

The Charles Williams Society

Newsletter



No. 81. Spring/Summer 1996

DOUBLE ISSUE

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

9 November 1996: John Hibbs will give a presentation entitled "The Schizogenic Moment in Troilus and Cressida: 'This is and is not Cressid'" in the Church Room of St Matthew's Church, St Petersburg Place, Bayswater (nearest Underground stations Queensway and Bayswater), starting at 2.30 pm. **N.B.** There is not much heating in the Church Room - if the weather is cold, dress warmly.

15 February 1997: Glen Cavaliero will speak on "Two Readings of Merlin" (on CW and John Cowper Powys). This meeting will start at 2.30 pm in St Matthew's Church Room.

31 May 1997: The Society will hold its Annual General Meeting in St Matthew's Church Room, commencing at 12.00 noon. This will be followed after an interval for lunch by an address (speaker to be announced) at 2.30 pm.

8 November 1997: The Hon Secretary Gillian Lunn will speak on a subject to be announced. The meeting will start at 2.30 pm 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 (0171-221-14-16).

OXFORD

We are now nearing the end of *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.

THE EDITOR WRITES

My apologies (again!) for the late appearance of this Newsletter. It is hoped that with the next issue the Newsletter and the seasons will once again be in line.

A new computer and printer have made possible a number of changes in the appearance of the Newsletter: please let me know what you think of them.

Considerations of space have led to the postponement of the account of *Frontiers of Hell*, which will appear in the next issue (now scheduled for mid-November).

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to:

Rev. A.H. Apps, 18 Longworth Way, Guisborough, Cleveland TS14 6DG.

D.M. Bruyns, Jacob Catslaan 37, 4561LJ Hulst, The Netherlands.

Curtis M. Perrin, 2 Crescent Street, Natick, MA 01760-2507, USA.

CHARLES HADFIELD

As we go to press, news of Charles Hadfield's death has reached us. An obituary notice will appear in the next issue.

REFERENCE LIBRARY: HELP NEEDED

Help is urgently needed in the reference library for the cataloguing of the contents.

As members of the society will know, a reference library was established twenty years ago when the society was founded. It contains a large number of precious items: books, periodicals, papers etc. which are used by scholars from all over the world. It is the property of the society and is, of course, open to all members of the society. But none of the material is catalogued so it is difficult to know exactly what is there.

The society would be happy to pay the full expenses of anyone who would undertake this work. It does not require the expertise of a professional librarian, only someone who will be able to work through the considerable amount of material and make a comprehensive list of its contents.

Brian Horne
Hon Librarian.

RESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE 1997

A 24-hour residential conference of the Society has been arranged for FRIDAY & SATURDAY 18 & 19 JULY 1997 at the Royal Foundation of St.

Katharine, Butcher Row, London E14. The Conference will start with supper at 8.45 on Friday evening and will end with afternoon tea at 4 pm on Saturday.

We are very pleased that the Revd. Huw Mordecai has agreed to be our speaker. His subject will be announced later.

St. Katharine's offers good facilities for a conference. The house is both gracious and comfortable and has its own chapel. There is also a pleasant garden. There is accommodation for 27 guests, mostly in single rooms, but with a few shared rooms.

The cost of the conference (this includes full board) will not exceed £45 per person.

Details of conference arrangements will appear in later Newsletters, as will an application form. We hope that this early notification of dates may enable some overseas members who plan to visit this country in 1997 to attend the conference.

Thank you to all Society members who returned the questionnaire to signify their interest.

Eileen Mable.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 8 June 1996 (some main points)

The Society held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 8 June 1996 in St Matthew's Church Room, St Petersburg Place, Bayswater. The meeting was chaired by Eileen Mable. Apologies for absence were received from Doris Howells, Patricia Kelly, John Lewis, Grevel Lindop, Hilda Pallen, Thelma Shuttleworth, Ruth Spalding, and Richard Sturch. Reports were presented by the Hon Secretary, the Hon Librarian, the Hon Treasurer, the Newsletter Editor and the Membership Secretary.

Gillian Lunn, Hon Secretary, announced details of the meetings for 1997, as far as they were known. She had just received confirmation that Richard Sturch's appearance on *Mastermind* answering questions on CW would be broadcast the next Wednesday. Correspondence held out some, though slight, hope of seeing some of CW's books reprinted.

Brian Horne, Hon Librarian, reported that not much had happened since the last AGM: there had been a 'steady trickle' of users, and Donna Beales had made use of the library for a day on her visit from America. The collection was still in urgent need of cataloguing - help would be welcome.

Brenda Boughton, the Hon Treasurer, presented copies of the accounts up to 29 February 1996. Over the past year income (£2416.91) had exceeded expenses (£1200.48) by some £1216.43, of which £521.59 had come from the sale of Thelma Shuttleworth's books, and a further £150 represented an

honorarium from the BBC for setting questions for *Mastermind*. With the Bristol and West Building Society in the throes of a takeover, she had written to enquire whether charity accounts were to continue: a full answer was yet to come. If charity accounts were to be discontinued, it might be advisable to think of moving the account.

Andrew Smith, Newsletter Editor, proffered apologies for the late appearance of the last Newsletter, and promised reform. He hoped to be back on schedule with the next issue - if members found he was falling behind again, they should feel entitled to bay for blood.

Lepel Kornicka, Membership Secretary, reported that the Society had 136 members, of whom 86 were in the UK, and 50 overseas. This was a slight rise on last year, there being a steady influx of new members. Ten members, more than a year behind in subscriptions, had been sent reminders: of these, one had so far borne fruit.

Eileen Mable, Hon Chairman, said it was now twenty years since the Society's foundation, and she felt a certain pride, pleasure and thankfulness at its lasting for that time. However, some ambition would be nice from time to time, and we should be looking at what new things could be done. The response to the questionnaire about a conference in 1997 had been sufficient to back a 24-hour conference, which had now been booked with the Royal Foundation of St Katharine (see notice, above). There was no further news as regards the possible commemoration of CW in the revised ASB: we must wait and see. We can be pleased that Boydell and Brewer have reprinted *The Figure of Beatrice*: this might be something to give interested friends. The Hon Chairman then thanked Brenda Boughton for her three years' service as Hon Treasurer: Brenda had agreed to act as Treasurer for two years, and had stayed to do three. The Society was extremely grateful to her for acting as an excellent and efficient steward of the Society's money.

