The Charles Williams Society

N E W S L E T T E R

No. 28, WINTER 1982

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

II June 1983: Annual General Meeting. Professor Barbara Reynolds will speak on 'Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers and Dante'.

10 September 1983: We will hold our annual day conference in the church of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, London EC4. Professor de Mello Moser will speak on the theme of his book 'Charles Williams, A Quest, Vision and Myth'; Brian Horne will lead the discussion following, and after lunch we will read from the Taliessin poems.

19 November 1983) on one of these dates we will be having an outside speaker
) and on the other will be reading from Many Dimensions.
25 February 1984)

All meetings (except the conference) will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 29 May 1983 at 1pm at St Basil's House, 52 Ladbroke Grove, London W.11. Coffee and tea are provided but sandwiches should be brought. As we make a donation of £5 to the House funds for the use of the room, each member will be asked for a contribution on the day. We will continue reading Arthurian Torso.

OXFORD READING GROUP

For details contact either Brenda Boughton (Oxford 55589) or Anne Scott (53897).

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

For details please contact Charles Huttar, 188 W.11th St., Holland, Michigan 49423, USA. Telephone (616) 396 2260.

PERFORMANCES OF CRANMER

David Dodds' production of Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury announced in the previous Newsletter has been postponed until 10, 11, 12 and 14 May. It will take place in St Mary Magdalene church, Oxford (not Magdalene College but the church not far from the Martyr's Memorial), starting at 8pm on weekday nights, 7.30 on Saturday. Seats will probably cost £1. Further details are available from David Dodds at Merton College, Oxford, or by telephoning him at home on Oxford (0865 54844). Support for this enterprising venture will be very welcome.

NEW BOOKS ON C.W.

Members may be interested in the following books recently published concerning CW:
Charles Williams by Agnes Sibley, available from G.G. Hall & Co., 70 Lincoln St., Boston, Mass 02111, USA (our thanks to Mrs Hobbs for this information);
The Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams, available from Boydell & Brewer Ltd, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF at £5.95.
Charles Williams, Poet of Theology by Glen Cavaliero is due to be published in March 1983 by Macmillan Press Ltd, at £20.
The Novels of Charles Williams by Professor Thomas Howard is due to be published by the Oxford University Press, New York in July 1983, at £14.

RALPH BINFIELD

The Society sends its greetings and best wishes to Ralph Binfield, formerly research

assistant to Charles Williams in Amen House, and long distance runner, who we hear is ill and much confined indoors. He writes to Alice Mary Hadfield as vigourously as ever this week: "By the way, I am always criticising the use of the word 'magic' for 'conjuring' remembering C.W.'s strict adherence to the real meaning and his saying that any practitioner of magic would fall foul of Witchcraft Acts. Another point of C.W.'s - the fact that he had turned to astronomy instead of astrology!"

GILLIAN LUNN

Our hard working Secretary will be away from 25 April to 25 July. Any queries arising during this time should be addressed to the Chairman, Richard Wallis.

SUBSCRIPTIONS I983

A subscription renewal slip is enclosed with this Newsletter. Please ignore it if you have already paid.

NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to Dr Martin Barlow, Trinity College, Cambridge, CB2 ITQ.

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We are pleased to be able to reproduce the talk given by David Dodds to the Society on I3 November I982, entitled'"I am a Wonder Whose Origin is Not Known" - Some Thoughts on David Jones, Charles Williams and Vernon Watkins and their use of the Poetry attributed to Taliessin'.

"I think you will have to take up the study of the original Taliessin - in the light of our more modern Type: someone will do it one day, + why not start?" So wrote Charles Williams to Anne Renwick, then an undergraduate at Oxford, adding, "just lest this time you should squeak, they won't, I know, but it's a charming idea!" (I) While I will not, indeed, undertake quite the study Williams proposes, I would like to consider the use Charles Williams, David Jones, and Vernon Watkins make of some of the poetry attributed to Taliessin, especially some in 'Taliesin' in Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of The Mabinogion (2).

I will try to speak briefly on David Jones, simply because one could profitably go on at great length without being exhaustive. And I will necessarily treat Vernon Watkins briefly, as I am not sufficiently well acquainted with his work to speak with confidence.

In David Jones's First World War book, In Parenthesis (I937)(3), his use of the Taliesinic material erupts in a context of soldiers' boasting about length of military experience: claims grow in hyperbole and boldness, but it is still a transfixing moment when the Welsh soldier, Dai, answers the Cockney's "Wot about Methuselum, Taffy?" "I was with Abel when his brother found him". Jones says he associates his boast "with the boast of Taliessin at the court of Maelgwn". While freely and considerably reworking and expanding it - drawing on Caesar, the Symposium, the Song of Roland as well as Nennius, the Welsh Triads, and Malory; and touching on many of the significant events of both the mythic and actual history of Britain, from the fall of Troy to the fall of Arthur - Jones seems to take this poem from the story of Taliesin beginning "Primary chief bard" as his structural source and model. And some lines and parts of Jones's poem echo specific lines in "Primary chief bard" or in other poems attributed to Taliesin. For instance, Dai's presence at the Passion recalls, "I was at the place of the crucifixion of the merciful Son of God". Earlier, Dai says "I was the spear in Balin's hand / that made waste King Pellam's land". This echoes and interprets a line from the poem beginning "First, I have been formed": "I have fled as a spear-head, of woe to such as has a wish for it" and another from "The Battle of Goddeu": "I have been

a ferocious spear"(4).The way his use of these lines interprets them is a good example of his method throughout "Dai's Boast". While preserving the sense of wonder and mystery which characterizes these poems attributed to Taliesin, his particular references are always intelligible, however obscurely, and richly allusive. In the two instances I have cited we have another example of his intricate ordering and interrelating of the materials. Dai says "I served Longinus that Dux bat-blind and bent" and "With my long pilum / I beat the crow from that heavy bough". The spear that wounded Pelles was, of course, that of Longinus. Here too we see something of the intellectual and moral complexity of the poem: as the spear that wastes and as one of "the Dandy Xth" Pretensis, who is therefore in some sense more directly responsible for the Crucifixion than most of us, he is yet "set under authority" - Balin wields, and private soldiers do not choose their duties, and when a soldier, he is protective of the Crucified Lord: "I kept the boding raven / from the Dish."

