

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 33, SPRING 1984

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAM'S SOCIETY

+ + + + +
 + 7 July 1984: The Society's Annual General Meeting and day conference +
 + will be held at Pusey House, Oxford on Saturday 7 July from 11am to +
 + 5 pm. The Annual General Meeting, which is open to members only, will +
 + commence at 11.15am: +
 + Agenda +
 + 1. Apologies for absence. +
 + 2. Report on the year's work by Richard Wallis, Chairman of the +
 + Council. +
 + 3. Presentation of the Accounts by the Hon. Treasurer. +
 + 4. Report of the Hon. Secretary. +
 + 5. Report on the Newsletter by the Editor, Molly Switek. +
 + 6. Election of Council Members under paragraph 5 of the Society's +
 + constitution. +
 + 7. Any other business. +
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 + After the A.G.M. has ended, at, or as soon as possible after 12.15pm, +
 + there will be a break for lunch for which members and guests are +
 + asked to make their own arrangements, but coffee and tea will be ava- +
 + ilable. At 1.15pm, for those who wish, a walk will start from Pusey +
 + House to places of interest connected with C.W. and to St Cross to +
 + see the church where C.W. worshipped and his grave in the churchyard, +
 + returning by 2.15pm. At 2.30pm Rev. Dr. Ralph Townsend will speak on +
 + "Williams and the Anglican Tradition", to be followed by discussion +
 + and tea. There will be a fee of £1 for the conference. All members +
 + are very welcome. +
 + + + + +

10 November 1984: Canon Raymond Hockley will speak - subject to be announced.
 This meeting will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1.,
 starting at 2.30pm.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 17 June 1984: at 1pm at St Matthews Church Room, St Petersburg Place,
 Bayswater, London W2 - off the Bayswater Road halfway between Queensway and
 Notting Hill Gate tube stations (Central Line). Please bring sandwiches - tea
 and coffee provided. We will continue reading Taliessin Through Logres and
 Region of the Summer Stars. A contribution towards the cost of the room will be
 required.

OXFORD READING GROUP

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

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

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

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May we remind any members who have not yet renewed their membership of the Society
 that subscriptions are due from 1 March.

(as we think of her in The Charles Williams Society) puts her story into the context of our times. A deft phrase of hers and it all comes back. Dublin lit up - guiding the German bombers round. To me back came Goojerat Barracks: bitter wartime winter, and going through snow into Colchester early on Sunday with those marvellous lines ringing in one's ears:

"Going to the altar Belles and Arthur moving down."

The Charles Williams Society! This Society itself we largely owe to Alice Mary and to her husband Charles. Much, too have the Hadfields contributed as authors in their own right, preoccupations notwithstanding (including what might be called their ministry, almost, to Canals). I prize in particular those invaluable guides for newcomers, Alice Mary's King Arthur and the Round Table and the quite excellent The Church's Year by 'Charles Alexander'.

An Exploration is definitive, and fuller than An Introduction. The earlier work becomes, I think, a valuable supplement. The glow of life in Amen House is so well captured there that that chapter will remain in our annals, together with the recorded names of those around Charles Williams then, some of them still members of our Society. Incidentally, what a help and joy it is to use the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations in the knowledge that this compilation was so much the work of Charles Williams and Alice Mary. Does The English Poetic Mind greatly praise Rossetti? Turn then to the Dictionary and see what it quotes of Rossetti. For example: "Around the bitterness of things occult" (Our Lady of the Rocks). Above all, thanks be that, together, C.W. and A.M. defended and successfully defended the inclusion of quotations from hymns. What with our modern liturgies and our modern translations where would we be, today, without the truths so imperishably entrenched in our hymns?

I have alluded to the loom of war. Besides war without, there was war within, intellectual warfare.* Cambridge put an end to Oxford's idealism, replacing it with Individualism. Analysis ousted synthesis; monism was replaced by Impiricism. My station and its duties gave ground before Moore's Principia Ethica and the cultivation of states of consciousness. For Oxford, relations had been internal, part of the whole, and truth had lain in coherence. For Cambridge, relations were external and truth was correspondence. Monism (or pantheism) had amalgamated; now, Individualism was isolating. Missing from both was any true doctrine of identity. London spoke. Charles Williams, all alone, was one - a genius - who dealt not in states of consciousness but in something more permanent and profound: states of being. (Opening by chance the Preface to a slim volume of the thirties - Poems by Gerald Claypole, Blackwells, 1937 - I read: "if only people would cultivate the habit of poetry - of writing poetry as well as reading it - how this could improve the quality of existance." True indeed; and Charles Williams cultivated that habit to the fullest - sonnets fell like snowflakes - but it was for something more existential than any quality. It was for the sake of substance itself.) He knew any declared identity; even identity in utmost self-division. He perceived and he nourished vital souls, the acts, the consent of the loving will. Doing so he was able, imaginatively, to enter also into states of being other human. Read, for example, his praise of Matthew Arnold and of Arnold's descriptions of snowscapes, of moonlight and of solitude. Still more, Charles Williams sutured by spiritual imagination into states of being over and above the human leading up to that supreme self-relationship, the Godhead Themselves. For it is Christian Theism which by distinguishing the Tricene Creator and created souls makes identities, and Identity itself, Its and theirs, and the relations between, possible. Say rather, it makes possible for us to apprehend and live by what we could not otherwise apprehend nor live by. Oxford too - and Cambridge in sequence -