The following members were elected to the Council for the next year: Eileen Mable (Chairman), Gillian Lunn (Hon Secretary), Brian Horne (Hon Librarian), Richard Jeffery (Hon Treasurer), Lepel Kornicka (Hon Membership Secretary), Andrew Smith (Newsletter Editor), and members Brenda Boughton, John Heath-Stubbs and Anne Scott.

Under 'Any Other Business', Richard Wallis asked if anything more had been heard about CW's commemoration in the Westminster Abbey window. Nothing had. Brenda Boughton proposed that the AGM should begin at 12.00 rather than 11.00. It was agreed that this should be tried, though it meant losing the readings (&c) before lunch. Lepel Kornicka proposed that we should have one meeting a year in Oxford. Brenda Boughton suggested that one

meeting a year should be out of London - perhaps Birmingham? Gillian Lunn pointed out that 1997's meetings and the conference were already arranged. The discussion ended inconclusively in a welter of possible locations.

Following the AGM, a number of members read passages from CW's poetry. Brian Horne, on behalf of John Heath-Stubbs, read 'At Dawn' from *Poems of Conformity*; Anne Scott read a portion of 'The Prayers of the Pope'; Brenda Boughton read part of the Prologue to *The Region of the Summer Stars*; and Andrew Smith read part of the unfinished poem 'The Taking of Camelot'. Each reading prompted a certain amount of discussion, and thereafter the meeting adjourned for lunch.

BRIEF REPORT OF A COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 8 JUNE 1996

Council welcomed the new Treasurer, Richard Jeffery, and warmly thanked Brenda Boughton for her work in the past three years.

Arrangements for 1997 were discussed and a sub-committee was set up to plan and organise the 24-hour conference in July. Also discussed were possible free publicity for the Society, the hope of some of CW's books being reprinted, the need for the Reference Library to be catalogued as soon as possible and the possibility of a new, or revised, entry on CW in the forthcoming new edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. A letter of appreciation will be sent to the publishers who have reprinted *The Figure of Beatrice*.

CW - OLYMPIC MEDALLIST?

Charles Williams's friend, the poet J.D.C. Pellow, noted in his diary for 21 August 1924 that Williams had been awarded a Diploma and Bronze Medal by 'the Olympic Games', but was 'uneasy' as to what it meant and how many others might have received similar awards, and so was not boasting of it 'at present'. In this Olympic centenary year, does any member know anything more about this?

A BORROWED HARP

The Queen's Captive, second in Haydn Middleton's *Mordred Cycle* of novels has just been published by Little, Brown and Company (£15.99 in UK) and, like its predecessor *The King's Evil* (1995 - now available in paperback), draws upon CW's Arthurian poetry as one of its principal sources of inspiration. Here, however, it is made plain that the disordered realm of the previous book was due to the wrong choice, 'the kingdom made for the king', and in the forthcoming last book of the trilogy, *The Knight's Vengeance*, we are to look forward to 'the king made for the kingdom'. Middleton's novels are always

rewarding to read, but - since he is a very physical writer - often require a strong stomach. (For once, the dust-jacket matches the contents: if you are repelled by the one, you are unlikely to relish the other.) An earlier novel by Middleton, *The Collapsing Castle*, apparently has as its main character a poet not unlike CW, but (alas!) this is the one novel of his that I have (as yet) been unable to find.

REVIEW

Imagining Evil. By Brian Horne. London. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996. pp.144 + xiv. £8.95.

There have been a number of books, or sections of books, devoted to the "problem of evil", how to reconcile the existence of sin and pain with that of a good and all-powerful God. This is not one of them. Brian Horne's interest is not in the intellectual solution of the "problem" but in the ways the *imagination* has approached it. Our need is not for arguments alone, but for a vision of the scheme of things, and an understanding of the place of evil in it. As a result, the thinkers we find covered in this book are as likely to be poets or novelists as theologians or philosophers - and are by no means all Christians.

Dr. Horne begins with, and often recurs to, a scene from Camus' *The Plague*, where, as a child dies, in pain, Dr. Riez rejects the attempts of Father Paneloux to reconcile this with the reality of the Christian God. But thereafter the pattern is historical. We move from myths like that of Pandora and, of course, Eden, and on to the *Book of Job* which (like so many others) he finds hard to interpret: we are certainly to reject the comforters' insistence that all suffering is deserved, but are we to accept Elihu's "purification" ideas? And what are we to make of God's apparently irrelevant intervention? In *Job* we first meet the name "Satan", and thereafter the possibility of dualism develops or at least the Christian near-dualism in which evil is both weaker and derivative; interestingly, modern attempts to dissolve the concept of the devil (and indeed of God) seem not to have wholly captured the public imagination.

The next stage begins with Augustine. Here the intellectual theory that evil is a *privatio boni*, nothing positive, sits uncomfortably side by side with an unquestioning acceptance of the demonic. In mediaeval thought the two became separated; popularly, life is seen as a warfare between heaven and hell for a human soul, and scholastically, the *privatio* theory is blended with a doctrine of free will: but the two come together (and here members of the Society may begin to take particular interest) in Dante. There the damned have chosen their own hell, have lost the "Good of the intellect"; but this is itself evil's utter defeat, and Satan is only a monstrous misery at the bottom of the universe.

Charles Williams is not referred to in the pages on Dante (Dorothy Sayers is); but he certainly is when we come to Milton. Dr. Horne sees him (and C.S. Lewis) as interpreting Milton in the light of the *privatio* theory - hence the impossibility of saying "Evil, be thou my good" without the self-delusion of a "divided consciousness", for evil is nothing. But in fact Milton's too was a "divided consciousness"; the older ways of thinking are being superseded by more individualistic and intellectualising ones. Horne sees Milton as in the end a kind of gnostic; salvation is by reason, which leads one inevitably to truth, and Satan falls through a failure of intelligence.

So begins the Enlightenment. The next chapter deals with the optimism of Leibniz and Pope - and with Voltaire; and the next again with the reaction in deliberate seeking after evil in Baudelaire and the Decadents. Then, after a brief glance at Barth, we come to Williams. Almost an eighth of the book is devoted to him, drawing chiefly, and naturally, on *He Came Down From Heaven and The Cross*.

