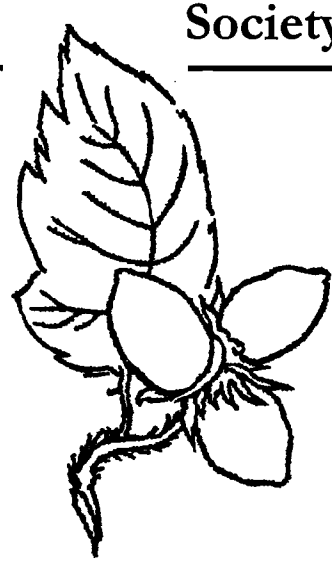
The Charles Williams Society



Newsletter

No. 88 Autumn 1998

The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams's sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society's meetings which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at Kings College London.

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The Charles Williams Society

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From the Editor

It is fitting that Gillian Lunn should write the main article in this issue. Gillian has just stood down as Secretary of the Society after many years' service.

Brian Horne and Eileen Mable pay tribute to her elsewhere in these pages. I would like to add my voice to theirs in thanking Gillian for her hard work, and also welcoming her successor, Richard Sturch.

Should anyone need to contact me, please note my change of address.

Best Wishes,

Mark Brend

Back issues

As mentioned in issue 86, preparing back issues of the newsletter for reprinting proved more difficult than originally anticipated. However, a master copy of each issue of the Society's newsletter has now been produced, together with an up-to-date index.

Charges for reprints of back issues will be set at the next council meeting. A full index, together with details about how members can obtain back issues, will be provided in the next newsletter.

In the meantime outstanding issues of the newsletter have been sent to those members who were missing issues. We apologise for the delay in despatching these.

Charles Williams Society meetings

- **Saturday 14th November 1998**
  Dr Andrew Walker will speak on "The Narnia Tales of C.S. Lewis". The meeting will start at 2.30 pm in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church, St. Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, London (nearest underground stations: Queensway and Bayswater). Please note that there is not much heating in the Church Room - if the weather is cold, dress warmly.

- **Saturday 27th February 1999**
  This meeting will include a showing of a video of a recent performance of Charles Williams's *The Masque of the Manuscript* and *The Masque of Perusal*. Please note that this meeting will start at 2.00 pm and not the usual time of 2.30 pm. It will take place in St. Matthew's Church Room.

- **Saturday 5th June 1999**
  Annual General Meeting at 12.00 noon in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church. At 2.30 pm Grevel Lindop will speak on "Charles Williams, Robert Graves and the White Goddess".

- **Saturday 16th October 1999**
  Bishop John V Taylor will speak on The Doctrine of Exchange. The title is to be confirmed. The meeting will take place in Pusey House, Oxford at 2.30 pm.

Reading Groups

For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda Boughton, tel: 01865 515589.

Council meeting

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 6th June 1998 in Pusey House, Oxford

- The cataloguing of papers in the reference library by Christine English has now been completed. Her work is much appreciated.
- Membership of the Society dropped from 137 in 1997 to 105 in 1998. This was largely caused by deletion from the member-list of those who had not paid their subscriptions.
- Council discussed the possibility of changing the dates of the Society's financial year (1 March to 28 February) to coincide with the calendar year. It was decided to make no change.
- Gillian Lunn was warmly thanked for her work as Secretary and a formal vote of thanks was recorded (see also page 9) Richard Sturch was welcomed as her successor.

Eileen Mable

New members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new member of the Charles Williams Society:

- **Mr Edward Gauntlett**
  21 Downsay
  Whyte Leafe
  Surrey
  CR3 0EW

MR James

Members intending to attend the memorial for MR James should note that the date for this has changed from the one stated in the last issue of the newsletter. A service and placing of a plaque will now take place at 5pm on September 26th 1998.

For further details please contact Clive Ward: 01543 307151.

AGM

A summary of the Annual General Meeting held on 6th June will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

Internet Site Update

In the last issue of the Newsletter Andrew Williams outlined the plan to develop a presence on the Internet for the Charles Williams Society. Development work on a World Wide Web site for the Charles Williams Society has proceeded well and a framework for the site has now been established.

Named **CWWW**, the site will contain a number of pages of information about the life and work of Charles Williams as well as the activities of the Society.

The following areas will be included within the site:

- A brief biography of C.W.
- A bibliography of works about and by C.W.
- Images of places associated with C.W. as well as C.W. himself
- Information about the C.W. Society including a membership form
- C.W. Newsletter extracts and a back issue catalogue
- Forthcoming Society events
- A feedback area for visitor comments
- Links to other sites of related content

It is hoped that the site will be of interest both to Society members and to those who are new to Charles Williams. The site should be ready to go "online" by the end of this year. Further details will be provided in the next newsletter.

Please do contact the editors if you have any comments or suggestions about the content of the site. Imaginative ideas will be especially welcomed!

MBrend@compuserve.com andrew.williams22@virgin.net

Co-Inherence Discussion

On the subject of the Internet, one of our American members contacted the editor to recommend the discussion list mentioned in Andrew Williams' article in Issue 87.

I really welcomed the news that the society is considering setting up a Web Site on the Internet.

I am an enthusiastic member of the coinherence discussion list (**coinherence@chelmsford.com**), and would like to recommend it to other members of the C.W. society. We discuss specific works at a particular time. The most recent one now completed is Shadows of Ecstasy, and we expect to discuss Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury next.

There is a great variety of backgrounds represented by list members, and our discussions are very challenging. Occasionally some members want to discuss a particular issue in a broader context than the work we're dealing with, and in that case, they are encouraged to carry on such peripheral discussions off-list.

I am sure that many members of the Society would enjoy (and be appreciated by list members) taking part in the Coinherence discussions.