* see, on this paragraph, Sir Alfred Ayer in A Part of My Life (Collins 1977) and his comments there on G.E.Moore and the latter's paper on Internal Relations to The Aristotelian Society (Proceedings 1919 - 20).

had been recovering this doctrine, which Charles Williams so well called the doctrine of glory. At Oxford and then Cambridge this was the work of The Inklings: and them, during the war, Charles Williams himself was to join. A metaphysic, a vision of life and belief, was reinstated - the very opposite of what is widely and rightly called Reductionism. The way of intellectual affirmation was reopened. Yeats had done this, from County Sligo - in a non-Christian mode:

"So get you gone, von Hügel,

Though with blessings on your head."

And mention of Yeats, with his undertones of the Occult and of a different Byzantium - "that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea" - brings me on to the two main things which in Alice Mary's second book are notably new ones. These are the Golden Dawn and "love's second image". Charles Williams was introduced to the occult society of The Golden Dawn by Fred Page of Amen House in the early years, it seems, of his marriage. He remained with it for a number of years, after which it faded from his life. Yeats, Waite and Evelyn Underhill were among its members and reading the novels of Charles Williams we may be interested to read also the novels of Evelyn Underhill, of Arthur Machen and of R.H. Benson, creator of a precursor of Clark Simon. Alice Mary emphasizes, rightly I am sure, that Charles Williams' faith was never sapped. Why did he leave? Perhaps he found that the more he learned of the occult, the less he liked it. For the occult has two trends: it sexualises the Godhead; and it sees nature not as creation but as emanation. Thus it blurs good and evil, equating the Fall with finitude, not sin. A neophyte who was a Christian, once he sensed that, might well draw back. "Out of Egypt have I called my son". Yet there is a golden ambiguity here. In leaving Egypt, the Israelites at the same time "spoiled" (despoiled) "the Egyptians". Moses himself was "learned in all the lore of the Egyptians." He put down superstition: yet also he set up the Tabernacle. And (saving the comparison) from the Occult Charles Williams brought over, imaginatively, much that was to give unusual force to the Christian allegories of his novels and poems. The ritual of tone and posture, the focus on the hand (Yod), even the word coinherence (vide Machen and Eliphas Levi) come here. And here, no doubt, in occult ceremonial, lies the clue to Alice Mary's otherwise perplexing story of symbolic sword-play. In some contexts, a blow may count for a salute. Compare dubbing, manumission, and early confirmation rites. Alice Mary's own notes to the Taliessin poems are, in such matters, a great help. If she can still add more, e.g. on the "victimisation of blood" and the two priesthoods, that will always be most welcome. The occult requires its adepts to find the philosophers stone, that is, their true selves. This Charles Williams did. As the Apostle enjoins, he worked out his own salvation in (like Kierkegaard) "fear and trembling". As required, too, he made his own interpretation of the Tarot: the Magician, i.e. the Divine Word, the Son; the Hanged Man, the Messiah, who operates (compare Duns Scotus) past-wards, as well as future-wards; the Fool, i.e. Love (the Trinity, especially the Spirit) moving and self-moving both before (alpha; omicron/tau, and omega) before and amid and after the Creation.

In this and other ways Charles Williams baptised the Occult, adapting it to give new force to old truths. All this leads on to, and pales before, the doctrine of substituted love. In An Introduction, Alice Mary distributes this doctrine throughout her pages and their story. In An Exploration she epitomizes it in a Note on Coinherence, Exchange and Substitution. Neither on these two presentations would I be without. Both are done with lucidity and conviction. But the epitome is a special gem - given that, elsewhere, Alice Mary shows that coinherence is not just being all in the bundle of life together - though that indeed - but the activities of love derived through the Incarnation from The Coinherence itself, from the Co-indwelling of the Trinity, the perichoresis, to use St John Damascene's word - words brought into prominence by Prestige's God and Patristic Theology (Heinemann, 1936).

Experience and theology interact. An Exploration tells us for the first time

about Charles Williams' shattering experience of "love's second image", which hitherto one had only surmised. Married and a father, and with a whole cycle of poems already written under the inspiration of his early love, Charles Williams in Amen House had the stupefaction of finding himself in love with the young and newly-appointed librarian Phyllis Jones. Propinquity (unavoidable for two years till her departure for Java on marriage) ensured intensity: a double joy while feelings were reciprocated; a double anguish when they were transferred to another. He was mocked. Through all, and at what cost, he stayed - alike to his own vows and to his own feelings - true. Illumination was laceration. He endured this; and proved the reverse also. For his loss he made into our gain, through his Masques, his essays, his plays, his novels, his histories, his biographies, above all his poetry. In romantic theology, the theology of the meaning of eros, it is possible to push things too far. And there is a temptation to over-dwell or to over-subtilise. Adan Fox in Old King Coel, and Tolkien in his letters, rebuke this. For all that, in this theology Charles Williams by setting himself, as he would say "on the marble of Exchange" has enriched the whole range of our understanding of the Faith. Starting with the human love (and it is in this order - the reverse, with all respect, of the pulpit order - that the glory lies) Charles Williams conveys us into the divine. To be wounded in love (Canticles 5.7, Zechariah 13.6), to be "wounded in the house of a friend"! What to do? Charles Williams not only tells us, he shows us. Devote it to God, to love itself, to Primal Love Themselves. Then, having devoted it, operate it. By the activities of unforbidden love - with results, it may be, which will alter even the very past. What was once wasting will prove to be no longer waste. More and more in his life as in his writings Charles Williams was being transmuted. The Taliessin whom he sang, he had become. Towards the end, while working with him for the Figure of Arthur, Alice Mary learned that he had two other themes still in mind: Wordsworth, and the figure of Nature; and the Eucharist and, say, the figure of Arch-nature. Would that we had those two projected volumes!

