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The
**Charles
Williams**
Quarterly



No. 119

Summer 2006

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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 magazine and may attend the Society's meetings which are held twice a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at The Centre for Medieval Studies in Oxford.

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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

I watched *The Da Vinci Code* the other day. I'm afraid I couldn't be bothered with the book, but having read *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* a couple of times I didn't feel I needed to read the novel. It seems to be part of a large literature that rakes over the same ground in a way that allows one to dip in at any point and meet old friends such as the Templars, Rosslyn chapel and so on.

What interests me is that whereas *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, though a best seller, didn't cause quite the stir the publishers had hoped for, Dan Brown's novel and subsequent film seem to have given Christians much more of a shock. Coincidentally and more seriously we now have the recent publication of *The Gospel of Judas* following up other Gnostic pieces from Nag Hammadi, issued in translations by Marvin Meyer and colleagues. It struck me that there was an interesting parallel here with the Reformation and later publication of the Rosicrucian Manifestos. As Luther and King James etc. made the Bible available to all who could read we are now inundated with a plethora of recently discovered Gnostic texts. To push the analogy, *Holy Blood* and its sequel *The Messianic Legacy* might fit the roles of the first two RC manifestos, with Brown's novel filling the *Chemical Wedding* slot. Andreae famously admitted writing this as "a joke" but it was, arguably, the most influential of the three. Perhaps now, with the fundamentalist "counter-reformation" in full swing, we really are in for a millennial change in Judeo Christian doctrine and belief, particularly emphasising Mary Magdalene and the feminine. I wonder if Williams would approve?
Edward Gauntlett.

Society News & Notes

International Symposium

Faith, Myth & Literary Creation since
1850

Lille Catholic University, Lille, France
18th/19th May 2007

(Notification of this was received too late for the last issue and the deadline for papers has now passed. However, the symposium will be of interest to members.)

Religious faith, myths and legends have always been present in literature. However, their role has changed over time. Since the middle of the 19th century, with the diminishing role of religion in European society, writers with some kind of belief system, whether religious or political, have tended to use myth in two different ways. They have either retold the old, familiar myths of the past (classical, Nordic, Arthurian, medieval etc.) so that they carry a new message to their own generation or created their own, new myths as modern vehicles of traditional truths. Many writers have combined the two techniques.

It is intended to explore either of these uses of faith and myth in English, French or other European literature since 1850. Contributors may concentrate on a single author or compare two or three authors' treatment of the same theme. Papers may be delivered in English or French.

Academic panel : Suzanne Bray (Lille Catholic University), Christine Fletcher (University of Maryland University College), Adrienne Gavin (Canterbury Christ Church University), Emmanuel Godo (Lille Catholic University), Daniel Warzecha (Lille III University)

You may be interested to know that we already have a very interesting proposal on Tolkien and Catholic theology and one on Counter-Enlightenment Aesthetics in George MacDonald, but so far nothing on CW.

Membership Secretary

Guy Carter has resigned from the position of Society Membership Secretary.

The post will be filled by Richard Sturch temporarily. We offer our thanks to Guy for his work over the last few years.

Gavin Ashenden

The Kent State University Press has announced the publication, in December 2006, of Gavin Ashenden's *Charles Williams: Alchemy and Integration*. This "explores both the history behind the myths and metaphysics Williams was to make his own and the hermetic culture that influenced him [and] examines and interprets its expressions in Williams's novels, poetry and the development of his ideas and relates these elements to Williams's unpublished letters to his platonic lover, Celia." Cloth, 304pp ; the price quoted in KSUP's latest list is \$55.

Grevel Lindop

Grevel's latest collection of poetry – *Playing With Fire* – was published by Carcanet last January. One of the poems included, "A Dozen Red Roses" won the £1,000 *Poetry London* prize last autumn. Our congratulations to Grevel on this. *Playing With Fire* re-tails at £9.95 (pb, 93pp).

