

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 80, WINTER 1995/6



MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

8 June 1996: The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held in the Church Room of St Matthew's Church, St Petersburg Place, Bayswater (nearest Underground stations Queensway and Bayswater), starting at 11.00 am. After an interval for lunch, this will be followed by Grevel Lindop's addressing the Society on "Charles Williams and the Poetic Mind" at 2.30 pm. N.B. There is not much heating in the Church Room - if the weather is cold, dress warmly.

9 November 1996: John Hibbs will give a presentation entitled "The Schizogenic Moment in 'Troilus and Cressida': 'This is and is not Cressid'" in St Matthew's Church Room.

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READING GROUPS:

LONDON

For information, please contact Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS (0171-221-1416).

OXFORD

We are currently halfway through TALIESSIN THROUGH LOGRES. For more information, please contact either Anne Scott (Oxford 53897) or Brenda Boughton (Oxford 515589).

CAMBRIDGE

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

DALLAS CATHEDRAL

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

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THE EDITOR WRITES

Many apologies for the vast delay in the appearance of this Newsletter, which should have come out as far back as December. In order to bring the issues back into line with the seasons, the next one will be a combined Spring and Summer number, and should appear at the beginning of July. This will contain both an account of the world premiere performance of CW's play FRONTIERS OF HELL in February, and (it is hoped) the text of Grevel Lindop's address to the AGM in June. A copy of the agenda for the AGM is enclosed with this Newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following:

Mrs Baron Battles, 1278 San Miguel Ave, Santa Barbara, CA 93109-2135, USA.

Mrs Bernadette Bosky, 206 Valentine St, Yonkers, NY 10704, USA.

Rev Canon A.J. Gardiner, Windmill Lane, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 2DS.

Mrs Janet Lee, 22 Arcadia Road, Istead Rise, Gravesend, Kent DA13 9EH.

Mr John Lewis, 11 Greens End Road, Meltham, Huddersfield, Yorks. HD7 3NW.

Mrs M.C. Lowerson, 9 Bradford Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1RB.

Mr H. Partridge, 39 Wallingford Road, Handforth, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 3JT.

By an oversight, Donna Beales's address was given incorrectly in the last issue. It should have read: 375 Aiken Ave # 11, Lowell, MA 01850, USA.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

These fell due for renewal at the beginning of March. A form is enclosed for this purpose, should you not already have paid. Members are encouraged to give serious thought to paying by Banker's Order - a great help to the smooth running of the Society.

REPORT OF A COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 1996

Council completed plans for 1996 meetings and discussed plans for 1997, including the hoped-for overnight conference.

There are currently 132 members of the Society; 82 in the UK, 50 overseas. Some members have still not paid their subscriptions for 1995/96. A final reminder will be sent to them with the Newsletter.

The sale of Thelma Shuttleworth's donated books has made a helpful addition to funds. Some money has been transferred from the current account to the savings account.

Articles and a dissertation on Charles Williams's work, sent by members, have been deposited in the Society's Reference Library.

Council again discussed the need for the Reference Library to be catalogued and another appeal will be made in the Newsletter for help.

Possible free publicity for the Society was discussed and will be further investigated.

CW IN PRINT...

Members may like to know that THE FIGURE OF BEATRICE is available as a paperback from Boydell & Brewer at £14.95 or \$27.00. ISBN 0 85991 445 3.

...AND ON MASTERMIND

The transmission of the round of the BBC quiz 'Mastermind' in which Richard Sturch answered questions on CW has been again delayed, possibly until the end of May. UK members are advised to keep a sharp eye on the pages of the Radio Times.

OUTLINES OF ROMANTIC THEOLOGY

Martin Moynihan writes to say, as a pendant to his review of the OUTLINES in Newsletter No.60, that he has now found that St Augustine, in his Sermon No.372, 'On the Lord's Nativity', does indeed describe Christ's blood shed on the Cross as 'a priceless dowry', thus confirming what was hazarded in the review. This means that,

without endorsing the OUTLINES in full, we can at least still keep the end-paper map of TALIESSIN THROUGH LOGRES as valid.

