



The
**Charles
Williams**
Society



Newsletter

No. 102

Spring 2002

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.

Officers of the Society

President: **John Heath-Stubbs OBE**

Chairman:

Mrs Eileen Mable
28 Wroxham Way
Harpenden
Herts, AL5 4PP
01582 713641

Secretary:

Revd Dr Richard Sturch
35 Broomfield
Stacey Bushes
Milton Keynes
MK12 6HA
01908 316779

Treasurer:

Mr Stephen Barber
Greystones
Lawton Avenue
Carterton
Oxon OX18 3JY

Membership Secretary:

Mrs Lepel Kornicka
15 King's Avenue,
Ealing
London, W5 2SJ
020 8991 0321

Librarian:

Dr Brian Horne
Flat 8, 65 Cadogan Gardens
London, SW3 2RA
020 7581 9917

Newsletter Editor:

Mr Edward Gauntlett
21 Downsway,
Whyteleafe
Surrey, CR3 0EW
020 8660 1402
Edward.Gauntlett@down21.freeuk.com

Web site: http://www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc/

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Reading groups

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



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From the Editor

Gareth Knight, the author of, amongst many other works, *The Magical World of the Inklings*, was editor (under his real name) of a couple of magazines in the 60s and 70s that usually included a lengthy piece by him headed ‘The Editor Thinks...’. This allowed him considerable scope by warning his readers that they were about to get a forthright personal opinion. I thought that it might be as well to appropriate this idea for the following airing of my views.

The Society exists “to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information” on Charles Williams. The ground of this exchange has been the thrice annual meeting organized by the Society, free to members, at which we usually hear an original paper. Allied to the meeting is the Newsletter, relying upon the papers for its existence.

In the short time that I have been a member attendance at meetings has dwindled and we are now a very select core group within the Society. Nevertheless, we have continued to attract high quality speakers. But for how much longer?

You may feel that it is unnecessary for you personally to attend since the paper will turn up (eventually) in the Newsletter. As a matter of fact, of course, only half of it appears because the discussion and argument that follows is not recorded. At the February meeting we were treated to a high level discussion between Angelika Schneider and John Hibbs at the conclusion of her talk on ‘The King’s Coins’. A version of the paper will appear in a future issue of the News-

letter; the discussion and other points raised by the audience will not.

Those of you who reside in Russia or the United States, & places otherwise inconvenient for London and Oxford, may rely on the Newsletter to provide you with regular additions to the available body of Williams scholarship & news of other developments. I note that most of the feedback I have received as Editor has come from outside the UK. Members living in the home counties, however, are well placed to attend the meetings. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that speakers of quality will be disinclined to turn up if they can be sure that there won't be much of an audience. And if we can't get speakers there won't be material for a Newsletter.

Now, it may be the case that the membership would rather we reviewed the Society's activities. Perhaps we should give up the meetings and simply ask for essays? In that case the Newsletter would become a much less frequent production with the writers lacking the pressure of a deadline or the attraction of lively feedback. Or are there other suggestions as to how we should best fulfil our aims? We've continued organizing the meetings and producing the Newsletter because no one has suggested that we do differently. If the Society is to progress (or even to survive) perhaps we should. What do you think?

The Annual General Meeting is coming up. All are welcome to come and air their opinions; those unable to attend could write to the Newsletter or a member of the Council to express their views. Is the *status quo* the way that you would like the Society to continue? If so, are those who can willing to support it by attending more of the meetings and getting involved in the debates about Williams's work? If not, let us know how you would like things to be changed. I, for one, would certainly appreciate your input.

The Editor thinks... he won't get much of a response.... Prove him wrong.

Edward Gauntlett

Council Meeting Report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 23 February 2002 at St Matthew's Church Room, Bayswater.

The Chairman described plans to install a stone slab on the Williams' grave to keep it looking neat.

The Librarian reported that the Bodleian would not, after all, be able to house the Society's Reference Library. He would approach Plater College, Oxford.

The Secretary said that Charles Williams's name now appeared on the Oxford Diocesan Calendar; he was to be commemorated on May 15th.

The Treasurer's written report was distributed. The first application for Gift Aid refunds from the Treasury was being processed. There were, unfortunately, still a number of Standing Orders going to our old bank account.

It was agreed to drop the idea of reprinting *The New Christian Year*, as there had been a poor response to the suggestion in the last Newsletter.

There was discussion of the possibility of another Society Conference. It was agreed that 2004 would be a better date than 2003, and various venues were discussed. One or more organizers were badly needed!

The suggestion was made that one of our meetings in 2003 should be an all-day one, with two sessions and time for fraternization. This would probably be in Oxford. The dates for meetings that year are provisionally February 22nd, June 21st and October 25th.

Richard Sturch

Society News & Notes

Annual General Meeting:

Saturday 15 June

The AGM is an opportunity for members to share their views and concerns about the Society's affairs and you are urged to come if you can.

Elections to the Council will be held. In addition to those Council members who have served for three years since their previous election and must, therefore, stand again there is also a vacancy for one ordinary member. Anyone who is unable to attend the AGM but wishes to nominate another member for election to the Council may do so by writing to the Secretary by Saturday 8 June. The letter must be signed by the proposer, seconder and nominee.

If there is time available after the AGM's business has been concluded we often invite short readings. This year, as a small tribute to Anne Ridler, members may like to bring one of her poems to read and, if they wish, to speak about it briefly.

Overseas Subscriptions

We very much regret that all membership subscriptions (and any other payments to the Society) must now be made in £ sterling. The bank makes a conversion charge of £7.50 for *each* foreign transaction processed – over half an overseas member's annual subscription. Clearly the Society cannot afford this and we have no alternative but to ask that all payments be made in sterling. We apologise for the inconvenience this will cause overseas members.

George MacDonald Society

The George MacDonald Society is organizing a summer school in Huntly on the 8, 9 and 10 August. The speakers will be Colin Manlove, David Robb and David Neuhouser (U.S.A.). There will be an exhibition of some of MacDonald's manuscript material. The three day event will end with a book fair on the Saturday. For further information please contact Ian Blakemore on 016973 499 24 or email – ORTS@rosleybooks.com.

The New Christian Year

Only five members responded to the notice about a possible reprint of this book. We shall not, therefore, investigate further.

New Member

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

Christopher Scarf, Marygate House,
343 St Mary's Lane, Upminster, Essex
RM14 3HP.

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- ◆ **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 Petersburg Place, Bayswater, London W2 at 2.30 pm.
- ◆ The meetings for 2003 are provisionally scheduled for: **Saturday 22 February, Saturday 21 June and Saturday 25 October.**

The Quest for Integration: *The Century* & Correspondence from the later years.

By Revd. Dr. Gavin Ashenden.

The following paper was given at a meeting of the Society on 9 June 2001.

