

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

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Members may be interested to read Martin Moynihan's 'Note on the Supplement Notes' written by Thelma Shuttleworth on 'Taliessin in the Rose-Garden'.

"On 'well are women warned from the altar' Thelma Shuttleworth comments that women should approach the altar with reverence. True indeed. But so should we all. And I suggest Charles Williams meant more than that, especially as the full text reads 'warned from serving at the altar'. By this he did not mean to limit women (he would be the last to do that) but to enhance them and indeed all of us out of his regard not only for reverence but for sex itself and marriage - that great sacrament which is lifelong monogamy. In the Holy Mysteries of the Altar there is (so I believe Charles Williams believed) a nuptial reality. And for men and women alike this would be lost, not to say violated, if celebrant and communicants ceased to be as husband towards wife. The ordained priest represents and enacts Messiah - in a word, the Bridegroom. And we - all souls, His redeemed humanity - constitute the Bride. Psyche is feminine towards the Divine Eros.

Patmore has this. Duns Scotus implies this.(1) And it is what the Scriptural record, from Genesis to Revelation, is all about. The blind leaders of Logres nourish, alas, a fallacy of rational virtue. But Sarras, Carbonek and true Camelot know that the rosegarden is paradisaal truth.

Its diagram of glory is formed by the Co-inherence (triune), the Twy-form Nature (biune) and - see the Grail chapter in Arthurian Torso - the Four Altars: the Altar in Heaven, the Earthly Altar, the Altar of the Heart and what establishes the rest, the Altar of Calvary, where all is completed ('consummatum est').

Calvary restored Scorpio to the Zodiac. It validated the sacraments, not least that of sexual union in lifelong marriage. Thereby it restored what had been divinely intended 'from the Beginning': or, in Greek (see the Gospels, and Plato's Symposium) 'ap archés': it restored mankind's archnatural, androgynous nature.

This nature is the Covenant in our flesh, namely our sex. We are not complete. Individuation is for union. Male-and-female created He them. In the image of God created He mankind. For

God's image is the whole, not half,
And in our love we dimly scan
The love which is between Himself.(2)
(Patmore: 'The Prototype' in The Angel in the House).

Because of the Fall, men and women are under the curse. Equally, all of us, men and women, married or single, can, through Messiah, in the biunity, turn curse into blessing. But it is the natural life of women which shows this more clearly than men's does. This is fitting because the souls of all of us, men or women, are (to repeat) feminine towards God, are as beloved to lover in the life of the spirit.

In nature and spirit, bloodshed is loss.. But it may be devoted to good. Menstruation rightly understood (and not 'little by them understood') shares in Calvary's new life (3). The soul's obedience, like the 'be it unto me' of the Theotokos, coincides with Christ's 'seed-springing surrender'. Travail is fruitfulness, whether of good works or of offspring or of both: either way, we souls are saved in the child-bearing (4). The staunching, the menopause, is that passage from the natural to the spiritual which is the process and whole goal of our being (5). That end is not knowledge but love: not beatific vision only but (as in Duns) beatific union. For

Christ's marriage with the Church is more,
My children, than a metaphor.
(Patmore: 'The Wedding Sermon')

It is this union (6) which is celebrated on each of the four Altars. It is a mutual act. What husband and wife (priest and priestess to each other) celebrate in the natural order, that Christ and His redeemed Logres (each soul a cell, a tingling cell of the organic body) celebrate in the spiritual. Thus the Altar is never sexless. It is trans-sexual. If it were a-sexual or unisexual then there would be no spousal relationship. The Ship of Solomon would not contain the Bed which is Solomon's. And there would be no marriage of Heaven with Earth."

Footnotes:

(1). Regarding marriage as sacrament, Scotus gives more weight than St Thomas to marriage before the Fall. Also, he sees the Incarnation (ie Union; at-onement) as the prime purpose of Creation, regardless of the Fall. Because of the Fall, it needed to be the Redemption too. But it was also the first Consummation, to be followed, afterwards by the Parousia, ie the Second Consummation, that full and final Marriage of Heaven and Earth which we fore-experience at the Altar, including the Altar of the Heart.

