia's death which seems to be taken up at the beginning of Part III – "The river's tent is broken", the repeated and assertive "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" of Part II and indeed the whole fragmentary structure and sense of ruin of the poem itself? Williams goes on to describe the lines as "one of the refrigeria of Mr Eliot's hell", but I think they too fit rather with the lines from his own endpiece

> …..then with the flight
> of our tangled spectres, after the last tired shout
> of applause, time ends. The attendants will go about
> the empty corridors, putting out even the night.

Williams's response to the closing of the pub is that of a native Londoner, in whom the life of London continues, not that of the "metoikos", the resident alien in Cosmopolis which Eliot habitually regarded himself as. Williams could have pointed to other lines in the poem which do seem to be refrigeria – above all the fishmen and the mandoline in Billingsgate with the "inexplicable splendour" of St Magnus Martyr – to provide a parallel, but it is perhaps interesting that he does *not* choose them. What he does choose finds a parallel in a poem of his own written earlier and I suspect as either an echo or (if he had at some stage doubted his interpretation) a riposte to *The Waste Land*. The poem is in *Windows of Night* (published 8 January 1925) and is called, significantly enough 'The English Tradition'. A man leaving a bus says "Good-night to all you ladies" and Williams comments:

> Young and fresh and wild,
> Tossed on the London light;
> Lovelace, Sackville, and Carew,
> All were singing, and we too,
> "Good-night to all you ladies,
> Good-night!"

I must here admit that I am trying to build up a picture in which Williams has an urge to replace the tradition which seems to be dying between the fragments of *The Waste Land*. For I want to suggest that the structure and some of the incidents of Williams's novel *The Greater Trumps*, published in 1932, owe a great deal to this urge. Williams could scarcely have been unaware, when he structured his book on the twenty-two Greater Trumps of the Tarot pack, that Eliot had already done the same thing in *The Waste Land*: not surprisingly in *Poetry at Present* he had listed "the figures on the Tarot cards" among the "strangest figures" whom we glimpse in Eliot's poetry – though I do not suppose that the Tarot pack can have been wholly strange to someone like Williams, who had associated with A. E. Waite. But it is not only a matter of the structure. I suppose that, after the vision of the butterflies in *The Place of the Lion*, most of Williams's readers would think that his most memorable and original vision of "a thing wholly itself but laden with universal meaning" is the passage in *The Greater Trumps* describing the traffic policeman. The archetypal Tarot pack has been described, and

Henry has caused Nancy to make the first experiment with it. Nancy half-seriously asks Henry if the policeman outside her home in London is "one of your mysterious Trumps?" Henry suggests the Emperor, and repeats it, as they drive through London, of a traffic policeman. And for a moment Nancy

> saw in that heavy official barring their way the Emperor of the Trumps, helmed, in a white cloak, stretching out one sceptred arm, as if Charlemagne, or one like him, stretched out his controlling sword over the tribes of Europe pouring out from the forests and bade them pause or march as he would. The great roads ran below him, to Rome, to Paris, to Aix, to Byzantium, and the nations established themselves in cities upon them. The noise of all the passing street came to her as the roar of many peoples; the white cloak held them by a gesture; order and law were there. It moved, it fell aside, the torrent of obedient movement rolled on, and they with it. They flashed past the helmed face, and she found that she had dropped her eyes lest she should see it.

Immediately there follow similar epiphanies, of the Empress, the Chariot, and the Hanged Man; and later the Lovers, the Falling Tower, and others until at last the Fool appears.

Such epiphanies, dependent on such a total structure had appeared in *The Waste Land*, even though Eliot, as he says in his notes, had departed from "the exact constitution" of the Tarot pack of cards. Madame Sosotris tells a fortune, probably the protagonist's, and the images she lists appear in order through the poem (although one, the Wheel, had its principle appearance eliminated by Ezra Pound). First in Madame Sosostris's telling is "the drowned Phoenician sailor", and he first appears in the next stanza, among the crowds in the London streets, disconcertingly reincarnate as Stetson, who was with the narrator "in the ships at Mylae" – the Romans' first sea battle when they overthrew the (Phoenician) Carthaginians. He recurs through the poem, to have his own section in *Death by Water*. Next is "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, / the lady of situations" whom I suppose most readers take

to be the lady of *A Game of Chess*, then "the man with three staves" whom Eliot associated with the Fisher King, then the Wheel, the merchant, the Hanged Man (explicitly absent as he is to be in the Emmaus passage near the end), and finally "crowds of people, walking round in a ring" as they do, also near the end, "over endless plains". Madame Sosostris's fortune-telling is full of jargon, and one cannot tell whether the various epiphanies are only aesthetic effects (inspired, not improbably, by what James Joyce called epiphanies in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*) or are glimpses of some lost whole vision. Fear, fragmentation, and Eliotic irony brood over them.

Williams fills the background of his Tarot epiphanies with an ancient vision, the tradition of correspondences running through the cosmos, expressed in the image of the dance. As Henry tells Nancy

> ..there is nothing anywhere that does not change. That change – that's what we know of the immortal dance; the law in the nature of things – that's the measure of the dance, why one thing changes swiftly and another slowly, why there is seeming accident and incalculable alteration, why men hate and love and grow hungry, and cities that have stood for centuries fall in a week, why the smallest wheel and the mightiest world revolve, why blood flows and the heart beats and the brain moves, why your body is poised on your ankles and the Himalaya are rooted in the earth – quick or slow, measurable or immeasurable, there is nothing at all anywhere but the dance.

