The Charles Williams Society

N E W S L E T T E R

No. 67, AUTUMN 1992

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

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

5 June 1993: The Society will hold its Annual General Meeting. Following this David Dodds will speak on his work editing the unpublished writings of Charles Williams.

23 October 1993: Dr Paul Siddes will speak on Charles Williams and the problem of evil".

All these meetings will take place in Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1. starting at 2.30 (except for the AGM which will start at 11 am).

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 4 April 1993: We will continue to read the new Arthurian Poems from Arthurian Poets - Charles Williams edited by David Dodds. We will meet at St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburgh Place, London W2 (nearest tube stations Queensway and Bayswater) at 1 pm.

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

Statement by the Chairman of the Council of the Charles Williams Society

"With regret I have informed the Secretary and members of the Council that, because of advancing age, I wish to give up the Chairmanship of the Council and the office of Honorary treasurer at the next Annual General Meeting on 5 June 1993.

The management of the Society is vested in the Council which at present consists of five honorary officers, as shown on the last page of the Newsletter, and three ordinary members, Dr Adrian Thomas, Mrs Anne Scott and Mrs Joan Northam. Our Constitution and Rules provide that the Council may appoint any of their number to the office of Chairman or to such honorary office as they may determine but there shall be not more than eight honorary officers and not more than four ordinary members.

The Council need additional members and they

ask members of the Society to consider nominations for election at the Annual General Meeting on 5 June 1993. As far as possible, for the convenience of its members, meetings of the Council precede by about an hour the Society's lecture meetings which are usually held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1.

Names should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs Gillian Lunn at 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL. A copy of the Constitution and Rules is available on request to her or to me."

Richard Wallis
Chairman of the Council

Richard Wallis - an appreciation

"When Richard Wallis became Chairman of the Council of the Charles Williams Society in 1976 I very much doubt that he imagined that year after year, for sixteen years, those who gathered for the Society's Annual General Meetings would unanimously vote for his retention of that office. There cannot be a member of the Society who does not regret his departure. Times change and people come and go but it seemed as if Richard would always be there. Now that his retirement is inevitable we look back on those sixteen years with affection and gratitude. Outstandingly loyal both to the memory of Charles Williams and the Society he, Richard, helped to form, he has never missed an AGM and seldom been absent from the quarterly meetings over which he has presided with such care and humour. In all those years he has guided us with a kindness and a modesty that we have come to recognise as characteristic of a man who has understood, and made his own, some of the deepest insights of

the man he has sought to know."

Brian Horne and all the other
Committee members

Council Meetings

An extra meeting was held on 22 October 1992 at which our Hon Chairman told us of his intention to resign at the 1993 AGM. He will also retire as Hon Treasurer. Council met to discuss the implications of this for the Society and also to express profound gratitude to Richard Wallis for all he has done for the Society for so long and to wish him well in his retirement.

At the meeting held on 7 November 1992, arrangements were put in hand for additional councillors to be authorised to sign cheques on the Society's account. Arrangements continue for the 1993 AGM which will be chaired by Brian Horne and at which Richard Wallis will formally retire from the Chair of the Council and as Hon Treasurer. The autumn 1993 meeting was agreed. Further correspondence with the Dean of Westminster is planned about the Poets' corner memorial window. It is hoped that access to the Society's Libraries may become more straightforward in the future.

NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to Adrien Lake, 49 Oxford Street, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S6 3FA.

* *

At the Society's meeting on 7 November 1992 Professor John Hibbs spoke on "Charles Williams and current economic thought". We are very pleased to be able to reprint this talk in the Newsletter.

"I first came across CW's work in a small anthology in the World's Classics series - Modern Verse 1900 - 1940. My copy is dated August 1943. The poem printed there, which 'spoke to me', is headed 'The Coming of Palomides'. It still has the same 'glamour' for me; the same mix of romance and hard thinking that marks all of the poetry, and most of the prose as well. Then I picked up a copy of The House of the Octopus, and - after suffering from missionary plays in my childhood - discovered that religion did not necessitate apallingly bad literary standards.

