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## King Arthur and the Grail in the Poetry of Charles Williams

### I

In Alain de Lille's *Prophetia Anglicana* of 1160 we read:

Whither has not flying fame spread and familiarized the name of Arthur the Briton, even as far as the Empire of Christendom extends? Who, I say, does not speak of Arthur the Briton, since he is almost better known to the peoples of Asia than to the Britanni, as our palmers returning from the East inform us? The Eastern peoples speak of him, as do the Western, though separated by the width of the whole earth . . . Rome, queen of cities, sings his deeds, nor are Arthur's wars unknown to her former rival Carthage. Antioch, Armenia, Palestine celebrate his acts<sup>1</sup>.

Since Alain's eulogy of King Arthur 800 years have elapsed, civil convulsions have troubled the country: the supersession of the feudal by middle class culture, the Reformation, the industrial revolution, and in the twentieth century the drying up of every source of continuity, the disintegration of all decisive and binding traditions. At the beginning of this century the poet did not recognize and acknowledge a generally binding frame or system of reference, and he therefore refused to work upon the old heroes and metaphors of Wales and Brittany. Modern poetry, as William Butler Yeats once said, has got tired of them<sup>2</sup>.

A new mythology, derived from anthropology and religious history, has taken the place of the matter of Britain. In this modern age, which has sometimes been called the post-mythic period, a genuine mythic narrative is no longer possible. The modern narrator cannot take for granted that his myths are accepted by a homogeneous community. He has available only some mythic analogues, created by writers endowed with a special sort of poetic mentality, which does not and will not admit a difference between the poetic symbol and the reality it stands for. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, ethnology, sociology and modern political ideologies have been exploited and transformed into the frame of a new mythology. To pass judgement upon this kind of literature would be premature. But we may well be sceptical about the result of these endeavours. It is most unlikely that the newly created myths will ever be accepted as a means of unifying the disordered world. Yeats' subtle occult system of moon phases will appeal only to a very small minority of the initiated. D. H. Lawrence's anti-intellectual message concerning the coalescence of body and spirit has evoked



a livelier response, but scarcely anybody will have found the lost co-inherence (as Williams called the unity and centre of life) in the myth of the God Pan and in phallic consciousness. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, elaborated from an awareness of Homer's *Odyssey* and its intact world, displays little more than the raggedness and indigence of modern man; and Ezra Pound's source of all good — his monetary system managed by the state — leads us into a secularised heaven without any dignity, his Usura, being a power destroying and dissolving culture, into a hell without any symbolic significance.

It is therefore small wonder that the poets — dissatisfied with myth deprived of its religious roots and therefore barren — have again returned to King Arthur and Guinevere, to Lancelot and the Grail. In this half-forgotten legendary world they have discovered a mythology ideally suited as a poetic referent for human existence, social relations and metaphysical aspirations. Here they have found the antagonism between the Christian world as a realisation of the theme of order, and chaos as a consequence of human passions and moral decay: they have seen the decline of civilization in the mirror of King Arthur's world. Thus has begun a new stage in the career of the legendary British king, of whom the Celts believed as early as A. D. 1100 that he was not dead but would return one day and recover his land<sup>3</sup>.

## II

Among modern poets Charles Williams has been the most successful in re-creating and re-modelling Arthurian myth. At his death in 1945 he left an unfinished study on the *Figure of King Arthur* which informs us of the intention of his Arthurian poetical works, *Taliessin Through Logres* and *Region of the Summer Stars*<sup>4</sup>. He wanted to point out the development of the myths of King Arthur and the Grail, their gradual approximation to each other, their amalgamation and the future fate of the Grail. Two subjects are near to Williams' heart: King Arthur's world and the world of the Grail. If we compare the two focal points of this 'Arthuriad' with similar mediæval works, e.g. Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, which must be regarded as Williams' main source, we shall indeed recognize his individuality and originality. The tale of Lancelot and Guinevere<sup>5</sup>, which is the most perspicuous and accessible part of the story to modern readers, is only treated in passing. The centre of the whole myth and thus the *raison d'être* of Williams' work is the Grail. King Arthur's empire is from the beginning deliberately designed for the Grail. The union of the Arthurian world and the Grail is for Charles Williams not a historical or legendary event, but a complex symbol of the union of *imperium* and Christianity, and therewith the symbol of Christ's return to earth, the *παρουσία*.

