The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 46, SUMMER 1987

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

3 October 1987: Dr Gisbert Kranz will speak on the subject 'Priests in CW's novels'.

27 February 1988: Mrs Eileen Mable will speak - subject to be announced.

4 June 1988: The Society will have an all-day meeting including the AGM in Pusey House, Oxford. George Sayer will be the speaker.

The first two meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1, starting at 2.30pm.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday August 2 1987: We will continue reading CW's biography Rochester. We will meet in St Matthew's Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, W2 (nearest stations Queensway and Bayswater) at 1pm. Tea and coffee will be provided but please bring sandwiches.

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 Ms Myrtle Kraft, Box H, Portal, Arizona 85632, USA.

THE SOCIETY'S A.G.M. 2 MAY 1987

The Society held its AGM on 2 May 1987 at Liddon House. Reports of their activities during the year were made by the Hon Secretary (reproduced below), Hon Treasurer and Newsletter Editor. The accounts for the year including the Centenary Fund were approved and the existing Council members were all re-elected for a further one year term. Following the AGM, John Heath-Stubbs addressed the meeting (reproduced in this Newsletter) and, following a break for sandwiches, we much enjoyed reading extracts from CW's Myth of Shakespeare under the direction of Ben Robertson.

Report to the AGM by Mrs Gillian Lunn, Hon General Secretary:
"In St Albans there was the Festival Eucharist in the Abbey on May 24, followed by lunch in the Chapter House and the visit to St Albans School. The Public Library showed an exhibition of CW's life and work, which was also shown in the Abbey Theatre foyer during the production there of Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury. A somewhat expanded exhibition, though basically the same, was shown in Islington Public Library a few weeks later and on 12 July, its last day, the commerative plaque on CW's birthplace, nearby, was unveiled by our Chairman. On the 100th anniversary of CW's birth, 20 September, we had the service at the University Church in Oxford. After that a number of members and others visited CW's grave in Holy Cross Churchyard, Oxford, and a wreath was laid thereon by Dr Gisbert Kranz on behalf of the Inklings Gesellschaft. September also saw the opening of the exhibition of CW's life and work

(shown for several weeks) in the Divinity Schools, Oxford. Further afield - there was the publication on September 20 of an article about CW in an Italian newspaper; on 30 October at Wheaton College, Ill., the 12th Annual Marion E Wade Lecture was given by Dr Joe McClatchey, entitled 'CW and the Arthurian Tradition'- to quote from Newsletter 43 - 'the focal point of Wheaton College's celebrations of the 100th Anniversary of Williams' birth'; and early in November the International Charles Williams Symposium was held at Mülheim, West Germany, this was organised by the Inklings Gesellschaft and several of our members attended and contributed.
I might perhaps have mentioned first the Centenary Selection of CW's poems, edited and introduced by Mrs Anne Ridler, which was first made available early in the year. It proved its worth - not, of course, that that was ever for a moment in question! - at our Society's November Liddon House meeting when, for the first time ever, our speaker did not turn up. We had plenty of copies of the Anthology and were able to read and discuss it together. The final event of 1986 was the unveiling by the Mayor of St Albans of the commerative plaque on the site of CW's boyhood home there, followed by a reception in the office of the builders who had put up the plaque.

Almost all the books offered for sale in the last Newsletter were sold straight away; most could have been sold several times over. Such is the demand for CW's books that, sadly, a number of people have to be disappointed; it is particularly hard on overseas members, whose Newsletters take longer to reach them. I would not dream of suggesting that anyone should relinquish a cherished or only copy - but if anyone has spare copies (not of the novels, which are more easily obtained) do please let me know. While on the subject of books: - a new book has been published in the USA, our member Mrs Helen Hobbs recommends it highly and will present a copy to our library. It is Charles Williams by Kathleen Spencer (published 1986, No 25 in the series: Starmont Reader's Guides to Contemporary Science Fiction & Fantasy Authors).

