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The Web of Glory: A Study of the Concept of Man as Expressed in the Christian Fantasy Novels of Charles Williams

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THE WEB OF GLORY: A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF MAN AS
EXPRESSED IN THE CHRISTIAN FANTASY NOVELS OF
CHARLES WILLIAMS

BY

BEVERLEE FISSINGER SMITH

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts

June 1964

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LIFE

Beverlee Fissinger Smith was born in Chicago, Illinois, on December 18, 1930.

She was graduated from St. Willibrord High School, Chicago, Illinois, in June, 1949. After graduation she worked for the R.R. Donnelley & Sons corporation, in the mail department, until her marriage in January 1950.

After her marriage Mrs. Smith worked for the Sherwin-Williams paint manufacturing company, Chicago, Illinois, until the birth of her first son, in April 1952.

After her second son was of school age, Mrs. Smith returned to college, and received her degree of bachelor of arts from St. Xavier College, Chicago, Illinois, in June 1962.

SIGLA

Abbreviations of Williams' Books (Other than the Novels)
Used in Secondary Footnotes

<u>Title</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>
<u>The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante</u>	<u>Figure of Beatrice</u>
<u>He Came Down From Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sins</u>	<u>He Came Down</u>
<u>The Image of the City and Other Essays</u>	<u>Image of the City</u>

Note: After the first reference, the novels will be referred to only by title.

Some men are less than their works, some are more. Charles Williams cannot be placed in either case. To have known the man would have been enough; to know the books is enough; but no one who has known both the man and his works would have willingly foregone either experience.

T.S. Eliot, Preface to All Hallows' Eve, p. xi.

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHARLES WILLIAMS

Because critical work on the novels¹ of Charles Williams, scanty as it is, concentrates on Williams' concept of romantic love and on its correlative theses, this paper will primarily concentrate on his concept of the nature of man, as expressed by his strange characters and his even stranger plots, which are clothed in the machinery of myth, ritual, and occult.

Just as it is not necessary to believe in the Swiftian world of the Lilliputians or the Rabelaisian world of Gargantua, it is not necessary to accept literally the strange multi-leveled world and supernatural events posited by Williams in the novels. It is sufficient that Williams believed in them and wrote about them; thus, there will be no attempt in this paper to establish

1

Cf. the excellent study by Mary McDermott Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love (New York, [1962]), and that by Joan Turner Belfuss, "The Principal Theological Ideas in the Christian Fantasy Novels of Charles Williams" (unpublished Master's thesis, Loyola University, Chicago, 1963).

the validity or orthodoxy of his ideas or to justify them, except from a literary standpoint. Rather an attempt will be made to present what he said and how he said it.

Because some understanding of Williams' symbolism and recurring themes, as well as an awareness of the man himself, is requisite for an understanding of his view of man, the preliminary chapters will be devoted to acquainting the reader unfamiliar with Williams with the man himself and with his use of symbols in the presentation of his themes. The rest of the study will concentrate on the novels themselves. This paper is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the corpus of Williams' work; rather, it is hoped that it is another step towards the assignment of the novels to their rightful place in contemporary literature.

Charles Walter Stansby Williams could easily have been a character in one of his own novels, for no one more ordinary, more unassuming, could be imagined. Born September 20, 1886, he spent his life in relative oblivion, even though he wrote forty books² which were published and over two-hundred signed critical articles and reviews, which appeared in various scholarly journals and London papers. Richard Walter Williams, Charles's

²

Including seven volumes of poetry, thirteen dramas, seven novels, five books of literary criticism or essays, three theological volumes, and eight historical biographies.

father, was a chronometer-maker by profession and an author by avocation. Although Charles Williams was christened in St. Anne's Church in Finsbury (he was to remain in the Anglican church the remainder of his life, never passing through any period of religious doubt common to so many of his day, such as Eliot and Auden), he grew up in St. Albans, near London, where the family, after his father's eyesight failed, opened a small stationery and artists' materials shop.

Williams was educated in the usual manner for children of his class. In 1894 he attended St. Albans Abbey School, and in 1898, won a County Council Scholarship to St. Albans Grammar School. There he met George Robinson, who came to share his love of literature and who remained one of his closest friends. Both boys won several prizes in writing contests for the school magazine, and in 1901, both were awarded an Intermediate Scholarship to the University College, London, which was available for a three-year period. Unfortunately, before the end of the 1903-4 session, Williams was forced to leave because of his family's financial situation. However, the two years at the University, spent in reading and absorbing literature, cultivated and deepened the literary taste which his father had instilled in him as a small child. After leaving the University, Williams gained employment at the Methodist New Connexion Publishing Office and Book Room, where, through a colleague, Harold Eyers, he was introduced to Frederick Page, with whom he was associated the rest of his life. It was on the recommendation of Mr. Page that

Williams, in 1908, entered the Oxford University Press as a reader. And there he was to remain until his death in May 1945.

Although the Press gave Williams stability, friendship, and work that encouraged the ranging powers of his mind, it did not provide him with the financial security that he longed for but never possessed all his life. He was fortunate, however, in that, from 1913 on, the London publisher of Amen House of Oxford University Press was Humphrey Milford, a publisher who "allowed his staff great freedom and [who] knew Williams for the Phoenix he was, though sometimes he was puzzled how to reconcile him with commercial necessities."³ Milford, "who became Caesar to this poet," was a man who possessed a fine literary judgment and a quick and acute intelligence. This combination of authority and benevolence helped to give Williams his concept of the ideal ruler which figures in his Arthurian poetry so predominantly.

During this transitional period Williams met Florence Conway (renamed Michal) whom he married in 1917. Five years later their only child, a son named Michael, was born. At this time Williams began to lecture on English literature for the London County Council's panel of Evening Institute Lecturers. By the 1930's he was lecturing weekly (a two-hour session) at the City Literary Institute and at the Balham Commercial Institute. In

³

Anne Ridler (ed.) in The Image of the City by Charles Williams (New York, 1958), p. xvi.

1938 he was invited to lecture at the Sorbonne on Byron and Shelley. It was the only time he left his beloved England.

In 1939 when Amen House was moved to Oxford because of the war, Williams went along, serving in the dual capacity of editorial reader for the Press and lecturer on English poetry for the University. Such was his growing reputation at the University for these lectures and for his tutorials that he was awarded an honorary M.A. in 1943.

The honors which had been slow in coming were not long to be his. In May 1945 Williams entered the hospital for what was described as routine surgery. He survived the operation only to die a few hours later. He is buried in Oxford's St. Cross Cemetery, where, after his name, the marker simply reads

POET

20 SEPTEMBER 1886--15 MAY 1945

UNDER THE MERCY

The biographical data stated above, while giving the who, the when, and the where, does not tell the what and the why; i.e., it does not tell about Williams the man, nor about Williams the writer. And to separate these two aspects is impossible, for, as Eliot wrote in the Preface to Williams' All Hallows' Eve, there is "no writer who was more wholly the same man in his life and in his writings"⁴ than Williams.

⁴ T.S. Eliot in All Hallows' Eve by Charles Williams (New York, 1958), p. xi.

Not only through his own works is the picture of the man gleaned, but also through the words of those most closely associated with Williams. Certain qualities are remarked upon by all who knew him: his great facility of mind, his remarkable memory, his skepticism, i.e., his ability to play the "devil's advocate," his humility, his love of talking, and his sense of humor. C.S. Lewis, one of Williams' closest friends and associates, especially in Williams' Oxford days, described him as being

tall, slim, straight as a boy, though grey-haired. His face we thought ugly: I am not sure that the word "monkey" had not been murmured in this context. But the moment he spoke it became...like the face of an angel--not a feminine angel in the debased tradition of some religious art, but a masculine angel, a spirit burning with intelligence and charity. He was nervous (not shy) to judge by the trembling of his fingers. One of the most characteristic things about him was his walk....There was something of recklessness, something even of panache in his gait....To complete the picture you must add a little bundle under his left arm which was quite invariable. It usually consisted of a few proofs with a copy of Time and Tide folded around them....That face--angel's or monkey's--comes back to me most often seen through clouds of tobacco smoke and above a pint mug, distorted into helpless laughter at some innocently broad buffoonery, or eagerly stretched forward in the cut and parry of prolonged, fierce, masculine argument and "the rigour of the game"....He was a man eminently fitted by temperament to live in an age of more elaborate courtesy than our own. He was nothing if not a ritualist.⁵

Although he did not live in an age of "elaborate courtesy," Williams nevertheless practiced it himself, for "he gave to

5

C.S. Lewis (ed.), Essays Presented to Charles Williams (London, 1948), pp. ix-xii.

every circle the whole man: all his attention, knowledge, courtesy, charity, were at each one's disposal."⁶ This courtesy, Eliot believed, would have even been extended to every kind of supernatural company.⁷

Another side of Williams which impressed all with whom he came in contact was the intellectual, for with Williams, "the whole man...was greater even than the sum of his works....In [him] the intellectual gifts were greater than the aesthetic...."⁸ His reading was kaleidoscopic, ranging from Egyptology, Biblical literature, studies of Byzantine civilization, the literature of the occult, to historical materials, Augustine, St. Thomas, and Kierkegaard. The focus of his mind jumped from subject to subject like a man in mid-stream hopping from rock to rock, interested in the vantage point each new firm step gave him and not so bent on the opposite shore as to be indifferent to the means of his passage. Page, a close personal friend, thought Williams was the "most intellectual man of his generation, meaning that as description, not praise. He read everything and remembered everything."⁹ He especially liked to repeat favorite passages

6

Ibid., p. ix.

7

Eliot, p. xiii.

8

Ridler, p. x.

9

Christopher Fullman, "The Mind and Art of Charles Williams" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1954), p. 18. Also see Eliot, supra, p. xii.

of poetry,

and nearly always both his voice and the context got something new out of them. He excelled at showing...the little grain of truth or felicity in some passage generally quoted for ridicule, while at the same time, he fully enjoyed the absurdity; or contrariwise, at detecting the little falsity or dash of silliness in a passage which ...he also admired.¹⁰

These intellectual gifts enabled Williams to become a skilful dialectician, and, surprisingly, a skeptic, in the sense of being a "questioner." W.H. Auden, in the Preface to Williams' The Descent of the Dove, a history of the Holy Ghost in the Early Church, wrote that no historian was more courteous to all alike than Williams. "Whatever the issue, Faith against Works, Pelagian versus Jansenist, whoever the party leader, Calvin, St. Ignatius Loyola, Montaigne, Pascal, Voltaire, [he] never fail [ed] to be just to both sides."¹¹ This ability to play the "devil's advocate" in matters of religion and morality is also a characteristic in the novels where Williams writes of states of being--of Good and Evil--from the particular vantage point of each. Eliot notes that "it was characteristic of his [Williams'] adventurous imagination that he should like to put himself at the point of view from which a doctrine was held before rejecting it."¹²

10

Lewis, p. xi.

11

W.H. Auden, Preface to Descent of the Dove by Charles Williams (New York, 1956), p. xi.

12

Eliot, p. xii.

Closely associated with this dialectical bent was a quality of pessimism, both of which were "the expressions of his feelings," rather than qualities of his mind. Williams often commented that if he had been offered the gift of life, he would not have hesitated to decline it. "His capacity for enjoyment seemed so strong that this death-wish in him was hard to credit, but he was certainly not exaggerating in what he said."¹³ But above these feelings were the things in which he believed (and about which he wrote), and these were wholly optimistic. "They did not negate the feelings; they mocked them."¹⁴

It is one of the many paradoxes in Williams that while no man at times said (and wrote) deeper and darker things, no man's conversation was less gloomy in tone; "it was, indeed, a continual flow of gaiety, enthusiasm, and high spirits."¹⁵ And how he loved to talk! All his friends comment on their conversations with him. Christopher Fry remembers the talks he and Williams would have when they would meet "once-a-week in Oxford for beer and cheese...together with Basil Blackwell and

13

Ridler, p. xxxi.

14

Lewis, p. xiii.

15

Ibid., p. xii.

Gerard Hopkins."¹⁶ And Lewis, commenting on his weekly meetings with Williams, writes that:

the talk might turn in almost any direction, and certainly skipped from grave to gay, from lively to severe;...but wherever it went, Williams was ready for it. He seemed to have no "pet subject." Though he talked copiously, one never felt that he dominated the evening...The importance of his presence was, indeed, made clear chiefly by the gap which was left on the rare occasions when he did not turn up. It then became clear that some principle of liveliness and cohesion had been withdrawn from the whole party: lacking him, we did not completely possess one another. He ...will always stand up in my mind as a cheering proof of how far a man can go with few languages and imperfect schooling.¹⁷

These conversations seemed to have had the same effect on all who shared "this exchange of selves." Auden, too, recalls his meetings and counts them among his most "unforgettable and precious experiences." A few years after Williams' death, he wrote that he had "met great and good men in whose presence one was conscious of one's own littleness; Charles Williams' effect on [Auden] and on others ...was quite different: in his company one felt twice as intelligent and infinitely nicer than out of it one knew oneself to be...."¹⁸ Auden, like Eliot, feels that Williams gave himself entirely to the company he was

16

Christopher Fry, Personal letter to this writer, January 8, 1964.

17

Lewis, p. xi.

18

W.H. Auden, "Charles Williams," The Christian Century, LXXIII (May 2, 1956), 552.

in; for "any conversation with Charles Williams, no matter how trivial or impersonal the topic, was a genuine dialogue."¹⁹ This comment is further supported by others, such as his most uncritical and warmest supporter, Alice Mary Hadfield. In the biography she wrote of Williams, she relates that:

the habit grew up between us of going to a cafe after the lecture to talk. Evenings of glory! To sit there, my blood beating with Troilus, or the Eternal Son, or Beatrice, tired enough to let the world slip and the cafe swim away,...to be free in the contemplation of lovely and immortal things,...and hear nothing but C.W.'s voice, to be wholly surrendered to the strength of his thought--no words of mine can ever tell what such hours meant. "I knew a phoenix of my youth." Everyone of C.W.'s friends had many hours like those.²⁰

So, literally, one can say that his life was a torrent of words, creating and re-creating his own ideas, inspiring ideas in others, living truly in the written word--his own and others--and in the exchange of words with others.

From the above it can be seen that few men have been so revered and so esteemed in their lifetime, even if by so small but distinguished a circle as those who loved Charles Williams. It seems that he possessed a "loving-kindness" so remarkable that

19

Ibid.

20

Alice Mary Hadfield, An Introduction to Charles Williams (London, [1959]), p. 123. Cf. Eliot, Preface to All Hallows' Eve (supra), pp. ix-xii.

it caused T.S. Eliot to ask whether he was to be called "Blessed Charles in his lifetime." Eliot saw Williams' importance as being "above all, in his supernatural insight, for an age which has largely lost that power." In a memorial broadcast Eliot said that to him Williams seemed "to approximate, more nearly than any man [he had] ever known familiarly, to the saint."²¹ It was, however, Williams' emphatic affirmation, as against a rebellious or merely negative view of God, man, and society, that is his most distinguishing characteristic. "That this emphatic affirmation" affected Williams' closest associates is a living tribute to the man himself; but it was his death that produced the deepest effect of all. On that May 15th morning in 1945, C.S. Lewis made his way to the Radcliff Infirmary to see his close friend:

It was a Tuesday morning, one of our times of meeting. I thought he would have given me messages to take on to the others. When I joined them [Fr. Mathew, Basil Blackwell, Lewis' brother, and others] with my actual message-- it was only a few minutes walk from the Infirmary, but, I remember the very streets looked different--I had some difficulty in making them believe or even understand what had happened. The world seemed to us at that moment primarily a strange one. That sense of strangeness continued with a force which sorrow itself has never quite swallowed up. This experience of loss (the greatest I have ever known) was wholly unlike what I should have expected...no event has so corroborated my faith in the next world as Williams did simply by dying. When the idea of death and the idea of Williams thus met in my mind, it was the idea of death that was changed.²²

21

Ridler, pp. xxviii, xxxii.