In a remote Herefordshire church, near which Wordsworth sometimes stayed, there is a window which is inscribed, to his memory, with his Sonnet on the Virgin; while across the Worcester border there is, it chanced, in an old village church, a stone altar round which runs those words from Isaiah (45:15) Vere, tu es deus absconditus, "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself". Would Charles Williams have applied to the Holy Mysteries - as Wordsworth in one of his Ecclesiastical Sonnets (No XI) would not - those great lines from The Prelude (Book VI)? Would he have found that, as there is a Celian, and as there is an Alpine, so also there is a Dominical moment:

"when the light of sense
Goes out - but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world"?

We cannot tell. But we can be grateful, immeasurably grateful to Alice Mary Hadfield for having given us insight into so very much; and not least for her perceptive account of those last months with him - he in Oxford, she there from her native South Cerney - when he had, if not a presentiment, or anticipation of his passing. With her he drew on the past; with her he spoke of this and that; together, they shared delight, and rest of spirit. For Walter Pater wrote truer than he knew. We are older than the rocks, or shall be. And Charles, like Mrs Anstruther, was growing onto, into, the rock. Say rather, that he who had not flinched from the chisel (Tolkien told of himself how he for one was greatly moved by the very word Stone) was becoming stone; no, a stone; stone of Bors' bones; a stone in that building still a-building which is the Kingdom of Love, the temple of all saints, Dante's Rose.

Thus then things moved, as Alice Mary records, to "peace, and the perfect end". And glad we are, most noble lady, that you have given us, in your book An Exploration, so feeling a chronological account, drawn from loving personal

knowledge, of the acts - indeed, those descents of the Dove - which were, and are, the life and work of Charles Williams.

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The Literature of Mysticism in Western Tradition by Patrick Grant, published by The Macmillan Press Ltd, pp 180, £20. Review by Martin Moynihan.

Patrick Grant, of the Queen's University of Belfast, of Sussex and Illinois Universities and now Professor of English at the University of Victoria in British Columbia has added to his previous studies of literature this attractively produced volume. It is at once an anthology and, interspersed, a commentary in depth. The commentary has six chapters, on Mysticism, Faith and Culture; Imagination and Mystery; Historical Crises from Incarnation to Imagination; Self and Ego; the Cross; and the Way; with a Conclusion.

The book can be, and I am sure will be, used as an excellent bedside book. Its extracts range very widely and so does its Bibliographical Guide. As I turned from this quotation to that, from old friends to new ones, what a pleasure it was to discover more than one passage from Charles Williams. But then, reading on, how perplexed I felt, indeed shocked, to encounter not once nor twice, in the commentary and the quotations, attacks on that doctrine which Charles held most dear: Substitution: The Atonement. No doubt this doctrine has often been wrongly expressed. It remains true, as Young wrote in Night Thoughts, that "a God all mercy is a God unjust". And is it just misrepresentation which is here objected to? I think not. The intemperance of the language (the atonement "neolithic" and so on) suggests a violent antipathy to the real thing: to the rescue of God, following the condemnation of God: to Christ our Ransom (His own very word) resulting (be it so) in contrition and in our redemption in Him.

The doctrine of the Atonement, said Shaw and how many others, is immoral. God be thanked! It is. Or rather, it is super-moral. It is Love in action. And it cuts me to the quick when clever men seek to take away from ordinary folk what is our first hope: not Union, but Salvation. And Salvation not through knowledge (gnosis) but by belief (pistis); not through "consciousness" but through conscience; not by intellect but by love, will. And not free will only. There is much in this book about free will. But Salvation talks to us in bondage. Calvary delivers us (it delivered Bunyan) when we cannot help ourselves. It is expiation, not just example. It delivers, by just a deathbed whisper; by just the flicker towards it of an eyelid (Numbers 21.8; John 3.14). For Calvary was a - it is the - cosmic event. It was the overthrow of Satan. As Christopher Smart sang, to David, the Royal Psalmist:

"Thou that stupendous truth believed
And now the matchless deed's achieved -
Determined, dared and done."

Done! And done for us provided only that we will. Quicumque vult. Not just Pharaochs or heaven-born or circumcised males or deified Caesars. No. Whosoever - and not excluding (for Love stands proxy) infants.

Let not Professor Grant talk of Incarnation, of Annunciation and of other mysteries in general until there has been talk of the Incarnation, the Annunciation and of Christ's substitution for Adam. Without that we wise clerks are hurting - we are deserting Christ's little ones:

"Reverend Sir", wrote Pattison to Mr Batesby in War in Heaven (chapter 13), "I return your books which you very kindly lent me. I've no doubt they're quite right - but they don't seem to mean the Precious Blood."

