



The
**Charles
Williams**
Society



Newsletter

No. 96 Autumn 2000

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**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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: Mr Richard Jeffery
Lothlorien, Harcourt Hill
Oxford, OX2 9AS
01865 248 922 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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/

Contents

Newsletter No 96

Autumn 2000

Officers of the Society	2
Reading groups	3
From the Editor	4
Forthcoming meetings	5
Society Conference Report <i>Stephen Barber</i>	6
Society news	8
Michael Williams	9
Charles Williams: The Nature of the Poet <i>Glen Cavaliero</i>	11
Book Review <i>The Harmony Within</i>	25
Editorial Policy	27

Reading groups

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



The
**Charles
Williams**
Society

No 96 Autumn 2000

From the (new) Editor

As a fairly new member of the Society it seems my progress through it has been swift to say the least. Stephen Medcalf suggested I join in spring 1998; I was welcomed in the summer, on the Council a year later, and now presuming to undertake one of its most public offices. All this has come about because of something amounting to little more than a whim. In casting about for something to write my MA thesis on it occurred to me that there might be an original line to be found in C.W.'s association with Arthur Edward Waite.

I confess to having kept my head down when Eileen made her various requests for someone to take on the Editor's job; I was (and am) sure that there are others in the Society more capable than me. For one thing my experience of computers has been restricted to writing letters and papers, and my main priority with this issue has been just to produce something that looks like its predecessors. Also my previous editing experience has been merely proof-reading technical reports for marine engineers, and even that was some time ago. I hope you will all bear with me while I settle in. At least you can rest assured I won't be initiating any major changes of style.

Thanks are, of course, due to Eileen Mable and Andrew Williams for their work in producing the Newsletter over the last 18 months or so (longer in Andrew's case). I would also personally like to thank Andrew for trekking over with the Society's computer and taking me through the basics in my rather cramped back room, and Eileen who was kind enough to reprise her role briefly by looking over the first draft of this issue and making some amendments.

Anyway, that's enough of me. Herewith C.W. 96.

Edward Gauntlett.

Charles Williams Society meetings

- ◆ **Saturday 14th October 2000**

A recording of the talk on Charles Williams given by the late Anne Scott to the Oxford Branch of the University of the Third Age. The meeting will take place in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church, St. Peterborough Place, Bayswater, London, W.2. at 2.30 pm.
 - ◆ **Saturday 10th February 2001**

The meeting will be held in Pusey House, Oxford at 2.30 pm. Walter Hooper will speak on a subject to be announced.
 - ◆ **Saturday 9th June 2001**

Annual General Meeting in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church at 12.30 pm. At 2.30 pm the Revd. Dr. Gavin Ashenden will speak on a subject to be announced.
 - ◆ **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.
-

Society Conference

The Society held its Conference at The Royal Foundation of St Katharine, London, on June 16th – 17th 2000. Report by Stephen Barber.

The Charles Williams Society Conference took place on the weekend of 16-17 June 2000 at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine in the East End of London. Twenty—seven people attended with many from overseas, including two each from Germany and Russia, and seven from the USA.

There were four formal sessions, one on the Friday evening after registration and an early supper, and the remainder on Saturday. The Friday session was given to readings from the Arthurian poems chosen and introduced by Dr. Brian Horne. It was a rare pleasure to hear this poetry read aloud and it prompted a good deal of discussion.

On Saturday, after Holy Communion and breakfast, Dr. Glen Cavaliero, author of *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology*, spoke on ‘Charles Williams: The Nature of the Poet’. Williams was a poet of theology, not of devotion, and his inspiration was intellectual. He delighted in ideas, in role-playing, and in ceremony; for him the true reality was always hidden. His theology initially owed something to Coventry Patmore, later more to Dante, and his vision was esoteric rather than exoteric: for him the doctrines of the creed and the Arthurian legends symbolize a present reality. Time and space are simultaneous. The Incarnation is not the consequence of, but the reason for the creation, as he expounds in his essay ‘The Cross’. His concept of beauty, expounded in his criticism, is visionary but does not exclude practicalities: there are latrines as well as sublimities. His poetics reflect this sacramental theology.