The time-play, the conquest of time, which characterizes the Taliesinic poems is everywhere present in "Dai's Boast". It is wide ranging: from the fall of the rebel angels to the death of Roland; and there is a curious kind of close play around events, apparent prayers that events may be prevented, after they have been ackowledged as having taken place. Dai early says "I the adder in the little bush" which caused the final disaster at Camlann, yet later prays to Brân the Blessed (probably a Celtic god in origin, but according to a late tradition the man who introduced Christianity to Britain, and according to most scholars the prototype of the Fisher King)(5): "In the baized chamber confuse his tongue: / that Lord Agravaine" and so avert the catastrophe. Again, he twice alludes to Arthur's exhuming "in his huge pride" the head of Brân, which so long as it remained buried was a talisman insuring the fertility of the land and protecting it from invasion, and in both instances immediately prays its protection may continue:"O Brân lie under". The prayers have a note of desperation, and the whole poem a darkness of tone which is uncharacteristic of the poems attributed to Taliesin. It is full of disasters - the fall of angels, Man, Abel, Troy, Brân, Camelot, and Roland; the maiming of Pelles; and "emigrant host(s)", expeditionary forces, that "came no more again": and near the end is an allusion to the failure of the hero in the "Welsh Percivale story" to ask the restoring question. Yet the "woeful uncovering" of Brân's head is balanced by praise of Elen Luyddawg who is identified with St. Helena, so by an implicit reference, to the Invention of the Cross. And Dai's last claim begins "I am the Single Horn" - a reference to the unicorn, image of Christ, purifying the waters.

Throughout the poem one might discern a pattern of woman figures who involve heroes in (often eventually fatal) difficulties: Samson's wife, Helen of Troy, the princess Fflur, Elen, and implicitly Guinevere, as well as Branwen, the sister of Brân. The sequence culminates in references to and quotations from the Middle English poem Quia Amore Langueo in which the human soul is depicted as the beloved, sister and spouse, who makes Christ suffer and for whom our courteous Lord lovingly suffers and dies. Again we see the rich complexity of the poem: the woman figures are either innocent causes of disaster, or of somehow mitigated if very real culpability - the Crucifixion - Quia Amore Langueo references are immediately followed by:

> I was in Michael's trench when bright Lucifer bulged his
> primal salient out.
> That caused it,
> that upset the joy-cart,
> and three parts waste.

The juxtaposition and the joy-cart / apple cart wordplay, with the observation "That caused it" indicate Man's guilt is mitigated by his being tempted, and, in a sense, all of Paradise Lost is epitomized in five lines. And again, we see Jones reworking his Taliesinic sources: "I was with my Lord in the highest sphere, / On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell" (and perhaps the reference to "the rampart of Satanas" in "If you be primary bards"). (6). They are adapted to the conditions of the First World War and the point of view of the common foot soldier, another feature of the poem as a whole. Throughout the poem one may discern a figure developed combining the attributes of poet, philosopher, and priest - by references to King David (and "Dai" is, of course, a form of that name), to Socrates, and to Melchisedek. Yet this Dai-Taliesin figure seems always also the common soldier: little David, the servant - "I took the smooth stones of

the brook"; Socrates on the "Potidaean duck-board" - the common soldier as "beneficent artisan", digging, staking trip-wire, bricking a barrow to bury the dead. Even the reference to Melchisedek, "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3), is coupled with a quotation of "Old soljers never die they / Simply fade away."

It only remains to say that the "Dai's Boast" section of In Parenthesis more clearly points the way to the rest of David Jones's poetry, in style, method, themes, and concerns, than any of the rest of that work. (And to quibble, quietly, that the particularity of some of the references - identifying Dai with David, Socrates, and a soldier of the Xth Fretensis - make me uncomfortable, seeming almost necessarily redolent of metempsychosis, lacking the salutary dash of "neither is this Thou".)

Taliessin is a central character in Charles Williams's treatment of the Arthurian material. But it is only in "The Calling of Taliessin" first published in The Region of the Summer Stars (1944) (7), that any extensive use is made of the main source of information about the legendary Taliesin, the "Hanes Taliesin" (translated by Lady Guest, with the translations of most of the poems adapted from Owen Pughe's translation of the "Hanes"). Indeed, in "The Calling" Williams not only draws upon the tale and Lady Guest's notes, but paraphrases, quotes, and reworks two of the poems included in the tale. As I have had the good fortune to examine and collate three drafts of Williams's poems, I will include in my consideration the development of his use of the "Taliesin" poems.

Two drafts are typescripts with Williams's MS. corrections, in the Marion E. Wade Collection at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois (uncatalogued). One is so close to 1944 as not to concern us here. The other (examined only in photocopy) is entitled "THE WORKING OF PORPHYRY" and numbered (I)-9. I will refer to it as P. The third draft is a Williams holograph among the letters to Anne Renwick entitled "The Working of Po(rphyry)" (the upper-right corner of the first leaf is missing, including most of "rp" and all the following letters) and numbered (I)-8, II-17 (with two leaves clearly missing). I will call it R. The precise date, provenance, and nature of each draft is unclear.(8). Textually, P is closer to 1944 than R and the simplest and most economical solution is to consider R an earlier draft than P.