JOHN HIBBS WRITES

Gisbert Kranz, in his review of Brian Horne's CHARLES WILLIAMS: A CELEBRATION, worries me when he says that "very few people are apt and willing to undergo the toil of trying to comprehend (CW's) Arthurian poems". I wonder what Roger Ingram would say to that? For my part, as a young man seeking to master the art of poetry when the books first appeared, I fell upon them eagerly. I found that they spoke to my condition, as poetry does, and so very little "toil" was involved. It had been the same with Hopkins' "terrible sonnets" and the experience put me off my intended career in Eng. Lit. The problem, surely, is the assumption that to comprehend a poem is essentially an intellectual activity. Taking the Taliessin poems, their subtleties of rhythm and internal rhymes act directly upon the senses, bringing - if you will let them - comprehension in their wake. It is then that you start to need the background that so many of the Society's excellent papers can provide. But it seems to me that to "undergo toil" is just the wrong way to go about the work; intellectual effort interposes barriers to the experience of the "grand art".

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At the Society Annual General Meeting on 30 September, Canon Eric James spoke on 'Another's Glory: A Testimony to the Influence of Charles Williams'. We are pleased to be able to reprint his talk below.

If this were a sermon, not a talk, and if I were to give it a text, I've no doubt what that text would be: the Fourth Chapter of the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians, and the Seventh Verse: "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

You see: I've said I would talk on "the influence of Charles Williams" - I meant his influence on me; but I have to start with the influence of the person who first introduced me to the writings of Charles Williams. That will, of course, be no surprise to those of "The Company of the Co-Inherence".

In 1939, I was fourteen. As soon as the Second World War began, in September, a soldier, John Godfrey Rowe was billeted in our vicarage in Chadwell Heath, ten miles east of London.

John had joined up, from Leeds University, where he had been in training for ordination with the Community of the Resurrection. There he had met Fr Mark Tweedy, who had interested him in Charles Williams.

John Rowe and I soon became close friends. I have, in fact, a book for both my birthday and for Christmas for all the years from 1939 until John died an untimely death, in 1970 - aged fifty - when one morning he was unlocking the doors of St Mary's Bathwick, where he was then vicar. He had served curacies in Bournemouth and Alton, and had been Tutor then Vice Principal of Wells Theological College. But before he was ordained - before he'd got his First in Classics, when he returned to Leeds after the War - he would write to me, wherever he was stationed, during the War, as a Captain in the Royal Marines - from Malta, Sicily, Belgium, and so on; and not infrequently there would be something in his letter about Charles Williams. John Rowe's framed photograph ever since has had a place on my chest-of-drawers.

I should, perhaps, explain to you that I left school when I was fourteen, when the War broke out, and went to work at a riverside wharf on the Thames. I also began to learn the organ then at Southwark Cathedral, which was close by. I was not unintelligent, but I did not have any formal education for seven years. However, in 1940, 41 and 42, I bought Eliot's FOUR QUARTETS, as they appeared, from Alfred Wilson's bookshop in Gracechurch Street, in the City; and I still treasure those first editions.

What I also need to explain to you is what I will call "the state I was in" in 1939 and 1940, and all those War years - the state I was in, in common with many others. In 1939 there was the upheaval of the beginning of the War. John Rowe came into my life then, bringing Charles Williams with him, so to speak; but John was soon being posted to other places. In 1940, the riverside wharves on the north of the Thames, by London Bridge, were all bombed. I watched them burning, and saw much of the City aflame. Several of my friends were killed in the RAF and Fleet Air Arm, and two of my friends, who had been fellow choirboys with me, were killed when a land-mine exploded near our church at Chadwell Heath.