Dr. Stephen Medcalf’s subject was ‘The Dance Along the Artery: T.S.Eliot and Charles Williams’ which he prefaced with a reading of ‘Burnt Norton’. Dr. Medcalf pointed out that the preternatural quality that Williams’s friends noticed in him was not apparent in the 1920s, and that his extended spiritual sense devel-

oped as a result of his struggle over his relationship with Phyllis Jones. This developed his understanding of the body which, as matter, should be the significant presence of God as elaborated in 'Bors to Elayne: The Fish of Broceliande' or as put by Chloe in *Many Dimensions*: "We must not deny in the darkness what we have known in the light." Dr. Medcalf contrasted Charles Williams's affirmative way with the *via negativa* of Eliot in the *Quartets* and suggested that Eliot had been influenced by a number of passages in C.W.'s work, not only in the acknowledged use of *The Greater Trumps* but also the butterfly scene in *The Place of the Lion* and the garden scene of *Descent into Hell*. He also advised his listeners to turn up Williams's review of *Four Quartets*.

Before the third scheduled talk we had a short address by Dr. Natalya Trauberg, one of the two Russian visitors. She told us that interest in C.W. in Russia had sprung from reading Chesterton, C.S.Lewis and Dorothy L.Sayers, and that four of his novels had been translated into Russian. She had first held a conference in Russia on Charles Williams as long ago as 1988.

Charles Huttar's paper was on 'Myths of the End Time in Charles Williams's Fiction'. He pointed out that Yeats's apocalyptic poem 'The Second Coming' was quoted by Williams in his first novel, and went on to demonstrate that each novel contains a cataclysmic event though disaster is each time averted. In this Williams was reflecting the tone of much fiction of the 1920s, including the science fiction of H.G.Wells, and the pessimism of Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, and he embarked on a sustained parallel between Williams and the Russian philosopher Solovyev. Other apocalyptic themes reflected in Charles Williams's fiction include the appearance of an Anti-Christ figure, the return of Christ, and the concept of a centralized world power.

The Conference then formally closed, though discussion continued for some time in the garden. One participant said that had she been asked to choose three speakers on C.W. it would have been these three. All were enthusiastic about holding another conference, perhaps in two years' time.

© Stephen Barber, July 2000.

Society news

C.W.'s war-time letters to his wife.

In a recent letter Roma King writes:

'I would like to make a brief report to the members of the society on my work with the letters. I discovered I could not include the whole of the correspondence and the necessary notes etc. in a single volume. Moreover, there were letters that seemed to me of only secondary importance, and there was a great deal of repetition. I decided to make a selection of those that seemed to me essential. I have sent the manuscript to the publisher and am awaiting galley proofs. I have no idea at present about a possible publication date. I do know it will not be immediate. I have been through this process enough in the past to know that it all requires time. I am, of course eager to push it through as rapidly as possible.

'Lucille joins me in sending warmest greeting to our friends in the C.W. Society. We feel a very strong bond there.'

Anne Ridler

Anne would like us to give details of her book *Working for T.S. Eliot – A Personal Reminiscence* describing her life as his secretary. This is published in a limited edition of 125 copies, numbered and signed by the author. At 18 pages and costing £30 this must be regarded as a collectors item. It can be obtained from Enitharmon Press, 36 St George's Avenue, London N7 0HD.

Terry Barker

After Acorn by one of our Canadian members, Terry Barker, deals with Canadian poet Milton Acorn (1923-1986) and mentions C.W. a number of times. 42 A4 pages. Published by Unfinished Monument Press, PO Box 4279, Pittsburgh, PA 15203, USA at £5.50 (US\$8, Canadian \$12).

Michael Stansby Williams, 1922 – 2000

We are sorry to announce the death of Michael Williams, son of Charles and Michal Williams, of a heart attack on Tuesday 27 June.

A requiem Mass, attended by some of Mr. Williams's friends, was held at St. John's on Bethnal Green on Wednesday 12 July. The Society was represented by three members, including the Chairman.

During correspondence last year about the maintenance of his parents' grave in Holywell Cemetery, Oxford, Mr. Williams expressed his thanks for the Society's work in keeping alive the memory of his parents and in promoting Charles Williams's work to new readers and scholars. It is good to know we had his support.

His friend for many years, Terry Drummond, gave the funeral address and the following is reproduced from his notes.

Michael remained single throughout his life, but took into his life three children, being godfather to two and honorary grandfather to the third. To each one, along with their parents, he was an extension of the family and for him they became family.

Michael lived in a shadow, that of a famous father. Many people beat a path to his door to discuss the writings of Charles Williams, and he did not always find this easy. Americans wanting to write a thesis, authors writing about other authors who had known C.W., Michael met them all. He preferred those who did not carry the glint of excessive enthusiasm.

Apart from the children, their families, and his bookshop (he worked for many years on Tower Hill and was well known and liked by many customers) Michael had a great love for the cinema and theatre. The women in his life were the stars of the pre- and post-war period: Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwick and many others. In his flat were in the region of 200 video tapes, no doubt full of films recorded from the TV.

Another strand of interest was the detective novel. In the main he preferred American rather than English, but Agatha Christie was read and re-read.