(2). The image of God. Body-and-soul, and also twain-in-one-flesh, image the biune. 'I, me, myself', and also man-wife-and-child, image the triune. So does, in Patmore, man, wife and that 'Angel in The House' which is their unanimity (see the trio in Waite's version of 'Les Amoureux' in the Tarot). The biune is our way to the triune. And, as Chloe knew in Many Dimensions, 'the way to the stone is in the stone'.

(3). Travail: the bringing forth of children and / or loving deeds and so manifesting Messias: Nancy knew this, in The Greater Trumps.

(4). The new life. Betty knew this, in All Hallows Eve, and so did the Wise Water ('there is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins').

(5). This life passing into the next. Margaret Anstruther knew this, turning herself (in The Descent into Hell into the Rock whence she was hewn).

(6). Union. The Queen's Servant and the King's Poet knew this - knew that 'blast of union' which (albeit by renunciation) smites absolute love into Love Absolute. So too does each willingly freed and re-sworn Soul participate with her Poet (her Maker and Redeemer) in that same Love. Whoever wills: Nancy knew this, in The Greater Trumps.

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Martin Moynihan writes: "The Inklings-gesellschaft will devote its 1986 January meetings in Aachen to Charles Williams. The Inklings-Jahrbuch, Band 3 1985, is a fine forerunner of these meetings. Dr Karl Heinz Goller of Regensburg has a wide-ranging contribution on the modernity of Charles Williams' Arthurian poetry. The Editor himself, Dr Gisbert Kranz, opens up European vistas on the subject of Substitution. In recent articles for North Wind (the George MacDonald Society) and for Letterature (Genoa University, ed Prof. Giorgio Spina), Martin Moynihan has drawn parallels with Paul Claudel. Dr Kranz adds to Claudel comparison with Gertrud von le Fort and he gives a full analysis of Substitution in Claudel's Le sonlier de satin and L'annonce faite a Marié.

Best of all, the Jahrbuch gives a segment of Dr Kranz's forthcoming translations of Taliessin Through Logres into German. It is thrillingly effective. And the notes are excellent. The English eye is caught by many facets high-lighted by the German. German is a language of capitals, for example; and compare 'flaring over all the king's dragon ramped' in 'The Crowning of Arthur' with 'Alle überstrahlend, der Köni

The beauty of a feminine arm was an image that captivated Williams over the better part of his writing lifetime, an objective correlative, so to speak, having, however, a significance far different from that of the arms imagined by T. S. Eliot's Prufrock, "braceleted and white and bare / (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)"--"arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl." The sensuousness of Eliot's image is deliberately univocal; the insecure Prufrock is threatened by the rank sexuality of the world which it represents to him. Williams's image is equally sensuous yet at the same time metaphysical in the strictest sense; the insecure Philip is somehow comforted and enlarged, not threatened, by its intimations of an unknown world of mighty but unseen realities. Shadows of Ecstasy was written about 1925,<2> and lines Williams wrote in the early 1940s shed light on the nature of this image. He speaks here, it appears, of an experience he himself has had.

O arms, arms!

everything sensual and metaphysical there
rides together: . . .

. . . I saw it so once;
everything is in the body--source and measurement:
I am the most material poet that lived
since Lucretius. . . .<3>

Around the same time he wrote in a letter to his wife:

But as Milton said of you--

Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye.

--O I babble & quote: 'tis nothing. I could still cry a little in your arms, kissing them first; they are the chains of heaven. Without such chains, heaven itself pales.<4>

Earlier he had given another fictional character, Palomides, an experience parallel to that of Philip Travers.

I saw the hand of the queen Iseult;
down her arm a ruddy bolt
fired the tinder of my brain
to measure the shape of man again;

. . .
Blessed (I sang) the Cornish queen;
for till to-day no eyes have seen
how curves of golden life define
the straightness of a perfect line,
till the queen's blessed arm became
a rigid bar of golden flame
where well might Archimedes prove
the doctrine of Euclidean love.<5>

Like Philip's vision, that of Palomides is fleeting:
Relation vanished, though beauty stayed;
too long my dangerous eyes delayed
at the shape on the board, but voice was mute:
the queen's arm lay there destitute,
empty of glory. . . . (p. 36)

There, however, the resemblance ends. Palomides responds to the loss of his vision in a way that is very nearly disastrous, bringing him (as we shall see) to the brink of damnation before a change of heart enables him to grasp the doctrine of love radiated by the queen's arm.