22

Lewis, p. xiv.

As has been stated above, and implied throughout this paper, there was between the man and his work no sensible division. Williams was a prolific writer; he was equally adept at writing poetry or drama as he was at writing a critical review for Time and Tide. His great output can in part be attributed to the "financial lash on his back," and in part to the fact that "he would respond to almost any appeal, and produce a masque or play for a particular occasion for some obscure group of amateurs. Yet he left behind him a considerable number of books which should endure, because there is nothing else that is like them or could take their place."²³

Of all the genres in which he wrote--literary criticism, theological essays, book review, drama, fiction, history, biography--it was for his poetry that Williams is most often praised and for which he himself desired to be remembered.²⁴ Reaction to his poetry has ranged from high praise to fierce condemnation. Perhaps the correct estimate lies between these two extremes. Inasmuch as an analysis of Williams' poetry is not germane to the present study and several excellent studies²⁵ have

²³

Eliot, p. xiii.

²⁴

Cf. Page 5, supra.

²⁵

Cf. Cornelius P. Crowley, "A Study of the Meaning and Symbolism of the Arthurian Poetry of Charles Williams" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1953); Fullman, supra; L.C. Huddleston, "The Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams: Their Development and Background" (unpublished Master's thesis, Birkbeck College, London, 1953); and the excellent study "Williams and the Arthuriad" by C.S. Lewis in the 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 (London, 1948).

already been undertaken, only general comments on the poetry will be made.

Williams' earliest published poetic efforts, The Silver Stair (1912), Poems of Conformity (1917), and Divorce (1920), reveal a strong religious sensibility, a Dantean view of love, i.e., the love between man and woman as interpenetrated with the love of Christ for the world, a sacramental insight into the world, and, characteristically, an underlying earnest skepticism which removes him from the charge of cant or bourgeois acceptance of the status quo. In this he was quite unlike Phillip in Shadows of Ecstasy who "serenely unconscious of what he owed...felt his own serious growth wiser than that cool air of gracious skepticism."²⁶

The Silver Stair, printed privately by Sir Francis and Alice Meynell, is a series of Petrarchan sonnet sequences. From the titles of these sonnets, for example, "That for every man a woman holds the secret of salvation (Sonnet XXII), "All Women bring him into subjection to the One" (Sonnet XVIII), and "That

26

Charles Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy (New York, 1950), p. 40. All future references to this work will be to this edition. References to Williams' other novels will be to the following editions: All Hallows' Eve (London, 1960), Descent into Hell (London, 1961), The Greater Trumps (London, 1954), Many Dimensions (London, 1947), The Place of the Lion (London, 1952), and War in Heaven (London, 1954). For abbreviations of these and other works of Williams' used in secondary footnotes, see the sigla.

the love of a woman is the vice-gerent of God" (Sonnet XVII), Williams' sacramental and Platonic view of love is revealed. This view was further exemplified in the novels by his heroes and heroines, such as Nancy,²⁷ Chloe,²⁸ and Anthony.²⁹ The greatest expression of this view occurs, however, in his great prose work on Dante, The Figure of Beatrice,³⁰ which was first published in 1943, and has since become a classic in Dantean scholarship.

Although, as in all his writings, Williams was more pre-occupied with ideas than with form, his seven volumes of poetry show that he was by no means indifferent to form. In fact they show that he was very familiar with a variety of forms: the sonnet, ballad, quatrain, free-verse, alliterative verse, four and five stress couplets, all of which reveal a constant search for a metric idiom suited to his ideas. His later work, for example, Taliessin Through Logres,³¹ his reworking of the Grail myth, suggests the "brilliance and verbal virtuosity of Christopher Fry. The language, themes, the moods, in the earlier poems, are quite traditional and frankly imitative of the idioms

²⁷ The Greater Trumps; ²⁸ Many Dimensions; ²⁹ The Place of the Lion.

³⁰ Charles Williams, The Figure of Beatrice: A Study of Dante (London, 1957).

³¹ Charles Williams, Taliessin Through Logres (London, 1938).

and moods of his predecessors."³² It is only in the later work that a change is noted. Taliessin and The Region of the Summer Stars (now printed together) are both noted

for the soaring and gorgeous novelty of their technique and for their profound wisdom....They seem to [C.S. Lewis] to be among the two or three most valuable books of verse produced in the century. Their outstanding quality is what [he] would call glory or splendour--a heral~~ic~~ic brightness of colour, a marble firmness of line, and an arduous exaltation....It is the work of a man who had learned much from Dante (the Dante of the Paradiso) and who might be supposed (though in fact he had not) to have learned much from Pindar. If its extreme difficulty does not kill it, this work ought to count for much in the coming years.³³

And John Heath-Stubbs asserts that Williams' poetry is wholly original and as fully modern in its own way as Eliot's. Whereas Eliot, actuated partly by a "negative mysticism," stripped his language of all ornamentation to an "ascetic bareness," Williams, with his "affirmative" approach to the same beliefs as those held by Eliot, required a language rich with "imagery ceremonial and hieratic."³⁴ These same characteristics are also to be found in the novels. In fact, because of the difficulty of Williams' poetry, and because of the similarity of themes and imagery in the poetry and novels, Auden advises readers to postpone reading Williams' poetry until "through reading his prose, they have

32

Fullman, p. 126.

33

Lewis, pp. vi-vii.

34

John Heath-Stubbs, Charles Williams ("Writers and Their Work: No. 63"; London, 1955), p. 10.

become thoroughly familiar with his ideas and his sensibility," for "like the Blake of the Prophetic Books, Charles Williams has his own mythology which a reader must master...."³⁵

Thus, it is that the poetry and all of Williams' work³⁶ must be interpreted with reference to and in the light of his leading ideas.

35

Auden, Descent of the Dove, pp. ix-x.

36

For a detailed analysis of Williams' literary criticism and review, see Lawrence R. Dawson Jr., "Charles Williams: An Reviewer and Reviewed" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1960); for an analysis of the dramas, see Fullman supra; also see Allardyce Nicoll (ed.), A Survey of the Theatre from 1900 (Norman, Oklahoma, 1951), pp. 86-87, in which Ernest Reynolds, discussing the dramas of Yeats, Synge, Eliot, and Williams, comments that in their "dramas of the mind...we feel modern English poetic drama has learned to grow up and to cast off the mortmain of an over-conscious traditionalism."

If indeed all mankind is held together by its web of existence, then ages cannot separate one from another. Exchange, substitution, co-inherence, are a natural fact as well as a supernatural truth.

The Descent of the Dove, p.69

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEB OF GLORY

In the novels of Charles Williams, as well as in all his work, Williams is first of all a Christian writer who assumed as his "first principles" the facts of Revelation, facts posited but never proved. From these "facts" Williams derived his recurring themes. These themes reveal his view of man and the world in which man exists. At the center of this view lies the dogma that the whole universe is to be known as good.

One can look upon the natural world of man's experience as a source of insight into the reality of God, as in some way supernatural, or, as Williams termed it, "archnatural."³⁷ This view of man and the world is usually termed "sacramental," but Williams preferred not to use the term because "in popular use it throws over the light of the serious object a false light of semi-religious portentousness...in popular use it dichotomizes too much...."³⁸

³⁷Cf. Arthurian Torso, pp. 72-73.

³⁸Figure of Beatrice, p. 65; Cf. "Natural Goodness" in Selected Essays by Charles Williams, edited by Anne Ridler (London, 1961), pp. 106-07.

The dual world of the natural and the supernatural are blended in the novels into an approximation which is almost a unity and where the difference is only one of degree. One gets the impression that he saw the formal experience of God in the act of worship in church as simply a more intense insight than that of one's informal experience of God in nature, in creatures, in one's friend or wife. To him, the natural was a manifestation of God in the dimensions of time and space, but not an ens a se. The world, as creature, is clearly distinguished from God as creator. It is this "archnatural-natural" view which Williams possessed that opens up the universe and gives a greater significance to life itself. It is this sacramental view of the world, that is, the world seen as good, that clearly distinguishes him from other modern "religious" writers, as Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley, "who reveal more than a lurking suspicion that the human body is the creation or the abode of the evil one."³⁹ It is Williams' view that the "natural was supernatural and the supernatural natural...." This view, which "provides both the immediate thrill and the permanent message of the novels," gave him a more profound insight "into Good and Evil, into the heights of Heaven and the depths of Hell."⁴⁰

If God is the source of Good, then Williams states he is also the source of evil. "I form the light and create darkness:

³⁹ Chad Walsh, C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics (New York, 1949), p. 19.

⁴⁰ Eliot, p. xiv.

I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things."⁴¹

However, in postulating that nothing but good existed before the Fall, Williams rejected the metaphysical as well as ethical dualism in the notion of an evil power or principle or being that is outside of and contradictory to God:

There is no split second of the unutterable horror and misery of the world that He did not foresee (to use the carelessness of that language) when He created....The Omnipotence contemplated that pain and created; that is, he brought its possibility--and its actuality--into existence. Without him it could not have been; and calling it his permission instead of his will may be intellectually accurate but does not seem to get over the fact that if the First Cause has power, intelligence, and will to cause a universe to exist, then he is the First Cause of it. The First Cause cannot escape being the First Cause... [for] God only is God.⁴²

God however knows evil as the privation of good, but man must experience it. And because man had determined to know good as evil, there could only be one remedy, that is, to "know the evil of the past itself as good,...to find right knowledge and perfect freedom together, to know all things as occasions of love."⁴³

In the writings attributed to "Dionysius the Areopagite," the author states two ways by which one can come to God: the Negative Way and the Affirmative Way. The Negative Way is the

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Isaiah 45: 7.

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Charles Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins (London, 1950), pp. 98-99.

⁴³

Ibid., p. 58.

Rejection of Images. But because everything that is created is also an imperfect image of God, the Way of Affirmation consists in the acceptance of all images, "in the love of all things, not for their own sake, but as images of the Divine."⁴⁴

All that these two Ways hold and mean was telescoped by Williams into the maxim: "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou." The first clause accents its complement, "Neither is this Thou." There exists between these Ways a transcendental relationship: the Way of Negation is meaningless unless one first posits something which is to be rejected; conversely, the Way of Affirmation is grounded in the rejection of complete identity between image and basis, and "presses towards the God who being beyond all imagery is in a strict sense, unimaginable."⁴⁵ The Negative way of the mystic is fulfilled by and connected with the affirmative way; they are as two species within the same genus. Although their functions differ, their life is one:

Neither of these two Ways indeed is, nor can be, exclusive. The most vigorous ascetic [following the Negative Way], being forbidden formally to hasten his death is bound to attend to the actualities of food, drink, and sleep, which are also images....Both [those who follow either Way] are compelled to hold their particular image of God negligible beside the Universal Image of God which belongs to the Church.⁴⁶

Although Williams attributed this formula to St. Augustine, it is generally, by Auden, Eliot, and Father Gerbase, Mather, thought to have come from Williams himself. At first glance the two

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Heath-Stubbs, pp. 15-16.

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Shideler, p. 25.

⁴⁶

Figure of Beatrice, pp. 9-10.

Ways appear to be "utterly irreconcilable...; yet, [one sees] in John of the Cross, the alleged "negativist, 'that God's footprints are in the sands and meadows and mountains of the world."⁴⁷

This was the world as Williams viewed it. There are, of course, many so-called "religious" or "Christian" writers who

write as if the world were per se evil and as if it were created by some evil force or deity. A complete contradiction of the Christian sacramental view [i.e., Williams' view] of the world--"for God so loved the world, etc."... [one sees] and loves the world in God, not apart from God or in antithesis to God; to exclude God from his world by a selfish and sensual addiction to the world is as much an error as to exclude the world from God by a "spiritual" view which regards the body and the material world as dirt ...All of which...boils down to "this also is Thou; neither is this Thou."⁴⁸

Just as Williams postulated that both Ways are necessary, so also did he insist that one Way is not necessarily any easier or better than the other. Both are equally difficult; "to affirm the validity of an image one does not at the moment happen to like or want...is as harsh as to reject an image...which one does not happen to like or want..."⁴⁹ T.S. Eliot, in The Cocktail Party, discusses these two ways when Celia goes to Harcourt Reilly for advice because she is so dissatisfied with her life:

CELIA

I couldn't give another the kind of love--
...I wish I could--which belongs to that life...
Still,

⁴⁷ Fr. Christopher Fullman, O.S.B., Personal letter to this writer, September 17, 1963.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Figure of Beatrice, p. 13.

If there's no other way...then
I feel just hopeless.

REILLY

There is another way, if you have courage...
The second is unknown and requires faith--
The kind of faith that issues from despair.
The destination cannot be described...
But the way leads toward possession
Of what you have sought in the wrong place.

CELIA

That sounds like what I want...
Which way is better?

REILLY

Neither way is better.
Both ways are necessary. It is also necessary to
make a choice between them.

CELIA

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Then I choose the second.

(Act II)

Although Celia (and perhaps Eliot himself) chose the Way of Negation, Williams was an exponent of the Affirmative Way. The Way as he revealed it is primarily an "attitude of the mind, and its qualities--joy, humility, and a protective skepticism--are present throughout his work, which, although he had many masters (Dante, Milton, Kierkegaard, Patmore, to name a few), in style and content is completely his own."⁵¹

⁵⁰ T.S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party (London, [1958]), pp. 140-41.

⁵¹ Glen Cavaliere, "The Way of Affirmation," Church Quarterly Review, CLVII (January-March, 1956), 27.

The one truly distinctive mark of the Way of Affirmation is that it asserts the reasonableness of the universe. It shouts that what one's senses reveal is not wholly delusion and what one's reason tells one is true, is Truth:

...the whole man, flesh and mind and spirit, is by his nature...capable of God...the right way--and the only safe way--to approach the Powers is by means of the Images.⁵²

From the beginning of its history, the Church has accepted both reason and Images as legitimate means of acquiring and transmitting information about God. On Pentecost the Way of Affirmation was exemplified when the Holy Ghost descended in tongues of flames and the congregation responded in tongues other than their own. Thus God is known by the affirmation of Images, but he is known to be God by their rejection. Although one separates these Ways conceptually, they are both present to a greater or lesser degree in all phases of life, as Williams testifies in the novels. For example, in The Place of the Lion, which deals with archetypal images, Anthony Durant, in the conclusion, saves the world by re-naming the beasts; thus, by using the Images, he is an exponent of the Affirmative Way. Side-by-side with Anthony, however, is Richardson the book-seller who, following the Way of Negation, offers himself to the Unity and returns to it. He had

read in those books of the many Ways which are always the Way. But not by books or by phrases, not by images

⁵²

Dorothy Sayers, Further Papers on Dante (London, 1959), p. 203.

or symbols or myths, did he himself follow it. He abstracted himself continually from sense and from thought, attempting always a return to an interior nothingness where that which is itself no thing might communicate its sole essential being....Alone and unnoticed he went along the country road to his sacred end. Only Anthony...commended the other's soul to the maker and destroyer of Images.⁵³

For both ways, it is experience that provides the content of knowledge of God; it is reason that supplies the form. And just as these ways are to be found in Christianity, so too are both to be found in literature. Just as the Way of Affirmation complements the Way of Negation, so too does the Way of Allegory complement the Way of Images. Thus it is that Williams' novels are allegories which were written to convey definite ideas, ideas which are discovered through images and presented in imagistic terms.⁵⁴

Central to Williams' philosophy is the doctrine of the Incarnation, which implicitly posits the concept of a dynamic relationship of three persons in One God. This relationship is one of mutual love, of Love loving Love. It is a hierarchial relationship with each person Co-equal and Co-eternal. The Church declared "that the Son existed in the Father and that the Father in the Son." The same preposition "in" was used to define Christ's relationship to His Church: "We in Him and He in us." The emphasis, Williams thought, that should be placed

⁵³ The Place of the Lion, pp. 139, 195.

