The
Charles Williams Society

Newsletter

No. 101 Winter 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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Contents

Newsletter No 101 Winter 2001

Officers of the Society **2**

Reading Groups **3**

From the Editor **4**

Council Meeting Report **6**

Society News & Notes **7**

Forthcoming Meetings **9**

God is not Dead - Charles Williams
Canon Michael Stancliffe **10**

Anne Ridler.
Stephen Medcalf **17**

Phyllis MacDougall **26**

Editorial Policy and Copyright **27**

Reading groups

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

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No 101 Winter 2001

From the Editor

I must, before anything else, apologize for the lateness of this issue of CW that should now be more accurately designated ‘early 2002’ as I am writing this on the day of the Solstice and there is no chance of the copies being produced and distributed this year. So, I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year and have not been too preoccupied with meditations along the lines of ‘what does Gauntlett think he‘s doing?’

One of the reasons for holding this issue back was the need to include a proper notice in respect of Anne Ridler’s death. We were to have included a note of congratulation on her being awarded the OBE for services to literature and I am sorry that this opportunity has been missed. She died on 15 October and those at the Society meeting on the 13th will remember that her health had been mentioned as a matter for some concern.

The October meeting featured a reading of *The House by the Stable* and we were fortunate to have the original manuscript to consult on the point of whether a certain line should read *lest* or *let*. However, close scrutiny of the faint pencil marks served only to divide us into two opposing camps. Ruth Spalding, whose property the MS is, could only add that when her company had performed the play in Williams’s presence they had read *lest* and he hadn’t objected. Perhaps some future critic will devote a chapter or two to this question.

In the absence of a talk from that meeting I have chosen to print Michael Stan-

cliffe's paper that has been in stock for some time and deserves to appear finally. It dates from 1965 and some of what he says may read slightly strangely, but I have chosen not to interfere with the text. Readers may find something to comment on, and I welcome letters, but there is no need to write to inform me that *War in Heaven* was not Williams's first novel.

Edward Gauntlett

Totally Mad?

Peter Howson, a new member of the Society, was recently among those interviewed by the Sunday Herald for an article nominating 'books of the year'. He kindly sent in a copy of the relevant page in which the following distillation of his interview appears.

> This year I discovered the books of Charles Williams, a contemporary of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis but kind of forgotten now. I don't think I've ever enjoyed anyone's writing so much, in particular *Shadows of Ecstasy* (Victor Gollancz, currently out of print) a totally mad novel about Africa invading Europe.

Peter points out that the Herald edited out a lot of his interview and apologizes if the summary of *Shadows* seems "shallow". It reminds me of a friend's summing up of the film *Where Eagles Dare* - "Richard Burton plots & counter-plots and Clint Eastwood shoots people" - and seems, on revisiting the text, wholly accurate in those terms. It is perhaps of interest that Williams set his story in the autumn (Isabel refers to the chill of October nights on page 54).

Council Meeting Report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 13 October 2001 at St Matthew's Church Room, Bayswater

The Chairman reported that Michael Williams's ashes had now been interred. She and the Secretary would meet Terry Drummond, Mr Williams's executor, to discuss the proposal to put a kerb around the grave and lay gravel within it.

It was agreed to make reciprocal mention of the "Web of Exchange" website on ours with the proviso that it was made clear that theirs was not authorized by the Society.

The Treasurer reported that a new current account with Cafcash had been opened. He had received a cheque from the building society for £8,617.96, which would be used to open a Cafcash gold account. He would obtain details of how to reclaim tax on Gift Aid subscriptions.

The Membership Secretary said that seven names had been removed from the roll.

The Editor passed the Russian translation of *The Greater Trumps* to the Librarian.

The Librarian reported that the Bodleian Library was enthusiastic about taking charge of the Society's Reference Library as a "gratuitous bailment". It was agreed that if satisfactory answers to a couple of points were received the transfer would proceed.

The Chairman said that if we were to hold conferences every three years the next would be due in 2003. There was some discussion of this matter and how to organize the next conference whenever it took place.

Richard Sturch

Society News & Notes

Note from the Treasurer

The Society is in the process of transferring its banking to Cafcash Ltd., a specialist bank for charities. Members are encouraged to set up standing orders for their subscriptions. A mandate in the required form, together with a Gift Aid declaration is available from me, although it is not obligatory to use this. The details are:

Cafcash Ltd., Kings Hill, West Maling, Kent ME19 4TA.

