Gillian Lunn

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 50, SUMMER 1988

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

12 November 1988: Doreen Berry will speak on "Byzantium, Rome and Canterbury".

25 February 1989: Elisabeth Brewer will speak on "The Role of Women in the Arthurian Poetry of Charles Williams".

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

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 6 November 1988: We will continue reading Descent into Hell. We will meet in St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburgh Place, London 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 (Oxford 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, 188W.11th St., Holland, Michigan, 49423, USA, telephone (616) 396 2260.

C.W.S. A.G.M. 1988

The Society held its AGM on 4 June in Pusey House, Oxford. Mrs Lunn, the General Secretary, presented a full report of the year's activities, all of which have been recorded

in Newsletters, including the finding of C.W.'s Letters to Peter. She expressed gratitude to the bookseller, Aidan Mackay, who first pointed them out and who has helped us in various ways. The death was announced, with regret, of CW Society member Freddie Webber, late of Cambridge. His valuable collection of CW books has been given to the Society. Correspondence Mrs Lunn had received in the course of the year, with her replies, were made available for members to look at, including, among many more (a) correspondence with English Heritage who, unknown to us, have been pondering since 1983 on whether to finance a plaque on CW's birthplace and finally informed us, in 1988, that, regretfully they could not!, (b) a letter leading to a brief mention of this Society in The Times Literary Supplement earlier this year, and (c) an official request for the Legal Deposit of our Newsletters.
Reports were also made by the Hon Chairman, Hon Treasurer and the Newsletter Editor. The accounts for the year were approved and the existing Council members were all re-elected for a further one year term with the exception of Hilda Pallan who had decided not to stand again.
The AGM accepted a suggestion of the Committee that the Newsletter's print should no longer be reduced in size, thus making it easier to read.

BOOK AUCTION - news from Gillian Lunn

Following the death of a member of this Society, Freddie Webber, late of Cambridge, we have been given his CW books. In commercial terms it is a valuable collection but Council felt that it would not be right to sell the books on the open market; it would have been Freddie's wish for members of this Society to have them. Some have been put into the Reference Library which now, as a result, has a complete set of CW first editions. Some have gone to members who had waited long fo a particular title. Recently the Society has received another valuable gift of books, from which the Libraries (Reference and Lending) and the waiting-list have benefited. It is difficult to put an appropriate price on the remaining books and we hope members will agree

that the fairest way is to let members make the decisions. What are they worth TO YOU? Therefore the books will be

A U C T I O N E D (by post).

Never having organised anything like this before I have had to think hard about how best to do it; I hope all will agree that the following rules are fair:

i. the books are for sale to members of this Society whose subscriptions and other payments are fully paid up-to-date.

ii. separate bids must be made for each title, in writing, to me. (It's no good writing e.g. "£50 for all the novels"). Bids to be made in pounds sterling.

iii. bids, please, for each book, not including postage cost. Overseas members please indicate whether, if you "win", you want me to air-mail the book (strongly advised, though expensive.) British members - I will send by second class mail unless you advise me otherwise.

iv. send no money with your bids.

v. to give everyone enough time - closing date for bids will be:

1st NOVEMBER 1988

FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE ABOVE RULES WILL RESULT IN THE BID BEING DISQUALIFIED.

On, or soon after, 1st November 1988, I will send each book to its highest bidder, with instructions re payment. I will not inform "losers" unless a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed with their bid. (N.B.: between now and 1 November it would be unfair for me to divulge the current bidding-valuation for any particular title - please don't ask me!) All the books are in good or reasonably good condition, none has a dust-jacket.

Hoping members will think this is a fair arrangement, we offer these books:

All Hallows' Eve (1st ed. 2nd imp.)
Descent into Hell (1st ed.)
The English Poetic Mind (cover faded at edges)
Great Lives (Readers' Union 1941 incl. CW's Queen Elizabeth)
The House of the Octopus

The Greater Trumps (1st ed. inscribed: "Eugene Mason from Charles Williams", also inscribed by Malcolm Saville)
James I (2nd ed. with introduction by Dorothy L Sayers)
Poetry at Present
Religion and Love in Dante
Shadows of Ecstasy (1st ed.)
Three Plays (with Hugo Dyson's logo on inside front cover)
War in Heaven (1st ed.)
Windows of Night
Witchcraft (1st ed. slightly marked on front cover)

Please send your bids to Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL

May I pass on my thanks to all of you who responded to my appeal for Jiffy bags. If anyone has any more spare ones I would be most grateful if you could let me have them - they are so useful for sending books in!