So do not let us say - with Paul Tillich apparently - that the Cross is a sign

of the insufficiency of all signs; or that on the Cross (Pange, lingua, gloriosi!) Christ accepted death as human fate only. He accepted that fate as man's punishment, and paid our price: mundi pretium. His, therefore, is the sign of triumph:

"At that sign of triumph
Satan's legions flee."

"Legion" within - and legions without. I owe much to William Law. I respect him as a Non-juror. And, on my retirement, his Serious Call inspired fuller devotional practice. But, in these pages, he, with others, takes me aback. It is not just that you cannot live a working career by his wrongly strict precepts nor that I had to turn from him, in this matter, to Francis de Sales; from Bunyan's "Vanity Fair" model of society to Spenser's Cleopolis and the realm of courtesy. No, I was taken aback at Law's whole reading of history, and this book's too.

The Crusades, for example, did not originate from aggressiveness. They were Resistance movements. Arthur (after Constantius) was the first crusader. At Badon (c500A.D.) the North, the pagan North, was at the gates. At Tours (732A.D.) it was the South and the East (militant Islam). What we owe to Charles Martell! And are we to think that the Bulgars (absit nomen : now it is drug traffic) were any less insidiously aggressive - or any less long-suffered - than the Cities of the Plain? That they did not establish no-go-areas robbing God's little ones of baptism and matrimony? Instead thanks to Roncesvalles, Jerusalem, Ascalon, Muret - instead, as Chesterton wrote:

"It was Richard, it was Godfrey, it was Raymond at the gate."

There is much in this book against Venice. But there is nothing about Belgrade (1458) or Lepanto (1571). There is nothing about Vienna - yet in William Law's own times (see Wordsworth's sonnet on Sobieski) the East had once again been only just flung back, from the walls of Vienna (1683). We celebrated the tercentenary last year. As for our times, did we not have (full circle) the North again at our gates in 1939-45? And shall we willingly forget those R.A.F. pilots (Poles among them) who, as Stephen Spender had written:

"left the vivid air
Signed with their honour."

Sad to record, as I read these pages I feel something else is still at our gates: the Further East. All that Indian nihilism, which is conjured up by "the ego" and by talk of self-abolition. "The ego" is not a Scriptural term (in this book, where Scripture is quoted, it is mostly wrested). We do not believe in Nirvana, any more than we believe in Fate. We do not (pace Blossius) believe the soul will be absorbed into deity. It will, D.V., behold the beatific vision. Even in this life there can be no in-othering without selves. We seek not the annihilation of the Ego but the fallen Soul's re-sanctification.

The range of knowledge in T.L.M.W.T. is beyond praise (it is a question whether it does not go too wide: does Thorean really belong?) This makes it the more difficult to note what is not there. I think Charles Williams would have missed Grigena Duns, and Berkeley. And he would have been puzzled at so much on nominalism (false) and so little on realism(true). Charles Williams loved the Athanasian Creed - that Hymn of Love. He loved Poetry and Theology. There is indeed one omission so huge as at first to escape notice. Nothing from The Divine Comedy! Surely this is Hamlet without the Prince. Not is it, perhaps, an accident. Re-read Canto VII of the Paradiso and Dr Barbara Reynolds' notes on Dante's theology of the Atonement. And re-read, too, Charles' fine epitome in The Figure of Beatrice (chapter XI):

"Man might have made satisfaction for sin? He could not; God might, 'only by courtesy', have forgiven? He would not; rather, he would himself become man that man might make satisfaction."

There are not a few references to The Trinity - to The Co-inherence, that is,

with Whom we pray to be made companions. But these references are mostly of this type: Light, heat, and sweetness. Not Persons! "It was not good", said Charles, quoting Chesterton, "for God to be alone." Love cannot be alone. St Augustine is discussed but with controversy on "just war"; and how I long for the forthcoming new translation by Edmund Hill of St Augustine's de Trinitate.

Thanks to Professor Grant's book - and thank it I do - I shall be reading many of his authors again. I expect to find that I have been taking several of them too much on trust. Some of these mystics disparage sacramentals. Will they leave us even the sacraments? True faith is corporate. Eckhart (p.16) falsely equalises interior soul worship and church worship. Fox, I believe, would do away with psalmody. The more I read Boehme the warier I become. And if Rolle was transvestite then give me Chaucer.

It dawns on me that the true Western tradition is indeed the sacramental one. That is the Way, for mystics and for common folk alike. There, for all, is our salvation. We shall experience unspeakable things. But like St Paul we shall subordinate personal secrets to the one great and now Open Secret, the mystery from before all ages, of the Incarnation and Substitution of Christ. In my future re-reading I may find I have in places misjudged some of the meanings in this book. But, at first reading, it seems to me to contain radical error. Under the appearance of ecumenism it conveys unorthodoxy. Under a cloak of mysticism it conceals several daggers. And I must so report me to The Table Round.

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Objections to Charles Williams (Part I) by Stephen Medcalf.

This paper was delivered on the dark and bitterly cold afternoon of 11 February 1978 at All Saints', Margaret Street. I originally intended to revise it, but since it is an exercise in objecting to Williams with which I do not entirely now agree, I think it best now to leave it as it stands. I have, however, added one or two notes at the end.