Under the Mercy,

Helen Hobbs

George MacDonald Web Site

Readers with access to the Internet may also be interested to visit the Web Site of the George MacDonald Society. This attractive and informative site has been produced by Mike Partridge, a member of the Charles Williams Society.

The address is:
http://www.georgemacdonaldsociety.com/

A Tribute to Gillian Lunn

At the Council meeting in June, Gillian Lunn stood down as the Secretary of the Charles Williams Society. She had held this position over a period of 18 years. Brian Horne pays tribute.

The summer of 1980 was a singularly fortunate one for the Charles Williams Society: it saw the appointment of Gillian Lunn to the office of General Secretary. It would he invidious - and of course, simply wrong - to say that this is the most important of the offices in the Society, but it is certainly the pivotal office. This is the one around which most of the work turns, and in Gillian we have been blessed with someone whose has conducted her duties with energy and devotion.

These two qualities are essential for the life and vigour of any community (and the Charles Williams Society is, in a real sense a community): mere devotion, however lavish, will not be enough to achieve the ends for which a society exists, and mere energy, however impressive, will be fruitless without love of the purposes for which the society exists. The work of the General Secretary can be demanding: the keeping of the Minutes of every meeting; the invitations to speakers; the dealing with sometimes large amounts of correspondence; the answering of questions ahout the Society. All this Gillain has done with unfailing good humour; and more than good humour: with love. No interested stranger to either the work of Charles Williams or to the Society remained a stranger for long: they were immediately caught by Gillian's enthusiasm and knowledge. On the few occasions when Gillian was unable to be present at meetings there was always a sense of something missing.

In addition to her work as General Secretary she oversaw, for many years, the sale of books that had come into the possession of the Society. By this means she not only enabled many who would have heen unable to obtain precious, and sometimes rare, texts in any other way to add them to their collections, she made

a significant contribution to the dissemination of the knowledge of Charles Williams.

The Society is much in her debt (though I am sure that she, being the person she is, would not see it that way) and we take this opportunity to thank her for the modest and generous way in which she served us.

Brian Horne

A presentation to Gillian

During her 18 years as Secretary Gillian has become a well-known and much loved member of our Society, not least for the warm and generous friendship she has extended to so many of us.

We hope to make a modest presentation to Gillian at our next meeting on Saturday 14 November. Would any members who wish to contribute please send donations to me to arrive not later than Monday 26 October. May I ask overseas members to make cheques payable in sterling because of conversion charges.

Eileen Mable

"A Borrowed Harp"

The following paper was delivered by Gillian Lunn at a meeting of the Society on 8th November 1997.

I think I should begin by saying that what follows will be digressive. I looked "digressive" up in the dictionary and the definition was all I had hoped - stopping short of irrelevant but including "rambling hither and thither". I have much in mind descriptions of Charles Williams' lecturing style as he strode about hither and thither. Well, I don't think I shall do that but he was also known and noted for using, in his lectures, one writer's work to lead into, and help to understand, his approach to another's.

I think I can best try to explain my choice of title by recalling what other writers, critics in this case, wrote about another poet - or, more correctly, what they left out. A long time ago I had to write an essay on T.S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*,[1] a happy assignment. I love the poem and enjoyed reading critical studies of it. There was lots to learn. Everyone wrote about the Cavalcanti sonnet quoted at the beginning and Shakespearean quotations; many identified various Old and New Testament references and prayers, some of which I could spot for myself. No-one I could find, however, set down what seemed a reference for the very first line so absolutely clear that it didn't seem possible that Eliot wasn't using it as his starting-point for his poem titled *Ash Wednesday* and beginning

"Because I do not hope to turn again..."

re-iterating that word "turn" many times, both the actual word and in such imagery as the spiral staircase. Well! In the Book of Common Prayer the Epistle for "The First Day of Lent, commonly called Ash Wednesday" (from the Old Testament Book of Joel, in fact, not a Pauline Epistle) begins

"Turn ye even unto me, saith the Lord..."

There is also the dreadful Commination Service "Denouncing of God's Anger and Judgements against Sinners", to be used (though I suspect it wasn't often, but T.S. Eliot would doubtless know all about it) on Ash Wednesday, in which there is a sort of litany of curses, a long exhortation full of: "Turn ye... turn ye..." and the last congregational prayer begins:

"Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so we shall be turned".

I shall return to the Book of Common Prayer later, and Eliot will re-appear a little too.

* * * * *

What I want to talk about - Charles Williams' Taliessin poems - seems perhaps first definable by *ex*clusions. I am not including everything in David Dodds' book[2]; not the early Arthurian poems, early versions or previously-unpublished ones. I am only talking about the poems C.W. himself prepared for publication in the two volumes *Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*.

I am totally ignorant of astrology, necromancy and occult ideas and happenings. My abysmal ignorance of mathematics means that I can only wonder at, and enjoy two-dimensionally, so to speak, Palomides' exuberant extolling of Iseult's charms; and though I found out what "asymptote" means (and, come to that, "Transit of Venus" too) my response to reading about Taliessin's feelings on first seeing Blanchfleur is similarly limited.

I am not tracking history, delightful as it might be to ponder in full detail C.W.'s fascinating "use" - that seems the right word - of Church History in The Prelude to *The Region of the Summer Stars*, nor e.g. the history of the first minting of money in Britain, as in *Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins*.

I am not primarily considering meanings, as such. With a tremendous effort of self-denial I am not majoring on imagery either. I want to try and investigate Taliessin the poet, not such technicalities as verse-structure or rhyme-schemes, of

which, like so much else, I am too ignorant; but I want to go to where he found some of the words in which he expressed himself.