The distinctive feature of the dance, as imagined by Williams with the figures of the Tarot as the dancers, is that at its centre stands the Fool (numbered 0 in the traditional Greater Trumps), which to most people "was still: it alone in the middle of all that curious dance did not move." But there is a legend, "the most ancient tale of the whole human race", that it does move. One character in the novel, "a woman of great power" who "possesses herself entirely", for whom "everything's complete…in the moment" because she sees everything as moved by love, sees the Fool moving "dancing with the rest…as if it were always arranging itself in some place which was empty for it." This is Nancy's aunt sig-

nificantly named Sybil: with obvious general significance but, in view of the correspondences with *The Waste Land*, perhaps also intended as a transposition into life of the Sybil in the poem's epigraph, who wants to die. The legend that the Fool does move, and the fact that this seer and saint can see him move, weave themselves into the plot of the novel, and it is clear that the legend has, as at least part of its meaning, the tension between Aristotle's God who does not move but moves the universe because He is at its vertex, and the Judaeo-Christian God who moves the world by His love for it.

It has been conjectured that Williams was again inspired in this imagination by Eliot, not from *The Waste Land*, but by the later, Christian Eliot of *Ash Wednesday* V:

> Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
> About the centre of the silent Word

(which itself may echo the motto of the Carthusians *stat crux dum volvitur orbis*) or perhaps from the line I have already quoted from *Coriolan*: "At the still point of the turning world".

One could, however, understand Williams's image of the Fool as being generated out of the whole complex of doctrine we have touched on, together with the image's place as nought in the Tarot pack without supposing him to have Eliot's lines in mind. But even discounting this borrowing, the pattern of the Tarots seem to me enough, and well enough established, to provide a clear case of what is modishly called intertextuality, but which Williams would have called more profoundly, Exchange. One might quote from his poem on the parable of the 'Wedding Garment', where he presents exchange as the only way we can live in heaven, and apply the instance of the father and the son to himself and Eliot:

> …magnificence
> a father borrowed of his son,
> who was not there ashamed to don
> his father's wise economy.

Moreover, even if Williams did not take the image of the unmoving Fool at the centre from Eliot, the similarity is sufficient to make it clear why it should be Williams's version of the cosmic dance and not, for example, that of Sir John Davies in his poem *Orchestra*, that should be the source of the version in *Burnt Norton*.

Let us now turn therefore to the two uses of the dance in respectively the lyric and the discursive sections of *Burnt Norton* II. The first use in the discursive section depends on Eliot's repetition of his own line from *Coriolan* and appears like that to be entirely concentrated on the return from the world of the many to the world of the one: "…at the still point, there the dance is." But the second use, subtly but clearly, includes the world of the many in its own right, "…Except for the point, the still point, / There would be no dance, and there is only the dance." And this line also clearly echoes the peroration of Henry's description of the dance as the image of the world of the many: "there is nothing at all anywhere but the dance."

A few lines later again, we are not surprised to find the image of negation itself denied –

> concentration
> Without elimination, both a new world
> And the old made explicit,

This world is not eliminated – note that "concentration / Without elimination" is as it were a subjectivisation of the ancient definition of God as a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, but, as it were again, lessening the negative stress even of that. The "partial ecstasy" of this world, we are next told, is completed, its "partial horror" resolved.

Moreover, all this turn towards the created world is already present in the first, lyric section of Part II. I began with the discursive section because one can see more clearly there Eliot enlarging on his own, originally negative, line, and because it is of this section that Helen Gardner explicitly alleges the derivation from *The Greater Trumps*. If we examine the lyric section with the assumption that the dance there too is from the novel, then we find that, in another sense than the

mystical, it marks a shift from the negative to the positive. The images of the first lines all include an element of pain in their picture of the world of time and of the body. The pungent garlic and the dazzling sapphire – a powerful and strange synaesthetic pair – prevent the smooth turning of the axle-tree, which must be the tree that measures the movement of the whole universe and so, as Aristotle defines time (the measurement of motion), creates time. And "the trilling wire" – which makes a third in the synaesthetic sequence – even if it sings, "sings below inveterate scars", the results of "ancient wars". In fact, the image of the singing wire seems to be like the voices of *Murder in the Cathedral*

> The impossible is still temptation.
> The impossible, the undesirable,
> Voices under sleep, waking a dead world
> So that the mind may not be whole in the present.

But with the next line in *Burnt Norton* the image of the circulation of the blood becomes wholly delightful when it is described as a dance:

> The dance along the artery

And that the dance should be felt in the blood seems also an echo of Williams – partly from Henry's phrases already quoted "why blood flows and the heart beats" and partly from Nancy's wondering a little earlier in the same chapter how she could tell her father that "I had a glimpse of a dance that went all through my blood."