As Secretary of this Society, I was invited to the re-opening of the Oxford pub (the Inklings' meeting-place) The Eagle & Child. I went, and enjoyed it very much. It has been attractively re-furbished, and proper honour is paid to the Inklings, with photos, descriptions and a fine wooden wall-plaque.
Finally, I want to express warm appreciation and gratitude to all those Councillors and members who worked so hard to make the Centenary Year so successful."

REFERENCES TO C.W.

Dr Glen Cavaliero writes: "No doubt your members are aware of the fact, but CW's only short story In Semperiternam Pereant has been reprinted in the Oxford Book of English Short Stories - the first time, I think, that it has been generally available".

Gillian Lunn reports the following: "The 4th O.U.P. edition of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poems (originally 1967) has just been re-printed in paperback. 'Acknowledgements' refer to '... Robert Bridges, the first editor: to him no adequate tribute can be paid. Charles Williams, the second editor, boldly enlarged the Hopkins canon and introduced a firmer note of editorial appreciation.'
The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations (2nd edition 1971 and 1980) includes a CW gem, adding in parenthesis 'Quoted in ... The Faber Book of Aphorisms'.
Images of Belief in Literature (ed. David Jasper: Macmillan 1984) has a marvellous 28-page essay by Peter Walker: 'W.H. Auden: Horae Canonicae: Auden's Vision of a Rood - A Study in Coherence'. He asserts and shows that '... one particular writer .. Charles Williams ... is to be seen as a particular formative presence throughout the poems ...'. Twentieth Century British Poetry: A Critical Introduction by John Williams (Edward Arnold pbk, 1987) - Preface says: '... intended as a guide for those encountering the period for the first time ...', back cover says: '... an introduction for students seeking to establish a broad sense of the literary chronology of the period.') in the 3rd chapter: 'Post-Modernist Poetry 1930-1950' says: '...The intellectual ground for a Romantic revival was prepared not only by Read and de Selincourt, but by the literary criticism of C S Lewis, Sir Geoffrey Keynes, Mona Wilson,

Kathleen Raine and Helen Darbishire, with American critics - among them S. Foster Damon, Arthur Beatty and RD Havens - making a significant contribution. Equally important in this respect were the novels and poetry of Charles Williams, steeped in mysticism and the occult, and the work of Dorothy Sayers.' Also, later in the chapter: - '... Familiarity with Hopkins was helped by a new edition of his poems brought out in 1930 by Charles Williams.' "

SUPPLEMENT

There is no Supplement with this Newsletter.

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Following the Society's AGM on 2 May 1987, John Heath-Stubbs spoke on 'The Figure of Cressida'. We are very pleased to be able to reproduce his talk here.

"What I propose to talk about has, perhaps, only a contingent relationship to Charles Williams and his work, but Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida was a play which he held to be important and which he deals with in the title Reason and Beauty in the English Poetic Mind. What he saw Shakespeare exploring in it was the theme of the abolition of identity, the contradiction between Troilus' Cressida and Diomede's Cressida. When, in the play, Ulysses brings Troilus to witness Cressida's unfaithfulness, the young lover cries out bitterly: 'Think we had mothers.' Ulysses, the man of unimaginative reason, replies: 'Why, what has she done which could dishonour our mothers?' and Troilus answers: 'Nothing at all, unless that this be she'. This abolition of identity, this bitter negation of the Beatrician experience was a motif which CW explored both in his poetry and in his novels. In the Palomides poems of Taliessin Through Logres, the blatant beast:

'scratches itself in the space between
the Queen's substance and the Queen'.

This is Palomides' experience when his vision of the Queen Iseult seems contradicted for him by his realisation that her love is given not to him but to Tristan.