Bank Sort Code: 40-52-40

A/C Name: Charles Williams Society

A/C No. 00008635

It is essential to include the first four zeros, as bank account numbers must have eight digits. Some standing orders have been returned because they did not contain the account number in full. If you have amended your instruction to the bank please check that they have the correct number.

The New Christian Year

How many members would, like John Hibbs (see Autumn CW), welcome a new edition of *The New Christian Year*? More relevantly, how many would buy a copy if it were available?

Publication by the Society could be a possibility, but only if enough copies could be sold to make this economically viable. Before we even begin to estimate costs we need an idea of what the likely demand for copies would be if they were priced at (say) £10 per copy plus postage and packing.

The New Christian Year, as those who already own a copy will know, is a collection of short readings for each day of the year, arranged according to the calendar of the *Book of Common Prayer*. That the Church of England has changed the vocabulary of its year in no way invalidates the use of the book, as John Hibbs's letter testifies. The readings come from a wide range of authors. Charles Williams wrote in the Preface "An effort has been made to ensure that all the passages chosen shall have in them some particular greatness of phrasing. The works of the teachers and saints of the Christian Church are full of such phrases,

and it sometimes seems a pity that we should prefer the looser and less powerful exhortations of contemporary piety. A recovery of a greater knowledge of the greater men [women are included] is much to be wished."

If you think it likely that you would buy a copy (or copies) of a new edition of *The New Christian Year* please inform Richard Sturch.

Further, if there is any other short work by Charles Williams that you would like to see reprinted and would be likely to buy, let Richard know that also.

Susan Maennling

We are sorry to announce the death in June of Susan Maennling. Susan joined the Society in 1976 and was at one time a member of the London Reading Group.

The Clique

The following has been received from Michael Cole, Editor of The Clique – 'Book-collecting and library information services since 1890'.

1. Special website for members of societies and associations.
www.ukbookworld.com is Britains leading website set up in co-operation with www.uksocieties.com. It holds a selection changing each day of over half a million books published between 1600 and 1990 offered for sale between £5 and £5,000 by some 600 British booksellers.

2. Reduced price on 2001's cd-rom price-guide for rare and out-of-print books. This contains the current catalogue prices of 420,000 old books in all subject areas published between 1600 and 1990. By special arrangement with the Clique, members of British literary and historical societies can obtain copies of this UKBW 2001 Windows cd-rom for £48 in place of the normal retail price of £60. For further details contact The Clique, 7 Pulleyn Drive, York, YO24 1DY (01904 631752).

New Member

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

Dr Peter Howson, 6 Royal Terrace, Glasgow, Scotland G3 7NT

Ian P. Blakemore

Ian informs us that he is hoping to hold meetings (with papers) in the north of England. Anyone interested should contact him at Rosley Books, Rosley Farmhouse, Wigton Cumbria CA7 8BZ.

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- **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, St Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, London W2 at 2.30 pm

- **Saturday 15 June 2002** The Annual General Meeting will be held in Pusey House, St Giles, Oxford at 12.00 noon. At 2.30 pm Stephen Barber will speak on 'The Metaphysical and Romantic in the Taliessin Poems'.

- **Saturday 2 November 2002**
Canon Donald Allchin will speak on 'Charles Williams and David Jones' in the Church Room, St Matthews Church, St Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, London W2 at 2.30 pm. (Please note that the latter two meetings' details have been changed since the last issue.)

Charles Williams

By Canon Michael Stancliffe.

The following paper was delivered at Westminster Abbey on 24 March 1965, being one of a series of Lent Lectures under the overall title ***God is not Dead***.

In this series of Lent Lectures we are seeking to speak of, and draw attention to, four men and one woman who have been very aware of, and sensitive to, the travail and agony of the 20th century and who have yet in their different ways mightily affirmed that God is not dead. And the word 'affirmed' is particularly appropriate in the case of Charles Williams. Dorothy Sayers called him "The Master of Affirmations". He had no illusions about the pains of human existence, as we shall see; he had the greatest sympathy with Job, and he used to say that if ever he had enough money to build a church he would seek to have it dedicated to St Thomas Didymus Sceptic. Yet he was constantly speaking and writing of the 'Way of Affirmation' and commending it as a proper mode of living for Christians. More of this later.

