

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 45, SPRING 1987

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

2 May 1987: The Society will hold its AGM and have a Day Conference. The AGM will start at 11 am (see enclosed Agenda); following the official business, at about 11.30, John Heath-Stubbs will speak on 'The Figure of Cressida' followed by discussion. We will break for lunch at about 1pm (bring your own sandwiches - coffee and tea provided) after which we will read A Myth of Shakespeare - please bring a copy if you have one. We expect to finish by about 4.15 with a cup to tea.

3 October 1987: Dr Gisbert Kranz will speak on the subject 'Priests in CW's novels'. This meeting will start at 2.30pm.

Both these meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday, 31 May 1987: We will finish reading Arthurian Torso, and start the biography Rochester. We meet at 1pm - please bring sandwiches. For details of venue, please contact Richard Wallis (tel. 221 0057).

OXFORD READING GROUP

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

CAMBRIDGE READING GROUP

For information please contact Geraldine and Richard Pinch, 5 Oxford Road, Cambridge CB4 3PH, telephone Cambridge 311465.

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

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

NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to Mrs Eileen Mable, 28 Wroxham Way, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 4PP.

SUPPLEMENT

There is no Supplement with this Newsletter.

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At the Society's meeting on 21 February 1987, Mrs Joan Northam spoke on 'The Division of Knowledge'. We are very pleased to be able to reproduce her talk in this Newsletter.

"Let me begin by expressing my thanks to your Committee for their kind invitation to me to speak to you today. It is a great pleasure to be here, as I have been a member of the Charles Williams Society for two years now, and very much enjoy attending the meetings and receiving the Newsletter.

It has been good to know that others share what must be reckoned a minority interest, and to hear from different speakers their own particular contribution to the understanding, interpretation and appreciation of Williams and his writings.

Since accepting the invitation, the division of knowledge on which I have elected to speak has become for me a most uncomfortable and disconcerting reality at times. In imagination, I have known this moment sometimes as terror, sometimes as delight, as I have alternated between wondering how I could ever have been foolhardy enough to agree to speak and at other times elated at the prospect!

What, then, is this 'division' of knowledge? How does Williams describe it? and why should I choose to speak about it? Essentially, it is a recognition of the flawed nature of human judgement, which began with the Fall and has spread out from there into all areas of life. From that initial division, confusion, misunderstanding and error arise from the deeply rooted insistence on seeing and knowing apart from the Unity in which we live and move and have our being. As a result, we limit truth to what we personally and individually see and experience, refusing to see that all things are 'under the Mercy'. I chose the subject because the more I read Williams and thought about the idea, the more areas of life were, it seemed to me, illuminated by this description of our condition.

C.W.'s account of it is to be found in the chapter entitled 'The Myth of the Alteration of Knowledge', in He Came Down From Heaven. Here, he describes in other, more abstract and less emotive terms than those we are familiar with from the book of Genesis, what happened to the relationship between God and Man in Eden. Of their desire to know 'what the good would be like if a contradiction were introduced into it,' he writes:

'The Adam were permitted to achieve this knowledge, if they wished: they did so wish. They knew good: they wished to know good and evil. Since there was not - since there never has been and never will be - anything else than the good to know, they knew good as antagonism. All difference consists in the mode of knowledge. They had what they wanted. That they did not like it when they got it does not alter the fact that they certainly got it.'

The possibility existed for the Adam to 'know' after another fashion. They were permitted to choose. They chose. I hope to share with you not only some of the instances where the division of knowledge is dealt with in C.W.'s writings, but also some of the situations where it operates in our own experience.

If I suggest that the great advantage of this particular way of describing the Fall is that it does away with the moral overtones, I risk being misunderstood. Perhaps 'pseudo-moral' would be more accurate. There can be few attitudes more fatal to genuine morality than too self-conscious an insistence on it, as C.S. Lewis points out in That Hideous Strength when he writes of Mark Studdock:

'He was not thinking in moral terms at all: or else (what is much the same thing) he was having his first deeply moral experience.'
(THS p.184).