In the midst of all this was his Christian faith. In the 1970's he was a regular attender at St Botolph's, Aldgate, and it was through my work there that we met. His reading included small works of Christian meditation and prayer. He may not have been a regular churchgoer in the last years of his life, but his faith remained important.

His death was sudden and unexpected. He felt ill, was able to eat a sandwich prepared by a friend and neighbour, and then retired to bed and a quiet end to a good life.

While at St. Botolph's Michael wrote the following prayer.

Pray For Us, St. Botolph.

Pray for us as we travel.
 We who feel ugly, unwanted.
 When others turn away or deride us,
 Protect us.
 We who have sinned, and will sin again,
 We who are self-righteous,
 Teach us.
 We for whom no one cares,
 We who care for no one,
 Be with us.
 We who want to receive only good things
 And to give nothing,
 Show us.
 We who are happy, we who mourn,
 We whose bleeding, pleading hands are left empty,
 Walk with us.
 Guide us to walk together
 Even with those we hate,
 And never looking back with either gladness or regret.
 That all people,
 All peoples
 Shall travel in triumph loving and praising God
 And as we travel
 Pray for us, St. Botolph.

© Terry Drummond 12 July 2000.

Charles Williams: The Nature of the Poet.

The following paper was delivered by Dr. Glen Cavaliero at the Charles Williams Society Conference on 17 June 2000.

1

Opinions may differ as to the merits of Charles Williams's poetry, but there can be little disagreement as to its character. Williams was a religious poet; more significantly, he was theological one. The majority of religious poets are of a devotional cast — the names of John Donne, George Herbert and William Cowper come immediately to mind; they address their Maker directly, give voice to the various aspects of their relationship to Him. Other poets are of a more reflectively intellectual type — Milton, for example, or Blake or T. S. Eliot: they may on occasion write devotional verse, but their governing preoccupations are philosophical. But few, if any, poets have been so concerned with *theology* as was Charles Williams: the closest approximation to his work is that of Coventry Patmore, whose influence on him was considerable; but even Patmore is as much celebratory as he is speculative. His theology of romantic love, as expressed in *The Unknown Eros*, is a matter of rhapsodic assertion rather than of close intellectual analysis.

Charles Williams seldom writes devotional verse, but when he does so it is in formal, even impersonal language, its wryly melancholic tone seeming to emphasise the distance of God rather than His nearness; moreover, it is only in his early books of verse that he addresses Him directly. But his poetry is none the less infused with a spirit of contemplation: he is concerned with what he sees rather than with what he feels. But although his vision is essentially an intellectual one, a vision it is. Rooted in his sense of history, it reflects his awareness both of the human capacity for joy and of the insidious negativity of evil; above all it is determined by his response to poetry, both by his study of it as a vehicle for imaginative truth, and his practise of it as a craft. He is at once a theologian

shaped by poetry and a poet inspired by theology.

However, it is not easy to appreciate such an achievement at the present time; both contemporary secular society and the contemporary religious temper are out of touch with the kind of theological perspective which his work commands. For his is an esoteric point of view, rather than an exoteric one: he regards the material order as being *informed* by spirit and not as being acted upon by spirit or as being in opposition to it. Moreover, his portrayal of reality is governed by his sense of an eternal dimension rather than of a strictly chronological one.

The priority given to chronology in popular and intellectual feeling and culture over the past three centuries is the product of scientific materialism, of the rationalistic philosophies of Descartes and Locke, of the prevailing view of physical phenomena in terms of cause and effect, in terms of what is demonstrable and proved to work. This first, then that — we think in terms of sequence rather than of relationship, in terms of narrative rather than of portraiture. Christianity, the religion that gave birth to the artistic and scientific culture of the West, declares the inherent goodness of matter because it is the vehicle of God's self-revelation in Christ; it has thus necessarily emphasised the condition of temporality under which matter operates and through which it is experienced. Moreover, the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection are seen to take place in time: accordingly the language of sequence prevails both in devotional expression and in credal formulae — He came down, was incarnate, died and was buried, rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven, all in the past tense. The theological realities embodied in the life of Christ are known exoterically as history, and in a purely materialistic and non-metaphysical culture like the present they are, as such, vulnerable to disproof or rational rejection simply because they are linguistically involved in the same mode of discourse as that in which our mundane affairs are conducted. As a result, such is the theological illiteracy of the age, even otherwise intelligent people can justify a simplistically confident atheism on the grounds that no one in their right mind could believe in the existence of an Old Man in the Sky — as though any thinking person could. For as the Archdeacon remarks in *War in Heaven*, 'How can you insult God? ... About as much as you

can pull His nose.'