Eliot then introduces a more recondite aspect of medical knowledge which reconciles the wire under the scars with the circulation of the blood by mentioning "the circulation of the lymph". For it is the circulation of the lymph that carries poisons introduced into the blood to a point where they can be dealt with. And then, as in Henry's exposition, Eliot relates the dance in the body to the dance in the macrocosm, "the drift of stars". This is imaged again in the return of the image of the axle-tree: for I take it that "the moving tree", in and above which in the poem we now move, is that same measure of time, now turning smoothly. But it now has "the figured leaf" on it, and although this has been quite plausibly related to a paradisal garden in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* where the fates of men are inscribed on

"many a figured leaf", I wonder if it may not also relate to Nancy's experiences of the cards, while they fall in relation to the figures of the dance, "as if the great leaves of some aboriginal tree, the sacred bodhi-tree under which our Lord Gautama achieved Nirvana or that Northern dream of Igdrasil or the olives of Gethsemane, were drifting downward…" At any rate Eliot's is a tree which has below it the strife of time, "the boarhound and the boar", while above it this strife is "reconciled among the stars", a line followed by one of those gaps of Eliot's across which, as across the synapses of the nervous system, information passes to the line inherited from *Coriolan*: "At the still point of the turning world". So this original negating line of Eliot's is not only in *Burnt Norton* related to a shift in what follows from the one to the many through the image of the dance, but has already been introduced by a shift from a sense of the imperfection and pain of time and the physical to a sense of the delighted movement of the blood and the perfect movement of time in the image of the dance.

In both cases the shift is from the way of negation to the way of affirmation and we cannot be surprised to find that the next part of the poem, Part III, defines, contrasts and accepts these two ways as "daylight / Investing form with lucid stillness" and "darkness to purify the soul", both over against our common state of "dissatisfaction / Time before and time after / In a dim light". Part V weaves affirmation and negation together in relation to poetry, music and the visual arts, but (because these are all works of art) with more attention to affirmation. One image of the way in which form and pattern reach "the stillness", that of the Chinese jar which "still / Moves perpetually in its stillness", parallels the moment in *The Greater Trumps* when Nancy realises that "the apparent quiescence" of an old arch is only an aspect of the stresses which hold it together and of the dance of the "electrical nuclei" which make up matter.

The continued contrast of the two ways, however, rather calls to mind another novel of Williams's, *The Place of the Lion* and the continued contrast there of affirmation, represented by the protagonist, Anthony Durrant, and negation, represented by the bookseller's assistant, Mr Richardson. No doubt this contrast was one of the elements which particularly fascinated Eliot in this novel: but as we have seen, what he overtly praises in it, more than in the other novels, are the descriptions of "the sort of elusive experience which many people have once or

twice in a lifetime" and, as he added in a talk on the wireless on Williams in 1946, "have been unable to put into words."

This prompts me to bolder speculation about the relation of Charles Williams to *Burnt Norton*. For the thread of mentions of the way of affirmation in *Burnt Norton* leads back from the image of daylight "investing form with lucid stillness" through "the moment in the rose-garden" to the passage in Part I, which is strictly without parallel in Eliot's poetry precisely because it is an attempt to put into *narrative* form that "sort of elusive experience" on which Williams bases his novels. There are passages, like that of the hyacinth girl in *The Waste Land*, which present such an experience, but as a moment, not as a narrative: and there are the three passages in the remaining quartets which are deliberate parallels to the rose-garden of *Burnt Norton*, but do not present elusive experiences. *East Coker* offers a ghost story which is clearly a fiction embodying the particular historical continuity of the village: *The Dry Salvages* presents Eliot's memories of the New England coast: *Little Gidding* describes an experience which, while certainly religious and in that sense preternatural, is familiar to anyone who believes in the validity of prayer, and visits a place where "prayer has been valid."

I am therefore suggesting that the narrative of the rose-garden in *Burnt Norton* to a large extent works like, and to an important extent was inspired by, the narratives of elusive experience which Eliot admired in Williams's novels. And this is made a little more likely in that the passage of which Eliot seems most likely to have been thinking when he wrote the introduction to *All Hallows Eve*, the vision of the butterflies in *The Place of the Lion*, distinctly resembles the narrative in *Burnt Norton* in setting and initial atmosphere. Both stories, that is, happen in a secluded garden on one of those hot days in summer or autumn when the heat, the light and the silence seem to prepare for something uncanny, whether hallucination or vision.

Whether it was the example simply of this episode that prompted Eliot, or whether perhaps direct suggestion from a conversation with Williams is more likely I do not know. Their acquaintance was certainly prospering in the second half of 1935 when Eliot seems to have composed *Burnt Norton*: for although Eliot dates their greater intimacy from his going to see Williams's play *Thomas*

Cranmer of Canterbury in 1936, there is a letter from Williams to Eliot dated 21 November 1935 after an evening together, saying "I have not known so happy and easy a time since the dearest of my male friends died two years ago."

Now the root of the rose-garden story is undoubtedly the actual garden at Burnt Norton itself, and Eliot's visit to it, which probably happened at the end of August or beginning of September 1934. His description of the garden in the poem is topographically and atmospherically exact: whether what he describes as happening there did so, or whether he thought of it as a setting for experiences such as he had had elsewhere, or had learnt of other people having, we cannot be certain.

But I am inclined to believe that quite a lot of it did happen: that all the natural elements in the story happened, and that Williams, either by example or actual encouragement, caused Eliot to trace out in imagery something preternatural or, one might say, mystical that either elusively happened or was really implicit in what happened.