Williams was born in London in 1886 in a part of society that knew nothing of affluence. One of his grandfathers was a clockmaker, the other a cabinet maker; his mother had been a milliner up to her marriage and his father a clerk in a small firm of importers in the City which went bankrupt when he was 45 and fast going blind, and when Charles was only 8. There were just enough savings to start a small shop for artists' materials in St. Albans, and it was in St. Albans that Charles went to school, subsequently winning a County Scholarship to University College, London, at the age of 15. The family finances, however, did not stretch sufficiently far to enable him to complete the course. He got a job in the Methodist Bookroom, and four years later in the Paper, Printing and Proof-reading Department of the London house of the Oxford University Press. He spent the remainder of his life as a member of the London staff of the Press, devoting his spare time to writing and to lecturing at night schools and to W.E.A. classes. When war came in 1939 he was evacuated with the rest of the staff at Amen House to Oxford, and it was at Oxford that he died in 1945 at the age of 59. Add the facts that he was married and that he

was a practising and devoted member of the Church of England, and the unexciting outline has been told of the life of one of whom John Heath-Stubbs has written: “I have no hesitation in stating my opinion that C.W. is one of the most important, as well as one of the most neglected, thinkers and poets of our present century.” His biographer, A. M. Hadfield, has made the point that “he was, like Kierkegaard, God’s spy in his generation … Like a good spy’s, his life was indistinguishable. He lived and died wholly part of the commonplace order of his day, without any particular advantages or disadvantages, but he made of the total ordinariness of his life a most extraordinary and impassioned existence. People of all levels recognised that in Charles Williams something touched their lives which was of first importance and was not to be found anywhere else.”

I know that to be completely true in my own case. I only met him once, and that was 25 years ago, but there are few men to whom I owe more, and from that day to this hardly a month has passed without my refreshing myself from his writings. He left behind him many books: seven novels, a dozen plays, seven books of poetry, six or seven biographies, five works of literary criticism, and two or three major theological works, together with two devotional anthologies an innumerable essays and reviews. And they all have a quality which is unique. Reviewing his volume of poetry *Taliessin Through Logres*, C. S. Lewis wrote: “If this poem is good at all it is entirely irreplaceable in the sense that no other book whatever comes anywhere near reminding you of it or being even a momentary substitute for it. If you can’t get an orange then a lemon or grapefruit will give you a taste that has something in common with it. But if you can’t get a pineapple then nothing else will even faintly put you in mind of it. *Taliessin* is like the pineapple. You may like or dislike the taste; but once you have tasted it, you know you can get it from no other book in the world” - except in the other books Williams wrote.

If it be asked wherein this uniqueness lies, the answer would seem to be partly in Williams’s style but chiefly in his particularly sharp awareness of the supernatural and his gift of imparting that awareness to others. Of his style: C. S. Lewis has described it as having a quality of ‘glory’ or ‘blaze’. It is high-spirited – not in the sense in which we use ‘high-spirited’ to describe the horseplay of young humans, but high-spirited as the word might be used to describe the gay activities of

the angels. The other marked characteristic of Williams's writings is his acute sensitivity to the things of the spirit. He wrote as easily of the other world as of this; spirits, both good and evil, were to him every bit as real as men and women of flesh and blood, and he largely succeeds in persuading us to feel the same. Some people are colour-blind, some are tone-deaf, and the great majority today are both blind and deaf to the numinous world which is the obverse of our everyday world and which it interpenetrates at every point; our sixth sense, our awareness of the supernatural, has become largely atrophied. But it was not so with Williams, and he knew his way about that supernatural world as others know their way about Westminster. The result is that his writing has in it what might be called an extra dimension – time and space and the Other. This is true of all his works, but appears most strikingly in his novels, and they have been called 'supernatural thrillers'. They are thrilling in any case, but that extra dimension makes them doubly so. The scene of the first novel is set in 20th century England, yet it is quite properly called *War in Heaven*; equally appropriate is the title of another of the novels – *Many Dimensions*. In a broadcast talk on 'The Significance of Charles Williams' (*Listener* 10 December 1946), T. S. Eliot said: "At ease in human society, I am sure he would have remained equally composed if a ghost, an angel or an evil spirit had entered the room. He would have known how to receive any kind of supernatural visitor, for he took the other world as simply as this one. If I had ever to spend a night in a haunted house, I should have felt fearless with Charles Williams in my company."