Over the next few years I bought and read everything I could get hold of, and almost all the books were still in print. Along with Hopkins and Yeats, this was a heady cocktail of verse, made stronger by the novels, which uncover the realities beneath everyday behaviour. And this was taken further by the criticism; I still find the analysis of Troilus in The English Poetic Mind the heart of CW's work, just as he found it to be at the heart of Shakespeare's. I once made a 'presentation' of this, using excerpts from the play interspersed with comments built on the argument of this wonderful book. (It does not seem to have been noticed that CW preceded R D Laing's enlightening study of schizophrenia - in The Divided Self [London 1959]. In Troilus I suggest we have what may be called 'the schizogenic moment').

I am tempted to go down that road, but perhaps it is not one that an economist can rightly explore. I would just say, though, that another forming influence on my thought offers another link to be discussed another time. My cousin R H Blyth, who was chiefly responsible for introducing western thought to Zen Buddhism (Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics [Tokyo, The Hokuseido press, 1948] would have said of CW's work on Troilus (and much else) 'but of course'. For of all authors, CW's life and work seem to me to exhibit Zen most notably, and since Zen never sits on a pedestal, we do well to remember that. (It is something I believe Alice Mary Hadfield understood very well).

Now, what is this man talking about? you will ask. When do we get to the dreaded subject of economics? Starting to think about this paper, earlier this year, I received by some working of providence the Spring 1992 number of that excellent American journal, The Humane Studies Review. (Published by the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University, Fairfax VA). In it there is, in the series Current Issues in Literature, an article by Donald McCloskey, who is a professor of Economics at the University of Iowa, called Reading the Economy. I commend it to you.

To quote selectively is unfair, but inevitable. (I do not mean 'quote' in the sense that so infuriated Roger Ingram in Shadows of Ecstasy). McCloskey starts from the definition of economics given by Alfred Marshall in The principles of Economics [London 1890]: 'a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life'. (Marshall, after Adam Smith, is still the daddy of us all). Would not CW have said the same of 'literature'? Is it not true of every aspect of his work? But McCloskey, building on this, makes a statement that I specially commend to

you, of which I suppose CW would say 'but of course'. It is this:

> If literature often cannot be summarized without loss, my theme can: It is 'The dichotomy between the economy and the spirit is bunk.' ... The dichotomy is nutty and hurtful, and it is about time we got rid of it.

But, as McCloskey goes on to say, the typical academic specialist in Literature will turn to Marx for understanding of 'mankind in the ordinary business of life'. The problem that arises from that is the Marxian assumption that you do not need to look further. The danger then is that, like those who enter the wood of Broceliande, they return 'loquacious with a graph / or a gospel, gustily audacious over three heavens'. (From 'The Calling of Taliessin' in The Region of the Summer Stars). Aside from the essential theoretical weakness of the labour theory of value, on which Marxian economics is built, there is its self-confessed materialism; the ultimate in reductionism, that denies the validity of all but economists in accounting for human behaviour, and human thought.

Furthermore, the literary and religious establishments alike tend to be hostile to the doctrine of free exchange that lies at the heart of western liberal economics, and at the heart of CW's theology, too. It is open to question how far the bench of bishops today have read any economics - or, for that matter, any Charles Williams. Certainly the pronoucements that some of them deliver show a total absence of rigorous thought about the ordinary business of life. And, I have to admit, economics has not made itself easily accessible.

Sir Roy Harrod, the biographer of Keynes and an important economist in his own right, has stressed the need for economists to look beyond the walls of their own discipline in order to

become better economists. Too many stay within those wall, and cultivate their own private gardens within them. The walls, be it said, are walls of non-communication; an affront to literature and scholarship. At their most extreme, they defy the layman to enter, by their use of esoteric equations. As Robert Heilbroner said (I found this in The Guinness Dictionary of Poisonous Quotes [Enfield, Middlesex, 1991]) - 'Mathematics has given economics rigour, but alas, also mortis'. In a form of trahison des clercs, some economists defy the layman to enter their country without first having mastered a new language. (Admittedly, the sociologists are even more reprehensible in this way).