OLIVE SPEAKE - an appeal from Lyle Dorsett

Does anyone in the Society have any information about Olive Speake ("Stella") who corresponded for several years with Charles Williams? Please write to Lyle Dorsett, Marion E Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, USA.

BOOKS BY C.W. SOCIETY MEMBERS

Two books have recently been published by Society members:
- A Victorian Family Postbag by Anne Ridler published by the Perpetua Press, Oxford at £9.95 plus 75p postage (£1.75 overseas)
- The Country Chapel by John Hibbs published by David & Charles at £10.95 (and containing a quotation from The Place of the Lion).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

If anyone has forgotten to renew their subscriptions, could

they please do so as soon as possible. Rates are £5 single, £7.50p joint membership for UK members, £6 or US $13 single, £8.50p or US $18 for joint membership for overseas members. Please send a cheque to Peter Couchman, 85 Hangleton Way, Hove, East Sussex BN3 8AF.

COMPUTER PRINTING OF THE ADDRESS LABELS

Peter Couchman has put the Society address list on computer. If your envelope is wrongly addressed, Peter would be grateful if you could tell him so that he can correct it.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to:

Rene and Mrs Elaine Tixier, 14 rue de Valmy, 31400 Toulouse, France

Miss Diana Pulvermacher, 3 White Hill Court, Berkhampsted, Herts HP4 2PS

SUPPLEMENT

There is no Supplement with this Newsletter.

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At the Society's A.G.M. on 4 June 1988, George Sayer spoke on "C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams as literary critics". We are pleased to be able to reproduce the talk in this Newsletter.

"In 1936, a few weeks before the publication of C.S. Lewis' The Allegory of Love, Sir Humphrey Milford handed Charles Williams a proof copy and told him to write something about it to help the sales staff when they offered it to booksellers. He read it with great excitement, astonished to find that Lewis, of whom he had never heard, shared many of his ideas about the nature and importance of Romantic Love. He had thought of writing a book on the subject, but now Lewis had

done it with far greater detail and learning than he was able to command. Lewis had not many pupils at that time - few undergraduates at Magdalen read English - but I think nearly all those fortunate few shared Williams's enthusiasm. The Allegory was not just a literary work. It recorded one of the few really important changes in European feeling, one that affected the lives even of undergraduates. To repeat a paragraph that Williams quoted in He Came Down From Heaven: 'French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth century. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination or our daily life untouched .... Compared with this revolution, (AL4) the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature.' The characteristics of this courtly love were humility, coutesy, and the religion of love. The lover must have but one lady, towards whom he should be modest and humble, claiming little virtue except that which arose from obedience to her, even to her slightest whim. His behaviour was controlled by what became an elaborate code of manners, from which the courtesy shown to ladies by elderly gentlemen even of our own day is derived. This love had little to do with marriage, which was a humdrum relationship concerned with prosaic but necessary matters such as money, land and the production of children. In it passionate love would have been thought out of place. In the opinion of some authorities even sinful. 'Far from being a natural channel for the new kind of love, marriage was rather the drab background against which that love stood out in all the contrast of its new tenderness and delicacy' (Al.13) At this stage in history courtly love could hardly help being an idealisation of adultery.

As for the religion of love, it was as if 'here is my heaven' is expanded into a system with a god, saints, commandments, and a lover who prays, sins, repents, and is finally admitted to bliss.

This intoxicating doctrine was spread by the poets throughout Western Europe. No doubt it at first influenced only the lives of the literary and fashionable, but it was never just a literary movement. It is one of the most striking examples of the influence of literature on life. Lewis reviews brilliantly its development in France and England, through Chretien de Troyes, Chaucer and Lydgate to Spenser. The book ends with a long section on The Faerie Queene in which he shows that Spencer has done something of great importance. He has effected not just a reconciliation but a union of the ideals of courtly love with Christian marriage. To quote Lewis, Spencer is 'the greatest among the founders of that romantic conception of marriage which is the basis of all our love literature from Shakespeare to Meredith.' (AL.360). Of course this too was never a literary movement. The work of the poets, especiall Shakespeare, profoundly influenced educated men in this country so that their desire became to marry for love, and i possible to be in love with those whom they had married.

