

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 65, SPRING 1992



MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

16 May 1992: The Society will meet from 11am to 5pm and hold its AGM. The AGM will start at 11am. The agenda is enclosed. Following the AGM, at about 12 noon, Ruth Spalding will read, with the assistance of three other voices, her script of "A Portrait of Charles Williams", first broadcast on the BBC third programme on 13 September 1961. After lunch, Rev T Gorringe will speak on "Eros and Spirituality".

7 November 1992: Professor John Hibbs will speak on "Charles Williams and current economic thought".

27 February 1993: Gwen Watkins will speak on "The novels of R H Benson and Charles Williams".

All these meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 14 June 1992: We will read "Terror of Light" and "The Three Temptations" from Collected Plays. We will meet at St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburg Place, London W2 (nearest tube stations Queensway and Bayswater) at 1pm. Tea and coffee will be provided but please bring sandwiches.

OXFORD READING GROUP

For information 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, 188 W. 11th St., Holland, Michigan 49423, USA. Tel: (616) 396 2260.

DALLAS CATHEDRAL READING GROUP

For details please contact Canon Roma King, 9823 Twin Creek Drive, Dallas, Texas 75228, USA.

NEWS ABOUT BOOKS

Members may be interested to know of Society member Martin Moynihan's book The Latin Letters of C S Lewis, published in 1987 in the USA by Bookmakers Guild Inc. which explores the correspondence between C S Lewis and Don Giovanni Calabria of Verona, a Roman Catholic priest.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions are due to be renewed from 1 March 1992. The renewal form is enclosed for those who have not yet done this.

NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to Anne Spalding, 24 Weston Road, Lewknor, Oxford, OX9 5TU.

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LINKING TWO POWERFUL IMAGES - A note by John Hibbs

From "Mount Badon" in Taliessin Through Logres comes one of those lines that live with you, illuminating the uncertainties that arise when we seek to comprehend 'the springs of action':

"Fool,
all lies in a passion of patience - my lord's rule".

The king's poet is his captain of horse, but more: he is the author of victory over the pirate chaos.

... the heart of our lord Taliessin determined the war

And the significance is underlined in "The Calling of Taliessin in The Region of the Summer Stars, with Merlin's bidding:

rescue the king at Mount Badon

Everything turns upon the unity of feeling and action, enabling Taliessin to identify

the point where the pirate chaos might suddenly yield and instantaneously to 'fetch the pen of his spear from its bearer'. This instant which includes within itself eternity is encapsulated in the words 'a passion of patience', as it is reflected in the vision Yeats had of Caesar:

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.

But there is another figure whose unity of feeling and action resonates in the mind just as does that of Taliessin, and that also in the decision that turns the outcome of a battle. In E R Eddison's Mistress of Mistresses (Faber 1935), Lessingham, with his 'hundred picked riders and a hundred of his veteran foot', takes the action that defeats Roder at the battle of Lorkan Field. Let Eddison's own prose describe it:

"Even as the gannet, half closing her wings, drops like a broad-barbed arrow to the sea, cleaving the waters with a blow that flings up spray with a swish as of a spouting whale, so, suddenly, seizing the moment, Lessingham struck."

The figure of Lessingham, who forms the ambiguous link between 'our' world and that of Zimiamvia throughout Eddison's unfinished saga, has long stayed in my mind as in some way linked with that of Taliessin.

In The Inklings (Allen & Unwin 1978) Carpenter records that Eddison met Lewis, Tolkien and Williams at Oxford in 1943 and again in 1944, but we do not hear what CW thought about the man or his books. The linkage I outline here may be no more than a personal accident, but I thought it sufficient to bring to the attention of others, who may make of it what they will.