⁵⁴ Shideler, p. 28.

on the Incarnation was, as the Quicunque vult states, that "not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by the taking of the manhood into [*italics* | mine] God" did Christ become Man. The reverse has all too often been emphasized; for example, in War in Heaven the Archdeacon noted:

That the subjects of their conversation should be taken into God was normal and proper; what else, the Archdeacon wondered, could one do with parish councils? But his goodwill could not refrain from feeling that to Mr. Batesby they were opportunities for converting the Godhead rather firmly and finally into flesh.⁵⁵

Thus the basis of all affirmations is the Christian affirmation of the dignity of the human body.⁵⁶ In view of this the Pauline doctrine of the Christian society as the Mystical Body of Christ had special appeal for Williams, as seen by his constant insistence on the essential sacredness of the human body and the material world.⁵⁷ In All Hallows' Eve Lester, a young woman, recently a bride,--and recently dead--is met by her husband Richard, who seeing her thinks to himself:

...the body that had walked and lain by his was itself celestial and divine. Body? it was no more merely body than soul was merely soul; it was only visible Lester.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ War in Heaven, p. 56.

⁵⁶ Cf. "Natural Goodness," "Sensuality and Substance," "Index of the Body," in The Image of the City, pp. 68-87.

⁵⁷ In "Index of the Body" (*supra*) Williams states: The structure of the body is an index to the structure of a greater whole....I hope it is not unorthodox to say that the body and soul are one identity....The body was holily created, is holily redeemed, and is to be holily raised from the dead. It is, in fact, ...less fallen, merely in itself than the soul in which the quality of the will is held to reside...(pp. 81-85).

⁵⁸ All Hallows' Eve, pp. 189-90.

And Lester, in return, sees that Richard,

in his whole miraculous pattern, all the particles of him, of the strange creature who was in every particle both flesh and spirit, was (the only word that meant the thing he was) a man....⁵⁹

This view of the dignity of man found fuller expression in Williams' doctrine of Co-inherence which, based on the Co-inherence of the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father, and "we in Him and He in us," is realized more or less perfectly wherever human beings exist in social relationships. Every manifestation of a just social order on earth is in some degree an image of the divine order of heaven, and thus the quest for just such a society becomes a mode of the Affirmative Way.⁶⁰

As Williams himself noted in The Descent of the Dove, co-inherence did not begin with Christianity; "all that happened then was that co-inherence itself was redeemed and revealed by that very redemption as a supernatural principle as well as a natural."⁶¹ This play of interaction among separate identities is "the Co-inherence." The source of its existence and continuation, Williams attributed to God. However society may

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Ibid.

60

Heath-Stubbs, p. 23.

61

Descent of the Dove, pp. 69-70.

wish to deny the fact, it does live from one another whether its members live for one another or not. Co-inherence is an ultimate prerequisite for any life at all; that is, life is organic, consisting of a system of interdependencies, all of which depend on other living things in order to exist. This systematized, organic entity is symbolized in Williams' works as "The Hill," "The Empire," or simply as "The City."⁶² These terms have their own existence in eternity, separate from nature, and yet, entering and informing nature. They refer to the whole complex of relations--past, present, future; spiritual, physical; natural, supernatural--by which man is bound to man and to God. Such terms, whether in his poetry or prose, image an orderly, fully functioning community of living souls; that is, they are an image of the Divine Order, symbolizing the inextricable union of the spiritual and temporal, the invasion of the eternal into time, "and the course of the spirit at the heart of all flesh."⁶³ It is the polarity and the ambivalence of hope and despair, of faith and doubt, in the depths of the human personality that provides Williams with much of the subject matter of his novels. Out of the paradox of this conflict within, he draws the meaning of life's uncertainties. Yet he is not indifferent to the world without.

⁶²In the Arthurian cycle the "City" is Byzantine; in the novels it is his beloved London, Battle Hill, or simply "the City." For a history of the word "co-inherence," cf. The Figure of Beatrice, p. 92, note.

⁶³

Fullman, "The Mind and Art...", p. 36.

He sees man not as a spirit eager to be quit of the world and its complexities, but as inescapably bound up with all the manifold interests and concerns of his fellow human beings. Rather, Williams' art is an attempt to express the high heroism and betrayals of the human heart in conjunction with and against the background of the eternal world. Although there are many similarities between Williams' City and that of Augustine, there is a very significant difference in regard to point of view. "Augustine's City of man is wholly reprobate; Williams' City of man represents all that is good in the natural order. His usual implication is that the City of God is the City of Man raised to the full heights it was intended had not there been the Fall."⁶⁴ Consequently Williams' City is to be achieved not by the destruction of the natural world but by the perfection of it: "Grace perfects nature; it does not destroy it."⁶⁵ The natural order thus is not of itself inferior to or subordinate to the supernatural order, but only a separate level of the Divine, functioning as a part of that Plan in conjunction with other levels.

The principle of co-inherence involves two corollaries: the doctrines of exchange and substitution. It is co-inherence

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 197; Cf. Chpt. VII, "The City" in He Came Down, p. 87 ff.; also Lewis, Arthurian Torso, p. 175.

⁶⁵ He Came Down, p. 87.

that specifies that man should subjugate himself to the laws of exchange and that he must obey these laws freely. The doctrine of exchange in turn demands that love must be present, for to love is to live co-inherently. The more intense the love, the more clear the opportunities for exchange are seen. To human relationships, exchange adds a new dimension: "the natural goodness in the mere act of lending a book becomes an article in the web of glory."⁶⁶

Just as Williams' concept of co-inherence is based on the doctrine of the Incarnation, Exchange is based on the doctrine of the Atonement, that Great Exchange of Humanity for Man:

By that central substitution, which was the thing added to the Cross by the Incarnation, he became everywhere the centre of, and everywhere He energized and re-affirmed, all our substitutions and exchanges. He took what remained...of the torn web of humanity in all times and places, and not so much by a miracle of healing as by a growth within made it whole....⁶⁷ He has substituted His manhood for ours in the secret of the Incarnation and Atonement. The principle of the Passion is that He gave His life "for"--that is, instead of and on behalf of--ours. In that sense he lives in us and we in him, He and we co-inhere. "I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me," said St. Paul, and defined the web of universal power toward substitution....⁶⁸ [Thus] by an act of substitution, He reconciled the natural world with the world of the kingdom of heaven, sensuality with substance....Up

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Ibid., p. 87.

67

"The Cross," in Image of the City, p. 137; "The Way of Exchange," in Image of the City, pp. 152-53 (also in Selected Writings, supra).

68

and down the ladder of that great substitution all our substitutions run....⁶⁹ We are to love each other as he loved us, laying down our lives as he did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other; that is, by acts of substitutions, we are to be substituted and to substitute. All life is to be vicarious--at least, all life in the kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious....The one who takes has to set himself--mind, and emotion, and sensation--to the burden, to know it, imagine it, receive it--and, sometimes, not to be taken aback by the swiftness of the divine grace and the lightness of the burden... [for] the pattern of the glory is a pattern of acts. [and] the archetypal act is that of the bearing of burdens....⁷⁰

From this rather extensive quotation, one can see that the bearing of another's burdens depends upon intention and upon action. One only has to will it, as Lester does for Betty in All Hallows' Eve and as Peter does for Pauline in Descent into Hell:

"Its easy...it needs only the act. For what can be simpler than for you to think to yourself that since I am there to be troubled instead of you, therefore you needn't be troubled? And what can be easier than for me to carry a little while a burden that isn't mine?...Ring me tonight ...and tell me you are being obedient to the whole fixed nature of things...."⁷¹

Thus, not knowledge but intention is the principal requisite for Exchange. Since one cannot carry his own burdens, then Williams simply points out that he must carry another's and allow another to carry his. Whose he carries is not important. Usually one's choice is governed by one's character and social position and environment.

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Descent of the Dove, p. 235; He Came Down, pp. 83, 89, 97; Cf. St. Paul to the Galatians, 6:2.

⁷¹

Descent into Hell, pp. 98-100; Cf. All Hallows' Eve, pp. 137-48.

One very important aspect of the doctrine of Exchange is that it is not limited to Time. Substitution, if true at all, is independent of time and place. These are categories of nature, not restrictions upon the acts of exchange, acts which belong to the Eternal Now, in that eternity which supports nature and extends it. In the novels Williams presents the simultaneity of the present, past, and future, in presenting his organic view of life. Lester, in her new state of living-death, wanders around London, and

not only space but time spread out around her as she went. She saw a glowing and glimmering City, of which the life was visible as a roseal wonder within. The streets of it were first the streets of today...for she was now confirmed that not alone in the house she had left did that rich human life go on. It was truly there, even if...she had no present concern with it....It was London known again and anew. Then, gently opening, she saw among those streets...another London, say,--other Londons, into which her own London opened or with which it was intermingled....It was all very greatly ordered.. ..She was (though she did not find the phrase) looking along time. Once or twice she thought she saw other streets, unrecognizable,...but these were rare glimpses and less clear, as if the future of that City only occasionally showed....As she came down towards what was to her day the centre of the City, there was indeed a moment when all houses and streets vanished,...and she was going down a rough causeway among the trees, for this was the place of London before London had begun to be... that great town in this spiritual expedition of its glory, did not omit any circumstance of its building in time and space....⁷²

Time in the novels is dealt with "mechanistically" in that man lives in time, and in a sense, because his time is limited,

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All Hallows' Eve, pp. 167-68; Cf. Seed of Adam for the same treatment of time.

Others he saved; himself he could not save.

 Virgil was fathered of his friends,
 He lived in their ends.
 He was set on the marble of exchange.⁷⁵

That "vicarious life of the kingdom" is not necessarily confined to a sequence among the human members of the kingdom is most clearly illustrated in Descent into Hell where Pauline, the heroine, who is afraid she is going insane because she has seen her doppelganger, is relieved of her burden of fear and worry by Peter Stanhope, poet and playwright. She, in turn, goes out to meet her martyred relative, who had died four centuries before during the Marian persecutions, in an act of love and exchange:

One called: What of him that hath not? but who could be that hath not? so universal, in itself and through its means, was the sublime honour of substituted love; what wretch so poor that all time and place would not yield a vicar for his distress, beyond time and place the pure vicariate of salvation?⁷⁶

Thus Williams explicitly believed that in circumstances where the substitution could not take place at the time the burden needed to be borne, the act could be performed in eternity, in the infinite contemporaneity of all things and all acts. His view does not imply past events need not to have happened; rather it explains why the past occurred as it did by referring to another event that took place later in time but concurrently in eternity.

"The events of the past remain irrevocable and irreducible."⁷⁷

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Arthurian Torso, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁶

Descent into Hell, p. 172; cf. p. 31, supra.

⁷⁷

Shideler, p. 97.

The night before his martyrdom, Pauline's ancestor cried out in fear, as Christ had cried out in the Garden during his agony. It was this fear of what was before him that Pauline was able centuries later to relieve when she went out to meet him:

...and a voice sounded. It said, in a shout of torment: "Lord God! Lord God!" ...The cry freed her from her fear and delirium, as if it took over its own from her.... She said in a voice breathless only from haste: "Can I help you?" ...She was here. She had been taught what to do. She had her offer to make now and it would not be refused. She herself was offered, in a most certain fact, through four centuries, her place at the table of exchange. The moment of goodwill in which he had directed to the City the man but lately died [a suicide] had opened to her the City itself, the place of the present and all the past The choice was first in her; Omnipotence waited for her decision. She knew what she must do....Behind her, her own voice said: "Give it to me, John Struther." He heard it....It was a devotion and an adoration; it accepted and thanked..., Pauline turned. She thought afterwards that she had had no choice then, but it was not so.... It had been her incapacity for joy, nothing else, that had till now turned the vision of herself aside; her incapacity for joy had admitted fear, and fear had imposed separation. She now knew that all acts of love are the measure of capacity for joy....The unseen crowd poured and roared past her. Her debt was paid, and now only she knew why and when she had incurred it. The sacrifice had been accepted....She had lived without joy that he might die in joy, but when she lived she had not known and when she offered she had not guessed that the sacrificial victim had died before the sacrificial act was accomplished.... There was a pause, a suspense of silence....She heard the voice once more: I have seen the salvation of my God... He blessed her...He dead and she living were made one with peace.⁷⁸

All that Williams does here and elsewhere is to stretch one's notions of contemporaneity and to demonstrate man's capacity for operating within that larger and more meaningful Present. "At

the table of exchange all times are now and no one who seeks to receive or give aid is denied. Therefore anyone in the present can contribute to the salvation of any other person from fear, sin, pain, ignorance, or any other disorder."⁷⁹ In nature man recognizes the past, present, and future, and accepts his inability to act except within the present; in eternity this inability is not recognized or accepted. Eternity contains only the present, but it contains in a "blinding simultaneity" all present moments that have been, are, and will be. Everything that happens or will happen has in this sense already been completed. To God all was willed in one act, and there is only the Now.

Exchange is frequently difficult, demanding, and painful, as one can see from the passage quoted from Descent into Hell. Sometimes exchange requires the living-up of one's own life, just as that Sacrifice by which all sacrifices are to be judged resulted in death--and life. That act by which evil is changed into good is an act of sacrificial exchange, and such an act is the highest activity of love. It is in this manner that salvation from sin is achieved; the sin is not wiped out, but its energy is redirected. Such conversions of energy are exemplified several times in the novels, for instance, in the Greater Trumps,

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Shideler, p. 98.

when Nancy calms a snow storm which threatens to engulf the world and destroy it:

Between that threat and its fulfilment stood the girl's slender figure, and the warm hands of humanity in hers met the invasion and turned it....Nancy's hands dropped to her side; the joy that possessed her quieted; she became still The storm had been turned back....Babel had overwhelmed her being....She was going to live and find Henry and show him the palms that had taken the snow, and make him kiss them for reward....⁸⁰

In Nancy's case the result brought pain but not death. However in War in Heaven the Archdeacon not only converts the energy to a good purpose but also sacrifices his life in so doing. The Archdeacon, near the end of the novel, is sent for by Gregory Persimmons, who has been able to get his hands on the Holy Grail. Gregory also holds as hostages two friends of the Archdeacon in order to make sure that the Archdeacon will come. In his desire for power, Gregory uses the Grail during the celebration of a Black Mass. At the foot of the altar, upon which the Grail rests, the Archdeacon is placed, tied hand and foot. During this macabre occurrence

the third stream of energy passed over [the Archdeacon], and its very passage shook the center of his being from its roots...this was absolute rejection...this was negation ...rejection which tore all things asunder and swept them with it in its fall through the abyss...he cried desperately to God and God did not hear him and he was afraid...he knew that another existence was present ...he was part of that Act which far away words issued in those faint words "Let us make man...in our Image, after our Likeness...."⁸¹

80

The Greater Trumps, pp. 187-98.

81

War in Heaven, pp. 240-45.

Whether the sacrificial victim lives, as in the case of Pauline and Anthony, or dies, as in the case of Chloe and the archdeacon, in every case the innocent deliberately take upon themselves the impact of an evil energy and redirect it.⁸² Sinful man is not destroyed but changed, and changed by the introduction of another energy that counteracts the energy of the original and actual sin. Therefore, in the novels, there can be no salvation without sacrifice.

Williams also showed another facet of the conversion of energies, the conversion of good into evil. He showed not only the Way of Affirmation, which is the Way of Images, but also the Perversion of the Way, which consists in the inability to participate fully in the processes of exchange.

The opposite of co-inherence is in-coherence, and the opposite of communion is isolation. And to Williams the central heresy of man is his declaration of independence not only from God but from humanity as well. It is central to his thought that far from being an isolated individual cut off from his fellow human beings, every man is in fact linked with all others. "To oneself from the nature of things...."⁸³

82

Pauline, Descent into Hell; Anthony, Place of the Lion; Chloe, Many Dimensions; Archdeacon, supra.