Palomides should at least not be blamed for obstinately rejecting something obvious. "The wonder, the thrill, of a shoulder or hand," Williams wrote in a review published in 1939, "awaits its proper exploration. At present we [the institutional church] have simply nothing to say to anyone in a state of exaltation, watching for 'meaning'. . . . The hungry sheep look up for metaphysics, the profound metaphysics of the awful and redeeming body, and are given morals. . . ."<6>

The challenge of these texts to us in the present study is threefold. Though much has been written about Williams's concept of the so-called Dantean or Beatrician

experience and much too about his materialism--on both of which these extracts form a representative mini-anthology--his views on these matters are not yet as widely understood as could be wished. Therefore our first task is to clarify this aspect of Williams's thought. In the process of doing so, we will look closely at some of Williams's Arthurian poems, and thus the study should lead secondarily to new interpretive insights on these difficult texts. Third is the closely related question of the origins and modifications of Williams's ideas, for though the usual critical way of talking about it seems to suppose a Dantean source, Williams himself wrote to a correspondent, "I developed my own view of romantic love by myself, and not through reading Dante."⁷ Yet Williams did make the Dantean link, to the point finally of manifesting in a substantial study⁸ how central it had become in his thought. We will ask, then, when and how his views developed and what new insights his study of Dante contributed. Such an inquiry, touching as it necessarily does on biographical matters, will be greatly aided by new information which has only recently become part of the public record on Williams's life, and may in turn contribute to a better understanding concerning the questions raised by the new documents.

II

What is destructive to Prufrock in his imagining of women's arms is his inability to permit them to betoken anything beyond a threatening sexuality. His state of mind reflects--accurately enough as concerns one spirit of the age--a despair of transcendence. But other contemporary visions bring us closer to Williams's view of the matter, and Lawrence and Yeats are worth quoting here because Williams himself quoted them appreciatively; their phrases evidently were absorbed into his mind. D. H. Lawrence, poet of sexuality as a vehicle of transcendence, wrote words that very nearly (but for "blood") might have been Williams's: "The soft outstretching of her hand was like the whispering of strange words into the blood, and as she fingered a book the heart watched silently for the meaning."⁹ Yeats, a votary of the spirit (and a fellow-initiate with Williams in the Rosicrucian mysteries),¹⁰ spoke of love more wistfully as an agonizingly inadequate approach to a spiritual world to which it invites us:

All that ever loved
Have loved that way--there is no other way.

Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.¹¹

Forgael, the second speaker in this dialogue from Yeats's play, goes on to insist that "What the world's million lips are thirsting for / Must be substantial somewhere." Williams's epigraph for his first book of poetry, The Silver Stair, ended with the first quotation, as if to make his own claim more affirmative by contrast: a claim, based on the doctrine of love expressed in his sonnet cycle, that the transcendent "other way" is not, after all, inaccessible.¹²

Williams's mature Romantic Theology¹³ is rooted in the principle that "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite";¹⁴ in its Beatrician aspect, this principle would refer more particularly to every person. One way of cleansing the doors of perception is being in love, which gives one a double vision of the beloved, seeing through his or her ordinary humanness to the glory of a restored Imago Dei in that person. This does not mean some ethereal substitute but real, corporal beauty. "The body of the beloved appears vital with holiness; the physical flesh is glorious with sanctity--not her sanctity, but its own."¹⁵ But also implicated in this revelation is an awareness of the Deus behind the Imago.¹⁶ Thus, one's perception is enhanced both of the beloved and of existence itself, in what C. S. Lewis (p. 116) regards as a recovery of prelapsarian awareness. Such epiphanies, while not the whole of the Beatrician experience, are its necessary starting point and continuing nourishment. For distinction's sake we can usefully apply to them the term "Beatrician moment." Besides its immediate emotional and perhaps physical impact, the Beatrician moment produces in the beholder two effects, intellectual and moral: the inchoate "revelation of an 'unknown mode of being'"¹⁷ and an infusion of humility and caritas. In both respects, a "new life" has been imparted.

