



The
**Charles
Williams**
Society



Newsletter

No. 99

Summer 2001

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 King's College London.

Officers of the Society

President: **John Heath-Stubbs**

Chairman:

Mrs Eileen Mable

28 Wroxham Way
Harpenden
Herts, AL5 4PP
01582 713641

Secretary:

Revd Dr Richard Sturch

Islip Rectory, The Rise, Islip
Oxford, OX5 2TG
01865 372163

Treasurer (temporary):

Revd Dr Richard Sturch

Membership Secretary:

Mrs Lepel Kornicka

15 King's Avenue, Ealing
London, W5 2SJ
020 8991 0321

Librarian:

Dr Brian Horne

Flat 8, 65 Cadogan Gardens
London, SW3 2RA
020 7581 9917

Newsletter Editor:

Mr Edward Gauntlett

21 Downsway, Whyteleafe
Surrey, CR3 0EW
020 8660 1402

Web site: http://www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc/

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Reading groups

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



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From the Editor

I have found that the June issue of CW has a peculiar feel which stems, I suppose, from the lack of a preceding meeting of the Society. Fortunately the odd piece of correspondence has arrived to reassure me that the Newsletter does in fact go out to real people and the addresses on my database aren't just the products of a feverish imagination.

This issue includes Walter Hooper's lively paper on the relationship between Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis together with the other Inklings. I was particularly impressed by the descriptions of the disagreements between friends: the friction of people with real ideas rubbing against each other. There is the picture, for instance, of Charles Wrenn deciding at an Inklings gathering that the only thing for Williams was to burn him at the stake – and Lewis agreeing! Also Lewis pitching into C.W. “for all [he] was worth” over some question of style.

All of which reminded me of one of Arthur Machen's letters to A. E. Waite, written in February 1906 at the time when they were discussing Graal symbolism. (The fruits of these discussions subsequently appeared in Waite's *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*.) Machen wrote:

Was there not a tacit convention that we should avoid mere argument? If this still stands: good: if not: have at you for *all* your opinions as to the Church and the Heresies! From them all, so far as I understand them, I wholly and heartily dissent: in the hy-

pothesis of the Holy Assembly I do not believe ... I am ready if necessary to maintain theses on all these points, when and where you will.

Around dawn somewhere secluded presumably. And these two remained firm friends for another 36 years.

While looking for this quote (from *Arthur Machen Selected Letters*, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough 1988) I came across another story which seems appropriate in connection with C. W. and his incurring of Wrenn's wrath. Machen, using a formula he shared with Waite of prefacing some judgement of doom with the words "you remind me of a man who...", writes of an Indian mystic at the time of the Mutiny who was discovered sitting in holy meditation by an English soldier. The soldier "bayoneted him on general principles. As he died, the saint, looking with great composure on the soldier, observed: 'Thou also art *that*.'"

Edward Gauntlett

Society News & Notes

Library

We are grateful to one of our members, Professor Giorgio Spina, for the gift of a copy of his recent publication: *G. MacDonald e I Romantici Tedeschi* - a study of George MacDonald's relation to a number of German writers of the Romantic tradition, including Novalis, E. T. A. Hoffman and Jean Paul Richter.

John V. Taylor

The Society was represented by the Chairman at the Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Bishop John V. Taylor held at Winchester Cathedral on Saturday 7 April. His talk to the Society, 'The Doctrine of Exchange', appeared in CW 94 (Spring 2000).

C. S. Lewis Foundation

The following information has been received advertising the Foundation's summer seminar.

The C. S. Lewis Foundation announces the first in a series of summer academic programs to be held at The Kilns, the former home of the late author and Christian apologist.

Entitled 'Branches To Heaven: The Geniuses of C. S. Lewis' the program is based on the book of the same title written by conference leader Dr. James Como who will explore the range of Lewis's genius while addressing the surprising reason for his enduring literary and spiritual influence.

The summer program will offer unique access to Lewis's home to a small group of participants. Having once fallen into ruin, The Kilns has been beautifully restored by the Foundation to become the C. S. Lewis Study Centre, welcoming scholars from around the world to study Lewis's legacy.

The summer program features lec-

tures by learned scholars, discussion, individualized tours of the region and excursions to Orchard Tea Gardens, Blenheim Palace and Studley Priory.

'Branches to Heaven' will be held twice during the summer: 29th July to 4th August and 5th to 11th August. To receive a brochure and registration form email info@cslewis.org.

Having checked their website (www.cslewis.org) we find the price of attending one of these seminars was US\$2,695.00 in 2000 (unless they left the wrong date up).

Their web site is quite interesting in itself and they can also be contacted by post: C. S. Lewis Foundation, P. O. Box 8008, Redlands, California 92375, USA. Phone (909) 793 0949.

Georgette Versinger

It is with regret that we received news of Madame Georgette Versinger's death on 12 May 2001. An active member of the society, she had written to the editor only a month earlier. We hope to include a longer notice in a future issue.