83

Descent of the Dove, p. 217.

The effects of the refusal of Exchange are many, among which is the emphasis on the Self. The effect of this emphasis on Self is total isolation:

Some things [are] possible only to a man in companionship, and of these the most important [is] balance. No mind [is] so good that it [does] not need another mind to counter and equal it, and to save it from conceit and blindness and bigotry and folly. Only in such a balance could humility be found, humility which [is] a lucid speed to welcome lucidity whenever and wherever it presents itself.⁸⁴

Another effect of the refusal of Co-inherence is what Williams termed as the perversion of images, which he traced to the failure of reason. "The circles of Hell contain what is left of the images after the good of the intellect has been deliberately drawn away."⁸⁵ Evil is thus established as a positive force which prevents the processes of exchange from taking place. The imbalance of the imagination, reason, and skepticism caused by the perversion of images, in turn, produces sentimentality, fanaticism, intellectual apathy, and the "surrender of the intellect to the disordered sensualism of the moment."⁸⁶ This inaccuracy is Williams' definition of hell, and no where is that state more clearly defined than in Descent into Hell where Pauline's ascent is paralleled by the descent of Wentworth, an aged historian, who literally descends into a hell of his own

⁸⁴ The Place of the Lion, p. 187.

⁸⁵ Figure of Beatrice, p. 114.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

choosing and making. Because Wentworth's pride has been hurt by the rejection of a girl whom he desires, he allows bitterness, jealousy, and resentment to possess his very essence. Since he cannot have the girl herself he contents himself with a succubus of her which embodies not the independent personality of the girl, but is only a reflection of his own imagination and desires:

The shape of Lawrence Wentworth's desire had emerged from the power of his body. He had assented to that making...; he had assented to the company of the shape which could not be except by his will and was imperceptibly to possess his will....There flowed from the creature by his side the sensation of his absolute power to satisfy her. It was what he had vehemently and in secret desired-⁸⁷ to have his own way under the pretext of giving her hers.

And so Wentworth continued to turn inward, loving himself, living in isolation. His initial sin, that of jealousy of a fellow-historian, rising from pride, is also his last. In the conclusion of the novel, Wentworth attends a banquet given in honor of the historian. "Hate still lived in him [Wentworth] and hate might have saved him, though nothing could, had he hated with a scholar's hate. He did not; his hate and his grudge were personal and obscene."⁸⁸ In the taxi, on the way to the dinner, his descent into the abyss of the Self literally begins:

He was very near the bottom of his rope...and there suddenly before him was Sir Aston Moffott. The shock almost restored him. If ever he had hated Sir Aston because of a passion for truth, he might even then have been saved...he looked at Sir Aston and thought, not "He

87

Descent into Hell, p. 127.

88

Ibid., p. 215.

was wrong in this facts," but "I've been cheated." It was the last consecutive thought he had...he would not understand anything about him....There were faces which ceased to be faces...working and twisting in a horrible way that yet did not surprise him...He was looking up an avenue of nothingness, and little flames licked his soul, but they did not come from without, for they were the power and the only power his dead past had on him.... Presently...he was drawn, steadily, everlastingly inward and down through the bottomless circles of the void.⁸⁹

As W.H. Auden remarked, no other author draws the states of damnation so forcefully as does Williams, and no one, not even Dante, shows so vividly that no one is ever sent to hell.⁹⁰ Rather, one desire to go there, and he freely chooses. The Way of Affirmation leads to co-inherence and salvation; the refusal of the Way leads to isolation and damnation. In the novels Williams shows the consequences of both choices on the souls of his characters--on those who accept and on those who refuse to follow the Way.

89

Ibid., pp. 215-22; Cf. Eliot's Ash Wednesday, part 2.

90

Auden, Preface to Descent of the Dove, p. v.

He left behind him a considerable number of books which should endure, because there is nothing else that is like them or could take their place.

T.S. Eliot, All Hallows' Eve, p.xiii.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NOVELS

The book-jackets of Williams' novels describe them as "spiritual thrillers" or as "metaphysical thrillers." In a sense these descriptions are an accurate and just appraisal--as far as they go. But they do not go far enough. The novels are these and more. It is true that Williams was preoccupied with the "irruption of the metaphysical into the physical...and [was] haunted always by the vision of trespass upon the borders of two worlds--the 'calling' down of 'naked and impersonal powers out of the realm of time and space."⁹¹ It is also true that, if one is considering his use of such machinery as myth and occult, the novels certainly are thrillers. Yet these surface qualities do not do justice to what Williams is trying to convey to his readers. He is trying to do more than entertain; he is trying to show a side of life that is too often neglected in the literature of today, a side nevertheless still valid.

Williams, as Eliot noted,⁹² did not write in the mainstream of contemporary literature. Much literature of the time in which

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Sayers, p. 200;

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Cf. Preface to All Hallows' Eve, p. xiv.

he wrote was [and still is] a literature reflecting an age of disintegration, cynicism, and despair.⁹³ It was also an age of great world conflict. Williams had seen World War I take the lives of many dear friends; he had seen England torn by the turmoils of war; he had seen conflicts arise in Africa, India, and in Egypt, which disrupted the Empire. Besides these external conflicts, England was torn by internal social unrest and unemployment. She was also disturbed by religious unrest and conflict, such as the furor caused by Bishop Barmes of Birmingham over his interpretation of the Anglican doctrine of the Eucharist and his views of evolution, and the spectacle of Parliament debating the technical theological matters involved in the revision of the Book of Common Prayer.⁹⁴ It was also a time in which the "intelligentsia...were not likely to rush to an author with such theological interests as Williams had."⁹⁵

Williams was not a social critic per se protesting the abuses of his age, nor was he a "moral" critic in the sense of being a didactic writer. He did not preach. He wrote to communicate ideas, states of being, the essence of goodness and evil. Although he did not mirror the immediate and naturalistic problems of his age and did not imitate the "pseudorealistic techniques

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Cf. Edwin Muir, The Present Age from 1914 ("Introduction to English Literature"; London, 1939), V, 182ff.

94

Fullman, pp. 34-35.

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Ibid., pp. 32-33 (quoting from a letter from Auden).

which troubled most writers of his time," he nevertheless did treat twentieth-century problems, even if they were not couched in customary twentieth-century terms and modes:

Contemporary dilemmas and frustrations are seen by Williams in relation to the universal and timeless issues of morality and religion of which they are parts, and they are presented in terms that are meaningful to all men in all times. And by means of this sort of aesthetic distance, he achieved not less but more relevance to his age.⁹⁶

C.S. Lewis has stated that he regards Williams' place in literature to be "ambivalent." On one hand he could be placed with the "counter-romantics" insofar as he believed that "un-theologized romanticism" was sterile; on the other, he could be regarded as the leader of the resistance against the moderns insofar as he believed that the romanticism that the moderns were rejecting as "senile" was in reality only immature. All it needed was to grow-up. Thus, it is as difficult to classify and pigeon-hole Williams as it is his novels.⁹⁷ Part of the difficulty in classifying the novels stems from the fact that, as George Winship says, Williams is not read for his style but for what he had to say. "He wrote as a man sometimes will who in his special field faces neither sharp competition nor searching criticism."⁹⁸

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Moorman, pp. 154-55.

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Lewis, Essays, p. vii.

98

George P. Winship, Jr., "This Rough Magic: The Novels of Charles Williams," Yale Review, XL (Winter, 1951), 288.

As has been previously indicated, although Williams' novels did not attract a large following, they did attract a small but hard core following which has remained devoted since the years of their publication. This hard-core interest has tended to spread slowly but surely and has even crossed the continent from England to the United States. Evidence of this interest can be seen in the fact that two⁹⁹ of his novels have been re-issued in paperback in the United States within the past two years. Also critical material on Williams has been published, for example, Mary Shideler's book on Williams' romantic theological themes. Articles in scholarly journals, theses and dissertations, and even a mention in the Concise Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, testify to a growing interest in the man and his works. Lately, critical material on the similarity of Williams' works and that of others, such as Lewis, Eliot, and J.R.R. Tolkien, and his influence on such authors, has been appearing. A recent example of the above is the new book by Edmund Fuller, Men With Books Behind Them,¹⁰⁰ which treats, among others, Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams. It is safe to say that a few years back, the most that would have happened is that Williams would have been relegated to a footnote, or, at the most, a passing comment. Because criticism which has appeared has treated, more or less, the major virtues and vices of the novels, this present study will,

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All Hallows' Eve and The Greater Trumps.

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Edmund Fuller, Books With Men Behind Them (New York, [1962]).

after commenting on the common characteristics of the novels, give only a brief resume of the major criticism. By examining these common elements, which can for purposes of convenience be discussed in relation to setting, plot, and character, one may gain a clearer insight into their structure.

The setting of Williams' novels is dual in nature; that is, the particular setting is always London and the neighboring suburbs. At the same time, however, Williams posits a preternatural world (his "archnatural" world), which he refers to as The City, Battle Hill, or the Garden, in which his characters also live and act. This preternatural world, which is a neoplatonic concept, and which in the context of the novel is not divorced from the natural world, becomes a framework for choice, rather than a source of human values. Consequently Williams' characters operate in both worlds, the world of time and space and the world of moral value, simultaneously.

Williams' characters are for the most part common, ordinary men and women who are involved in the daily business of making a living. Occasionally one finds an African prince, a High Chief Justice, or a noted poet-playwright, but these characters are usually secondary if not minor figures. In each novel there is an antagonist who, acting as a catalyst, precipitates the action. This character epitomizes the essence of evil. On the other hand, the protagonist, around whom all the action pivots,

epitomizes the essence of goodness. This character is usually thrust into the preternatural setting or circumstance without any awareness of what is occurring at first. He does not actively seek, but passively accepts. Characters such as Simon Le Clerc, Wentworth, Considine, and Gregory Persimmons, are examples of the evil antagonist; yet each is very different and each is evil in his own way. Examples of protagonists are Anthony, Chloe, Lester, and the Archdeacon, who also are distinct characters with their own personalities. All other characters are only "shades" of black and white, for Williams never colors gray; that is, he never has "mixed" characters. Nor are his characters ever neutral, although some try to be. Ultimately they are forced to make a choice by the circumstances in which they find themselves. Although his characters are either black or white, they vary in degrees of intensity; that is, some are more good than others (i.e., they are further along the Way) and some are more evil than others.

His characters may be saints or often loyal sons of Belial. They do however show many subtle variations of personality, many sharply observed vices and virtues of human nature. But we are made to see ultimately that every soul is either in Satan's camp or in God's, for Williams does not hesitate to project the fortunes of a character to that ultimate judgment. Every body is either a goat or a sheep; there are no other species. In this realm of characterization Williams achieves great clarity; he meets and excels even the comic books on their own terms.¹⁰¹

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George P. Winship Jr., quoted, with kind permission of the author, from a chapter of his unpublished manuscript, The Novel and the Whole Duty of Man, Chapter IX, 121-22.

The plots, such as they are, are basically the same; that is, all seven novels are concerned with the unlawful attempt on the part of the antagonist and his disciples to seize and possess for selfish reasons power of one type or another. This power may be centered in an inanimate object, such as the Holy Grail or the Stone of Suleiman, or it may be the power of ideas or emotion. All start with a specifically contemporary, though frankly supernatural, situation, which is then universalized through Williams' use of myth and various symbols. All of the books make use of magic and occult; some more than others. All make references to Christian symbols which may be used as symbol qua symbol or only as a means of enriching the plot through the association of ideas. Specific reference to God (who is usually referred to by function, e.g. "Under the Protection, "Under the Mercy," "By the Permission) or to the Church is conspicuously absent, especially in the later novels where the symbolism becomes more and more complex. (Williams' use of myth, occult, and symbolism will be discussed in the next chapter.) The climax in every case is brought about by the protagonist making himself or herself a path or channel through which the Divine Will may operate. In regard to action in the novel, Williams places the greater amount on the effects which result from the choices made by the characters involved, especially the choice made by the protagonist, rather than on the causes or motives that lead up to the choices made. Frequently the choice is only implicit in the

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narrative, and very seldom are the characters faced with an explicit, clear-cut decision. Roger Ingram is one exception. He is given an explicit invitation by Considine to join him in his conquest of death. Another notable exception, which is most interesting, is the choice with which Lester in All Hallows' Eve is confronted. Although Lester is dead on page one of the novel, she is given the opportunity and the choice of accepting the Way of Affirmation or refusing it.¹⁰² And Evelyn in the same novel-- and in the same condition--is given the same choice; yet she chooses very differently. Whatever the particular circumstances surrounding the choice, the choice nevertheless pivots on Williams' doctrines of co-inherence, substitution, and exchange. Conse-

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The problem which Lester presents is one which most critics completely skirt or just mention in passing. Williams implies within the context of the narrative that Lester, quite dead, is given both the opportunity and the ability to make one last will act which is to determine her ultimate salvation (or damnation). To Williams this will act is the final act of obedience (or disobedience) to a Higher Authority that all must make. At first glance, this view is theologically quite unorthodox, to say the least. However, to this writer, this is not the case. In as much as man, in the particular judgment, judges himself, for the damned never see God (if they did they would be unable to turn away from the Good, the True, and the Beautiful), then this act of self-judgment is in reality a final act of the will. Because Williams is writing a novel and is restricted by the medium itself, Lester's decision covers the length of the novel. However whether it takes an instant or days is not really important, for all action occurs in the Eternal Now. One's final choice, however, is conditioned by the way one leads his life when alive and by the way one faced death. When this writer wrote to C.S. Lewis, Fr. Gervase Mathew, and Christopher Fry, about this explanation, she was gratified to know that they felt that it was a "good one" and one "which Williams would have assented" to. (See the addendum for photostats of letters by C.S. Lewis [which was written only a few weeks before his death], and Christopher Fry.)

quently the sharpness of moral characterization has in Williams a philosophic foundation.

Because the emphasis is on the effects of choice rather than on motives for choice, Williams is not what one would call, for lack of a more suitable term, a "psychological" novelist. Yet because he does become involved with the consequences of action on the personality and on the soul of his characters, he does fit the definition of a writer who examines the interior aspects of his characters, i.e., the three component parts of the soul--the intellect, the will, and the emotions. If one does not see why such-and-such a choice was made, one does see what happens because it was made. And because motivation is underplayed, the importance of environment in relation to character is not stressed. In fact the reader is only given as much as it is necessary for him to know, and no more. Whether Williams felt that environment played little or no part in the shaping of moral character, one cannot say with certitude. One can say that in regard to his own characters, social position and environment, and even education, were not important in the determination of their choice.

Criticism of the novels can also be discussed in terms of setting, plot, and character. Winship, in commenting upon Williams' dual setting, stated that "in his invented world [Williams established] a single scheme of things where atoms,

thoughts, and spiritual values are equally real. In such a world, though it is imaginary in the form which he gives it for our entertainment, the truths of doctrine have a vividness missed in the portrayal of a purely natural universe."¹⁰³ Miss Marjorie Wright, in her comparative thesis on the cosmic settings in the works of Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams (supra), noted that the romantic tendencies in these settings, which are objectionable to some readers, "represent a rejection of certain implications of modern realism, and thus, perhaps, [they] could not have occurred in any other setting."¹⁰⁴

In regard to Williams' use of the supernatural, occult, and magical devices, and his use of myth, in relation to plot, it must be again pointed out that, however bizarre the events postulated in the novels may be, these events are always in themselves essentially logical. The miraculous is only used as a catalyst to trigger the reaction of the characters to the abnormal intrusion in their daily lives. The focus of interest nevertheless still remains on the characters themselves, and not on the supernatural aspects.