The first poem from the story of Taliesin which Williams uses is that beginning, "First, I have been formed". He compresses and restructures the content, and changes the context and apparent reference of the poem. In the tale, it is an answer to Elphin's question as to "what he was, whether man or spirit." Williams makes it "Taliessin's first song" on emerging from the coracle. Taliesin's flight from Ceridwen after having accidentally received the "three charm-bearing drops" from the "cauldron of Inspiration and Science" which she had intended for her son, Afagddu, a flight in the forms of various creatures, one after another, explicit in the prose and a likely explanation of the poem, is omitted in Williams's retelling: the power and the significance of "the changes" are not limited to a specific exercise. In the prose there are four changes, in the poem, fifteen. In the main, Williams follows the poem's sequence, with omissions, and changing "iron in a glowing fire" to "the kindled fire": the "fish" comes from the prose sequence. He smoothes the abruptness of the changes by repeating the name of the creature - "from the frog to the crow, from the crow to the leaping roe", - giving more of a sense of development. (And, indeed, the first four changes follow the sequence in which the classes are supposed to have emerged in evolutionary theory - fish, amphibians, birds, mammals - perhaps he is deliberately playing with the idea.) Taliessin is "already initiated in the changes of the cauldron of Ceridwen, ... the fated cycle communicated in heathen secrets". Williams's introduction of the fish at the beginning and the mysterious "fish split / to be at once on the dish and again in the sea" at the end of "the changes" emphasize that it is a "cycle", yet also show what progress is possible within this cycle. He is initiated into "heathen secrets", "Druid secrets": occult knowledge. This seems to be good as far as it goes - "his heart, ears, and eyes were wise / from Druid secrets" - but insufficient. He had so much, but only so much:

> for the Lord God had not yet set him at liberty,
> nor shown him the doctrine of largesse in the land of the Trinity.

And it is later said "he heard now dimly / of the food that freed from the cycle". Williams takes the last line of his source - "And the Lord God then set me at liberty." - gives it a turn, and opens up its significance. There, it seems only to refer to Taliesin's Providential delivery from the "leathern bag" (or coracle) in which Ceridwen placed him and threw him into the sea. Here, the working of Providence is given even greater emphasis, for the liberation is not merely occasional or temporal, though occuring at a particular point in space and time, but spiritual, or more correctly, of the whole man. The line becomes central to the poem, because "The Calling of Taliessin" is not only concerned with an occupation that is a vocation, but with the means and occasion of his divine summons to that service which is perfect freedom. (To savor the rich comprehension of the title a bit further, we may note that as Taliessin has been called, so (insofar as anyone can) he is to call - his vocation is the summoning of others.) The indirect presentation of "Taliessin's first song" suggests that he himself does not yet know that he has not yet been set at liberty. His growth in knowledge is another facet of the subject of the poem.

Williams's other changes and additions to his source all seem significant. "The kindled fire" suggests "Fire of the Spirit, life of the lives of creatures, /spiral of sanctity, bond of all natures, / glow of charity, light of clarity" (9) and points to the liberating kindling that is to come. "The cooked loaf" is not just the seed, the creature wheat, but the work of Man's hands, suggesting a positive response, human cooperation and interaction with that which is given. Together "fish" and "cooked loaf" are suggestive of the miracles of loaves and fishes, and of Christ as Bread of Heaven, somehow really present in the Eucharist, and as Ιχθύς. "From shapes that eat / to shapes that are eaten" perhaps suggests growth in acceptance, in "pacience", and shadows a continued movement toward the calm center, "the still point". (IO). Williams's comment on the Eucharist in The Figure of Arthur adds resonance:

> The Flesh and the Blood, invoked by the act of the celebrant, were there in their own full act - and were yet passive ... they were eaten, yet they themselves received the eater into themselves; they were separate yet they were one. (II)

The description of the fish as "split" may suggest "separate yet one", and a simultaneous existence in two worlds, as it were, and, perhaps, "my body, which is broken for you". But "split" also suggests division, schism - might it be meant to indicate that Taliessin cannot yet appreciate "the single existence of the Incarnate Word ... wholly and absolutely one"?(I2). These lines (25-28) together seem to suggest that Taliessin has some true yet incomplete inkling of the Christian Mysteries. "The changes ... communicated in heathen secrets" point beyond themselves, are types of greater things, yet are part of a closed"cycle", themselves insufficient.

The discontinuity of this relationship between "heathen secrets" and Christian Mysteries, which is seen as both a continuity and a discontinuity, is stressed in the published version much more than in the early drafts. To take only the most striking example, the lines beginning with what is line 7I in 1944 in R read:

> Before Wye from his father Henwg, or else
> from a wandering priest among the vales of Wye -
> he, it may be, who saw in the land of the Trinity
> the Druids stand among the angels and saints
> round the single point of the whole thrice co-inherent Trinity -

with the last line altered to "at the point of the thrice doubly co-inherent Trinity". And P says much the same thing:

> he, it may be, who saw the Druids stand
> in the land of the Trinity among the angels and saints,
> circling that thrice doubly co-inherent point (.)

Any such lines are omitted from the final version, and distinctions in this matter made clearer throughout the poem.

The second poem from the story of Taliesin which Williams uses is that beginning "Primary chief bard" - what David Jones calls "the boast of Taliessin at the court of Maelgwn". Williams does away with Maelgwn and the rest of the "Hanes Taliesin" and makes the poem an answer to Elphin's question about Taliessin's lineage. He seems to preserve the

flavor and tone of his source very precisely, while both integrating it into the whole poem and giving it, I believe, a particular interpretation in his reworking. As with "First, I have been formed" Williams is selective in what he uses, but in this case he freely changes the sequence of the claims he includes. While preserving the violation of linear time that characterizes his source, he seems to order the claims in various ways. Most of the statements from line 51 through line 62 are in the past tense and deal with actions and sufferings, while those that follow seem more of a personal characterization, with almost all verbs in the present or future tenses. From line 55 through line 62 there seem to be patterns of falling and rising, constraint and freedom, suffering and triumph: "I suffered, yet I stood in the Galaxy ... and flew; I rose ... and was tangled; I was mangled, yet my true region is the summer stars; I was thrall .. and free". A piece of patterning is introduced by "sleeping-chamber" and "mirror" (l.52) which suggests the play with "visions" and "vision" (l.53) which is picked up by "dreams" (l.55): together they foreshadow the action of the rest of the poem. And a line from the source - "And my original country is the region of the summer stars:" - quoted in the title of the collection, is altered in such a way as to strengthen the suggestion that they continue to be his "region" and is made a refrain (ll.54, 61) echoed throughout the rest of the poem: "and my true region is the summer stars."