New Members

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

Mrs. S. Hattersley,
The Coach House,
The Causeway,
Wirksworth,
Derby
DE4 4DL.

Terry Drummond,
48 Northampton Road,
Croydon,
Surrey
CR0 7HT

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- ◆ **Saturday 9th June 2001**
Annual General Meeting in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church, St. Petersburg Place, Bayswater, London W2 at 12.30 pm. At 2.30 pm the Revd. Dr. Gavin Ashenden will speak on *The Quest for Integration: Michal and Celia – Poetry and Letters*.

- ◆ **Saturday 13th October 2001**
A reading of *The House by the Stable*. In the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church at 2.30 pm.

- ◆ Provisional dates for 2002 are the following Saturdays: 23rd February, 15th June (AGM), and 2nd November. The locations of and speakers at these meetings will appear as soon as they have been confirmed.

C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams

The following paper was delivered by Walter Hooper at a meeting of the Charles Williams Society in Oxford on Saturday 10th February 2001.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply honoured to address the Charles Williams Society. However, let me confess that I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, a Charles Williams 'scholar.' I know that many of you are, and that some had the inestimable privilege of knowing Charles Williams personally. I have of course read many of Williams's works, but it's as well I tell *you* of my general ignorance before you tell *me*.

Because my interest in Charles Williams came through his friend C. S. Lewis, I should probably mention that, following a few months as C. S. Lewis's secretary in 1963, I have been editing his literary remains on behalf of his estate since that time. While I know Charles Williams had a whole, other, life even before he met Lewis, the relation of the two men is a marked part of C. S. Lewis's writings and thought.

My interest in Lewis began in 1954. I came originally from North Carolina, in the Southern United States, and immediately after taking my degree from the University of North Carolina I was drafted into the army. I had just enough time to buy my first Lewis book - *Miracles* - before I was sent off to basic training. It was while undergoing some very hard physical exertion that I began reading C. S. Lewis. And, like many others, I discovered Charles Williams through him. There were two dear little ladies who ran a bookshop back home, and they sent me whatever Lewis titles they could find. Today you can go into Blackwells and see a score of Lewis titles - the Narnian stories, the theological works, books on literary criticism - spread out before you.

The order in which I read them was something like, *Miracles*, *Arthurian Torso*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. I'm glad I read Lewis's works in this random order because it means I've never, like those who

know only one kind of his books, thought of him as being more than one man. Reading them in this higgledy-piggledy order also made it possible for me to expect people to have a wide variety of interests and gifts. One of the chief characteristics of Lewis's writings is that he always points you to the books or whatever it was that caused him to write his books in the first place. For instance, the book he and Charles Williams wrote together - *Arthurian Torso* - led me to read those authors who'd captivated them - Gildas, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the whole Arthurian tradition.

But it was Lewis himself that made a complete and lasting conquest of me. I owe him, to paraphrase Lewis himself, as much as one man can owe another. Not long after leaving the army I began teaching English Literature in the University of Kentucky. I'd been corresponding with Lewis from the time I went into the army until 1963 when he invited me over to see him.

Before we met in June of that year I was commissioned to write a scholarly work on Lewis for an American series. When I mentioned this to Lewis he said 'Far better write about the unanswering dead!' At the same time I came across his essay on 'The Anthropological Approach,' which begins: 'It is not to be disputed that literary texts can sometimes be of great use to the anthropologist. It does not immediately follow from this that anthropological study can make in return any valuable contribution to literary criticism.'¹ He goes on to say that the type of criticism he termed 'anthropological' 'takes us away from the actual poem and the individual poet to seek the sources of their power in something earlier and less known ... in fact, finds the secret of poetry pleasure anywhere rather than in talent and art.'²

It's a pity I didn't take it more to heart. But at that time the rage in American universities was the anthropological approach - the assumption that every ingredient in every book came from someone else. All the papers I read on Lewis were about 'Influences': they purported to explain where he got the idea of the floating island in *Perelandra*, where he got this and where he got that. In the chapters I wrote before meeting Lewis I set out to explain how he'd been 'influenced' by various writers - including Charles Williams. It didn't occur to me that if Lewis

‘got’ something from Charles Williams, then he in his turn ‘got’ it from someone else, who got it - of course - from someone else, so that every idea would have to go all the way back to Adam.

But how different all these things were shown to be after meeting Lewis! The first blow against the anthropological approach occurred on 7 June 1963 when we met for the first time at his house in Headington Quarry. Over pot after pot of tea I sampled his wonderful conversation, which was impossible to separate from a constant seeking for truth. For example, I asked Lewis which of his books he thought best. ‘I think *Perelandra* my best book,’ he answered. Then he asked me, ‘Which of my works do you *like* best?’ ‘Well, I agree with you,’ I said. ‘I think *Perelandra* your best book.’ ‘But that’s *not* what I asked,’ said Lewis. ‘The question was which do you *like* best?’ ‘Oh - “like”,’ I said. ‘I *like* *That Hideous Strength* the most of all your works.’ ‘So do I,’ replied Lewis. This distinction between what one thinks ‘best’ and what one ‘likes’ the most was typical of the way he thought and talked.