As the first chapter of my forthcoming book sets out to correct certain factual biographical details, so this paper (which will form the last chapter) has the aim of re-ordering and re-drawing the biographical details that relate to Phyllis Jones in particular, and 'Michal', his wife. Two tasks in particular are undertaken. The first and simplest is the revision of the biographical details as they appear in the correspondence to Phyllis Jones of 1935-43, and also in the *Century of Poems* (dated 1926-1927) which function as an introduction to the relationship. A copy of these poems is lodged in the Bodleian, but has received no critical attention. They chart the early and formative stages of the relationship between Williams and Phyllis Jones or 'Celia', and describe in more detail the nature of the vision that Williams perceived.

The second task will be an analysis of the hermetic influence which functioned to give coherence to Williams's pattern of thinking in mythical terms. It expressed itself in the correspondence with both 'Celia' and the last letters to his wife which overlap, from 1940-1945. At this point the question of his own personal reconciliation of his myths arises. Was integration achievable in Williams's own fractured experience?

The influence of hermeticism provided Charles Williams with a vision of reality which required an overall integration, particularly of the spiritual and material. This holistic metaphysic was particularly directed at the fusion of the romantic and the religious, following the pattern that Waite had established in *The Secret Doctrine in Israel*. But it went further than that. It aspired as a principle of coherence to find a way of uniting both the affirmative and negative spiritualities which provided the two poles of theological and experiential interpretation in Christian spirituality and artistic vision. Co-inherence springs directly out of this unifying intellectual and

aesthetic coherence. His dictum “This is Thou; neither is this Thou” attempted to bind together transcendence and immanence. But a question that inevitably proposes itself arises out of the duality that lay at the heart of his personal life. To what extent was Williams able to implement this restitutive hermeticism in his own life and achieve this aim of integration in his own affairs? Or to put it another way, if one of its attractions was to root theological reflection in the praxis of human experience by incorporating the romantic into a wider metaphysical framework of reference, how did it express itself in his life practically?

The key to this question lies in biographical study. One of the difficulties that his biographers face, notably A. M. Hadfield, is his relationship with Phyllis Jones and the disintegration that it both represents and implies of his marital experience. There remain important omissions from his biographies which need amending. The most important one is the continuation of his relationship with Phyllis Jones beyond her marriage to Billie Somerville and her exodus to Java. Hadfield had access to letters written to her in Java, and asked Phyllis Jones about the resumption of a literary relationship. Phyllis had asked by letter “Am I still Celia” and Williams had replied

The answer is that you are. Quite clearly, quite certainly, you are all that I ever said. I always saw *you*...[I] cannot bear to think that you should think of those letters, those poems, as being *past*. They are as much as you will have them be - from me now.¹

Phyllis Jones retained some correspondence from the period 1935-1943 which has not come into the public domain, but which she made available to me. One clear effect that it has is to contradict Hadfield’s analysis of the period after 1938. She writes:

In the last year or two Phyllis Somerville’s marriage had broken down, and early in 1938 she returned from Java with her daughter Penelope Celia. She lived in London, and did occasional editorial work for the O.U.P. This sometimes brought her in to the Production office or the Library. She and Charles had very intermittent relations. He did not look for any renewal of the vision nor did he deny the past.²

In fact the correspondence shows the opposite. There was a renewal of the vision and a continuation of the relationship until as late as 1942, albeit expressed in correspondence punctuated by lunches.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF CONTRADICTION

When Williams wrote in his Preface to *The English Poetic Mind* that

The following essays are based on two convictions: (1) *Troilus and Cressida* is of a great deal more importance than has generally been allowed, (2) the central crisis in *Troilus* is in direct poetic relation to the culminating crisis in Wordsworth's account of his own history in the *Prelude*,³

he was using a study of the handling of the experience of crisis by the great poets as a way in part, of looking for a solution for the contradictions in his own experience. He described something of that experience more fully in the introduction to the letters of Evelyn Underhill. She had come to the point of conversion to Roman Catholicism, only to be balked by an encyclical condemning the very theological modernism that had underlain the integrity and direction of her journey. Williams wrote:

One is apparently left to live alone with an Impossibility. It is imperative, and in the end possible, to believe that the Impossibility does its own impossible work; to believe so, in whatever form the crisis takes, is of the substance of faith; especially if we add to it Kierkegaard's phrase that, in any resolution of the crisis, so far as the human spirit is concerned, 'before God man is always in the wrong.' That is not, by itself, the complete truth; we should have to add to it the opposite and complementary phrase that, also before God, man is always in the right; but the other is more important for our own sense of any resolution. The only rightness there is in the Impossible itself.⁴

Williams's own experience of unresolved impossibility was the eruption of the romantic vision in which he fell in love with Phyllis Jones, a young employee at the

Oxford University Press. The impossibilities stacked up one after the other. The most obvious one was the emotional betrayal of his marriage, in particular after having made a small name with his early poetry (most obviously, *The Silver Stair*), in celebration of his love for his wife. There was the impossibility of consummation given his strict adherence to the metaphysics underlying Christian morality. A further 'impossibility' arose to be faced when she moved on to become the lover of Gerry Hopkins ('Alexis') another colleague in the Press, and then made two subsequent marriages.

His biographer A. M. Hadfield describes the relationship with a hesitant sympathy. In the same way that the Rosicrucian influence was underplayed by her because she found the concept uncongenial, so also she underestimates aspects of his relationship with Phyllis Jones. Most importantly she underestimates the scale of the relationship and was ignorant of the later correspondence which continued long after she believed some form of closure had been arrived at. Other commentators like Shideler ignore the Celian experience altogether and concentrate on the Dantean rationalisation of the Celian experience. Beatrice was Dante's lover and not Williams's, and so functions to provide a commentary on the theology of romantic love without any undertones of moral discomfort. But intellectually and emotionally Williams's Dantean vision was fuelled by the 'Celian' vision which acted as a bridge between his experience as a young man with Michal and his later mature theologisation of the Divine Comedy. More personally, the tragedy of loving someone outside the marriage who remained inaccessible in every way, except as the recipient of poetry and spiritual or personal direction, marked the second half of his adult life.

The assumption that Hadfield leaves the reader with is that of a fading away of a middle-aged crisis. Michal Williams's response was understandably even more brusque when she refers to the matter in correspondence after her husband's death.⁵ The reality was more complex, and raises the question of whether or not by the end of his life Williams managed any reconciliation of this dichotomised romantic, emotional, and religious experience. Hermetic mythological culture had furnished his relationships with a structure which defined them. If one of the functions of hermetic culture, as suggested, was to facilitate integration philosophically and religiously, the issue of whether or not he managed some form of

integration of his own fractured personal experience is of particular interest.

‘Celia’, acted as the controlling romantic and emotional myth for him from 1926 until 1942, (replacing or augmenting the romanticism of his marriage to ‘Michal’ or Florence). A brief outline of the relevant dates is needed to clarify the biographical facts, and to allow an examination of the accuracy of the dates attributed to the *Century*.

In 1924 Phyllis was appointed to a position in the Library. Hadfield describes how the library in 1925 was becoming more of a common room in the Press in which meetings took place and people socialised.