His exposition of Williams's thought here is excellent, and one hopes will send readers of *Imagining Evil* on to the books themselves. I also found his (very sympathetic) treatment of Baudelaire particularly interesting, quite simply because of my own ignorance. I should judge the book weakest on Leibniz. Not because Horne is unfair, but because I think he has overlooked the role of Leibniz's imagination. The great value of this book lies, as I have said, in the way it shows Christian (and other) minds locating evil in their vision of the scheme of things, rather than (or as well as) devising logical explanations of it. But Leibniz too had such a vision - a vision of all the multiplicity of worlds that God *might* have created. His "optimism" was not a facile theory, nor a simply rationalistic one; it too had some of its roots in the imagination. But this is a minor defect in a wide-ranging and stimulating book.

Richard Sturch.



At the Society meeting in June, Grevel Lindop spoke on 'Charles Williams and the Poetic Mind'. We are pleased to be able to reprint the text of his talk here.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a great honour as well as a great pleasure to be invited to address the Society, especially on the occasion of its Annual General Meeting. What I can have done to deserve the honour I don't know, because I am both a new recruit

to the Society and also a relative novice in the study of Charles Williams. So I must put my cards on the table at once and say that though I admire his poetry greatly, and have read most of his novels and much of his literary criticism, I know very little about his theology, which perhaps for many of you is the most important part of his work. Time will cure at least some of my ignorance, for I am an enthusiast for his work, and I hope my enthusiasm may lead you to look indulgently on my ignorance. No doubt I shall make a fool of myself, but if (as Palomides reflects in a rather more extreme situation),

It is true I shall look a fool before everyone;
why not look a fool before everyone?

My enthusiasm for the work of Charles Williams began with his poetry. Having read, some years ago, the beguiling opening lines of 'Taliessin's Return to Logres', I found myself drawn irresistibly into the labyrinth of *Taliessin Through Logres*, which I continue to explore; and I soon began to read the novels as well, attracted by their blend of exciting narrative, sparkling wit and the pervading light of an intelligence which seems constantly to view things from a different, and a just slightly higher, perspective than that which we are used to. Williams seems always to be viewing human affairs from one of the points up near a corner of the ceiling: he sees and hears all the usual things, but he can also see the grouping of all the people in the room and notice what is going on behind their backs and in the unnoticed corners, physical and mental, so that despite the lightness of tone there is a disconcerting completeness of vision and a startling honesty about the things people actually do and think.

So much for the pleasures of Williams's creative work. But I am an academic by profession, and when academics want to learn more about something the first thing they do is arrange to teach a course on it. A couple of years ago I decided to draw together a number of things I was interested in by teaching an undergraduate course on the 'Inklings'. To give it some intellectual backbone and ensure that it was not overrun by simple-minded Hobbit-fanciers, I divided the course into two halves. The second of these dealt with the poetry and fiction of Williams, C.S. Lewis and Tolkien; the first - and to my students much less enticing - part would study a selection of the writings of Williams, Barfield, Tolkien and Lewis in the fields of literary criticism, linguistics, mythology and philosophy. This was intended partly as the dragon at the gate, to deter students looking for a soft option. We read large parts of Barfield's *History in English Words*, *Poetic Diction*, and *Saving the Appearances*. We discussed Lewis's *Personal Heresy* controversy with E.M.W. Tillyard, as well as *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, *The Abolition of Man* and some of his essays. In the case of Tolkien we read his classic articles on

Beowulf and *The Battle of Maldon*, as well as *On Fairy Stories*. And when it came to Williams, it seemed to me that, (apart from a chapter or two of *The Figure of Beatrice* - illuminating even though my students would mostly not have read Dante) the natural choice must be *The English Poetic Mind* and *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*. A case might have been made for *Poetry at Present*, but, fascinating as that book is for the enthusiast, to a student it inevitably looks dated, and it deals with too many poets who are no longer much read.

With the two books about the 'Poetic Mind' the case is altogether different. They deal with poets - Milton, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Pope - who even in these benighted days are the staple of English literary education; poets whose major works at least my own students could be assumed to know; and as for looking dated - well, the more I examined *The English Poetic Mind* and *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*, the more obvious it seemed that their ways of reading poetry were both deeply illuminating and, still, revolutionary. I was startled to find Williams developing modes of critical interpretation which anticipated and in some cases went beyond the readings developed in recent decades by such notoriously controversial literary theoreticians as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Deconstruction would hardly have been news to Charles Williams. He was practising it in 1932. And he was already well aware of what has since been called 'the death of the author', though his ironic sense of the ridiculous would have rejected the portentous solemnity of the phrase with its Nietzschean associations.

Moreover, despite being, apparently, a 'postmodernist' *avant la lettre*, Williams conducted his extraordinary readings (as one would expect) with great sensitivity and a profound love of poetry, grounded in a firm sense of the spiritual. His work thus had a flavour very different from the spiritual aridity and subtle dislike of literature which one so often encounters in more recent critics.

These were surprising, and exciting, discoveries. Almost equally surprising, however - though self-evident, of course, the moment one reflected - was that Williams's criticism seemed to have gone largely unremarked, both at the time and since; both on the part of his admirers and on that of the wider literary public. Of course, Mrs Alice Mary Hadfield discusses it in a biographical context, and Dr Glen Cavaliero gives the two books on the Poetic Mind a couple of pages, but both of them have other tasks and hardly emphasise the originality and brilliance of Williams's work in this field.

The English Poetic Mind was published by Oxford University Press in 1932; *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* followed from the same press a

year later. The two books are connected in much more than title. In the Preface to *The English Poetic Mind* Charles Williams writes that 'Upon this subject it would have been possible to write a book either of five hundred or of two hundred pages; I chose two hundred with equal reluctance and decision.' [EPM v] In fact the book is rather over two hundred pages; and as it was followed within a year by a second book of almost two hundred pages which continues and extends its arguments. It is tempting to think that Williams either drafted, or at least mentally sketched out, something close to his original five hundred pages and then shrewdly portioned them into two volumes. On the other hand, as the books also represent the substance of the lectures he was giving during these years at the City Literary Institute and elsewhere, it is also likely that the work kept developing in the course of his teaching and that the volumes represent two successive years' harvesting of the field.

At any rate, the books present what is essentially a single body of work; a reading of major English poets, of extraordinary originality. It has to be admitted that they are not altogether easy to read; or that perhaps they are in a way too easy: so rapid and mercurial is the play of mind that the reader tends at first to skim along over the surface of the prose, enjoying the sparkling intelligence but travelling too fast and with too much sheer pleasure to assimilate the profound and subtle ideas Williams is presenting. The books also presume (which can be a problem for students) almost as great a familiarity with the poets as Williams's own.¹ A first reading needs to be followed by careful, thoughtful and even doggedly analytical reading, if the full depth of the arguments is to be grasped.