But I was still not cured of the anthropological approach. Not long afterwards, when with Lewis at one of the Monday morning Inklings meetings, I asked if he was ‘influenced’ by Charles Williams. ‘I notice,’ he said, ‘that if I order a pork pie *you* order one. If I order a pint of bitter *you* order one. Is that influence?’ He went on to say ‘Williams was a very great friend. If I was influenced by him I’m not conscious of it.’

Not long afterwards Lewis asked me to become his secretary, and I moved into his house in Headington Quarry. The plan was that I’d remain with him until I had to go back to the States to teach one final term, and then return in January 1964. The months we spent together were the happiest of my life. I brought out the chapters of the silly book I was writing, and we laughed as we applied the anthropological approach to them. After this nothing could have persuaded me to publish them. One of the insights which Lewis brought to our discussion was about Charles Williams’s Arthurian poems. I was trying hard to understand what exactly the Grail was. Was it, I asked, the Cup of the Last Supper, or was it, as Jesse Weston and others thought, a ‘Celtic cauldron of plenty’? Did Charles Williams get it right? Lewis gave my anthropological approach a dolorous stroke by quoting a paper he

read at Cambridge on 'The Genesis of a Medieval Book' in which he said:

We must not say that the Grail 'is' a Celtic cauldron of plenty, or that Malory's Gawain 'is' a solar deity, or that the land of Gome in Chrestien's *Lancelot* 'is' the world of the dead. Within a given story any object, person, or place, is neither more nor less nor other than what that story effectively shows it to be. The ingredients of one story cannot 'be' anything in another story, for they are not in it at all.³

I'm ashamed to include so much autobiography in this paper, but it does relate to Lewis and Williams, and I hope you'll forgive me if I mention one final thing. You'll remember that in that bracing description of Lewis's old tutor, W. T. Kirkpatrick, in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis said 'If ever a man came near to being a purely logical entity, that man was Kirk.'⁴ 'Here was a man,' said Lewis of Kirkpatrick, 'who thought not about *you* but about what you *said*.' I sometimes got the impression that Lewis modelled himself too much after Kirkpatrick, that he tried not to see *you*. One evening he told me that his housekeeper asked him something that morning about 'your young man.' 'Who is my young man?' Lewis asked her. 'Why, Mr. Hooper,' she said. 'Do you know,' said Lewis to me that evening. 'I never thought of you as being younger than myself. I thought we were about the same age.' This surprised me because I was 32 and Lewis was 64. But I knew he wasn't entirely serious about thinking *only* of what one *says*. It worried him that my real father might be hurt at my coming over here to look after him. Nevertheless, there was a lot of Kirkpatrick in Lewis in that he listened attentively to what you *said*, but seemed hardly to notice how you looked. He thought it odd that his friend Tolkien was always noticing whether his friends looked well or ill.

I think Charles Williams was the exception for Lewis: I think Lewis noticed everything about him. To explain what I mean by this I need to mention a particular way in which I think Lewis has been misunderstood. In *Surprised by Joy* Lewis mentions a distinction he picked up from Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time and*

Deity (1920). Up until 1924 when he read it, he says he stood like a sentinel over his thoughts and feelings, hoping that by looking ‘inside himself’, catching his thoughts as they were ‘going on’, he could thus understand them. Alexander distinguished between ‘Enjoyment and ‘Contemplation’. When you see a table you ‘enjoy’ the act of seeing and ‘contemplate’ the table. When your tooth aches you ‘enjoy’ or ‘experience’ pain first-hand; but you ‘contemplate’ pain, look at it from outside, when you write a book about it. From this Lewis went on to develop the idea in his important little essay ‘Mediation in a Toolshed.’ There he distinguished between ‘Looking *at*’ something, as a physiologist might study pain in order to find out what it ‘is’; and ‘Looking *along*’ an experience, as someone *inside* an experience - perhaps someone in pain or someone in love - is able to do. ‘We must,’ he said, ‘deny from the outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*. One must look both *along* and *at* everything.’⁵

I expect most of us saw Richard Attenborough’s film, *Shadowlands*, which came out in 1993 and is about Lewis’s marriage to the American divorcée Joy Davidman. The script writer, William Nicholson, had earlier written the TV version and the stage version of the same story. The story is far from accurate, but one of my *chief* objections to *Shadowlands* is that the author does precisely what Lewis warned against in his ‘Meditation in a Toolshed.’ Nicholson divides the two aspects of everyone’s life - ‘looking at’ and ‘looking along’, and creates a C.S.Lewis who only ‘contemplates’ or ‘looks at’ or ‘studies’ experience from the *outside*. And he makes Joy someone who only ‘enjoys’ or ‘experiences’ or ‘looks along’ experience from the *inside*. Thus you get Lewis, the absent-minded don who rambles on about *The Romance of the Rose* and pain without ever having experienced either from the inside. Joy is another half-person: she experiences things only from the inside - love, childbirth, unhappiness, more love, cancer. The main thrust of the story thus seems to be that Lewis - the theorist - cannot be made whole without Joy the experienter.