On the model of the Old French Prose *Lancelot* Williams calls Arthur's kingdom Logres. It is part or province of the Byzantine Empire which in turn represents

the incarnation of divine order. Coming from the mediæval Arthurian legend we should have expected the Roman Empire as the more obvious starting point. But for Charles Williams Byzantium means a strictly hierarchical orderliness and organic subdivision. For him divine order is geometrical precision and perfect harmony of the component parts. He therefore did not want a rivalry between the members of the empire or a representation of struggles for political predominance. Thus Williams gives the story of King Arthur a new turn which can be understood only through a retrospective glance at the early Arthurian works.

The theme of order looms large at least as early as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*<sup>6</sup>. The learned Bishop of St. Asaph was not so much interested in the heroic deeds of the historical King Arthur as in the representation of the *regnum*, for which King Arthur stood as a kind of symbol. Geoffrey constructed a glorious past in which the empire of the Britons was on top of the world and able to compete with the Roman Empire. He apparently intended to found a new political ideology<sup>7</sup>. He tried to demonstrate that the dynastic dream of an Anglo-Norman kingdom mightier than the empire of Charlemagne or even Augustus was a practical possibility. Geoffrey heightened the *primordia urbis* and transformed Arthur into a monumental figure: greater than Hector and Aeneas, Alexander and Charles the Great, visible symbol of an empire superior to Rome. The foundation of this new empire was to lie outside the mediæval *imperium*; Geoffrey's Arthur was meant as an emperor of Christendom<sup>8</sup>.

In the literary works following Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* the national pretension manifested itself in an emphatic insistence on the war against Rome. In the most famous Middle English work on the tragedy of King Arthur, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*<sup>9</sup>, the war against Rome is the main subject. Even in later chronicles we can recognize that the interest has been shifted to the Roman war<sup>10</sup>. In Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* Arthur had been about to climb the Alps when the news of Mordred's treason arrived and the army was forced to a quick retreat. According to Peter of Langtoft Arthur had already passed the Alps and the trumpets had summoned to dinner when the harbinger delivered his fatal message<sup>11</sup>. John Hardyng says that the decisive battle between the Roman and the British army took place at the river "Awbe" in "Romany"<sup>12</sup>. In the *Annales de Wigornia* (and other chronicles) Arthur is within reach of Rome when the messenger stops further advance<sup>13</sup>. In Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* finally Arthur defeats Rome, subdues the empire and is crowned emperor: "... he was crowned Emperour by the Poopys hondis, with all the royalté in the worlde to welde for ever."<sup>14</sup>

Charles Williams presents a new concept of the Arthurian kingdom and at the same time of Arthurian myth. The most important innovation is the abandonment of the antithesis between Logres and Rome. Already in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* Rome had only been "the slowly fading mistress of the world".

The war against the empire is reduced to one laconic sentence: "And Arthur strove with Rome."<sup>15</sup> Williams says that this war against the emperor "ought not to happen", "it had better be dropped": "No national myth was ever the better for being set against a more universal authority."<sup>16</sup> Williams gives up the rivalry between Logres and Rome and thus gets rid of the nationalism prevalent in Geoffrey and Malory. Arthur's kingdom becomes an organic part of the Byzantine Empire.

Williams develops the idea of the empire as an organism in a quite literal way<sup>17</sup>. He takes up a suggestion of William Wordsworth who in the *Prelude* terms the human body an index of grace and honour, power and worthiness; in other words: the structure of the body is an index to the structure of a greater whole<sup>18</sup>. Williams is anxious not to separate the physical structure from the greater whole. The body is treated as an index, which means that the verbal element and the microcosmic physical structure are duplicated in the greater structure of the whole. In Williams' poetic imagination the microcosmic-macrocosmic structures are fused. The head of the empire's body is Logres, for it is in Britain that the historical process has its origin and becomes conscious. The breasts are France, whence Christendom has received the milk of learning and of faith ("the breasts of intelligo and credo")<sup>19</sup>. Rome is represented through the hands of the pope which mediate the blessings of the church. The navel stands for Byzantium, the organic centre and residence of the emperor. The genital organs are Jerusalem where Christ was crucified and where the redemption of man took place<sup>20</sup>. Thus the empire is an organism, the human body on the other hand an image of the empire, the kingdom of God<sup>21</sup>.