In 1927 Williams wrote the first of the three masques, *The Masque of the Manuscript* for his colleagues at Amen House. *The Masque of Perusal* followed in 1929, described accurately by Hadfield as being “darker in colour”. In a letter to Raymond Hunt in a ‘sketch of an autobiography’, he wrote that their “great period” was from September 1926 to April 1927: “After that, everything went wrong - except, of course, the Holy Ghost.”⁶

The first issue that these poems present is their type-written date on the manuscript of the collection, and the accurate charting of the relationship consequent upon it. Phyllis Jones provided the date for the typist and repeated it in subsequent interviews with me. There is an unavoidable difficulty which raises at least some preliminary doubt over the date arising in a letter from Williams to Phyllis Jones which Hadfield refers to in *Charles Williams, An Exploration of his life and Work*. The poems describe a year of intense emotional and some physical intimacy between them both. Yet in the letter dated approximately 1929 (for reasons which will become evident) Williams writes:

What a year. I don't really go back much - or rather only vaguely - before the end of last June. And the first Tolstoy. And then ... the lecture. And the second Tolstoy. Do you remember offering to take me to the ‘Ghost Train’ ? Yes, you liked me a little then. But instead I took your arm - which to me was like a weekend at Brighton - and we talked about Almighty God.... it was only the second time in my life I had taken - even as remotely as that - a woman's arm. And certainly it was only the second

time that the idea of kissing her crossed my mind - as it did at Victoria. And took four months to eventuate, Blessed be He!... All is but a prelude. We begin something new - and that is also a prelude. Will next year be sharper, sadder, but as precious as the past ?⁷

The period the letter refers to suggests a different date. There were two Tolstoy Centenary exhibitions. Tolstoy was born in 1828 and consequently they took place in to 1928, which offers corroboration for the event. The Oxford University Press had an exhibit at the exhibition, and Williams took Jones to see it. If the letter referring to his taking her arm and wanting to kiss her, for the first time, is associated with the exhibition, then nothing of a deeply personal nature can have preceded it, making the dating 1926/7 difficult. The cycle of poems acts as a form of poetic diary to describe the way in which the relationship began, developed and was redefined in those crucial twelve months, and offers internal evidence of its development:

The second autumn cannot be the first -
 ...[i]n her
Soul, body, intellect, are not what they were.⁸

suggests the relationship first erupted in the late summer or autumn of either 1926, (following Williams to Hunt) or 1928. As will become clear, the relationship appears to have had an intense and romantic mutuality in the early months. *The Century* charts the hesitation, frustration, and final withdrawal of Phyllis from an affair that had developed further than she was willing to go. Physically the poems and letters chart the exchange of kisses. But no doubt it was the emotional intensity and as becomes clear, the controlling possessiveness of Williams, which became most uncongenial to her. Her withdrawal caused Williams intense pain and desolation,⁹ and is reflected in a moment of poetic critical self-examination that is one of the most powerful and moving pieces of this cycle.¹⁰ A form of *modus vivendi* appears to have been achieved by the end of the cycle.

There is evidence on both sides of the argument. In the *Century of Poems*, which

is the context for “great period”, no. 56 is entitled ‘At A Rehearsal Of The Masque’; no. 57 ‘ With The Sonnets Concluding The Masque’ and no. 58, ‘On The Proposal That In A Second Masque, She Should Present The Soul Ecstasy, And On Her Objections.’ The first Masque, *The Masque of the Manuscript* was performed on the 28th of April 1927.

However, one of the difficulties with the accepting the earlier date is that it suggests that it was three years before Fred Page disclosed the fact of the relationship to Florence Conway, ‘Michal’ with the serious consequences that flowed from the trauma. Given that it flowered intensely for a year, that would seem a little odd. If, however it flowered between 1928 and 1929, then 1930 is still sufficiently close to the eruption to make the 1930 date of disclosure reasonable. Hadfield documents that 1927 was the year that Phyllis Jones’s mother sold her house with Phyllis moving to a flat in Upper Bedford Place. Hadfield is not clear if it was 1930 or in 1933 that Fred Page disclosed to Mrs Williams the fact of her husband’s adoration of Phyllis. The interview with Phyllis (now Dougall) confirmed the date of 1930. If Phyllis Dougall was wrong about dates for the *Century*, she may not be reliable elsewhere. In fact 1930 was the year she broke her leg in a riding accident which lends some weight to her claim to be sure. It was also the year and occasion that Williams then discovered that she had moved on to become the lover of Gerry Hopkins, his colleague who inhabited an upstairs office. In 1925 in writing *The Black Bastard* Williams had modelled Isabel on Michal. In 1930 he was writing *Many Dimensions*, and he had chosen Phyllis for the character of Chloe.

The three verse plays were written between 1929 and 1930, *The Witch*, *The Rite of the Passion*, and *The Chaste Wanton* (published by Milford as *Three Plays* in 1931). All three are presentations of the death of love, suggesting that they were written in the aftermath of Phyllis’ withdrawal from the affair. How long after remains unclear.

Williams was seriously ill in 1933, and was rushed to hospital suffering from intussusception.

In September 1933 Phyllis moved from the Library to Production under Miss Peacock. The next serious crisis arose in the autumn of 1934 when it appeared that

Phyllis would be leaving the Press on one Friday that September and be marrying Billie Somervaille whom she had known since moving from home to Bedford Square in 1927. He had been studying to become a Company Secretary at the time, and since moved to Java having found employment with an oil company. Billie Somervaille had come home on leave and Phyllis had agreed to marry him and move to Java. Both Williams and Hopkins were severely shocked by it.

Hadfield has had access to the some of the correspondence Williams sent to Phyllis during those years, but some letters were retained by Phyllis and lent to me. They add to the picture considerably. Phyllis's return to England in 1938 was no surprise to Williams. He had been acting as a sounding-board over the failing marriage through his correspondence offering a mixture of friendship, love, counselling and spiritual direction.

What is not clear from Hadfield is that he continued to write to her on her return. His last letter is dated August 1942. In her interview, Phyllis Dougall confirms that her son Roddy was born in the Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in 1942, and that that year was the last time she saw Charles Williams. The question arises as to why there appears to have been no communication between them after 1942. What then becomes clear is that Williams turned back to his wife in the last three years of his wife, and invested in her the full emotional and spiritual resources of his imagination and intellect.

THE CELIAN MOMENT

Hadfield offers the reader a description of the unfolding of Williams's relationship in general terms. There is no examination of its beginnings in the *Century*, no recognition of its extension beyond a few letters in the 'Java years', and only a brief reference to the 'Celian Moment' as he wrote about it in his introduction to *The New Book of English Verse*¹¹ with note of an accompanying letter to Phyllis. Shideler ignores it and Cavaliero writes an intellectual history of Williams with few references to the drama of his personal life that underlay it. He does not even attribute Williams's description of the Celian moment to Phyllis Jones in his brief reference to the Introduction to the *New Book of English Verse*.

Yet as Williams makes clear in his letters, the Celian experience dominated his personal life and his poetic and imaginative thinking from 1926 to 1942. In this lies the importance of making accurate reference to the relationship with Phyllis Jones, and her effect as a catalyst and inspiration for the myth of Celia that was to expand and deepen into his treatment of Dante in *The Figure of Beatrice*.