Besides regretting that Lewis and Joy had been truncated in the way I’ve described, I remember what most struck me while watching the film. ‘How unfair,’ I said to myself, ‘to treat Lewis as if he’d never loved anybody, never knew love, joy and pain first-hand. What about his friendship with Charles Williams?’ Lewis saw his

mother die when he was nine, and during the First War, when he was himself wounded, he saw numerous friends slaughtered before his eyes; he was in love with Mrs. Moore in his twenties. And it seems to me, having considering the matter for years, that perhaps the most *complete* friendship Lewis ever enjoyed was with Charles Williams. I don't know as much about how Williams viewed Lewis, but I'm certain Lewis both looked *at* and *along* Williams, contemplated what he said and enjoyed his actual company.

By friendship, I mean of course that love Lewis rehabilitated so marvellously in *The Four Loves* (1960). You'll remember that the four loves are, Affection, Friendship, Eros and Charity. In his description of Friendship, Lewis said that in some ways, nothing is less like a love-affair than a Friendship. 'Lovers,' he said, 'are always talking about their love; Friends hardly ever about their Friendship. Lovers are normally seen face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest.'⁶ He goes on to say that it is when companions discover a common interest that friendship arises. 'It is,' he said, 'when two such persons ... share their vision ... that Friendship is born. And instantly they stand together in an immense solitude.'⁷

In brief, Friendship is always *about* something, and in the case of Lewis and Williams we know exactly what the beginning of their friendship was about. Some years before he read anything by Williams, the great Jane Austen scholar, Dr. R. W. Chapman, urged Lewis to read Williams's novels which he described as 'spiritual shockers.'⁸ Then in February 1936 Nevill Coghill lent him a copy of that spiritual shocker called *The Place of the Lion* (1931). Writing to his boyhood friend in Belfast, Arthur Greeves, on 26 February 1936 Lewis said 'I have just read what I think a really great book, "The Place of the Lion" by Charles Williams. It is not only a most exciting fantasy, but a deeply religious and (unobtrusively) a profoundly learned book. The reading of it has been a good preparation for Lent ... for it shows me ... the special sin of abuse of intellect to which all my profession are liable, more clearly than I ever saw it before. I have learned more than I ever knew yet about humility.'⁹

Things moved quickly after this. On 11 March 1936 Lewis wrote to Charles Wil-

liams praising *The Place of the Lion* and suggesting they meet. Williams, on the editorial staff of the Oxford University Press, was at that very time reading the proofs of Lewis's *Allegorical Love Poem*, or *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936) as it came to be called, and he wrote to Lewis on the 12th March saying:

If you had delayed writing another 24 hours our letters would have crossed. It has never before happened to me to be admiring an author of a book while he at the same time was admiring me. ... To be exact, I finished on Saturday looking ... at proofs of your *Allegorical Love Poem* ... If ever I was drawn to anyone - imagine! I admit that I fell for the *Allegorical Love Poem* so heavily because it is an aspect of the subject with which my mind has always been playing. ... I regard your book as practically the only one that I have ever come across, since Dante, that shows the slightest understanding of what this very peculiar identity of love and religion means.¹⁰

'After this,' said Lewis, 'we soon met and our friendship rapidly grew inward to the bone.'¹¹ I've never been able to discover the exact date of their first meeting. However, they met often in Williams's office in Amen House, London, and Lewis's rooms in Magdalen College. Then, on 7 September 1939, at the outbreak of the Second War, the Oxford University Press was evacuated to Oxford. Hardly before he knew what had happened, Williams found himself a member of Lewis's circle of friends, The Inklings. This group of friends dates back to 1929 when Lewis and Tolkien began meeting to read aloud the things they were writing. By the time Williams joined they were meeting every Thursday evening in Lewis's college rooms and on Tuesday mornings in the Eagle and Child, or Bird and Baby as most of us know it. The group included Lewis, his brother Warnie who'd just been recalled to the army, Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, Dr Humphrey Havard and Charles Wrenn. In a letter Lewis wrote to Warnie on 5 November 1939 he told him of William's first experience of the club on 2 November:

I had a pleasant evening on Thursday with Williams, Tolkien, and Wrenn, during which Wrenn *almost* seriously expressed a strong wish to burn Williams, or at least maintained that conversation with Williams enabled him to understand how inquisitors had felt it right to burn people. Tolkien and I agreed afterwards that we *just* knew what he meant. ... The occasion was a discussion of the most distressing text in the Bible ('narrow is the way and few they be that find it')¹² and whether one really could believe in a universe where the majority were damned and also in the goodness of God. Wrenn, of course, took the view that it mattered precisely nothing whether it conformed to our ideas of goodness or not, and it was at that stage that the combustible possibilities of Williams revealed themselves to him in an attractive light. The general sense of the meeting was in favour of a view on the lines taken in *Pastor Pastorum* - that Our Lord's replies are never straight answers and never gratify curiosity, and that whatever this one meant its purpose was certainly not statistical.¹³

