GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Elisabeth Brewer, speaking of Charles Williams's Grail-novel, *War in Heaven*, and of the two volumes of Arthurian poetry reprinted here, has said 'these works are in effect the first imaginative, full-scale literary treatments of the Grail theme after Tennyson's "Idyll of the Holy Grail", published in 1869.'[1] Nor have the years since the publication of *The Region of the Summer Stars* (1944) seen the appearance of a comparable treatment of the Grail in verse (or, for that matter, prose). This being so, *Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region* together constitute the major imaginative work about the Grail of the twentieth century – certainly in English, probably in any language. They are the great modern Grail poem. And C.S. Lewis has said of them 'that they seem to me, both for the soaring and gorgeous novelty of their technique and for their profound wisdom, to be among the two or three most valuable books of verse produced in the century.'[2]

It is therefore surprising that they are not better known and more widely read. The mystery must be partly explained by their reputed difficulty. Even lovers of Williams's novels, and historical, critical, and theological works, often shy away from his poetry, because of its supposed difficulty; or, it must be admitted, sometimes after a baffling first encounter.

This is unfortunate. For the poems prove immediately enjoyable and rewarding to anyone who refuses to worry about the difficulty (rumoured or even experienced) and simply reads them. If this is true for anyone, it is particularly true for the reader who brings to the poetry some familiarity with the Arthurian stories (especially in Malory's retelling). Williams wrote that 'It has sometimes been said that it is necessary to

know Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in order to follow *Taliessin*. I very much hope that this is not so'.[3]

We certainly do not need to know Malory, or anything else about the Arthurian material, to enjoy much of the poetry. This is not only true of striking lines, like the first line of 'The Vision of the Empire' – 'The organic body sang together' – or of vivid visual images, such as fill 'The Calling of Arthur'. Entire poems work, and work brilliantly, quite apart from our knowledge or ignorance of the Arthurian references and contexts: to take one example, in 'The Crowning of Arthur' there is a movement from the splendour of chain mail and of heraldic colours, metals, and beasts, massed yet distinct in the firelight, with the king's dragon over all, to

> molten metals and kindled colours pouring
> into the pyre; at the zenith lion and dragon
> rose, clawed, twisted, screamed.

The forcefulness of the poem, the shock of the change that takes place, do not depend on our knowledge of the characters. But the more we do know of them, the richer and more powerful the poem appears. It is full of tensions and forebodings of what *may* happen. For example, Morgause and Lamorack are linked as red moon and black sea, and juxtaposed with Dinadan, whose arms are 'a silver fish under bloody waters'. In Malory, Morgause and Lamorack become lovers, and are slain by her sons, as is Lamorack's friend Dinadan. Here, Guinevere comes in Lancelot's hand 'into the king's mind'. Readers familiar with the stories will see the vision of dragon and lion battling as a prophecy of the wars between Arthur and Lancelot following upon Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere. Further in the background is Arthur's incest with Morgause, and its consequences, which Williams treats in detail in 'Lamorack and the Queen Morgause of Orkney'. But amid all this foreboding, is something else. The first coat of arms described, is that of Lamorack's brother, Percivale. His shield, and the star upon it, seem the point to which all the fires pour. And he proves to be one of the achievers of the Grail.

The more we know of other tellings of the stories, the more we can consciously appreciate Williams's innovations: for example, in placing Arthur's coronation after, rather than before, the wars to establish his kingship, or in introducing characters at the crowning who do not appear in Malory until much later – particularly, Lamorack and Percivale. But the effectiveness of Williams's changes does not depend on such conscious comparisons.

Anyone who wants to know how worthwhile Williams's poetry is, should try 'Mount Badon', 'The Calling of Arthur', 'The Crowning of Arthur', or the 'Prelude', in *Taliessin through Logres*. There are difficulties, but also immediate rewards. Whether in a periodical, an anthology, or such an experiment as here proposed, Williams's Arthurian poems can work, and satisfy, individually. But they are clearly interrelated. Images and themes are developed throughout the body of verse. The question arises, how are they to be read?

Here we find ourselves in the midst of a controversy. In the first book-length study of the poetry, *Williams and the Arthuriad*,[4] C.S. Lewis establishes a chronology which integrates both volumes. But Williams's friend and biographer, Mrs Hadfield, objects – 'The poems should not be intermingled'[5] – and is the first to expound persuasively each volume as an ordered sequence within itself. Drs Cavaliero and Moorman are foremost among those regarding the two books as distinct, deliberately-arranged wholes.

A look at the history of Williams's work with the Arthurian material will illuminate the matter, even if it does not yield a simple answer.

Williams began working on an epic in about 1912: as near in time to Swinburne's *Tale of Balen* (1896) as we are to John Heath-Stubbs's *Artorius* and David Jones's *Sleeping Lord* (1974), and only twenty-six years after Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* were given their final form – in the year of Williams's birth (1886). Williams said his epic began 'in a vague disappointment with the way in which Tennyson treated the Hallows of the Grail in *Balin and Balan*' and 'with certain things in

Malory', also related to the Grail.[6] When he started planning his Grail epic, Williams had already written a carefully structured sonnet sequence, *The Silver Stair* (c.1908; published 1912). And by August 1912, he had written his second major work, a long dramatic poem, set in the time of Constantine and concerned with another of the Hallows of Christ's Passion: *The Chapel of the Thorn*.[7]

Rather than plunging straight into writing his epic, Williams started keeping a Commonplace Book, full of detailed and developing notes on the treatment of Arthurian characters and the structuring of the poem, but with very few drafts in verse. This continued. There are notes on works published in 1915 and 1916, and at the end, 1919 and 1920. A song, intended for inclusion in the epic, was published instead in Williams's *Poems of Conformity* (1917). All his careful preparation did not, after eight years, yield an epic.

On 28 February 1930, he wrote to his employer, Humphrey Milford, the Publisher of the Oxford University Press, that for twenty years he had 'always meant one day to annotate certain significances in Malory' but had 'never known how to start. Another long, long poem on the Grail looked so depressing, and odes and things were not narrative enough.'[8] And in a later lecture, Williams said that even while keeping his Commonplace Book, 'I was doubtful of a long blank verse poem [. . .] and yet linked poems did not then please me'.[9] Though he was uncertain how to start, he still aspired to do so: in 1923 (John Pellow noted) he was contemplating 'an Arthurian poem or play'[10] and in 1924 he referred jocularly to 'the (unwritten) Graal ballads'.[11] Yet he wrote no play, or long poem of any sort. Instead, January 1926 found him at work on a detective novel about the Grail – published in 1930 as *War in Heaven*.

Sometime in 1927 or 1928, Williams was asked 'to write a few notes on the Arthurian legend, I wrote instead the poem which appears here as *Percivale's Song to Blanchfleur*'.[12] Thereafter, he wrote a couple more. Then the opportunity to publish a limited edition (*Heroes and Kings*) arose: and he included his

recent Arthurian lyrics. This was in July 1929. He became convinced that a cycle of linked poems in various forms *was* the way to proceed, and between July 1929 and February 1930 he raised the number to nearly forty, and wrote a synopsis of the whole work. He intended to write another twenty or thirty poems to finish it. In the event, he finished forty-nine poems, only fourteen of which were ever published. These are reprinted here for the first time, along with a selection of ten of the remaining poems, never before published: altogether amounting to half of this cycle.

The period following the publication of two of these poems in October 1931 is tantalisingly dark. Williams continued to work on the cycle, but his style changed. Then, late in 1934, he drew up a list, combining old and new poems. But he became convinced that no simple combination was possible – his style had changed too radically. Of the poems published in *Taliessin through Logres*, only three correspond to single earlier poems. Even the one closest to its original, 'Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass', has been thoroughly remade. What Anne Ridler has called 'the old pastiche style',[13] full of deliberate archaism, where too often the interesting matter of a poem is poorly served by a slack, diffuse manner, gave way to a taut, vivid poetry of unobtrusive metrical sophistication – as almost any comparison of an old poem with a new one shows at once.

Writing to Milford on 14 October 1935, Williams described the cycle as 'My Life Work, and will come out in bits over what decades remain, and I had proposed to publish (with you, if you would be so kind) the first few next year'.[14] In the event, *Taliessin through Logres* did not appear until 1938.

Dr Cavaliero thinks it better to call the cycle 'unfinished' than 'incomplete', seeing both published volumes as 'entire in themselves'.[15] It seems undeniable that *Taliessin through Logres* is no mere collection, but a deliberately structured work. However, a recent discovery suggests that in June 1939, Williams did not consider it entire in itself. In a letter sketching his plans for the poems he wanted to write next, he speaks of one as 'just preceding the present *Percivale at C.*'[16] Though the

cycle would come out in bits, the bits were meant to fit together. This did not preclude a book-length bit having its own character. On 29 November 1941, Williams wrote 'Provisionally the new lot will be called either *Jupiter over Carbonek* or *The Household of Taliessin*' and planned a 'third (and perhaps last) Taliessin volume, on the Quest itself.'[17]

Things happened differently, both because of the nature of his creative process, and of opportunities which arose. He published four new poems, separately, in periodicals. With the acceptance of the last of these by *Poetry London* came the invitation to publish another book. In it, he included the four published poems, plus three others and what he called 'a kind of *ad hoc Prelude*'.[18] C.S. Lewis suggested the title: *The Region of the Summer Stars*.[19] While Anne Ridler is right in saying that it 'was never meant to be more than Work in Progress',[20] Williams nonetheless thoroughly revised most of the poems included, integrating them with each other, and shaping the whole volume. On 9 April 1943, he wrote to his wife, 'it will do exactly what I want – + that is, get these poems out [. . .] + leave me free to get on which I can't while they're hanging around.'[21] They appeared, after long delays – and sold out almost immediately. His publishers clamoured for more. But none of the poems he was working on was finished, and before he finished any more, he died.

Looking back at *Taliessin* from *The Region*, 'The Son of Lancelot', 'The Coming of Galahad', and 'The Last Voyage' can be seen to point the way forward: longer, non-stanzaic, often more narrative poems. But Williams intended to go much further in this direction. In the letter of November 1941 quoted above, he spoke of 'the longer *narrative* poems I want'.[22] And in a letter to his wife of 7 May 1943, thinking of Wordsworth and his own verse, he said 'One cannot know poetry by reading or writing lyrics.'[23] Some of the late fragments included in the selection published here for the first time, suggest that, had he lived to finish these poems and write others, they might have been very long indeed. The eighty-eight lines about Arthur's throne and

council (p. 280, below) seem no more than the beginning of that poem.

Not only did Williams intend longer narrative poems, but he clearly postponed working on what he thought most important, leaving it till last – largely because he did think it so important, and did not yet feel capable of it. In June 1939, he wrote of 'Balin and the Dolorous Blow. God had better take care of this; I can't' and 'O no; *not* the Achievement in Sarras; not yet.'[24] He had treated these to varying extents in the poetry of 1929–31 – for example in 'Taliessin's Song of the Myths', 'Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium', 'Nimue's Song of the Dolorous Stroke', and 'Percivale's Last Song', all included here. But he did not live to replace these earlier efforts with more sufficient poems. Other intended subjects were the Grail Mass at Carbonek and the Conception of Galahad. (Williams's most detailed treatment of a Grail Mass, one clearly indebted to ideas worked out in the Commonplace Book, occurs in *War in Heaven*.) Having sent off *The Region* to the publisher, he hoped to get on with the next and larger Taliessin volume, which he wanted to regard as one whole, rather than a collection of poems.[25] This suggests an even more careful attention to the structuring of component books.

We are left in uncertainty as to how, in this respect, to read the poetry. Some of the late fragmentary poems seem clearly meant to complement poems in *Taliessin* or *The Region*. Yet the published and intended volumes, as we have seen, seem whole entities. The poems are parts of both smaller, and greater, whole works. Neither simply integrating them, nor keeping them too strictly apart, seems adequate. About what Williams would have done, had he lived, we can only speculate. Fortunately, none of this – not even the incompleteness of the greater whole – prevents our enjoyment of what he did finish. And Lewis's commentary, together with the others listed in the Bibliography below, can help new and old readers of Williams's poetry to enjoy it, in whatever order they take the poems.

Williams centres his retelling of the Arthurian material on

the Grail. He makes clear how, in terms of the story, in his 'Preface' to *The Region*. It is a deliberately anti-nationalistic (though not anti-patriotic) retelling. His Arthur is not, like that of Geoffrey of Monmouth or Malory (Book V) a world-conqueror. Nor is he the originator of an ideal social order. Instead, Logres is part of the 'organic body' of the Empire. The vision informing the poetry professes to be 'hierarchic, republican'. A diversity of function, which can bring with it real practical inequalities, is combined with a radical equality of dignity and end. Interdependence – for good and ill – and deference are stressed. For example, in 'The Calling of Arthur', the people and the nobility are united in a revolt against a tyrant, which yet needs someone to organise and direct it: that is, someone to fulfil the proper office of a king. 'Mount Badon' complements this with a brilliant study in leadership, delegation, and deference. Arthur has organised the strategy, yet defers to his officers in executing it in detail. Taliessin, more mysteriously, defers across time and space, to Virgil. Virgil's writing of the intervention of Apollo at Actium (*Aeneid* VIII, 675ff.) helps Taliessin find where and when to strike. But in and through all this, is a waiting on, and acting of, the Logos.