This is the first thing that Williams can do for us – quicken our atrophied sense of the supernatural. But secondly, he does not do this by offering us an escape into an exciting world of spooky make-believe or of piously spiritual irrelevance. He does not allow us for a moment to forget the hard and horrid facts of everyday human existence. He never pretends they don't exist, or that they are anything but hard and horrid. It has been said that

> no one could have written a better attack on Christianity than he … He was ready to accept as revealed doctrine the proposition that existence is good; but added that it would never have occurred to him, unaided, to suspect this … He even said, mocking himself while he said it, that if he were saved, the acceptance of eternal life would not be so much the guerdon as the final act of obedience. He

> also said that when young people came to us with their troubles and discontents, the worst thing we could do was to tell them that they were not so unhappy as they thought. Our reply ought to begin "But of course…" For young people usually are unhappy, and the plain truth is often the greatest relief we can give them. The world is painful in any case; but it is quite unbearable if everyone gives us the idea that we are meant to be liking it. Half the trouble is over when that monstrous demand is withdrawn … It is one of the many paradoxes in Williams that while no man's conversation was less gloomy in *tone* – it was, indeed, a continual flow of gaiety, enthusiasm and high-spirits – no man at times said darker things. He never forgot the infinite menaces of life, the unremitted possibility of torture, maiming, madness, bereavement, and (over all) that economic insecurity which, as he said in *War in Heaven,* poisons our sorrows as well as modifying our joys. (C. S. Lewis: Preface to *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*)

Williams knew – and felt – that the whole creation groans and travails together in pain. "The distress of the creation" he wrote "is so vehement and so prolonged, so tortuous and torturing, that even naturally it is revolting to our sense of justice, much more supernaturally."

And yet … and yet, he affirmed most strongly that God is not dead, that God is just and that God is love – and for many of us his affirmations ring as genuine as anything that has been written on this subject in English in this century – and a great deal more genuine than the sick stuff with which it is currently fashionable to foul the wells of the world's thinking and imagination, as though there wasn't enough unpleasantness in it already. Few men have better understood or described the real evil of evil – some of his descriptions of the practices of sorcery are frankly hideous. And yet, meeting all his scepticism and pessimism, opposing it, victoriously rising above it, was his central affirmation that the whole universe is to be known as good, and anything and everything which exists – however it appears to us – exists by the sovereign permission of an ineffably good God. Even the Devil, he said, exists and acts by the Divine permission and is, if we could but see it, the servant of God. This was what Williams was getting at when

he spoke of the Devil as "the back of Christ" and as "that Judas whose office it is to betray men to God."

And if it be asked how Williams came to affirm so strongly the goodness of God and the essential goodness of every part of the universe – how he reconciled this affirmation with his recognition of the universal frustration, distress and outrage of the existence which God has given us, the answer (he would say) is to be found in the Cross. I wish there were time to expatiate on this, or, better, to read in full his essay *The Cross*, but these quotations must suffice.

> The distress of the creation is so vehement and prolonged, so tortuous and torturing, that even naturally it is revolting to our sense of justice, much more supernaturally. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together. This then is the creation that 'needs' (let the word be permitted) justifying. The Cross justified it to this extent at least – that just as God submitted us to His inexorable will, so He submitted Himself to our wills. He made us; He maintained us in our pain. At least, however, on the Christian showing, He consented to be Himself subject to it … He deigned to endure the justice He decreed … Adorable He might be by awful definition of His Nature, but at least He had shown Himself honourable in His choice. He accepted Job's challenge of long ago, talked with His enemy in the gate, and outside the gate suffered (as the men He made so often do) from both His friends and His enemies … This then seems to me the most flagrant significance of the Cross; it does enable us to use the word 'justice' without shame – which otherwise we could not. God therefore becomes tolerable as well as credible. Our justice condemned the Innocent, but the Innocent it condemned was one who was fundamentally responsible for the existence of all injustice…
>
> He was not like us, and yet He became us … He substituted Himself for us. He submitted in our stead to the full results of the Law which is He. We may believe He was generous if we know that He was just. By the central substitution, which was the thing added by