In the Genesis myth, the newly-awakened self-consciousness of the Adam produces its now familiar effects. Taxed with what they have done, both parties seek a scapegoat. Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. In C.W.'s account,

there is no opportunity for such buck-passing. He apportions no blame, but when the situation is outlined, responsibility is evident. Truth - and consequences.

In this context, it is interesting to note C.W.'s comment on the role of the serpent and his minions:

'... long before Milton, the prayers of Christendom implore aid against the malignity of fallen spirits. The popularity of the legend has perhaps been assisted by the excuse it has seemed to offer for mankind, by the pseudo-answer it has appeared to offer to the difficulty of the philosophical imagination concerning a revolt in the good against the good, and by its provision of a figure or figures against whom men can, on the highest principles, launch their capacities of indignant hate and romantic fear. The devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence; he has, on occasion, been encouraged to reintroduce into Christian emotions the dualism which the Christian intellect has denied, and we have relieved our own sense of moral submission by contemplating, even disapprovingly, something which was neither moral nor submissive. ... While (the devil) exists, there is always something to which we can be superior.'

(HCDFH p. 15)

Now there are those who are made deeply uneasy by the words 'The devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence'; for they see in them an indication that Williams fails to take evil seriously. Their worst fears are - as they think - confirmed when they recall his affirmation that 'there never has been and never will be - anything else than the good to know ...'.

Here is one result of a divided knowledge of C.W.'s writings! To take these statements as the sum total of what he has to say of good and evil results in a complete misrepresentation and misunderstanding of his thought. Others, as aware as Williams of the fearful destructive power of evil have made remarkably similar observations regarding its lack of substance. Is it Martin Luther who somewhere defines sin as 'a shadow that God despises'? And doesn't C.S. Lewis also delightfully note that 'the whole of hell could be swallowed by a butterfly'?

Though an admirer of Williams, Leanne Payne in her book The Holy Spirit in the Works of C.S. Lewis is so dismayed by what she terms his 'synthesising of opposites' that she devotes almost an entire chapter to discussing the matter. She cannot like the thought that all things coinhere in the Omnipotence, for she sees in that a refusal to acknowledge evil as evil, and objects: 'Although his motives were of the best, the solution he came to gives rise to a figure of Love and of the Holy Spirit that contains darkness in it'. She makes no mention of the mysterious proclamation of the Unity in Isaiah 45: 'I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.'

If all things are, indeed, 'under the Mercy', then even the very worst of events is transformed by that fact. ('Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.') The division of knowledge has far-reaching consequences, for we do not continually bear the principle in mind. Although at our end of it, the rope appears a myriad separate strands, any one of which may hang a man - or save him - at the other, the strands unite to form a stout cable, securely held by That Which was before all things, by and in Which all things hold together. (Col. 1:17)

On C.W.'s belief that those who affirm all images will be led into the knowledge of love, she comments: 'What seems to be missing from this view is the recognition that by itself the imagination can lead into the perverse and destructive, as well as into the knowledge of love'. Well, certainly so, as Williams is well aware.

Everything hinges - personal responsibility, personal choice again - on what we are really looking for. It is admittedly perilous to mistake the creature for the Creator: we are warned against the folly of falling down to the stock of a tree. It is always as well to bear in mind the wisdom: 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou.' Further evidence of the fragmentary nature of our knowledge and therefore understanding is to be found in the fact that Leanne Payne can suspect Williams of underestimating the power of evil when she has not only read Descent into Hell with its memorable account of Wentworth's personal descent, but acknowledges its profundity of insight in a footnote:

'The character of Wentworth in Williams's Descent into Hell is an incredible artistic revelation of an unchanging image that bears no more becoming, and therefore descends into the hell of self. Many persons ... after reading Descent into Hell cry out that they are such a one. Their lives change after such a revelation.' (RP p.197)

We are too easily persuaded to believe that certain convictions cannot logically co-exist with others. Christians, we think, cannot wish to be materially prosperous, a concern for the poor is incompatible with right-wing politics, true worship is a solemn affair - one cannot be seriously joyful! These propositions require close critical examination, something which often upsets comfortable preconceptions.