In another sense, however, this vita nuova is only beginning, and what characterizes the "Beatrician experience" as a whole is the role of the beloved in the lover's pilgrimage toward eventual salvation--"a state in which those first Beatrician encounters, . . . full of such a thrilling tremendum, seem almost paltry . . . compared to the massive whole of single and exchanged Love."<18> This is the state to which Beatrice has brought Dante by the end of the Divine Comedy. The "beatitude" whose irruption is announced to Dante at the age of nine (Vita Nuova 2) is thus a double reference, to the blessedness of that first Beatrician moment and to the bliss of heaven which is the end of the experience.<19>

In his prose and poetry Charles Williams presents several characters who undergo, or who inspire, Beatrician experiences. The latter--for example (from the quotations at the beginning of this article), Rosamond Murchison, Queen Iseult, and Mrs. Michal Williams--may be referred to as instances of the "Beatrician character." This term, however, has been used rather indiscriminately and hence confusingly in the critical literature, so that we must now turn briefly to a clarification of it. It is important to distinguish the Beatrician character from another bringer of salvation, the Christ-figure, though these two types have some similarities, and to complicate matters some of Williams's fictional characters belong to both types at once. But one's relationship to Beatrice is based on being in love; to Christ, on being loved, with a love that goes beyond desire and even beyond sympathy to identification. Beatrice is passive: the lover receives something from her<20> (revelation, strength of purpose, salvation); Christ is active and gives the other something. The salvation known through Beatrice begins with knowledge and involves the lover in acts of the will; it is a salvation to be "worked out." The salvation given by Christ begins with faith and requires the recipient to accept passively--"it is God which worketh in you"--and to act not reciprocally but in a new direction, becoming Christ, in turn, for someone else.

The Beatrician experience does not depend on Beatrice's returning the love, or being aware that she has given anything, or even herself possessing the knowledge which is revealed to the lover through her: she is a God-bearer. In Williams's novels, the Beatrician characters in this sense are Rosamond in Shadows of Ecstasy and Damaris in The Place of the the Lion.

The Christ-figures who give themselves to others and vicariously for others, quite apart from the others' "being in love," are Chloe in Many Dimensions, Sybil in The Greater Trumps, Peter, Margaret, and especially Pauline in Descent into Hell, and Lester in All Hallows' Eve in her relationship with Betty. The idea of their being a medium of revelation is not totally absent, just as in Christ the Father is seen, but Sybil is the only character of those six in whom Williams emphasizes that aspect of the Christ-figure.

There are other characters, however, in whom the two figures are fused. When Beatrice returns love, she adds to her passive role an active one which, in varying degrees, resembles the redemptive act of Christ. Sometimes the return of love is virginal, as with Beatrice herself in the Divine Comedy and both Taliessin and Din-drane in Williams's The Region of the Summer Stars.<21> More often, for Williams, it includes the full range of love that belongs to a successful marriage, or to a relationship which is in the process of becoming a successful marriage. Examples in the fiction of this Christ-who-is-still-Beatrice or Beatrice-who-has-become-or-is-becoming-Christ are Isabel in Shadows of Ecstasy (in whom the element of identification is emphasized: see the last half of chapter 10), Barbara in War in Heaven, Nancy in The Greater Trumps (and Henry too, in the scene where he is the Hanged Man), and Lester in All Hallows' Eve in her relationship with Richard.<22>

Examining the paradigmatic Beatrician experience in detail, we find that Philip Travers and Palomides each illustrate several of its aspects, but not many of the same ones. Philip's vision of glory in Rosamond's arm is a Beatrician moment in which transcendent "beauty" and transcendent meaning issue their call to his very mundane self. It involves an intellectual awakening: having "suddenly . . . under-