My first reason for this is that Eliot later said that visitors to the garden would not find anything very remarkable about it. For this is really not true. Some years ago I was talking about the poem to a lady who, as a girl of seventeen, had lived there for a month. "Burnt Norton" she said. "I haven't thought about it for years. That wonderful house, and the garden where you never felt alone. I didn't know there was a poem about it." And to a limited extent from my own two visits there I would confirm what she said: the beauty and the solitude and the slight oddness of the layout are all remarkable. If Eliot did not attribute the strangeness which is there to the garden itself, I think that must have been because of the strangeness of what happened in his personal experience.

The poem opens with some lines which, with some very insignificant differences, were written for, and then discarded from, the scene in *Murder in the Cathedral* from which I have already quoted, when Becket is tempted with the thought that things might have been different now if he had made a different choice in the past, and indeed that the choice might still be reversed (see *Burnt Norton* I lines 1 – 14).

The rose-garden in this passage Eliot associated, he said, with the garden in *Alice in Wonderland* into which Alice cannot get because she has grown too big to get out of the house. And yet these lines were written in about March 1935 – after he had been into the actual rose-garden which he proceeds to describe. It is then a garden *both* which might have been and which is: and this strange coincidence is what one feels throughout Part I. This feeling is illuminated for me by a passage which Eliot may or may not have had in mind from yet another novel by Williams: *Many Dimensions*. The Chief Justice, Lord Arglay, reflects:

> Every infinitesimal fraction of a second the whole universe peeled off, so to speak, and passed out of consciousness, except for the extremely blurred pictures of memory, whatever memory might be. Out of existence? That was his difficulty; was it out of existence? He remembered having read somewhere once a fantastic theory that whenever a man made a choice, a real choice – whenever he definitely did one of two things he also did at the same moment the other and brought an entire new universe into being that he might do so. For otherwise an infinite number of potentialities would exist for ever unfulfilled – which, the writer had said, though Lord Arglay had forgotten his reasons, was absurd. It had occasionally consoled him, or at least had appeared to him as a not disagreeable hope, when the Court had rejected an appeal from a sentence of death, to think that at the same time, in a new universe parting from this one … they had allowed it. In which case a number of Christopher Arglays must exist; the thought almost reduced him to idiocy. But in the same way the past might, even materially, exist; only man was not aware of it, time being, whatever else it was, a necessity of his consciousness. 'But because I can only be sequentially conscious', he argued, 'must I hold that what is not communicated to consciousness does not exist? I think in a line – but there is the potentiality of the plane.' This perhaps was what great art was – a momentary apprehension of the plane at a point in the line. The Demeter of Cridos, the Praying Hands of Dürer, the *Ode to a Nightingale*, the

> Ninth Symphony – the sense of vastness in those small things
> was the vastness of all that had been felt in the present.

The opening, metaphysical lines of *Burnt Norton* affirm that there is neither free-will nor redemption if all time is present to eternity, and that the rose-garden which we might have entered if we had made a different choice is only an abstraction which never could have existed. The speculations of Lord Arglay offer a metaphysic in which what might have been is given a concrete reality, and the past is likewise given a concrete reality in addition to its continuance in the present. What happens in the rose-garden opposes the opening metaphysic of the poem, not with another metaphysic, but with an experience which seems to be directly of the existence in the present moment both of what might have been and of what has been.

Why Eliot should have felt this in summer or autumn of 1934 at the garden of Burnt Norton has a highly probable personal explanation. Almost certainly he went there on a walk with Emily Hale, whom he might have married. A rose-garden was already the symbol to him of love fulfilled, lost or transcended as in the ambiguous lines of *Ash Wednesday*:

> The single Rose
> Is now the Garden
> Where all loves end

and to come unawares, as he remembered doing, on the rose-garden at Burnt Norton could not but have engendered the thought: "We might have been together in the rose-garden: and we are." And the "we" of the public poem (which invites any readers who have thought of how different their lives might have been, to share his experience of the garden) will in the writing have had the personal meaning "Emily and I."

I do not pretend or wish to explore all the meanings of the extraordinarily rich passage which follows. But I must note here something which struck me as it must have struck many readers when they learnt of the part probably played by Emily Hale in the rose-garden; that is how close a parallel is found for it in much

that Kierkegaard says about faith and his relationship with Regine Olsen (and incidentally in that absolutely Kierkegaardian parable *Babette's Feast*). But I originally dismissed the parallel in any genetic sense, on the ground that Eliot does not seem to have known anything of Kierkegaard before he was translated into English; the first evidence seems just too late to have affected the composition of *Burnt Norton* – the publication of a review by T. S. Gregory of E. L. Allen's *Kierkegaard: His Life and Thought* in Eliot's *Criterion* in January 1936. But the idea has revived in my mind since I realised that one of the few people in England who knew much about Kierkegaard in 1935, and would certainly have talked excitedly about him in that year was Charles Williams. For from February 1935 he was dealing with Alexander Dru and spending "much time" with him on the project of translations of Kierkegaard to be published by the Oxford University Press. So if by any chance Williams and Eliot discussed deep issues of religion, as they almost certainly did in 1935, Kierkegaard would probably have entered the conversation, and perhaps even in connection with private parts of either of their lives, even the visit to Burnt Norton.