But Shakespeare did not invent the story of Troilus and Cressida. When I was invited to talk to you I thought it might be interesting to follow the development of this character from her origins in the medieval Chaucer to her treatment by three of our greatest English poets and one very notable Scottish poet. More recently there is also the operatic treatment of her story by Sir William Walton to a libretto by Christopher Hassle but about this I will not have much to say. This relating of a theme or a character in one poet to the work of others is something which CW liked to do. His view of poetry was, I think, almost that images and characters had an existance independent of the individual poet's imagination. The image of the forest which he describes, among other places, in the opening pages of The Figure of Beatrice - the forest of Broceliande in the Taliessin poems is, as he once said in answer to a question I put to him, only his own small portion of that great forest. Therefore, to follow the changing fortunes of Cressida as it were through the various poetic imaginations which have dwelt upon her, may, I hope, not be irrelevant to the understanding of CW's own interpretation of Shakespeare and in accordance with the spirit of his own approach to poetry.

The story of Troilus and Cressida is part of the tale of Troy but it is not to be found in Homer or in any of the classical Greek and Roman authors. It is a medieval story and first appears in the Roman de Troie by Benoit de Saintmaur. But stories are not created simply out of nothing. If you will pass back your mind to Homer's Iliad, you will recall that the theme of that poem is the wrath of Achilles and that it begins with a quarrel over a woman captive. Menaleus has taken Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses, priest to Apollo. Her father begs the King to release her but is churlishly refused. He prays to his god and Apollo sends a plague into the Greek camp. The Greeks therefore persuade Menaleus to give up Chryseis but he demands Briseis, who has been assigned in the booty to Achilles, as compensation and it is this demand which causes the wrath of Achilles and his withdrawal from the war until he is persuaded once more to take part in the fighting in order to avenge his friend Petrochles and kills Hector. All this brutal treatment of women as mere chattles to be exchanged and owned is quite appalling, of course, and it represents, no doubt, the reality of war in ancient times. Simone Weil, in her splendid essay on Homer, shows the universality and the truth of his writing about war - how he shows that war reduces people to mere objects and, though we are a long way from the early feudal society which Homer describes, that truth is still with us.

The figure of Cressida, as she appears in the literature of the Middle Ages, seems to have arisen from a confusion of Chryseis and Briseis. Her name, in fact, represents the Greek accusative form of Chryseis's name - Chryseida. Furthermore, Chryseis's father, the priest Chryses, has been confused with Calkas, the soothsayer, who accompanied the Greeks to Troy. Cressida, or rather, Criseyde (the French form of her name which Chaucer also used) first appears, as I have already said, in the Roman de Troie of Benoit de Saintmaur in the thirteenth century. For the medieval poets, the story of the siege of Troy, together with other matter taken from classical antiquity, notably the story of the siege of Thebes and the romantic account of the adventures of Alexander the Great, formed part of the 'matter of Rome'. This was one of the three 'matters' - legendary material on which the medieval poets traditionally drew. The other two were the 'matter of Britain' (the whole Arthurian cycle) and 'the matter of France' (the legends of Charlemagne and his Paladins) but all three are in a certain sense matters of Rome and as such hark back to the imperial ideal, the idea of Christendom as a unity providentially ordained by the establishment of the Roman Empire. The kingship of Britain was supposed to have been established by Brutus the Trojan, the great grandson of Aeneas, the founder of Troy. Moreover, Arthur was Emperor and not merely King for he was supposed to have conquered the Roman Empire challenged by Lucius Iberus, consul or Emperor of Rome. Arthur's conquests, in fact, probably represent the ambitions of Henry II towards an Anjovin Empire which should include a unified Britain as well as his hereditary lands on the continent.