Thus, the interrelations stressed are not only within the present, or within the world. Spiritual and material, God and the universe, are radically united.

God is variously revealed by the world, through created images. The poetry is particularly concerned with the experience of romantic love in this respect. The characters exhibit different responses to experiences, especially this romantic experience. They exemplify different kinds of love. They are, in fact, symbolic characters. But they are not simply symbols. They are (fictional) human beings. This produces a tension, of which Williams was quite aware. In his Commonplace Book, he ponders whether Galahad would have a devotion to the Virgin Mary 'or whether he is singly (as being the image of a man's final thought) devoted to God. As a real person, he might adore her, hardly as a *simulacrum* – the first difficulty of any symbolic reading.'[26] In the poetry itself, Williams lived

with this difficulty. Telling Anne Ridler about 'Percivale at Carbonek', he says that the forms and figures in *Taliessin through Logres* are 'as universalized as my style allows.'[27] But that poem is a perfect example of his refusal to flatten the characters into symbols. Galahad is very much a human being there, however universalised. There, Williams prevents what he was on guard against in his Commonplace Book: Galahad fizzling out 'as a sort of "unsexed" abstraction.'[28]

Even as symbols, the characters are internally dynamic. However singly Galahad is devoted to God, or symbolises mature, exuberant love of God, 'The Last Voyage' uses alchemical imagery to show him undergoing transformation as he draws nearer to Sarras, 'the land of the Trinity'.

At the opposite pole is the change of the newly-crowned Arthur. Williams notes, in his Commonplace Book, Swinburne's attention to Arthur's unconscious sin of incest with his sister as the cause, eventually, of 'all the disasters and the tragedy of the Table.'[29] In his poetry, Williams alters this. The incest, and apparently many other disorders, including the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere, follow from a more conscious choice of Arthur's. Arthur seems to entertain the question 'the king for the kingdom, or the kingdom for the king?', and to choose the latter. It is an improper response to what is presented to him – the kingdom, his office as king, Guinevere (and the Grail, associated heraldically with her). It is a radical act of improper self-exaltation.

Williams says of the earlier poetry, but it seems to hold true here, that 'The knights are capacities of man and modes of being (but also knights).'[30] Thus, Arthur and his knights together symbolise man. Arthur's choice can be seen as the misdirection of the mind or will within anyone which allows his passions (Lancelot) to run wild, corrupting their proper action.

Williams also connects Arthur's choice with the Dolorous Blow. In the Commonplace Book, he asks if the Blow means 'personality guarding itself in its own selfhood, instead of yielding itself completely up? – as Balin used the lance for his own

welfare.'[31] In developing this, another sort of universal symbolism is introduced, for Williams makes the Blow a symbol of the Fall of Man. King Pelles is not only wounded by the Blow, he is divided, becoming Pelles and Arthur. This is explicit in Williams's earlier poetry, and seems to inform the later.[32] It does not appear to be worked out satisfactorily.

Here the difficulties and tensions of 'symbolic reading' are heightened. Complications arise as to the relationship between the characters and their actions as symbols of Man and the Fall of Man, and those characters as fallen human beings in a fictionalised mediaeval Christian Europe. (Similar complications affect the Empire itself.)

Fortunately, no difficulties about their interrelations prevent our enjoying the various levels and dimensions of the poetry. One outstanding feature is its realism, its perceptiveness about what life is like in all its complexity. The 'new Camelot' which follows the Apocalyptic ending of war in 'Mount Badon' is no perfect kingdom, free from dangers and practical problems. Nor does Arthur's momentous selfish choice totally deprave the realm, or prevent the building of a relatively good society. 'Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins' brilliantly displays this realism. Coinage is useful, indeed 'a good thought'. It is also a practical necessity to a certain level of social organisation, and so, a practical inevitability. But what are its dangers? How may the new economy function, and more importantly, how is it likely to? 'What can be saved without order? and how order?' Even a very good social order, practically free from injustice, poverty, and war, would still leave room for basic questions. Is this all there is? Is material well-being for a lifetime the best and highest possibility?

The poetry forcibly and persuasively suggests that philosophical questioning is not alone in raising the possibility that there is more. There is experience.

> Though Camelot is built, [. . .]
> everywhere the light through the great leaves is blown

> on your substantial flesh, and everywhere your glory
> frames.[33]

Williams's blurb for *Taliessin through Logres* says 'The names and incidents of the Arthurian myth are taken as starting points for investigation and statement on common and profound experience.'[34]

Questioning and experience point to the centrality of the Grail and the Grail Quest in Williams's retelling. His second published essay (1923) includes this praise: 'Tennyson, in the Round Table of the *Idylls*, really did get nearer to describing a Republic, even *the* Republic, in working order than ever did his predecessor or contemporary.'[35] But his first published essay (1920) makes this criticism:

> He 'made a realm and reigned.' If it is objected that the whole of this realm, with its culmination in the chivalry of the Table, is to represent man, and that Arthur is to stand for that inmost soul which does not falter in its loyalty to God, whatever the sense may do, then we have a right to demand that something more should have been made of the Graal episode. The Graal is obviously communion with God; and if Arthur, as the faithful soul, had any business it was exactly with that quest which Tennyson's Arthur so definitely refuses.[36]

Williams set himself to show the proper relation of '*the* Republic' and the Grail. As suggested above, there is no radical opposition in the poetry between earthly and heavenly. Instead, the universe, and especially human society, reflect in their interrelatedness the co-inherent 'community' of the Persons of the Trinity. More, the Triune Creator is involved in and attentive to all there is, every time, place, action:

> all measures, to infinite strength, [. . .]
> fill the jewel-joint-justiced throne; [. . .]
> every joint a centre,
> and every centre a jewel.
> Each moment there is the midmost.

So teaches 'Taliessin in the School of the Poets', at the end of which Taliessin sighs, '*Sis salvator, Domine*' – 'Be a saviour, Lord'. What is believed, must be actualised. We must co-operate in the setting of our loves in order, in our perfection into beings who can freely, unselfishly love. The Grail, as the Cup at the Last Supper, which caught Christ's blood as He hung on the cross, reveals God's self-giving love, in making free creatures, and in becoming further united to them, and vulnerable to them, in the Incarnation, while working to bring them to their proper end. That end is characterised by joyful participation in a community of love which includes both creatures and Creator.

The poetry shows different ways to the same end, such as, involvement in society, and monastic seclusion; marriage, and celibacy. Such ways are distinguished, yet not radically opposed, or independent of each other. Thus, Williams quotes Galahad's last words in Malory (XVII, 22):

> 'Fair lord, salute me to my lord Sir Lancelot my father,
> and bid him remember of this unstable world.'
> The grand Rejection sang to the grand Affirmation;
> itself affirming, itself honouring, its peer:
> 'Salute me, salute me, to my lord Sir Lancelot my
> father.'[37]

Galahad, whose way is seen as turning from God's images to God, both affirms the 'falsely true'[38] lover from whom he derives, and bids him set his love in order.

Elsewhere, Williams writes that the 'intended material salvation' of the Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat

> had, inevitably, one temporal limitation, it could not redeem the past. That co-inherence would not reach the millions who had died in their misery; the Republic of the future was to be raised on their bones. That could not be helped. But the City of Christendom had declared that all must be capable of inclusion – unless indeed they deliberately preferred a perpetual exile.[39]

This, too, is a theme of the poetry, from 'The Vision of the Empire' through 'Taliessin on the Death of Virgil' to 'Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass' and 'The Prayers of the Pope'.

'Life' wrote Williams, in an essay on the Cross, '(experience suggests) is a good thing, and somehow unendurable; at least the Christian faith has denied neither side of the paradox.'[40] The unendurable is not denied or ignored in the poetry. But joy and reconciliation are strongly imagined, and aspired towards. The desire for everything to be reconciled and unified can appear too strong, with Williams in danger of confounding good and evil, or seeming to say, evil is good. And, indeed, though Williams can describe himself as 'an orthodox Christian'[41] and one who always keeps his 'doctrine homogenous and consistent',[42] there is much in his works and life which does not appear easy to square with such a description.[43] But at best, the Arthurian poetry is characterised by something named in the closing lines of 'The Prayers of the Pope', the last of the poems he published: 'a live hope'.

FOR
HUMPHREY MILFORD
UNDER WHOM WE OBSERVED
AN APPEARANCE OF
BYZANTIUM.

Unde est, quod non operatio propria propter essentiam, sed haec propter illam habet ut sit.

De Monarchia, I, iii.

[The proper operation (working or function) is not in existence for the sake of the being, but the being for the sake of the operation. (Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* (Faber, 1943), p. 40)]

Prelude

I

Recalcitrant tribes heard;
orthodox wisdom sprang in Caucasia and Thule;
the glory of the Emperor stretched to the ends of the world.

In the season of midmost Sophia
the word of the Emperor established a kingdom in Britain;
they sang in Sophia the immaculate conception of wisdom.

Carbonek, Camelot, Caucasia,
were gates and containers, intermediations of light;
geography breathing geometry, the double-fledged Logos.

II

The blind rulers of Logres
nourished the land on a fallacy of rational virtue;
the seals of the saints were broken; the chairs of the Table reeled.

Galahad quickened in the Mercy;
but history began; the Moslem stormed Byzantium;
lost was the glory, lost the power and kingdom.

Call on the hills to hide us
lest, men said in the City, the lord of charity
ride in the starlight, sole flash of the Emperor's glory.

III

Evil and good were twins
once in the alleys of Ispahan; the Moslem
crying *Alla il Alla* destroyed the dualism of Persia.

Caucasia fell to the Moslem;
the mamelukes seized the ancient cornland of Empire.
Union is breached; the imams stand in Sophia.

Good is God, the muezzin
calls, but lost is the light on the hills of Caucasia,
glory of the Emperor, glory of substantial being.

The Vision of the Empire

α

The organic body sang together;
dialects of the world sprang in Byzantium;
back they rang to sing in Byzantium;
the streets repeat the sound of the Throne.

The Acts issue from the Throne.
Under it, translating the Greek minuscula
to minds of the tribes, the identities of creation
phenomenally abating to kinds and kindreds,
the household inscribes the Acts of the Emperor;
the logothetes run down the porphyry stair
bearing the missives through the area of empire.

Taliessin walked through the hither angels,
from the exposition of grace to the place of images.
The morn brightened on the Golden Horn;
he heard behind him the chariots' clatter
that bore a new matter to all the dialects;
he saw the nuntii loosened on the currents
over the sea, in the mechanism of motion,
rowers' arms jointed to the imperial oars.
Chariots and galleys sprang from the shores;
the messengers were borne over sea and land.
The king's poet gazed in the mirror of the Horn.

β

The morn rose on the Golden Horn.
I saw the identities imaged in a sapphire sea:
beyond Sinai Ararat, beyond Ararat Elburz –
light-sprinkling, flaked-snow-sparkling,
chastities of ranged peaks of Caucasus,
snow's glow on the world's brows

changed with deep vales of verdure.
The missives of identity came from the scribes
where the tribes gather and keep holiday
on the name-day and birthday of their father the Emperor.
The Empire's sun shone on each round mound,
double fortalices defending dales of fertility.
The bright blades shone in the craft of the dancing war;
the stripped maids laughed for the joy of the province,
bearing in themselves the shape of the province
founded in the base of space,
in the rounded bottom of the Emperor's glory.
Spines were strengthened, loves settled;
tossed through aerial gulfs of empire
the lost name, the fool's shame,
fame and frame of lovers in lowlands of Caucasia,
rang round snowy Elburz.
The organic body sang together.

γ

Elburz rose in the Golden Horn.
South from the sea-bone, Thule, the skull-stone,
herbage of lone rock,
the scheme of Logres, the theme of the design of the Empire,
rose in balance and weight, freight of government with glory.
Merlin, time's metre, climbs through prisms and lines;
over near Camelot and far Carbonek,
over the Perilous Sell, the See of union,
the phosphor of Percivale's philosophical star shines.
Lancelot's lion, bewildered by the smell of adoration,
roars round Guinevere's lordly body.
Merlin defines, in blazons of the brain,
shield upon shield, station upon station;
and the roads resound with the galloping lords.
The swords flash; the pirates fly;
the Table stands rigid in the king's hall,
and over their seats the plotted arms of the soul,
which are their feats and the whole history of Logres.
Down the imperial highroad the white nuntius rides
to heighten the hearts of Lateran, Gaul, and Logres.