He wrote to Warnie again on 11 November 1939 about a meeting on 9 November: 'On Thursday,' he said, 'we had a meeting of the Inklings - you and Coghill both absented unfortunately. ... I have never in my life seen Dyson so exuberant - "a roaring cataract of nonsense". The bill of fare afterwards consisted of a section of the new *Hobbit* book from Tolkien, a nativity play from Williams¹⁴ (unusually intelligible for him, and approved by all) and a chapter out of the book on *The Problem of Pain* from me. It so happened - it would take too long to explain why - that the subject matter produced a really first rate evening's talk of the usual wide-ranging kind - "from grave to gay, from lively to severe".¹⁵

Lewis read more of his *Problem of Pain* at other meetings of the Inklings. He remembered Charles Williams remarking that, while God had approved Job's *impatience*, the 'weight of divine displeasure had been reserved for the "comforters", the self-appointed advocates on God's side, the people who tried to show that all was well - "the sort of people", he said, immeasurably dropping his

lower jaw and fixing me with his eyes - "the sort of people who wrote books on the Problem of Pain".¹⁶

I sometimes wonder how Charles Williams managed both his work for the Press and his part in the Inklings. But there was even more in store for him. Before Hilary Term began in 1940 Lewis persuaded the University to invite Williams to lecture on Milton, and on 29 January 1940 he began a series of weekly lectures. Writing to Warnie on 12 February about a lecture Williams gave on 5 February in the Divinity School on *Comus* he said:

On Monday C.W. lectured nominally on *Comus* but really on Chastity. Simply as criticism it was superb - because here was a man who really started from the same point of view as Milton and really cared with every fibre of his being about 'the sage and serious doctrine of virginity' which it would never occur to the ordinary modern critic to take seriously. But it was more important still as a sermon. It was a beautiful sight to see a whole room full of modern young men and women sitting in that absolute silence which can *not* be faked, very puzzled, but spell-bound: perhaps with something of the same feeling which a lecture on *unchastity* might have evoked in their grandparents - the forbidden subject broached at last. He forced them to lap it up and I think many, by the end, liked the taste more than they expected to. It was 'borne in upon me' that that beautiful carved room had probably not witnessed anything so important since some of the great medieval or Reformation lectures. I have at last, if only for once, seen a university doing what it was founded to do: teaching Wisdom. And what a wonderful power there is in the direct appeal which disregards the temporary climate of opinion - I wonder is it the case that the man who has the audacity to get up in any corrupt society and squarely preach justice or valour or the like *always* wins?¹⁷

I said that Lewis both looked *at* and *along* Charles Williams. I don't know of any-

one whose physical looks Lewis describes so often. Writing to his former pupil, Dom Bede Griffiths, on 26 December 1941, Lewis said: 'We made him lecture on Milton to the faculty, so that ... we actually heard a lecture on *Comus* wh. put the important where Milton had put it. In fact that lecture was a panegyric of chastity! Just fancy the incredulity with which (at first) an audience of undergraduates listened to something so unheard of. But he beat them in the end.

'He is an ugly man with rather a cockney voice. But no one ever thinks of this for 5 minutes after he has begun speaking. His face becomes almost angelic. Both in public and private he is of nearly all the men I have met the one whose address most overflows with *love*. It is simply irresistible.'¹⁸

'In appearance,' Lewis wrote elsewhere, 'he was tall, slim, and straight as a boy, though grey-haired. His face we thought ugly: I am not sure that the word "monkey" has not been murmured in this context. But the moment he spoke it became, as was also said, like the face of an angel - not a feminine angel in the debased tradition of some religious act, but a masculine angel, a spirit burning with intelligence and charity. He was nervous (not shy) to judge by the trembling of his fingers. One of the most characteristic things about him was his walk. I have often, from the top of a bus, seen him walking below me. The face and hair being then invisible, he might have passed for a boy in the early twenties, and perhaps a boy of some period when swords were worn. ... Burke's "unbought grace of life" was in him. ... The highest compliment I ever heard paid to [his manners] was by a nun. She said that Mr. Williams's manners implied a complete *offer* of intimacy without the slightest *imposition* of intimacy. He threw down all his own barriers without even implying that you should lower yours.'¹⁹

As far as I've been able to discover, Williams's lectures on Milton have not survived. However, what I believe to be the essence of those lectures survives in Williams's Preface to *The English Poems of John Milton*, ed. H. C. Beeching, New Edition (1940). If that Preface is not in print these are sad times.