Taliessin is surely a vehicle for many of his creator's ideas. So were some characters is the novels; Peter Stanhope, for instance, who explained and taught Pauline in *Descent into Hell* about exchange and substitution. He was a playwright; so was C.W.. But C.W. wanted most to be known and valued as a poet. He made Taliessin a poet; a professional poet; the King's Poet. In that function, as the King's bard, with his harp, he sang the stories of his people, as bards do. He was the one who recorded and set down what had happened, so that his version of events became the received official truth, as bards' tales do. He tells us the history of Logres. Others speak and sing: conversations, love-songs, interior monologues like Mordred's and the Pope's Prayers - who recorded them? Taliessin is narrator much of the time. Taliessin's creator narrates too; the voice is the same. Taliessin is an educated, scholarly, wryly humorous early 20th century Englishman, an Anglican theologian with a distinctive, indeed peculiar, style of writing. Everybody's style of writing must be affected by his or her reading - at least I should think so. Children copy and plagiarise stories and textbooks (and no doubt computers too) as part of normal development. Poets, however original and innovative, must get the words they think with from somewhere.

* * * * *

In the Taliessin poems the beginning of Arthur's kingship, at Easter, is described in *The Crowning of Arthur*. That must have been the start of Taliessin's official bardic function. In the last verse of the poem we read that:

> "...the Pope says Matins in Lateran"

The New Testament lesson set to be read at matins on Easter Day is from the Book of Revelation (1, 10-19) and the last verse is an instruction:

> "Write the things which thou has seen and the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter."

Taliessin obeyed those first two injunctions; what interests me is how his words were chosen. My apologies in advance that in quoting some passages I will be leaving out some lines or parts of lines; you will probably notice this.

* * * * *

Among things I would love to know about C.W.'s own life, very high on the list would come more knowledge about the boyhood walks with his father in the countryside around St Albans. In Mary Alice Hadfield's *Introduction to Charles Williams*[3] she writes that the walks: "became a regular and important pleasure ... they talked – of stories, poetry, history of ideas..." and Charles Williams' sister later said that: "to them 20 miles was nothing in those days."

We can never know just what they talked about. We know that Walter Williams had been a writer of poems, short stories and articles, and a wide-ranging reader. There must have been much that he wanted to talk about with his son and much that he would want to encourage him to read and think about.

When I first read the Taliessin poems and then, some time after my enjoyable researches into Ash Wednesday, I tried to write about them, I did a lot of looking-up, seeking clues and references, mostly simply for understanding of meanings. This was in the 1970's, well before the publication of the Charles Williams Society Newsletter Annotations[4], Glen Cavaliero's book[5] and much else that has since been published about the poems. I was deeply into dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

You will recall, in *The Founding of the Company*, how Taliessin's household is described; the three modes or stations of understanding of the members' exchange and co-inherence. From the second stanza:

> "The king's poet's household opened on the world
> in a gay science devised before the world..."

In pursuit of explanation of this gay science I found that this was the name of a Medieval troubadours guild for users of the Provencale language. This seemed

worth pondering; maybe everyone knows it anyway. And then... I chanced to find, while I wasn't even looking, in C. Day Lewis's book *The Poetic Image*[6], reference to:

> "... a minor Victorian, E.S. Dallas, (who) once wrote an admirable book called The Gay Science – an attempt to propound a "science of criticism"... He called his book the Gay Science because he believed that criticism, the science of the arts, should give pleasure too... He maintained that the object of all art is to give pleasure."

There it is – "Art for Arts Sake" – one of the great debating points for the late Victorians. Surely C.W.'s father would have had views on that. E.S. Dallas seems to have been quite well known, a friend of George Henry Lewis and George Eliot. Perhaps C.W.'s father read the book, which was published in 1876[7]; perhaps C.W. did too; surely it could have been in the back of his mind when he wrote of Taliessin's household – of the "non-elect" and "the very heathen" who "prized"... "the gay science"?

* * * * *

I got another unexpected jolt of recognition from reading something much more accessible than a nearly-forgotten Victorian critic, again when I was not thinking particularly of C.W. and Taliessin; to explain it here, however, I will start with them[6]; *The Departure of Dindrane*, when I first read it, seemed to be – as indeed it is – partly about an attractive, sympathetic character, a Greek slave-woman in Taliessin's household with a difficult decision to make. In a week's time she is going to be freed from slavery – as in the poem's second stanza:

> "Logres kept the old Levitical law;
> each slave, at the end of seven years,
> was freed, in the change of flesh, from the mesh of bondage.
> The jubilee came; and he free or she
> before the king's bailiff was called to make choice
> with his own voice – either to be landed overseas

by a Government ship, crowns in purse, at the nearest
port to his own dearest land; or in Logres
to be given – for a woman a dowry, for a man a farm
or a place in a guild or the army; or, at last,
to compact again with a free heart's love
in what household was sweet alike to past and future".

The last choice – to stay as a free person within the household where you had been in bond, would only be likely if you had been happy there, of course. As I got into difficulties in understanding later sections of this complicated contrapuntal poem I was grateful for C.S. Lewis's comments in *Arthurian Torso*[8]. It was clear enough that it was all happening on a day of incessant rain; everyone was riding horses, cloaked and wet. Taliessin and Dindrane headed a procession out from Camelot and the slave girl rode behind them. She had her problem to solve – her whole future – but she was acutely aware of theirs. Their decision had been made; they loved each other and were about to part. The slave liked, perhaps loved, them both and she felt for them as well as for herself. She resolved her problem, perhaps, in the light of theirs and when, a week later, she came to announce her decision she worded it in recollection of how she had felt that day. I'll quote C.S. Lewis on this passage:

"... seven days later she comes before the king's bailiff and swears to remain in the household of Taliessin. The obscurity of the words in which she does so masks what I take to be piece of good psychology. All through that wet ride her whole attention has been fixed on Taliessin and Dindrane. The very jingling of their bits as they rode has beaten its tune into her brain until it has become the symbol of the challenge she was accepting and the standard against which she has to measure herself. Now at last she is" - he quotes - "quits with those two jangling bits."