The English Poetic Mind begins by defining poetry. There is verse, there are poetic forms, and these are important but they are not poetry itself. Moreover, poetry, Williams asserts, must not be confused with its subject-matter. 'Love poetry is poetry, not love; patriotic poetry is poetry, not patriotism'. Poetry, says Williams, 'alludes to' its subject; but 'good poetry does something more than allude to its subject; it is related to it, and it relates us to it,' He quotes Keats:

Through the sad heart of Ruth when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn:

and comments:

¹ Evidently Williams frequently quotes from memory; and this produces, as in most writers, a number of interesting minor misquotations. Thus RBPM p.72 speaks of the 'sick heart of Ruth'; p.109 has 'make a heaven of Hell, and [sic] hell of heaven'; and EPM p.117 has 'Captain or Colonel or Knight at Arms' (sc. 'in Arms': the slightly odd 'at Arms' is no doubt from Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci').

those lines relate us to an experience of exile. They awake in us a sense of exile; more accurately, a realization of our own capacity for enduring exile.

Let this immortal life, where'er it comes,

Walk in a cloud of loves and martyrdoms;

that awakes in us - not certainly love and sacrifice, or love and sacrifice would be easier things than they seem to be. But it does awake a sense that we are capable of love and sacrifice. It reminds us of a certain experience, and by its style it awakes a certain faculty for that experience. We are told of a thing; we are made to feel as if that thing were possible to us; and we are made so to feel it ... that our knowledge is an intense satisfaction to us; ... and this knowledge, satisfaction, and finality are all conveyed through the medium of words, the concord of which is itself a delight to the senses. [EPM 3]

And he concludes, 'This sensuous apprehension of our satisfied capacities for some experience or other is poetry of the finest kind.'

This perception - that in poetry the medium of verse, itself pleasurable, reveals to us a sense of our own capacities for experience by relating us to its ostensible subject, is (I think) a profound and original one. It avoids the tempting opposite errors of asserting, either that poetry somehow *gives* us vicarious experience; or that it is merely a matter of pleasant sounds and images. Rather, poetry works by reminding us of what we know, in such a way as to show us our own potential for further and different experience. It enriches us by reflecting to us what we are, and what we may become. This insight is no doubt connected with the importance Williams attaches at several points in the book to the idea of potentiality, summed up in Wordsworth's lines which place imagination beside

hope that can never die,

Effort and expectation and desire,

And something evermore about to be. [EPM 20]

- a passage from which Williams repeatedly quotes in the course of the book. The possible and the potential are for Williams in a sense the particular domain of poetry.

Two other ideas, however, are explored in much greater detail in *The English Poetic Mind*. One is the notion that the work of great poets exhibits a 'crisis' - perhaps coinciding with a personal crisis in the life of the poet himself (though as we shall see this biographical aspect is something about which Williams is ambivalent, since he has objections to identifying any poet's biography with the development of his poetry). Williams suggests that poets confront in their poetry, if not in their lives, a moment when they perceive a fundamental conflict or contradiction within their most cherished values. That

which they most deeply believe in fails them, and not only fails them but actually comes into conflict with itself so that their world is split and internally divided. Their greatness as poets depends upon their ability to face this conflict without flinching, to trust their poetry (rather than their ideas or their wishes) through it and beyond it to a new resolution and harmony.

Different poets, in Williams's view, manage this to different extents. His supreme example is Shakespeare, for whom Williams finds the crisis in *Troilus and Cressida*. Williams makes no assertions about Shakespeare's biography, but he does see a progression in the situations faced by the central characters of the plays, as Shakespeare's genius explores the nature of the interlinked themes of 'change - solitude - action: these three things'. [EPM 76] The crisis comes, in *Troilus*, at the point where the hero becomes aware of the mutability of Cressida, on whose faithfulness he has built all his hopes:

This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida.
If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimony,
If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
If there be rule in unity itself,
This is not she. O madness of discourse,
That cause sets up with and against itself,
Bi-fold authority! where reason can revolt
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
Without revolt: this is, and is not Cressid.

Something of Williams's argument depends on chronology, for he stresses the place of *Troilus and Cressida* in the midst of the great tragedies, with *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* before it and *Othello*, *Lear* and *Macbeth* following. *Troilus* thus becomes a kind of turning-point, which makes the agonies of the great tragedies possible and, beyond them, the passage, through *Antony and Cleopatra*, into the tranquillity of the last plays, the serenity of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. The achievement of Shakespeare's later work is made possible by the courage with which in *Troilus* he allows himself to confront stalemate: total commitment confronted by total disillusionment. Shakespeare even allows himself to write, as a result, a not-very-good play, and to follow it with another partial failure in *Measure for Measure*. But the rewards of trusting his poetry through these difficulties are the later tragedies and the last plays.

Other poets, Williams suggests, have been less successful. Wordsworth presents the crisis in *The Prelude*, and it is to be found at the point where England declares war on revolutionary France, and Wordsworth finds his allegiances agonisingly divided and experiences 'A conflict of sensations

without name',

a sense

Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt

In the last place of refuge - my own soul.

However, Wordsworth, in the view of Williams, was not able to sustain this experience. Unable to confront steadily this knowledge of inner contradiction, Wordsworth's poetry retreats. As he confesses,

The hiding-places of man's power

Open; I would approach them, but they close.

The decline evident in the poetry after 1805 is the result of an inability to go through and beyond the crisis, once it has been recalled and presented in *The Prelude*. Possibly, Williams suggests, this is because the crisis occurred (biographically) before Wordsworth's poetry had matured. In 1793 he had written only minor poetry, and hence could apply the full strength of his poetry to the experience only in retrospect, when it was already too late for the crisis to be lived in terms of that poetry.

In the case of Milton, Williams sees the character of Satan as an embodiment of the crisis. Milton is able to conceive both of total allegiance to God and of total rejection of Him; Satan, indeed, creates himself precisely by that rejection. Milton, it seems, cannot altogether hold both sides of this contradiction fully in his poetry. Williams concedes with Blake that Milton

had given the whole great striving with the contradiction in things, all the force it has in itself, and all the strength necessary to meet and bear it without yielding to it . . . to Satan, and could not therefore repeat it with Christ.