Like Williams, Spencer is an allegorical writer. Lewis's interpretation of his allegorical treatment of the ethics of courtly love almost rivals in subtlety and depth his interpretations of Williams's poetry in the second part of Arthurian Torso. Williams is more theological and, though more speculative, more profound. In He Came Down From Heaven, he had written magnificently on the spirituality of falling in love. He deseribes it as 'something like a state of adoration and it has been expressed of course bette by the poets than by anyone else'. (Note the 'of course'. Williams never doubted that the poets were wiser than the rest of us.) The experience of the beloved arouses an unanalysed sense of significance. Though it cannot be defined, it is of great importance. The lover becomes aware of the archetypal perfection of the beloved. She is seen as Eve might have been seen before the Fall. She is radiant with a portion of the Divine Light. She has a paradisal comeliness of candour and restraint, seen especially in the eyes and mouth, 'the two places where the beauty of the soul most chiefly appears.' (HCDFH 95).

The beloved has the power to renovate nature in those who behold her. She is the helper of the faith. 'She was created not only to make a good thing better, but also to turn a bad thing into good.' (Ib). She produces humility, the self-forgetfulness which alone makes room for adoration. She is the vision of the divine glory and the means of the divine grace.

This will seem to some people as far-fetched as the courtly love of Chretien de Troyes that Lewis describes, but there is no doubt that it was presented by Williams quite seriously as a way of life that some of us may be called to follow. What he calls Hell has made three main attacks on it. The first is by leading us to assume that it should be permanent. This is false and dangerous, though the state of being in love should lead to an exchange of vows and in some cases to marriage. The second is jealousy, a mortal sin. The third is the supposition that this love is the property of the lovers. On the contrary, it possesses them. 'It is their job, their direction, their salvation.'

The subject is treated at greater length in The Figure of Beatrice, Williams's book on Dante, and shown in action in Taliesin Through Logres, on which Lewis wrote a commentary that clarifies the duties of the lover. What is this thing, he asked, flashing between Rose and Elayne? There is only one way to find out. The two must become the one flesh that alone can utter the secret name of their love. This will take them in two directions. One to 'the smooth plane of the happy flesh'. The other to Christ, so that they become one living symbol of the great 'twy-nature'. Lovers 'have had a vision of reality that would have been common to all men if Man had never fallen' (TL 16). A similar experience can come through nature as in Wordsworth's case. It is a call towards a disciplined way of life that strives towards perfection. The attention of the lover must not be diverted away from the beloved's body. He must love her whole person, not just her soul, for the division between soul and body is momentarily resolved by the experience. The 'glory' appears in the flesh. (TL 119).

Most of us need a good deal of help in understanding Taliesin Through Logres. Lewis gives us just enough. The difficulty of such literary criticism he once wrote 'arises from the fact that the poetic vision has almost too much meaning for prose ...' (Al. 344) ...'The more concrete and vital the poetry is, the more complicated it will become in analysis; but the imagination receives it as simple in both senses of the word. Oddly, as it may sound, I conceive that it is the chief duty of the interpreter to begin analyses and to leave them unfinished. They are not meant as substitutes for the imaginative appreciation of the poem. Their only use is to awaken the reader's conscious elements in him which alone can fully respond to the poem'. (Al. 345). Lewis is a great critic because over and over again he succeeds in doing just that. Another subject of Williams's theological criticism and one which also greatly interested Lewis was evil and its nature. Williams was convinced that everything in the world was good. Yet he was at the same time extremely aware of the horrors, of the dark side. How were the two to be reconciled? What was the cause of the contradiction? How did men come to see good as evil?

For clues to the understanding of evil he went again to the poets, for 'they understand everything', as he wrote in the first paragraph of The Forgiveness of Sins. He went to Shakespeare and to Milton, the most theological of English poets. In his first critical work, The English Poetic Mind, he quoted some of the opening lines of Paradise Lost:

> Him the Almighty Power
> Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'etherial sky
> With hideous ruin and combustion, down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
> In adamantine chains and penal fire
> Who durst defy th'Omnipotent to arms.

