

Taliessin through Logres
by Charles Williams
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.
Taliessin's return to Logres
The seas were left behind;
in a harbour of Logres
lightly I came to land
under a roaring wind.

Strained were the golden sails,
the masts of the galley creaked
as it rode for the Golden Horn
and I for the hills of Wales.

In a train of golden cars
the Emperor went above,
for over me in my riding
shot seven golden stars,
as if while the great oaks stood,
straining, creaking, around,
seven times the golden sickle
flashed in the Druid wood.

Covered on my back,
untouched, my harp had hung;
its notes sprang to sound
as I took the blindfold track,
The road that runs from tales,
through the darkness where Circe's son
sings to the truants of towns
In a forest of nightingales.

The beast ran in the wood
that had lost the man's mind;
on a path harder than death
spectral shapes stood
propped against trees;
they gazed as I rode by,
fast after me poured
the light of flooding seas.

But I was Druid-sprung;
I cast my heart in the way;
all the Mercy I called
to give courage to my tongue.
As I came by Broceliande
a diagram played in the night,
where either the golden sickle
flashed, or a signalling hand.

Away on the southern seas
was the creaking of the mast,
beyond the Roman road
was the creaking of the trees.
Beyond the farms and the fallows
the sickle of a golden arm
that gathered fate in the forest
in a stretched palm caught the hallows.

At the falling of the first
chaos behind me checked;
at the falling of the second
the wood showed the worst;
at the falling of the third
I had come to the king's camp,
the harp on my back
syllabled the signal word.

I saw a Druid light
burn through the Druid hills,
as the hooves of King Arthur's horse
rounded me in the night.
I heard the running of flame
faster than fast through Logres
into the camp by the hazels
I Taliessin came.
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 Cradlemaas 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 Cradlemaas 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 sough
is up with hammer and sickle, and holds Thames mouth
Lanc-elot 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 Cradlemaes 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 Ciry'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 Aeneid'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
thar 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 tie 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, tributaries 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, misted, screamed;
Taliessin beheld a god lie in his tomb.

At the door of the gloom sparks die and revive.;
the spirit of Logres fades, glows, fades.
It is the first watch; the Pope says Matins in Lateran;
the hollow call is beaten on the hoard in Sophia;
the ledge of souls shudders, whether they die or live
Taliessin's Song of the Unicorn
Shouldering shapes of the skies of Broceliande

are rumours in the flesh of Caucasia; they raid the west,
clattering with shining hooves, in myth scanned -
centaur, gryphon, but lordlier for verse is the crest
of the unicorn, the quick panting unicorn; he will come
to a girl's crooked finger or the sharp smell
of her clear flesh but to her no good; the strum
of her blood takes no riot or quiet from the quell;
she cannot like such a snorting alien love
galloped from a dusky horizon it has no voice

to explain, nor the silver horn pirouetting above
her bosom - a ghostly threat but no way to rejoice
in released satiation; her body without delight
chill-curdled, and the gruesome horn only to be
polished, its rifling rubbed between breasts; right
is the tale that a true man runs and sets the maid free,
and she lies with the gay hunter and his spear flesh-hued,
and over their couch the spoiled head displayed -
as Lesbia tied horned Catullus - of the cuckold of the wood;
such, west from Caucasia, is the will of every maid;
yet if any, having the cunning to call the grand beast,
the animal which is but a shade till it starts to run,
should dare set palms on the point, twisting from the least
to feel the sharper impress, for the thrust to stun
her arteries into channels of tears beyond blood
(O twy-fount, crystal in crimson, of the Word's side),
and she to a background of dark bark, where the wood
becomes one giant tree, were pinned, and plied
through hands to heart by the horn's longing: O she
translucent, planted with virtues, lit by throes,
should be called the Mother of the Unicorn's Voice, men see
her with awe, her son the new sound that goes
surrounding the City's reach, the sound of enskied
shouldering shapes, and there each science disposed,
horn-sharp, blood-deep, ocean and lightning wide,
in her paramour's song, by intellectual nuptials unclosed
Bors to Elayne: The Fish of Broceliande
The king is building Camelot; he has bidden his host
depart to their homes, the wards only of the towns
pricked for weapons; and each lord to his own land.