Hence not only the relative lack of enthusiasm the reader often feels for Milton's God, but also the fact that it was, for example, impossible for Milton to take such a moment as the Crucifixion as the subject of *Paradise Regained*, which had instead to remain largely an intellectual debate between Christ and Satan or even, as Williams delightfully puts it,

something rather like a devout and aristocratic statesman being interviewed, at the request of the Government, by an atheistical and ungentlemanly newspaper-correspondent. [EPM 141]

But Milton's ability to conceive of simultaneous victory and defeat, rebellion and submission, enables him nonetheless to reach the final serenity of the conclusion of *Samson Agonistes* whose 'calm of mind, all passion spent' is, in Milton's more self-conscious manner, an intimation of 'that state in which Shakespeare produced the last plays'.

Other poets fail altogether to penetrate the 'crisis'. Some reach it and stop; some (like Tennyson) see it and veer firmly away. Williams is interesting on

the moment when Tennyson does this. It occurs when Lancelot, in the *Idylls*, confesses (referring to his love for Guinevere) that

In me lived a sin
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
And poisonous grew together, each as each,
Not to be pluck'd asunder.

Arthur, says Williams, 'simply denies it'. [EPM 191] Tennyson cannot bear to contemplate the possibility: he is a great enough poet to see the crisis, but not great enough to trust his poetry through a steady contemplation of it. Hence

All the loveliness, all the nobility, all the exquisite art and real sensitiveness which are there [says Williams] cannot make up for the refusal of Tennyson's genius to pursue that contradiction further. [EPM 192]

The main outline of Williams's theory of poetic crisis is probably now clear. Certain reflections immediately occur. One is that there are other examples which he might have given but, at least in *The English Poetic Mind*, for diverse reasons, could not. In the case of Dante, the crisis took the form of the death of Beatrice, around whom the young Dante's whole poetic and intellectual world had been built; in *The Figure of Beatrice* Charles Williams was to base his account of Dante partly on the theory we have just been examining. There is also, of course, Williams's own crisis of love in the early 1930s, and it has been taken that the argument of *The English Poetic Mind* was shaped by this personal experience. No doubt this is true, but it is hard to avoid also the sense that Williams was viewing the path of poetic development as somewhat similar to the spiritual path of the mystic, and that the poetic crisis is to some extent a parallel to the Dark Night of the Soul as analysed by Evelyn Underhill [*Mysticism*, II, ix] in which 'the clear light of reality [becomes] a torment instead of a joy' and the soul experiences 'the anguish of the lover who has suddenly lost the Beloved' or 'the intellectual darkness and confusion [which] overwhelms everything else'.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of *The English Poetic Mind*, and one which is developed in greater depth in *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*, is what we might call the idea of the self-sufficiency of poetry. As Williams writes at the beginning of *The English Poetic Mind*,

Criticism has done so much to illuminate the poets, and yet it seems, with a few exceptions, . . . still not sufficiently to relate the poets to the poets, to explain poetry by poetry. Yet in the end what other criterion have we? Wordsworth's

poetry is likely to explain Shakespeare's poetry much better than we can, because poetry is a thing *sui generis*. It explains itself by existing. [EPM vi-vii] Poetry, then, is *sui generis*. Poetry can only be explained by poetry. More than this, and perhaps as a consequence of this, poetry is not a mode of communication.

It is surely true [writes Williams] that the chief impulse of a poet is, not to communicate a thing to others, but to shape a thing, to make an immortality for its own sake . . . Did Shakespeare primarily want to make *us* feel what a murderer's heart was like? It is inconceivable; he primarily wanted that heart to be. [EPM 5]

The ideas become more startling. Poetry, we are told, can only be explained by poetry. Poetry, we are told, is not primarily communication. But the third facet of this meditation is the most startling of all. For it gradually emerges that poetry is not, or should not be, about anything but itself. The subject of poetry is poetry.

We can see now why Williams has spoken of poetry as 'alluding to' its ostensible subjects. It is his precise way of acknowledging the fact that poetry mentions all kinds of things, without committing himself to the view that poetry is ultimately concerned with them. Thus, in Williams's readings of the poems, Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' certainly mentions the nightingale; but it is not *about* nightingales: it is about poetry. *The Prelude* certainly alludes to particular events in the life of the historical individual William Wordsworth; but it is not the autobiography of Wordsworth; it is a poem about the coming of poetry. We can see that Williams has been entirely serious in saying that poetry is *sui generis*. It is related to other things, and it relates us to them; but it is only itself and cannot be described or explained in terms of anything else.

The consequences of this view as worked out in Williams's readings of particular poems are fascinating and startling. It enables him to make very short work of the conventional idea of the author. Dealing with *The Prelude*, Williams begins by setting up a distinction between the entities he calls on the one hand 'Wordsworth', and on the other 'William'.

The reader [he says] who is more interested in Wordsworth as a personal poet and a psychological problem will tend to read it in one way, the reader who is more interested in the poetic effect of the poem in the other. [RBPM 17] Addressing those who are interested in 'the poetic effect of the poem', Williams continues,

Let us imagine that the *Prelude* is about a person called William, to whom the things described in the poem happened, and to whom, except for the irreducible minimum of natural necessity ... nothing else happened. A poem contains for

itself nothing but what it does contain and nothing of what it contains exists, for poetry, outside the poem. [RBPM 17]

Anyone familiar with recent literary theory can hardly fail to hear in this an anticipation of Jacques Derrida's notorious statement - regarded as so revolutionary when it was made in the 1960s - that 'il n'y a rien de hors-texte' - 'there is nothing beyond text', or 'outside the text' (the French here is of course strictly untranslatable).

Williams tells us that Wordsworth's value 'lies in, and only in, the poems he writes - not in what he means by them.' Whatever meanings may or may not have been intended by William Wordsworth the historical personage are therefore irrelevant, and we can forget about 'Nature, the sensationalist philosophy, Godwinism, and mysticism.' [EPM 9] Indeed, the real author of the poem - except at its weaker points, where it falls away from its real task and becomes personal - is Poetry itself, and not Wordsworth at all. Speaking of *The Prelude's* Book IV, for example, as the moment of poetic dedication approaches, Williams tells us that

Poetry is feeling the first faint stirrings of universal mortality, as opposed to the attributed universalism of the poet's young emotions ... Poetry is beginning to write more about things, and less about what the poet felt about things.