Such hard and fast - and frequently erroneous - conclusions can be drawn only when leaving out of account altogether factors which have an important bearing on the situation. Knowing 'in part' enables Leanne Payne to accuse Williams of 'synthesising' God and the devil, and to forget the passionate conviction with which he writes of the consequences of chosen evil, showing it for what it is, not attempting to minimise its seriousness. Certain that C.W.'s thinking has led him to a version of the Holy Spirit 'not truly the Comforter', she quotes the following passage by way of illustration:

'There are those who find it easy to look forward to immortality and those who do not. I admit that, for myself, I do not. It is true that the gradual stupefaction of the faculties which normally overcomes a man as he grows older seems to make - if not the idea of immortality more attractive - at least the idea of annihilation less so ... Whatever else is true, the idea of annihilation is more repellent. But I cannot say I find the idea of immortality, even of a joyous immortality, much more attractive. I admit, of course, that this is a failure of intelligence; if joy is joy, an infinite joy cannot be undesirable. The mere fact that our experience on this earth makes it difficult for us to apprehend a good without a catch in it somewhere is, by definition, irrelevant. It may, however, make the folly more excusable.'

Leanne Payne comments: '... it seems to me that Williams has so firmly convinced himself of the coinherence of good and evil that he is robbed of joy and the hope of immortality that goes with it.'

Surely not! To offer the quoted passage as the sum total of C.W.'s thoughts on the subject is again to misrepresent him. Of his lack of enthusiasm for the idea of immortality, he readily concedes 'a failure of intelligence'. He's only human! Here he expresses an unease which mortals naturally feel in contemplating the Immortal. Eternal light reminds us that our time is limited. Sinners aware of their condition are inclined to be less than entirely at home in the presence of the Holy. It is a common experience: 'Woe is me, for I am undone...' says Isaiah in the temple in the year that King Uzziah died. 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man ...' Simon Peter entreates in the boat on the lake of Gennesaret. But fear and a desire to escape do not constitute a comprehensive account of their response. Enabled by the Presence to know all things in the Presence, Isaiah exclaims: 'Here am I, send me', and Peter in a later burst of illumination, full of a new kind of knowledge cries out: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!'

Williams, too, describing in The Place of the Lion the overwhelming nature of this other mode of knowing writes of Mr Tighe's response to the vision of the archetypal butterfly:

'O glory, glory,' Mr Tighe said. 'O glory everlasting!' Anthony said nothing; he couldn't begin to think of anything to say. Mr Tighe, apparently collecting himself, went an unconscious pace or two on, and stopped. 'O that I should see it!' he said again. 'O glory be to it!' He wiped away his tears with his knuckles, and looked back at the garden. 'O the blessed sight,' he went on. 'And I saw it. O what have I done to deserve it?'

Like Simeon in the Temple, and John Struther in Descent into Hell his eyes had seen salvation and he, too, could say: 'Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.' Simeon knew then by experience the fulfillment of that known formerly by intelligence: that he should 'see the Lord's Christ'. Mr Tighe, who in his collected specimens glimpsed by intelligence the promise of the beatific vision, now experienced the Vision Itself. For both, the occasion is a re-union of divided knowledge. 'All difference consists in the mode of knowledge.' Simeon beheld the Incarnate Deity - the embodiment of that reunion in human flesh. Mr Tighe adored the Butterfly to end - as It had begun - all butterflies - and their collecting! What more could the world offer? In Mr Tighe's enraptured response to the Original Butterfly, we are shown new light on the words in St Mark: 'Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.' They are so familiar that perhaps the possibilities of their meeting have become obscured. Martyrdom defines them too narrowly. Submission and subservience, sacrifice and self-denial emphasize their negative aspects, focussing attention on self to the neglect of the brightness of the Glory. Mr Tighe's experience is that of being caught up in something infinitely bigger than himself, of being taken out of himself altogether - literally, as it later transpires.

Another poet with a vision - Charles Wesley - has written lines which march miraculously in harmony with Mr Tighe's experience:

Then let me, on the mount^{ain} top
Behold Thy open face
When faith in sight is swallowed up
And prayer in endless praise (MHB 736)

Faith and sight - two 'modes of knowledge'.