Beyond the empire is P'ol'u, the land of the antipodes, where order slides into anarchy. Octopods with enormous slimy tentacles move waving across the silent sea and glower with lidless eyes upon the coast of the empire. Ideas from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* mingle with the mediaeval lore of the Antipodes which was sometimes even counterpoised with the Arthurian world, as e.g. in Etienne de Rouen's *Draco Normannicus*<sup>22</sup>. P'ol'u is a kind of hell, the kingdom of the headless king. West of Logres is Broceliande, the mysterious wood of making and of everything concerned with making, the country of Apeiron<sup>23</sup>. Mistress of this forest is Nimue, "mother of making". She is evidently modelled under the influence of Swinburne's "Lady of the Lake", but as the great mother and lady of Broceliande she combines time and place, her children Merlin and Brisen, twins of parthenogenetical birth. In the forest of Broceliande, outside the empire, lies the Castle of Carbonek, where Grail and Bleeding Lance are kept.

Merlin and Brisen prepare the fusion of Byzantium and Carbonek, the amalgamation of the secular and religious ideal, the perfection of Christendom on earth: the παρουσία.

Williams has changed the geographically unfixed Logres of mediæval authors into a spiritual landscape which is characterized by geometrical order. But order is not only in itself a value, it also refers to holiness, to God who manifests himself in mathematical and geometrical symbols as "operative providence". Religion should be expressed in mathematically clear images with precise outlines. Sin, for example, is the rejection of a pattern, the overthrow of a divine plan through man<sup>24</sup>. The ordered and hierarchically graded Logres refers to a macrocosmic universe to which it corresponds in the same way as the human body does to the empire. But Logres is only a transitory realisation of the ideal social order — the creation of a happy moment — and therefore unstable, dependent on men's readiness to conform to the laws. If they are lacking in disinterested love and make themselves the centre of the world, the original chaos comes back: "... things fall apart, the centre cannot hold."<sup>25</sup>

Compared with Malory's work on the downfall of Arthur's world, the dimensions have widened. They remind us of Milton and his representation of the Fall of Man<sup>26</sup>. Heaven and earth combine in a new mythical empire which is not less real because it has never existed. Neither is it the idealistic portrait of a utopian φανταστικόν, but a universally valid representation of the situation of man, even of modern man. But apart from this applicability to contemporary history Williams' myth lives from its own centre, its meaning and inherent grandeur.

### III

As with the kingdom of Arthur, Williams presents the Grail in a form it has never had in the preceding literature. One might even say that before Williams there has never been an adequate poetical version of the Grail legend in English literature. Besides the unimportant work of Henry Lovelich<sup>27</sup> there are five versions of the early history of the Grail, which was already well known in England about 1250, as can be proved by an interpolation in *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae*<sup>28</sup>. The oldest extant version has come down to us in the alliterative fragment *Joseph of Arimathia*<sup>29</sup>. Of the *Quest del Saint Graal*<sup>30</sup>, the most important part of the Grail legend, there is only one English adaptation, Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*<sup>31</sup>.

Malory does not care very much for the mystery of the Grail and its spiritual function<sup>32</sup>. He is more interested in worldly honour and fame than in spiritual chivalry. This is by no means inconsistent with the fact that Malory follows his source during the quest much closer than in the rest of his work. He draws upon the *matière*, but he changes the *sen*<sup>33</sup>. The transcendental aim of the quest should help the all too secular knight to find his primary destination. But Malory did not or could not recognize the spiritual significance of the quest. He takes the Grail into his secular world.

The hierarchical structure of values of the French Prose *Lancelot* ends in Galahad, a saint similar to Christ, who has a unique position in the Arthurian world. He belongs to the court of King Arthur, but his real home is the mystical Sarras, his sphere of duties not the tournament but the Grail. And yet there is never the slightest doubt that Galahad is the best knight in the world. Malory, however, in contradiction to his source, insists on the fact that Lancelot was a better swordsman and fighter and a better knight than his son Galahad. By this change Malory has secularised his source. Through Lancelot he enhances worldly chivalry, which is now on an equal footing with the world of the Grail. The quest simply becomes one knightly adventure among many others.