Arthur's imperial conquest, first told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, make him no less a valid Roman Emperor than Charlemagne who historically was crowned by the Pope as Caesar Augustus and did seek to establish a real European Christian unity. The basis for the legend of Arthur's imperial conquest would seem to be the historical bids made for the Roman Empire from a British base by Constantine and by the usurper Maximus who appeared in Welsh legend as Maxenwledig, Emperor of Rome, although the real Maximus, a Spanish adventurer, was, in fact, ignominiously defeated. These historical reminiscences seem to have been combined with primitive myths of Arthur as a hero who raids an Otherworld which is both a supernatural place and a western island thought of as a home of the dead. Lucius Iberus, in fact, is probably Lugh, the Irishman, an ancient Celtic god who appears in earlier Irish sagas and whose cult probably extended over the whole Celtic world; he must have been the titular divinity of Lyons or Lugdunum in Gaul. He may originally, in fact, have been a Lynx totem.

The story of the siege of Troy as it appeared to the Latin middle ages was different from that which we know from Homer. There was, it is true, a standard medieval school text book called Homer which was, in fact, a Latin abridgement of the Homeric material, but in late antiquity had appeared two accounts of the siege of Troy attributed to Dares the Phrygian and Dictys of Crete respectively. Both these fictitious authors claimed to be eyewitnesses of the Trojan war and were therefore taken to be more reliable than Homer. The works attributed to Dares and Dictys were, of course, spurious, though it has been suggested that, in some cases, their real authors may have drawn on early traditions which might even have gone back beyond Homer. Both these accounts are written from the Trojan point of view and hence it is, that, for the Middle Ages, the Trojans, who were, after all, through Aeneas, the ancestors of the Romans and of the founders of other European nations including Britain, are treated more sympathetically than the Greeks. This heroic view of the Trojans still subsists with us in such a common phrase as 'to work like a Trojan', and Hector, along with Julius Caesar and Alexander, was traditionally numbered among the nine Worthies.

Benoit's story of Troilus and Cressida begins with the parting of the lovers and the going of Criseyde to the Greek camp. It is her wooing by Diomede which forms the main love motif and this wooing of Diomede was transfered by Boccaccio to Troilus's wooing. Boccaccio's telling of the story of Troilus and Criseyde is the subject of his Italian poem *The Filostrato* which is Chaucer's immediate source. Chaucer attributes the story to "Myn Auctor Lollius". It was a common convention in the Middle Ages to give a fictitious source for one's work - a trick which Cervantes, incidentally, plays very effectively in *Don Quixote*. It is possible that the name Lollius, can be taken to mean "big mouth" which is the actual meaning of the name Boccaccio. The medieval concept of authorship was not ours. A medieval work (Malory's is an extreme example) can at the same time be a translation and thoroughly original. The is likewise true of Chaucer, most notably in his *Troilus and Criseyde* with which my survey must really begin. The most important changes that Chaucer made was in the figure of Pandaro or Pandarus who is Boccaccio's invention, although Pandarus, prince of the Lithians, does occur in Homer. In Boccaccio's poem, Pandaro is not Criseyde's uncle but her cousin, a young man of Troilus's own generation. In Chaucer, he becomes a figure of humour and worldly-wisdom. The wooing becomes much more subtle than the light-hearted seduction described by Boccaccio.

The Criseyde of Chaucer (and of Boccaccio) is not like Shakespeare's Cressida, a young and inexperienced, sexually unaware girl, but a youthful widow. She is in an equivocal position in Troy since her father Calkas has defected to the Grecian camp. She is not without sexual experience and is aware of her own sexuality. This is very much brought out in the scene where Troilus first sees her, in church, as it happens. The story of Troilus's wooing with the assistance of Pandarus, is told by Chaucer with delicacy, frankness, humour, and, at one point, passion. There is nothing of such psychological subtlety, in narrative English as opposed to drama, for perhaps another 400 years.