He has sent me to be his lieutenant on the southern coast,
over ships in the harbours and sheep flocks on the downs;
to define the kingdom - from unpathed Broceliande

to the eastern forelands. In the great hall's glow
Taleissin sang of the sea-rooted western wood;
his song meant all things to all men, and you to me.

A forest of the creatures: was it of you? no?
monstrous beasts in the trees, birds flying the flood,
and I plucked a fish from a stream that flowed to that sea:

from you? for you? shall I drop the fish in your hand?
in your hand's pool? a bright-scaled, red-tailed fish
to dart and drive up the channel of your arm?

the channel of your arm, the piercing entry to a land
where, no matter how lordly at home is set the dish,
no net can catch it, nor hook nor gaff harm?

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

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

back to its haunt in a fathomless bottomless pool;
is there a name then, an anagram of spirit and sense,
that Nimue the mistress of the wood could call it by?

None but a zany, none but earth's worst fool,
could suppose he knows; no name was thrown thence;
some say a twy-nature only can utter the cry

(what? how?) to bring it from the stirred stream,
and if- inhumanly flashing a sudden scale,
aboriginally shaking the aboriginal main.

Double tracks then their dazzled eyes seem
to follow: one, where the forked dominant tail
flicks, beats, reddens the smooth plane

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

Will you open your hand now to catch your own
nova creatura? through stream and cataract sped,
through shallow and depth? accipe, take the fish.

Take; I have seen the branches of Broceliande.
Though Camelot is built, though the king sit on the throne,
yet the wood in the wild west of the shapes and names

probes everywhere through the frontier of head and hand;
everywhere the light through the great leaves is blown
on your substantial flesh, and everywhere your glory frames
Taliessin in the School of the Poets
Through Camelot, which is London-in-Logres,
by Paul's and Arthur's door,
Taliessin came to the school of the poets;
through an exposition of song,
over a glamour of golden-work,
his shadow fell on the floor.

Phoebus there in mid-mosaic
on a mud-born Python trod;
his beams about him enmeshed the world,
London, Rome, and the underseas;
the moving shadow over all
lapped the edge of the god.

Dusk deepened in the work's width;
from rituals and prophecies,
from skins of runes and vellums of verse,
the children of song to the brass of a man,
searching the dark of Phoebus' style,
turned attentive eyes.

Their hearts ached, their thoughts foiled,
with sorrows and young loves;
within verse they were teased by verse;
Taliessin stood by the chair of the poets;
in the court beyond the lattice
cooed the king's doves.

Butterfly fancies hovered
round the edged Phoebean shape.
'Fortune befall,' the king's poet said,
'the weighed gold of butterflies' wings,
the measure of the swaying hazel's shade,
or of light in the neck's nape.

'Skeined be the creamed-with-crimson sphere
on a guessed and given line,
skeined and swirled on the head-to-heel,
or the radial arm's point-to-point;
reckoned the rondures of the base
by the straight absolute spine.

'Swung be the measuring hazel wand
over thighs and shoulders bare,
and grace-pricked to gules the field
by the intinctured heart's steel;

but best they fathom the blossom
who fly the porphyry stair.

'At the huge and heavy stair's head
all measures, to infinite strength,
from sapphire-laced distances drawn,
fill the jewel-joint-justiced throne;
adored be God and the Emperor
for the gathering of the nth.

'From the indulged Byzantine floor
between right and left newel
floats the magnanimous path of the stair
to a tangle of compensations,
every joint a centre,
and every centre a jewel.