Williams has a genius for using the familiar phrase to reveal some previously unremarked meaning. When Anthony Durrant asks Mr Tighe for an explanation of the vision of the Butterfly, Mr Tighe responds unhelpfully: 'I couldn't tell you anything you don't know.' It is, when you come to think of it, merely true. It is how things are. There is a suggestion of it in the Lord's reply to Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM' - and His instruction to Moses to tell his people: 'I AM hath sent me to you'. It will mean nothing - or it will mean everything.

Receiving intelligence is perhaps only possible when the truth of it is in some sense already known. I take this to be the reason why none of my teachers ever succeeded in making sense of mathematics for me. It must be - so I tell myself - that I lack the knowledge which would enable me to receive the intelligence. Doubtless, some of my teachers would reverse that order! The need for some kind of 'intelligence' knowledge is paramount. Without it, an explanation is a foreign language. Perhaps this is why our Lord so emphasised the importance of belief to those enquiring what they must do to work the works of God: 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' And the further promise: '... all things are possible to him that believeth.' (Mk, 9:23) We cannot believe what we do not know. Wesley writes of the power of this kind of knowing in the lines:

In Jesus I believe and shall
Believe myself to Him (MEB 557)

Williams echoes the thought: 'Will is rather a thing we may choose to become than a thing we already possess - except so far as we can a little choose to choose, a little will to will.' (HCDFH p.19) In Wesley's lines, head knowledge is to be exercised until it becomes heart knowledge. 'Preach faith until you have it', he was once advised, 'and then, because you have it, you will preach faith'. And so it proved.

When Leanne Payne comments that the story of C.W.'s life seems to her to be 'the story of his untiring genius at work to cause "alien and oposite experiences to coinhere"', one is left with the impression that he laboured to bring about something which was not so. But although he certainly laboured to express the Truth in his life as in his writings, the Truth expressed is a discovery of what is already given, not an imagination or invention of his own. He writes of that discovery - of citizenship of the City - so that others may share it, if they will. He describes reality as we are invited - by the Permission - to choose to know it.

He writes, of course, in his own inimitable way. No one else expresses the Truth quite as he does. For some, this is a blessing, for they cannot understand him at all. I confess to having felt like that about his poetry, until our last meeting in November when we read together some of his poems and I was delighted to find that I understood something at least of what he says in them. Of particular interest, in light of today's theme, was the poem entitled 'the Two Domes' from Windows of Night:

'What are those domes? you asked in Clerkenwell:
And I: One is the Old Bailey and one St. Paul's,
Sitting up there like the broken halves of the shell
Of the egg of life, whose overspilt yolk we are.'

Division again - Justice or Mercy, Law or Gospel. Both stemming from the same Source, both essential, neither to be understood or known apart from the other, yet in our experience known so often only in separation.

It is interesting to read C.W.'s comments on St Paul's writing from The Descent of the Dove, for the words seem as fitting a description of C.W.'s own work as of St Paul's letters:

'In order to understand and explain, the convert produced practically a new vocabulary. To call him a poet would be perhaps improper (besides ignoring the minor but important fact that he wrote in prose). But he used words as poets do: he regenerated them.'

The regeneration of language which both men accomplish superbly is also the occasion for criticism of their style by those who find the writing exaggerated, over-ornate. Each writer seems to require of words something of which words are not - or ought not to be - capable.

The pattern of divided knowledge can be traced in criticisms of C.W.'s writings. C.S. Lewis, himself a model of clarity, 'pitched into' Williams for all he was worth for his 'obscurity'. Some think he writes 'purple prose', others that he writes a kind of shorthand. For some his style is too highly coloured, and some can't make head or tail of him! One couple to whom, with greater enthusiasm than judgement, I lent War in Heaven, returned it half-read with barely suppressed shudders, murmuring misgivings over his - and probably my! - preoccupation with the occult. At our meeting in February 1986, Dr Rowan Williams described certain excerpts from The Descent of the Dove as 'purple passages' and some of C.W.'s writings as self-indulgent'. Charles Williams, interestingly enough, makes a similar observation of St Paul: 'There must have been many of the churches he founded who were so illiterate as not to have heard of his best purple passages.' It seems Williams is in good company! And purple is, of course, a royal colour. Hugo Dyson's exclamation: 'Clotted glory from Charles!' will find an echo in many of C.W.'s readers. There is certainly lots of glory. Sometimes he seems almost too highly coloured - and charged! - for us to swallow. Eternity and eternal truths are so richly described, almost laid on with a trowel, that the effect can be akin to being faced with a rich and creamy dessert after a full and satisfying first course. Like the man who, having begged God for a revelation, got what he asked for, one wants to cry: 'O enough! enough! I can't bear any more!' There is just so much of the beatific vision mortal man can bear, and live, even when despite its brilliance, it is a veiled splendour.