Troilus and Criseyde, the title, has been described rightly as a psychological novel, but Chaucer calls it a tragedy. Medieval critical theory did not necessarily associate tragedy and comedy with dramatic presentation. It seems to have been thought that in antiquity, tragedies and comedies were mimed while someone read the narrative from a pulpit - this perhaps may represent an actual practice in late antiquity but we do not know. But Troilus and Criseyde is a truly tragic work. The medieval definition of tragedy which is given by Chaucer in the prologue to his *Monk's Tale*, is, to our way of thinking, perhaps a simplistic one. It is concerned basically with the concept of fortune's wheel. The hero begins in the state of felicity and is plunged by the turn of the wheel into one of misery. And this is true of the story of Troilus and Criseyde. It is mere chance that an exchange of prisoners is arranged so that Antinor, who has been captured by the Greeks, is to be returned to Troy and Criseyde sent to join her father Calkas in the Greek camp. This might have led to her felicity but, in fact, puts her in an even more unprotected position in the Greek camp where she is unable to resist the pressure put upon her by Diomede and becomes unfaithful to Troilus. She is not like Shakespeare's Cressida, a wanton, but her character, her very feminity and gentleness, has a fundamental flaw of weakness in it which does, in fact, make the story a tragedy in the sense that those of us who have read Aristotle (as Chaucer had not) can appreciate.

It is also an ironic tragedy. For me, one of the most poignant moments in the poem is where Troilus waits in vain by the gates of Troy for her return and then "Troilus to Troy homeward he went". In a way unusual in Chaucer, there is a sort of pun. We are made aware of the relationship of Troilus's name to that of the city of whose king he is the youngest son, and the equal doom which is prepared for both. But because the story of Troy is part of the 'matter of Rome', part of a greater plan of destiny, Troilus and Criseyde are actors in a drama whose full scope they cannot understand. When Troilus is finally slain, his spirit rises to the celestial spheres where it laughs seeing the folly of the human life that he has been leading and Chaucer begins one of his most famous passages, his exhortation to "yonge, freshe folkes, heorshe", to turn from the folly of earthly loves to Him who will "falsen no man".

The next poet to take up the story of Criseyde was the fifteenth century Scotsman, Robert Henryson, schoolmaster of Dunfermline. In his Testament of Criseyde, we are in a world subltly different from Chaucer's, the world of the very end of the Middle Ages. Europe had been devastated by plague, and, partly contingent on this, there was a general social disintegration. It was the age of the Peasant Revolts and of the break-up of the old feudal structure of society. The "dance macabre" or dance of death is one of the great images of the fifteenth century and variations of it pervade the poetry of that period. The greatest of European poets in that Age was Francois Villon whose work is in the form of a testament, a convention which was becoming widespread in English literature. There is a rather depressing period between the greatness of Chaucer and the first beginnings of the Renaissance proper in the work of Wyatt and Surrey. This is partly due to very rapid shifts in the language which caused metrical uncertainty. I suspect that this is directly connected with the break-up of the feudal system. It was impossible in practice for people to remain tied to the land. Populations, therefore, became mobile, speakers of different dialects mingled with a consequent breaking down of inflections. But in Scotland, though in this period it was equally torn as England by the feuding of the great nobles, the system was perhaps not so obviously breaking up and the heritage of Chaucer which for poets south of the border seemed almost too heavy a burden to take up, was friutful in Scotland. Henryson's poem, as he tells us in his Prologue, arose directly out of his reading of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde; thinking that Chaucer had not told all, he attempted a sequel.

Criseyde, deserted by Diomede, returns to the house of her father Calkas, but there appears before her a procession of the seven planetary gods, each of which reproaches her for her lack of fidelity. Last comes Saturn, the bringer of melancholy, old-age and disease, and as a punishment, he smites her with leprosy. Shakespeare had perhaps this incident in mind when, in Henry V, Doll Tearsheet is described as a "lazar kite of Cressid's kind". Leprosy indicated here by the word "lazar" is probably syphillis; the two diseases had some symptoms in common and were confused, but for Henryson writing in the middle of the fifteenth century, it is too early for syphillis. Criseyde joins a company of lepers bearing a begging bowl and a clapper. They wait at the gates of the city and Troilus comes through riding to his death. He gives alms, particularly to the young leper who is Criseyde whose face seems faintly familiar. Criseyde asks the others who it was who had given her the alms, for her disease apparantly had blinded her, and they tell her it was Troilus. Then, stricken deeply with remorse, she makes her testament which gives its title to the poem and dies. It is a powerful poem though Henryson, the schoolmaster, judges Criseyde in a way which Chaucer and, I think Shakespeare, do not.

Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida will, I suppose, for the majority of us, be the most familiar treatment of the figure I am dealing with. But Chaucer's poem is a masterpiece whilst Shakespeare's play a problem. The editors of the first folio indeed seemed to be uncertain whether it should be regarded as a tragedy or a comedy. Its affinities are with the dark plays which Shakespeare wrote around about 1600 with Hamlet but more clearly with Measure for Measure and with All's Well That Ends Well - the dark comedies, or problem plays, as they have been called. The American critic Wylie Cypher in his very interesting book titled Four Phases of Renaissance Style, relates these plays, along with other works of roughly the same period in English - the tragedies of Webster and Ford, the early poetry of John Donne and others - with the mannerist movement in Renaissance painting. The mannerists had exhibited a kind of failure of nerve coming between the confidence of the high renaissance and the confidence of the baroque, often associated as it was with the triumph of the Counter-Reformation. In mannerist painting, not only are the actual images dark, but the figures are distorted - the design of the picture uncertain so that the centre of interest does not come where we would expect it to come, and something of the same happens in the poetry and drama I have cited. Wylie Cypher has pointed out that there is perhaps a relationship between this development in the arts and what was going on in the same period with regard to cosmology. Contrary to what is often said, the Copernican system, with its mathematical simplicity and elegance, was for the most part received gladly. The sun, the visible image of God, was now seen to be at the centre of the universe, and the earth, so far from being the lowest point of the cosmos, as the oldest Ptolomeic system postulated, is now taking part in the great dance with the other glorious planets around this central fire in mathematical circles. But it was disturbing when Keppler showed that the planets moved not in perfect circles but in elipses and confidence was only to be restored with the new synthesis of Newton.

We may experience Troilus and Cressida as an anti-heroic play. When I first read it in the thirties it seemed to me to be astonishingly contemporary, and I think it may still do so for the young with its sexual frankness and its anti-war feeling. The down-grading of the Homeric heroes in this piece is partly in the tradition of Dares and Dictys which I have already alluded to.

But it is also partly deliberate for Shakespeare had read Homer - Chapman's translation had recently appeared. It is notable that Ulysses appears, perhaps for the first time since Homer, as a noble and wise character, though of limited vision. He is quite incapable of understanding Troilus' crisis, his problem over the division between Cressida and her identity. For since Homer, in Euripides, for example, and Sophocles and in Virgil, the character of Ulysses, the supreme politician, had been progressively blackened. The later Greeks and perhaps the Romans had learned to be disillusioned with politicians. Incidentally, I cannot resist mentioning, in passing, the remark of John Addington Simonds that, of the two principal heroes of the Homeric epic, Achilles represented the Greeks as they wished to see themselves, while Ulysses is a picture of the Greeks as they really were.

In a certain sense, the tragic centre of Shakespeare's play is not in Troilus at all, but in Hector, the one truly noble character (still in accordance with the medieval tradition). On the last occasion I saw this play, the actor playing Hector made the fatal mistake of treating this character also as a mere braggart. The real tragedy is using the death of Hector. Troilus, disillusioned, is left alive at the end of the play:

> 'Sit, gods, upon your thrones, and smile at Troy! '

Shakespeare, I am sure, knew Chaucer well, and he had been haunted by the story of Troilus and Cressida at least since the time when he wrote The Merchant of Venice:

> 'The moon shines bright: in such a night as this,
> When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
> And they did make no noise, in such a night
> Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
> And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
> Where Cressid lay that night.'

