

# The poet at Lambeth Palace

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

July 15, 2011

When the [T-Mobile royal wedding video](#) went viral (look-alikes portray the principals and dance down the aisle), much was made of the impressive stand-in for the Archbishop of Canterbury. But the genuine article is no less delightful: the real Rowan Williams might not bust a move while coped and mitred at Westminster Abbey, but his words dance and sparkle whenever he reaches for his theologian-poet hat.

Playwright David Hare recently [spoke to Williams for the Guardian](#). It's an uncommonly interesting interview--due in part to Hare's skillful write-up but especially to Williams's boldness and good humor. A highlight:

The archbishop is clearly resigned to the inevitability of being misrepresented ("Did you know the editorial [you wrote recently] would excite the press?" "I had a shrewd suspicion." "Are you now immune to it?" "Not entirely, but I'm inured to it"), but on occasions, I suggest, it happens because he lifts the knife, then fails to plunge it in. When he observes that economic relations as they are currently played out threaten people's sense of what life is and what reality means, surely what he's really saying is that capitalism damages people. To my surprise, he agrees. Does he therefore think economic relations should be ordered in a different way? "Yes." So is it fair to say, then, that he's anti-free market capitalism? "Yes," he says and roars with laughter. "Don't you feel better for my having said it?"

And:

"You know [that scene in the Woody Allen film where they have an argument in a cinema queue](#), and [Marshall McLuhan](#) is standing behind them and

able to interrupt to settle the argument? Woody Allen turns to the camera and says, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if life were like that?' Well, no Marshall McLuhan will ever step forward in the queue and say to Richard Dawkins, 'The archbishop's right.' It's not going to happen."

And:

"Herbert's very important to me. Herbert's the man. Partly because of the absolute candour when he says, I'm going to let rip, I'm feeling I can't stand God, I've had more than enough of Him. OK, let it run, get it out there. And then, just as the vehicle is careering towards the cliff edge, there's a squeal of brakes.

'Methought

I heard one calling *Child!*/And I

replied *My Lord.*' I love

that ending, because it means, 'Sorry, yes, OK, I'm not feeling any happier, but there's nowhere else to go.' Herbert is not sweet."

"And you like that?"

"Non-sweetness? I do."

Some liberal Anglicans would love to see Williams leave his ecclesial position. That's a topic for another post, but speaking selfishly as a non-Anglican, I wouldn't complain if Williams were to spend less of his time trying to hold together a fragile communion and more of it sharing his sharp mind and quick wit with the world.