Some lines, of which the last mentioned is an example, are little changed from the source, some combine lines, others are wholly original. One feature of Williams's method is a movement away from the conventionally emphatic toward a more effective understatement. The source's "the Son of the Virgin" becomes "the son of a virgin". "I was with my Lord in the manger of the ass;" becomes "I was ... free in the manger of an ass." These subtle changes may help to bring about the apprehension of the meaning of the words. preventing the whole phrase being automatically passed over as a formulaic counter and allowing the force of the Myth and the wonder of the claim to be felt. These changes are part of a general attention to suggestiveness. "I carried in battle a banner before Lleon of Lochlin" combines two lines: "I have borne a banner before Alexander;" and "I have been bard of the harp to Lleon of Lochlin." "Lleon" and his queen add Celtic local color, but don't seem to represent an allusion intended to be recognized (at least I cannot discover any reference to him beyond the source's, and none at all to her). R and P have "I carried in Asia a banner before Alexander" and no mention of "Lleon", so this attention to unspecific suggestiveness is seen to be a conscious part of Williams's process of revision. (This preference of the unfamiliar to the familiar, Lleon of Lochlin to Alexander, contrasts sharply, as we have seen, with David Jones's treatment of the same material.) "I was mangled for a night and a day by black swine" (which retains just an echo of "For a day and a year in stocks and fetters") is another example of this. Black swine are Welsh (mochyn du was a bad name to call someone in my family within living memory) but there are none in the story of Taliesin. Nor does it seem likely that this is a highly allusive treatment of the story of Twrch Trwyth anticipating that of David Jones in "The Hunt". Yet, however undefined, there seems to me to be, in both instances, a great sense of significance, of mystic power. (In this respect, we may compare the "black swine" with Eliot's "three white leopards ... under a juniper tree".) (I2A). "And flew over the waves when the world was in flood" is unspecific enough to suggest both the Deluge and the Creation.

"I rose to the third heaven with her of the penitence" recasts the source's "I have been in the firmament with Mary Magdalene" and the early drafts have "Mary Magdalene". This change may be another example of Williams's increased attention to suggestiveness. While "her of the penitence" is a perfectly appropriate epithet for Mary Magdalene, given the traditional association of her with the woman who washes Christ's feet with her tears (Luke 7: 37-50) and the traditional image of her, I say this knowing the source and the drafts. Would one be likely to think of her, otherwise, or wrong to think of Cunizza or Rahab in the third heaven in the Paradiso? Perhaps the reference is not specific, the uncertainty, or the multiplicity of appropriate examples, deliberate.
If, however, "her of the penitence" is meant to be recognized as referring particularly to Mary Magdalene, there seems to be some contradiction between this claim and a subsequent reference to her. When Taliessin encountered the light moving toward him from the wood onto the road between Broceliande and Logres -

his heart sang an invocation
of the woman whose name he had heard in a tale of the myth,
of Mary Magdalene who had charity for Christ - she
to him in his grief as he to her in her sin.

The second line quoted is not found in any form in R or P. In the same way the qualification "now dimly" in line 45 and the line "Dim and far came the myth to Taliessin" are absent from the early drafts. These changes making Taliessin's knowledge of Christianity more distant and indirect are part of the process which emphasizes the insufficiency of his early knowledge and wisdom. But this contradiction between Taliessin's lyric and the rest of the poem with respect to Mary Magdalene is not exceptional, but characteristic: three other claims are clearly contradictory in the same way, but more pointedly.

We have noted the whole poem's concern with the growth of Taliessin's knowledge. An obvious feature of the poem, with the exception of this embedded lyric, is its basically chronological, linear sequence. Line 15 refers to the present, lines 110-123 describe Broceliande and contain a reference to the present (112-116), and lines 289-294 tell what Taliessin is to go through, but none violate the temporal sequence of the action narrated as Taliessin's lyric does. Even what he sees in his "visionary sleep" and the commissions he hears, while overlapping to a certain extent, tend to follow a straight-forward chronological sequence: he sees himself on his journey (11.300-304); he hears Merlin's first commission - to go to Byzantium, return, help establish Arthur and prepare for the "sea-coming" (342-350); he sees himself as the king's poet, awaiting with the court the "sea-coming", and then he sees a ship with (apparently) the Grail-bearer (355-389); finally, he hears the second commission, including mention of the possibility of the Dolorous Blow and the cessation of the "coming from the seas" (410-433).

This linear progress of the poem parallels that of the processes with which it is concerned: the development and calling of Taliessin and
the dispensation
of Carbonek to Caerleon, of Caerleon to Camelot, ... the union
of King Pelles and King Arthur, ... the sea-coming of Sarras
(11.280-282). The end toward which Merlin and Brisen are working and toward which Taliessin is called to work is quite simply The End, "the end of all things" (I Peter 4:7), "the close of the age" (Matt.28:20), "the return of Our Lord by means of the Grail". (13). With the Second Coming time shall be no more. The processes with which the poem is concerned are parallel, complementary, interrelated: the coming of God into Taliessin, and into Logres and thence the whole world, and the in-Godding of Taliessin, and Logres, and the world. Both involve a passing into eternity.

The paraphrase of "First, I have been formed" concludes "the Lord God had not yet set him at liberty, / nor shown him the doctrine of largesse in the land of the Trinity." He learns about Christianity: "he heard now dimly / of the food that freed from the cycle" (11.45-47) and"Taliessin heard a word of the Empire" - "Dim and far came the myth" of the Creation, Fall, Incarnation, and Redemption "to Taliessin" (71-79) and "he was caught by a rumour." (91). Even if, indeed, he did hear "Before Wye from his father Henwg", it is only in his "visionary sleep", apparently on account of his vision of "the glory", that "Taliessin / began ... to share in the doctrine of largesse" (11.317-318). But before Taliessin begins "to share in the doctrine of largesse", when it is said he is "not yet set at liberty", he claims in his riddling lyric:

I suffered in dreams derision for the son of a virgin,
yet I stood in the Galaxy at the throne of the Distributor
and flew over the waves when the world was in flood,
I rose to the third heaven with her of the penitence ...
I was ... free in the manger of an ass. (11.55-58, 62).