I suppose that most of us here assembled, including myself, find that Charles Williams speaks to their condition, perhaps uniquely: we agree with T.S.Eliot that "he left behind him a considerable number of books which should endure, because there is nothing else that is like them or could take their place." Eliot seems to mean primarily that, "Williams knew and could put into words, states of consciousness of a mystical kind, and the sort of elusive experience which many people have one or twice in a lifetime", and instances The Place of the Lion. I would add for myself that Descent into Hell is capable of making one feel one has heard the word Ivan Karamazov imagined, that will make it certain that the universe has always been right; and that The Descent of the Dove is the only book outside the Bible, and some commentaries on the Bible, that persuades me to see history as the activity of God. But to think as highly of Williams as that raises a problem. For it is plain that the greater part of the world does not think so highly of him, and we should ask why, and whether there is any justification for their view. Why do people like or dislike Williams? Even though the answer may not change our estimate of him, it may reveal something about him to us. I shall begin by looking at four hostile critics, and then try to formulate my own difficulties.

Kenneth Allott says of his poetry: "like other writers (C.S.) Lewis has in my opinion been hypnotised by his memories of the man and by his conviction of the importance and wisdom of the things Williams had to say, into imagining they are said (and happily) in the poems." Simply stated as a general reason for the appeal of Williams this will not do: it is enough to point out that many people who find Williams speaks, and speaks excitingly, to their condition, have no

memories of him other than of his writings. But there is a more subtle version of Allott's remark which I think is true from my own experience. When I first read Williams, from mere curiosity about a writer said to be unlike anything I had read, I found him somewhat impenetrable. When, a year or so later, other paths led me to him which I shall speak of hereafter, I found I grew to like him rather suddenly and to like all of him at once: even books, which I recognise as overall rather poor, I devoured because they were aspects of his personality. Allott is in fact in one way right. Liking Williams can be very much like knowing a person, having memories of a person: and one can believe, rightly or wrongly, that one intuits things said which have importance and wisdom even when one knows that they are apparent only when you know him as a whole person - when some rather sudden and single contract of the imagination has been made. But the contract can be made through the writings. Allott is right in diagnosing the pattern of liking Williams - it is like knowing a person. He is wrong in supposing one could only acquire that pattern by personal acquaintance. This says something about Williams' writings which, again, I shall defer considering.

The second misleading description of the appeal of Charles Williams is that offered by Dr Leavis in The Common Pursuit, which can easily be reversed. Dr Leavis makes his own oblique and paranoiac version of Allott's diagnosis, describing Williams' influence as "a subject worth attention from the inquirer into 'sociology of contemporary literature'", and comparing it to that of Robert Bridges. This is Dr Leavis' way of stating that Williams had personal friends in Oxford and London who, merely because of personal acquaintance would use positions of academic power to impose "his verse-constructions" - Dr Leavis' words - on students. Perhaps too Dr Leavis implies that people like Williams because they are Christians and like overtly Christian literature. It would be easy to reverse this and say that Dr Leavis is suspicious of doctrinally committed Christianity and particularly of the more Catholic kinds, and therefore has an unfair drag of prejudice distorting his reading of Williams. And it does seem likely that Dr Leavis' suspicion of Williams does overlap with his suspicion of Eliot's Four Quartets - not perhaps because of what they choose to believe, as Donald Davie wittily comments of other opponents of Eliot so much as because of "what they choose to disbelieve - the sectarian alternatives to Christianity such as are in our enlightened age so abundantly on offer ... What outrages him is not their credulity but their scepticism".

However it is again plain enough that this will not do empirically. Good Christians, reading Christians, Catholic Christians do not necessarily have a special liking for Williams: those who like Williams are not at all necessarily Christians. Again something can be salvaged from Dr Leavis' criticism. There is little doubt that no-one is likely to be able to read Williams who has not some kind of religious feeling: not that Williams' writing is religion without literature, but that what he is saying needs some religious capacity to be understood. (The examples I gave of his uniqueness at the beginning, The Place of the Lion, Descent into Hell and The Descent of the Dove, would suggest that).

Leavis observes that "Williams' preoccupation with the horror of evil is evidence of an arrest at the schoolboy (and -girl) stage rather than that of spiritual maturity" and that his dealings in "myth, mystery, the occult and the supernatural belong essentially to the ethos of the thriller. To pass off his writings as spiritually edifying is to promote the opposite of spiritual health". This is too like Eliot's remark that Williams was concerned not merely with the conflict between good and bad men, but with that between Good and Evil, too close to the kind of religiousness which anyone would find in Williams, to be dismissed out of hand. Had Williams - Eliot goes on - "himself not always seen Evil, unerringly, as the contrast to Good - had he understood Evil, so far as it can be understood, without knowing the Good - there are passages in (All Hallows' Eve), and in other books (notably Descent into Hell) which would only be outrageous and foul". I think Eliot's way of putting it is much better than Leavis', and I think the bulk of

Leavis' accusation is due to a lack of moral perception in Leavis: but not all. Perception of evil over and above perception of bad is a dangerous thing, and I think perhaps Williams did quite often cross the borderline into an interest in evil and a reaction which was tainted. You remember that Dante portrays himself as having to be rebuked by Virgil in the lower reaches of Hell for yielding to just that temptation. I doubt if any human being is immune to it, and I think there is at any rate a case for those who say one should not contemplate evil, or if at all, then rarely. One of the soundest proverbs is that you can't touch pitch without being defiled.