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TALIESSIN IN BYZANTIUM - by George Every

I think I may be able to say something useful about the role of the Byzantine empire in the later poems of Charles Williams. I took Byzantine special and optional subjects for an external degree of the University of London in 1928-9, while I was a student at the University College of the South-West of England, now the University of Exeter. There, and in these subjects, I had the advantage of supervision from Christopher Dawson, who had just finished Progress and Religion and was at work on The Making of Europe. Ten years later, in 1938, as a lay brother of the Anglican Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham, I was introduced to Charles Williams, who gave me Taliessin Through Logres and his anthology on The Passion of Christ. The poems I found difficult, as T S Eliot did until he read The Descent of the Dove, but they were in my mind when I wrote in 1943-4 the first chapter on Byzantine civilisation in The Byzantine Patriarchate, 451-1204. This was not published until 1947, but by 1944 I had cited from "The Vision of the Empire":

'The logothetes run down the porphyry stair
bearing the missives through the area of empire.'

in an account of liturgies performed by Byzantine functionaries, not only the clergy and 'clerks of audience' in the emperor's sacred palace, the Whitehall of Constantinople, but peasant farmers in regulated communes, who sowed seed, built houses and dug wells according to rules prescribed by liturgical tradition,

believed to be in harmony with the movement of God the creator through the universe, and with angels and archangels, apostles and prophets, martyrs, virgins and other saints portrayed in their churches, where Christ the Pantokrator reigned over all, with the Mother of God by his side, but in obedience to the Father.

I might have begun my quotation earlier:

"The organic body sang together;
dislects of the world sprang in Byzantium;
back they ran to sing in Byzantium;
the streets repeat the sound of the throne."

To Charles Williams the Roman empire was the seedbed of the Christian Church in and after the age of persecutions. The empire was the same empire with the same name from the rise of Rome to the fall of the new Rome at Constantinople. The Muslims, Arabs and Turks, called it Roum or Roumelia, the Franks, including the English, Romania or Roumania. The Greeks still call their spoken language Romaic. The Byzantine name was given to the empire by French scholars who wished to distinguish it clearly from the Holy Roman empire which by the seventeenth century had become one of the appertenances of the house of Austria. Some of them were Gallicans who would not wish to identify the Eastern Roman Empire with the Holy See. Charles Williams, as an Anglican, may have felt a like embarrassment, as I did when at Damascus I had to enquire for the patriachate Rum-Orthodox, Rum meaning Greek. But he knew that in the period envisaged in his Arthurian poems there was no alternative centre of civilisation. The old city of Rome was in ruins, and in his mind civilisation meant cities. The West did not begin to have a culture of its own until Paris had a university in the twelfth century, and after that fresh waves of Eastern influence continued after the Crusades, the fall of Constantinople, and in his own day the Russian emigration.

C S Lewis was no doubt right in saying that his first acquaintance with Byzantium was in Gibbon, as was mine, but neither of us could share Gibbon's perspective in The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. The Descent of the Dove shows the depth of his positive interest in the formation of Christendom, to Gibbon the great disaster. This he shared with T S Eliot and Christopher Dawson. His interest in slavegirls points to his enthusiasm for the typists and shop-assistants who came to his extension lectures. These seemed to him more intelligent than undergraduates, at any rate until he met their like at Oxford during the war.

No doubt there were slaves in Byzantium. The word slave in German and English is taken from the Schlavs or Slavs of Eastern Europe. This usage first appears in the ninth century, in German and only later in Latin and Greek. But I am not sure that all the servant-girls listed by Brenda Boughton in the Spring number of the Newsletter (61) are slaves. They rather stand for the working classes in an urban civilisation, accomplished in arts and crafts. The serving-maid in "The Star of Percevale" speaks in familiar terms to the Archbishop, and he to her. The girl in the stocks in "The Ascent of the Spear" endures jeers from "the stable-slaves" for her part in a brawl, but Taliessin calls her "Ah lady".

"Under the Direction she denied pride;
her heart flowed to the crowd."

Later "She said 'I was wrong from beginning ...'". In "The Sister of Percevale" a back "scarred from whip or sword" bent to draw water from a well. "The scar lightened over a curved horizon, but

"A round plane of water rose shining in the sun;
she steadied the handle, the strain ceased; her
arm
balanced the line."