The esoteric vision, on the other hand, perceives theological reality as timeless. And this, in practice, is how we respond to it. Present day believers may declare their conviction that Jesus rose from the dead; but unless they are also aware that he *rises* from the dead as the central fact of all human experience, their belief is simply a matter of assent to an asserted historical fact. But those who are accustomed to think in terms of spiritual reality as being primary are less preoccupied with the temporal dimension; for them, to cite a passage in *Many Dimensions*, the Stone is not in Time but Time in the Stone. It is this esoteric understanding which relates Christian doctrine not only to human experience (emotional, artistic or whatever) but which also sees the Incarnation as itself validating the existence of religious belief as such.

Williams's poetry and fiction witness to his interest in and sympathy with religious traditions other than his own. In part he owed this to his period of occultist studies, for occultists, in the words of Roma King,

perceive a relationship between the part and the whole, and they acknowledge the possibility of concourse between what is below and what above. These recurring ideas must have been a powerful stimulus to Williams's imagination, leading him to find not identities but analogies between the occult and his own Christian beliefs. Williams was by temperament inclusive, and although he regarded the Incarnation as the consummate revelation, he considered it a fulfilment, not a rejection, of all other insights. (1)

Such a viewpoint is similar to that articulated by Chesterton in *The Everlasting Man*.

As with so many visionary writers, Williams perceives the revelation of God in the glory of His creation, and he sees it whole. He translates all theological assertions into the present tense. Creation is *now*, the Fall is now, the Incarnation and its consequences are here and now. Time and space and the material or-

der which is subject to them and which operates through them, are simultaneous — as, indeed, Williams in his two final novels portrays them as being. But this simultaneity can only be believed and acted upon in faith; it can never be proved, for proof belongs to the realm of time and space.

In ‘Natural Goodness’, one of those occasional essays in which some of Williams’s most pregnant theological assertions are contained, he endorses Duns Scotus’s teaching that the Incarnation would have taken place even had there been no Fall. (2) This is of course itself a way of putting things which uses the language of temporality; but it does emphasise that the Incarnation constitutes the reason that the universe exists at all, a contention that is at the heart both of Williams’s theological teaching and of his poetic vision. The Incarnation is not the consequence of the Creation but its essential nature; it is not a mere remedy for sin but an endurance and conquest of the effects of sin. Such a belief lies behind such a poem as ‘Percivale’s Last Song’, (3) part of ‘The Advent of Galahad’ collection which was to be reworked as ‘Percivale at Carbonek’ in *Taliessin Through Logres*. ‘... Love went up to the altar / to sing his Mother’s Mass. / He sang a Mass of Our Lady / And the universe began.’ Love — that is, the Divine Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity — *does* that which He *is*. And the Mass is a Mass of Our Lady’s fore-ordained Motherhood, the guarantor of the essential goodness of the material order which has Christ for its reason for being. It is this essential goodness which is asserted in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary: it is what is implied in the credal statement that the Incarnation involves the taking of Manhood into God. Accordingly, ‘The Immaculate Conception is the moment of the coming into being of redeemed humanity.’ (4) And the universe itself is the Mass, the timeless action in which Love lives the life of love. Indeed, one might alter the tense of the verbs in Williams’s poem, and say ‘He sings a Mass of Our Lady, and the universe begins’ — that is to say, it is the beginning of the universe in terms of its purpose and destined fulfilment. What our imaginatively impoverished age likes to refer to as ‘the Big Bang’ is in metaphysical reality a paean of Divine Joy. And from the esoteric perspective the universe begins and ends in an eternal Now.

'Now' is a term in constant use; yet it refers to a concept merely. The present moment is not to be experienced, for it is past as soon as it is consciously realised. As Rose Macaulay describes it in *Told by an Idiot*, the present is a 'queer little isolated point of time, with no magnitude, but only position.' In *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* Williams distinguishes between what he calls 'the true present', 'the specious present' and 'the eternal present'. (5) The true present contains our objective existence in space and time, the specious present our consciousness of self in space and time. The eternal present is our created relationship with God and embraces both. Poetry, like all human activity, occupies the specious present; it may, even, be described as being itself a specious present. Williams is clear as to the function of poetry in this connection. 'The greatest poetic experiences are of a nature which include (sic) the lesser. They do not explain them philosophically; they relate them poetically.' (6) But the completed work partakes of the simultaneity of eternity, where, in Lois Lang-Sims's words, 'events affect their own causes, and are caused by their own effects.' (7)