The Temenos Academy recently presented a lecture by the American scholar, poet and biographer on "Eliot's *Four Quartets*: a Spiritual Journey." This, unfortunately fell between the last issue of CW Quarterly and this one. However, members should be aware that Temenos has a programme of lectures, seminars and publications which may well be of interest. Details can be found on their website: www.temenosacademy.org. Alternatively they can be obtained by post from Temenos Academy, PO Box 203, Ashford, Kent TN25 5ZT. Telephone 01233 813663. temenosacademy@myfastmail.com

Membership List

We shall shortly be issuing an updated list of members with a future issue of the CW Quarterly. Anyone who would prefer their addresses did not appear (or, indeed, that their names be omitted entirely) should contact the editor.

Temenos Academy

CD Course

Regent College has produced a course of lectures on 10 CD's (10.5 hours) using *The Greater Trumps*, *Place of the Lion* and *Descent into Hell* as an introduction to some key themes: coinherence, substituted love, the ways of affirmation and negation and false distinctions between 'natural' and 'supernatural'. The focus is on the novels but C.W.'s criticism, theology and poetry are also drawn upon.

The course is available from Regent Bookstore, 5800 University Blvd, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 2E4. Telephone (604) 228 1820.

Email: bookstore@regent-college.edu

www.regentbookstore.com

A review of the course should appear in a future issue.

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- ◆ **Saturday 14 October 2006** at St Matthews, Gt Peter St, Westminster (quite near Victoria Station).

Brian Horne will introduce Charles Williams as a biographer. There will be readings from his historical biographies in the afternoon. The meeting will start at about 10.30 and end around 4.30. Final details will be communicated to members in a separate mailing. This meeting will incorporate the AGM.

- ◆ **Saturday 24 March 2007** (Oxford)
- ◆ **Saturday 13 October 2007** (London)

COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 6 May at 65 Cadogan Gardens, London SW3

The Society's Council met on May 6th at 65 Cadogan Gardens. It was agreed all round that the March meeting at Oxford had been a great success. The one drawback was that Nigel Bryant had spoken without text or notes, and there was therefore no way his talk could be reproduced in the Quarterly.

The Secretary had received "Under the Mercy", the audio course on Charles Williams by Loren Wilkinson issued by Regent College. It was agreed to ask Suzanne Bray if she would review it for the Quarterly. [She has since accepted this, and the discs have been sent to her.] He had added Ed Gauntlett's paper on "CW and Magic" to the website, though it had come out a little oddly. An international symposium on "Faith, Myth and Literary Creation since 1850" was to be held at Lille on May 18th/19th 2007, and papers were being invited.

The Treasurer said that a small transfer had been made from reserves to current account, The former now stood at £8872.01 and the latter at £123.97.

Plans for the Quarterly were introduced by the Editor. It was agreed that besides the usual papers from our meetings (now only twice a year) we should republish pieces by CW that were not very accessible, "A Myth of Bacon" (which we had published a number of years ago in instalments) would be a good one to start with.

The Chairman had been in touch with Ted Lewis, of the Oregon publishers Wipf and Stock, who wanted to reprint a number of CW's works,

including his literary criticism. Discussion would take place with Bruce Hunter, who owned the copyright, and the Oxford University Press, who had originally issued the critical works.

Plans were drawn up for the meeting on October 14th at St Matthew's, Westminster. The first meeting of 2007 would be in Oxford on March 24th, and would probably turn our attention to Williams's critical work.

Richard Sturch, Secretary.

REPORT ON THE SOCIETY'S 2006 SPRING CONFERENCE HELD IN OXFORD

For the spring conference this year we went back to the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Oxford, which, thanks to the kindness of the Principal John Fennelly, both houses the Society's reference library and again provided hospitality for our conference. We started with coffee in the Principal's office, which doubles as the Centre's library and is full of tempting books.

Nigel Bryant then spoke to us on the subject of the origin of the Grail legends. He started by inviting us to clear our minds from any of the ideas put about by Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*, and drawing our attention instead to a group of French romances of the twelfth century. The first mention of the Grail – or, rather, of a grail, for it is not yet a proper noun, - comes in the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes. At this point it is not connected with either the Last Supper or the Crucifixion. Tantalizingly, Chrétien left his poem unfinished, but other writers took up the story, added to it, and eventually completed it. Robert de Boron provided the earlier history of the grail, which linked it to Joseph of Arimathea and the passion, in a work that is a kind of latter day apocryphal gospel. Other writers bound it in with the cycle of stories about King Arthur. A later work, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, combined the grail legend with Cistercian mysticism – a somewhat unstable combination. Malory, who for most of us is the beginning of these stories, in fact comes at the end of the medieval period and his work derives from the French romances..