The addition "in dreams", made in revising the line after P, seems to be in keeping with the rest of the poem, suggesting he had not (yet) so suffered in the course of actual waking life. But unless all that follows is to be taken as "suffered in dreams", which does not seem clearly indicated, we are presented with pointed contradictions.

In the source, Taliesin says:

> I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor; ...
> I have been in Asia with Noah in the ark, ...
> I have been with my Lord in the manger of the ass, ...
> I have been in the firmament with Mary Magdalene;

and the wonder, mystery, and audacity of these claims is inherent. But to these, by the context, Williams has added his own particular contradictions and wonder. I think the claims, as used, have a precise significance, which, indeed, may also help to interpret them in themselves.

By becoming Incarnate the Eternal Lord came to participate fully in the world of time and space as a man. And the Athanasian Creed asserts the Incarnation took place "Not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God." (I4). David Jones, in a note on his use of the "Taliesin" poems, says, "I was not altogether unmindful of the boast in John viii.58." I think it is of this claim that Williams is particularly mindful in his recasting. If "Before Abraham was, I am" were spoken by the Eternal Logos from heaven before the Incarnation, it would not especially amaze - of course God is before His creatures come into existence. But it is spoken by the man Jesus, who is not, however, some separate subject or person, but is seen in this speaking as the One who is Perfect God and Perfect Man.

In commenting on the verse of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven", Williams writes:

> The events for which we sincerely implore that fulfilment upon earth are already perfectly concluded by it in heaven. Their conclusions have to be known by us on earth, but they already exist as events in heaven. Heaven, that is to say, possesses timelessness; it has the quality of eternity, of (in the definition which Boethius passed on to Aquinas) "the perfect and simultaneous possession of everlasting life". (I5)

All times and places, I believe he suggests, are equally (and simultaneously) related to eternity. So are heaven and the Eternal Lord of Heaven related to all places and times. It would seem, then, that in the taking of the Manhood of Christ into God, in the Incarnation, the Manhood is somehow related to all just as the Godhead is, for they are One. And, somehow, in and through Christ human beings enter eternity and so the relationship of eternity to time and space.

Paul knew "a man in Christ" who was "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. I2:2), and it is the wonders and mysteries of the in-Godding of the individual that Williams explores, and demonstrates, and celebrates in Taliessin's lyric.

But what of the particular contradictions of Taliessin's apparently being free before he has been freed? We may compare a passage from Descent into Hell where Stanhope has substituted himself for Pauline Anstruther, literally fearing in her stead:

> The act of substitution was fully made; and if it had been necessarily delayed for years (could that have been), but not by his fault, still its result would have preceded it. In the place of the Omnipotence there is neither before nor after; there is only act. (I6).

Williams suggests that result can precede act in time if the act is made not only in time but in "the place of the Omnipotence". Taliessin can truly utter as events the results of his salvation before it has come to pass in time. When he enters into "the perfect and simultaneous possession of everlasting life" it is just that - possessed perfectly and simultaneously. All the time of his life is redeemed and each time is at once equally related to eternity and through eternity to each other.

The final line of the lyric - "and till the doom I am handfast with all the dead" - transforms its source: "I shall be until the day of doom on the face of the earth". "Handfast" gives a positive sense of continuity and solidarity, of a firm and personable link, and has the specific meaning of "betrothed" or "married" - no marriage with another "till death us do part", but with "all the dead" and "till the doom" when the dead are dead no more. The line asserts the complete interrelation of all men at all times and places, the fullness of the coinherence of all.

We might note this mysterious presence of the future in the past, or rather of all at each point, is touched upon again in a dialogue of the living and the dead, the second colloquy between Betty and Lester in All Hallows' Eve, when Betty says:

> I don't think, you know, we really did have to wait - in a way this was there all the time. I feel as if we might understand it was really all quite happy - if we lived it again ... I feel as if all of you had been there even when you weren't, and now perhaps we might find out how you were there even when you weren't. Oh well, ... (17).

"When Elphin asked him his lineage, he sang riddling" (1.48), perhaps it is easiest to think riddling to himself as well - "I am more than my own vision" - yet speaking truth with respect to himself even as he sang.

The repeated references to "summer stars" throughout the rest of the poem suggest and demonstrate Taliessin's in-Godding: the "point" he sees "as if it had swallowed all the summer stars" is likened to

> the entire point of the thrice co-inherent Trinity
> when every crown and every choir is vanished,
> and all sight and hearing is nothing else

(11.326-339), recalling the imagery of the last six cantos of the Paradiso and the in-Godding of Dante. And the perception of "the third heaven" - "the stones of the waste glimmered like summer stars" - (11.256-257) becomes that of Taliessin (320-323, 397-400). Furthermore, the stones of "the wide waste of Logres" are likened to "summer stars" and the household Taliessin is commissioned to gather is equated with both:

> the stones of the waste glimmered like summer stars,
> as if the king's poet's household of stars
> shone, in a visible glory

(11.398-400, and compare 223-227). This suggests both that his "true region" is in some sense in his household in Logres, and the in-Godding of household and Logres.

Taliessin's second commission is not only to help prepare directly for the "sea-coming" but to "buy souls in many markets":

> if cease the coming from the seas
> at the evil luck of a blow dolorously struck,
> it may be that this gathering of souls, that the king's poet's household
> shall follow in Logres and Britain the spiritual roads
> that the son of Helayne shall trace westward through the trees
> of Broceliande; they who shall be called and thralled
> by Taliessin's purchase and their own will
> from many a suburb, many a waste; say
> that they are a wonder whose origin is not known,
> they are strown with a high habit, with the doctrine of largesse, (11.412-429).

By reference to the doctrine and the varied repetition of a line from the source quoted in Taliessin's lyric - "I am a wonder whose origin is not known" - the members of Taliessin's household are explicitly likened to him. The earlier use of the line is redefined by this: whatever else it means, it is another claim suggesting he is already "called and thralled by ... purchase and (his) own will" when he sings it. And it suggests the other wonderful claims of the lyric can also be made by his household. The same apparent contradiction of result before act in time is also delicately present here: "they shall be called and thralled" but "they are a wonder".