Different critics have written most various things about this passage. Some have written about the sentence construction or paragraph structure, others on the vocabulary, the meaning of the words in Latin and in the English of Milton's day. Of those concerned with the subject matter one might ask us to note how the tyrannical behaviour of the deity produces

in us sympathy for Satan and admiration of his courage, another might wonder if Satan was intended to be the hero, and a third might write about Milton's Judaic or Old Testament conception of God. The questions Williams asks are quite different. They are more important and at once help the reader to grasp the essential meaning of the poem. 'Who was this being who durst defy omnipotence? What could have been his motive? He must have forgotten his own true nature. He must have come to imagine that he shared the same nature as God, that he was, like him, self-begot, but unfortunately less powerful. Of course the sensible thing and the only way to happiness would have been for Satan to submit. But he cannot bear the idea. He must cling to the false idea he has of himself and of his own importance. So

'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven'.

Williams is concerned to show us that Satan's predicament is relevant to ourselves. The state is well known to modern man. 'The corner of a suburban road, a metropolitan doorway are equally adequate surroundings.' Many men prefer their own myth to obvious reality. To quote from The English Poetic Mind 'the only choice that a man can make in such a crises is between submitting to the good or refusing to submit to it, and if he refuses to submit he does so because so and only so can he hold 'divided Empire with Heaven's King.' 'Every bad baronet in the old stories did the same thing.' (EPM 123).

The idea is developed in Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind, published three years later. Because he has been forced to leave Heaven, Satan has lost his sense of reality, his knowledge of what Heaven is really like. He has come to see good as evil and holds a false idea of what happened there. With the other rebel angels he 'shook God's throne'. This sounds fine and heroic, but a little thought shows us that it could not have been true. Almost more absurd still, he believes that by his mental attitude he can turn Hell into Heaven.

'Farthest from him is best
Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields
Where joy for ever dwells. Hail, horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor; one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.'

The rhetoric is so splendid that it is easy to be carried away by Satan's heroics, but again a little thought shows us the foolishness of his attitude. Williams points out that Milton makes him supremely absurd as well as sinful. How absurd, how silly to war in heaven against 'Heaven's matchless King'. He continues:'What is this heaven against which he is rebelling? It is a state where the paradox of human love at its finest is true of the very nature of life itself ... (R & B 111). But to stay in Heaven Satan would have to be grateful. 'Gratitude is the deliverance of the soul, the very way of life and the activity of the creation.' But poor Satan cannot bear to have anything given him. 'It makes him feel subordinated'. Satan has another objection. He hates equality - 'Heaven's free love dealt equally to all' ... 'One can't be full of happy gratitude if one is always saying: 'Put me first'(R&B 111). In such a situation a man may prefe to be blind to the beauty of love and to 'stand on his rights It is a quite impressive phrase. But, as Williams points out the pronoun cancels the noun. There are none.'

This attitude to Satan will be familiar to the happy few of us who were taught by Lewis in the nineteen-thirties. Does this mean that he took his ideas about Satan from Williams? The answer is 'Certainly not!' He discussed Satan with me in 1935, a year before he had any contact with Williams or had even heard of him. It is my second example of the extra-ordinary way in which the two men thought on the same lines. It seems from the dedicatory letter to Lewis's A Preface to Paradise Lost, which was published in 1942, that Lewis knew

first about Williams's ideas through listening to the lectures on Milton that he gave in Oxford. 'To think of my own lecture', he wrote, 'is to think of those other lectures at Oxford in which you partly anticipated, partly confirmed, and most of all clarified and matured, what I had long been thinking about Milton ... There we elders heard (among other things) what we had long despaired of hearing - a lecture on Comus which placed its importance where the poet placed it - and watched 'the yonge fresshe folkes, he or she', who filled the benches listening first with incredulity ... then with toleration, and finally with delight, to something so strange and new in their experience as the praise of chastity. .... It is a reasonable hope that of those who heard you ... many will understand henceforward that when the old poets made some virtue their theme they were not teaching but adoring'. (P to PL v). The last sentence is really important. 'Not teaching but adoring' virtue. It describes just what the poet who is truly wise does. The function of the literary critic is to revere the virtue thus revealed, and to help us to kneel and revere it with him.

Like Williams, Lewis emphasises the moral relevance of Paradise Lost. His tone is urgent and disturbing: 'to admire Satan is to give one's vote not only for a world of misery, but also for a world of lies and propaganda, of wishful thinking, of incessant autobiography. Yet the choice is possible. Hardly a day passes without some slight movement towards it in each one of us. This is what makes Paradise Lost so serious a poem.... We have all skirted the Satanic island closely enough to have motives for wishing to evade the full impact of the poem. For, I repeat, the thing is possible, and, after a certain point, it is prized ... Satan wanted to go on being Satan. That is the real meaning of his choice. "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven". Some, to the very end, will think this is a fine thing to say; others will think that it fails to be roaring farce because it spells agony.' (P to PL 100).