> the Cross to the Incarnation, He became everywhere the centre of, everywhere He energized and reaffirmed, all our substitutions and exchanges. He took what remained, after the Fall, of the torn web of humanity in all times and places, and not so much by a miracle of healing as by a growth within it made it whole. Supernaturally He renewed our proper nature … It is finished; we do but play out the necessary ceremony. In bombings from the air, cancer, or starvation, for instance? Yes, I suppose so; if at all, then certainly in those examples. The Church (of which He seems to have had a low opinion) is His choice, but Nature was His original choice, and He has a supreme fidelity. It is, in fact, that fidelity which causes Him to maintain His creation and to die for His creation and to renew His creation.

It was through this insight into the meaning of what he called the grief, outrage and obscenity of the Crucifixion that Williams was able to affirm so strongly his belief in the goodness of the living God and in the innate goodness of His creation, and to draw the practical conclusion for ourselves that the aim of all Christian living is to love everything because God loves it – everything, not only what is obviously good and beautiful and whatsoever obviously helps us towards the Vision of God, but to love also what appears to our imperfect sight and twisted knowledge to be evil and ugly and a barrier to the vision of God. The main stream of Christian sanctity in the past twenty centuries has followed the Negative way, to deny or shun or subdue all that does not directly assist us towards the vision of God. And Williams would not deny for a moment that some are called to find God along that way. But there is also another way for those who claim to follow One who was not ashamed to be called a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and that is the Affirmative Way of which Williams himself was so outstanding an exponent. Is it not also the way expounded, each after their very different manners by the Jesuit scientist, Teilhard de Chardin, by John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, and by Petru Dumitriu, the Rumanian author of that great novel of 1964, *Incognito*?

Time forbids me to enlarge on the many conclusions which Williams drew for our own following of Christ – his deep insight into the nature of forgiveness, his

teaching as to how we may practise among ourselves the doctrines of substitution and exchange, come to be aware of the Co-inherence of all in God, and thus to approach the vision of that Co-inherence in Williams's great image of the City.

But his books are there for all to read. To read them, and to pray in their language, is to go upon an adventurous journey into a land which will be strange to many. The way is undoubtedly hard at times. It is not for the witless or the lazy-minded, for those dispirited fundamentalists who call themselves rationalists, or for those who know all the answers because they learned them in Sunday School and have learned nothing else since. But it leads to a high country which, in addition to being fascinating, unforgettable, and supremely enjoyable, is quite vitally important. It is there that the remedies for most of the diseases and ignorances of the world today are to be found. If you suffer from night starvation then Horlicks is no doubt very good for you – but a holiday in the Alps is very much better. If a Church is sick with anxiety for itself the kind of remedies proposed in such a document as the Paul Report are no doubt very good: but a journey to those high realms to which Charles Williams takes us is very much better.

© Barbara Stancliffe

At Christmas 1959 Mrs. Josephine Page gave me the manuscript draft of Charles Williams's *Poems of Conformity* to add to the manuscript of his poem *Ballade of a Country Day* which I already had from Fred Page, her husband. I thought that somebody at the centre of knowledge about Charles Williams should know where these were, and as I'd read Anne Ridler's brilliant introduction to his work in *The Image of the City* I wrote to her from Merton College. She responded by asking me to tea at Stanley Road, showed me, and let me borrow, CW's commonplace book and reminisced about him. I must have said something about the part played by CW's wife Michal in his work, for the only thing I remember from her reminiscences was that he found Michal reading *Taliessin through Logres* and she asked "Who was Broceliande?" I think I would now detect a faint hint of jealousy in her picking out that story, but I didn't then: it came across as a sympathetic though mildly comic instance of the difficulties of husbands and wives. Afterwards Pru-