Hadfield quoted from a letter in 1935 where Williams asks Phyllis to read the book through from the beginning

because then you will come upon what I have called 'the Celian moment' in the proper order. You will know that it is, for me, a definition of all that the great vision of you was...[I]ndeed it seems to me that it was the most marvellous visibility of the potential and the actual in you - in your beauty, your power, your goodness, your intelligence, your love - that was your peculiar greatness... [Y]ou were in fact - I wrote you a poem about it didn't I? at once the stone and shell of Wordsworth's vision - geometry and sound - exact definition and reverberating loveliness.¹²

In a following letter dated the 4th of November 1935, which has remained in the owner's possession until now, Williams writes further about the Celian moment and the rationale behind his selections of poetry in *The New English Book of Verse*. Both for its tone and its detail, it is worth reproducing in full.

AMEN HOUSE

4 Nov. 35

My Dearest, dearest Celia,

There go to you by this week's mail two books - Dorothy Sayers' new one, *Gaudy Night* (and I only hope dozens of people aren't sending it), but it was a matter of allegiance for me to send), and my own anthology, of which you have seen the Introduction. I think perhaps you will not dislike or reprove, as it were, the Introduction or the Notes, where the Celian moment appears again - twice, though you very likely may not want to be bothered about it just now. I have collected as many Celian poems as I

could find of value, and Whitehead is only in the Notes for our sake. Marvell's *Match* I love because of "and that was Celia". In January I am speaking to a University Literary Society at Cambridge - on *Poetry and the Celian Moment*: when I will launch the phrase vocally on the world. It is an easier January engagement than yours, but, if I succeed in planting it in criticism, then at least another thing which springs from you and all you did shall be held of value. And you will remember that it is meant - one side for poetry, and one for you.

The book itself has certain things in; there is hardly a page without some description of you, but also there are a number of our joint loves. There is, on page 261, 'by our first strange ...'; on page 389 - admire, my blessed, God's providence and me - 'who think too little and who talk ..' I put Congreve's phrase into the Introduction for your beloved sake. There are chunks of your *Prelude* and my *Paradise Lost*. There is "Unknown Eros", though there is not "my nightingale". And there is nothing of beauty or goodness or intelligence from beginning to end that does not mean to me something of you - nor anything of their opposites that has not been exposed as fought or hated in and by you. As you will know how I wrote a poem once on the Wordsworthian stone and shell (pp 503-4) which identified them with your hands in Holborn, and said how one was the mathematics or meaning of things and one was their beauty and sound. Or words to that effect. And certainly they catch me still, on many and many a night, on the very point of real sleep, and thrust me upwards again into wakeful-ness. But as for the book, darling, there is one thing you will have to forgive, I know, and (if you are kind) take the burden of or yourself - or rather the indecency - and that is the Acknowledgements. But there are no "overtones" or "undertones" there; they mean exactly what they say, and no more, and there is but one Celia; and not outpourings or offers or petitions or tributes since you left here... I will not say deflected, for they have never had any power or chance deflecting, but have come near shadowing the least fact of you, of you, of you: nor have any of them ("perhaps I should say 'alone!'"') been able to produce even any satisfaction to them. One by one I dismiss all "my young women" to be "Kings and priests over themselves" - and (very properly) all of them go. There was but one who would not: to whom, for ever, as far as she will be with me, be ascribed, as is most justly due.. and so on.¹³

The introduction he refers to traces through poetic experience the different names of the vision of the poet for the beloved. Myra, Amaryllis, Chloe, Dianeme, Amoret, Stella, Ianthe, and from Marvell, Celia. The Celian moment functions to describe both the actual experience of the love for one woman, and the potential universality that encompasses the whole poetic spectrum. Williams notes its bi-functionality, existing both for the sake of the romantic experience itself, and for the sake of poetry. He traces and distinguishes the Celias of the Elizabethans, Jonson, and Percy. The 'moment' appears in both early Shakespearean comedy and in Milton's "bruted Neera of Cambridge". Both Swift and Pope treated it for its own sake as love, and for the sake of their poetry. Shelley offered some illumination and Coleridge transformed the concept into that of Christabel and the Abyssinian maid. In the nineteenth century Williams adjudged the experience to have lost its 'overtone'. But the greatest defect of the age was the failure to explore the metaphysics that lay behind the experience, or as Williams put it,

It was still bright with something of angelic light, from "the top of speculation"; few then explored the angelhood.¹⁴

In the last few pages of the introduction Williams both sketches out the trail of the Celian moment as it is presented in the volume, but also gives a clue to what he means by "exploring the angelhood." The persons who utter and presumably experience the universality of the Celian moment become super-personal by the mere intensity of their personalities, and further, by the breaking down of the parameters of 'normal' experience, they take on the knowledge of refusal and rejection, of hell. In this perception it was Milton and the Metaphysicians who went beyond Shakespeare, for his "people were able-they were compelled-altogether to die."¹⁵ But if Shakespeare did not offer the full spectrum of hell, he did renew the Celian moment with a new perfection; "it hovered on the edge of more than humanity when a kind of earthly-immortality rang in Ariel."¹⁶ When analysing Kipling and Yeats, he explains what role he attributes to the exercise of myth. In poetry, even Christianity is a myth, and the practice of the myth functions to introduce the element of metaphysical exploration and speculation to accompany what would otherwise be a

less dimensioned interpretation of human experience. The book ends with the death of Gerard Manley Hopkins, because

It is the moment of the close of myths. Flecker and Francis Thompson delayed the end; Eliot recovered Agamemnon; Chesterton infused them with the ceremonial of the apocalypse, but if the poets use myth, it is by private compulsion in the face of cultural rejection. Pan is dead.¹⁷

In this lengthy introduction Williams offers an apologia not only for the interaction of myth and the exploration of metaphysics, but also for his own use of the myth of Celia in his personal experience. The influence of hermeticism had the effect of blurring the distinction between secular and spiritual, between the material and the transcendent; and Williams was to find this affected him in two ways. It had the advantage that he was able to interpret the experience of romantic love as moments of lucid theophany; it had the disadvantage that he was unable to make the necessary distinctions in his own experience of it between the exploration of the spiritual potential the experience carried latent within it, and his own erotic and romantic inclinations. Throughout *The Century*, there is the continuous overlapping of these two categories of experience in a way which is confusing and damaging to the integrity of each.

A CENTURY OF POEMS FOR CELIA. AMEN HOUSE 1926-1927 CHRONOLOGY AND MYTH

In order to make a use of the collection of one hundred poems that is consistent with the material covered above, three elements invite consideration. There is a chronology of the relationship; the unfolding of the separate myths; and the evidence of the running together of the erotic and religious responses.

The first two can most easily be taken together. Williams, who clearly kept copies of his poems to Celia is offering an anthology from the range written over a year. In the Prologue he writes with a style that is close to affectionate doggerel;

I will choose out a hundred poems for you

of all I have written since our love was new,
of all that, in this sudden burst of days,
I have written for your pleasure and your praise
which is your easy setting by of pleasure;
therefore I have written this song for you to treasure.