Nothing there reminded me of any other poem until I read Tennyson's *Tiresias*[9].

Utterly different of course – but there is a bit in the middle where, as part of an exhortation to self-sacrifice, the tired, old, blind speaker recalls, and foretells, the horrors of war in terms of the *sounds* of troops of horses:

"... what a weight of war
Rides on those ringing axles! jingle of bits,..."

Well! I don't know. Did C.W. himself?

Of course he didn't quote from Tennyson's Arthurian poems in his own; equally "of course" he must have known them very well. He knew a great deal about early Arthurian myths and legends, and theorised about their origins. I think I'd almost rather – I wish almost as much anyway – that he'd lived to finish the marvellous *Figure of Arthur* as that he'd completed his cycle of poems.

* * * * *

A digression here, because I can't resist mentioning a splendid find I made in a charity shop on a wet afternoon: - a book written 10 years before the first of Tennyson's Idylls of the King were published: *King Arthur: an Epic Poem* by the Rt. Hon. Lord Lytton[10]. It must have been well-received as it was re-printed many times; my edition is 1870. The epic is very long and I confess to not yet having read much of it, but it has useful summary headings to each of its 12 books plus an introduction and notes from which one can learn such things as that Arthur's crowning at Caerleon was by the Arch-Prelate Dubricius, and that Merlin is "a seer gifted with miraculous powers for the service and ultimate victory of Christianity".

There is no Holy Grail, no Galahad and no Guinevere. Arthur seems to be a Christian missionary; he roams the world - to "the Polar Seas", where he addresses a Norwegian crew and "subdues an attack of the Esquimaux from their ice-huts" and Gawaine "exorcises the winds, passing himself off as a priest of Freya". They also encounter whalers, pygmies and bears, demon dwarfs, Valkyries and a volcano. Meanwhile Lancelot "wanders in valleys on the other side of

the Alps" where he discovers a "Happy Valley" wherein dwells a surviving band of pre-Roman Etrurian magicians; they sing an Etrurian dirge. There is a Chorus of Pinching Fairies and another Chorus of Preaching Fairies. Arthur sees visions of "Times to be:

Coeur de Lion and the Age of Chivalry;
Henry VII restores the line of Arthur, the founder of civil freedom;
Henry VIII and the revolution of thought;
Elizabeth and the age of poetry."

A short extract from this epic is all there is time for now:

"Caradoc had half forgot
That famous epic which his muse had hit on,
Of Trojan Brut –
From whom the name of Briton..."

I should really be quite surprised to learn that C.W. hadn't heard of and probably read, Lord Lytton's triumphalist Victorian King Arthur.

I expect that he also knew another of my junk-shop finds - a play: - A tragedy – Arthur by Lawrence Binyon, produced in 1923 with a famous cast and incidental music by Elgar[11]. As one might guess the play, after bitter battles, ends with poignant lament for the lost youth of the nation. 1923 - an interesting year for a new play about King Arthur. By then C.W.'s mind, and pen, had been at work on Arthur and the Matter of Britain for some years.

* * * * *

In the Note he appended to Taliessin through Logres he writes of the book's title: - "This was not taken from Tennyson, but it was confirmed later by a line in *The Holy Grail:*

'Taliessin is our fullest throat of song'".

I find that note mysterious. Tennyson's *Holy Grail* was published in 1869. C.W. saying that his chosen title was "confirmed later" by the one line in it which contains the name Taliessin seems odd. We do know, however, that he considered Tennyson's treatment of the Grail to be inadequate, and that this was probably a factor in him deciding that he would write about it himself.

If, consciously or otherwise, he had used word-sequences from Tennyson, Swinburne or other Arthurian poets, surely we would know about it by now.

* * * * *

Ideas, and associations of ideas from other writers are another matter. For instance: - I don't suppose that he was influenced by George Eliot is a way that would make him want to quote - or "borrow" - identifiable sequences of words; he would have told us if so. But his developed doctrine - so to call it - of co-inherence which, when he wrote of it theologically he related to the Trinity, might have been brooded in his brain among other ideas. George Eliot was concerned to show, in fiction, the inter-relations of people's lives. I think it was perhaps in a letter that she wrote of "the stealthy convergence of human lots", but she also used the analogy of a web. As, of course, did C.W.:

"... the knotted web of Empire"

from *The Last Voyage*; and:

"Lancelot and Arthur wove the web...

in *Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass*, when Taliessin by the end was:

"manacled by the web, in the web made free..."

That couldn't possibly be considered borrowing. There are, however, a few passages in the poems which, surely, are at least debatable. Here are two, both from *The Prayers of the Pope*:

The evil wizards...

"...called and enthralled the dead,
the poor, long-dead, long-buried, decomposing
shapes of humanity; the earthy shapes stirred...
...the sorcerers
touched them and bade them walk...

Consuls and lords felt the cold coming
and yet the drumming of the earth under the tribes,..."

Are we meant to catch at that "cold coming"? T.S. Eliot's *Journey of the Magi*[12] begins with it, well-known to be a quotation from a sermon by Lancelot Andrewes. The last line of The Journey of the magi – coming to mind as one thinks of C.W.'s poor long-dead shapes of humanity – is: "I should be glad of another death".

And, a second echo, or perhaps "borrowing": a little later on in *The Prayers of the Pope*:

"...well
had Mordred spelled his lesson from his father King Arthur.
The prince had hungered; he had waited tomorrow and tomorrow..."

Are we meant to think of Macbeth? Are we deficient if we don't? Are we silly if we do?

* * * * *

Perhaps "borrowings" might most properly mean quotations or adaptations which C.W. presumably meant a reader to recognise, both words and context. I am here considering mostly biblical ones and some from the Book of Common Prayer.