In the powerful chapter on Satan's followers, he labours to show that their situation is similar to ours because Milton

describes the very situations from which human situations grow. Explanation is necessary because modern readers often do not believe in Hell. 'Each of them is like a man who has just sold his country or his friend, or like a man who by some intolerable action of his own has just quarrelled irrevocably with the woman he loves. For human beings there is often an escape from Hell, but there is never more than one - the way of humiliation, repentance, and (where possible) restitution. But Satan's followers refuse to consider this seriously. The whole debate is an attempt to find some way out other than the only one that exists.' Moloch's way out is that of a rat in a trap, fury, blind hatred - their furious enmity may help them to forget the misery of their situation. Belial's attempt at escape is to be inactive, and above all not to awaken the memories of their appalling loss. Hell may gradually become more bearable. Human analogies might be in the case of the traitor the thought of the time when he first saw the real nature of what he was doing, for the lover memories of the happiness he has destroyed and his last unforgettable conversation with the woman he has cheated. Such memories are agonies that must not be reawakened. Henceforth, keep away from high thoughts, aspirations, emotions that might dispell 'the comfortable glooms of Hell', avoid 'great literature and notable music and the society of uncorrupted men as an invalid avoids draughts' - that must be his policy. As for Mammon, the human analogies with him are the men who can't see the difference between Heaven and Hell. 'What do you mean by saying we have lost love? There is an excellent brothel round the corner. What do you mean by all this talk of dishonour? I am positively plastered with orders and decorations ... Everything can be imitated, and the imitation will do just as well as the real thing.' (P to PL 103 - 4).

All these are examples of classical literary criticism, such as might perhaps gain the approval of Dr Johnson. They depend on a particular view of the value of good literature. Lewis summed up the contents of many books of literary aesthetics by saying that the purpose of literature

was to make one 'better, wiser or happier'. This combines the statement of Dr Johnson, in his Preface to Shakespeare that 'it is always a writer's duty to make the world better' with that of Sir Philip Sidney in his Apology for Poetry that the object is to teach and delight, a view that had been hackneyed since Horace, and was never challenged, until the nineteenth century. Even at that time some of the great romantic poets would have accepted most of Lewis's summary. Wordsworth, who thought good poetry the result of the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', most certainly had a moral purpose. Good poems were never produced except by those who had thought long and deeply. 'The understanding of the reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified'. He wants, too, to counteract 'the degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' which he finds in the England of his day. Shelley in his extraordinarily lofty Defence of Poetry almost identified great poetry with wisdom. 'Shakespeare, Dante and Milton are philosophers of the very loftiest power'. Poetry makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world... Poetry redeems from decay the visitation of the divinity in man.'

In one of his last books Lewis produces another explanation of the value of literature. It provides an enlargement of our being. Through reading we enter into other men's beliefs even though we think them untrue, and share their emotions even though we think them depraved. Reading admits us to experiences not our own, experiences which may be beautiful, terrible, awe-inspiring, pathetic, comic or merely piquant. 'Literature gives the entrée to them all. Those of us who have been true readers all our lives seldom realise the enormous extension of our being that we owe to authors. We realise it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense, but he inhabits a tiny world. In it we should be suffocated. The man who is contented to be only himself and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others.

Even the eyes of humanity are not enough. I regret that the brutes cannot write books. Very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a flea; more gladly still would I perceive the olfactory world charged with all the information and emotion it carries for a dog. ... in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself, and am never more myself than when I do'.(An Essay on Criticism 140).

I do not think that this theory should be regarded as an alternative to the classical one. What Lewis is really doing is to describe with wonderful eloquence a way in which reading can make us both wiser and happier. If one accepts this theory, it follows that, as far as the ordinary reader is concerned, the role of the literary critic should be to act firstly as a signpost, to direct us to those authors and books which we are likely to find most enjoyable and profitable, especially to those whom we might otherwise never have come across on our own. Among poets Coventry Patmore, who was much admired by both Lewis and Williams, is an example, and perhaps Elizabeth Gaskall among novelists. His second purpose should be to give us some help in understanding the writers to whom he has directed us.