stood" her arm, he knows what "abysses of intelligence" still beckon him. The moral aspect is present as well: confronted with a sort of mental double exposure, his sense of Rosamond-as-infinite jostled by his realistic memory that she has annoying faults, he is obedient to the love born of that moment (and previous such moments)<23> and refuses to be annoyed. Only later, when we have read on to pp. 60-2 and 134-6, do we appreciate the magnitude of this victory in view of the undoubted shallowness, bad temper, and general unworthiness of Rosamond. But Philip's love, strong enough to keep a firm "repose and certainty" (p. 101) and even to endure a snub by Rosamond comparable to Beatrice's refusal to speak to Dante, is nurtured by further Beatrician moments founded on the mere memory of her beauty (pp. 76-7) and of the dimly glimpsed reality "of which Rosamond was a shape and a name" (pp. 84-5; cf. pp. 99, 102). One has the sense that, entirely without any intention on Rosamond's part of playing such a role, Philip is growing spiritually and she is somehow responsible.

Quite different from Philip's situation is that of the knight Palomides, who appears not as a lover but as a stranger. In the first of two poems devoted to him, "The Coming of Palomides," he is given the Beatrician vision of Queen Iseult almost upon first seeing her. He is a master of "music-craft"<24> and of rational system in general. He also, as a Saracen, "denies the Incarnation"; for, explains Lewis (p. 124), Islam "stands for all religions that are afraid of matter and afraid of mystery, for all misplaced reverences and misplaced purities that repudiate the body and shrink back from the glowing materialism of the Grail." Palomides journeys from the domain of the scimitar with its "sharp curved line" (line 7)--the enforcing rule of law and also the analyzing reason which defines and divides asunder but has no place for Coinherence. He knows well the lessons of reason, "the measurement of man / that Euclid and Archimedes showed" (lines 2-3), but beyond the Pyrenees he encounters an offense: not a single line but a doubled figure--crosses, in fact, everywhere in Gaul and Italy. Here he confronts new "gospels trigonometrical" which "measured the height of God-in-man"; in other words, Trinity and Incarnation, classic expressions of Coinherence. Interested in neither "magic" nor "mystery," he decides to travel on to a country where they have been dispelled (he supposes) by Roman civilization: "Julius pierced through the tale of ghosts, / and opened the harbours of the north."

But a surprise awaits him in Cornwall in the form of "an outstretched hand." The light flaming from the queen's arm shakes his belief in the dissecting reason, firing his mind "to measure the shape of man again" (and "measure" is now a musical as well as a geometrical term). The paradox that "curves of golden life define / the straightness of a perfect line" makes him wonder if the line of the scimitar blade was not, after all, imperfect. The one-dimensional geometry of pure reason may define laws, but not the ultimate law of existence. "The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life," and it takes "curves of golden life" to go beyond Euclid (was Williams thinking of the post-Euclidean curved universe?), beyond legalism, and discover "a perfect line." For the ultimate law is love--

till the queen's blessed arm became
a rigid bar of golden flame
where well might Archimedes prove
the doctrine of Euclidean love.

Palomides sees

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.
There flames my heart, there flames my thought,
either to double points is caught;
lo, on the arm's base for a sign,
the single equilateral trine!

The imagery now turns to triangles, and for the next verse paragraph "intellectual power" sees "triple angles, triple sides," the suggestion in "the queen's arm's blissful nakedness" of "unions metaphysical," a "unity" that is community "triply obedient, each to twain . . . in the true equilateral ease."

And O what long isosceles
 from finger-point and shoulder flies
 towards me, and distant strain my eyes
 along the twin roads, there to prove
 the doctrine of Euclidean love;
 let the queen's grace but yield her hand
 to be by such strong measure spanned--

With that punctuation, Palomides' song "suddenly" breaks off, for he has made a near-fatal mistake. "Down the arm of the queen Iseult / quivered and darkened an angry bolt," and "the sign withdrew." Palomides has been confronted with mystery, he even recognized it as mystery and as good, yet by a lifetime of intellectual habit he is unprepared to respond except by seeking to bring it, too, under his control. The decision he makes is to turn his back on the effort required truly to understand "Euclidean love" (line 98). In the Beatrician moment Love has offered itself to him, but he can, or will, know love only as possession. "I caught her arm in a mesh of chords," he boasted earlier (line 52). Now he asks the queen to "yield her hand" to be "spanned" by his craft, his "strong measure"--as if he would comprehend the light that shineth in darkness. But the arm eludes his craft, and all Palomides succeeds in doing is making the arm "destitute, / empty of glory." The trinitarian vision shines a moment longer, growing more distant, and is gone.