Taking the poems in published order the first, I suppose, is the use of the Benedicite at the end of *The Vision of Empire*:

"O you shoulders, elbows, wrists,
bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever;
you fittings of thumbs and fingers,
bless ye the Lord;
sockets and balls in knees and ankles,
bless ye the Lord;
hips, thighs, spine in its multiples,
bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever..."

and 8 lines more. And the Pope, in his Prayers at the end, addresses God directly:

"bless thee, praise thee, and magnify thee for ever."

The body, the healthy living body and the buried, decomposing corpses, is of course a major theme or strand in the poems. Here the skeleton reminds me of the character, so to call it, in the play *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* - bones, a skeleton, but nothing of graveyard shudders or ghoulies and ghosties - all strength of structure, interdependent parts, vitality and movement. And in the poem it is first celebrated in well-known liturgical words of praise.

* * * * *

Probably the reader is meant to understand the Latin phrases embedded is *Taliessin in the School of the Poets*. In *The Death of Palomides* come - translated - sentences from Jewish prayers; C.W. himself put a note of explanation at the end of *Taliessin through Logres* about the word "Netzack" that he uses in this poem, but we're expected to recognise: "The kingdom, the power, the glory". C. W. also, in the Note at the end of the book, tells us of his use of Wordsworth's Prelude, both "the feeling intellect" and the image of stone and shell.

* * * * *

The first verse of *Percivale at Carbonek* ends:

"His eyes were sad; he sighed for Lancelot's pardon".

"He" is Galahad, here the desolating figure of a child who knows his father had wished him not to exist. Later his message is:

"Forgive Us,"... "for Our existence;
Forgive the means of grace and the hope of glory."

Perhaps the reader - perhaps Galahad too - is to see irony in that the quotation is from The General Thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer.

Lancelot has suffered; he has been - exactly - brutalised. The passage from The Sermon on the Mount: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over" has a sting, a cruel irony for Lancelot; for him it is: - (in The Son of Lancelot) -

"taunt of truth...
...
The gratuitous grace of greed, grief, or gain
the measure pressed and over-running;..."

* * * * *

The last poem of all: *The Prayers of the Pope* begins:

"Early on the feast of Christmas the young Pope
knelt in Lateran..."

and a few lines later we hear of his

"...meditation set to Magnificat,"

We are expected, surely, to know who first sang Magnificat, and when. Nearly at the end of Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, Cranmer's dreadful end, the Singers sing:

"He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away."

and it is completely, tightly in context; Cranmer is about to be given money to give to the poor before he's burned. Please correct me if I am being over-simplistic but I believe that Cranmer set the Magnificat firmly in place in the Book of Common Prayer, to be said or sung daily at Evensong.

In the long *Prayers of the Pope* the Pope draws together thoughts of the riches of the earthly Empire and of the wealth of blessings that may follow their loss; five times he ends a long stanza with the words:

"Send not, send not the rich empty away"

and these words end the whole cycle.

* * * * *

Considering these inclusions in the flow of the poetry, of easily-identifiable parts of the liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer I recall something very different indeed, that I find helps to emphasise their contextual relevance. This is George Eliot's eponymous hero Daniel Deronda[13], in a synagogue:

"he...gave himself up to that strongest effect of chanted liturgies which is independent of verbal meaning - like the effect of a Magnificat... The most powerful movement of feeling with a liturgy is the prayer which seeks for nothing special, but is a yearning to escape."

That surely is the absolute antithesis of C.W.'s ideas - his expressed ideas - of prayers and liturgies. "Independent of verbal meaning..." Well!!

There is also T.S. Eliot in *The Dry Salvages*[14] saying, as I understand it, something much nearer to C.W.'s thought, perhaps even a part of it? but not, surely, what C.W. as Taliessin is saying:

"The hint half-guessed, the gift half understood
is Incarnation..."

And so to one more scrap of Taliessin's thought that the reader is, I believe, expected recognise and identify - towards the end of the first stanza of The Founding of the Company:

"What says the creed of the Trinity? Quicunque vult;
Therefore its cult was the Trinity and the Flesh-taking,..."

Quicunque vult: the Athanasian Creed which, we are told meant so much to C. W.. That phrase "The Trinity and the Flesh-taking" reminds me of George Herbert addressing God: (the second verse of "Ungratefulnesse").

"Thou hast but two rare cabinets full of treasure,
The Trinity and Incarnation, Thou hast unlock't them both
And made them jewels to betroth
The work of thy creation..."

The doctrine of the Incarnation is, surely, everywhere implicitly present in C. W.'s Arthurian poetry. The Trinity is actually a place – Sarras.

* * * * *

Until I began, almost cursorily, to look for quotations in these poems because I'd found some and then, whimsically perhaps, to see whether - as with *Ash Wednesday* - there might be any interest in following biblical ones into the lit-

urgy of the Book of Common Prayer, I expected... - but, no, I didn't - I didn't really expect anything but that they would be relevant in their context and that I wanted to find out how. But I seemed, as I looked, to find something I hadn't even missed - a sort of strand of embedded quotations about and around the Resurrection; nothing overt or singing out - just embedded.

Here I must first insert another short quotation; perhaps you are already recalling it: from *The Calling of Taliessin*, describing those who return to the ordinary world from the awesome and dangerous Forest of Broceliande, study of which is not for here-and-now. Most people don't come back but those who do:

"come rarely again with brain unravished..."

some are:

"...by grace dumb...
like a blest child..."

but - Oh dear!

"... the rest loquacious with a graph
or a gospel, gustily audacious over three heavens."

That is certainly not a way I would wish to be thought of. I may, I do, love the poems passionately but I am not passionate about my opinions and my attempts to understand the poems; I am at least as interested in yours as mine.