Even at its weaker moments, when in Williams's view the poetry fails in greatness, the author as a unified being is not really present. Thus, discussing *The Excursion* in *The English Poetic Mind*, Williams tells us that in that poem the poet

succeeded in manufacturing four *eidola* of himself: the Wanderer, who is Wordsworth's idea of the incarnation of his own poetic mind; the Solitary, who is Wordsworth's idea of himself gone wrong; the Vicar, who is Wordsworth's idea of himself ordained, and the narrator, who is just Wordsworth. [EPM 170]

This sense of the poet in a hall of mirrors - multiplying or fracturing himself into all the main figures of the narrative - may in a sense retain the person of the poet (after all, the narrator, we are told, is 'just Wordsworth'), but when so many aspects of Wordsworth (including the 'incarnation of his own poetic mind') have already been distributed elsewhere, it becomes very doubtful what that 'just Wordsworth' can actually be.

In a similar vein, the brilliant reading of Pope's *Essay on Man* in *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* more or less does away with Pope himself, interpreting the poem as an intermittent dialogue between two incompatible voices, one of which represents the optimistic philosophy of Bolinbroke, whilst the other, the voice of poetry, breaks through with profound nihilistic insights which defeat the ostensible philosophy of the poem.

Elsewhere, Williams uses this insight that a poem contains *only* what it contains to dispose briskly of the whole realm of speculation about the lives of Shakespeare's characters off stage, questions of the 'how many children had Lady Macbeth?' type. As he says in *Reason and Beauty...*,

By a kind of verbal shorthand we say that Desdemona is this or Othello is that, and forget that neither Desdemona nor Othello nor any other character is anything but Shakespeare's language. [RBPM 132]

In similar vein he reminds us that it is pointless to ask what Macbeth is doing before the play started, for until that moment Macbeth does not exist.

Again, since the voice of the poem is not the voice of the historical Wordsworth or the historical Shakespeare, but instead is simply poetry speaking of, and for, itself, it follows that any passage may be read as primarily about poetry; and only secondly, or by 'allusion', as concerned with its ostensible subject. For Williams this seems to apply most essentially to the greatest passages. Reflecting on Othello's lines

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;
Let me not name it to you, ye chaste stars!
It is the cause -

Williams asks,

What is the cause? The lines are as perfect as any in Shakespeare, and as effectual. But what is 'it'? Desdemona's beauty? Desdemona's unfaithfulness? Perhaps, if the 'it' means something of the kind. But the lines are a supreme example of Shakespeare's poetry, and therefore they refer to Shakespeare's poetry. A poet's style is produced by his style, of which the *facts* of his plot may or may not at any moment be an important part The lines are spoken in a play and they are the play. They mean, they are, the discovery and the expression - the poetry - of action itself. They are action speaking of itself. They are poetry gathering up into itself all the preceding poetry. To relate them to anything outside themselves is to lessen them; it is necessary to relate everything else to them. [EPM 80]

This quality of reading poetry self-referentially, as if poetry derives meaning first of all from its poetic context, secondly from its relationship to other poetry, and only then, and indirectly, from its descriptive relationship to other realities, removes what Derrida and his deconstructionist followers have called 'logocentrism' from Williams's criticism, since it does not require the words to depend for their meaning on any particular stable referent. If poetry refers only to poetry, it may at times be, strictly, impossible for us to grasp its meaning. And indeed this is in a sense what Williams asserts of the most profound passages in Shakespeare, like the lines from *Othello* quoted above.

Such passages cannot be interpreted: we can only say that they refer to poetry in its fullness.

Williams carries this approach audaciously into his readings of Wordsworth as well as of Shakespeare. From one point of view, he indicates, it makes criticism redundant or even misguided. *The Prelude*, he says,

has yet to be fully considered in relation to general poetry, and that would probably best be done by an edition of the poem annotated for that purpose with parallel passages from other poets. [EPM 9]

Williams sees his own criticism largely as an attempt, in a more discursive way, to do just this: to relate poetry to poetry.

The sense of poetry as self-referential allows Williams to interpret even passages which seem to have an obvious external referent as being primarily about poetry. Thus, on Hamlet's lines

If it be now, tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now, if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all ... Let be. [V.ii.220ff]

and Edgar's

Men must endure

Their going hence even as their coming hither.

Ripeness is all. [V.ii.9-11]

- on these lines, Williams comments,

What has to end, of course, is the play. It is to the play's conclusion that Shakespeare is addressing himself, it is that which forces from him an utterance consonant with the nature of whatever character speaks but consonant also with his genius at that time. [EPM 74]

And Williams adds a note:

It is a fantasy - and the Ghost of Banquo comes later to spoil it - but I have wondered whether the Ghost of Caesar and the Ghost of Hamlet's father are a visionary presentation of the visionary power (in Wordsworth's phrase) which was then pressing on him, apparitions of the 'something evermore about to be.' [EPM 74n]

- that is, of poetry itself in its further development.

As the note indicates, Williams is equally ready to interpret passages of *The Prelude* which have apparent psychological 'causes' within the narrative, as being about poetry itself. Thus, after the robbing of the snares, and the stealing of the boat, in the first book, the 'low breathings', the 'sounds of undistinguishable motion', and the 'unknown modes of being' perceived by Wordsworth are all interpreted, by Williams, as 'the pressure of the genius on the outer consciousness' [EPM 14]: they are the incursion of poetry itself into the mind, and the poem. The

dark

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society

is read by Williams not as a statement about the development of the personal psychology but as an account of the achievement of the great poets; in each of them discordant elements are united in one society by the inscrutable workmanship of their genius, and the society is the style. [EPM 15]

Most audacious of all, I think, is the passage where Williams reflects on Wordsworth's nightmares, during the period of the terror which followed the first phase of the French Revolution, in which he found himself entangled ...

In long orations, which I strove to plead
Before unjust tribunals.

On this, Williams comments:

The dream did but prophesy his doom; from then till now much of Wordsworth's verse has been regarded precisely as his genius entangled in long orations before our unjust tribunals. [EPM 26]

Here, then, Wordsworth's poetry has predicted its own reception.

I think enough has been said on this point. Again and again, Williams suggests that we can read poetry as primarily about poetry, and only by 'allusion' as concerned with other things. And in this he has startling anticipated views which were to be expressed by the most audacious literary theorists thirty, forty and fifty years after he wrote.