Taliessin saw this mathematically and turned it into

poetry. This reminds me of Byzantine Aesthetics by Father Gervase Mathew, who told C S Lewis that Charles Williams understood Byzantine history better than Gibbon.(1)The Athenian slave-girl in "The Departure of Dindrane" rode in the retinue of Taliessin. In this she chose to remain. The Caucasian, liberated to be "The Queen's Servant", is stripped naked and clothed with the body of her resurrection.

"The wool rose gently on no wind,
and was flung to her shoulders; behind her, woven of
itself
it fell in full folds to a golden-creamed cloak;
hued almost as the soft redeemed flesh
hiding the flush of the rich redeemed blood
in the land of the Trinity, where the Holy Ghost
works
creation and sanctifications of flesh and blood."

This is an image of redemption, of liberation from slavery in the resurrection of the body, but without bondage there is no salvation.

In The Descent of the Dove the abolition of the slave-trade and then of slavery is a belated victory for Evangelical Christianity, but "never before the nineteenth century had there been so much property to be owned or (proportionally) so few allowed to own it. Millions instead of thousands were dispossessed, and wholly dispossessed ... Mere hunger pre-occupied the lowest classes, and insecurity crept more and more into the lives of the middle-classes." (2) This led inevitably to revolution, to a command economy and a new and terrible slavery. But the expectation of the Second Coming, lost in the schism at the beginning of the second millenium, was renewed in exchanges between East and West, between Catholic and Protestant, in and out of the Church of England, while the poems in The Region of the Summer Stars were being written in the perspective defined in the preface to them. To Malory and his

sources the Matter of Britain was the legacy of an heroic age, as Homer was to the Greek tragedians. They saw there the foundation of medieval (modern) kingdoms in conflict with the Holy Roman empire. To Charles Williams Byzantium was still there, and the Byzantine expectation broke through again in Russia before and after the revolution. His view of Byzantium as the centre of history owes something to J B Bury's notes on Gibbon and his books on the Later Roman Empire, something perhaps to Robert Byron's Byzantine Achievement, published in 1929 with a different reading of Byzantium in relation to Rome, much to friends in the emigration. Since his time the Roman Catholic Church has been partially Byzantinised, sufficiently to take me out of the Anglican communion into it. This may go further with more revolutions in Russia, where the Third Rome has survived the Third International. In this context Byzantium in the poetry of Charles Williams may make sense.

- (1) In Arthurian Torso p. 206
- (2) p.224.

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BOOK REVIEW by Stephen Medcalf

Arthurian Poets: Charles Williams, edited and introduced by David Llewellyn Dodds. Published by Boydell & Brewer at £14.95 paperback (ISBN 0 5115 291 0) and £39.50 hardback (0 85991 327 9).

David Llewellyn Dodds' edition of Charles Williams' Arthurian poems offers us, along with Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars, and Dodds' own good but necessarily too brief introduction, three splendid gifts:

- first, a (slightly trimmed) reproduction on the cover of David Jones' more or less contemporaneous (1940) and gorgeous water colour "Guenever" in the Tate Gallery, which shows Lancelot breaking into the chapel in Sir Meliagrance's castle, where among her wounded

knights the naked Guenever is waking;

- secondly, of Williams' earlier Arthurian poetry, all fifteen previously published but never collected poems, with fourteen of those never before printed, making up a large part of the sequence The Advent of Galahad;

- and thirdly, six fragmentary but substantial poems from what would have been published after The Region of the Summer Stars, had Williams lived.

The last is the best. All the fragments explore regions which Williams had hardly touched before, and bear witness to a development of new life in him in his last years. One can even be taken as a whole poem, though it would probably have been part of a longer one: it describes Bors riding to celebrate Pentecost at Camelot, and cheering himself as he goes with a song about the renewal of love in the constant marriage between himself and Elayne, which evidently reflects what we know from his letters was happening between C.W. and Florence Williams in those years. The new life in Bors' marriage anticipates some new consummation in the story of Arthur's court, probably, as Dodds' suggests, the Pentecost to which Bors is riding is that when Galahad comes to sit in the Perilous Sell, and the quest for the Grail begins. The poem is closely connected with another and finer but more fragmentary one in which Taliessin, also at the beginning of Pentecost, is told by Merlin to expect that his poetry is to be surpassed and superseded by Percivale's. There are closely similar lines in the two poems about the new day, which in the Taliessin poem run:

Down the hill from Caerleon by the Roman road
the two lords went; the May moon
was bright, but chilled already by unseen morn;
the clearness of the sun thrilled through the
clearness of the moon,
but unratified. The texture of the trees freshened,
and the herdsmen were up in the meadows. No walls
parted then Caerleon from the country ...