Milton was one of Lewis's first loves, and he'd been lecturing on Milton at Oxford since 1937. In December 1941 he gave a series of lectures in University Col-

lege of North Wales in Bangor later published as *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (1942). It's impossible to imagine what that book would have been like without - I almost said 'the influence of Charles Williams' - but I'll amend that to Williams's lectures, writings and conversation on Milton. In dedicating *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* to Williams, Lewis said:

To think of my own lecture is to think of those others lectures at Oxford in which you partly anticipated, partly confirmed, and most of all clarified and matured, what I had been thinking about Milton. ... It gives me a sense of security to remember that, far from loving your work because you are my friend, I first sought your friendship because I loved your books. But for that, I should find it difficult to believe that your short *Preface* to Milton is what it seems to be - the recovery of a true critical tradition after more than a hundred years of laborious misunderstanding. The ease with which the thing was done would have seemed inconsistent with the weight that had to be lifted. As things are, I feel entitled to trust my own eyes. Apparently, the door of the prison was really unlocked all the time; but it was only you who thought of trying the handle. Now we can all come out.

I'm sure we'd be wrong to assume that those things which made Williams such an 'irresistible' man blinded Lewis to both the good and the bad in his writings. Some of you may have read Lewis's early debate with Professor E. M. W. Tillyard of Cambridge University in a group of essays entitled *The Personal Heresy*. Lewis believed that the 'concealed major premise' in Tillyard's book on *Milton* (1930) 'is plainly the proposition that all poetry is *about* the poet's state of mind.'²⁰ In contrast, Lewis believed that the correct way to read was to 'look with [the poet's] eyes, not at him. ... The poet is not a man who asks me to look at *him*; he is a man who says "look at that" and points; the most I follow the pointing of his finger the less I can possibly see of *him*.'²¹ We must thus be sure that when reading Williams's work Lewis tried his best to see, not Williams, but what Williams saw.

In a letter to Warnie of 4 May 1940 Lewis said ‘We had an unusually good Inklings on Thursday at wh. Charles Williams read us a Whitsun play, a mixture of very good stuff and some deplorable errors in taste.’ The play was *Terror of Light*, and the chief error in taste was the invention of a romance between St. Mary Magdalen and St. John.

‘Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a good fire?’ Lewis wrote to Dom Bede on 21 December 1941. ‘His stories (I mean Williams) are his best work - *Descent into Hell* and *The Place of the Lion* are the best. I quite agree about what you call his “affectations” - not that they are affectations, but honest defects of taste. He is largely a self-educated man, labouring under an almost oriental richness of imagination (“clotted glory from Charles” as Dyson called it) which could be saved from turning silly and even vulgar in print only by a severe early discipline which he has never had. But he is a lovely creature. I’m proud of being among his friends.’²² When Owen Barfield criticised the bad writing in one of Williams’s book, Lewis said, ‘Don’t imagine I didn’t pitch into Charles Williams for all I was worth.’²³ In his excellent book on the Inklings Humphrey Carpenter points out that ‘Williams found in Lewis what he had almost entirely lacked up to this time - a friend of high intellectual ability who was fundamentally very enthusiastic about William’s work, but was also extremely and beneficially critical.’²⁴ I’m led to believe that Williams took Lewis’s criticism with grace. Lewis was probably tougher on his pupils, one of whom told me that ‘arguing with Lewis was like entering a beauty contest. You had to be prepared to be told “You’re damned ugly.”’

As information about the Inklings comes to light we are forced to revise some of our ideas about the relationship between those friends. You are probably aware of the critical things said about Williams in Professor Tolkien’s letters. Writing to his son, Michael, shortly after Lewis died in November 1963, Tolkien said: ‘We were separated first by the sudden apparition of Charles Williams, and then by his marriage.’²⁵ ‘C.S.L. was my closest friend from about 1927 to 1940,’ Tolkien wrote to Christopher Bretherton on 16 July 1964, ‘and remained very dear to me. His death was a grievous blow. But in fact we saw less and less of one another after he came under the dominant influence of Charles Williams, and still less

after his very strange marriage.²⁶ ‘I am a man of limited sympathies,’ Tolkien told Anne Barrett, ‘and Williams lies almost completely outside them. ... I actively disliked his Arthurian-Byzantine mythology; and still think it spoiled the trilogy of C.S.L. (a very impressionable, too impressionable, man) in the last part.’²⁷ I think Tolkien was being entirely honest when he confessed to being a man of ‘limited sympathies,’ and we should remember too that reading your work in front of him was also like entering a beauty contest. He disliked Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* *intensely*, and said so.