δ

The milk rises in the breasts of Gaul,
trigonometrical milk of doctrine.
Man sucks it; his joints harden,
sucking logic, learning, law,
drawing on the breasts of *intelligo* and *credo*.
I, Taliessin, born of the Druids by the sea,
drank also in the schools of Gaul;
I have drunk at the tables of all the doctors;
I have modulated song to the waters of Logres,
the running of Thames, the tidal basins.
I heard the iron chariots on the roads of Gaul,
but the fleets took me, distances of the sea;
the dialect of Logres was an aspect of Byzantium;
the grand art was taught in the heart of the harbours of Arthur.

ε

The mist rolled down the edge of an old sun;
mammoth and bear prowled on the broad ledge of the
shoulders.
Strength articulated itself in morals
of arms, joints, wrists, hands;
the planes of palms, the mid-points of hid cones,
opened in Lombardy, the cone's point in Rome,
seminal of knowledge, pontifex of the Arval college
of spiralling instincts, all roads (active and passive) from Rome,
to be bridge-builders in Gaul, clerks of audience in Byzantium.
Finger-nails, weaklings of seedtime, scratched the soil
till by iron nails the toil was finished in the time of our need,
the sublime circle of the cone's bottom, the seed-springing
surrender:
hands of incantation changed to hands of adoration,
the quintuple psalm, the pointing of Lateran:
active and passive in a single mystery,
a single sudden flash of identity,
the heart-breaking manual acts of the Pope.

ζ

Why moves the Pope in the marches of the Empire?
why do the golden palaces pale to the Papal
vesture, flesh and bone of reparation?
what was the crossing of the will of the Emperor?

η

The Adam in the hollow of Jerusalem respired:
softly their thought twined to its end,
crying: *O parent, O forkèd friend,*
am I not too long meanly retired
in the poor space of joy's single dimension?
Does not God vision the principles at war?
Let us grow to the height of God and the Emperor:
Let us gaze, son of man, on the Acts in contention.

The Adam climbed the tree; the boughs
rustled, withered, behind them; they saw
the secluded vision of battle in the law;
they found the terror in the Emperor's house.

The tree around them died undying,
the good lusted against the good,
the Acts in conflict envenomed the blood,
on the twisted tree hung their body wrying.

Joints cramped; a double entity
spewed and struggled, good against good;
they saw the mind of the Emperor as they could,
his imagination of the wars of identity.

He walked slowly through his habitation
in the night of himself without him; Byzantium slept;
a white pulsing shape behind him crept,
the ejection to the creature of the creature's rejection of
salvation.

Conception without control had the Adam of the error;
stifled over their head, the tree's bright beam
lost in the sides of the pit its aerial stream;
they had their will; they saw; they were torn in the terror.

θ

Elburz sinks through the Golden Horn:
the feet of creation walk backward through the waters.

The single galley hardly moves,
the stiffening mechanic of arms and oars fails;
patched with undyed canvas the purple sails
drag at the flagging hands of man;
the sea's unaccumulated distance drags at the sailor's hearts.

The sea-borne Asian mine,
stuff of Caucasia fashioned in Byzantium,
earth's gold sprinkled over the sea
and plated round the poop of the visionary spirit,
shines no longer nor lustily gleams.

On the brazen deck blasts of hot ashes
fall from unseen volcanoes; harsh birds,
stabbing at sea-broods, grating their mating calls,
cover it; down their flight gusts drove once the galley.

Phosphorescent on the stagnant level
a headless figure walks in a crimson cope,
volcanic dust blown under the moon.
A brainless form, as of the Emperor,
walks, indecent hands hidden under the cope,
dishallowing in that crimson the flush on the mounds of
Caucasia.

His guard heaves round him; heaven-sweeping tentacles
stretch, dragging octopus bodies over the level;
his cope by two is lifted from his body,
where it walks on the sinking floor of antipodean Byzantium.
Let us gaze, son of man, on the Acts in contention.

Phosphorescent gleams the point of the penis:
rudiments or relics, disappearing, appearing,
live in the forlorn focus of the intellect,
eyes and ears, the turmoil of the mind of sensation.

Inarticulate always on an inarticulate sea
beyond P'o-lu the headless Emperor moves,
the octopuses round him; lost are the Roman hands;
lost are the substantial instruments of being.

ι

The organic body sang together;
the Acts of identity adored their Lord;
the song sprang and rang in Byzantium.

O you shoulders, elbows, wrists,
bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever;
you fittings of thumbs and fingers,
bless ye the Lord;
sockets and balls in knees and ankles,
bless ye the Lord;
hips, thighs, spine in its multiples,
bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever;
bless him in Caucasia, bless him in Lateran,
bless him in the blazons of London-in-Logres,
if there be worlds of language beyond Logres,
bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever;
if there be wit in the rolling mass of waters,
if any regimen in marshes beyond P'o-lu,
if any measurement among the headless places,
bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever.

The Calling of Arthur

Arthur was young; Merlin met him on the road.
  Wolfish, the wizard stared, coming from the wild,
  black with hair, bleak with hunger, defiled
from a bed in the dung of cattle, inhuman his eyes.

Bold stood Arthur; the snow beat; Merlin spoke:
  Now am I Camelot; now am I to be builded.
  King Cradlemas sits by Thames; a mask o'ergilded
covers his wrinkled face, all but one eye.

Cold and small he settles his rump in the cushions.
  Through the emerald of Nero one short-sighted eye
  peers at the pedlars of wealth that stand plausibly by.
The bleak mask is gilded with a maiden's motionless smile.

The high aged voice squeals with callous comfort.
  He sits on the bank of Thames, a sea-snail's shell
  fragile, fragilely carved, cast out by the swell
on to the mud; his spirit withers and dies.

He withers; he peers at the tide; he squeals.
  He warms himself by the fire and eats his food
  through a maiden's motionless mouth; in his mood
he polishes his emerald, misty with tears for the poor.

The waste of snow covers the waste of thorn;
  on the waste of hovels snow falls from a dreary sky;
  mallet and scythe are silent; the children die.
King Cradlemas fears that the winter is hard for the poor.

Draw now the tide, spring moon, swing now the depth;
  under the snow that falls over brick and prickle,
  the people ebb; draw up the hammer and sickle.
The banner of Bors is abroad; where is the king?

Bors is up; his wife Elayne behind him
  mends the farms, gets food from Gaul; the south
  is up with hammer and sickle, and holds Thames mouth.
Lancelot hastens, coming with wagons and ships.

The sea-snail lies by Thames; O wave of Pendragon,
  roll it, swallow it; pull the mask o'ergilded
  from the one-eyed face that blinks at the comfort builded
in London's ruins; I am Camelot; Arthur, raise me.

Arthur ran; the people marched; in the snow
  King Cradlemas died in his litter; a screaming few
  fled; Merlin came; Camelot grew.
In Logres the king's friend landed, Lancelot of Gaul.

Mount Badon

The king's poet was his captain of horse in the wars.
He rode over the ridge; his force
sat hidden behind, as the king's mind had bidden.
The plain below held the Dragon in the centre,
Lancelot on the left, on the right Gawaine,
Bors in the rear commanding the small reserve:
the sea's indiscriminate host roared at the City's wall.
As with his household few Taliessin rode over the ridge,
the trumpets blew, the lines engaged.

Staring, motionless, he sat;
who of the pirates saw? none stopped;
they cropped and lopped Logres; they struck deep,
and their luck held; only support lacked:
neither for charge nor for ruse could the allied crews
abide the civilised single command;
each captain led his own band and each captain unbacked;
but numbers crashed; Taliessin saw Gawaine
fail, recover, and fail again;
he saw the Dragon sway; far away
the household of Lancelot was wholly lost in the fray;
he saw Bors fling
company after company to the aid of the king,
till the last waited the word alone.

Staring, motionless, he sat.
Dimly behind him he heard how his staff stirred.
One said: "He dreams or makes verse"; one: "Fool,
all lies in a passion of patience – my lord's rule."
In a passion of patience he waited the expected second.
Suddenly the noise abated, the fight vanished, the last
few belated shouts died in a new quiet.
In the silence of a distance, clear to the king's poet's sight,
Virgil was standing on a trellised path by the sea.
Taliessin saw him negligently leaning; he felt

the deep breath dragging the depth of all dimension,
as the Roman sought for the word, sought for his thought,
sought for the invention of the City by the phrase.
He saw Virgil's unseeing eyes; his own,
in that passion of all activity but one suspended,
leaned on those screened ports of blind courage.
Barbaric centuries away, the ghostly battle contended.

Civilised centuries away, the Roman moved.
Taliessin saw the flash of his style
dash at the wax; he saw the hexameter spring
and the king's sword swing; he saw, in the long field,
the point where the pirate chaos might suddenly yield,
the place for the law of grace to strike.
He stood in his stirrups; he stretched his hand;
he fetched the pen of his spear from its bearer;
his staff behind signed to their men.

The Æneid's beaked lines swooped on Actium;
the stooped horse charged; backward blown,
the flame of song streaked the spread spears
and the strung faces of words on a strong tongue.
The household of Taliessin swung on the battle;
hierarchs of freedom, golden candles of the solstice
that flared round the golden-girdled Logos, snowy-haired,
brazen-footed, starry-handed, the thigh banded with the Name.

The trumpets of the City blared through the feet of brass;
the candles flared among the pirates; their mass broke;
Bors flung his company forward; the horse and the reserve
caught the sea's host in a double curve;
the paps of the day were golden-girdled;
hair, bleached white by the mere stress of the glory,
drew the battle through the air up threads of light.
The tor of Badon heard the analytical word;
the grand art mastered the thudding hammer of Thor,
and the heart of our lord Taliessin determined the war.

The lord Taliessin kneeled to the king;
the candles of new Camelot shone through the fought field.

The Crowning of Arthur

The king stood crowned; around in the gate,
midnight striking, torches and fires
massing the colour, casting the metal,
furnace of jubilee, through time and town,
Logres heraldically flaunted the king's state.

The lords sheathed their swords; they camped
by Camelot's wall; thick-tossed torches,
tall candles flared, opened, deployed;
between them rose the beasts of the banners;
flaring over all the king's dragon ramped.

Wars were at end; the king's friend stood
at the king's side; Lancelot's lion
had roared in the pattern the king's mind cherished,
in charges completing the strategy of Arthur;
the king's brain working in Lancelot's blood.

Presaging intelligence of time climbed,
Merlin climbed, through the dome of Stephen,
over chimneys and churches; from the point of Camelot
he looked through the depth to the dome of Sophia;
the kingdom and the power and the glory chimed.

He turned where the fires, amid burning mail,
poured, tributaried by torches and candles,
to a point in a massive of colour, one
aureole flame; the first shield's deep azure,
sidereally pointed, the lord Percivale.

Driving back that azure a sea rose black;
on a fess of argent rode a red moon.
The Queen Morgause leaned from a casement;
her forehead's moon swallowed the fires,
it was crimson on the bright-banded sable of Lamorack.

The tincture changed; ranged the craft
of the king's new champion in a crimson field;
mockery in mockery, a dolphin naiant;
a silver fish under bloody waters,
conquered or conquering, Dinadan laughed.

A pelican in golden piety struck well
the triple bloody drops from its wound;
in strong nurture of instinct, it smote
for its young its breast; the shield of Bors
bore its rich fervours, to itself most fell.

Shouldering shapes through the skies rise and run,
through town and time; Merlin beheld
the beasts of Broceliande, the fish of Nimue,
hierarchic, republican, the glory of Logres,
patterns of the Logos in the depth of the sun.

Taliessin in the crowd beheld the compelled brutes,
wildness formalized, images of mathematics,
star and moon, dolphin and pelican,
lion and leopard, changing their measure.
Over the mob's noise rose gushing the sound of the flutes.

Gawaine's thistle, Bedivere's rose, drew near:
flutes infiltrating the light of candles.
Through the magical sound of the fire-strewn air,
spirit, burning to sweetness of body,
exposed in the midst of its bloom the young queen Guinevere.

Lancelot moved to descend; the king's friend kneeled,
the king's organic motion, the king's mind's blood,
the lion in the blood roaring through the mouth of creation
as the lions roar that stand in the Byzantine glory.
Guinevere's chalice flew red on an argent field.

So, in Lancelot's hand, she came through the glow,
into the king's mind, who stood to look on his city:
the king made for the kingdom, or the kingdom made for the
king?

Thwart drove his current against the current of Merlin:
in beleaguered Sophia they sang of the dolorous blow.

Doom in shocks sprinkled the burning gloom,
molten metals and kindling colours pouring
into the pyre; at the zenith lion and dragon
rose, clawed, twisted, screamed;
Taliessin beheld a god lie in his tomb.

At the door of the gloom sparks die and revive;
the spark of Logres fades, glows, fades.
It is the first watch; the Pope says Matins in Lateran;
the hollow call is beaten on the board in Sophia;
the ledge of souls shudders, whether they die or live.

Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins

I came in; I saw you stand,
in your hand the bread of love, in your head lightness of law.
The uprightness of the multitude stood in your figure;
my fieldsmen ate and your women served,
while you watched them from the high seat.
When you saw me a southern burst of love
tossed a new smile from your eyes to your mouth,
shaping for that wind's while the corn of your face.
It was said once that your hair was the colour of corn;
he who said so was capable only to adorn
the margin of parchments drawn in schools of Gaul;
their doctrine is your hands' main. I am come again
to live from the founts and fields of your hands;
colour is art, but my heart counts the doctrine.

On the forms of ancient saints, my heroes, your thumbs,
as on a winch the power of man is wound
to the last inch; there ground is prepared
for the eared and seeded harvest of propinquant goodwill,
drained the reeded marches, cleared the branched jungles
where the unthumbed shapes of apes swung and hung.
Now when the thumbs are muscled with the power of goodwill
corn comes to the mill and the flour to the house,
bread of love for your women and my men;
at the turn of the day, and none only to earn;
in the day of the turn, and none only to pay;
for the hall is raised to the power of exchange of all
by the small spread organisms of your hands; O Fair,
there are the altars of Christ the City extended.
I have ridden all night from organization in London,
ration and rule, and the fault in ration and rule,
law and the flaw in law, to reach to you,
the sole figure of the organic salvation of our good.

The king has set up his mint by Thames.
He has struck coins; his dragon's loins

germinate a crowded creaturely brood
to scuttle and scurry between towns and towns,
to furnish dishes and flagons with change of food;
small crowns, small dragons, hurry to the markets
under the king's smile, or flat in houses squat.
The long file of their snouts crosses the empire,
and the other themes acknowledge our king's head.
They carry on their backs little packs of value,
caravans; but I dreamed the head of a dead king
was carried on all, that they teemed on house-roofs
where men stared and studied them as I your thumbs' epigrams,
hearing the City say *Feed my lambs*
to you and the king; the king can tame dragons to carriers,
but I came through the night, and saw the dragonlets' eyes
leer and peer, and the house-roofs under their weight
creak and break; shadows of great forms
halloed them on, and followed over falling towns.
I saw that this was the true end of our making;
mother of children, redeem the new law.

They laid the coins before the council.
Kay, the king's steward, wise in economics, said:
'Good; these cover the years and the miles
and talk one style's dialects to London and Omsk.
Traffic can hold now and treasure be held,
streams are bridged and mountains of ridged space
tunnelled; gold dances deftly across frontiers.
The poor have choice of purchase, the rich of rents,
and events move now in a smoother control
than the swords of lords or the orisons of nuns.
Money is the medium of exchange.'

Taliessin's look darkened; his hand shook
while he touched the dragons; he said 'We had a good thought.
Sir, if you made verse you would doubt symbols.
I am afraid of the little loosed dragons.
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.

We have taught our images to be free; are we glad?
are we glad to have brought convenient heresy to Logres?'

The Archbishop answered the lords;
his words went up through a slope of calm air:
'Might may take symbols and folly make treasure,
and greed bid God, who hides himself for man's pleasure
by occasion, hide himself essentially: this abides –
that the everlasting house the soul discovers
is always another's; we must lose our own ends;
we must always live in the habitation of our lovers,
my friend's shelter for me, mine for him.
This is the way of this world in the day of that other's;
make yourselves friends by means of the riches of iniquity,
for the wealth of the self is the health of the self exchanged.
What saith Heracleitus? – and what is the City's breath? –
dying each other's life, living each other's death.
Money is a medium of exchange.'

I have come now to kiss each magnanimous thumb,
muscles of the brain, functions of the City.
I was afraid the Council had turned you into gold,
as was told of Midas who had ass's ears.
What can be saved without order? and how order?
Compact is becoming contract; man only earns, and pays,
the house outside the City burns but the house within is
enslaved.
What without coinage or with coinage can be saved?
O lady, your hand held the bread
and Christ the City spread in the extensor muscles of your
thumbs.

Say – can the law live?
can the dead king's head live?
Pray, mother of children, pray for the coins,
pray for Camelot, pray for the king, pray.

The Star of Percivale

By the magical western door in the king's hall
the Lord Percivale harped; he added no voice;
between string and string, all accumulated distance of sound,
a star rode by, through the round window, in the sky of
Camelot.

Taliessin stood in the court; he played
a borrowed harp; his voice defined the music.
Languid, the soul of a maid, at service in the hall,
heard, rose, ran fleetly to fall at his feet.

Soft there, quiescent in adoration, it sang:
Lord, art thou he that cometh? take me for thine.
The music rang; the king's poet leaned to cry:
See thou do it not; I too am a man.

The king's poet leaned, catching the outspread hands:
More than the voice is the vision, the kingdom than the king:
the cords of their arms were bands of glory; the harp
sang her to her feet; sharply, sweetly, she rose.

The soul of a serving-maid stood by the king's gate,
her face flushed with the mere speed of adoration.
The Archbishop stayed, coming through the morning to the
Mass,
Hast thou seen so soon, bright lass, the light of Christ's glory?

She answered: *The light of another, if aught, I bear,*
as he the song of another; he said: I obey.
And Dubric: *Also thy joy I wear; shall we fail*
from Percivale's world's orbit, we there once hurled?

The sun rose, bringing cloud;
the day-star vanished; the king's household in the court
waited; their voices were loud; they talked of their fights
till the altar centred between lights; the lords entered.

The nuntius of Byzantium there, the Emperor's logothete,
angelic, white chlamys crimson-girdled, saw in a vision
a new direct earth of sweet joy given
and its fusion with a new heaven, indirect joy of substitution.

The household kneeled; the Lord Balin the Savage moved
restless, through-thrust with a causeless vigil of anger;
the king in the elevation beheld and loved himself crowned;
Lancelot's gaze at the Host found only a ghost of the Queen.

The Death of Palomides

Air strives with wings, wings with air.
In the space of the glory the stresses of power contend;
through the kingdom my heart's revolutions ascribe to the
power
quicken the backward wings of passages and paths.

Once, when the Prophet's shout had taken Cordova,
north I rode through a moon of Spanish winter,
and lay for a night in a lodging of ancient Israel,
twins of Levi, under the height of Monsalvat.

Sea-grey was one and sea-wrinkled,
one burned sun-black, with clawed hands;
guttural, across the charcoal fire, their chant
dropped into pauses, poured into channelled names.

The first mathematics of Ispahan trembled
before the intoned formulæ; their smiles cast
totals from a myriad intricate calculations,
while the screams of eagles in conflict shook the Sierras.

I sat and heard, aloof in my young seed-mail,
scornful of my secret attention; the hut shook,
the air span, with titles of cherubim and seraphim;
the voices rose into clearness; they pronounced *Netzach*.

Sharply I shouted into the sound: *Netzach?*
What is Netzach? Together and deeply they answered:
Netzach is the name of the Victory in the Blessing:
For the Lord created all things by means of his Blessing.

One now, sea-grey and wave-wrinkled,
calls through all my body to the sun-blackened:
The Lord created all things by means of his Blessing,
and they float upwards; the paths open between.

Once the paths were interminable; paths were stations.
Unangelical speed loitered upon them,
supposing the everlasting habitations had received it;
only the dolphin Dinadan swam and smiled.

Then Iseult was living; then was the tournament;
then I longed, feared, fought, was angry.
Now if still I fight, fear, am angry,
I know those terminable paths are only paths.

Loneliest of lords, Dinadan smiled; I feared.
Now no sound is near but aerial screams,
no soft voices, nothing except the harsh
scream of the eagle approaching the plateau of Netzach:

its scream and its passage approaching its primal station
backwards; about me a scintillation of points,
points of the eagle's plumes, plumes that are paths;
paths and plumes swoop to the unbelieved symbol.

I left the Prophet; I lost Iseult; I failed
to catch the beast out of Broceliande;
Lancelot forgave me; if I was christened in that pardon
it was half because I was a greater fool so.

I have gone back, down the road of Logres, the arm
of Iseult, the pass of Monsalvat, into the hut;
I sit with the old men, as they were; we sing:
The Lord created all things by means of his Blessing.

I utter the formula; the formula is all that lives:
sharply the Prophet, Iseult, Lancelot, Dinadan,
call to me this at my dying, and I to them:
The Lord created all things by means of his Blessing.

If this is the kingdom, the power, the glory, my heart
formally offers the kingdom, endures the power,
joins to itself the aerial scream of the eagle . . .
That Thou only canst be Thou only art.

Percivale at Carbonek

In the rent saffron sun hovered the Grail.
Galahad stood in the arch of Carbonek;
the people of Pelles ran to meet him.
  His eyes were sad; he sighed for Lancelot's pardon.

Joy remembered joylessness; joy kneeled
under the arch where Lancelot ran in frenzy.
The astonished angels of the spirit heard him moan:
  Pardon, lord; pardon and bless me, father.

Doubtfully stood the celestial myrmidons, scions
of unremitted beauty; bright feet paused.
Aching with the fibrous infelicity of time,
  pierced his implacability, Galahad kneeled.

The passage through Carbonek was short to the house of the
      Grail;
the wounded king waited for health; motionless
the subdued glory implored the kingdom
  to pardon its power and the double misery of Logres.

Under the arch the Merciful Child
wept for the grief of his father in reconciliation;
who was betrayed there by Merlin and Brisen
  to truth; he saw not; he was false to Guinevere.

Between the Infant and Bors and myself on each hand
under the arch I heard the padding of paws,
woven between us, the faint howl of the wolf.
  The High Prince shivered in the cold of bleak conjunction.

His hand shook; pale were his cheeks;
his head the head of a skull, flesh
cleaving to bone; his dry voice rattled;
  'Pardon, Lord Lancelot; pardon and blessing, father.'

He knelt silent among the circles of the wolf.
Until the lover of Guinevere acknowledged his son
a bitter frost crept in the bones of Galahad.
  The Host in the Lateran lay in a hid sepulchre.

Stiffly the Child's head turned; the drawn engine
slewed to his left, to Bors the kin of Lancelot.
He said: 'Cousin, can you bear pardon
  to the house of Carbonek from the fallen house of Camelot?'

Bors answered: 'What should we forgive?'
'Forgive Us,' the High Prince said, 'for Our existence;
forgive the means of grace and the hope of glory.
  In the name of Our father forgive Our mother for Our birth.'

'Sir,' Bors said, 'only God forgives.
My lord Sir Lancelot my cousin is a lover and kind.
I assent to all, as I pray that my children assent
  and through God join with me in bidding their birth.'

The Infant said: 'Go, cousin.' Bors
stepped from the arch; the angelic household met him.
The High Prince stepped in his footprints; into the sun
  Galahad followed Bors; Carbonek was entered.

NOTE

These references are not intended to help the poems as poems. All that comes from Malory is, I think, familiar, but though he provided many hints in his images he does not seem to trouble to work out the possibilities of relation. I have summarized a few as they are used here, and made what other acknowledgements are due.*

Title.] This was not taken from Tennyson, but it was confirmed later by a line in *The Holy Grail*:

> Taliessin is our fullest throat of song.

p. 23.] The images in the third and fourth stanzas are those used of a particular state of being in *Comus*, the *Nightingale Ode*, the *Prelude*, and the *Divine Comedy*.

pp. 31 et seq.] Bors was the nephew of Lancelot, and the companion of Galahad and Percivale. He had two children by Elayne, the daughter of King Brangoris, 'and sauf for her syre Bors was a clene mayden'.

pp. 35 et seq.] Lamorack was the brother of Percivale and Blanchefleur. He was the lover of the queen Morgause of Orkney, Arthur's sister. The two were killed by her sons, Gawaine and Agravaine, for the honour of the house of Orkney.

pp. 51–52.] After the dolorous blow struck against King Pelles in Carbonek by Balin the Savage, Balin and Balan his brother killed each other unknowingly, and Arthur unknowingly committed incest with his sister Morgause, who became by him the mother of Mordred.

p. 55.] The quotation from Heracleitus was taken from Mr Yeat's book, *A Vision*.

* The original page-references in Charles Williams's 'Note' have been altered to indicate the correct places in the poems as reset for this edition.

p. 65.] 'the feeling intellect' is from the *Prelude*, Book 14.

p. 75.] Galahad came to Caerleon after Palomides had been christened on the Feast of Pentecost. 'In the honour of the hyghness of Galahad he was ledde in to kinge Arthurs chamber and there rested in his own bedde' – *Morte d'Arthur*, Book XIII. The image of the stone and shell is from the *Prelude*, Book 5.

p. 80.] The variation of the Merlin tale is due to Swinburne (but this Merlin is young): *Tristram of Lyonesse*, Books 1 and 6.

p. 82.] Netzach is a station on the Sephirotic Tree; its quality is Victory.

p. 88.] Blanchefleur died from a letting of blood to heal a sick lady; her body was taken by the three lords of the quest, and buried 'in the spyrytual place'.

p. 90.] 'the unseen knight' was Garlon, the brother of King Pelles. It was through the quarrel with him that Balin the Savage came to strike the dolorous blow at Pelles 'with the same spere that Longeus smote oure lord to the hearte', so that 'he myght never be hole tyl Galahad the haute prince heled him in the quest of the Sangraille.'

