

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

NO. 17, SPRING 1980

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY 1980

The annual general meeting of the Charles Williams Society will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1. (adjoining the Grosvenor Chapel) on Saturday 31 May 1980 at 2.30 pm.

- Agenda
1. Apologies for absence.
 2. Report on the year's activities by Richard Wallis, chairman of the Council.
 3. The accounts - to be presented by Philip Bovey, treasurer.
 4. Report of the General Secretary, Brian Horne.
 5. Report on the Newsletter to be presented by Molly Switek, editor.
 6. Election of Council members under paragraph 5 of the Society's constitution.
 7. Any other business.

Brian Horne
General Secretary

The annual general meeting is open to members only. After it has ended at, or as soon after 3.30pm as possible, a meeting open also to non-members will be held, at which the speaker will be the Reverend Dr Erik Routley. Questions and discussion will follow, after which refreshments will be available. The Council hopes that as many members as possible will be present and that they will invite friends to the open meeting.

6 September 1980: One day Summer Conference in London - further details below.

22 November 1980: Brian Horne will talk about The Descent of the Dove.

Society meetings are held at 2.30pm at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1. (North Audley Street is the second turning to the right, south, off Oxford Street, going from Marble Arch towards Oxford Circus; after Grosvenor Square it becomes South Audley Street. Another convenient access is from Park Lane.)

Each meeting is followed by discussion and tea. Please bring copies of any books which might be referred to at a meeting. There is no fee for members, but 50p must be paid for a guest (each member may bring one guest) and this should be handed to the person in charge of the meeting.

The Society's Lending Librarian brings a selection of library books which may be borrowed by members.

MEETINGS OF THE S.W. LONDON GROUP OF THE SOCIETY

For information please contact Martin Moynihan, 5 The Green, Wimbledon, London SW19. Telephone: 946 7964.

LONDON READING GROUP

3 August 1980

9 November 1980

Both these meetings will be held at Alice Mary and Charles Hadfield's house, 21 Randolph Road, London W9, starting at 1pm. Please bring sandwiches.

We are going to start reading The Descent of the Dove.

COINHERENCE AND THE READING GROUPS

In Charles's thinking on exchange, substitution and coinherence, he sought points in the Christian life to which the ideas were particularly related. He intended all human love, not only romantic.

He chose: 1. The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 25 March, as the knowledge and acceptance of the life of love, divine love exchanging with human at every level.

2. Trinity Sunday (the Sunday after Whit Sunday), as the origin and sustainer of all, Three in One and One in Three, God and man coinhering by the taking of manhood into God in the Incarnation.

3. The Transfiguration, 6 August, the knowledge of human love as coinhering with the divine, wholly man yet wholly glorious; all mortal failure, sin and weakness carried for man in substitution by Christ.

4. All Saints, 1 November, the rejoicing in the company of all lovers, and movements to love everywhere and in all times, and in the coinherent body of which they are part, the life of love and glory which all can know at times.

Every year the dates must vary a little, but the aim is to relate the meetings of the Reading Group to these four foundations.

C.W.S. SUMMER CONFERENCE, SATURDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 1980 : CW AND THE CITY

The plan for the day is as follows: The Conference will open at 10.15 in a meeting room in the City church of St Andrew-By-the-Wardrobe. Between 10.30 and 11.30 Charles Hadfield will talk about Amen House and its surroundings as CW knew them, and will have some exhibits. There will be a break for 30 minutes for members to look at the exhibits and have some coffee and then Anne Ridler will talk on the idea of the City in CW's thoughts and writings for an hour until 1pm. There will then be a break for lunch until 2.15 (please bring sandwiches), during which Charles Hadfield will lead a short walk to Warwick Lane and the site of Amen House. From 2.30 until about 5.00 we will read Judgement at Chelmsford. There will be a conference fee of £1 to cover expenses. A warm welcome is extended to all members, particularly any from overseas who would be in England at that time.

The church of St Andrew-By-the-Wardrobe is in the City of London, near St Paul's Cathedral in Queen Victoria Street E.C.4, a few hundred yards from Blackfriars Bridge and almost opposite the Mermaid Theatre. The nearest Underground station is Blackfriars (on the District and Circle lines), but Mansion House (on the same lines) and St Paul's (on the Central line) are both within walking distance.

E. MARTIN BROWNE

Members will have noted with regret the death at the end of April of E. Martin Browne, a member of the Society, whose presence at our Conference in Oxford last year was so welcome. A short obituary will appear in the next Newsletter.