As none of the surviving French romances tell a complete and coherent story, Nigel Bryant has compiled one himself, *The Legend of the Grail*. (This has now come out in paperback.)

In the afternoon we had readings from Charles Williams's Arthurian poems.

Those who wanted to read submitted their suggestions. Stephen Barber then coordinated them and invited the readers to say something about their choices. One reader said that he had taught the novels and read the theology but never tackled the poems, so he had simply chosen the shortest poem in the book!

Unfortunately, Nigel Bryant neither used a script nor was he recorded, so we cannot print his talk. Nor, obviously, can we do more than report the readings. But this was a happy and well-attended event, and we may well follow a similar format for future day conferences, each time considering a different aspect of Williams's work.

WILLIAMS AND THE SEA-NYPH CYMODOCEA

BY

STEPHEN BARBER

In 'The Last Voyage' the ship of Solomon drives towards Sarras, and Williams uses two similes to characterize her motion. This paper is concerned with the first:

as the fine fair arm of pine-changed Cymodocea,
striking from the grey-green waters of tossed Tiber,
thrust the worshipful duke to the rescue of Rome;
(lines 58-60; *Taliessin through Logres* page 86)

My aim is to write a gloss on this passage, but I need to make something of a voyage myself to get into a position to do so. Let us start with Cymodocea. (I read this with 'y' as in French 'u', both 'o's short, the 'c' hard, the stress on the 'e', 'ea' disyllabic; this is the 'reformed' pronunciation which Williams probably expected; but the 'traditional' pronunciation with a soft 'c' and the stress possibly on the second 'o' would also work.) In Greek mythology, this name belonged to a Nereid, one of the fifty daughters of the minor sea-god Nereus and the Okeanid Doris. Hesiod gives an account of them together with names for all fifty (*Theogony*, 240-264). Many of these names express aspects of the sea; *Κυμοδόκη* (Kumodókē), to give her the Greek form of her name, means 'wave-receiver'. Homer gives a similar list, and she turns up there also (*Iliad*, 18: 39). The Nereids are sea-nymphs, who, like all nymphs, are female, semi-divine, long-lived though usually not immortal, and forever young. Nymphs are usually associated with a place or some part of nature. The function of the Nereids is chiefly to remain as a group, playing in the sea or dancing on the shore. A few of them have individual stories; the best known is Thetis, desired by Zeus but foretold to bear a son greater than his father. Zeus therefore reluctantly married her off to Peleus, a

mortal. Their wedding is the main subject of Catullus's longest and most elaborate poem, and their son was Achilles.

In the *Aeneid*, Virgil first introduces our sea-nymph, Latinizing her name, with some of the other Nereids as attendants of the sea-god Neptune, the Roman equivalent of Greek Poseidon, while the Trojans are sailing from Sicily to Cumae in Italy (5: 826). But it is the later use of her name that is relevant to Williams's passage, and by this time Virgil has used it in a different story.

In Book 9, the Trojan ships are under attack by Aeneas's enemy, Turnus. Cybele, the Phrygian mother-goddess, whom Virgil treats as mother of all the gods, had previously extracted an agreement from Jove, the equivalent of Zeus. This was that the ships, which had been built from pine trees from her sacred grove on mount Ida, should never be overcome, but that those which had completed the journey should be turned into sea-nymphs. When Turnus began his attack on the ships the promise was fulfilled (9: 80-122). This episode has been much criticized; it has been called 'the most incongruous episode in the whole *Aeneid*' (R. D. Williams); it is much more the kind of story we would expect to find in Ovid, who does indeed use it (*Metamorphoses* 14: 530-65). However, what is clear is that these sea-nymphs, though like Nereids are not Nereids, since they started life as pine trees, not daughters of Nereus (9: 102-3); they are not given individual names at this point.