That part of Lewis’s science fiction trilogy which Tolkien believed contact with Williams spoiled was the final volume, *That Hideous Strength* (1945). Professor Tolkien was wonderfully kind to me, but I’m sure I’d be voted the ugliest in the beauty contest if he’d known that *That Hideous Strength* is my favourite book. If you like it, you’ll almost certainly like Williams’s ‘spiritual shockers’ because the ‘recipe’ so to speak comes from Williams. As is made very clear in Lewis’s essay on ‘The Novels of Charles Williams’, both men were fond of ‘Supposals.’ For Lewis it began with the first of his science-fiction novels, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938). Suppose, he asked himself, there are planets which contain creatures other than man? Suppose they have rational souls, not ‘merely the faculty to abstract and calculate, but the apprehension of values, the power to mean by “good” something more than “good for me” or even “good for my species.”’ He took his supposals into his *Chronicles of Narnia* as well, asking himself, ‘Suppose there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as He became a Man in our world, became a Lion there.’²⁸

‘Such supposing,’ he said in ‘The Novels of Charles Williams,’ ‘appears to us the inalienable right and inveterate habit of the human mind. We do it all day long; and therefore do not see why we should not do it, at times, more energetically and consistently, in a story.’²⁹ The chief attraction of Williams’s mixture of the realistic and the supernatural was his creation of good characters. ‘Good characters in fiction,’ said Lewis, ‘are the very devil. Not only because authors have too little material to make them of, but because we are readers have a strong subconscious wish to find them incredible... We see [Williams’s] good people in strange circumstances and do not think much of calling them good. Only on later reflection do we dis-

cover what we have been surprised into accepting.³⁰

Those of you who are researchers should look into this matter of 'good characters' more deeply. I am sure that Lewis's interest in the problem of creating good characters, and his own ability in that direction, owes much to Charles Williams. I detect what I think is its beginning in Lewis's letter to Sister Penelope of 9 August 1939 in which he says: 'Do you know the works Charles Williams? Rather wild, and full of love and excellent in the creation of convincing *good* characters. (The reason these are rare in fiction is that to imagine a man worse than yourself you've only got to stop doing something, while to imagine one better you've got to do something.).'³¹ If I were forced to choose the best piece of writing in *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* it would be a paragraph which, I'm sure, reflects Charles Williams both as a man and as a creator. In the chapter on Satan, Lewis said:

It remains, of course, true that Satan is the best drawn of Milton's characters. The reason is not hard to find. Of the major characters whom Milton attempted he is incomparably the easier to draw. ... To make a character worse than oneself it is only necessary to release imaginatively from control some of the bad passions which, in real life, are always straining at the leash; the Satan, the Iago, the Becky Sharp, within each of us, is always there and only too ready, the moment the leash is slipped, to come out and have in our books that holiday we try to deny them in our lives. But if you try to draw a character better than yourself, all you can do is to take the best moments you have had and to imagine them prolonged and more consistently embodied in action. But the real high virtues which we do not possess at all, we cannot depict except in a purely external fashion...It is in their 'good' characters that novelists make, unawares, the most shocking self-revelations.³²

In connection with Williams's novels, let me mention that when the American

periodical, *The Christian Century*, asked Lewis in 1962 ‘What books did most to shape your vocational attitude and your philosophy of life?’ one of the ten books Lewis listed was *Descent into Hell*.³³

We long-winded speakers place ourselves in the position of contestants at a beauty contest, and before I’m told I’m damned ugly, let me hurry to say that, besides goodness, Lewis admired Williams’s works for their doctrine and Wisdom. In a letter to I. O. Evans of 28 February 1949 Lewis complained about the novels of H. G. Wells being ‘*first class pure fantasy ... and third class didacticism.*’ ‘I object to his novels with a purpose,’ he said, ‘not because they have a purpose but because I think them bad. Just as I object to the preaching passages in Thackeray not because I dislike sermons but because I dislike bad sermons. ... It must be found on books where the doctrine is as good on its own merits as the art - e.g. Bunyan, Chesterton ... Tolstoi, Charles Williams, Virgil.’³⁴

We have already noticed Lewis describing Williams’s lecture on *Comus* as an instance of ‘a university doing what it was founded to do: teaching Wisdom.’ It is a pity there is not time enough to consider in detail the Arthurian writings of Charles Williams, but let me at least remind you of one of the conclusions Lewis reached in his Commentary on them: ‘I begin,’ he said, ‘by considering these *Arthuriana* as a book of wisdom - a book that makes consciousness. If I say that in this respect it seems to me unequalled in modern imaginative literature, I am not merely recording the fact that many of Williams’s doctrines appear to me to be true. I mean rather than he has re-stated to my imagination the very questions to which the doctrines are answers. Whatever truths or errors I come to hold hereafter, they will never be quite so abstract and jejune, so ignorant of relevant data, as they would have been before I read him.’³⁵

Charles Williams’s death in the Radcliffe Infirmary on 15 May 1945 was a shock and a grievous blow to Lewis, and he says he had difficulty in getting Williams’s other friends to believe it. Of his many tributes to his friend, one was the editing of a *Festschrift* he and others planned to present Williams, *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (1947). It was typical of Lewis that he persuaded the contributors to make over the royalties from the book to Charles’s widow.