There are many other aspects of these volumes on the Poetic Mind which it would be a pleasure to explore. Among the most exciting is Williams's insistence on the importance of poetic form, that the poetic form is the ostentatious limitation which constitutes the world of the poem, and through which the poet 'determines to know the subject of his poem so, and not otherwise'. Poetic form thus avoids the pretence of prose that things are being presented in literature as they really are. Verse is thus 'the reflection of the limitation of man's nature magnificently worked into the very stuff of the poem' - an observation which clearly has theological implications but also takes account (as much criticism to this day does not) of the thought of Immanuel Kant and its denial that we can ever know 'things in themselves'. This is most finely put, I think, in *Reason and Beauty*... at the point where Williams sums up the difference between prose and verse:

Exquisitely leaning to an implied untruth, prose persuades us that we can trust

our natures to know things as they are; ostentatiously faithful to its own nature, poetry assures us that we cannot - we know only as we can. [RBPM 10]

Many questions remain. The questions of how far Williams's insights are 'true' or 'valid', and how far they are compatible with one another - for example, how far the notion of the poetic crisis is really compatible with so impersonal, so non-biographical a view of poetry - are ones which I cannot answer, and which must be left to others. A few easier matters, however, may be addressed. I hope it has become clear that I think Williams a critic of brilliance, of profundity and of dazzling originality. There naturally arises, then, the merely historical question of how it happened that he failed of his proper impact and influence.

One can only guess. An obvious answer might be that his books on the Poetic Mind (which so clearly belong in their intellectual excitement and analytical brilliance with those better-known critical volumes of the late twenties and early thirties, I.A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929), Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932)) were nonetheless too far ahead of their time. Admittedly, Williams's views on the impersonality of poetry may well owe something to Eliot's seminal essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which first appeared in 1919. But Williams's marvellous and still unsurpassed close readings of Keats's 'Nightingale' Ode and Pope's *Essay on Man*, for example, were of a type which was not really to be seen again until the emergence of the American 'New Critics' whose work is typified by Cleanth Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn* in 1947 and Wimsatt and Beardsley's *The Verbal Icon* in 1954. And I've indicated my personal view that other aspects of Williams's thinking would have had to wait until at least the late 1960s, and the appearance of Derrida's *On Grammatology* and Barthes's *The Death of the Author* for any chance of becoming acceptable to his fellow-critics.

I have not been able to make a systematic study of the reviews, but those in the *Times Literary Supplement* certainly suggest a reaction of dazed bafflement. *TLS* reviews were, of course, anonymous; but through the generous assistance of the *TLS*'s archivist, Eamonn Dyas, I can reveal that *The English Poetic Mind* was reviewed (*TLS* 1932 page 443) by Basil De Selincourt, who found it a book of high critical intensity but not perhaps of very high critical authority and warned nervously that

There is danger, we think, in such insistence upon the essence and core of all, lest a kind of mental paralysis, an aesthetic 'complex', may establish its dominion over us.

Clearly De Selincourt was frightened by the intensity and purity of Williams's work. He also completely failed to grasp Williams's sense of the impersonality of great poetry, grumbling that

only too often that shadowy figure, the Shakespeare of history, appears to respond in a very beggarly fashion to Mr. Williams's exalted demands.

Clearly the reviewer was altogether unable to shake off the idea that the historical Shakespeare must be doing and experiencing all the things Williams attributed to his poetry.

Reason and Beauty... fared little better. Reviewing it in 1934 (page 89), again anonymously, Arthur Clutton-Brock objected at the very outset to Williams's declared method, and was forthright in his condemnation:

He borrows from the poets whom he studies the majority of the terms which he uses, and in this way constructs a private language ... The mists would be more effectively dispersed if the inquiry did not take the shape of a pattern made from the actual utterances of poets.

Why this method should be so objectionable, Clutton-Brock disdains to say. Presumably it was simply not what he was used to, and he was therefore 'agin it'. Evidently he was not a man of great imagination, for on one of Williams's subtler speculations about *Paradise Lost* he blusters, 'the suggestion that the Third Person of the Trinity is a poem is really too startling a heresy even for one so notoriously prone to heresies as' (- for a moment one expects the name of Charles Williams, but no -) 'even for one so prone to heresies as Milton.' (You may like to know, since I have the information on hand and am reluctant to lose the archivist's efforts, that De Selincourt received £5 16s for his review, and Clutton-Brock a mere £2 17s 6d; such were the wages of critical incomprehension in the 1930s.)

It seems evident that Williams's work was found to be too intense, too novel for the critical taste of the time. A criticism which took its stand within poetry, rather than peering into poetry from the standpoint of the everyday world, frightened and puzzled its readers. And (unlike Empson and Richards) Williams did not have the literary resources of the political Left to advance his cause.

Perhaps it is time for Williams's criticism to reach the audience it deserves. Of course, criticism is nowhere near as important as poetry: it is one of the virtues of Williams's criticism that it founds itself on that very recognition. And of course it is not in itself a virtue merely to be chronologically 'ahead of one's time'. Yet it is of some value that Williams's criticism is still intensely alive, demanding and rewarding. It is also of value that where he anticipates the literary theorists of so-called Postmodernism, he does so in a way which shows

how a criticism aware of what we now call 'textuality' can be practised without falling into nihilism, absurdity or that subtle hostility to poetry which one often senses in the critics of the present day.

Williams achieves these things because he sees poetry as the manifestation of, simply, the poetic mind. Not of this or that person's poetic mind, but of that universal and transcendent poetic consciousness² which was also, simultaneously (in 1932), and four years before he knew of Williams's existence, posited by C.S. Lewis in his essay 'The Personal Heresy in Criticism'. Charles Williams has an important contribution to make to literary criticism at the present day. After so many decades there is, I believe, if not a popular audience - I doubt there could ever have been that - then at least an *academic* audience which would now appreciate Williams's criticism, and to whom in turn Williams could bring that one thing which so many modern critics so conspicuously lack: namely, the Poetic Mind.

(c) Grevel Lindop 1996.

DISCUSSION

(As best I can reconstruct it from my notes - Ed..)

Brenda Boughton opened the discussion by remarking, anent 'The Personal Heresy' that CW lectured many times that one should return to the text, not read the critics. Grevel Lindop replied that this was in part related, in historic terms, to a move to an obsession with the words on the page. CW was concerned with the relation of passages, like one exploring the connexions of the World Wide Web. Lewis's views were remarkably similar, yet there was no trace of influence. They were, however, reading similar books.