Then in Book 10, we have Aeneas coming to the rescue of his comrades with a new fleet, which had been loaned him by the Etruscan king Tarchon. He meets the former ships of his own fleet, now sea-nymphs, and they dance around his ship in salute. One of them is a better talker than the rest. She is named as Cymodocea (10: 225). She therefore cannot be the same sea-nymph as appeared in Book 5: after all the present one was still a ship then and never was a Nereid. She has to be another sea-nymph with the same name. Virgil left the confusion unresolved – after all he left the poem unfinished and unrevised – or perhaps he liked the name so much that he used it twice, intending to change it in one of the places. Anyway, she warns Aeneas of the danger ahead and, on finishing, 'with a thrust of her right hand, she drove the ship upon its way' (*dixerat et dextra discedens impulit altam / haud ignara modi puppim*, 10: 246-7). This is the source of Cymodocea and her

thrust of the ship in 'The Last Voyage'.

The translation of the Virgilian sentence I have just used is taken from Williams's own retelling, *The Story of the Aeneid*, published in 1936 while he was working on the poems of *Taliessin through Logres*. And there are other Virgilian echoes here. In the Introduction to his retelling he comments on Virgil's feeling for Nature: 'a feeling exact in its details, and yet laden with a content which is certainly not Wordsworthian, but from which Wordsworth might have learned'. He goes on: 'His river-gods (cf. Tiber, p. 95) and his sea-nymphs (p. 118) are neither rivers nor waves, and yet they are not merely gods inhabiting those places. A kind of strange life, inhuman, and yet aware of humanity, moves in them' (Introduction, ix).

I have left in his page references, because the second one is to this passage in Book 10 (I shall come to the first one shortly), and they also show Williams associating sea-nymphs with the Tiber as he does in our passage. In fact the Tiber is doubly relevant. Firstly, in Virgil Aeneas is still sailing down the coast when he meets the sea-nymphs and is given his helpful push. But in Williams he has already turned up the river Tiber before Cymodocea appears, and there is no mention of her companions. This compression of Virgil's story is followed by and indeed requires another. In the *Aeneid* Rome has not yet been founded and Aeneas is heading for the Trojan camp, which is near the river mouth (7: 35-6, 106). However, Williams has him coming 'to the rescue of Rome', which is, or rather will be, about thirty kilometres upstream. Aeneas is rescuing Rome in the sense of the idea of Rome or of the destiny of the descendants of the Trojans who will found it. Rome is an embodiment of the City for Williams in a way that the Trojan camp cannot be.

Moreover, Rome is suggested by mentioning the Tiber, on whose banks it will be built. But in describing Cymodocea as 'striking from the . . . Tiber', has Williams relocated their meeting upstream? The exact position of the Trojan camp is not easy to work out from the scattered references in Virgil's text. However, the matter is dealt with in Appendix F of J. W. Mackail's edition of the *Aeneid*. Mackail was the leading English Virgilian scholar of the time, and his edition was published in 1930 by the Oxford University Press, so Williams would have had ready

access to it, and might have used it when preparing his own retelling. Mackail provides a map and explains that ‘On reaching the mouth of the Tiber . . . the Trojan fleet rowed up the river for about a mile . . . There they landed, and fortified a camp’ (529). The next incident after the meeting with Cymodocea is that Aeneas sees the Trojan camp (10: 260), so Williams clearly felt it legitimate for the meeting to be described as on the Tiber, although he may be considered as having relocated it. I pass over the question of whether or how far sea-nymphs are permitted to go up rivers; since Cymodocea started life as - or in - a tree she would then presumably have been a Dryad; as a water nymph she would be a Naiad; the relocation to fresh water does not appear to bother her.

Secondly, Williams was clearly impressed by the passage in which Tiber the river-god appeared to Aeneas in a dream (8: 31-65); this is his first reference in the passage quoted from Williams’s Introduction. His purpose was to advise Aeneas of how to find the future site of Rome, but for our passage it is his appearance rather than his prophecy that is important. He is described as ‘clothed in a grey-green cloak’, Williams’s version of *eum tenuis glauco uelabat amictu / carbasus* (8: 33-4). This gives us the ‘grey-green waters of tossed Tiber’ in ‘The Last Voyage’. The adjective *glaucus*, rendered by Williams as ‘grey-green’ is hard to translate; originally it meant ‘gleaming’ but later it came to be used for the colour of rivers and the sea; translators usually render it as ‘grey’.