The sense of the eternal Now is found in the work of many visionary writers (indeed it may be said to define them), writers such as Henry Vaughan, Gerard Manley Hopkins, or Julian of Norwich who likens all that exists to a small hazel nut in the palm of God's hand. And yet in the later Arthurian poetry of Charles Williams this visionary element does not exclude the element of history: his poems maintain for the most part a narrative mode, are full of the past tense. But poetically, in their technique, they establish the priority of the esoteric domain. In Williams's poems as, for him, in life itself, everything is a potential metaphor within the reality of God, Whose action and Divine light are simultaneously creative and redemptive — two words for the same state of timeless being. The Creation itself is analogous to a poem, and in Williams's hands the Arthurian myth embodies a vision of history as being the expression of eternal realities which intermesh in a manner that any close reading of a serious poem can recognize as being of the same kind as the interrelationships of the various elements in that poem's making.

In his critical writings Charles Williams is careful to distinguish between the outward form of a poem ('verse') and the quality called 'poetry', which verse may or may not embody. Not being a systematic theorist, he nowhere offers a definition of this quality, remaining content to illustrate its presence; but if he refrains from specifying what it is, he points out what it does, arguing that its presence is known by the absence of cant. Defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as 'words used for fashion, without being meant' and as 'unreal use of words, implying piety', cant is 'the great and everlasting enemy of poetry', being

a danger wherever ... anything appears but the most extreme poetic honesty in its moments of extreme poetic success: that is, much more often than not. (8)

Being responsive to ceremony and ritual, Williams was ready to accept the necessarily fictive and artificial nature of poetic diction.

The language of poetry is bound to be ceremonial, however direct. It is when versifiers ... use such a language without the intensity it should convey and concentrate that Cant begins to exist; it is when ceremony is willingly accepted as a substitute for intensity that it triumphs. (9)

Although it would be unjust to accuse Williams's own early poetry of being informed by Cant, it can fairly be criticized for too ready a reliance on contemporary verse forms and the swinging rhythms favoured by such popular poets as Chesterton and Masfield. Thus in 'Inland Travel', a characteristic metaphysical poem from his second collection, we find suggestive collocations reduced in significance by the inappropriateness of their rhythmical embodiment.

The North Sea and the Channel
 Bring mighty ships to wreck,
 But the west seas beat for ever
 On the rock of Carbonek:
 The high rock, the lone rock,

The rock that none can see,
The rock that men call Cephas
In tongues of Christentie. (10)

David Dodds's contention that by 1931 Charles Williams was being 'recognized as a real and original poet, one with a definite distinctive voice of his own, a modern poet, perhaps a major poet', (11) can be taken as a necessary corrective to the current orthodoxy that significant early 20th century poetry begins with Eliot's *Prufrock* (published in the same year as Williams's *Poems of Conformity*, 1917); but one can see why Chesterton could express his 'profound admiration' for such 'extremely individual poetry' (12) — it was so very like his own. None the less their peculiarly thorough understanding of the esoteric aspects of Christianity give Williams's poems a distinct theological 'edge' over those of his contemporaries among Catholic poets.

But if he remained at this stage faithful to the metrics and diction of Late Victorian verse, Williams deplored the failure of his immediate predecessors 'artistically to suggest an adequate significance in conduct', and the fact that 'none of these poets had the full capacity of the mythical imagination.' (13) Such a charge, however, was not applicable to one 19th century poet whose contribution to the Arthuriad possessed occultist resonances that would seem to have had a direct influence upon Williams's own. This was Robert Stephen Hawker, the eccentric vicar of a remote Cornish parish, whose masterly 'The Quest of the Sangraal' draws on the same Cabbalistic and theological imagery that one finds in Williams's Arthurian poems, and who likewise achieves much of his effect through paradox and condensed allusiveness. In a passage describing the Ascension of Christ, Hawker tells how '...The Syrian Twelve / Watched their dear Master darken into day!' Those last three words form a concentration of impressions, both sensory and mental. On the material level they describe a darkening through diminishment as the figure of Christ disappears into the upper reaches of the sky; on the spiritual level the 'day' of Heaven is dark to the limited, unconverted senses of mankind, so that the Christ is hereafter to be known in a manner other than the physical. But the expressive action suggested by the *verb* 'darken' (an energising process as contrasted with the immobility of the noun or adjective

‘dark’) establishes a dynamic yet integrating relationship between bodily and spiritual perceptions: a fusion is achieved whereby the written word becomes sacramental. This sacramental power to convey a sense of transcendental realities was, Williams believed, the very nature and function of major poetry. His own *Arthuriad* accordingly mediates its metaphysics by way of organised poetic statement, rich in complex associations and in ambiguity.