Be that as it may, the sense of the garden as a place where past decisions are transcended transforms it in the poem into an image of our own world before we made any radical decisions, "Into our first world": and the overtone is evidently not only of our own personal early lives, but our general first unfallen life, the Garden of Eden. But precisely where the garden becomes most archetypal it becomes most exact. The dead leaves, the shrubbery, the roses, the empty alley leading into the box circle all seem increasingly exact and can in fact still be found in the garden at Burnt Norton. Then comes, as the peak of this increasing particularity, the peculiar shock of the garden, a shock considerable even if one is, having read the poem, expecting it, and one which must have been the greater to someone who did not expect it: the dry concrete pools which were never filled because the weight of the water would have burst the embankment which constitutes them. Even the light effects, even to someone expecting something strange, are surprising: one of my companions on my first visit remarked, looking down into the empty pools "It's as if twilight were made visible." On grounds of more natural likelihood, one might suppose that Eliot thought he saw water in the pools. Whether in association with that the association of the lotos rising, or whatever it symbolises, happened then and there, it is again impossible to say. In

Eliot's notes on the lectures he heard at Harvard in 1913 – 14 on Buddhism by Masaham Anesaki we find that "the lotos alone is perfect, because it has many flowers and many fruits *at once*. The real entity is represented in the fruit, its manifestation in the flower. Mutual relation of final reality and manifestation." What later he may probably have read in Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* which identifies "the unfoldment of *the mystical lotus* of the Hindu yogi" with "the moment of the expansion of consciousness" is, as it were, a subjective correlative of the other explanation. Momentarily, the whole stress is on fulfilment, which is driven so far that the uncanny sense of presence in the garden is fulfilled too, in a manner like the epiphanies of Charles Williams:

> And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.

Now, however, something happens which has happened twice before in Eliot's poetry, though with variations. In *The Waste Land* in the climactic passage about a journey through the waterless desert, the poetry simulates water –

> …. sound of water over a rock
> Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
> Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop

But there follows the despairing dismissal of the mirage –

> But there is no water.

In *The Journey of the Magi,* the Magi come out of the desert to a "temperate valley / Wet, below the snow line" which in many ways promises to be the end of their journey. But it too is dismissed –

> But there was no information…

However, in the *Journey* there are two differences: first they go on and find their real end; secondly, the reader is aware, though in the poem the Magi are not, that what they find will cast back meaning on what they saw in the temperate valley. Christ's birth will end in the "three trees on the low sky" and other emblems of

the passion there (a movement not unlike the return from discovering the love of God to its informing our human affections in Eliot's letter to Bonamy Dobrée).

What happens in *Burnt Norton* is certainly more like what happens in *The Journey of the Magi*: that is to say, something genuinely illuminatory follows the vanishing of the first vision. But it is hugely disconcerting –

> Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
> Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
> Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
> Cannot bear very much reality.

That the laughter of the children is in fact positive I do not see how one can doubt: something like perhaps what C. S. Lewis describes, I should think quite independently, in *A Grief Observed*, "that impression which I can't describe except by saying that it's like the sound of a chuckle in the darkness. The sense that some shattering and disarming simplicity is the real answer." And if one had any doubts, it becomes clear later in the *Four Quartets* that this is the really given experience of something beyond normal experience in the poem. For the lotos and the reflections in the water are never mentioned again, whereas "the laughter in the garden" is (in *East Coker*). But why are we told to go? And what kind of reality is it which human kind cannot bear very much of? Is it a mystical reality that is simply too great for us to bear for long? Or is the "reality" the contrast between the happy world, real or possible, of the children, and the dry world to which we return? What we retain is given in the last three lines of Part1, of which the second and third simply repeat lines 9 and 10.

> Time past and time future
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.

But I take it that after the intervening episode these lines are repeated with a total revaluation of meaning. For we now know that "what might have been" is not

simply to be dismissed as an abstraction in the world of speculation. It too is always present to the "one end". That is, for the sense of being trapped in the present moment which could not have been otherwise, there is substituted the sense of the eternal present which, whatever it is, is, as we shall be told in Part II, not fixity.

Anne Ridler has made powerful and subtle use of the imagery of *Burnt Norton* in a poem in praise of Williams's collection of Arthurian poems, *Taliessin through Logres*. It was, she says, time that we saw "the real map of England" which contains

> "Arthur, the Grail, the Wounded King"
> And remembered that our footsteps echo in another world
> (Even concrete cannot imprison that reverberation)

The implication is, I take it, that Williams presents as direct vision what Eliot gives in fragmentary echo, not only in *The Waste Land* ("Prison and palace and reverberation…") but still in *Burnt Norton* – although perhaps there is a concession that Eliot's vision is more through the modern. (Perhaps Eliot's most wonderful achievement was to make the phrase "dry concrete" into high poetry.) Certainly the charge which David Jones brought against Charles Williams (probably because he was uneasily aware it could be brought against some of his own work) "Somehow, somewhere, between content and form, concept and image, sign and what is signified, a sense of the contemporary escapes" can hardly be brought against Eliot. And yet of all these three, all concerned with the relation of time to the eternal, Eliot was the most liable to be concerned in religion and metaphysics with the eternal to the exclusion of the temporal.