* * * * *

The story begins at Easter and ends at Pentecost - "the festival of flames" at Lancelot's Mass. References specifically to Easter move the action on, so to speak. Arthur was crowned at Easter in - probably - all tellings of the story. C. W. doesn't "major on it", but, almost at the end of "The Crowning of Arthur":

"Taliessin beheld a god lie in his tomb."
and then: "the hollow call is beaten on the board in Sophia;..".

Hell is being Harrowed; on Holy Saturday in the Orthodox Church wooden clackers were – perhaps still are – sounded instead of bells on that one day. In a later year, redeemed from the dreadful lycanthropy:

"... in Carbonek's guest-chamber
...Lancelot lay tended, housed and a man,
to be by Easter healed and horsed for Logres;..."

* * * * *

Near the start of that poem: *The Son of Lancelot* comes something different:

"at the height of the thin night air of Quinquagesima..."

and then again:

"the small whistling breath of the thin air of Quinquagesima..."

a cold wind blows - of coming Lenten fasting and penance; the wolves run over the snow. The first wolf is poor mad Lancelot and, before he was stricken he had been, we're specifically told: - "on a merciful errand". Lancelot is, we're to understand, a merciful man, a charitable man; one of Palomides' tormenting difficulties with his pride was that Lancelot had first forgiven him for cheating at a tourney, and then rescued him when he was kidnapped by pirates. The Gospel for Quinquagesima (from Luke 18) is Christ's healing of the blind beggar who remembered to say Thank you; the Collect for the day begins: "O Lord who has taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth"; and the Epistle which follows it is the great passage on charity (1 Cor. 13): "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal..."

* * * * *

Most curiously in The Last Voyage Galahad, aboard the Ship of Solomon:

"...leaned against the wind...
He sang Judica te, Deus; the wind,
driven by doves' wings along the arm-taut keel,
sang against itself Judica te, Deus."

What, I asked myself does this mean? In mediaeval times, it seems, Passion Sunday was popularly called Judica Sunday because the opening words of the introit psalm are "Judica me, Deus." – "Be thou my Judge, O Lord, for I have walked innocently...". Judica me, Judica te,... I still ask what is meant. The next words in the poem are: "Prayer and irony..."

* * * * *

St Matthew's and St Mark; Gospels, telling of the Last Supper, have the disciples hearing Jesus foretelling that one of them will betray Him, and of their asking Him: "Is it I?" Taliessin, in The Ascent of the Spear, teases, braces and encourages his alternately recalcitrant and abashed slave. Embedded in his speech comes:

"...Is it I then... whose face
Christ beholds now suffused and sufficed with his brilliant bold?..."

St Mark's telling of the Last Supper (chap. 14) is set as the new Testament lesson at Evensong on the first Sunday in Lent; the Old Testament reading is Genesis 8: Noah being able, at least, to come out of the Ark – saved.

* * * * *

The comment of the Jewish high priests, after the Crucifixion, is in all three synoptic Gospels: "He saved others; himself he could not save." Taliessin, using those words of Virgil (in Taliessin on the Death of Virgil), subtly condemns big-

oted dogmatism and draws on C.W.'s doctrine of unlimited Co-Inherence for his belief that others, later in time, could save Virgil for the Christian Heaven; was it not a vital issue in the early church, in the time of Logres, to work out how pre-Christian worthies could be saved? The Gospel for Palm Sunday is Matthew's telling of the Crucifixion with these words in it; its also set for Matins on the fifth Friday is Lent, and Mark's version is set for Evensong that day.

In *Bors to Elayne; on the King's Coins* Bors tells Elayne of his dream and the words he heard: "Feed my lambs", quoting Christ's thrice-reiterated command to Peter at the lakeside picnic, told in St John's Gospel: "...the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after that he had risen from the dead." Interestingly that passage is set as the New Testament lesson at Evensong on the third Sunday after Easter, when the Old Testament reading is Exodus 33 in which Moses is allowed to see God's back; we know that that – "the grace of the Back in the Mound" – was in Taliessin's mind at a very important moment in *The Sister of Percivale.*

* * * * *

And so to the Gospel for Ascension Day - the end of St Mark's Gospel (disputed now, I believe, by theologians) – Jesus's last words, his promise to the disciples – "In my name shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them..." In *The Prayers of the Pope* this petition for:

> "...thine unknown elect:
> ...
> so much shall the healing metaphysic have power upon them –
> from evil and mischief and the crafty assaults on the devil.
> Purely their souls shall go and their bodies securely,
> whether in body or soul they drink deadly,
> or handle malice and slander as they handle serpents,..."

And that last chapter or Mark's Gospel is also set to be read on the fourth Wednesday after Trinity at Evensong, when the Old Testament lesson preceding

it (with the Magnificat, of course, between them) is from the Book of Proverbs; the last verse to be read is: "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich shall surely come to want..."

* * * * *

That concludes my pursuit of embedded biblical passages into their places in the Book of Common Prayer, their order in the Church's year. There may well be more. Those are the ones I found, and I was surprised to find that, though quite deeply embedded, so to speak, they all connect in this way to the Resurrection. The Company, the Kingdom - the society of Logres is seen and sung in the light (is that the word ? yes, why not?) of the Co-Inherence, of the Trinity. The Incarnation is implicit, and explicit. Tentatively I suggest that it adds something to the word-pictures of some individual characters that, whether consciously or not, they and Taliessin relate their inner lives also to the Resurrection.

I think that's enough, now, of that. A fleeting return to the book *The Gay Science*, which I managed to track down, and found full of amusement and interest. In the short passage I am about to quote E.S. Dallas was actually writing about imagery, and warning against critics' over-intensity in that interesting area. But it is perhaps a warning for me too :

> "One of the most piteous things in human life is to see an idiot vacantly teasing a handful of straw, and babbling over the blossoms which he nicks to pieces. It is not more piteous than the elaborate trifling of criticism over figures of speech and the varieties of imagery."