John Heath-Stubbs remarked that in the *New Book of English Verse* CW interprets Crashaw as Poetry speaking about itself. This would have surprised Crashaw, even profoundly shocked him. Two of the poets in *The English Poetic Mind* were not mainstream: Patmore, whom John Heath-Stubbs has always admired, and Bridges, whom he 'just can't take'. Grevel Lindop said that people learned from Bridges: Ezra Pound was much the same. Patmore's *The Angel in the House* was loathed, unread, by feminists. John Heath-Stubbs cited *The Unknown Eros* with approval, and said that he had once contemplated a book of 'splendid failures' which would have included Patmore, Young, and

² And thus, of course, CW's approach cannot be considered truly 'Deconstructive', since (as in C.S. Lewis's view) the Poetic Mind acts as a foundation on which the interpretation of poems can ultimately be based. But CW's approach is all the better for that!

Warner (of *Albion's England*). The discussion then veered to the literary influence of Young, particularly in Germany.

Gillian Lunn asked whether the students who took the Inklings course shared the speaker's enthusiasm for CW's critical writings. He replied that they found it both fascinating and daunting, which was true of the whole course. One Russian student was so taken with the literary theory of the Inklings that he was now doing a Ph.D. on it in St Petersburg. This gave Grevel Lindop a sense of connexions being made back into a wider culture. He asked why the two books were not reprinted, and this led to a brief discussion of the OUP's tenacity in not remaindering academic books.

Brian Horne asked how the speaker would distinguish CW's 'poetry is about itself' from the aesthetes' 'art for art's sake'. didn't they look similar in 1930? Grevel Lindop said the difference was that 'art for art's sake' is about values and hence ethics, CW's views are about semantics - but yes, there is an apparent 'dangerous' kinship, and it may be an ancestor of CW's views. CW only uses poetry to describe the Poetic Mind, whereas Lewis claims (in effect) that it is a state of mind in which one writes(?).

John Heath-Stubbs asked how one distinguished between fiction and poetry. David Jones's *In Parenthesis* hovers between prose and verse. One could apply CW's views to prose. The speaker replied that this was true, insofar as prose calls attention to its limitations. Boundaries dissolve on close inspection.

Stephen Medcalf asked if CW's theory of poetry were related to magic. Roger Ingram in *Shadows of Ecstasy* has the *English Poetic Mind* attitude, but this is a step towards magic, 'ritual transformation'. Grevel Lindop expressed cautious interest in the idea. Stephen Medcalf then asked if it was on that account that CW was not well received. I.A. Richards treated literary criticism as a branch of psychology. CW thinks of *special* energy. Grevel Lindop agreed: 'this is what makes CW so good'. He said that he'd like to lure other critics into reading the books as they have much of interest to present theorists, but uses it for more beneficent purposes.

Stephen Medcalf asked about Owen Barfield. Grevel Lindop said that what in Barfield corresponded to 'the Muse' is 'original participation', which recaptures the sense of meaningfulness in poetic language. This feels German: if Barfield were German, he would be Heidegger and command respect. His roots are in the German philological tradition (e.g. Grimm). John Heath-Stubbs suggested a connexion with Kant. Grevel Lindop presumed it came through Steiner. When CW says 'we know only as we can,' it suggests Kant. Stephen Medcalf mentioned Coleridge, who the speaker said was both correct and incorrect on Kant.

Richard Jeffery wondered how the speaker thought of the two books in relation to, say, *The Figure of Beatrice* and the *Introduction* to Milton, which seem by contrast straightforward and penetrating, not wilfully eccentric. Grevel Lindop answered that *The Figure of Beatrice* was a development from the Poetic Mind books, with a more theologically-orientated approach. Ultimately, Postmodernism says that we shouldn't have criticism, which is pointless and self-contradictory. So Derrida and Heidegger. Then Heidegger writes books and Derrida writes more, but with an underlying feeling that we shouldn't. Could we take the method of CW's books and apply it further? They were disconcerting books, arousing fear in their reviewers: the fear of the intensity of CW's books breaks through.

Brian Horne put what he styled a 'rude question': 'You're a poet: do you believe in the Poetic Mind?' On the speaker agreeing, saying he thought he did, Brian Horne then asked who was at work, 'you or the Poetic Mind', when writing a poem. Grevel Lindop replied that what he did now was not his own work at all, and hence he had ceased to publish it. Brian Horne found it an odd conception, that the work was not produced by the artist - yet 'I' am writing it: my consciousness and emotions are at work. Lepel Kornicka asked how the speaker regarded the poet 'as craftsman'. John Heath-Stubbs said that every poet ought to be capable of occasional poetry, as required of the Poet Laureate. Poems can be both made and given. When he was younger, he expected them all to be given, but now he enjoys making them if asked. Grevel Lindop quoted Blake on inspiration: 'when this was dictated to me'. The verse was dictated, and Blake chose the form. John Heath-Stubbs said it became clearer if one applied it to music: Beethoven is inspired *and* plans the music. Grevel Lindop said that you can't leave the orchestration to the Holy Ghost, who provides the melodies. Technical capacity becomes the strings of an Aeolian harp, and needs to be well-tuned.

Stephen Medcalf said there seemed to be two kinds of theory: there was Golding's reference to 'my Daemon', and the speaker seemed to be talking of something more impersonal. Grevel Lindop replied that this was merely a different mental image for the process.

At this point, because the speaker had to leave, the meeting drew to a close and the Chairman proposed a vote of thanks for a brilliant and stimulating talk.



COMPETITION WINNER

The 'last words' competition attracted a number of entries, most of them by Richard Jeffery. However, the winner was Ruth Spalding, with the following last words for Pride, from *The House by the Stable*:

To Hell, and badbye to you all! Now let the brawl
of Hell burst forth. I shall come first
all ways - and so I welcome fate.
I'll glow now with eternal hate
and everyone shall clearly see
my love, stupendous love - of ME.

FROM ST SILAS'S MAGAZINE

The following sonnet was contributed by CW to the Fiftieth Anniversary Number of the Parish Magazine of St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town (Sept-Oct, 1922).

Saint Michael

There was a motion within Deity,
And the first seraph lived, saw, and became
One cry through all his nature and his name,
Mi-ca-El: Who is like to Thee? Thence to be,
Began the hierarchic mystery
Of spirit, where, though he be first in fame -
Goldenly helmed, thrice ringed, thrice winged with flame -
Yet each of his angels is hardly less than he.

But all his angels and he, gathered into one
Fire, as a lantern high upon the mast
Of the Admiral's vessel shine; and in their track,
with night watch set and guards at every gun,
Float through the ocean of the unknown vast
The twelve huge ships of the labouring Zodiac.

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