WITCHCRAFT by CW

A new paperback reprint of the first edition of Charles Williams' Witchcraft, with an introduction by Dr Glen Cavaliero, Member of the English Faculty, University of Cambridge (and member of CWS) was published on 17 April 1980 by The Aquarian Press, price £4.75. If any member is interested in buying a copy they should write to: The Aquarian Press, Dept 732, Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, NN8 2RQ.

CW BOOKS FOR SALE

Charles and Alice Mary Hadfield have a few CW books available for sale on a first come first served basis, and are advertising in the Newsletter with the CWS Committee's agreement. Anyone interested in buying any please write to them at 21 Randolph Road, London W9 1AN. The prices quoted include postage:

- 3 copies New Book of English Verse - Gollancz. CW introduction and selection 1935. £2.75p each.
- 1 copy War in Heaven - Faber. 1947. £2.36p
- 1 copy War in Heaven (with jacket) - Faber 1947. £2.36p
- 2 copies Descent into Hell - Faber 1949. £2.36p each
- 1 copy The Place of the Lion - Faber 1952. £2.36p
- 1 copy Shadows of Ecstasy - Faber 1948. £2.36p

CW AS A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER

CWS member Gillian Lunn writes: "I've always been fascinated by the idea of CW as a young Sunday School teacher - as mentioned both in Alice Mary Hadfield's Introduction to Charles Williams and in Anne Ridler's introduction to The Image of the City. Has anyone any recollections of him at this stage, I wonder?"

NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT

There is no Supplement with this copy of the Newsletter but there will be one with the next edition.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members are reminded that the 1980-81 subscriptions are due from 1 March 1980; £2 single members, £3 couples. Please send these as soon as possible to the Treasurer.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Mrs Elizabeth Hecht, 30 Rue St Dominique, Paris, France 75007

David Llewellyn Dodds, Child Hall Room 412, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, 02138, USA

Mrs Helen D Hobbs, 1329 E. Monroe St, South Bend, Indiana 46615, USA

Mr and Mrs Topless, 58 Kennel Lane, Fetcham, Leatherhead, Surrey

Masaki Abe, c/o Fuji Bank Ltd, Tokyo, Japan.

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Chairman: Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS
(221 0057)

Secretary: Rev Dr Brian Horne, 11b Roland Gardens, London SW7 (373 5579)

Treasurer: Philip Bovey, 102 Cleveland Gardens, Barnes, London SW13 (876 3710)

Membership

Secretaries: Jenet and Philip Bovey, address as above.

Lending

Librarian: Mrs Anne Scott, 25 Corfton Road, London W5 2HP (997 2667)

Editor: Mrs Molly Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London N7 8PD (607 7919)

CHARLES WILLIAMS AND GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, POETRY AND THEOLOGY - by Brian Horne

No-one can deny that Charles Williams's verse, viewed as a whole, presents the reader with something of a puzzle. There is a marked contrast between the early volumes, The Silver Stair, Poems of Conformity, Divorce and Windows of Night, and the two later Arthurian cycles, Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars. One book of verse, Heroes and Kings, published in 1930, lies midway between the first and second periods of Williams's poetic activity, but it does little to help solve the riddle of his poetic 'sea-change into something rich and strange.' Up to the publication of Heroes and Kings, Williams seems, almost deliberately, to have been ignoring the poetic climate of the twentieth century. However original the themes of the early poems may be, most of the verse itself remains stuck at the level of doggerel; the diction and rhythms, the colours and intonation are, almost invariably, derived from nineteenth century models. Every poet must, of necessity, find his own 'voice', and, clearly, Williams had not found his when he produced his first five volumes - the voice here is only the echo of many voices from an earlier age. He was fifty years old before he spoke to the public in distinctive tones, and very strange those tones proved to be. The Arthurian cycles bear no relation to any identifiable poetic movements of the twentieth century, but they bear a very close relation to a single voice of the nineteenth century, that of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

In 1930 Williams edited, for the Oxford University Press, the second edition of Hopkins's poems and provided a long critical introduction. It is significant that a third of this introduction is devoted to a detailed study of Hopkins' prosody, and it is in Hopkins's work that, I believe, a key to the enigma of Williams's development can be found. Williams might have had more admiration for the masterpieces of other poets, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth, but it was the peculiar prosody of the late Victorian Jesuit poet that supplied him with the instruments for the fashioning of his own poetry.

Anne Ridler has commented on the connection between the style of Hopkins and that of Williams in an illuminating way:

"He took from Hopkins, for one thing, a habit of rhythm, of breaking up a statement into short segments linked by rhyme and by period stresses, which Hopkins had adopted from early English poetry"
The Image of the City Introduction.