There are certain technical defects present, especially in the earlier novels, which tend to create a barrier between the author and his readers. For example, there was a good deal

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Winship, The Whole Duty, p. 127.

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Wright, p. 7.

of over-writing, of excess of description, and of dialogue of a "false brilliance" which was later overcome. "In this respect the distance between War in Heaven and the sobriety and strength of All Hallows' Eve is a remarkable witness to [Williams] continually growing and self-correcting art."¹⁰⁵ John Heath-Stubbs commented that part of the trouble with the novels stems from the fact that "his form is artificial and his dialogue lacks realism--it is highly stylized."¹⁰⁶ Occasionally his utterances would be "too redolent of the oracular," and "his prose was often so highly charged with meaning as to be not easily intelligible, but in all his writing we are presented with an individual poet's adoring vision of those truths which so intimately concern us. As such they provide food for thought and nourishment for the soul."¹⁰⁷ A passage, taken from The Place of the Lion, will illustrate what is meant by the above criticism. The novel deals with the Platonic Forms which, when unleashed in the world, gather unto themselves their ectypes. At the end of the novel, the house of the "adept" who was responsible for the unleashing of the Forms burns continuously for several days, to the puzzlement and astonishment of the fire-fighters. One of the Forms appears by the

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Lewis, Essays, p. vii.

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Heath-Stubbs, p. 28.

¹⁰⁷

Glen Cavaliero, "The Way of Affirmation," The Church Quarterly Review, CLVII (January-March, 1956), 28.

Fire:

The movement of the Eagle was the measure of truth, but the birth of some other being was the life of truth, some other royal creature that rose from fire and plunged into fire, momentarily consumed, momentarily reborn. Such was the inmost life of the universe, infinitely destroyed, infinitely created, breaking from its continual death into continual life, instinct with strength and subtlety and beauty and speed. But the blazing Phoenix lived and swept again to its nest of fire, and as it sank all those other Virtues went with it, themselves still, yet changed. The outer was with the inner; the inner with the outer. All of them rose in the Phoenix and a pattern of stars shone round its head, for the interfused Virtues made a pattern of worlds and stayed, and all the worlds lived and brought forth living creatures to cry out one moment for you and then be swallowed in the Return.¹⁰⁸

Although it is always somewhat unjust to pick out a single passage for inspection and analysis, one feels that the above passage does illustrate one problem of Williams' prose style; that is, it is so "highly charged with meaning as to be not easily intelligible." This is also what Winship meant when he charged that Williams made his "Universals" so vivid that his human characters appeared somewhat flat.¹⁰⁹ This may or may not be the case, but it can be shown that his characters do show many subtle variations of personality which reveal all the foibles of human nature. Certainly there is a world of difference between the playful, romantic Nancy and the rather devoted but serious Chloe. And certainly Jonathan is nothing like Henry, nor is Simon like Considine. And Sybil is nothing like Margaret

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The Place of the Lion, p. 185.

109

Winship, "This Rough Magic," p. 290.

Anstruther, except that both are well along the way. Thus it is that Eliot can state that Williams "personages have a reality, an existence in their own right which differentiates them from the ordinary puppets."¹¹⁰ Mrs. Beifuss also stated that Williams' characters are not flat, nor are they caricatures or symbols per se. "They are lively and vital for the most part. They do not just represent humanity in its encounter with the adversaries; they are humanity." She further stated that one reason why his characters present such difficulty when categorizing is that they are never seen under normal conditions; therefore, the reader cannot compare their actions with how they would act in other than abnormal times.¹¹¹

Another reason why Williams' characters seem to fail at times is that he was primarily interested in conveying states of being rather than in just telling a story or portraying individual characters acting in a set situation, and, as Auden pointed out, fiction is not an ideal medium for describing such states. In addition it is virtually impossible to describe the state of grace artistically, because

to this state the capacity of the soul for expression is irrelevant. A commonplace person who can utter banalities is just as capable of redemption as a genius; ...if a writer picks a genius to represent the state of grace, he is almost bound to suggest that salvation is the consequence of genius, that the redeemed are a

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Eliot, Preface to All Hallows' Eve, p. xvii.

111

Beifuss, p. 45.

superior elite; but, if, on the other hand, he chooses a common place person, banalities remain artistically banalities, whatever glories they may conceal.¹¹²

Whether or not Williams' characters utter banalities would, in the last analysis, rest with the individual reader to a great extent; however it must be admitted that he did choose the commonplace person for his heroes and heroines. Ernest Beaumont feels that these commonplace characters show a fundamental discrepancy between the way they are portrayed and how they act. Therefore he feels that Anthony Durant, as a second Adam, does not convince the reader that he possesses the necessary qualifications to save the world by re-naming the Beasts in the end of The Place of the Lion, and Betty Wallingford, in All Hallows' Eve likewise fails to convince the readers that she has sufficient spiritual perception necessary to perform miracles as she does in the end of the novel.¹¹³ Nevertheless Williams' novels must be judged by the norms he himself set up, and not by pre-conceived standards imposed from without. It must be remembered that he is read not for his style, but for what he had to say. These defects, if that is what they are, do not detract from what he had to say, if the reader takes time to look, even if they do detract from how he said it.

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Auden, "Charles Williams," pp. 552-53.

113

Ernest Beaumont, "Charles Williams and the Power of Eros," The Dublin Review, CCXXXIII (1960), 65-66.

Another major area of criticism centers around Williams' use of myth, ritual, and occult. Several critics¹¹⁴ feel that these elements sometimes get in the way of the meaning and tend to "clutter up" the work, rather than help in any way. In justice to Williams, since he deliberately choose to use such elements, one must at least reserve judgment until one sees what he did with them, and why. Certainly he must have seen advantages that perhaps these critics tend to overlook or disregard.

¹¹⁴

e.g., Beaumont, Walsh, Cavaliero, and Auden.

"After all, one shouldn't be put out of one's stride by anything phenomenal and accidental. The just man wouldn't be."

The Place of the Lion, p. 21.

CHAPTER FOUR

MYTH, RITUAL, AND OCCULT

As one reads the novels, one quickly becomes aware of a factor which distinguishes Williams' work from others which fall into the same general classification.¹¹⁵ This factor is that Williams took the supernatural seriously. Magic is seen not as something which may provide one with a fanciful escape from reality into the world of "make-believe," but as the "image of something which is a part of the world as we know it."¹¹⁶ Before one can examine Williams' use of such devices as myth and occult, one must first be aware of what exactly myth itself is and how it operates.

Francis Fergusson says that "'myth' is one of those words which it has become almost impossible to use without apologetic quotation marks. Ill-defined for centuries, it is now used in many senses and for many purposes: to mean nonsense or willful

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Heath-Stubbs feels they belong to the same literary genre as the stories of Sheridan Le Fanu, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, and M.R. James; they are an off-shoot of the Gothic romance and a close relative of the detective story. T.S. Eliot feels Williams was influenced by G.K. Chesterton.

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Heath-Stubbs, p. 8.

obscurantism in some contexts, the deepest wisdom of man in others...." This trend is a recent development in philosophic and anthropologic circles.¹¹⁷ Williams did not treat myth as either nonsense or profound wisdom.

Ernst Cassirer insists that myth is to be interpreted literally. He opposes all allegorical interpretation of myth on the grounds that such interpretations reduce myth to some other mode of cultural truth, such as philosophy, religion, or history, and do not account for the "unique and irreducible element in mythic expression; that is, all mythic thought is concerned with the denial and negation of the fact of death and the affirmation of the unbroken unity and continuity."¹¹⁸ Myth may have profound symbolic value, as some contend, not because myth necessarily and intrinsically contains any latent, esoteric wisdom, but, if at all, because the theme suggests universal patterns of conduct and motivation.

Thomas J.J. Altizer, in discussing the religious meaning of myth and symbol, asserts that myth is a "primary mode of the religious response which in its origin cannot be separated from ritual....Myth, like ritual, is a mode of encounter with the sacred which makes possible the continuous representation, or

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Francis Fergusson, "'Myth' and the Literary Scruple," in The Human Image in Dramatic Literature (Garden City, New York, [1957]), pp. 161-62.

118

David Bidney, "Myth, Symbolism, and Truth," in Myth: A Symposium, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, 1958), p. 5.

re-evocation of a primal sacred event...." By its nature, he feels, myth dissolves the "profane world" and opens up the world of "sacred Reality" to those who participate. "Ritual effects what the myth represents, so that myth-ritual is the re-living of all that is known as the numinous, the sacred, and the transcendent."¹¹⁹

Mr. Bidney adds that "in myth, ritual acts are 'explained' and validated. Myth thus is a unique form of symbolism which supervenes upon the symbolism of ritual in order to validate and perpetuate it." Consequently the mythic imagination implies a belief in the reality of its object, for "the mythopoeic mind does not regard myth merely as a symbolic expression or representation of some independent reality. The mythic symbols are identical with the reality. Hence mythical reality is accepted as given and is not subjected to critical evaluation."¹²⁰

Northrup Frye adds yet another definition of myth. He states myth is "the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication...." Ritual cannot by itself account for itself, for, Frye explains, it is "pre-logical, pre-human, and pre-verbal,... [Thus] myth is the identification of ritual and dream in which the former is seen to be the latter in

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Thomas J.J. Altizer and others, eds., Truth, Myth, and Symbol (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, [1962]), pp. 93-94.

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Bidney, p. 8.

movement."¹²¹ Myth, on the other hand, to Eliot is a device for controlling, for ordering, for giving "a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility, and anarchy which is contemporary history." Myth thus arises out of a desire for order, manifesting itself in "rituals of appeasement, in a confusion of things seen and unseen, and expressing itself by means of a preterlogical language...It, like all literature, is an attempt to bring order out of chaos, and, like most poetry, it conducts its affairs by means of symbolic language...."¹²² Consequently an author can use an allusion to a myth to call forth the whole substance and meaning of the myth. By superimposing "the already ordered experience contained within the framework of the myth upon the chaotic experience, [an author attempts] to create order within the work, and to control and regulate his own vision of contemporary life."¹²³

In a recent publication, Myth and Realities, Fr. John L. McKenzie, S.J., provides an illuminating synthesis of just what a myth is supposed to be, of what it is, and of what it is not. For example, myth differs from art in that essentially it is an act of belief: "Myth expresses in action and drama what metaphysics and theology express dialectically. Myth is not

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Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), pp. 106-07.

122

Moorman, pp. 11-12.

123

Ibid., p. 151.

merely story or tradition, because the object of myth is an archetype which survives in the eternal Now..." Myth itself is defined as a "form of expression of belief, with no judgment about its veracity implied." The element common to all myths is that they deal with the "knowledge of the unknowable...the reality which [man] perceives but cannot recognize and define is inadequately defined by myth... [which] ultimately reduces all causality to the mysterious divine causality which lies beyond perception." Although myth is always associated with religious belief and practices, it should not be thought to be identical with religion. It is not religion, nor mere metaphor, nor poetry, nor history, nor "a story," nor an allegorical view of nature (although it is always closely connected with Nature), nor logical discursive thought, nor a substitute for discursive thought. Whether myth precedes ritual or ritual myth is not known; however they always appear together. In myth causality is reduced to divine causality, as stated above, and as such takes on a new dimension:

Causality in mythical thought is the intuition of a cosmic event which is reflected in the succession of events in the phenomenal world. Without the cosmic even the phenomenal world would not happen or would cease....The succession of phenomena is achieved by the interplay and sometimes by the conflict of personal wills on a cosmic scale.¹²⁴

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John L. McKenzie, S.J., Myth and Realities: Studies in Biblical Theology (Milwaukee, [1963]), pp. 183-90.

Fr. McKenzie concludes that myth, as can be seen from the above, is not a univocal term; there is no generally accepted definition acceptable to all. However, since Williams uses myth to such a great extent, it is necessary to see just what he thought myth was. In He Came Down From Heaven, he stated:

...to the imaginative...all is equally myth. We may issue from it into other judgments--doctrinal, moral, historic. But in so doing, we enter into another kind of thought and judge by other tests--more important perhaps, but not the same. In myth we need ask for nothing but interior consistency....¹²⁵

A myth for Williams thus "consisted of a narrative that has acquired a significance beyond its own immediacy--that is, a myth is a story functioning as a symbol."¹²⁶ In conclusion, then, one can say myth is a symbolic device used by many writers to enrich their narratives.

There are several reasons why a writer would wish to use myth. Richard Chase, for instance, convincingly argues that myth-invented or used--is found whenever an order beyond that of space-time needs to be suggested.¹²⁷ By using myth the story and the concrete cosmic event are consequently removed from time as it is known in the profane world: "myth transforms the concrete time and space of profane existence into the archetypal

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p. 66.

126

Shideler, p. 45.

127

Ward Pafford, "The Literary Uses of Myth and Symbol," in Truth, Myth, and Symbol, eds. Thomas J.J. Altizer and others (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, [1962]), p. 132.

time and space of the sacred beginning and the sacred center."¹²⁸ Myth also provides a skeleton or framework for the narrative; it gives it a definite pattern which is easily seen and which can easily be built upon. The general skeleton remains in view regardless of how many details are included. Myth allows the setting to be capable of bearing the cosmic pattern worked out in it. Having all its relationships in itself, myth does not demand to be related to accepted associations; hence the autonomy of myth decreases the localization of themes in which it is employed and increases the strength of archetypal associations. With myth each object and each event can stand out in its own definite shape and yet be related to that Other of which it is a part. Because an object or event is simply involved in the myth, it thus becomes universal. Therefore, through the use of myth, Williams was able to draw upon a great stockpile of common imagery, which enabled him to order and condense his ideas, and to "give symmetry to his world view to an extent and with a completeness that would have been impossible in a contemporary metaphor."¹²⁹ As he himself stated, "Mythology always heightens the style."¹³⁰

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Altizer, p. 97.

129

Moorman, p. 152.

130

Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 25.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of myth is its identification of symbol and object. However when an author uses myth, he is only responsible for the initial connection that the symbol makes. "Myth lays out with persuasive completeness the ideal world toward which the symbol glances, and it reaches back into the concrete world in which the image is rooted."¹³¹ Cassirer states that the mythic symbol is not a representation concealing some mystery or hidden truth, but is a "self-contained form of interpretation of reality....In myth there is no distinction between the real and the ideal; the image is the thing...."¹³²

It is important however to understand that Williams' use of symbolism is not properly a literary device in the usual sense of the term, but is instead the key to his view of reality; hence, to his view of man. It is only then that the reader can avoid the pitfall of looking upon the supernatural aspects of the novels as a contrived mechanism used to create atmosphere. In Williams, the supernatural must be taken as seriously as he took it. And for him, the supernatural was natural and the natural supernatural.

Williams' friendship with C.S. Lewis¹³³ can be traced

131 Pafford, p. 133.

132 Bidney, p. 4.

133 Cf. Lewis, Preface to Essays Presented to Charles Williams (supra).

back to the problem of symbolism. In 1938 C.S. Lewis had just read Williams' War in Heaven and was on the verge of writing him a letter to tell him how much he had enjoyed the book when Lewis received a letter from Williams telling him how much he had enjoyed [his book], The Allegory of Love. In this book Lewis discussed the difference between allegory and symbol. Because this passage made such an impression on Williams, it will be quoted at some length:

Allegory, in some sense [said Lewis], belongs not to medieval man but to man, or even to mind, in general. It is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms. What is good or happy has always been high like the heavens and bright like the sun. Evil and misery were deep and dark from the first. This fundamental equivalence between the immaterial and the material may be used by the mind in two ways.....On the one hand, you can start with the immaterial fact, such as the passions which you actually experience, and can then use visibilia to express them. If you are hesitating between an angry retort and a soft answer, you can express your state of mind by inventing a person called Ira with a torch and letting her contend with another invented person called Patientia. This is allegory,...but there is another way of using the equivalence which is almost opposite of allegory, and which I would call sacramentalism or symbolism. If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world....The attempt to reach that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism....The difference between the two can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given--his own passions--to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real. To put the difference in another way, for the symbolist, it is we who are allegory; we are the "frigid personifications;" the world we mistake for reality is the flat outline of that which elsewhere veritably is in all the round of its unimaginable dimensions....Symbolism is a

mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression.¹³⁴

And if Williams was nothing else, he was a sacramentalist.