The best example I know of this traditional literary criticism is Lewis's English Literature in the Sixteenth Century. This is the best seller among the Oxford Histories of English Literature. And no wonder. The book opens with an astonishing survey of sixteenth century ideas. Lewis tells us that the Renaissance never existed, or, if it did, it was of no importance. He mounts a powerful attack on the humanists. 'They killed Latin by refusing to let it develop and grow. They were obsessed with the decorum which avoids every contact with the senses and the soil. They could not believe that the poets really cared about shepherds, lovers, warriors, voyages and battles. Medieval readers had been wiser in weeping with the heroines and shuddering at the monsters. Humanism was

a Philistine movement in philosophy. 'The new learning created the new ignorance.'

Most explanations of the new romanticism are wrong. Astronomy is rarely mentioned in literature. The discovery of the New World was a great disappointment because it meant an end to hopes of an easier route to the East. The new Science was something to which the humanists were indifferent or hostile. It was anyway closely allied to the old magic. Platonism was connected in the public mind with a system of demonology. The view many of us have of the Puritans is wrong. The Protestant Doctrine of Salvation by Grace is not gloomy or terrifying. It is joyous. The person who experiences that conversion 'feels like one who has awakened from nightmare into ecstasy'. It was the Puritans who praised the marriage bed. They were accused of being young, lusty and radical. It was the Catholics who exalted virginity. The creed of Calvin was that of progressives, even of revolutionaries. It appealed strongly to those whose tempers would have been Marxist in the nineteen-thirties. 'The fierce young don, the learned lady, the courtier with intellectual leanings were likely to be Calvinists. He was a dazzling figure, a man born to be the idol of revolutionary intellectuals'.

All this and much more in the first sixty pages. The dust and the controversy their brilliance provoke has never died down. We know that they delighted Charles Williams. The rest of this great work consists of a concise yet thorough survey of all the principal and many minor writers of the period. During the nine years he had worked on the book he had read every text on which he gave a judgement. He was often bored - those who looked through his books after his death sometimes found at the end a date and, neatly written, theletters 'n.a.'. They stand for 'Never Again'.

No one can read without delight the many pieces of enthusiastic literary criticism. Sometimes they are of new discoveries, such as that of Tyndale as a great prose writer. Let me quote from his comparison of Tyndale and More. This illustrates also Lewis's skilful choice of quotations which

makes his book a joyful anthology.

'What we miss in More is the joyous, lyrical quality of Tyndale. The sentences that stick in the mind from Tyndale are half way to poetry:

> "Who taught the eagles to spy out their prey? even so that children of God spy out their father. That they might see love and love again."
>
> "Where the spirit is, there is always summer."

In More we feel all the smoke and stir of London; the very plodding of his sentences is like horse traffic in the streets of London. In Tyndale we breathe mountain air.'

In his splendid chapter on the Scottish Chaucerians, he invites us to share his enthusiasm for Gavin Douglas and Dunbar to whom he gives real greatness. Listen to this on an uncharacteristic poem of Dunbar's: 'It is speech rather than song, but speech of unanswerable and thunderous greatness. From the first line to the last it vibrates with exultant energy. It defies the powers of evil and has the ring of a steel gauntlet flung down.' The longest chapter is on two of his favourities, Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. I am speaking for many if I say that I can never dip into that chapter without feeling compelled to go to my bookcase and take down either the Arcadia or The Faerie Queene. No one has written so well on the lyrics of Edmund Campion, with such understanding of their metrical subtleties. He was able to do this because he was,like Williams, a fine poet, and unlike Williams, also sensitive to music.

Because he believed John Donne to be over-rated and a lesser poet than Campion, Lewis gave to him just five pages. When I spoke to him about it, he said: 'I have given him space according to his merit, as it seems to me, No more and no less.' This illustrates his independence of fashion and the views of other academics. Like Williams, he trusted his own sensibility and was fearless in attacking idols, cant and trendiness.