My brother, by the way, four years older than I, was then in training for ordination, so I wasn't entirely theologically illiterate. And it was against this background that I first read, and then reflected upon, what Charles Williams had to say. *THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE* - his "short history of the Holy Spirit in the Church" - had been published in 1939. In 1940, in *THE ST MARTIN'S REVIEW*, there was his article entitled "The Church Looks Forward" - called, later, "The Way of Affirmation". That same year there was what he wrote on "The Image of the City in English Verse", which was published in *THE DUBLIN REVIEW*, and in 1941, again in *THE DUBLIN REVIEW*, he wrote on "The Redeemed City". That same year his pamphlet *THE WAY OF EXCHANGE* was published. His book *THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS* was published in 1942, and in 1945 his new novel *ALL HALLOWS' EVE*.

I also began to familiarise myself with what Charles Williams had written before the War. I cannot, of course, say precisely what passages in Charles Williams' writings most helped me fifty years ago. But let me read you some of the passages which were certainly relevant to my wartime condition.

The War confronted one with a fundamental complexity. It was so easy to simplify: to turn Hitler, for instance, into "Schickelgruber" and all Germans into unmitigated evil. That was, perhaps, the only way you could bomb them. But complexity could also paralyse action.

There is a passage in THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE which addresses this question of "complexity". I suspect it also helped me to be, in the profoundest sense, Anglican:

"If I cannot be certain, then what is the use of thinking or believing anything?" - which is an evasive way of saying, "Since I cannot be God, I refuse to be man." Others, desperate for the security of a rock to stand upon, resort to unreasonable but comforting dicta such as 'This is self-evident ... this was revealed ... this can be proved'. The assurance thus acquired, however, is illusory. 'It is the old trouble which the wise Greek had seen so long ago: "Give me an inch of earth to stand on and I will move the world" But there is no inch of earth; there never has been; there never ... can be."

The War also confronted one with naked evil. It was impossible - I found - to evade thinking out the Cross afresh - which Charles Williams did - and thinking out Forgiveness afresh - which he also did. Williams wrote in THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS:

God "neither forbore to create because we were about to sin nor ceased to sustain when we had begun to sin. It is the choice of a God, not of a man; we should have been less harsh. We should not have created because we could not have endured; we could not have willed; we could not have loved. It is the choice of a God, not of a man."

He wrote in HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN:

There is no split second of the unutterable horror and misery of the world that he did not foresee (to use the uselessness of that language) when he created; no torment of children, no obstinacy of social wickedness, no starvation of the innocent, no prolonged and deliberate cruelty, which he did not know. it is impossible for the mind of man to contemplate an infinitesimal fraction of the persistent cruelty of mankind, and beyond mankind of the animals, through innumerable years, and yet remain sane..... The Omnipotence contemplated that pain and created; that is, he brought its possibility - and its actuality - into existence. Without him it

could not have been; and calling it his permission instead of his will may be intellectually accurate, but does not seem to get over the fact that if the First Cause has power, intelligence, and will to cause a universe to exist, then he is the First Cause of it. The First Cause cannot escape being the First Cause. All the metaphors about fathers giving their children opportunities to be themselves fail, as all metaphors fail. Fathers are not the First Cause. God only is God. The pious have been - as they always are - too anxious to excuse him; the prophet was wiser: "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."

Williams comments, again in HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, with reference to those who say:

in love or in laziness, "Our little minds were never meant..." Fortunately there is the book of Job to make it clear that our little minds were meant. A great curiosity ought to exist concerning divine things. Man was intended to argue with God ... The pretence that we must not ask God what he thinks he is doing (and is therefore doing) is swept away. The Lord demands that his people shall demand an explanation from him. Whether they understand it or like it when they get it is another matter, but demand it they must and shall ... Such a philosophical curiosity is carried on into the New Testament. It accompanies the Annunciation. The Blessed Virgin answered the angelic proclamation with a question: "How shall these things be?"

In his essay in the theological symposium WHAT THE CROSS MEANS TO ME he wrote, in 1943, that the Cross:

does enable us to use the word "justice" without shame - which otherwise we could not. God therefore becomes tolerable as well as credible. Our justice condemned the innocent, but the innocent it condemned was one who was fundamentally responsible for the existence of all injustice...