The very first poem deals mockingly with Alexis' (Gerry Hopkins's) latest novel. The second is entitled "On a thwarted invitation to lunch: also, on a question about the Rosicrucians". Hadfield has described Phyllis Jones as eager to learn, and the discovery that Williams was an authority and still a member of an esoteric group exercised an attraction.

We should have sat and chatted you and I,
of Christian Rosycross and of his creed,
of other masters, of the dark and high
symbol and doctrine - how the final Deed
is only reached by hearts and lives that bleed,
Messias, or the little feathered bunch
frozen in winter by some leafless weed.
But I was going to ask you out for lunch.

Williams clearly felt himself to be an older man without the immediate attractions of her contemporaries and finishes with the wistful lines,

Go, Celia, where your best appointments lead:
The people whom you know (I have a hunch!)
are young and gay and of your own fair speed,
but I was going to ask you out to lunch.¹⁸

Certain of the poems have prophetic touches to them 'On having left her suddenly' has the couplet,

Dark symbol ! Celia it shall be
 you who shall one day drop me.¹⁹

No. 33, 'On Flirting With Alexis' also has a tinge of prophecy as well as offering an indication of Williams feelings which have become sufficiently engaged to suffer a degree of jealousy.

I do not blame Alexis; he was wooed-
 wooed by what invitation, o by what
 challenge of womanhood, the maiden snood
 deftly arranged, the whisper, the hard lot
 of the fair damsel in the paltry cot
 (that is the library), keeping it trim -
 and he must haste to help you at a trot:
 but Celia, need you so encourage him ?

Envoy

Ask, princess, ask your conscience, if the slot
 of that strong lion should provoke your whim
 to lure it forth: I should not care a jot
 but Celia, need you so encourage him ?²⁰

Whatever pressures Phyllis thought she could escape from when she agreed to marry Billie Somervaille, it can not have been unconnected with evading both Williams and Hopkins. In 'On A Letter Warning Her To Be Careful Lest She Came To Shipwreck', Williams writes of the consequences of attracting a series of lovers, however playfully. A degree of jealousy remains:

Alexis, Colin, Urban love me, each
 in his degree, and I love in return.
 and all of them have much to learn and teach,
 and I have much to teach and much to learn,
 among my peers; nor lower no more high

than any of this republican brotherhood,
 but their sweet sister, their fair friend am I.
 Shipwreck, I shipwreck? So she smiled and stood.²¹

In no 36, a clerical visitor refers to Celia as a “good lady” which provokes a mockingly reverential pastiche of possessive defensiveness;

But ‘this good lady’! Celia! this
 foot, this impetuous mind and heart,
 this agile victory over Dis
 this mouth that smiles at every smart
 this winged procession from your soul,
 across the dark and ruddy world,
 this beauty, shining from the whole,
 in your slim hands and hair new curled!
 Celia a lady ? Celia good ? What else ?
 what other is the truth each sonnet tells.²²

There came the point, inevitably perhaps, when she began to resent the claims of her that the poetry and his attitude explicitly embodied. Williams responded to her shot across his bows with ‘On the Word My’

If I should say my Celia should the word
 as many implicits of evil bear
 as in the ruffian language of the herd,
 snorting possession over all things fair?
 Ah think not so; it hath a double sense,
 but freedom either way its meaning lights....
 So long, my Celia, shall the word endure.
 as you allow, since that my means your.²³

In no. 44, he turns back to a religious theme ‘At Mass on Ascension Day’, choosing

'tis faerie of the ever dreaming mind,
 mimicking its own great disdain, to be
 the thing whereto its daylight life is blind;
 'tis capture, bondage, 'tis the infidel
 loosed on the holy places of all love....

'tis Celia, but 'tis Celia in a dream.²⁷

The Circassian state which he elaborates on in the following poem, no. 50, seems to involve the category of submission and mastery that Lois Lang-Sims was to enter to become the slave girl, Lalage. In so far as those critics who have attributed a degree of sado-masochism to Williams have a point, it is the Circassian state in which it is expressed. Celia is an alternative myth of romantic vision.

The Celian and Circassian states
 exist on common ground,
 but say, what difference between
 those august names is found?

This - the Circassian changes not,
 how marvellous soe'er,
 immortally rebellious and
 continuously fair.

....

But O the Celian State proceeds
 from change to growing change,
 and all it hath of permanence
 doth still more widely range.

....

The Celian and Circassian States
 on common ground abide,

and daily the Circassian maid
shall fault and I shall chide.

But O with what a marvelling thought
I see the stars ascend
at evening through the Celian air,
my sister and my friend.²⁸

The three myths come together in a remarkable way when Williams chides Phyllis for some apparent resentment of Williams's attitude and behaviour. She appears to no longer want to 'play'. In 'On a Morning Meeting, he writes:

Do I detect a certain flagging
in the daughter of Maia's tread ?
Have the jests and general ragging
weari'd already that golden head ?
What ! Does Circassia find it tiring ?
what ! does Phillida find it dull ?
What ! has Celia put off aspiring ?
have all of them ceased to be worshipful.²⁹

In the next poem 'On Her Forgetting Certain Pencils,' he explains the different dynamics attached to the three mythic personae (if one includes 'Phyllis').

Since Celia, on the best hypothesis,
cannot forget, being all three perfected,
and since Circassia, though she work amiss,
works with a joyous and deliberate head,
it must be Phillida who so left void
work she is nigh but is not paid to do -
Phillida the official, the employed,
the B.Sc. and the librarian, who

kept all three pencils over the weekend,
 and how shall Phillida be charged with it ?
 Celia might be implored, Circassia penned
 in chains; but neither for their peer is fit;
 who - is she ? - by subordination gagged,
 is neither begged nor bullied, but just nagged.³⁰

The myth of Circassia is justified in the following poem ‘On the Wars of Circassia’ along the lines that Cavaliero pursued in his exploration of the principles of spiritual direction when he introduced the Letters of Lois Lang- Sims in *Letters to Lalage*.³¹ Submission is the key to a higher purpose. The key line here is “the centre which is you,” which suggests Williams understood quite clearly the limits of the myth and its purpose. He intended Phyllis to as well. Strikingly he introduces the siege imagery and austere morality of Bunyan’s *Holy War*.

Think that by this the centre which is you
 rides more advanced among the watching stars,
 for from this wild submission you renew
 admired defiance in more potent wars.

So, when the dark drum of Diabolus
 begins throughout your shattered streets to roll,
 you, trained to honour and to battle thus,
 shall save the inmost places of Mansoul.³²

In the poems numbered 50 ‘On Possibilities’ and 56 ‘At a Rehearsal of the Masque’ he makes further distinctions between Phyllis, Celia and Circassia. But by no. 70, ‘On An Unexpected Departure’ the crisis of her rejection is breaking surface. She has it appears walked out on him, and taken the over the dynamic of control.

I learn another etiquette; the mode
 of a new land, and mightier I discern:

patience, O practised in that loftier code:

I too, I too, shall learn....