The sense of anticipation and newness is thrilling, confirmed in the lines about the trees and herdsmen, by a suggestion of actual observation of something happening in nature (experienced firewatching in Oxford, perhaps?) such as is almost totally missing from Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars; there it is replaced by a powerful suggestion of the supersensuous such as in the earlier part of this passage from the new poem is given by the clearness of sun and moon.

Perhaps there would have been more suggestion of natural observation in the unwritten third volume: on the other hand, it is clearly not the new poetry of Percivale, which Taliessin describes in lines that are fine in an altogether other way:

Dull should I have been not to have known by the
Throne

a greater than I, a more than Virgil's peer.

Dry with moaning, high leaning to heaven,
is Percivale's voice, speaking such dialect of stone
as the granite towers use in that land beyond sea
where they talk and stand and move on the Trinity's
business.

The air of that world is always thunder in this
and the print of Percivale' voice is the hint of the
thunderbolt.

It is tempting to think that Williams had T S Eliot in mind when he wrote this. Eliot announced more or less contemporaneously a similar ambition to get beyond poetry - "The poetry does not matter" - in the last three Quartets, and the mention of thunder makes one think of the last section of The Waste Land. But probably the temptation should be resisted. This new Taliessin poem had the title - though Williams cancelled it - The Calling of Galahad. Evidently the idea is that even the most perfect of poetry of the imagination, such as Taliessin represents, will not suffice to describe the achievement of the Grail, which must be left to Percivale. The poem which in Taliessin

Through Logres described Galahad's entry into Carbonek was put in the mouth of Percivale, although its style is not really distinguishable from the first supersensuous style of Taliessin himself. But it must be presumed that the "dialect of stone" is the style that Williams would have tried to write if he had come to the achievement of the Grail, although he might have taken hints for it from Eliot.

But Taliessin himself is shown with a changing consciousness in another of the fragmentary poems, The Taking of Camelot, in a way which is a relief to those who feel (as I do) that in The Region of the Summer Stars, notably in "The Queen's Servant", he, and perhaps Williams with him, was becoming too confident of his image as King's poet, and degenerating from the splendour of Taliessin Through Logres into something uncomfortably close to pompousness. When he takes Camelot, Taliessin kills King Cradlemas. Doubtless Williams echoes here his own complex feelings about the war: for though the killing seemed unavoidable, Taliessin feels guilty. More strangely, his guilt brings new life in a way that one would expect rather from Kierkegaard's kind of Christianity than from Williams':

Alien and inalienable, rife with terrors,
rose in the king's poet's heart the interior life,
read, dreamed, thought, and yet un-lived
in Caucasia, in Gaul, and the antechambers of
Byzantium.

Curiously, just as there are kinds of new life in both the new Bors poems and The Taking of Camelot, although of very different kinds of new life, so in both the Calling of Galahad associated with the Bors poem, and The Taking of Camelot, there is a new sense of the going on of events in time. The particular detail of this kind in The Taking of Camelot is associated for me with the putting of David Jones' "Guenever" on the cover of these poems, for it raises the question whether Williams in his Arthurian poems and Jones in his Arthurian poems and paintings are doing the same

kind of thing.