Malory's unwillingness or inability to grasp the significance of the Grail quest is certainly not a unique failure but rather a general human response to the spiritual world. Modern man in particular does not appreciate the ascetic ideal. John W. Donaldson, one of the recent editors of Malory, has therefore omitted the quest altogether. He calls this part the interpolation of a monk, incompatible with the spirit of a tale of chivalry, because based on the ideals of chastity and penitence and therefore a stranger to the world of Arthur<sup>34</sup>. In a similar way Tennyson has represented the quest as an experience of the three mystics Galahad, Perceval and Bors, evoked by ecstatic visions of holy virgins. The 'Table Round', and with it the average man, has nothing to do with the quest<sup>35</sup>.

Charles Williams knows about this human attitude towards holiness. Mordred, the cynic and traitor says:

My father dwelled on the thought of the Grail for his luck,  
But I can manage without such fairy mechanism  
If it does prove to be, which is no likely thought  
I will send my own dozen of knights to pull it in<sup>36</sup>.

For Williams, the Grail is not a fairy mechanism, but a spiritual power. He devotes the greater part of his later poetry to the re-establishment of the Grail in the world of today, a very courageous though not a promising enterprise. Williams enters upon his task as a literary historian and as a poet. His prose work *The Figure of Arthur* displays his astonishing erudition in the field of Arthurian literature. His conception of the Grail is straightforward and unambiguous, and certainly a little prejudiced in favour of Christian associations. No matter whether the Grail was originally a chalice, a platter, or any other kind of vessel, it enters Europe together with the Eucharist. Chrétien's Grail has nothing to do with the Celtic "vessels of plenty". It does not provide food for the body but for the soul of man, it is for his eternal salvation<sup>37</sup>. It goes without saying that the Grail not only serves a small *élite* (the elect), as in the works of Malory and Tennyson: it is meant for mankind.

The wound of the Fisher King is in Williams' myth an injury of man physically and spiritually. Of course, he does not deny the sexual implications of the



wound, but he is most of all interested in the symbolical function of sex, namely its reference to Jerusalem, and the significance of Jerusalem in the anatomical myth. According to Williams Perceval's failure in the Grail Castle is due to a sense of guilt precluding an enquiry into sanctity. His callous impatience towards his mother reveals the nature of his guilt, which is connected with human nature. Williams recognizes here the first (unintentional) hint of original sin. The continuators of Chrétien took advantage of the Christian aspects of the theme. The Waste-Land motif was added to the myth, an originally pagan belief that the healing of the wounded king can restore fertility to the whole land. The wound of the Fisher King is explained by means of the "dolorous blow" which becomes in Williams' myth a symbol of Man's Fall. When Perceval was crowned king, King Arthur and the whole 'Table Round' remained in the Grail Castle for a month. Here we recognize the new centre of the Arthurian legend which moves towards the Grail.

The last Arthurian legend mentioned by Williams is *Perlesvaus*. It is easy to see why Williams was especially interested in this particular work. Its exposition seems to indicate that the Arthurian world and the Grail should for the first time be united in a literary work. King Arthur rides out to restore his former fame. He finds a hermitage and in its chapel he experiences the mystery of the Eucharist. On the altar he catches sight of a beautiful young woman with a child on her knees. While the hermit reads the mass the woman changes into "Our Lady of Sorrows" and the child becomes the thorn-crowned Christ with a face and stature similar to his (Arthur's) own. At the *ite, missa est* the lights are extinguished and the vision disappears. Arthur returns home. He arrives at Cardoil full of good intentions, and he promises to Guinevere always to fulfil the will of God. According to Williams this is Arthur's nearest approximation to the mystery. In no other version is such a grace granted to the king, except perhaps in the appearance of Galahad at the court of King Arthur. But an amalgamation of the two worlds did not take place, there was not even a contact between them. Williams, however, regarded the unification of these two worlds as his foremost task and duty.

#### IV

Williams' new Arthurian myth consists of two unfinished lyric cycles which have appeared under the titles *Taliessin Through Logres* and *Region of the Summer Stars*. As in the *Morte Darthur* and similar versions the starting point is the crowning of King Arthur. Even at this point a presage of future mischief creeps over the reader. Merlin does not take part in the crowning of the king. He sits in the steeple of St. Stephen and meditates on the inevitable decline of the kingdom. He is aware of the "dolorous blow", the wounding of the keeper of the Grail with the sacred spear. Man wounds himself, and that is an image of the Fall. The

result is the decay of order into anarchy. Balin kills his brother Balan without recognizing him. The Fall and the first murder destroy the innocence of the kingdom. The disease of disorder spreads over the country.