In that same essay, Williams wrote:

...in the last reaches of that living death to which we are exposed He substituted himself for us. He sub-

mitted in our stead to the full results of the Law which is He. We may believe He was generous if we know that He was just. By that central substitution, which was the thing added by the Cross to the Incarnation, He became everywhere the centre of, and everywhere He energized and reaffirmed, all our substitutions and exchanges. He took what remained, after the Fall, of the torn web of humanity in all times and places, and not so much by a miracle of healing as by a growth within it made us whole.

Some of you will be able to think back fifty years to the War and will know well what a help such writings were at such a time.

That sense of the one body - in earth and heaven - was a great help in a War which removed so many of one's friends from this earthly scene.

But Charles Williams gave one, amidst all the destruction, the Hope of a New World. He wrote:

The idea of the kingdom has always had some content of revolution and of love, however conventional and prosaic the visible Church has made them; for the maxim of the kingdom is that of all love and all revolution: ecce, omnia nova facio - behold, I make all things new.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... and I John saw the holy city .. descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

Charles Williams seemed to have the ability to keep one eye on the City of London and the other on the City of God. Warwick Square showed him the sign of the Cross on the dome of St Paul's - that saving sign during the War - and, through the Cross, Heaven.

I've already quoted that wonderful sentence "He energized and reaffirmed all our substitutions and exchanges."

The works of Williams are, of course, riddled with examples of burden-bearing and substitution.

It was John Rowe who introduced me to the Practice of Substituted Love. But it wasn't long before I was handed over, so to speak, to Eric Abbott, who, in 1946 became

Dean of King's College, London, where I trained for ordination. Eric taught me, for instance, my Greek alphabet in Evening Classes at King's. We were soon close friends and he was sharing with me what Charles Williams meant to him.

It was Eric who put me on to those two marvellous anthologies THE PASSION OF CHRIST which Charles had produced in 1939 and THE NEW CHRISTIAN YEAR, which he had produced in 1941.

In THE PASSION OF CHRIST there is a remarkable passage from a Lancelot Andrewes Passiontide sermon:

"He began to be troubled in soul, says St. John; to be in agony, says St. Luke; to be in anguish of mind and deep distress, says St. Mark. To have His soul round about on every side environed with sorrow, and that sorrow to the death. Here is trouble, anguish, agony, sorrow, and deadly sorrow; but it must be such, as never the like, so it was too.

"The estimate whereof we may take from the second word of melting, that is, from His sweat in the garden; strange, and the like whereof was never heard or seen.

"No manner violence offered Him in body, no man touching Him or being near Him; in a cold night, for they were fain to have a fire within doors, lying abroad in the air and upon the cold earth, to be all of a sweat, and that sweat to be blood; and not as they call it diaphoreticus, a thin faint sweat, but grumosus, of great drops; and those so many, so plenteous, as they went through His apparel and all; and through all streamed to the ground, and that in great abundance; read, enquire, and consider, if ever there were sweat like this sweat of His. Never the like sweat certainly, and therefore never the like sorrow..."

I don't think any single passage has more influenced my own preaching and preaching style.

I've always felt that, however ignorant and unskilled a child of Andrewes I am, I look to him as a kind of father-figure in preaching. And with his tomb in Southwark Cathedral and his being a retired bencher of Gray's

Inn - there's a stained glass window to him in our Chapel
- I have good reason to do so.

Let me just read you some more paragraphs of that
Andrewes Passiontide sermon:

"His most sorrowful complaint of all others; not that
His friends upon earth, but that His Father from heaven
had forsaken Him; that neither heaven nor earth yield
Him any regard, but that between the passioned powers
of His soul, and whatsoever might any ways refresh Him,
there was a traverse drawn, and He left in the state of
a weather-beaten tree, all desolate and forlorn.
Evident, too evident, by that His most dreadful cry,
which at once moved all the powers in heaven and earth,
My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Weigh well
that cry, consider it well, and tell me, if ever there
were cry like that of His; never the like cry, and
therefore never the like sorrow."