With this in mind, one might ask, supposing that I am right in feeling the strong analogy between *Burnt Norton* I and the epiphanies in Williams's novels, and supposing that he had used the incident in one of his novels, what would he have made of it? I suppose that a male and female would have gone into a garden, that all would have happened as in the poem with the presences, the water and the lotos, but that the novel would have continued with the male refusing to believe

that the pool was empty, insisting that the lotos was still there, and refusing to obey the bird and leave the garden. For him, the children's' laughter would have become mocking: but the girl would have gone out of the garden and learned to live in time.

I think this because it is more or less what happens in *Descent into Hell*. Lawrence Wentworth opens a door into our first world, into Eden, into "the sealed garden, no less sealed for being so huge, through a secret gate of which he had entered, getting back to himself" where there is a noise of "lapping and lulling waters" which becomes the rustling of leaves in a wood. Beyond the wood he reaches "a place of cisterns and broad tanks, on the watery surface of which the moon still shone" although the moon has vanished. A ghost comes towards him but he rejects it, because even a ghost is too much of external reality to him who has returned into his own body, to the body of Adam before Eve was created. There he finds the image of a woman who has rejected him, an image which is made out of himself or is a manifestation of Lilith who is illusion. To the crisis of a rejection he cannot believe in, he responds, as I suggested earlier, like Satan on Mount Niphates.

In contrast with him is Pauline Anstruther, who has lived her life in terror of meeting herself, her doppelganger, in a terror which becomes redemptive when they meet, when she redeems the ghost whom Wentworth rejected, and takes up her life in the world, now that she is whole.

Eliot could in fact have known *Descent into Hell* in 1935. Williams wrote it in 1934 when it was refused by Gollancz, who had published his earlier novels; and Eliot at some time accepted it for Faber, who published it in 1937. The imagery of the gate opening on a return to Eden and the mysterious pond is, however, no more than suggestive of a relation between the two works. More persuasive to me is a parallel in one of the later passages in the novel, which contrasts Pauline's acceptance of the otherness of God with Wentworth's flight into himself along with Lilith. At the opening of the play in which Pauline leads the chorus she is

> aware of a new thing – of speech in relation to the silence in which it lived.

> … She knew she had always spoken poetry against the silence of this world; now she knew it had to be spoken against – that perhaps, but also something greater, some silence of its own. She recognized the awful space of separating stillness which all mighty art creates about itself, or, uncreating, makes clear to mortal apprehension. Such art, out of "the mind's abyss", makes tolerable, at the first word or note or instructed glance, the preluding presence of the abyss. It creates in an instant its own past. Then its significance mingles with other significances; the stillness gives up kindred meanings, each in its own orb, till by the subtlest graduations they press into altogether other significances, and these again into others, and so into one contemporaneous nature, as in that gathering unity of time from which Lilith feverishly fled. But that nature is to us a darkness, a stillness, only felt by the reverberations of the single speech. … That living stillness … rose at the sound of the trumpet – that which is before the trumpet and shall be after, which is between all sentences and all words, which is between and in all speech and all breath, which is itself the essential nature of all, for all come from it and return to it.

The play here on *stillness* and *silence*, on *now* and *before* and *after*, on *beginning* and *end*, in relation primarily to words and therefore to poetry, but also explicitly to music and the visual arts ("word or note or instructed glance") is certainly closely analogous to Eliot's

> Words move, music moves
> Only in time; but that which is only living
> Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
> Into the silence. …(*et seq. Burnt Norton* V to line 13)

Eliot is, of course, relating the nature of his own poem simply as poetry to "the still point" that is "always present" of which we become aware in the garden at Burnt Norton. In the lines that immediately follow (beginning "Words strain,"),

he associates the straining of words under the tension of such uses with the temptation of the "Word in the desert" by "The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera."

In a dialogue appreciative of the *Four Quartets* which Williams wrote for *The Dublin Review* in April 1943, it becomes clear that he associated this opposition of words and Word against "chimera" with his own opposition of the "one contemporaneous nature" revealing the "gathering unity of time" against Lilith who "feverishly fled" it. One of his speakers asks

> But when he says
>
> "That which is only living
>
> Can only die"
>
> May we say that only that which does not live, as we mean living, does not die? Is everything else only "the loud lament of the disconsolate chimera"? How ridiculous and how right a phrase!

In these passages, both from *Burnt Norton* and from *Descent into Hell*, it is clear that one can only reach "the still point", the "stillness", the "one contemporaneous nature" and the "unity of time", though all are beyond time, through time itself through the sequence of words and events. So in my imagined novel of *Burnt Norton* by Charles Williams the girl would learn to live in time, not only, as is said earlier in *Burnt Norton*, to incorporate the experience of the timeless moment into time – "Only through time time is conquered" – but also to reach the timeless moment. Chloe, in *Many Dimensions*, is told by Lord Arglay that "the way to any end is in that end itself. For as you cannot know any study but by learning it, or gain any virtue but by practising it, so you cannot be anything but by becoming it." And that is linked with his meditation on choice, on what might have been and what has been, from which I have quoted, and which follows four pages later, by his immediately remarking "by becoming one thing a man ceases to be that which he was, and no one but he can tell how tragic that change can be."

In his dialogue on the *Four Quartets* Williams goes so far as to say that, like "every poet who covered all his distance", Eliot can be seen to have said "only one thing", and that thing is precisely the thought from *Many Dimensions*, although Williams does not signal that he is quoting from his own novel, "that you can only be a thing by becoming it."