The king is also seized with it. In the early versions Mordred was the king's nephew, son of King Loth and Arthur's sister Anna. Later on he becomes a son of the king, born through incest. Williams says of Arthur that he cohabits with his sister without recognizing her: "The shape of a blind woman under the shape of a blind man."<sup>38</sup> The incest had been described by mediæval authors without any comment, though they saw clearly that the result of this sin was the traitor Mordred, the destroyer of the Arthurian world. In the Taliessin cycle the incest is a symbol of egotistic self-love, narcissism, called *Gomorriha*. Thus Arthur has reached the lowest point of his career. It seems to me that the characters of epic cycles have a life of their own, independent of the specific intentions of their authors. Arthur at any rate is steadily going downhill, a process which has been called "epic degeneration". Williams makes him the antagonist of the Grail which he betrays by egotism and by lack of *caritas* and *largesse*.

As in most mediæval romances King Arthur is an unmoved mover, the passive centre of his kingdom. Someone else has to act in his stead, and, as Malory did before him, Williams chooses Lancelot for this part, the favourite of King and Queen, the poet's best example of the way of affirmations and of images, just as the nun Dindrane who sacrifices her blood for a leper, is an example of the negative way, the way of image-rejection. Only Guinevere is treated without the slightest sympathy. In all the previous versions she was, as the schoolgirl said, "a lady very much subject to the misfortune of being run away with", and even Williams cannot think of very much for her to do or to be. She can only sit, wait, and love. Galahad, the pure knight, cannot be born from her. His mother must come from the family of the Grail kings, his father must belong to the secular chivalry. Carbonek and Camelot are to be united in the person of Prince Galahad. Originally, Williams thought of Arthur as the father of Galahad, but he gave up this plan, because the destiny of the 'Table Round' (that is of chivalry proper) must be determined by the king. Therefore Williams follows literary tradition and makes Lancelot father of the elect. After the begetting of Galahad Merlin's work is done. He disappears into the mystical darkness whence he came. The advent of Galahad, subject of the poem *The Coming of Galahad*, is modelled according to the symbols of stone and shell. This is taken from Wordsworth's *Prelude*<sup>39</sup>. At the beginning of Book V the poet tells us his dream: in a sandy desert he met a Bedouin carrying a stone and a shell. The stone was Euclid's elements, geometry or intellect, the shell prophetic poetry<sup>40</sup>. For Williams these two symbols are the poles of human life: the geometric and the vital, Byzantium and Broceliande. In the person of Galahad the stone has been fitted to the shell — this he calls the finding of identity. Galahad is the image of the

New Man, an example of the necessary union of the Arthurian world and Grail.

Taliessin has seen this identity in five different houses, in the house of poetry, in sensual life, in the intellect, in the Church, and in the imaginative vision. The intellectual Gaul needs the shell, the life of the flesh needs the stone. All the houses are linked with each other, none of them can exist on its own. In my opinion Taliessin does not speak uncertainly here, as C. S. Lewis has said. The five houses turn into the triangular points of the pentangle which was regarded as a symbol of perfection by Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Gnostics. The immediate source of Williams might be the Middle English romance *Gawain and the Green Knight*<sup>41</sup>, in which Gawain bears the pentangle on his coat of arms. The allegorical explanation of this symbol rests on the idea of the endless knot, so called, because the "interlacing lines are joined so as to be continuous"<sup>42</sup>. If you follow the lines, you will always return to the same point. Taliessin traces the lines of the pentangle, and the importance of the individual houses diminishes. One blends into the other. His measure fails, because it is only applicable to the categories. But in the pentangle they become a unique identity.

The poem on Galahad closes with Taliessin's vision of the ascent of the soul to the inner heaven. Like Dante, who regards the planetary spheres as different grades and classes of holiness, Williams takes the planets as stages in the spiritual development of man. The first planet is Mercury, the God of opposition and change, the stage of competition among the houses. Venus is the sphere of orientation and decision, i. e. of preference. Jupiter with his two moons refers to irony and defeated irony, which does not chafe against the unalterable state of the world, but draws its sting by laughing at its absurdity. Saturn is the planet of loneliness and meditation<sup>43</sup>, promise and symbol of the future Golden Age<sup>44</sup>. Logres has only reached the sphere of Jupiter. There, still living side by side, are Galahad and Lancelot, the anxiety of the heart and the miseries of human life. But the outlines of the future development are already clearly recognizable: the enormous powers of Broceliande have engendered Galahad, but have exhausted themselves in this process. Logres becomes Britain, Carbonek and Camelot are further apart than ever before.