'Each moment there is the midmost
of the whole massive load;
impulse a grace and wonder a will,
love desert, and sight direction,
whence the Acts of Identity issue
in the Pandects and the Code;

'while in the opposite shires of Logres
the willows of the brook sway
by the tribal tracks and the Roman roads
in the haze of the levels and the lengthening lines,
and the nuts of the uncut hazel fall
down the cut hazel's way.'

Taliessin's voice sharpened
on Virgil's exact word;
he uttered Italy seen from a wave;
he defined the organisms of hell.
Blindfold on their perches
the king's falcons stirred.

The darkening glamour of the golden-work
took colour from each line;
dimly the gazing postulants saw
patterns of multilinear red
sprinkled and spreading everywhere,
and spaced to one design.

The king's poet stood by the sovereign chair;
in a harsh voice he cried
of the stemming and staling of great verse,
of poetry plunged into the void

where Virgil clutched at clumps of song
when that master of poets died.

Tendebantque rnanus there
in the broad Phoebean ground
they saw the macrocosm drawn;
they heard the universal sigh
in the balance of changing levels
and complemented sound.

Infinite patterns opened
in the sovereign chair's mass;
but the crowned form of anatomized man,
bones, nerves, sinews,
the diagram of the style of the Logos,
rose in the crimson brass.

Breathless explorers of the image,
innocent, lucent-eyed,
the young poets studied precision;
Taliessin remembered the soul:
Sis salvotor, Domine,
the king's poet sighed
Taliessin on the Death of Virgil
Virgil fell from the edge of the world,
hurled by the thrust of Augustus' back; the shape
he loved grew huge and black, loomed and pushed.
The air rushed up; he fell
into despair, into air's other.
The hexameter's fullness now could find no ground;
his mind, dizzily replete with the meaningless sweet sound,
could found no Rome there on the joys of a noise.
He fell through his moment's infinity
(no man escapes), all the shapes of his labour,
his infinite images, dropping pell-mell; above,
loomed the gruesome great buttocks of Augustus his love,
his neighbour, infinitely large, infinitely small.
In the midst of his fall others came, none to save.
While he was dropping they put him in a grave.
Perpetual falling, perpetual burying,
this was the truth of his Charon's ferrying -
everlastingly plucked from and sucked from and plucked to
and sucked to a grave.

Unborn pieties lived.
Out of the infinity of time to that moment's infinity
they lived, they rushed, they dived below him, they rose
to close with his fall; all, while man is, that could
live, and would, by his hexameters, found
there the ground of their power, and their power's use.
Others he saved; himself he could not save.
In that hour they came; more and faster, they sped
to their dead master; they sought him to save

from the spectral grave and the endless falling,
who had heard, for their own instruction, the .sound of his
calling.

There was intervention, suspension, the net of their loves,
all their throng's songs:

Virgil, master and friend,
holy poet, priest, president of priests,
prince long since of all our energies' end,
deign to accept adoration, and what salvation
may reign here by us, deign of goodwill to endure,
in this net of obedient loves, doves of your cote and wings,
Virgil, friend, lover, and lord.

Virgil was fathered of his friends.

He lived in their ends.

He was set on the marble of exchange.

Lamorak and the Queen Morgause of Orkney
Hued from the livid everlasting stone
the queen's hewn eyelids bruised my bone;
my eyes splintered, as our father Adam's when the first
exorbitant flying nature round creation's flank burst.

Her hair was whirlwind about her face;
her face outstripped her hair; it rose from a place
where pre-Adamic sculpture on an ocean rock lay,
and the sculpture torn from its rock was swept away.

Her hand discharged catastrophe; I was thrown
before it; I saw the source of all stone,
the rigid tornado, the schism and first strife
of primeval rock with itself, Morgause Lot's wife.

I had gone in summer at the king's word to explore
the coast of the kingdom towards the Pole; the roar
of the ocean beyond all coasts threatened on one hand;
on the other we saw the cliffs of Orkney stand.

Caves and hollows in the crags were filled with the scream
of seamews nesting and fleeting; the extreme theme
of Logres rose in harsh cries and hungry storms,
and there, hewn in a cleft, were hideous huge forms.