Eric Abbott often referred us to a passage from THE NEW
CHRISTIAN YEAR which has become central for me not only
in spirituality but in pastoral work, wherever I have
served:

A certain old man used to say, 'It is right for a man
to take up the burden for those who are near to him,
whatsoever it may be, and, so to speak, to put his own
soul in the place of that of his neighbour, and to
become, if it were possible, a double man; and he must
suffer, and weep, and mourn with him, and finally the
matter must be accounted by him as if he himself had
put on the actual body of his neighbour, and as if he
had acquired his countenance and soul, and he must
suffer for him as he would for himself. For thus it is
written "We are one body", and this (passage) also
affordeth information concerning the holy and
mysterious kiss.'

At the end of my training at King's, I went to my first
international ecumenical conference, in Holland, under
the auspices of the World Council of Churches. The very
first night I came into collision with some French
Protestants and German Strict Lutheran students.

To my astonishment they labelled me - and the label was not a compliment - "typically English". No one had ever called me that before. They did so because I had been arguing the merits of compromise whereas they had been arguing that a Christian had to hold to "Either - Or"; "Yes or No" positions, not "Both - And" on the particular point we had been discussing.

It was a real shock to me to be told that my viewpoint had its origins in the country of my birth. I sat down and wrote to Eric Abbott that night: and, in answer, Eric immediately sent me a strange but strangely helpful reply. It was an extract from a lecture on BYRON AND BYRONISM, which Charles Williams had delivered at the Sorbonne in 1938 and which was subsequently published in the Bulletin of the British Institute of the University of Paris. Let me read you that extract:

Considering Byron and considering this whole business of English verse, it occurred to me the other day that the great difference (I submit this to you; it may be perfect nonsense, but I thought I would just like to offer it to you) between English verse - literature if you like - and French literature, French poetry, is, on the whole, that you have tended to say one thing and we have tended to say another, and the difference between these two attitudes is this. On the whole, in France, you have, I think it is true to say, that (in France) you have tended to say Yes or No. You have had about you that very high decision, that very high intellect, that very great realization of choice which has tended on the whole to say Yes or No. Now, in English literature - I think about the English mind - the opposite is true and I think it would perhaps be useful if we did not blame each other, if I may put it so, for a thing which is profoundly natural. The English have on the whole tended to say Yes and No. It does obviously sound ridiculous to you. I beg you not to be quite so sure that it is all that ridiculous. I do think if you read, for instance, some of the English poets, if you feel the English attitude, the English scepticism and the English belief, there is a union of opposites, or

at least there is an effort towards that union of opposites which does want passionately to unite apparently irreconcilable things. It may be quite useless, it may be quite silly, but I say it exists, and I say it is not our fault, as it were: it is in our blood, when we try and do things which have this effort towards uniting a 'yes' and a 'no'. It is not enough that we should say no; it is not merely because we are not good logicians - that doesn't matter at the moment - it was born and bred in our blood and in our bones. Why, of the greatest of our poets, is it quite impossible to know really what philosophy he held? Precisely because of this; because we get to the end of Shakespeare's work only to find that he has included everything, he has included every tendency. You continually see this sort of habit, of hesitation. Why, when we die for things we do not believe, why, when we are martyrs for the things of which we are sceptical, a thing you would never do because the greatness of your genius is different; why do we go into battle with a cry which sounds half a derision of the things for which we are about to die? I will not say it, but I do suggest that when you are martyred, you are martyred for things you support, for causes which you profoundly and passionately believe; and I say when we are martyrs, we perish for things in which we believe and yet do not believe, and I say, if I may, that it will be a very great thing if the two minds, if the two cultures, if the two passions of poetry and art, if our two very great traditions could for a little while sometimes be tender to each other and pardon each other. No doubt you can forgive us, that is comparatively simple; but could you possibly bear us to forgive you? That is the real difficulty. It is quite easy to be tolerant of others, but it is difficult to be tolerated by other people. If we could bring together those two lobes of the mind, those two sides of human existence, if we could begin to appreciate those cultures profoundly on that basis, I am not sure that anything, anyhow so far known to man,

could be greater than the union of the interchanged knowledge of those two states of mind.