Only if, ere the learning is at an end

my mind grows darker for a little while,

pardon.³³

In 71, which has no title, he rationalises her withdrawal and the fractured relationship. But in no. 72, 'Daydreams' he writes an extraordinary poem of humiliated self-analysis and deprecation. There is little else like it. It takes the form of confession.

All this unhappy afternoon
 I have been dazed by an evil moon
 that floats within me and turns my dreams
 into visions nearer the truth, it seems;
 I am not I, and if we talked
 of God or poetry as we walked,
 it was that they should be panders both
 to an old man, full of lust, and sloth,
 crawling and peeping and slinking about
 behind those masks and only to find
 for his greasy slimy and feverish mind
 the thought that pleases him; in what guise
 so'ever, 'tis that he hath longed to surprise.
 If I chat of Wordsworth or of Donne
 it is that old man that I put on;
 if I speak of eternity,
 it is that old man grows in me;
 if I seem to talk of your soul
 I am grown whole to that old man's whole,

who in his own manner enjoys your youth:
and this I know at last is truth.

...[t]he great fat crocodile lifts his head
and drags himself forward with feet outspread
on the compost of damned souls that is hell,
and each body breaks like a breaking shell;
and above, O how far away none knows,
glimmers the faint light of the Rose:
and the crocodile snaps at it, and again
with all his horrible mouth in vain
stretches and snaps, and far away
the Rose folds up, and the Night and the Day
are perfectly closed - but over me
the crocodile waddles eternally.³⁴

He continues to write however. In 73, 'On Her Practice', he likens himself to a bound child, unconscious, and bruised. But her fingers strove to pluck the bonds away. In 74 'On a Gesture of Affection' he has asked her for a sign of affection, which she had given. He seems pathetically grateful. By 78, 'On Her Past', he defends himself against having caused her any harm.

Yet this at least, princess, I cannot say:
"She had been happier were it not for me";
you raised no ignorant eyelids on the day
of man's ill-hap and waxing misery;
your blood was not unheated; not at peace
your gracious spirit moved above the dark,
and in my most unmeant and dear increase
I spoiled no vision and I quenched no spark.
This, this at least Immanuel shall declare,
Howe'er he judge my motives and my will;

this, this at least himself he deigned to share,
 using my nearness for his heavenly skill;
 though either of each other now are rid,
 Celia, that shall not ruin what I did.³⁵

The resolution to the crisis is found in 'On the Knowledge of Love'. It contains the required synthesis after his declaration of love, attempted control, and her consequent rejection which appears to be a renunciation of the erotic element in their relationship. He returns to the hermetic vision - romanticism infused with spirituality as mediated by the poets. It appears to be the only acceptable way to relate to her now. A combination of circumstances and ideology have forced it on him.

Love that the poets teach I practise still;
 however poorly, yet I practise it.
 and therefore will I have therein my will
 toward you, and set it all in order fit.
 For first to love and then to order so
 that nothing injudicious is therein -
 this is the art which man was set to know,
 and therefore hath relation to his kin.
 But having known desire, it cannot be
 that knowledge should be subject to desire
 a second time , nor to captivity
 return what to pure freedom doth aspire.
 Only as I love others, I love you;
 ah in you first that choice I saw and knew.³⁶

Although no. 89 is not the last poem, yet it does offer a conclusion and a diagnosis of the year of passionate engagement. There is contrition for having overstepped a limit no longer acceptable to her, and a rationalisation of what has happened. If there is an element of control in the relationship, it is Phyllis who is ex-

ercising it. He reverts, as he began, to the safety and stability of addressing her as “sister”.

Sister, an end is now; a grave delight
closes the fantasy and the frenzy both;

If I should err again, if you should err,
it is not purposed, no nor permanent;
this is the newer friendship that we meant,
and aught beside does but for an hour stir.

...I never was so wise as this before
no, not when my first youth began to adore
Love, and beheld his full divinity shine.

For that was heaven brought down to earth, but this
earth raised to heaven, since heaven is nought but He:³⁷
littler desire in either, but to see -
because to see is lovelier than to kiss.

And if it wholly perish, if this year,
you meet me in the entry, and less sweet
it seem than when some newer friend you meet,
it will not therefore have been less than dear:

it will not therefore have been less than He
in whom all death is, and all life made new,
to whom be ascribed, as is most justly due,
all praise, dominion, government, equity.”³⁸

THE INFUSION OF THE ROMANTIC BY THE EROTIC

The religious overtones of the last lines raise the issue of the influence of hermetic culture on Williams's romanticism. In Waite's Qabalistically inspired writing the body becomes the key to incorporating a wider spiritual dimension. The strength of this perspective is that it mandates the poet in his celebration of the material as revelation of the spiritual. The difficulty is that it does not allow for any obvious demarcation between the spiritual and erotic. Through *The Century* Williams exhibits this confusion.

He is never quite clear what she is to him. He uses 'sister and friend' initially. "But O with what a marvellous thought I see the stars ascend, at evening through the Celian air, my sister and my friend."³⁹ In 40, she is 'sister', in 48 'child'. After the crisis, he returns to 'sweet sister, fair salvation, dearest friend'.⁴⁰ But the main area of confusion is between the spiritual, romantic and erotic.

When writing a poem in honour of her eyelashes, he brings together romantic longing and religious overtones;

The fringed curtains - O if Prospero
 had looked on those and not Miranda's eyes
 and seen the shadow that their lashes throw
 under the darkness where your meaning lies !
 O if the youthful prince whose heart declared
the lifting of her eyelash is my lord,
 had seen your lift, and all the purpose bared
 which are in those large deeps of meaning stored.⁴¹

While starting with physical attributes that carry an ambiguity, he moves on rapidly to an overt religious imagery that still carries within it overtones of erotic and romantic attraction. In "At Mass on Ascension Day" (quoted earlier), it isn't clear what the operation of great alchemy is transforming. But the critical final line, "In thee Love runs and yet does not make haste" is clearly religious love, but with overtones of human loving. There is no distinction made. Her praise is set in another poem, no. 57, called 'With the Sonnets Concluding the Masque', in overtly religious language with overtones of the Virgin Mary.

O no, in this too you are free from sin,
 generous immaculate,
 ... [y]our perfect movement gave him what he sought,
 a gateway for his entrance.⁴²

He continues in the next poem with lines that are close to idolatrous;

...[t]he only soul that does not mirror God
 because reflection is in every quest
 but the quest ends in that great period
 where you are all and all are you! O mute,
 O sacred wisdom holy beyond speech.⁴³

The attribution of holiness is intensified and the spirituality cloaks both romanticism and eroticism.

The avoidance of Phyllis and the adoption of Celia in Marian mode is the mechanism by which he holds the sensual romanticism within the cover of spirituality of piety. The hermeticism allows for veneration of the body. In other circumstances the erotic quality of the physical attributes would be more obvious.

In no. 68, the title suggests a religious theme, "On Her Growth In Grace." In fact it reverts to being a conventional love poem devoid of any religious imagery.