'A habit of rhythm' hardly seems to suggest a profound influence, but in the realm of poetry this particular feature of style, rhythm, can be of crucial importance. It is necessary, in this context, to recall the argument on the subject of metre in S.T. Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. When Coleridge refers to metre as 'the proper form of poetry', the word 'form' must be understood in its full seriousness: as something giving shape and apprehensibility to an otherwise amorphous and incomprehensible mass. For Coleridge's 'metre' is the essential mark of a poem. Rhythm is a more complicated idea - possibly a combination of Coleridge's concepts of metre and rhythm. It involves more than the number of syllables in a line of verse or its musical 'beat', and includes the subtler problems of the juxtaposition of longer and shorter vowels; of light and dark sounds; the placing of stresses and accentuation. Consequently it is possible to find quite distinct rhythms operating within any of the conventional poetic forms. As the poetry of Hopkins itself so clearly demonstrated, the discovery of a distinctive rhythm is thus the discovery of a distinctive poetic persona.

If it is true that Williams learned from Hopkins, not only the use of an unconventional form, but a technique of rhythm, it might suggest that he did nothing more than become an image of the older poet. That this was not the case may be seen by comparing two poems, one by each of the poets. The Bugler's First Communion is not the finest of Hopkins's creations, but it demonstrates admirably the characteristic aspects of his work. The third and fourth stanzas run as follows:

Here he knelt in regimental red.
Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how feign I of feet
 To his youngster take his treat!
Low-latched in leaf-light housel his too huge godhead.

There! And your sweetest sendings, ah divine,
By it, heavens, befall him! as a heart Christ's darling dauntless;
 Tongue, true, vaunt - and tauntless;
Breathing bloom of a chastity in mansex fine.

Williams's The Crowning of Arthur is, contrariwise, one of his finest creations; it is also a poem which clearly approximates to the style of Hopkins. The first and second stanzas run as follows:

The king stood crowned; around in the gate,
midnight striking, torches and fires
massing the colour, casting the metal,
furnace of jubilee, through time and town
Logres heraldically flaunted the king's state.

The lords sheathed their swords; they camped
by Camelot's wall; thick-tossed torches,
tall candles flared, opened deployed;
between them rose the beasts of the banners;
flaring over all the king's dragon ramped.

The stylistic similarities are obvious: the absence of a regular metrical beat and the bold use of homophones in close proximity to each other; the almost ostentatious use of rhetorical devices like alliteration, half-rhyme and assonance; the occasional dislocation of grammar and syntax; the use of the compound epithet; the flagrant artificiality of language - as if to distinguish it as far as possible from normal speech patterns. By these means both poets achieve, to an extraordinarily high degree, a quality of 'compression', yet who could deny that the two poems ^{produce} utterly different effects? The difference has grown out of, what can only be called, a difference of imaginative sensibility.

Williams is an intellectual poet in a way that Hopkins never tried to be, yet every creative effort of the Victorian was governed by a pair of 'intellectual' concepts which had been forged during the years of his poetic silence after he had first joined the Society of Jesus: 'inscape' and 'instress'. Inscapè may, briefly, be described as the inner pattern or shape of the object that is outwardly being perceived, and instress as the relation between that inner meaning and the beholder. His poetry is a remarkable blend of the object sensuously perceived and the poet's apprehension and understanding of its (hidden) meaning. The boy at the communion rail in The Bugler's First Communion is indubitably there before the mind's eye, but the purpose of the poem is not to depict a scene vividly, it is to communicate to the reader a certain structure of life contained within the scene. The poet perceives the inner pattern of the incident, but only by closest observation of the incident itself. Consequently, Hopkins's images have an extraordinary vitality and substance. Williams's images do not. He did not take over the concepts of inscapè and instress - there is no reason why he should have; his poems are more ritualistic: an arrangement of images in accordance with an already conceived intellectual pattern. Beneath the glittering surface there is tightly-packed thought. Like heraldic devices, his images, however colourful, insistently point away from themselves to the ideas they are intended to convey.

But an interesting fact emerges here. Hopkins connected his concepts of inscapè and instress to his understanding of the writings of a medieval theologian to whom he and Charles Williams were both deeply indebted: Duns Scotus (1264 - 1308). In 1872 Hopkins recorded the following in his journal:

"After the examinations we went for our holiday out to Douglas in the Isle of Man. Aug. 3. At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the Sentences in the Baddely library and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus."