As I have suggested, Charles Williams has greatly influenced all my pastoral work: as a curate in Westminster, as a Chaplain in Cambridge, as a parish priest in Southwark and a Canon in Southwark Cathedral and its Diocese; but it was in 1973 that I came very close to him.

That year, Robert Runcie, then Bishop of St Albans, invited me to be Canon Missioner of St Albans. We had been friends for twenty years. It was time for a change from Southwark, and I gladly accepted the invitation.

But as soon as I got to St Albans, I was confined to bed with disc trouble. So it was that Robert Runcie first came to see me in St Albans when I was in bed. He did not waste much time in consolations, but said: "Well, there's something you can do while you're in bed. You can write this year's leaflet for the Week of Prayer and Almsgiving we have each year at St Albanstide." "Oh Robert," I exclaimed, "Couldn't I do that next year? I know nothing about St Alban; nothing about St Albans; nothing about St Albans Diocese." "Yes." said Robert, "I see the force of your argument. But the thing ought to have gone to press a week ago; and you're the only one with the time to do it."

You know when you're on a loser with Robert Runcie, so I caved in quickly; but I said "Well. I refuse simply to write 'hagiolatry' about St Alban. Could you bring round all the 'evidence' you can for the historical St Alban?" I ought to have been warned by the smile on the face of the Bishop as he left my bedroom. He returned within the hour, to dump on the end of my bed an armful of huge tomes, pamphlets, et cetera.

The more I read about St Alban, the more I was fascinated by the story of someone who gave shelter to an unnamed priest, who, in company with other Christians, was being pursued by the Roman Emperor, Severus; and that Alban put on the clothes of the priest, and was killed instead of the priest.

I was fascinated, not least because the story seemed to me "pure Charles Williams" - except that it was history not fiction. The story was a "substitutionary story" par excellence.

My next visitor, a young priest at the Abbey, Keith Jones, appointed this year Dean of Exeter, I had known as a curate in Southwark. He was an intelligent young man. I judged he would know about Charles Williams, so I asked him directly - "Tell me what you know about Charles Williams." "Well," he said, "I'm taking Holy Communion to his sister tomorrow morning."

Charles' parents had moved out to St Albans from Holloway in 1894, when Charles was eight and his sister Edith, five. The Williams bought a shop in Victoria Street, St Albans, near the Art School and began to sell artist's materials.

Charles began his days at St Albans Abbey School in 1894 and gained a scholarship there in 1898. He went on to University College in Gower Street in 1901.

But to me one of the most important facts is that Charles loved the Abbey and its ritual and in particular the historical pageants, not least about the life of St Alban, which were regularly performed at St Albans, the Abbey and the school working together.

That the sensitive Charles Williams, in his youth, was immersed in the life of St Alban, there can be little doubt; immersed in the life of that extraordinary example of sacrificial substitution.

To conclude what I have to say today on how Charles Williams has influenced me, I simply want to read his "Apologue on the Parable of the Wedding Garment", which appeared first in TIME AND TIDE in those dark days of December 1940. It was John Rowe who first introduced me to it; but it was Eric Abbott whom I first heard read it, when I was a student - in the Chapel of King's College Theological Hostel. He read it during a Devotional Address on "The Borrowed Garment":

No single being dared...

come without other kind of dress
than his poor life had to profess

It was an address on the need of grace and the need to receive grace from others.

For fifty years it has spoken to me of the very heart of the Gospel: of Charles Walter Stansby Williams, its minister; of John Godfrey Rowe; and of Eric Symes Abbott, upon whose souls may the Lord have mercy.

The Prince Immanuel gave a ball:
cards, adequately sent to all
who by the smallest kind of claim
were known to royalty by name,
held, red on white, the neat express
instruction printed: Fancy Dress.