PREFACE

These poems are part of a series of poems which began with *Taliessin through Logres*,[1] but these, generally, are incidental to the main theme.

That theme is what was anciently called the Matter of Britain; that is, the reign of King Arthur in Logres and the Achievement of the Grail. Logres is Britain regarded as a province of the Empire with its centre at Byzantium. The time historically is after the conversion of the Empire to Christianity but during the expectation of the Return of Our Lord (the Parousia). The Emperor of the poem, however, is to be regarded rather as operative Providence. On the south-western side of Logres lies the region of Broceliande, in which is Carbonek where the Grail and other Hallows are in the keeping of King Pelles and his daughter Helayne. Beyond the seas of Broceliande is the holy state of Sarras. In the antipodean seas is the opposite and infernal state of P'o-l'u.

Nothing more is, I think, necessary to these poems. But in general the argument of the series is the expectation of the return of Our Lord by means of the Grail and of the establishment of the kingdom of Logres (or Britain) to this end by the powers of the Empire and Broceliande. Logres, however, was distracted by its own sins, and the wounding of King Pelles (the Keeper of the Hallows) by the Lord Balin the Savage was the Dolorous Blow which prevented the union of Carbonek and Logres and therefore the coming of the Grail. There followed, by a heavenly substitution, the begetting of Galahad by Lancelot on the Princess Helayne in an enchantment. Galahad is brought up in a Convent of White Nuns under the

1 Oxford University Press, 1938.

care of Dindrane, Percivale's sister. Afterwards he goes to the court of Arthur and then departs, together with Percivale and Bors, for Carbonek and Sarras where he finally achieves the Grail. Meanwhile wars break out between Arthur and Lancelot through which, and through the treachery of Mordred the King's bastard son, Logres is overthrown and afterwards becomes the historical Britain, in which the myth of its origin remains.

1944 C. W.

Prelude

Irony was the Fortune of Athens; Rome came
to pluck the Fortune of Athens, and stand embattled
as in arms, so in mind against evil luck.
A few wise masters devised for the heart
a road from the universe into dematerialized spirit,
but most prattled cunning preventive doctrine;
till on a day from a hill in the middle of Athens
where men adored Irony the unknown lord,
Paul sent over Athens and Rome his call:
'Whom ye ignorantly worship, him I declare.'

The crooked smiles of the Greeks
fled from their faces while thorned-in-the-flesh the Apostle
against their defensive inflections of verb and voice,
their accents of presaged frustration, their sterile protections,
named in its twyfold Nature the golden Ambiguity.
Then for the creature he invented the vocabulary of faith;
he defined in speech the physiological glory
and began to teach the terms of the work of glory.
The young Church breakfasted on glory; handfasted,
her elect functioned in the light. But the ancient intellect
heard, delaying and playing with its archives, and demurred
that pain was easy, and completeness of belief costly,
and flesh too queasy to bear the main of spirit.
The converted doctors turned to their former confessions,
the limitary heresiarchs feared the indiscretions of matter,
and the careful Nestorius, coming to befriend peace,
preached in Byzantium. Before the sermon was at end
the metaphysicians, sitting to note him, heard
from the City the roar of burning and bundled torches
rise through the fixed stars: *Theotokos*, *Anthropotokos*;
his disciples shrank from the blood-stream where the full
torches
ruddily poured round the eikon of Mary-in-blessing.
Professing only a moral union, they fled

from the new-spread bounty; they found a quarrel with the
Empire
and the sustenance of Empire, with the ground of faith and earth,
the golden and rose-creamed flesh of the grand Ambiguity.

Fast as they, the orthodox imagination
seized on the Roman polity; there, for a day,
beyond history, holding history at bay,
it established through the themes of the Empire the condition of
Christendom
and saw everywhere manumission of grace into glory.
Beyond the ancient line of imperial shapes
it saw the Throne of primal order, the zone
of visionary powers, and almost (in a cloud) the face
of the only sublime Emperor; as John once
in Patmos, so then all the Empire in Byzantium:
the Acts of the Throne were borne by the speeding logothetes,
and the earth flourished, hazel, corn, and vine.

The Empire, in the peace of the Emperor,
expected perfection; it awaited the Second Coming
of the Union, of the twy-natured single Person,
centuries-belated, now to be; but how
only a few saints knew, in Apennine
or Egypt or Cappadocia, monk or nun,
slave or princess or poet, or, white in Lateran,
like the ghost of man awaiting his body, the Pope.
Hope, as by night the first of the summer stars
in the universal sky high hung,
in them looked on the sea, and across the sea
saw coming, from the world of the Three-in-One,
in a rich container, the Blood of the Deivirilis,
communicated everywhere, but there singly borne,
and the morn of the Trinity rising through the sea to the sun.

The Empire lay in the imposed order; around
the Throne the visionary zone of clear light
hummed with celestial action; there the forms
of chamberlains, logothetes, nuncios, went and came,
diagrams of light moving in the light; they lacked

the flesh and blood, the golden cream and the rose
tinctures; these dwelled in Byzantium; they were held
in men and women, or even (as named qualities)
in the golden day and the rose-gardens of Caucasia.
But also in the mind of the Empire another kind
of tale lay than that of the Grail; those
who worked in the ports heard shipmen say
that in the antipodean ocean was a sight
known only to the Emperor's lordliest admirals
who, closeliest obeying command, passed
near to the harbour and vile marshes of P'o-l'u;
there on the waves a headless Emperor walked
coped in a foul indecent crimson; octopods
round him stretched giant tentacles and crawled
heavily on the slimy surface of the tangled sea,
goggling with lidless eyes at the coast of the Empire.

This, fable or truth, none knew
except the high sea-lords; enough
that in the stuff of the Empire the quality of irony
flickered and faded before the capacity of faith;
all the peoples awaited the Parousia, all
the themes vibrated with duty and expectation
of the coming of the vessel where, ere the Deposition,
the blood of the golden single-personed Ambiguity
fulfilled its commission and was caught; then for a season
was hidden in its own place, till at last (bidden
by ultimate Reason) it deigned at last emerge
out of the extreme verge of the west and the east;
priest and victim. Only the women of earth,
by primal dispensation, little by themselves understood,
shared with that Sacrifice the victimization of blood.

The Calling of Taliessin

By some it was said that Taliessin
was a child of Henwg the saint, bred in Caerleon,
and thence come, miracle-commissioned; by some
that he sprang from the bards, the ancient guards of the cauldron
called of Ceridwen; she goddess or priestess,
Tydeg Voel's wife, whose life was legend,
and he if her son then so by magic: none
knew; no clue he showed when he rode down the Wye
coracle-cradled, and at the weir was seen
by Elphin the son of Gwyddno and drawn to shore.
The men with Elphin then could only stare
at the bright forehead of the lonely river-fugitive,
the child coming from the wild Druid wood.
Could they believe in the light that lived from his brow?
decision, there as here, was the mind's election,
the arbitration of faith, the erection of the City.
But Elphin was a man of the tribes, his vocation the blood's,
nor could feel, in more than a chorus after a meal,
verse; vainly Taliessin's first song
through river-mated rhythms while he smiled at the sky
pulsated; only in the song a recurrent code
showed the child already initiated
in the changes of the cauldron of Ceridwen, from the fish to the
frog,
from the frog to the crow, from the crow to the leaping roe,
from the roe to the kindled fire, from fire to wheat,
from the wheat to the cooked loaf, from shapes that eat
to shapes that are eaten, and then to the fish split
to be at once on the dish and again in the sea –
the fated cycle communicated in heathen secrets;
for the Lord God had not yet set him at liberty,
nor shown him the doctrine of largesse in the land of the Trinity.

In Elphin's house he grew and practised verse;
striving in his young body with the double living

of the breath in the lung and the sung breath in the brain,
the growing and the knowing and the union of both in the
showing,
the triune union in each line of verse,
but lacking the formulæ and the grand backing of the Empire.
Yet then his heart, ears, and eyes were wise
from Druid secrets in the twilight and the sun-dawn;
his hearing caught each smallest singular cry
of bird and beast; almost he talked their talk;
his sight followed each farthest flight, each small
insect-dance-pattern in the air; he knew
correspondence and the law of similitudes; he had seen the
cauldron
of poetry and plenty; he heard now dimly
of the food that freed from the cycle, of the butteries of the
monks
and the baps and beans of hermits in Thule and the Thebaid.
When Elphin asked him his lineage, he sang riddling:
'My heritage is all men's; only my age is my own.
I am a wonder whose origin is not known.
I carried in battle a banner before Lleon of Lochlin,
and held in the sleeping-chamber a mirror for his queen.
I am more than the visions of all men and my own vision,
and my true region is the summer stars.
I suffered in dreams derision for the son of a virgin,
yet I stood in the Galaxy at the throne of the Distributor
and flew over the waves when the world was in flood.
I rose to the third heaven with her of the penitence
and was tangled through every sense by the hazel bush;
I was mangled for a night and a day by black swine,
yet my true region is the summer stars.
I was thrall to Ceridwen and free in the manger of an ass.
Before speech came to pass, I was full of the danger of loquacity.
It is a doubt if my body is flesh or fish,
therefore no woman will ever wish to bed me
and no man make true love without me.
All the doctors come to stand about me,
yet I shall never have any near me to need me.
Every king shall call me Taliessin,
and till the doom I am handfast with all the dead.'

'The Ceremony of the King's Homage' is the working out of an idea in Williams's Commonplace Book about national guilds having

> the various knights of the Table for their champions, orators, and almost embodiments: so that a session of the Table is almost a gathering of the State (this also includes the idea of the common people without the difficulty of their separation from the chivalry).[53]

Williams returned to the idea in his plans of June 1939, with some variation: 'the lords of the Table represent the guilds, the towns, + the rest: so that the Table stands for the kingdom; though the king's Council is above them'.[54] What finally resulted, was the unfinished poem about the general and privy councils (p. 280, below). It begins, however, with a description of Arthur's throne reworked from 'Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium' (which is in turn indebted to Tennyson).

We might also compare the various Palomides poems: for example, 'Palomides' Song of the Questing Beast' with 'The Vision of Iseult' and with all three poems in *Taliessin*. 'Palomides Before his Christening' should also be compared with both the 'Colophon' and 'Palomides' Song of Iseult'. Significant changes are made to the story of Palomides between *Advent* and *Taliessin*, the most important being that in the later

version he fails to capture the questing beast. Palomides comes to baptism in a very different state inwardly, in the two cycles.

Palomides's baptism itself is seen in yet another poem in *Taliessin*, 'The Coming of Galahad'. This poem provides an interesting example of the relation of the later to the earlier poetry. It begins with what is in effect a reworking of 'Taliessin's Song of the Setting of Galahad in the King's Bed'. For its anatomical imagery of the palace, however, it is indebted to 'Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium' (which is also the source of 'the magical western door in the king's hall' mentioned at the beginning of 'The Star of Percivale', and nowhere explained in the late poetry). Williams's novel restriction of Gareth's service is worked out in the *Advent* cycle (cf. 'The Ceremony of the King's Homage'). Thus, 'The Coming of Galahad' derives in various ways from several *Advent* poems, and might be compared with several others (including 'Taliessin's Song of a Princess of Byzantion') as a meditation on the event of its title. Such comparison, however, would underscore its originality.

The anatomical imagery just mentioned also shows a dramatic combination of real continuity and radical change between the earlier and later poetry. The imagery uniting anatomy and geography, the female body and the Empire, which is found throughout the late poetry, does not occur in the *Advent* cycle. However, it is paralleled and foreshadowed by that of two poems.

In 'Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium' her 'body is made one with Arthur's hall'. And in that very first of Williams's Arthurian poems, 'Percivale's Song to Blanchfleur', Percivale speaks to record 'the myth / of Britain and thy body one therewith', identifying each part with some Arthurian character. Furthermore, there are particular continuities within the imagery. For example, in the late poetry, the hands are associated with Rome, and notably 'the heart-breaking manual acts of the Pope.' This echoes Percivale calling Blanchfleur's palms 'fair honourable priesthoods', 'centres of consecrating energy', and identifying them with the bishops of Winchester

and Canterbury. In this instance, the image goes back even further. In 'Ecclesia Docens', published in *Poems of Conformity* (1917), Williams addresses his fiancée, Florence Conway, as 'priestly fair', and compares her with the Apostles: 'Traditional, pontifical, / Thy hands, as theirs, are wise'.[55]

Williams's poetic investigation of and statement on romantic experience has its starting point in his meeting with Florence Conway in 1908. This experience informs his first four published volumes of poetry, and also his plans for an Arthurian epic. One of his innovations – making Bors a married man with children – presumably antedates his own marriage, as Florence and he did not wed until 1917. But his experience clearly feeds into his later treatment of Bors and Elayne.

Williams dedicated *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938) to his wife 'by whom I began to study the doctrine of glory'. In his study of Dante, *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943), he directs attention to the problem 'of the appearance of the second image of the Beatrician kind', suggesting that this image is not to be denied, but that we are 'asked to free ourselves from concupiscence in regard to it.'[56] It was a practical problem for Williams, because he fell in love with his colleague, Phyllis Jones.

