Books

1. My first book, of course, was my dissertation, *The Life and Thought of Benjamin Whichcote*, published by Ann Arbor microfilms. Initially I had thought of publishing it in regular book form but, for reasons I cannot quite recall, I never even contacted a publisher. Eventually I published some of the information in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, but much of the work remains only in microfilm form. The topic is still significant, for Whichcote was the founder of the Cambridge Platonist school, a liberal, less dogmatic form of Protestantism that appeared in 17th century England. Whichcote was John Locke’s favorite preacher, but several of his followers, such as Henry More and Ralph Cudworth often took issue with Cartesianism and the general trend of philosophy of that age. As I reach the end of my career as a teacher I am drawn to return to that era for another look at a part of the history of philosophy seldom mentioned in textbooks.
2. One reason why I did not initially follow up on my study of Whichcote was that I had become enamored with Biblical studies. By 1970 I had produced my first printed book, published by Fortress Press, *Ten Words of Freedom*. It is a study of the Ten Commandments and their relation to the whole exodus story. It bears the clear influence of Paul Tillich’s philosophy and a kind of Biblical archaeology that sought to prove the Bible factual. Although I still agree with Tillich about many matters, I certainly no longer accept some of the arguments used about the factuality of the exodus event. Therefore, there are many parts of the book with which I now thoroughly disagree.
3. Somebody must have liked *Ten Words of Freedom*, because I was invited shortly after its publication to write an introduction to the Old Testament for Barron’s Educational Series. This I did and by 1972 *Understanding the Old Testament* was in print. Admittedly some chapters are better than others. Certainly many Biblical scholars would have emphasized different matters. I think, however, that as an introductory textbook it does what an introduction should do. It informs the reader without overwhelming anybody with too much technical material. It also introduces some of the basic questions that every reader of the Bible ought to ponder. It is a positive book without being dogmatic about either theological or historical questions.
4. Barron’s liked my book very much and before long I was invited to participate in the writing of another one, this time about the history of Judaism. A rabbi had submitted a manuscript for a book, but the publisher did not think much of his historical work. So I was asked to write the historical section while the rabbi’s work was confined to Jewish life and practice. This I did, but when the rabbi heard that a gentile was involved in the project he backed out, leaving me with half a book. Happily, I was able to flesh out the narrative more fully and add some documents in an appendix at the end. I had to wait for sometime before I found a publisher but eventually it was accepted and published in 1980 under the title Judaism by the Theosophical Publishing House. Although it is relatively brief, the book does, I think, cover the basic thinkers and movements within Judaism in an unbiased way. I have received several complimentary letters about it from Jewish readers.
5. In the meantime, I had headed off intellectually in a new direction. Not only had I begun exploring Chinese philosophy; I had introduced a course on Mahayana Buddhism. This, of course, led me to rethink the whole meaning of Christianity and how it relates to other spiritual traditions. Out of this work came *Yeshua Buddha*, an attempt to imagine how the gospels would have been read and interpreted by someone who began with Nagarjuna or Vasabandhu rather than Plato and Aristotle. Much to my surprise I found that Mahayanists could make very good sense out of the gospels, possibly better sense than could a Platonist. Though this book was written after *Judaism*, it was actually published in 1978, two years before *Judaism* was in print.

After 1980 there appears to be a hiatus in my work. Actually during the 1980s I wrote two scholarly works, “Time, Space, and Power” a work that grew out of my new, very popular beginning course, and “The Stupa, the Lingam, and the Cross,” a study of three major religious symbols. Neither saw the light of day. I think I should have worked harder to find a publisher, but initial rejections encouraged me to set them aside to be redone at a later time. That time has never arrived. During this period I also coauthored
two books: *A Spiritual Approach to Male/Female Relations* (1984) and *Angels and Mortals: Their Co-creative Powers* (1990). Although I wrote only one article for each volume, because I also did some of the editing, I include them here.

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A SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO MALE / FEMALE RELATIONS

J. Krishnamurti / Haridas Chaudhuri
Roberto Assagioli / Viktor Frankl
Dane Rudhyar / Gina Cerminara
Geddes MacGregor

Edited by Scott Miners

A QUEST BOOK
By 1990, I was back on track publishing a book that I have used quite regularly in my introductory class. It is a collection of quotations by both eastern and western thinkers (including me) about major questions of human life. Although it is a work with many voices, the choice of voices and hence the central argument of the book is very much mine.
9. Then I turned to poetry, producing my first chapbook in 1991. It is a book that takes the reader around the world with poems with both western and eastern themes. A stop in a Sufi tavern will have to suffice as an illustration of what the book contains.