"The son of Helayne" is Galahad, so the "spiritual roads" they shall follow are those to the achievement of the Grail. Of the Grail Williams says, "It is the tale of Galahad; it is the tale of the mystical way; but it is also the tale of the universal way."(18). "The Calling of Taliessin" relates the particular calling and in-Godding of a particular person, but it is also paradigmatic.

To discover two more senses of the title, we may note that in the story "Taliesin", when he is discovered, the weir-ward "took up the leathern bag, and he who opened it saw the forehead of the boy, and said to Elphin, 'Behold a radiant brow!' (tal iesin, in Welsh) 'Taliesin be he called,' said Elphin," Williams does not make this calling of "Taliesin" explicit, but he does rework the incident: "The men with Elphin then could only stare / at the bright forehead of the lonely river-fugitive". And, before

in the course of time he begins "to share in the doctrine of largesse", before he is called to "buy souls", before he sees the "double shape, /gently-shining" of Merlin and Brisen, such, we are told, as he himself in the future "might seem ... to his true lovers", before he has been seen to act himself in any way, his "bright forehead" is calling, or rather God through it:

> Could they believe in the light that lived from his brow?
> decision, there as here, was the mind's election,
> the arbitration of faith, the erection of the City. (11.II-15).

(It is interesting to consider in this connection, Mrs Juliette Wood's observation, in her Study of the Legend of Taliesin, of how strikingly Ceridwen is not behaving according to folktale type when she spares Taliesin upon seeing him "by reason of his beauty".(I9). And it is interesting to consider in light of the line "low be the purchase or high - all's low" (1.413) the Welsh story's "punning on Taliesin, as if it meant 'fine value'"(tal meaning "worth, value,payment" being a homonym with tal meaning "forehead"),(20), though presumably we have Holy Luck rather than authorial intention to thank in this instance.)

Mrs Gwen Watkins, the poet's widow, has written, "All Vernon Watkins's poetry is pre-occupied, as Roland Mathias has pointed out, with the conquest of time."(2I). Mr Mathias seems to be one of the few critics who has written much about Vernon Watkins, and I would like to pass on some of his remarks which would appear to indicate some notable affinities between Watkins's and Williams's thought. Watkins viewed the poet's business as "nothing less than the validation, not merely of poets gone before, but of all mankind, in an eternity of truth which new flashes of perception brought nearer." He strove "to prove that nothing was lost forever, no person, no part of life experienced". And "a pattern must be found to show that nothing had been in vain." "The joy which is woven true - the poetry which is distilled out of the tragedy - is what it is because nothing can be wiped out or forgotton." Finally, in discussing the symbolism of the poetry (here with reference to "The Age-Changers") Mr Mathias says, "sand-grains ... exemplify human beings who are trusters, accepters, residual cellular identities which have been shaped by the cyclical forces of the universe, ...(and) are in a position to deny time" noting that "that alert acceptance is not achieved without toil."(22). And we may note the lines of "Green Names, Green Moss":

> Yet every moment must,
> Each turn of head or hand,
> Though disfigured by dust,
> Incorruptibly stand(.)(23)

Vernon Watkins wrote at least seven poems dealing with Taliesin. (24). None of them seem to draw as much on, or remain as close to their sources as Jones's and Williams's reworkings."Taliesin and the Mockers" (another version of his first song when found in the weir) preserves the particular flavor and wonder most closely, with a Psalm-like account of the Creation which reminds me a bit of the poem attributed to Taliesin beginning "O God, the God of formation",(25) and with some lines that seem to be specific reworkings of Taliesinic lines, as "I saw the building /Of Babel's Tower" of "I have been the chief director of the work of the tower of Nimrod" - a recasting which does not make the poet responsible for Babel. Again, "Taliesin in Gower" (1950) has lines which recall the transformational poetry particularly "First, I have been formed": I am foal and violet ...

> In a hundred dramatic shapes I perish, in the last I live and sing ...
> I have passed through a million changes.

But perhaps the most interesting of the poems is "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision". There are few particulars from the sources: the "three drops" come from cave rock rather than cauldron; the fish is strikingly and economically developed. There is an obvious Blakean reference. Perhaps in my unfamiliarity with Watkins, I more readily assimilate the unknown to the known, but there are many things which remind me of Williams's works: "Earth's shadow hung" of the "shadow of Brisen" and "earth's coned shadow"; the terrible "penumbra of history", the changing, breaking, and scattering of life, "the pin of pivotal space", and the "irreducible diamond" of "Taliessin in the School of the Poets" and "Taliessin on the Death of Virgil"; "the socket of all men's eyes" of the suicide's climb to the place of the skull in Descent

into Hell.
Taliesin has learned to accept - life, grief; has "endured all vicissitudes", and his tears "have dried to Chance". In some sense, it seems, he has conquered time, entered timelessness - "Here time's glass breaks". The sandgrains "whirled to a pattern": it is not too much to attribute this perception to Taliesin, noting Mr Mathias's comment on Watkins, "Life had overwhelmed him once and that overwhelming must imply a pattern of overwhelming that was meaningful". (26). Again, we may compare "Taliessin the the School of the Poets": universal order is perceived, but what about the universal reality of loss? Taliesin touches "the spring of vision" and "the pin of pivotal space" and sees "One sandgrain balance the ages' cumulus cloud." He seems here to have some further perception of, perhaps, the endurance, the eternal validity of all - the most minute speck, shaped by time, survivor of time, shows time in some sense insubstantial. Recognizing the terrible reality of change and loss, recognizing "Time reigns; yet the kingdom of love is every moment, / Whose citizens do not age in each other's eyes." While I would not suggest he has worked out the same solution Williams has, as expressed in "Taliessin on the Death of Virgil", it is interesting that here, too, the only finally satisfactory conquest of time, and loss in time, is in some sense by "the kingdom of love".