Many years before Lewis' book was published, Mrs. Charles Williams wrote a book on Christian symbolism in which she outlined the requisites for a "true" symbol. In as much as Williams had assisted her, from the side-lines, so-to-speak, one can safely assume that he subscribed to her views. In the book she stated:

that the first necessity for a true symbol is that it should have a separate existence of its own. Yet (a second necessity) that existence must be in some way dependent on the greater existence for which it stands and for which it represents. On the other hand, an emblem has an arbitrary and accidental relation to the idea with which it is connected...With a symbol there is an identity expressed, but with allegory, it places emphasis on the "other meaning" rather than on identity. Allegory begins with abstractions; symbolism with reality. Allegory is imposed from without; symbolism evolves from within.¹³⁵

And this is the fundamental difference that Williams sought to stress in the novels. He preferred to begin with real persons, places and things, and then let them suggest their symbolic or sacramental value. At the same time he was careful not to destroy their primary and literal identity.¹³⁶

¹³⁴

C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London, 1953), pp. 44-45, 48.

¹³⁵

Michael Williams (Mrs. Charles), Christian Symbolism (London, 1919), p. 12.

¹³⁶

For a comparison of Williams' technique in using symbols with that of Dante's, cf. Dorothy Sayers, Further Papers on Dante (supra), pp. 140-47, 190; also Cavaliero (supra), p. 21.

the Golden Dawn is an organization which has exerted a greater influence on the development of occultism since its revival in the last quarter of the 19th century. There can be little or no doubt that the Golden Dawn is or rather was until very recently the sole depository of magical knowledge, the only Occult Order of real worth that the West in our time has known....The membership of the Golden Dawn was recruited from every circle, and it was represented by dignified professions as well as by all the Arts and Sciences, to make but little mention of the trades and businesses. It included physicians, psychologists, clergymen, artists, and philosophers; and normal [one wonders if he is implying the above were not "normal"] men and women, humble and unknown, from every walk of life ...from every station of society....¹⁴²

It is not too difficult to see what attraction such a society would have for someone like Williams, who possessed such a fertile, romantic imagination. The Order offered him literary companionship,¹⁴³ a rich core of intensely elaborate ceremonials, and a most complex system of symbolism, which seemed to weave religion and mystical systems into one great tapestry. "Magic offered ...a reinforcement of belief in the power of the word or symbol to evoke a reality otherwise inaccessible..."¹⁴⁴ Father Fullman feels that Williams left the Order as his con-

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Israel Regardie, My Rosicrucian Adventure (Chicago, 1936), p. 8. This writer is indebted to Fr. Fullman for calling attention to the fact that this book is only available through the Library of Congress.

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Other members of the Order of the Golden Dawn were A.E. Waite, with whom Williams was closely acquainted; W.B. Yeats; Evelyn Underhill, whose letters Williams later edited; and Arthur Machen.

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Ellmann, p. 88; Cf. Williams, Witchcraft (New York, [1959]), p. 25.

ception of the doctrine of co-inherence grew, and he had an increasing awareness of "the person of Our Lord."¹⁴⁵ Whether this growing awareness presented a "conflict of interests," one cannot say. Whatever the case Williams left the Order, and he never violated his initiation oath at least not in the novels where the temptation must have presented itself. Neither does he treat the occult practices with ridicule, nor are they treated skeptically or underplayed (if anything, they are overplayed in the earlier novels). They are only presented as a part of a greater whole; they are simply the things that men do in Williams' world. As such they are treated sanely and objectively, and, above all, seriously.

Williams' first published novel, War in Heaven (1930), deals with the discovery, loss, re-appearance, and final disappearance of the Holy Grail (or as Williams spells it, Graal), which turns up in a small parish church in the suburb of Fardles, on the outskirts of London. A second plot deals with the murder of a man called Patterson in the publishing house run by Gregory Persimmon's son. The two plots are tied together by Gregory, who not only has murdered Patterson but who also seeks the Grail in order to use it in the celebration of the Black Mass. This

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Fullman, p. 91. For a more complete picture of occult societies of the 1930's, cf. Denis saurat, Literature and Occult Tradition (London, 1930), and William Seabrook, Witchcraft: Its Power in the World Today (New York, 1940), pp. 82 ff.

novel, more than the others, makes extensive use of occult. It is also rich in mythic symbolism. For example, the Grail itself is not only a religious symbol but a literary one as well. The richness of both traditions is clearly established within the context of the narrative, as can be seen in the passage where the Archdeacon, after stealing back the Grail, makes off with it in the car belonging to the Duke of North Ridings, a Catholic and poet. Also in the car is Kenneth Mornington, who had worked in the publishing house where the murder was discovered. On the way to the Duke's house in London, with the adversaries in pursuit, Mornington says:

"We're carrying the San Graal...Lancelot and Pellas and Pellinore--no, that's not right--Bors and Percival and Galahad. The Archdeacon's Galahad, and you [the Duke] 146 can be Percival...and I'm Bors...We shall meet at Carbonek.

Thus these three are clearly identified with the three in Malory's Morte D'Arthur who carried the Grail to safety to Carbonek.

Although the Grail is supposed to have been the chalice Christ used at the Last Supper, and therefore holy, to the Archdeacon, it is only a symbol:

"In one sense, of course, the Graal is unimportant-- it is a symbol less near Reality now than any chalice of consecrated wine. But it is conceivable that the Graal absorbed, as material things will, something of the high intensity of the moment when it was used and in its adventures through the centuries." ...Of this sense of instrumentality he recognized...the component parts--the ritual

movement, the priestly office, the mere pleasure in ordered, traditional and almost universal movement "Neither is this Thou," he said aloud.¹⁴⁷

Another overt Christian symbol is that of Prester John, the mythic priest-king (who also is the weakest symbol, because he is unnecessary for the resolution of the plot; hence one must assume he was brought in only for his mythic and symbolic value). The symbolism here is again both literary and theological. Prester John says of himself that he is:

"...a messenger only...but I am the precursor of the things that are to be. I am John and I am Galahad and I am Mary; I am the Bearer of the Holy One, the Graal and Keeper of the Graal...All magic and all holiness is through me...yet not I, but He that sent me. You shall watch yet through a deeper night, and after that I will come to this place on the second morning from now, and I will begin the Mysteries of my Lord, and thereafter He shall do What He will...."¹⁴⁸

To Barbara, the mother of the child Adrian, whom Gregory desires to use in his diabolical rites, Prester John says, "'Sleep securely tonight; the gates of hell have no more power over you"'; to the Duke, "because you have loved the thing that is mine, this also shall save you in the end"; and to Mornington he says, "'I have no message...except the message of the Graal ...Tonight thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.'¹⁴⁹ And later, clearly identifying himself with Christ, he states, "'The time is at hand...I will keep the passover with my disciples.'" Yet

¹⁴⁷

Ibid., pp. 37, 50-51; cf. p. 137.

¹⁴⁸

Ibid., p. 204;

¹⁴⁹

Ibid., p. 203.

he does not identify himself with God The Father. To Barbara's husband, Lionel, who desired annihilation from Prester John, the priest-king answers:

Death you shall have at least....But God only gives, and only He has Himself to give, and He, even He, can give it only in those conditions which are Himself....But do not grudge too much if you find that death and heaven are one ..., for the door that opens on annihilation opens only on the annihilation which is God.¹⁵⁰

In conclusion Prester John says Mass with the Grail, just before he and the Grail disappear. But before he could say the Mass, he had to rescue the Grail from Gregory and his disciples. Here he identifies himself both with John and the Grail itself:

I am John...and I am the prophecy of things that are to be and are....He that is righteous let him be righteous still; he that is filthy let him be filthy still...I am sacrifice to him that hath offered sacrifice; I am destruction to him that hath wrought destruction...for I am myself and I am He that sent me.¹⁵¹

Prester John is thus a part of the Christian tradition when he identifies himself with John, Mary, and "He that sent Me"; he is a part of the literary tradition of Malory and other writers of the Grail when he identifies himself with Galahad and the "Keeper of the Grail." Yet these two traditions are not separate but one. "He is a living sign through which the power of God is loosed in the world. The sign retains its own identity and at the same time becomes a channel of power."¹⁵²

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Ibid., pp. 250-51;

¹⁵¹

Ibid., pp. 245-46; cf. p. 175.

¹⁵²

Beifuss, p. 28.

Barbara, who has undergone a frightening experience at the hands of Gregory, who had put some magical ointment on her arm, is also a symbol of sacrifice. After she recovers from her "nightmarish" experience, she and her husband and Kenneth Mornington take a walk:

She smiled at [Lionel], and then as she leaned against the gate of the Gully grounds, she unconsciously stretched her arms along the top bar on either side. So, her feet closely together, her palms turned upwards, her face toward the evening sky, she seemed to hang remote, till Kenneth said sharply, "Don't Babs, you look as if you were crucified."¹⁵³

It is however in Gregory's use of the magical pentagram, in his celebration of the Black Mass, and in the ritual murder of Mornington, that the depth and power of Williams' knowledge of occult is fully realized. After obtaining the magical ointment from the Greek, Gregory returned to his room:

Slowly, very slowly, he undressed, looking forward to he knew not what and then--being entirely naked--he took ...a pinkish ointment, very much the colour of the skin, and at first he thought it had no smell...he paused for a moment, inhaling it, and finding in it the promise of some complete decay. It brought to him an assurance of his own temporal achievement of his power to enter into those lives which he touched and twist them out of their security into a sliding destruction....Gregory smiled, and touched the ointment with his fingers...and began the anointing. ...From the feet upwards in prolonged and rhythmic movements his hands moved backwards and forwards over his skin, he bowed and rose again, and again. The inclinations gradually ceased as the anointing hands grew higher--round the knees, the hips, the breast....All the while his voice kept up a slow crooning, to the sound of which he moved, pronouncing as in an incantation of rounded and liquid syllables what seemed hierarchic titles.....He began

the second anointing. But now it was only the chosen parts that he touched--the soles of the feet, the palms of the hands, the inner side of the fingers, the ears and eyelids, the environs of the nose and mouth, the sexual organs...the third anointing was purely ritual. He marked various figures upon his body--a cross upon either sole, a cross inverted from brow to foot, and over all his form the pentagram reversed of magic. While he did so his voice rose in a solemn chant...light and sound were married in premonitions of approaching experience ...Silent and grotesque he lay, and the secret processes of the night began....¹⁵⁴

This ritual seems to be a perversion of the Last Rites of the Church in which the dying person is similarly anointed with Holy Oil to confer upon him spiritual health. However Gregory's anointing only confers spiritual death. The Last Rites prepare one for entry into another world; so also did Gregory's rites usher him into another world. The Church anoints in the sign of the Cross; Gregory in the sign of the reversed pentagram. Both anoint the parts of the body which are the occasions of sin; one for forgiveness, the other for initiation. And thus Gregory was ready for his passage into that other world:

By no broomstick flight over the lands of England did Gregory Persimmon attend the Witches' Sabbath, nor did he dance with other sorcerers upon some blasted heath before a goat-headed manifestation of the Accursed. But scattered far over the face of the earth...those abandoned spirits answered one another that night; and That beyond them...--That beyond them felt them and shook and replied, sustained and nourished and controlled.... He was being made one with something beyond his consciousness; he accepted [*italics mine*] the union in a deep sign of pleasure...And now he was ascending; lower

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Ibid., pp. 71-73.

and lower into a darker and more heavy atmosphere....He was hungry--but not for food; he was filled with passion--but not for flesh...he longed to be married to the whole universe for a bride....These were his marriages; these his bridals....It came, it came, ecstasy of perfect mastery, marriage in hell, he who was Satan wedded to that beside which was Satan. And yet one thing was needed and he had it not--he was an outcast for want of that one thing...the memory of the child Adrian floated into him, and he knew that this was what was needed...Adrian was the desirable sacrifice ...the last experience was upon him, the accepted devoteeNailed as it were, through feet and hands and head and genitals...he was now divorced from the universe; he was one with a rejection of all courteous and lovely things. By the oblation of the child he was made one with that which is beyond childhood and age and time--the reflection and negation of the eternity of God. He existed supernaturally --and in Hell.¹⁵⁵

Thus Gregory, who desires the power of a god, divorces himself from his fellow human-beings; and in the abyss of the Self, he chooses his own damnation by accepting "the union in a deep sign of pleasure."

The ritual involved in Williams' version of the Black Mass shows the depth of Williams' knowledge in these rites as well as the power of his imagination. After Gregory removed the Grail from its place in a cabinet, he changed from a dinner jacket he was wearing and donned a white cassock "marked with esoteric signs." After he filled the Grail with wine, he brought a short rod and laid it on the slab in front of the Grail. At the back of the altar was placed a chafing dish which contained herbs and powders. "Lastly, with great care he brought to it from the cabinet a

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Ibid., pp. 73-76.

parchment inscribed with names and writings, and a small paper from which he let fall on to the wine...a few short hairs." After closing the cabinet and re-entering the circle, Gregory took the rod from the altar and bent down, closing the gap by drawing the rod slowly around in a circle. He then moved silently to the altar:

Very slowly he stretched his hands over the chalice and began to speak..."Pater noster qui fuisti in caelis...per te omnipotentem in saecula saeculorum...hoc est calix, hoc est sanguis tuus infemorum...in te regnum mortis, in te delectatio corruptionis, in te via et vita scientiae maleficae...qui eris in sempiternum. Amen" ...The rod moved in magical symbols upon the wine...and then in a murmur through which the whole force of the celebrant seemed to pass, it came again. "Adrian, Adrian, Adrian...It is I who speak, image to image, through this shadow of thee to thee. Adrian, well met...In the world of flesh know me, in the world of our lord, and in the world of shadows... O child, my sacrifice and oblation...I, dimissus es." Then he broke the circle, and very slowly, in reverse order, laid away the magical implements. He took the Graal and set it inverted on the floor. He took off his cassock and put on--in a fantastic culmination--the dinner-jacket he had been wearing.¹⁵⁶

Gregory, who rejected all "courteous and lovely things" in the abyss of Self, is destroyed and damned. And the Archdeacon who alone loved the Grail for its own sake ("...for love's sake... let me be courteous still to It for Thy sake, courteous Lord") is rewarded--with death and salvation. At the conclusion of the Mass offered by Prester John and at which Adrian acted as server, the Archdeacon left his pew and walked towards the altar. After kissing Adrian, he mounted the steps, and then slowly sank to the ground. The Duke, smiling at Lionel, remarked,

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Ibid., pp. 90-93.

"I suppose they will say he had a weak heart."