This then is another point for later consideration. I will now leave my first two objectors, Allott and Leavis, who concur in finding so little of poetic value in Williams that they believe only personal acquaintance could blind Eliot, Auden, Anne Ridler, C.S.Lewis etc. etc. to his worthlessness. But I would note that both Allott and Leavis are sensitive listeners to poetry and literature. There is something to be riddled out here: I suspect it is simply that Williams belongs rather emphatically to a class of poets that both of them dislike. In Leavis' case, that should not worry us too much, since the class includes Milton: but we should not ignore it, because it probably does suggest something true about what Williams' work is like. I would next note that in a way Allott and Leavis could not be further from the truth. I think that more harm has been done to Williams' reputation by the advocacy of two of his personal friends than by any attack. I mean here Dorothy Sayers and, alas C.S.Lewis. I spoke earlier of my own first and abortive attempt to read Taliessin through Logres. I used Lewis' commentary, and I am sure it did not help. In spite of Lewis' marvellous gift for persuading one to read any poet whom he likes, this is no advantage when he distorts the meaning and tone as much as he does Williams's. It is not only that their minds were unlike, although both enjoyed the same things: it is far worse, that one element of Lewis' capacity - his immense forensic turn, his Irish love of argument, his polemic quality - resembles Williams' commitment and clarity just sufficiently to enable one to confuse the two. And in the confusion, it is the clearer, simpler quality that dominates one's impressions. Some examples. First, one I am conceited about, because later when I knew Williams better I was re-reading Lewis's That Hideous Strength: I came on the passage "something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven't you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Mordred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell: a nation of poets, a nation of shopkeepers, the home of Sidney - and of Cecil Rhodes." It is a passage which formerly I had admired very much: now somewhat purged by Williams, I recognised something wrong, or at any rate something Williams would never have said. Picture my delight, when later again I came across this passage in Williams' Queen Elizabeth: "Money (Elizabeth) treated as a series of events, and no dogma could persuade her to loosen those events. There is in this a peculiar and satisfying likeness between her and that greater spirit, which was to be the chief glory of her reign; nor did the mind of Shakespeare, when it ceased from Othello, forget to use reasonable means to recover his proper dues from his debtor at Stratford. The English, a nation of shopkeepers, are a nation of poets, of whom a number of the best come literally out of shops. They, like the angel of the Apocalypse, set one foot on the known and one on the unknown; it is their balance, and Elizabeth and Shakespeare in their different ways are two of those who kept it." You see the difference: Lewis's genius for clarity, classification, dichotomy, Williams's for complexity, ambiguity, balance. Both in different senses do justice: but Lewis's justice weighs into good and evil, Williams's stands on both sides. If poets and shopkeepers are a pair, Lewis is apt to slide into saying (I do not suppose he would necessarily have thought on reflection) that one is noble, the other base, one bad, one good. Williams, on the contrary, is temperamentally incapable of saying yes without simultaneously saying No: you remember that his first act in courting his wife was to give her a set of sonnets on Renunciation. Both Lewis and Williams polarise, or at least separate a confused matter into two or more sharply distinguished peaks. (You may again remember how delighted Williams was with the

Report on Doctrine in the Church of England because it specified three clearly differentiated Eucharistic doctrines, of the Real Presence, Virtualism and Receptionism tenable within the Church). But Lewis will oppose his peaks simply, Williams will point out how they are interconnected, respond, coinhere. Even when he claims not to, Lewis tends always to make one peak good, the other bad (consider his treatment of what he calls Drab and Golden literature in his History of Sixteenth Century Literature). Even, on the other hand, when Williams does say which alternative must in the end be preferred, he does it reluctantly at the end of a striving and with a backward glance (consider him on the relations of scepticism and belief, the coinherence of the two and the final necessity to prefer belief à propos of Montaigne and Pascal in The Descent of the Dove).

The same differences appear in Lewis's commentary on the Arthurian poems. Lewis defines Byzantium as "Order, envisaged not as restraint nor even as a convenience, but as a beauty and splendour." Williams' notes say something more elusive: "Byzantium is rather the whole concentration of body and mind than any special member. (The Lady Julian I found last night says that the City is built at the meeting place of substance and sensuality.)"

There is nothing actually inconsistent, except that one suspects that Lewis is making Byzantium one side of a division - Order as opposed to what is ordered, or as opposed to disorder - where Williams is certainly insisting on some kind of coinherence. For Williams the City, Byzantium I take it, is built at the meeting-place of substance and sensuality: Lewis seems to be drifting towards identifying Byzantium with substance.

This is clearer when we find Lewis professedly abridging Williams. Lewis had lost Williams' note from which he had abridged and wrote in Arthurian Torso that Broceliande is "a place of making, home of Nimue. From it the huge shapes emerge, the whole matter of the form at Byzantium - and all this is felt in the beloved." Williams' own note read: "Nimue is almost the same state represented by the Emperor's Court, but more vast, dim and aboriginal. The huge shapes emerge from Broceliande, and the whole matter of the Empire, and all this is felt in the beloved."