I remembered how the archbishop in Caerleon at a feast
preached that before the making of man or beast
the Emperor knew all carved contingent shapes
in torrid marsh temples or on cold crookt capes.

These were the shapes only the Emperor knew,
unless Coelius Vibenna and his loathly few,

squat by their pot, by the twisted hazel art
sought the image of that image within their heart.

Sideways in the cleft they lay, and the seamews' wings
everywhere flying, or the mist, or the mere slant of the things
seemed to stir them; then the edge of the storm's shock
over us obliquely split rock from rock.

Ship and sculpture shuddered; the crags' scream
mingled with the seamews'; Logres' convulsed theme
wailed in the whirlwind; we fled before the storms,
and behind us loosed in the air flew giant inhuman forms.

When from the sea I came again to my stall
King Arthur between two queens sat in a grim hall,
Guinevere on his right, Morgause on his left
I saw in her long eyes the humanized shapes of the cleft.

She sat the sister of Arthur, the wife of Lot,
four sons got by him, and one not.
I heard as she stirred the seamews scream again
in the envy of the unborn bastard and the pride of canonical Gawaine.

I turned my eyes to the lords; they sat half-dead.
The young wizard Merlin, standing by me, said:
'Balin had Balan's face, and Morgause her brother's.
Did you not know the blow that darkened each from other's?

'Balin and Balan fell by mistaken impious hate.
Arthur tossed loves with a woman and split his fate.
Did you not see, by the dolorous blow's might,
the contingent knowledge of the Emperor floating into sight?

'Over Camelot and Carbonek a whirling creature hovered
as over the Adam in Eden when they found themselves uncovered,
when they would know good as evil; thereon it was showed,
but then they must know God also after that mode.'

The eyes of the queen Morgause were a dark cavern;
there a crowned man without eyes came to a carved tavern,
a wine-wide cell, an open grave, that stood
between Caerleon and Carbonek, in the skirts of the blind wood.

Through the rectangular door the crowned shape went its way
it lifted light feet: an eyeless woman lay
flat on the rock; her arm was stretched to embrace
his own stretched arm; she had his own face.

The shape of a blind woman under the shape of a blind man
over them, half-formed, the cipher of the Great Ban,
this, below them both, the shape of the blatant beast matched,
his mouth was open in a yelp; his feet scratched.

Beyond them a single figure was cut in the rock;
it was hewn in a gyration of mow and mock;
it had a weasel's head and claws on hand and feet;
it twirled under an arch that gave on the city's street.

The child lies unborn in the queen's womb;
unformed in his brain is the web of all our doom,
as unformed in the minds of all the great lords
lies the image of the split Table and of surreptitious swords.

I am the queen's servant; while I live
down my eyes the cliff, the carving, the winged things drive,
since the rock, in those fleet lids of rock's hue,
the sculpture, the living sculpture, rose and flew.

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 Heraclitus? - 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 rase, 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 Ascent of the Spear

Taliessin walked in the palace yard;
he saw, under a guard, a girl sit in the stocks.
The stable-slaves, lounging by the gate,
cried catcalls and mocks, flung roots and skins of fruits.
She, rigid on the hard bench, disdained
motion, her cheek stained with a bruise, veined
with fury her forehead. The guard laughed and chaffed;
when Taliessin stepped near, he leapt to a rigid salute.
Lightly the king's poet halted, took the spear
from the manned hand, and with easy eyes dismissed.
Nor wist the crowd, he gone, what to do;
lifted arms fell askew; jaws gaped;
claws of fingers uncurled. They gazed,
amazed at the world of each inflexible head.

The silence loosened to speech; the king's poet said:
'Do I come as a fool? forgive folly; once more
be kind, be faithful: did we not together adore?
Say then what trick of temper or fate?' Hard-voiced,
she said without glancing, I sit here for taking a stick
to a sneering bastard slut, a Mongol ape,
that mouthed me in a wrangle.