In *He Came Down from Heaven*, Williams says it cannot

> very easily be maintained that Dante was a striking example of New Testament monogamy, considering the extent to which his imagination concentrated itself on one woman while he was married to another.[57]

Something like this, too, was (and for the reader, is) a practical problem in Williams's life. Mrs Hadfield quotes a letter from Williams to Phyllis Jones, referring to the Arthurian poems in *Heroes and Kings*, stressing their relation to her. It was she who asked for some notes on the Arthurian legends, in response to which he wrote 'Percivale's Song to Blanchfleur' – 'and then my other poem about the Assumption of Celia – and there the method lay.' He says

> though the poems are not what I could have wished, still Tristram does derive from your Circassian and inscribed hands, and Lamoracke from a not unworthy fantasy of you, and the first Palomides is a lament for you.[58]

In his *Century* of poems to Phyllis Jones, written prior to these Arthurian poems, Williams uses three different nicknames which are also characters, to symbolise aspects of her: Celia, Phillida, and Circassia. Two are carried over into his Arthurian poetry in different ways. Taliessin's beloved in the earlier poetry, the Princess of Byzantium, is named 'Caelia'. And the 'Caucasia' of the later anatomical geography was 'Circassia' in the drafts of 'The Vision of the Empire'.

Anne Ridler notes that Williams used 'images first in some "Euclidean" love poems, the material of which was later used' in 'The Coming of Palomides' in *Taliessin*.[59] What is probably the earliest of these, is drafted on the back of a manuscript of 'Palomides' Song of Iseult', and addressed to 'Celia'. And 'Taliessin's Song of the Unicorn' began as a pair of sonnets given to Phyllis Jones. Williams's reuse of non-Arthurian poetry was in fact wide-ranging. As he notes, 'the *Death of Virgil* was originally a much worse poem about the death of Milton'[60] – which is printed below. The process continued throughout the late period. 'The Queen's Servant' derives from occasional poems, and the unfinished 'Daughter of King Brandegoris' draws on an earlier poem to Williams's wife.

Perhaps Williams's 'poem about the Assumption of Celia' was given an Arthurian preface to become 'Taliessin's Song of a Princess of Byzantion'. Even as a part of the cycle there seem to be discrepancies between it and such other poems as 'Taliessin's Song of Byzantion' and 'Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium'.

Many of Williams's innovations to the Arthurian material which are embodied in the *Advent* poetry long precede his acquaintance with Phyllis Jones. For example, one note in the Commonplace Book includes his alteration of Malory (XVII, 11, 21) in placing 'the body of Percivale's sister' with the

questing knights in the same ship. (Williams apparently treats this only in his later style, first in 'Taliessin's Song of the Last Voyage'.) To the words 'Percivale's sister' he adds a query whether 'Blanchefleur' is 'called "sister" only as a kind of name to describe their virginal love'.[61] An earlier query on symbolic characters informs this one:

> ? Perceval – virginal love: he rarely sees his mistress, but their souls dwell holily together.[62]

Williams here selectively synthesises Malory, where Percivale has an actual, and unnamed, sister, with Gerbert's continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, where Perceval and Blanchefleur are virginal lovers. This is the treatment he realises in his first Arthurian poem, 'Percivale's Song to Blanchfleur', and throughout the *Advent* cycle.

Taliessin, too, at a certain point, enters his plans for the epic, and is an important character. However, he has nothing like the prominence he is given from *The Advent* on. And the Byzantine Princess, and their relationship, are quite new. She does not survive in the later published poetry, though she does appear in some occasional poems using the Arthurian characters. One of these is the principal source of 'Taliessin in the Rose-Garden', and a source of 'The Departure of Dindrane' as well. In the published poetry, Blanchefleur replaces the Princess Caelia as Taliessin's beloved. She apparently also becomes the actual sister of Percivale and Lamorack. Though Percivale and Taliessin are together named 'lords in her heart',[63] there is no clear evidence of any such virginal erotic love between herself and Percivale, as exists between herself and Taliessin. (Incidentally, the spelling of her name is never settled, and after a rereading of *Perlesvaus* – perhaps Sebastian Evans's translation as *The High History of the Holy Graal* – Williams could not resist taking up as well the name there given to Perceval's sister, Dindrane.)

On 27 April 1943, while working on the poetry to be included in *The Region of the Summer Stars*, Williams wrote to his wife,

> I shall reserve for you the dedication of what I hope will be my, till then, best + greatest poems – the third Taliessin volume; only Taliessin will have vanished by then, + we shall have only the loftier + more remote figure of Percivale.[64]

The unfinished poem with the cancelled title 'The Calling of Galahad' (below, p. 286), embodies this same intention.

We have noted, above, various interrelations between Williams's life and his poetry, including some between himself and the characters in it. They are not simple, and his readers must beware of any reductive biographical readings. Their complexity can be seen further in the fact that Williams not only wrote occasional poetry using Arthurian characters, but played with his Arthurian 'myth' in his correspondence and his daily life. He could superscribe a letter 'Oxford/or Camelot',[65] and assign Arthurian characters or rôles to others and to himself. Though he took pains to distinguish his character Taliessin from himself, that was the part he regularly played.

From the first poem, 'Percivale's Song to Blanchfleur', there are also explicit applications of 'the myth of Britain' within the story. 'The Calling of Taliessin' and 'Taliessin in the Rose-Garden' provide the most striking examples of this in the late poetry. In the latter, it is thoroughly generalised as well:

> women's flesh lives the quest of the Grail [. . .]
> Blessed is she who gives herself to the journey. [. . .]
> Happy the woman who in the light of Percivale
> feels Galahad, the companion of Percivale, rise
> in her flesh.

Such applications, as well as the symbolism of the poetry at large, have practical spiritual implications. But at least some, including those named, seem to have other, though quite mysterious, practical levels. When we compare Williams's magical activities involving a ceremonial sword and paper knife, described by Mrs Hadfield, which he is reported to have said

were necessary for his poetry,[66] with the details of 'Taliessin's Song of the Unicorn', it seems likely that the poem is related to actual magical practices. Other practical levels in the poetry may be similarly related to magical acts. Unfortunately, such a conjecture, even if correct, does not dispel the mystery, or illuminate those levels deeply, with respect to their intended functions or rationale. It should be noted, however, that Williams's magical practices are not simply carried over from the secret society to which he belonged for a decade, the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross. For example, a note in its *Ceremony of Reception* specifies that 'There is no Sword in a Temple of the Rosy Cross.'[67] Williams, by his own admission, here as elsewhere was an innovator.[68]

'The Last Voyage' provides a clear example of his innovative freedom with a body of traditional esoteric symbolism, that of alchemy. In 'Percivale's Last Song', Williams had expressed the climax of the Mass at Sarras by using alchemical imagery:

> O crimson transmutation
> when the prince was made the Grail!

In 'Taliessin's Song of the Last Voyage', he develops this imagery in more detail by associating the questing knights with colours in a traditional ascending progression: 'in black armour, Bors', 'a silver pillar, Percivale', while

> Fierce in the prow the alchemical Infant burns,
> white by mere celerity achieving the crimson.

But in the final version, he quite untraditionally reverses the last two – 'red by celerity now conceiving the white' – apparently preferring the symbolic potential of 'white' to technical precision.

In 'The Last Voyage', the question of mysterious practical levels also arises. Here, too, there is continuity from the beginning. 'Percivale's Song to Blanchfleur' seems to suggest that the womb is

> the destined and thrice holy place
> where is the Action and the last embrace,
> this is the Mother of the Achievement

of the Grail. In 'The Last Voyage', the vessel in which the alchemical transformation is taking place is identified with 'the hollow of Jerusalem'. And in the map which forms the endpapers of the first edition of *Taliessin through Logres* (reproduced as the endpapers of this volume), drawn to Williams's specifications and illustrating the anatomical geography, Jerusalem corresponds to the genitals. Here we confront some of the real difficulties of Williams's Arthurian poetry, interpretive and otherwise.

Taliessin's Song of the Myths

In the beginning, ere the world was made,
the young gods saw the Spear, and were afraid.

And ere the earth was fashioned, and hung up
round in the sky, the young gods saw the Cup.

Then the Immortals trembled and had fear
for the showing among them of the Cup and Spear;

till a bright fount of revelation sprang
among them; o'er them the Bright Forehead sang.

In wattle huts, amid the woods of Wales,
I heard the Druids telling o'er their tales.

I walked among the Druids, and among
their songs I heard what the Bright Forehead sung.

What is the falling of the Drops? one cried,
and *What the Cup that catches?* one replied.

One sang: *I fall; I fall through space and time;*
And one: *It waits thee, lo, as rhyme waits rhyme.*

One asked: *What gathers, gathers on the Spear?*
One answered: *Joy; a life, a life is there.*

On marble, amid Roman altar-flames,
I heard the hierarchs patter sacred names;

and as the golden sickle takes the moon
I saw with golden fire the chalice strewn.

I heard the orient invocations twine
amid the immingled branches of the Vine.

Amid bare altars, on a Passion-tide,
they sang the Spear-thrust and the bleeding Side.

But in a chapel of Byzantium I
beheld a great Lance grow athwart the sky.

I saw the red drops gather, one by one,
upon the crimson point above the sun.

Thence, one by one, a myriad-falling throng,
creation issued, each fall a new song.

There was I gathered, thence I fell, and lo,
I saw the glory far beneath me glow.

I heard the Druids in the hills of Wales
chanting: O *sacred Grail that holds the grails!*

I fell; I was not; I began to be;
my passage brought immortal news to me,

I was the stone upon the road, the leaf
thrusting through spring, I was the harvest sheaf.

I was the ant laden with eggs, the sleek
panther at couch, the eagle on his peak.

I was with Odin and I was with Christ;
I was the Priest and I the Sacrificed.

In wattle huts, amid the hills of Wales,
I heard the Druids telling o'er their tales.

And I was that whereof they told, and I
was in the telling – and the trance went by.

But ere I woke, one instant I beheld
a castle whence the Druids' music swelled.

Whereto the Lance that pierced the high heavens through
shrank; to a Cup the nether glory drew.

And kings and high priests came to gaze thereat;
and by it on a throne a Watcher sat,

who suddenly starting up wailed, crying: *Woe*
for the Castle of Carbonek and the Dolorous Blow!

And lo, the Lance, there where it hung aloof,
enlarged and towered and smote through wall and roof,

and o'er the earth, in angry darkness veiled,
scattered the sacred mystery unengrailed.

And I awoke, and lo, the Emperor
sat, as God sits, above all peace and war;

and at his side a holy princess stands
and prayers go up to him from all the lands,

and there he gives and there he gives not – yea,
there is none on earth shall rule him any way.

But a strong heart, a strong wall, is he found
to bar us from the heresy of Mahound.

And all about him those bright foreheads go
who send their music to the lands below,

and song by many voices is increased,
whereof I Taliessin am the least.

Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium

To the divine Stability in New Rome,
the sublime Emperor in his child, the first
princess of Christendom, Christ's Christendom,
potent by mere corporeal sanctity
to show the spiritual intellect
working in all degrees, pulse, mind, and soul,
and studying other zodiacs than our own,
from the poor singer Taliessin, these.

Thy will is God's in mine; thy will be done.
Because of that our working, when thy soul
found itself living which was dead before,
I, looking with illumined eyes, have known
the secret of the King's hall; of the King
I know not yet – also, I look to know.
Thine is the kingdom – therefore thine the hall;
Write, said'st thou, breaking that white stillness which
is nearer Love's speech than all earthly sound,
Write of the King, and I have written; *Write*
of the King's hall. Thus then – bless me, my queen.

Long is King Arthur's hall and tipped with gold,
here, there, in coigns and grooves, where'er the strong
arches are softly rounded each to each.
The throne is of two golden dragons twined,
immazed, commingled; for a canopy
one head, 'twixt wings extended, fiercely thrusts
gapingly downwards; round the pedestal
the other thrusts two feet out for two steps,
and for the third and highest lays his head
grinning, malignant, but abased; the arms
are of the scaly and maltwisted tails.
So sits the King, his feet on a tasked foe,
by disciplined ferocity his head
ceilinged, as when King Suleiman bowed the Djinns

and Afrites – fear made tolerable by grace
as in all love; love lies in vanquished fear.

Upon the right-hand is a little door,
where three ways part; the first to the queen's bower
high turreted o'er Camelot; and one
to the king's privy chambers and the rooms
assigned his secretaries, musicians, clerks,
with those who are his household or who hold
all offices of headship in the realm,
viceroys and prefects, and ambassadors:
the third way is the Lord Archbishop's – that
finds out the Chapel and the Mass at dawn.