Now I must not deny that economics does have a high level of abstraction where its theoretical foundations are concerned. But I would defend the thesis that this abstraction is accessible conceptually, without having to have recourse to the formulae and diagrams beloved of the textbook writers, which, in my experience, put too many beginning students off. There is a paradox here, comparable perhaps to that expressed by Udall and The Confessor in Episode IV of Judgement at Chelmsford - I recall the scene clearly even now:

The Second Gentlemen: Do you understand that, my girl?
Envy (curseying and impertinent): Of course, father.
The First Gentleman: Why your dress is to be so sober, hey?
Envy: Of course. It's as simple as the Holy Gospel.
The Second Gentleman: Ha, indeed. Is the Gospel simple, Nicholas?
Udall: Well - in a way, yes, sir.
The Confessor (in an undertone): Brother, the Gospel is not simple, and you know it.
Udall: Well - in a way, no, brother.

Perhaps I may take that as the best

illustration I can find for the 'difficulty' of economics. But if economics is at one and the same time 'simple' and 'not simple', to master it is no more easy than it is to master any worth-while discipline; say, theology. Mainstream 'neo-Classical' economics makes this more of a problem, sine its theoretical account of the ordinary business of life can seem somewhat detached from human experiene. 'Homo oeconomicus' is an abstraction living in a world where uncertainty has been made to appear irrelevant.

There is however an alternative paradigm, and one that, in my experience, appeals more to the actual experience of living in an uncertain world, where the future is unknowable, and information so diffuse as to make centralised decision-making ineffective. It is commonly labelled 'neo-Austrian' economics, since its originators came from that society. It is not my purpose today to explore the range of economic thought, but rather to bring together some of the ways in which neo-Austrian thinking seems to me to have parallels in CW's work.

The author to whom I turn for this is F A Hayek, the Nobel prize-winner whose death earlier this year deprived us of one of the few prophets that modern European culture has produced. And Hayek's work certainly extended well beyond the garden walls of economics. For Hayek - still best known, I suppose, for <u>The Road to Serfdom</u> [London 1944] - has bequeathed to us a view of people engaged in the business of life that I believe would appeal to Lord Arglay, the Chief Justice in <u>Many Dimensions</u>. For Hayek sees the business of life - the working through of the market <u>as process</u> - as depending upon a set of abstract rules, such as the sanctity of contract and the inviolability of private property, that have grown up because they have been seen to be successful, at the end of the day, in advancing the progress of society.

The Austrians see the market, where all business takes place, as a 'catallaxy'. The term appears quite early in the evolution of economic thought; Richard Whateley in 1831 suggested that 'the best name for economic science would be Catallactics, or the science of exchange' (Roll, A History of Economic Thought, p. 338 [London, revised edition 1973]). I suggest that CW would have found that approach to the business of living sympathetic, and might have carried it forward, for is not 'the doctrine of exchange' central to his thought? And here, I think, we approach matters of great depth and worth. On another occasion recently, I presented a paper on the congruence of Hayek's thought with that of the theologian P T Forsyth (Forsyth, Hayek and the remoralisation of society, reprinted by the Libertarian Alliance [London 1992]). In Judgement at Chelmsford we have CW's great statement of the doctrine - and again the words come to me as from the stage at the Scala Theatre in 1947:

> 'Thus through all eternity
> I forgive you, you forgive me;
> as our dear Redeemer said -
> this the wine and this the bread'

It is the dimension of Christian theology that, it seems to me, both Forsyth and Williams bring to Hayek's great vision of the 'extended order' of society. In Forsyth, I find his concept of the 'cruciality of the Cross' as the origin of just behaviour between men; in Williams it is this sanctity of exchange. For it is a basic concept of economics that each exchange leaves the participants equally satisfied; there can be no economic exchange subject to coercion. And, as Hayek concludes, socialist economies involve coercion in all our business. Indeed, he goes beyond that, remarking that 'To be controlled in our economic pursuits means to be ... controlled in everything'. The doctrine of exchange is about free exchange, or it is about nothing.