For Lewis, Byzantium is form in the Aristotelian Categories, Broceliande matter. Williams means something definitely, though perhaps subtly different: Nimue and the Emperor's court are almost the same - dare I apply the difference to their countries, Broceliande and Byzantium? - but one is more vast, dim and aboriginal. They balance and interweave: the difference is like that of form and matter, but not I think nearly so opposed, more like conscious and unconscious for a psychologist who finds the one implicit in the other, or like the same person waking and dreaming. How different Williams and Lewis are depends on what Williams meant by matter. I do not think he meant the thing, or aspect of anything which longs to receive form and matter in the Aristotelean senses. Rather, I think he meant in the sense in which we and he talk of the Matter of Britain, the vast mass of story already formed, waiting to receive a special author's sense and direction. Even that is slightly to distort Williams.

My third example is the oddest. Lewis leaves one with the impression that the poem Taliessin on the death of Virgil is about "the problem of the virtuous pagan." He omits, what Williams' own note to him explicitly said, that the poem is not necessarily about the salvation of pagans, but about anyone's salvation. Is Lewis here simply accommodating Williams to simple orthodoxy? I think rather that he is taking a simple concrete instance of an elusive more general notion. Following his dichotomous instincts, he takes the doctrine of salvation by substitution, and, because the poem takes as an instance the pagan Virgil, assumes it to apply

to the conspicuous example of the virtuous pagan, and not to the Christian, forgetting Williams' own note.

I may be unfair in citing Dorothy Sayers along with Lewis, but I have in mind her commentary on the Divine Comedy, an attempt to systematise the more intuitive commentary of The Figure of Beatrice. I have not checked a vague impression supported by the explicit testimony of the scholar and friend of both Williams and Dorothy Sayers, Colin Hardie. The case of Dorothy Sayers and C.S. Lewis is largely a matter of misunderstanding by mistaken systematisation, and it may not be thought relevant as an objection to Williams. I cite it partly because I am interested in all that deters people from reading Williams, and I am sure this mistaken lumping of him with a special and rather polemic group of people, the Inklings, is sometimes such a deterrent. But this has not affected the reputation of other members of the group, Owen Barfield and J.R.R. Tolkien for example, even those who dislike both Lewis and Tolkien have actively tried to make it do so. Nor indeed has it deterred people from enjoying the non-polemic works of Lewis and Sayers themselves. If it has affected Williams, then, for good perhaps as well as for ill, it must be because he is prone to being misconstrued.

Partly this proneness to misconstruction is entailed by the very nature of his virtue - subtlety, balance and complexity are prone to be affected by their very opposite, our urge to make them clear to ourselves, and the answer is to train our perceptions better. But Williams is at times so obscure as to ask for it. And much more importantly, I think there is within his own work an urge, a *nisus* towards pattern making of whose proper limits I do not think he was himself aware. He was aware of course that that was his failing. Anne Ridler quotes his autocriticism to the effect that if he could give his young self advice he would say: "Patterns are baleful things ...".

And now after Allott and Leavis, I would mention two adverse critics who are very different in that they respond to Williams' genius, and assert it explicitly, but believe that he spoilt it by some such urge to patterning. Those are Robert Conquest and David Jones.

Robert Conquest is a somewhat cranky, extreme liberal who reacts against totalitarianism very violently wherever he suspects it. He regards Williams as a rare, if not unique, case of "a genuine writer who has fully accepted a closed monopolistic system of ideas and feelings, and what is more, puts it forth-rightly with its libidinal component scarcely disguised". He gives as evidence:

- a. the complete acceptance of a closed system of ideas,
- b. the manipulation of this system as the only intellectual exercise,
- c. the treatment of the outsider with a special sort of irritated contempt which conceals, or sometimes betrays, other emotions,
- d. the subordination of all ordinarily autonomous spheres of thought and feeling to the a priori: a lack of humility in the presence of the empirical.

Now a lot of Conquest's elaboration of this is exaggerated or even silly. Some of it is due to his treating Williams and Lewis together: although he frequently notes that Lewis is much cruder than Williams, he still takes much too far a Lewis' eye view of Williams, such as I have sketched. At times, Conquest is plain wrong. A man is pretty far gone in opposition to order who finds, as Conquest does, the vision of the policeman as the Emperor of the Trumps totalitarian in the political sense, and who thinks it obvious that his readers will prefer the 'pirate chaos' of Mount Badon to Byzantium. But he is wrong, one should note, in the mood that is now dominant: the mood, to take an instance of something now being rebelled against, of the Rousseauist

teachers who cause the son of a friend of mine to suffer from tension headaches, because his class is violently competitive and intolerably noisy - direction being abhorrent.

I think in fact criteria (a), (b) and (c) largely wrong of Williams. But I suspect some justice in the accusations of too much pattern: of a libidinal component in the acceptance of that pattern: and of something missing in the relation of a priori to empirical. To those I shall recur.