Through his fault, not Iseult's, and not of its own mere transiency, Palomides' Beatrician moment passes. Once "the queen's identity" (line 10) or "substance" (line 132) has been sundered from the queen's earthly presence he cannot--as Philip could--continue to believe in the mystery of their essential unity: "Relation vanished" (line 111). Beautiful she remains, but no longer infinite. The desire to possess implied already a denial of her infinity; the failure to possess can only transform the Beatrician energy into a jealousy that feeds his pride, obsesses his life, and severs him from the chivalric community, as is shown in the second Palomides poem, "Palomides Before His Christening."<25> His one Beatrician moment abides in his memory--not for bliss, however, but stinging (because he remembers it as humiliation): "bees buzzed down Iseult's arm in my brain" (line 25). Life is essentially competitive, a quest to win by force of arms what he thinks will restore to him the queen's favor. When he finally catches the beast he has hunted, however, through exhaustion of both body and spirit he lets it escape; and this seeming failure is followed by another vision, not Beatrician this time but nevertheless holding the beginnings of redemption. Not Iseult's beautiful arm he sees, but bones, arm bones and thigh bones "loving" each other (line 57), "longing" to be wedded together (so the phrase "bone of its bone" suggests). "Spirit" is present also--the whole scene that Palomides imagines evokes Ezekiel's vision in the valley, yet it lacks the prophet's triumph. Palomides' ingrained rationalism will not yet allow a full union of body/"skeleton" with "spirit" (nor let him admit that the cross-figure has any special significance--"the Chi-Ro is only a scratching like other scratchings"). Still, the vision has awakened his imaginative life to the point where, upon remembering something Dinadan once said to him, he can recognize his spiritual danger on the brink of hell, come to himself, and determine to be baptized.<26> This decision marks his acceptance both of the materialism of Christianity, in the sacramental rite, and of humility ("why not look a fool before everyone?")--the lesson he had rejected at the palace in Cornwall. But he has not yet quite absorbed the other Beatrician virtue, love; not till he relinquishes the negative desire to possess can he begin on the positive side. There are signs of such a change in his new respect for Dinadan, the "lord without a lady" (line 98). Palomides, then, relates to Williams's Beatrician doctrine on three points--he is granted the "moment," he flunks the "experience," but he illustrates finally the fact that salvation may be possible by a different way.<27>

Even Philip and Palomides together do not give us the whole range of the Beatrician experience, of which another important aspect is the physical union of the lovers. It is not essential, of course: Dante did without it and was even married to someone else, and Williams's Taliessin represents the choice of a virginal mode of response to the Beatrician vision. But Williams equally, in keeping with his incarnational theology, emphasized the rightful place of the body as the focal object of the Beatrician moment<28> and exalted the sacrament of marriage as "a unique opportunity of following [the Dantean] way."<29>

One of the three Grail knights is a married man, whose addresses to his wife make up two of the poems in Taliessin. "Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins" (pp. 42-5) presents the married state as an epitome of the City. Bors has just come from the court, where the new mintage of coins has been perceived to hold both promise and danger for the life of society, the political economy; at home, he looks upon Elayne in her role at the center of the household economy, her "hair . . . the colour of corn" (line 9), her hands distributing bread as an act of domestic love. Here ordinary life, conducted in accord with the Beatrician vocation to virtue, becomes sacramental, redeeming neutral things, whether coins or bread, so that it is their promise not their danger which is fulfilled. The concluding question about the coins--"can the dead king's head live?" (line 101)--echoes Ezekiel's question about the dry bones and thus hints that the answer must be affirmative. "Can the law live?" Bors also asks (line 100)--yet another link with the themes of Palomides--and the answer is that it depends on how well the citizens give it life by means of their faithfulness in love.