Charles Wesley, writing with similar vigour and enthusiasm of the same reality reminds us that there is necessarily a veil between us - for only so can we bear the brightness of the Glory:

insight, the Eastern tradition more generally bearing in mind the essential unity - or interrelatedness - of matter and spirit. Eastern mystical writings are therefore of more immediate use to Capra in pursuit of his thesis. However, for one whose background is that of western Christianity, and who is also an appreciative reader of C.W., reading Capra has taken on additional significance as the strands of Eastern mystical thought and the physicist's understanding of the behaviour of matter are woven together by the comfortingly familiar particulars of Christian truth in scripture and experience. I shall return to Capra briefly in a few moments, with a quotation which might just whet your appetite, if you haven't come across him before.

The results of seeing facts in isolation from each other are high-lighted in these words from The Descent of the Dove, referring to the rise of the Gnostic heresy in the Church:

'See, understand, enjoy,' said the Gnostic; 'Repent, believe, love,' said the Church, 'and if you see anything by the way, say so.'

The Gnostic emphasises knowing by experience, the Church knowing by belief. Experience, and revel in it, say the Gnostics. Obey the command to believe and then you may experience, says the Church. Insisting on the primacy of obedience, it adds: 'and if you see anything by the way, say so.' That is an encouragement, but it is essentially secondary ... the obedience comes first. But there has sometimes been, in the Church, so weighty a stress on obedience and so little encouragement either to speak of or to expect any experience that the temptation to give up and try something less demanding and more fun has sometimes been very great. A temptation, nonetheless. Obedience matters. But even obedience is not an end in itself, and we are assured on very good Authority that if we believe, we shall see. Williams writes powerfully of the crucial personal choice to be made, in terms of affirmation or denial of self. Other descriptions of it are possible. It is an embracing of relationship - or its refusal. It is the acknowledgement of the inter-connections of the Web of Exchange and one's own place in it, an obedience to the laws of the City - or their denial. It is a recognition that self alone is extinction - what Malcolm Muggeridge somewhere terms 'the tiny dark dungeon of the ego' - and that abundant life is to be found only in unity.

Pauline Anstruther discovers the reality by choosing to accept Stanhope's offer of help. She is terrified by her personally divided knowledge, but unlike Simon the Clerk, she chooses to know that she must come to terms with herself if she is, finally, to know as she is known. Stanhope's offer to bear the burden of her fear sounds to her improbable in the extreme, but she is desperate, and she chooses to venture. Stanhope's assistance frees her to follow necessity. Later, she is afforded opportunity to help another as she has been helped. Here is revealed the coinherence of the generations, for the burden that Pauline now shoulders is the very one which caused her fear! The sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children, but because all times co-exist in the Lord of Time, that fact need no longer be a death sentence. Forgiveness, release, reconciliation are possible throughout all generations. Pauline, freed from ancestral bondage is reunited with her forebears. This is the revelation and discovery of the true freedom of belonging. John Struther dies rejoicing, with a shout of triumph on his lips, and Pauline, his descendant, bearing his fear of the fire, rejoices too that she is playing her destined role in the family story. Time - as C.S. Lewis once wrote - 'works backwards', and that knowledge which was partial is perfected and completed in the Unity. Wentworth, too, chooses how he will know, and his choice, easy at first, becomes narrower, more cramping, less satisfactory to him as the story progresses: an illustration of the deceptively tempting width of the gate and breadth of the way which leads to destruction. Wentworth will have things disposed as he wishes, and any interference with that enthronement of self will be discarded, denied, expunged from his world. Others exist in order to gratify him, and only as they do so. His choice - a series of small decisions - result in his destruction. Even his succubus ceases to please him, for his appetite can only be satisfied by its denial, a paradoxical operation of the City which he has refused to know. The novel is appropriately entitled Descent into Hell.