In The Taking of Camelot there are lines

They came to Verulam at dawn;
there, under the ruined church on the hill
they watered and changed horses - ate, drank;
prayed, laughed.

which bring to the mind of anyone who knows St Albans the continuity of its history, and the way in which that continuity was caused by the presence on the hill above Roman Verulamium of the church placed there to mark the place of the martyrdom of St Alban, round which the mediaeval town later grew. This is an effect, connecting the world of the Arthurian poems through history with the present day, tht is very rare in Williams' poetry - confined otherwise, I think, to the suggestion in Taliessin in the School of the Poets that Taliessin enters the school "by Paul's and Arthur's door". If one knows a fair amount about Williams' life, one understands that this links Arthur' world with St Paul's cathedral, and St Paul's suggests Amen House beside it, and so Williams' work there and the Masques by which he ritualised and enchanted the place. One does not need to know that Williams was brought up in St Albans to feel the impression of continuity in the lives from The Taking of Camelot.

It is odd that Williams did not use that effect in the Arthurian poems: for his novels are full of it, conspicuously in relation to St Albans in Descent into Hell, and London in All Hallows' Eve. Evidently he wanted the world of Taliessin Through Logres to be as self-contained as it is. But David Jones complains of a consequence of this self-containedness in his essay on Williams, "The Arthurian Legend", in his Epoch and Artist. He misses, he says, "nowness". "Somehow, somewhere, between content and form, concept and image, sign and what is signified, a sense of the contemporary escapes, or rather appears to me to escape." To illustrate this sense of the contemporary, he instances a phrase from James Joyce which works a little like the

lines about Verulam. Joyce describes Suffolk Place in Dublin where the Norsemen held their "things" or councils as "Northmen's thing made south folk's place." Jones praises him both for metamorphosing "Suffolk Place", so as to reveal the Northmen's "thing" hidden in it, and for finding a "Suffolk Place" to metamorphose. Williams, he implies, although he had the power to do this and could have shown the world of Arthur hidden in the present day, did not find "the actual, the intimate and the now", in which to show it hidden. Consequently, readers find not enough to hold them so that they can become familiar with the strangeness of the Arthurian world and of Williams' interpretation of it.

There may be some truth in this (although Jones himself is uncertain) to the extent that readers are apt to feel if they come across the Arthurian poetry before having been caught by something else in Williams' writing, that there is a key which they need before they can begin to respond to the poetry. In contrast, some might feel, David Jones' picture on the cover, although it is quite as full of symbolism and Arthurian reference as Williams' verse, has a kind of initial invitingness. Even if you do not know the story behind it, it suggests, you can make up your own story, and it will be more or less good enough. No doubt that is why it is on the cover. But if you open the book, will you not still find that the style of the verse asks that you discover both the right story and the right interpretation. Robert Conquest long ago, in a much more hostile review of Williams' poetry than David Jones, praised the talent that made it, but said that what it had made was totalitarian. This is the wrong word. But I take this self-contained quality, this absoluteness, to be what he means. In our age, which has made freedom its central value to the extent that critics are continually making statements which imply that there are no constraints on interpretation at all, that a poem means anything a reader wants it to mean, such absoluteness is a considerable bar to response.

It is a problem which is highlighted by David Llewellyn Dodds' remaining gift to us, the earlier Arthurian

These are not nearly such good poetry as Taliessin Through Logres. Some are so slackly written that it requires considerable expenditure of energy to keep's one attention on them, and indeed are only valuable because they show in what ways the later poetry is good. Compare for example the magnificent last verse of the "Prelude" to Taliessin Through Logres:

Good is God, the muezzin
calls, but lost is the light on the hills of
Caucasia,
glory of the Emperor, glory of substantial being.

with its predecessor

Wise is the Moslem law;
but lost is the light that lay on the snows of
Circassia,
glory of the Emperor, glory of substantial being.

They are equally knotty and esoteric in their symbolism. But the first line has become much more precise and removes the need to guess at why the Moslem law is wise, but inferior to Christianity in its perception of the glory of the incarnation of God. The second line, by omitting the unnecessary "that lay" and the distracting "snows", suggests much more powerfully that the light is the light of divine glory. The supersensual quality of Taliessin Through Logres can be seen emerging.

Nevertheless, some of these weaker poems reveal significances which make one realise that one has made no sense at all of lines that depend on one's knowing them in Taliessin Through Logres. Take the opening of "The Star of Percivale":

By the magical western door in the king's hall
the Lord Percivale harped ..."