Cressida is mentioned here along with the tragic heroines of ancient story - Dido, Medea and Thisbe. But in his own play, which may possibly be a re-writing of an earlier one dating from about the time that he composed Romeo and Juliet (the two plays have some points in common), the figures of Pandarus and Cressida are downgraded along with the Homeric heroes and this must be deliberate. Pandarus becomes merely the pander - the word is, of course, derived from his name - he is a dirty-minded voyeur, but also a kind of cousin of the nurse in Romeo and Juliet. The shift is swift from innocence and inexperience to the girl who makes eyes at all the soldiers as soon as she comes into the Grecian camp. She succombs to the seductive wiles of Diomede with very little resistance yet her portrait is not just that of a wanton. Her frailty is part of her humanity. Sir Walter Raleigh, the Edwardian critic, interestingly relates her to two other characters of Shakespeare - to Cleopatra on the one hand and on the other to poor Doll Tearsheet:

> 'Come, I'll be friends with thee, Jack: thou art going
> to the wars; and whether I shall ever see thee again
> or no, there is nobody cares'.

There is one final treatment of the story of Troilus and Cressida and that is the re-working of Shakespeare's play by John Dryden. At the period he did this re-working, Dryden was becoming disenchanted with the rhymed heroic plays he had championed a few years earlier and was beginning to re-consider

Shakespeare as a model from whom he might learn. Two of his plays exhibit this renewed interest in Shakespeare. One of them, *All For Love* is a masterpiece. It is a re-telling of the story of Anthony and Cleopatra in Dryden's own terms, but not in any sense an adaptation of Shakespeare. It is, perhaps, the only English play which can challenge comparison with the tragedies of Corneille and Racine. *Troilus and Cressida, or, Truth Found Too Late*, is another matter altogether. It is not an original play but a re-working of Shakespeare. Many of Shakespeare's scenes and characters remain unaltered but new scenes are added and, as we shall see, the ending of the play is radically different. It may seem shocking that Dryden should have the termerity to re-write Shakespeare, but this was a common-place in his day. It should be remembered that adaptations of *King Lear*, the first one by Nahum Tate and then by David Garrick, were the normal stage versions until well into the nineteenth century. The actors and directors of that century, although they did not actually tamper with the text, except for a notorious Bowdlerisation of Shakespeare's language, were nevertheless almost equally free in the way that the plays were presented. The Beerbohm Tree's production of *King John*, for example, included a long scene, in dumb show, of the signing of Magna Carta, a document nowhere referred to in Shakespeare's text, and his *Hamlet* ended with the death of the prince and Horatio's words:

> 'Goodnight, sweet prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! '

whereupon the audience was actually treated to the sound of the celestial choir.

When I consider recent productions of Shakespeare at our two most prestigious theatres, I do not think that we, in the twentieth century, have any reason to take a superior attitude to the nineteenth or eighteenth or seventeenth centuries. It could be argued that Dryden's version of *Troilus and Cressida* is a better acting play than Shakespeare's and it might be worth a revival, though I cannot think that anyone would have the courage to try this (an authentic Shakespearian *Troilus and Cressida* is too much of a rarity anyway.) Ulysses remains an important character in Dryden's version and, in fact, has the last word after the death of Troilus with a typical Restoration monologue advocating passive obedience to the monarch (a moral which there does not seem anything very much in the play to justify). But the character of Cassandra, one ofShakespeare's most striking creations, is cut. Dryden also added as a tour de force, a quarrel scene between Hector and his brother Troilus on the occasion of the decision of the Trojans to hand Cressida over to the Greeks. This scene is modelled on the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. But Dryden's imagination could not accept the paradox of the contradiction in Cressida's character. In effect she remains faithful to Troilus but on the advice of her father Calkas (Dryden also disliked priests) merely pretends to accept the advances of Diomede as a delaying tactic since Calkas intends to escape from the Grecian camp and to take his daughter with him. It is this deception which Troilus witnesses. Later on, when she learns of her repudiation by her lover, Cressida commits suicide. This finally convinces Troilus, but too late, of her truth. The suicide then, an innovation of Dryden's, is a deed that neither Chaucer's Criseyde nor Shakespeare's Cressida could have brought herself to, I think. As a function of the play, it is an heroic act. In Sir William Walton's opera, the librettist also makes Cressida commit suicide in the end. This suicide seems to me to be pointless and to savour too much of nineteenth century romantic operatic cliche but I have not heard this work and must suspend judgement.