Lester and Evelyn in All Hallows Eve are further examples of the results which follow from the vital choice. Lester, full of failings and human weaknesses yet has known something - someone - whom in her better moments she has preferred before herself. Not always, and certainly not wholly, but sometimes, at least in part. Richard has been - is still - genuinely important to her. She feels bereft without him, incomplete - not always, but sometimes. Slowly, building on this, she is able to choose a positive approach to Evelyn, whose only interest in Lester is as a means of indulging her desire to complain to someone. Lester, not always willingly, chooses Evelyn's wishes over her own, and begins to learn more of the nature of the City, to discover her place as one of its citizens.

Brought face to face with Betty, Lester confronts her own earlier discourtesy. Like Pauline, she must come to terms with her actions. She can choose to know her unkindness to Betty for what it was, seeing it honestly, naked and ugly and without excuse. ('Not weighing our merits..'). Further she must ask Betty to see it like that too. Every opportunity is afforded her to wriggle out of it, to evade the truth. Betty's natural reluctance to hurt and to be hurt could prove Lester's undoing, but she is determined to know and to be known as she is, however painful and risky that may be. The relationship will only work if each sees the other as she really is, and not as she would like to be. Faced squarely, it is saving knowledge. In the City, to know the truth is to be set free. Evelyn chooses to know - Evelyn. All her difficulties in life, as she wishes to believe, have been caused by others. She gets what she has chosen, only to discover - 'breach to breach, death to death' - that this withdrawal into self is the end of self. Self discovery is possible only in relationship. Evelyn's 'melt-down' is her own judgement on her refusal to coinhere. The Holy Trinity is the paradigm of this knowledge of truth in relationship - the Godhead Himself described as community! The Pattern is set from the Centre.

Sybil in The Greater Trumps beautifully illustrates the principle. Living and moving in the stillness of the Centre, she alone of those watching the little golden figures on the table sees the activity of the Fool. The images dispose themselves - are disposed - in accordance with the movements of that ubiquitous Centre. Aaron and Henry Lee hope for Sybil's help in unLocking the secrets of images and cards, but Sybil is not to be used:

'Really ... I'd rather not - if you don't mind,' Sybil said, apologetic but determined. 'It's - it's so much like making someone tell you a secret.'
'What someone?' Henry said, anger still in his voice, 'I don't mean someone exactly,' Sybil said, 'but things ... the universe, so to speak. If it's gone to all this trouble to keep the next minute quiet, it seems rude to force its confidence. Do forgive me.'

And through the snowstorm's swirling madness, Sybil stands serenely secure, busy with the small, everyday matters of life, her hand offered to others, the hand 'which helped Lothair and comforted Nancy and healed Aaron, which had picked up the kitten and closed the door and controlled the storm...'. Sybil, knowing in and from the Centre considers even such a snowstorm and concludes that it is 'silly to get into a state of crouching hysterics' over it. Such knowledge is high, and brings with it the peace which passes understanding, and the authority to speak in tones that even the winds and the waves obey. Others see only the wild fury of the blizzard - Sybil knows even that controlled. She knows, too, that what we see and how we see it depends very much upon where we choose to stand, and that we cannot demand that others should stand where we do. So while she herself must decline to interfere with the Tarots and the figures, she acknowledges the freedom of others to do what she cannot, and replies to Nancy's uncertain 'Don't you think we ought to?'

'Of course, if you can. It's just - do excuse me - that I can't.'

How many conflicts might be avoided if the display of such courtesy were more general!