But in ‘Bors to Elayne: On the King’s Coins’ Taliessin warns of the dangers inherent in this sacramental ambiguity of words; their very wealth of association encourages simplistic, and thus manipulative, interpretations.

Sir, if you made verse you would doubt symbols...
 When the means are autonomous, they are deadly; when words
 escape from verse they hurry to rape souls;
 when sensation slips from intellect, expect the tyrant;
 the brood of carriers levels the good they carry. (14)

The lines are an instance of the way in which Williams links his *Arthuriad* with the contemporary world, in this case with that of propaganda and popular catch—phrases, of media-produced cliché: indeed, our current use of the word ‘media’ as designating an independent entity is itself indicative of sensation slipping away from intellect. Only the genuine poet, the maker, both uses and disposes of words in such a way that the authentic Word may be spoken. All else tends towards Cant.

The development from Williams’s early style to his late one can provide a good instance of a development from Cant to genuine poetry. The early Arthurian poems published in *Heroes and Kings* (1930) are minor in the same way that many of the poems in Williams’s four previous collections had been minor; they are bookish in diction, burdened with their use of rhyme, and subordinated to their predetermining metres.

Who on this night of all the Table wakes

to worship and to such protracted glee?
 For there in Camelot the Archbishop flakes
 their roofs and eaves with white austerity;
 and if the Queen and Lancelot find their joy
 are they not chambered in the world's annoy,
 where Agravaire about the keyhole spies?
 ('Tristram's Song to Iseult') (15)

The flaccid rhythms are weighted down by such anachronisms as 'glee' and such poetical left-overs as 'annoy', a misplaced feminine line ending ('austerity') and one word — 'flakes' — that is coined in order to provide a rhyme: the precision of the final line is a rebuke to the rest. All these poems are cluttered with diction out of minor late-Victorian verse ('wot', 'sooth', 'withal' and so on); while thumping metres frequently stamp ideas into linguistic triviality.

For a length of seven suns
 in a convent of White Nuns
 where time grows mystical
 I watched the ritual...
 ('The Song of the Riding of Galahad') (16)

It is a far cry from such near-doggerel to the splendours of *Taliessin Through Logres* with its vision of Blanchefleur professed

to the nuns of infinite adoration, veiled
 passions, sororal intellects, earth's lambs,
 wolves of the heavens, heat's pallor's secret
 within and beyond cold's pallor, fires
 lit at Almesbury, at Verulam, at Canterbury, at Lateran,
 and she the porter, she the contact of exchange.
 ('The Son of Lancelot') (17)

The rhythm is dictated by the words themselves, their conjunction (frequently amounting to oxymorons) generates the poetic energy that empowers the verse.

The meaning of the lines arises *out* of them, rather than being directed to them.

Williams's successful adaptation of his style to the esoteric interpretation of the Arthuriad is the resolution of a technical problem inescapably attendant on writing from such a viewpoint. For one serious limitation of the esoteric approach is that it involves using language with a fixed system of referends (what Philip Larkin referred to with salutary irreverence as 'the myth kitty'), a language that does not allow for contingency and verbal craftsmanship. Its method, even in its resort to occult symbolism, is that of simple allegory. To achieve the desired poetic resonance the poet has to rely on incantation — a term which carries the word 'cant' perilously near its heart. In the 20th century where the Arthuriad is concerned, incantation is more or less a dead letter. There is now no commonly held imaginative response at its command. Some more integrating poetic methodology is called for.

This can be found in Williams's mature style, which reaches fruition with the relaxed metrics of *The Region of the Summer Stars*, in which a sensuously realised visual perception is combined with an esoteric mode of apprehension. Thus 'Taliessin in the Rose Garden' can portray Guinevere walking with two of her ladies in a manner at once naturalistic and persuasively symbolic.

Hazel-lithe she stood, in a green gown;
bare against the green, her arm was tinged
with faint rose-veins, and golden-flecked
as the massed fair hair under the gold
circlet of Logres; on one hand was the ring
of the consort of Logres; deep-rose-royal
it drew the rose-alleys to its magical square. (18)

The predominance of monosyllables, of alliteration and of assonance, together with the intricate patterning of vowels and consonants, produce an effect of solid, throbbing material substance; while the 'green gown' and 'rose-veins' serve to integrate the figure of the queen with that of the garden in which she walks. The golden crown declares her royalty and almost raises her to the stature of a nature

goddess. (A further layer of meaning is suggested by that expressive ‘hazel-lithe’: the hazel is associated with witchcraft and divination.) The phrase ‘consort of Logres’ suggests the musical harmony of the orchestrated energies of the Kingdom, of which the royal marriage is the centre; ‘deep-rose-royal’ combines metaphysical notation with romantic symbolism and human ceremonial expression. The entire passage attains a maximum of actuality with the maximum of possibility in what Williams in another context designates a ‘Celian moment’.