In "Bors to Elayne: The Fish of Broceliande" (pp. 24-26) the emphasis is more on the sexual aspect of the conjugal state. Bors brings Elayne a gift, a fish he has caught in a stream. It is a memento of a song he heard about the mysterious sunken forest of Broceliande. The "song meant all things to all men, and you to me" (line 9). Song and wife are identified in his mind as the vehicles of an elusive but all-important glimpse of ultimate meaning, of which both fish and forest are also symbols. "Your arm," he tells Elayne in words reminiscent of Philip Travers's reverie, is "the piercing entry to a land" safe from mortality (lines 16 ff.). "No net can catch" this fish; intensely real, it is nevertheless a mystery beyond rationalism. Dropped into her hand,

it darts up the muscles of the arm, to swim
round the clear boulder of the shoulder, stung with spray,
and down the cataract of the backed spine leaps

into bottomed waters at once clear and dim,
where nets are fingered and flung on many a day;
yet it slides through the mesh of the mind and sweeps

back to its haunt in a fathomless bottomless pool.

The last two lines signal that the Beatrician moment is over--yet not over, for the fish has been absorbed into the permanent Beatrician experience which Bors knows in Elayne through their marriage. There is, thus, one way after all in which the fish can be--if not possessed, at least summoned. Its "name," "an anagram of spirit and sense," can be known (though it be the ultimate in folly to think so). "A twy-nature only" can call it forth, that is, the one flesh of husband and wife--but also the incarnate God-man, the grand antitype to which all lesser instances of Coinherence answer. The fish, traditionally a monogram for Christ who definitively links "spirit and sense," symbolizes in addition two other things: the sexual consummation of the sacrament of marriage and the bodily resurrection implicit in the sacrament of baptism. It leaves in its wake "double tracks":

one, where the forked dominant tail
flicks, beats, reddens the smooth plane

of the happy flesh; one, where the Catacomb's stone
holds its diagram over the happy dead
who flashed in living will through the liquid wish.

(to be continued in Newsletter No. 40)

N O T E S

- 1>(1933; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 56.
- 2>A. M. Hadfield, Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), p. 45. Subsequent references to this work will use the simplified title Exploration.
- 3>"Poem at Night" (unpublished), quoted by Hadfield in Exploration, pp. 200-1. I follow the text given earlier by Mrs. Hadfield in An Introduction to Charles Williams (London: Robert Hale, 1959; hereafter cited as Introduction), pp. 176-7. Where it differs (in the singular "measurement"), she has kindly verified the reading for me from the MS.
- 4>Undated MS letter to Michal Williams, No. 8 in series of 1939-1945 wartime correspondence (Wade Collection, Wheaton College). The allusion is to Eve in Paradise Lost, 8.438.
- 5>"The Coming of Palomides," in Taliessin Through Logres (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938), pp. 34-5.
- 6>"Sensuality and Substance," Theology, May 1939, rpt. in The Image of the City and Other Essays, ed. Anne Ridler (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 74-5.
- 7>Quoted by Hadfield, Exploration, p. 34.
- 8>The Figure of Beatrice (London: Faber & Faber, 1943).
- 9>The White Peacock (London: Martin Secker, 1927 rpt.), p. 387, quoted by Williams in "Sensuality and Substance," p. 73.
- 10>Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), pp. 80-1.
- 11>The Shadowy Waters, in The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 410.
- 12>Williams returned to these lines in the essay on Yeats in Poetry at Present (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 64, and read them more positively, calling Forgael's reply "piercing and prophetic."
- 13>The fullest analysis of Williams's system is Mary McDermott Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962). The best exposition of its larger theological context and implications is Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Poetry of the Image in Dante and Charles Williams," in Further Papers on Dante (London: Methuen, 1957), pp. 183-204. Other useful studies are by C. S. Lewis, "Williams and the Arthuriad," in Arthurian Torso, ed. C. S. Lewis (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 116-20; John Heath-Stubbs, Charles Williams, "Writers and Their Work" 63 (London: Longmans, 1955), pp. 15-27; Ridler, pp. xlii-ix; and chap. 4 of R. J. Reilly, Romantic Religion (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1971). His own exposition of it, with an emphasis on the Beatrician aspect, first appeared as chap. 5, "The Theology of Romantic Love," of He Came Down from Heaven, "I Believe," 5 (London and Toronto: Heinemann, 1938). According to Hadfield, Exploration, p. 165, this "contains the core of his unpublished Outlines of Romantic Theology," which had been composed in 1923-24. Further restatements and refinements appeared in the pamphlet Religion and Love in Dante (London: Dacre Press, 1941) and in The Figure of Beatrice.