But where we stand and how we choose to know depends very much on what we are really looking for. Though we are unfortunately unable to read Lord Arglay's Principles of Organic Law, there are others whose chosen subject has become for them a way of discovery of a unity greater than its own. In The Tao of Physics, Fritjof Capra

describes a moment when, after many years of study, research and experiment, there was revealed to him the unity of matter and spirit. Listen to his account of the experience - you may think it sounds quite familiar:

'Five years ago, I had a beautiful experience which set me on a road that has led to the writing of this book. I was sitting by the ocean one late summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance. Being a physicist, I knew that the sand, rocks, water and air around me were made of vibrating molecules and atoms, and that these consisted of particles which interacted with one another by creating and destroying other particles. I knew also that the Earth's atmosphere was continually bombarded by showers of 'cosmic rays', particles of high energy undergoing multiple collisions as they penetrated the air. All this was familiar to me from my research in high-energy physics, but until that moment I had only experienced it through graphs, diagrams and mathematical theories. As I sat on that beach, my former experiences came to life: I saw cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I saw the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I heard its sound, and at that moment I knew that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers worshipped by the Hindus.'

Williams knows quite well what he means: this, from The Greater Trumps:

'The walls, the stairs, the doors, the ceiling, were all alive. They were formed - all that (Amabel) could see of them through snow and mist - of innumerable shapes, continuously shifting, sliding over and between each other. They were in masses of colour - black mostly, she seemed to see, but with ripples of grey and silver and fiery-red passing over them. Dark pillars of earth stood in the walls, and through them burning swords pierced, and huge old cups of pouring waters were emptied, and grey clubs were beaten. ... there were two shapes before her: one was a strange lady and one was a man, in a great white cloak and golden helmet with a crown round it. As if treading a dance together, the two went forward..' (TGT p.221-2)

The living, changing, moving, growing, kaleidoscope of the Pattern of the Glory is expressed also in C.W.'s description of Anthony Durrant's vision of the pit in the house in The Place of the Lion; and you will each be able to think of other instances where Williams explores as only he can the coming together of that which we define and isolate as matter with that we call spirit, to celebrate in union the Great Dance.

Capra notes the impossibility, since Heisenberg, of maintaining the 'classical ideal of scientific objectivity', explaining that the results obtained from scientific experiments 'will be conditioned by (the scientists') frame of mind ... and it is up to each scientist to decide which path to take..' And to know what he has chosen! I recall the story of the two witnesses to an accident in which a pedestrian was knocked down by a bus painted green on one side and yellow on the other - the colours of a local firm's product for controlling fowl pest! One witness swore that the bus was green, the other, viewing from the opposite side, that it was yellow. Each was correct - as far as he knew.

Remarking in The Forgiveness of Sins the need to recognise the validity of varieties of approach to a subject, Williams refers to his mention in the text of 'that admirable but heretical poet, William Blake' and comments:

'I call Blake heretical for various reasons which cannot here be discussed. But I do so with some hesitation, since the explorations of his work which have been so far made have mostly been in the manner he denounced - by detached intellectual analysis. What might be found could a better method be discovered, I do not think we know.'

Blake himself sums up our narrowness of vision and unimaginative approach to knowledge in the lines:

This life's five windows of the soul
Distorts the Heavens from pole to pole
And leads you to believe a lie
When you see with, not thro' the eye.
(The Everlasting Gospel)

and further:

If the doors of perception were cleansed,
everything would appear as it is, infinite.
'Myth', as Malcolm Muggeridge somewhere observes, 'is often truer than fact'.

I suppose this paper might have been called 'Points of View'! The reserving of judgement on Blake could prove a timely reminder to us in many areas of life today, when we are increasingly prone to take up from one standpoint one aspect of a complex situation and present it as though it represented the whole. It should also warn us that there are more things in heaven and earth than can possibly be discovered and understood using the much vaunted 'scientific' method. When truth is seen in part and mistaken for the whole, it may sometimes resemble error, and it is as well to remember that we experience the Omnipotence as Judgement - an antagonism in the Good - before - under the Mercy - we come to know Him as He is.^v

© Mrs Joan Northam

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OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Chairman: Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS
(tel. 01 221 0057)

Secretary: Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL
(tel. 01 346 6025)

Treasurer: Richard Wallis, address as above.

Membership Secretary: Miss Hilda Pallan, 167 Holly Lodge Mansions, Oakeshott Avenue, Highgate, London N6 6DU (tel. 01 348 3903)

Lending Librarian: Rev. Dr. Brian Horne, 11b Roland Gardens, London SW7 3PE
(tel. 01 373 5579)

Newsletter Editor: Mrs Molly Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London N7 8PD
(tel. 01 607 7919)

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