Double doors, at the south end, open; there
beyond a court of grass, a bridged moat,
and the King's outer walks and pleasaunces,
the country lies; there run the royal roads
to Winchester, the ports – yea, thence to Rome,
Byzantium, thee; from thee, Byzantium,
and Rome, the pilgrims and the legates come.
There, from my stool sitting beside the King
I, looking down the hall, behold the sky
(thee!), and thy feet upon that threshold shine.
Ten soldiers watch without it night and day.

Upon the left-hand side, some half-way down,
the door into the courtyards of the king,
set towards the city; at a gate between
meet two smooth walls of marble, vastly curved,
whereby the common people meet, the poor
unnamed support of the bright-showing Crown:
within, beside the court, are narrow paths
one way to butteries, kitchens, pantries, stores,
one to the jakes and heaps of rubbish; thus
the butlers, sewers, cooks, and serving-boys
may group to watch the glory; with them come
the grooms and stable-men, runners, and else
the general servants of the great king's hall.

But opposite – O opposite, princess!
set in the right-hand wall, some third part down,
there is the marvel! once a door was there –
a door by which none entered or went out,
yet open – nay, a doorway but no door;
a rose five-petalled borne between two hands
carved on the lintel, either post a tree,
one with a serpent, one with swelling fruit;
upon the path a cross was graved below:
without was darkness, always darkness, save
at midnight on great feasts a light shone forth
but from no moon or sun, as if the world
looked through itself at some antipodes
of day, where vast hills hovered cloudily,
pinewoods wind-shaken, but no wind to feel,
and noiseless waterfalls from unseen heights,
gleaming in a diffused uncentred dawn,
which left the entry and the threshold black,
and from a pit of darkness thrilled to light.
This was the door! this was the Magians' door.

None passed; none dared; in sudden silence went
who crossed (from north to south) the void within.
It was the centre whence the hall was raised
outward expanding, north and south and east,
as ruled the wizard: this and Arthur's throne
were essence to the whole – how found, how drawn
into a universe of seats and thrones –
beyond, the city; and beyond, the world
(round which in order, a bright Table, sit
canopied, pedestalled, throned, the watching stars) –
how this was wrought, material of time,
a point enlarged to involuting space,
none but the wizard knows, but once my lord
Archbishop at a Christmas prophesied,
being in a vision and an ecstasy,
that Arthur should be lord of Logres, nor
till then, but then, should the hall wholly fill
with light, and then should come through that dark door
bearing upon his breast the ruddy Grail,
our Champion, our White Prince, the Merciful Childe.

O was it madness? was it prophecy?
Phosphor of heaven, reveal; pure mouth of God,
say: for the prophecy hath fled: the door
is lost, the entry covered – in its stead
rises among our thrones the Perilous Chair.
And how should he for whom it waits come forth
from what behind it is for ever sealed?

Balin le Sauvage – live he, live he lost
capable of return, in heaven or hell,
none hears – a fierce knight, raided on command
a hold of brigands; thence returning, brought
his spoil – five casks of treasure, and a girl, –
before the King, claiming the girl: the King
forbade, she not consenting: thrice denied,
Balin in frenzy, with his sword's threat, faced
the dragon-throne: which before, Lamorack leapt,
Lucan and Sagramore, with who else sat
about the foot. Thwarted, the savage knight
ran yelling at the girl, caught her right up,
and, she held on a shoulder and his sword
around him waving, plunged at the dark door.
Whereat Sir Dinadan and Sir Percivale
sat, either side; they sprang, he shrieking struck,
past both the reeling champions drove his way
with one last roar of passion, and was gone.

The girl next morn was by a shepherd found
upon a hill at hand, hurt, palsied, dumb;
but none hath seen the Savage even till now.

Three nights thence by the Majesty of the King,
so bid, I sat at food – he, Lamorack, I,
and the queen's fairness; all, perturbed at heart,
fell silent, nor that silence felt a sound
when softly near the wizard Merlin came,
nor when his voice, to the King's eyes, breathed forth:
Wait, sire: I watch the hour. Even on the word,
the King fell swooning on the board; at once
we, hastening to him, felt the sudden earth
unstable, heaving under us; a cry

broke through the darkness, far off, agonized;
the queen and Lamorack were by the King,
but me a hand touched; Merlin spoke to me:
This is the Stroke: begins salvation: come,
singer, for though gods make the myths, to make
the myths of gods more credible is thy charge.
Come, the priest waits: this is the birth of time.
Ere worse can chance I go to seal the door.

Believest thou? Byzantium, thyself
hast prophesied within thyself such things.

We stood within the hall, we three alone,
the singer and the wizard and the priest;
no light, save that by art a faint light glowed
between the wizard and the insulted dark
which pressed without the doorway, fiery streaks
broke in it, lightning from an unseen heaven.
Revolted nature shook again; far off
a dreadful cry made answer yet again;
and Merlin moaned and with deep breaths began
vibrating conjurations. Then the walls
moved; from each side the direful wizard drew
braces and barriers, coverings, plates and shields,
the very walls were moulded to his hands,
which up and down, this way and that way, moved,
ordaining, ruling, and compelling all,
and here and there the dark was joined to it
through chinks and crevices, as if a pall
pushed blackly through the marble and the gold:
but when he lifted both his hands and drew
from the great roof above him something down
to join the hall's roof to the canopy,
lo – had the Archbishop faltered I had fled –
one point of lightning pierced through all and glowed
an angry, watchful, supernatural spark
full in the moulding's front. I saw and shook,
and had no eyes to look on it. At once,
even as the earth shook a third time, the cry,
louder, more dreadful, as if nigh at hand,
broke; Merlin joined his own voice to the cry,

answering, uniting, meeting, gathering it;
and fearful to our eyes the Perilous Chair
stood, monstrous, militant, oppressive, void.

How shall the White Prince come? how shall the Grail?
the holy, sweet, bounteous, assuaging Grail?
how shall it come and tabernacle with us?

But Merlin, standing by the Perilous Chair,
when the morn came and every man, amazed,
saw that his neighbour and himself were safe,
the young king sitting with o'erheavy brow
upon the dragon-throne, by him the queen,
spake to the chivalry sitting in their stalls;
'A thing is fallen upon Logres, whereof
the like hath not been seen since Adam fell;
a darkness is henceforth upon your eyes,
and in your reins dissension; there shall be
anguish, the father with the son, the wife
against the husband, love being wroth with love,
man hating peace and man denouncing joy,
man loathing his own nature meant for joy
and man in frenzied chase pursuing joy
down joyless leagues: this shall be till the end
come, till the high prince come, of whom not now
I tell you; here, set in the pathless door,
the Perilous seat awaits him; at this point
is the Return, which whoso tries unpurged
it were better for him he had not been born,
yet born he must be. This is the menace, this
is the terrible and disastrous chair of love,
where whoso sits shall lose himself – unpurged,
nor he nor Love shall find him any more.
Enough – for all the evils that must be
shall ye too soon find out by single trial.
Yet, yet be of good courage; time abates,
and merciful is the mystery of Helayne.'

Thereafter, some while silence being kept,
the King commanded and the trumpets cried
to bring the decent business of the day.

Hierophant of wisdom! magical witch,
imposing on, therefore diffusing from,
those limbs the shape and style of chastity,
and recreating all thyself in God,
comes he? how comes he? when? Canst thou not tell
whose body is made one with Arthur's hall,
and in thy frame the frame of things secure?
Declare then how – ah no, do not declare;
words can not tell us what we have not seen.
Break not thy meditations, Altitude,
that are the sovereign sweetness of the world,
nor with unprofitable toil blot out
that serene thing which, looking through thy face,
is to thy servant and to Caesar's house
imagination of eternity.

Divites Dimisit

(*For Michal, in memory of the darkness*, 1914–17.)

The line held along the Rhine and the Danube;
the consuls and kings defended the fords and the roads;
but the chosen champions of the Empire forgot the Empire.

Pale was the tale of peace in London and Lutetia,
bloody the Noel-song; the towns of Logres
felt the sliding planes of the raiders' sails,
and Gaul all the push of the Northern woods,
natural growths, moods infinitely multiplied
across bleak plains, in rains and snows,
strength unarticulated in morals, and race
sullenly by marshes separated from race,
virtue monopolized and grace prized in schism.
Heathendom grew within the Empire; few
guessed how men were shaped in body or mind;
they pined thinking of the grand attack; their loves
escaped back to the old necromantic gnosis
of separation, were it but from one soul.
Frantic with fear of losing themselves in others
they separated one soul for denunciation –
the devil, or the khan of the Huns, or the wizard of Asia.
Losing the City, they made substitutes for the City –
mutes or rhetoricians instead of the sacred poets,
braggadocio or burlesque for fair hope.

Early on a feast of Christmas the young Pope
Deodatus knelt in Lateran, slender, strong,
Egyptian-born, white-haired, seeming as old
as Merlin, in his trance of prayer the twin of Merlin,
but for the seer's black hair bleached,
as if Merlin, time's metre, were smitten by sacred loss.
Before and above him a glass reliquary held

the Holy Blood, crimson; he waited to pass
to sing the Eucharist; meanwhile the Pope prayed.
Sweet his voice sounded in the late Latin
founded on Virgil, colloquial, capable of rhyme,
fastening in a new time Lupercal and Lateran,
and hastening by measure the flood of the soul in the blood.
The young Pontiff's meditations set to *Magnificat*,
to the total Birth intending the total Death,
to the Love that lost Itself, nor only an image
nor only all the images, but wholly Itself.
The Pope prayed: 'But each loss of each image
is single and full, a thing unrequited,
plighted in presence to no recompense, no
purchase of paradise; eyes see no future;
when the Son of Man comes, he brings no faith in a future.
Send not, send not, the rich empty away.'

Good or bad or both, the lords of Logres
loosening their swords before the last battle,
each remembered his single particular loss.
The king felt: 'Now the dynasty fails. . . .'
Bors felt: 'Farms and manors are burned;
the corn lost, the poor returned to starvation. . . .'
Lancelot, standing by the landing of his men at Dover,
felt: 'If we win, after this, her kiss is the king's. . . .'
Only Taliessin, in the west with the king, smiled
to think how the household had founded a new Order,
known by no name, least their own,
grounded in the law of the Empire, the acts of the Throne,
the pacts of the themes, from rose-lordly Caucasia
to the sentences sealing the soul through the whole of Logres
in the mouth of London-in-Logres; their salutation
was everywhere the promulgation of the Co-inherence.

The Pope prayed to the blessed Blood in Lateran:
'Rich in sorrow, rich in heart's heaviness,
blessed are we, bearing soul's wealth now,
and cannot any how part with that wealth, laden
with loss, and the loss always an affirmation,
double affirmation – image and the opposite of image

(which its wit, as thine, O Blessed, courteously carries,
but thine thyself only and the lack of thyself):
send not, send not, these rich empty away.'

Well had Mordred spelled his lessons from the king,
from his father, King Arthur, whose mind designed the Grail
to decorate Logres with life and end strife
in the hall of Camelot, all aggression put down,
and the Crown establishing plausible justice in Logres.
The prince hungered; he waited to-morrow and to-morrow
till the sorrow of the waiting, satiating his blood,
drove him to change the double wealth of loss
for the single having; his craving refused itself.
He joined with the pirates against and to gain the Crown,
he leagued with foes of the Empire against the Empire,
setting his image up against the Empire,
begetting on the succubus of his longing, in the world of pirates,
the falsity of all images and their incoherence.

The Pope prayed: 'Where is difference between us?
what does the line along the rivers define?
Causes and catapults they have and we have,
and the death of a brave beauty is mutual everywhere.
If there be difference, it must be in thy sense
that we declare – O Blessed, pardon affirmation! –
and they deny – O Blessed, pardon negation! –
that we derive from them and they from us,
and alive are they in us and we in them.
We know how we have sinned; we know not how they.
Intend for us the double wealth of repentance:
send not, send not, the rich empty away.'

Over the Rhine, over the Vistula and Danube,
pushed the grand tribes; the land shook
as band after band stamped on the Roman towns
whose burning lamped their path; their wrath grew
with victory; thereon they knew no returning.
They followed the corpses to battle, corpses called
out of earth by the wizards, vivified, automatized
precursors of the hordes in a necromancy of justice;

the mechanized bodies stalked over the fords;
consuls and kings felt the cold coming
of the dead whom the lords of empire had once slain,
the uneyed images of old blockade and barricade,
children starved in sieges, prostituted women,
men made slaves or crucified – all from graves
drawn by maleficent spells, but too-veritable ghosts,
before those hosts moving in a terrible twilight.