In fact this reading of Scotus came to a great deal, for the theology of Duns Scotus provided the poet with a metaphysic that exactly expressed his own instinctive awareness of the nature of creation and of the relation between God and the world. Duns Scotus shaped his own doctrines in the context of the intricate and subtle debates of the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, and space forbids a description of that debate here. At the risk of over-simplification I will merely say that Duns Scotus saw the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, i.e. God the Son, as the power of all creation driving everything in nature, each living thing, towards achieving its completeness in what he called 'haecceitas' (thisness) which is the unique quality of each thing. Moreover a thing most gloriously manifests God when it is being most gloriously itself, and vice versa. Hopkins embodied this doctrine poetically in the lines:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves - goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

(From: As Kingfishers Catch Fire)

To know something really and truly is to know the unique individuation of a thing in all its particularity, and to have discovered this is to have discovered something of the nature of God Himself.

All readers of Charles Williams must be finding the language of this discussion deeply familiar. And when one of the editors of Hopkins' work, W.H.Gardner, writes

To Hopkins ... an inscape was something more than a delightful sensory impression: it was an insight by Divine grace into the ultimate reality - seeing the "pattern, air, melody" in things from, as it were, God's side. is he not writing about what Williams called the Way of the Affirmation of Images? And could there be a more precise embodiment of this way of life than in Hopkins's "... for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the father through the features of men's faces."

What, for example, was Beatrice to Dante? According to Williams, nothing other than Christ playing in the Florentine girl.

A kind of dreadful perfection has appeared in the streets of Florence; something like the glory of God is walking down the street towards him. (The Figure of Beatrice)

This close connection between Gerard Manley Hopkins and Charles Williams could be demonstrated over and over again; one more example will suffice. In 1874 Hopkins wrote in his journal: 'That is Christ playing at me and me playing at Christ, only it is no play but truth; that is Christ being me and me being Christ.' Hopkins and Williams both insist that it is insufficient for human beings to treat each other as if they were Christ; they assert that in a mysterious way each individual is Christ himself.

He who does not merit - Beatrice? say 'salute',
salvation - need not hope to find her. But this
is to identify Beatrice with salvation? Yes, and
this is the identity of the Image with that
beyond the Image. Beatrice is the Image and the
foretaste of salvation. (The Figure of Beatrice)

I am not claiming that the writings of Duns Scotus and his theology were the source of Hopkins' and Williams' understanding of life - that would be to detract from their original genius - but both men were immediately attracted to Duns Scotus and acknowledged that their more instinctive and imaginative awareness was given a metaphysical scaffolding by the medieval theologian. Each drew from him in his own way. The notion of 'haecceitas' enabled Hopkins to work out his theories of inscape and instress, but for Williams it was Duns Scotus' teaching on the Incarnation that was the most important.

Traditionally the Christian Church has explained the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in terms of redemption. The created world having fallen away from the love of God, its Creator, by its own perverse and sinful will is lost until God acts redemptively by Himself becoming man, entering into His own creation and taking upon Himself, in Jesus Christ, the consequences of man's rebellion. Duns Scotus was not the first to challenge this view, but he became the most famous proponent of a different speculation: that the Incarnation was not brought about by man's sin, and that God had always intended to become incarnate. It could be argued that many of Hopkins' poems hint at this attitude to Creation and Incarnation, but Hopkins never drew out the meaning of the doctrine as explicitly as Williams did. It is the basis of all Williams' teaching about the flesh of man and the place of the human body in the natural world. It is, for example, the underlying theme of the essay The Index of the Body, it is spoken of in the essay Natural Goodness, and its implications are explored in The Forgiveness of Sins. Here he develops the doctrine's implications in a way that might have startled Duns Scotus himself. Having asserted that 'the beginning of all this specific creation (the universe) was the will of God to incarnate', he enlarges on this theme by stating:

It is clear that this Incarnation, like all his other acts, might have been done to himself alone. It was certainly not necessary to create man in order to become man. The Incarnation did not involve the creation. But it was within his nature to will to create joy, and he willed to create joy in this manner also.

Far from being the cause of the Incarnation, sin and its unhappy consequences, suffering and death, are merely the conditions under which the flesh-taking, intended from all Eternity, take place. These are the most explicit references to the doctrine, but it is present in much that Williams wrote, and even the end-papers of the first edition of Taliessin Through Logres with their drawing of a human figure superimposed on a map of Europe are a curious exposition of the teaching.

My purpose in comparing Gerard Manley Hopkins and Charles Williams, and by connecting both to Duns Scotus, has not been to diminish the achievement of the two men, but to enrich our understanding of their work by placing them in their tradition of Christian culture. Poetry and theology are both part of that culture, and the work of a poet or theologian can never be understood and appreciated in isolation. In 1917 T.S.Eliot in a famous essay, Tradition and the Individual Talent, wrote, 'His (the artist's) significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone ...' I hope I have been able to help us see the significance, and enhance our appreciation, of these two writers in this short essay.

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