How much of all this does the reader need or want to know? Cymodocea’s message of warning is not relevant, nor the use of her name for two different nymphs, nor the issue of the site of the Trojan camp, nor the possible relocation of the meeting with Cymodocea from the sea to the river Tiber, nor the origin of the phrase ‘grey-green’. Sources are not meaning, and much of this is irrelevant to Williams’s meaning. This article is long already, but even so, with heroic restraint I have refrained from exploring other fascinating byways, such as other appearances of Nereids in Greek literature, Virgil’s apparently earliest reference to Cymodocea (*Georgics* 4: 338, which is generally agreed to be an interpolation), his echo of the opening of Catullus’s poem, the potential confusion with Cymothoe, who really is a Nereid (*Aeneid* 1: 144), or sundry allusions to the Virgilian passages in other English poets.

Meanwhile, what gloss, containing only the essentials and omitting the detailed Virgilian references, would I offer for the passage? The following is, I suggest, the minimum, adding a few points for completeness:

58-60: the headlong rush of the ship is compared to the speed of Aeneas's ship as he rushes to the relief of his comrades, besieged by Turnus. *Cymodocea*: a sea-nymph. Her *fine fair arm*: Williams regularly sees a woman's arm as embodying her beauty, as in 'The Coming of Palomides'. *pine-changed*: in the *Aeneid*, *Cymodocea* was originally one of a group of pine trees in a sacred grove on Mount Ida, from which Aeneas's original fleet was built; they were turned into sea-nymphs by Jove to avoid their being burned by Turnus; he was lent a new fleet by the Etruscans. *Tiber*: the river on which Rome will be built. *thrust*: *Cymodocea* gave Aeneas's ship a push which gave it great speed. *worshipful duke*: Aeneas: his constant epithet is *pius*, which is hard to translate, but implies a combination of 'faithful' and 'devout' for which *worshipful* is an equivalent; *duke* is a descendant of the Latin *dux*, a military commander. *Rome*: in relieving the Trojan camp Aeneas looks forward to the future city.

However, personally I find the poem illuminated by exploring something of Williams's use of Virgil and his admiration of Virgil's feeling for Nature. What do other readers think?

Richard Sturch begins his very interesting piece on Tolkien and Williams with a reference to C. S. Lewis that he could not trace. The passage comes in the essay on friendship in *The Four Loves*, and runs as follows:

‘Lamb says somewhere that if, of three friends (A, B, and C), A should die, then B loses not only A but “A’s part in B”. In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead I shall never again see Ronald’s reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him ”to myself” now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. Hence true Friendship is the least jealous of loves.’ (*The Four Loves* , 1960, 73-4)

Stephen Barber

Imagine my surprise! Unable to attend our local Primary School’s “Service of Carols and Readings for Christmas 2005” I later looked at the service-sheet and saw that Year 5 children were reading “Kings came Riding” by Charles Williams.

I had to think hard where to find a source for this, and then realised: this was the one poem that C.W. wrote specially for his wife’s compilation *Modern Verse for Little Children* (OUP 1938). “From a Walking Song”, also included, was an extract from a poem first published in *Windows of Night*.

I wrote to the Headteacher, asking to be told whether the poem was chosen from that book and, if not, where it was found. A nice reply came from the Deputy Head who had found it in “a book called *Rhyme and Rhythm* ... published by Macmillan in 1965.” I wonder if any Society members know about this book, or of any other instances of C.W. poems being used in schools or school activities these days?

“Kings came Riding”, being not very easily accessible, is perhaps worthy of being reproduced here. I do wish I’d heard the 9 and 10 year olds reading it.

Gillian Lunn

Kings Came Riding

Kings came riding,
One, two, and three,
Over the desert
And over the sea.

One in a ship
With a silver mast;
The fishermen wondered
As he went past.

One on a horse
With saddle of gold;
The children came running
To behold.

One came walking,
Over the sand,
With a casket of treasure
Held in his hand.

All the people
Said "Where go they?"
But the kings went forward
All through the day.

Night came on
As those kings went by;
They shone like the gleaming
Stars in the sky.

Charles Williams

Editorial Policy

The Charles Williams Quarterly and the Society's Website have two functions. Firstly, to publish material about the life and work of Charles Williams. Secondly, to publish details of the activities of the Society.

Contributions to the Quarterly 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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