In his Preface to that volume, the best thing Lewis wrote on Williams, he said that shortly after his funeral, when he and other friends were sitting in Addison's Walk talking about Williams, one of them commented: 'Our Lord told the disciples it was expedient for them that He should go away for otherwise the Comforter would not come to them. I do not think it blasphemous to suppose that what was true archetypally, and in eminence, of His death may, in the appropriate degree, be true of the deaths of all His followers.' 'So,' concludes Lewis, 'many of us felt it to be. No event has so corroborated my faith in the next world as Williams did simply by dying.'³⁶

Notes

1. C.S.Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (1969), p. 301.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
3. C.S.Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (1966), pp. 39-40.
4. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life* (1955), Ch. IX, p. 130.
5. C.S.Lewis, *First and Second Things: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (1985), p. 54.
6. C.S.Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960), Ch. IV, p. 73.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
8. Preface to *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C.S.Lewis (1947), p. viii.
9. *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S.Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)*, ed. Walter Hooper (1979), p. 479
10. Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S.Lewis: A Biography* (1974), Ch. V, p. 134.
11. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, op. cit., Preface, p. viii.
12. Matthew 7:14: 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'
13. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, ed. W.H.Lewis (1966); Revised and Enlarged Edition, ed. Walter Hooper (1988), pp. 326-7.
14. *The House by the Stable*, included in *Seed of Adam and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Ridler (1948).
15. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, op. cit., p. 328.
16. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, p. xiii.
17. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, pp. 338-9.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 362-3.

19. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, pp. ix-x.
20. C.S.Lewis and E.M.W.Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (1939), Ch. I, p. 2.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
22. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, p. 363.
23. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, letter of 22 December 1947, p. 385.
24. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (1978), p. 116.
25. *The Letters of J.R.R.Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (1981), p. 341.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
27. *Ibid.*, letter of 7 August 1965, p. 349.
28. C.S.Lewis, *Letters to Children*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (1985), letter of 29 May 1945, p. 45.
29. *Of This and Other Worlds*, ed. Walter Hooper (1982), p. 50.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
31. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, p. 322.,
32. *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (1943), ch. XIII, p. 98.
33. Walter Hooper, *C.S.Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (1996), p. 752.
34. *Letters of C.S.Lewis*, pp. 389-90.
35. C.S.Lewis and Charles Williams, *Arthurian Torso: Containing the Posthumous Fragment of 'The Figure of Arthur' by Charles Williams and A Commentary on The Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams* (1948), p. 191.
36. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, p. xiv.

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4.
Chosen & Edited by Barbara Reynolds. Preface
by P. D. James

Reviewed by Toby English

As I write this review a report has been published in the trade press about the Sotheby's auction in December where Dorothy Sayers's library was sold. Did you buy *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* inscribed to her mother, which sold for £2,400? I thought not! Perhaps you bid on her working library – which included firsts of *The Lord of the Rings* – a snip at £24,000? Or did you settle for the manuscripts of her plays for a paltry £25,000? One can only watch with awe as a writer's whole career is measured out to the regular tap of the auctioneer's hammer.

Far away from this hurly-burly, but as if to confirm her importance and status, the final volume of Barbara Reynolds's magisterial edition of Dorothy's letters has appeared – fully annotated, finely printed and well indexed ... and what a wealth of learning is on display!

It contains what is probably the most important letter she ever wrote (to John Wren-Lewis) - a discussion of the Christian popularizers such as herself, Williams, Lewis and T. S. Eliot – which includes her passionate defence of the “passionate intellect”. Asserting that she was not “by temperament an evangelist” and that she was “quite without the thing known as 'inner light' or 'spiritual experience'” she goes on to explain that the only presupposition of Christianity she can “swear to from personal conviction is sin”. And yet ... “since I cannot come at God through intuition or through my emotions ... there is only the intellect left”. She is in “love with the pattern” and only through the pattern comes her belief.

She offers, in the same letter, wise criticism of Williams. “If Charles had a weakness, it was perhaps the temptation to see himself too readily as Taliessin and Peter Stanhope”. And she is amused by aspects of Lewis, who is “hopelessly unsafe on sex ... and commits howlers of mere construction in his books which might make the Eldils weep”.

Near the end of this magnificent letter she cries out “I am so sorry – the cat has trodden on the page”. Many a letter features her cats. She describes herself as the Manager of the factory Kittens Unlimited, and offers sage advice to prospective cat owners. And advice and criticism on the theatre. And on Dante. And thriller writing. And Lucan. And against – how very much against – Robert Graves.

These letters need returning to again and again. They are going to sit on my shelf of happy correspondences, endlessly dip-inable, along with Sylvia Townsend Warner, T. H. White, Keats and Gilbert White.

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The Charles Williams Society's Newsletter and Web site have two functions. Firstly, to publish material about the life and work of Charles Williams. Secondly, to publish details of the activities of the Society.

Contributions to the Newsletter and the Web site are welcome. If you wish to submit a contribution, please take note of the following:

- ◆ Submissions should be sent to the Editor.
- ◆ Submissions over 300 words should be made on floppy disc, typewritten paper, or by e-mail.
- ◆ Submissions under 300 words can be hand-written.
- ◆ Submissions on paper should be one-sided and double spaced.
- ◆ All quotations should be clearly referenced, and a list of sources included.
- ◆ The Editor reserves the right to decide whether to publish a submission.

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