As it stands in this poem. the magical western door means very little, and makes a feeble start to the poem. Williams remarked that he liked the title

Taliessin Through Logres because it sounds romantic and vague and is almost classically exact. This is what he was aiming at throughout the book. But this door is not exact, is too vague, is too vague even to be weakly romantic - until one discovers what it is from one of the best of the early poems, "Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium". It is the door of creation, beyond which was darkness,

..... always darkness, save
at midnight on great feasts a light shone forth
but from no moon or sun, as if the world
looked through itself at some antipodes
of day, where vast hills hovered cloudily,
pinewoods wind-shaken, but no wind to feel
and noiseless waterfalls from unseen heights ...

Through it Balin went to deal the dolorous blow: from it the Grail, if it is ever achieved, will be brought.

All this gives an important context to what is said in "The Star of Percivale", and to a line in "The Crowning of Arthur"

At the door of the gloom sparks die and revive

and one re-reads those poems with greatly increased insight and therefore enjoyment. But until those poems were rewritten, or at least published in their weaker form, one had sometimes to walk in reading the published poems on steps that were not there.

Williams' later Arthurian poetry, to say it again, is oddly self-contained. Rather rare readers find themselves at home in it from the start, needing no key: rather more have found a key in the novels or other writings before they come to it. But by what intuitions could one be introduced to it, that would bring it more easily than it usually is taken to be, under T S Eliot's canon: "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood"? Some such intuitions can be found by following up the suggestion

of Jones' Guenever, and comparing the descriptions in words which both Jones and Williams give of Guinevere. Williams' is brief, in "Taliessin in the Rose Garden":

Hazel-lithe she stood, in a green gown;
bare against the green, her arm was tinged
with faint rose-veins, and golden flecked
as the massed fair hair under the gold
circlet of Logres; on one hand was the ring
of the consort of Logres; deep-rose-royal
it drew the rose-alleys to its magical square.

Jones' is much longer: it is in his great meditation on sign, art and sacrament, The Anathemata, and describes Guinevere at the Midnight Mass of Christmas, over eleven pages. But the greater part of this concerns her ritual posture at the altar and the purple robe like a chasuble adorned with golden bees and furred, which descends to her buskins of Andalusian leather furnished with polar ivory brought to ber by the Celtic sea-god. The only parts of her own person that are revealed are, as with Williams, her fair hair against the golden circlet

"So that the pale gilt where it was by nature palest, together with the pale river-gold where it most received the pallid candle-sheen, rimmed the crescent whiteness where it was whitest."

her brow, white as the moon, and "her neck-shaft of full entasis, as though of Parian that never ages, still as a megalith, and as numinous". She is in fact seen as like the moon, and like a "chryselephantine column (native the warm blood in the blue veins that vein the hidden marbles, the lifted abacus of nature gold)" that "leaned, and toward the Stone".

There is an evident contrast in their treatment of human flesh. Jones wants to relate it to ritual, to its clothing, to myth, architecture and stone, Williams also to ritual, but to stress that naturalness in colour of both the clothing and the flesh itself and its likeness to roses. In the case of the human body,

Williams does begin from naturally observed reality, even though presently he wants to relate it to the blood of sacrifice and other things. Here, he has found "the actual, the intimate and the 'now'", in the fleshliness of the human body, which interests Jones less than the making of architecture and ritual. This can be seen even in the watercolour Guenever. Guenever's naked body is in itself awkwardly sensuous, not glorious nor symbolic: it is made allegorical because the bed on which she lies suggests an altar, and her bedroom is a chapel, where the bodies of her knights beside hers suggests the sleeping dead of all wars throughout history.