Williams' second novel, Many Dimensions (1931) still used a material object, the stone of Solomon, as the nexus of spiritual power. It too included many references to myths and retained much of the occult. Charles Brady has described this novel as possessing "a quality of youth in which the old Arabian Nights cross the plane of the New Arabian Nights in a most enchanting manner."¹⁵⁷

Many Dimensions, as the title itself suggests, initiates the reader into the metaphysical dimensions of time, motion, and space. The story deals with the mythical stone of King Solomon (Suleiman) which is, in fact, Prime Matter, that from "which all things are made." On the literal level, the Stone is a magical talisman; on the metaphysical and philosophical level, it is prime matter, and as such, is all that is potential. Hence it cannot of itself act. On the symbolic level, it images all energies of matter and the spirit of God within and without the universe. The heroine, Chloe, is secretary to the High Chief Justice, Lord Arglay, who is distantly related to Sir Giles Tumulty (a character who appeared in War in Heaven) who has gotten his hands on the Stone in order to experiment with it. The Stone defies the laws of time and space, and can be endlessly multiplied without losing its properties or dimensions. Within the Stone

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Renascence, II (1949), 62. (Untitled book review.)

are the letters of the Tetragrammaton, the holy letters which symbolized the name of God, which is a familiar symbol in Hebrew and Christian art and literature. It was also commonly found in occult societies. Specific references to the Stone of Solomon can also be found in literature, for example, in Joan Evans' Magical Stones of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Particularly in England.¹⁵⁸ The Tetragrammaton is also imbedded in the forehead of Chloe; however it is only visible to a few of the characters, such as the Persian ambassador, who seeks the return of the Stone to his family's keeping, and the High Chief Justice. Thus Chloe is identified as something "holy," as something "of God." Although both Lord Arglay and Chloe are described in the beginning of the novel as agnostics, both give themselves up to the Stone, one more completely than the other. She represents the sacrificial victim, Love and Mercy; he Justice in perfect control and balance:¹⁵⁹

She was the Path and there was process within her, and that was enough...only the justice of Lord Arglay, in the justice of the Stone which law between himself and the woman he watched, beheld the manifestation of that exalted Return. He had seen the Types [exact duplicates of the Stone] come together and pass through her form, till they had entered entirely into the Type upon her hands...He saw the Mystery upon her hands melting into them...What the Stone had been she now was. Along that path, offered it by one soul alone, It passed on its predestined way--one single soul and yet one not solitary....With such eyes he saw also

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(London, 1922), pp. 75, 94, 144, 159.

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Many Dimensions, p. 41.

black upon her forehead...the letters of the Tetragrammaton....¹⁶⁰

Chloe is further identified as a co-redemptress in that she assumes the burden of making herself a path "through which the spiritual forces of the Stone may pass in restoring it to the Unity whence its powers are arrived." She is described as the "savior of the wretch hanged at Wandsworth," "whom Sir Giles tricked into using the Stone to gain the continuance of life, and who experiences a horrible life-in-death as a result. Her anger at those who seek to use the Stone for selfish reasons is described as "the wrath of the Lamb" and "righteous supernatural anger."¹⁶¹ The High Chief Justice becomes a symbol of Joseph, the guardian, when Chloe becomes Mary:

...as far as might be within his protection and certainly within his willing friendship, there was growing the intense secret of Chloe's devotion to the Mystery. As if a Joseph with more agnostic irony than tradition usually allows him sheltered and sustained a Mary of more tempestuous past than the Virgin-Mother is believed to have either endured or enjoyed; so Lord Arglay considered, as far as it was clear to him, his friend's progress towards the End of Desire...she wanted only to serve the Stone.¹⁶²

This relationship is given additional emphasis when an attempt is made to remove one of the Types from Chloe's possession. Although she could have used the Stone to remove herself from her bedroom,

160

Ibid., pp. 261-62.

161

Ibid., p. 127;

162

Ibid., pp. 194-95.

she refused to attempt to be helpful to God, and being in an agony she prayed more earnestly. The God purged her as she writhed; ...she turned upon her face, and with both hands beneath her pillow holding the Stone, she lay still, saying only silently in her panting breath: "Thy will, do...do if Thou wilt; or--or not [Authors's ellipses]".¹⁶³

As in the previous novel, Chloe is rewarded with death just as was the Archdeacon. To Williams, death is not an evil.

Courtesy becomes a ritual in Many Dimensions, as it does in most of the novels. For example, when Lord Arglay, while experimenting with the Stone in the earlier pages of the book, goes to Chloe's room, traveling through space, to get a chapter of his book that she had been working on, and returns, he apologizes to her for making it necessary that she must carry it back. And "Chloe, used to the light courtesy with which he had always treated her, had rarely seen in him that rich plentitude of power which seemed to make his office right and natural to him."¹⁶⁴ Thus, courtesy is a quality which characterizes those who serve the Stone, and discourtesy characterizes those who do not. By extension, this characteristic difference can be used to divide all of Williams' characters into two camps.

The next novel which Williams published still retained power for its theme. However, now the power was not centered in any material object; it was the power of an idea itself that con-

¹⁶³

Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁶⁴

Ibid., p. 29; cf. pp. 31, 224-25.

cerned Williams. The Place of the Lion (1931) is in many ways Williams' most philosophic and complex novel in regard to symbolism. The plot centers around the unleashing of the Platonic Forms. As the archetypal images appear, they assimilate their ectypes into themselves, and so endanger the world. The world was created by the entrance of these great principles into matter; now it was to be destroyed by a reverse process. For example, all the butterflies of the world, millions of them, are gathered into The Butterfly, which signifies Beauty. What is true of animals is also true of people who are drawn to images that reflect their dominant characteristic. For instance, one woman who writes poison-pen letters is turned into a snake; another who desired strength is gathered into the Lion. The Principles are only returned when Anthony Durant, who has a passion for Truth, renames the Beasts. Williams sought in the novel to serve notice that ideas are "more dangerous than material things." Anthony's fiancée, Damaris Tighe, is a young woman who is working on her dissertation, and yet has never given a thought to the fact that her subjects are living forces of the imagination. Anthony as Archetypal Man becomes another Adam; by subduing and renaming the beasts, he stresses the point that energies cannot be misused:

...those who deserved the power of the Immortals, the virtue of the things that they sought, not for that virtue's sake, not even for the sake of greater experiences, but merely that their old experiences might be more satisfactory to them. Foster wanted to be stronger than those

with whom he came in contact; he had made himself a place for the lion, and it seemed the lion was taking possession of its habitation; its roar echoing in the wilderness and the dry places of the Soul.¹⁶⁵

There are in the novel nine spheres of archetypal animals, with the eagle forming a balance between the others, which form four pairs of opposites, e.g., the lion and the lamb. As in medieval philosophy, the eagle represents to Anthony Divine Wisdom. But to Damaris it is a pterodactyl, hideous and obscene with its giant beak. To Anthony it is worthy of love and awe; to Damaris, because of her superficial attitude and the failure of her imagination, it is an object of fear. Anthony

was poised in a vibration of peace, carried within some august passage. The myriad passage of the butterflies recurred to his consciousness, and with an inrush of surpassing happiness he knew that he was himself offering himself to the state he had so long desired....Borne now between the rush of gigantic wings he went upward and again swept down; and the cliffs of the abyss had vanished, for he now moved amid sudden shapes and looming powers. Patterned upon the darkness he saw the forms--the strength of the lion, and the subtlety of the crowned serpent, and the loveliness of the butterfly, and the swiftness of the horse --and other shapes whose meaning he did not understand.¹⁶⁶ They were only hints and expressions of lasting things.

However Damaris

stood still, gasping at it...the beastly apparition remained...its eyes held her, its wings moved, as if uncertainly opening; its whole repulsive body shook and stirred; its beak...jerked at her, as if the thing were

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The Place of the Lion, p. 148.

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Ibid., pp. 115-16.

stabbing; then it opened....The horrid presence of that other filthy thing had swept down...there was nothing round her but a hideous and vile corruption, nothing except a vibration that went rhythmically through her...and then she heard her name...it was spoken as normally as it had been spoken a hundred times in that place--the state of knowledge....Anthony was standing near her...and then there was shade of wings in the air, and another flying thing sailed into sight and floated slowly to his shoulder. There, eagle-plumage, eagle-beaked, eagle eyed, it rested; he raised his hand, and as if in august leniency it allowed itself to be caressed. His eyes...full of love and loving laughter, rested on hers. She received with joy both love and laughter; there went out from him, and from the Augustitude upon his shoulder, a knowledge of safety would she but take it....¹⁶⁷

Although occult per se is absent, passages like the above owe their power to Williams' skill in describing such states as people being turned into snakes or descending into a pit, an abyss. These passages are like those in War in Heaven -- a tour de force depicting the essence of evil.

Williams returned to his earlier formula for his next novel, The Greater Trumps (1933), which blends Eastern and Western philosophies in a pattern of complex symbolism. Eastern philosophy is represented by his use of the Isis myth and in his use of the Tarot cards as the instrument in which all material and spiritual power is concentrated.

The Tarot cards have an unusual history which Williams traces in the context of the narrative. It seems that they were thought to have been "invented" to amuse Charles VI of France.

¹⁶⁷

Ibid., pp. 128-34. Williams owed much to the Bible for his imagery. Cf. Revelation, 12:14, 13:14-15, 19:20, and 20:1-4;

Yet the cards were known prior to Charles' time among the Chinese and Indians. They were also known in Egypt, for Etteilla mentions in one of his tracts on the Tarot cards that there "is a representation of the mystical arrangement of these cards in the Temple of Ptah at Memphis." Two "great" exponents of the Tarot, Court de Gèbelen and Lévi, have always assigned to these cards a "quabalistic [sic] or Egyptian origin." Mathers' research into their origin tends to support this thesis.

The term "Tarot" or "Tarocchi" is applied to a pack of 78 cards, which consist of 4 suits of 14 cards and 22 symbolic picture-cards, answering for trumps. These trumps are numbered from 1 to 21 inclusive; the 22nd card is marked zero, 0, and called the Fool. The four suits, Sceptres, Chalices, Swords, and Pentacles, answer to the customary Diamonds, Hearts, Spades, and Clubs, respectively. The symbolic picture-cards include those of the Juggler or the Magician, the High Priestess or Female Pope, The Lovers, the Hanged Man, and the Wheel of Fortune. Each is suppose to represent something or some quality. The Juggler represents Will; the High Priestess Wisdom or knowledge; the Lovers Wise Disposition; the Hanged Man Sacrifice; and the Wheel of Fortune symbolizes fortune, good or bad. Williams draws upon the symbolism of these cards and blends it with that of his own. The word "Tarot" is derived, according to Mathers, from an Egyptian word, "taro", meaning "to require an

also the Apocalypse 12:14-15, 14:9-11, 19:19-20, and 20:1-4.

answer, or to consult; ergo, that which is consulted or from which an answer is required." He attributes the addition of the final "t" to being a sign of Egyptian hieroglyphic gender. But behind this "open" but apparently arbitrary and bizarre symbolism, the Tarot cards, to the "adepts" contain a more complicated system of "recondite" symbolism of which Williams was no doubt aware (even if his readers are not).¹⁶⁸

In the novel the Tarot cards are supposed to be the key to knowledge of the future, to knowledge of the universe. But the key to the Dance of the cards lies in the Fool who seemingly does not move at all. However, one character, Sybil, who, as her name indicates, is a seer or prophetess does see the Fool move. The Cards indicate the relationship of God to the universe; thus, to Sybil, the Fool moves quickly in and out among the other dancers, those pictured on the cards, and all of their movements are related to it. "If the Fool is the reconciling unity of the Dance of the Tarots, then Sybil is the reconciling unity of the dance of the characters of the novel,"¹⁶⁹ for it is she who has achieved "the clear vision of love."¹⁷⁰

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S.L. MacGregor Mathers, The Tarot (New York, [n.d.]), pp. 4-10; cf. Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York, [1957]), pp. 77-80.

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Beifuss, p. 33.

170

Greater Trumps, p. 206.

Intertwined within the symbolism of the Tarot cards is that of the Isis-Osiris-Horus myth. This myth of death and re-generation is extended by Williams when he combines it with the Christian myth of redemption.¹⁷¹

Once again it is a young woman, Nancy, who saves the world from threatened destruction. In this case, by the shuffling of the Cards by the girl's fiance, a cloudy mist¹⁷² threatens to unleash an unending snow storm. Henry, the fiance, is identified as the Hanged Man, who on the card is pictured as a smiling figure, hanging upside-down, wearing a crown-like wreath. Nancy's father sees Henry:

a horrible idea...nevertheless there it was: Henry was-- hanging in the void, his head downwards.¹⁷³

The storm which Henry has unleashed into the world is identified with the Tower of Babel, which also unleashed confusion into the world. The snow drifts were like "Babels ever rising and falling." After Nancy has quelled the storm, it is stated that "Babel had overwhelmed her being; she had walked among the imagined Tarots seeking for the love which she held to be her right, her possession, her living subject."¹⁷⁴

171

Gf. R.T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Egypt (New York, [1906]), pp. 97-106.

172

Gf. Exodus 16:9 and Numbers 9:15-23.

173

Greater Trumps, pp. 195, 197; cf. p. 220;

174

Ibid., p. 197.

One of the most fascinating characters in the novel is that of Mad Joanna, the High Priestess, Isis, the hierophant, who seeks her dead son Horus. At the end of the novel she identifies Nancy as her son; thus, Nancy is a Christ-figure, and Joanna is Mary, the mother of the world:

Joanna opened her eyes, and they fell on Nancy....The presentation of the dance was forever done....Mr. Coningsby edged round to [Sybil]. "What's she doing?" he asked. "Is [Joanna] apologizing or what?"...

[Sybil] turned back to her brother, and said, "She has found her child....She thinks Nancy is her child....She is looking at something immortal....I mean Nancy. I don't think it much matters about boy or girl. She thought her child Messiah."

"O!" Mr. Coningsby said. "And is Nancy Messiah?"

"Near enough," Sybil answered. "There'll be pain and heart-burning yet, but, for the moment, near enough."¹⁷⁵

And earlier Sybil had bidden Joanna to "Come and adore."¹⁷⁶

The most unusual and interesting symbolism is not explicitly Eastern or Christian. However it is closely associated with religious art of all religions. This symbolism concerns "hands," which are a recurring symbol in many of Williams' other works as well, for example, the Taliessin poetry. Hands to Williams are "an index of the body." In the novel, Aaron, Henry's grandfather, is described as occasionally putting up his hands as if to ward off the approaching cloud:

What was happening? what threat and fulfilment of threat

¹⁷⁵

Ibid., pp. 226, 229-30.

¹⁷⁶

Ibid., p. 226.

was at hand?...The cloud was taking on form--and then he realized he was looking at a moving hand, a man's hand, blocked out of the golden mist...but as he lifted his eyes he saw another--more like a slender woman's hand...everywhere it was made up of hands, whose shape was formed by it, and yet it was not the mist that formed them, for they were the mist.¹⁷⁷

After Nancy has made herself a Path for the storm by gathering the Tarot cards, she glanced down:

her hands had been so busy...continually shaping something... she stretched them out to either side of her; what could she do now to redeem the misfortune that threatened? What in this moment were her hands meant to shape by the mystical power in them? She remembered the priest's hands that very morning raised for the ritual blessing; she remembered hands ...the Praying Hands of Durer, the hands of Christ on the Cross or holding off Saint Mary...the hands of the Divine Mother lifting the Child, the small hand of the Child himself raised in benediction; she remembered the hands of the Emperor...the hands of the Juggler...the hand of the Fool as he summoned the last danger from its tomb...It was no doubt a thing to wonder at, the significant power of man's hands
....

for Nancy had gathered in "her warm hands of Humanity...the invasion and quelled it."¹⁷⁸ It was her hands which bore the brunt of the storm. When "she stood above the world...her outstretched and downturned palms felt the shocks....She was going to live and find Henry and show him the palms that had taken the snow, and make him kiss them for reward...and all ways adore the Mystery of Love."¹⁷⁹ Thus Nancy was to show her palms to Henry as Christ did to the Doubting Thomas. And as Thomas

177

Ibid., pp. 186-87.