Within Earth's town there chanced to be
a gentleman of quality,
whose table, delicately decked,
centred at times the Court's elect;
there Under-Secretaries dined,
Gold Sticks in Waiting spoke their mind,
or through the smoke of their cigars
discussed the taxes and the wars,
and ran administrations down,
but always blessed the Triune Crown.

The ball drew near; the evening came.
Our lordling, conscious of his name,
retained particular distaste
for dressing-up, and half-effaced,
by a subjective sleight of eye
objectionable objectivity -
the card's direction. 'I long since
have been familiar with the Prince
at public meetings and bazaars,
and even ridden in his cars,'
he thought; 'His Highness will excuse
a freedom, knowing that I use
always my motto to obey:
Egomet semper: I alway.'

Neatly and shinningly achieved
in evening dress, his car received
his figure, masked but otherwise
completely in his usual guise.
Behold the Palace; and the guest
approached the Door among the rest.

The Great Hall opened: at his side
a voice breathed: 'Pardon, sir.' He spied,
half turned, a footman. 'Sir, your card -
dare I request? This Door is barred
to all if not in fancy dress.'
'Nonsense.' 'Your card, sir.' 'I confess
I have not strictly... an old friend...
His Highness... come, let me ascend.

My family has always been
in its own exquisite habit seen.
What, argue?' Dropping rays of light
the footman uttered: 'Sir, tonight
is strictly kept as strictly given;
the fair equivalents of heaven
exhibit at our lord's desire
their other selves, and all require
virtues and beauties not their own
ere genuflecting at the Throne.
Sir, by your leave.' 'But -' 'Look and see.'
The footman's blazing livery
In half-withdrawal left the throng
clear to his eyes. he saw along
the Great Hall and the Heavenly Stair
one blaze of glorious changes there.
Cloaks, brooches, decorations, swords,
jewels - every virtue that affords
(by dispensation of the Throne)
beauty to wearers not their own.
This guest his brother's courage wore;
that, his wife's zeal; while, just before,
she in his steady patience shone;
there a young lover had put on

the fine integrity of sense
his mistress used; magnificence
a father borrowed of his son,
who was not there ashamed to don
his father's wise economy.
No he or she was he or she
merely: no single being dared,
except the Angels of the Guard,
come without other kind of dress
than his poor life had to profess,
and yet those very robes were shown,
when from preserval as his own
into another's glory given,
bright ambiguities of heaven.

Below, each change was manifest;
above the Prince received each guest,
smiling. Our lordling gazed; in vain
he at the footman glanced again.
He had his own; his own was all
but that permitted at the Ball.
The darkness creeping down the street
received his virtuous shining feet;
and, courteous as such beings are,
the Angels bowed him to his car.

(c) Eric James.

(The following account of the ensuing discussion was written up from notes some time after the event. I hope I haven't travestied anyone's expressed opinions - it seemed something worth trying for the sake of those who weren't able to attend. - Ed.)

Stephen Medcalf opened the discussion by professing puzzlement as to what the poem was about - this life or Heaven? Brian Horne suggested it concerned the life of grace in both natural and supernatural worlds. Eric James said it was a parable of interdependence, of how we depend on others. George Hay talked of the problems involved in identity, how in some psychiatric cases the

person trying to help has to be the other person, and how progress could be made by holding together two diverging hypotheses. He cited that week's episode of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION as exploring a theological issue without mentioning God.

Joan Northam made the point that you are what you are because of what you've received. Richard Sturch cited CW's 'Dialogue on Hierarchy' to the effect that the Prime Minister must be docile to an expert scullion, as an example of perhaps the crudest level of learning from other people's virtues.

Eric James said that the poem was close to him now because it reminded him of an occasion when he was sent to attend a reception (which he expected to hate) at the German Embassy to celebrate Bonhoeffer's anniversary. He was on the stairway, at the head of which the German Ambassador waited, when a man spoke to him who turned out to be one he respected and admired (Eberhart Betger?). The ensuing conversation was 'all gift'.