Like Galahad, who has seen the holy Grail already in Camelot, Perceval and Bors are the elect of the Grail. They are at the same time living flesh and blood and incarnations of typical attitudes towards life. Perceval is the pure lover, full of spiritual questions and problems, Bors the ordinary mortal man, married, with children, a man aspiring to perfection but laden with earthly concerns. Galahad however does not belong to this world. Williams would not want us to see him as Christ. But he is a symbol for the divine spark in man, "man's capacity for Christ"<sup>45</sup>. In Carbonek Galahad heals the wounded king, Christ appears to him in the Grail and sends him to Sarra where he recedes from man's view. His

leaving Camelot marks the final separation of the Arthurian world and the Grail. Arthur's thinking circulates more and more round his own power and importance. In mediæval works, such as *Perlesvaus*, the loss of *largesse* caused the decline of the kingdom; in Williams' work it is the lack of *caritas*, the self-conceit of the king. He enters into a war with Lancelot, Mordred betrays the king, father and son kill each other.

The "Prayers of the Pope" bring the cycle to an end. As a kind of refrain we hear the desperate cry: "Send not, send not the rich empty away." The whole empire has divided itself into antagonistic groups. The pope feels inside himself the schism, the return of chaos, the spiritual death. Thus Williams leaves us in a world similar to that described by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* where the Fisher King asks: "Shall I at least set my land in order?" and where he receives answer by means of the nursery rhyme: "London bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down . . ." The vision of a significant voyage towards a fixed destination has evaporated. There will be no salvation from the curse of sterility.

But Williams does not send us home without any hope: Taliessin's household will remain. Though he has formally dissolved the company and restored to God his task and lieutenancy, there will always be a kind of hidden communion, the work will go on. And there is still another hope: Broceliande will always remain good. The roots of the forest fasten on the tentacles of P'ol'u, the forces of death are checked and chained by the mother of making.

## V

Can we call Charles Williams a modern poet? What is his place in literary history? The *avant-garde* of modern lyric poetry will reject him. In modern poetry (they declare categorically) the individual perception of the world has to be transferred to the infinite field of potential experience. Modern poetry is destructive. It dismisses idealistic conceptions of the world, it insists on breadth of vision and outlook. But above all, modern lyric poetry has to shift its subject out of the light of clarity and perceptibility into the darkness of obscurity, mystery, and uncertainty. The metaphor is only tolerated as a kind of irritating impulse which blots out other impulses and thus gives rise to a dialectical movement. If we subscribe to this view we can hardly call Williams a modern poet. At the best, some of his stylistic means might be acceptable to our stern modernists, the sprung rhythm which Williams has adopted from Gerard Manley Hopkins, the esoteric obscurity and difficulty of the poetical utterance, the mannerism of his language, the juxtaposition of disparate metaphors. But contrary to the ruling tendencies of modern lyric poetry the mysteriousness of his poems gives way to flashes of deepest insight, the cryptic darkness changes into lucid objectivity.

Yet Williams is not a traditionalist. He is not primarily involved in examining whether traditional myths and legends are suitable for modern use. For Williams,

the Grail is not part of a venerable mythology, but a spiritual incentive, a challenge and a destination. Though his Grail remains a symbol of the transcendental, his message has nothing to do with the a-logical fascination of modern poetry. Even the reader who cannot accept Williams' message, because he finds it repellent, antiquated, or unrealistic, must nevertheless admit that Williams' poetical world is coherent, consistent, intelligible, perspicuous. Moreover, it is modern, full of spiritual unrest, stir and fermentation. In spite of Williams' adherence to Malory and other mediæval authors, the subject appears to be an appropriate means of expression for the poet's message to his century, perhaps because Williams has penetrated deeper into the Arthurian myth than any of his predecessors, because he has clearly expressed what they had only vaguely anticipated.