Fortunate, for a brawl in the hall, to escape,
they dare tell me, the post, the stripping and whipping:
should I care, if the hazel rods cut flesh from bone?'
'Ah lady,' the king's poet murmured, 'confess yes,
except in the stress of a sin worse than the rage.
Though the High Steward's needful law punish the flaw,
wrong not us with pride of guilt or no guilt.
Be witness, Virgil, I too have been rash
to curse the praters and graters of verse.
Engage the flash of thy pardon, Omnipotence, there!
But here before this crowd,
do we amiss? are we proud?' Burning red,
with the laugh half-sob, she said:
'We do amiss - if we -': and he:
'You whose arrogant hands would not cast one ski
beloved, will you be wroth with your own poor kin?
Though the Caucasian theme throb with its dull ache
make, lady, the Roman motion; undo
the fierce grasp from the bench; lay on the spear's climb gently; clasp
the massive of light, in whose point serene and severe
Venus, Percivale's planet, phosphor and hesper, is here'
She obeyed; she made assent and ascent
she laid below his her hand on the shaf
under the Direction she denied pride;
her heart flowed to the crowd.

By Taliessin's side a demure chamberlain spoke:
'The High Steward to the king's poet: the lord Kay to the lord Taliessin:
if who sits here be his friend,
her fetter is his to keep or end.'
'Nor mine,' the king's poet said, 'to prefer. Sir,
she is, of force, at hand: ask her,
and do, either way, a grace of thanks to my lord.'
The messenger glanced. Celestialling the word,
her colour a deference still,
her voice adored and implored: 'Lord, what choice?' Who:
'True; yet if the king's servant and yours could speak,
he might hold it for heaven's best skill
to treat the world's will but as and at the world's will.'
'They will say -' she began; and he:
'either way; they will use to call either side
pride (to stay) or fear (to go).
Do they - do we - know? Love, and do what you choose.'
She said: I will take the Steward's grace:
do I well? Is it I then,' the king's poet said, 'whose face
Christ beholds now suffused and sufficed with his brilliant blood?
whom the feline guile of Omnipotence lures?'
The chamberlain with a sly smile offered the keys.
Taliessin signed them away. 'Release?
Let come the fellow whose duty unlocks the stocks' bar:
is it ours to undo
the fetter whereto the world's order consigned
its own disordered mind?'

Aching, stiff, she rose, stumbled, fell;
the king's poet caught her. 'So are the guilty taught,
sweet friend, who sit in the pass of the Perilous Sell.'
She said, I was wrong from beginning - 'Not to an end.
A new Pheilippides, that stumble was Marathon won.
Remains but the triumph's race to run.

Taliessin in the Rose-Garden

The king's poet walked among the queen's roses
(all kinds all minds taking),
making verse, putting distance into verse,
cutting and trimming verse as tile gardeners the roses.
He turned, at a path's end, between two bushes
of cabbage-roses, scions of Caucasia, ceittifolix,
hearts folded strong in a hundred meanings.
Along the level spinal path Taliessin,
his eyes abused by the crimson, confused saw
for a moment in the middle distance a rush of the crimson
shaping at the garden's entrance to a triple form,
to three implicit figures of the mind; His eyes
cleared; appeared three women of Camelot
the feminine headship of Logres, the queen Guinevere,
talking to Dindrane, Percivale's sister; beyond,
as the ground-work she was and tended, a single maid
hardened with toil on the well-gardened roses:
what was even Dindrane but an eidolon of the slaves?