Stephen Medcalf said he was still puzzled by the wearing of others' virtues. Eric James cited St Paul's 'Put on humility', and talked of how easily we lose sight of its meaning. Brian Horne suggested the apologue was about surprise; the guests were accepted and loved for things other than what they prided themselves on. Eileen Mable said that the lordling remains himself, but we are covered by the virtues of those close to us, in a pale hint of what happens in the Eucharist. Brenda Boughton contrasted the figure of Antonio in Auden's THE SEA AND THE MIRROR. THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE, THE HOUSE OF THE OCTOPUS, and C.S. Lewis's 'The first principle of Hell is "I am my own",' were also cited by various members.

The Chairman then moved us gently off the staircase onto other topics. Richard Sturch suggested that CW exemplified the English habit of thought represented by the words 'not "yes or no", nor "yes and no", but both'. Eileen Mable said she was enlightened by the extract from CW's Byron lecture, but was unsure how it bore on the subject of the talk. Eric James said that he'd included it because Eric Abbott had been his mentor.

Brian Horne raised the question of how CW relates to today's society - is he becoming out-of-date? Eric James talked of CW's Pauline emphasis on the body. Mentioning St Albans, he remarked that he suspected CW was a snob and preferred Hampstead; there was perhaps some guilt behind the way Williams concentrates on meeting across social divides. Nonetheless, CW gives the spirituality for social and incarnational beliefs in a fragmented society.

John Heath-Stubbs observed that CW was certainly not happy with the snobbishness of Oxford society.

Stephen Medcalf said that Williams seemed to have been influential as a thinker and teacher. What of his novels and poetry?

Eric James replied that they were not really important. CW was an 'intellectual novelist' - he cited the use of 'The Theory of Substituted Love' as a chapter heading to illustrate this. Stephen Medcalf raised the question of CW's visionary side. Eric James hoped that he had touched on this. The vision of the 1940s was now returning. Few people had done Butler, Beveridge and so on justice; they were down-to-earth, but had vision. The two cities were all too visible in Warwick Square when it was bombed. He added that during the War he had been firewatching on a wharf where the New Globe now stands - the moonlit dome and cross of St Paul's Cathedral had been a remarkable sight.

George Hay observed that, although people are willing to receive what CW has to give, the influence of novels works both ways. He instanced the works of Ayn Rand, who maintained that selfishness was a good thing, and whose novel THE SHRUG exposed society and pointed to the individual as being neglected. She turned intellectual society upside-down, and was in part responsible for 'Reaganomics'. CW, however, will have a longer-lasting effect.

John Heath-Stubbs said he doubted whether any novel or poem really changes society; poets write not for society but for the individual. He was, however, sympathetic to George Hay's way of thinking. Some poems (such as

Tennyson's 'Sea Dreams') have effects unrelated to their contents. If poetry does influence people it is not because it contains 'a message', but rather perhaps because of the subconscious working through.

Gillian Lunn asked whether Eric James ever met Edith. He replied that she was then an invalid in her last days, and a sick communicant. She had no memories of her friends.

The topic of snobbery briefly recrudesced. Gillian Lunn observed that snobbery was then a different thing. John Heath-Stubbs noted that C.S. Lewis was an Oxford snob. Anne Spalding recalled reading, in her young days, a book in which a charlady was made fun of. CW had reprimanded her for laughing at it.

The Chairman then proposed a vote of thanks and the meeting closed.

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COMPETITION

This will be the last competition for the time being. Members are accordingly invited to invent and submit last words for any character, real or imaginary, named in CW's works, from Caesar Augustus down to Mrs Rockbotham. In the case of an historical character, whose last words are actually known, new ones must be invented. A copy of the 1952 reprint of ARTHURIAN TORSO (CW's last words on Arthurian myth) will be awarded to the winner.

Please submit entries to the editor by 1st July.

As there were no entries for the previous competition, the copy of THE FIGURE OF BEATRICE will be added to the above prize.

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