There is here a general contrast. Both poets are visionaries concerned with the universe as sacramental. Both want to show us, as Williams put it in Witchcraftm how a thing being wholly itself may be laden with universal meaning. Both see an analogy between meaning in words and meaning in sacraments: both follow through meaning in both words and sacraments to see God's meaning in everything. It is not a vision easy to convey in the present day, which is dominated by what Jones called the utile, by the practical and functional, and only accepts the kind of meaning with which Jones and Williams were concerned in the form of that individual, subjective and totally free interpretation of which I have already spoken. Williams' understanding and expression of it came from the way in which the human body is naturally meaningful, either generally, as informed by spirit, or particularly in the glory with which lovers see it. Jones' understanding came from art itself, in the analogy between the artist and the minister of a sacrament in making matter meaningful.

Jones' way was probably, in a civilisation whose artefacts are more dominated by function than symbol, the more difficult to use in writing and painting, as indeed he says in his most anthologised poem, A,a,a, Domine Deus. Oddly enough, this may make what he did produce more accessible to modernists who even without religious sensibility sympathise with his artistic

struggle. Williams seems not to have had to struggle, in the writing of his poetry, to retain his vision. In "Bors to Elayne: On the King's Coins", which begins and ends with the meaning of Elayne's hands, he unhesitatingly condemns the elimination of meaning in a functional world:

the brood of carriers levels the good they carry.
We have taught our images to be free; are we glad?

One penalty he paid was isolation. His capacity to see symbol where others see bare matter is one of the grounds of what David Jones calls "his flavour, the atmosphere which is powerful, 'strong and strange' as Mr Lewis says." It is continually too strong and strange at one point or another even for us his admirers, as even for David Dodds, who objects - wrongly I think - to the use of oil from the ground for Arthur's crowning, because it comes from near Caucasia and because of its multiple uses, in one of the new fragments:

The gold mined in Caucasia, of a kind for kings,
thrice-refined in the City; the sacred oil
from wells also by Caspian, stuff of fertility,
lubricant to every function, for the unction first
of the king's crowning ...

A greater penalty was in his erotic life, in the painfulness of trying to recognise what he saw in human and fleshly beauty and reconciling it with other human relationships. I again think David Dodds wrong in appealing to Lois Lang-Sims' Letters to Lalage for evidence that he did not in his life keep his "doctrine homogeneous and consistent". It seems to me that this is exactly what he did, and that it was this which caused unavoidable strains. There are suggestions in the early Arthurian poems of how much the world of Taliessin had its source in the pains of his relationship with Phyllis Jones. Thus what appears in "Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass" as pentecostal fire:

the festival of flames
fell from new sky to new earth; the light in bands
of bitter glory renewed the imperial lands.

appears in its earlier form, "Taliessin's Song of Lancelot's Mass", as the glory of Christ's resurrected body, between resurrection and ascension, but coming through Celia, his name for Phyllis Jones, upon Circassia, the earlier form of Caucasia as the realm of human flesh:

And from the general vision
for my sole heart to confess
there grew beyond the altar
a Byzantine princess.

The altar stood between us
of our Lord's great courtesy
and the awful light spread round us
that we had bidden to be.

'Twixt advent and departure
of pierced and shining hands
the bitter Caelian glory
renewed circassian lands.

This earlier form bears witness, not only how much the renewal of his sense of divinity manifested in humanity owed to Phyllis Jones, but also how much he presumed that such a manifestation of glory might be bitter. There is admittedly something unbalanced in this earlier sense of what can appear through humanity in intense love. The Princess of Byzantium in this Mass seems to play the part, with Williams' approval, which he condemns in the later poetry in "The Star of Percivale":

Lancelot's gaze at the Host found only a ghost of the Queen.

And in the latest poetry, in "The Daughter of King Brandegon's", what remains of this kind of relation between love and the Mass is Bors remembering Elayne,

when sideways tossed your eyes
as we have to the Consecration; the Eucharist
holds this no less; there is never a kiss
lost there, whatever the cost to us.

The Princess of Byzantium, idolised in The Advent of Galahad, is removed in the published poetry, her place as Taliessin's beloved being taken by Blanchefleur, sister of the awesome figure of Percivale, never idolised, but herself someone who subjects her life to sacrifice and substitution.