"Dr Lampert presents this book to us as 'an introduction to the theology of the sacraments, a discussion of the fundamental religious and philosophical premises of sacramental theology'. He contends that this 'has generally drawn less attention to itself than the doctrines of the various sacraments.' He divides his essay into three parts: (i) God and the World, (ii) the Divine Realm - meaning, roughly, material existence, (iii) the Sacrament. This last part is therefore the cause as well as the conclusion of his writing. But the others are necessary.

It is necessary, for example, before the sacramental can be considered, to recapitulate the right relation of the universe to God. This, of course, is simply that that relation is (a) wholly one-sided, (b) fundamentally two-sided. Dr Lampert says: 'In virtue of its inclusion into being, 'nothingness' becomes the very ground of the creature in its self-existence'. He adds that 'all that lives knows the temptation to metaphysical suicide, a longing to escape the fiery wheel of being'. This temptation (real as it is) is, however, like all temptations, a longing for an impossibility (Hell itself is, I suppose, nothing but an obstinate and everlasting effort to establish an impossibility). And the more intense the longing to be uncreated, the more vivid the characteristic of the creature.

The creature, then, being from nothing, finds itself in relation. It is precisely created in relation. Man's 'very manhood and creatureliness is this: to be related to God.' This relation reaches to and includes man's corporeity, for that corporeity is not accidental and transient but essential and (in some sense) eternal. The Incarnation is in the glory of God. 'Corporeity must have, and indeed has, its absolute mode of being in the triune life of God'. The incarnate life was conditioned by the perverse longing of the creature against proper relation. That the glory of the corporeity should endure this was its agony and yet (might one say so) a redoubled glory. But it also renewed in the human body the possibility of being identified with that glory. 'The good tidings of Christianity are a witness and prophecy of just this absolute significance of the body'.

This body exists in a symbolic universe. All matter presents - say, re-presents - spiritual facts. All Nature is, in this sense, sacramental but it is a limited sacramentalism. 'The difference between the sacrament and the symbol lies first of all in that the former is something singled out, and set apart, notwithstanding its absolutely universal character. The symbolic power of nature as such does not yet create the sacrament The integration of nature is constantly realized in the sacrament.' Nature has indeed to be constantly re-integrated; creaturely existence is renewed in its full meaning and its possibilities; indeed, in its full actualities at those points where God takes up 'a single fragment of creaturely being' and makes it 'the place of His utmost presence'. Dr Lampert makes this clear by a brief discussion of the place of water in baptism. He proceeds to a discussion on metabolism, which denotes 'the identity of the different and the difference of the identical - a true antinomic miracle'. 'The miracle of sacramental metabolism, or translation is not a physical but a metaphysical event'. This exposition brings us to the central Sacrament Itself. I do not know whether Dr Lampert would think it true to say that the elements in That, the bread and wine, which were once capable of supporting the human body, now become capable of supporting the nourishing the whole human organism, body and soul in their single identity. They are (in a word used, he tells us, by the Eastern Fathers) 'transferred'; they belong to divine life. But it is, of course, divine life as it determined itself to exist in relation to this creation.

There follows two very fine chapters on the Epiklesis and on the Ultimacy of the Sacrament. 'The Sacrament is in effect the anticipation of the transfigured

cosmos of the age to come ... The power of the sacrament, though realised within the human and cosmic world of untransfigured nature, transcends the limits of this age and reaches out to the world to come: for the sacrament itself is this supreme 'transcensus'. It is an eternal witness to the ultimate destiny of the created universe. The transcendent power of God is already present in the world, that this world may be finally redeemed and transfigured'.

This is the power of the Gospel against all gnosticisms and all matter-despising pieties. There are things in Dr Lampert's work to which I should mildly demur; there are others which may be disputed by the theologians. But as a whole it seems to me a very notable and desirable statement of a point of view not yet sufficiently realized, but precisely native to the Gospel and characterizing it alone among all the religions of earth.

Charles Williams, Oxford".

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