The air was clear, as near as earth can
to the third heaven, climax tranquil in Venus.
Only (what lacks there) it breathed the energy
from Broceliande that ever seethed in Logres,
the variable temperature of mastering Nature; Taliessin's
senses under Nimue's influences stirred and trembled
with the infinite and infinitesimal trembling of the roses.
At the entrance to the long rose-path he saw
the sensuous mode, the consummate earth of Logres,
the wife of Arthur, the queen of the kingdom, Guinevere.
Hazel-lithe she stood, in a green gown;
bare against the green, her arm was tinged
with faint rose-veins, and golden-flecked
as the massed fair hair under the gold
circlet of Logres; on one hand was the ring
of the consort of Logres; deep-rose-royal
it drew the rose-alleys to its magical square.
There, in the single central ruby, Taliessin
saw, in the sovereign gem of Logres, the contained
life of Logres-in-the-Empire; till the flush of the roses
let seem that the unrestrained rush of the ruby
loosed a secular war to expand through the land,
and again the shore of Logres and that soon
felt the pirate beaks in a moon of blood-letting;
and within, yet encircling, the war, the sacred stone
shook with the infinitesimal trembling of the roses
and melted inwards into the blood of the king
Pelles, belted by the curse of the Dolorous Blow;

so rich was the ring and by Merlin royally runed.
The path of the garden was a verse into the wound,
into the secrets of Carbonek and the queen's majesty,
in the king's poet's mouth; he heard himself say:
'The Wounded Rose runs with blood at Carbonek.'

Making the poem he made, heard himself
say in the rose-garden to the queen of Logres -
she? He spoke low, she talked and laughed;
under her brow she looked for the King's friend
Lancelot. Taliessin heard himself say:
'Tristram and Mark were in love with the Queen Iseult.
Palomides studied her more; so I
everywhere study and sigh for the zodiac in flesh
scandal to men, folly to women! but we,
Palomides and I, see everywhere the hint,
in a queen's shape or a slave's; we bid for a purchase;
the purchase flies to its aim in the heart of another;
our fame is left us darichng, and our mind to find
a new law; bitter is the brew of exchange.
We buy for others; we make beauty for others;
And the beauty made is not the beauty meant:
shent is pride while the Rose-King bleeds at Carbonek.

'Scandal to the pious Jews, folly to the sly Greeks!
But I was Druid-born and Byzantium-trained.
Beyond Wye, by the cauldron of Ceridwen, I saw
the golden sickle flash in the forest, and heard
the pagans mutter a myth; thence by the ocean
dreaming the matter, of Logres I came where the hierarchs
patter the sacred names on the golden floor
under the Throne of Empire; I saw how the City
was based, faced fair to the Emperor as the queen to the king,
slaves to lords, and all Caucasia to Carbonek.
The magnanimous stair rose in the hall of Empire.
The Acts of Identity issued from the Throne; there
twelve images were shown in a mystery, twelve
zodiacal houses; the sun of the operative Emperor
wended through them, attended by the spiritual planets,
attributing to the themes their qualities of cause and permanence:
in each the generation of creation, in each the consummation.
All coalesced in each; that each mind
in the Empire might find its own kind of entry.
Aquarius for me opened the principle of eyes
in the clearness above the firmament; I saw below,
patterned in the stellar clearness, the rosed femininity
particled out of the universe, the articulated form
of the Eve in the Adam; the Adam known in the Eve.
To visionary eyes the path of man began
to pass through the themes and the houses; can I recall
all? shall even the queen be seen in the full
glory now in Camelot outside Byzantium?
Nay, say only that the Twins ran in the arms
and laired in the hands - in the queen's hands, in Rome

the City of Twins, wolf-twins, cubs
humanized to labour, making muscles and thumbs,
that each might neighbour the other to instruments and events.
The Scorpion-contingency, controlled and ensouled in Jerusalem,
held its privy place; the Acts of Identity
furnished with danger the anger of the laden tail.
Earth and the queen's body had base in Libra.
Glorious over Logres, let the headship of the queen
be seen, as Caucasia to Carbonck, as Logres to Sarras.

