

The (Dis)Honesty of the Intellectual in Charles Williams’ *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury*

“The danger of metaphors, and the damage they can do to intelligence, has rarely been better exhibited than by the too familiar comparison of Church and State to soul and body. It is plausible, and untrue. For the Church, by definition, includes the body, and the State, by experience, aims at the soul. It may aim at the wrong kind of soul, just as the Church, at times at least, has seemed to require only a much attenuated body. But normally both are related to both.” —“Church and State”, 1939 review

Cranmer’s Mixed Motives

Part 1

Cambridge 1528	Cranmer admits to a love of words over any a little heresy (4).
1529, Archbishopric 1533	His mixed motives to the King’s authority (8-9).
1534-6	Cranmer gives into the King’s sentence on Anne (14).
1537-English Bible	Cranmer offers THE BOOK, yet receives a change in heraldry (17-20).
Death of King Henry 1547	Cranmer’s concern for the King; rejoins him to think on Christ (24).
Edward VI, 1547-53	Cranmer’s impatient approach to the commoners, allows for the lords’ violence against them (28-29).
Book of Common Prayer 1549-52	His joy in penning the Book of Common Prayer (31-32). He faces the skeleton openly for the first time and begs for more time to finish his work which he sets above all else (35).

Part 2

[undated, in Edward’s reign]	Cranmer’s desire for peace above all; his refusal to judge the priest (37-40)
Queen Mary 1553-58	Cranmer desires to face Mary with his honest service but fears; his profound struggle with his motives (46)
The Degradation 1555-6	His humiliation at being condemned by Mary before a new bishop.
The Recantations 1556	His attempt to justify himself and to compromise with various wordings.
The Martyrdom 20-21 March 1556	Cranmer finally and simply runs to God and recants his recantations; his final honest admission

The Role of the Skeleton

“It was, no doubt, we who sinned, and sin, in the flesh; but the flesh itself retains for us many signs of that high calling from which we apostatized. Death itself is an outrage, a necessary outrage, upon a unity. We must accept it, as we must accept, for ourselves or for others, many another outrage. But it has been regarded, from the beginning, as an unnatural thing, a separation in the unseparated. . . . The high doctrine of the physical resurrection restores to mankind the unity of which it had been derived. The new union can hardly be scarless;” — *The Redeemed City*

(5) “Fast runs the mind,/ and the soul a pace behind:/ without haste or sloth/ come I between both.”

(11) “I set the images free, /all idols of hall, chapel, and marketplace,/ spectral images, lacking love’s grace, of me.”

(11) “I only am the pit where Gehenna is sprung;”

(12) “But through their delirium, I walk like a blind/ beggar, pleading for a man to be kind;”

(12) “I am the way,/ I the division, the derision, where/ the bones dance in the darkening air,/ I at the cross-ways the voice of the one way,/ crying from the tomb of the earth where I died/ the word of the only right Suicide”

(13) “I am the way, the way to heaven;/ . . . I am the way, the way to hell,/ . . . I am the way, the way to salvation,”

(13) “I am the jawbone of the ass/ on which, it is said, it came to pass,/ Christ rode into Zion;”

(14) “I/ am the broken image, the bones of the image, the image/ taken away from me and I from the image.”

(18) “Till the day when I sound [your image’s] knell and yours as well,”

(22) “I must divide/ his life to the last crack and pull his soul/--if it lives—through the cracks;”

(25) “. . . the place of derelict grief/. . . where he and I, cheek by jowl, shall be comradely met.”

(33) “I. After such a prologue,/ whatever faces you see, or hear feet go by,/ they are only I, points and joints in me;/ I only waiting for what I only am working.”

(34) “An indweller, my lord;/ a copier-out, a carrier-about/ of works and words, an errand-runner.”

(34) “Anything, everything; fellow, friend, cheat, traitor./ I was born under Virgo, of an outlandish house, . . . My name, after today’s fashion, is latinized/ into Figura Rerum. . . I am the delator of all things to their truth.”

(34-5) “I will call you, for you bade me show you the end,/ no servant now, but friend.”

(35) "I am the nothing you meant./ I am sent to gather you into that nothing."

(35) "I am the Judas who betrays men to God."

(35-6) "Of all the Father gave me, I will lose none. . . . In your lives and tongues I will bring you to climb/
at my time, without haste, without sloth,/ the rungs of my ladder, where the redeemed/ walk;"

(36) "Can you wait? can you see me coming? can you wait?/ for a little while and here I am; spin,/ spin
each of you his brave platter,/ his work his life! How it topples and falls!"

(41) "I am his match/ to delay and dismay."

(41) "Controversialists are apt to forget the facts/ til a certain jangle of my bones comes to remind
them."

(42) "Shall I, the splendor and the glory, tire?"

(45) ". . . my hour is at hand; now I am yours"

(48) "I run with you, O my people, through the dark air."

(49) "When time and space withdraw, there is/ nothing left/ but yourself and I: lose yourself, there is
only I."

(52) "Where is your God?/ When you have lost him at last you shall come into God."

(53) "I will try in my way, not yours nor any man else's"

(54) "Mine is the diagram; I twirl it to a point,/ the point of conformity, of Christ. You shall see Christ,
see his back first—I am his back. . . I am Christ' back; . . . life in death, death in life. . . I am the thing that
lives in the midst of the bones"

(55) "I will run faster than you./ I will run faster than this man's words or yours."

(56) "I have made equilibrium; I have drawn him/ level."

(56) "I only measure what I only am."

(57) "I am equated to [Thomas'] very soul;/ I am his equilibrium; Thomas, speak."

(57) "And I lead you from all temptation and/ deliver from evil!"

(58-9) "But I know all. . . .I for you, you for me: let us say all:"

Discussion Question: Why does the Skeleton talk so much about his identity? Is it a consistent one? Is he good or evil? What is his relationship to death? To Christ?