Thus the critic of 1866, quoted by C. Day Lewis in 1946; have things changed, I wonder?

* * * * *

Nonetheless I don't think I can resist musing just a little on Taliessin's harp.

First a couple of sentences from C.W.'s *Commonplace Book*, as quoted in Anne Ridler's Introduction to *The Image of the City*[15]:

> He begins with an unattributed quotation:
>
> "'The whole point of plainsong is to decorate the unimportant syllables.' (and goes on) is this a principle of Art?... Turn into 'Never decorate except in unimportant parts.'" (I.C. lix)

Others may disagree but I do tend to think of Taliessin with his harp and that it is important to him. But I am not so sure that it was really important in itself. When Taliessin sings it is always the words that matter, as one would expect. But the harp does perhaps have a little more significance than just background accompaniment, in the poems; it sometimes seems to appear when he's feeling emotional.

I think it is legitimate to ignore the poems' published order here and begin with *The Calling of Taliessin*. The druid-raised British lad sets off for Byzantium:

> "On his shoulder a covered harp, and he cloaked
> over his tunic; laced boots of hide
> on his feet, and a sword of Rome by his side..."

Apart from the sword of Rome, and perhaps think of a guitar rather than a harp - and he sounds quite like a modern youngster setting off Inter-Railing, even to the Doc Marten boots! When he returns, grown-up, with his *Vision of Empire*, to his native country and walks through the woods to Arthur's camp:

> "Covered on my back
> untouched, my harp had hung;
> its notes sprang to sound
> as I took the blindfold track...."

and, near the end of that poem: - *Taliessin's Return to Logres* :

"I had come to the king's camp;
the harp on my back
syllabled the signal word...."

I am not sure whether to think that the harp made noises of its own volition or whether, just as likely perhaps, it got jolted as he jogged along.

Before we hear again of Taliessin's harp we have Palomides, newly arrived at the Cornish court. King Mark says, in "The Coming of Palomides":

"...Little we know
of verses here; let the stranger show
a trick of the Persian music-craft."

Palomides gazes at Iseult, with Tristram on one side of her and her husband the king on the other - he:

"caught her arm in a mesh of chords,"

(that's "chords" with an "h" but surely we're meant to note the aural ambiguity) - it is the sounds of his harp, his Persian music-craft, that has caught her arm. A few lines later his passionate perception of her arm, caught in his mind and mixed there with the beautiful forms of mathematical precision, shows him:

"... fiery circles leap
round finger-point and shoulder; arc
with arc encountering strikes a spark
wherefrom the dropping chords of fire
fashion the diagram of desire."

And that diagram of desire is, I think, the first glimpse of the questioning beast. There are occasional mentions of other musical instruments: *At Arthur's Crowning*:

"Over the mob's noise rose gushing the sound of the flutes"

and a couple of lines later the wonderful:

"flutes infiltrating the light of candles."

I am not so sure about the flutes "gushing" but I think the idea grows on me... In Mount Badon signalling the start of the battle:

"the trumpets blew, the lines engaged."

And in The Sister of Percivale another trumpet announces Blanchfleur's arrival at Percivale's court. Just after that:

"Percivale saw his verse-brother..."

surely recalling the occasion at the beginning of *The Star of Percivale* when he, Percivale, had been playing:

"The Lord Percivale harped; he added no voice..."

and

"Taliessin stood in the court; he played
a borrowed harp; his voice defined the music."

His voice then; but before long, in that poem, we are given his words. As so often does accompany some high emotion; here Taliessin has to deal with a serving-maid who seems to have a bad attack of calf-love - for him. He sings to her; they are about to go to church and the Archbishop is in sight. Taliessin jollies the girl out of it, steadies her and readies her for the Archbishop:

"... the harp sang her to her feet;..."

In *The Coming of Galahad* Taliessin's harp features for the last time in *Taliessin*

through Logres. He sings and plays a curious little nursery-rhyme:

> "Down the porphyry stair the queen's child ran;
> there he played with his father's crown..."

The porphyry stair to the Emperor's throne at Byzantium has thus come into the nursery world of Logres.

A little later in the same poem Taliessin talks with Gareth and his line is interrupted - emotion again. He says:

> "... the sister of Percivale, the – 'his harp sang' - Princess Blanchfleur..."

A few lines later: "Taliessin stayed the music" to talk of druids, stone and shell.

And that's it. Apart from the lad with the harp on his back in The Calling of Taliessin there is no mention of the harp in *The Region of the Summer Stars* until, in *The Prayers of the Pope*, it is almost the end:

> "Taliessin gathered his people before the battle..."

his hands now are empty:

> "... he lifted his hands to the level of his brow, the hands that had written and harped the King's music;..."

And there he is dissolving the formal bonds of the Company, of his household. His writing preserves the story – but the bard's music fades.

But Taliessin knew, and showed, the inspiration and enrichment of hearing – sharing – using – another voice to sing with – or to borrow from.

Notes

1. T.S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday", *Collected Poems*, (Faber).

2. David Llewellyn Dodds, ed., "Charles Williams", in *Arthurian Poets* (Boydell Press, 1991).

3. Alice Mary Hadfield, *An Introduction to Charles Williams*, (Robert Hale, 1959).

4. Charles Williams Society, *The Taliessin Poems of Charles Williams: by Various Hands*, (1991).

5. Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, (Macmillan, 1991).