With the aid of these readings of Eliot through Charles Williams, one might conclude that in *Burnt Norton* Eliot's sense of the way of the affirmation of images has become very close to Williams's: that the lotos, symbol of "mutual relation of final reality and manifestation" is Williams's "a thing being wholly itself yet laden with universal meaning", and is the climax of the process by which the whole garden is realised to be such a symbol: that hidden within this is the personal meaning understood by Lyndall Gordon of Eliot's love Emily Hale as Beatrice: and that the vanishing of the lotos and the later sense in the poem that one can only regain such a moment by working through time is a muted kind of Niphates crisis.

But in the last seventeen lines of *Burnt Norton* there seems to be a terrible tension between these thoughts and the wish I attributed to the Wentworth-like figure in the imaginary novel, to stay in the moment in the garden. Eliot begins with the necessity of time, "the detail of the pattern is movement" but counters this with the Aristotelian thought of the relation of movement to God, who is unmoved –

> Desire itself is movement
> Not in itself desirable

Which he tries to reconcile with the Judaeo-Christian idea of God in the extraordinary paradox

> Love itself is unmoving,
> Only the cause and end of movement,
> Timeless, and undesiring.

Williams in his dialogue tries to unpack the line "Love is itself unmoving" by saying "that the greatest moments are those whose movement is within them" and that such a moment may constitute "the redemption of time". But this, al-

though one could certainly take it as a true gloss on "at the still point, there the dance is" seems to me precisely what "Love itself is unmoving" is *not* saying.

Eliot next offers to reconcile love and desire with the idea of incarnation: for I think Derek Traversi must be right in interpreting the Incarnation in the next four lines. But if so, incarnation seems still to be conceived of as only a movement, perhaps *any* movement of grace or vision. Just so in *The Journey of the Magi*, the narrator is not concerned with the whole life of Christ, only in encountering, at one moment and in one place, the incarnate Christ. And the remaining lines of *Burnt Norton* seem to enlarge on this feeling in relation to the moment in the garden, ending with the last two lines which a colleague of mine angrily, but I think rightly, described as "blasphemous".

This knot is what is untied in the remaining three *Quartets*. In the middle two it is not my impression that anything new is associated with Charles Williams, although the dance reappears at the beginning of *East Coker*, and the sound called out by something "that is and was from the beginning" at that of *The Dry Salvages*. But both controvert or transcend the ending of *Burnt Norton* –

> Not the intense moment
> Isolated, with no before and after,
> But a lifetime burning in every moment

in *East Coker*. And in *The Dry Salvages* the "lifetime's death in love" of the saint, matched with the "hints followed by guesses" worked out in living by "most of us".

This development leads into an image in *Little Gidding* of which we can say (as of Williams's use of the Tarot cards in *The Greater Trumps*) that it was not possible for Eliot to use it without being aware of its previous use by Williams, whether or not that prompted his own taking up of it. This is "The dove descending" of Part IV, which evidently parallels the title of Williams's 'Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church' published in 1939, *The Descent of the Dove.* The theme of the book, "the grand activity of the Church", is "the conversion of time by the Holy Ghost." Eliot, who reviewed it enthusiastically in *The New Statesman and Nation* for 9 December 1939, said that "the author's intention … is to

chronicle the points of crisis and decision, at which the Church (in its widest sense) has been guided by the Holy Spirit."

Eliot's way of putting it, in which "points of crisis" are part of a continuing guidance, strongly suggests that the word "history" in the passage of *Little Gidding* V which finally resolves the difficulties posed by the end of *Burnt Norton* owes something to *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History*….

In spite of the absence of clear verbal echoes, it may be that the sense of time in all the last three quartets owes something to that book: for Eliot must have been contemplating the writing of *East Coker*, from which the others flow, precisely in December 1939. But it is certainly clearest in *Little Gidding*, when he comes to write about the Holy Spirit. It is even possible that the silence or synapse between Parts III and IV of *Little Gidding* mimes the opening sentence of *The Descent of the Dove*. Part III ends

> And all shall be well and
> All manner of things shall be well
> By the purification of the motive
> In the ground of our beseeching.

"The ground of our beseeching", the foundation and justification of our praying, is a phrase by which Christ describes Himself to Julian of Norwich in her *Revelations of Divine Love*. This meditation on history then ends with Christ in our praying. Out of the silence that follows, at the beginning of Part IV, the dove descends. The opening of *The Descent of the Dove* describes this synapse.

> The beginning of Christendom is, strictly, at a point out of time.
> A metaphysical trigonometry finds it among the spiritual Secrets,
> at the meeting of two heavenward lines, one drawn from Bethany
> along the *Ascent of Messias*, the other from Jerusalem against the
> Descent of the Paraclete.

One cannot confidently say that there is more than an analogy here. But the analogy, even if it is only that, demonstrates how far Eliot moved, largely under Wil-

liams's influence, from "the still point of the turning world" to this other still point from which the Holy Spirit descends, governing a history which is a pattern of timeless moments.