There were of course academic tutors and reviewers who disliked the views of Williams and Lewis. Williams could be written off on the grounds that he was no academic, indeed a man who had never undergone a course of study at any university. It was of course impossible to do this with Lewis. The attacks were nearly always about the introduction of Christian doctrine in his criticism. Professor Garrod of this University wrote in the Oxford magazine that for him the prime hindrance to enjoyment of A Preface to Paradise Lost was its 'theological rubbish'. He does not argue against Lewis's point which was of course that it is impossible to understand a theological work such a Paradise Lost without knowing a little theology. In the same way it is not possible fully to appreciate a painting on an Old Testament theme without knowing the story that it illustrates. Another reviewer, L. C. Knights, describes Lewis's arguments as 'abstract, irrelevant and unconvincing.' Even Dame Helen Gardner, who in many ways admired Lewis, wrote of English Literature in the Sixteenth Century 'the book is marred throughout by an insistent polemical purpose, expressed in the title of the first chapter "New Learning and New Ignorance." This extraordinary chapter ... is devoted to proving that the Humanists did immense harm. Though the index gives many references to Erasmus ... when one looks up the references one finds that they are nearly all derogatory.' I did look up the references to Erasmus. There were 19 of them, and really I could not find one that was derogatory. But the standards Williams and Lewis followed and the books that they loved are now up against far more serious dangers than those of academic critics. Many people, especially those who are young have come to look at life and consequently literature in a different way. The result is that they feel that these and many other classics have no message for them. They are irrelevant to the way they think and live. The subject has been examined at length by Professor Allan Bloom in an important book, The Closing of the American Mind. I will mention some of the points that he makes. One must bear in mind that he is an American professor and England is fortunately a less advanced country: Truth is relative. So is virtue. Nothing is certainly right or wrong. Tolerance and openness are the most desirable qualities. 'The true believer is the real

danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, racism ... The point is not to correct the mistakes and really think you are right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.' (p.26). Sin, Goodness, Heaven, hell are medieval conceptions with no meaning for the modern mind. Every one has a right to choose his or her own scheme of values and to adopt his or her own life-style. 'Romantic love is now as alien to us as knight errantry and young men are no more likely to court a woman than to wear a suit of armour, not only because it is not fitting, but because it would be offensive to women. As a student exclaimed to me, with approval of his fellows: "What do you expect me to do? Play a guitar under some girl's window?" Such a thing seemed to him as absurd as swallowing goldfish.' The word love is in fact rarely mentioned. Instead there is talk of a commitment, or a relationship or just of sex.

Because I thought Professor Bloom's views about the collapse of traditional culture might be purely American, I tried them out on my step-daughter and her friends, all young Oxford graduates and none of them fools. The results, much to my surprise, amply confirmed Bloom's criticisms. None of the books and plays we talked about had any relevance to their lives. Some were entertaining and this is why they read them. They were often unaware of the existence of any theme or moral. Obvious moralising was always disliked. They thought Marx, Freud and Darwin had influenced the way in which they lived. So of course had some of the scientists and inventors of technical processes. They doubted if anyone else had. They too believed that almost everything, certainly all morality, was relative and that tolerance towards the life-styles that other people chose for themselves was an essential virtue. This attitude to the past has produced in America and to some extent in England a most unhappy rootlessness. The wisdom of the past is no longer there to console, encourage and confirm. They are worse off than far less well educated people were not very long ago. My grandmother, for instance, had only the ordinary education of a village school, yet she could quote much of the Bible and quite a lot of Shakespeare. She often

quoted these books in times of doubt and difficulty. I can hear her reciting: 'Love is not love which alters / When it alteration finds .../ O no! It is an ever fixèd mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken .../ Love's not time's fool../Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,/ But bears it out even to the crack of doom.' I have no doubt at all that it helped her very much in a difficult marriage.

I am sure that we can all think of times when we have received support from the wisdom of the poets. C.S. Lewis told me that the memory of the sonnet: 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame' had often preserved him when tempted. 'Grace often comes to us through the poets. And of course they need not be Christian. I owe an immense amount to the Greek poets, and many times I have been helped by a couplet of Yeats.' What a pity it is that the learning of poetry by heart is and has been for twenty or thirty years out of fashion in our schools! Except of course as a part of the task of swotting for exams.

Both Lewis and Williams were quite clear about what literary criticism was for. It was to direct us to the best literature and, if necessary, to help us to understand it. Unfortunately such a simple approach is unlikely to be acceptable in academic circles, which are often influenced by various post-Kantian philosophical ideas. Our view is that literature is not really an imitation of life. The opposite is nearer the truth. The world we think we know we know only through language. Each novelist, each writer constructs his own pattern of words, which need not be related to any other reality. Each piece of writing is thought of primarily as a word structure. Academic criticism is also influenced by linguistic philosophy. It seems that meanings in language arise from differences in a system of signs. We grasp their meaning by thinking about how they are distinguished from or connected with each other. Literature is about making new things out of the available signs, and literary criticism is about how the author has done this. The object of these new ideas is perhaps to cure us of what those who hold them might call 'the realistic fallacy'. Their cause is like that of the art critics who want to cure us of an affection for realistic or representational painting. Fortunately they have little influence except on academics who seem to me self-conscious in their writing and