Anne Ridler

30 July 1912 – 15 October 2001

An appreciation by Stephen Medcalf

dence Frank, a girl at St Hilda's who knew Anne's poetry much better than I did, was anxious to know what she was like. "A birdy lady with thin legs" I said. It disconcerted Prue, who had formed a different image of Anne as a poet of young love, new marriage, and first born children. I don't think the difference between the two aspects was at all due to age – Anne was forty-seven then and I suppose in her mid-twenties when she wrote her first love poems to Vivian Ridler, who became her husband. On the one hand, I think she must always have looked as I described her – and I don't think it is irrelevant to note how many of her best poems are concerned with birds, their look and movement ('The Cranes', 'Bathing off Roseland', 'Bempton Cliffs', 'The Halcyons'). On the other, the most succinct and powerful of her [poems about her young children, 'Choosing a Name', had only just been published in book form, in *A Matter of Life and Death.*

Both aspects true then: both perhaps related to her having been born, Anne Bradby, in 1912 in the heart of the clerisy. Her father was a housemaster at Rugby, her uncle Humphrey Milford, Printer to the University of Oxford, and her principal teacher a friend of her uncle Humphrey's, Olive Willis, who founded Downe House, the school in Berkshire where Anne boarded. "To this day when I return," she says in her life of Olive Willis, *Olive Willis and Downe House,* "the view from the school windows takes my breath away."

It was at Downe House that she first encountered Charles Williams, who even more than Olive Willis or her later and much admired employer T. S. Eliot, and less only than her husband, most influenced her life. Olive Willis had been introduced to CW by Humphrey Milford in 1917. "From time to time" Anne says "Williams came to lecture on literature to the school, thrilling and puzzling them by his passionate and unorthodox approach, his prodigious eloquence and his chanted reading – or recita-

tion, more often, for his memory was inexhaustible. From him, as from Olive herself, a young creature could catch the love of poetry as readily as the measles." The girls performed his *A Myth of Shakespeare* in 1931: and in August 1930 he came with Michal and their son Michael to stay at Aisholt, Olive Willis's cottage in the Quantocks, along with four of her girls, Anne, Diana, Jean and Mary. I suppose it is especially of that August and its atmosphere that Anne speaks in a poem of about 1936 – 7, 'For A Birthday', which must be about CW who, she says

> is his own
> where most he takes and gives, and grew slowly
> in a whirlwind of words to scepticism and mercy.
>
> And spoke of myths as living, and brought in
> the word *ineluctable*, and young could suffer
> as older he was brought into desperate pain
> but did not cease to love…

For at the request of the girls he wrote 'A Song of the Myths' to commemorate their stay, which was printed at the end of *Three Plays*. "We walked with sudden laughter, and made music out of love" he says, and

> Above the rippling rivers, amid the swelling combes,
> in gardens fair and flowered, in low and lovely rooms,
> among the farms of Somerset, the shepherds and the smiths,
> we walked by sun and starlight, and looked upon the myths.

A myth behind each one of those present is evoked in turn, going through the day. Anne's time is dawn, and her patron double both "the mother of the mother of God" and the prophetess Anna at Christ's presentation in the Temple.

> I saw the vigil ended, and the light of Israel come
> where Saint Anne stood up to prophecy the tale of Christendom.

I don't suppose he meant more than to evoke the associations of her name in the atmosphere of those days. But when one considers those two wonderful poems of

hers ‘For a Child Expected’ and ‘Christmas and Common Birth’ in which she describes how

By God’s birth
All common birth is holy: birth
Is all Christmas time and wholly blest

Perhaps one may see an element of the seer, or rather the guide, in CW’s picking out “the mother of the mother of God” and the prophet of “the tale of Christendom” as Anne’s patrons.

The myth he evokes for himself is his own Duchess of Mantua in the second of *Three Plays,* ‘The Chaste Wanton’ which, presumably, read to them at Aisholt. In the introduction to *The Image of the City* Anne quotes as typical of him lines from a play which must have meant a great deal to her.

The Duchess: I did not dream I lived in pain?

Vincenzo: In pain?
The columns of your palace live in pain,
the stones beneath us are alive with pain,
all the vibrating atoms of the jewel
that lifts upon your bosom are oppressed
with the mere difficulty of being.

She said that the secret of his appeal to the young was that he presumed that they were unhappy, and so gave them a way out of their unhappiness: and in ‘For A Birthday’ that she was “cut by his voice from the cat’s cradle of accidie / and from worse despair”.

She went on both deriving inspiration from him and arguing with him about poetry and religion up to and after his death, as she describes in *The Image of the City* and in the poems ‘Taliessin Reborn’ and ‘Charles Williams: In Anamnesis’. And in *The Image of the City* she printed the magnificent set of collects which he composed for her marriage to Vivian in 1938.