Within and without the way wove about the image,
about the City and the body; I followed the way
from the eyes; it was swallowed in the sweet dark pit
of the palms - lit how? lit by the rays
from the golden-growthed, golden-clothed arms,
golden-sheathed and golden-breathed, imperially
shining from above toward instruments and events,
rays shaken out towards the queen's hand stretched
to welcome the king's friend, or a slave's to trim
the rose or pluck a nut from the uncut hazel,
or the princess Dindrane's to the fair conclusion of prayer.
Under the flashes, down a steep stair, I came
to a deep figure; I came to the house of Libra.
Libra in the category of flesh is the theme of Caucasia,
the mesh of the net of the imperially bottomed glory;
and the frame of justice and balance set in the body,
the balance and poise needful to all joys
and all peace. I studied universal justice
between man and man, and (O opposite!) between man and woman
by their own skill and the will of the Throne; light
compact in each fitting act of justice in the City,
and support-in-the-flesh of the sitting body of beauty.
Scandal to the Jews, folly to the Greeks! let the hazel
of verse measure the multifold levels of unity.

Under the rays I studied arch-natural justice.
Suddenly at a moment the rays ranged wild
and the darting light changed. The roseal pattern
ran together, and was botched and blotched, blood
inflaming the holy dark; the way of return
climbed beside the timed and falling blood.
"The zodiac of Christ poorly sufficed the Adam;
they bade the Scorpion sting; they looked wildly-
on the crookt curves of identity; venom is hereditary,
and the Adam's children endure the Adam's blood.
Cain, seeking a cure, was driven farther
into the pit; at a blow he split the zodiac.
He called into being earthly without heavenly justice,
supposing without his brother, without the other,
he solely existed: fool! the roseal shape
vanished; instead, the clearness of Aquarius was bloodshot,
the Twins for very nearness tore each other:
the way climbed against timed and falling blood,
by a secular stair of months, deep-rose-royal.

And I there climbing in the night's distance
till the clear light shone on the height's edge:
out of the pit and the split zodiac I came
to the level above the magnanimous stair, and saw
the Empire dark with the incoherence of the houses.
Nay, there, as I looked on the stretched Empire
I heard, as in a throb of stretched verse,
the women everywhere throughout it sob with the curse
and the altars of Christ everywhere offer the grails.
Well are women warned from serving the altar
who, by the nature of their creature, from Caucasia to Carbonek,
share with the Sacrifice the victimization of blood.
Flesh knows what spirit knows,
but spirit knows it knows-categories of identity:
women's flesh lives the quest of the Grail
in the change from Camelot to Carbonek and from Carbonek to Sarras,
puberty to Carbonek, and the stanching, and Carbonek to death.
Blessed is she who gives herself to the journey.

'Flesh tells what spirit tells
(but spirit knows it tells). Women's travel
holds in the natural the image of the supenatural,
the shed metrical of the shed anthropometrical.
Truth speeds from the taunt, and Pelles bleeds
below Jupiter's red-pierced planet; the taunt
yields to the truth, irony to defeated irony.
The phosphor of Percivale's philosophical star
shines down the roads of Logres and Broceliande;
happy the woman who in the light of Percivale
feels Galahad, the companion of Percivale, rise
in her flesh, and her flesh bright in Carbonek with Christ
in the turn of her body, in the turn of her flesh, in the turn
of the Heart that heals itself for the healing of others,
the only Heart that healed itself without others,
when our Lord recovered the Scorpion and restored the zodiac.
Blessed is she who can know the Dolorous Blow
healed in the flesh of Pelles, the flesh of women;
and hears softly with touched ears in Camelot
Merlin magically prepare for the Rite of Galahad
and the fixing of all fidelity from all infidelity.

'This I saw in a chamber of Byzantium; the princess
Dindrane again opened my eyes in Aquarius.
Let the queen's majesty, the feminine headship of Logres
deign to exhibit the glory to the women of Logres;
each to one vision, but the queen for all.
Bring to a flash of seeing the women in the world's base.'
Taliessin saw the queen from the Throne, again
from the rose-garden; she talked sideways to Dindrane.
The king's poet came to the entrance; the queen said,
with the little scorn that becomes a queen of Logres:
'Has my lord dallied with poetry among the roses?'