The Tavern

In the tavern
On the Way
Drinking wine
From dusk till dawn.
Others hurry
On their way,
Bearing burdens
Pressing on.
I abide here
In the night
Unaware of
Travelers gone
Here the Path ends,
Here I stay.
Bless me, pour
Another One.
10. That was soon followed, in 1993 by another chapbook, *Matters of Life and Death*. Again, one poem from the collection will have to suffice.

**REVERIE**

It is the time of the birds.

Strangely,

The wing turns

Like Death in the forest.

It is the time of the birds;
And slowly.

Autumn slowly,

The moon-set whirrs.

It is the time of the birds;

For now.

Even now,

As the wing turns,

Do not awaken me.
11. In the same year, 1993, my son published a book called *Memory Stones*, a very fine history of Welsh churches and Welsh culture in central New York. The book is very much his, but I was asked to photograph all sorts of sites, sometimes very obscure, sometimes well known. In any event, for good or for ill, examples of my photography are found all through this work. The cover will have to serve as an example of my work.
That was followed in 1996 by another photographic book. It was an attempt to combine photography and poetry as a reflection on life. All the trees of winter were photographed in black and white on the Hamilton College Campus.

DARK TREES
and
EMPTY SKY

A PHILOSOPHICAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY
One page will have to suffice as an example of what is within:

VI. Filling the Universe,
    Glowing with
    The Lightness of Emptiness:
    Blessing all.
13. Also in 1996 I published a work based upon lectures I had given at the Krotona Institute in California. The book was published under the title *A Reassessment of Absolute Skepticism and Religious Faith* and is a working out of the implications of what I call absolute skepticism for human life. By absolute skepticism I mean that skepticism that is not based upon some other certainty or intellectual commitment. Nagarjuna, who offers “the destruction of all views” is my primary example of such skepticism.

Unfortunately, the cover of the book is just a dark blue and has no writing on it so no cover is reproduced here. Nevertheless, I believe that this is one of my more important contributions to the philosophy of religion.

14. In the meantime, something most extraordinary occurred. Through a series of unpredictable incidents, I came into contact with the Edward Robinson family of New Jersey, the present Edward Robinson being the direct descendent of the famous Biblical
scholar who graduated from Hamilton in 1816. Quite unexpectedly I was given huge quantities of material related to the life and work of that great scholar. Because of my connections with both Hamilton and archaeology, I seemed to be the best person to do the job. With the massive help of Hermine who spent untold hours deciphering his very difficult handwriting, I was able to write the first full-length biography of Robinson, placing him with the time period in which he wrote. While other scholars worked almost exclusively with ancient language and texts, Robinson actually went to the Holy Land and located many of the ancient sites of which the Bible speaks. Somewhat later, Hermine published a biography of his second wife who was an extraordinary writer and scholar in her own right.

15. My fifteenth book is undoubtedly my strangest and is quite unlike any of the others. It is all the result of a dream I had in 1972. In that dream I was visited by a very lovely woman, whose name I never learned, and given a book to read. The next morning I went
to my office to do some work and suddenly lines from the book began to return to my memory. Setting aside everything else, I began to write down poems. That morning, before lunch, I had written 18 poems. The book, however, did not stop there and over the next few weeks I was able to write down the whole book that consisted not only of poetry but of a story of a quest by a strange assortment of men. Woven into the text are many of my interests at that time: Tarot, astrology, Lao Zi, the Bible, kabbalah.

Quite frankly, I did not know what to do with this work, so I put it in my desk drawer and did nothing. It was only in 2000 that I pulled it out, reread it and decided that whether anyone else ever read it or not I should publish it, if only to honor the woman in the dream who gave it to me. Some people have read it and found it quite difficult to decipher, but those with an esoteric bent have found it moving.
16, The Way of Adam certainly arrived in a strange way, but then so did The Secret Sayings of Ye Su. I was attending a Buddhist-Christian Studies conference when two Chinese men approached me while I was sitting in the residence hall lounge waiting for dinner. What they showed me was a photograph of a manuscript in Greek of a “gospel” that apparently was found in China. Needless to say I was excited, but I also doubted my ability to translate it well. They must have read Yeshua Buddha, however, and insisted that I could do it.