The Pope passed to sing the Christmas Eucharist;
he invoked peace on the souls of all the dead,
yoked fast to him and he to them,
co-inherent all in Adam and all in Christ.
The magical march of the dead by Rhine and Danube,
and the tread of the necromancers who affirm only
vengeance and value of victory, he lonely
received; he sheaved there the corn of his prayer.
The wizards in the Empire and beyond the Empire
walked and talked silently in the spiritual place.
The gnosis of separation in the Pope's soul
became a promulgation of sacred union;
his their sin and theirs his
in the mystical kiss of sin and pardon in Christ.
He offered his soul's substance to the living corpses,
his richness of repentance, his weal in their woe.
Quick the crowd, the thick souls of the dead,
hovered in the Pope's substance over the engrailed
Blood of the Eucharist, blood of the total loss,
the unimaged loss, the offering of Itself to Itself.
The easement of exchange led into Christ's appeasement;
reconciled, their spirits became tongues of the Holy Ghost
under the heartbreaking manual acts of the Pope.
Before the host on the rivers the corpses dropped,
sank, and were swept away; within the Empire
the false champions of Empire felt the Empire
revive in a live song of the sacred City.

Kneeling after the Eucharist the Pope said,
for the riches of loss, *Magnificat*; prostrate, he prayed:
'Send not, send not, the rich empty away.'

The Taking of Camelot

I

The king's poet was his captain of horse in the wars.
He rode fast, after Badon, with his household
and some force, spared from pursuit of the pirates,
to seize at the root of the kingdom, London-in-Logres
called then Camelot. At Reading the companies
crossed the Thames and bore to Verulam, by tracks
down which the scared or feed peasants led
through the woods; already the king's scouts had held
such at disposal. They came to Verulam at dawn;
there, under the ruined church on the hill
they watered and changed horses – ate, drank;
prayed, laughed. A fading Paschal moon
changed with the sun and left the air cold.
Then Taliessin chose five-score men,
stout-hearted, well-horsed; he bade
the rest follow with his steward; but he and his
down the great Roman road, as clear
as Virgil's verse in the wild imagination of empire,
rode at speed for the central city. Mounting,
'*De bellare superbos*', the king's poet said;
'but if the superb be too superb to watch,
or watch only the roads where the whole army
moves flagrantly on Camelot, the better; if
the[y] despise the subject – the subject are not safe till dead.
'Gentlemen, trot.' At his side his chaplain smiled:
'Sir, nor then: the perilous Parousia tells
nothing else; the skeletons are coming to Cradlemas,
and we – Deo gloria – his fast-flying past.'

II

All had been prelude; now, in the man Taliessin
suddenly, with violence, the interior life began;
guilt fell on him; open beneath the skies,
blood-besprinkled, alone, outrageous, he stood.
Virtuous and accurst, righteous and by the worst collected,
elected to mere damnation by an act of justice,
the king's poet lacked all possible justification.
Cradlemas' body before him denied him salvation;
he had righted earth but to be displighted from heaven.
Terrible in the sun he saw his deed done,
and he the doer, a base outlaw. Cain
and he had in that place one immingled brain;
the shouts of his men were vain in his seized ears.
This was sin; the point of decency and duty
had been, within him, conjoint with and confirmed
    blasphemy

Taliessin stood above the dead king,
the dead thing was his future; he more dead,
in his living, his blood poisoned and penalized; his heart
still though beating, cheating his helpless hands,
where the sword hilt clung; rung by rung
he saw the time climb down an infinite sky –
period, period, period, and no period
till the corpse of the dead Cradlemas bled no more
even sluggishly, but as slow now went all grace,
and the face of the king's poet as deathly as he,
the bones high-passioned in its cold mould.
Alien and inalienable, rife with terrors,
rose in the king's poet's heart the interior life,
read, dreamed, thought, and yet unlived
in Caucasia, in Gaul, and the antechambers of Byzantium.

An alternative version of part II also survives:

All till now had been prelude; suddenly
in the man Taliessin the interior life began.
Now was a deed that lacked all justification,
and he fallen in damnation, blood-besprinkled,

virtuous and accurst, by an act of mere justice
reversed from justice;
He had righted earth but to be displighted from heaven;
Cain and he had one immingled brain,
as he saw there in the sun his deed done
and the shouts of his men were vain in his shocked ears.

Taliessin stood over the dead king.
The dead thing was his future; he more dead
in his living, his blood chill, and his sinful heart
beating but still, cheating his helpless hands
with the whole simulacrum of life without the soul.
Period, period, period, and no period –
till the corpse of the dead Cradlemas [ ] no more
even sluggishly.

The face of the king's poet was deathly as his;
high-passioned in the bones of the cold mould.
Alien and inalienable, rife with bitterness,
rose in his heart at last the interior life –
read, dreamed, meditated, but yet unliving,
in Caucasia, in the doctrine of Gaul, the redemption of
    Logres,
in the audience-chambers and golden harbours of Byzantium.
He himself was dead to himself; now
he fed on death and felt it for the only food.
His chaplain rose to his feet from the stricken body.
He said: 'Also let his soul find rest.'

Taliessin

III

The blood had run red; the shed blood
sank into earth, or dried and flaked off,
or was washed away; the wide war ceased;
mere tyranny ceased; fear ceased.
King Arthur came to Camelot in the fall of the year
bearing wood and food to warm new-builded Camelot.

NOTES

1 Elisabeth Brewer, 'Charles Williams and Arthur Edward Waite', *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 4 (1983), 55.

2 C. S. Lewis, 'Preface', *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. vii.

3 'Charles Williams on "Taliessin through Logres" ', *The Poetry Review*, 32 (March/April 1941), 77: reprinted in *The Image of the City and Other Essays* [hereafter cited as *Image*] (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 179.

4 It was first published in ***Arthurian Torso*** *containing the posthumous fragment of* **The Figure of Arthur** *by Charles Williams and a commentary on the Arthurian poems of Charles Williams by C. S. Lewis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

5 Alice Mary Hadfield, *An Introduction to Charles Williams* (London: Robert Hale, 1959), p. 147.

6 'Charles Williams on "Taliessin through Logres" ', 77: *Image*, pp. 179–80 [italics supplied for Tennyson's title].

7 See the present author's *'The Chapel of the Thorn*: An unknown dramatic poem by Charles Williams', *Inklings Jahrbuch*, 5 (1987), 133–54.

8 Charles Williams to Humphrey Milford, letter of 28 February 1930 entitled 'King Arthur' (Wade).

9 Charles Williams, undated lecture notes entitled 'Taliessin' (Wade).

10 John D. C. Pellow, diary entry for 15 September 1923 (Dr R. J. N. Pellow).

11 Charles Williams to J. D. C. Pellow, letter of 5 September [1924] (Dr R. J. N. Pellow): Williams's spelling of 'Graal'.

12 Charles Williams to Humphrey Milford, letter of 28 February 1930 entitled 'King Arthur' (Wade).

13 Anne Ridler, 'Introduction', *Image*, p. lx.

14 Quoted in Alice Mary Hadfield, *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work* [hereafter cited as *Exploration*] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 135–36, 244.

15 Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* (London: Macmillan/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 98.

16 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of [*circa* 18–23 June 1939] (Bodleian): Williams refers to 'Percivale at Carbonek' in *Taliessin through Logres*.

17 Charles Williams to Raymond Hunt, letter of 29 November 1941 (Wade).
18 Charles Williams to Mrs Joan Wallis, letter of 27 May 1943 (Mrs Wallis).
19 Reported by Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 26 May 1943 (Wade).
20 Anne Ridler, 'Introductory Note to the Arthurian Essays', *Image*, p. 174.
21 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 9 April 1943 (Wade).
22 Charles Williams to Raymond Hunt, letter of 29 November 1941 (Wade).
23 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 7 May 1943 (Wade).
24 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of [*circa* 18–23 June 1939] (Bodleian).
25 These intentions of Williams are reported by Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 28 May 1943 (Wade).
26 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 20 (Bodleian MS. Eng. e. 2012: described as *The Holy Grail*, from the inscription on the spine of the volume).
27 Charles Williams to Miss Anne Bradby [later, Mrs Ridler], letter postmarked 15 February 1935 (Anne Ridler: quoting from her transcription).
28 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 102.
29 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 48.
30 Charles Williams in what Anne Ridler has entitled 'Notes on the Arthurian Myth', *Image*, p. 176.
31 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 142.
32 See 'Nimue's Song of the Dolorous Stroke', and compare 'The Last Voyage' and 'Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass'.
33 'Bors to Elayne: The Fish of Broceliande'.
34 The dustjacket of the first edition of *Taliessin through Logres*; Anne Ridler identifies it as drafted by Williams, when she quotes it in 'Introduction', *Image*, pp. lxiv–lxv.
36 Charles Williams, 'The Commonwealth in English Verse', *The Contemporary Review*, 124 [No. 692] (August 1923), 233.
36 Charles Williams, 'The Hero in English Verse', *The Contemporary Review*, 118 [No. 660] (December 1920), 835.
37 'The Departure of Dindrane'.
38 Tennyson, 'Lancelot and Elaine', lines 871–72: Lewis notes that Williams praised these lines: *Arthurian Torso*, p. 95.
39 Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Longmans, 1939), pp. 229–30.

40 Charles Williams in *What the Cross Means to Me: A Theological Symposium* (London: James Clarke, 1943), p. 171: reprinted in *Image*, p. 134.
41 Charles Williams, *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, edited by Alice Mary Hadfield (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 8.
42 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 5 August 1941 (Wade).
43 With respect to his life, see, for example, *Letters to Lalage: The Letters of Charles Williams to Lois Lang-Sims*.
44 Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 9 July 1945 (Wade).
45 C. S. Lewis, 'Preface', *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, pp. vi–vii.
46 Linden C. Huddlestone, *The Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams: Their Development and Background*, M.A. thesis, University of London 1952 (unpublished), p. 66.
47 Anne Ridler, 'Introduction', *Image*, pp. lxiii–iv: the two poems from which she quotes, the 'Prelude' and 'Mordred's Song of the Kingdom', and the third, to which she refers, 'Taliessin's Letter to a Princess of Byzantium', are published here for the first time.
48 Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 7 July 1940 (Wade).
49 Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 29 July 1940 (Wade).
50 Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 11 August [1940] (Wade).
51 Charles Williams, lecture entitled 'The Matter of Britain' (undated: probably spring 1943), p. 4 (Wade).
52 Charles Williams, *The Figure of Arthur* in *Arthurian Torso*, p. 82.
53 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 165.
54 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of [*circa* 18–23 June 1939] (Bodleian).
55 Charles Williams, 'Ecclesia Docens' in *Poems of Conformity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 51.
56 Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* (London: Faber, 1943), pp. 48–49.
57 Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven* (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 91.
58 Quoted in Alice Mary Hadfield, *Exploration*, pp. 82, 241.
59 Anne Ridler, 'Introduction', *Image*, p. xxxiv.
60 Charles Williams, undated lecture notes entitled 'Taliessin' (Wade).
61 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 121.
62 Charles Williams, Arthurian Commonplace Book, p. 1.
63 'Son of Lancelot'.

64 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 27 April 1943 (Wade).

65 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of 3 March 1941 (Bodleian).

66 Alice Mary Hadfield, *Exploration*, p. 106.

67 [A. E. Waite], *The First Order of the Rosy Cross, World of Action, Part I: The Ceremony of Reception into the Grade of Neophyte, 0=0* (privately printed, 1916), p. 8; quoted in R. A. Gilbert, *A. E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* (Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987), p. 186.

68 For example, Charles Williams, in an undated letter to Miss Olive Speake, refers to 'a ritual' involving 'the Double Staircase of the Path, which I have just invented, + yet it is a mystery and a sacrament': he describes it, gives its text, and says, 'This is the first ritual I have written, if you except the *Rite of the Passion*, which is like yet unlike' (Wade: catalogued as 'Letters to Stella, MSS. 11–12'): *The Rite of the Passion*, written for the Three Hours Service on Good Friday 1929, is one of the three plays in the volume entitled *Three Plays*.

69 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of [*circa* 18–23 June 1939] (Bodleian).

70 Charles Williams to Mrs Thelma Shuttleworth, letter of 16 November 1939 (Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. e. 136, f. 122v).

71 Charles Williams to Raymond Hunt, letter of 29 April 1942 (Wade).

72 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], 10 October 1941 (Bodleian).

73 Published in *Image*, p. 174.

74 See note 17 above.

75 Charles Williams to Miss Anne Renwick [later, Mrs Scott], letter of 25 June 1942 (Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. d. 452, f. 48).

76 Charles Williams, *The Figure of Arthur* in *Arthurian Torso*, pp. 84–85.

77 Charles Williams to Miss Anne Renwick [later, Mrs Scott], letter of 3 January 1944 (Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. d. 452, f. 76).

78 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 7 May 1943 (Wade).

79 Charles Williams to Raymond Hunt, letter of 6 April 1944 (Wade).

80 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 25 September 1944 (Wade).

81 Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 21 April 1943 (Wade).

82 Margaret Douglas to Raymond Hunt, letter of 26 May 1943 (Wade).

83 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of [*circa* 18–23 June 1939] (Bodleian).

84 Charles Williams to Florence ['Michal'] Conway Williams, letter of 29 November 1944 (Wade).

85 Charles Williams to Mrs Joan Wallis, letter of 11 January 1945 (Mrs Wallis).

86 Charles Williams to Mrs Alice Mary Miller [later, Hadfield], letter of [*circa* 18–23 June 1939] (Bodleian).