(19)

The poem then opens inward to explore that possibility.

There, in the single central ruby, Taliessin
 saw, in the sovereign gem of Logres, the contained
 life of Logres-in-the-Empire; till the flush of the roses
 let seem that the unrestrained rush of the ruby
 loosed a secular war to expand through the land,
 and again the shore of Logres — and that soon —
 felt the pirate beaks in a moon of blood-letting;
 and within, yet encircling, the war, the sacred stone
 shook with the infinitesimal trembling of the roses
 and melted inwards into the blood of the king
 Pelles, belted by the curse of the Dolorous Blow;
 so rich was the ring and by Merlin royally runed. (20)

Williams has the ability (evident also in his novels) to describe simultaneously two distinct planes of consciousness, and to fuse their reciprocal metaphoric expression in a new awareness. The ‘sovereign gem of Logres’ is both the ruby itself and the queen; and it is the ‘unrestrained rush’ of the queen’s passion for Lancelot which looses the secular war that splits the Round Table. The ‘moon of blood-letting’ refers both to a season of destructive warfare, and to the menstruation of women, without which there can be no procreation. The stone ‘shakes’ (reflecting both the movement of the roses and the vibration of the queen’s hand) and melts ‘inwards into the blood of the king’ — one expects to read ‘Arthur’: it would seem to be appropriate. But it is that very appropriateness

which makes the substitution of ‘Pelles’ so effective, since Pelles, the wounded Grail keeper, is himself another manifestation of that kingship which is embodied in Arthur — indeed, which *is* Arthur when esoterically understood. The wealth of association is further enriched by that ‘belted’, with its sense of being bound or even beaten, and that of being armoured for action. In Williams’s world of redemptive creation a curse can turn out to be a blessing: all things are double. (One is reminded in this connection of the popular term for menstruation as being ‘the curse’.) So also Taliessin’s vision is neither an optically induced delusion nor the reward of his own percipience: the ring is a hermetic messenger, exhibiting both the mastery of foreknowledge and the power that goes with it.

And yet the passage closes with four lines that abjure any notion that meaning is to be found outside the words themselves.

The path of the garden was a verse into the wound,
 into the secrets of Carbonek and the queen’s majesty,
 in the king’s poet’s mouth; he heard himself say:
 ‘The Wounded Rose runs with blood at Carbonek.’ (21)

‘The path of the garden’ — not ‘the garden path’: the garden is itself a path. It does not simply *resemble* a verse, as in a simile; interpreted esoterically it *is* a verse. For whereas a simile deals merely with the surface of experience (looking, as it were, sideways across that surface, and also backward to the ingenuity of its maker) metaphor posits a deeper and a richer mode of participatory awareness. The wound of the king who bleeds supernaturally is, by analogy, the wound of the queen who bleeds naturally in menstruation; but the path into the wound, into a knowledge and understanding of it, exists only as it is articulated by the king’s poet in the disciplined response to the particular moment that achieves authentic poetry. And that poetry is *given*: Taliessin ‘heard himself say’ the intense line of verse which is poetry in its fullness and concentration of meaning.

‘The Wounded Rose runs with blood at Carbonek.’ Williams’s readers have followed the growth of the line from its visual and imaginative sources, and can thus appreciate in the process the elements that went to its making and thus to

its meaning. The relationship between word and Word is not that of a subordinate reproducing the command of a superior; it is a matter of incarnation through participation, both redemptive and sacramental.

Williams's presentation of Arthurian mythology may constitute an imaginative and intellectual diagram, but the literary technique which achieves it is dynamic. His poems' iconographical and linguistic evolution is an aspect of what they mean, so that that meaning includes not only what the poems are, but also *how* they are what they are. Their language and their message are thus aspects of each other. Williams employs words in order to demonstrate how words become the generators of what they signify; he sees them in action, creating new meanings as they combine. His art is the art of *poesis*, of making. The evolution of his poems reflects the way in which he handles the various elements in the Arthurian myth: his people are in perpetual development as they move among the different states of being — the states of war, of romantic adoration, of public responsibility or spiritual dearth, of voluntary submission to their destiny, of poetic inspiration. Those states can be experienced both actively and passively, so that people find themselves in them — and that phrase also can be used in both an active and a passive sense. The poetry and what went to its making combine in a reality that transcends them both.

Williams's finest poetry, like all the finest poetry, resonates. It achieves a combination of esoteric with exoteric in a timeless Now, that 'Now' which we experience when we respond fully to the measure of great verse. And the nature of what great verse evokes and rests upon is nowhere more powerfully and characteristically portrayed by Williams than in Taliessin's vision of the Trinitarian source of all creation.