In spite of the assurances of modern literary historians it is by no means certain which kind of poetry will in future years be regarded as the typical expression of our time. But surely Williams' poetry is also modern, though it exploits the treasure-house of the past, for it reflects the situation of modern man. Indeed some people believe that only by returning to the old sources can we regain the lost centre of life. In his old age William Butler Yeats no longer rejected the metaphors and stories of Wales and Brittany. "Supreme art", he said, "is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths."<sup>46</sup> Chrétien de Troyes said the same thing in a slightly different way: "I agree with the opinion of the Bretons that King Arthur's name will live on for evermore."<sup>47</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alanus ab Insulis, *Prophetia Anglicana* (Frankfurt, 1603), pp. 22 f., tr. Roger Sherman Loomis, in "The Oral Diffusion", *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford U. P., 1959), p. 62 — hereafter cited as *ALM*. On Arthur's fame see Alfred of Beverley, *Annales sive Historia de Gestis Regum Britanniae*, ed. Th. Hearne (Oxford, 1716), p. 2: „notamque rusticitatis incurrebat, qui talium narrationum scienciam non habebat.“ See Levin L. Schücking, *Soziologie der literarischen Geschmacksbildung* (Bern, 1961), p. 78. On tales about the forest of Broceliande see *Roman de Rou*, ed. H. Andresen, 2 vols. (Heilbronn, 1877—79), vv. 6415 ff. Cf. *The Vita Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. and transl. by J. J. Parry (Univ. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, X, No. 3) (Urbana, 1925):

Vos ergo Britanni  
Laurea sarta date Gaufrido de Monemuta  
Est etenim vester, non quondam proelia vestra  
Vestrorumque ducum cecinit scripsitque libellum  
Quem nunc Gesta vocant Britonum, celebrata per orbem.

<sup>2</sup> Arno Esch, „Zur Situation der modernen englischen Dichtung: Die Suche nach einer Mythologie“, *GRM*, 37 (1956), 163—175. Cf. Charles Moorman, *Arthurian Triptych* (Perspectives in Criticism, No. 5) (Berkeley, 1960). Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (Baton Rouge, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> See "The Legend of Arthur's Survival", *ALM*, pp. 64 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Taliessin Through Logres. The Region of the Summer Stars* (Oxford U. P., 1954) — hereafter cited as *TThL*, RSS. *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 (Oxford U. P., 1952) — hereafter cited as *AT*. *The Image of the City*, ed. Anne Ridler (Oxford U. P., 1958) — hereafter cited as *IC*. For discussion see John Heath-Stubbs, *Charles Williams* (Writers and their Work, No. 63) (London, 1955). Mary McDermott Shideler, *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams* (New York, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> For a German version of the tale which can be read with delight and profit, see Ruth Schirmer, *Lancelot und Ginevra: Ein Liebesroman am Artushof* (Manesse-Bibliothek der Weltliteratur) (Zürich, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. A. Griscom (London, 1929). *Historia Regum Britanniae: A Variant Version*, ed. I. Hammer (The Medieval Academy of America) (Cambridge/Mass., 1951).

<sup>7</sup> See W. F. Schirmer, *Die frühen Darstellungen des Arthurstoffes* (Köln, 1958), pp. 19 f. Heinrich Pähler, *Strukturuntersuchungen zur Historia Regum Britanniae des Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Diss. Bonn, 1958), chap. 6 and 7.

<sup>8</sup> See *Histories of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth*, tr. by Sebastian Evans (London, 1911), "The Translator's Epilogue", pp. 242 f.

<sup>9</sup> *Morte Arthure*, ed. E. Björkman (Alt- und Mittelenglische Texte, No. 9) (Heidelberg, 1915).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Herta Brandenburg, *Galfried von Monmouth und die frühmittelenglischen Chronisten* (Diss. Berlin, 1918).

<sup>11</sup> *Chronicle of Peter Langtoft*, ed. T. Wright (Rolls Series, XLVII) (London, 1866—68), 2 vols., I, 217.

<sup>12</sup> John Hardyng, *The Chronicle: Together with the Continuations by R. Grafton*, ed. H. Ellis (London, 1812), p. 143:

Through Fraüce, Burgoyne, Savoye & Lumbardie,  
Into Italy, and so through all Tuskayn;  
Fro Tuskayn then so into Romany,  
To Awbe ryuer Kyng Arthure came so than,  
And [loged on that water as] manne;  
Wher with Lucius he faught in bataille strong,  
Either other proued with strokes sore emong.