I took the text home with me and over the summer was able to translate the seventy-two short sayings. I sent my translation and the text back to them, as I had promised to do, thinking that they would publish the text. Their word of thanks for my work was the last that I heard from them. They simply disappeared, leaving me with only a copy of my translation and a few notes.
After waiting several years, I finally decided to publish the work, because it seems very significant to me. Some doubt my veracity about the project, and I really can’t say I blame them, but I know that the meeting and the translation did occur. My guess is that this document came from the Christian community that began in China in the 7th century. It is clearly Christian but also reveals many influences from both Buddhism and Daoism.

The cover shows, in a photograph I took, a Christian pagoda located about fifty miles from Xian that I visited while in China with a group of Hamilton students. Not far away is a very ancient Daoist temple and complex. *The Secret Sayings of Ye Su* was published in 2004.

17. In 2006 I put out a work privately that is hardly esoteric or inexplicable at all. *Around The Quad* is a series of “poems” about Hamilton College as I remember and have experienced her. It has been quite popular among some alumni. Two poems will help to set the mood:
An Evening Stroll

Sometimes, as evening wanders toward the valley,
I take to wandering myself
Along the old cemetery walks,
Past all those men I once knew
Who still speak to me
Gravely
Of that past long ago.

There lies David Ellis, a fountain of
Historical facts,
And Marcel Moraud who fought, he said,
With the Underground in France,
And his colleague, Frank Hamlin,
Who always made you feel he spoke only to you,
And David Millar and Bob Browning,
Robert Barnes Rudd and Digger Graves,
Win Tolles, and even Bob McEwen,
The college Prexy for so long.

All came from elsewhere
To lie, together
With Sam Kirkland, Skenandoah
And the Roots,
Here on a sloping hillside
In the Hamilton Cemetery
With only stones to remind the world
Of the glories that once were.

Wally Johnson

You could see him at faculty meetings
On the second floor of Buttrick
Craning his neck to take attendance,
But he spent most of his time traveling,
Having dinner with old alums wherever he went.
He knew everyone, or so they said.
One time an FBI agent arrived to do
A background check on an alumnus.
Let us call him Fred Jones.
The problem was everyone knew Fred
Was a heavy drinker and so they didn’t say much
Except, “Wally Johnson will be able to tell you.”
As the Dean and the agent left the office,
Win spotted Wally.
“Wally, you remember Fred Jones, don’t you?”
“Why of course,” said Wally taking the agent’s hand,
“It’s so nice to see you again.”

18. That was followed in 2007 by *The Voyage of Life*, a collection of my poetry.

I had wanted to include all four of Thomas Cole’s paintings known together as the voyage of life, but eventually I settled upon using only his first picture for a cover.

19. For years I had wanted to write a book about perhaps my favorite thinker, Lao Zi, but every time I tried I felt frustrated in my attempts. How could one write a learned book
about someone so opposed to learning? One day, however, my poetic imagination took hold and I created a “new” *Dao De Jing* for the 21st century.

The poems and the illustrations are mine, but the essential ideas come from the Old Master himself. Here is one chapter:

**30. Be Rooted**

The myriad of things manifest and embrace
The yang and the yin
And these two together make
One turning whole,
But the cosmos is born
From No Thing
At every moment.

Blossom in the world,
But be rooted
In the great mystery.
Flowers cut off from their root
Soon perish.

20. I had been working on *Dancing with Daffodils* for quite a long time. It is my autobiography, complete with many pictures and poems. Of course it isn’t finished yet, but I decided it was time to get copies to my family and so I “self-published” it. Whether it will be of any use to anyone remains to be seen. Whatever other people think, I enjoyed putting it together.

21. After all that personal matter, I returned to somewhat more scholarly writing, publishing *Religion: What It Has Been and What It Is*. The work, in really a very few pages, sketches out the social purposes and the history of human religion. In it, I develop what I think is a rather unique perspective on what religion really is.
22. In the offing, is a major book on the cartoonist Thomas Nast and his relation to 19th century American history.

THOMAS NAST IN HISTORY

BY JAY G. WILLIAMS