...

a deep, strange island of granite growth,
thrice charged with massive light in change,
clear and golden-cream and rose tintured,
each in turn the Holder and the Held — as the eyes
of the watcher altered and faltered and again saw

the primal Nature revealed as a law to the creature;

...

(‘The Founding of the Company’) (22)

It is passages such as this which validate the claim that Charles Williams is supremely and uniquely a poet of theology.

© Glen Cavaliero, 2000.

NOTES

1. Roma A.King, Jr ‘The Occult as Rhetoric in the Poetry of Charles Williams’, *The Rhetoric of Vision*. Essays on Charles Williams. ed. Charles A Huttar & Peter J. Schakel (1996) p. 167
2. Charles Williams, *The Image of the City* ed. Anne Ridler (1958) pp. 75 — 80
3. *Charles Williams* (Arthurian Poets) ed. David Llewellyn Dodds (1991) p. 243
4. Lois Lang-Sims, *The Christian Mystery*. An Exposition of Esoteric Christianity (1980) p. 42
5. Charles Williams, *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* (1933) p. 11
6. *ibid.* p. 14
7. *op. cit.* p. 57
8. *The New Book of English Verse* ed. Charles Williams (1935) p. 8
9. *ibid.* p. 11
10. Charles Williams, *Poems of Conformity* (1917) p. 19
11. David Llewellyn Dodds, ‘Continuity and Change in the Development of Charles Williams’s Poetic style’, *The Rhetoric of Vision* p. 194
12. *ibid.* p. 194
13. *The Image of the City* p. 187
14. *Charles Williams* (Arthurian Poets) p. 54
15. *op. cit.* p. 196
16. *op. cit.* p. 232
17. *op. cit.* p. 65

-
18. *Op. cit.* pp. 114 – 115
19. *The New Book of English Verse* pp. 12 — 13
20. *Charles Williams* (Arthurian Poets) p. 115
21. *ibid.*
22. *op. cit.* p. 127.
-

***The Harmony Within* (revised Edition)**

By Rolland Hein

Chicago, Cornerstone 1999, pb US\$12.95, Can\$17.95.

Reviewed by John Docherty (modified from a review in *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*).

Rolland Hein's book, first published in 1982, is one of the best known and most accessible critical studies of George MacDonald's writings. This new Cornerstone Press edition will bring it to the attention of a fresh generation of readers. Hein's completely rewritten introduction is well-judged to appeal to such readers, taking up contemporary themes he has explored in *Christian Mythmakers* (1998), a work also published by Cornerstone. Everyone interested in MacDonald's writings should possess *The Harmony Within*, with its wealth of Christian insights. Eighteen years after its first publication it still remains, on balance, the best book to give or recommend to most people asking for an introduction to the life and writings of MacDonald. In many places the reader is likely to wish the analysis was deeper and more extensive, but Hein's identification of the essentials of MacDonald's thought is impeccable.

Sadly, however, Hein has not taken the opportunity of a new edition to carry out very necessary revision of the main text of the book. Virtually the only changes made here are small adjustments of phrasing to accommodate to the new Introduction. The paucity of textual revisions and their very minor nature is a great disappointment. The book cannot, therefore, be recommended to anyone who has a copy of an earlier edition.

Although neither factual inaccuracies nor questionable theories have been corrected in the main text, the changes in the rear-matter are extensive. A new seven page “Glossary of Scottish Terms” is very welcome. Hein has also added a “Suggested Reading Plan” which names one novel, one fantasy and one sermon for each month of the year. This can be recommended unreservedly. The bibliography is enormously extended by the inclusion of all the Johannsen reprints (now including all books by MacDonald except for the Sidney anthology) and (in a separate sub-list) all the “Abridged and Modernized Novels”. But Cornerstone have somehow managed to cut out random blocks from the sub-list of “Secondary Sources”, which previously was a valuable resource containing many entries not found in other bibliographies.

One can applaud Cornerstone’s concern that this important book should reach as many new readers as possible. But the confidence of such readers will inevitably be diminished when they study it alongside the works to which it alludes and notice the many mistakes.

© John Docherty, 2000

Editorial Policy

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.

Copyright

Everything in this Newsletter (unless otherwise stated) is the copyright of the Charles Williams Society. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a mechanical retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any other means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Editor.

Quotations from works by Charles Williams are copyright to The Estate of Michael Williams and printed in accordance with the Society's standing arrangement with the copyright owners.

© Charles Williams Society 2000

Registered Charity No. 291822