My fourth and last adverse critic of Williams is also a great admirer of his, and moreover a rather similar poet who has suffered a rather similar neglect, from which however he seems to be emerging much the sooner. This is David Jones. He wonders whether the poetry is not lacking in something difficult to express "something wholly to do with time - with now-ness. Somehow, somewhere, between content and form, concept and image, sign and what is signified, a sense of the contemporary escapes, or rather appears to me to escape. I know it is there in idea; I don't doubt but what the characters and situations were linked up in Williams's mind with now: but I do not often feel this now-ness in the words and images, or rather I feel it does not inform and pervade the poems as a whole ... What the artist lifts up must have a kind of transubstantiated actual-ness. Our images, not only our ideas, must be valid now: ... of now, yet reaching back to 'the foundation of the city' and therefore valid for the future."

He gives two examples of now-ness: first the phrase just quoted, the Roman way of reckoning time "from the foundation of the city", "from then till now". Better, however, he says, is a sentence which includes also "how then became now" and "the change of people on an unchanged site: "the sentence is James Joyce's 'Northmen's thing made southfolk's place.'" That is, the Georgian assembly rooms in Dublin in Suffolk Place are made where the Norsemen made their assembly, their "thing". Joyce has done two things with Suffolk Place: he has metamorphosed it in sense and appearance, but also he has found it. He has married "a concept and universality" to "the actual, the intimate and the 'now'".

This of David Jones is tentative, but carefully considered. Since it occurs in a review of Arthurian Torso, it may have been put into his mind, at least part of it may have been, by a qualification from C.S. Lewis's part of the book. Charles Williams' poetic world, says Lewis, "is certainly not a world I feel at home in, any more than I feel at home in the worlds of Dante and Milton. It strikes me as a perilous world full of ecstasies and terrors, full of things that gleam and dart, lacking in quiet, empty spaces. Amid the 'surge and thunder' of the Odyssey you can get a snug fireside night in Eumaeus's hut. There is no snugness in Williams's Arthuriad, just as there is none in the Paradiso. What quiet there is is only specious: the roses are always trembling, Broceliande astir, planets and emperors at work. Can we then condemn it, as Raleigh came near to condemning Paradise Lost because it was insufficiently homely? Not, I think, unless we know that comfort and heartsease are characters so deeply rooted in the real universe that any poetic world which omits them is a distortion"

Now, of course, what Lewis is saying is quite distinct from what Jones

is saying. Yet, allowing for the fact that "now-ness" is not something Lewis would be interested in as any kind of privileging the present over other moments of history, may not both comments originate in a similar response? Jones finds that somewhere between content and form, concept and image there is missing "the actual, the intimate and the 'now'". Lewis does not "feel at home in the world of Taliessin, it has no "quiet, empty spaces". Both feel that very subtly some mark has been missed which has to do with what is called "relevance" - not of concept, Jones insists, but in expression. Lewis associates it with what, apparently, he misses in Dante and Milton. That suggests to me that whatever is missing is precisely what Leavis, who notoriously despises Milton, and perhaps Allott, think is so essential to poetry that they deny that Williams wrote poetry. And Conquest among other things accuses Williams of "a lack of humility in the presense of the empirical".

It is noteworthy that among his positive strangenesses, Williams was perfectly at home in the worlds of Dante and Milton. And perhaps Jones would find what he is looking for in Williams's lovely comment on the last lines of Paradise Lost:

"They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow
Through Eden took their solitary way.

There are no linked lovers in our streets who are not more beautiful and more unfortunate because of those last lines; no reunion, of such a kind, which is not more sad and more full of hope. And then it is said that Milton is inhuman. The whole of our visibility, metaphysical, psychological, actual, has been increased by him."

I love that: yet ... I don't know. Even there, aren't those "linked lovers" a little high-falutin'? Has Williams perhaps raised them a little too far into a dream language? I ask because the parallel sentence - from an unpublished letter - which I had in mind to illustrate his at-homeness in Dante has the right touch, the touch Jones is looking for, both in concept and expression:

"If it is not true of a sunblistered girl at a Brighton factory dance, it is probably not true of Beatrice."

But it so happens that the "relevant" phrase about the sub-blistered girl is quoted by Williams from a review written by his correspondent, Hugo Dyson. The concept, no doubt, is Williams's: the expression still Dyson's.

But I am now slipping into the second part of my paper, when I try to formulate my own qualifications about Williams.

(Continued in next Newsletter)

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PROFESSOR FERNANDO DE MELLO MOSER

Members will be sad to hear of the untimely death of Professor Fernando de
Mello Moser. He was a good friend to the Society attending our meetings
when his visits to London permitted and speaking at our day conference last
September. His depth of knowledge and understanding, and his charm of
character will be missed. For those who did not see it, The Times printed
this obituary of him on Saturday 5 May 1984: "The death of Professor Fern-
ando de Mello Moser on April 23 at the age of 56 is a sad loss for **Anglo-**
Portuguese cultural relations. Born in Oporto in 1927, he came to academic
life comparatively late, becoming Professor of English Literature at the
University of Lisbon after gaining his doctorate in 1970. He became the
President of the Institute for Portuguese Language and Culture in 1981.
Under his direction the Institute strengthened and developed the sponsorship
of Portuguese studies in the United Kingdom, a policy which has made it
possible to maintain eighteen 'leitores' at British universities. A Catholic
humanist, he was the author of studies on Sir Thomas More, Shakespeare, Milton
and medieval English drama, which provide many original insights on themes
not frequently handled by English scholars. His book on Charles Williams
must rank as one of the most important studies of that writer. He was
appointed an honorary OBE in 1983."

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