Taliesin seems to have a still further vision, involving the convergence of "Future and Past", with the receipt of the "three drops", instructive, enlightening, which are "the soul's rebirth". It is Taliesin's response that is most interesting (Roland Mathias thinks this part of the poem unique in Watkins's work).(27). I have presented what I think to be Williams's interpretation of how Taliesin's extraordinary claims can be seen to be literally true, and how they may be truly attributed to any whom the Lord God has set at liberty. But we are still left with the problem of what to do with these true and wonderful claims, this vision, whether directly apprehended or mediated to the imagination and the intellect by the art of "men who make all transcience seem an illusion" or perhaps more precisely, work with the transcient in such a way as to represent the Eternal. We are left with the problem of how to relate these true perceptions to our everyday lives. It is this problem, I think, that Vernon Watkins addresses, and perhaps he provides a satisfactory and salutary solution accommodating the Eternal to the mundane.

> Taliesin answered: 'I have encountered the irreducible diamond
> In the rock. Yet now it is over. Omniscience is not for man.
> Christen me, therefore, that my acts in the dark may be just,
> And adapt my partial vision to the limitation of time.'

Charles Williams, who in the Figure of Beatrice, in "The Death of Beatrice", wrote, of "the objective reality of the glory",

> But why do we not see it always, everywhere, and
> in all? Because the Divine Mercy intervenes. Mercy?
> Mercy assuredly ... While we are what we are, the
> Divine Mercy clouds its creation ... (28)

might well second this saying. After the gracious Vision which initiates, one must get on with the business of living according to its Truth, even - no - especially in the dark.

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Notes

1. Letter of "2I Oct / 40" in the letters of Charles Williams to Anne Renwick, Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. d 452. All items under this shelfmark are holographs.
2. The Mabinogion, trans. with notes Lady Charlotte Guest, 2nd ed. (London: Bernard Quaritch, I877). I have collated the texts of the two poems, "First, I have been formed" (p. 475) and "Primary chief bard" (pp. 482-483) with those in the I849 edition; the 3 eds. of I902; the "Everyman's Library" ed. (c.I906); and the trans. Lady Guest cites as her source (p. 500). There are few differences between the eds. and none which would decisively establish or rule out a given ed. as Jones' or CW's source.
3. David Jones, In Parenthesis (London: Faber and Faber, I963, rpt. I975), pp 79-84, 207-2I0. I have collated the text against both ed. I of I937 and the I978 reprint

incorporating authorial corrections, quoting them where they occur.

4. The Four Ancient Books of Wales, ed. W.F.Skene, trans. Robert Williams (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), vol. I, p.283. The poem is found in the Book of Taliesin.
5. Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1961), pp. 284-286.
6. Mabinogion, p. 484.
7. Charles Williams, The Region of the Summer Stars (London: Editions Poetry London, 1944). I will refer to the edition hereafter as 1944.
8. There is enough evidence (which I won't attempt to summarize here) to suggest CW was working on the poem under the title 'The Working of Porphyry' between mid-April and late September 1944. The TS close to 1944 is entitled 'THE CALLING OF TALIESSIN' and has been made a part of a TS. of The Region by CW.
9. Charles Williams, The House of the Octopus (London: Edinburgh House Press, 2nd impr. 1945), p.9.
10. T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton", in Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.191.
11. Arthurian Torso, by Charles Williams and C.S.Lewis (London: OUP, 1948), p.22.
12. Charles Williams, "Natural Goodness", in The Image of the City and Other Essays, ed. Anne Ridler (London: OUP, 1958), p. 76.

12A. T.S.Eliot, "Ash Wednesday", in Collected, p.97.

13. The "Preface" to The Region, p.6.
14. Quoted, e.g., Charles Williams, The Descent of the Dove (London: Longmans, 1939), p.59.
15. Charles Williams, He Came Down From Heaven (London: Heinemann, 1938), p.4.
16. Charles Williams, Descent into Hell (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p.139, with "necesarily" corrected.
17. Charles Williams, All Hallows' Eve (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), p.139.
18. Figure of Arthur, in Torso, p.84.
19. Juliette Wood, A Study of the Legend of Taliesin, unpublished M. Litt. thesis, Oxford University 1979, pp. 130-131. While Mrs Wood's thesis has not been published as such, various publications have been drawn from it.
20. The Poems of Taliesin, ed. Syr Ifor Williams, English version J.E.Caerwyn Williams (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968, rpt. 1975), pp. xvii-xviii.
21. Vernon Watkins, Unity of the Stream, ed. Gwen Watkins (Cardiff: Yr Academi Gymreig, 1978), "Forward", p. (7).
22. Roland Mathias, Vernon Watkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), pp. 40, 53, 73, 66, 77-78.
23. In Unity, p.95.
24. Six of them, including "Taliesin and the Mockers", "Taliesin in Gower", and "Taliesin and the Spring of Vision", are printed together for the first time in Unity. The seventh is "Poet and Goldsmith", which Mr Mathias says "had been provisionally called 'Taliesin at Sunset'" (p. 104). It appears in Vernon Watkins, Selected Poems 1930-1960 (London: Faber and Faber, 1967). Mr Mathias also says the "'Ballad of the Mari Lwyd' shows him well acquainted with Taliesin's boast before Maelgwn" (p.99), though this was not readily apparent to me. All of Watkins's "Three Sonnets for Charles Williams", The Wind And The Rain 7 (1951), pp. 90-91, are concerned with CW's Arthurian cycle and two mention 'Taliessin'. I had not read them when I wrote this paper, and will not attempt to add a consideration of them here.
25. In Skene, I, pp. 552-557.
26. Mathias, p.64.
27. Mathias, p.103.
28. Charles Williams, The Figure of Beatrice (London: Faber and Faber, 1943, 5th impr. 1950), pp. 47-48.

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Appendix on Dating

None of the drafts have dates on them. Among the letters to Anne Renwick is a verse latter, undated, beginning: "If I were to add again: you are a good girl./ might you not be bored - yes?" which includes these lines:

> I have been brooding over Brisen. I do not know
> quite how to manage a poem I find I began
> called The Working of Porphyry - and can
> you think what it is about? a high Rite
> magically worked by Merlin in his sister, at night
> in Carbonek, Brisen his sister, so to draw
> the image of a foreshadowing. But what to do
> with her at the point of a pentagram + he
> seeing the chart in her illuminated skin
> of the Emperor's stair, porphyry of stair + soul,
> soul of the High Prince before his coming, pole
> of Merlin's vision .. but what Irene, to do?

and later including:

> We turn to other things -
> did you ever read, among the springs
> of verse, Blake's Prophetic Books?