Educated after Downe House in Italy and at King's College, London, she went to work in publishing for Faber and Faber. Much of her best work then and thereafter was in editing and anthologizing – her two World's Classics volumes of *Shakespeare Criticism 1920 – 1935* and *1935 – 1960* have been a standby and an inspiration to anyone wanting to think seriously about Shakespeare, and I think her Faber *Best Stories of Church and Clergy,* for all its peculiarity of subject matter, the most satisfying and well balanced of all anthologies I have read, ranging from Balzac to P. G. Wodehouse.

For a time she was T. S. Eliot's secretary. Of the time when she was beginning to be a poet she wrote

> For myself, I should say it was Eliot who first made me despair of becoming a poet; Auden (with, of course, dead poets, notably Sir Thomas Wyatt) who first made me think I saw how to become one.
>
> An age can afford a few poets who stand aside from this battle for the colloquial idiom in poetry, and continue to use the artificial diction of an earlier generation – as, in our own day, are such poets as Walter de la Mare and Charles Williams – but not many; and with these, the young must "admire and do otherwise" as Hopkins put it. It can also afford a different kind of poet, who treats words as though he were present at their creation – a Dylan Thomas or a George Barker – but only if the main channel is kept clear. These are the luxuries of a strong tradition.

To my taste, Auden was not a wholly good influence on her work. In 'A Letter' she says

> coming to verse, I hid my lack of ease
> by writing only as I thought myself able,
> escaped the crash of the bold by salt originalities.
> This is one reason for writing from one's heart;
> a better is, that one fears it may be hurt.

That kind of escape was part of what she picked up from Auden, and another part was his glorying in an unshared background. One poem, for example, which John Heath-Stubbs chose for the *Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse* disturbed me for years with a sense that there was something weightier behind it than is explicit in the words.

> Now Phillipa is gone, that so divinely
> Could strum and sing, and is rufus and gay,
> Have we the heart to sing, or at midday
> Dive under Trotton Bridge? We shall only
> Doze in the yellow spikenard by the wood
> And take our tea and melons in the shade.

I asked Anne what she had to do with Trotton Bridge, and she answered "Why do you ask? Of course you know Trotton Bridge, as you're in Sussex. We were there on a family holiday when war was declared in September 1939. Uncle Humphrey, who was there with his secretary Phillipa, ordered a taxi, and they went off together, back to work."

To know this does, for me, improve the poem more than something so inexplicit ought to. In other cases. Mostly later in her poetry, to share the background of her poems is to change their nature, but neither to exalt nor to depress them. Of the origin of one image she said that T. S. Eliot, dictating to her a letter to A. L. Rowse commenting on his writing, said "You poke the meaning of your story at the reader, when you should be leaving it to form at the edges of the eye where the rods and cones are less worn, just as you see more of the Pleiades on a clear night when you are not looking directly at them."

She used the image three times in poems, becoming more explicit each time. In 'A Letter' she uses it in excuse for her earlier Audenesque poetry:

> By an inadequate style one fears to cheapen
>   glory, and that it may be blurred if seen
> through the eye's used centre, not the new margin.

In ‘For BM who died by accident in childhood’ when she had begun to acquire her own personal voice, she centres the whole poems on it:

> These matters are too hard for me.
> Only I know that looking direct at heaven
> All is a blur of tears, but we
> Searching our world’s dark disc to see
> What light or hope are there, may yet be given
> A sight of perfection through the keener edges of the eye.

She ends the poem

> … if our eyes
> Have bright margins, it must suffice.
> May the dark central cone diminish, till
> Above the disc of eye and earth the full glory rise.

In ‘Backgrounds to Italian Paintings: Fifteenth Century’ she uses the image perhaps less poignantly, but more confidently.

> Gaze at the story boldly as children do –
> The wonder awaits you, cornerwise, but never
> Full in the face; only the background promises,
> Seen through the purple cones at the edge of the eye
> And never to be understood:
> The sleep-wreathed hills, the ever winding river.