178

Ibid., pp. 192-93;

179

Ibid., p. 197.

submitted and was saved, so also did Henry. It was Nancy's hands which made Joanna go mad and attack her. And it was the fact that Joanna's cat had no hands that momentarily caused Nancy to fear. "'It's got no hands,' and this seemed to her so horrible that she nearly lost control. It had no hands; it had no spiritual instruments of intention, only paws that patted or scratched...."180

It is perhaps significant at the end of the book that one of Nancy's hands is in Henry's and that the other is in Joanna's; and Sybil's hand, "the hand that had tossed them into subjection," was busy helping:

It seemed...that Miss Coningsby held out a golden hand towards the staircase down which Joanna was beginning to creep. The hand which had helped Lothair and comforted Nancy and healed Aaron, which had picked up the kitten and closed the door and controlled the storm, was stretched to gather in this last reverted madness of man. It lay there -- the centre of all things, the power and the glory, the palm glowing with a ruddy passion veiled by the aureate flesh--the hand of all martyrs, enduring; of all lovers, welcoming; of all rulers, summoning. And, as if indeed it summoned, the cloud of gold rushed down to it...the hands of all the symbols stretched towards the hand that, being human, was so much more than symbol. Nancy and Henry from above beheld them, hands imperial and sacerdotal, single and joined, the working hands that built the Tower, the helpless hands that formed the Wheel...so the hand of the Fool had at last fulfilled the everlasting promise and yielded its secrets to the expected hour...the vivid figure of the Fool...had come from all sides, yet he was one. All-reconciling and perfect....181

180

Ibid., p. 200.

181

Ibid., pp. 227-28; Cf. pp. 220-23.

In the same year (1933) that the Greater Trumps was published, Shadows of Ecstasy appeared. This novel does not involve any material object as an instrument of power; rather it shows the power of the emotions which overshadow a life of reason. It can also be called a "minor revolt" against the scientism of the age. Nigel Considine, one of Williams' most romantic and interesting characters--and also the most enigmatic--proceeds by methods of the experimental sciences¹⁸² in his search for the conquest of death. He affirms the necessity for passion as a supplement to the intellect. He, who has lived for two centuries, achieves ecstasy and invites other to do the same. He invites admiration in his selfless dedication. He is as ascetic as a priest on one hand; and on the other, he is as ambitious and determined as Marlowe's Faust. Ecstasy is described as "man's natural life."

Considine, a perverted Christ-figure, seeks to build not the kingdom of God but the kingdom of man; instead of bringing Light to the world, he espouses Darkness, shadows of ecstasy:

"I will encounter darkness as a bride
And hug it in mine arms."¹⁸³

Considine differs from Williams' other adversaries in that he wishes to be of ~~service~~ to man; he does not wish to conquer

182

The treatment is similar, only not as grotesque, ~~that of~~
Lewis' N.I.C.E. in That Hideous Strength (London, [1945]).

183

Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 3. (Measure for Measure.)

death for himself alone. He also differs from the others in that he tries to dominate nature by natural means, whereas characters like Gregory and Simon seek to dominate and invade supernature by supernatural means.

Several of the scenes seem to parallel the life of Christ. For example, there is an exorcism scene; however Considine is not officiating as Christ did. An Anglican priest is trying to get rid of Considine's hypnotic influence over a Zulu King, Inkamasi. There is a Last Supper where the wine brings death to the body, not life to the soul. And one character says of Considine "He is seeking to find that way--to be the food on which one feeds, to be free from any accident of death, to know the ecstasy of being at one priest and victim--all these ends are in his search...."¹⁸⁴ Like Christ he promises everlasting life to his disciples:

Because I live, men shall live also....To live on by the power, not of food and drink but of the imagination itself recalling into itself all the power of desire--that is well too. But to die and live again, that remains to be done and will be done. The spirit of man shall go out from his body, and revivify it...it is the formula of man divinitized....¹⁸⁵

Considine, like Christ, is also betrayed by one of the "chosen." After he has administered the chalice of poison to Inkamasi, a bullet pierces his skull. And Roger, whose ecstasy was poetry, remarks to the "High Priest," Gaithness, the Anglican vicar, "I

¹⁸⁴

Ibid., pp. 125-56.

¹⁸⁵

Ibid., p. 84.

hope you paid him [Mottreux] better than Caiaphas did! Even at half-crowns it would only come to three pounds fifteen."¹⁸⁶

Whether Considine is eternally damned is not clear, but it does seem clear that the man who perverts the Images and who seeks to become a god will end by destroying himself.

The last two novels, Descent into Hell (1937) and All Hallows' Eve (1945) are usually considered to be Williams at his best. Much of the symbolism involving Williams' themes of co-inherence, substitution, and exchange, has been previously discussed and will not be repeated here.

In Descent into Hell the symbolism is predominantly Christian, with a bit of Eastern myth thrown in for flavor. For example, Williams refers to Battle Hill as the Redeemed City of Zion; but the place where Wentworth dwells is Sodom and Gomorrah. This "city" is described in terms that make the reader's skin crawl as he reads of the spiritual incest that is taking place.

Men can be in love with men, and women women, and still be in love and make sounds and speeches, but don't you know how quiet the streets of Gomorrah are? haven't you seen the proofs that everlastingly reflect the faces of those who walk with their own phantasms...for they lose the capacity for change, except for the fear of hell...; there's no birth there, and only second death. There's no distinction between lover and beloved; they beget themselves on their adoration of themselves, and they live

yards of tubes or pipes or paths or ropes or something coiled in his body...the hand was leading him...he thought he could smell Adela, or if not Adela, something like her. ...He was going on...the door wouldn't open for anyone; it was his door...because it was his wish....Many Eves to many Adams; one Eve to one Adam; one Eve to each; one Eve to all, Eve....He could just see the shape of the woman beside him. He might be back again in Eden, and she be Eve. ...He was inside and at peace. He said aloud: "I won't go back." The woman beside him...was saying eagerly: "Yes, Yes, Yes, better than Eve, dearer than Eve, closer than Eve....Come along; come along; farther in; down under, down under....She...to whom a name was given in a myth; Lilith for a name, and Eden for a myth, who in one of the shapes went hurrying about the refuge of that Hill of Skulls.... He was held, consoled, nourished, satisfied; Adela; he; sleep. The door swung shut after him. She in him; he in him. They went home.¹⁹¹

Wentworth's act is a perversion of Williams' doctrines of exchange and substitution. He exchanged himself for himself. Instead of the City, he chose Gomorrah. Thus he descended into a Hell not only of his own choosing but of his own making.

Pauline's aunt, Margaret Anstruther, also descends into Hell, but she goes, as Christ did, out of love, and to release a captive soul. When she goes to show the suicide the love he needs in order to be admitted to the City, she descends into his hell, and thus takes away his fear, which has been the impediment preventing his admission. Beaumont feels that her descent is partly an aesthetic device. "If communication between the Anstruthers and the suicide were purely spiritual, there would be far less impact upon the reader....In order to make an impression upon us, the artist must materialize his forms; that is after all

the procedure of Dante."¹⁹²

Another major symbol in the novel is that of the rope. In the passage quoted above [P. 95], the rope is mentioned when Wentworth feels hundreds of yards of tubes or ropes or something around his body. The rope is first mentioned in connection with the suicide who hangs himself. It becomes somewhat of a Jacob's Ladder in that not only do characters descend upon it, but also the suicide ascends. It is significant that, at the end of the novel, as Wentworth descends totally and forever into the abyss of Self, he feels himself descending upon a rope, lower and lower.¹⁹³

Of all the novels, Descent into Hell relies less on magic and occult; yet it is the best structured. It is perfectly symmetrical in its patterns of ascent and descent, of salvation and damnation.

In the last novel Williams comes full circle. The theme once again is power, and the novel relies heavily on magic and occult. The plot revolves around the invasion of supernature by nature, in the person of Simon Le Clerc who tries to make his daughter Betty his emissary in the world of the dead. The book draws on the Simon Magus myth and, once again, on the

¹⁹²

Beaumont, p. 62.

¹⁹³

Cf. p. 41 of this study.

Tetragrammaton of Jewish lore.

The myth of Simon Magus is the tale of the black magician, that is, "of the adversary, of the conquering daemon of the rites, who enters the scene as the hero-villain of the action."¹⁹⁴

Simon Magus was the reputed founder of Gnosticism. He was also the first Biblical "arch-heretic," guilty of a spiritual sin against the Holy Ghost. According to the story in Acts viii:20, Simon was worshipped as a god in Samaria, but his miracles were outshone by Phillip. Simon was so impressed that he believed and was baptized. When he saw how the Holy Ghost was bestowed on the people by the laying on of hands, he very foolishly offered money to purchase the power. He was rebuked by Peter, and seems to have repented. However, from this account, legends sprang up. It was told that he went to Rome and there challenged Peter to a battle of "miracles." Simon promised to fly from a high tower. However, because of Peter's intercession, Simon fell to earth instead, and was killed. His body was then supposed to have been cut into four pieces and scattered. The legends did not die, however. More and more Simon Magus came to symbolize an Anti-Christ figure.

According to Gnostic teachings, a soul that has never owned a human body would be more potent than a departed and purified

¹⁹⁴

E.M. Butler, The Myth of Simon Magus (Cambridge, 1948), p. 74.

one for magical operations.¹⁹⁵ Thus Simon sends Betty out on her mission. In the course of her mission, Simon uses all the tricks of his trade and resorts to all sort of occult practices. For example, he "creates" a body out of dust and spittle for a young woman (Evelyn) who has recently died; he sticks pins into a waxen figure in a voo-doo fashion; and he proceeds to pronounce the Ineffable Name of God backwards. By reversing the Name of God, Simon invokes the opposite of God. It is said that the soul of a person is contained in one's name; thus, to know the name is to control the person.¹⁹⁶ But by reversing the Name, Simon seeks to reverse the balance of exchange among the worlds. God has reserved the right for himself to initiate action from above to below; it is not for man to loose upon nature supernatural energies against which nature has no protection. And this is what Simon tries to do. In trying to gain knowledge of the future, he forgot that, after Christ's coming, there could be no more fore-telling; the future

had to be treated as unknown if man was to be treated as free. Also the future really no longer mattered. Such knowledge was not so much immoral as it was irrelevant to the reality of Love Loving and being loved at every moment. That is what mattered.¹⁹⁷

195

Ibid., pp. 75-78.

196

Cf. Edward Clodd, Magic in Names and in Other Things (London, 1920), pp. 36-157.

197

Witchcraft, pp. 30-31.

Besides being an Anti-Christ figure, Simon is also a perversion of the Holy Trinity. The night after the conception of his daughter, Simon makes two exact duplicates of himself, as the mother of the girl, Mrs. Wallingford, watches from her bedside chair:

She almost fell at what she saw. Between her and the mirror, and all reflected in the mirror, were three men.... She felt madly that that nearest form was he, her master, whole child she bore....These others were no shadows or ghostly emancipation; they had solidity and shape....It was he who remained; the others were images and actual copies of him, magically multiplied, flesh out of flesh, and sent upon his business...and she knew that in all the world only she, besides the Clerk, who now sat before her in the throned seat, knew that these others were not true men at all, but derivations and automata, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, but without will and without soul.¹⁹⁸

Simon, like Christ, also has disciples. His followers are described as beetles, "men who were beetles, beetles who were men; insects who had just been men; men who had just become insects. Metamorphosis was still in them."¹⁹⁹ They too were without "will and without soul." And Simon, having chosen to see nothing except what his limited wit showed him, ultimately saw only his own faces reflecting back at him the blast of loathing with which he stared at them. In refusing love, Simon

had refused all possibilities in death. He would not go to it, as that other child of a Jewish girl had done.

198

All Hallows' Eve, pp. 102-03.

199

Ibid., p. 44.

That other had refused safeguard and miracle; he had refused the achievement of security. He had gone into death, and the Clerk had supposed it his failure--ignored and in pain. The Clerk had set himself to decline pain and ignorance. So that now he had not any capacities but those he could himself gain.²⁰⁰

The concluding chapters are particularly rich in imagery. For example, water, which throughout has been symbolic of grace, becomes a dominant image, and is a sign of power. Earlier, Betty had remembered that in her childhood she had been immersed in water, in a great river, and she had seen a large fish swim by. The water in that instance symbolized the cleansing waters of baptism, and the fish Christ. In the last chapter it is a torrent of rain that finally destroys the Clerk. The water is roseal in color, symbolizing the sacrificial water of the Cross, i.e., the water mixed with blood that flowed from the side of Christ, and the water mixed with wine in the sacrifice of the Mass. Within the sorcerer's circle, Lester enters to see if she can free Evelyn from Simon's power:

The rain did not seem to her to be driving into the round hall...it was invisible to her....They came walking upon the waters...forms like Simon, two Simons,...Behind them, as they went, the faint roseal glow in the waters and the rain gathered thicker and followed...the colour of it--rose or blood or fire...it came with a furious rush...down over all of them...but torrential most over the centre of the circle as if the centre of the storm was centred there...The grace drove against them from behind...An opaque cloud gathered. It had been so when that other Jew ascended....But that Jew had gone up into the law and ac-

200

Ibid., p. 109.

ording to the law. Now the law was filling the breach in the law.²⁰¹

And the law was fulfilled. "In the place of the images the God offered himself to his seekers, through the effort of his creature [s]."²⁰²

201

Ibid., pp. 225-32.

202

The Greater Trumps, p. 200.

And God created man in his own image...And He saw that it was good....

Genesis I: 25, 27.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONCLUSION

This discussion began with a picture of the man himself. It is fitting that it should end in the same manner.

It can be admitted that Williams will never be popular in the ordinary sense of the word. But it is also admitted that he no doubt will continue to attract a group of devoted readers, for Williams asserted the dignity of man by defining exactly what man was and by stating what man was to do. Man was creature and not creator. Granted he was made in God's image, but he was image. Secondly, man was made to know, love, and serve his creator. This is the message of all Williams' works. Centuries ago someone asked St. Thomas Aquinas how one could become a saint, and St. Thomas is said to have replied, "Will it." Centuries later Williams said the same thing.

His view of man was best summed up in the last words he spoke to Christopher Fry. In a letter to this writer, Mr. Fry recalled their last meeting. Mr. Fry had just gotten out of the army, and he and Williams had met at Oxford.

He walked with me to the "bus station": and as he was getting onto the bus he was saying that in the next world

we should find that we enjoyed everything about our lives -- "even if we had been murdered!"--this he called out to me as the bus moved off. A week or so later I opened the Times and saw the announcement of his death.²⁰³

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Quoted from a letter dated January 8, 1964.

7 Oct 63

The Kilm...

Headings Quarry

copy

Dear Mr. Francis Smith
your thank me for last

time give your question is at a way that

couple to have when I will I had the

chance, he did not. He was here yesterday had

in answer as it was have with me and other

don't see the number or we have it, maybe

your like - but it is better to show on

many at - separation (or investigation) in

do you make before date, in my good in my not

- with I can like a

He knows a great deal of science than I

and I will see that he has a volume can be

that will be for the children

I like America to this day, still alive, with

nothing and then to come have been different

Mr.

your always

P. S. Smith

January 8, 1964.

Dear Mrs. Smith:

I'm afraid I can't help you very much. My friendship with Charles Williams, counted in hours, was fairly brief, though it spread across several years, and I valued - still value - it deeply. Early in 1940 I would meet him once a week in Oxford, for beer and cheese at the lunch-hour: together with Basil Blackwell and Gerard Hopkins. After I left Oxford a few letters passed between us. When I came out of the army I met him again in Oxford - he was asking about a play, *The Firstborn*, which I had started before he was and had now taken up again: and I told him I wouldn't show him any more of it until it was finished (I was about three weeks away from finishing it). He walked with me to the "bus station": and as he was getting onto the bus he was saying that in the next world we should find that we enjoyed everything about our lives - "even if we had been murdered!" - this he called

out to me as the bus moved off. A week or so
later I opened the Times and saw the announcement
of his death. — Your comment on All Hallows' Eve
is a good one and would certainly, I think, have
been assented to by Charles Williams.

yours sincerely:

Christopher Fry

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Approval Sheet

The thesis submitted by Beverlee Fissinger Smith has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

29 May 1964
Date

James P. Spencer
Signature