<sup>13</sup> *Annales de Wigornia*, in *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. R. Luard (Rolls Series, XXXVI) (London, 1869), IV, 362.

<sup>14</sup> *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. E. Vinaver (Oxford U. P., 1948), I, 245.

<sup>15</sup> "The Coming of Arthur", *Poetical Works* (Oxford U. P., 1954), p. 295.

<sup>16</sup> "The Figure of Arthur", *AT*, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "The Index of the Body", *IC*, p. 80 f.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. John Heath-Stubbs, *Charles Williams*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> *TThL*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Arno Esch, "Paradise and Calvary", *Anglia*, 78 (1960), 74—77.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. C. D. Lewis: "... every image recreates not merely an object but an object in the context of an experience, and thus an object as part of a relationship. Relationship being in the very nature of metaphor, if we believe that the universe is a body wherein all men and all things are 'members one of another', we must allow metaphor to give a 'partial intuition of the whole world'. Every poetic image, I would affirm, by clearly revealing a tiny portion of this body, suggests its infinite extension." *The Poetic Image*, The Clark Lectures given at Cambridge in 1946 (London, 1947), p. 29, quoted by

Clifford Dymont, *C. Day Lewis* (Writers and their Work, No. 62) (London, 1955), p. 34.  
Cf. Maung Ba-Han, *William Blake: His Mysticism* (Bordeaux, 1924), p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> *The Draco Normannicus of Etienne de Rouen*, ed. R. Howlett (Rolls Series, LXXXII) (London, 1885), vol. 2, part III.

<sup>23</sup> On Broceliande cf. McDermott Shideler, *Theology of Romantic Love*, p. 102 f.

<sup>24</sup> See IC, p. 145. Moorman, *Arthurian Triptych*, p. 67.

<sup>25</sup> William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming", *Collected Poems* (London, 1958), p. 211.

<sup>26</sup> See Nathan Comfort Starr, *King Arthur Today* (Gainesville, 1954), p. 178.

<sup>27</sup> *The History of the Holy Grail*, by Henry Lovelich, Skynner, ed. F. J. Furnivall and D. Kempe (E. E. T. S., ES, No. 20, 24, 28, 30, 95) (London, 1874—1905).

<sup>28</sup> William of Malmesbury, *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae*, Migne, *P. L.*, CLXXIX, 1701 f.

<sup>29</sup> *Joseph of Arimathea*, ed. W. W. Skeat (E. E. T. S., OS, No. 44) (London, 1871).

<sup>30</sup> On the origin of the Grail legends cf. *ALM*, pp. 274 f., pp. 325 f.

<sup>31</sup> On Malory's *Morte Darthur* see Charles Moorman, *The Book of Kyng Arthur* (University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

<sup>32</sup> See E. Vinaver, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Oxford U. P., 1929), pp. 70 f.

<sup>33</sup> On the origin of the Grail legends cf. P. E. Tucker, "A Source for 'The Healing of Sir Urry' in the MD", *MLR*, 50 (1955), 490 f.

<sup>34</sup> *Uther Pendragon of Britain* (New York, 1943).

<sup>35</sup> "The Holy Grail", *Poetical Works*, p. 401.

<sup>36</sup> "The Meditation of Mordred", *RSS*, p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> According to Chrétien the Grail is a vessel commonly used to contain a salmon or a lamprey or a pike. Williams does not explain the equation with a sacramental chalice. Cf. *ALM*, pp. 276—277.

<sup>38</sup> *TThL*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John P. Gigrich, *An Immortality for its Own Sake: A Study of the Concept of Poetry in the Writings of Charles Williams* (Diss. Washington/D. C., 1954), p. 106. Gigrich notes that "Williams borrows the general outline of the poetic process, its terminology, and the concept of poetic reason from the writings of Wordsworth, especially from the *Prelude*".

<sup>40</sup> *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1959), vv. 1—150.

<sup>41</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1955), vv. 630 ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>43</sup> *Paradiso*, XXI, 26—27.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ferdinand Piper, *Mythologie der christlichen Kunst von der ältesten Zeit bis in's sechzehnte Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1851), p. 215. Cf. also C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge U. P., 1964).

<sup>45</sup> IC, p. 176.

<sup>46</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London, 1955), p. 490.

<sup>47</sup> *ALM*, p. 563.