6. C. Day Lewis, *The Poetic Image*, (Cape, 1968).

7. E.S. Dallas, *The Gay Science*, (Chapman and Hall, 1866).

8. C.S. Lewis, *Arthurian Torso*, (OUP, 1948 and Eadman, 1974).

9. Tennyson, *Tiresias*, (many editions).

10. Rt. Hon. Lord Lytton, *King Arthur: an Epic Poem*, (Routledge, 1849).

11. Lawrence Binyon, *Arthur: a tragedy*, (Heinemann, 1923).

12. T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi", *Collected Poems*,

13. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, (many editions).

14. T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages", *Four Quartets*, (many editions).

15. Anne Ridler, ed., *The Image of the City*, (OUP, 1958).

Literary Essays

Dr Brian Horne reviews *Literary Essays* by John Heath-Stubbs, edited by Trevor Tolley.

I doubt that many societies are able to boast, as the Charles Williams Society can, of having two distinguished poets of international renown not only in its list of members but active in the affairs of the society. I speak, of course, of Anne Ridler and John Heath-Stubbs. John Heath-Stubbs celebrates his eightieth birthday this year and his publishers, the enterprising firm of Carcanet, has chosen to honour him with the publication of a collection of essays written over more than fifty years and edited with care and affection by his friend, the Canadian scholar Trevor Tolley. The earliest piece dates from 1945: "George Crabbe and the Eighteenth Century", the most recent from 1989: "The Astrological Basis of Spenser's *Shephearde's Calendar*". Those two titles (of twenty-two) alone will give the reader some idea of the extraordinary range of this volume.

Some essays appeared as review articles in periodicals, some as contributions to anthologies, some as introductions to books of poetry, but, whatever their origin they are all stamped with the unmistakable characteristics of John Heath-Stubbs's own mind and sensibility. Those of us who have been privileged to have known him through the meetings of the Charles Williams Society will know what those characteristics are. How often, after a talk has been given at one of our meetings have we not been amazed and entertained by the intervention of John Heath-Stubbs in the discussion? Erudition and enthusiasm mark every utterance. It frequently seems as though no subject, however esoteric, is beyond the reach of that inquiring mind. Listening to him speak or reading his essays and poetry one is aware immediately that he is a scholar-poet of the first order. He is at home in the City of Learning as he is the City of Art but the

knowledge obtained in the former has been transmuted over many decades by residence in the latter. The creative act turns information into poetry. The judgements made on the poetic art of others are thus made with indisputable authority. Here is a characteristic comment from the essay on David Jones:

> "The ancients made the Muses the Daughters of Memory. When Blake indignantly repudiated this idea, as the false invention of the rationalizing intellect, he did not know that Mnemosyne signified more than the empirical memory of things perceived and recorded by the senses. Mnemosyne (as Keats knew) is a mighty goddess, standing for the transmitted communal wisdom and experience of the tribe. She is sister to Themis, who (far beyond abstract Justice) signifies the community's intuitive sense of what is fitting and customary." (p. 131)

In the essay on TS Eliot he traces references, in that most referential of poets, not only to well-known sources in Dante, Cavalcanti and St. John of the Cross, but to Thomas de Quincey, Frances Hodgson Burnett and George Macdonald. He also, incidentally, provides the only convincing reading that I have ever come across of the enigmatic line in *Gerontion,* "The goat coughs at night in the field overhead". Members of the Charles Williams Society will be pleased to know that the whole of the pamphlet he wrote on Charles Williams for the British Council in 1955 is re-printed here. It is the longest essay in the collection; and that so substantial a piece has been included seems to indicate that his interest in and admiration for Williams is undimmed. There are also essays on Italian literature: Tasso and Leopardi; on American writers: Poe, Pound and Hart Crane: and on English poets as different as John Dryden and Cecil Day Lewis. Throughout the volume one has the sense of his profound awareness of the living tradition of European culture. He seems to carry its history in his head and be able to refer to its details as effortlessly as if he were referring to the whereabouts of a beloved friend.

Of course, in an anthology as diverse as this; so rich in thought, information

and opinion, individual readers will want, from time to time, to demur, to offer a different judgement, to challenge an interpretation. I, for example, think he overestimates the poetic gift of Thomas Gray and fails to do justice to that of WH Auden. The Auden essay casts an interesting light on historical perspective and iliustrates the dangers of making predictions. In 1976 John Heath-Stubbs predicted that Auden would be 'much less widely read and admired than he has been in the last forty years or so.' Twenty eight years have passed and Auden's poetry is as widely read as it ever was. However, the intention of the criticism is never to destroy. Even at his sharpest John Heath-Stubbs is generous: his primary purpose is to illuminate and help the reader understand the works under discussion; to increase enjoyment and appreciation. In other words, by deepening our knowledge of the literary tradition, to add to the delight of life.

Literary Essays by John Heath-Stubbs, edited by Trevor Tolley is published by Carcanet and costs £14.95. Pages: 214.

The Inklings Showcase Display

Mark Brend reviews a display of pictures of the Inklings at the National Portrait Gallery,

The Inklings were an informal group of writers and friends, centred around CS Lewis, who met regularly in Oxford from the 1930s until shortly before Lewis's death in the early 60s. This small display at the National Portrait Gallery consists of drawings and photographs of various members of the Inklings, each with a brief but informative biographical caption.

Lewis was and remains the best known member of the Inklings. Norman Parkinson's photograph of him, for which Lewis, resplendent in his dressing gown, mustered a suitably pugnacious expression - forms the centrepiece of the display.

C.W. attended Inklings meetings during the war years, and is generally remembered as the third most significant writer of the group - Tolkien being the second behind Lewis. Members will be most interested to see the original of Anne Spalding's lithograph drawing of CW, which is reproduced in the Society's brochure.

(Members considering travelling into London to visit this display should be aware that it consists of only 6 items.)

The Inklings Showcase Display will be on view in the Early 20th Century Gallery (First Floor, Room 27) at the National Portrait Gallery St Martin's Place, London until 31st December 1998. Admission is free.