There is, as far as I know, no other re-telling of Cressida's story, though she does appear at the very end of Walter de la Mare's remarkable romance Henry Brocken. In this book, the hero rides out, as it were into the world of English literature where he encounters various familiar characters and at the very end of his pilgrimage he meets Chaucer's Criseyde, still longing for Troilus but still remembering Diomede,

I hope this tracing of the fortunes of Criseyde may have held some interest for you and it is not, I submit, wholly irrelevant to an understanding of Charles Williams's attitude to poetry.

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Members might be interested to read Charles Williams's review of C.S.Lewis's The Problem of Pain (Christian Challenge Series, Centenary Press 3s 6d) printed in the January 1941 edition of Theology and reproduced with permission.

"I shall not attempt to summarize here an already compact book. Mr Lewis's prose is known, and those who know it would not thank me for translating it into mine. His style is what style always is - goodness working on goodness, a lucid and sincere intellect at work on the facts of life or the great statements of other minds. The danger for the literary reader in such a style is obviously very great: one reads to enjoy and not to learn or to dispute. It is the reader's fault if he does and not Mr Lewis's, who gives him, from the first page to the last, every opportunity of learning or disputing. To add that the wise reader will generally find himself learning is, with Mr Lewis, to be platitudinous.

One of the great and terrible capacities of men is that their reason is a living power, not dependent on immediate personal emotion. All my own emotions rebel against the pattern of this book. I do not want to be shown that pain is, or may be, a good, that (given our present state) its inevitability is a good. When Mr Lewis, having pictured a really bad man, contented in his evil, says: 'Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion,' I want to disagree. But it is only such half-speculative sentences that I dare question. The great pattern of the book is wrought too deeply into Christian dogma and the nature of man (which are largely the same thing; dogma is there but the statement of his true biology) for one to disagree.

It is therefore with a sense of elucidation of something one has always known that one reads. The plan of the book can be shown by the chapter headings. The Introductory chapter (i) describes the origin of religion and of Christianity - the existence of the numinous, the existence of morality, the identification of these two elements, the identification of Jesus with That which was both numinous and righteous. It is only after this that the 'problem' of pain arises. It involves a consideration of (ii) Divine Omnipotence, (iii) Divine Goodness, (iv) Human Wickedness, (v) the Fall, (vi and vii) Human Pain, (viii) Hell, (ix) Animal Pain (x) Heaven. (There is a note by Dr R Havard 'on the observed effects of pain'). The chapter on Animal Pain is perhaps especially valuable, as that on Hell is especially terrifying, and that on

Divine Omnipotence especially lucid. It is good to be reminded that 'nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God'. Meaning by nonsense, non-sense.

I have quoted from 'Hell'; I may quote from 'Heaven': 'Each soul will be eternally engaged in giving away to all the rest that which it receives.' It is in objection to that pain lies. That we object to it - even that Mr Lewis may object to it - is only of importance, and of pain - to us."

Charles Williams

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The Latin Letters of C.S. Lewis by Martin Moynihan has been published by Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, USA, this year and is available in London from the Church House Bookshop, Great Smith Street, London SW1. This is a reprint of an article which appeared in Seven, Volume 6 in 1985.

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