The most powerful and persuasive moment of epiphany in Williams's novels, in which time is transcended and reconciled, is the scene in *Descent into Hell* in which Pauline meets her double. There are one possible, and one virtually certain moment in Eliot's last works where this scene is echoed. In *Little Gidding* II the narrator meets a ghost who is partly his double and partly all his predecessors in the art of poetry. The time "the uncertain hour before morning", the setting in an open street are like the scene in the novel. So is the odd detail in the poem that "the dead leaves still rattled on like tin", which, although it recalls the "dead leaves" in *Burnt Norton* on which the ghosts walk, also perhaps echoes "the dead leaves of a great forest", the sound of the damned who beset the dead workman to whom Pauline shows the way to London just before she meets her double.

More certainly, this theme of *Descent into Hell* of the double must influence the narrative of Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly in *The Cocktail Party* of how he saw Celia's martyred self standing behind her when he first met her living self. This has often been remarked on, particularly because he introduces his description by the quotation from Shelley about the magus Zoroaster used similarly in the novel. I suspect that Harcourt-Reilly was himself partly a portrait of Williams: at least I have heard of no one besides Williams who could dismiss people quite naturally with such phrases as "Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence" as Harcourt-Reilly dismisses Edward, Lavinia, and Celia. But the name Celia itself is the most curious suggestion in the play of an association with Williams. For it was his name for Phyllis Jones, and although he tried to introduce it into literary criticism in his preface to *A New Book of English Verse* as a kind of equivalent to Beatrice in English verse, and later gave her name to the young woman in the *Dialogue* who suggests that "Love is itself unmoving" may be "the redemption of time", still the most personal meaning, if he had confided it to Eliot, would be the most appropriate overtone for Celia in the play. This is particularly so if Eliot knew that Chloe in *Many Dimensions*, who both in manner and final martyrdom closely resembles Celia in *The Cocktail Party*, was intended as a portrait of Phyllis Jones.

But with Celia Coplestone we have come very close in Eliot's terms to a Beatrice existing in the ordinary world. There are only a few stops to a still closer, and final, picture. It is no secret that Eliot commissioned Williams to write *The Figure of Beatrice*, persuaded him to write some parts of it more lucidly ("Eliot is being a pest" Williams wrote to his wife) and reviewed it as enthusiastically as he had *The Descent of the Dove* in *The Times Literary Supplement* for 24 July 1943. It is a sign of that movement in Eliot which, after the writing of *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* with its entirely affirmative understanding of time and living, enabled him to make his second marriage, and out of the experience of his marriage to write those lines of Monica's at the end of *The Elder Statesman* which sound very much as if (contrary to what Eliot wrote to Bonamy Dobrée) ordinary human affection can lead to the love of God.

> Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me,
> Loss and vicissitude cannot appal me,
> Not even death can dismay or amaze me
> Fixed in the certainty of love unchanging.

Charles Williams wrote in the *Dialogue* that it was "one of the strange diseases of our age" that people of his generation should ever have counted "so positive a mind [as Eliot's] a negative." I think he was wrong to reverse his own initial position so strongly as to read the *Quartets* back into the early work. But of the *Quartets*, *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* and *The Elder Statesman* he is right.

Boethius by Helen M. Barrett. CUP 1940

Reviewed by Charles Williams for *The Dublin Review* Vol. 207 July – December 1940.

We are pleased to be able to reprint this review for the 100th CW.

Certain imprisonments have proved of permanent value – Socrates, Boethius, More. Of these the first and last represent a great classic and a great Christian fidelity. Both Socrates and More had reconciled their hearts to apparent Evil Fortune before they suffered it. But Boethius seems not to have done. He had everything – except that terrible reconciliation. In those strange centuries which measured the change from Plato to Christ, he is – at that moment – an example of the whole alteration. It is in him that one sees it happening.

He was a scholar and a public man, a philosopher, and even a theologian. In his studies – what are left of them – we can trace the Platonic Forms becoming Christian. He gave a definition of eternity which, taken up by St. Thomas, remains of permanent value. He served the state. He had, in the best sense, all the right thoughts and all the right principles. And then? Then he found he had not. In a day he was flung down, arrested, imprisoned, waiting to die dreadfully. The right doctrines, the right morals, the right emotions – what good were they? Socrates had found them so because they were already one with him; so, in an even loftier sense, with More. But Boethius in his prison was deserted. It is to the honour of his immortal sincerity that he recalled them; that he compelled them to force from him the confession, in that place of bad luck, that there is no such thing as bad luck. 'All fortune is good.'

Miss Barrett's book presents simply and sensitively the biography (such as it is), the intellectual elements in his thought, and the influence his books exercised. Her book is meant for the general reader, and it is in that sense that

that it succeeds. She discusses the question which has perplexed some and she gives, I think, the right answer. Why does the *Consolation* avoid all specifically Christian terms? The answer is that Boethius did not think like that – not at bottom.

He had written theological tracts; he accepted, no doubt, dogma, yet his blood did not beat to technical Christendom. He translates back, as it were; as Socrates all but translated forward. The new metaphysic illuminates the classic heavens, and stretches down the long pathways of the past. And Boethius walks in the verbal paths of the past, except for one grand difference. He has pronounced with complete conviction the word 'God'. His cell opens, therefore, on one side naturally into the cell of Socrates, on the other supernaturally into that of More. He has the scope of neither. But without him they would be farther from each other, in spirit, than in history. Their three voices impose on history the one great text – "all luck is good".

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