...[i]f you grew
 a small flower in your garden plot..

and if, one joyous eve of spring,
 you to your garden wandering out,
 found a high bush of colour fling
 a rain of fragrance all about.

... [h]ardly by others seen,

but seen but known, but loved, by you.

...[w]ould you not with a startled mind,
a trembling breast, a beating heart,
gaze at it from behind the blind.⁴⁴

In the depressive confession of 'Daydreams' he admits that this confusion was deliberate, though it seems more likely that the motivation spanned both consciousness and the unconscious. If it was mere strategy, as he accuses himself of, it is unlikely he should revert so overtly to it after the crisis has past - 'Christhood' and 'kiss' are found in the same verse in 82 iii - though it is not clear if this kiss is that which has the irresponsible overtones of Eros, or more ominously the fatal encounter with Judas in Gethsemane:

Celia I see the Christhood that you are,
I put your work on and am made agen:
O wear it ever spirit.
...[A]ll's done; kiss me; this is the end,
sweet sister, fair salvation, dearest friend.⁴⁵

He continues to synthesise the religious and romantic when in 'On Looking Forward' he appears to compare his first experience of love with this second. The first appears to carry overtones of the incarnation, the second, the deification of humanity in orthodox theology:

For that was heaven brought down to earth, but this
earth raised to heaven, since heaven is nought but He:
littler desire in either, but to see -
because to see is lovelier than to kiss.⁴⁶

Hermeticism finds its way back as the controlling category for his vision when he writes the epilogue, and sets it in terms of transformation and alchemy. The jour-

ney for her is to be one of inward change, with the poet as the poor companion who observes and celebrates, and in the best traditions of courtly love, serves from afar.

And she was one who walked in loneliness...
 [s]he found no peace in all her range
 and modes of loving, till she knew to change
 all things within herself; she would not cease
 from utmost labour till the utmost Peace,
 finding fulfilled all that its need demanded,
 within her soul transforming it, expanded.

She was more beautiful when she loved than light
 astonishing the green leaves of Spring; her flight
 upward was like her motion forward, rare
 as any sun-directed folk of air
 alchemical or actual; going gaily,
 she set her foot upon the dragon daily.

and therefore one who saw...
 [w]rote for his pleasure first, then in her praise,
 then as a poor companion upon the ways
 that go unto the end beyond all choosing,
 these poems for her laughter and her musing.⁴⁷

In a later letter, Williams summarised the experience of contradiction he had encountered in her:

What you have, Celia, - what you *are*, rather, - is one of those curious and marvellous beings whose lure is the refusal, whose invitation is the denial, whose hand of union is the sword of separation. It is the type

which hides in some of Shakespeare's boy-heroines (spiritual in ou, theatrical in them). It is what I have meant by babbling about your virginal aloofness. It is, I think, not a common type (and incidentally it was always my childhood's dream, my adolescent vision)... [Y]our abandonments and play do but emphasise it - but woe to the wretch who doesn't realise it. I think you might easily be, because of that, a delirium to some minds.⁴⁸

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To be continued.

(This paper forms the substance of a chapter of Gavin Ashenden's forthcoming book, provisionally entitled *Charles Williams – Alchemy and Integration*, to be published by Kent State University Press later this year. The conclusion of the paper, covering the unseen letters to Celia and the letters to Michal, will appear in the next issue. -Ed.)

NOTES

¹ Hadfield *Exploration* p. 129. Referring to correspondence in the Bodleian. (Somerville) no. 0355. No date is given.

² Hadfield. *Exploration* p. 164.

³ Williams. *English Poetic Mind*, 'Preface' p. v.

⁴ *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, edited and introduced by Charles Williams, (Longmans, Green and Co. London. 1943.) p. 15.

⁵ In a private letter from Michal Williams to Glen Cavaliero, dated 22nd October 1956, she wrote commenting on a draft mss he had written, "Only one thing is wrong. However much Charles' seven year itch with that virgin tart masqueraded as love in excelsis it was as sordid and unhealthy as all such affairs."

⁶ Williams. Letter to Raymond Hunt, dated 1 March, 1940. Wade Centre.

⁷ Hadfield. *Exploration*. pp. 72,73.

⁸ Williams, *A Century of Poems 1926-1927*. Unpublished poems, The Bodleian, no. 88.

⁹ In an interview, Phyllis Dougall she recalled the experience of what today would be described as being stalked by Williams after her rejection of him in what she thought was 1927, but we re-date as 1929; "He would follow me through the streets. When I was living in Upper Bedford place, I would be walking down one side of the street and I would be conscious of him walking down the other side of the street, just sort of talking to himself." 21st February 1992.

¹⁰ No. 72, 'Daydreams'. See below.

¹¹ Williams, Ed. *The New Book of English Verse*, Associate Editors, Lord David Cecil, Ernest De Selincourt, E.M.W. Tillyard. (Oxford University Press. 1935.)

¹² Hadfield, p. 122 quoting from letter no. 360. The Bodleian. 1935.

¹³ Charles Williams to Phyllis Somerville. Unpublished letter lent by the recipient.

¹⁴ Williams. *The New Book* 'Introduction' p. 13.

¹⁵ Williams. *The New Book*, p.15.

¹⁶ Williams. *The New Book*, p.15.

¹⁷ Williams. *The New Book*, p.17.

¹⁸ Williams, *A Century of poems for Celia*, Unpublished. Original Mss, Bodleian. No. 2. "On a thwarted invitation to lunch: also, on a question about the Rosicrucians."

¹⁹ Williams. *Century* no. 24.

²⁰ Williams. *Century* no. 33.

²¹ Williams. *Century* no. 34.

²² Williams. *Century* no. 36.

²³ Williams. *Century* no. 38.

²⁴ Williams. *Century* Prologue.

²⁵ Williams. *Century* no. 44.

²⁶ Williams. *Century* no. 48.

²⁷ Williams. *Century* no. 49.

²⁸ Williams. *Century* no. 50.

²⁹ Williams. *Century* no. 52.

³⁰ Williams. *Century* no. 53.

³¹ Cavaliero was exploring the issues raised by Lois Lang-Sims in her collection of letters *Letters to Lalage*, in the form of accusations that Williams was merely using Lang-Sims manipulatively within the confines of the myth of the slave girl Lalage. Cavaliero suggested that an element of spiritual direction was being exercised that Lang-Sims had misjudged.

But in view of Williams' own fascination with images and the practise of power, one can see a personal compulsion fulfilling itself as well. Theologically, the slave girl embodies a necessary stage of growth, for in the mind of God Lois is identical with Lalage and her successive fulfillments; but in the life of time and fallen humanity, the roles fail to coincide. Williams' spiritual direction of souls was designed to clarify their various functions.

Lois Lang-Sims. *Letters to Lalage: The Letters of Charles Williams to Lois Lang-Sims*. Ed. Glen Cavaliero. (Kent Ohio and London. Kent State University Press, 1989) Introduction, p. 10.

³² Williams. *Century* no. 54.

³³ Williams. *Century* no. 70.