It is, of course, a difficulty in symbolic writing like Williams's which has meanings in various directions and on various levels, that the more one stresses any one way in which it works in relation to "the actual, the intimate and the now", the less one does justice to some other. Thus as Williams moves, as he seems to, towards a historic connection between Arthur's Logres and modern Britain, such as that in the lines about Verulam, he puts a strain on the relation between the world of the poems and ideal humanity, experienced by lovers who see their beloved ablaze with heaven. This is already happening in the published poetry, and is one of the reasons for a difficulty which Dodds ponders, that one cannot quite rearrange the poems in Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars to make one sequence, as C S Lewis tried to do so in Arthurian Torso. For in The Region of the Summer Stars Williams (perhaps under pressure from the academic scholarship of Tolkien, whose poem objecting to the untroubled anachronism of Taliessin Through Logres is in Humphrey Carpenter's The Inklings), becomes more conscious and conscientious about history. Thus in Taliessin Through Logres those who know something of the vision of God but deny coinherence are represented by the Moslems, who did not exist for many generations after any possible historic date for Arthur; in The Region of the Summer Stars their place is taken by the Nestorians. More subtly and more importantly, the last line in the last but one poem of Taliessin Through Logres runs: "Logres was withdrawn to Carbonek; it became Britain."

In the preface to The Region of the Summer Stars, Williams renders this into prose: "Logres is overthrown and afterwards becomes the historical Britain, in which the myth of its origin remains." This is a very historical rendering, which might tempt one to think that Britain was once Logres, but now everything that was

Logres has been removed from it. Williams tries to prevent us from thinking this by adding "in which the myth of its origin remains". This phrase must be more or less equivalent to "to Carbonek": that is, Carbonek is that spiritual place in modern Britain where, as in "Northfolk's thing made Southfolk's place" in Joyce's Dublin, you should find a myth of origin. That interpretation fits perfectly well if you consider the Arthurian world not as a historical myth, but as a myth of what the human body and mind is: Carbonek does spiritually and psychologically correspond to the romantic, poetic and chivalric ways in which we have imaginative access to the Grail. Yet if, as in the prose rendering of The Region of the Summer Stars you historicise the myth, you find that the presence of Logres in modern Britain, and therefore the meaning of Carbonek, has too much to do with a bare remembering of something past. How inadequate that is, you may see if you consider Williams' lovely remark in his life of Queen Elizabeth apropos of the commercial sense which Elizabeth shared with Shakespeare: "The English, a nation of shopkeepers, are a nation of poets, of whom a number of the best came literally out of shops. They, like the angel of the Apocalypse, set one foot on the known and one on the unknown." So, Logres is a present part of Britain .

Perhaps it is important to include among the Arthurian cycle of poems, to support this sense of the presence of Logres, not only some of The Advent of Galahad, but also the one body of Williams' verse in which he shows one of the places of his Arthurian world in the external world of the twentieth century. It is not Logres he shows but P'o - l'u, and the poetry is some of his latest, the haunting, distressing but triumphant play The House of the Octopus. There would be further advantages in including this play. It would more than answer Dodds' feeling that in Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars P'o - l'u is not as successful as in its first limited appearance in the early Mordred's song of the Kingdom. Moreover, in it two themes which Williams intended to treat in his Arthurian poems, but never did, are brought forward. First, Anthony the

missionary priest in the play is, as it were, Arthur continuing and winning his moral struggle over the dilemma expressed both in the epigraph to Taliessin Through Logres, and in The Crowning of Arthur and later;

the king made for the kingdom, or the kingdom made for the king?

And secondly, the figure of the Flame in The House of the Octopus fulfils what Williams meant to be central to the Arthurian cycle but actually only included by allusion, his understanding of the unseen and mysterious workings of God's providence expressed in the invisible knight Garlon. Like the newly printed fragments of The Calling of Galahad which must have been written more or less contemporaneously with it, The House of the Octopus manifests the uncanny vision of the world which Williams acquired as he drew near his death.

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A.G.M AND MEETING 16 MAY 1992

Please note that no formal arrangements are being made for lunch. There are pubs and snack bars in the area for those who wish to eat out. For those who prefer to stay put tea and coffee will be available but please bring sandwiches.

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