In the seventh and eighth lines above, "to do / with" is altered to "he saw / in". In the ninth line, either "in" is written over "on" or vice versa: I can't tell which is the final reading.

The first reference to the Prophetic Books in the letters to Anne Renwick occurs in that of "30 Sept. / 41": "Also I will lend or give you the Prophetic Books". In his letter of "16 April / 41" Williams writes:

> In fact, We would almost go so far as to offer the
> highest tribute that We can and say: 'You are a good
> girl, Irene.'

He continues through an elliptical explanation and concludes:

> And ever since then - it was in a taxi near - St.
> Pancras, We seem to remember - the phrase is very
> high (?), serious, and rare with Us. After all
> which .. reminiscence? no, for it lives .. We will
> repeat: 'You are a good girl, Irene.'

The importance given to the phrase in the letter of 16 April 1941 makes it seem likely that its emphatic use at the beginning of the verse letter, introduced "If I were to add again", deliberately recalls the letter of 16 April. If so, the verse letter could not have been written before 16 April 1941. The positive reference to the Prophetic Books in the letter of 30 September 1941 means that the verse letter must antedate that letter.

Therefore, we can at least establish that Williams was working on the poem under the title "The Working of Porphyry" between mid-April and the end of September 1941. What to make of the description of the poem in the verse letter, just what relationship the poem as described has to drafts R and P, I do not feel confident to say.

Mr Humphrey Carpenter has kindly brought it to my attention that in a chronology compiled by Raymond Hunt, now in the Wade Collection, the beginning of "The Working of Porphyry" is assigned to October 1941. Perhaps P is assignable to such a date, though the evidence is not yet sufficient to do so.

I a letter to Anne Renwick which I believe to be dated "5 Nov^{r}/43" (the date is unfortunately difficult to decipher), Williams says of a group of poems "They are the P.(L.) pamphlet." and in ennumerating them includes "The Calling of Taliessin" (T. + Merlin; I forget if you know it)".

The Chelmsford Diocesan Chronicle has kindly given the Society permission to reproduce in the Newsletter Charles Williams' Notes on Religious Drama printed in the Chronicle on 23 May 1937. It is felt that this wil be of interest of members.

'Keats in his Letters says: "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us". Without considering the general critical implications of this phrase, we may observe in it a hint of the difficulty of religious drama. It is drama written "with a purpose", it has upon it the marks of a design imposed from without. The only design which we can bear in art is that which arises from within. We distrust, and justly, poetry which is willing to subordinate its own proper nature even to the - in this sense - alien business of religion. If the imposed design is to succeed, it must be by uniting itself wholly with the nature of poetry, which is to express, not doctrine, but existence, or only doctrine as existence.

The technique of poetry involves two things which may, roughly, be called (i) invention (ii) diction. By invention I do not mean ingenuity, but discovery - the discovery of a method of attack. This is not at all the same thing as the ingenious trifles of decoration. It is the discovery of those images of human experience in which the desired religious design can be so achieved poetically that what is "palpable" to us is the poetic and not the religious purpose. A good love poem is, first of all, a good poem: its love-concern is secondary.

It may very well happen that the attack will be indirect: that the images will not be of the central idea so much as of something connected with the centre. The plays which approach the Nativity directly are usually driven to fill themselves up with adoration. A state of adoration is one of the most desirable in life, but very few poets can be trusted to make more than an odd lyric out of adoration; those who can are generally the most intellectual. Intellect is a necessity to artistic adoration. Simple faith, simple worship, may be good things for the soul. But in poetry that simplicity (outside, I say, occasional lyrics) is given only to the greatest poets towards the end of their poetic careers. When their style has reached that, they generally die.

(ii) Diction. The heresy of simplicity has affected our choice of words.

There are a great number of words in the English language. Very few of them are used for Nativity plays; the sheep and the cows perhaps would not understand them. Generally speaking, however, the narrowness of diction is due not to a deliberate choice but to a lack of imaginative vitality; we have, in fact, nothing particular to say. Why then say anything? Why write plays? Because of the Subject? That way one may (possibly - I do not believe it) find devotion; but not art, much less great art. Some effort towards that untrappable thing, however, may be made by attention to the sound of words. Our attention may be given to the word "Incarnation" as a fact for faith, but our minds must attend to it as a complex doctrine, and our sensations to it as a rich sound. Consider what Shakespeare does with the word "incarnadine"; consider the sound of "Incarnation" in the Athanasian Creed. It is the rich complexity of sound as well as image that we must invoke - complexity and intensity. And many, many more words.

Finally, let us encourage ideas, with which diction is so closely connected. I often see reviews of books by Christians defending Christianity; rarely, of books by Christians attacking Christianity. Yet it is we who should be

attacking, questioning disputing. The cry of the Blessed Virgin "How shall these things be?" is our signal; the scepticism of S. Thomas was a part of the Apostolic College, and the scepticism preceded the answer. What we need is a freedom, a vigour, of the intellect; let us say, an intellectual style, a habit of scope, a greatness in thought. Dogma was never meant to cramp us, but itself to be a means of freedom: dogma must be accepted and disputed at once (so to put it). It is this kind of style, of clarity of spirit, which is needed for religious drama. The drama of the Church must be a free drama; at present it is far too hampered by good intentions. Good intentions, whatever they may be in life, are the dark hell of poetry.

> Come, and come strong
> To the conspiracy of our spacious song.

The Church - I mean the organization; not the Mystical Body - must speak to the poets on their level; they will not come off it. She must approach them in their style; they will not drop it. They also have their welfare - "the poets militant below" - and if they are to be of use to her, she must learn their language, for that language is their very great trust, and they will be false to Almighty God and the Incarnate Word if they lose it.'

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