uncertain about how to evaluate the literature of the past. Present day writers are seriously handicapped by moral and religious uncertainty. To quote Iris Murdoch, who is a philosopher as well as a novelist (rare combination!)
' ... literature is about the struggle between good and evil, but this does not appear clearly in modern writing, where there is an atmosphere of moral diffidence and where the characters presented are usually mediocre. The disappearance or weakening of organised religion is perhaps the most important thing that has happened to us in the last hundred years... Life is soaked in the moral, literature is soaked in the moral. Values are only artifically and with difficulty expelled from language. .. the author's moral judgement is the air which the reader breathes. The bad writer ... exalts some characters and demeans others without any concern for truth or justice. .. The good writer is the just intelligent judge.' (Men of Ideas ed. Magee p.282). 'The just intelligent judge'. The same phrase fits admirably the good critic, says the C.S. Lewis of English Literature in the Sixteenth Century. Yet it seems cool praise for him and still more for Charles Williams who was in his best work an inspired critic if ever there was one. This goes for the brilliant He Came Down From Heaven and also for much of The Figure of Beatrice. This book sees the theme of all or almost all of Dante's writing as what Williams calls the Way of Affirmation, one of two ways to sanctity in religious practice. The other Williams calls the Way of Rejection. It is the ascetic way, and consists of the renunciation of pleasures and other inessentials (which Williams calls images) in order to concentrate on a relationship with the deity. The Way of Affirmation consists of perceiving and praising the presence of God (the 'Glory' as Williams often called it) in His creation. Williams's book and Dante's Divine Comedy deal with this as a method of progress towards the inGodding of man, but in particular with romantic love as a mode of the Way. Williams insists that Beatrice is a real woman or girl, not an allegorical figure. She was seen, body and soul, in her heavenly perfection. 'Many lovers'. he writes, have seen ladies as Dante saw Beatrice. Dante's great gift to us was not the vision, but the ratification by his style of the validity of the vision'. Why then don't we see it in everybody? Williams's answer to this question illustrates his originality. It is because

of the Divine Mercy. Yes Mercy. He quotes Dante's Convivio. 'The soul is so intoxicated after gazing it at once goes astray in all its operations.' If seeing one in this way is enough to send the soul reelingly astray, what chaos would follow if we saw many of our fellows in this way, what sin, what despair! This perversion of the image, this going astray is the subject, really the only subject of the Inferno. The Purgatorio is then the recovery and the Paradiso is an image of the whole act of knowing, ending in a balanced whole. It is an image of the whole redeemed universe and also an image of a redeemed love-affair.' It is a book full of good things. Williams's usual themes are here, often put better than anywhere else. Thus of the inter-life of souls: 'It is the moral duty of lovers, as they certainly at moments know, to plunge with love into each other's life - bringing power; power to resist temptation, to reject, to affirm, to purify, to pray. "I will pray for you" is a good saying; a better "I will pray in you"'. And on work: 'Almighty God did not first create Dante and then find something for him to do. ... all the images were created in order to work. Hell is the cessation of work and the leaving of the images to be without any function, merely themselves'. And on the last page: 'The Way is not only what the poem is about; it is what Love is about. It is what Love is 'up to' and the only question is whether lovers are 'up to' Love'.

If we except He Came Down From Heaven in so far as that remarkable work is literary criticism, The Figure of Beatrice is much the best of Williams's critical books. Its importance to the student of Dante is shown by the fact that it is the only critical work that Dorothy Sayers recommended in her translation of the Inferno. She dedicated the book to Charles Williams 'the dead master of the Affirmation'. This indicates its real importance for the rest of us. She accompanies this dedication with a quotation from the Inferno which, quoted in full, in her translation reads: 'for I keep with me still,/ stamped on my mind, and now stabbing my heart,/The dear, benign, paternal image of you,/You living, you hourly teaching me the art/By which men grow immortal; know this too;/I am so grateful, that while I breathe air,/My tongue shall speak the thanks that are your due.' (Inf. xv,80-86). Books on the Way of Affirmation are very few. The Figure of Beatrice is one that can show us

the way from the first vision of the Glory to the gates of Paradise."

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