Which brings me to what I take to be CW's closest approach to 'catallactics'; the poem 'Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins' in Taliessin through Logres. It is really remarkable how much economics there is in it; one could give it to a postgraduate student to enlighten her or his own thought.

I think it was Trotsky who said 'If you want to destroy capitalism, first debauch the currency'. Fortunately, capitalism has proved itself able to survive even such debauchery as the Bolivian inflation, ten years ago, at an annualised rate of 24,000 per cent. But we have in recent years seen, here at home, the confusion of values that has gone along with the steady fall in the value of money; and we have more recently seen the consequences of the self-seeking manipulation of the international exchange rates. This is the kind of thing that Bors feared would follow from the release of the king's little dragons. Bors is the steady, dependable man, for whom common sense rules, yet whose reason is shot through with the vision that he finds in Elayne. The problem for all such men is that 'common sense' is often in conflict with the discipline of economics. Take for example the 'paradox of thrift' - were we all to be thrifty and careful there would be no spending to enable the catallaxy to move forward, so the supposed virtue of mere thrift restricts the growth of wealth in society. (Much of the current 'recession' has been brought about as people have stopped buying, not so as to save and invest, but so as to reduce their debt). So Bors finds it difficult to reconcile his instinctive distrust of the coinage with Kay's cogent argument for the benefits it will bring - and is not Kay 'the king's steward, wise in economics'?

But Taliessin, too, is afraid, and CW makes no attempt in the poem to reconcile the ambiguities, beyond leaving two statements

resonating in the mind. And in this he takes us, with great skill, to the very heart of the essential ambiguity of money, just as every economist has to. Bors says of the dragon-coins 'They carry on their back little packs of value', but he sees 'house-roofs under their weight / creak and break', and what better metaphor could there be for the recent collapse of the housing market, as 'shadows of great forms / halloed them on, and followed over falling towns'.

Yet Kay, in words appropriate to Hayek's thought, sets out the case for money: 'The poor have choice of purchase, the rich of rents'. Foreseeing Kipling's observation that 'transport is civilisation', he says 'Traffic can hold now and treasure be held, / streams are bridged and mountains of ridged space / tunnelled' - have we not here the Channel Tunnel, internationally financed as 'gold dances deftly across frontiers'? And he concludes, in words that CW must have heard in the world of small businesses in which he grew up: 'Money is the medium of exchange'.

Were that all, things would be so simple (or, as Udall had to acknowledge, perhaps not). But in the next stanza Taliessin discerns the problem that has shaken the polity of Britain in recent weeks - that money may also be a commodity in which trade can proceed, to the detriment of its function in exchange. Ask anyone in the export and import trades of our own kingdom what they think about those who play the currency markets, and you will feel the truth of Taliessin's comment, that 'When the means are autonomous , they are deadly'. Pursuing his analogy with verse, he goes on: ...when words / escape from verse they hurry to rape souls; / when sensation slips from intellect, expect the tyrant; / the brood of carriers levels the good they carry.' and he asks 'are we glad to have brought convenient heresy to Logres?'

Unexpectedly, it is the Archbishop who answers. Dare I ask who, on today's bench of bishops, could have such command of the landscape where theology and economics meet? Who but a poet, and the 'grand art' is not a requisite for episcopal rank, yet). The Archbishop brings into play the treasury of ancient wisdom: 'What saith Heracleitus? - and what is the City's breath? - / dying each other's life, living each other's death.'