³⁴ Williams. *Century* no. 72.

³⁵ Williams. *Century* no. 78.

³⁶ Williams. *Century* no. 83.

³⁷ This may well be a contrast between loving Michal and loving Celia.

³⁸ Williams. *Century* no. 89.

³⁹ Williams. *Century* no. 50.

⁴⁰ Williams. *Century* no. 82 iii.

⁴¹ Williams. *Century* no. 19. "the fringed curtains" is a quotation of Prospero to Miranda. Williams will associate himself with Prospero, again through Stanhope in *Descent Into Hell*.

⁴² Williams. *Century* no. 57.

⁴³ Williams. *Century* no. 58.

⁴⁴ Williams. *Century* no. 68.

⁴⁵ Williams. *Century* no. 82 iii.

⁴⁶ Williams. *Century* no. 89.

⁴⁷ Williams. *Century* Epilogue.

⁴⁸ quoted by Hadfield in *Exploration* as a "letter of the time" (1929-31). p. 81.

The Masques of Amen House, together with Amen House Poems; and with Selections from the Music for the Masques by Hubert J. Foss

Introduction by Bernadette Lynn Bosky. Edited and annotated by David Bratman. Altadena, Calif.: The Mythopoeic Press, 2000.

Reviewed by Charles A. Huttar

Few of us can have experienced a corporate culture quite like that reflected in this book. The sense of community that characterized the London offices of Oxford University Press in the 1920s is part of the Williams mythology, celebrated by him as “a new wonder in the world” (p. 77). In this volume, the third production from the Mythopoeic Press (and the first to be devoted to Charles Williams), members of the parent Society have provided the means to make such a wonder more real to our imaginations.

Among the more familiar types of office socializing are the Christmas party and the company picnic; that OUP should put together private dramatic entertainments, modeled after the court masques of the early seventeenth century and acted by Williams and other members of the staff, suggests an atmosphere rather different in its level of intellectual and literary culture. Williams wrote these three masques at two-year intervals from 1926 to 1930, and Hubert Foss, the energetic founder of OUP’s music department, composed music for the two masques that were performed. By including five vocal selections from the music, this book helps readers (as printed versions of drama often fail to do) to gain some idea of the performances on more than just a verbal level. It further fills out the background by including selections from other verse, spanning the period 1926 to 1939, in which Williams celebrated life at OUP and his coworkers there.

At the performances, Sir Humphrey Milford, OUP’s London publisher, was—

like Kings James and Charles in Ben Jonson's time—present only as ruler (“Caesar”) of the “court” (other staff and invited guests) which formed the audience. To them Williams addressed, in seventeenth-century style, prologues and epilogues, between which he framed allegorical plots. The first of these entertainments, “The Masque of the Manuscript,” traces the publishing process from the first arrival of a manuscript at the Press, through its evaluation, acceptance (here Caesar gives the thumbs-up), and editorial correction, then its physical destruction in order to be “resurrected” as a bound volume and placed in the showroom (the “Library”). In “The Masque of Perusal,” after a lapse of two years a reader finally shows interest in the book, and it is transformed into a “thought” in his mind that will in turn develop into a further creation. Publishing, thus, is seen not as an end in itself but as serving a higher purpose—resembling in this respect, in Williams's system of symbolism, the Holy Grail. “The Masque of the Termination of Copyright” (never acted but now, finally, printed, though from a typescript with pages lost) is set nearly a century later, when the book, at last public property and serving no longer even an economic end, standing instead entirely on its merits, is reevaluated and republished: symbolically, it faces death but becomes immortal.

Bernadette Bosky does an excellent job of introducing the texts. In part 1, “The Author,” she packs into eight pages a lot of information and judicious comment on Williams's life and career. Part 2, “Amen House” describes the physical setting and personal relationships at OUP, devoting half of its nine pages to the two persons given the most prominent attention in the masques, Milford and Phyllis Jones, the staff librarian. Next, in “The Literary Tradition and Williams's Masques,” Bosky illuminates the peculiarities of these in-house entertainments by explaining the conventions of the two seventeenth-century genres that inform them, masque and pastoral. With all this useful background, less space is needed in part 4, “The Masques” (just over five pages), to provide the essential information about Williams's pieces and call attention to their main literary features.

David Bratman, as editor, provides textual notes; a separate introduction to the music section, with an account of Foss's career and program notes on his music for the masques; and twelve pages annotating the more arcane allusions, both literary and personal. The notes are welcome: enough, but not too much. Part of the

pleasure in reading the masques comes from perceiving how the allegorical figures, in their characterization and their interplay, mirror the real-life personalities and situations of those playing the parts. Phillida (Phyllis, Williams's inamorata in real life) and Alexis (Gerry Hopkins, his rival) are but two examples. Without the introduction and notes, much of this would be difficult to catch.

The appended verse consists of all ten of Williams's "Sonnets on the Masque of the Manuscript," some of them devoted to the individual actors; ten of the hundred poems he wrote for Phyllis at the beginning of their relationship, under the title "A Century of Poems for Celia"; and twelve other poems focusing on life at Amen House (or, for the last of them, in Oxford where the Press had just moved when war broke out). Fully half of the twelve pay homage to Milford in his role as the "Caesar" of this little publishing empire.

The masques and occasional verse together testify to Williams's overflowing inspiration in both versifying and mythmaking. His imitative styles—at times metaphysical or Popean or Audenesque—have a self-conscious quality that renders the verse more than mere pastiche. True to his principle that eternal verities are mirrored by the mundane, he provides, in the masques especially, an abundance of witty banter but ("Hear the purpose under all/Jesting" [140]) never far separated from the most serious of themes: hierarchy, death-and-rebirth, the value of work and the necessity of a sense of purpose, the tension felt at OUP between scholarly ideals and inescapable commercial considerations, scepticism (we "are none of us certain of truth" [63]), the supreme authority of love, the vision of an ideal "City" (to use Williams's term for it), the transitoriness of earthly bliss, and a parallel between words and the divine Word. Indeed, the masques both state and at the same time exemplify the Christian paradox that what is but fleeting (in this case, the interpersonal relationships of a particular time and place and the ephemeral nature of the form itself, designed for a single production) may incarnate something that is permanent.

a particular time and place and the ephemeral nature of the form itself, designed for a single production) may incarnate something that is permanent.

It seems clear that the corporate ethos depicted here was real, not just a figment of the poet's imagination, though at the same time Williams took seriously his own role, as mythmaker, in the shaping of it. But Williams did not take himself over-seriously: part of the charm of these productions is the vein of self-mockery they reveal. Sharply aware of the ways influential friends had assisted his own advancement, he recognized the parallel to the patronage system of a former age; and his hyperbole—as when phrases from the Prayer Book are applied to “Caesar” (e.g., “To whom be ascribed, as is most justly due . . .” [78])—is a proper aspect of the chosen rhetoric, just as it had been in the complimentary verse of Jonson and Donne. The darkening tones of the third masque show how much Williams himself realized that the spirit of Amen House was a short-lived achievement, by then already fading.

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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.
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