The curious balance in poetry between universality and particularity is altered in ‘Choosing a Name’, which Helen Gardner chose to represent her in *The New Oxford Book of English Verse.*

> Even as the gift of life
> You take the famous name you did not choose
> And make it new.
> You and the name exchange a power:
> Its history is changed, becoming yours,

And yours by this: who calls this, calls you

if you know that the name was Benedict, and even more if you know that the subject of the poem is commonly known as Ben. But I do not think the merit of the poem is altered.

In these later poems, she had found her own voice, in poems, a little paradoxically, about the intimacy of relation within a family and of the independent existence of each person, and about the mutual modifications of awareness:

One does not learn to look with another's eye
  For ever, but the rigid world
  Moves and is unfurled.
This is the effect and virtue of passion's part
That trains the eye and exercises the heart.

These poems are very much her own, but partly because she was never in public associated with any particular group, partly because her unassertive stability and gentle unshaken religious belief did not fit with what people like to say about twentieth century poetry, they are lamentably little known. Had 'The Crab Is In', an early poem about menstruation which is the only one known to me which makes a male feel something of what that feels like for a woman (not excluding certain poems by Charles Williams) been written fifty years later by a political feminist, it would probably be known everywhere as a breaker of barriers. And one might compare Stevie Smith's 'Not waving but drowning', an excellent poem which everyone knows for its wretchedness, with Anne's much less well known, and though less succinct not much less excellent 'A Waving Hand' which ends

Suppose, when we are dead,
The soul moves back, over the gulf of nescience,
To relive a lifetime, all that was done and said …
Some say remorse impels it, the pitiless conscience
That drives toward expiation;
But it might be a different need:
To live each *now* in the illumination

Of what's to come; wholly to understand
Those tears, that waving hand.

That curious sense of the passing of time to fulfilment, along with the revelation of intimacy of which I have spoken, go with an extraordinarily accurate sense of natural phenomena (often a gardener's sense) to make Anne's special voice. One of the very last of her *Collected Poems* of 1994, and of the poems which she wrote for her husband, has all these elements, together with a beginning in Charles Williams

Something Else
"They call it quiet affection. It's not affection, and it's not at all quiet, but let that pass". *Charles Williams*
For V

Old age has its particular season,
Not quite to be compared with autumn or winter:
Not to the luxuriance of autumn.
Not to the austerity of winter.
Passion it has, compounded of present joy
And memory of past fulfilment;
Precarious, being timebound,
With pleasure the more poignant, so
Its durable fire burns the lifelong day.
I might choose, for an emblem of its happiness,
The surprising glass-blue berry, held in a magenta star,
Of the fruiting clerodendron.

But the poem she chose to end the volume reverts to birds.

That love continues blest
In different guises;
That immortality

  Is not mere repetition:
It is a blue flash,
  A kingfisher vision.
It is a new-feathered
  And procreant love,
Seen where the halcyon
  Nests on the wave.

('The Halcyons')

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It is with regret that we note the death of Phyllis MacDougall, better known to students of Charles Williams's work as Phyllis Jones, the Phillida of the Amen House myths and the basis of Chloe Burnett in *Many Dimensions.*

> Whatever process had been working in her body, since the day when her inner being had been caught with the Stone into the Unity, closed quietly and suddenly. The purgation of her flesh accomplished itself, and it was by apparent chance that Arglay was with her when it ceased. He had paused by the bedside before going to his own room next to hers for the night. As he looked he saw one of those recurrent tremors shake her, but this time it was not confined to one side but swept over the whole body. From head to foot a vibration passed through her; she sighed deeply, and murmured something indistinguishable. So, on the moment, she died.
>
> Arglay saw it and knew it for the end …. "Under the Protection," he murmured. "Good-bye, child," and so, his work at an end, left her.

Phyllis MacDougall

4 July 1901 – 2 December 2001

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Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome. If you wish to submit a contribution, please take note of the following:

- Submissions should be sent to the Editor, preferably on floppy disc; otherwise by email attachment to: Edward.Gauntlett@down21.freeuk.com.
- Submissions on paper should be typed double spaced and single-sided.
- All quotations should be clearly referenced, and a list of sources included.
- Submissions of just a few hundred words may be hand written.
- The Editor reserves the right to decide whether to publish a submission. Usually the main article in any issue will be a paper previously read before the Society; in most cases such papers will be published as received, with little or no editorial input. Other submissions may be edited.

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