Through Bors' reporting to Elayne of the conversation of the lords as they look upon the king's coins, CW seems to me to bring us to the door of what I suggest is the central problem of economics; the inherent conflict between the two uses of money. Kay's functional vision and the distrust of the king's poet. And, having brought us to this point, he leaves it to the Archbishop to comment, by one small adjustment of Kay's perfectly valid remark. An adjustment of one small presposition - and CW must surely have rejoiced in the way one part of speech can carry so much meaning! Taking up Kay's proposition that 'Money is the medium of exchange', the Archbishop concludes; 'Money is a medium of exchange' and thereby opens the possibility of salvation, in economic terms.

Hayek, in The Constitution of a Liberal State (reprinted in New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas, [London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978]) identifies the need for a just regime for public expenditure and taxation. This seems to me to be near to Bors' comment on the 'organisation in London' from which he has ridden to reach Elayne, 'the sole figure of the organic salvation of our good': 'ration and rule, and the fault in ration and rule, / law, and the flaw in law ...'. But Bors flies back to the old, rural certainties; the farmstead as household and home to the extended family; the lost dream of the good peasantry, for which France and Germany today would sacrifice the

food of our cities on the altar of the Common Agricultural Policy. Bors fears the way in which 'compact is becoming contract', but the Archbishop has no such atvistic leanings. With an insight worthy of Aquinas he says 'make yourselves friends by means of the riches of iniquity'; perhaps even an echo of the divine ambiguity in Matthew 10, 16 - 'be wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Revised Standard Version). The doctrine of exchange lies at the heart of all things; money is a medium of exchange.

I hope I have not trespassed too far on your time in this exploration of some themes that I believe have been unduly neglected. It was Alice Mary Hadfield who set mo on this path, when she sent me a reference I needed for a paper of another kind (Looking Upwards: An essay on the origins of authority in church, state and industry. [Congressional Federation, Nottingham, 1991]). In this paper I have sought to home in on Bors and Elayne because it is so extraordinarily relevant to the central problems of economics, but I have tried also to examine in some measure the whole range of CW's work, in the light of McCloskey's remark that 'The dichotomy between the economy and the spirit is bunk'. Working from that assumption, I have also tried to show how the work of Charles Williams can be illuminated from the perspective of - at least - neo-Austrian economics, as well as to extend Harrod's argument that economists should learn from the world outwith their own narrow discipline. McCloskey says in his article: 'It is hurtful for nine out of ten adults who work in home, office or factory to be told their main occupation is beyond the reach of poetry and fiction. No wonder they turn to other sources of poetry and myth, to rock music and country, the TV soaps and the National Football League. The literary people keep telling them that what they do is 'alienating' and that the only real living happens in leisure time and in libraries.'

But if 'literary people' have in this way alienated themselves from the people, as I agree they have, the same is true of economists and to compound the process, literature and economics have turned their backs upon each other. Part of CW's greatness lies in the absence of such barriers from his work, though he knows they exist, as witness Roger Ingram again (in Shadows of Ecstasy), who confesses to 'embalming' poetry, and who finds Muriel, the maid, so offensive. So if I have done something to indicate a congruence between CW's work, and that of Hayek, perhaps I have opened a further breach in the walls. I rather think that both men would, in that case, approve. In which case, there is work to be done."

 (Dr Hibbs is Emeritus Professor of Transport Management in the University of Central England Business School)

* *

OFFICERS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

Chairman: Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS (tel: 071 221 0057)

Secretary: Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL (tel: 081 346 6025).

Treasurer: Richard Wallis, address as above.

Membership Secretary: Mrs Lepel Kornicka, 12 Amherst Avenue, Ealing, London W13 8NQ (tel: 081 997 0807).

Lending Librarian: Rev Dr Brian Horne, 11b Roland Gardens, London SW7 3PE (tel: 071 373 5579).

Newsletter Editor: Mrs Molly Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London N7 8PD (tel; 071 607 7919).

* *

COPYRIGHT